

Hi, all,

I wanted to briefly share my experience with Operation Move In this year. I have been at UTC since 2010 and have long refused to participate in OMI and other similar events, believing this kind of programming was not my responsibility. As a tenure-track faculty member, I was hired to be an expert in an academic field and a college professor; my time and effort ought to be allocated in a way that reflects those responsibilities. I ran the Read2Achieve program for a number of years and helped orchestrate the first class sessions, but I believed anything outside the world of academics (or at least tangentially related) was not my job. After my experience this year, I realize I was deeply wrong.

I had every intention of ignoring the calls for OMI volunteers this year until I received the email from Erica Holmes Trujillo calling for partners from the academic affairs side of the university. I have worked with Erica since she was hired to run the HUB and each time I have been reticent about adopting one of her initiatives, I've quickly discovered that she was right. To the benefit of my colleagues and myself, but most importantly, our students. So when the initial emails calling for volunteers came out, I gave serious thought to this program for the first time. And, after speaking with Erica and learning of the program's need for additional help, I signed up to work both Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00-3:30.

This year's OMI may have been the most important and meaningful experience in my fifteen years at UTC. As I carried countless bags and vacuum cleaners and televisions and books and musical instruments, I was struck by just how vital a service OMI is for our campus. I met parents who were dropping off their first student and parents who were dropping off their third or fourth. I met first generation college students and their entire, deeply proud extended family. I experienced a whole range of emotions over the course of those two wet, hot, and humid days. I realized there is a lot I didn't know about our students, things you can only learn when you're carrying their belongings up three flights of stairs on a hot August afternoon. It was a very humbling experience.

Ultimately, I was left with the conviction that this work is essential to the academic mission of the university because it offers us an important opportunity to really see the student populations we serve. How can we expect to effectively educate these students when we know so little about them? Standing in empty Decosimo dorm rooms, holding student belongings as they and their families process this new experience was a real eye-opening moment for me. I shared this experience with my colleagues and I've challenged my department to step up next summer and join me in this work because I believe it is integral to our success as both a department and a university. But more than our success, we owe it to our students and their families.

I am not so naïve as to believe that two days lugging personal effects has given me a full understanding of the complexities of the academic affairs-student success nexus. But I felt compelled to share my experience with you because I know there is a lot of important work that can be done in bridging student success and academic affairs on this campus. I see now the incredible importance of this work; please consider me an enthusiastic partner as we move forward to support our students and address the various challenges we face in higher education.

All best wishes,

Andrew

Andrew D. McCarthy  
Head, Department of English  
UC Foundation Associate Professor