

Online Orientation

Last week San Jose State University announced that its incoming students will not be participating in on-campus orientation this summer as is typical for new students. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, SJSU will be substituting in-person orientation with a virtual experience for new students.

“It doesn't feel the same; welcoming students to SJSU over a computer screen,” said Alison Ross-Medina, a returning summer orientation leader who has been hosting informational webinars for new students. “It's hard to make incoming students get excited about the school if they can't be here on campus.”

According to the New Student and Family Programs division of San Jose State's Student Affairs Office, the virtual orientation is still just as important as the in-person orientation and attendance is required for new students to register for classes in the fall. Incoming freshmen will be required to participate in a two-day virtual orientation while incoming transfer students will participate in a single day virtual experience. During the virtual orientation new students will have the opportunity to attend multiple info sessions on topics ranging from financial aid to class registration.

Despite the absence of in-person orientation, new students will still be required to pay a \$250 enrollment deposit when choosing an orientation date, sparking confusion.

“It's frustrating that my little brother still has to pay for orientation when he can't have a traditional orientation experience,” said Polet Ramirez, a fourth year SJSU student whose younger brother plans to attend SJSU in the fall.

The removal of an in-person orientation also limits social interactions for new students. “Those new students are missing out on making their first friends in college. I am still friends with people I met during my orientation,” said Kevin Aguilar, a first-year mechanical engineering major that currently lives on campus.

The loss of the typical summer orientation also means the loss of the typical summer orientation leaders, a group of student staff who works throughout the spring semester to prepare for summer orientation days.

“It's kind of devastating to a group of highly involved students that have worked hard to prepare for something that won't be happening now,” said Ross-Medina. “Usually all the orientation leaders live together in the dorms over summer and become like a big family but it won't be like that this summer.”

When it was announced to the incoming community that orientation would be virtual, it was also announced to the orientation leaders that they would not be living on campus this summer and

would instead be working remotely from home. The normal high-energy orientation leaders must now interact with their students through a computer screen. The orientation leaders will still be interacting with new students during the online orientation in the form of smaller virtual breakout sessions.

“Really the student and orientation leader interaction time just got slashed. I almost don't feel like an orientation leader anymore,” said Sofia Casey, a first-year orientation leader.

On Wednesday San Jose State University released preliminary plans to operate virtually for the fall 2020 semester.

“The fact that classes will most likely be online in the fall makes it that much more complicated,” said Ross-Medina. “When a new student asks about how the fall semester will go, I don't know what to tell them because I'm not sure myself.”

For now, San Jose State students must wait for a definite answer on whether classes will be in person or online for the fall semester.