



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Legacy Edition

College Orientation for New Students 2.0

In 1995, I authored the *Innovation Abstracts*, "College Orientation for New Students," after Central Florida Community College's (CFCC) Counseling Department won the Florida Association of Community Colleges Exemplary Practice Award for its student orientation program. As a young, naïve Director of Counseling, I was honored that CFCC—a rural Florida college—was given the prestigious recognition.

There have been a lot of changes in community colleges and society since 1995. Who could have predicted that in less than 25 years, students would be able to access information about community colleges with the swipe of a finger on their mobile devices? Or that technology would play a critical role in how students view and evaluate postsecondary education? In less than 25 years, community colleges have moved from the philosophy of "if you build it, they will come" to creating programs to satisfy all of students' needs in order to increase enrollment rates.

Since the great recession, many two-year colleges have struggled to maintain high student enrollment numbers. Further, community colleges' budgets have been impacted by decreased state support. State legislatures often tie community colleges' funding to year-to-year retention and credential completion rates. In some states, the starting salaries of community college graduates are assessed and are considered part of colleges' performance funding formula. Today, colleges need to enroll students in high-paying career programs and ensure students quickly complete their degrees. Summer semesters are no longer seen as optional or only for those students who need to retake courses. In order for students to complete their educational plans in the prescribed time, enrollment in summer terms is usually necessary. To ensure completion, departments now offer sufficient course sections during the summer semesters. The community college mantra is no longer about giving students access; instead it is focused on enrollment and completion rates. The higher education landscape has been completely transformed.

New Student Orientation

With all of the changes occurring at community colleges, new student orientation remains a critical component of the matriculation process. Currently, there is new nomenclature for student orientation called onboarding. Unlike the student orientations of 20 years ago that were multiple

days in length culminating with course registration, the new onboarding orientation process extends throughout a student's first year and provides a comprehensive and coordinated review of timely information and support services. Community college faculty and staff learned from past student orientations that students can't absorb all of the provided information in a two-day period. For example, why include information about how a student can withdraw from a class when the student hasn't even registered? Why should a student learn about childcare, if he or she doesn't have any children? The former orientation model comprised of a parade of services is boring and obsolete.

As part of the onboarding experience, essential information is often delivered online or may have an online component where students can complete parts of the onboarding process at a time and place most convenient to them. Cyber orientation, particularly for distance-learning students, is essential and required by most regional accreditation agencies. Career development now plays a more significant role in the orientation process. In fact, many institutions customize a student's onboarding plan based on the intended program of study he or she chooses, tailoring the orientation information to a particular major pathway. Many colleges are now including a student success course in their onboarding programs. Traditionally, student success courses were only required for students who tested into developmental or remedial courses. Now, student success courses are for all students beginning their college careers. Student success courses focus on career exploration, wellness and mental health, and success strategies such as time management and study skills.

Academic Advising

Academic advising has progressed significantly over the past 20 years. Advising isn't only limited to in-person appointments; instead, many colleges are creating virtual experiences using Skype or LiveChat. Furthermore, students are no longer advised term to term. As part of the onboarding process, institutions are encouraging students to develop educational plans for their entire program. These educational plans can be stored in students' personal college profiles where they can be accessed at any time by students and their advisors. Revisions to students' educational plans are made in real time, and many institutions use these plans to schedule the appropriate number of courses each semester. Through curriculum mapping, faculty and advisors identify the sequence in which courses are taken, providing students with more prescribed and streamlined course options. Advisors, or

success coaches, now case manage their students' course loads and help students select appropriate courses for their majors. Students often work with one advisor who is considered an expert in that specific major.

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A Support System

Despite the changes over the past 20 years in higher education, the fundamental fact still remains that student success depends on the accessibility students have to support systems at their colleges. In the evolving community college environment, the roles of faculty have increased. This does not mean that all faculty need to do tutoring, advising, or take on the work of the financial aid office, but it does mean they help students figure out what kind of help they need and where to go to get it. Faculty are expected to be the first points of contact for many students and, as such, to know what support services are available on and off campus. It is no longer sufficient for faculty to just be experts in their academic disciplines.

One way faculty members can integrate student support services into their curriculums is by having representatives from advising and tutoring present to students ways in which those services can assist them achieve their academic goals. For example, a faculty member can invite an academic advisor to the classroom to discuss career opportunities relevant to the course, thus helping students understand the steps needed to get a job in that field.

Even when it is not possible to integrate support services into classroom instruction, there are ways to increase students' awareness and usage of support services. For instance, faculty can encourage students to receive academic tutoring, remind students to meet with their advisors, and remind students about registration deadlines. Faculty members can also encourage students to attend staff-led workshops that build study skills.

Conclusion

Community colleges are now more focused than ever on increasing student retention and completion rates. Postsecondary institutions take into account students' perspectives and are more in tune to their needs. Today, as an older, more seasoned Vice President of Student Services, my colleagues and I, including faculty members, view students holistically and design wrap-around services to promote their successes. We provide mental health counseling and work closely with community agencies to combat homelessness and hunger. Since I began my career, the two-day, new student orientation has transformed into an onboarding process that touches every aspect of the college experience. Onboarding is more and more being designed to provide students with the tools needed to accomplish their academic goals.

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