

## Orientation and Transition Support Narrative

Like many institutions, StFX has been evolving our orientation programs to adapt to the rapid change and increasing complexity of student needs. Increasingly, the pressure for institutions to have policies and education to support mental health and wellbeing and to prevent sexual violence, hazing, and substance-related harms, has expanded the education and awareness initiatives institutions need to prepare new students for campus life.

A thoughtful and intentionally designed holistic orientation and transition program will facilitate the academic and social integration of new students, which are the primary contributors to student persistence (Tinto, 1994).

With the launch of the Student Experience and Opportunities plan, StFX has committed to a number of actions that will meet the strategic priority to optimize the first-year experience.

The StFX goals of the orientation and transition plan are:

1. To set the academic tone of the StFX experience;
2. To familiarize students with the academic expectations and provide opportunities for new students to establish effective habits for independent learning;
3. To create a foundation for a flourishing campus that prioritizes students' learning and development;
4. To provide mechanisms for students to establish personal connections and sense of community characterized by respect and belonging;
5. To define the behavioural expectations and Xaverian values;
6. To help new students get acquainted with the campus and educate them about resources that support their academic and social success.

Characteristics of our transition support approach:

- Collaborative and integrated program delivery with academic support services, health & counselling, accessible learning services, Black, Indigenous, International and Gender and Sexual Diversity advisors, human rights and equity, sexual violence prevention and response office, Students' Union, and other student services.
- Focused residence transition for our highly residential campus
- Focused Academic transition program
- Focused educational programming prior to arrival and during first week to set expectations for all to contribute to a respectful, inclusive, and safe campus environment (Waves of Change, substance harm reduction and awareness, anti-oppressive practices)
- Social programming designed to help students make connections to the university and peers
- Engagement with services early and proactively
- One on one check-in connections during the first few weeks in residence
- Early alert tools for staff to recognize and intervene early when a student could benefit from a specific service

- Restorative approach (where appropriate) to behavioural issues to first educate and develop students to correct behaviour, maintaining community has proven to be effective in improving campus culture
- Tailored orientation and transition supports for students from diverse communities:
  - Relaxed Start: Students with disabilities, anxiety, or who are neurodiverse can opt for the Relaxed Start. These students check-in half a day early so that they can settle in a simpler environment before the excitement of orientation week.
  - Community Connections: The Advisors with the Diversity Engagement Centre host special orientation programming for students who identify with diverse populations and who would benefit from connecting with community. Black, Indigenous, International, and gender or sexually diverse students are invited to participate and move into residence a day earlier than the rest of campus.
  - The Diversity Engagement Centre (DEC) Peer Mentorship Program helps students from historically excluded groups with their transition to university life and connection in community. First-Year Mentorship Program supports students in their successful transition to StFX by pairing them with undergraduate peer mentors. These peer mentors provide support and advice, helping to ensure that new students flourish inside and outside the classroom. Students build valuable connections that they can continue to draw on throughout the first year and beyond.