Hello students and families!

My name is Ryan Milligan and I am the assistant director for the ICS program of study and I will be taking you through this academic welcome. Today we are going to start off by talking about why does the program of study do what it does, how does the program of study do what it does, how do we encourage students to start setting themselves up for growth, where does the journey start, and then some takeaways and next steps as we conclude this presentation. I do want to add that this presentation is not going to go into extreme depths of the academic dept or the program of study itself, these things will be add in future presentations. For the sake of SOAR, we tend to keep things very light because SOAR tends to be very overwhelming for students and families alike.

So, why does the program of study do what it does? 12 years ago when we first began thinking about the beyond academics model, we really were focusing on these four factors on the screen: Transition & Development, Self-Determination, Interdependence, and Emerging Adults. It is important to really think about this time as an experience for emerging adults to really start stepping into their future lives. So what do I mean about emerging adults? That is our students. Anybody in the ages of 18 all the way up through their early 30s can be considered an emerging adult. While we focus on emerging adults stepping into their future lives, we really push the other three points of interdependence, not independence, self-determination, transition and also development. Interdependence is really important to the program model because one of the things we discuss in all four years is that nobody is truly independent of anybody else. We all depend on people, systems, other different types of supports to help get us through life. It is important though that while we are using interdependence that we are self-determined but we also understand the need for development. This means that we are going to be spending the next four years taking steps, albeit small at first, and then larger, so that you can test the boundaries of, “Can I do this on my own? Or do I need something or somebody to help me with this?” The ultimate goal is that all of our emerging adults walk away from this experience stepping into the lives that they truly want to lead in a confident and comfortable fashion.

Now let’s take a look at what some of our families have noted as being important outcomes for their students. Many of our families do talk about the independent living aspects as well as the social connections and community involvement. But what really stands out to many of us in the department is the point about perceptions of self. One of the key factors going into this experience and navigating all 4 years is really self-exp. That’s why through much of our program of study, as well as the university at large, you will experience as a student a ton of opportunities for self-reflection. Whether that’s in a classroom and you are asked to reflect on an experience you just had, or you go to a workshop, or even athletic event and you are asked to pause for a moment and think about what it means to be a student,
a person right in that moment, right in that experience. Another thing that stands out to a lot of us is letting go. I think for many families and students, this is easier said than done. We don’t expect for this to happen overnight and families talk about the journey that it takes them to be able to say, “I am truly letting go of their child.” At the same time, I don’t like to think of it as truly letting go. I like to think about it as allowing and supporting all of us to become the people that we are meant to be. That means that you as a family are stepping into a role in which you can have an adult relationship with your child or family member. For you as a student this means that your relationship with your family is going to change and you are going to start seeing your family in a different way, almost as a peer, as an adult because you are going to be making some very similar decisions that your family members make on a day to day basis.

[slide 5]
Now let’s consider some other things that families have said. One thing is that parents have gained a new perspective on their student’s capabilities. I think all of us are guilty of not realizing the levels of support that we naturally have around us when we are living at home with our families. We all utilize supports whether that’s in a school, our greater community, or at home. But what’s always interesting to see is students and families come into the first year of this program of study at UNCG is how much we don’t even realize that we do on a day to day basis. We see this when students come to campus. They might forget to set their alarm, they might forget their keys, or they might be on point. They might get up exactly on time, they might get up three hours early. It really depends and every student is different. That’s why you’ll often hear us refer to things as being a new normal for UNCG. Those students might have been able to do something on their own when they are at home or might have needed some support at home to do something; that’s not always the case at UNCG. Being in this new environment around their peers and around staff and faculty who are there to support them, students will find a sense of their new normal and they might be able to do some things that they weren’t able to do before on their own. But they might need some new systems in place so that they are able to engage in the environment the way that they would like to. With this in mind, do understand that their first month or two at UNCG is very flexible with our department. And we are really observing and working with students to figure out where are the needs for support. Where should we focus, what should our priorities be? And what can we do so that students create and have a smooth transition into the university.

[slide 6]
So how does the program of study do what it does? You’ll see that we transition a lot of things from the k-12 point of view or lens to a more higher ed lens. In k-12 there is alternate accommodations for success. K-12 wants every student to succeed and will do everything in their power so that every student does succeed. Now in higher ed, at UNCG, it doesn’t mean that we don’t want students to succeed. But one of the things that we want more than anything is for students to step into their own person so that they have the opportunity to succeed. But it is up to them to succeed in the end. That’s what we mean by accommodations or opportunity. Our office as well as many other offices across campus will provide accommodations but ultimately it is up to the students to use those tools and systems of support in order to engage and learn from the experiences around them. A huge piece of this
is intrinsic motivation. You'll notice that in the first few months that it’s really up to the student to decide. Yes, I want to be involved in the gym. Yes, I want to be involved in clubs. Yes, I’m going to study. In K-12 that’s not often the case. Many students and families are extrinsically motivated whether it’s a daily grade that might come out from an individual teacher, it might be what we call swag or a t-shirt that gets thrown out at a basketball game. It’s not that these motivations don’t occur in higher ed, but you will see a big transition to intrinsic motivation while here at UNCG. What do we exactly mean by intrinsic motivation? That means that you the student are going to be the driving force behind everything. You’re going to do things that you want to do and need to do because you decide to do it. We’re not here to tell you that you have to do this or you have to do that. We’re here to guide and advise and sometimes unfortunately potentially warn. But ultimately in the end, it’s up to you. Your parents can’t make you get out of bed to go to class every morning. We as staff can’t force you to go to a basketball game or to a club even though we know that students who get highly involved are more successful at UNCG. In the end it is up to you. Over the course of the next few months, members of our team will probably be working with you as a student and you as a family to figure out what some of those intrinsic motivators are. Things that you just get really excited about. Things that you get up for and you think about instantly. It’s not something that you’re like “uh, maybe I’d like doing that.” but something where you’re like, “I can’t wait to do that.” Another piece of this is the transition from families and teachers and supports being the main pilot in your future to you as students being the pilots of this journey. The folks around you, your families, staff, faculty at UNCG are all here and we are all willing to be co-pilots and flight attendants, and engineers, and folks that work on your plane to get you through this journey. But ultimately you are the pilot. You decide when this journey starts. You decide when we take off. And you decide where we’re going. That’s a lot. And we don’t expect it overnight. One of the things that we talk about are structures and systems. These are two really big words but what they mean basically in this environment is that we are going to provide little routes or maps to help navigate you through this experience and to step into that piloting role. We don’t expect you to come to campus ultimately prepared to be your own independent self. If we expected that then there would be no need for us, you could just do it without coming to UNCG. But what we do expect is a lot of effort on your part as the student. We are going to challenge you and we are going to put you in positions to kind of test that piloting skill. This means that you need to be making decisions on your own. We’re going to provide a lot of guidance, a lot of talking through situations and scenarios. We’re going to tell you, “hey this may be a good thing to take to your family and discuss with them.” But ultimately it needs to be you leading that decision-making. Which takes us to the last point here: student-driven decision making. It’s really important - you’re the one driving this experience. You’re the one that’s going to be living at UNCG and going to class every single day, doing the assignments that you’re required and asked to do. So it’s really important that you’re invested in this experience. If at any point you feel like you’re not invested or this isn’t the right place, we need to have that conversation because we don’t want you to be miserable or feel left out. We want you to be included, we want you to have a journey and a path and a direction and we want to challenge you to become the person that we know you can be.

[slide 7]
So what does that mean we do? One of the things that we really need from the get-go is reciprocal open and honest communication and interaction. What does reciprocal mean? That means that it comes from
both sides and it’s willing to give on both sides. So families you need to be very open with your students. We encourage and require that all families make sure that you keep your student on emails, even if it’s a very large concern. We want students to be a part of every conversation. Students, with big decisions we encourage you to include your family because they are often the ones who are moral or financial supports for this experiences. Students we expect you to be open and honest with your staff and faculty around you. Staff are expected to be completely open and honest with you. And staff are also expected to keep an open and honest communication with families and students. Once again, you’ll see that families and students are together when communicating with staff. That’s because it’s extremely important for students to know and be a part of all decision-making while at UNCG. From the good, to the day-to-day, to sometimes the really big challenges, students are expected to be a part of every conversation. We also expect that students are going to give forth effort. We don’t expect you to be perfect. We don’t expect you to be even remotely great at everything. What we do expect is that you’re going to put forth an effort with challenges and assignments and different things that we offer for you to do while at UNCG. We also want students to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Now that might seem strange at first, but bear with me, it actually makes more sense than you would think. Though I know that every single day is not going to be an uncomfortable situation; in fact, most students say that day-to-day their lives are pretty good at UNCG. In fact, I would dare I say great. But there are going to be situations in which you feel uncomfortable. Whether that’s going into a classroom for the first time and being expected to engage and introduce and talk about yourself. It might be your first exam in a class. It could be that you’re going to the Coliseum to watch a basketball game on your own without anybody around you, expect for maybe a friend. Some of these situations might give you the little butterflies in your stomach – and that’s normal. We often talk about that being uncomfortable in light ways is actually times when you’re growing. Because you’re thinking, you’re learning, you’re experiencing. So it’s really important that when those uncomfortable situations come along that you pause, you think, and you reflect because that’s truly where the learning happens. Now with that said, once again, I believe that our students experience a great time at UNCG so I don’t want you to think that every day is going to be a bad situation, because it’s not. Uncomfort doesn’t necessarily mean bad. The first time I got an A on an assignment and my teacher actually said that I got an A in front of the class, I was uncomfortable. Why? Because people were looking at me. A good thing, an A on an assignment, became public. And for me I’m not necessarily the person who likes being in public all the time. I like being on the sideline. So that was an uncomfortable situation for a good experience to help me learn how to be okay in a larger space. The next thing is resources. Supports are all around us. Once again, we believe that we are all interdependent, not independent. So one of the things at UNCG is that we are very adamant about students finding their resources. We are going to do everything that we can to help navigate you to the appropriate places and spaces for you to engage with any accommodation that you might need or any resource that you need. Now, what do I mean by resources in college? This could be anything from the Speaking Center to help you get prepared for a presentation that you have. It could be the Writing Center to help prepare you for a paper that you’re currently working on. It could be the Counseling Center because you realized that moving to UNCG was a little harder than you expected. It could be the clinic on campus because you might not be feeling well and you need to see a nurse or a doctor. It could be that we are providing a resource towards a bank or maybe an expert in a field that you’re interested in. For instance, if you’re interested in education, I might send you over to a professor that I might know in education who can talk about things that you need to know in order to set yourself up to step into that field. The other thing that’s really important, and probably the most important,
while here at UNCG are that you have commitments. Now, some places might say goals and you’ll hear us say that from time to time. But really and truly I want you to think of goals as commitments. You’re making commitments to yourself. Goals and commitments are things that are going to push you forward to becoming the person that you want to be. That’s really important while you’re here at UNCG. One of the things that we really don’t want to hear from students is, “oh, I’m finished with my goals” or “I’m finished with my commitments.” Being an adult in this world right now, you should always have commitments that you’re striving for. You should always have goals that are pushing you to the next level. That’s how we are growing and developing as people. Your family members probably have commitments and goals. Your grandparents probably have commitments and goals that they’re working towards. If you have younger siblings then they probably have commitments and goals that they are working on. Now with that said I do want to say this: if you want to be the same person that you are today right now listening to this presentation after you graduate from UNCG then this program is probably not the right fit. What do I mean by that? If you already think, “hey I’m going to move right back home after four years at UNCG and I’m going to live with my family and they are going to just and they are going to go right back to the way things were.” Then this might not be quite the right fit for you. You’re going to find this challenging and difficult because we are going to be pushing you in a different direction. If you currently have a job or are employed through any type of business and you want to go right back into that job, this program is probably not the right fit for you. We are going to push you to develop new skills and new talents so that you can go on and you can get a job promotion or a new job completely. We want you to step into the person that you are becoming not the person that you are right in this moment.

[slide 8]
So, when does that journey start? It starts now. We don’t want you to think, “oh, well I’ll wait until tomorrow to start thinking about those commitments that Ryan was talking about” or “hm, I’ll just wait until August when I get to school.” No – we want you to start right now.

[slide 9]
So, with that, students and families, some of the big takeaways: This program of study is here to promote change and growth. It might be uncomfortable at times but that’s okay. If you’ve driven down interstate 40 or 85 you’ve probably hit a bump or a pothole – it’s normal. College is a lot like that. It’s smooth sailing for a lot of it and it’s getting you to where you want to go but every once in a while there’s a bump or a pothole. So just know that in the next few months it’s normal to be uncomfortable. Let us know that you feel uncomfortable. We might talk about it and work through it together. Also, remember that communication, effort, resources, and commitments are what moves you forward while you are here at UNCG. So practice those things while you are at home during the summer. Your families are going to be a great resource for getting you to that next step as you step into being an emerging adult here at UNCG. Remember, we are here for you. Don’t go just thinking about questions or having problems and keeping them to yourself. Same thing with things that you are excited about – we definitely don’t want you to keep those things to yourself. Feel free to email us, give us a call, get in touch with us somehow, someway because we’re going to get in touch with you so we want to create that conversation now. So what are some of your next steps? The first thing is to complete your SOAR
Canvas modules – I think there’s about 10 of them. Remember, you don’t have to get everything right, you don’t have to remember everything; it’s a lot of material. It’s normal to feel overwhelmed right now. So feel free to ask any questions that come up for you along the way. Jot them down however you prefer and send them to us via email or give us a call and ask. We’ll give you the best answers that we can. Know that July is a really important month for you as a student and family. Stay in touch for the most up to date information and plans as we plan for the fall. We are definitely not immune to everything that is going on around us so our Chancellor and university and department are making all the plans that we can for a smooth transition for this fall semester. But we are staying in touch with quite a few people in the process. So please stay in touch for the most up-to-date information. Look out for communication and other sessions from our office. We want this summer to offer webinars and live conversations so that you have platforms for you to learn more about us, learn more about the program of study, but also ask questions. It might be just getting to know a staff member, it might be getting to know about one of your classes. So keep out on the lookout. Also, touch base with our department administration, which will probably be myself, about your fall courses. Now typically we refer to this as advising and registration; you’ll hear a lot of advising and registration talk through SOAR. What we mean by that is that this is the time when you talk about things and commitments that you have going on and things that you want to be involved in. We take that and we apply it to what we call co-curricular or some of the fun things outside of the classroom and some might apply to some of your classes. Now, historically we register students face-to-face but for this summer, given everything that’s going on, I will take the summer to register you all for all of your courses and then we will make a one-on-one appointment for you to talk through some of the things that you’re excited about at UNCG, some of the courses that you may want to take, and some of the things that you may want to do. This will be your opportunity to ask questions about the classes that you’re going to take. You might say, “is this required?” and I might say, “yes” but at least you’re going to understand why and how it’s going to get you to the next step. You may also have courses that you know that you want to take – and that’s great! That gives me a chance to write those down and even if you don’t get into those classes this fall, we will be able to insert those into your plan of study over the next four years. Ultimately remember this: have fun! SOAR is meant to be a fun experience and to welcome you to the university. Remember that you don’t have to take everything in and remember exactly what everyone said. You don’t even have to remember my name – it’s okay, it’s normal, have fun, and welcome to UNCG!