Refining Your Learning Skills
A Second Chance for Academically Dismissed Students

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Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada
Agenda

- About Dalhousie University
- Context for Program
- Refining Your Learning Skills
  - Q & A
- Student-Identified Problems & Strategies
- Program Effectiveness
  - Q & A
- Design Elements
- Key Success Factors
- Student Voices
  - Q & A
- Summary
Dalhousie University
Dalhousie University

- Comprehensive, publicly-funded research-intensive university
- 18,500 students; 14% International; 55% F
- 180+ degrees, 12 Faculties
- Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Engineering, Architecture, etc.
- 1,100 professors; 1,121 acres of campus

First to second year retention rate of 84%

Goal:
- 90% retention rate by 2018 to be U15 competitive
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Context

- Too many Engineering students were not making a successful transition from high school to first-year university
- Too many first-year students were dismissed
- Too many did not return for second year
- Visa implications for International students
  - Led to development of academic recovery program

- 2010  Faculty of Engineering, 14 students
- 2012  Management & Commerce
- 2014  Arts & Social Sciences, Computer Science
- 2015  EXPANSION
Refining Your Learning Skills

Description

- 10 morning non-credit summer program
- 265 students since Summer 2010
- 80% or 212 passed; 212 returned
- Cohort by discipline (20 – 24 students)
- 30 hrs classroom plus daily assignments
- Practical, experiential, reflective
- Academically dismissed/probationary students
- 80% or B– required to pass
- Considered in appeal for readmission
- $795
Topics

1. Thoughts & Feelings
2. Time Management
3. Learning from Lectures & Note Taking
4. Coping Strategies
5. Goal Setting & Academic Integrity
6. Procrastination & Alternative Thinking Strategies
7. Learning Styles
8. Assertive Communication & Exam Anxiety
9. Exam Preparation & Survival Tips
10. The Future
Problems Identified by Students

- Technology Addiction
- Lack of sleep; sleep problems
- Can’t say “no” to friends
- Too much socializing
- No schedule
- No “to do” list
- Low expectations
- Lack of persistence
- Lack of motivation & commitment
Student-Generated Coping Strategies

- Give parents access to bank account so they can monitor when I visit liquor store.
- Don’t post photos to Facebook. Turn off FB.
- Share schedule with parents and friends.
- Print off assignments; go to library; leave computer at home; set limiter on computer.
- Keep motivational pics and lists on bathroom mirror.
- Dream about my future & the life I want to live.
Dreamboard

I Feel Good about These Changes:
1. Doing assignments before I hangout with friends
2. Getting to class early
3. Taking responsibility

Working On:
1. Being positive
2. Stay on task
3. Give advice

Time Waster's Hints:
- Keep a to-do list
- Reward yourself at the end of your study sessions
- Plan on your day
- Take short breaks
- Clip away at each assignment
- Leave the house if you are getting bored
- Read yourself into doing more quizzes when you feel like taking a break
- Set up an automatic response on your phone for messages
- Limit use of Facebook but not one day, maybe only half as less every day

Goals:
- Graduate
- Get a job in Australia
- Travel to South East Asia
Effectiveness

Management/Commerce Students
15% of those dismissed never return
For the 85% who return...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Returned to Good Standing</th>
<th>Probation</th>
<th>Dismissed</th>
<th>GPA Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed and readmitted after <strong>Refining</strong> (n=21)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>+1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed and readmitted without Refining (n=28)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>+.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissed and readmitted after sitting out a year (n=10)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Effectiveness

### Engineering Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good Standing</th>
<th>Probation, etc.</th>
<th>Dismissed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Engineer Students’ Performance Relative to Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>% of students</th>
<th>Good Standing</th>
<th>Probation Etc.</th>
<th>Dismissed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 – 100</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–89</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–79</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–69</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Design & Improvement Process

- Input from Faculty advisors, academic advisors, instructors, and students
- Pre and post instructional staff meetings
- Ongoing research and improvement
- Daily student reflection/feedback
- End of course student feedback
- Follow up with students
- Follow up with Faculty advisors
Key Success Factors

- Students are “ready”
- Timing avoids competing with other courses
- Structured to support success and change
  - No phones, laptops, tablets
  - 9:00 am start
  - Tough love
  - Assignments due every day 9:00 am
- Combination of Head, Heart, Hands
- Psychologists, advisors, faculty as instructors
Key Success Factors

- Face-to-face honest sharing with peers and instructors
- Holistic approach
- Daily reflective & practical assignments
- Daily feedback
- Caring, committed instructional team
- Conditional readmission
  - Reduced workload
  - Meetings with advisors
  - Intrusive advising
I fought tooth and nail to get out of taking this course. On the first day, I was angry and just put my head down and wanted to get out of here. On the second day, I realized that I was going to learn a lot here. I started looking at myself, my sleep patterns, time management, not taking anything seriously, doing assignments in one hour when I should have been putting in four. I have been to the library for the first time—it’s an amazing facility! I’m saying “no” to friends and turning off my phone.

Man, this course is the best thing that ever happened to me.

Matthew
I didn’t think this course would benefit me in any way. I was totally wrong. It was a life-changing decision to come to this course. I used to be lazy, but I’ve changed.

Gillian
I never experienced failure before. I’ve been privileged. Then I got dismissed. I was crying in the secretary’s office.

But now I know that no one can have a successful life without facing failure. This course has helped me move on feeling stronger.

Justin
Summary

Nothing succeeds like success.