

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:

It's a real joy and honor to be a partner in the student's experience when they arrive on campus. To be there for the new students, for their families and their supporters is really, as you said, a magical moment.

My team and all my colleagues such as yourself do such a wonderful job greeting the students and truly welcoming them to the Orange Family and demonstrating how much Syracuse University is there to support them with our programming, with what the schools and colleges do, with the support that alumni engagement gives, even with their new student send-offs or how they support our programs, it's just truly remarkable how the whole campus comes together to welcome and support our new students.

John Boccacino:

Our guest on today's 'Cuse Conversations Podcast, she is Carrie Grogan Abbott, Director of New Student Programs here at Syracuse University and a proud graduate of Syracuse. She got her master's degree in higher education, so when I tell you she knows Syracuse Welcome, she knows the move-in ritual. She's been doing this for quite a long time.

Carrie, I won't ask you how many welcomes you've been a part of, but safe to say you're an expert in this arena and thank you for joining us to discuss all things Syracuse Welcome.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

I'm proud to tell you, actually, John, first, thank you for having me, but Syracuse Welcome, this is our 20th anniversary and I have been affiliated in some capacity with all of them. Yeah.

John Boccacino:

And when people hear, first of all, it's such a friendly name, it's "Syracuse Welcome." It's our fun word for "move-in" for having first year students and all students who are returning to the university come back, but it's really special in your role. You direct everything associated with orienting and supporting first-year students from the first day on campus through the end of their first year.

For you personally, why is this such a magical special time of year?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Oh gosh, for so many reasons. It's a real joy and honor to be a partner in the student's experience when they arrive on campus. To be there for the new students, for their families, and their supporters is really, as you said, a magical moment. My team and all my colleagues such as yourself do such a wonderful job greeting the students and truly welcoming them to the Orange Family and demonstrating how much Syracuse University is there to support them.

With our programming, with what the schools and colleges do with the support that alumni engagement gives, even with their new student send-offs or how they support our programs, it's just truly remarkable how the whole campus comes together to welcome and support our new students.

John Boccacino:

What is it about Syracuse's Welcome and Syracuse's move-in program series of events that really stands out from its peers?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Well, we do hear from families that the logistics of this is the best process I've seen. This is my third child going to school, and we really do take pride in the way we organize the move-in process. But for me, what makes us stand out is the Orange, John, for lack of a better expression. When students get here and through that Syracuse welcome period, we just introduce students to our pride, all the things that Syracuse University has to offer, and really instill that Orange Spirit right as they get here.

And I think that that's a wonderful just moment we can be there together with the students as we welcome them. So I know my colleagues across the country do amazing jobs as well, but we are sure proud of the experience that we can give the students. I think the other thing that sets us apart too is the way our program is very intentionally scaffolded for students.

So when they arrive, our goal is to welcome them to the university as a whole and welcoming them to there for our residential students to where they're going to be living in there, acclimating them to the residence hall. So it's that university welcome. Then after that, we really want the students to be connected to their schools and colleges, right?

So they have the school of college programming the next set of couple days, and then after that we have our huge program in the city of Syracuse. So that introduces them to our city and all the exciting things the city of Syracuse has to offer. So there's this intentional rollout of the experiences that the students have.

So when they start the first day of classes, they have been connected to all these various layers that makes up Syracuse University.

John Boccacino:

I want to set the stage for our audience who's checking out our podcast today. So Syracuse Welcome starts August 24th and runs through August 27th. There's orientation programs, there's social gatherings, there's introductions to the city of Syracuse where the students will have a relationship during the course of their time here as students. But this is not something that comes together easily or lightly.

Carrie, you and your team with the New Student and Family Programs team, you've been working hard on orientation for quite some time. When does the process of planning Syracuse Welcome begin, and what kind of challenge is it trying to assist thousands of students with the move-in process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

That's a great question, thank you for asking. So planning for Syracuse Welcome is a year-round activity. As soon as we finish Syracuse Welcome in August, we debrief and start planning for the next upcoming year. So truly, it really does take a year to plan and execute what we offer for the new students. The entire campus comes together. Certainly I'm kind of the conductor of the orchestra, but it does take every unit and all of their pieces of the puzzle to make Syracuse welcome happen.

My colleagues in Alumni Engagement, for example, doing the new student send-offs, my colleagues in schools and colleges preparing the advising process for students, all the onboarding they do. Our friends

in Auxiliary Services and Residence Life, getting the buildings ready and all of those pieces that just takes everybody, really, to make it all happen.

A lot of the work we do over the summer too is what I call a digital onboarding process. So their orientation is really taking place as they're preparing to arrive through the newsletters that we provide, through the Zoom sessions that we do for both new students and for their families so that when they get here, they are prepared to start their Syracuse Welcome experience.

John Boccacino:

It really feels like it's changed so much since when we were students. We both went to Syracuse-

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

It really does.

John Boccacino:

... you got your master's, I got my undergraduate, but the university bent over backwards trying to find ways to welcome you into the community. And when you look at new student sendoffs, for example, what do you like about those programs that really feed into the Syracuse welcome process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

I really love any opportunity where we can help students meet each other in a peer-to-peer small group environment. That's one of the things that our new student sendoff does really well, right? And introduces students to others who live in their area. So kind of making that hometown Syracuse connection, it really helps the students feel like they know somebody when they get to campus. And those small group interactions, we continue to facilitate.

So we have something that's called a series of pre-welcome programs, RFS hosts some, I have campus partners who host some, and there are students who get together with a program around shared identity or interest. So my office, for example, coordinates one for first-generation college students and another one to support our students of color.

My colleagues who do outdoor education do a few. They go to trips to the Adirondacks. So there's multiple opportunities for that, but again, it builds small group relationships. Then, during Syracuse Welcome, we have Syracuse Welcome small groups where again, we get students together with an orientation leader in a small group environment to have those peer-to-peer interactions.

So, long story short, I love an opportunity where we can bring the students together on an individual level, and I love the new student sendoffs being kind of the opening moment for that because it brings in that alumni, that orange spirit that really helps connect them to that energy right away.

John Boccacino:

Syracuse is a large campus. There's-

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Mm-hmm.

John Boccacino:

... a lot of students that are, we mentioned more than 4,000 new students and first-year students will come during Welcome. It can be a challenge, it can be nerve-wracking trying to find that community. What do you think are some of maybe from your expertise, from your role, some pointers you might have for parents, for students, for family members, who want to help their son or daughter, their grandchild, whoever it might be, find that community on campus?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Taking advantage of what we're offering is huge, right? So attending these events, going to the sendoff, or making sure you're attending all of the Syracuse Welcome programming that we have to offer. Chatting with the person next to you when you're in your sessions for your school or college, meeting the people on your floor. But that's not always easy, John, either, right?

It does take amount of courage to be able to even introduce yourself to somebody new, particularly if you've grown up in a tight-knit community, you've gone to school with the same kids since you were in kindergarten, and now you're kind of forced to start over. So I also want to name that for students and let them know that it's not easy to build these relationships and relationship building takes time.

So it's also really important to kind of demonstrate some patience and grace with yourself, knowing it's probably going to take a while to build your community and friendships on campus.

John Boccacino:

I always laud the resources that we have here on campus. If you're looking for spiritual connections, Hendricks Chapel, the multi-faith, multi-denominational hub and heart of our university, is a great resource. All of the schools and colleges, you will get peer mentors, you will get a peer leader you're paired off with to give you advice in your school or college.

And then you've got the resident advisors, the unsung heroes, I feel like, of campus life who really are in charge of building that community on a floor level. Can you go into a little more detail about what students can expect from residence halls, residence directors and residence advisors once they have completed the move-in process?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yeah, I'd be happy to, and appreciate your shout-out that they're unsung heroes because the resident advisors are students themselves and they are there to be leaders to the students and live alongside them and be there to support the students. And that's really what they're there for, to demonstrate support to the students, to build community, to build a resource for students.

And all of our buildings also have professional staff, full-time staff who live in the residence directors. And then our staff in Student Living and Leadership is really robust. And they're working really hard at building their curriculum and the design of what the experience in-hall should look like for students.

I'll say though, John, too, I feel like I want to point out that sometimes we think that the RA's job is to shepherd students to programming or facilitate the friend-making piece. And while they're there to support students and encourage students, that's not really part of their role. Organizing the floor to go to an event after school starts, that kind of thing.

They're there to support the students, but we have to push ourselves a little beyond that individual to build our friendships.

John Boccacino:

What would you say to some of the family members to maybe allay or assuage some of the concerns that they might have about they're dropping off someone they care so deeply about for the next four years to earn this degree?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

It's so hard and [inaudible] junior in high school. So as this path of college discovery and knowing I'll be dropping her off soon enough, I have this additional layer of empathy that I've maybe had in the past of what it's like to leave this individual that you've devoted your whole life to caring for at school. I think the best thing you can do to support your students is to be a cheerleader or to be an encourager.

Be familiar with campus resources yourself so that if the student seems to not know where to start, you can provide a little advice on where to get started. The Barnes Center at The Arch has this really amazing student support webpage that lists everything from ways to get involved to how to access pet therapy or counseling if you need it, wellness.

So, I really feel like that's a great starting point, kind of a resource if you don't know where to start with a student. But encouraging them, letting students know it is okay, that it's going to take a little bit of time to find your place, but your place is here. And I think that's the point you're making too, John, with the resources that we have in the communities that you've had.

That your community is on campus, it may just take you a minute to find it, and that is okay.

John Boccacino:

And I feel like one of the, we mentioned Unsung Heroes being the RAs and the Residence Hall directors, but I really want to shine a light on another group that you and I both have come to know and love so dearly who really make move-in run incredibly smoothly. And I don't know about you, I love my traditions here at Syracuse-

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Mm-hmm.

John Boccacino:

... and every year since before World War II ended, every year since 1944, there has been an awesome, passionate, and enthusiastic group of student leaders. They're part of the orientation leader team. They're called the Goon Squad. Goon Squad members are here to help, give our audience a little perspective on just how special the Goon Squad members are, and what they will do for people that are going through the move-in process.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

So, we are celebrating the 79th year of this tradition of returning students welcoming our new students to the Orange Family. It's pretty incredible and I feel very honored that our office is the caretaker of this really important university tradition. So most of the students who are doing Goon Squad this upcoming year, we have over 650 students registered to be part of this team, and most of them are involved in a student organization or serve as a peer mentor as part of an organization with the Office of Multicultural Affairs or Barnes Center at The Arch, for our schools and colleges.

So the students who are welcoming our new students are connected, they're involved, and they're a great resource for students. So when our new students and families arrive, we have this huge group of

returning students to welcome, plus staff volunteers such as yourself who are out there welcoming our new students, and it really helps with that standout welcome experience as you mentioned before.

John Boccacino:

Well, I guess it's about time with our podcast discussion to actually dive into the nitty-gritty with move-in and with Welcoming.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Mm-hmm.

John Boccacino:

For parents that are listening, for family members who are listening, you have been communicated with quite extensively by Carrie's office. They've been telling you about the residence hall, they've given you the move-in date option, and you probably have some questions. If you were to address some of those parents and family members, what would you say is the most important thing to keep in mind besides being in your parking lot at the assigned time?

What are some keys to a successful move in experience?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

So yes, coming on the date and time that you've selected is really key because the way we organize the move-in is really quite a well-oiled machine. And when families who've not done a move-in here before when they get here, it all kind of makes sense. The reason why we organize people in days and times by residence hall, so we can manage that flow of traffic and so our Goon Squad students can help you move in efficiently.

So I think that patience is key because in the society we live in, we're not really used to waiting in lines anymore. I mean you do, you wait in a line in your car, you can wait for a little bit as quickly as our process runs. There's still some waiting involved, but that is time with your student, that is time with your student in the car before you're dropping them off in their Residence Hall that can be really special if you take advantage of it, right?

It's a great time to talk, to bond, and it's a great opportunity to be together as a family or a support system before you drop a student off. In terms of packing, I think that less is more, and I think that Instagram and other social media outlets like TikTok have given students a bit of pressure to have a very fancy Residence Hall room. Right? The products that they sell and the photos that you'll see online have these just stellar, beautiful rooms and that's not necessarily easy to achieve, nor does it need to be.

So, that pressure kind of builds some anxiety about getting your room set up and it also frankly adds to cost of things that you buy when you buy the fancy pillows and all the decor, that all can add up, and there's really not a ton of room. So I do encourage people to pack light and to not stress about all the decor because you can also add to that once you get here, when you get into the room and feel a bit settled as to what you may need.

Key things of course are bedding and towels, some storage options. Our dressers do go underneath the bed. All of our beds are lofted, so there's some kind of inherent storage there for students, but sometimes you don't know what you need until you get someplace.

John Boccacino:

I've always found it interesting to see the groups of cars that pull into the circles. You have the one group that's like, everything in the kitchen sink that Johnny or Susie could need for the entire year, they pack it up there. And then you get the families who are like, "Hey, this is enough to get you through for the first couple of weeks. Don't overburden, don't over-pack the cars."

I think it's a really good piece of advice. Don't pack too much. It's not like this is the only time you're going to get access to the Residence Hall. It's really welcome and move-in, this period is to bring in your main essential items and not things you're going to need five months from now.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yeah, that is a really good point. We do have families who come and we have West Coast families, we have international families, so they may not be back, and I think that that does add some stress to it because of the, as a loved one, me as a mother or whatever your relationship is with a student, sometimes caring for them is making sure you know that their environment is ready to go when you leave.

So I really do understand that stress. I think the point you and I too are making John, is that things can be Amazoned. We have Target nearby, and there are some trips to Target coming up where students can get some additional things. So not that I'm plugging a specific store, it's just to say that there are opportunities to kind of pick up additional things. So where it might be a loved one, a parent or supporters last time in the hall for a little bit, there's access to other things here in Syracuse once you get in and get settled and realize you might need this or that.

John Boccacino:

What would fall under the "Must have" category, and then what are some items to avoid either that are not allowed or that students and parents and families should not be bringing for move-in?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Obviously like bedding, like I said, to get your bed set up and towels, students usually bring some kind of shower shoes and shower caddy, so you can kind of go back and forth to that. Syracuse is known for our chilly weather, and so sometimes students will bring clothes up until fall, maybe up until you needing a fleece or your bigger hoodies or sweaters, and then get winter clothes a little bit later, the boots and the parkas and swap that out for your summer shorts and that kind of thing.

Having a fan is helpful, especially for the beginning of the year. Our Residence Hall spaces really aren't air-conditioned, so that is an opportunity that you may want to consider bringing that. Having your school supplies for students who are getting a new laptop, it's really helpful to consult either and with our ITS department and the Syracuse University campus store, they're really good at knowing what kind of computer students need for their academic programs because that could vary by what program that you're in.

So, those are some things to consider that you're bringing. Oh, and also I'll add things that make you feel a piece of home, so maybe some family photos or photos of close friends or just some small pieces to make you feel connected to home as well. But in terms of what not to bring the tapestries on the wall, there are certain wall hangings. You can't have pets, of course, we have had a student who wanted to bring a frog, for example, in the past, so froggy has to stay home.

Things that generate heat you aren't supposed to have. Although students can have a Keurig type little coffee maker, those kinds of things. But we do have a list of things that you can't bring on our website, and so if folks do have questions about that, I recommend that they check that out.

John Boccacino:

I want to offer, Carrie, a chance to talk about, we mentioned some opportunities for students to find community, and Syracuse welcome is not just about the moving in process. It's one key component, but there's so much more that will take place during Syracuse Welcome, highlighted of course by new student Convocation and so many great opportunities.

What are some other programmatic highlights that these students will get to experience and enjoy during Syracuse Welcome?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

So many and so thank you for asking. So our new student move-in after the pre-welcome period begins on August 22nd, and so we have engagement programming, student social connection programming that begins that night. We have a big party on the quad that's Y2K-themed this year, so early 2000s.

We're going to have music videos on a giant inflatable screen, and that's always a well-attended event. And then we have our Slice is Right event, which is going to be in the dome this year, and it is a game show interactive experience, also celebrating its 20th anniversary, and it's a program organized and developed by our orientation leaders. And it also has roots in the Goon Squad, John, actually.

The Goon Squad used to put on something called "the Goon Show," and it was this whole production that was designed and performed by the Goon Squad members, so kind of in that same spirit. Now the orientation leaders, we have Convocation, of course, we have a big pep rally on the quad.

After that when the marching band plays, we have the Syracuse Welcome Fête. This is the second year for that program. Fête means "celebration" in Haitian Creole, and that event is open for all students, and it's really an opportunity though to celebrate and highlight the resources for our students of color. We're connected and collaborating with 119 Euclid for that event, so that should be really fun.

We have another event on the quad. I'll be quick now, I promise, on Friday night, which is a carnival style program, we have a dance party and then all of the Goon Squad members who, if they had a portion of their student org members participate in Goon Squad are going to have a table, we're having a mini organization fair at that event, so that's a great opportunity to start connecting with students.

Then on Saturday, we have Citrus in the City, that is a classic favorite for all of our students. It's the food festival that we have right downtown in the heart of the city in Clinton Square, which is the home of many festivals over the years. So, students kind of get a taste of all the different events that take place in the city.

After that, the students take their annual photo on the Dome turf in an event we call "Dome Sweet Dome." They get in the shape of a big black "S" and take a photo, they get their new student t-shirt. So it's a really full week, but it's really exciting. And then there's programming that continues the next week. We have shuttle buses over Labor Day Weekend to the New York State Fair.

So for students who've never been to the fair or students from Central New York or who may have been, that's a great opportunity to do that. I think I got everything, John. Hopefully I didn't miss anything major.

John Boccacino:

I feel like our first year students get very spoiled in a sense because within the first week of being on campus, they get to set foot on the Dome floor twice, and they won't-

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yes!



John Boccacino:

... do that again until their graduation, until their Convocation Commencement Ceremony. So make sure to soak it up, take all the photos that you can. Are parents, what's the decor for New Student Convocation? Is it just for students or families, can they still stick around at that point?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

We welcome families to attend that program, and so if families are still here, we would love for them to come to New Student Convocation. And I appreciate you naming that tradition and that specialness that is Convocation. It's a formal academic ceremony. It is the bookend to commencement, and so you and your student and their peers are not going to be in the same space in that same way until they graduate. So it's a really, really special and meaningful opportunity. After that, we do have a dinner on the Dome turf, so it is that unique chance for both students and families to kind of be on the field and experience that, because it's true as a student, you really don't get that opportunity really too often. It's really a special kind of unique opportunity.

John Boccacino:

There's such a buzz, there's such a hype in the air, and you can sense the excitement of the new academic year, but you can also get the sense, Carrie, that, would you agree that probably right after New Student Convocation, that's a good time for the parents and the family members to say goodbye and let their families, let their son or daughter, their family member, start their Syracuse journey. That's a pretty good departure point, right?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Yes, I would say so. We do ask, so there is some programming for families that people can stay on Friday morning. The schools and colleges hosts sometimes an info session with the staff or the dean in the mornings. So we definitely recommend that folks say "Goodbye" by noon on Friday, but knowing sometimes our students aren't up and ready to go Friday morning, that Thursday night might actually be their kind of official "Goodbye" moment.

And I see it. I see those moments where families are saying goodbye to their student and it's emotional, but it's also a really beautiful moment to witness as well.

John Boccacino:

There's so much, and we hope our audience has really picked up on the attention to detail that Carrie and her staff put into planning this week-long "Welcome to the Syracuse Family." For you, what is the most rewarding part? What is it when you're looking back and you're seeing everything play out, what really makes you feel so content with what your team has brought to these students?

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Well, I'll tell you, I appreciate you noting the attention to detail, because it takes a lot. It is the planning down to the line item of all the things we need to order and the people we need to organize and all those pieces. But I have to tell you, John, I remember my "Why," "Why do I do this? Why does my team spend all of this time dotting the i's and crossing the t's?" And it's because we truly want our new

students to have an incredible Welcome experience, and for that to go seamlessly for the students so they can focus on just getting here and getting acclimated and feeling welcome.

That's our goal. We want students to feel their sense of belonging to the Syracuse community right when they arrive, and that's why we do what we do.

John Boccacino:

Well. If you have any questions about the Syracuse Welcome experience, [experience.syracuse.edu](http://experience.syracuse.edu) is a great place to start off with all of your resources. It's a new student programs section, has frequently asked questions, ways to contact the staff members, required tasks to complete before you come to campus. There's the Becoming Orange e-newsletter. There's valuable parking information. Some people might try to think they can slip in, find a dead spot.

No, when your time is given to move in, please adhere to that. We don't want to give Carrie and her staff any sorts of headaches to have to solve by people going rogue and trying to find a new parking spot. But it's a lot to handle. Carrie, you make it run so smoothly, you and your team, and you do it with a smile too, which people need to appreciate the patience that goes into this and be kind to the people who are only there to help facilitate this journey.

And keep up the great work with Syracuse Welcome, and we always appreciate your expertise.

Carrie Grogan Abbott:

Thank you for having me. For our new community members who are listening today, we can't wait to meet you. And for our current families and students and maybe our alumni who are listening, thank you for being part of our Syracuse community where we're so grateful for you and all you do to welcome our new students and families.

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.