

# Graduate Welcome Week at NYU

*Off-Campus, Commuter, Non-traditional,  
Graduate, Professional, and related category*

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## Executive Summary

Graduate Student Welcome Week at New York University was designed to help new graduate students acclimate to their academic programs, NYU, and New York City. In the four years since its creation, the impact of this Welcome Week has become far reaching and has influenced the way offices within the university collaborate.

Building community at NYU is a challenge owing to physical space constraints and fairly independent schools and colleges. NYU comprises 14 separate graduate schools and, comparatively, individual graduate students can have dramatically different experiences while at the university. Finding resources and building connections can be challenging for NYU's graduate students. Small communities may form at the school level, but connections to a university-wide community can be difficult to achieve. Without the cohesive programming provided by Graduate Welcome Week, students might have difficulty accessing services, making connections, and transitioning to graduate school.

Since the inception of Graduate Student Welcome Week, the Office of Graduate Student Life has collaborated with schools, departments, and divisions to create a comprehensive array of programs for welcoming and orienting new graduate students. The initiative has grown exponentially, and promises to serve as a touchstone for the continued attention to graduate student life at the university.

### **Program Highlights**

Since 2004, Graduate Welcome Week has expanded from 28 to over 130 programs this past fall (with more than 2800 new graduate students attending). Originally, Welcome Week programs addressed needs similar to those of the undergraduate population. Today, topics such as English as a second language, finding housing in NYC, and transitioning into the graduate arena, are addressed; and owing to student demand, new offerings are added each year.

The goals of Graduate Student Welcome Week include:

- Teaching students how to access information, resources, and services that assist in the transition into graduate school and support their success at NYU.
- Helping students understand the relationship and unique urban setting of NYU within NYC, and how to negotiate multiple identities as a graduate student and NYC resident.
- Creating space for social networking within and outside of academic programs.
- Encouraging students to seek out opportunities for connections by joining clubs and organizations, and developing leadership roles.

While these goals are addressed in all programming efforts, examples include:

- *Four Hallmark Events*: the Graduate Networking Reception, the Graduate Social, the Graduate Student Cruise, and the Presidential Welcome.
- *Grad Life 101*: a program that outlines the variety of services that Student Affairs offices provide along with the office locations, hours of operation, and contact information.
- *Student Affairs Open Houses*: a week of open houses take place in all of the Student Affairs offices where students can learn about the services each has to offer.
- *Tours Curriculum*: providing tours of the main campus, the main library, and surrounding neighborhoods for graduate students to familiarize themselves with area.
- *Grad Success Series*: beginning during Welcome Week, it comprises a variety of workshops designed to address common transition issues encountered by new graduate students.

## **Program Description**

In 2004, the Office of Graduate Life developed Graduate Welcome Week, a series of programs and services created for new graduate students at New York University. At the start of each fall semester, students can choose from over 130 Welcome Week programs to help assist in their transition to graduate life.

### **Institutional Context**

At the largest private university in the world, with 14 graduate schools and colleges, NYU life is fast paced, diverse, and dynamic. While individual graduate schools attend to academic orientations, Graduate Welcome Week serves as a complement to them and connects students to support systems and services.

### **Demonstration of success in addressing student needs and critical campus issues**

NYU is decentralized with each of the graduate schools operating fairly independently from one another. Communities may form at the school level, but university-wide connections are difficult to achieve. Without the cohesive programming provided by Graduate Welcome Week, students might have difficulty accessing services, making connections, and transitioning to graduate school.

### **Student learning, transitions, retention, and success**

While the submission limitations do not allow for comprehensive descriptions or rationales for all of the Graduate Welcome Week components, the highlights are provided below.

#### *The Four Hallmark Events*

The four Graduate Welcome Week hallmark events include: the Graduate Networking Reception, the Graduate Social, the Graduate Student Cruise, and the Presidential Welcome. The Graduate Networking Reception provides opportunities for students to meet with professional staff from a variety of offices in Student Affairs. The Graduate Social encourages students to meet other students in a relaxed setting. A New York City skyline cruise introduces students to the City, and the week culminates with a reception hosted by the president of the university.

#### *Grad Life 101 and Student Affairs Open Houses*

“Grad Life 101” is a program that outlines the variety of services that Student Affairs offices provide along with the office locations, hours of operation, and contact information. To accompany Grad Life 101, a full week of open houses take place in all of the Student Affairs offices where students can learn about the services each has to offer.

#### *Tours Curriculum*

A “tours curriculum” provides tours of the main campus, the main library, and surrounding neighborhoods for graduate students to familiarize themselves with area.

#### *Grad Success Series*

The Graduate First Year Success Series begins during Welcome Week and comprises a variety of workshops designed to address common transition issues encountered by new graduate students.

### **Collaborations**

Graduate Welcome Week succeeds in centralizing a large amount of information and offering programming to all graduate students, because of the intentional collaborations with student and academic

affairs counterparts. Many of the schools participate in Welcome Week activities by presenting at sessions or promoting programs to their new graduate students. Additionally, during each graduate school's orientation, the Director of Graduate Life discusses the myriad services offered at NYU.

Offices in the Division of Student Affairs participate in many of the Welcome Week programs. These offices include: the Center for Multicultural Education and Programming, LGBT Student Services, Student Activities, International Students and Scholars, the Student Health Center, the Wasserman Center for Career Development, and the Department of Residential Education.

## **Technology**

At NYU common physical space is limited, and it can be challenging to gather large numbers of people for face-to-face promotion of services, resources, and programs. In order to ameliorate this challenge, technology is used to create virtual spaces.

### *Communication*

The graduate residence halls send "Email Direct" correspondence using a database that allows for individual emails to be sent by residence hall. This tool is used to conduct surveys, collect demographic information, and assess interest in program topics. For large-scale communications, the Graduate Life Office sends weekly electronic HTML newsletters with information about upcoming programs and resources available to all new graduate students.

### *RSVPs*

NYU hosts an "RSVP" system where a student can sign up for a program then receive an email reminder the day before the event occurs. Programs offered specifically for graduate students in residence, also use an online system for Welcome Week events. In addition, for programs where ticket purchase is required, there is an online system to help avoid time spent waiting in line.

### *Online Resources*

The Graduate Life website was created to be a welcome portal for graduate students, promote Graduate Welcome Week, and provide a clearinghouse of information for student services throughout the university. One of the distinctive elements of the website is a podcast version of the campus tour, an innovative way to help acquaint students who cannot make it to campus. For the residential community, the "Grad Halls Blog" serves as another source of information and is updated daily.

## **Niched Communities**

### *Graduate Students in Residence*

NYU houses 1500 graduate students. The schools of Medicine and Law have 600 students in their housing program, with the other 900 students being housed within Residential Education. Welcome Week is a vital part of assisting the residential population in their transition to NYU. With Resident Assistants as facilitators, residents attend programs throughout Welcome Week with their building communities. Instead of RAs executing small-scale programs, during Welcome Week RAs build community in their halls by attending specific programs in a cohort-like structure.

### *Graduate Students with Children*

Graduate Life has tailored its approach to serving graduate students. For example, students with children have needs that differ from their peers who aren't parenting while going to school. The Office of Graduate Life hosts a parent resource fair along with other services for these students. Additionally, the Graduate First Year Success Series focuses on writing, research, and development of personal skills (e.g., tax seminars, networking, budgeting) and is promoted during Welcome Week.

### *Graduate Student Leadership Development*

Welcome Week serves as an opportunity for graduate students to develop leadership roles at NYU. As Welcome Week leaders, returning graduate students who want to “give back” to the graduate student population assist in the daily operations of Welcome Week.

### **Use of Assessment**

Structured assessments are a part of the continuous improvement strategy of Graduate Welcome Week. The assessments include a Welcome Week evaluation, and a needs assessment survey conducted through the graduate student list-serve. In addition to these assessments, the residence halls use the Educational Benchmarking Inventory through ACUHO-I and assess student satisfaction with services in the residence hall. The RAs use a semi-structured conversation protocol with residents known as BASE (Bridging Academic and Social Experience) to help drive the initiatives within the buildings as well as plan “Welcome Back Week” at the start of each new spring semester.

### **Sustainability**

In 2004, Welcome Week began with 28 programs. It has grown to over 130 programs, and more than 2800 graduate students participated this past fall.

The institutional commitment to Graduate Welcome Week is evidenced by the support of the president of the university, and the recent creation of a director position in the Division of Student Affairs. NYU is dedicated to addressing the needs of a very diverse graduate student population. Graduate Welcome Week provides a cohesive and comprehensive introduction to the university’s investment in graduate student success, academically and otherwise.

As evidenced in the collaborations discussed earlier, the Office of Graduate Life will continue to work with myriad NYU administrative units to provide quality services for graduate students while focusing on the creative and responsible stewardship of resources, imaginative programming initiatives, and a common mission for graduate student success. As such, the importance of Graduate Welcome Week cannot be understated; this dynamic program will continue to grow, and be re-created, to best serve graduate students.