



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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A NEW FACULTY ORIENTATION

New faculty orientation at Tomball College occurs the week before the fall semester begins. The beginning of any school year is busy enough with all of the usual start-up activities, and it is an especially difficult time to get people together to share ideas and visions. But we dared to try something new that required setting time aside to meet those objectives. Our first-time experience at getting new faculty together and acquainted with the college and each other was a tremendous success and time well spent. We recommend it to others who are hiring more full- and part-time faculty than ever before.

Our college has experienced tremendous growth over the last several years. In fact, enrollment has doubled since 1996, and 25 percent since last fall semester. Of the 85 faculty members currently on staff, 40 have been hired within the past three years. It is that “new faculty,” three years or fewer, that compelled college leaders to design and host this orientation.

The orientation was held off-campus at a bowling alley to provide seclusion and help participants avoid the temptation to go to their offices, answer e-mail messages, or return phone calls during the breaks. What a novel idea that we should stand around and talk with one another instead of rushing off to do chores! The risk, however, was that we would feel these orientation activities to be a waste of time with all of the work that accompanies getting ready for a new semester hanging over our heads. If that was the feeling, it never was expressed nor manifested during the day’s events.

The day began with the usual introductions about who we were and how we came to be at Tomball College. But, an interesting twist was added to the activity—we had to include something about ourselves that would make others *remember who we were*. The responses were enlightening and humorous. There was the government teacher who had taught in China, where a student had written about him that he was “short, fat, and handsome.” There was the math teacher who had held numerous high school records for diving, only to have them broken by Laura Wilkinson, an Olympic gold medallist. There was the English teacher who had

graduated from Tomball College in 1988; needless to say, she was immediately recruited for membership in the Alumni Club. Each of us who participated would remember the unique qualities that we shared with one another.

Other activities included listing things *we wish we had known* before coming to Tomball. These lists included such items as more classroom management skills, more developmental education strategies, and what to expect from the students. All were recorded and filed away for planning future in-services meetings scheduled during the upcoming semesters; it was clear that these needs should be addressed when more time could be devoted to focused, in-depth discussions. The plan would be to have the more experienced faculty participate in the in-services, to organize and lead the effort. What could serve the students better than to have the faculty join together from all disciplines and seniority levels to address the issues of focusing their energies into student success?

The lunch break, once again with a captive audience, was conducive to faculty bonding, sharing of ideas and experiences, and developing extraordinary camaraderie. In the afternoon session, faculty were divided into small groups, traveling from notepad to notepad, commenting on such issues as the first day of class, the syllabus, the disruptive student, group testing, and collaborative learning, among others. The creativity demonstrated in this exercise was astounding. We all were captivated by the ideas that we saw written on those notepads! The enthusiasm for the activity was contagious. Each group was responsible for summarizing the ideas that had been written on the various notepads. As we all agreed, it may have been the best part of the day. All of this information was recorded, summarized, and distributed to the participants within days of the orientation.

This full day was productive and enjoyable for all, according to the results of an evaluation survey distributed several days later. Moreover, feedback from participants would be used to improve the new faculty orientation to be held next year.

A final word should be added about using a bowling alley as a retreat site. The alley was a convenient



meeting place and adequately designed for the orientation activities we had planned. But we found it was an especially good choice because it provided a terrific way to end the day—we held a spirited bowling contest that drew in all of the orientation participants. To even the playing field, each bowling frame had some very interesting and especially challenging requirements, such as ball between the legs, backwards bowling, eyes closed, and other unusual bowling techniques that participants elected to demonstrate. While all of the participants reported having a grand time, we knew that the true value of these orientation activities would be recognized during the weeks and months ahead, as new faculty would meet others in the hallways and classrooms, sharing ideas and laughs with their newfound colleagues.

An interesting sideline to the new faculty gathering was that when word got out about the orientation, the returning, experienced faculty called for an off-site retreat of their own—they said that they wanted “rejuvenation time.” We honored the request, and a similar day was immediately planned just prior to the beginning of the spring semester.

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