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# Unleashing Success: Empowering College Students with Innovative Move-in Day & Onboarding Strategies

Leveraging the Onboarding Success Pyramid to Foster Student Success

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The Onboarding Success Pyramid</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Goal of the Pyramid</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Student Experience: First 30 Days</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Technology and Student Expectations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introducing the Onboarding Success Pyramid</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Logistics &amp; Details</i>	<b>9</b>
<i>Guidance &amp; Mentors</i>	<b>11</b>
<i>Community Connections</i>	<b>13</b>
<i>Individual Fulfillment</i>	<b>15</b>
<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>16</b>





# The Onboarding Success Pyramid

While the transition to college is an exciting time, it also presents anxieties, uncertainties, and challenges. A difficult start to the semester can impact academic success and student persistence. This white paper proposes an innovative framework, *The Onboarding Success Pyramid*, designed to guide higher education professionals in organizing an optimized move-in and orientation experience for incoming students.

*The Pyramid* outlines the progression of a meaningful, supportive, and successful move-in experience:

- Provide **Logistics & Details** to ensure a seamless move-in day experience.
- Establish **Guidance & Mentors** to create a comprehensive and engaging orientation program.
- Foster **Community Connections** for sustained support and engagement post move-in.
- Achieve **Individual Fulfillment**, the ultimate objective of a successful new student onboarding.

A student's progression through *The Pyramid* requires technology, from virtual tours and interactive campus maps to unified event calendars. This white paper serves as a call to action for higher education professionals to leverage this framework and embrace technology to enhance the student experience, thereby bolstering student persistence and fostering an optimal learning environment.



# THE GOAL OF THE PYRAMID: STUDENT PERSISTENCE

For decades, researchers have studied the college student experience and the reasons they either persist or dropout. Dr. Vincent Tinto, the leading researcher on student persistence, identified four primary barriers to student persistence:

## ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Students persist when they are engaged in their education and value what they're learning. When students have positive academic experiences early on, they are more likely to develop meaningful connections and maintain their commitment to learning.

## FINANCIAL DISTRESS

Financial distress extends well beyond a student's ability to pay for college. 42% of students report that they left their college or university due to financial hardship but, more specifically, face food insecurity and/or housing insecurity.

## WELLNESS

College student wellness refers specifically to mental health and wellbeing. Mental health challenges, from anxiety to depression, significantly influence a student's ability to persist. In fact, the Surgeon General has called on college and university leaders to address the mental health crisis on our campuses, with more than 60% of college students meeting criteria for mental health issues.

## SENSE OF BELONGING

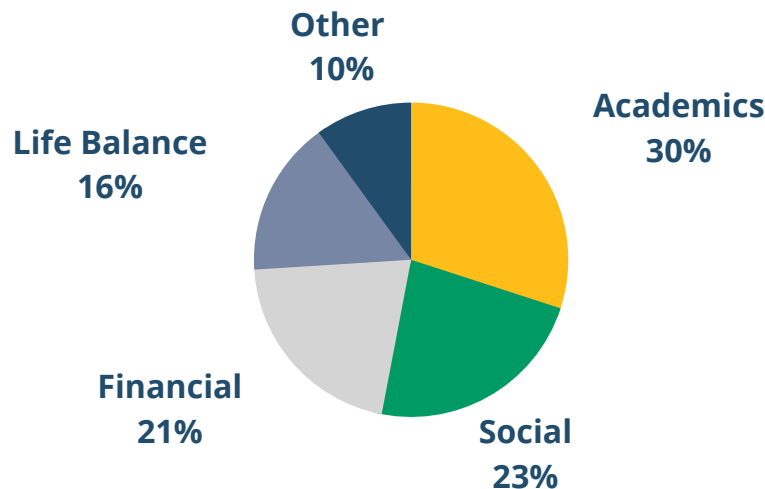
Creating a sense of belonging on campus is key to student success, however the connections need to be made early and often. Building a sense of belonging happens when a student connects early and socially, whether in the residence hall, student organizations, or other opportunities to engage with the campus community.

According to the 2020 National Survey of Student Engagement, students who persisted between semesters at higher rates also reported a stronger sense of belonging.



# THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND THE FIRST 30 DAYS

In fact, in a [2022 Transition to College](#) survey, when asked about those college experiences they felt least prepared for, student responses could be categorized into four areas:



Students challenged by academics identified *academic rigor, academic workload, preparing for exams, and time needed to study* as the biggest challenges.

When evaluating financial challenges, students identified fully *understanding the costs associated with college and the lack of knowledge regarding money management* to be the biggest challenges.

When it comes to social connections, students identified the following three areas as the most difficult:

*Being away from home;  
Meeting new friends;  
Meeting and living with a new roommate.*

Finally, when evaluating life balance, students found it difficult to *manage varying class sizes, balance their academic expectations with their social life, and navigate many competing priorities.*

***Colleges and universities have an opportunity during orientation and move-in day activities to address these challenges, provide resources, and connect students with faculty and peer mentors who can serve as a resource when such challenges arise.***



# TECHNOLOGY AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Before the start of the fall 2021 semester, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* released a report: **The Future of Gen Z**. In this report, students were asked to share their thoughts on a variety of topics, including what they expect from technology.

Today's college students engage daily with high tech experiences, and expect similar opportunities when they arrive on your campus. Today's students have had access to, and engagement with, technology on levels incomparable with other generations.

**They understand deeply how technology can, should, and must work to provide what they need.**

They see technology as more than a way to get information, but also as an extension of who they are and how they communicate with others, including family, friends, faculty, and peers. Building relationships is key to student success, and today's college students use technology in unprecedented ways to build relationships with others in your campus community.



## KEY TAKEAWAY

Students today have unprecedented expectations when it comes to how their college or university uses technology.



# TECHNOLOGY AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Today's college students have only known a world with the internet, constant access to technology, and instant communication through technology platforms.

**Technology is critical in their ability to make decisions, find resources, connect with others, and build relationships.**

As difficult as it may be to understand, the right technological resources will help today's college students find success academically, make connections on campus, build relationships within your community, and develop a sense of belonging, all key to supporting student persistence.

As we introduce the *Onboarding Success Pyramid*, we will also expand on some of the recommendations for using technology to support the new student orientation and move-in experience.

**Interactive Maps for Navigation & Parking**

**Digital Check-In & Registration**

**Virtual Tours, Online Resources & Guides**

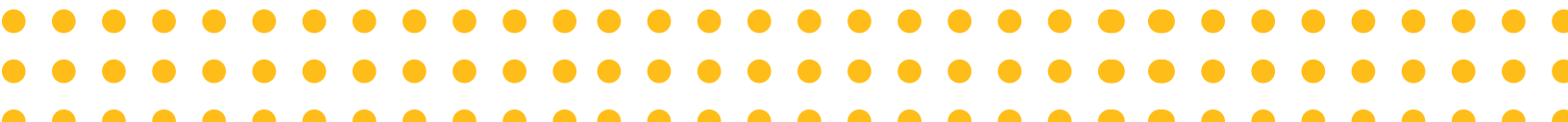
**Virtual Events & Tours**

**University-wide Events Calendar & Event Promotion**

**Wayfinding**

**Digital Resources & Support Services**

There is a common statement in higher education: Meet students where they are. In order to do that with today's college student, you must adopt available technology in order to meet the expectations and needs of your students.

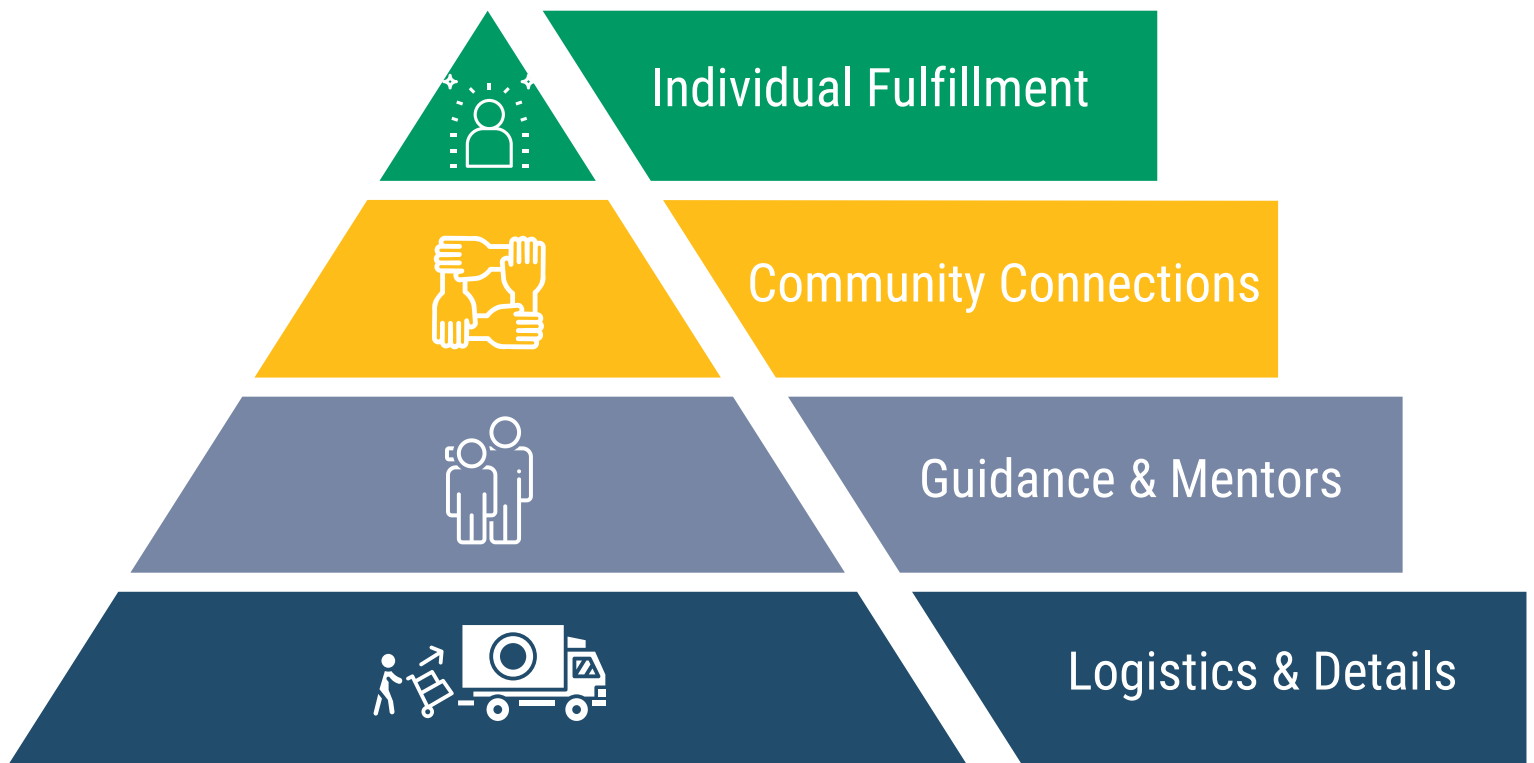


# INTRODUCING THE ONBOARDING SUCCESS PYRAMID

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs outlines how people prioritize their wants and needs, building a foundation by meeting lower needs first before one can move on to fulfilling more important needs.

Similar to Maslow's Hierarchy, the ***Onboarding Success Pyramid*** postulates that in order for a student to achieve **Individual Fulfillment**, they will need a strong foundation for a successful move-in, the opportunity to build relationships and receive guidance from mentors, and the ability to make connections across the community starting from day one.

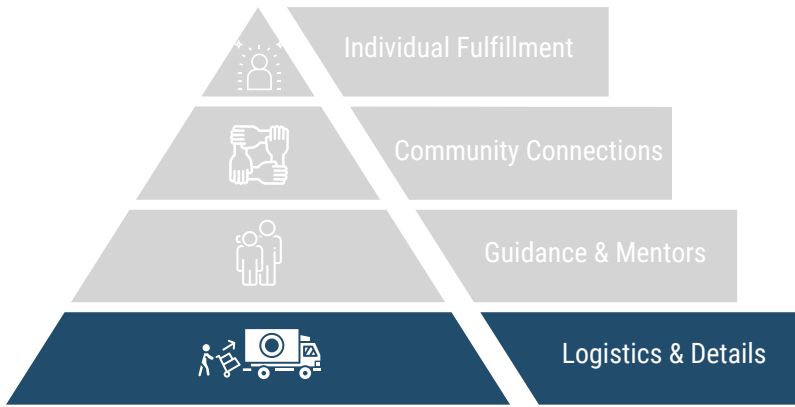
Without meeting the basic needs of students with regards to move-in day, students will face unnecessary challenges at the start of their first semester.



Let's dive deeper.



# LOGISTICS & DETAILS: A STRONG FOUNDATION



**“The line between disorder and order lies in logistics...”**  
**– Sun Tzu**

The line between a successful move-in day and a failure also lies in logistics.

While the move-in day process is different across colleges and universities, the goal is the same:

**Support a smooth transition to campus.**

Move-in day can set the tone for the semester. A successful move-in day leaves the student feeling excited, prepared, and connected. A difficult move-in experience, on the other hand, leaves a student feeling uncertain and unsupported, creating a challenging environment at the start of the semester.



Although move-in day procedures vary from campus-to-campus, there are consistencies in the experience.



Upper classmen welcome new students to campus.



Students are given a packet of information on upcoming activities and new student resources.



Students get the key to their new room.



Staff and current students are waiting to help empty cars and move boxes.



# LOGISTICS & DETAILS: A STRONG FOUNDATION

Unfortunately, even with consistencies, the move-in day experience can be taxing for many students. It's a new space, a new experience, a mix of excitement and anxiety - and disconnected or confusing move-in day information can cause the anxiety level to rise, smothering any excitement the student feels.

To build the right foundation, to provide a smooth transition to college and living on campus, prioritize how you share the details. [Use this checklist to guide you.](#) Each recommendation is a proven strategy to support a seamless move-in day.

- Create a Move-In Day webpage.
- Personalize move-in day information through email.
- Create and send a detailed checklist.
- Provide answers to FAQs and key contact information.
- Use social media as another tool to connect students with important information.



## TECHNOLOGY TIP TO SUPPORT LOGISTICS & DETAILS

**Provide interactive maps with routes to each residence hall and other key locations for a successful move-in day.**

Consider the standard move-in day information: an email with step-by-step instructions, recommended arrival time, and an attached PDF map of campus.



Now imagine a more interactive and engaging experience where students and families can see live updates and turn-by-turn wayfinding.

Create an immersive experience where move-in day guests can easily find the bookstore, financial aid, the cafeteria, or other key resources available for new students moving in.



# BUILDING COMMUNITY: GUIDANCE & MENTORS



Students visit. They apply. They receive their offer of admission. They submit their deposit. They apply for housing. Now what? After submitting the deposit, the two biggest events in preparation for attending college are new student orientation and move-in day.

Orientation is an exciting time - a time for students, families, and other supporters to prepare for this next transition to college.



**New student orientation is an opportunity for students to further explore the campus they will call home, learn about the resources and support available to them, and connect with other new students. It is an opportunity to connect with, and build, community.**

Students who develop a connection and build relationships during their orientation are more likely to stay enrolled beyond the first year and persist to graduation. These connections include both faculty and peer relationships.



Students who believe they've built a strong relationship with a faculty member are more likely to persist and graduate; more likely to engage with their professional work post-graduation; and more likely to have stronger mental and emotional well-being.

Further, students receiving support from peer mentors are more likely to succeed academically, rate their first-year college experience as positive, establish a sense of belonging, and are more likely to persist to graduation.



# BUILDING COMMUNITY: GUIDANCE & MENTORS

To ensure the opportunity exists for students to make connections with both faculty and peers, consider the following recommendations:



- Create online resources and guides, with key recommendations (or the dos and don'ts) from your current students on the most important things to do on and immediately after move-in day.
- Create faculty welcome videos that are sent to students before and after orientation, including messaging that talks about the role of faculty in student success.
- Create engaging content, including self-guided tours, to help students engage with campus, meet new people, and begin to build those relationships that are key to success.



## TECHNOLOGY TIP TO SUPPORT BUILDING COMMUNITY

Send students the shared, branded, interactive university events calendar, highlighting key events and opportunities for new students to connect with others on campus.



Integrate the location of key events, and additional information, into your interactive campus map so students know exactly where to go and how to get there.

# A SENSE OF BELONGING: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



Sense of belonging has been mentioned in almost every section of this white paper. This is because it is one of the biggest barriers to student persistence.

Without a sense of belonging, a student is significantly more likely to leave their college or university. The first 30 days are critical in establishing a sense of belonging.

In the fall of 2022, the Chronicle of Higher Education released a report, [Reimagining the Student Experience](#). The report spends a significant amount of time discussing how colleges and universities should be connecting with students early and often in order to build a sense of belonging.



*Belonging, or the sense of connectedness and the feeling that you matter to those around you, translates into stronger academic performance, persistence, and engagement.*



*Students who reported a stronger sense of belonging intended to return to their college at higher rates.*



*97% of students who felt valued by their college or university intended to persist to the following semester or year.*

Knowing that this third pillar is significant to student success, it is important to showcase the features of your campus that welcome students from diverse backgrounds. Physical signs that a student is welcome on your campus do just as much to build a sense of community and belonging as any other activity you may initiate.

# A SENSE OF BELONGING: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



## TECHNOLOGY TIP TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Use interactive campus maps or wayfinding technology to help the diversity of students on your campus.



Showcase accessible routes across campus.



Highlight family spaces, such as nursing lounges and family restrooms.



Highlight gender neutral restroom locations.



Promote religious spaces, including both worship and prayer spaces.



Showcase safety features on campus, such as blue lights or recommended pathways for evening travel across campus.

Additionally, using digital tools to highlight new student information and activities is an opportunity to engage with students through the technology they use on a daily basis. Remember, this generation of college students has never known a time without technology, so integrating it is a must as you engage your incoming students.

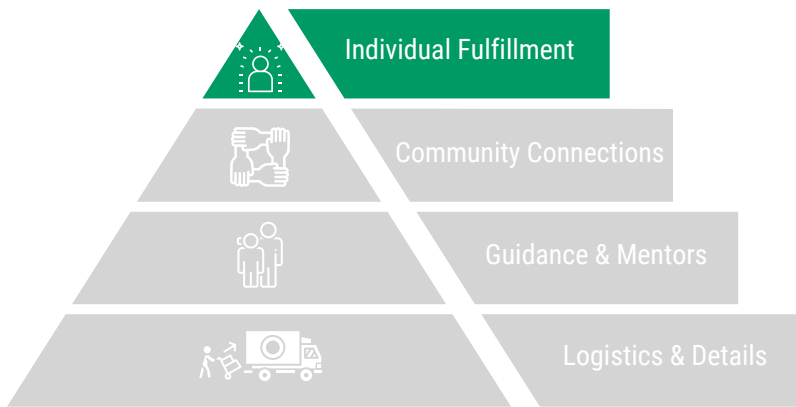
## Showcase welcome events for both new students and families through an interactive and campus-wide event calendar.

Create engaging content on microsites or through video highlighting the support services on campus:

- Counseling and health services
- Student leadership and organizations
- Financial aid and literacy support
- Academic tutoring and/or writing center



# THE GOAL: INDIVIDUAL FULFILLMENT



As we approach the top of the pyramid, Individual Fulfillment, it is appropriate to circle back to Maslow's Hierarchy, specifically the level regarding self-esteem.

In college students, self-esteem often presents itself through establishing one's identity or building one's confidence. Confidence is built by having the knowledge to feel capable and strong.

Each recommendation in the first three levels of the pyramid are designed with this goal in mind.

**To ensure your new students feel capable and strong, therefore achieving individual fulfillment:**

- Provide the right logistical information for a successful move-in day.
- Offer opportunities to connect and develop relationships with mentors, both faculty and peer.
- Design programs and provide resources focused on making community connections and building a sense of belonging.

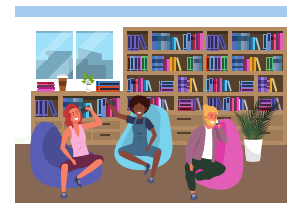


## TECHNOLOGY TIP TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL FULFILLMENT



**Evaluate the work you are doing to support a meaningful orientation experience and successful move-in day.**

**Optimize technology in those areas where it makes a difference: logistics, making connections, building community, establishing a sense of belonging.**



**Focus on the first 30 days as critical for student success.**

# NEXT STEPS



Evaluate and optimize your current move-in day processes.



Conduct an assessment of the technology available to you and how it aligns (or doesn't) with student expectations.




Develop both pre- and post-move-in day resources, considering how students should start building community before they arrive on campus.



Make a plan for the first 30 days and what you can do to support sense of belonging and overcoming the common challenges new students face.

To schedule time to discuss orientation or move-in day strategies, integrating technology into these strategies, or how you can better support student persistence, please connect with us.

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