

Orientation/ Welcome Week

Recommendation

We recommend expanding and rebranding BHSU's orientation/move-in weekend and welcome week, currently known as Green and Gold Days. We propose a six-week welcome program, which will include significant academic program integration, separate orientation for transfer students and incorporation of GS 100 course content. Additionally, we recommend the organization and implementation of this program be included into the first-year experience/advising center.

Introduction/Why?

Orientation is currently a three-day event that begins with campus move-in on the Friday prior to the first day of classes in the fall semester. Move-in weekend includes limited programming focused on residential living, relationship building and campus navigation. There are meet-and-greet activities in the residence halls, in the Spearfish community and on campus which include residential and commuter students along with campus administration, faculty and staff. For two additional weeks, student organizations host Green and Gold Days which focus on social integration to both the BHSU campus and the Northern Hills community. According to Ruffalo Noel Levitz, BHSU needs to address the gap in the student transition, add value to the welcome week activities, and help students develop their institutional identity.

A review of the other SDBOR institutions demonstrates the importance of balancing social and academic integration throughout welcome week by providing opportunities in career services, civic engagement, academic advising, student organization activities, and institution traditions. Many institutions including SDSM&T, SDSU, and Northern State offer orientation in conjunction with their new student registration sessions in the summer. Move-In weekend and coinciding Welcome Week then focus on highlighting topics from orientation on a minimal level while emphasizing campus connections socially, academically, and amongst the community. Furthermore, BHSU has previously attempted to include vital orientation information directly following students moving into the residence halls. In contrast, USD, SDSU, and Northern State provide a full day for move-in, family exploration, and parental involvement strengthening the student and family initial impression of the university experience.

Beyond current practices at the SDBOR level, research provided by Chickering and Tinto support our recommendations specifically addressing the expansion of Green and Gold days to the first six weeks while identifying key factors to address throughout this time (see Appendix 1). Chickering (1969) emphasizes the evolution of student identity development and commitment to the institution that occurs during the first six weeks of the semester as a student transitions into higher education. Therefore, expanding welcome week to coincide with a student's natural progression of identity development allows for BHSU to complement this process offering resources and programs enhancing the student experience. Tinto (1993) further emphasizes effective retention by instilling institutional commitment, educational commitment, and creating a social and intellectual community. Therefore, key additions include developing traditions, enhancing academic orientation and welcome programs through program coordinators, developing a connection with the Spearfish community, and

highlighting effective social programs. Last, the remaining recommendations to enhance welcome week include developing an awareness and addressing specific student needs including family background, financial need, and other contributing student attributes.

What we propose:

We propose to expand the BHSU Orientation Program (Green and Gold Days) to include intentional programming for the first six weeks of fall semester. The program will include move-in weekend, GS 100, Homecoming festivities, Residence Life programming, student organization programs and successful integration into the campus community.

Move-In Weekend: Thursday through Sunday

Recommendations:

- Separate move-in days for new and returning students
 - New Students would move in on Thursday (one day earlier than current practices)
- Add a free day (move-in day) for parents and students to stop by offices, explore campus, explore the community, and attend campus/community fair (we propose Thursday)
 - **Note: Include a Presidential Address on move-in day for new students; Offer parents' session the same day; Include residence hall meetings in the evening to wrap up the day
 - Work with community partnerships to provide meals for new students during move-in day prior to the Avians contract going live; further work with the City of Spearfish to provide a City-Wide welcome/celebration including parent discount at local hotels and restaurants, businesses decorate windows and signs, etc.
- Introduce programs addressing green and gold days outcomes: Campus Resources/Need to know, faculty welcome, social gathering within major, Downtown Friday Nights, residence hall programming, community service, Hike to the H, contracted entertainment, welcome back dance, etc. (continue with current practices of focusing on social integration (Friday/Saturday), campus/community integration (Friday/Saturday), and academic integration (Sunday))
- Establish Orientation Leaders that begin during NSR throughout Green and Gold Days and the first semester/year

Green and Gold Days/Yellowjacket Welcome

Work with Student Organizations to continue to offer social programming expanding throughout the first six weeks

Collaborate and integrate GS 100 Curriculum

Week One: Academic Integration

Includes special academic program welcome/orientation from program faculty, academic advisor meetings, academic planning, career development (part-time/workstudy job fair), Faculty luncheon, Student Resources Fair

Week Two: Social Integration

Includes residence hall programs, contracted entertainment, activities in all buildings on campus (introduce various opportunities for study/hang out spaces), green and gold organization programming, student organization fair, young center extravaganza

Week Three: Community Integration

Includes community scavenger hunt, visit Spearfish, Spearfish canyon hiking, canoe trip, organized city-wide community service; Businesses decorate for BHSU Week; Alumni Integration to new student welcome; Student discounts for local businesses; Progressive meal tours

Week Four: Student Resources

Includes reintroduction of student resources carried over from move-in weekend including mental health counseling, Title IX, campus office scavenger hunt, math and writing centers, the library, disability services, peer mentors, advisors, public safety, TRIO/SSS, etc., Budgeting 101, Adulthood Seminar, Time Management/Organization

****Note:** This is usually the time when students begin to feel homesick and overwhelmed with the academic course load. Dunn (2018) and many other articles indicate after the first few weeks is when homesickness develops strongest. Mitigating factors include parental involvement (open discussion about homesickness during parent sessions at NSR and move-in day), getting involved, getting familiar with unfamiliar surroundings, talking to people, finding a constant/routine, calling home when needed, and reaching out to others/resources (Heffernan & Harrington, 2019)

Week Five: Motivation/Encouragement

Motivational Speaker, Mental Health resources fair/stress management fair, Random acts of kindness, letters from home (parent program?), intentional contact from key groups (Residence Life, Academic Advisors, Athletics, TRIO, CAIS, International Studies, Honors, etc.)

Week Six: Traditions and Institutional Commitment

Includes SWARM week (may have to be switched depending on the week it falls. For fall 2020, homecoming is the week of October 3), Hike to the H, Tailgating, Jeans on Fridays, etc. This is where new traditions need to be established to help students feel connected to BHSU and Yellow Jacket Pride.

2) Identify and address improvements resulting in successful academic integration including the *introduction of program coordinators, career services, and intentional academic specific programming.*

Intentional Programming from Academic major (this should extend outside of the first six weeks, but a high emphasis during this time). This may include, but is not limited to a session for organization including adding syllabi dates into planners, study sessions prior to first exams, checking-in after week three to check on academic status/transition, etc. (aligns with Starfish dates); These practices should also be built into living-learning communities, residence hall programming, academic student organization programming, etc.

Career Services during this time should also be readily available. This may include a majors fair for new students in which they can connect to faculty in their major, or explore the many majors (and minors) BHSU offers; Tabeing in the student union for students to meet with Career Services to do career inventories, career exploration, skills inventories, etc.; Offer resume development workshops and leadership development opportunities early; Internship fair; Local Employers fair for students to meet and interact with local business and meet future employers

3) Move the organization and implementation of orientation and welcome week to the first year advising/experience center emphasizing the integration of both student affairs and academic affairs staff and faculty. This recommendation provides the experience and knowledge of staff that are dedicated to the first-year transition from the moment a student steps onto campus (including NSR) throughout their first six weeks and the successful completion of the first year. This includes the introduction, hiring, and use of orientation leaders throughout Green and Gold days and possibly as peer mentors for freshman students throughout the first semester (similar practices at Northern State University).

In support of our recommendation to coordinate the orientation program through the first year advising center, we defer to Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2009). Their research examined successful institutional variables that positively impact student orientation programs. The variable of having a designated orientation office did positively influence and help first-year students in their transition to college by understanding academic expectations and specific life skill development. While some stakeholders question the value of having dedicated resources such as staff, office space and financial support for orientation programs, this study provides support for those dedicated allocations rather than dispersing orientation responsibilities across functional areas.

**Changes aren't doable under current system. Must be built into first-year advising/experience

4)Create transfer-student specific activities integrated into the first six weeks.

- During orientation/move-in weekend, have separate programming dedicated to the needs of transfer students while also integrating them into social activities both on campus and in the Spearfish community.

- A separate task force/planning committee should be dedicated to developing transfer student welcome, orientation, New Student Registration, and integration.
- Add transfer student orientation from this year?
 - Focus on Resources/Office Names
 - Transfer student social integration to campus; feel like part of campus with students who already have connection

To conclude, Ruffalo-Noel Levitz indicated that current BHSU students desire increased value in orientation as well as making some activities mandatory. While we have not discussed making orientation activities mandatory, we have increased the value by adding significant academic, social, campus, and community integration throughout the expanded design. Richter and Hillman (2013) from Noel-Levitz also indicate the changing viewpoints of students throughout the first year related to academic motivation which may include study habits, writing, math, and science confidence, their desire to finish college, and their attitude toward educators. Another changing viewpoint involves general coping through sociability, family emotional support, opinion tolerance, career closure, and financial security. While these issues are addressed specifically throughout the first six weeks, it is important to note that dedication to these issues should continue throughout the first year. Key areas that we addressed that were indicated as high need at the start of the year include: interest in part-time jobs, clubs and organizations, interest in government and activities, qualifications for occupations, and educational opportunities. It is also important to note that students tend to have the highest need mid-year in these areas: study habits, tutoring, discussing attitudes toward school, feelings of discouragement, and student loans.

Outcomes

By providing a shift from current practices to the current recommendation, BHSU can capitalize on our first year, full-time student's natural identity development and transition. A few key outcomes are expected based on the literature which are directly tied to the need indicated from Ruffalo-Noel Levitz.

1) Intentional programming that unites academic and student affairs provides a platform for students to navigate their transition effectively while tying their identity development to Black Hills State University. Students will develop competence, manage emotions, establish autonomy and interdependence, create mature relationships with both peers and faculty/staff, engage with their purpose, and begin to develop strong integrity. While these outcomes are related to their entire higher education experience, the first six weeks are pivotal in allowing first-year, full-time freshman to build a foundation for future development.

2) By focusing on strengthening the institutional experiences, students will develop protective factors that buffer against a departure decision from BHSU (Tinto, 1993). While many factors outside of institutional control contribute to a student's decision to departure, increasing commitment to the academic system through programming related to academic performance and intentional interactions with faculty/staff as well as increasing commitment to the social system through extra-curricular activities and

peer group interactions allows for Black Hills State University to have a positive impact on all controllable factors (Reference Appendix A).

3) Tying together the introduction of program coordinators, living-learning communities, and the expanded Green and Gold Days further demonstrates BHSU's priority on increasing the impact of the transition period with successful integration into the campus community as well as further commitment to future generations of yellowjackets.

References

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