



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## College Orientation for New Students

Central Florida Community College serves approximately 6,000 students in a tri-county area. As with most two-year institutions, CFCC serves a diverse student population. These students range from the displaced homemaker who has earned a GED, to the honors student who wishes to save money before transferring to the university, to the factory worker who has been laid off, to the student who has recently located to the Central Florida area and English is not his/her first language. To effectively serve this broad constituency, CFCC Counseling Department has developed an orientation program which recently has been recognized as the 1993 Florida Association of Community Colleges Student Development Commission Exemplary Practice.

College Orientation is a one-credit-hour course required of all degree-seeking students at CFCC. Regardless if students are transfer, or first-time college students, if they are planning to attend full- or part-time, all need to be familiar with the college's policies and procedures.

CFCC counselors attempt to ensure that prospective and new students understand the admissions procedures. Everyone requesting information is given a "Getting Started" handout which outlines the initial steps degree-seeking students must follow before attending orientation. Once these steps have been completed, the Records/Admissions office invites students to the academic advisement/registration portion of orientation, at which time they will register for their classes. "Getting Started" sessions, one hour in length, involve representatives from admissions, financial aid, and testing; from special programs such as Student Support Services, Displaced Homemakers, and the Educational Opportunity Center; and from any academic disciplines that wish to publicize particular programs. At the end of the session, applications are accepted, financial aid packets are distributed, and placement test appointments are made.

Seven Advisement/Registration (A/R) sessions are scheduled each term and accommodate approximately 75 to 150 students. The sessions are offered during the day, evening, and on weekends. At the beginning of each A/R session, an institutional research question-

naire is distributed to identify demographics of the entering class. Differences and similarities between degrees are explained, and majors are discussed. The CFCC catalog is explored. Counselors review deadlines, withdrawal procedures, grade point average computations, core classes, course descriptions, course schedules, and full-time/part-time hours. A video on using the phone registration (OSCAR) is included.

Students are divided into smaller groups according to their majors and meet in separate areas. One counselor is assigned the Associate in Science/health-related occupations, and another is assigned the Associate in Science/non-health occupations. Students pursuing an Associate in Arts meet with two counselors. During the smaller sessions, degree programs and academic requirements are explained in detail. University parallel program students are divided into specific upper-division majors (architecture, agriculture, business, education, nursing/P.T./O.T., pre-med/pre-vet/chemistry/physics/biology/pharmacy, pre-law, etc.); preprofessional requirements and the transfer process are explained. Transcripts are evaluated, and graduation checks are conducted to determine the courses still needed for graduation.

At the end of the first day of orientation, all students register for their classes. Each group's time is staggered to decrease the amount of waiting time. The first day's activities take approximately five hours.

As part of their class schedules, students register for the second seven-hour portion of orientation. Again, students have a choice of weekday or weekend times. During this session, students are introduced, via a 15-minute presentation, to key campus people and resources such as Minority Affairs, Student Activities, Student Support Services, Community of Scholars/Phi Theta Kappa, Career Placement/Co-operative Education, Security, and EOC. In addition, students are given tours of the CFCC campus and the Learning Resource Center and Skills Lab. At the end of the day, students take a multiple-choice test on academic degree requirements and CFCC policies/procedures, and are given an assignment to complete within the first two weeks of classes. They are asked to read *Student Success Secrets* by Eric Jensen and write a 500-



word paper on study skills, or research the career of their choice and write a 500-word essay. A grade of "S" (satisfactory) or "U" (unsatisfactory) is awarded to each student, depending upon attendance, the results of the multiple-choice test, and the completed assignment. The Counseling Department conducts Group Academic Advisement Sessions to review academic requirements during subsequent semesters.

Students report that they are more familiar with CFCC policies and resources after taking the college orientation course. They know how to select appropriate classes, use phone registration, withdraw from

a class, apply for graduation, and who to see if they have problems. Exit surveys indicate that more than 90 percent of CFCC students are now familiar with campus offices and resources.

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## *Snap Profiles*

Composition students have come to expect the predictable: a number of assigned essays, a series of group projects, and an instructor who follows the syllabus. Try whetting your students' appetites for observation, concentration, and personal profile writing with this surprise tactic.

The first time I experimented with this strategy, I chose the department secretary to make an announced visit to the classroom. She wore three or four memorable accessories that I provided: a flamboyant hat, unusual glasses, a leather jacket, etc. She carried a late registration card, along with a cartoon-style Snoopy folder, a textbook, and a foreign language dictionary. She appeared suddenly, 20 minutes into the class session, and asked for another instructor. She was insistent but did not stay more than two minutes.

After the surprise visitor's exit, the class members were divided in their reaction. Some laughed at her eccentric appearance; others were perturbed and wondered if she was unbalanced. Before any further conversation, I asked the students to list six characteristics they observed while the mystery guest was in the classroom. Then we compared notes and tallied responses on the board.

The students who participated in this exercise amazed themselves and me by recalling extensive details about a visitor they observed for only a few moments. They recalled her height range, hair color, timbre of voice, and accent, and even speculated on

age and college major. If these details are examples of what students can glean from a two-minute encounter with a stranger, think of what can be achieved when writing a personal profile of a friend or family member! Their next assignment was obvious: to write a vivid personal profile of someone they had known for many years. Another surprise awaited writers here; it is not easy to describe someone whose features are familiar.

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*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

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