Remote Innovative Student Engagement Program

Urban Campus R.I.S.E

Student Affairs Case Study Competition 2021
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R.I.S.E.: What is it?

R.I.S.E. is an orientation add-on program that colleges and universities will use as a supplement to their own model of first-year and transfer orientations.

Beyond the traditional use of orientation (to relay critical information to students and parents, as well as orient them to their new campus), the objective of the R.I.S.E. program is to assist incoming students in building a lasting community of social support throughout their college experience. While some universities already make jump-starting the process of building connections a major component of orientation, it is even more essential that this be key component given the lack of connection that so many students are facing: lack of connection to fellow student and lack of connection to the campus community as a whole.

R.I.S.E. hopes that students will feel a sense of belonging and community following orientation, and feel equipped to continue building new relationships on campus (virtually and in-person) after having the chance to see social-engagement behaviors modeled, and having practiced them, at one of their earliest encounters at their new institution.

Theoretical Orientation and Proposed Need in the Literature

At this point in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is well noted by higher education and student affairs professionals that student's general emotional and mental wellbeing has been negatively impacted by the sudden and unpredictable change of the campus community landscape and learning environment (Hasan & Bao, 2020). Students are lonely and stressed (Arslan, Yıldırım & Aytaç 2020), and student affairs practitioners need to do something about it.

Our proposed program hopes to address this need, and is informed by Self-determination theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior. We have selected these two theories of behavior in order to design a program with the intention and likelihood of successfully assisting students in behavior change that will lead to increased healthy social behaviors and attitudes towards the self and the community, as well as decrease potentially harmful attitudes and feelings, such as loneliness and incompetence or inability to build connections.

Program Goals

1) Influence positive student **attitudes** through our planned orientation event, with a key focus on setting self-sustained goals regarding student to student connection, and student to campus engagement
2) Provide an initial connection experience at orientation: **improving norms** about student experience and connection in the virtual landscape
3) Increase student levels of **perceived behavioral control** by promoting student connection beyond initial orientation activities through goal-setting

Building Background: Who's our demographic?

- Urban State Campus
- Incoming first-year and transfer students
- Robust population of students representing multicultural identities
- Students who have experienced loneliness or disconnection as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Student-led orientation groups

R.I.S.E. Committee

- New Student & Family Programs Representative
    - This would be the liaison to the group creating orientation programs
- Residential Life & Housing Representative
    - Should the students return to campus, this would be an in-person contact for them
- Lead Student Orientation Leader
    - A more seasoned leader (2nd year) or possibly the graduate student managing this group
- Assistant Dean of Students
    - Can serve as a facilitator for other office relationships within Student Affairs and outreach
- IT Rep
    - Assistance with event promotion, IT troubleshooting

Consulting Departments: University Marketing, Multicultural Office, Disability Services, Wellness Resource Center, Academic Advising

The core values of this committee are consultation, efficiency, and representation. While we have kept the committee to a small group, we actively seek input from office and groups on campus not represented on the committee. The purpose behind our small committee is agility and efficiency to be able to meet student needs quickly. We also acknowledge our small committee can not accurately represent all identities within the freshman class, and therefore we will continually seek additional perspectives when making plans and decisions. We are informed by student needs data and make evidence-based decisions about student programming and engagement.

Rethinking Orientation Structure

R.I.S.E. aims to incorporate engaging activities within orientation groups to foster connection beyond the traditional orientation structure.

The switch to a virtual learning model has caused a disruption to student socialization with peers and the university community (Carmody et al, 2020). Successful strategies that encourage student engagement incorporate "increased and personalized communication with students" (Rager, 2020). This could positively impact retention rates in producing an environment that promotes an 'as close to normal' experience as possible for students (Rager, 2020).

Students' expectations for their orientation experience are not being met. R.I.S.E. will strive to normalize the new virtual orientation experience for future semesters in a way that mirrors the original expectations of incoming students. This can be achieved through personalized approaches that promote building a community of support. A proactive rethinking of traditional orientation structures provides students the opportunity to take control back over their orientation experience and encourages engagement.

R.I.S.E. Day Add-On

How does it work?

Each first-year or transfer student is required to complete an orientation. The overall structure of each university's orientation will vary, but R.I.S.E. will act as an add-on to combine with already established programs. What this portion of the program aims to do is rethink traditional orientation structures for the virtual environment. Students will learn the required information to introduce them to their university while having a personalized touch built in to sustain social connection and campus engagement through virtual activities (i.e. virtual campus tour, ice breaker activities, social connection activities, post-orientation follow ups).

Considerations

- The program will need to ensure it is still meeting basic expectations of the university's learning objectives for incoming students.
- Universities should strive to incorporate personalized touches in their other scheduled orientation experiences, not just in the add-on day event.
- The virtual activities should happen separate from parents and families to encourage students to build connections with one another, building a supportive foundation of community support.
- The committee is aware that students will be spending a majority of time online during orientation. Experiential activities should be limited to 45 minutes, with 15 minute breaks built in.

Limitations

- Possible limitations include access to technology and a reliable or stable internet source.

Who is leading it?

- Student orientation leaders will facilitate the R.I.S.E. add-on day and any additional experiential virtual activities throughout the orientation period.

Virtual Tour Option 1 - Social Media

How does it work?

An experienced orientation leader would partner with University Marketing to film a tour of the spaces on campus that would most-often be frequented by first year students. This might include the student commons spaces, dining halls, recreational facilities, residence hall, and class rooms. The leader will not only show students what is waiting for them when they are able to return to campus but they will provide information on how to interact with the resource in a virtual environment. As an example, while touring the campus recreational facilities, the leader would mention that students can take virtual work out classes by signing up online.

There will be a moderator present on the social media platform to answer questions from students and family members. The video would go live on YouTube to allow specific populations to access the video during orientation. The video settings can be changed to only allow those with the link to view the video during their allotted time during orientation. This would allow the moderators to manage the incoming questions appropriately.

Considerations

- The committee is aware that students and familiar will be spending lots of time online during orientation and will keep the prerecorded tour to 30 minutes.
- The video will need to be fully captioned and if possible, available in multiple languages.
- This format would foster student to campus engagement but does not lend itself to student to student connection.

Limitations

- With a prerecorded video, there is limited amount of two-way communication that can take place between the host and the viewer. Moderators will be needed.
- There are often limits to the size of files we can upload to social media platforms and we will need to be mindful of the size and quality of the video.

Who is leading it?

- Orientation leaders would both be leading the prerecorded virtual tour and moderating the questions being asked on social media platforms.
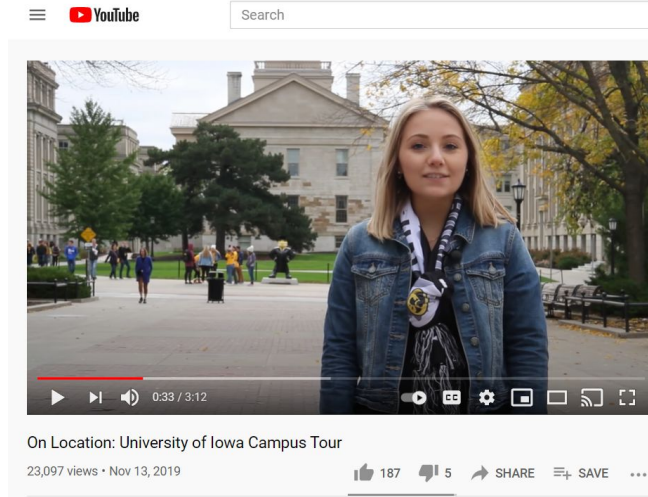
Virtual Campus Tour Option 2 - YouVisit

How does it work?

The YouVisit platform allows colleges and universities to create 3D maps of campus that students can navigate at their leisure. The platform also allows students to hear a student from the university guide them through the process. This platform gives students a truly immersive experience and introduction to the university.

Considerations

- This platform is more costly than a free social media platform but may provide a better experience for students. This company also provides schools with data on how virtual tours and time spent in virtual tours, turns into registered student.

Limitations

- With a format such as YouVisit, answers to questions would likely be populated in advance as is typically done with chatbot technology, leaving students and families without live answers to the questions that come up during the tour.

Who is leading it?

- Orientation leaders would both be leading the prerecorded virtual tour and moderating the questions being asked on social media platforms.
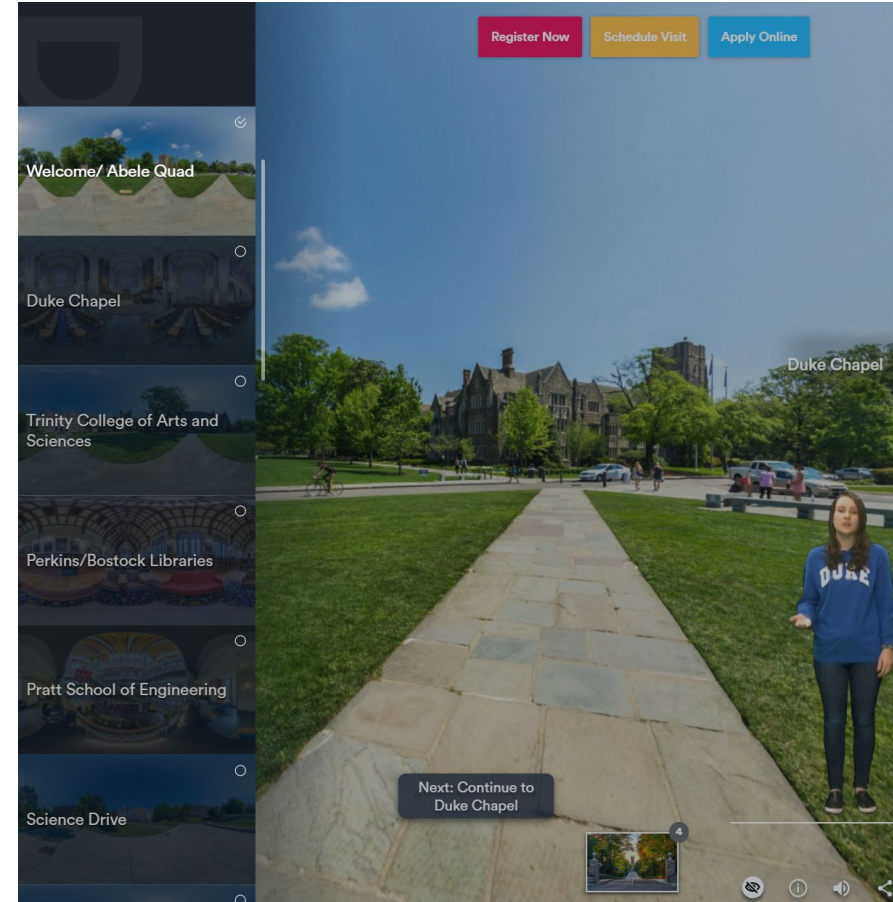
(Duke Univ., 2020)

Breakout Rooms - Speed Friending

How does it work?

The orientation leader will utilize the Zoom platform to separate the students rotating into dyads or triads within breakout rooms. The students will have conversation prompts to help jump start discussion and will rotate to a new dyad or tried every 10 minutes.

Considerations

- Students will be left in the breakout rooms for 10 minutes with their partners and the moderator will not be privy to the content of the discussions.
- Student will have the option to leave breakout rooms if they desire or if they become uncomfortable.
- This format will allow students to exchange contact information with those they make a social connection with to continue a conversation.
- Every effort should be made for all students in the group to meet with each other.

Limitations

- Students will need to take the initiative to continue the conversation outside of the activity.
- Moderators cannot monitor the content of all breakout rooms simultaneously and so all group members should agree on rules of conduct in advance.

Who is leading it?

- Orientation leaders would be handling the logistics of the Zoom room and the breakout room.

Joining Breakout Rooms...

Breakout Room 1

It may take a few moments.
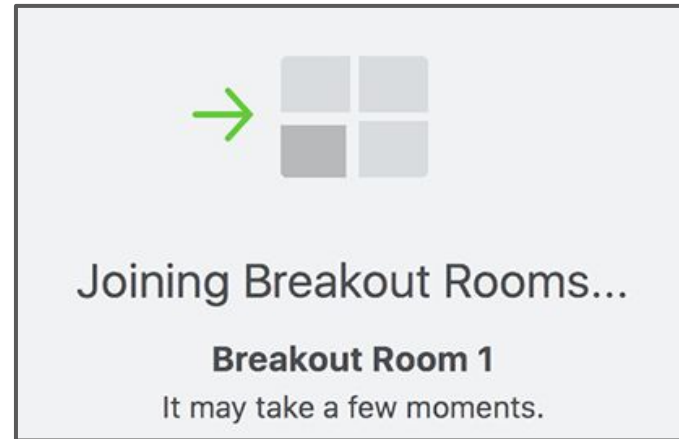
(Popov et al., 2014)

Setting Intention

How does it work?

Students will work with their orientation leaders and groups to discuss intentionality around building their social community at VCU. Leaders should be conscious that not all students will have the same level of interest in building social networks.

This activity, based in self-determination theory, will involve a round activity with the orientation group. The group will discuss the following, answering either on their own or with the group:

1. Do you want to work towards building a social group on campus?
2. What do you need to build a social group on campus?
3. How will building a social group on campus impact your college experience?

Considerations

- The leader may need to educate the group on the benefits of setting an intentional goal, how they can set intention through a written activity or discussion with the group, and the leader may also need to assist students in identifying realistic goals.

Limitations

- Students may not be interested in sharing their social goals for the year with orientation leaders and the group of students they are attending orientation with.

Who is leading it?

- Orientation leaders would be handling the logistics of the Zoom room and the intention setting activity.

(Houston, 2020)

R.I.S.E. Post-Orientation Follow-Ups

After orientation, leaders offer a check in meeting following the first week of classes

Objectives include:

- Remaining connected with their group following orientation
- Encouraging and modeling positive social behaviors
- A sense of connection and support already formed at the initial week of the semester

While connections may or may not last extend beyond the events facilitated by orientation leaders, students have had a chance to see and practice creating new relationships on campus, and know that they can reach out to their orientation leader for resources and support.

Supporting and Encouraging Connection Beyond Orientation

Beyond your orientation group: Each incoming class has access to student lead chat rooms for varying subjects, such as...

- Off campus activity recommendations
- Setting up study groups: (i.e. is anyone currently taking geosystems 101?
- Tech questions
- Other shared experiences

These are student lead, moderated by resident hall advisors or orientation leaders

Marketing and Social Media

Promotional Video

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEW5LFMqy4/_u8J5K2WTIEQ3GZuY34Y-g/watch?utm_content=DAEW5LFMqy4&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink

Social Media

- R.I.S.E. Social media platforms will post tips and reminders about staying connected, building new connections, and future events
- R.I.S.E. highlights: monthly or weekly features on social media platforms: student photos with short biographies, or short videos from students on how they are staying connected virtually or in a socially-distanced way
- All incoming students will be exposed to R.I.S.E program at orientation

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