



## Chapter 1: Orientation

Orientation can be considered the launching pad for a successful First Year Experience program. Generating student excitement at the beginning of the school year can yield positive outcomes related to everything from student retention, to GPAs, to classroom engagement and eventually even into success in the workplace. Use the tools in this chapter to make a lasting first impression with students and set them on the right path for a great first year experience!

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A trends review by Ray Pun, First Year Student Success Librarian, Fresno State University in California
- **Starting Off on the Right Foot: Proven Cases of Successful Orientation Programs**  
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# Library Orientation: Maximizing Impact for New Students

By Ray Pun, First Year Student Success Librarian, California State University, Fresno

**Do you recall your library orientation experience when you were a first year student?**



For most of us, probably not. As for me, the only memory I have is a librarian saying the library does not own textbooks for us to borrow. This gave me the impression I didn't need to visit or use the library until much later. Over the last decade however, libraries have changed quite a bit, providing much needed services, resources, and support to students at all levels.

At the beginning of each academic school year, waves of new students arrive on campus and struggle to make sense of their surroundings and classes. For librarians, this presents an opportunity to introduce incoming students to various services to support their needs during the academic year. Many research studies suggest students, particularly incoming first year students, may have “library anxiety” and/or may feel unsure of how to use the library or ask a librarian for help. Engaging with students in library orientations can help reduce the feeling of library anxiety and foster new relationships between students and librarians.

In this section, we will explore different types of orientations, with suggestions and examples of activities and best practices geared towards first year students, international students, transfer students, and distance learning students.

## First Year Student Orientations

**As the saying goes, “first impressions are the lasting ones.” The same applies to first year students!**



**What are some ways to engage with first year students?** Some librarians will give in-person overviews of library services during summer sessions, such as summer bridge programs. Others may show videos (see Fresno State's library orientation video) that briefly introduce important services and resources for first year students. Although preparing a video may take time to create initially, it's a great resource to be able to reuse with different incoming classes.



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## In-Person Orientations

If your institution requires in-person orientations for incoming students, check out the [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox](#) to find a wide range of activities, from making zines to teaching basic research skills. These lessons come from [The First Year Experience Cookbook](#) and can provide a creative ways to introduce library resources to your new first year students.

## Interactive Games

In lieu of library tours, some academic libraries have used scavenger hunt games to engage students. [Long Island University Libraries](#) created [The Amazing Library Race](#) based on the popular reality TV show. In this type of activity, students work in groups through a series of challenges while exploring various spaces within the library to learn more about the services and resources. At the end, winning teams may receive prizes! To make sure your scavenger hunt is successful, try out the game with your colleagues first.

## Welcome Programs

“Welcome” programs are another way to orient your students for the new academic school year. For example, you can organize a photo booth in front of your library for anyone to participate in. This can be a nice way for students to feel connected to the library and to share their photos and thoughts on social media platforms like Instagram or SnapChat. For this type of activity, schools have either rented a photo booth from an outside vendor, or created their own DIY photo booth using digital cameras, props, and other technologies hosted in the library.

## School Swag, Prizes, and Giveaways

If you have a modest budget, consider investing in “swag” items for prizes or giveaways. Some popular items among students have been: microfiber cloths to clean surfaces of cellphones and eyeglasses, multi-charging cables for USB to Apple Devices, or phone wallets for storing cards. Some schools give out USB flash drives, t-shirts, sunglasses, and academic planners too. Adding your school logo on swag items can be a nice touch as well.

Engaging with first year students can be challenging, but fun. To keep your students engaged and continue to promote library services throughout their academic career, it helps to have some creative and out-of-the-box activities to use!

**Do you know what percentage of your student population are first generation college students?**

Sometimes first generation college students find the adjustment to academic culture to be particularly challenging. Orientation can be especially helpful to acclimating this group to college life.

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## International Student Orientations

Orienting students who come from different parts of the world can be challenging. **Have you thought of creative ways to introduce “American-style libraries” to your international students?** Some academic libraries have organized a series of workshops on this topic, while others have partnered with their international student office to provide a general orientation and tour. Below are some examples to use with your new international students.



### International Student Tours

Offer tours catered to international students highlighting the services and resources your international students might really need:

- » Does your library have a prayer/meditation room for those who might be religious?
- » Is there a section for foreign language collections in your library?
- » Where are the tutoring or writing centers in the library located?
- » Are there quiet study spaces available to use?

These are some questions you may want to go through in your tours with international students.

### Alternative Language Orientation

Some academic libraries may offer library orientation in different languages. The University of Pittsburgh Library System for example, has orientations in [Chinese-Mandarin](#) for their new Chinese students. If you have colleagues who can speak other languages, this can help create meaningful conversations and presentations for international students for whom English is a second or third language.

## Transfer Student Orientations

Students transferring from another institution may struggle to figure out their new campus environments at first, and may be reluctant to ask for assistance when looking for necessary resources. Collaborating with your school’s office for transfer student services by attending their events, workshops, and fairs is a great way to begin to think about outreach toward transfer students.

**Here are some additional ideas from institutions who provide orientation services for this often overlooked population:**

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### University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Tammy E. Ivins, Transfer Student Services Librarian [has a deep involvement](#) in several programs surrounding transfer students. She hosts office hours in the campus' Military Resource Lounge, provides outreach workshops, and visits some of the feeder community colleges to meet with incoming transfers in order to provide better library sessions for these students.

### University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This university created a "personal librarian program" for transfer students to support their academic development. When their [case study](#) suggested a more personalized approach could offer an effective way for libraries to better support transfer students, they began connecting subject librarians with transfer students majoring in similar fields.

### University of California, Merced

The University of California, Merced's library created this [LibGuide](#), covering ten important things transfer students need to know. The LibGuide is a quick and easily accessible resource to acclimate transfer students with their new environment.



## Online Distance Learning Student Orientations

There are some students you may never see or interact with. **How do you orient them with library resources and services when they may not be close to the university at all?** Many academic libraries utilize LibGuides to feature library orientations through videos and tutorials. If you don't have access to LibGuides, there are some alternative ways to engage and encourage participation.

Here are some creative examples:

### Hillsborough Community College

Hillsborough Community College Libraries created an [online library orientation for their students](#). The LibGuide allowed librarians to connect with students through a straightforward, simple, and clear introduction to library services and resources.

### Penn State University

Penn State University Libraries [created a LibGuide](#) featuring digital badges, a very popular trend in higher education today. Students are encouraged to attend the online orientations, and in doing so, earn a

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badge. If your university has a badging system, this is a creative way to incentivize students to learn more about library services online.

### California State University, Fresno

This library created an online [library orientation game](#). While this type of activity may require some in-person components for those who live nearby, it can help online students develop a sense of belonging with the library. If you are considering this approach, it is helpful to design a game that connects closely to library orientation services. Some mobile apps to consider using for design are [Social Scavenger](#) or [Eventzee](#).

### Additional Options

If you don't have access to LibGuides, some alternative options include [WordPress](#), [Weebly](#), or [Wix](#), or using your university's existing learning management systems including Canvas, Blackboard, or Moodle.

You can also browse YouTube for [library orientation videos](#) you can adapt to fit your institutions needs or gather inspiration!

## Conclusion

Designing an orientation program to fit your institution's needs can come in all shapes and sizes. From in-person tours and presentations to online activities, there are so many resources available to experiment with as you setup your orientation. Not all orientations are alike; orientation events can be hosted throughout the fall semester and in different settings. When you're planning an orientation event or activity, be sure to alert your campus partners and teaching faculty to get the word out to the new students coming in!



# 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 library adopted a less formal, more personalized approach.

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## Proven Cases of Successful Orientation Programs

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.*



## Continue the Conversation

Interested in seeing what types of library orientations your peers are organizing? What kind of swag is most popular during welcome week?

See results in real time with this quick, live-results [survey](#).

 Keep the conversation going using the Twitter hashtag [#LibraryFYE!](#)

## Additional Resources

Looking for more helpful tips and tricks? Here are some additional viewing and reading materials to help you plan a great library orientation.

- [Fall Library Kick Off: Engaging Orientation Activities](#) by Ray Pun. Further ideas for interactive orientation programming with links to tools and apps to help facilitate activities.
- [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox](#) An open platform for discussing and sharing materials related to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy.
- [The First Year Library Experience](#) with Ray Pun and Meggan Houlihan. Co-authors of *The First-Year Experience Cookbook* share best practices and new directions to explore when providing orientation and instruction in the FYE.
- [Webinar Recap: The First Year Library Experience](#) Key points from the above webinar to tide you over until you can dig into the full recording.
- [Helping Transfer Students Succeed: General Tips & Strategies for Academic Librarians](#) by Ray Pun. Further ideas and activities to help better support transfer students through the library.
- [Digital Learning Objects: Exploring New Ways to Teach Online Learners](#) by Ray Pun. A recap of discussions from the 2017 ACRL conference around online components of the library FYE.
- [Planning Library Orientations](#) by Kylie Bailin, Ben Jahre, and Sarah Morris. Pre-order for June 1st book release.

