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University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Your First New Friend

08.12.2009 | Campus and Community Michael Jones, the first in his family to go to college, has talked to his "success coach" a half dozen times since enrolling in biochemistry at the University of Dayton. He's yet to set foot on campus, but his jitters are evaporating.

"The whole college experience for me is surreal. My coach is there to talk me through it," said Jones, of Charleston, W.Va.

Riley Quinn, an incoming pre-med student from Rochester, N.Y., asked her coach whether most out-of-state students stayed on campus during weekends (they do) and what kind of service opportunities are available for first-year students. "I feel like I'm going to a University with a support system in place," she said.

The University of Dayton is one of only a handful of schools in the country to offer a personal success coach to all admitted students for the six months leading up to the start of classes and during their first semester, according to Sundar Kumarasamy, vice president for enrollment management. The success coaches counsel students about more than majors. They give pep talks about money and time management, living with roommates, even the inevitable homesickness.

"If we provide students with a strong start before they get here, some of the anxiety will be gone when they get here. When they don't know who to call, they have someone to call," said Kumarasamy, who is working with a San Francisco company called InsideTrack to engage students during the college-decision process and ultimately help ensure their success when they enroll.

Count Riley Quinn as a believer in the University of Dayton's personal touch. "I was on campus five minutes when I told my dad this is exactly where I want to be," said Quinn, who visited Syracuse, Notre Dame and the Rochester Institute of Technology. "It's the sense of community and how helpful everyone is."

InsideTrack has coached students at more than 50 campuses, but this is the first time the firm has begun coaching prospective first-year students so far in advance of fall classes.

"We are contacting students during their decision process and highlighting some of the great assets of the University of Dayton. In addition to encouraging them to visit the campus and see for themselves, we're letting them know that they'll have the option of a having a success coach work with them from now through the end of their first semester. We also proactively connect them to the University's Office of Student Success to help with the adjustment to college life. That's compelling to students and parents," said Kai Drekeimer, founder and president of InsideTrack.

Added colleague Chris Larsen: "We're finding that coaching is a big differentiator for students and, for some, it is the reason they'll choose to attend. For all prospective students, it is evidence that the University of Dayton is really dedicated to their success."

Once students arrive on campus this fall, their success coach will check in periodically and point them to campus resources. The University's newly established Office of Student Success, for example, provides parents and students a one-stop shop for any worries on their mind — from a mother's job loss to a student's poor performance in class.

All universities are competing to stand out in the minds of prospective students, who Kumarasamy says receive "160 pounds of shiny mail" during the wooing process. But for the University of Dayton, success coaching is more than an added feature, he said.

"Success coaching is a great fit for our mission. At the University of Dayton, we take care of students one at a time. We're telling students that your experience here will be much more personalized," he said.

Sundar Kumarasamy, vice president for enrollment management, at 937-229-3725.