

Leadership Based Camps: Promoting Involvement and Positive Transition before Students set Foot on Campus

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Extended Orientation programs, as outlined by NODA (National Orientation Directors Association), are programs that supplement traditional new student orientation and provide an extension of the orientation and transition process. The two programs explained in this article use the "camp" model for extended orientation programs, and both are optional programs in which students can choose to participate. Typically, camp models are based on a specific leadership model or specific experiential education component, and they are often successful when students are taken to an off-campus retreat setting for a few days and nights.

Both programs utilize the Social Change Model of leadership throughout the curriculum of the program. The Social Change Model was created in 1994 and is the most widely used student leadership model in colleges and universities across the United States. Through this model, students learn the "Seven Cs" of leadership: Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment, Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, and Citizenship. With a comprehensive understanding of these values of leadership, students learn that leadership is socially responsible, collaborative, inclusive, values-based, and process-oriented. Additionally, through purposeful use of the Social Change Model, students can initiate positive change within themselves, groups, the university community, and society at large (NCLP, 2013).

Camp Eagle

Camp Eagle is a three-day leadership-based extended orientation program at the University of Southern Indiana (USI). Established in 2006, the program goals for Camp Eagle include introducing incoming students to the University's history and traditions, supporting students in developing personal values, developing students' leadership and teamwork skills, exploring the importance of service

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learning, helping the participants develop an appreciation for diversity, and meeting other incoming students and developing strong relationships early in their college careers. The program is important to USI because the information that can be provided in the University's one-day orientation program is focused mostly on academic advising and registration. The Camp Eagle program provides students with additional exposure to campus life and introduces them to the benefits of being involved and taking the initiative to make an impact on the campus and local community.

Camp Eagle begins on a Friday morning, during which students are split into groups, and student facilitators, called Eagle Leaders, lead participants through a series of icebreakers. That afternoon, participants work with their group to complete a low ropes challenge course to build teamwork and camaraderie. During the evening of the first day, the students learn about leadership based on strong moral values and the importance of congruence of their values and actions. The second day begins with activities focused on collaborating and working through conflict within a group. Additionally, participants explore diversity, which often leads students to challenge their first impressions of others and gain an understanding of what they have in common with others as well as what makes them unique. The afternoon of the second day of Camp Eagle focuses on community engagement. Students participate in a service project in the local community and later discuss the impact the service made on themselves and others. The evening of the second day and morning of the third are geared toward helping students develop an appreciation for the university's traditions and history, in addition to connecting students to the organizations and leadership opportunities available to put their new leadership skills to work. At the end of the camp, students are asked to set personal goals for themselves as student leaders in college.

Each educational activity is co-taught by a staff member and an Eagle Leader. Additionally, the Camp Eagle Journal guides students through each activity and provides them with opportunities to record their thoughts and insights. Once educational sessions are complete, students are asked to complete a personal reflection, which challenges students to apply the leadership lessons to situations they have experienced or likely will experience in their lives. Following the personal reflection period, students have a small group meeting, during which Eagle Leaders lead conversations about how the topic applies to being a leader in a college setting.

At the conclusion of Camp Eagle, students complete an evaluation of the experience, where learning outcomes are measured and satisfaction is assessed. The learning outcomes most highly achieved include the recognition and development of personal values, ability to work with others, and the connections students made with peers and staff. Additionally, the experience leads many students to a stronger sense of belonging in the campus community and a deeper commitment to civic engagement and social responsibility.

Additionally, USI conducts a second assessment at the end of the students' second semester of college. The second assessment is sent to all Camp Eagle

participants, as well as a random sample of students who did not attend the camp. This assessment determines how Camp Eagle participants compared to their peers regarding their transition to the university, connection to the institution, involvement in clubs and organizations, interest in leadership opportunities, and progression in skills related to the Social Change Model. Predictably, Camp Eagle participants outperform their peers in almost every area.

Ram Academy

Suffolk University started a similar program, Ram Academy, as an extended orientation and emerging leaders retreat in August of 2011. The “camp” was founded as an opportunity for students to learn about involvement on campus and to make connections with other students before they even start their college careers. Ram Academy is an optional program open to 50 new incoming students.

The goals and learning outcomes for the program are to help students think critically and self reflectively, to begin to develop leadership skills, both individually and in groups, to acknowledge the diverse community we live in; and to develop a connection to the Suffolk community by building relationships with incoming students, current students, and staff.

Similar to Camp Eagle, Suffolk’s Ram Academy starts on a Wednesday morning in August, when students are taken by bus off campus to an outdoor recreation facility until Friday afternoon. Suffolk University’s campus is urban, so taking students to a more remote, secluded area provides an atmosphere that allows students to focus only on the Academy and its goals. The program has many low rope activities facilitated by both the facility’s staff and Suffolk University’s staff from the Orientation & New Student Programs Office and the Student Leadership & Involvement Office. We introduce the Social Change Model of Leadership and then relate activities to each of the “Seven Cs” outlined. After groupings of activities, the students break up into small groups and have time for reflection and discussions focused on the Cs they experienced. Time is also allotted for journal writing and reflection, so students can reflect, both as a group and individually, on what they are learning and experiencing. In addition to activities that relate to the Cs and breaking out into small groups, other activities focus on ethics and values, diversity, and a “College Myth Dispeller” panel around a campfire at night. The students also get some free time to enjoy water sports, fields, and equipment as well. On the second night, we have each student share their “hopes and fears” for college, asking them to hold on to their hopes and burn just their fears in a bonfire for all to see. On the last day, the Academy focuses on traditional welcome week activities, such as the incoming class social, a boat cruise on Boston Harbor, and a performing arts showcase, getting students involved on campus and in the commencement of a Ram Academy graduation and induction program. Overall, our hope is that the students are excited to start their journey at Suffolk and integrate into the larger community right away.

Overall, the Ram Academy program has had extremely positive reviews and assessments. An evaluation is conducted at the conclusion of the program,

and students rate the experience extremely high. The majority of students that participated attended all Welcome Week activities, joined clubs on campus right away, and became members of our emerging leaders program. Students that we have tracked and surveyed have all overwhelmingly said that the program absolutely helped them transition to college life, get involved on campus, and make friends easier. One student said, "The program is a great first step to college" and echoed that the program achieved its goals of helping students build connections and shaping them as a leaders before they even step on campus. Participants in the program all seem to be reaching their academic goals as well.

General observations from both students and staff involved with the program include that Ram Academy participants start their college career as a diverse, tight-knit group, and they attend programs together, as well as study and hang out together outside of class. The informal feedback that students give supports that they appreciated the program and the opportunity to meet others, including upperclassmen and staff, before they came to campus. Participant feedback supports that many of these students will strive to be executive board members of many of the student groups on campus.

Conclusion

Ram Academy and Camp Eagle are examples of extended orientation programs that not only cultivate institutional affinity and a sense of belonging in the campus community within its participants, but they also encourage campus involvement and the development of strong relational bonds between students during their transition to college. Additionally, students who participate in these programs are instilled with social responsibility and a desire to serve the university and its surrounding community. Participants leave with set of leadership skills that can be utilized in clubs and organizations and a set of goals for the co-curricular accomplishments they would like to achieve during their college careers. These programs have the power to positively impact involvement and leadership on campus, as well as encourage positive transitions for students to their new universities.

References

National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP). (2013). *What is the SCM?* Retrieved from <http://socialchangemodel.ning.com/page/what-is-the-scm>