

from an empty lot to a finished landscape, knowing they are enhancing a homeowner's and the community's environment. Finally, this specific approach also provides a teaching environment for students in which they can convey horticultural information and the importance of landscaping to the HFH homeowner.

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Developing and Teaching an Orientation Course for Students at a Technical College

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Abstract

First-year orientation courses can be very effective at helping students succeed. However, orientation courses should be adapted to meet the needs of the student population served. This article discusses journal writing, student facilitator teams, and other learning activities used in an orientation course for students enrolled in an Associate of Applied Science degree program at a technical college.

Introduction

Many universities and colleges have established first-year orientation courses to help students achieve success at college and in their professional lives (Tinto, 1993; Noel et al., 1985). The effectiveness of these courses in promoting student success and improving retention at colleges has been well-documented in several recent studies (Fidler and Moore, 1996; Hoff et al., 1996; Glass and Garrett, 1995; Barefoot, 1993; Stumpf and Hunt, 1993; Davis, 1992; Fidler, 1991).

Barefoot and Fidler (1996) have published information about orientation courses offered at colleges across the nation including types, descriptions, structure, and content. The National Resource Center for the Freshman Experience at the University of South Carolina maintains a Website ([\[/yc.sc.edu\]\(http://yc.sc.edu\)\) which provides considerable information about orientation courses including syllabi for several courses offered at selected colleges. A number of texts written specifically for orientation courses are available including those by Gardner and Jewler \(1998\) and Ellis \(1997\).](http://</p></div><div data-bbox=)

The orientation courses and texts cited in the previous paragraph are directed primarily toward students enrolled at colleges which offer curricula with a strong liberal arts component. However, it is well-documented that the personality types, learning styles, and interests of students who enroll in two-year or four-year technology-oriented programs differ substantially from those of the general college population (Zimmerman et al., 1994; Barrett et al., 1987; Myers and McCaulley, 1985).

I am a faculty member at the Agricultural Technical Institute (ATI), a small (800+) two-year technical college which is a school in the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. ATI attracts students who are primarily interested in and motivated by course work and learning activities that emphasize applications and are career-related. The campus is open-admission and many of the students are required to enroll in developmental reading, writing, and/or mathematics courses based on placement tests.

Several years ago, a required orientation course entitled *Personal and Career Orientation* was established at ATI for all entering students who enroll in Associate of

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Applied Science degree programs. *Personal and Career Orientation* is a one credit-hour course which meets twice weekly during the first five weeks of the Autumn Quarter. Multiple sections of the course meet concurrently. Each section is composed of about 25 students (assigned by the scheduling computer) and a faculty "facilitator." Common syllabi and course materials are available. However, facilitators are free to modify their sections of the course.

I have voluntarily taught one the sections of orientation annually since the course was established in 1992. One of my greatest challenges in being a facilitator has been developing effective student-centered activities given the characteristics of the student population. Based on my experience in working with students in the course and their feedback via oral and written comments, I have learned that many of the orientation activities developed for general college audiences often are not effective. Therefore, the topics covered in my course are similar to those in more traditional orientation courses, but the learning activities and materials have been modified. Major changes that I have made are discussed in the following section and include: emphasis on journal writing, total commitment to small-group discussion-based format, student facilitator teams, application-oriented classroom exercises, and an individual journal-based conference at the end of the course. The syllabus for the course is shown in Figure 1.

Learning Activities

Journals and Journal Writing

Journal writing assignments are often included in orientation courses. However, I have made orientation a journal-based course and journal writing is the major component of the course grade. Records of high school performance and results of placement tests indicate that many of the students who enroll at ATI do not have strong writing skills. Therefore, I emphasize journal writing in the course because it provides an excellent opportunity for students to practice writing and to get into the habit of writing. Journal writing also enables students to explore and express their thoughts and concerns during this important period of transition and change in their lives.

Students are required to make both in-class entries on assigned topics and out-of-class entries on assigned and self-selected topics. Topics for the assigned entries are shown in the course syllabus (Figure 1) and are oriented to the interests and characteristics of the student population. Journal entries are sometimes used to stimulate students' thinking about a topic prior to its introduction in class. At other times, students are asked to make journal entries after a topic is discussed in class. This give them the opportunity to reflect on and further explore the concepts and ideas presented. The emphasis on journal writing dictates that students will take a major, active, and individual role in the

learning process. The journal writing assignments are also an excellent way to help students self-achieve course objectives.

At the conclusion of most class meetings, I ask students to turn in one journal entry of their choice. I then read the collected journal entries, handwrite a dialogic-oriented response on each, and return them to the students at the next class meeting. At the end of the course, I collect and evaluate the journals based on qualitative and quantitative criteria. The journals are returned to the students during an individual conference in my office.

Small-Group, Discussion-Based Format

I have observed that many of the students in my orientation class are hesitant about actively participating in class discussions. In order to create a more comfortable and supportive environment for individual participation in the course, I have changed the classroom procedure to one in which all activities are first conducted in small-group settings.

Students are assigned to groups of three or four at the start of each class session. The groups work as a unit during the entire class period, completing exercises based on handouts and then reporting to other members of the class. The only formal classroom rule is that private conversations are not allowed when someone has the floor during those parts of the activities involving the class as a whole.

The small-group discussion-based format enables students to get to know each other on a personal basis and creates an informal and student-oriented environment. It makes use of cooperative learning and gives students valuable experience in participating as a member of a group. Assigning the initial responsibility of working on classroom activities to small groups enables students who would normally not enter into a general classroom discussion to contribute immediately. Knowing that their groups will have to report to the class as a whole encourages students to work together and purposely on the exercises.

Student Facilitator Teams

Student facilitator teams are used in the orientation course as another means to make class sessions more student-centered. All students are assigned to a facilitator team at the first class meeting and each team helps plan and then conducts one of the class sessions.

The facilitator teams meet with me prior to "their" class to discuss the scheduled activities. They then meet on their own to plan the class session in more detail and decide on each individual's responsibilities. During class sessions, the facilitator teams control and direct the activities. I am present to assist the teams as needed and to coordinate other aspects of course operation. Team members are required to provide a brief written report following their class session.

The facilitator teams make students more active

participants in the course. The teams also give these beginning students valuable experience in a number of skill areas that are topics in the orientation course.

Application-Oriented Class Activities

I have developed most of the activities and the associated handouts that are used in the course. Given the personality types, learning styles, and interests of the students, I have found that class exercises and written material need to be straight-forward, concise, and application-oriented. I also limit both the number of topics covered and the amount of material presented on each topic.

Activities that have been added to the course in recent years include: the reading of a Dr. Seuss story as part of the diversity session, a critical thinking exercise at the beginning of each class, facilitator team reports, an upperclass student/faculty panel, an instructor interview/e-mail assignment, a dialog-oriented MBTI presentation, and a career-related exercise. Practical applications of all topics in the course to the personal and professional lives of the students are constantly stressed.

An Individual Journal-Based Conference at the End of the Course

As mentioned in the discussion of the journal, at the end of the course I collect, read, and evaluate the student journals. As I read through the journal entries, I gain considerable insight and knowledge about the composite individual lives of the students. I make note of important and interesting information that I glean from the journal content.

When students come to my office for their scheduled conferences, I share with them the overall evaluation of the journal. I then engage in a two-way dialogue based on my notes of their journal content. These dialogues have turned out to be one of the most important and rewarding components of the orientation course. Students appreciate and respond to the interest shown in their lives and experiences.

Conclusion

Numerous studies have shown that orientation courses can be very effective in helping students succeed in college. However, when developing and teaching an orientation course for students enrolled in a technical college, it is important to consider the characteristics of the student population. Modifications in the learning activities should be made based on the personality types, learning styles, interests, and academic backgrounds of the students.

I have found that self-directed and applied learning activities are an effective approach to presenting the content of the orientation course. Journal writing, student facilitator teams, small-group discussion-based format, and application-oriented classroom activities provide excellent opportunities for such student-centered learning.

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Figure 1. Orientation Course Syllabus

GENERAL STUDIES T201 - Mr. Zimmerman's Section

COURSE ORGANIZATION

Personal and Career Orientation
Class Days/Hour: W & F 1:00 (5 wks, 1 credit hour)
Instructor: Allen Zimmerman
Office: 144H Halterman
Phone: 262-3911-1263
E-mail: zimmerman.7@osu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

This orientation course provides an opportunity for students to learn about and adopt techniques that will help them achieve success in college, employment, and life. Topics include diversity, learning styles and study skills, campus support resources, and skills required for success in achieving personal and career goals.

Education is a lifelong endeavor and the overall purpose of this course is to help students learn and grow both in the current academic environment and throughout their lives.

Personal and Career Orientation is based on cooperative learning. Students will work in groups, share ideas, discuss issues, and evaluate responses. The instructor will function primarily as a facilitator.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- * Understand the meaning and importance of diversity, individual differences, and human dignity.
- * Evaluate personal learning styles and use appropriate study skills.
- * List and describe the various campus support resources.
- * Evaluate and apply the skills necessary to be successful in college, employment, and life.
- * Demonstrate improved proficiency in:
 - * Critical thinking skills
 - * Communication skills
 - * Interpersonal relations
 - * Group processes and teamwork
 - * Leadership
- * Accept responsibility for their own success in college.

MATERIALS

T201 Course Packet by Allen Zimmerman
MBTI Booklet (Introduction to Type In College)
OSU-ATI Bulletin
OSU-ATI Student Handbook
Journal Binder and Paper

GRADING SYSTEM

Straight Scale - 90/80/70/60 (+ and - assigned as appropriate)
Journal - 70%
Class Participation - 20%
Library Worksheet - 5%
Course/Curriculum Worksheet - 5%

Because this course is based primarily on activities held during class sessions, attendance and active participation at all classes is **required** (make-up written assignments will be assigned for excused absences). **Students with one unexcused absence will have their final grade lowered one letter. Students with more than one unexcused absence will automatically be awarded an E (failure) for the course.** In order to successfully complete the course, students must attend the final individual conference.

Each student will serve as a member of a student facilitator team. Team members will meet with the instructor (or invited resource personnel) prior to the class for which they are responsible and help plan class activities. Team members will then serve as facilitators during the class meeting.

COURSE SCHEDULE

9/23 - Class 1 - Topic: Course Introduction

- * Brief introduction - instructor and course
- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Introductions of students by others in their group
- * Syllabus - course information and procedures
- * Classroom protocol, diversity, and individual differences
- * Journal handout and discussion
- * Journal entry - My Feelings About This First Week of College
- * Student facilitator teams
- * Journal assignment - Autobiography

9/25 - Class 2 - Topic: Stress and Time Management

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal entry - Techniques I Use to Properly Manage My Time
- * Handouts and activities
- * Journal entry - How I Cope With Stress
- * Journal and e-mail assignment - "Get Acquainted" Advisor Interview

9/30 - Class 3 - Topic: Expectations of Students and Instructors

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal entry - My Greatest Frustration at College to Date and How I Plan to Deal With It
- * Expectations - Student and Faculty Panel Discussion
- * Journal assignment - What My Class Policies and Grading Procedures Would Be If I Were a College Instructor

10/2 - Class 4 - Topic: Personality Types and the MBTI

- * Divide into small groups
- * Journal entry - My Personality Characteristics and Traits
- * MBTI booklet, handouts, and activities
- * Journal assignment - How I Can Apply the MBTI Results Concerning Diversity and Individual Differences to My Life

10/7 - Class 5 - Topic: Academic Issues and Campus Resources

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal Entry - Comparison of High School Versus College
- * Bulletin, Student Handbook, and activities
- * GPA worksheet, Course/Curriculum worksheet and assignment
- * Journal assignment - How I Feel About Grades

10/9 - Class 6 - Topic: Study Habits and Skills; Self-Destructive Behavior

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal entry - How I Currently Study and Prepare for Classes
- * Handouts and activities
- * Journal entry - How I Am Going to Improve My Study Habits and Skills
- * Journal assignment - My Current Thoughts and Feelings About College

10/14 - Class 7 - Topic: Library Orientation

- * Students are to meet in the library with the library personnel
- * Library assignment provided and graded by library personnel
- * Journal assignment - How I Plan To Make Use of the Library Resources

10/16 - Class 8 - Topic: Diversity and Human Dignity

- * Divide into groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Read aloud "The Sneetches" by Dr. Seuss, stop before the ending
- * Journal entry - My Ending To "The Sneetches" Story
- * Handouts, Student Handbook, and activities
- * Journal assignment - My Thoughts and Feelings About Diversity and Human Dignity

10/21 - Class 9 - Topic: Leadership Styles

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal entry - My Leadership Experiences and the Qualities of a Good Leader
- * Handouts and activities
- * Journal entry - A List of People I Know in Leadership Positions and Their Leadership Characteristics
- * Journal assignment - My Personal Leadership Style

10/23 - Class 10 - Topic: Goal Setting and Career Opportunities

- * Divide into small groups, critical thinking worksheet
- * Journal entry - My Employment Strengths and Areas Where I Might Need Improvement
- * Handouts, Internship form, and activities
- * Journal Assignment - My Short and Long Term Goals in Life
- * Schedule individual conference for discussion and return of journal
- * Assignment - Complete and turn in journal

Reminder: A minimum of two out-of-class journal entries on self-selected topics are required each week in addition to classroom entries and those assigned as homework.

Montana Legislators' Knowledge and Perception of Agriculture

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Abstract

This study assessed the level of agricultural knowledge and perceptions of elected officials who served in Montana's 54th legislative session in 1995 as members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate.

Of the 150 survey instruments mailed out to both chambers, 90 usable surveys were sent back for a 60% return rate. Data were collected in three sections: (1) agricultural knowledge true/false statements, (2) agriculture perception statements, and (3) demographic information of legislators.

Data collected from respondents cannot be statistically generalized to the entire population of the 54th Session of the Montana Legislature. However, the findings may have practical implications for College of Agriculture faculty since they indicated a need for better education for the general public about agriculture and agricultural issues. Support and encouragement must be provided to agencies of agricultural education in the future as they strive to maintain or increase public agricultural literacy.

Introduction

During the 20th century this country was transformed from an agrarian society into one in which over 97% of all employed persons do not produce their own food. Rather, they are free to manufacture other products or provide services which are characteristic of highly industrialized nations (Nipp, 1988). This transformation has contributed to the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by most U.S. citizens. Although this country's dependence on an inexpensive, abundant, and safe supply of food and

agricultural products has not diminished, the production of agricultural products has become concentrated in the hands of progressively fewer producers.

Coinciding with the decline of employment in production agriculture there has been a diminished representation of broad agricultural interests in Congress and many state legislatures. Mayer and Mayer (1974) reported that:

. . . only government officials identified with an agrarian interest wish to serve on the Agriculture committee and subcommittees. This self-selection has tended to support large-scale government programs intended to support narrow classes of producers with little regard for end users or even an overall production policy. (p. 91)

Most state and national legislative representatives have been elected from non-agricultural districts and few have any direct relationship with agriculture. The number of politicians who analyze agriculture questions and issues from the perspective of a consumer, rather than a producer, is increasing (Nipp, 1988). This shift has and will continue to impact the development of agricultural policies in this country. The change in focus from production-oriented food and agricultural policies to consumer-oriented policies has the potential to dramatically affect the stability and reliability of the food production and distribution system in this country.

Although direct involvement in production agriculture has declined, increasing numbers of citizens in this country have become more vocal about issues related to agriculture, food, and natural resources. Public response to

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