Fall 2008 Orientation Review – F-1

Review & Recommendations (based on student evaluations, student assistant input and CiE staff input)

Student Evaluations

Since orientation was divided into F-1 and J-1, the evaluations were also divided. In general, the F-1 students ranked almost all the categories higher than did the J-1 students. Overall, the orientation received very positive reviews with almost all of the categories getting a score between 4 and 5.

The highest scores given by the F-1 students were for “Q&A” (4.80), “Important Topics & Practical Information” (4.75) and “Introduce your Partner” (4.73). The highest scores given by the J-1 students were for “Q&A” (4.71), “Important Topics & Practical Information” (4.57) and “Inside Scoop” (4.43).

The three lowest scores given by the F-1 students were for the “Scavenger Hunt” (4.125 – likely skewed by one person ranking it with a “1”), “People Bingo” (4.13), and for “Academic Preparedness” (4.33). The three lowest scores given by the J-1 students were for the “Introduce your Partner” (3.71), “SEVIS & Immigration” (4.00), and for “Adjusting to a new Environment” (4.33).

The students mentioned the opportunity to meet other international students as their favorite part of orientation and the Q&A session was also quite popular. While there was some disagreement, most students also mentioned People Bingo and the Student Panel as two of their favorite activities.

F-1 students requested more breaks, more icebreakers and more days for orientation (first day was too much information). J-1 students requested an in-depth discussion of wolfbucks, spacing out the orientation over more days, and a more in-depth tour of campus (especially on how to use the library).

Sessions/Presentations

Academic Preparedness
Dr. Lorenz did a good job at giving an overview to Loyola’s academic environment and answering questions related to GPA, etc. Even though the session received relatively low marks, I think it’s worth keeping in the program as it provides important information to the students.

SEVIS and Immigration
The powerpoint has a problem with the timing in that it keeps skipping ahead…this will need to be fixed for next year. Also, this session received low marks. It might be good to try to liven the session by doing SEVIS bingo or some other activity.

Q&A Session
This was the favorite for both groups of students.

Student Health
Alicia Bourque gave a short overview of the services offered by Student Health. This session is beneficial due to its brevity and the information provided. However, the talk given by Kevin seemed to be confusing to some of the students and I had to interject with clarification a few times. It may be better to give the talk myself next year.

Important Topics & Practical Information
While this session received relatively good reviews, I believe the amount of information in this section led to the comment made by some students that there was too much information. The content of the session needs to be reviewed for any deletions or additions and then it might make sense to break up the topics throughout the day.

Adjusting to Life in the U.S.
This session had different information for F-1 and J-1 students. Debbie and I did a cross-cultural talk with activities for the F-1 students, but the J-1 students did a campus tour. The F-1 students were clearly quite interested and engaged in the session. The J-1 students should also have the cross-cultural session as part of their orientation next year.

The Inside Scoop
According to verbal feedback and the student evaluations, the Inside Scoop student panel was very popular.

Activities

Introduce Your Partner
Students seemed to enjoy this activity and it was a good way to break the ice initially.

People BINGO
The students continued with this activity for quite a while and seemed to enjoy the chance to talk with each other. Be clear in advance of who the winner is: the person who completes the entire sheet or the person who gets 5 in a row.

Scavenger Hunt
Most of students said they enjoyed the competition aspect of this activity. Some students got lost, so perhaps an overview of the campus map would be helpful before beginning this activity. Also, one student said that it was too easy, but I don’t think students would enjoy it as much if it were very difficult.

Other Recommendations

Hurricane Preparedness
We stressed the importance of having a hurricane evacuation plan at the orientation, but some students who had just arrived ended up evacuating with the school to Baton Rouge for Hurricane Gustav, which was not a very pleasant experience. Apparently, Loyola is looking into other evacuation sites further inland. Find out where the school will be evacuating next year in order to inform the students and also stress the importance of having a clear plan of action in case of an evacuation.

Separate vs. Combined Exchange and Degree-Seeking students
After the Fall 2007 orientation, Debbie and I felt that we should separate the exchange student orientation from the degree-seeking given the growing number of exchange students and given the different needs of exchange students vs. degree-seeking students. However, after separating the two groups, I think it would be best to create a hybrid of sorts where the two groups would join together for certain sessions they have in common, such as Academic Preparedness, the President’s Welcome, Q&A Session, Adjusting to a New Environment, and the Inside Scoop Student Panel. This would also allow the two groups of students to meet each other.

Table Organization in Room 311
Organize the tables in Room 311 in groups rather than in rows to encourage students to engage with each other and create a less formal atmosphere.

Advance Information
Many of the students had questions about their academic advisors, schedules, email addresses, LORA log-in, meal plans and whether they were required to take a placement exam. I would recommend including information about these matters in each student’s folders. We should also send an email to all of the students who will be attending orientation a couple of days before orientation to remind them of the orientation and to bring all of their immigration documents.

Coordination with NSO
Information about International Student Orientation was not included in the NSO materials. Be certain that it is included next year, especially the make-up session for international students who miss the first day of our orientation. Many of the students requested the New Student Orientation packets and they wanted to leave orientation to go get them. Next year, we should pick up the folders from NSO in advance to give to the students.

Activities the week of orientation through Labor Day
The shopping trips and inBUS activities were popular, especially at the beginning after the students have just arrived. These activities should be continued next year.

Food
Le Boulangerie and the fruit were quite popular with the students. Estimating 2 mini-pastries per student and 3-4 people per pizza seemed to be fairly accurate estimates.

Materials
I would recommend having Welcome/Orientation packets available year-round for any new students or scholars. The contents of the orientation packets should be reviewed to ensure that we are including all pertinent and helpful information.

Transportation from Airport
Our office coordinated airport pick-ups along with University Ministry and Residential Life. This was a very popular and successful program. Next year, be sure to collect the cell phone numbers for all the international students and the people going to pick them up to facilitate communication.