Shaping Student Expectations: Does College Orientation Matter?

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Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement

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Warrant for Study

Student Transition Theory
- Separation - Distancing self from past associations-family, friends, high school, etc.
- Transition - Entering college, interacting with new individuals in new environment, learning to participate in the new community
- Incorporation - Becoming a full member of the college community, adopting appropriate behavioral patterns.
(Van Gennep, 1960; Tinto, 1993)

Previous Studies on Student Orientation
- Indicates an indirect, but positive effect on first-year persistence
- Tend to aid students in initial socialization and social integration
- Participation in orientation can have positive effect on academic achievement.
- Propose that extended orientation programs will yield greater positive outcomes
(Upcraft, 1984; Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989; Swing)

New Student Orientation Programs Should:
- Help students adjust academically; introduce students to academic requirements, facilities and classroom expectations.
- Help students with personal adjustment to college; introduce students to social organizations, campus support services, and the types of personal growth/developmental changes they might encounter.
- Help families understand the ways in which their student will change as a result of college
- Help the institution learn more about its student body and their needs.
(Perigo & Upcraft, 1989)

Why Is Information Important?
- Information is Powerful
  - The quality of information, family/school resources, & social networks individual students have access to and can apply toward their educational goals plays an important role in attainment (e.g. Bourdieu, Coleman, Hossler, McDonough)
- Information Forms Expectations
  - In addition to being necessary to navigate the search process, information also helps shape students' expectations for college experience.
Why Do Expectations Matter?

- Expectations affect the actual experiences of college students by:
  1) Serving as a filter through which students evaluate and select various types of educational opportunities.
  2) Predisposing students to seek specific learning activities.
- Student expectations and subsequent experience are not always congruent.
  - Ex: First-generation or low-income students may have less tacit knowledge of what college is like.
  - May influence students' overall performance in college and satisfaction with their experience.

Questions of Interest

- Does the effect of college orientation on students' expectations differ across institutions?
  - If so, are these "between-institution" differences explainable by the characteristics of the orientation programs or institutions that the students attend?
- Does the effect of college orientation on students' expectations differ across students?
  - If so, are these "between-student" differences explainable by the characteristics of the students who attend?
- How does the match between student and faculty expectations about time spent studying differ by the students' backgrounds?

Data Sources and Sample

Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement
- Annual survey of first-year students at baccalaureate degree-granting institutions
- 2005-2006 pilot administration at 70 institutions
- Administered prior to start of classes, usually at orientation or welcome week

Faculty Survey of Student Engagement
- Annual survey of upper- and lower-division faculty
- 2006 administration at 131 institutions
- Administered during the spring semester

Survey Instrument Histories

- Both surveys were designed as companions to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
  - Annual survey of first-year students and seniors at four-year institutions that measures extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development.
  - Documents dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and provides information and assistance to colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning.
  - Approximately 600 institutions plan to participate in NSSE 2007 in the spring.
Study Sample

- Student Sample
  - Part 1: 19,615 entering first-year students
  - Part 2: 26,620 entering first-year students
  - 59% female, 41% male
  - 77% white, 23% of color
  - 64% have at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree

- Institutional Sample
  - 60 baccalaureate degree-granting institutions
  - Includes 1 Canadian University
  - 60% private, 40% public
  - Undergraduate student body <400 to >35,000
  - Range on Barron’s from non-competitive to most competitive

Institutional Sample

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Part One: Influence of Orientation on Expectations

BCSSE asks of entering college students:
- To what extent have the following influenced your expectations about your experience at this college?
- Family members
- Friends/students in high school
- Friends/students already attending this college
- High school guidance counselors
- High school teachers/administrators
- College recruiters/admissions counselors
- College website/materials
- Campus visits
- College orientation
- External publications (e.g., guidebooks)

Responses range from ‘Not at all’ to ‘A lot’

Question of Interest #1

Does the effect of college orientation on students’ expectations differ across institutions? If so:
- Are these “between-institution” differences explainable by the following characteristics of the institutions’ orientation programs:
  - Timing of Orientation: Welcome week vs. Other
  - Length of Orientation: Single vs. Multiple Day
  - Mandatory vs. Voluntary Nature of Orientation
- Are these “between-institution” differences explainable by the following characteristics of the institutions:
  - Residential Character
  - Size

Findings

- The influence of orientation on college expectations does not differ much across institutions
  - Only 5% of the total variation in the influence of orientation was between institutions – the rest was between students.
- None of the following three characteristics of orientation programs explained this variation between institutions:
  - Timing of Orientation: Welcome week vs. Other
  - Length of Orientation: Single vs. Multiple Day
  - Mandatory vs. Voluntary Nature of Orientation

Test Your Knowledge: #1

- The more residential the institution, the more influence orientation has on college expectations.
  - True
  - False
Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By Residential Setting

![Bar chart showing influence of orientation by residential setting.]

Test Your Knowledge: #8

• The larger the institution, the more influence orientation has on college expectations.
  - True
  - False

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By Institution Size

![Bar chart showing influence of orientation by institution size.]

Question of Interest #2

• Does the effect of college orientation on students’ expectations differ across students?
  • If so, are these “between-student” differences explainable by the characteristics of the students who attend?
Examples:
  • Do males find orientation to be more influential than females?
  • Is orientation more influential for private high school students than for public high school students?

Have some ideas?
It's time to test your knowledge...

Influence of Orientation

Imagine two hypothetical college-bound students...

Who are similar in all of the following ways but one:

- Gender
- Race
- Parents' Education
- Degree Aspirations
- High School Grades
- High School Leadership
- High School Type
- College Residential Character
- College Size

Test Your Knowledge: #1

• Orientation is more influential for males than for females.
  - True
  - False
Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Your Knowledge: #2

- Asian Americans find orientation more influential than White students in shaping their expectations.
  - True
  - False

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Your Knowledge: #3

- Orientation is more influential for students who aspire to earn a Master's degree than for students who aspire to earn a bachelor's degree.
  - True
  - False

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By Degree Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bachelors</th>
<th>Masters</th>
<th>Doctoral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Your Knowledge: #4

- Students with better high school GPAs find orientation to be more influential in shaping their college expectations.
  - True
  - False
Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By High School GPA

- Students who are more involved in high school leadership activities find orientation to be more influential in shaping their college expectations.
- True
- False

Test Your Knowledge: #5

Students who are more involved in high school leadership activities find orientation to be more influential in shaping their college expectations.

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By High School Leadership Involvement

- Orientation is more influential for graduates of public high schools than for graduates of private high schools.
- True
- False

Test Your Knowledge: #6

Orientation is more influential for graduates of public high schools than for graduates of private high schools.

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

By High School Type

- “Test Your Knowledge” Scores
  - 7-8 Good Job!
  - 5-6 Not Bad!
  - 1-4 This has been educational, No?
Summary of Findings

- Orientation is an Important Source of Information that Shapes Student Expectations
- Differences in the influence of orientation appear most pronounced by:
  - Gender
  - Race
  - High School Leadership Involvement
  - High School Type

Influence of Orientation

- A Hypothetical: Imagine Two Students
  - Case 1: White male who attended a private high school and was moderately active in leadership activities
  - Case 2: African American female who attended a public high school and was very active in leadership activities

Influence of Orientation on Expectations

A Hypothetical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American Female</th>
<th>White Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Influential</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Influential</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why does orientation as a source of information matter?

- Answer: Because the accuracy of student expectations can inform a student's ability to effectively integrate into the campus learning experience
- Example:
  - Comparing student expectations with faculty expectations about the time per week that students spend studying

Findings

Part Two: Matching Faculty Expectations

- BCSS asks of entering college students:
  - During the coming school year, about how many hours do you think you will spend in a typical 7-day week preparing for your class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)?
- FSSE asks of lower division faculty and instructors:
  - In a typical 7-day week, about how many hours do you expect your students to spend preparing for your class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)?
  - Student responses were compared to adjusted average lower division faculty responses by college Carnegie Classification
**Question of Interest #3**

- How does the match between student and faculty expectations about time spent studying differ by the students’ backgrounds?
- Examples:
  - Are students who primarily rely on the college/university as a primary source of information more likely than other students to match faculty expectations?
  - Are students who attend more selective colleges less likely than other students to match faculty expectations?

Have some ideas?

It's time again to test your knowledge...

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**Primary Source of Expectations**

- BCSSE asks of entering college students:
  - To what extent have the following influenced your expectations about your experience at this college?

- **Family members**
- **Friends/students in high school**
- **High school guidance counselors**
- **High school teachers/administrators**
- **College recruiters/admissions counselors**
- **College website/materials**
- **Campus visits**
- **College orientation**
- **External publications (e.g., guidebooks)**

Responses range from 'Not at all' to 'A lot'

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**Primary Source of Expectations**

- Using cluster analysis, we identified four student types:
  - Those students who primarily relied on:
    - **Family and Friends**: 42%
    - **High School**: 10%
    - **College**: 22%
    - **All Sources Equally**: 26%

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**Matching Faculty Expectations**

Imagine **two** hypothetical college-bound students...

Who are similar in all of the following ways but one:

- **Source of Information**
- **Gender**
- **Race**
- **Parents’ Education**
- **Degree Aspirations**

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**Test Your Knowledge: #9**

- Students who primarily relied on which source of information had the greatest likelihood of matching faculty expectations about time spent studying?

  - **Family/Friends**
  - **High School**
  - **College**
  - **All Sources**

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**Matching Faculty Expectations**

*By Information Source*

- **Family/Friends**: 50
- **High School**: 53
- **College**: 55
- **All**: 58
Test Your Knowledge: #10

- Females are **less likely** than males to match faculty expectations about time spent studying?
  - True
  - False

Matching Faculty Expectations
By Gender

Test Your Knowledge: #11

- Asian Americans were **more likely** than other students to match faculty expectations about time spent studying?
  - True
  - False

Matching Faculty Expectations
By Race

Test Your Knowledge: #13

- Students with higher educational expectations have the **same likelihood** of matching faculty expectations about time spent studying.
  - True
  - False

Matching Faculty Expectations
By Degree Aspirations
Test Your Knowledge: #14

- Students with higher high school GPAs are more likely to match faculty expectations about time spent studying.
  - True
  - False

Primary Source of Expectations
By High School GPA

![Bar chart showing the primary source of expectations by high school GPA.](chart)

Test Your Knowledge: #15

- Students who are more active in leadership activities in high school are less likely to match faculty expectations about time spent studying.
  - True
  - False

Matching Faculty Expectations
By High School Leadership

![Bar chart showing matching faculty expectations by high school leadership.](chart)

Test Your Knowledge: #17

- Students who attend more selective colleges are more likely to match faculty expectations about time spent studying.
  - True
  - False

Matching Faculty Expectations
By Selectivity of College Attended

![Bar chart showing matching faculty expectations by selectivity of college attended.](chart)
Matching Faculty Expectations

- “Test Your Knowledge” Scores
  - 7-9 Nice Work!
  - 5-6 Not Bad!
  - 1-4 This has been educational, no?

Summary of Findings

- Family/friends were by far the most often cited source of college expectations, yet students who relied primarily on this source were least likely to match faculty expectations.
- Students who relied on all sources equally had the greatest likelihood of matching faculty expectations.

- Regardless of information sources that were used, differences in entering students’ ability to match their expectations with the expectations of their faculty differed substantially by:
  - Race
  - Educational expectations
  - High school leadership
  - Selectivity of the college attended

Implications

- “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”
  Albert Einstein

- How should we characterize orientation programs?
  - Readily available measures “don’t count”
    - Need better measures of qualitative differences in orientation programs to understand differences in their effectiveness
    - Residential character and size are institutional characteristics that matter—what are these proxies for?

Implications for Practice

- Realities of New Student Orientation Programs
  - Are an extension of a campus’ culture and traditions
    - Culture can work for or against your programming efforts or attempts to change
  - Can require substantial budget outlays
    - Dilemma is high visible expenditures, with frequently less tangible or measurable $ outcomes
  - Student body continues to diversify on most campuses
    - Non-traditional age students, delayed entry students, online degree programs, all expand the types of information orientation programs may need to include.
Implications for Practice

• #1: Heavy Role of Family/Friends
  • Focus on availability of quality and comprehensive information for all
  • Do information sessions include "what to expect" conversations? Academics? Extra-curriculars?
  • Is information provided at different levels of specificity?
  • Do we help all families (FG, low income, various races) develop accurate expectations of college?
  • Do we help students ask questions during campus visits that lead to accurate expectations?

• #2: More Info Sources = Better Information
  • Review information sources available to students
  • Timely
  • Accurate from reliable sources
  • Easy to understand
  • In what format are resources offered?
  • Materials during orientation only
  • Website
  • Mailings to homes
  • Local paper
  • How can students get information about college from you without meeting in person in your office or on campus?

• #3: Who Can Help Us in These Efforts?
  • Are faculty involved in your programs and presenting a consistent message?
  • Does your admissions info lead into and match your orientation info?
  • Network with colleagues
  • Ask/offfer to help develop new college info sessions and ideas for getting to know student needs.
  • External sources of data on entering students (CIRP, BCSSE, SAT/ACT profiles)

Take-Home Message

• We can better understand our students and more effectively help them transition to and be successful in college
• We can shape student expectations, which increases student persistence and college success
• Collaborating with others and using student data and other info sources can help us to assist all students more effectively by confirming or challenging our perceptions

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Presentation materials from this session are available on the NSSE website: www.nsse.iub.edu

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