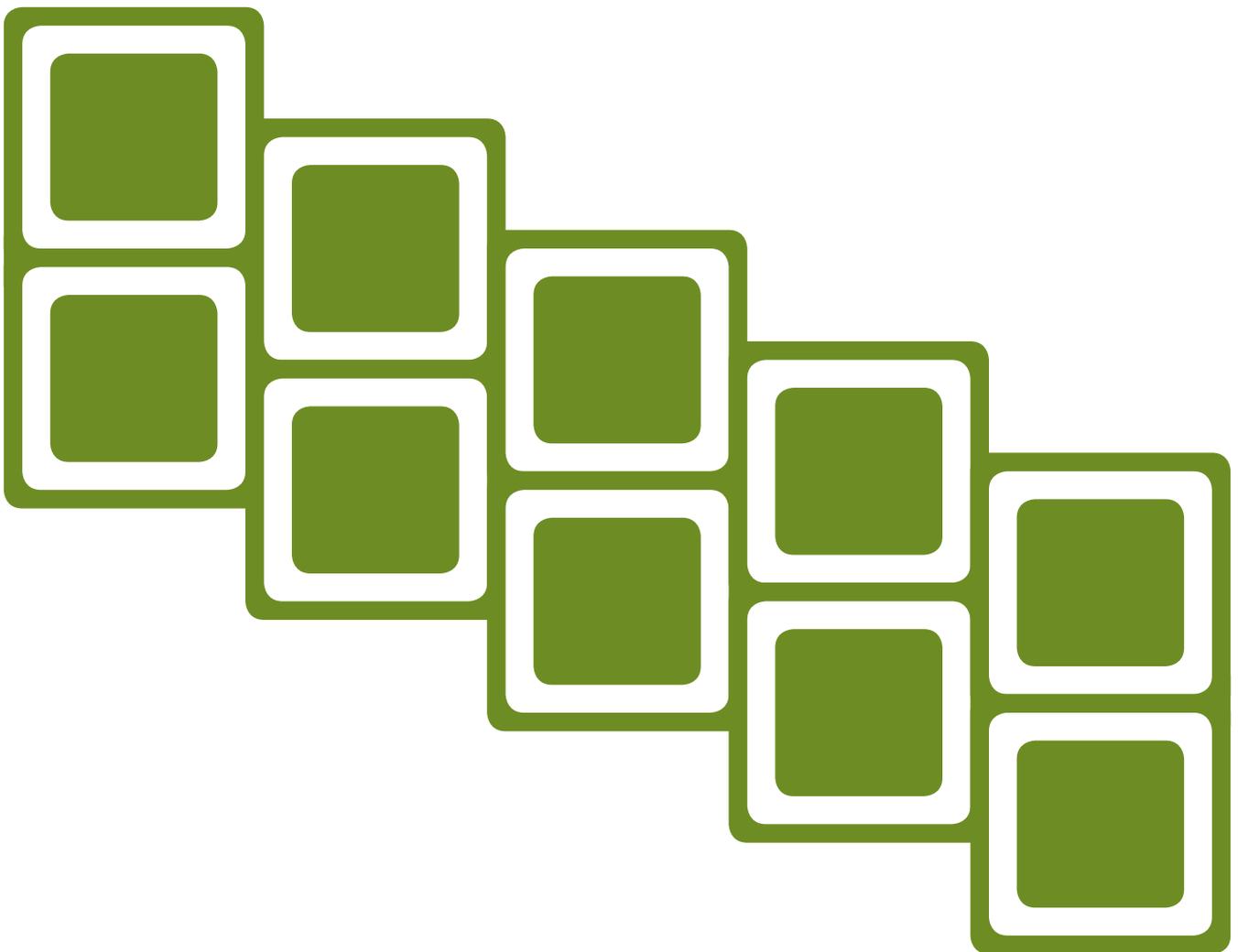


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Shaping the Academic Environment for Summer Visiting Students

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Abstract

Summer visiting students comprise a small but sizeable student group for some colleges and universities. Given this, what do schools need to know to guide and advise this group of students? This article emphasizes models of summer sessions structures based on the experience of two urban universities and how they developed processes to help visiting students connect with university resources. Structures allow staff to standardize admissions and interactions with visiting summer students, using best practices and strategies for success. This article also focuses on ways to implement advisory and guidance systems within a school by highlighting admission, enrollment, and curriculum procedures.

For some institutions, summer sessions visiting students provide a strong enrollment base. Many of these students want to get ahead in summer, or stay on track in their academic careers. While the focus is primarily on an institution's own students, visiting summer students also represent a large enough group to nurture.

Inherent in the definition of visiting summer students is that they are transient and thus require minimal attention. In most cases, this approach is enough, because visiting students typically know what they need to succeed during the short duration of summer study. Some, however, struggle to adapt to a temporary summer academic setting. Developing a basic and thoughtful system helps this outside student population by reducing their stress as they attempt to navigate unfamiliar university systems on their own. This, in turn, allows them to focus on their studies.

In all institutions, their undergraduate and graduate students are the priority during summer. These students are carefully advised by staff who direct them to the best course options to advance their academic goals. Visiting students have similar goals, but are often left to their own devices. Providing a structure to help them through another school's admission, registration, payments, and student services systems will clear up any confusing steps and complete their course of study successfully. This article highlights examples from two universities, Loyola University Chicago (LUC) and University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) as a way to underscore the advantages of such systems.

The Urban School

Throughout their history, UIC and LUC both have been characterized as Chicago-based commuter schools, with each eventually expanding into residential universities. LUC, a private university founded in 1870 as St. Ignatius College, is one of the nation's largest Jesuit Catholic universities, and the only one located in Chicago. UIC is Chicago's largest public research university with one of the most diverse student bodies in the country.

The scope of the city, the resources that a metropolitan location offers, and the size of UIC and LUC help attract students to their quality and wide-ranging curriculum. Because both campuses are located in the same metropolitan area, they share the same visiting student base. Based on general course enrollments at these institutions, this student demographic is typically interested in pre-health professional, pre-professional, or business courses.

Approaches to Summer Sessions

Loyola University

As summer administrators, we are the advocates for all things summer. Building collaborations and strengthening already existing relationships not only helps current and visiting students, but also recognizes that summer has its own personality. In 2005, Loyola brought the guiding principles for visiting students more in concert with their general practices and procedures. This allows

visiting students easy access to student services, libraries, academic departments, and university offices, which helps them navigate the university. The summer sessions office, currently under the College of Arts & Sciences, also incorporates visiting student advising and integrates Loyola policies and protocols into the overall management.

University of Illinois at Chicago

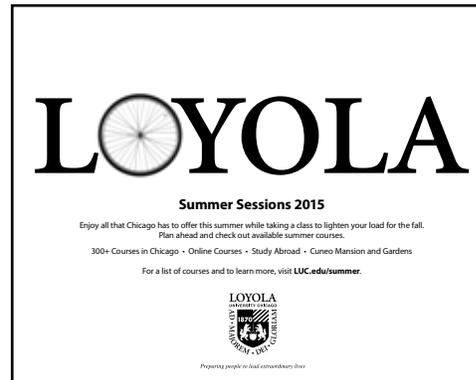
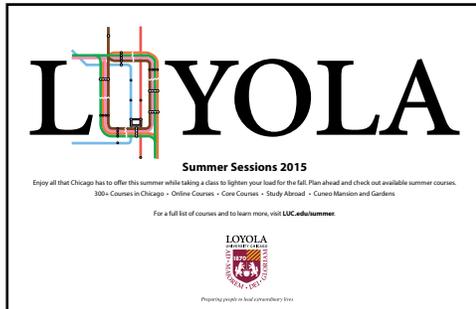
While UIC employs a more hands-off approach in terms of direct advising of visiting summer students, it uses approaches similar to Loyola's to assist them in navigating campus systems. In 1995, UIC created a dedicated Summer Session office, now under the vice provost of the Office of Academic & Enrollment Services, and charged the office with increasing the accessibility of summer session for both UIC and visiting students. The office works with academic and administrative units in addressing the unique needs of the visiting population, develops Summer Session marketing, and provides visiting students a single point of contact for information.

Reaching Our Audience

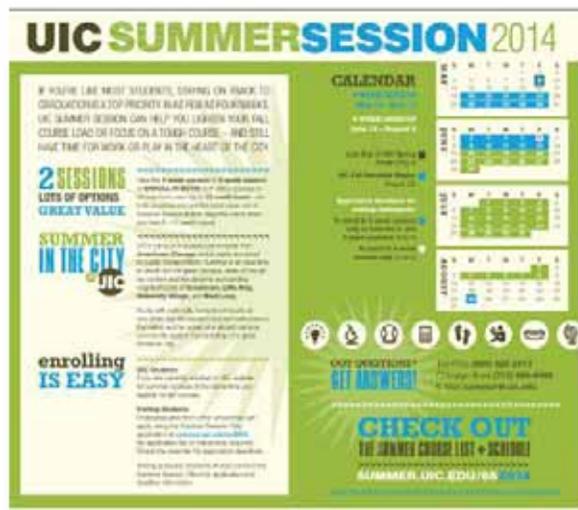
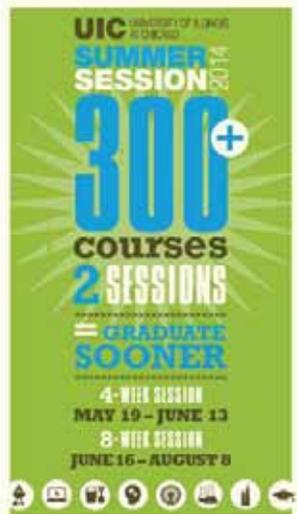
Developing an overall communications strategy, which includes marketing, web-based communications, email, and customer service, helps staff understand the make-up of the visiting student population. Culling information from interactions with visiting students also helps build a solid summer structure.

Both universities employ simple marketing campaigns (see next page for branding ads for 2014). Using branded messages throughout the year and across different platforms lets potential visiting students consider each university as an option. A useful, independent website dedicated to Summer Sessions is also a key component to reaching visiting students (see LUC.edu/summer and summer.uic.edu). Providing a catalog listing, course description, mode of instruction, costs, application, and other general information in one place helps students, faculty, and staff explore course options, understand expectations, and focus on specific questions important to them.

Visiting Student Marketing



Marketing Brochure



Summer Structure Models

Developing a rational system helps guide how an institution handles the flow of visiting summer students. Summer offices should consider providing advising and student services, which may have slightly different processes during the summer itself. The overall objective is to allow visiting summer students easy access to course information and registration, but with the added understanding that they need to follow guidelines that govern academic integrity. A simple, fair, and helpful structure allows colleges and universities to focus on visiting students without compromising their own students' needs or overwhelming staff.

Planning

At both LUC and UIC, the designated summer office manages marketing and collaborates with admissions, the registrar, and various administrative and advising offices to develop policies and procedures for visiting students, which insures that general student processes run smoothly (see Figure 1). For example, the College of Arts & Sciences at Loyola works with academic advising units across the university to make sure that academic and student policies are consistent.

While Loyola summer courses are managed, budgeted, and scheduled by each college within the university, UIC's Summer Session office provides centralized coordination and funding for summer courses, which are planned and scheduled by academic units.

Summer Visitor Admission Processes

Academic success for visiting students begins with a quick and efficient admission process. In conjunction with the undergraduate admissions offices, both LUC and UIC created a free online non-degree application that maintains each school's academic integrity and admission policies. For example, Loyola requires visiting students to have a high school diploma; college or university students require a minimum 2.0 GPA and must be in good academic standing. UIC's online application for Summer Session requires students to have a good academic standing at the last school of attendance. Neither school requires documentation, unless requested by departments for specific courses.

Offering an online application system early in the academic year benefits students and allows staff to review the student base and correct problems in the system. The undergraduate admission offices at both campuses handle visiting student summer applications quickly, making it a priority during specific seasons throughout the year.

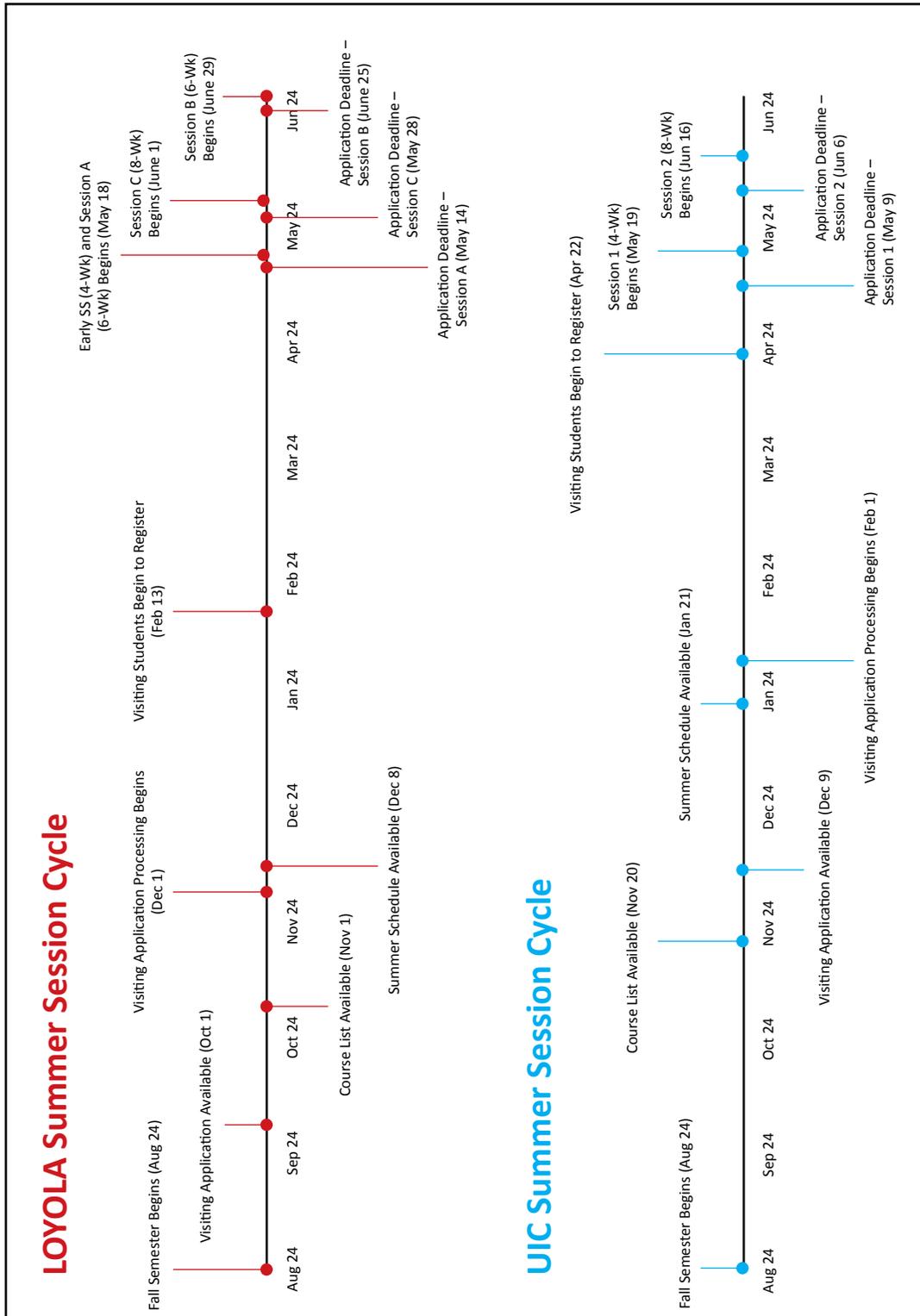


Figure 1
 Timelines of Key Summer Sessions Dates

General Guidance for Visiting Students

While visiting students are enrolled for the short term, that in no way minimizes the importance of their achieving success and how that success supports the overall success of summer sessions. Giving advice and guidance that adhere to university policies is crucial because it reinforces university policies and procedures and creates less ambiguous areas of concern when dealing with visiting students.

Course Offerings and Enrollments

Universities and colleges should review enrollment trends and student needs when determining courses offerings. The demand for some subjects also paves the way for visiting student enrollments. Undergraduate courses in biology, chemistry, and physics will meet the prerequisites many students seek as they prepare for health or medical professions, or prepare for the MCAT. Introductory business, math, and online courses may also meet the demands of an applicant applying to professional programs. Humanities courses, however, are more likely to be popular for home institution students. In most cases, the strength of a program in any academic discipline can bring in visiting students, particularly if the courses are at the 100 or 200 levels.

Registration Timing and Seat Availability

Encouraging visiting students to enroll early creates an advantage. LUC opens registration early in the year, typically in February; UIC opens enrollment to visiting students in April. Advanced marketing helps students identify deadlines and course offerings. It encourages them to select courses of interest and seek any necessary approvals for registration.

The ability to respond to enrollment pressure in popular courses ensures seat availability for visiting students, even if priority is given to the university's undergraduate population first. LUC accommodates as many students as possible without compromising the ability of faculty to teach and for students to learn. At UIC, the Summer Session office monitors enrollments and will provide additional funding to add sections where needed.

Prerequisite Management

Because LUC and UIC's visiting summer student applications do not require a transcript, coding the students as exceptions to the prerequisite enforcement moves enrollments along smoothly for these students. In most cases, visiting students will already have fulfilled the prerequisite requirements. However, the decision to enforce a prerequisite requirement, which is routine with some disciplines, is dependent on academic departments within a college. Most universities or colleges can develop a system that works around this obstacle.

To accommodate the need for students to have fulfilled prerequisite requirements, the summer session offices at both universities request an unofficial transcript for review. If approved, students are given permission to register. Loyola and UIC summer session offices have also developed a process for identifying and alerting affected students early to reduce delays in registration. Engaging departments that require this documentation is key to efficiency. This means asking designated staff to review transcripts (official or unofficial) and set up a registration process so that the responsibility is spread among staff and students. For the most part, academic departments, the registrar, and undergraduate admissions will work as a team to smooth over this process and ensure that coding of prerequisites for visiting students is completed properly.

Developing Academic Advising and Student Services

Once the above-mentioned procedures are in place, nuance may be more important than process in the institution's interaction with visiting students. Because of this, guidance and advising structures developed for summer sessions should be similar to those already in place for regular students. This lessens confusion about priorities, while attending to the needs of visiting students.

Working across their universities with academic advisers and assistant or associate deans from academic units on issues related to courses and general student policies, LUC and UIC apply the following methods for directing and advising visiting students:

- LUC provides advising for students who request it. Students can schedule meetings or drop in, but a hands-off approach is usually employed, because visiting students are typically aware of their academic needs.
- UIC also follows the hands-off approach; Summer Session staff will assist students in searching for course information, but there is no formal advising available beyond this.
- Both schools collect syllabuses for popular courses in the sciences, math, economics, accounting, etc.

For complex issues, deans, department chairs, and the bursar also help with the following processes:

- Assisting visiting summer students in following the protocols and expectations of student life as outlined in the respective student handbooks.
- Dealing with the deans' offices if an academic grievance arises (grade disputes, faculty issues, and student issues) with a visiting (or a home) student. When dealing with weightier issues, it is extremely important that all students are guided to follow the academic policies of an institution; policies that maintain the academic rigor of the school.
- Following the same procedures that apply to the general undergraduate population for visiting student appeals. These appeals usually deal with a student's non-attendance or some aspect of the student's participation in a course. Implementing the same procedures across student groups helps an institution maintain its integrity and lessens the gray area surrounding appeals.

- Working with student services to provide advice on how visiting students can access tutoring, the office for students with disabilities, the wellness center, or other services is encouraged. At both Loyola and UIC, visiting students have access to all amenities and resources of each university.
- Communicating with visiting students must be consistent across all units; interoffice collaboration ensures no misunderstandings arise about issues such as billing or withdrawal deadlines. Fostering open channels of communication helps students who enroll stay enrolled, and complete courses successfully.

Recommendations

Overall, Summer Sessions at LUC and UIC manage aspects in similar ways. While the summer offices differ on some details, the universal strategies rely on the same elements: an efficient admission system that maintains academic integrity, customer service that moves visiting students through registration quickly, appeals that help maintain the universities' set of rules, and connecting students to school resources.

In general, to develop and maintain a successful visiting student population, we suggest:

- Assessing course schedules and determining needs.
- Developing a strong, but simple admission and registration system.
- Developing a well-tuned structure for visiting students that integrates with general services and student structures of your own student population and institution.
- Developing an advising structure that works in conjunction with policies set for a school's own student body, without contradicting the needs of visiting students. This is one of the strongest points in developing a system—buy-in from others will not only give you authority but also will allow others to provide advice on student matters.

Our identity as Summer Sessions staff becomes a tangible reminder to students and staff that we are the ones who create and maintain a transparent system for visiting students. Over time, the recognition of this identity helps build an awareness of the needs of visiting students throughout the campus, making future collaboration on visiting student issues much easier because other units are more likely to remember this often-overlooked student group. Most institutions already have policies and protocols set up to enhance a visiting student system. The key is accessing these structures and collaborating across the institution to fine tune and manage the processes for the summer semester. Taking the initiative to render a coherent path for visiting students is possible, as long as others understand that the goals are in line with general policies.

Melding the visiting student population is important and having a seamless semester—one that provides an easy flow for administrators, faculty, and students—will help universities and colleges build a foundation for success.

Biographies

Maria Lettiere is the assistant director of Communications and Academic Affairs, College of Arts & Sciences at Loyola University Chicago. She is responsible for some key initiatives in the college including Summer Sessions and J-Term and for varied projects related to curriculum and web-based communications. Prior to joining Loyola, she worked at the Chicago History Museum and The Public Square, a program currently under the Illinois Humanities Council.

Natalie Kokorudz is assistant director of the Summer Session Office at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she has worked for seventeen years. She is primarily responsible for the summer instructional budget and planning course offerings with the colleges, along with oversight of student services and marketing. She has been the NAASS regional vice president for the North Central Region and served as secretary and president of NCCSS.