2019-2020: New Student & Family Programs

Definition of Unit

Providing Department:
New Student & Family Programs

Department/Unit Contact:
Allen Mullis

Mission/Vision Statement:

The Office of New Student & Family Programs is committed to serving students and families by:

- Providing programs and services to assist the transition of new students into the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of Tennessee Tech.
- Exposing new students to the University's educational, extracurricular, and multicultural opportunities in order to foster personal growth.
- Educating parent and family members and establishing partnerships to support students' academic and personal success.
- Developing students as leaders who are engaged inside and outside of the academic community.

The purpose of the Office of New Student & Family Programs is to bridge the gap and ease the transition of first year students to the University through engaging and educational programming. All programs and services align with the institution's Tech Tomorrow strategic initiative focusing on improving the undergraduate student experience, CAS (Council for Advancement of Standards) Standards, and the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education (NODA) guidelines.

The Office of New Student & Family Programs reports to the Executive Director for Student Success within the division of Enrollment Management & Career Placement.

Goal 1 - Develop educational and effective orientation programs to establish successful new student transitions to the campus community.

Define Goal:

Create orientation programs that educate new Tennessee Tech students about campus and student life, academic resources, and co-curricular and social opportunities to assist with their transition.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

- Each orientation program will be designed to meet the needs of its specified cohort.
- Informational and educational sessions within each orientation program will be evaluated based on learning outcomes to determine students' obtainment of information.
- Recruit, select, and effectively train student leaders to assist with the execution of orientation and transition programming.
- Ongoing professional staff development to benchmark departmental programming among peer institutions in an effort to enhance current programming and develop new programs.

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment: Student and Guest/Parent Orientation Evaluations

Frequency of Assessment:

After Completion Of Each Orientation Event

Rationale:

The SOAR Student and Parent/Guest Evaluations and Transfer Orientation Evaluations are an evaluation each orientation participant submits at the conclusion of their respective program. It asks an array of questions covering the program and collects both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis and programmatic improvements.

- Success is defined by program sessions received an average score of 3 or higher on a 4 or 5 point scale over the course of the summer (scales vary based on question), and qualitative reporting is used to help shape ideas.
- The evaluations provide a complete and clear picture regarding what our participants believe to be receiving from the program, because on average, 90% of student participants and 60% of guest/parent participants submit the evaluations.
- The evaluations are tabulated, bound, and shared with the individual offices that sponsor sessions during orientation programming. Digital copies of the evaluations and results is kept on file within the Office of New Student & Family Programs.

Spring Orientation 2019 was the second year that we only offered an online orientation experience for our new freshmen and transfer students; we did not offer an on-campus option for this cohort of students.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results - Goal 1

Results:

Student Orientation, Advisement, and Registration (SOAR) Program:

The SOAR program provides the foundation for new first-year traditional freshman (under the age of 21) to begin their transition from high school to Tennessee Tech University. This program is primarily focused on assisting these new students with their transition, but has adopted parent/family programming to better support student success and progression in higher education.

Through constant monitoring of attendee (student and guests) evaluations, campus partnerships, and student leaders, the program has begun transitioning from a single unit program to a campus-wide effort. Over the last fiscal year, my team and I have worked on the following areas to improve the program's student and guest experience:

Below is a table showing the first-time traditional freshman numbers over the last decade to explain their impact on the SOAR program since its implementation.

Entering Class of Fall (First-Time Freshman)	Class Size	# Registered for SOAR
2007	1,649	n/a
2008	1,659	n/a
2009	1,882	n/a
2010	1,898	1,936
2011	1,960	1,915
2012	2,046	1,982
2013	2,162	2,059
2014	1,875	1,868
2015	1,577	1,543
2016	1,608	1,561
2017	1,761	1,666
2018	1,890	1,978
2019	1,705	1,835

- **94%** matriculation rate (fall 2019) for first-time freshmen in to the SOAR program.
- On-boarding processes for new first-time freshmen and new transfer students include a communication plan to transition students from Admissions to New Student & Family Programs.
    - Once admitted students will receive email communications from Admission's CRM about their cohort's orientation program.
    - Students will then receive mailed invitation with orientation registration instructions and information about the program they will attend.

        - Once registered, students receive additional email and text message communications regarding reminders for their upcoming session.
        - Once registered for orientation, campus departments (Residential Life, Health Services, Admissions for Selective Service items, Academic Units, etc) will have access to reports to either contact the student for advisement/registration (Transfer Students) or Pre-Enroll students within courses for the fall term (SOAR first-time freshmen).
- Evaluated each informational session to determine learning outcomes and areas of opportunity for improving the amount and magnitude of information received.
- Continued partnership with student success centers to implement pre-enrollment process for students prior to attending SOAR program over the summer.
- Continuously improving content (both materials and educational sessions) students receive at orientation.
    - Meet with orientation presenters to discuss opportunities for improvement in their sessions
    - Provide feedback to presenters throughout the summer, depending on feedback received from parent/guest and student evaluations.
    - Provide a Presenter Workshop as an opportunity for presenters to refine and enhance their presentation skills.
- Increased supervision of SOAR program experience on an internal level by monitoring the interactions of our SOAs with their student groups and interacting with parents/guests to ensure the needs of each attendee are met.
- Continue the SOA role and communication with students throughout the summer with email follow-up, which is monitored by Assistant Director, Coordinator, and student coordinators.

Evaluation results below are based on responses from students and parents/families/guests whom attended the program. The evaluation results are an overall average.

Student Question:

2014 & 2015 - *Overall, I feel SOAR has been beneficial to me.*

2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019 - *Overall, I would agree that SOAR is a helpful resource in navigating my transition to Tech.*

Parent/Guest Question:

2014 & 2015 - *Overall, I feel SOAR has been beneficial to me as a parent.*

2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019 - *Overall, I feel SOAR was beneficial & resourceful to me as a family member of a Tech student.*

(Scale of 1-5, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, & 5 = strongly agree)

	Avg. Student Rating	Total Student Responses	Avg. Parent/Guest Rating	Total Parent/Guest Responses
2014	4.59	1,227	4.53	981
2015	4.48	876	4.48	780
2016	4.42	1,010	4.55	657
2017	4.59	1,170	4.64	806
2018	4.57	1,554	4.65	845
2019	4.61	1,469	4.63	934

Question: *Rate the helpfulness & friendliness of the Tech faculty, staff, & students.*

(Scale of 1-5, where 1 = not helpful & friendly, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, & 5 = strongly agree)

	Avg. Student Rating	Total Student Responses	Avg. Parent/Guest Rating	Total Parent/Guest Responses
2014	4.80	1,231	4.82	985
2015	4.76	877	4.86	792
2016	4.77	1,017	4.83	660
2017	4.76	1,171	4.84	809
2018	4.79	1,553	4.85	846
2019	4.81	1,468	4.87	938

Professional Staff & Student Development

All department professionals are members of the Association for Orientation, Transition, & Retention in Higher Education (NODA).

Due to funding, no professional staff members were able to attend the 2019 NODA annual conference in San Diego, CA. Allen Mullis served as one of the two Tennessee State Co-Coordinators for the organization.

See attachment regarding student staff development and training.

Attachments:
SOA_TrainingOutline_2019; SOAR2019_EvaluationReport; SOAR2019_ParentGuestItinerary; SOAR2019_StudentItinerary; SpringOrientation2020_EvaluationReport; TransferOrientation2019_EvaluationReport; TransferOrientation2019_Itinerary

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications and Continuing Improvement - Goal 1

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Goal 1: Continue tracking enrollment trends for new first-time freshmen under 21 (traditional freshmen students) to establish the appropriate number of sessions needed to adequately accommodate the cohort. Orientation registration session student maximums must be monitored to maintain a quality and effective program, as well as, provide advising units a balanced student count to facilitate advisement, registration, and introduction to majors. Sessions dates will continue to be scheduled in accordance to other Tennessee universities' programs and summer schedules to maintain a recruiting advantage.

Transfer Orientation and online orientation programs have been developed. Online orientation has been fully implemented and provided as an option for transfer students for 2.5 years. Looking ahead to the future, we are currently working to implement an international track to the online orientation as well as other methods for improvement and enhancements within the online orientation.

Orientation programs will continued to be evaluated against needs of the University and its strategic plan in onboarding students, CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education), and the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention (NODA) programming standards.

Link to Assessment:

Goal 2 - First-Year Experience Programs

Define Goal:

Establish and maintain first-year experience and student success programming for new students to continue their transition to the University after orientation. These programs are designed to engage them inside and outside of the classroom, integrate them into the campus community, initiate their preparation for the global economy, and develop them into leaders.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

- Establish and create Week of Welcome programming to provide new students the opportunity to explore campus post-orientation, connect with students within and outside of their major, and introduce them to university faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Provide students opportunities and programming to explore ideas, philosophies, and cultures outside of their own.
- Create opportunities for students to learn campus traditions, culture, and resources throughout their first year to initiate a sense of belongingness.
- Share resources and information for continued transitional support both academically, socially, mentally, and physically.
- Foster peer connections and supportive relationships within and outside of the classroom
- Ongoing professional and student staff development to benchmark departmental programming among peer institutions in an effort to enhance current programming and develop new programs.

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment: First-Year Connections Peer Mentor Evaluations

Frequency of Assessment:

Annually

Rationale:

Peer Mentors assigned to First-Year Connections instructors are asked to complete an evaluation regarding the course(s) they supported. This evaluation gives program directors the opportunity to evaluate and assess the utilization and role of Peer Mentors within the program. Also, we are able to receive feedback regarding how these mentors may further their involvement within the program to support student success and retention. Exit surveys are a useful resource to glean invaluable information from the student para-professionals that are actually carrying out the vision created by the professionals.

- The exit surveys will provide the Director of the program the ability to problem solve and learn any behind-the-scenes information that could either help with efficiency or effectiveness.

- Success will be interviewing at least 80% of the exiting staff to get a clear picture of the program from their perspective.
- Administrators are often removed from the front-lines and student interactions on campus. Conducting exit surveys with transitioning peer mentors is critical, because we can truly learn in a non-confrontational manner if we are effectively meeting our goals.
- Results are discussed with the co-directors of the program to identify learning outcomes, content integration, and peer mentor utilization.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results - Goal 2

Results:

Convocation:

Program Summary: Successfully executed the annual University Convocation program. We estimate over 1,000 students participated in the 2019 Convocation Ceremony. After this event, the freshman class is escorted to Tucker Stadium for their Class Photo.

First-Year Connections:

Program Summary: Utilized a SharePoint site to provide instructor-specific content, resources, and a one-stop location for all items associated with First-Year Connections. Use of the SharePoint site allows us to initiate consistency with the program and facilitate the transition of new instructors into the program.

First-Year Connections Peer Mentor Program:

Program Summary: Continued use of an online application process for Peer Mentors to eliminate the former paper process for submitting applications. Appointed peer mentors to 72% (54 out of 75 sections) of the First-Year Connections sections for Fall 2019 (does not include Honors 1010 or International Sections). The percentage decrease over the previous year (Fall 2018) is most likely due to continued uncertainties with the program and the Peer Mentor role, which resulted in many peer mentors being appointed last-minute.

Conducted two training sessions for Peer Mentors (one prior to the start of the semester and one mid-semester) to educate them on the expectations of their role and resources available to support their students. Peer Mentors were expected to attend University Convocation and Running of the Freshmen with their students, which supports the increase in freshman students

participating in these events. Peer Mentors were required to submit monthly reports of the activities they were performing both inside and outside of the classroom.

Continued use of a SharePoint site created specifically for Peer Mentors provided them with resources, including suggested events to attend with their classes, tips for connecting with mentees, suggested class presentation topics, and more.

Requested and received feedback from peer mentors regarding their role, which has proven valuable as we make program adjustments and changes for FY 2020-2021.

Week of Welcome:

Student Organization Mix & Mingle	Religious Organizations and Churches Fair
130 Student Organizations Participated	**40** Organizations and Churches Participated

Program Summary: Week of Welcome is a series of events, beginning with Great Move-in Day and ending during the first week of classes, focusing on student involvement and engagement opportunities with the University. For 2018, our department continued campus partnerships with Tech Activities Board, Athletics, Student Activities, Student Government Association, Greek Life, Multicultural Affairs, Athletics, Communications & Marketing, and the Student Success Centers.

Some of our notable events include Great Move-In Day, Freshman VIP Night at the University Bookstore, Student Organization Mix & Mingle and Dancin' on Dixie, Fall Classes Guided Tour, Cookeville Business Fair (now Connect with Cookeville), Movie on the Quad, Cosmic Bowling at Bowling World, and Hypnotist Dr. Jim Wand.

In 2018, Tech's Office of Communications & Marketing (OCM) took oversight of the Cookeville Business Fair (now Connect with Cookeville) event; they continued hosting the event in 2019 as well. For 2019, the Student Organization Mix & Mingle was also transitioned to the Office of Student Activities.

2019 was also the second year that the Student Success Centers hosted open houses during the "Freshman Fall Classes Guided Tour" event. This idea was to help build additional community with new students within their academic departments/colleges before classes began.

For 2019 Week of Welcome we also created additional partnerships with Tech's Army National Guard to help sponsor water for various events, and the Tech Army ROTC to help sponsor the Cosmic Bowling event.

Each incoming new freshman student who attended SOAR is mailed a postcard home with the Week of Welcome schedule. This allows us to promote the events to students before arriving on

campus and allow their parents/families to help support participation in each of these events. In addition, schedules are provided to students in their welcome packages provided by Residential Life on Great Move-In Day.

First-Year Newsletter

In Spring 2019, our department piloted a first-year newsletter, called *Beak Speak*. This electronic newsletter was sent out to all new freshmen students enrolled for the spring semester and included various tips and resources for students to help with student retention initiatives. Of the 1,699 first-year students this email was sent to, 33% of them opened the email within 24 hours.

This newsletter was continued for Fall 2019 & Spring 2020. Examples are attached below.

For the August 2019 newsletter, 48.1% of students who received the email (1,684) opened it, and 7.2% of those who opened it clicked a link within the email.

For the October 2019 newsletter, 33% of students who received the email (1,650) opened it, and 4% of those who opened it clicked a link within the email.

For the January 2020 newsletter, 34.5% of those who received the email (1,704) opened it, and 4.6% of those who opened it clicked a link within the email.

For the March 2020 newsletter, 45% of those who received the email (1,518) opened it, and 2% of those who opened it clicked a link within the email.

Attachments:
BeakSpeak_FreshmanNewsletter_Aug2019; BeakSpeak_FreshmanNewsletter_Jan2020; BeakSpeak_FreshmanNewsletter_Mar2020; BeakSpeak_FreshmanNewsletter_Oct2019; Fall2019_PeerMentor_ActivityLog_Huntley_FOED1822.pdf; Fall2019_PeerMentor_ActivityLog_Rossi_CHEM1500.pdf; PeerMentor_ExperienceSurvey_Fall2019; PeerMentor_TrainingOutline_2019; WeekOfWelcome_Schedule_2019

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications and Continuing Improvement - Goal 2

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Due to uncertainties with this program, it is difficult to determine where to focus potential efforts. However, we will continue to determine best practices for First-Year Connections peer mentors and evaluate survey responses to determine additional program or training needs for peer mentors.

Research new and benchmark current transition programming initiatives, such as Week of Welcome, to determine any new events that can possibly be added or programs that are no longer successful that may need to be terminated. Explore opportunities for additional partnerships across the campus and Cookeville community to help improve programming and acclimation of students within the local community. We are also currently in the process of working to create an extended Week of Welcome to further engage and connect new students with the university.

Link to Assessment:

Goal 3 - Parent & Family Programs

Define Goal:

Explore, develop, and assess opportunities and programming to support parent and family transitions to Tennessee Tech. Programs will allow parents and families to assist and guide their student through the college experience while fostering a healthy level of involvement.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

- Build collaboration between parents and families and the University for student learning, development, and success.
- Support Tennessee Tech's mission for student success and progression by partnering and educating parents and families on campus events, programs, and resources for their students.
- Create programming and events for parents and families to provide them with a sense of belonging within the campus community and their student's education.
- Create a central resource center for the University's students' parents and families.
- Establish and maintain a Parent Association which allows parents and families access to resources, networking, and communications to keep them informed with campus events, tools, and tips.
- Ongoing professional and student staff development to benchmark departmental programming among peer institutions in an effort to enhance current programming and develop new programs.

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment: Parent Association Membership Survey

Frequency of Assessment:
Annually

Rationale:

Each year, a membership survey is sent to current members of the Tennessee Tech University Parent Association (TTUPA) to:

- determine overall value of membership
- identify opportunities for increasing membership involvement and value
- identify areas of need for the Association

Results from the survey are shared with the Association's Board of Trustees to review, assess, and discuss improvements or items of interest for the membership base.

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results - Goal 3

Results:

Family Weekend:

Program Summary: Family Weekend 2019 was held September 13-15. Students and their families were able to participate in various activities, including departmental events, a campus-wide scavenger hunt, and a Golden Eagle football game. Our office partnered with colleges and academic departments to host events during Family Weekend. Besides academic departments, we also had involvement from the campus Bookstore and Dining, the Golden Eagle Golf Club, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Residential Life, and Athletics.

Due to popularity from 2017 & 2018, we hosted two (2) Family Paint Nights at the Art Jam! This event was hosted at the Art Jam CKVL and helped to broaden our community partnerships. Both events were at full capacity and many families had to be turned away. For 2019, we decided to host one or the two Art Jam events specifically for Tennessee Tech Parent Association members. Looking forward to 2020, our department will determine how to accommodate more families in a socially distanced or virtual setting.

Tennessee Tech Parent Association:

Since 2009, students of TTUPA (Tennessee Tech University Parent Association) members have regularly posted higher first to second year retention rates compared to the rest of the students in each cohort. We have found that students whose parents are members of the association are more likely to stay enrolled at Tech. The Fall 2014 & 2015 freshman cohorts combined to show a 3-6% increase in freshman to sophomore retention compared to the university weighted average of 74% for all freshmen.

Year	New Memberships
2009	601
2010	515
2011	630
2012	697
2013	747
2014	546
2015	405
2016	419
2017	484
2018	562
2019	631

- Continued 2015's membership recruitment campaign which includes parent Board of Trustee members speaking to SOAR parents and guests about joining.
    - Revised the informational/recruitment video to be shown during each SOAR session.
    - 631 new members for a total of 1,618 active memberships.
- Award $16,250 in scholarship awards for 2019-2020 award year.
    - One (1) $250 scholarship, twenty-one (21) $500 scholarships for sophomores and juniors and two (2) $1,000 scholarships for seniors, one ($1,000) scholarship (Greer Carr Founding Member Scholarship) to a junior, and one (1) $1,500 Legacy scholarship to a sophomore.
- Fall 2019 Commencement graduated 64 students and Spring 2020 Commencement graduated 170 students whose parents were members of the TTUPA.
- Annual Survey of membership (313 responses):
    - 96.34% are satisfied with their membership;
    - 97.96% like the content of our monthly communications;
    - And 96.75% would recommend joining the Parent Association to another Tech parent.
- Elected three (3) new members to the Board of Trustees for a total of 9 plus three (3) ex-officio members.
- Continued TTUPA outreach by tailgating during various Tech home football games in the Fall 2019, hosted one event for members in Nashville/West Tennessee (Spring 2019).

Parent & Family Calendar

The Parent & Family Calendar is distributed each year to members of the TTUPA in order to keep parents and families connected and informed throughout the semester regarding upcoming deadlines, holidays, and happenings on campus.

Since 2018, we have included monthly tips for parents/families to share with their students relevant to that particular month. In 2019, we also started including conversation starters for parents to utilize with their students in each month.

Parent Orientation

According to Parent & Family Orientation standards, the following content areas should be covered:

- Housing
- Financial Aid
- Academic support services
- Campus safety

The itinerary for Tennessee Tech's Parent & Family Orientation is attached for reference. For 2019, we partnered with Dr. Chad Luke in the Counseling & Psychology department to continue the wellness session for incoming parents and families.

Parent Website

The Parents webpage (www.tntech.edu/parents) provides a central hub for Tech parents and families. The site outlines various resources (Parent Association), tips, FAQs, and family programs (Family Weekend) for Tech families to stay informed and connected.

Parents Facebook Page

The Tennessee Tech University Parents Facebook page serves as an additional resource to connect parents to current news and events on Tech's campus, in addition to general reminders for them to share with their student and helpful articles and tips. See attached insight report.

Professional Staff Development

All three department professionals are members of Association of Higher Education Parent / Family Program Professionals (AHEPPP).

Attachments:
2019_TTUPA_MembershipExperienceSurvey;
2019_TTUPA_OnlineCommunication_DataReport.pdf; Family_Weekend_Program_2019;
FamilyWeekend2019_Evaluation.pdf; Parent&Guest_Itinerary_SOAR2019;
Parents_FacebookPage_Insights_2019-2020; TTU_Parent_Family_Calendar_2019-2020;
TTUPA_Fall2019_eNewsletter_.pdf; TTUPA_October2019_eBlast.pdf

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications and Continuing Improvement - Goal 3

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Continue to assess and benchmark parent and family programming to determine best practices with involving parents and families with their student's education. Review AHEPPP (Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals) standards to assess current programs successes and opportunities to align parent & family programs with Tech Tomorrow Strategic Plan. Establish additional scholarship opportunities with Parent Association and increase endowment funding.

Orientation programs will continued to be evaluated against needs of the University and its strategic plan in onboarding students, CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education), and the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention (NODA) programming standards.