

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the Cuse Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal communications specialist at Syracuse University.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Our goal is for our new students and their families to feel immediate part of our Orange family and be excited to be here. Our orientation program is a mix of academic and social connection programming with the goal for students to feel connected to each other, start to build friendships and relationships, relationships with the university that Orange pride, and then also get connected with their academic unit. Learn more about their school college, learn more about the staff and the faculty that work in that space, and then also get to know their classmates.

John Boccacino:

Well, it's hard to believe, but Syracuse Welcome, the university's new student orientation program takes place August 25th to 28th with on campus move in occurring starting August 24th. Syracuse Welcome really represents the first steps in a student Syracuse University journey.

And on this episode, we are thrilled to welcome on Carrie Grogan Abbott, the director of new student and family programs here at Syracuse University. Carrie's going to offer up some tips and some best practices for new and returning students and their families as they start a new year here at Syracuse. Carrie, thanks for making the time to join us.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Thanks for having me, John.

John Boccacino:

What would you say before we get into the nitty gritty for Syracuse Welcome, what's a word of wisdom you can offer parents, grandparents, family members about this uncertain time?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Oh gosh, that is such a good question. The first thing that came to mind is patience. And I say that it's not really patience, patience with the process, patience with yourself, with your student. This is a time of anxiety sometimes for families, right? There's a lot to prepare to get ready for college.

There's a lot of unknown there and that can manifest with stress for the student and for their family. So, and then yeah, just the not knowing what to expect. So I say patience with all of those things to kind of give yourself grace and space to have all of those feelings and all of that anxiety, but then also patience to know if there's something you don't know right now, we're going to let you know, maybe it's just coming soon.

John Boccacino:

We have a great tradition we'll get to called the Goon Squad that'll be there to help you through every step of your actual move-in journey. But I want to start at the very beginning when it comes to Syracuse Welcome. What exactly can our students and their family members expect when they step foot on campus for Syracuse Welcome?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Well, I think when families first arrive, we're all about the Orange welcome. So we'll talk about the Goon Squad, but we have tons of students, faculty and staff who are there to greet the students. Our goal is for our new students and their families to feel immediate part of our Orange family and be excited to be here.

Our orientation program is a mix of academic and social connection programming with the goal for students to feel connected to each other, start to build friendships and relationships, relationships with the university that Orange pride, and then also get connected with their academic unit. Learn more about their school college, learn more about the staff and the faculty that work in that space, and then also get to know their classmates.

John Boccacino:

Sending a loved one away to school can elicit a lot of feelings of you can feel remorse over the distance, you can feel a fear over how they're going to handle being away from home for the first time, but we are here to help. And I love the volunteer aspect. There's so many people that get involved and give back during Syracuse Welcome.

I'd be remiss if I didn't start with the Goon Squad members. The Goon Squad celebrates its 78th year this year. Hard to believe 78 years. It feels like it's been longer of our Goon Squad students helping out. What exactly is a Goon Squad and what role will they play to offer both a welcoming and friendly face and helpful arms and hands in the moving process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Love talking about the Goon Squad. It's a campus tradition that my and myself and my team feel a lot of pride and honor really to be the keepers of that tradition and keep it moving. So the Goon Squad was started in 1944. Initially it was a group of students who had to reinforce the new students wearing beanies. They used to have to wear beanies.

That tradition very, very quickly just evolved into a new student welcome team. So returning students would come together and they would help the students move in. They would be part of events. They used to be the cheering section, kind of like the Otto's army of the forties and fifties. So really for 78 years, we've had returning students be involved in the welcome of our first years.

So for this year in 2022, we have over 500 students who are volunteering their time to be part of this volunteer welcome team. A lot of those students are involved in student organizations. So what's nice about that is not only are they providing that welcome to the university, but they're also able to talk about involvement opportunities, which is really important to a lot of our students as they're arriving.

John Boccacino:

As helpful as staff members can be for the student part of it, who better to offer advice and expertise than the students themselves, who not that long ago were the wide-eyed first years getting ready for their first year here at Syracuse University?

We run our move-in so smoothly, from the process of pulling your car in, you get your assigned time slot to come to your residence hall. There are these abundance of gray bins that are out there. What role will the Goon Squad members play?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

That's such a great question. So we do have the bins, the famous gray bins. And so the traditional process is, maybe I'll just talk you through that, John. So when a family arrives, we typically have them in a line of cars, like a queue. And then when it's your turn to move in, you'll pull up in front of the building.

And that's where our volunteer comes in, the team. A Goon Squad member, faculty staff member, or an orientation leader or all three, are there for the welcome to Syracuse University. And then they'll get the bins there and they will just help people unload their car. Get that bin filled up. As you know, we use a lot of masking tape.

We like to label the bins with the students' name and their room number so we know where it's going. And then typically the Goon Squad student will go with the new student up to their room, help them unload that bin and then bring it back downstairs. And so what we would want is a family member or a support person who can move the car to stay with the vehicle so they can move the car while somebody starts the move in process.

John Boccacino:

It's a very well thought out process. And it has to be because Carrie, how many first year students are we welcoming onto campus this year? I mean, we're not talking about a couple hundred, this is a monumental undertaking.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

It is a lot, John, yeah. So we have just under 4000 new students that we're welcoming, which is amazing. We do a lot of students who arrive early. So athletes, for example. We have some students participating in what we call pre welcome programs. So these are opportunities for students to arrive early and meet with a small group of students.

Our office runs one for transfer students called transfer transitions. We also have a program for first generation college students called Cuse First. That's a great opportunity for students to connect to each other. A lot of our colleagues in Hendricks Chapel are sponsoring programs. We have an outdoor orientation program through recreation services.

I'm sure I'm forgetting somebody, but anyway, we have students who come in through that. Our students who come in for the marching band come in early so they can start their practice. But the majority of the students are moving in August 23rd to 25th. So it's, we'll be moving in probably over a thousand students a day, at least on the Tuesday and Wednesday. Probably at least 500 on Thursday.

John Boccacino:

And that's why when Carrie was asked the most important piece of advice, patience really has to be at the forefront. Because as much as you care about getting your family member into their residence hall, there's 3999 other families that are going through the same thing.

It's not just one family at a time. But again, we run it so smoothly here at Syracuse. What kind of challenge is it to organize and orchestrate this process? And how long has this process been underway, trying to orchestrate all these moving parts?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Well, I talk about Syracuse Welcome all year round. It does, it takes a year to put this all together. I think very fortunately myself and my team inherited a very well designed move in process. At its core, it's not changed very much over the past several decades.

I think what we've been able to enhance is the technology around that process, using electronic signup processes that have improved over the years. So the goal would be for a student and their family to be able to pick the day and time that they move in.

So with enhanced technology, that process has gone very well. It's removed some steps. And then the on campus team, our colleagues in parking services, department of public safety are huge to helping make sure all of this works, the traffic flow, making sure students know where they're going, getting people in lines.

So we have all the right people on campus who are involved and commit the time into planning. If I might highlight, the patience piece of it, right? So the student and family end of it, waiting is hard.

My nephew said that once when he was six. It's hard to wait and it stays with me because it is hard to wait. And so you may be waiting in your car for a while. Sometimes that's difficult to do. But I've also heard families tell me they had an unexpected hour with their student that they could just spend time together and talk.

And that ends up being kind of a special memory for families. Or I've had people tell me, they just popped a movie on their iPad and just kind of chilled. Because you just kind of got to wait. So quoting my nephew, it is hard to wait. But I'm hoping that the end result is kind of worth that wait time.

John Boccacino:

You've assigned, there's assigned move in times.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yes.

John Boccacino:

And dates for the families to bring their loved one here to campus. But there always seems to be a couple of parents or a couple family members who think, "Oh, what's it going to hurt if I go a couple minutes early or try to line up ahead of my time slot?" What would you tell those Renegade family members to keep them in line?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Oh, Renegade, that's funny. We love people to stick to their time as best as possible. And that's how we manage that traffic flow. Right? And we have people do the different time blocks to manage wait times, but also manage safety and security and traffic.

So it is preferred that people come right around their move in time. When we start moving at 9:00 AM, have I had families who are lined up at 6:30 in the morning? Yes I have. But that is not something that people need to do.

John Boccacino:

It's this phenomenon, it seems like every year where you get two schools of thoughts for the families, they either bring everything in the kitchen sink or they bring the bare minimum to get through the first couple weeks of the semester. It's okay if you forget something, right? You don't need to pack everything for the next four, five, six months in your van when you're coming to Syracuse.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

That's such a great question. So I think leaning into that, I don't want to call it anxiety space, but leaning into that space of, "I'm bringing my student to school. I want to leave them with everything they need."

There is a certain amount of stress related to the shopping and the packing and the room set up. The big box stores will make you think that you need so much stuff that you don't need. So there's that. And then also Instagram's a problem, John, right?

Because people post pictures of these elaborately decorated residence hall rooms, and then people are thinking, "Oh, that's what my room needs to look like." I don't know what your room looked like when you were in college, mine was pretty basic.

I remember having a very detailed conversation with my mother about the comforter that I chose. And she said, "You better like it, because you're going to use it for four years." Which honestly, actually we still have at my parents camp.

But I digress the stuff, the stuff is a thing. You have to remember, the room is small. And you may not be able to pick out the perfect storage item in advance, right? You may get in there and start to set up and say, "Gosh, I really need this bucket I think to keep my toiletries in," that kind of thing.

So I think coming in a minimalist approach is good. You can go out typically and run some errands after and maybe pick up a storage thing. Also in the world that we live in with online deliveries, students can have stuff shipped to their room and or they're building, right?

They get packages there down at the main desk, so they can always get something shipped. In terms of clothing too. So as you know, John, it can get a little chilly in Syracuse, right? So sometimes also we'll recommend bring that fall, late summer to early fall wardrobe.

If a student's able to go home at Thanksgiving, that's a good time to maybe switch out some stuff. Or if a family member's coming for family weekend, send back the shorts and give me the fleeces, that kind of stuff. So you can kind of strategize on how the clothing situation will work and that kind of thing.

John Boccacino:

What are some other mistakes that you think you've seen made by well-intentioned family members during move-in that could slow or deter the process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Well, coming with multiple cars. When you come with three cars, that's tricky. People who rent a U-Haul, we've seen that, of course and fill it. That's not all going to fit. So less is more is certainly a way to go. Bringing in large furniture. We've had people ask if they could bring in their own mattress.

So the answer to that is, no. Use what we've got there. You can put a mattress pad around the whole thing. You can get a memory foam top, or you can kind of [inaudible 00:16:15] what you have. But stuff like that, you can't really bring in furniture and new mattresses and stuff like that. So, I mean, it's all well intended, right? It goes back to, we want to take care of our child and we want to leave them their room.

You're used to having their room at home and maybe helping with laundry or helping them decorate and that kind of thing. So making your student feel set up in their own space, I think. I mean, I'll speak from my own lens as a mother, you want to know your child's in good hands. And so some of that bringing this stuff to school is how that manifests.

John Boccacino:

Now, speaking of the safety angle, we are all at the university cognizant of the impact that COVID-19 played in the last couple of years. And we're learning to live with COVID-19.

There's some changes to how Syracuse Welcome is going to go as it relates to COVID-19. What's new? Are there any policies that parents now have to follow when it comes to vaccination status? And there was a check-in station the last couple of years you had to go to before you moved into your residence hall room, how has that changed this year?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Gosh, that's such a good question. So reflecting backwards, yeah. I mean, like the whole world, 2020 really threw us for a loop. Between March of 2020 when the university shut down and then when we reopened in August, that was definitely something. And we had a very elaborate check-in system, a lot of screening.

We could no longer, I think we only had one family member go into the building with a student to unload their belongings. And that was really sad because a lot of people really look forward to that process. Right? That setup process. So last year was a little better.

And I would say going into 2022, we are really back to a traditional process and that guests can come into the building to help their students set up. We've kind of been able to ease back. I will tell you that the requirements to be a Syracuse University student in terms of vaccinations, immunizations is definitely more extensive than it was in the past.

Students are required to have their two doses of COVID vaccine and a booster shot if they're eligible. And we are taking that very seriously. Students are not allowed on campus if they haven't either had those immunizations or unless they've gone through a waiver process for medical, religious reasons. So I would say going into 2022, that's the biggest impact that COVID is going to have on student arrival.

John Boccacino:

And the best part I can say about these policies is you will be over communicated with when it comes to what exactly you have to show, what you have to bring, the status requirements. And it's a blessing to have that over-communication.

Because parents and family members can know right from the get-go what they need to do to be compliant and to start their Syracuse University journey. Now moving into the residence hall is just one step in this process. There is a ton of other great activities planned during Syracuse Welcome. What can parents and family members and their students expect beyond the move in process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yeah. We have so many events that are planned. And we have kind of a social engagement program every night. So I can just give you kind of the quick summary of what those are. Tuesday night, the 23rd, we have an annual ice cream social. Sounds super basic in its content, but it's a place where a lot of students just talk about meeting their first friend.

It's a very low key ice cream social. And then we also have the Slice is Right, which is a game show that our orientation leaders create. I never know what it's going to look like, but that's in Hendricks Chapel. So that's, it's really fun because that's sometimes the student's first opportunity to be in that space as well.

On Wednesday, August 24th, we are having nineties night, which again, our students kind of came up with that concept. We're going to play old nineties music videos and have a lot of glow in the dark stuff. And just, I don't know a lot of things that are nineties, throwback to the nineties.

So that'll be really fun. I'm very excited to see what that looks like. As somebody who was in college and high school in the nineties, I'm excited to relive that part of my youth, right? And Thursday, August 25th, is really a special day. That's our official kickoff to Syracuse Welcome. It's that official Syracuse University student moment.

We have our new student convocation. That's a program where families are invited and encouraged to attend. We have a celebration on the quad after that. We have a couple different evening activities also going on that night. We're very excited in collaboration with 119 Euclid, which is our new home and center to celebrate our BIPOC students.

So that's going to be a collaborative event with them. And we're going to have a BIPOC supporting student organizations there. So it's kind of like an open house, little mix and mingle. So we're thrilled about that. And then also the barn center is going to have an open house, a really big event.

All of their things will be open, the climbing wall. They have glow rollerskating, all kinds of stuff. And then also on the Orange Grove, we are going to have a concert featuring some student bands. So that was really popular last year. And you know what?

I'm not done, because Friday night we have a big carnival with inflatable things. And then one of our signature programs. And John, I think you've been at this before, but we have a program in Clinton Square in downtown Syracuse called Citrus in The City.

And it's a food festival. We have food from area restaurants, the marching band performs. We have tons of student organizations who perform. And it is just, it's really fun. Everybody likes food, but it's also a way to introduce our students to the city of Syracuse. It's the home, a lot of different festivals, different cultural festivals take place in Clinton Square.

So that's kind of the summary of what goes on during Syracuse Welcome. We have a ton of stuff that goes on Labor day weekend as well. Sometimes families are worried kind of the fun stops and then what happens. But Orange After Dark has programs during Labor Day weekend. We sponsor buses to the state fair all weekend. We have shuttle buses that go to the fair. There's a lot to look forward to.

John Boccacino:

You and your staff, and I know it takes a village to pull off Syracuse Welcome, but there's so many great activities. And this is just the beginning of your Orange journey. I'm so glad you brought up the new student convocation because this is your first opportunity to step foot on the JMA Wireless Dome. And it's so cool. You're on the field. You're there with your family members and your parents who have come with you. What exactly will take place during convocation?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yeah. Thank you for bringing us back to that because it's a really special ceremony, right? It is the bookend to commencement. Students and families are not in that space together the same way until they graduate from Syracuse University, right? They're bookend events and it's really, it's meaningful.

So it is a formal academic program. There's regalia, there's pomp and circumstance, the academic procession, the provost speaks, the chancellor speaks, the students sing the alma mater together for the first time as a class. So there is a lot of meaning behind the program.

And I really, I love that. I love the meaning behind it and the specialness of it and that our families can be there to participate. Now we also know that not everybody can stay or not everybody can travel to Syracuse.

So that program is also going to be live streamed this year. That's one of those post COVID things that I lean into as something we've learned is how to live stream thing so that we can be inclusive of everybody. So for first, for families who aren't able to attend, we'll have that live stream available on our website.

John Boccacino:

One last question I want to get to and concerning... It concerns when is the right time for parents and family members to leave their son, their daughter, their family member here at campus.

I know that there's no right answer, but what advice do you have out there as a mother yourself when it comes to, when is it appropriate for the family member to say their goodbye to the student?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Oh, it's funny. I knew you were going to ask me that. So what we recommend to families is that they leave by 12 or 1:00 PM on Friday, which is the 26th of August. We have some family programming, the schools and colleges will host some family information sessions that morning. And then you really need to let the student do their thing. They have academic sessions, they have other things going on.

So that moment is hard, right? It's hard to leave, but we got to let them do it. Right? We got to let them spread their wings and fly. Not to be cheesy, but I think then it's like the, what's next? Right? So it's okay to have a good cry on your way home in the car. And when you get home, could I give a little post Syracuse Welcome first year advice for families as well, John?

John Boccacino:

That's what we have you on here for, Carrie.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Right.

John Boccacino:

Lay it on us.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yeah. So I think the thing is, is that it's an adjustment, right? It's an adjustment for you not to have your student at home. It's an adjustment for the student not to be there. And so maybe talk in advance about how often you're going to talk.

Are you calling me five times a day? How much are you supposed to be texting me? If I don't pick up the phone, I might be in class. It's good for families to know their student's class schedule so they can just know and expect to hear from you.

Students are going to be quick to call their families when things aren't going well. Right? That's a moment when I need my mom or my support person. I don't think I did well on my first test. I'm not sure I'm getting along with my roommate. And what will happen the next day or even a couple hours later, whatever happened with the roommate is fine.

You get that test back and you did fine. But it's in that moment that you forget to call home or you forget to text your parent and be, "Everything is great." So I think I like to share with families to be aware of those ups and downs and we're going to have them. And again, the patience, the patience with it all, patience with the process.

John Boccacino:

And while the separation anxiety can indeed be real as you're about to say goodbye, it's not really goodbye because there's so many ways to stay connected, including the amazing time known as family weekend, which is a great opportunity to welcome back the parents, the grandparents, the aunts, the uncles, every member of the family that wants to come back.

We hold family weekend, October 14th to the 16th highlighted of course, in my sports opinion with the football game against NC State on the 15th of October. But there's really so much more that goes into family weekend. What exactly is family weekend?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Family weekend's wonderful, and another initiative that comes out of our office under the direction of my colleague, Missy Mathis-Hanlon. It is a wonderful mix of connection opportunities for students and for their families. And then also some academic programming.

So our office hosts some things and then also the schools and colleges will host some activities as well. So there's scheduled events, but there's also time for students to just spend time with their families.

So that schedule, the draft of it, the initial events is on our website. The registration's up on our website. And we're just kind of finalizing the schedule and we'll have details as they become available. But it's a really special weekend and we really do hope that if families are able to, they can come and join us.

John Boccacino:

And Carrie, give us the website for our parents, for family members where they can go if they have more questions, they want to find out more information, where should they head?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Okay. So the website's a little long, but it is [experience.syracuse.edu\NSFP](http://experience.syracuse.edu/NSFP). So that stands for new student and family programs.

John Boccacino:

We will also include links of course.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Awesome.

John Boccacino:

In our story and our podcast. But I wanted to put you on the spot a little bit with spelling out the website for our audience out here. Carrie, you're a treasure trove of knowledge and information. I know it's

going to go very smoothly coming up. Thanks for all you do, and thanks for lending your expertise here on the podcast.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

It was wonderful. Thanks for having me.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the Cuse Conversations podcast. My name is John Boccacino signing off for the Cuse Conversations podcast.