Supporting New Students
Comparing Student and Administrator Perception of Needs

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Learning Outcomes

As a result of this presentation, attendees will (or will be able to)...

– Understand what students are thinking about during their first year
– Understand what perceptions administrators hold in regards to needs and wants of freshmen
– Determine whether we are accurately perceiving the successes and challenges our students are experiencing
– Identify methods used to assess student needs
Purpose of Study

What support do first-year students at Northwestern University need, what types of support do they want during orientation and their first year, and what do they report using; and how do these students’ perceptions compare to administrators’ perceptions of first-year students’ needs?
Institutional Profile

• Private, highly-selective institution located in Evanston, IL
  – Acceptance rate: 13.9% for Class of 2017
• Fall 2013: 2,047 freshmen
  – Total undergraduate: 8,349
• Quarter system
• 6 academic schools with own programs and services
Overview of Literature

• Support: Any resource on campus that aims to help students learn and develop during their time at the university.
  – Can include offices, individuals, and any types of resources students consider supportive to them (adapted from Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot, 2005)
Overview of Literature

• Students must adjust their expectations upon entering college because their expectations can be self-limiting or self-fulfilling (Cohen & Jody, 1978; Cole & Korkmaz, 2010; Kuh, 2007; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005)

• Students want support during their first year but students feel their school did not support them as much as they expected it to (Kuh, 2007)

• When students interact with faculty and staff, they are more likely to seek the resources they want and need (Cole & Korkmaz, 2010; Kuh, 2003)
Overview of Literature

• Freshmen felt they had most need in academic & career areas, least need in personal/emotional and social areas (Daddona & Cooper, 2002)

• Time management, financial management, and career planning also emerged as areas of need after school had begun (Daddona & Cooper, 2002)

• Social support is often needed – difficult for students to find their niche (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005)
Overview of Literature

• Freshmen struggle most with building and maintaining relationships, homesickness, finances, academics, unexpected stressors, and balance (Daddona & Cooper, 2002; Gefen & Fish, 2012; Kuh, 2007; Misra & McKeen, 2000; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Wang et al., 2012; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005)
Gap in Literature

• Lack of research at highly selective institutions
  – Bono, Pei and Bristow (2013)
  – Cohen, Sherrod, and Clark (1986)
• Student support mechanisms emerged as theme, not as main focus
• Lack of research on administrator perceptions
Methodology

- **Survey Data**
  - 2013 CIRP Survey
  - 2013 Wildcat Welcome Survey

- **Focus Groups**
  - n=10
  - Q-sort

- **Artifact Analysis**
  - First-Year Advisory Board Meeting Minutes, November 2013

- **Interviews**
  - n=4
  - Q-sort
2013 CIRP Survey

Self-rated traits

- Academic ability
- Competitiveness
- Drive to achieve
- Self-confidence (intellectual)

Percent of respondents (n=967)

Highest 10%  Above Average  Average  Below Average  Lowest 10%
2013 Wildcat Welcome Survey

To what extent did Wildcat Welcome provide useful information on...

- Safety and security on campus
- Campus support services to keep me physically healthy
- Campus support services to keep me mentally healthy (CAPS, etc)
- How to find information like the online schedule of courses
- How academic advising works
- Academic Requirements

Percent of respondents (n=1267)

No useful information
Slightly useful information
Moderately useful information
A great deal of useful information
## Focus Group and Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Mentions</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>44 (1)</td>
<td>32 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>32 (3)</td>
<td>27 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Culture</td>
<td>38 (2)</td>
<td>23 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>16 (6)</td>
<td>27 (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>27 (4)</td>
<td>22 (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td>22 (5)</td>
<td>16 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>14 (7)</td>
<td>11 (7)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations</strong></td>
<td>9 (8)</td>
<td>9 (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bold** – theme from Artifact Analysis
Conclusions

• Students and administrators agree that more support is needed in life skills
• Administrators underestimate the stress students feel surrounding academics
• Many themes were interrelated; can be difficult to disentangle their interactions
• Students unsure about where to seek resources and information
• Students often wanted more information provided upfront
Recommendations

• Centralization of resources
  – Increased communication with academic advisors
  – Specialized workshops
  – Creation of virtual spaces

• Collaboration with campus partners to create workshops to help students learn about life skills
  – Time management
  – Study skills
Recommendations

• Timing of delivery of resources
  – Students wanted all information upfront while administrators did not want to overwhelm students
  – Balance of exposing students to information as early as possible and following up when information is most relevant

• Bringing the resources to the students
  – Bringing existing workshops to students in a space they are comfortable in (Thompson, 2008)
Recommendations

• Use people students have a connection with
  – Most frequently used resources included advisors, peer advisers, community assistants, professors, and their peers
  – Capitalize on these people to share information about other resources on campus
References


Wilcox, P, Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). ‘It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people’: the role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. Studies in higher education, 30(6), 707-722.
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