

Orientation and Transition: Some Thoughts on Progress and Development

Daniel J. Robb

This article gives an overview of some of the trends and observations in the orientation profession which have been mirrored within the National Orientation Directors Association. The changes since the initiation of the association in 1948 have been dramatic, and predictions of continuing changes in the profession are indicated.

The National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) has enjoyed a short, yet productive, history as one of several professional organizations dedicated to the issues associated with higher education. Beginning as a small group of professionals who met informally on an annual basis, NODA has now become a thriving, multifaceted association. As we move toward the new millennium, NODA will continue to take leadership in issues and programs which affect the lives of college students in dramatic ways.

NODA exists to assist college and universities in meeting the challenges which new students bring to college campuses each year. While the title of the association includes only the word "orientation," NODA has moved well beyond those narrow bounds, embracing the concept that orientation is instrumental to the education and retention of college students. No longer simply a registration process, orientation has become a central focus, producing both immediate and long-term effects. These outcomes influence, not only the students, but also their families, and, indeed, the colleges and universities themselves.

As college orientation programs have grown in responsibility, so has NODA in its role to educate those who work with new students on college campuses. NODA is somewhat unique in that it includes students as one of its core members rather than simply inviting them to attend conferences. The association actively courts students not only for membership, but also as leaders at all levels. These student members, in cooperation with professional staff members and faculty, work to improve the new student experience via conferences, meetings, publications, and interest groups. Although the name of the association may indicate a more narrow focus, the leaders of NODA have, over the years, moved the organization into the forefront of shaping programs and services for new students.

The similarities between the changes in new student orientation and NODA, as a whole, are striking. NODA began with a small group of very dedicated professionals meeting to discuss orientation and how it could affect the lives of students on campus. Almost fifty years later, over 600 NODA members will meet in Denver in 1997 to

evaluate our progress and plan for the future. The national conference represents only one of the many opportunities our members have to discuss, brainstorm, and plan for the future. Well over 1500 members participate in a variety of activities throughout the year in an effort to continually monitor trends and student data.

The NODA Executive Committee and Board of Directors are responsible for overseeing the programs, conferences, leadership, and finances of NODA. The association has taken this role in a way few others have done; although there is certainly a formalized leadership structure, NODA encourages participation in decision making from all members of the association. The Board of Directors includes students (both undergraduate and graduate), faculty members, and professional staff members from all types of college and university campuses.

Those few trailblazers who met in 1948 would undoubtedly be surprised that their legacy has increased to its current level of strength and the issues with which we must now cope. They would marvel at the impact orientation professionals must now have on issues such as alcohol abuse, relationship violence, and adjustment difficulties. The role of orientation director must have been viewed more simply in 1948 — and even until recent years— as helping students "get used to" college. One of the things, however, which has not changed is that our predecessors in 1948 shared the same high level of concern for student academic and personal success.

Obviously, much has changed in higher education over the last fifty years. NODA has vigorously attempted to be a leader in advocating positive changes in campus programs and, as illustrated above, the association has undergone a great degree of change in its short period of existence. While it would be fair to say that NODA has developed into a stronger organization, these changes were not at all seamless. As an organization, it was sometimes difficult for NODA to determine the extent to which we should be an advocate for change, versus the extent to which it should maintain status quo. Conflicts are inevitable and NODA was no different. There has been significant debate over the years regarding many of these changes and the association has had some years where the change and the progress were painfully slow. However, NODA can now count among its latest successes increasing conference attendance (both regional and national), much improved and stable financial status, direct election of members of the Board of Directors, and an increase in membership numbers.

NODA and its leadership must be advocates for orientation issues such as the involvement of family members, community service programs, and social issue development. This advocacy has not been without controversy; however, NODA has continued to take a very active role in developing, monitoring, and evaluating trends.

The association actively participates in the development of standards for the profession through the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (1988) because we believe very strongly that we are entrusted by students and their families to provide a quality service. Although the concept of *en loco parentis* has been eased from the policies on college campuses, the reality is that students and parents expect that orientation staffs will work hard to make a difference in students' lives. NODA has chosen to make sure it is in the forefront of new programs and services which make a difference for all students, their families, and the various communities in which they live and study.

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The association has long shed any thoughts of a monolithic view on how students should be oriented to college. NODA works to present information on public and private, two-year and four-year, residential and commuter, and all other types of institutions. The association has a number of formal interest groups called "Networks" in order to better represent the interests of various constituencies and issues. The Networks serve as the conscience of the association for many issues and help to educate our leaders and other members about crucial issues.

NODA believes in its responsibility to keep the higher education community informed regarding issues and research on new student programs. The publications of the association continue to reflect this effort, and the reinstatement of *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition* represents a strong commitment toward that goal. A series of other publications keep members actively informed about trends in higher education in addition to providing current data with which colleges and universities may seek to modify campus orientation efforts.

NODA has grown in size, commitment, and responsibility over the last several decades and will undoubtedly continue to be a leader in higher education. The Executive Committee and Board of Directors have made clear, through its ongoing strategic planning efforts, that status quo is simply not enough. An ambitious and continuously reviewed series of goals assure NODA a place in the leadership in advocating change and supporting the development of new and innovative programs.

The new millennium will continue to bring serious challenges to higher education, and college orientation programs will continue to bear responsibility for assisting new students and their families in the transition to college life. The new student experience has proven to be critical in persistence rates at colleges and universities and NODA, like its predecessor of orientation professionals, will remain dedicated to assisting the campuses and the staff members who work on them. NODA will continue to assure that students and their families receive a continually improving programs and services which adjust to meet the changing needs of entering students.

Reference

- Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. (1988). *CAS standards and guidelines for student services/development programs: Student orientation programs self-assessment guide*. Washington, DC: Author.

CAMPUS NOTES

Denise Rode, Associate Editor

A Large Research University's Approach To a One-Day Summer Orientation Program

Lori Bumgarner, Charles Mathies, and Scott Ranges

The University of South Carolina (USC) is located in the heart of South Carolina, easily a two hour drive for most in-state students, who compose nearly 80% of the student body (USC Orientation Data Bank, 1996). Therefore, it is expedient for USC to offer a one-day orientation program and to work with other campus divisions to extend the new student experience beyond orientation by supporting fall activities.

According to the USC summer orientation evaluation results (1996), fewer than 20% of the students, and just over 10% of the parents, said they would have preferred an orientation program that was more than one day, and 96.5% of students and 97.7% of parents were satisfied with the overall quality of the program. In addition, 95.2% of students said they felt better prepared and more comfortable with USC after attending orientation, while 97.3% of parents were satisfied with the overall quality of the program. In addition, 95.2% of students said they felt better prepared and more comfortable with USC after attending orientation, while 97.3% of parents felt more comfortable about their students enrolling in USC. Ninety-seven percent of summer orientation participants enrolled in classes for the fall semester.

The primary objective of USC's orientation program is academic advising and class registration, while providing a wealth of logistical information necessary for the transition to campus. There is a de-emphasis on social activities during the summer program.

The summer orientation day begins with an opening session and information sessions on dining, housing, and career services. In small groups, students are taught skills needed for phone registration, while parents meet with academic advisors for their students' colleges. At lunch, parents and students have the opportunity to confer with one another and with various campus offices and student organizations.

Following lunch, the students meet with academic advisors, register for classes, and have identification cards made. Parents meet with student affairs staff and address concerns ranging from finances to coping with their students leaving home. A panel of current USC students answers parents' questions on topics from campus safety to transportation to computer needs. The day concludes with optional visits to the financial aid office, career center, library, health center, and/or a residence hall.

The one-day orientation program can be offered because it is complemented by other campus programs that offer social opportunities when students arrive in the fall.

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