

The Role of Social Capital and Habitus in Facilitating Transition to University

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Abstract: This study examines how the college orientation program at De La Salle University supports the transition of first-year undergraduate students by activating social capital and reshaping habitus. Anchored on Bourdieu's theory of practice and Stanton-Salazar's concept of institutional agents, the research explores how access to peer networks, mentorship, and institutional knowledge (social capital) interacts with the development of values, skills, and dispositions (habitus) to promote integration into university life. Using a qualitative, inductive thematic analysis, Zoom-based focus group discussions were conducted with eleven sophomore and junior students who previously participated in the orientation program. The findings reveal that the orientation program fosters a strong sense of belonging, enhances resource navigation, and nurtures adaptive dispositions aligned with Lasallian values. Peer agents and institutional mentors play a pivotal role in modeling inclusive behaviors and service-oriented identities, demonstrating how habitus evolves in response to meaningful engagement with institutional structures. While challenges remain for students whose initial habitus may not align with institutional norms, the program's emphasis on communal support and reflective practices helps bridge this gap. Overall, this research underscores the importance of designing orientation programs that account for the diverse social and cultural capital of new students, thereby fostering long-term academic success and meaningful engagement.

Key Words: capital, habitus, college transition, college orientation program, student affairs

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition to university represents a complex interplay of social and cultural dynamics, making it both an exciting and challenging period for first-year students. Orientation programs are designed to ease this transition by providing guidance, support, and access to institutional resources. However, understanding how these programs foster lasting integration requires a robust theoretical framework that accounts for the multifaceted nature of student adaptation.

This study is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's

theoretical constructs of social capital and habitus, complemented by Stanton-Salazar's framework on institutional agents. Bourdieu's concept of social capital refers to the resources and support embedded in individuals' networks, such as mentorship, peer relationships, and access to institutional knowledge, that can facilitate academic success (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In parallel, his notion of habitus describes the ingrained dispositions, values, and behaviors shaped by past experiences and socialization (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990). These two concepts are interrelated in that social capital not only provides the practical

tools needed for college adaptation but also contributes to reshaping an individual's habitus, aligning it with the expectations and culture of the university environment.

Building on this foundation, Stanton-Salazar's (2011) framework introduces institutional agents, key figures such as faculty, mentors, and peer facilitators, who actively transmit cultural capital and support the transformation of students' habitus. In this view, institutional agents are not merely conduits of information; they serve as role models who bridge the gap between students' pre-existing dispositions and the new social norms of the academic field.

These interrelated theoretical perspectives inform our research design and analysis by guiding the selection of key variables. We focus on how social capital (through networks, guidance, and information-sharing) interacts with and reshapes habitus (values, skills, and dispositions) during the orientation process. This conceptual framework is visually mapped in our accompanying diagram, which illustrates how institutional agents operate within the field to activate social capital and catalyze shifts in habitus, ultimately facilitating successful student integration.

By clarifying these theoretical interrelations, the study not only advances our understanding of college transitions but also provides a structured approach for examining how structured support systems, such as college orientation programs, can promote equitable access to resources and foster long-term academic success.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how students at De La Salle University leverage social capital and whether this engagement fosters a habitus that supports their successful transition to college. Using Zoom-based focus group discussions enables an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences, attitudes, and behaviors related to social capital.

2.2. Research Setting

The study is conducted within the context of De La Salle University, focusing on the environment surrounding the college orientation program. This setting is critical, as the program plays a central role in shaping students' initial encounters with the university's resources, networks, and shared values.

2.3. Participants

Eleven participants ($n = 11$), comprising four male and seven female students, were recruited for this study. All participants are sophomores and juniors from different colleges within the university. Their diverse backgrounds provide a unique perspective on how the orientation program impacted their academic and social adaptation.

2.4. Instruments

A semi-structured FGD guide was developed to investigate key aspects of the participants' experiences during orientation. The guide included inquiries such as how the college orientation helped them establish connections with teachers, mentors, organizations, and offices; how it facilitated relationship-building with peers; what information or insights they gained from the orientation program that helped them navigate the first year in college; and what changes in their thinking or behavior could be attributed to their participation in the orientation. These questions were crafted to capture the nuances and depth of the participants' experiences regarding the activation of social capital and the shifts in habitus.

2.5. Procedure

Focus group discussions were conducted online, ensuring convenience and accessibility. The session lasted for two hours, and questions were released to participants before the actual interview to allow for better introspection. During the sessions, all participants—representing different colleges and batches (sophomores and juniors)—were given an equal amount of time to share their experiences. After obtaining informed consent and observing ethical guidelines in line with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, sessions were recorded for accuracy. Audio recordings

were later transcribed verbatim. We then familiarized ourselves with the data through repeated readings to identify initial patterns and recurring statements.

2.6. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed through a systematic, multi-step process. First, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and we reviewed the transcripts multiple times to immerse ourselves in the data. Next, we coded the transcripts by segmenting them into key ideas, behaviors, or values, such as "sense of belonging," "time management," and "academic stress," with Google Spreadsheets serving as an organizational tool to record and track these emerging codes. We employed inductive coding methods to allow themes to emerge naturally from the data. These initial codes were then iteratively grouped into broader themes to accurately represent the diverse experiences of the participants. Following this, a thematic analysis was conducted wherein significant themes were identified and analyzed in relation to the research questions. Selected quotes from participants were employed to authentically illustrate the findings, which were subsequently contextualized within established theories, including Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Finally, the study's findings, limitations, and practical implications, including recommendations for enhancing peer mentorship programs, were summarized—ensuring a balanced view of strengths and potential biases in the data. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and the secure handling of data, were rigorously maintained throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore how the college orientation program at De La Salle University supports first-year students in their academic and social transition by activating social capital and shaping habitus. The findings, organized around the dimensions of social capital (access to information, sense of belonging, and mentorship) and habitus (values, skills, dispositions), reveal a dynamic and reciprocal relationship where institutional resources interact with students' internal dispositions to facilitate integration.

3.1. Social Capital: Accessing Institutional Advantage

Consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) framework, students *accessed valuable institutional resources* through peer networks and structured orientation activities. The sharing of tips, such as reserving library rooms or navigating AnimoSpace, reflects how social capital offers more than academic knowledge; it gives students cultural cues for functioning within the university. These resources were often activated through informal peer-led sharing activities and group interactions, underscoring Stanton-Salazar's (2011) emphasis on the role of institutional agents in democratizing access to capital.

Moreover, peer networks fostered a *sense of belonging*, which emerged as essential for mitigating feelings of isolation. Participants repeatedly referenced the emotional comfort of knowing others were "*experiencing the same thing*," illustrating how shared experiences help students internalize group norms and navigate transitional anxiety (Horvat & Davis, 2011). The orientation program thus cultivates emotional capital, a subset of social capital that strengthens institutional fit.

Finally, *mentorship and guidance*—whether from peer facilitators, Lasallian Ambassadors, or faculty served as pathways for transmitting not only practical knowledge but institutional values. Students described mentors who modeled service and academic resilience, further reinforcing institutional alignment. This aligns with Stanton-Salazar's (2011) assertion that institutional agents are crucial to supporting low-status students, though this study reveals that peer agents often play a more prominent role in collectivist settings like the Philippines.

3.2. Habitus: Transforming Values, Skills, and Dispositions

First-year undergraduate students enter the university with habitus formed by their socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1977). Through participation in orientation, this habitus begins to evolve, particularly in three domains:



Values – Students articulated a growing identification with Lasallian values such as faith, service, and communion. One student noted, “*Nagkaroon ako ng pakialam,*” reflecting not only alignment with institutional culture but also a shift in their sense of moral responsibility. This mirrors Bourdieu’s view that the field can recalibrate habitus through exposure to dominant norms and practices.

Skills – Time management, help-seeking, and campus navigation were frequently mentioned. These reflect a hybrid of cultural and academic capital necessary for success. For instance, a student noted, “*LPEP made me realize I needed to balance work and studies,*” suggesting a reflective transformation that supports long-term academic adjustment (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021).

Dispositions – A key shift occurred in students’ orientation toward others. Phrases like “*Parang walang seniority*” and “*Everyone is friendly and willing to help each other*” illustrate how students moved toward inclusivity, egalitarianism, and service—values modeled during orientation and internalized through participation. These findings extend Calarco’s (2014a) work on how students are “coached” into behaviors that promote success; here, orientation plays that coaching role for all students.

3.3. Interplay of Social Capital and Habitus in Integration

As shown in Table 1, the synergy between social capital and habitus produced both academic and social integration. For example, access to peer mentorship encouraged help-seeking behaviors, which in turn fostered resilience. Meanwhile, exposure to communal values prompted service-oriented dispositions, reinforcing a sense of community.

This interplay is reciprocal. Students’ habitus shapes how they access and interpret resources (e.g., resource-focused students gravitated toward information access, socially oriented students to peer networks). At the same time, the orientation field transforms habitus by offering new scripts for academic and social behavior. Over time, these become internalized, forming a feedback loop that supports long-term adjustment.

3.4. Reflexive and Context-Bound Processes

Participants, now sophomores and juniors, described enduring impacts from orientation indicating that the initial activation of social capital had long-term effects. Relationships built during orientation were still relevant in their academic routines. For example, one student shared, “*I still rely on friends I met during LPEP for study tips,*” indicating continuity in support systems.

While most students reported growth and alignment, it's important to recognize that this process is not uniform. Differences in initial habitus (e.g., confidence, access to prior capital) may result in varying degrees of integration. Some students may require additional institutional support to bridge these gaps—suggesting a need for more responsive and differentiated orientation programming.

Table 1

Interplay between Social Capital and Habitus and its Effect on Academic and Social Integration

Social Capital Dimension	Habitus Component	Alignment	Sample Quote	Integration Outcome
Access to Information	Skills (Resource Navigation)	Practical knowledge of institutional systems + ability to navigate resources	" <i>Kuya mentioned reserving library rooms.</i> "	Mastery of academic logistics (Academic)
Sense of Belonging	Dispositions (Inclusivity)	Shared emotional experiences + openness to peer collaboration	" <i>Everyone was experiencing the same thing.</i> "	Reduced isolation (Social)
Mentorship and Guidance	Values (Service Inclination)	Role models inspiring service-oriented values	" <i>Seeing my facilitator inspired me to get involved.</i> "	Internalization of institutional values (Social)
Access to Information	Skills (Help-Seeking)	Peer-driven guidance + proactive engagement	" <i>I learned to ask upperclassmen for tips.</i> "	Proactive resource use (Academic)



Sense of Belonging	Dispositions (Peer Support)	Supportive networks + willingness to collaborate	<i>"I feel comfortable reaching out to classmates."</i>	Strengthened peer bonds (Social)
Mentorship and Guidance	Dispositions (Egalitarianism)	Mentorship fostering equality in student culture	<i>"Parang walang seniority."</i>	Egalitarian community (Social)
Access to Information	Skills (Time Management)	Institutional insights + self-regulation strategies	<i>"LPEP made me realize I needed to balance work and studies."</i>	Academic coping skills (Academic)
Mentorship and Guidance	Values (Communal Identity)	Guidance aligning personal identity with institutional mission	<i>"Nagkaroon ako ng pakialam sa Lasallian values."</i>	Institutional alignment (Social)

4. RECOMMENDATION

To translate the study's findings into actionable strategies, institutions should not only refine orientation programs but also integrate support across various facets of campus life. First, in terms of implementation guidance, the university could develop structured mentorship programs that pair incoming students with trained upperclassmen. For instance, formalized peer mentorship initiatives could include biweekly check-ins, orientation workshops, and discussion groups where experienced students share tips on time management, resource navigation, and academic resilience. Additionally, resource mapping workshops should be organized to help students identify and utilize key campus services, such as counseling, academic support centers, and digital platforms for collaboration. Potential challenges, such as ensuring consistent mentor availability and addressing diverse student needs, can be mitigated through targeted training sessions for mentors and the incorporation of feedback loops that allow for program adjustments throughout the academic year.

Second, regarding policy implications, the findings suggest that the benefits of robust orientation

programs extend beyond initial student adjustment. University policies should emphasize the integration of mentorship and support systems into broader academic advising and student support services. For example, institutional policies could mandate ongoing peer mentorship throughout the first year and embed orientation practices into academic advising frameworks, ensuring that every student has access to continuous support. Moreover, establishing cross-departmental coordination between the student affairs office and academic units can help streamline resource allocation and create a more cohesive support network, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and resilient academic community.

Longitudinal mixed-methods research looking into the effects of the orientation program on the integration and later academic success of students may be conducted for succeeding cohorts.

By adopting these recommendations, De La Salle University can enhance not only its orientation program but also its overall institutional framework, thereby promoting long-term academic success and meaningful engagement for diverse student populations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the transformative role of the college orientation program at De La Salle University in facilitating the transition of first-year students. By activating social capital and fostering the development of a supportive habitus aligned with institutional values, the program significantly enhances students' sense of belonging and resource navigation. Peer agents and institutional mentors are crucial in this process, providing vital guidance and modeling inclusive behaviors that promote academic and social integration. While challenges persist for students whose backgrounds may not align with institutional norms, the program's emphasis on communal support and reflective practices effectively bridges this gap, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and resilient academic community. The findings suggest that refining orientation programs and integrating ongoing mentorship can yield long-term benefits for diverse student populations, promoting meaningful engagement and academic success.

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