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**Extending Orientation:
 Curriculum Development in Freshman Seminars at Commuter Colleges**

Objectives

- Review research information on community colleges and first-year experience courses.
- Provide an overview of Freshman Seminar (3 credits) at Middlesex Community College (Connecticut).
- Share strategies to emphasize critical thinking in assignments and activities that promote extended orientation and curricular and co-curricular links.
- Review some general benefits of extended orientation—Freshman Seminars.

I. Community Colleges and First-Year Experience Courses

1. What percentage of first-time freshmen in U.S. colleges and universities enroll in community colleges?

- A. 24%
- B. 33%
- C. 45%
- D. 61%

Answer: C

Source: American Association of Community Colleges, *Fact Sheet*, 2004. www.ccsse.org.

2. The "traditional" age for college students is 18 to 22 years old. What percentage of community college students are 25 years or older?

- A. Nearly one-quarter
- B. Almost half
- C. Three-quarters
- D. All

Answer: B (@46%). Source: AACC, *National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends & Statistics*, 3rd Edition. WWW.CCSSE.ORG.

3. What is the national "dropout rate" (students not returning for the sophomore year) for two-year public institutions of higher education?

- A. 18%

- B. 28%
- C. 48%
- D. 68%

Answer: C "... This is compared to a 32% dropout rate for public baccalaureate colleges, 31% for public master's/ professional-degree granting institutions, and 24% for public doctoral degree-granting universities."

Source: ACT, Inc., Institutional Data File, 2002. www.ccsse.org.

4. According to full-time community college faculty, the most important goal for undergraduates to attain is

- A. the ability to think critically
- B. the ability to write effectively
- C. to be prepared for employment after college
- D. to master knowledge in a discipline
- E. all of the above

Answer: E "Over 80% of faculty ranked all four of these goals as 'essential' or 'very important' for undergraduates."

Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education Community College News*, 52(10), Page B10. (2005 October 28). <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i10/10b01001.htm> . WWW. CCSSE. ORG.

5. What percentage of community college faculty see developing the ability of their students to think critically as a "very important" or "essential" goal of their teaching?

- A. 53 percent
- B. 67 percent
- C. 83 percent
- D. 99 percent

Answer: D. Source: "Views and Characteristics of Community-College Professors." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52(10), B10. (October 28, 2005). WWW.CCSSE.ORG.

6. What percentage of two-year colleges offer some form of a first-year experience course?

- A. 43%
- B. 57%
- C. 80%
- D. 92%

Answer: D. @92%

Source: Barefoot, Betsy O. Co Director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College. 2002 National Survey of First-Year Academic Practices. www.firstyear.org.

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

- Conducted a national survey in 2003 of first-year seminars

- www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings

Course Objectives

The three most frequently reported objectives:

1. Develop academic skills
2. Provide an orientation to campus resources and services
3. Self-exploration/personal development

Course Topics

1. Study Skills
2. Campus Resources
3. Time Management
4. Academic Planning/Advising
5. Critical Thinking

Source: National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings.

II. Middlesex Community College

Background

Middlesex Community College, Middletown, CT

- Two-year public commuter college
- Enrollment @2300 students
- Average age student-29 years old (part time-31 years old; full time-22 years old)
- @70 of students who took the placement test in fall 2005 were placed in one or more developmental-level classes. (42% part time; 58% full time)
- Freshman Seminar (gen. elective, recommendation, developmental level)

MxCC Commuter Students

- @20% attend orientation (not mandatory) in fall 2005 (601 new students)

Foundations of Excellence New Student Survey®, fall 2005, 321 students participated
 Policy Center on the First Year of College, www.firstyear.org; www.fyfoundations.org

- @80% students surveyed indicated that they worked either part or full time.
- @48% (18-19 age range) ranked “high” or “very high” the degree that they understood how college was organized in regard to seeking answers for administrative questions (e.g., Financial Aid, Records...).
- @38% (18-19 age range) ranked “high” or “very high” the degree that they understood how the college was organized so that they could seek answers to questions regarding academic rules, such as withdrawal policies, probation, etc.
- @46% (18-19 age range) ranked “high” or “very high” the degree that they knew where to go for assistance with course work (e.g., tutoring).

- @24% (18-19 age range) ranked “high” or “very high” the degree that they understood where to go to be involved in a college-sponsored event or activity.
- @10% (18-19 age range) ranked “high” or “very high” the degree that their out-of-class experiences exposed them to world cultures.

III. Extended Orientation Component

A. Identification

1. Identify campus areas/offices that students would benefit the most from as part of the extended orientation—academic, cultural, social....
2. Identify, if possible, any campus activities that students may benefit from attending as part of a curricular and co-curricular activity. (and/or) Is there a particular office/person that students can visit (career center, advisors...)?

Considerations

- Does the campus have a calendar of events? -Designated months that will usually have some type of campus event/activity (lecture, forum, art exhibit, cultural/diversity event...).
 - Does the campus have a designated activity period?
3. Identify campus print or electronic material (e.g., catalogs, student handbooks, web sites) that will benefit from students’ attention.
 4. Identify technological resources from which students would benefit from increased knowledge. (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard)
 5. Identify key areas to increase student knowledge and understanding, such as diversity, conflict resolution....

B. Integration

Consider where and when to integrate the extended orientation components into the curriculum, course syllabus.

- Front load or integrate throughout course?
- Is the extended orientation component linked with text chapters, class lesson, etc?

C. Assignments and Activities

Encourage Critical and Creative Thinking

1. Include references to critical thinking terminology:

analyze	explain
compare	illustrate
contrast	interpret
criticize	outline
define	prove
describe	review
discuss	summarize
enumerate/list/identify	trace
evaluate	

2. Directions may emphasize skill sets, such as goal setting, time management....
3. Link with a particular chapter, lesson, outcome....

Examples of Activities & Assignments

Guest Speakers in Class

A guest speaker from an office/dept. visits college success class to share information about financial aid, business department majors, etc.

In-Class Activities/Discussion

Before the guest begins his/her presentation to the class, ask students to take notes, perhaps applying the note-taking strategies learned from another lesson.

After the presentation, have students **summarize** the information and share it with their other classmates. Then, have students **evaluate** the presentation or the presenter's style. If other guest speakers have come to class, have the students **compare and contrast** styles.

(Use the words "summarize," "evaluate," and "compare and contrast" in your directions. If the students are unfamiliar with the terms, ask them to brainstorm "definitions" to help them.)

To capture more of a reflective element, ask students to think and/or write about what they learned or did not learn. How has this information helped them? (**making connections, practical application**)

If you wanted to take it an additional step, have students **compare and contrast** their **note taking** to reinforce and show the **interconnection** with another class lesson.

Even more, have the students conduct some type of follow up or take-home assignment linked with the guest speaker(s).

Any suggestions? Brainstorm or share activities and/or assignments.

Campus Event Report

Assignment. Throughout the semester, the Career Development Center, the Student Activities Office, the Reading/Writing Lab, and other offices will be offering scheduled presentations, lectures, workshops, and various activities.

Directions.

- Select one of these scheduled events to attend.
- Make sure that your selection is pre-approved by your professor and that you attend the full presentation or activity.

- Take notes during the activity, as well.
- Word-process a two-page report about the scheduled event. This report will contain the following:

1. An introduction. In this, you will identify the date, time, place, and activity title. Include the names of individuals hosting the event, as well.
2. Body Paragraphs. This will describe or explain the event/activity in detail. What information was presented? What were some of the questions asked by students?
3. A conclusion. In this, you will reflect upon the activity and evaluate it. How will the knowledge derived from this activity help you in your personal life, your academic life, and/or your career?

Other Types of Assignments & Activities

- Career Portfolios
- Collaborative Projects
- Interviews
- Newsletters, posters
- Scavenger Hunts
- Survival Kits
- Additional Suggestions?

IV. Benefits of Extended Orientation Components--Freshman Seminars

- Ease transition to college
- Forge campus and community bonds
- Increase knowledge of campus resources
- Increase knowledge in key areas, such as diversity...
- Enhance critical thinking skills
- Encourage active learning
- Encourage skill use and application of newfound knowledge across the curriculum

Update or Create Extended Orientation Component—Evidence

- Anecdotal Evidence
- Surveys, Focus Groups, Questionnaires, Assessments (CCSSE, CCFSSSE-Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement...)

Helpful Links

- www.ccsse.org
- www.firstyear.org
- www.fyfoundations.org
- www.sc.edu