



On the Front Lines



For new VU students, Welcome Week is an introduction to university life in all its hectic glory. But what gives Welcome Week its powerful and lasting effect is the dedicated team of student volunteers behind it. That team, called Frontline, is made up of more than fifty students who work almost around the clock each August to make new students feel at home.

“We create an environment that ignites belonging and genuine relationships,” says Mikaela Holford, a senior psychology and sociology major and co-director of Frontline. “Frontline connects people so they feel like part of the community. They feel like they’re home.”

Frontline’s impact begins the moment students arrive at campus and Frontline leaders ferry all their belongings to their dorms, sometimes up multiple flights of stairs.

“Students don’t move a box,” says Holford. “We empty their cars and take everything up. It’s amazing, the positive attitude the Frontline leaders have. They are running up and down the stairs cheering. That means a lot to the families. We do get some protective dads who are afraid things will get lost, but we try to take it all on ourselves if we

can. That’s what we’re there for.”

The next few days are bursting with activities — small group icebreakers, beach games and fun outings — to get students acquainted with their new environment and with each other. Many, like Holford, are so impacted by their welcome that they volunteer for Frontline in subsequent years.

“I loved the spirit of welcoming people onto campus,” she says. “Frontline leaders want other people to have the same good experience they had.”

Perry Kalmeta, a senior communication studies major from Portland, Oregon, came to VU in 2005 with “a negative attitude.”

“I wasn’t expecting to make any friends,” he says. “I was extremely shy.”

He expected Welcome Week to be full of mundane academic meetings. To his surprise, Frontline leaders helped him move in and deliberately befriended him. Kalmeta was swept up in events like the “beach blast,” a visit to Downtown Disney and more.

“It helped me get out of my shell, meet new people and get excited about going to Vanguard,” Kalmeta says. “Frontline wrapped that

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Beach blast: VU students playing 'buck-buck,' a Welcome Week tradition. "We create an environment that ignites belonging and genuine relationships," says a Frontline co-director.

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negative attitude up and shipped it away. It gave me a handle on what Vanguard was about. The attitudes, the smiles, the general personality of the school — Frontline was the face of that. I really did a one-eighty that week."

As a result, Kalmeta decided to become a Frontline leader the next year.

"I felt called to be involved at Vanguard in some way. Frontline was the perfect way," he says. "It's a good feeling being involved in a ministry that affected me so much. Now I have chance to affect someone else."

In his third year with Frontline, he is co-director with Holford. They both agree that being a Frontline leader requires a lot more work than it might appear.

"It's a major time commitment," says Holford. "We go from morning to late night

without much break. We are solely there to get to know the new students and make sure they are having a good time. It's exhausting physically and emotionally. It's a lot tougher than people expect."

This year, 463 students came to VU for Welcome Week, most of them excited and nervous, eager to try out their independence yet anxious about whether or not they would find friends. Frontline leaders led activities, gauged the personalities in their groups and guided conversations so everyone got to know each other.

"The students are concentrating on who will I be friends with? Why am I so nervous? What will college be like? What will academic life be like?" says Kalmeta. "Frontline leaders get to be servants of the new students. We want to connect them to the community and allow them to

experience what Vanguard is, whether it's campus survival, academics 101 or worship and communion where they experience the impactful side of Vanguard and how worshipping God is a central part of our community."

Welcome Week also helps with student retention by connecting incoming freshmen early on with fellow students who share their interests and who can help ease the transition into college life. This year the Frontline team has added two new events: a family picnic for parents to meet the Frontline leaders, and a formal dinner to wrap up the week.

"The face of Vanguard is the Frontline leaders," says Kalmeta. "We put in the time and effort to make these students know they're part of a community that really does care for them."