



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Step Toward Success: A Team Approach to Orientation

"What outcomes do we have in mind when we think about new student orientation?" At Mayland Community College we decided on a set of five goals/outcomes. Each of these goals has been demonstrated in research and practice as essential to the success of community college orientation programs:

- Provide information about the infrastructure of the college
- Connect students with faculty and staff
- Connect students with other students
- Communicate college-level expectations
- Inspire students, giving them a willingness and eagerness to try.

We used these desired outcomes to guide us in developing the following orientation programming in hopes of realizing each of the stated goals. Our overarching intention was to weave outcome-maximizing strategies into the fabric of the orientation program, providing our students the best possible entry into their new educational experience. This preparation resulted in the Step Toward Success program.

The Program

The program began with students entering the music-filled student commons which had been preset for the five-hour orientation program. The "Quote Walls" along the entrance to the commons were covered with inspirational quotations. [The orientation team had made a campuswide call for quotations or sayings that were personally meaningful to employees and could be shared with the new students. Individuals were asked to "dress up the quote" (i.e., print it with a decorative layout) and turn it in for the quote wall.] After the students made their way through the quote-filled hallway, they were greeted by faculty and staff wearing MCC-brand attire, given an orientation packet and a name tag, and provided some refreshments.

The check-in session lasted 30 minutes, with the background music and refreshments providing a nice atmosphere for socializing. College employees involved with orientation were asked to introduce themselves and meet as many new students as possible during this time. The vice president of student services

then convened the session and introduced the president, who welcomed the new students to the college. After the presidential welcome, the vice president introduced the goals for the orientation and reviewed the procedures for the next event, the informational scavenger hunt.

Students were asked to assemble in groups of 10-13 each; the grouping was guided by numbers on individual name tags. Students with common numbers assembled with faculty and student guides (assigned to each group) who were stationed around the student commons. The first goal was for the students to be introduced to these faculty members and students. The faculty and student guides then oriented the new students using the campus maps that were included in the orientation packets; then they walked the group to the first informational breakout.

Informational breakouts (11 in all) were stationed throughout the campus and led by faculty, staff, and administrators. Each breakout lasted ten minutes and was intended to provide the essential information surrounding a given topic or area and to effect the orientation goals of articulating expectations and inspirations. Informational breakouts and their leaders were:

- Student to Student** (led by current students talking to new students about campus life)
- Career Planning and Placement** (led by the director of career services)
- Financial Aid** (led by the coordinator of financial aid)
- Job Placement/College Work-Study** (led by the coordinator of employer relations)
- Student Organizations** (led by the current presidents of the student government association and Phi Theta Kappa)
- S.O.A.R. Program** (led by the director of student support services)
- Bookstore** (led by the bookstore director)
- Study Skills and College Expectations** (led by the associate vice president of academic services)
- Registration** (led by the registrar)
- Handbook/Student Services** (led by a counselor)
- Library/LRC** (led by the director of the LRC)



Each breakout leader provided an informational checklist for the student's orientation packet. The sheet had key information blanks that the students were to fill in during the breakout sessions. We realized that only the essentials could be covered in the ten minutes allotted for the session; however, we tried to communicate important basics and connect the student with a contact person and area. The checklist provided a way to gather information and pointed the student to the essentials of any given session. After students filled in the blanks and completed the ten-minute session, the leader initialed each checklist page.

During the breakouts, the faculty and student guides rotated forward to the next station. Each time the student groups emerged from the breakout session, they met a new faculty member and a new current student to begin the trek toward the next information session—creating even more connections to the college. This process continued until the sixth informational breakout after which the students reassembled in the student commons.

The student commons was set for lunch and again background music was playing to encourage even more social interaction. Near the conclusion of the Pizza Hut and Arizona Iced Tea-sponsored lunch, the groups were reassembled for the remaining (five) informational breakouts. The students grouped with faculty and student guides who once more led them to their respective informational breakouts.

After the final breakout session, the large group convened in the student commons for the closing session. Orientation team members were waiting at the door to welcome the students back and to check the initials on student orientation packets as they entered the room. Students with initials on all checklists—which signified that they had gathered all the necessary information—were asked to place their name tags in a large bag to be used in drawing the names of prizewinners. In the closing session, the prizes were awarded (e.g., dinners for two at local restaurants, a special parking space, MCC clothing) and a closing message delivered, "Steps Along the Pathway to Possibility." This was a 20-minute, motivational, steps-to-success type of message meant to wrap up the orientation with a BANG! After this final message, we again reminded the students of the orientation goals. We asked the students to take out four post-it notes that we had inserted in their packets and use them to tell us how we did and what we could do better. We asked the students to place these post-its on an evaluation wall that was located on the way out of the student com-

mons. Once the orientation program was complete, we encouraged students to meet with faculty in different program areas and to contact the leaders of the breakouts to gather more information.

Outcomes

We had no negative comments about the orientation process—even after a five-hour program! Some of our favorite comments were:

- "You really boosted my confidence! Believe me, I really needed it; my confidence was really low."
- "Very caring."
- "This orientation was very helpful and I had fun! Thanks for coordinating such a wonderful day."
- "I can tell a lot of hard work was put into this. Thanks so much. The program was very interesting, organized, and exciting."
- "What a nice way to greet new students! Thank you for making us feel wanted and respected. I believe I'm going to love being a student here!"

The orientation team (a cross-section of staff, faculty, and continuing students) devoted time and effort to this program, striving to design and deliver the most effective orientation possible. We were committed to creating a value-added orientation process resulting in students being well-prepared to begin their studies. We are currently planning (1) a cohort performance study and (2) mid-semester and post-semester focus groups to collect data about students who completed orientation and to determine/ask how well the orientation prepared them for MCC studies. Initial reports from faculty include comments about how well-prepared the orientation students are when compared to the non-orientation students during the first few days of class. We are refining this program and moving toward required orientation.

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