



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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GETTING THEM EXCITED THE FIRST DAY

“Get them so excited the first day that they can’t wait to come back for the second” is our motto at Confederation College! Rather than bringing students in the first day of class to tell them about the textbook, when their tests are scheduled, and what we will cover in the course, faculty spend a day hosting an orientation that will help students become better connected with the college and each other.

Our Mission

To better accomplish the college mission of providing excellent, accessible, learner-centered education, we have:

- prepared a collegewide extended student orientation plan
- created a Student Success Team
- implemented a broad range of integrated student services that reflect the diversity of our learners’ needs.

Confederation College has a strong student union body that traditionally has offered great social events to new and returning students, but the college has decided to be and do more. A collegewide Student Success Committee was created to look at what we were doing to help students connect with their programs, the faculty, and each other. Committee members included students, student leaders, faculty members, administrators, and representatives from the local school boards.

We identified the best practices currently being implemented in selected programs. Focus groups, organized and led by some of the college’s marketing students, met to discuss and describe the ideal environment for student success. Students participating in the focus groups were asked about what they would like to gain from an orientation; 50% responded that they were interested especially in establishing “a bond with classmates.”

We learned that students were particularly anxious on the first day of class. Some of the most common

questions they asked of themselves on that first day included :

- Do I know anyone who is sitting next to me?
- Who is teaching me—what is she/he like?
- Do I have what it takes to be successful in this class?
- Am I going to fit in?
- Am I going to develop good friendships?

Working toward identifying appropriate responses to these questions, we created a Student Motivation Program, with these objectives in mind:

- Establish a strong student/program relationship. A faculty panel would conduct a “meet and greet” exercise to help students connect with their professors and come to understand better why each of the courses they would take is important in the program.
- Introduce students to career opportunities. Students would meet graduates and employers to identify the opportunities and demands of their career choice.
- Connect students with each other and with their faculty. We would schedule various social events—e.g., a welcome BBQ—where students could mingle with first-year and senior students, faculty, support staff, and administrators. Food and beverage would be provided to make the social event even more inviting and informal.
- Assist students in becoming aware of the location and services available to them. The Student Union would produce a video using student representatives to “show and tell” learners about what was available to them.
- Obtain feedback from students about their first impressions. Each program would collect feedback regarding students’ impressions and suggestions that could be used to improve programs, environments, and the like.

Implementing a Student Success Initiative

We began by inviting the coordinators of all programs to a session where they were introduced to the



idea of developing a motivation plan that would support students throughout the year. Best Practices currently being implemented in a number of programs were showcased and discussed. Everyone left the session with a sample plan, and each was asked to submit a plan before leaving for summer vacation. Their individual plans were to include activities, scheduled over the semester, that would accomplish the the Student Success Team's objectives.

When the faculty returned from summer vacations, they met to share and review their plans. It was decided that no regular classes would be held the first day of the semester. Rather, all college programs would begin by helping students make important connections within their new environment. Class discussions would shift from the more traditional overviews of course outlines and textbooks to discussions and exercises focusing on "how to be successful." Icebreakers and team-building exercises would be used to create a new atmosphere in the classroom. The faculty in one program area took the team-building activities outdoors and engaged learners in having fun while developing some new skills—e.g., students learned to juggle multiple objects, simultaneously learning the importance of successfully juggling the different aspects of their lives while going to college. In another program, faculty took group photos and later posted the pictures on bulletin boards around campus. Some faculty invited a number of their alumni to have lunch with the students and talk about their experiences after they graduated from Confederation College. In others, first-year students met with second- and third-year students. The idea was to get people talking, laughing, learning about their new environment, and feeling comfortable!

Some programs handed out booklets of information, including tips about how to survive college, take notes, prepare for exams, write reports and assignments, and study. Faculty spoke about the value of a college education. In one exercise, they asked students to calculate their potential lifetime earnings, comparing the potential earnings of a high school graduate and a college graduate in today's markets. This exercise generated some lively discussions and further convinced students that, indeed, they had made the right choice in enrolling in college.

Results

From our 2002 Student Satisfaction Survey, we learned:

- Ninety-four percent of students surveyed said YES, our college staff were friendly and welcoming! This was an increase of 11% over the previous year.

- Ninety percent said they felt that they had made the RIGHT CHOICE, up 8% over the previous year.
- Ninety-two percent believed they would complete their program successfully, up 19% over previous years.

Among other comments, our learners shared these thoughts about their first-day sessions:

- "I definitely feel more at ease with my choice."
- "I liked listening to graduates and learning about what's been happening to them."
- "We got to know our teachers on a more personal level."
- "Comfortable atmosphere, free food, and I learned to juggle!"
- "I got to know people!"
- "I am excited about my program!"
- "I look forward to this semester—it sounds like a fun, yet challenging (in a good way), program."
- "I like the atmosphere of friendliness."

From our learners' enthusiastic responses, we learned about some adjustments we needed to make for 2003. We believe that we are on to something that is working! Our learners now begin their college experience feeling confident that they have made the right choice and excited about the semester!

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Correction: *Innovation Abstracts*, Vol. XXV, No. 28, "An Introduction to the Library," inadvertently identified only one of the four authors, Lynda Dodgen, Professor, Sociology, North Harris College (TX). Please note that Adrian Rapp, Professor, Sociology, North Harris College; Olia Palmer, Reference Librarian, Associate Professor, North Harris College; and Sarah Naper, Business Reference Librarian, University of Northern Colorado, were omitted from the authors' list and information byline. We urge NISOD readers to add the additional authors to the issue currently in your files, and we extend apologies to all of the authors for this regrettable oversight.