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July 13, 2005
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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: Please replace the July 12, 2005, news release with this corrected one. The earlier version contained math errors. We apologize for any confusion.)

19 MILLION MINUTES — OR 36 YEARS: NEW STUDENTS LOG ON (AGAIN AND AGAIN), EASING COLLEGE TRANSITION

DAYTON, Ohio — What can you do in 19 million minutes?

That's 13,194 days, or 316,667 hours, or more than one billion seconds. You could also call it 36 years.

That's the amount of time last fall's entering class at the University of Dayton spent collectively during the summer on the University's popular Virtual Orientation (VO) Web site (vo.udayton.edu), a home-grown Web application designed to help smooth the transition to college for incoming students. The site features a weekly reality series, "Day in the Life," depicting the trials and triumphs typical of a day at the University of Dayton for a fictional first-year student named Wendy. For the first time, parents can log in to chat with one another and find out what courses their children can expect their first semester.

A number of universities are using the Internet as part of orientation for new students, but the University of Dayton's innovative site goes a step beyond because it builds a close-knit community before students even meet one another, according to Marcus P. Robinson, director of Internet development and Web strategy at UD and inventor of the site.

What in the world do teen-agers do when they're logged into VO for millions of minutes?

"The transition from high school to college is mammoth," said Julie Schade, content and operations manager of UD's Internet development division. "There are placement exams to take, campus ID cards to secure, books to purchase, roommates to meet and even décor to negotiate."

During the six months before the first day of class, items roll on and off students' electronic personalized "to do" list, keeping them at a steady trot toward their August arrival. "When it's all said and done, students set foot on campus armed with their course schedules, reading assignments and maybe even a few tips from a fictional first-year student's experiences

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— all coordinated and communicated through VO," Schade said.

These preparations account for about 7 million minutes. What's happening during the other 12 million minutes?

Some students are speculating about course work. Others are asking about season tickets to basketball games or unearthing a surprising array of political views. Still others are hunting for the ideal roommate. Threaded discussion forums, personal profiles and a message center transform a collection of young adults — representing a range of states and countries, ethnicities, social realities and life experiences — into a network of friends and learners.

Incoming University of Dayton students this summer are on pace to easily surpass last year's 19 million minutes online. Already, they've sent a record 27,129 messages to each other — mostly between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. For the first time, parents have been invited to join the virtual UD community that's helping their sons and daughters prepare for college life.

"We have 40 threaded discussions going on right now between parents," said Robinson, who logs in to monitor usage. "University of Dayton faculty, advisers, student development staff and campus ministers chime in where they see fit. One Dayton couple has even offered to be a 'help desk' for out-of-town parents for questions they might have about the city.

We are using technology to give families a glimpse of what the University of Dayton community is all about. They're engaged," he said.

Too engaged? "The VO experience can be rewarding to the point of addiction," Schade said with a laugh. "Just ask those logged in at 3 a.m. on a Tuesday."

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Just the numbers (2004)

166,702 logins
25,953 messages to each other
6,946 logins per week (averaging 89 per student)
5,632 textbooks purchased
4,000+ profile pictures submitted
2,000+ threaded discussions
1,761 practice placement exams reviewed
1,092 questions submitted to the help desk
37 requests for no morning and/or Friday classes
1 threaded discussion organizing a Columbus, Ohio, area cook-out
1 threaded discussion sparking a fiery debate over evolution vs. creationism
1 threaded discussion honoring the dancing banana emoticon

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