

Starting Off on the Right Foot

Proven Cases of Successful Orientation Programs



In this section we will look at three institutions who have found innovative solutions to address some of the challenges of building an effective library orientation program. Orientation is an exciting time on campus, and building a good relationship with new students out of the gate is an important step to starting the year off on the right foot.

Begin the year with these actionable tips to help you expand your reach, raise awareness of library services, and deepen interactions with students!



Part 1: Being In Two (or More) Places At Once



A common challenge with librarians, especially during orientation is the number of incoming first year students far exceeds the number of librarians available to provide meaningful instruction in a timely fashion. The semester moves fast, and if librarians aren't able to reach all new students when they arrive, students may develop bad habits, or miss out on resources that could have helped their research assignments.

Librarians at a large state university in the south found a solution to this challenge by coordinating with mandatory first year seminar classrooms to broadcast a live webinar into multiple rooms at once. Providing timely and relevant information about library resources and research strategies proved an excellent way to improve student outcomes and gain faculty buy-in—and nobody had to miss out!

Previously, only 35% of students received an orientation, and many of these sessions couldn't be scheduled until 2/3 of the way through the semester. **After implementing the webinar program, participation rose by over 100% and students received their orientation in early part of the semester when the instruction would make the biggest impact.** In addition to standardizing the orientation curriculum, librarians reported improved interactions with students. Students who attended saw higher GPAs and increased retention. When it was all said and done, **a team of just four librarians was able to reach over 3,500 students in the fall of 2017 alone.**

Part 2: The Personal Approach

Many libraries have adopted a “personal librarian” approach, where each student is matched with a librarian upon matriculation. This helps students see the library in a more personal light, rather than as a large and intimidating institution. While these programs are gaining popularity, a common problem is they are underutilized by students.

A small midwestern private university decided to engage incoming students with a series of introductions to the library as a way of solidifying these important connections. Realizing students weren't responding well to large group instruction during orientation, the



Starting Off on the Right Foot

Proven Cases of Successful Orientation Programs

library adopted a less formal, more personalized approach. At orientation, students:

- **Met with their Personal Librarian in small groups**
- **Visited the library's service spaces**
- **Received a tour of the library from a student worker**

The library collaborated with Student Life to ensure these events were a part of their calendar, and recruited student leaders to participate in the welcoming events.

Survey data indicated students responded well to this low-pressure, welcoming style—but it didn't stop there. Over the course of the year, Personal Librarians continued to reach out to students who attended the orientation, encouraging them and letting them know about available library services.

The librarians, having started their relationships with students with a more personalized approach, saw an increase in student engagement with the library, making more appointments with their Personal Librarian and participating in other library programs.

Part 3: Tour de Force

Coming up with fresh twists on the standard library tour is challenging, but one state university in Texas found interactive games translated into increased usage of library spaces. The library engages with students almost immediately, participating in on campus Move-In Day, then offers students a chance get to know the library (and win prizes in the process) with activities like:



- **Library Poker:** seven stations around the library offer cards, which students accumulate into winning hands to qualify for prizes
- **Selfie Tour:** students stop at locations marked throughout the library to learn about services and resources and post selfies at each spot to Twitter and Instagram
- **Library Lovers' Board:** following an open house event (that included small prize giveaways and food), students and faculty were given the chance to write what they love about the library on a Post-It note and stick it to a large board

All of these activities helped students get excited about meeting the library staff, seeing the facilities, and learning how the library could help them throughout their academic career.

**These case studies feature topics discussed in submissions to the 2018 FYE Innovation Awards, sponsored by Credo and Case Western Reserve University.*