

Complete Policy Title:

**Policy on the First Year Experience  
(Orientation and Transition) for  
Undergraduate Students**

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First Year Guiding Principles 1995  
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Responsible Executive: **Associate Vice-  
President (Students & Learning) and Dean of  
Students**

Enquiries: [Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

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## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

### PREAMBLE

1. The purpose of this Policy is to facilitate a positive orientation and transition process to ensure a successful integration of new students into the academic, social, geographical community, and all manner of student life at McMaster University. This Policy is written in the spirit of the University's guiding principles as stated in *Forward with Integrity*.
2. All University stakeholders share in the responsibility to welcome our students and create the best orientation and transition experience and, and to work collaboratively to position our students for success.
3. McMaster University aims to provide new student orientation and transition programming that is evidence-based and intentional, and with the individual student needs in mind, and in an environment where students feel safe and are supported.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4. These Guiding Principles represent our commitment to our new incoming first year undergraduate students when developing and delivering orientation and transition events and programs:
  - a) **Equality:** First year students join the University community with all the rights of those already here.
  - b) **Choice:** First year students are encouraged to participate in orientation and transition events and programs of their choosing and comfort.
  - c) **Individuality and Celebration of Diversity:** First year students have a right to express their individuality and celebrate their culture, gender, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and political affiliation.
  - d) **Privacy:** First year students have a right to private space and time.
  - e) **Safety:** First year students have a right to a safe environment free from harassment and discrimination.

### ORIENTATION

5. Orientation is the first important step for first year students in becoming members of the University community. For the purpose of this Policy, orientation begins from the time when students accept an offer of admission and normally extends through to at least the first six weeks of the first semester.
6. The Orientation process enables students to become familiar with the campus, connects them to their peers, faculty and staff, builds community, and provides students access to resources they need to be motivated, resilient, self-advocates, and responsible self-learners.

### TRANSITION

7. Transition of new students is a process that occurs throughout the first year and traditionally begins with Welcome Week.

8. Transition activities are designed to prepare students for academic and personal growth throughout their undergraduate experience.

### GOALS OF ORIENTATION AND TRANSITION

9. To support students in areas of:
  - a) **Student Learning and Development:** Participation in university life and include, but are not limited to, intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical, and spiritual development.
  - b) **Academic Preparedness:** Preparing students to achieve their academic potential.
  - c) **Retention and Persistence:** Building resiliency and persistence through their academic career.
  - d) **Value:** Demonstrating to new students that they are welcomed and valued by the University.
  - e) **Self-Efficacy:** A belief in their own abilities to positively affect their academic career and future success.
  - f) **Belonging:** Making connections with their peers, upper year students, faculty and staff and the wider external community.

### SCOPE

10. This Policy applies to all University stakeholders involved in the orientation and transition process of full time undergraduate students attending McMaster for the first time and includes transfer students but excludes McMaster English Language Development (MELD) diploma students and Undergraduate MD students.

### DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of interpreting this document words in the singular may include the plural and words in the plural may include the singular.

11. **“Academic Society”** means a student group that represents an academic unit/program during Welcome Week and/or for which the University collects fees on its behalf.
12. **“Activities”** means events, programs, and services that provide orientation and transition support to First Year students.
13. **“Club”** means a student group recognized by an Affiliated Student Union/Association that is dedicated to a particular interest or activity. The activity may be of an academic, social, recreational, cultural or spiritual nature.
14. **“Dean of Students”** is the Associate Vice-President (Students & Learning) and Dean of Students.
15. **“EOHSS”** means Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services, part of the University’s Human Resources department that provides risk management expertise.
16. **“Event”** means an activity, occurring on or off campus, organized by Recognized Student Groups and that may involve the expenditure of funds.
17. **“First Year Orientation Fee”** means a mandatory fee levied to all full time undergraduate students to assist in funding orientation activities.

18. **“Full time Undergraduate Students”** means students enrolled in 18 or more academic units and for whom the University collects a First Year Orientation Fee.
19. **“MSU”** means McMaster Students Union, a legally incorporated organization representing student constituencies, and that has its own constitution, by-laws, policies and insurance.
20. **“Risk Management”** means the identification, analysis, assessment, control and avoidance, minimization or elimination of unacceptable risk. Risk management involves the process of planning, leading, organizing and controlling activities in order to manage potential risk at all Events.
21. **“Sanctioned Event”** means an activity organized by a club/Academic Society/SOCS approved by a Faculty Associate Dean/Manager, Off Campus Resource Centre (OCRC) or an Affiliated Student Union/Association.
22. **“SOCS”** means the student group **Society of Off- Campus Students** that represents off campus students.
23. **“Welcome Week Planners and Reps”** means student leaders that are selected by the University to welcome and plan and deliver orientation activities. They are expected to develop positive connections with our First Year Students and be good role models.
24. **“Welcome Week”** means the period of time when activities and programs are scheduled to orient, greet and prepare students for their first year experience at University normally occurring the week before fall classes begin.
25. **“Welcome Week Advisory Committee (WWAC)”** means the group of University staff and MSU Representatives appointed by the Associate Vice-President (Students and Learning) and Dean of Students to oversee compliance with this Policy.
26. **“Welcome Week Planning and Implementation Committee (WWPIC)”** means the group of University staff and MSU Representatives and members planners and staff that plan and implement orientation activities.

## RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

27. This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the policies and statements listed below. Any question concerning the application of this Policy and/or related policies shall be determined by the Dean of Students. The University reserves the right to amend or add to the University’s policies and statements from time to time (this is not a comprehensive list).
  - [Academic Freedom, Statement \(SPS E1\)](#)
  - [Alcohol University Policy](#)
  - [Discrimination and Harassment: Prevention & Response, Policy on](#)
  - [Financial Accountability Policy for Student Organizations that receive fee remittances from the university](#)
  - [Fraternities-Sororities and Honor Societies](#)
  - [McMaster Students Union \(MSU\) Operating Policies](#)

- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Accessibility – University Policy on](#)
- [Policy on Student Groups \(Recognition, Risk Management, Event Planning\)](#)
- [Sexual Violence Policy](#)
- [Statement on Building an Inclusive Community with a Shared Purpose](#)
- [Inclusive Communications, Policy Statement and Guidelines on](#)
- [Student Appeal Procedures](#)
- [University Facilities for Non-Academic Purposes, Use of](#)
- [Violence in the Workplace, Policy on](#)

## SECTION II: ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT (STUDENTS & LEARNING) AND DEAN OF STUDENTS

28. The Dean of Students is responsible for the general oversight and communication of this Policy. The Dean of Students is the final authority for this Policy.

### FACULTY PLANNERS AND REPS

29. The University uses a student-based model for welcoming students. Faculty Planners are selected by governing groups representing Faculty, University departments, MSU departments and student groups and are responsible for planning various orientation activities. Reps assist Faculty Planners in planning and participating in the implementation of activities. The University is responsible for the training of all Faculty Planners and Reps.

### HOUSING AND CONFERENCE SERVICES (HCS)

30. The HCS provides various support services and promotes student life targeted to first year students living both on campus and off campus.

### MCMASTER STUDENTS UNION (MSU)

31. The MSU represents all full time undergraduate students, provides advocacy, various support services and promotes student life. They are a major collaborative partner that supports the first year student experience, including (but not limited to) programs and events offered during Welcome Week and supports Faculty Societies and Clubs involved with Welcome Week Orientation Programming.

### STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE (SSC)

32. The SSC is a unit within Student Affairs and provides various support services and experiential opportunities to students from the time they enter University until the time they graduate and beyond. The SSC is responsible for defining learning outcomes that drive the orientation and transition programming. The SSC is a major collaborative partner that support the first year student experience through programs and events including (but not limited to) Welcome Week and supports Faculty Societies involved with Welcome Week Orientation Programming. The SSC also provides extended transition programming throughout the first year. The SSC is responsible for the development and implementation of Faculty Planner and Rep training.

### WELCOME WEEK ADVISORY COMMITTEE (WWAC)

33. WWAC is a sub-committee of the Student Services Advisory Committee (SSAC), which governs the Compulsory Ancillary Fee Protocol. As part of the Protocol, the SSAC has delegated the responsibility to the WWAC for setting the overall goals and objectives of Welcome Week including (but not limited to) strategic themes, important messaging, and training requirements for Welcome Week Planners and Welcome Week Reps participating in Welcome Week. WWAC is responsible for ensuring program and financial accountability relating to the First Year Orientation Fee and overseeing risk management of events and activities during Welcome Week.

### WELCOME WEEK PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE (WWPIC)

34. WWPIC plans the activities and creates the schedule of events, oversees the training of the student leaders participating in Welcome Week. They are responsible for operationalizing Welcome Week under the overall direction of WWAC.

## SECTION III: SAFETY, RISK, ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

### SAFETY

35. It is the responsibility of all University stakeholders for the development and delivery of programs and events to ensure a physically safe environment, and that is free from harassment and discrimination for all participants.

### RISK

36. All University stakeholders involved in the development of orientation and transition programs and events have a duty of care and are responsible for incidents, damage or harm done during and after an event, and to follow all University policies and procedures on Risk Management, including (but not limited to) the Policy on Student Groups. All programs and events must be Sanctioned Events by the University.
35. Risk Assessment is a term used to describe the overall process to identify hazards and risk factors that have the potential to cause harm, and to determine appropriate ways to eliminate hazards, and/or control risks. When assessing risk there are a range of factors, which are articulated in the Policy on Student Groups, e.g. alcohol, financial, guest speakers, physical activity, reputation, and travel/transportation. EHOSS provides risk management expertise to all stakeholders.

### ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

36. The University is required to demonstrate its commitment to inclusivity by providing accessible participation in activities for our new students. Accessibility means removing physical barriers and creating an environment that everyone is able to participate. The University promotes a universal design concept when developing and implementing activities.
37. Principles associated with universal program and event design are:
- a) **Be Accessible and Fair** – Appealing and useful to all people with diverse abilities
  - b) **Be flexible in Use, Participation and Presentation** – Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities
  - c) **Straightforward and Consistent** – Easy to understand regardless of knowledge, experience or language skills
  - d) **Be Explicitly Presented and Readily Perceived** – Effective communication for all users (including pictorial, verbal or written)
  - e) **Minimize Unnecessary Physical Efforts and Requirements**
  - f) **Provides a Supportive Learning Environment**
  - g) **Ensure a Suitable and Comfortable Space** – Provides adequate space for assistive devices or personal assistance
38. In addition to the above Principles, other considerations should be used when developing orientation and transition programs and events, including (but not limited to): culture, language, nationality or ethnic origin, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation.



## SECTION IV: WELCOME WEEK

39. Welcome Week is one of the first opportunities to welcome first year students to the campus community, provide orientation and transition activities to familiarize new students with the campus and prepare them for a successful transition and integration in the social and academic McMaster community. The level of collaboration involves (but is not limited to) Faculties, academic societies, University Departments, and the MSU and affiliated Clubs.
40. Activities occurring during Welcome Week are framed by specific principals and goals as outlined in the Policy. The WWAC is responsible for setting targeted Welcome Week Outcomes.
41. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University and the MSU outlining the members of the various committees, specific roles and responsibilities, targeted outcomes, the distribution of the First Year Orientation Fee and Welcome Week parameters and other matters as appropriate will be developed and reviewed annually. The MOU will not supersede this Policy.