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## Incoming Impressions

August 23, 2002

Colleges and universities try all sorts of tactics to make their freshmen feel welcome when they arrive on campus.

Students at LeMoyne College will be treated to a dance, a barbecue, fireworks and a carnival.

At Syracuse University, upperclassmen help new students move their belongings into dorms while administrators tool around campus in golf carts handing out bottled water.

And at SUNY Upstate Medical University, the university holds a welcome dance at Drumlins, a picnic at Long Branch Park and a trip to a SkyChiefs baseball game or the state fair.

**When all** is said and done, college administrators hope for a good first impression that translates into a student's desire to join the campus community. Students who become involved in campus activities tend to complete their degree at the school they start out at rather than transfer.

"We want everyone we admit to graduate with us," said Anastasia Urtz, SU's dean of students.

Orientation programs for most local colleges and universities began this week, and classes begin Monday.

Many colleges and universities are offering several days' worth of orientation activities to give new students a taste of campus offerings.

"Our kids are so involved in such a highly involved, fast-paced schedule, once our classes start it's full speed ahead. They don't have a lot of free time," said

Donald Midlam, Upstate's associate dean for student services.

**A positive** orientation experience is important because colleges and universities are still working to cement their freshman classes, said Kevin Kruger, associate executive director of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. If a college or university makes a good impression in the early days on campus, students will be more likely to remain and return in future years, he said.

Orientation sessions and programs typically focus on traditional topics such as student conduct expectations, financial aid, and safety and security. But many institutions are now adding social elements to their sessions, Kruger said.

Since new LeMoyne students met with faculty members to talk about possible majors and registered for classes during summer orientation sessions, this weekend's activities will revolve mainly around social activities.

Saturday, LeMoyne is holding for the first time a new student convocation, complete with a welcome from a representative of Syracuse Mayor Matt Driscoll's office and the Rev. Charles Beirne, LeMoyne president. A picnic follows and a dance is slated for later that night. Sunday, LeMoyne is holding "Carnival LeMoyne." A fireworks display will cap the day.

**At the SUNY** College of Environmental Science and Forestry, new students break up into groups of about 10 each and about 45 upperclassmen have been trained to be their group leaders during the college's four-day orientation. Having the upperclassmen involved gives the new students a chance to ask questions they may be hesitant to ask administrators and also gives them the opportunity to meet their peers before classes begin, said Julie R. White, SUNY ESF's associate dean of student life.

"Freshmen are most concerned about are they going to fit in," White said. "For many of them, it's their first time away from home."

But any new student, whether it's someone fresh out of high school, someone transferring from another academic institution, or someone returning to school after a number of years, can be nervous about starting at a new school.

"We have students from their early 20s to well into their 50s," said Midlam of Upstate. "We try to set orientation knowing we have a very diverse group."

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