Employees Reflect on New Start's Impact as Program Marks 50 Years

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When Michelle McKelvey learned in the spring of 1999 that she would need to attend orientation as an incoming UA freshman, just the thought of finding a place to park on campus was daunting.

McKelvey, a Tucson native and the first in her family to attend college, had only been to campus once before, on a school trip to the Flandrau Science Center and Planetarium. She ended up parking far from the Student Union, where orientation began, and, in an age without smartphones, she had to rely on an unwieldy campus map to navigate her way to the building.

But when it came time to attend the first day of class that fall, McKelvey's familiarity with the UA and her readiness for college had improved drastically. That was thanks to the New Start Summer Program [1], which gives students a head start on key prerequisites and a feel for the campus before the school year begins.

The program, created to help acclimate and support students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, is geared toward students who are the first in their families to attend college, and those from low-income households. Any admitted incoming freshman enrolled in at least six units for the following fall semester can apply. Since it began, the program has served nearly 14,000 students. New Start participants move on to their sophomore year at a greater rate — about 6 to 10 percent higher — than freshmen who did not participate in the program.

"New Start made campus smaller," said McKelvey, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology in 2003 and is now the director of the Office of Academic Success and Achievement, overseeing programs such as Arizona Assurance [2], Arizona Mentors [3], the UA's Cultural Learning Communities [4] and First Cats [5].

New Start celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, giving McKelvey and other program alumni who now work at the UA an opportunity to reflect on how New Start helped get them where they are now.

Even at half a century old, the original mission of New Start has remained the same, said Tom Murray, who oversees the six-week program as director of new student experiences in the Office of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs Advancement.

"The way that I like to think about New Start is that we do everything we can to simulate what an entire semester experience is going to be during those six weeks over the summer so that students can learn how to be successful in their freshman year academically and socially," Murray said.
Applications to the program are open to any graduating high school senior, and New Starters can take up to seven credits of coursework in the six weeks. The full cost for a seven-unit program is around $4,900, but students often pay much less with help from federal student aid. The program is free for Pell Grant recipients.

Fitting as much of a semester as possible into six weeks means starting early: Students arrive for their first general education class at 7:30 a.m. In the afternoons, students can meet with tutors and attend a variety of educational and social events.

**Rafael Meza** remembers those early-morning drives from Tucson's east side to make his math class when he participated in the program in 1987. He also remembers the connections he made with other students, learning about the campus resources available to students, and the practical skills like note taking he picked up that helped prepare him for college.

Meza, now senior director for inclusive excellence and community development and assistant dean for undergraduate admissions in the Office of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs Advancement, still struggled academically his freshman year, but it was because of New Start, he said, that he was able to keep going.

"That's one of the reasons why a program like New Start is such an important program," he said.

Meza also credits New Start for helping him find a career in higher education—a significant change from his original plan to become an architect. Through the connections he made in the program, Meza became a student volunteer with the Office of Admissions, where he was able to share his own experiences as a new student with incoming freshmen. Then, during his senior year, Meza took a position as a student assistant in the minority student recruitment division of the Office of Admissions—the same division that sent the counselor who had recommended New Start to Meza when he was in high school.

Bringing the experience full circle, Meza noted that his current office on the lower level of Old Main is in the same space where his New Start class met.

"I think it's really neat now, looking back on my history with the UA, that that's where my college experience began," Meza said. "And now, almost 25 years later, I find myself working out of that same space."

The New Start connections run deep in Meza's office. His boss, **Kasey Urquidez**, vice president for enrollment management and student affairs advancement, and dean of undergraduate admissions, went through the program in 1990.

**Christine Salvesen**, who also went through the program in 1990, ended up overseeing it beginning in 2009 as associate director of the Office of Academic Success and Achievement. Salvesen became senior director of the office in 2015. After a promotion earlier this year, she is now executive director of student success and retention innovation in the Office of Academic Initiatives and Student Success.

As a New Start alumna who benefited from the resources the program helped her find, Salvesen said she can relate to students who are now in the same position she was in nearly 30 years ago.
"I try to find ways to provide those resources not only just in programming or campuswide retention initiatives, but also as a professional on campus," she said. "I still make sure to create those opportunities, to be able to work with students one-on-one, understand what those challenges are, and be able to still relate to their needs."

The 50th anniversary celebration ? scheduled for Oct. 26, during Homecoming ? will highlight the history of New Start and recognize people who were key in creating and sustaining the program. Alumni also are invited to attend a tailgate before the football game against the University of Oregon on Oct. 27.

Murray said he hopes the excitement around the anniversary motivates more alumni to get involved. The program has set up an email list [6] for those who want updates about New Start events and opportunities to get involved.

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