Student Orientation & Transition Services Wins Regional Award

Office of Student Orientation & Transition Services

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They won for the system-wide orientation modules for incoming students.
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Utah State University’s (USU) Student Orientation & Transition Services office took home the Innovative Program Award at the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention (NODA) regional conference. SOTS won for their creation and implementation of system-wide orientation modules for incoming students.

“The new model mitigates some of the information overload associated with orientation, and also standardizes the orientation experience for students attending our regional campuses and online programs,” said Lisa Simmons, director of Student Orientation & Transition Services. “We launched these modules in early 2017 and have seen an increase in persistence for students who complete all five. Several schools have seen our success, and are now adopting similar systems.”

Rather than inundating students and parents with mountains of information over the course of a few days, students now complete a series of five online modules over the course of several months. The modules are designed to deliver just-in-time information. Class registration is discussed in March, for example, and roommate conflict resolution is discussed in September when it is more relevant. Students have an orientation hold requiring them to complete the first two modules prior to class registration, and then they are incentivized and nudged to complete the remaining three modules.

According to Simmons, one of the greatest benefits is knowing students have access to information about Title IX, sexual misconduct reporting, campus safety, mental health, and more. “Rather than asking 30 plus representatives from different campuses to be sure they cover the information with their students, we can centralize the message and pull reports to see which students clicked through those pages.”

Since USU is Utah’s land-grant institution, the needs of incoming students vary as they begin school on the Logan campus, at a regional campus or center, at USU-Eastern in Price, or as a USU Online student living out of state. As a result, the orientation experience has to be customized and adapted for each student’s unique situation. The orientation modules are designed by a committee of USU employees from across the state, and the new system delivers both standard and customized information to all incoming students.

By winning the regional award, USU’s system-wide orientation modules will be considered for the NODA’s national award in October.

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