

The International First-Year Experience:
Universal Themes, National Variations

22nd International Conference on the First-Year Experience

July 21st, 2009

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Focal Points for First-Year Experience Programming in American Higher Education

1. Summer Transition/Bridge Programs
2. New-Student Orientation
3. Classroom Teaching and Learning
4. Academic Advisement
5. The Curriculum
6. Academic Support Services
7. The Co-Curriculum (Student Support Services)
8. Programming Designed to Promote Student-Faculty Contact Outside the Classroom
9. Assessment

SUMMER TRANSITION PROGRAMS

- * Summer Advising, Registration, Orientation
- * Summer Bridge: special *high school-to-college transitional support* provided for *academically at-risk* students *before* they encounter a full load of college courses

NEW-STUDENT ORIENTATION

Including:

- * Orientation for *parents* and *family* members
- * *Convocation* or formal *induction ceremony*

CLASSROOM TEACHING AND LEARNING

- * Lowering *average class size* of important, *academic skill-development* courses commonly taken by first-year students and elementary mathematics
- * "*Front loading*" experienced and *effective* instructors to teach first-year courses
- * *Faculty* development:
 - apprising faculty of changing *characteristics and needs* of first-year students
 - promoting greater use engaging, student-centered pedagogy (e.g., active and collaborative learning).

ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT

- * Encouraging *developmental academic advising*—i.e., personalized advising that relates students' present academic experiences to their future life plans, and connects students with key campus-support professionals
- * Special academic advising support provided for *undecided* first-year students
- * Matching competent and commitment advisors with first-year students, particularly at-risk students
- * Advisor *orientation, training, and development* for advisors of first-year students.
- * *Recognizing and rewarding* high-quality academic advising

THE CURRICULUM

- * *First-year seminar* (Extended-orientation/Student-success course)
- * Ensuring *all* new students have at least one *common learning experience* during their first year of college (e.g., common reading).
- * First-year *learning communities* whereby groups of first-year students *co-register for the same block of courses* during the same academic term

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

- * *Basic skill assessment at college entry* to diagnose new students' academic preparedness and place them in courses *placement* commensurate with their entering level of skill development
- * *Early-warning* or *early-alert* system in place whereby first-term students receive feedback about their progress before midterm

- * *Peer tutoring*
- * *Supplemental instruction (SI)* available for “high-risk courses” (i.e., classes with historically high attrition rates and/or low grades)
- * *Mentoring* provided to first-year students by more faculty, staff, or more experienced and specially trained peers.
- * *Course-integrated library instruction* delivered in the context of first-year courses
- * Provision of special academic support services to meet the special needs of students with *learning disabilities and physical challenges*.

THE CO-CURRICULUM (STUDENT DEVELOPMENT SERVICES)

- * Offering *numerous and varied co-curricular opportunities*
- * Co-curricular opportunities *intrusively* delivered to students and *aggressive recruitment of* students to promote their participation
- * Sensitivity to first-year *commuter* students when designing and scheduling co-curricular opportunities.
- * *Incentives or recognition* provided to students for their co-curricular involvement, (e.g., *co-curricular or student development “transcript”*).
- * Establishing campus *rituals* designed to build *campus community* and increase *institutional identification* among first-year students.
- * *Service-learning (volunteer)* experiences *integrated into the first-year curriculum*
- * *Peer-support and peer-networking* programs in which more experienced *student paraprofessionals* (e.g., peer orientation-week leaders, peer mentors, peer counselors, peer residential advisors).
- * *Leadership* development programs available for first-year students.
- * First-year *residential programs* intentionally designed to create a “*living-learning*” environment.
- * Acknowledging first-year student achievement by means of an end-of-the-year awards *ceremony*

FACULTY-STUDENT CONTACT OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

- * Faculty-student *mentoring* programs
- * Faculty-student *research teams*
- * *Faculty-sponsored student clubs and organizations*
- * *Special incentives, recognition, and rewards* for faculty involvement with students outside the classroom.
- * Adaptation of freshman-year programming for first-year *transfer* students

ASSESSMENT

- * Gathering data from first-year students at *college entry* for subsequent *student tracking* and development of a *longitudinal* data base for *value-added (talent-development)* assessment.
- * Administering first-year student *satisfaction* surveys and/or conducting freshman focus groups.
- * Annual assessment of the *percentage* of first-year students that fail to return for their second year.
- * Differential assessment of the satisfaction and retention of different *student subpopulations* (e.g., commuters, ethnic and racial minorities)

NINE PRIME TIMES FOR DELIVERING

FIRST-YEAR INTERVENTION & RETENTION PROGRAMMING

PROACTIVE

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1. *Summer Transition/Summer Bridge Programs*
 2. *New-Student Orientation & Convocation*
 3. *Extended-Orientation Course (New-Student Seminar)(Student-Success Course)*
 4. *Early-Alert/Early-Warning System (e.g., absenteeism reports during first 4 wks.)*
 5. *Midterm-Grade Reports (e.g., at 7-8 weeks into the semester)*
 6. *“Red Flag” Procedures (e.g., failure to pre-register or renew financial aid)*
 7. *Exit Interviews/Surveys (administered during the process of withdrawal)*
 8. *Already-Withdrawn/Departed-Student Surveys (conducted after withdrawal)*
 9. *Re-Recruitment of Withdrawn Students: Converting “Dropouts” to “Stop-Outs”*

REACTIVE

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