

## The Disorientation Program: Fostering Student Transition

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### History and Purpose of Disorientation

Historically orientation programs have contained components that reside within the following broad categories: academic and general information, logistical concerns, social/interpersonal development, testing/assessments, and transition issues (Smith & Brackin, 1993). Common transitions students experience are those between high school and college and between college and work. Programs that address transitional issues are designed to assist with these often difficult times by creating a sense of community, clarifying campus expectations, and assisting with the development of academic skills (Mullendore, 1992).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological transition suggests that when a person's new environment differs greatly from the previous environment, the person will have a difficult time adjusting, and possibly may experience failure. Therefore, it is imperative that transition programs address these issues. Borland (1999) noted that campuses with successful transition programs retain students by impacting their development and overall learning.

Building on this model and the existing body of research, Clemson University student affairs and academic affairs staff have created a one-day program entitled "Disorientation." A counterpart to Clemson's new student orientation program, the title "Disorientation" reflects the transitional experiences that students encounter when they leave the University at the close of their undergraduate years. The program's purpose focuses on transitions as students prepare themselves to enter the workforce or begin their career development process. The program content explores life and career transition issues such as relocating, financial planning, community relations, social etiquette, civic responsibility, major choice, resume writing, interviewing, and increasing career marketability.

The program is housed under the auspices of the Student Development Services Office in the area of leadership development and is coordinated through a collaborative committee comprised of staff and faculty from the following areas: Alumni Affairs; the Career Center; Academic Affairs; the University Union; and Student Development Services. The involvement of a collaborative committee enables the program to address a variety of transitional issues facing graduating students.

A unique aspect of the program is the inclusion of the Alumni Center staff and Clemson alumni. The goal of including alumni in Disorientation is to enable current

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students to learn from the expertise of alumni from their areas of study and to seek guidance and advice from those who have already “been there.”

## **Program Structure**

The program’s development was a result of assessments conducted by campus administrators as well as an analysis of nationwide trends in higher education. These analyses suggested that students often are not ready to enter the workforce, not because of weak academic knowledge, but due to the lack of personal preparation and background. Additionally, current students expressed a desire for access to a variety of methods for exploring majors and career fields beyond traditional career testing.

Each year, the program content varies slightly depending on the previous years’ evaluations and trends in the work force. Examples of life transition topics include: what life is really like after graduation, financial planning, social etiquette, and strategies for increasing marketability. Career transition issues include topics such as building a resume, interviewing skills, networking advice, researching graduate schools, job seeking strategies, and personal resume critiques.

Since its inception three years ago, Disorientation has been evaluated positively by the participants and members of the campus community. The original goal of assisting students with personal and career transitions continues to drive the overall content. However, each year, program evaluations and committee members’ assessments are used to enhance subsequent Disorientation offerings.

## **Program Logistics/Funding**

Disorientation is held on campus at the Madren Conference Center, which provides a corporate-like setting for this transitional program. The agenda includes concurrent sessions, a networking reception, and an etiquette lunch. Current faculty, staff, and alumni facilitate these events. The program is planned to coincide with other campus activities such as athletic and performing arts events. As a parenthetic note, early feedback suggested that alumni, faculty, and staff were more willing to be involved when the program was offered around coinciding campus events. This also enables alumni to combine multiple activities as they participate in Disorientation.

Student participation is drawn from a variety of sources. Advertisements are placed in the campus newspaper and on the campus cable network. Faculty and staff are asked to announce Disorientation in class and in organizations they advise. Also, flyers are posted on campus, several campus organizations are targeted for participants, and the campus-wide e-mail system is used to draw participants.

The annual cost of the program is approximately \$5,000. In order to provide a no-cost program for the students, University funds and corporate and community resources are obtained. Corporate resources included funding from the engineering firm Ingersoll Rand for a networking reception and financial sponsorship from Cryovac, a plastics company, which offset costs associated with Disorientation. Additionally, door prizes and other in-kind gifts are solicited and secured from University departments and

community businesses. The largest budget items associated with the program are meals and room rental costs.

## **Discussion**

Disorientation is a program designed to help with students' life and career transitions. The program provides additional benefits such as enhanced student retention and networking opportunities among participants, alumni, faculty, and staff. A secondary benefit is that of collaboration between student affairs staff and faculty to achieve the goal of student development. This collaboration also provides the opportunity for alumni to reconnect with their alma mater. In summary, Disorientation assists students with the development of the personal knowledge and skills needed to be a successful employee and a responsible citizen after their Clemson undergraduate education.

## **References**

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