

Orientation Planning Guide: Graduate and Professional Students

A successful orientation program establishes a welcoming and supportive departmental culture for students, and provides them with the information, tools, contacts, and confidence to thrive academically, professionally, and personally. Orientation can begin prior to your students' arrival on campus, and continue as they move through each stage of their academic careers.

Orientation provides departments with the opportunity to:

- Welcome and invite students to join your community of scholars.
- Foster an environment in which students feel empowered to ask questions, express concerns, and seek assistance.
- Provide information about the department's expectations for satisfactory degree progress, as well as realistic strategies for navigating through the graduate/professional student experience.

Orientation provides students with the opportunity to:

- Establish connections with departmental faculty, staff, and students.
- Learn about program requirements and unofficial expectations/cultural nuances of the department.
- Identify departmental, collegiate, and university support services, as well as informal avenues for assistance.
- Ask questions and/or express concerns.



Planning Your Orientation Program:

- Ensure that your department's expectations for satisfactory degree progress are clearly articulated and easily available to your students.
- Empower your current students in the planning process. Consider asking the following questions:
 - How would you describe a successful orientation experience?
 - What information was most crucial for you to know upon entering the program in order to thrive during your first year?
 - What is the most effective orientation format for sharing that information with students?
- Consider incorporating one or more of the following best practice elements into your orientation:
 - *Peer mentoring*, which provides structured opportunities for experienced graduate/professional students to meet with and assist new students.

- *Small group discussions*, to share information about how graduate/professional students fit into the academic culture, and about their new role(s).
- *Recognition of your students' diversity of cultures, values, and experiences*, and how this diversity may, for example, inform their sense of belonging in an academic environment, and how they best interact with faculty, staff, and other students.
- *Ongoing formal and informal opportunities* for peer and faculty interactions, throughout the students' first and subsequent years, that address their ongoing needs. Sessions for more advanced students might focus on research methods, thesis/dissertation writing, funding, and career options.

Delivering Your Orientation Program

Prior to students' arrival on campus:

- *Send a welcome letter to your incoming students*, if your department does not already do so. The letter could include information about important dates, funding, and appointments, selected readings on academia and/or personal and professional development, information on the necessities (parking and transit options, local food, housing), and contact information for students if they have any questions.
- *Take advantage of the [MyU Portal](#) for admitted students*, which provides university-wide information, and (for most departments) a platform for you to provide program-specific information, such as orientation date(s), links to faculty bios, links to student organizations, and links to program pages for Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Early in the first semester:

- Provide an initial orientation session that incorporates any/all of the elements described above, as well as any elements you identify as important for your students.
- For a more complete description of areas to include in your orientation, reference the [Doctoral Degree Completion Steps](#) documents from the [Graduate Student Services and Progress office](#) (GSSP).

Resources

Student Conflict Resolution Center

www.sos.umn.edu
612.626.0689, 254 Appleby Hall
Contact: Jan Morse

Boynton Mental Health

www.boynton.umn.edu
612.624.1444, 410 Church St SE
Contact: Matt Hanson

Graduate School

www.grad.umn.edu
612.625.2815, 321 Johnston Hall
Contact: Karen Starry