

AMHERST COLLEGE
REPORT FROM DEAN OF NEW STUDENTS
October 18, 2011 Faculty Meeting

As a faculty member, one has a theoretical awareness of Orientation: we show up for panels and particular events, and some of us participate in Advising and Departmental Presentations. It was only when I inherited the role of Orientation Director from Allen Hart and Stacia Bourne, that I became aware of the enormity of the program. Orientation as currently constituted is a 10 day Program of Events, Meetings, Trips, Films, Shows, and Mini-Classes that hires almost 300 student workers, involves 1500 people in the first two days, and ultimately launches a student either properly or improperly on his academic career. We put out publications, have a website, do mass email merges to our new students and feel an enormous responsibility for “getting it right.” It is no surprise that there is a Committee of students, faculty and deans that help me with this process. This year we added another student and a second area coordinator as we did an Orientation overhaul.

We organized the events of the week so that there was a logical flow, leading with academics, moving to the campus, and then out to the greater community as a whole.

In summary, here is what we did:

- Meetings with Academic Departments moved from Sunday to Monday a week earlier, before students register.
- Advising hours moved from 3 hours on Monday afternoon to six hours over the entire day of Tuesday with a break in the middle. This is also necessary due to the switch to on-line Advising.
- Eliminated the Labor Day Advising Session, because there is no new information available to the student at that point, and encouraged Orientation Advisors to schedule a follow up session during the first meeting.
- Students and Advisors used the student’s “Learning Goals” self-assessment form as a starting point for a discussion about learning rather than course selection.
- Instead of signing the honor code en masse in Buckley Recital Hall, most of the Class of 2015 signed their honor codes in First Year Seminars after a discussion with their First Year Seminar Instructors. Five seminars chose an alternative method in which this instruction happened through the writing seminar. In August, the students also read the Honor Code on-line and provided an electronic signature indicating that they had read the Honor Code.
- Extended Orientation: We reserved four Monday nights in the semester for an expanded discussion of the Honor Code, using teams of faculty and coaches to engage the students in conversations on Intellectual Property, Respect for Persons, and Class in the Classroom and a fourth session on Resilience. Please see attached description titled: Extended Orientation Events Fall 2011.
- All website material was reworked (page for parents and Dean’s blog).