

Student Transitions Task Force (Ad-Hoc) Summary Report

Background

In Summer 2016 the on-campus summer orientation program for first year students was replaced with a fully online format. The New Student Orientation (NSO) was delivered through Canvas and had 55 different sections, each corresponding to a degree program offered. Department chairs were asked to add content to the course in a format of their choosing (text, website links, hosting webinars, creating videos, etc.) while general content applicable to all incoming new students was coordinated by the Office of Student Transitions.

In addition to NSO, incoming students and their families had an opportunity to attend one of three (3) social events held in various locations in New Jersey (Northern, Central and Southern). There was no formal orientation program on campus.

In Fall 2016 it was concluded that the online orientation did not meet TCNJ's high standards. Several academic schools, deans, and department chairs shared concerns regarding the Summer 2016 program. These included:

- The decision-making process to change past practices did not include department chairs.
- Insufficient time and resources to build and implement an effective and comprehensive online orientation, as well as communicate to the campus community. This resulted in a product that was unwieldy, inconsistent, and confusing, which left students with increased anxiety (particularly in complex academic programs like our School of Education dual majors).
- Considerable burden throughout the summer months on assistant deans, program assistants, and/or department chairs, who answered individual questions that could have been answered for groups at an in-person event.

In response to these concerns, the Steering Committee appointed a Student Transitions Task Force (Ad Hoc) to assess and make recommendations regarding student transitions.

Charge

Please note that the charge below is copied from the Steering Committee, which refers to the group as "Student Transitions Council" or "Council". For purposes of this report, the group is recognized as the Student Transitions Task Force (Ad Hoc) or "Task Force".

The Student Transitions Council will promote support for students during periods of transition, including but not limited to 1) the period from acceptance through the middle of the fall semester for first-year students and for transfer students and 2) the senior year, as students prepare to transition from college to the work force or graduate studies. The council will provide advice regarding planning and strategic direction and make recommendations concerning the development of policies, procedures, and programs relating to issues of student transition. In its work, the Council should be particularly mindful of the need for thoughtful coordination between academic and non-academic realms.

The Council will forward planning recommendations to the Provost/VPAA, the VPSA, and/or the VPEM and to CSPP, which will determine whether further governance action is needed and will share

substantive recommendations with the campus for public input. Recommendations concerning policy, procedure, and program should be forwarded to the Steering Committee. In addition, the Council's recommendation concerning the need for a council within governance should be forwarded to the Steering Committee.

The Student Transitions Council shall consist of fourteen members as follows:

- Representatives of Academic Affairs (2)
 - Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs or designee
 - Academic Dean
- Representatives of Student Affairs (3)
 - Vice President of Student Affairs or designee
 - Director of Student Transitions
 - Representative from Residential Education & Housing appointed by the VPSA
- Representatives of Enrollment Management (2)
 - Director of Admissions
 - Executive Director of Records & Registration
- Faculty (3)
 - Appointed by the Faculty Senate, no more than 2 from a single school
- Staff (2)
 - Appointed by the Staff Senate, ideally representing areas not listed above
- Students (2)
 - Appointed by Student Government

The first meeting will be convened by the VPSA or designee. In keeping with the standard practice for Councils, the group should elect a chair and vice chair from among its members. Minutes of meetings should be submitted to Steering. The Council should see fit to draw on expertise from across campus or outside to assist it with particular issues. If it finds that more Council members are warranted, it should submit a request to Steering.

Task Force Work in the 2016-17 Academic Year

In November 2016, after assessing the successes and challenges of the online orientation model, the Task Force unanimously recommended that a hybrid model be implemented for 2017. Task Force Chair, Cynthia Paces, approached Provost Jackie Taylor and VP for Enrollment Management Lisa Angeloni to explain that the Task Force believed we could not wait a year to fix the problems that occurred in 2016. A hybrid orientation would maintain an online component, but a July orientation would be added back into the schedule. Although this action was outside the original charge, which was to focus on longer-term planning, Provost Taylor and VP Angeloni agreed with our approach. Much of the work of the Task Force went into planning Summer 2017 as a test case for future orientations.

The hybrid orientation model included two components. The first was a modified version of the previous summer's online orientation (NSO). Still delivered through Canvas, this version had one section (versus 55) and the content was streamlined to include only the most pertinent information and deadlines students must complete: Placement Testing, First Semester Worksheet, Summer Reading Assignment, Housing Application, Health Forms and ID Card Photo. The Task Force also met with Sharon Blanton, CIO, to gain knowledge on current and future technology projects in her area and how we can utilize

those advances in our work.

The second component was to bring back a one-day program on-campus in July, with changes to the format that would allow students and families the freedom to choose activities and sessions that most impacted them. Additionally, the Task Force identified clearer communication strategies, including direct notification from the Office of Student Transitions to Department Chairs throughout the year. Assistant Deans will continue to serve as important contacts for programming and implementation.

Feedback on the hybrid model was very positive, and a formal assessment took place in the fall. Student perceptions of the hybrid format were overwhelmingly positive, and the changes in the online orientation component resulted in greater student satisfaction in 2017 than in 2016 (Figure 1).

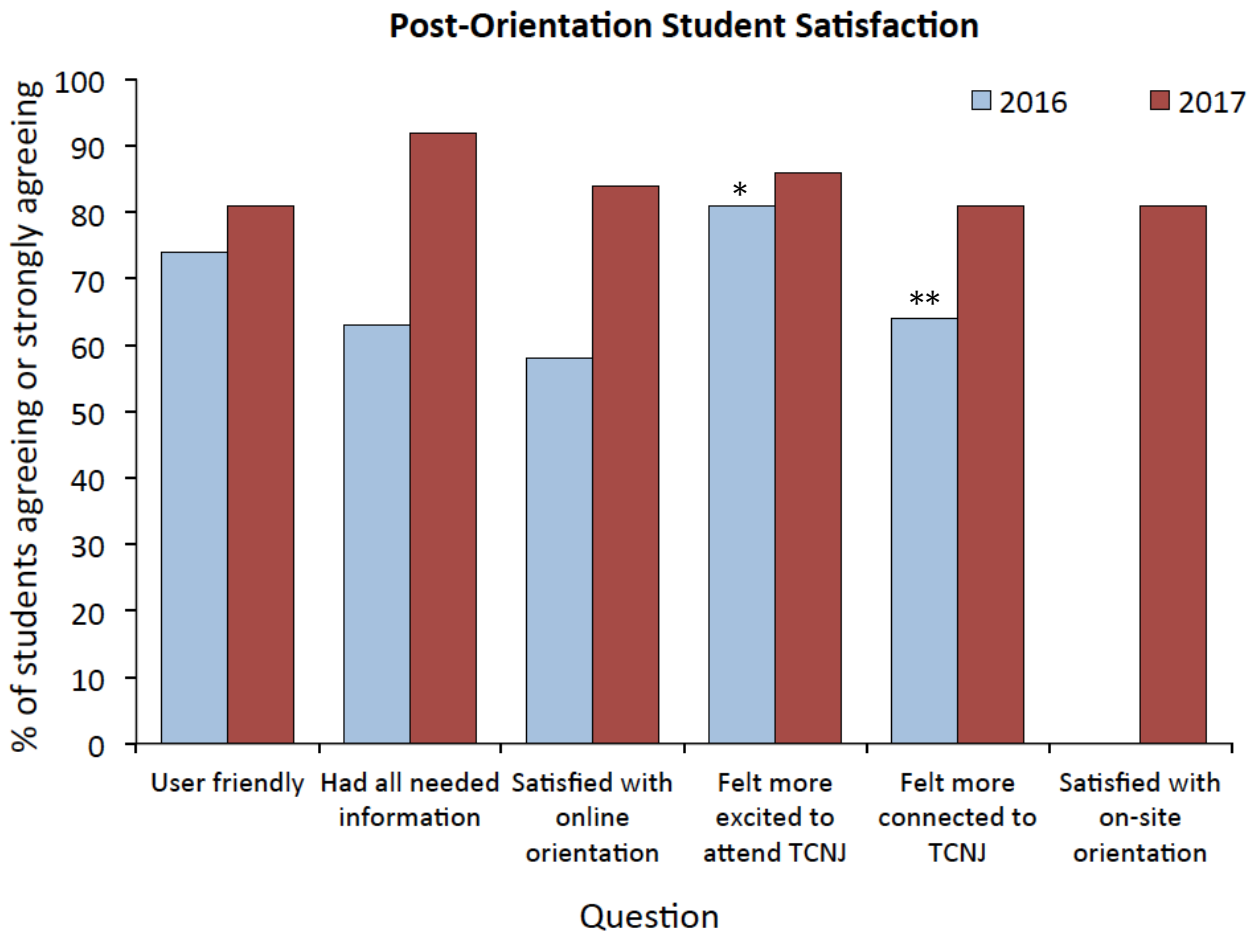


Figure 1. Post-orientation student satisfaction with online and on-site orientation in 2016 (blue bars) and 2017 (red bars).

*Statement evaluated by students in 2016 was “After completing the online orientation, I am pleased with my decision to attend TCNJ.”

**Statement evaluated by students in 2016 was “After completing the online orientation, I feel like I belong at TCNJ.”

Additionally, the Task Force spent significant time creating program objectives for each unique phase of the transition process for our new students: Accepted Students Day (April), Online Orientation (May-June), On Campus Orientation (July), Welcome Week (August), Extended Transition (September-October). The finalized objectives are attached.

Recommendations

Following the Task Force's work in the 2016-17 academic year, assessment of the hybrid orientation model in 2017, and discussions with group members, below is a list of recommendations the Task Force submits to the Steering Committee:

Short-Term

1. TCNJ should maintain the hybrid model for orientation while pursuing a high-quality online orientation for those students who cannot attend in-person. In the interim, the streamlined New Student Orientation (NSO) created in 2017 should be continued.
2. The Office of Student Transitions should continue to use the program objectives and communication strategies developed by the Task Force in the 2016-17 academic year. The Office should also continue ongoing assessment of the programs and services offered, as well as implement a formal assessment for TCNJ faculty and staff to provide feedback and suggestions.
3. Any changes to the orientation program should be based on assessment data gathered from piloted models and the campus community.

Long-Term

1. The Task Force, initially created for a one-year period, should be put into governance permanently. This will support the Office of Student Transitions in remaining a collaborative partnership between the Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management divisions.
2. Representation on the proposed Student Transitions Advisory Council (STAC) will mirror the Task Force and always include at least one Department Chair and one representative from the School of Education.
3. The STAC will make informed recommendations for transition models and programs, based on assessment data and other institutional factors. Please see the proposed work for the STAC below for additional long-term objectives and projects.
4. To adequately sustain the quality of events and current services, as well as expansion to better service our students in the future, the College should secure funding for additional human resources for the Office of Student Transitions.

Proposed Work for the New Student Transitions Advisory Council (STAC)

1. As the College moves towards expanding its technology capabilities, including the addition of a document management system and customer relationship management software, the STAC will focus on using that technology to communicate more effectively and efficiently with students, including the delivery of academic advising and online orientation.

2. The STAC will help develop and assess a plan to address issues related to technology access for our incoming students, especially those in our international cohort.
3. In its work during the 2016-2017 academic year, the Task Force identified additional transition periods (inter-year; study abroad and graduation) that are not currently supported by the Office of Student Transitions. The STAC is interested in exploring these transitions and benchmarking current efforts to provide the College with recommendations on collaborative oversight and support going forward.
4. Specific to supporting our students in their final year at the College, the STAC should create program objectives to help guide the Office of Student Transitions in its potential future work for this cohort, including the creation of programs and workshops that address concerns and anxieties beyond those traditionally addressed (e.g. interviewing for jobs, applying to graduate schools, career planning).

Task Force Members

2016-2017 Academic Year

Lindsay Barndt (Vice Chair)
 James Beyers
 Frank Cooper
 Amy Hecht
 Erica Kalinowski
 Patricia Kou
 Tracy Kress
 Grecia Montero
 Kit Murphy
 Cynthia Paces (Chair)
 Steve Schreiner
 Martha Stella
 Tina Tormey
 Samantha Williams (Fall 2016 Only)
 AJ LoPresti (Spring 2017 Only)

2017-2018 Academic Year

Elizabeth Bapasola
 Lindsay Barndt (Vice Chair)
 James Beyers
 Frank Cooper
 Erica Kalinowski
 Bill Keep
 Tracy Kress
 Dani Mauro
 Grecia Montero
 Kit Murphy
 Cynthia Paces (Chair)
 Matt Van Soelen
 Tina Tormey
 Chelsea Watson