

# Cal Poly Pomona NODA Consultation Final Report October 24, 2014

Dr. Cecilia Santiago-Gonzalez requested a NODA consultation to assist her in undertaking a scheduled program review within the Division of Student Affairs. She requested the consultation services of Dr. Gregory Wolcott and Dr. Richard Mullendore. This consultation involved two visits to Cal Poly Pomona, one in May to meet with as many stakeholders as possible while school was in session, and one for the consultants to immerse themselves in the program in late July.

This report is divided into two sections (with some redundancy). The first section will be composed of the consultants' observations and recommendations that may or may not be part of the criteria required for the Division's program review. The second section will utilize the Division of Student Affairs Program Reviews Criteria for Review format. We will reference the CAS Standards for Student Orientation Programs as a basis for some of our responses.

At the outset, we want to say that we truly enjoyed the opportunity to visit Cal Poly Pomona! The hospitality was tremendous, the staff and students were incredibly accommodating to our many needs and requests, and the orientation program is overall in very good shape. You know you feel welcome when it is hard to leave!!

## **PART 1 (Observations and Recommendations)**

### **Observations**

- Consistent feedback was received about the quality of communication and collaboration of the Orientation staff, namely Cecilia. There is a sense that things are "moving in a good direction" but many collaborators have only worked with the current staff for the last year.
- There is a perception that freshman orientation is not academic enough, despite the recent expansion of the program.
- There is not a clear message about the purpose and goals of orientation, nor outcomes for students who participate.
- Transfer students are a misunderstood population which complicates the process for meeting their needs during orientation.
- Most campus collaborators recognize the challenge of time and space limitations in orientation. Many comments were made about "information overload" during orientation, and have expressed interest in using technology and expanding orientation into the academic year.
- The housing mandate has caused angst among staff and orientation participants, and may complicate the goals of orientation programming. There is a perception that orientation's capacity to house students overnight is driving the enrollment plan. There is a perception that

moving orientation to an overnight program was done to help “sell” the housing initiative, when in reality it is a coincidence of timing.

- Although freshman retention rates are very high, availability of classes and persistence to graduation remain as significant concerns of many stakeholders.
- According to the program evaluation data shared with us in July, many program components are rated at a very high level. For example, 90% of freshmen strongly agree/agree that they understand academic expectations and where to locate academic resources (88% for transfers). Students also utilized the Guidebook application and commented positively. The student and professional staff were also rated very high in terms of their effectiveness. Areas for further review and analysis include academic advising during orientation and the length and sequencing of orientation programs.

### **Recommendations**

- The Orientation staff, with assistance from superiors, should chart a course for their future and determine capacity of their staff. Many campuses are moving toward a more comprehensive department model that coordinates orientation, FYE, and related programming.
- The current level of staffing should be examined in relation to other CSU schools of similar size and scope. This examination should take place in the context of the capacity analysis. At this point, it appears the current model of two professional staff and one administrative staff may not be sufficient to meet current demands, let alone additional responsibilities. Reclassification of the Senior Coordinator role should also be seriously considered.
- The orientation schedule should be analyzed in terms of goals and outcomes, with specific attention toward identifying components that relate directly to the academic mission and goals of the university.
- The transfer student population should be examined for demographic factors to address the myths vs. facts about this group.
- We recommend that the campus examine the various groups involved to carry out orientation functions to assess overlap, efficiencies, and training. These groups include orientation leaders, registration assistants, and Poly Transfer ambassadors.
- The issue of housing should be examined in relation to orientation. Rather than using orientation as a tool to “sell” housing, equal attention should be provided to students and parents/families/guests about how to navigate students living on campus and students who will commute. In addition, better communication regarding the rationale for extending the orientation program would be helpful. This could take place in a joint-session format.
- According to data from the program evaluation, the advising experience during orientation could be improved. An articulation agreement should be developed between student affairs and academic affairs related to the outcomes of the advising and registration sessions during orientation. i.e., all students will understand GE requirements, how to register, and will leave orientation having registered for 12 units.

- According to data from the program evaluation, some students felt the freshman and transfer program was too long. Efforts should move forward to further orientation activities into the fall, and perhaps even into the freshman year, to alleviate the burden on the orientation program and reduce “information overload.”
- Consider utilizing online education and technology to introduce students to wellness, counseling, alcohol abuse, and safety as well as Bronco direct training prior to orientation. There are various programs on the market that could be purchased to meet this need as well as campus trainings available. This approach could help maximize the time when students on campus, and in terms of Bronco direct training, improve students’ overall advising and registration experience.
- The length and structure of programs should be reviewed in light of feedback from students (via the program evaluation), the orientation advisory committee, and the associate deans’ council. The orientation staff have taken an intentional approach to program design based on the need to share specific information and resources during the program as well as federal mandates. However, pressures from various units and departments on campus for inclusion in the program can sometimes complicate program planning. Engaging the campus in the development of specific goals and outcomes for orientation would help clarify the rationale for program design.
  - Other specific program recommendations include:
    - Consider starting the freshman program in the morning, and reducing the program to two full days/one night. This would address the concern that the program is too long, and may help with scheduling program dates and sequencing.
    - More careful planning should take place to ensure plenary and breakout sessions start and end on time. During the transfer program, the plenary session ran late by 20 minutes, only allowing 10 minutes for the first breakout session. (Section 1B)
    - Both programs seemed to lack a session early in the program that brings everyone together and gets them connected. For example, having breakout meetings with orientation leaders or a even an activity where they meet each other at the round tables could help get participants more engaged.

## **Part 2 (Student Affairs Program Review)**

The Division of Student Affairs Criteria for Review are divided into four sections, each with three or four subsections. We will respond to each component in the order of its appearance in the outline we were given.

### **Section 1 (Program Review)**

Subsection A---Mission: The Division of Student Affairs has a published mission statement along with a vision and a values statement. The University has a mission statement as well as a motto "Learn by doing." The orientation program does not have a program specific mission at this time, and we recommend the development of a mission for the program using the CAS Standards as a model.

Subsection B---Review of Programs and Services: The Orientation Services office is responsible for several programs, including freshman orientation, parent and family orientation, transfer student orientation, international student orientation (in conjunction with the International Student Services office), and Bronco Fusion.. Because Cal Poly Pomona is on the quarter system, orientation programming takes place three times per year including an intensive summer program.They also produce the New Student Resource Guide and Parent/Family Resource Guide which is a comprehensive guide to help students and families get oriented to campus.The focus of this consultation was on the freshman and transfer orientation programs along with guidance on the parent and family orientations as well.

The orientation programs are exceptionally well organized and comprehensive. These programs meet student needs, comply with national standards, meet Federal mandates, and assist new students in their introduction to both the academic and co-curricular life of the University. (We will provide more depth to this section in our observations and recommendations.)

Subsection C---Diversity, Equity, and Access: The diversity in the orientation program begins with its highly diverse professional and student staff, certainly representing the diversity of the University. The freshman program incorporates sessions on diversity into the program appropriately. The transfer program, due in part to its brevity, does not have a specific session dedicated to issues of diversity. It is recommended that the transfer program be lengthened or adapted in order to provide a session on diversity. (We will have additional observations and recommendations regarding the transfer program later in this report.)

## **Section 2 (Organizational Structure)**

Subsection A---Leadership: Dr. Cecilia Santiago-Gonzalez and Erin DeRosa provide exceptional leadership for the orientation services office and programs. These staff are knowledgeable, have a great work ethic, and truly understand the importance of their programs to the success of Cal Poly students. They are highly respected on the campus, and are gradually making the programs stronger as they incorporate needed change. Their organizational skills are tremendous, as they need to be given the complexity of the programs for which they are responsible.

Subsection B---Organization & Management: The Cal Poly Division of Student Affairs is appropriately comprehensive in its scope of responsibility, and the Orientation Services Office is appropriately situated on the organizational chart. (However, please see the next subsection for a concern.) Managing a program as complex as orientation takes a great skill set and lots of assistance. The students (captains, returners, and first year orientation leaders) are wonderful! They are energetic, hard working, professional, dedicated, and diverse role models for the students they serve. The program is efficient from check- in to check- out, comprehensive in nature, upbeat, and represents the University very well.

Subsection C---Human Resources: Given the current responsibilities of the office, we believe it is staffed appropriately, however, as we review the division's strategic plan, it is obvious that additional full time professional staff will be needed to meet the requirements of the plan. Of more immediate concern to us is the Senior Coordinator title (SSPIV) for Dr. Santiago-Gonzalez. The responsibilities of her position relative to her colleagues (AGLII) at the same level on the organizational chart show an inequity in her title. We strongly recommend that this inequity be examined. The current title impacts her relationship with other constituencies as well as her role as a supervisor. It makes it appear that her position and responsibilities are not as important or valued as much as her peers.

Subsection D---Campus and External Relations: The orientation program has had several directors in the recent past, and campus perceptions about the program vary widely. We met with individuals throughout the University on both visits and it is apparent that significant progress is being made regarding the image of the program and perceptions about the program. Cecilia has made significant progress in the development of positive relationships with key stakeholders, yet she realizes that there is more work to be done. We recommend that the composition of the orientation advisory committee be studied to insure that the right players from the right offices are represented. We also recommend that the members of the committee be held accountable for appropriately representing their constituency in the meetings. Creating change takes time, but Cecilia is doing what can be done to pace change incrementally. Regarding external relations, we will discuss later our thoughts about further involvement opportunities for parents and family members.

### **Section 3 (Resources)**

Subsection A---Financial: In the years before Cecilia became the senior coordinator, the budget occasionally ran a deficit, but that is no longer the case. The program, except for Cecilia's salary, is self sufficient and totally dependent on the fees that participants pay (along with considerable in kind support). While the fees appear to be in line, it is always a good idea to benchmark the fee structure with similar programs at similar institutions. We are concerned at the lack of budget freedom that exists, especially for expenses exceeding \$1000. It is our understanding that the University lifted the ban on purchases above that amount that previously required a vice presidential signature, but the Division of Student Affairs maintained that requirement. There are times when orientation cannot wait on bureaucracy. We are satisfied with the controls and tracking mechanisms that Cecilia has in place; what is lacking is the freedom to expend the funds that have been allocated to Orientation Services. *(It is our understanding that this situation has been changed in a very positive manner since our visit.)*

Subsection B---Facilities: We had the opportunity to tour the office and storage facilities used by the program, and they are sufficient. It will be important to insure that adequate storage space continue to be available. We were also able to observe the entire transfer program and a portion of the freshman program. The facilities used by the program are appropriate given the current size of the various sessions. It may be necessary to limit the number of guests for some programs to eliminate standing room only in Ursa Major. The relationship with both Housing and the Bronco Student Center are excellent and we hope that the relationship with the BRIC staff will be just as good when it becomes available.

Subsection C---Technology: Orientation programs have to operate on the most current student information available to the institution. During our first visit, we recommended that a wired printer be made available at check-in, especially for printing transfer credit evaluations. That recommendation was implemented.

Given the increase in international students who often cannot attend the traditional orientation programs, and because graduate programs have requested that an orientation program be made available to graduate students, it is important that processes be developed to serve these students well. The current process uses Blackboard to administer an online orientation to some students, but it is inadequate as it does not provide a holistic orientation to the University. In addition, it is difficult to create videos and other items in a timely manner due to scheduling conflicts with support units. We recommend the purchase of an online orientation software package to meet these needs.

There may be the occasional need for other technology or reports to be available and the University should make every attempt to accommodate those needs.

Subsection D---Equipment: The program's equipment needs appear to be met and in compliance with national standards.

#### **Section 4 (Assessment & Evaluation)**

Subsection A---Culture of Evidence: The orientation program provides appropriate opportunities for participants to evaluate the program and its components. What is most important, however, is that the results are used to make changes to improve the program. Although the staff have implemented changes based on program evaluation, this approach is not widely understood by the orientation advisory committee or the campus as a whole. In our meetings with several campus constituencies, it was apparent that several positive changes had been made, but that some groups were unaware of the changes. We recommend that communication be improved, especially by those who serve on committees and who are responsible for taking information back to their departments.

Subsection B---Student Learning Outcomes: We had the opportunity to review the training program materials for the orientation leaders and to observe a training session. Learning outcomes are in place for the student staff. We did not, however, see evidence of learning outcomes for program participants, but since our visit those materials have been made available to us.

Subsection C---Legal Compliance and Ethical Standards: The program is in compliance with national standards. We were able to observe the compliance with Federal mandates in the program regarding issues like FERPA, HIPAA, and Title IX. The staff within the program maintain high personal ethical standards and expectations that the student staff do so as well.

Subsection D---CSU System Compliance Audits: We were not able to determine the issues regarding this section of the Division's report.

We hope the program review and these observations and recommendations are helpful, and we are available to provide further amplification as desired. We appreciate being given the opportunity to visit Cal Poly Pomona.