

Why higher education orientation sessions are important

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Higher education orientation sessions are widely regarded as valuable because - they help students transition academically, socially, and practically into higher education life. Research and sector guidance consistently point to several key reasons for their importance.

Support a successful transition to higher education

Orientation sessions are designed to help students adjust to the new academic environment, which often involves higher expectations, greater independence, and unfamiliar systems. Studies of orientation programs show that they act as a *foundation for success* by helping students make sense of the transition from school or previous study into higher education. By clarifying what higher education study involves early on, orientation can reduce uncertainty and stress during the critical first weeks.

Improve student engagement and sense of belonging

A central goal of orientation is to *foster early connections between students*, their peers, and the institution. Orientation activities commonly encourage social interaction, introduce campus culture, and help students begin building support networks. Research in higher education indicates that participation in orientation is associated with a stronger sense of belonging and engagement, which are important factors in how connected students feel to their institution.

Familiarise students with academic and support resources

Orientation sessions typically introduce essential academic structures and services, such as - enrolment systems, learning support, libraries, wellbeing services, and student advising. Sector guides on student orientation emphasise that early awareness of these resources *helps students navigate challenges* more effectively and seek support when needed, rather than waiting until problems escalate.

Positive influencing retention and persistence

Evidence from multiple studies suggests that orientation programs can influence students' *decisions to remain enrolled*. Research has found links between orientation participation and student persistence and retention, particularly when orientation addresses both academic expectations and social integration. Extended or well-structured orientation experiences have also been associated with higher retention into the second year of study.

Affirm student choice to enrol

Orientation can help students feel confident that they *made the right decision* in choosing their institution. Research into student experiences shows that effective orientation programs can affirm students' enrolment decisions by reinforcing institutional values, support structures, and opportunities available to them. This reassurance can be especially important for first-year and first-in-family students.

Establish expectations and responsibilities

Orientation sessions help *set clear expectations* about academic integrity, assessment standards, workload, and student responsibilities. By outlining these expectations early, institutions help students develop realistic understandings of higher education study, which can contribute to better academic adjustment and performance.

Higher education orientation sessions are valuable because they ease students' transition, build early connections, increase awareness of support services, and are linked in research to stronger engagement and retention outcomes.

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