

# Creating a Sibling Orientation Program: The University of Alabama's Successful Start

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As orientation professionals, we go the extra mile to plan programs to best benefit the students entering our institutions. We also work very hard to plan programming for the parents of these incoming students. But what about the siblings? So many students bring not only their parents, but also their younger brothers and sisters to Orientation—what can we do for them? After much discussion and encouragement from the University of Alabama's (UA) Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Orientation Office rolled out the new Bama Bound Sibling Orientation program. The program ran simultaneously with the Bama Bound freshman and parent orientation programs during the summer of 2006.

Initial planning for the program started with internal discussions that included professional staff members and orientation graduate assistants. We conducted a literature review on the subject of sibling orientation programs and found that there was a literature gap; peer institution benchmarking was conducted to look at the sibling programs offered by other institutions. This peer review helped us assess our resources and determine what types of activities might be possible on our campus. Based on this research and on discussions within the department and across campus, our office and campus partners decided what types of activities would make for an effective program and what partnerships on campus we would need to establish.

The decision was made to send invitations to the parents of Bama Bound students. We targeted rising 9th- through 12th-grade siblings for our program, and this was indicated on the sibling program invitation; however, some younger students did register and participate. The registration process went as follows: After the incoming UA students registered for their freshman orientation, their families were sent a Sibling Orientation invitation along with the regular students' orientation confirmation. Once registered, families were sent a sibling orientation confirmation which contained information pertinent to the program. There was also an online form available to be printed, completed, and mailed. The fee for the program was \$25, which included an information packet, meal card, boxed lunch, and a University of Alabama t-shirt. Sibling Program check-in took place concurrently with the new student and parent orientation check-in.

We decided that a healthy balance of academic and social activities would be best and wanted to showcase unique pieces of our university to the siblings; these were the main influences in designing the program schedule. A brief overview of our schedule is shown in Table 1.

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**TABLE 1**

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**Sibling Program Schedule**

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**Day 1**

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8 a.m.	Registration/Check-In (Sibling table in same location as Bama Bound student check-in)
9:15 a.m.	Welcome (with older sibling/family)
9:45 a.m.	College and school visit (with older sibling/family)
11:30 a.m.	Lunch (with older sibling/family)
12:30 p.m.	Meet at Starbucks
1 p.m.	Tour of Paul W. Bryant Museum (highlights the football championships and traditions at UA)
2:30 p.m.	University Recreation Center/Outdoor Pool Complex activities
5 p.m.	Exploration of the new Resource and Design Lab at Gorgas Library
6 p.m.	Ferguson Center Game Room activities
6:30 p.m.	Dinner (with older sibling/family)

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**Day 2**

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9 a.m.	“What to Look for in a College Visit” session
9:30 a.m.	“Discovering the University of Alabama” campus tour
11 a.m.	Lunch and tour of the Alabama Museum of Natural History
12:45 p.m.	Career Center’s Personal Interest Inventory
1:30 p.m.	Athletic Department tour

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We were pleased with the mix of activities for siblings during the first summer of this program. On the academic side, students visited the library and “worked” in the new Research and Design Lab using graphic and music editing software, completed an online career inventory assessment, toured the Museum of Natural History and Special Collections area (to see unique items such as Civil War relics, weapons collections, various taxonomy displays, and shrunken heads), and participated in a “What to Look for in a College Visit” session. The “What to Look For” session was conducted by one of our admissions counselors, but was not used as a UA recruitment tool; rather, the session focused on issues that students need to think about when trying to figure out what college is right for them, such as the differences between public/private, large/small, urban/rural, and residential/commuter campuses. However, of course there was some UA perspective and comparison about differences in institutions that used UA as an example.

There were social activities as well, such as the meeting at Starbucks and an initial get-to-know-each-other trivia activity in Alumni Hall following the tour of the Bryant

Museum. There were also activities that we chose to highlight specific parts of our institution that we consider unique to Alabama, such as the tour of the Bryant Museum (which highlights Alabama football traditions and championships), the newly expanded Outdoor Recreation Center, and our newly renovated athletic facilities. A key to the success of Alabama’s Sibling Program was identifying unique or outstanding campus features to highlight. We encourage readers who wish to develop a sibling program to think seriously about what features at your institution would be interesting and unique to your sibling attendees and work those into your program.

The 2006 Bama Bound Sibling Orientation served 102 sibling participants. Those who participated were directed to an online evaluation of the program before the end of the second day, and from that evaluation the program received very high marks (see Table 2 for a brief summary of the evaluation results).

**TABLE 2**

**Summary of Sibling Program Evaluation**

<b>Prompt</b>	<b>Result</b>
“I enjoyed the time at the Rec Center.”	93% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“The campus tour was enjoyable.”	80% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“The Career Center personal inventory was beneficial.”	73.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“I enjoyed the tour of the Bryant Museum.”	68.6% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“The session about ‘What to look for’ was beneficial.”	76.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“The quality of food was good.”	91.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“The staff was friendly and helpful.”	98.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement
“Overall, the program was enjoyable and beneficial.”	97.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this statement

The highest ratings were for the staff and overall program, which leads us to believe that we are on the right track in staffing the program with graduate students and with the selected program components. The participants also gave us some very good feedback through some open-ended questions on their favorite and least favorite parts of the program. They also told us what they would change if they could alter one aspect of the program. After a successful first summer, we are excited for an even bigger and better Sibling Program for Summer 2007!