

LesT: An Orientation Program for Lesley University Students with Disabilities

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Part 1: Why LesT?

Colleges are communities. If they were only collections of classes to earn a piece of paper, then they would not have mascot suits, big reunions, or generous alumni. Colleges are more than a container for classes. Whether they be online, in-person, or a combination of the two, colleges create an ecosystem around the classes that transforms classes not into the product being sold but the means of transportation into social groups. Whether those groups are majors that get enshrined into the degree, officially recognized and organized by the institution, or fellow fans of a subject—or even the one teaching the subject—these social connections are as much the prize awarded at the end of a college experience as the degree itself is.

With that in mind, colleges must cultivate a sense of belonging to retain their students. If they do not, they can go to another institution or leave postsecondary education entirely. Many do just that: 40% of college students in the United States drop out (Strauss, 2022). Dropping out is not just leaving a community, though. It is leaving an opportunity to recoup the money invested. The lifetime difference in earnings between a person with a Bachelor's degree and a person with a high school degree is \$570,000 (Greenstone et al., 2016, 16). It is more than increased wages that college dropouts miss out on too. It is also choice of jobs. Jobs that have family-sustaining wages are increasingly blocked behind postsecondary credentials: Two out of three require some kind of postsecondary credential, and half require at least a Bachelor's degree specifically (Fischer, 2019). Those who leave college without a degree do not have access to these well-paying jobs but still must contend with student loans. In other words, they get none of the benefits but all the drawbacks.

This risk is especially dire for disabled people—alternatively called people with disabilities. Disabled people are more 11.4% more likely to live in poverty than their non-

disabled counterparts (*2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*). Just over one-fourth of disabled people live in poverty in the United States (*2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*). Part of this is due to how the United States as a system functions: The expensive and time-consuming process of diagnosis is simultaneously the prerequisite to accessing needed care and support structures and no means of protection against predatory price-gouging. As a result, a family-sustaining wage is often a disability-sustaining wage. Even though college can be the needed access point to a disability-sustaining wage, only 16.1% of disabled people in the United States have a Bachelor's degree or more, compared to 39.2% of non-disabled people: a difference of 23.1% (*2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*). For disabled students in college, the experience is characterized by exhaustion as they grapple with low expectations by faculty and peers (Saia, 2022, 18), nonconsensual use as inspirational material (Saia, 2022, 21), and shock at their very presence (Saia, 2022, 21). First-time, full-time, "traditionally aged" disabled college students at Bachelor's-degree-giving four-year institutions have a 34% completion rate, versus the 51% completion rate for non-disabled students at those institutions (Saia, 2022, 17). These are the types of students in the Bachelor's degree programs at Lesley University. With a 34% completion rate on one hand and a 51% completion rate on the other, clearly all kinds of students can benefit from programming focusing on a sense of belonging.

How does sense of belonging increase college retention? **Schlossberg's theory of marginality and mattering** emphasizes that the quest for sense of belonging is enough to motivate behavior all on its own (Strayhorn, 2016, 43). This is something that is immensely useful to student-facing professionals. For example, a student who is struggling to understand a class may still attend that class in order to be with their friends. When students come to class, it is easier to see them struggling and connect them to institutional supports. Lesley University has a strong disability services infrastructure. It subdivides its office into two categories, "Learning

Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Autism/Asperger Syndrome” and “Physical, Sensory, and Psychiatric Disabilities” to ensure that the practitioners students encounter are specialists in a certain kind of disability (*Disability Services / Lesley University*) because disability is not a monolith and accommodations must be tailored to individual needs. However, a disability services office, no matter how strong it is, can reach students who are hiding from the institution. Schlossberg’s theory of marginality and mattering also explains that sense of belonging is particularly important for those with marginalized identities (Strayhorn, 2016, 43). Past experiences with discrimination impacts perception of current situations. People can think that alienation is the default. As a result, systems must be built in to explicitly include people who are accustomed to being excluded. Finally, Schlossberg’s theory of marginality and mattering discusses how sense of belonging is especially important during certain developmental periods and at times of transition (Strayhorn, 2016, 43). Traditionally-aged college students are ages 18 to 24. They are late adolescents. According to **Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development**, they are engaged in exploring their own identities. This process of finding one’s identity is turbulent but essential to well-being: “According to developmental theory, engaging successfully in the process of identity formation — coming to understand “who I am” in the context of relationships with others — promotes self-confidence, facilitates decision-making, and provides the foundation for fulfilling interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1968).” When adolescents feel like they are connected to others through this process of self-discovery, they can see how their inner turmoil is common among their peers and can commiserate with each other. Adolescents are not the only ones for whom sense of belonging takes on heightened importance. When someone, regardless of age, is entering a new environment, they simultaneously are separated from old social links and have not had time to cultivate new bonds. Thus, all people,

even those with strong previous connections, feel a sense of disequilibrium. This disequilibrium is distressing, but it is also a time when people are primed to accept new ideas and new people.

That is only an argument on behalf of orientation programming, though, not an argument for *this* orientation programming. The argument for LesT can be subdivided into the benefits of its teach-back model and the benefits of engaging with the physical environment in and around campus.

In order for students to feel like they belong, students must feel like they matter. How do people feel a sense of mattering? Fortunately, there is a theory that outlines the components of mattering: **Rosenberg and McCollough's five dimensions of mattering**. The first dimension of mattering is attention: being noticed and perceived as interesting (Strayhorn, 2016, 44). LesT enables its student-leaders to be visible amongst the crowd of entering undergraduates as deliverers of interesting information. After all, they are not teaching some required class. They are teaching how to access points of interest, broadly-speaking, and specifically showing how to reach a particular interesting destination. The second dimension of mattering is importance. Importance specifically means being the subject of someone else's concern (Strayhorn, 2016, 44). Here, the student-leader is the subject of the LesT trainer's concern, being part of a selected small group for the training and getting individualized attention within it. The third dimension of mattering is dependence—as in, feeling like someone else depends on you (Strayhorn, 2016, 44). Students who do not know about the MBTA, or even those who know about the system but not how to get to a particular destination, do depend on the LesT student-leaders. This dimension of mattering is particularly salient for disabled students, who, through their socializing and education, have been the recipients of knowledge but not often the communicators or givers of knowledge because the special education system operates based on deficit-based framing. When disabled students are included under the special education system paradigm, they are seen as

dehumanized examples of struggle, not people with unique, valuable experiences. The fourth dimension of mattering is appreciation: feeling respected (Strayhorn, 2016, 44). This is a related point to dependence, although they do not always go hand-in-hand. However, since LesT student-leaders are teaching broadly-useful information, even students who are not interested in the particular destination should respect the complexity of the MBTA system and those who would take part of their busy day to explain such a complicated system to others. The fifth dimension of mattering is ego extension: the phenomenon where you feel that others share in your success (Strayhorn, 2016, 44). LesT enables student-leaders to directly witness the results of their instruction efforts. They guide students to the destination, but it is up to their peers to show off how they know how to get back, which they could not have done without the instruction from the student-leaders! This sense of mattering is developmentally important to traditionally-aged college students. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development highlights how the conflict between identity versus role confusion is important to adolescents, but later theorists discuss how the resolutions of previous stages of development impact the current stage (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). To that end, it is important to examine the previous conflict: industry versus inferiority (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). Disabled students who grew up through the special education system have had little opportunity to be autonomous and have endured deluges of messaging about what they *cannot* do. As a result, it is likely that they have developed a sense of inferiority. LesT is an experience of industry. LesT lets student-leaders and student-learners alike practice doing things based on their own unique interests. Student-leaders pick what destinations they want to guide peers to. Student-learners select outings based on what activities sound interesting to them. The conflict after adolescence is intimacy versus isolation, which takes place in young adulthood (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). LesT combats isolation by connecting Lesley

University students to peers with similar interests, as well as to Boston-area activities and businesses that share those passions.

Connecting students to their physical environments increases sense of belonging. Social connections crystalize over **cultural artifacts**. There are seven types of cultural artifacts: “...history, traditions, language, heroes and heroines, sagas, the physical setting, and symbols and symbolic action” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, 398). While LesT does not connect students to all seven of these artifacts, it makes three of them explicit. It allows students to live the *tradition* of public transportation. It gives students access to more of the *physical setting* than they could without public transportation. It gets students accustomed to the *symbolology* of the MBTA. On top of that, LesT employs **Collins’ framework of emotional solidarity**. Collins’ framework of emotional solidarity explains that in-group bonds are organically created when people have physical copresence, a shared focus of attention, ritualized common activities, and exclusivity (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014, 79-80). LesT features physical copresence, as students go to stations, stops, and a final destination with their student-leader. The group shares a focus of attention on arrival times and maps. They engage in common activities like tapping their CharlieCards and looking for seating. Finally, activity groups are small and exclusive, enabling students to get into deep conversations.

LesT is a developmentally-sound program, but it is always difficult to introduce a new program, partially because of the sheer scale of students to be served. Fortunately for Lesley University, there is a small subset of students that stand to gain much from becoming LesT student-leaders. Enter the Threshold Program. Each entering class is only about 24 students. These students all come from the system of special education. All students, consequently, have formal diagnoses. As part of the Threshold application process, admitted students are all eager to increase their independence and do not need one-on-one aides (*Threshold Program | Lesley*

University). The program already has infrastructure in place to teach about public transportation because that is how students reach their internships (*Threshold Core Program | Lesley University*). Threshold's mission statement aligns with LesT's goals: helping students become “independent, responsible, and socially connected adults” (*Threshold Program | Lesley University*). As it is, however, Threshold students have a difficult time interacting with other Lesley undergraduates, partially because of their different schedules. This is a situation, though, where a problem is an opportunity. Threshold has its own orientation, separate from the orientations for other Lesley undergraduates. It is a single three-day orientation, unlike the orientation for other first-year Lesley students, wherein families pick from three offered times (*First-Year Orientation 2022 | Lesley University*). This helps ensure that tickets for the correct day are purchased and better enables LesT student-leaders to build community with each other. The Threshold orientation for 2022 included dorm move-in and sandwiched workshops for parents and caregivers in between dedicated days for student programming. The last day of Threshold orientation was Friday, June 24th. (*Threshold Student Orientation | Lesley University*). That was also the last day of Lesley undergraduate orientations (*First-Year Orientation 2022 | Lesley University*). That means, that weekend, all undergraduate students do not have orientation programming. That first weekend is still a time of transition, particularly for students who attended the third orientation. It would be useful to provide LesT programming at that sensitive period. If more time is needed to teach LesT student leaders, then the next weekend can be used for the first outings. Threshold Orientation ends with “Orientation Groups and Evaluation” from 2:45 to 3:20 on Friday (*Threshold Student Orientation | Lesley University*). Those same Orientation groups can be used for LesT or students can be re-shuffled. Either way, 3:20 is not late in the day. The initial instruction about LesT can occur then—or, if students are too tired, the following day or two can be dedicated to instruction and demonstration.

Part 2: How To Implement LesT

NOTE: This step-by-step guide for implementing LesT assumes that the LesT student leaders are from the Threshold Program (Option D in Appendix A). If another population is being used, then the pick-up locations will need to be altered based on which campus students reside in. The other dining areas are Washburn Commons on South Campus and Porter Café in University Hall for Porter Campus. All Threshold students reside in Doble Campus, although there are non-Threshold students in Doble Campus as well. Dining areas are recommended as pick-up points because they are pre-existing social hubs, but other campus locations can be used as an alternative. In addition, if a selection process other than a random lottery has been chosen, then a rubric to decide who will be chosen to become LesT student leaders must be generated. (See [Appendix A](#) for more details.) The days that are chosen can be altered depending on institutional needs; the important thing is that LesT training is a multi-day process.

🕒 FRIDAY, AFTER ORIENTATION GROUPS AND EVALUATION OR SATURDAY MORNING:

📍 LESLEY UNIVERSITY



Ava's kitchen: the dining hall for Doble Campus.

Step 1) Meet students at their campuses' dining halls. As of the writing of this guide (2022-2023 academic year), the dining area for Doble Campus is Ava's Kitchen, since White Hall is under construction.

Step 2) Subdivide students into groups. One can use the orientation groups or create new groups. Some fun ways to create new groups include counting off and organizing by a common interest or characteristic, like what direction is one's house from Lesley or what is your favorite animal out of these certain number of options. The objective, for a group of about 24 students, is to get into groups of four to six each. It is unlikely that the full Threshold class will be able to get into one train car, and it is important that students are close enough to hear and see instructions.

Step 3) En route to nearest T stop, the Porter stop, ask about their prior experience using public transportation. It makes sense to allow groups with more public transportation experience to go first, since they will likely need less time at the station. A fun icebreaker activity is to ask students which of these vehicles they have been on: a bus, train, and a ferry. The MBTA has them all! (Although our instruction will focus on trains and buses.)

📍 PORTER SQUARE T STOP



The entrance to the Porter Square T stop.

Step 4) Go down the escalator and/or elevator. This is an excellent time to explain about the courtesy rule of staying on the right side of escalators if you are not also walking with them.

Step 5) “Outbound” and “inbound” are crucial vocabulary. Start by having students identify their starting place: the Porter Square T stop. On the Red Line, almost all stops are south/down “inbound” from their starting place, which may be easier to visualize than “distance from Boston.” If students have difficulty visualizing the directions, point out that maps are at every station. Emphasize that there is no shame in double-checking!

Step 6) Teach about how to get a ticket. Depending on funding for the program, Lesley may have provided One-Day LinkPasses (\$11 each) for some or all students. Regardless of how many LinkPasses there are, all students should get familiar with the layout of the kiosks. Talk about Lesley’s semester CharlieCard, which, for one fee, enables unlimited rides per semester (no coverage for summer or winter break, though). The kiosks give a green and white “CharlieCard” which are tapped on the black scanners by the gates to let people in. Because the inbound and

outbound stations are behind the gates, if you walk to the wrong one, there is no additional fee. Note: The above two steps can swap places, depending on how long the lines are for the ticket kiosks.



An image of the inbound platform at the Porter Square T stop.

Step 7) For this example, we will be going on the inbound train to Park Street. While waiting for the train to Park Street, teach students about mapping services. Two examples of free mapping apps are Google Maps ([browser/Apple/Android](#)) and Citymapper ([browser/Apple/Android](#)). Citymapper is preferred over Google Maps because it clearly pushes MBTA maintenance/outage alerts, explains how frequently each type of bus shows up, and gives recommendations about when to leave to get on a particular train or bus. For students who enjoy quantitative data, Citymapper explains how much CO2 is saved and how much money students save on gas for each trip.

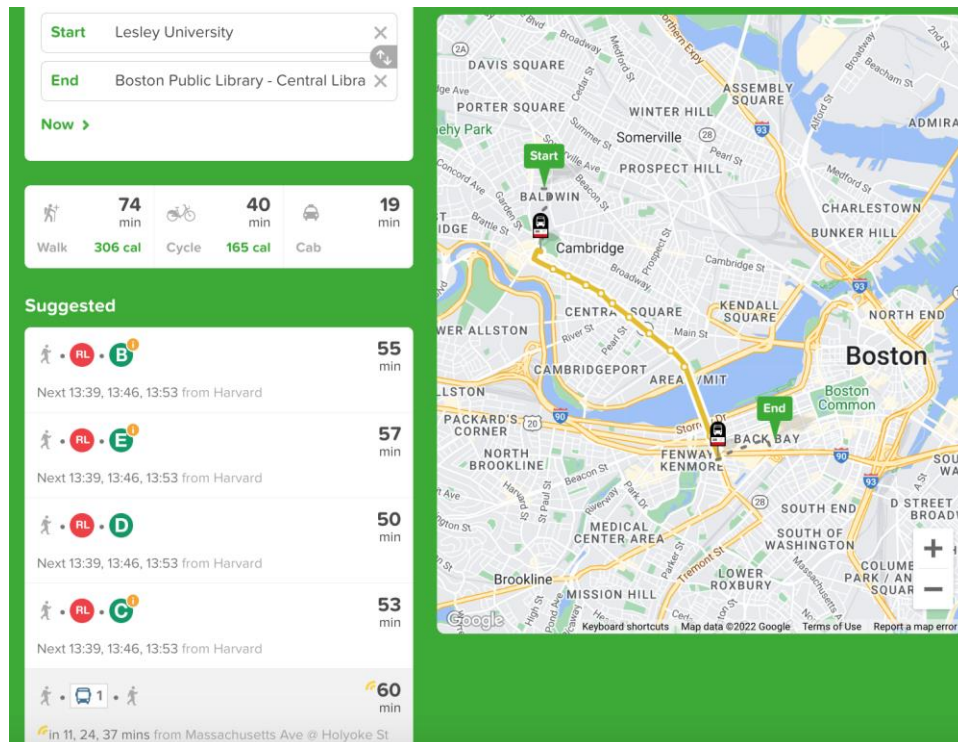
Step 8) Get on the inbound train to Park Street. Stay in the same train car. This is an excellent time to introduce the rules about seating: People are required to offer their seats to people with (visible) disabilities and senior citizens. Before the train starts moving, ensure all students are either seating or holding onto the poles or black hand holders. The train can move suddenly, and no one wants to fall down!

📍 PARK STREET

Step 9) Take Red Line train to Park Street. Show students how many activities are near Park Street (i.e: Boston Commons, Boston Public Garden, restaurants like Flavortown, stores like Newbury Comics, amenities like Boston Public Library).

Step 10) Introduce other lines by taking students to Boston Public Library via the Green Line (which can be almost any Green Line train because Boston Public Library is before the split for the Western service for the Green Line).

Step 11) Show that you don't need to spend money on multiple tickets by never exiting the station by taking students back to Lesley on one trip. Continue to talk about seating rules and the importance of holding on to the pole or black hand holders when the train is moving.



Sample times for a trip from Lesley University to Boston Public Library.

📍 LESLEY UNIVERSITY

Step 12) Back at Lesley, ask students about their experience. What do they still have questions about? Do they like using the apps or the in-person posted maps? What are they worried about? For students who learn better by revisiting information, [this](#) is a video about the T (which, as a bonus, shows that there is indeed an aquarium stop, but, to be clear, is from the COVID era and thus has outdated information about mask requirements and, since then, CharlieTickets have been increasingly phased out for CharlieCards) and [this](#) is a video about Citymapper. Both videos have closed captioning and slow, clear speakers.

🕒 SATURDAY MORNING OR SUNDAY MORNING

📍 LESLEY UNIVERSITY

Step 13) Help students find something T-accessible they are interested in. The color coding is as follows: **Red Line**, **Green Line**, **Blue Line**, **Buses**.

The following is a short list of T-accessible locations by common interests:

Food	Animals	Gaming
Pinochio's Pizza & Subs (Porter Square to Harvard Square or 77 or 96 Bus to Eliot Street @ Bennett Street)	Franklin Park Zoo (Porter Square to Andrew --> 16 Bus to Franklin Park Zoo @ Entrance)	Newbury Comics (77 or 96 Bus to Harvard Square --> 1 Bus to Massachusetts Avenue @ Boylston Street)
Clover HFI (Porter Square to Central Square)	New England Aquarium (Porter Square to Park Street -> Park Street to Government Center (B/C/D/E) --> Government Center to Aquarium)	Pandemonium Games (Porter Square to Central Square)
Tatte (Porter Square to Harvard Square)	Boston Public Gardens (Porter Square to Park Street)	GameStop (Porter Square to Harvard Square --> 66 Bus to Harvard St @ Beacon Street)

Help students learn how to use the “near me” feature on maps apps, if they are interested in something specific (i.e: certain kinds of foods).

Step 14) Pick times on the weekends for students to host LesT outings. Keep in mind that the fall semester for Lesley University students starts on September 7th, a Wednesday. Thus, there is an option to try to reach students the weekend before classes—but there may be fewer students on campus and an option to try to reach students the weekend after classes begin, which, while all students should be on campus, they may be less likely to attend programming as they focus on getting ready for classes. Student-leaders should make this decision, not facilitators, for they will be the ones who lead the outings and must, thus, have time set aside in their schedules.

Part 3: LesT Supplemental Materials

Appendix A: [Presentation To Stakeholders](#)

Sample slides:

Why LesT?: Sense of Belonging

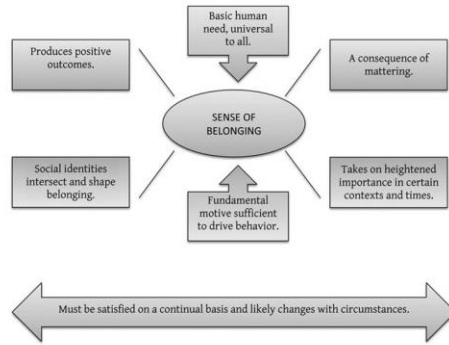


Figure 4.1 Core elements of belonging theory

Chapter 4 [Excerpt]: Sense of belonging in college: A fresh perspective (pp. 41-46). In Strayhorn, T.L. (2016). *Student development theory in higher education: A social psychological approach*. London, UK: Routledge Press.

Why LesT?: The Experience of Students With Disabilities In College

- "I avoid people on campus because they might not understand my disability."
–Jack, wheelchair user at University of Arizona

Saia, T. (2022). Disability Cultural Centers in Higher Education: A Shift Beyond Compliance to Disability Culture and Disability Identity *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 35(1), 17-30.

LesT Option D

Pros	Cons
The Threshold Program already has its own orientation.	Threshold students may require more support in LesT programming.
The Threshold Program has a small number of students: only about 24 each year.	Threshold schedules differ from the schedules of other Lesley undergraduate students.
Threshold students have traditionally been socially isolated from the rest of the Lesley community, and LesT is a way to integrate the wider Lesley student body.	The Threshold core program already focuses on teaching about public transportation, so the part about learning about public transportation may be redundant.
Threshold's mission statement aligns with LesT's goals: helping students become "independent, responsible, and socially connected adults."	

Threshold Core Program | Lesley University. (n.d.). Retrieved November 6, 2022, from <https://lesley.edu/threshold-program/core-program>

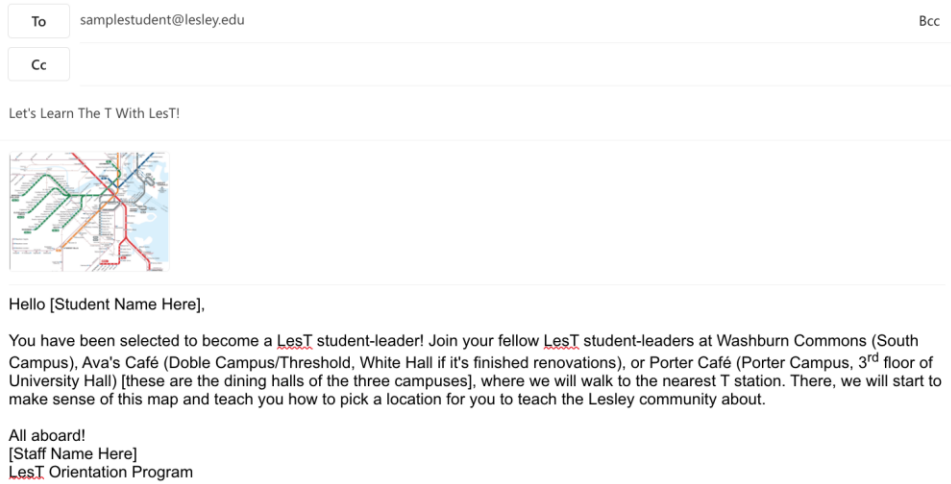
Appendix B: [Sample Outing Flyer](#)



The important thing is to edit the final location, date, times, and explaining what modes of transportation (i.e: what lines, what buses used). This template enables the editing of those elements.

Fun Fact: The example date is Sunday, September 3rd, 2023: the weekend before 2023-2024's projected fall term start, and the text that the destination is written is the dominant color on the Lesley University logo.

Appendix C: Sample Invitation Email



Plain text version:

Hello [Student Name Here],

You have been selected to become a LesT student-leader! Join your fellow LesT student-leaders at Washburn Commons (South Campus), Ava's Café (Doble Campus/Threshold, White Hall if it's finished renovations), or Porter Café (Porter Campus, 3rd floor of University Hall) [these are the dining halls of the three campuses], where we will walk to the nearest T station. There, we will start to make sense of this map and teach you how to pick a location for you to teach the Lesley community about.

All aboard!

[Staff Name Here]

LesT Orientation Program

Attached image: MBTA map



Appendix D: Sample Posts For Lesley Social Media

D1: Twitter

Lesley University
@lesley_u

There is a new addition to #LesleyUniversity orientation this year: #LesT! This program teaches #ThresholdProgram students about the #MBTA and trains these student-leaders to then teach their fellow students about the system. #Boston #Cambridge #CambMA @LesleyThreshold

3:30 PM · Jun 14, 2023 · Click to add client...

Lesley University
@lesley_u

We've selected the student-leaders for our new orientation program: #LesT. As a LesT student-leader, you will learn about the #MBTA and then pick a location to teach your fellow students about by taking them there! All aboard! 🚆

229/280 characters

12:00 PM · Jun 13, 2023 · Click to add client...

D2: Instagram

lu_threshold_program • Follow

Liked by lesleyuniversity and 1,909 others

lu_threshold_program All aboard for #LesT training! 🚆 #MBTA @lesleyuniversity ... more

View all 20 comments

JUNE 24

lynxorientation • Follow

Liked by lesleyuniversity and 1,909 others

lynxorientation All aboard for #LesT training! 🚆 #MBTA @lesleyuniversity ... more

View all 20 comments

JUNE 24

D3: Facebook



Lesley University

June 24th at 8:00 AM · 🌐

All aboard for #LesT training! 🚆 The LesT student-leaders will be learning about the #MBTA and teaching their peers about the system through outings. #golynx



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

👍 Kelly Coons and 1,909 others



Write a comment...



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