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Courtney Dell'Agnese
Roger Williams University

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Orientation Provides New Students a Path Towards Success at RWU

By offering the resources and information to see what daily life is like on campus, orientation leads incoming students towards success from the moment they arrive on campus.

March 26, 2019 | by Courtney Dell’Agnese ’19

BRISTOL, R.I. — Going to college is an exciting time in a student’s life. But, it can also be scary, nerve-wracking and leave you wondering what the next four years will bring. For many students, orientation is what sets the tone for their whole college experience. But while it’s just the first step of many, when orientation is done right, it puts you on the path towards success. That’s why RWU’s orientation team works year-round to make our students feel at home as soon as they step foot on campus.

Orientation is about more than just learning where your dorm is, where your classrooms are or how late the library stays open. At Roger, it’s about making new students feel comfortable and supported so they are ready to thrive, both academically and personally, when they start the school semester in the fall.

This year’s Student Orientation Coordinators (SOCs), Jessica Silva ’20, Noah Hysong ’20 and John Liberty ’20, know this story all too well. When they arrived on campus three years ago for their own orientation sessions they never imagined themselves in such an important, yet rewarding position. From the welcoming environment to the connections they built and resources they were shown, they credit orientation for giving them the tools to be successful at RWU.

“Orientation is the students’ first impression of what life is really like at Roger. So on our end, making sure that everyone has the best first impression possible is important,” Silva said. “Because while impressions can change, that initial experience for some people is something they will hold onto during their duration of time here.”

As SOCs, Silva, Hysong and Liberty work with Student Programs & Leadership staff members to plan and implement orientation sessions for first-year, transfer and international students. It’s a process that starts much earlier than you might think. When new students come to orientation in June, they may not realize that the preparation started before they even submitted their applications to RWU. Starting in November, the SOCS were interviewing and hiring a new group of orientation advisors while these newest hawks were still finishing up their college essays.
A large part of preparing new students for success is hiring the right team to welcome them to RWU. That’s why a staff that is not only qualified, but one that reflects the demographics of the student body as much as possible is essential. Providing orientation advisors with various majors, minors, extracurricular involvements and interests allows any new student to envision themselves in their shoes and able to succeed as well.

“We can’t fill every gap with happy-go-lucky, super extroverted people because while those people exist on campus, there are others who are shy or don’t open up as much, much like our incoming students,” Hysong said. “So we wanted to make sure that our staff can connect with everybody that comes in as a new student or transfer, as well as showing as many different little niches in our campus as possible.”

After rounding up the best and most diverse team of students, the SOCs begin making student and family guidebooks, booking speakers and presentations ranging from the CORE curriculum, the housing department and the counseling center, and planning a session-wide social event to expose new students to everything we offer on campus. Right away, students are made familiar with all the tools they can take advantage of during their time here as well as being introduced to the deans and faculty members within their designated schools and getting a taste of the social opportunities that are constantly offered.

“I think that’s what makes Roger so special. We have pretty much anything you would want to do between various clubs and orgs, activities, intramurals and athletics. We have so many things that you just need to take advantage of them,” Liberty said. “If you come here and are ready to immerse yourself in all the things we have to offer, you’re not going to be disappointed.”

For many new students, college is large step towards independence and uncovering what the future might hold. Our students have the ability to do things on their own, to discover new hobbies or interests and develop a plan for their future, all while having a solid support system to turn to when they need it. That’s why orientation aims to highlight the inclusion, diversity and acceptance we have on campus.

“Roger Williams does such a good job at making sure that anyone can find a home here,” Hysong said. “Regardless of your background or where you come from or where your interests are, you can always find some kind of way to feel at home. During orientation, if you focus on how you might feel day-to-day, if you are willing to get out there and see yourself being comfortable here, then college is going to be everything you wanted, and then some.”

For any questions regarding orientation or for more information visit their webpage, call 401-254-3385 or email orientation@rwu.edu.

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