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TOP STORY

WKU students move in this week

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As he helped unload the family car and move his freshman daughter into Bemis Lawrence Hall on Monday, it was hard for Ronny Spinks II to say goodbye.

But when asked if he thought his daughter Susan would do well, Spinks joked cheerfully – “She better!”

Monday marked the first move-in day for students participating in M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan, a transition program for new undergraduate students at Western Kentucky University. As many as 2,224 students were registered for the program Monday, according to Blair Jensen, assistant director for Housing and Residence Life and M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan coordinator.

The program, which starts a week before classes begin, allows students to move in early, meet their professors, make friends and get comfortable with the campus. It stands for Making Academic and Social Transitions Educationally Rewarding.

Normally, M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan students would move in over the weekend, but this year organizers decided to move the program closer to the start of classes on Aug. 27. Students are moving in Monday and Tuesday with orientation sessions and social activities beginning Wednesday.

The chance to get to know WKU motivated Mikayla Ruzanski and her friend Stephanie Catalano, both freshmen from Chicago, to sign up for M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan.

“We wanted to meet new people,” Ruzanski said.

Catalano agreed. She saw the program as a good way to start getting involved on campus and “step out of my comfort zone.”

The program offers events throughout the week that help students make connections and get to know campus better. They include a campus club and organizations fair Thursday and a community service blitz Saturday, among other activities.

The program is meant to help boost student success and retention.

Blair Jensen, assistant director for Housing and Residence Life at WKU, said students who participate in M.A.S.T.E.R Plan persist from the first year to the second year “at an 11 percent higher rate than students who don’t.” Students who participate also graduate at a 9 percent higher rate than those who don’t, Jensen said.

“I think it’s the connection that they form on campus,” she said of the program, adding it plugs students into resources and people they can go to for help.



The students who don't make that emotional and educational connection "are the students who leave us first," Jensen said.

Along with the educational and special events in the first week of classes, M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan also offers students long-term support.

About 50 current WKU students will serve as peer mentors for small groups of incoming students during their first year, according to a news release.

As Chris Catalano helped her daughter Stephanie Catalano get settled Monday, she felt like she was leaving Stephanie in good hands. It was Catalano's first time sending a child off to college.

"It's hard, but I'm very excited," for them, Catalano said. "The people are very friendly. They were very comfortable here."

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