Out of State Freshmen Experience Key Findings

In March 2011, a mixed methods data collection was conducted about the first year out of state cohort. 128 freshmen out of state students, staff, faculty, and student staff were invited to participate in a focus group. 78 parents of out of state students were sent a Qualtrics survey about their students' experience at LMU. The key findings are presented below.

Qualitative Findings

When asked what they found challenging about being an out-of-state student at LMU, five major themes emerged in their responses:

Theme 1: Culture shock

"It feels like I'm from an alien state" – first year AZ student

These students experienced a significant culture shock that negatively impacted their transition to LMU and exploration of Los Angeles:
- Students' preconceived perceptions of Los Angeles and LMU did not match with their experiences.
- Students were completely unprepared for the transition to LMU and Los Angeles.

Theme 2: Transition

The rhythmic nature of their transition to LMU is not in sync with the way LMU programs for first year students.
- Fall semester: initially too overwhelming and then becomes too underwhelming:
  - LMU Connect Club Fest and the Job Fair are too much too soon.
  - When they finally get their bearings, they feel like they have missed the opportunity to become involved.
  - They are unaware of how to get involved or what LMU has to offer.
  - Fall does not provide any "real" involvements.
  - They feel like they are lacking a true sense of belonging and purpose.
- Spring semester provides a combination of excitement, belonging, rejection and loss:
  - The recruitment season is overwhelming.
  - Waiting in anticipation for the major recruitments and feeling that they are not getting the experience they were anticipating.
  - Feel like the university is not coordinated in scheduling recruitments and rejection notification.
  - If they do not join an organization, they feel more isolated and feel like there is nothing for them to do on campus.
  - They are unaware/misinformed of how else to get involved outside of the recruitment opportunities.

Theme 3: Weekends and Holidays

"LMU keeps it quiet that 60% of students are from CA making it a suitcase school for freshman." –First year out-of-state parent

Students and parents are disappointed and challenged by the lack of weekend and holiday campus community and offerings.
- They find the Monday through Thursday campus community to be vibrant and engaging:
  - The campus community feels alive.
  - Everything is open and programs and activities are visible.
  - There is a lot to do.
  - Creates an environment conducive to organic peer connections and experiences.
- They feel isolated and trapped on weekends and holidays:
The weekends lack a defined social scene.
- A large majority of local students leave making the campus feel deserted and making them feel alone.
- They feel isolated and are unaware of where the other out-of-state students are.
- There is nothing to do on the weekends and if they are not part of a group they feel even more isolated.
- They feel trapped on campus and are unaware/misinformed of what LMU has to offer.
- They want to do things, but they are also seeking organic opportunities.

**Theme 4: Food services, location and hours**

"It is a struggle to find food on weekends and breaks...Spring Break was BRUTAL" - Out-of-state RA

Food services, locations, selection and hours of operation are not meeting students' needs or assisting in creating community:
- Limited hours and locations of operation make students feel the campus is deserted and they are stranded

**Theme 5: Misinformation about LMU programs, resources, activities and services**

"I find myself unable to help them navigate the university" - Teaching Fellow

There is a significant lack of awareness and misinformation about LMU programs, resources, activities and services:
- Students are unaware of/misinformed about and unable to locate what LMU has to offer.
- Faculty and staff are not fully aware of what is happening on campus and how to appropriately guide students who are struggling.

**Student Affairs Retention Initiatives**

In order to increase the retention of first year out of state students, Student Affairs must program for the freshmen class cohort with the needs of first year out-of-state students in mind through:
- Community & Collaboration
- Communication
- The LMU Experience