

# Academic Opportunity Program (AOP): A “Triple Punch” 1<sup>st</sup> Year Experience Course

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### Logistics

The students that come into college with weak academic background and possible limited exposure to the college bound track from high school; bring a challenge to the teachers who first start working with them. Our goal at Liberty is to identify the most at-risk students ahead of time and offer a program that can provide a bit of a safety net the first semester. If a student is accepted, due to Liberty’s varied criteria, our Registrar’s office has an ‘in house’ flagging system called Academic Caution to identify students that need a 1 credit mentoring course for support. Academic Caution students that also qualify for a foundational English course (ENGL 100) are then considered for the Academic Opportunity Program (AOP) which is the 3 credit MENT 100 course. These two mentoring courses are administered through our Bruckner Learning Center.

The logistics of the program is that we establish set schedules ahead of time comprised of our basic freshman classes; a one credit ethics course, a 3 credit Bible course, a 3 credit foundational English course, our 3 credit mentoring course, and one 3 credit course that fits into their major study. These students will be in a small-sized class for mentoring and English but in the large classes 200+ for the Bible and ethics course. After students have been accepted into college, we contact the student and parents and go through our advertisement of the program. Many choose this AOP program for the community connection piece, as well as the fact that the topics support success. Others choose it due to the personal attention the student will receive in a small class setting. Each course counts toward graduation, however, the foundational, English and mentoring course will only count as electives.

This course is not for everyone, but seems to have served our needs for this population.

### Curriculum

Our curriculum is designed as a “Triple Punch” pedagogical approach addressing affective, cognitive and social domains. Affective areas like self-awareness, self-management, and self-efficacy are covered through learning preferences, spiritual reflection, goal setting, time management, stress/health management, and motivation/mindset. Cognitive skills such as memory techniques, test taking strategies, notetaking forms, and reading comprehension are not only introduced but actually applied in practice in the classroom. Social needs are addressed in several ways. The actual reason for the same classes scheduled is to build immediate community and accountability partners. A three-tier approach toward campus connectivity is that we bring leaders of other departments into our class to present how they can be a resource. (Registrar’s office, Student Affairs Office, Career Center, Advising Center). Students are even advised through this course about next semester’s classes. We also take group tours of the Library and its many resources. We navigate together the many aspects of our LU website; Blackboard, Discussion Board, Assist, Tutoring, and Outlook.

We have a three-layered approach toward disseminating knowledge in the classroom. Monday is lesson based and permits room for class discussion. On Wednesdays, half the class meet in a small group for discussion while the other half use our in-class computers. This in-class complimentary computer program is giving opportunity to build communication skills and apply knowledge gained. Then on Friday, the two groups switch tasks. This daily change adds freshness to the curriculum and meets the many learning preferences of this population.

### Evidence

Our goal is to foster college success; seeing students in good academic standing with strong GPAs. This three tier approach of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of students in the AOP program has demonstrated results as we build the program. We have collected data for three years of first semester terms (Fall). Our best results were in Fall 14. We had 434 students on Academic Caution (AC); only 57 of them were in the AOP program. Of the 57 AOP students



only 2 ended the semester on Academic Warning. Of the 377 student on AC (without AOP) there were 64 students on Academic Warning. That calculates as 3.51% for AOP and 17% for AC (without AOP). The average GPA for AOP students was 2.49 and the average GPA for AC (without AOP) was 2.29. Needless to say we need to look at the different variables across the three years to determine what led one year to be more successful than another. It could be that one group had more challenges to overcome than another (lower high school gpa, lower SAT/ACT scores). There was a change in leadership for setting up the classes after F13. The students were pulled from early on in the admission process for F14, whereas the previous year and subsequent years we focused on those that applied late thinking they may have certain character traits harder to overcome. We also had two teachers teaching in the Fall 14 semester and so a varied presentational approach and/or more energy to give to individual students on the teachers' behalf may have also influenced the results. The uncontrolled fifth class, class from each students' major, could impact success also (i.e. nursing major). There are varied professors from these selected class schedules that could also influence results.

F13				F14				F15			
Total # AOP	52		[AOP only]	Total # AOP	57		[AOP only]	Total # AOP	39		[AOP only]
# on AW	10	18.5%	[AOP only]	# on AW	2	3.51%	[AOP only]	# on AW	4	10.26%	[AOP only]
Average GPA	2.25		[AOP only]	Average GPA	2.49		[AOP only]	Average GPA	2.59		[AOP only]
Total AC	379	327	[Total without AOP]	Total AC	434	377	[Total without AOP]	Total AC	249	210	[Total without AOP]
# on AW	53	16.21%	[% without AOP]	# on AW	64	17%	[% without AOP]	# on AW	20	10%	[% without AOP]
Average GPA	2.26	[Adjusted with AOP removed]		Average GPA	2.29	[Adjusted with AOP removed]		Average GPA	2.47	[Adjusted with AOP removed]	

**Summary:**

As seen from the three years of fall data, the AOP program has helped students not only adjust to the college environment, build relationships, and learn how to study, but has also brought up the overall GPA average. This means students start the following semester in good standing; which gives them confidence. Liberty's goal is to assist the most at-risk students with this 3 credit mentoring class early, so that retention does not become a problem due to academics. Good news for the Bruckner Learning Center that sponsors these one credit and three credit mentoring courses, is that our total number of students ending up on Academic Warning (AW) has also gone down across the board. This leads us to think that offering a supportive mentoring course for students that are accepted on Academic Caution (AC) has proven to be a necessity. Realizing that many different variables play a role in student success, we believe at Liberty, we are being proactive in the areas we can influence.