



Advancing Orientation: A Seminar-Based Approach to Community Development

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Bard College Profile

- Founded in 1860
- Highly Selective Small Liberal Arts
- 1900 Students
- 500 First Year-Students from 36 states + 40 Countries
- Rural New York
- 24 First-Year Residence Halls with
31 Peer Counselors (PC)

Language and Thinking Program

- An intensive introduction to the liberal arts and sciences that fosters robust interdisciplinary study, innovative pedagogy, and writing across a wide range of genres.
- The L&T program is attended by all first-year students in the last three weeks of August and successful completion is required to matriculate into the College.

The Academic Program

- Begins 36 hours after students arrive
- In class all day with required evening programs and homework Monday-Friday
- Friday nights & Saturday are free to do programming
- Sunday is reserved for academic meetings and homework

Why did we do this?

- Previous models were unsuccessful
- Time constraints
- Creating a common language
- Intentional connection with staff and resources
- Begin progress toward four-year co-curricular learning outcomes

Learning Outcomes

1. Conscientious Members of the Community and Society
2. Creative Problem Solvers
3. Intentional and Considerate Communicators
4. Pride in Institution and Self
5. Learn skills of self-care regarding Health & Wellness
6. Understand Campus Policies and Procedures

Our Solution

- One-day, seminar style approach to orientation
- Co-facilitated by student services staff and peer counselors
- Sections determined by residence hall/floor
- Flexible curriculum tailored by facilitators to meet unique needs of communities.

Course Design

- Contains three focus areas:
 - Classroom Community
 - Residential Community
 - Campus Community
- Each section has sub-sections, including:
 - Discussion topics
 - Group activities
 - Individual activities
 - Suggested readings

Classroom Community

■ *Objectives*

- Help students gain an understanding of the differences between college and high school classroom experiences as well as understand seminar style learning.
- Help students understand that there are a lot of learning styles used during the Language and Thinking course.
- To engage the group in a conversation about classroom power dynamics while helping students understand who to talk to when something goes wrong.
- Give students the resources to know where to go to for academic support.

Classroom Community

■ *Sections*

- Collegiate classroom expectations
- Power dynamics
- Studying in college
- Sustainability in material resources

Residential Community

■ *Objectives*

- Begin understanding of how to cultivate community
- Learn self-advocacy
- Learn problem-solving within the residential space
- Awareness of the cause/effect relationship with behaviors in the residence halls

Residential Community

■ *Sections*

- Cultivating community
- Conflict management & mediation

Campus Community

■ *Objectives*

- Know and understand campus resources
- Know (some) institutional history
- Awareness of individual impact on the greater campus community
- Awareness of opportunity to make an impact
- Basic understanding of alcohol and drugs and their effect on your body

Campus Community

■ *Sections*

- Campus Climate
- Campus Resources
- Alcohol and Drug Policies and Expectations
- Bard History

How did we do this?

- Staff support, buy-in and volunteers
- Space (air conditioning!)
- Materials (BYO!)
- Professional and para-professional staff pairings
- Developed brief training for facilitators

Departments Participating

- Counseling Center
- Health Center
- TLS Program
- Student Activities
- Residence Life
- Dean of Studies
- Buildings & Grounds
- Director of Libraries
- Multicultural Affairs
- Admissions
- Opportunity Programs
- Dean of Student Affairs Office
- Registrar's Office

Logistics: What did we learn?

- Timing! Too early in the day and not enough!
- Weather is not always our friend
- Snacks are important
- You should not have your entire emergency on-call staff facilitating

Pedagogy: What did we learn?

- Groups that collaborated reported increase response and engagement from students
- Groups that utilized activities reported increased engagement and retention
- Tangible representations for future reference
- Retention of information vs. source of information
- Increased sense of connection and accountability to peers

Pedagogy: What did we learn?

- Increased involvement in planning led to greater Peer Counselor agency and leadership in building
- Peer Counselors felt more supported by staff
- Staff report that format provided good foundation for future interactions
- Easier to adapt for transfer students than previous orientation formats

Changes for Next Year

- Continuing assessment!
- Reconsidering which objectives are most essential for THIS course
- Continue to acknowledge and incorporate diverse learning styles
- More training for diversity and alcohol/drug conversations
- More money for follow-up activities with groups

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