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CAMPUS NOTES Denise L. Rode, *Associate Editor*

The Growing Trends of Orientation Web Pages
David F. Rielley

The program for the 1999 national conference of the National Orientation Director's
Association included a pre-conference session and five interest sessions dealing with the
growing use of CD-ROMs, web pages, and other forms of multi-media in orientation.
Almost daily we learn about a new web page which offers new opportunities, cheaper
services, or easier access to information. The majority of today's students are Internet
literate before they reach college. They chat with friends and strangers, conduct
research, shop, and "surf." Yet, orientation programs are struggling with how to use this
tool to prepare students for their transition to higher education.

A review of a number of web pages (see Appendix A) indicates that several distinct
formats have emerged. These can be subdivided into three categories: (a) Basic, (b)
Enhanced, and (c) Orientation Online. These formats generally become more extensive
in content as they progress from the former to the latter.

The first format, Basic, provides essential information about a school's orientation
programs. Web pages that fit this category seem to be Internet versions of the program's
traditional mail-out brochure. They provide only the basic details about upcoming
orientation sessions such as the dates of on-campus orientation sessions, contact
information, registration information, cost of attendance, important phone numbers,
orientation expectations, and the ability to e-mail the orientation staff with questions.

The second format, Enhanced, offers much of the same information that the Basic
format provides, but goes a step further. By virtue of being Internet based, these pages
often provide links to other web sites of interest to students, such as financial aid and
housing. Many of these sites include a section with answers to frequently asked
questions. They also provide information that normally would not be feasible to include
in a mailer, such as student comments on their orientation experiences, virtual campus
tours, student handbooks, and pictures of previous orientation events.

While the first two formats take advantage of widespread interest in the Internet,
very few web sites are interactive, which is perhaps the Internet's greatest advantage.
These web sites provide orientation information but do very little actual orienting.

The third format, Orientation Online, takes advantage of the Internet's interactive
nature. This third category of web sites is designed to perform a significant portion of
the orientation function. Although these sites cannot provide the personal contact that
is so often crucial to the transition process for students, they can provide a way of
addressing administrative tasks before classes begin. For example, these sites can be
used to register first time students for classes (schedules are reviewed by an academic
advisor upon submission), order books, buy parking passes, pay fees, or take care of

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other details before a student arrives on campus.

San Francisco State University (SFSU), a pioneer in this format, uses this medium to orient students who cannot attend sessions on campus or at a satellite location. Anyone who wants to use the web orientation first must contact the SFSU orientation staff. This policy allows the staff to regulate who uses web-based orientation and establishes a communication link between the student and a representative of the university (Kingsbury, 1999). During the summers of 1998 and 1999, approximately 50 students used the SFSU virtual orientation website, with only one student needing follow-up contact to make a correction.

The potential advantages to web based orientation are numerous. By utilizing the Internet's interactive features, orientation professionals can reduce the amount of paperwork office staff must process by offering online orientation registration and payment, and by automatically forwarding students' information to academic advisors and student services areas. Examples of this interaction include orientation registration (including online payment utilizing electronic transfers or credit cards), course advising and registration, and even the creation of student identification cards as digital cameras become more prevalent.

By reducing the administrative duties and costs related to orientation sessions, university resources potentially can be shifted toward creating orientation programs that address other transition issues. According to Pounds (1987), time spent on skill-building activities will complement students' learning and increase confidence in their abilities to succeed. Rather than spending a day or more dealing with student identification cards and class schedules, orientation professionals can spend more time orienting students firsthand to their physical surroundings and offering opportunities for career exploration and workshops on such topics as understanding diversity, stress management or time management strategies, substance abuse, and safety awareness.

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Appendix A

List of Orientation Web Pages Visited

Boston University
http://www.bu.edu/orientation/e_index.html

Northeastern University
http://www.dac.neu.edu/student.affairs/orient.html

Northern Illinois University
http://www.reg.niu.edu/ornt

University of California-Los Angeles
http://www.college.ucla.edu/up/orientation

University of Nebraska-Omaha
http://www.unomaha.edu/~orient

University of Pennsylvania
http://dolphin.upenn.edu/~nso/

University of Saskatchewan
http://www.secc.usask.ca/orientation

University of South Carolina
http://www.sa.sc.edu/orien/Sotsinfo.htm

Valdosta State University
http://services.valdosta.edu/orientation