

Howard University
A virtual orientation for students and their families.

Case Study



HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Howard University is all about community – their students, and their families. And orientation is where it begins for all. With a lot of students having high financial support needs, many of whom could not afford to visit the campus in the summer to get information ahead of time, Howard had its' orientation challenges. Mailing a bunch of paper with important information to students didn't make financial sense either. It made the most sense to distribute important information through an online personal platform – one that was easily accessible to all students – an online orientation.

This would set the tone for students as they transition into the university. It would be a virtual experience from the beginning and include the online orientation, website, and chat rooms -- with the focus ultimately on keeping students informed, interested, and excited about coming to Howard University.

“Our idea of what a virtual orientation could do was to alleviate questions and phone calls about basic information, so instead of searching for information on the website – information on financial aid, payment plans, registration, academic programs, student services – all of that foundational information that students need to be aware of is available in one place before they arrive on campus,” said Charles Prince, Director of Student Success and Transition, Howard University.

They explained that since new student orientation is often a student's first experience with the university, it was essential that they provide a high quality, visually appealing, and user-friendly online orientation.



They started off using another company before coming to Advantage Design Group

Adated and restrictive template -- One of the biggest problems with the previous product is that Howard University was not able to change the template. They didn't like the look and feel. It seemed dated and it wasn't user-friendly. And they couldn't do anything about it.

Platform not fully responsive -- Students like to use their smart phones and iPads and the previous platform was not capable of this.

Too much to worry about -- With an annual fee of \$11,000, they were still required to manage the product themselves. If a document, photo or video had to be created and uploaded, Howard University was responsible for this task. If they wanted to change the fonts, they had to do it themselves. There wasn't anyone who was able to come on-site to record video. Technically it worked, but it was too much to worry about.

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Academics - Grading

The following grading system is used at Howard except where otherwise indicated in the school/college bulletins:

A	Excellent, 90 and above
B	Good, 80 - 89
C	Fair, 70 - 79
D	Poor, 60 - 69
F	Failure, less than 60
W	Official withdrawal (no grade value and not calculated)
UW	Unofficial withdrawal (no grade value and not calculated)
I	Incomplete (grade following U-calculated)

REQUIRED COURSES IN WHICH YOU RECEIVE FAILING GRADES MUST BE REPEATED

Incomplete grades may be assigned ONLY to students who, as a result of circumstances beyond their control (e.g., illness or family emergency), are unable to complete their coursework. Although the student initiates the request for an incomplete grade, the decision to assign an incomplete grade rests solely with the instructor. If the student's request is approved, the instructor establishes and submits specific "make-up" conditions on an Incomplete Grade Processing Form (IGPF). Each incomplete designation ("I") must be accompanied by an alternative grade ("C", "D", or "F"). The alternative grade will become the permanent grade, if the incomplete is not removed.

GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

Your grade point average is a summary of your academic record. You can calculate your GPA by the following formula: First, multiply the credit hours of each course by the value of the grade you received for that course.

The grade values are:
A = 4 B = 3 C = 2 D = 1 F = 0

The resulting numbers are quality points. Add the quality points and divide the resulting sum by the total number of credit hours you attempted.



The Process

Howard University was presented with three designs, and they incorporated a little bit of each into their final design. They entered into this process fully prepared to turn around their revisions according to the agreed upon timeline. The video production went perfectly and was scheduled to coincide with Howard University's graduation so that they could include some professional footage from their graduation day, including guest speaker, Morgan Freeman. This comprehensive virtual orientation took only four months from concept to completion.

They decided they needed something better... They found Advantage Design Group

They wanted a company that was a one-stop shop -- that had the ability to shoot first-class video and then edit it for them. Advantage Design Group was the only company that had all of that under one roof via their in-house video department. They also needed a fully responsive site to handle all the students using smart phones and iPads and wanted something that no other client had. They wanted something that would "pop" for their students, something that looked like they were on "the red carpet" -- something that truly demonstrated their commitment to academic excellence.

"We didn't do much of a search. I went to a conference and met Advantage Design Group. I liked what I saw, did my research and it seemed like a good fit. We needed someone who had done orientations for colleges of our size and who could come in and produce a high quality product in a short amount of time," explained Prince.

"Overall the process has been phenomenal. We knew what we wanted and on both sides we were up front. The process made sense for us to be able to complete this in a timely manner," Prince related.

The Results

Howard University recognizes that sending students to college is a family event and they have a desire to make parents feel a part of their institution. The online orientation has not only helped students become more informed, but it has also enabled families to feel more connected to their students and aware of what is going on. Their enhanced

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HOWARD STUDENT LIFE 1 OF 10

Introduction

Greetings!

I am Dr. Constance Ellison, Vice President of Student Affairs here at Howard University.

As Vice President it is a great pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations on your acceptance to Howard University. On behalf of the staff in the Division of Student Affairs we are excited to have you in our Howard family.

Our staff includes many of the most talented and dedicated people with whom I have ever worked. Our goal is to help you navigate your path through your matriculation at Howard University and help you get the most out of your experience. It will be through your



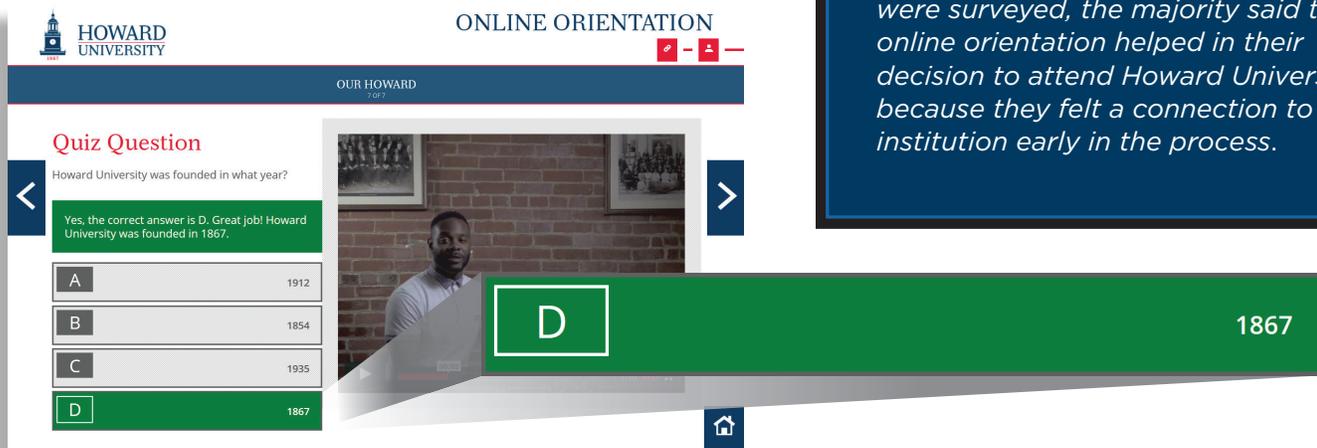
online orientation program allows parents to have access to all the foundational information their students have. As a result, parents are engaged earlier and the University is receiving less phone calls from parents.

They are now able to make online orientation mandatory for all students. Their university usually accepts 1,800 students each year, and enrolls around 1,500. Because of the online orientation, they are doing a better job of communicating with their students and more students who have been accepted are enrolling at their institution.

Another added benefit to their new online orientation is that they can easily expand and update it as needed. Howard University is approaching their 150th birthday and they are planning to replace some of their videos to include more information to document their road to 150 years of academic excellence and success. The Development Team is also planning to be more involved in orientation and make students more aware of fundraising. They are also planning to engage students early about how to be an alumnus, as well as highlighting Greek life, and particular schools and colleges at their university.

Prince concluded with the following advice for other institutions looking for online orientations, *“You need to determine what is best for students, what is best for the institutions and what is best for the services you are going to provide students to be successful. Orientation is a huge program that will make or break the students, so you should be fully onboard... Simply accepting students isn’t good enough, a good online orientation should give them an open window to see and engage in the institution from the comfort of their own homes. It is not only the best choice, it’s the only choice.”*

Howard University has seen a **50% reduction in summer melt** since implementing their virtual orientation. Before this program 10% of students did not follow through to attend Howard because they did not feel connected enough to the community or the campus, especially if they were coming from across the country. With the virtual orientation in place, summer melt has decreased to 5%, which increased their enrollment in 2015. When students were surveyed, the majority said that online orientation helped in their decision to attend Howard University because they felt a connection to the institution early in the process.



Advantage Design Group is an award-winning multimedia design and development firm based in Jacksonville, Florida. For nearly 20 years we’ve helped organizations show their story with a unique balance of creativity and technology. Today, our Advantage Orientation Platform is helping colleges and universities across America reach measurable goals for student orientation, transition, retention and success.

We can do the same for you. Contact us for a demonstration.

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