



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## Computerized Student Orientation

Student orientations can inform students about college procedures and services, and simultaneously introduce them to the future. With a computerized orientation, students are faced with the computer age in a personal, nonthreatening manner as soon as they enroll in college. While an important component of student retention, student orientation programs require considerable time and staff to adequately serve the numbers of new students. We decided that our small campus size and limited staffing dictated a computerized method of orientation delivery.

### Need for Change

The Glades Campus of Palm Beach Community College is the smallest of the four campuses in the district. Five hundred to 700 students attend classes each term, and orientation is required of all new students prior to registration. The student services staff is small, and the demand for academic advisement, coupled with the needs of new students, creates a staffing problem. In addition, most students are undecided about careers and unaware of financial aid and scholarship opportunities. Collaboration between student services and the campus computer resource coordinator has created an efficient and effective computerized orientation process to solve the problems created by such demands on the system. This solution combines orientation, career exploration, and scholarship discovery; it optimizes campus resources and enhances the quality of new students' experiences.

### Computerized Multimedia Orientation

Orientation begins the moment new students arrive to enroll. They receive a packet of information (which includes the college application, catalog, admission checklist, orientation evaluation form, and campus pencil) and are screened for placement scores such as the SAT or ACT. After screening, they participate in the campus orientation.

The orientation includes a customized multimedia computer presentation which utilizes music, multiple voice narration, digital full-motion video, and graphics to introduce pertinent college information, policies, and

procedures. It may also include career exploration and scholarship researching. The narrators for the presentation are currently enrolled students and campus staff. The presentation, accompanied by an admission checklist, leads students through the admission process.

**Career Exploration.** New students are directed to complete one of three automated career guidance inventories: *Merkler Style Preference*, *Career Match*, or *Vocational Interest Profile*. Each of these programs helps students investigate career interests, skills, and abilities. The results are provided to the advisor or dean of student services for review. Students who wish to continue exploration are provided follow-up appointments.

**Scholarship Researching.** Students use *SOURCES* to investigate methods of financing their education. This program is a computer database developed by the Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Career Development for the purpose of researching the availability of local, state, and federal scholarships and loans. Students receive printouts of the results of their search and share this information with an advisor or the dean of student services.

### Academic Advisement

After completing the College Placement Test, career inventories, and *SOURCES*, students meet individually with an advisor or the dean of student services for academic advising. During these sessions students raise questions and concerns that may not have been covered in the computer presentation. At this point, students seem better informed about the colleges' services and procedures.

### Usefulness and Flexibility

The entire orientation process takes about two hours (or three, if students must take a placement test). Except for academic advisement, the orientation takes place in the Center for Personalized Instruction (CPI), our study skills laboratory. This system allows the student services staff to provide quality advisement and counseling to new and returning students without



diminishing other services. The multimedia computer orientation provides information efficiently and in a lively fashion. The presentation is digital and can be updated easily to accommodate new information such as changes in college policy, procedures, or personnel.

### **Individualized and Student-Centered**

Although students start the admission and orientation process using the computer, they complete the process working with a student services official. This orientation benefits working students especially as the process can be completed in one visit to the college or over several days.

### **Results**

During spring 1995/96 registration, 75 students participated in orientation. Evaluation results were extremely positive. Students reported that the information they received answered many questions they had about coming to college. They also reported that the career inventories helped shape their thinking about college majors and possible future careers.

Others stated that the career inventory helped them reaffirm their choices of college major and vocational goals. All students reported that they appreciated the scholarship information they received through *SOURCES*.

### **Conclusion**

This orientation process is the first phase of our retention plan. It has been well-received by students, staff, faculty, and student development professionals. The full-motion video, graphics, music, and narration provide a program that is informative and entertaining. With this technology, the possibilities for the style and magnitude of presentations are immeasurable.

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## ***Final Performance for Final Exam***

Composition instructors have long held that evaluation of their students' abilities rests on the quality of their papers, rather than on major test scores. As one who teaches both composition and speech, I believe that the same principle holds true for public speaking.

The major hurdle in speech classes is overcoming performance anxiety or stage fright. By providing as many opportunities as possible for students to "perform," their anxiety will be reduced by the end of the semester; and they will become more accomplished and confident speakers.

In the past, my final exam covered the textbook materials, and sometimes students worked in collaborative groups. However, this textbook knowledge could not measure their speaking skills.

So rather than a test, we now have a final "performance." The subject area is open, encouraging the students' to put their most creative talents on display. Within a limited time frame, they have to give a speaking performance, whether storytelling, acting, or any type of speech previously given during the semester.

This past semester I heard the best speeches ever in my experience as a speech instructor. One gentleman performed a dramatic monologue from a play. One

young woman demonstrated how to make three easy and inexpensive Christmas presents. A young man gave an informative speech on dealing with the stress of finals week. A single parent read her son's favorite children's story. One student told a ghost story in a room illuminated with candles and the audience sitting in a circle on the floor.

During these speeches I observed the confidence, ease, and—dare I say it—enjoyment that this experiment provided. In the course of the semester, I plan to continue to supplement with a textbook, but as for the final exam, "the play's the thing."

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