

In-person uni orientation camps making a comeback

Incoming freshmen, organisers cheer return of campus activities, with extra precautions in place

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Orientation programmes for university students are making a comeback after a two-year hiatus, with most schools adopting in-person and virtual segments.

All six autonomous universities here told The Straits Times that they will have in-person activities on campus, after Covid-19 restrictions were eased this year.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), orientation camps organised by the student union, halls of residents and various faculties, among other groups, began two weeks ago. Rag and Flag – an annual event where students perform to raise money for charity – will take on an in-person format this year.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will have some virtual orientation activities to allow those unable to physically attend to participate.

The Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Social Sciences and Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will have physical orientation activities next month and in August, with SIT hosting exclusively in-person events.

The Singapore University of Technology and Design, which had in-person orientation activities in small group settings over the past two years, will have its orientation in September.

Before the pandemic, thousands of freshmen entering university would often participate in residential camps.

However, orientation camps in 2020 and last year were largely virtual and muted affairs, owing to Covid-19 restrictions on group sizes and gatherings.

The return of in-person activities has been welcomed by students.

Third-year student Rianne Han, 20, who is in charge of games and logistics for NUS Life Sciences Camp, said: "In a physical camp, there's a sense of community that



Students practising dance moves for the National University of Singapore's Rag and Flag event in 2016. Before the pandemic, thousands of freshmen entering university would often participate in residential camps, but such activities were largely virtual and muted affairs over the past two years because of the pandemic.
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cannot be replicated online. It is something that I'm really looking forward to this year."

Medical student Donovan Lim, 20, an incoming freshman who took part in NUS' King Edward VII Hall's engagement camp on June 1 and 2, said it left him with a better understanding of hall life and university life as a whole.

"A lot of the tips or advice that seniors gave me was when we were having organic conversations, which could not have happened in a virtual camp," he added.

For incoming SMU social science freshman Emma Ho, 19, an in-person event will make it easier for her to get to know her peers.

She noted that conversations feel more natural in a face-to-face setting than on an online platform.

Similarly, NTU-bound Jolene Chia, 19, who is pursuing a double major in psychology and media analytics, said: "You can't feel the vibe of the different co-curricular activities online – you need to be there to find the people and environment which will suit you the best."

But there are some, like 19-year-old Aman Zainal, who prefer a virtual camp.

"The large groups will tire me out quickly, as I'm someone who is more introverted," he said.

The student from NUS' College of Design and Engineering, who

will be entering the university this year, added that the fast-paced orientation programmes require a lot of interaction within a very short period of time. He prefers to get to know his peers gradually over the course of a semester.

For the organisers, the relaxation of rules will give their programmes an extra buzz.

Student Edmund Ong said the organising committee of the NUS Business Camp had to plan for both online and in-person scenarios in the light of changing Covid-19 restrictions over the past 10 months of planning.

The 22-year-old said he is relieved by the return of face-to-face orientation, adding: "We felt that an online event would not give freshmen the full experience, and lacked the excitement and fun we wanted them to have."

However, it is not all fun and games in orientation this year.

Some students who have already attended camps noticed that orientation activities were being conducted with extra precautions over concerns that the camps could be cut short or called off by the school administration – either over safe management measures being breached or over other forms of misbehaviour.

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VALUABLE CONVERSATIONS

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MEDICAL STUDENT DONOVAN LIM, an incoming freshman who took part in NUS' King Edward VII Hall's engagement camp on June 1 and 2.

OVERWHELMING

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MR AMAN ZAINAL, a 19-year-old student from NUS' College of Design and Engineering, who says he would prefer attending a virtual camp.