

Beyond the practicalities of newness: the benefits of an extended orientation

Rinskje Bruinsma¹

¹ Foundation Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 39 Donald Street, Karori, Wellington, 6021. New Zealand.

This paper looks at the extended orientation programme presented to newly-arrived international students at Foundation Studies, Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), a pre-degree programme. This enriched orientation is designed not only to inform students of services but also focuses heavily on equipping students with the right interpersonal and intercultural communication skill set as well as a network of social contacts from the very beginning. This is aimed at enhancing the student experience, increasing the students' feeling of social inclusion and academic success, and at increasing the likelihood of students making use of the services offered.

In view of the recognition that international students struggle to connect to their domestic peers and host institution, Foundation Studies, VUW, has additional challenges particular to this programme such as being located on a satellite campus. Thus I sought to find a way to give our students the tools, confidence and opportunity to create a bond between themselves and locals, as well as a sense of a connection to the University as a community.

The extended orientation draws on the principles of the Curtin Mentoring Program, Western Australia, where all new students are matched with a mentor on an opt-out basis. It also involves an adapted form of the Excel on Campus programme as developed by Griffith University, Queensland and adapted by Student Learning Support Services (SLSS) at VUW. It also incorporates significant student input from volunteers from extra-curricular programmes such as VicPlus and the Victoria International Leadership Programme (VILP). Furthermore, all newly arrived Foundation Studies students are matched with a local buddy through the International Buddy Programme (IBP), on an opt-out basis.

This presentation will examine ways in which the extended orientation can be applied more broadly, tying in with the overall conference theme of collaborations in providing services to international students and the subtheme of working across sectors.