

E-SOURCE 4.5

Peer Mentors Target Unique Populations; Increase Use of Campus Resources

The Center for Student Progress at Youngstown State University offers diverse programs, which pair adult students with adult peer mentors, residential students with residential peer mentors, and other students by major.

The Big Picture

A column by Joe Cuseo

Defining Student Success: The Critical First Step in Promoting It

Joe Cuseo discusses the first of three questions regarding student success: How should student success be defined or described?

Strategies for Treating Students Fairly in the Classroom

Authors discuss students' perception of justice in the classroom and suggest strategies for enhancing student satisfaction.

STOMP Acclimates New Students to the University of Louisville

University of Louisville uses an online program to deliver consistent and essential information to all its first-year students in an engaging and entertaining manner.

Making Study Abroad Accessible to ALL Students

Texas Woman's University uses innovative strategies to enable students with children, limited funds, permanent jobs, and other obligations to experience a two-week, faculty-led international experience in London.

CSU Northridge Transforms Its Approach to Information Competence

California State University, Northridge, collaborated with a first-year experience librarian to redesign its approach to information competence, making it more engaging and relevant for students.

Ceremony Introduces First-Year Students to Honor Code

The development of an honor code covering academic and social offenses prompted the creation of a new ceremony, A Call to Honor.

What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Peer Mentors Target Unique Populations; Increase Use of Campus Resources



CSP's 2006-2007 peer mentors. Courtesy Center for Student Progress, Youngstown State University.

Youngstown State University is an urban, open admissions institution with an enrollment of more than 13,000 students. According to a recent statewide report (Ohio Board of Regents, 2006), 56% of Youngstown State students are first-generation college students, and 26% are enrolled in developmental classes. The vast majority (90%) of students commute to campus, and more than one quarter (26%) are adults. At the same time, Youngstown State also has an honors program, many competitive academic majors, and is part of a consortium of medical programs offering a two-year baccalaureate degree and accelerated entrance into medical school. Helping such a varied group of entering students make the transition to college is a challenging task. Youngstown State is able to meet this challenge through a variety

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of programs and services, all of which work in collaboration with the University's Center for Student Progress (CSP) and which include matching incoming students with returning students who have similar characteristics.

CSP's mission is to ensure that students are integrated into social and academic communities and that they acquire the skills and knowledge needed to become successful learners.

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The Big Picture

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Defining Student Success: The Critical First Step in Promoting It

"First-year experience" and "student success" are terms found frequently married in higher education discourse. For example, first-year seminars are often referred to as student-success courses, and first-year experience (FYE) initiatives are intentionally designed to promote student success (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). The marriage of these two terms leads logically to the following trio of questions: (a) What constitutes student success (i.e., how should student success be defined or described)? (b) How do FYE programs promote student success (i.e., what specific types of experiences during the first year contribute to or increase the likelihood of student success)? (c) How can student success be measured or assessed (i.e., what constitutes "evidence" that student success has been realized and that certain experiences during the first year are responsible for its realization)? In this issue of *E-Source*, I answer the first of these three questions because it provides the critical foundation for launching the quest for student success in an accurate direction. I will address questions about promoting and measuring student success in subsequent issues of this newsletter.

Webster's dictionary defines "success" as a "favorable or desired outcome." Thus, *student success* may be defined as a favorable or *desirable student outcome*. In my estimation, the following desirable outcomes have been the most frequently cited indicators of student success in higher education.

Student retention. Entering college students remain, re-enroll, and continue their undergraduate education (e.g., first-year students return for their sophomore year).

Educational attainment. Entering students persist to completion and attainment of their degree, program, or educational goal (e.g., four-year college students persist to completion of the baccalaureate degree).

Academic achievement. Students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through and complete their college experience (e.g., students avoid academic probation or qualify for academic honors).

Student advancement. Students proceed to and succeed at subsequent educational and occupational endeavors for which their college degree or program was designed to prepare them (e.g., two-year college students

continue their education at a four-year institution, or four-year college students are accepted at graduate schools or enter gainful careers after completing their baccalaureate degree).

Holistic development. Students develop as "whole persons" as a result of their college experience. This holistic definition consists of:

- *Intellectual development:* developing skills for acquiring and communicating knowledge, learning how to learn, and how to think deeply
- *Emotional development:* developing skills for understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions
- *Social development:* strengthening the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement
- *Ethical development:* formulating clear value systems that guide life choices and develop personal character
- *Physical development:* acquiring and applying knowledge about the human body to prevent disease, maintain wellness, and promote peak performance
- *Spiritual development:* developing an appreciation of the search for personal meaning, the purpose of human existence, and questions that transcend the material or physical world

This holistic definition of student success is consistent with the comprehensive approach to promoting first-year student success called for

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We achieve this mission by providing students with an efficient and seamless delivery of opportunities for academic and social engagement throughout their education through a number of services: Orientation Services, First-Year Student Services, Adult Learner Services, Individual Intervention Services, Multicultural Student Services, Student Tutorial Services, Supplemental Instruction, and Disability Services. Peer mentors are instrumental in the delivery of Orientation and First-Year Student Services.

For new students, their first connection to Youngstown State is attendance at a one-day student orientation and registration (SOAR) program. During SOAR, students are paired with a peer mentor who serves as an orientation leader. Adult students are paired with an adult peer mentor, residential students are paired with a residential peer mentor, and other students are paired by major. Once classes begin, peer mentors will provide the delivery of First-Year Student Services, an extended orientation program, through individual and small-group meetings with students they met at orientation.

Peer mentors send a postcard to first-year students immediately after orientation and follow up with a personal phone call to set up a meeting immediately after classes begin. During these meetings, peers provide individualized delivery of topics such as goal setting, building a study schedule, assessing learning styles, preparing for tests, and helping students make connections to other CSP and University services. of. Typically, more than 3,000 referrals to

other University resources are made each semester. Peer mentors follow up on referrals during individual meetings.

Peer mentors are recruited through letters sent annually to the more than 3,000 Youngstown State University students who have a GPA of 2.5 or above and are at least a second-semester first-year student. The applicants participate in a two-stage interviewing process and attend two weeklong training sessions, one held in May before summer orientation begins and one held in August before classes begin. This comprehensive training includes campus tours, presentations by various campus resource directors, diversity awareness sessions, icebreaker activities, simulations, role playing, and hands-on activities that enhance the peer's ability to be a valuable campus resource. The training is designed to address all learning styles and to enhance the educational experience of each student.

Providing our students with an initial connection, i.e., being paired with a peer mentor through CSP's Orientation Services, and then transitioning them into CSP's First-Year Student Services normalizes and extends CSP usage. We know that many students continue to use the services of CSP beyond their first year. Last year, more than 6,500 individual students of all classes used one or several CSP services. Based on the number of students who continue to use CSP beyond the first year, we believe that the initial connection students make with CSP and its staff increases the likelihood that they will continue to use CSP and University resources as their academic and social transition continues. Moreover, we have found that students who

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by Upcraft and Gardner (1989) in their seminal text, *The Freshman Year Experience*, and is congruent with such concepts as multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), emotional intelligence or EQ (Goleman, 1995), and spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Also, it accurately reflects the vast majority of college mission statements and institutional goals, which include many outcomes that are not strictly academic or cognitive in nature (Astin, 1991; Kuh, Shedd, & Whitt, 1987).

The implications of this holistic definition of student success for one very desirable student outcome—student retention—is underscored by research, which repeatedly demonstrates that the vast majority (75-85%) of students who withdraw from college do so for reasons other than poor academic performance; in fact, most departing students are in good academic standing at the time of their departure (Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1993). These findings are reinforced by institutional research conducted at Indiana University, Bloomington, which launched a broad range of initiatives to enhance the quality of the first-year experience and improve student retention. After implementing these initiatives, one conclusion reached was that strict concentration on academic matters did not have a significant impact on student retention without equal concentration on the non-academic elements of student life (Smith, 2003).

Viewed collectively, these findings strongly suggest that student success is

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Strategies for Treating Students Fairly in the Classroom

Students' motivation to learn affects the effort they put into the learning process, how much they learn, and even what they learn (National Research Council, 2001). Students' motivation, in turn, is affected by a variety of factors, including their preconceptions about the subject, their prior experiences, and we posit, by their perceptions of how fairly they are treated by their instructors. This article reviews various aspects of fairness (justice) and suggests strategies for improving students' perceptions of fairness in the classroom.

Management scholars have found that people distinguish among four types of justice: (a) distributive, (b) procedural, (c) informational, and (d) interpersonal. Furthermore, employees' perceptions of justice predict their evaluations of their jobs and supervisors, as well as work-related behavior such as performance and turnover (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). The limited work on justice in the classroom finds parallel relations with course and instructor evaluations, but this work has only recently begun to exploit the conceptualization mentioned above (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Rodabaugh & Kravitz, 1994; Wendorf & Alexander, 2005). It is likely that students, like employees, care about all types of justice. Furthermore, their perceptions of justice should affect their judgments of their classes and professors, as well as their performance and desire to take additional classes in the same discipline. Note that this conceptualization deals with perceptions;

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it makes no philosophical claims about what is just. Thus, statements below that suggest that some action "increases justice" should be read as "increases perceptions of justice."

Distributive justice ("equity") deals with the perceived fairness of outcomes (e.g., grades) vis-à-vis inputs (e.g., performance on assignments). People determine whether a situation is fair by comparing their own situation (input-outcome relation) to some standard, which may be another person or their experiences in previous classes. Distributive justice is manifested when superior performance leads to higher outcomes than poor performance.

Procedural justice deals with the perceived fairness of the procedures by which outcomes are determined. One major concern is the opportunity to have a say, sometimes called "voice." In addition, procedures are considered fair insofar as they are consistent across people and across time, minimize decision-maker biases, are based on accurate information, provide a process for appeal of decisions, represent the positions of all involved, and satisfy basic ethical standards.

Informational justice deals with the existence and perceived appropriateness of information provided

about the procedures and outcomes. Informational justice is high when the procedure or decision is justified or explained, the explanation is truthful, and the explanation is complete.

Finally, *interpersonal justice* involves perceptions about the manner in which the decision maker treats those affected by the decision. Interpersonal justice is high when the decision maker treats others with respect, politeness, and dignity.

This conceptualization of justice in the educational realm has been presented in faculty workshops and to focus groups of faculty and students. The following illustrations are drawn from those activities and the authors' deliberations.

The syllabus is essential for establishing informational justice, which is enhanced by thorough explanations of class procedures and standards. Such details are especially important for any unusual aspects of the course.

In daily class activities, procedural justice will be higher when the instructor covers the material and follows the procedures specified in the syllabus. Interpersonal justice exists when the instructor treats students with respect and demands that they treat one another similarly.

Justice considerations are particularly obvious when one considers assignments. Distributive justice is affected by the time/effort required to complete an assignment in relation to the impact of the assignment on the course grade. Procedural justice suggests the use of identical requirements across sections of multi-section courses.

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use CSP services are retained at higher rates than those who do not (Figure 1). For example, of the 1,720 first-time, first-year students using CSP, 74% were retained, while the retention rate for the 211 first-time, first-year students who did not use CSP was 20%.

In examining a successful first-year program, it is essential to recognize and adapt to a multitude of student needs. At the CSP, we understand that it is not how the student "fits" into our campus programs but how our campus programs can "fit" the needs of our students. Through its collaborative programs (all eight services work in conjunction with one another), the philosophy of the CSP is to build success one student at a time.

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Related Articles in E-Source

Hall, R. (2006). Peer-mentoring program eases transition to university and increases retention. **4(2), 7.**
Steinberg, J. (2003). Peer mentor program integral to the first-year experience. **1(2), 5.**
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best defined as a holistic phenomenon, which embraces the multiple dimensions of personal development and the multiple goals of higher education. In the next issue of *E-Source*, this column

will focus on identifying the features of a first-year experience that are most likely to embody a comprehensive holistic definition of student success and realize its intended outcomes.

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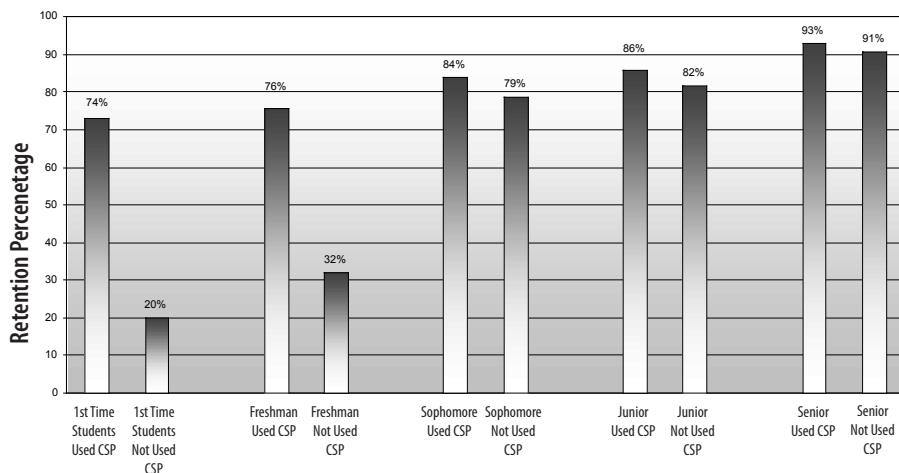


Figure 1. 2005-2006 fall-to-fall retention of full-time undergraduates by use of CSP services.

STOMP Acclimates New Students to the University of Louisville

How should institutions ensure that their entering students have the information they need to be successful without overwhelming them at orientation, during advising, or in the first-year seminar? The University of Louisville has developed an innovative, online tool to address this challenge.

The Student Tutorial Online Module Program (STOMP) provides essential information to new students in an online “edutainment” format. The online program includes an introduction and six modules that offer students information in a fun and engaging way by using animation, video, audio, music, and photographs and by featuring students, advisors, members of the administration, and faculty. The modules were initially introduced to first-year students in July 2006 and include information about the (a) general education curriculum, (b) faculty-student interaction, (c) academic support services, (d) academic policies and procedures, (e) personal and social development, and (f) university technology.

In 2005, the University of Louisville developed academic advising student learning outcomes (SLOs) for first-year students (see side bar for selected outcomes, p. 9). In developing the SLOs, we asked ourselves, “What do students need (in addition to academic information) to grow and develop into successful students, how do we deliver this information, and how will we know that students learned what we intended for them to

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learn?” Prior to STOMP, new student information was delivered through a variety of programs; however, the University wanted to ensure that all first-year students received consistent, essential information. Thus, the decision was made to develop engaging, entertaining, online modules that first-year students could access from home, classroom, or computer lab.

The development of STOMP was a university-wide initiative involving the collaboration and participation of more than 100 people, including the staff of the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning, faculty, professional advisors, students, student affairs professionals, library faculty and staff, student services staff, and information technology staff. An initiative that included so many “sides of the house” was unprecedented on our campus. Six committees were established to create the content for each module, which are based on the SLOs for first-year students (see sidebar for SLOs connected to university technology module, p. 9). Because our goal was to keep the students engaged, each module is in a different style so students would not be able to anticipate what would come next. Each module was also designed to be accessible for students with vision and/or hearing impairments. The first

module was available to the entering class in July 2006, and the last one was launched in October 2006.

First-year students complete the six online modules and quizzes as part of their first-year seminar. Their quiz grades are used in the computation of the final grade. The modules and assessments are available through their first-year seminar Blackboard site, and students have access to the modules immediately after their summer orientation through the end of their first-year seminar. Students who do not have access to high-speed Internet service during the summer may request a STOMP DVD. However, they must complete their quizzes online through their first-year seminar Blackboard site.

We surveyed the students enrolled in our 84 sections of the first-year seminar, and two thirds of the students indicated that STOMP helped them have a better understanding of the topics, policies, and procedures covered in the modules. About half say that the modules helped ease their transition to university. Also, 50% of students said they are more likely to use the resources that they saw in STOMP. On the whole, we are satisfied with these results, given this was the first group to experience STOMP and that there was no time to adequately market the project.

We plan to improve the quizzes by creating questions that require students to use critical thinking skills. Our current questions can be answered correctly by anyone who pays attention to the modules, but we want students to be able to conceptualize, analyze and synthesize, the information in the modules and make valid

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Students are perhaps most sensitive to justice issues in the context of grades. Distributive justice will be higher if the professor tests only material that was assigned or covered in class and gives partial credit. Procedural justice is enhanced through use of a grading rubric, which helps maintain consistency of grading with standards and across students. Informational justice will be higher when the standards by which the assignment will be graded are announced when the assignment is given; a grading rubric is also useful in this regards. Finally, interpersonal justice will be enhanced when feedback mentions positive as well as negative aspects of performance and when errors are not corrected in an insulting manner.

Although employing these concepts of justice may seem easy, there are also some challenges. For example, given cultural differences, it is distressingly easy to be interpersonally unfair. One culture's candor is another culture's insultingly direct communication. In addition, if a student needs special treatment (e.g., due to a disability or emergency), the instructor must balance the need for consistency across all students with the need to take into consideration the situation of individual students. Furthermore, although the various aspects of justice can be distinguished conceptually, in practice they may be confounded. For example, explaining the reason for an action (i.e., informational justice) may decrease perceptions of distributive or procedural injustice, and treating students with disdain may decrease perceptions of all types of justice.

In conclusion, faculty can enhance student satisfaction with their classes by taking into consideration the need to maintain distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice and by incorporating these considerations into the design and operation of their courses.

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eSOURCE FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS

E-Source for College Transitions (ISSN 1545-5742) is published bi-monthly by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. Telephone (803) 777-6029. A single-year subscription is \$40. A multiple-year subscription is \$35 per year. An institutional subscription is \$100 per year or \$95 per year for a multi-year subscription.

The National Resource Center has as its mission to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education.

The Center, a nonprofit organization, will use proceeds from the newsletter to defray publication costs, support research, and disseminate information.

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Making Study Abroad Accessible for ALL Students

Helping students gain the skills required for global citizenship through study abroad is highly desirable and encouraged by most universities. Texas Woman's University (TWU), a public institution of 12,000 students with large numbers of first-generation college students, endorses and encourages semester abroad programs for our students. However, students' external commitments (i.e., children and permanent jobs), complicated lives, limited funds, and lack of confidence in international travel have in the past limited the experience to a fortunate few. For students who cannot participate in a more traditional study abroad program, we teach British Culture and Politics as a blended class: on campus; on Blackboard; and through a two-week, faculty-led, international experience in London. This article outlines the elements of this unique program that we believe contribute to its success.

Financial Aid. Many of our students rely heavily on financial aid and, therefore, might consider study abroad beyond their means. Such students can be advised that since this is an academic course for credit, and the field experience is required of all students taking the course, the cost of transportation, room, meals, and admission fees may be considered under "cost of attendance" for financial aid purposes. A combination of grants and loans covers the basic costs for most of our students.

Merging Models. More than half (56%) of the U.S. students who study

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abroad opt for programs that last less than a semester (Institute of International Education, 2005). While the more traditional junior year or semester abroad programs are declining in popularity, these January, May, or summer semester international education experiences are increasing. The short-term programs are becoming the "norm" (Chieffo & Griffith, 2004).

Since TWU does not have a January term, a flex-entry class was established. Flex-entry is a modified term typically used for internships. It starts after a semester has begun and may continue into the next semester. We started our

flex-entry term this year in November and ended in mid-March. The flex-entry time frame allows ample time beyond the more traditional short-term two- or three-week model for academics, social orientation, and reflection. It means that our students were traveling in January during a flex-entry semester rather than pre-semester. This arrangement meets with approval from the university legal department and financial aid office since a student traveling pre-semester would technically be un-enrolled. Some study abroad models encourage additional course credits for pre-departure and post-return orientation and reflection; but with flex-entry, it is possible to accomplish the same course content within the framework of one class.

Blended Course. This is a blended online/on-campus/field site course. We meet on campus for an orientation in the fall. After those early classes until the day before we leave for London, the course is taught entirely from the web-based platform Blackboard. The

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Study abroad students make their way down Great George Street in London to the European Union's parliament office. Courtesy Lybeth Hodges.

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STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE TECHNOLOGY MODULE

- A.1 The student knows that an account has been assigned, how to access account, how to synchronize Netmail with personal account.
- A.2 The student recognizes Netmail as a primary (or fundamental or essential) means of communication from the university to the student.
- A.3 The student knows how to contact IT for help with e-mail (i.e., troubleshooting, log-on, password, or spam).
- A.4 The student understands how to access and log on to ULink.
- A.5 The student is aware of services and information available through ULink (e.g., financial aid, registration, bursar, student affairs).
- A.6 The student knows how to use Blackboard function for courses.
- A.7 The student understands how to access the online schedule of courses.
- A.9 The student understands how to use Minerva.

Remaining SLOs regarding technology are covered during the Summer Freshmen Orientation, first-year seminar, and academic advising sessions.

- A.8 The student understands how to find the online listing of general education requirements.
- A.10 The student understands how to access online placement tests, AP exams, CLEP exams, etc.
- A.11 The student is aware of how to use the university degree audit system.
- A.12 The student is aware of the online Intra-University Transfer request.
- A.14 The student knows how to access department web sites, including faculty information and contact information.

inferences and assertions about the information.

We also want to include more students and faculty in the module development. This year, we have revised the introduction to include student testimonials about how STOMP helped them. We are re-filming the provost in the General Education module to include information about critical thinking skills. In the Academic Support Services modules, we currently have mostly talking heads but have enlisted a committee—including four students—to redesign this to be a virtual map, similar to a board game. We also plan to have student focus groups view the revisions before we launch the 2.0 version in summer 2007.

Finally, we need to develop a comprehensive training plan so the faculty can better include STOMP in their first-year seminar. Because the six modules were not completed or distributed at the same time, the faculty found it difficult to plan their syllabi around them.

We hope the results of future assessments will show increased use by and relevance to students, including new transfers or students who need referrals to information covered in the modules. To that end, we are planning a comprehensive marketing campaign that will explain STOMP and what students can expect from the modules. Incoming students will learn about STOMP on the summer orientation web site, and they will view/experi-

ence the university technology module during summer orientation. Not only will the university technology module be entertaining and informative, we hope it will entice students to start on the other five modules in July (before they arrive on campus in late August).

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- Fleming, W. J. B. (2004). Student voices tell story of first year at College of Charleston. **1(5), 5**.
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STUDY ABROAD Cont. from p. 9



Study abroad students wait to visit Westminster Abbey in London. Courtesy Lybeth Hodges.

students use resources, participate in discussions, and complete exercises online. This has proven to be much more satisfactory than depending on students to do the required reading and come to class prepared in early January. Online, they are genuinely interacting with the material, with faculty, and with their classmates and, therefore, get on the plane with a better background in British history, politics, and culture. They also have had the opportunity to develop a sense of community with their classmates and with faculty.

One Location. After 14 years of taking students for experiential travel, it is our contention that staying in one location intensifies the learning experience. While there may be a temptation to do a two-week tour of Great Britain north to south, we stay in London and take only two or three day-trips out of the city as a group. Having one base of operation also eliminates the time, tension, and confusion spent in traveling, packing, unpacking, and re-packing.

Structured/Unstructured Itinerary.

Laubscher (1994) speaks of directed travel as, "direct physical contact with the material that is being dealt with on a more abstract level in the classroom" (p. 66). This applies to such activities as observing Parliament or meeting with representatives of the European Union. However, less formal contact with the culture also needs to take place if the goals (see side bar) for study abroad are to be met. By concentrating on London, the students are more likely to have contact with residents and develop confidence in traveling about the area. It also allows students to do more elaborate, individual on-site research for papers due later in the semester. It is our observation that intense learning occurs through participant observation outside a structured setting. Having the opportunities to observe the nuances of British culture while riding the tube, sitting in the park, walking through a museum, shopping for food, or, of course, visiting the pubs, are more likely to occur in a two-week field experience when there is less time spent in travel and structured group activities and more time spent in one place with a relatively unstructured itinerary. Students are, thereby, given more opportunity to become active learners.

We have found that this is a particularly useful model for involving a broader segment of our student population in a deeply engaging educational experience.

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GOALS FOR STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

- To expand and deepen thinking in a global context
- To encourage independent travel and research
- To open the possibility of study abroad to a wider range of our students
- To broaden career and academic options
- To reinforce the value of interdisciplinary understandings
- To develop a better understanding of British culture and politics

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CSU Northridge Transforms Its Approach to Information Competence

At California State University, Northridge, information competence has always been part of University 100, our first-year seminar. In fall 2006, we launched a new initiative as part of the course—the Freshman Connection Celebration, a one-day exhibit of student projects in our Student Union’s spacious Grand Salon. As we began collaborating with our new first-year experience librarian, we realized that combining the two elements—information competence and the Freshman Connection Celebration—would solve a problem that has vexed us for years: how to engage first-year students in research and make it personally meaningful for them. This article describes how we have reshaped our information competence unit in University 100 to make it correspond more closely to the learning needs of our first-year students and to offer them an appropriate academic venue—the Freshman Connection Celebration—to publicize the results of their research.

We typically offer 30 sections of University 100 each fall. Information competence in the first-year seminar has come a long way since the days when we called it “Library Week” and delivered it all during a single frantic week. Library Week included many student learning outcomes: creating effective search strategies; critical thinking; problem solving; time management; finding, selecting, and using research tools; selecting and evaluating sources; creating information products; applying appropriate citation styles;

students (e.g., alcohol use, credit card debt, plagiarism). However, the short timeframe meant that students might not have become acclimated to research as a process.

More recently, we have decompressed Library Week so that learning takes place more gradually throughout the term. Students in fall 2006 met once with a librarian early in the semester, after which they had several weeks to explore their assigned topics on their own before meeting in a library lab for guided, hands-on research. They met with the librarian once more after midterms for additional research guidance.

A dozen of the first-year seminar sections are linked to other classes as part of the Freshman Connection. In fall 2006, we invited students to develop a project on the importance of connection for new students that they would display at the Freshman Connection Celebration. The projects were extra-credit assignments and were not

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and reflecting critically on the research process. Our focus for information competence was on the process of research rather than the formal product. Students met with a librarian for one class session to learn about library resources and basic research techniques. In the next class session, they were set free in the library lab to begin the work of compiling an annotated bibliography on an assigned topic typically connected to issues faced by first-year



The winning poster at the Freshman Connection Celebration. Courtesy California State University, Northridge.

INFORMATION COMPETENCE Cont. from p.11

connected to the information competence unit.

To make the event interesting to first-year students, we scheduled it when there would be a noontime outdoor concert nearby, and we secured funding from student affairs for box lunches. The students came to view the projects in the Celebration along with their cohort faculty and were asked to wear their Freshman Connection T-shirts. Judges awarded prize ribbons for the best projects, and the student newspaper sent out a reporter and a photographer to cover the event. The celebration was featured on the front page of the next day's campus paper (Kammer, 2006).

In many ways, the Celebration was a success. Students wrote eloquently (in the required Celebration Reflection) about the ways in which this event offered them the opportunity to publicize evidence of their first semester's academic achievements. Their projects were quite creative and demonstrated that students understood the theme of the assignment, which focused on the importance of community as a key part of their academic progress. But, too many of the projects were produced at the last minute and there was little evidence of critical thinking or actual research.

As a result, the projects for fall 2007 will be an integral part of our information competence component, as opposed to a mere extra credit assignment. Students will not only produce the traditional annotated bibliography but will also use that information to create an additional research product such as a newsletter, brochure, poster, or oral presentation. We also plan to invite and welcome projects in newer



Students grab lunch before viewing project displays at the Freshman Connection Celebration. Courtesy California State University, Northridge.

formats such as web pages, blogs, and podcasts. By combining these two elements—the annotated bibliography and the research product—the students will be more likely to be vested in the topic than if they produced either one alone, and their projects will be much more likely to reflect the critical thinking that had previously been lacking. These products will all go on display at the 2007 Freshman Connection Celebration.

We will be making other changes, as well. First, we will work with the faculty before the semester to develop a list of topics and a set of research guidelines. Some of these topics will be culled from previous successful teaching experiences; all, we hope, will engage the students. We expect this list to be revised annually.

Second, we will make the research more accessible. While faculty readily agree that scholarly articles are crucial sources, it is unrealistic to expect first-

year students—new to the university as well as to their declared major—to decode scholarly writing successfully. Instead, we will ask them to evaluate more accessible sources in terms of currency, coverage, objectivity, and authority. This is a more realistic goal that should not overwhelm the students. It is also a way to focus intensely on critical thinking, a learning outcome now at the top of our revised list. And after all, our students will have additional opportunities to satisfy information competence outcomes in other university courses. Indeed, because information competence is now part of the university's new General Education requirements (see http://www.csun.edu/senate/policies/ge_reform.pdf), we know that many students will come to a library instruction session multiple times during their college career,

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Student poster on display at the Freshman Connection Celebration. Courtesy California State University, Northridge.

beyond the first-year seminar. Our librarians already teach more than 21,000 students in course-integrated library research sessions each year.

Third, we will divide the information competence assignment into smaller segments. We will incorporate a journal to scaffold student learning in the research experience. This will help them reflect critically on their research and should cut down on last-minute projects. The research journal will also give students substantive information to discuss in the formal research reflection that closes the information competence assignment.

Finally, looking ahead to fall 2008, we have already begun devising ways to connect our information competence work to new initiatives that will debut on our campus in fall 2007: the Freshman Convocation and the Freshman Common Reading Program. These new programs should offer rich opportunities for first-year students to apply basic research skills. In addition, we have begun to investigate a further link to the university's major speaker series. We are confi-

dent that we will have even more to celebrate in the coming years.

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For a copy of the Research Journal and Research Reflection assignments, please e-mail the authors.

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Ceremony Introduces First-Year Students to Honor Code



Michael Bumbry, Student Government President, welcomes first-year students and emphasizes the importance of honor in their college work. Courtesy Elon University.

For almost a decade, Elon University, a private institution located near Burlington, North Carolina, has functioned with two separate honor codes and pledges, one covering academic violations and one covering social offenses. In 2002, Elon began a campus-wide study of students' and faculty members' understanding of, compliance with, and attitudes toward honor pledges. The study found that students were more familiar with the academic pledge posted in all classrooms than with the social pledge, despite having received and signed both pledges during their first semester. Further, students did not seem to be making a connection between the two. They reasoned that

if they were doing well academically, the university should not monitor their social conduct. With more than 60% of Elon students studying abroad for at least one semester, the issue of behavior out of the classroom and out of the country was a growing concern. Moreover, pledges were signed during a three-week period in Elon 101 classes—only 15 people per group—and very little is known about what was said before or after the signing. As a result, students were most likely not receiving a consistent message about the value of the pledges.

In 2005, academic affairs and student life began revising the honor codes, combining them into a single statement affirming the values that Elon holds for its students. The grounds for academic and social violations did not change,

and the procedures for adjudicating offenses remained the same. The proposed code and pledge were reviewed extensively in both academics and student life and with the Student Government Association. The new statement of the code and the combined honor pledge were approved by

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all groups (see www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/elon_academy/Honor-Pledge.pdf)

The next step was to create a ceremony to celebrate the students' commitment to honor. The ceremony was to serve several purposes: (a) to make the honor code more visible on campus (to first-year students in particular), (b) to make the students' commitment to honor more public, and (c) to attach a ritual to the pledge that would help students recall their commitment. This was an effort to be more intentional as a group in clarifying and affirming the values of an Elon education.

The planning of the ceremony raised several questions. When is the right time to hold such a ceremony? During fall orientation before classes started seemed too early to carry sufficient weight, but after classes started, gathering all first-year students in one place was problematic. What should

one say that would be meaningful to 18-year-olds? What should be done to help students remember their honor commitment throughout the year?

The question of timing was settled by scheduling the event during the first Thursday in September and extending the

time set aside each week for chapel from 30 to 50 minutes.

This ensured that first-year students would not have class conflicts to keep them from the ceremony while keeping disruption of the regular class schedule to a minimum. Most



Student's Honor Coin. Courtesy Elon University.

See HONOR CODE p. 15

HONOR CODE Cont. from p.14

students met in Elon 101 classes and attended the ceremony as a group.

The ceremony, A Call to Honor, started with a procession into the Alumni Gym while the alma mater was played. Officers from each of the four classes, two trustees, two singers, and Elon's president marched down the aisle. The president led a community reading of the honor code but did not offer other remarks.

The ceremony used brief speeches by alumni and class presidents along with visual elements to emphasize the idea of tradition. Alumni were invited to talk about trust, and they lit a candle to symbolize that trust. As each class president presented a value (e.g., integrity, honesty, respect, responsibility), the officers from that class took the flame from the trustees' candle back to their table and lit a class candle. Later, class officers and senators distributed the flame from those five candles to all first-year students, who had been given small candles as they entered. Trustees showed the students a hardbound book titled *A Call to Honor* and asked student officers to sign it, with alumni and the president serving as witnesses to their pledge. Pages in this book start with the class of 1928, graduation year of our oldest living alumna, and extend until 2088, the year of Elon's 200th anniversary. Between the inaugural ceremony in 2006 and fall 2007 event, Elon's Office of Alumni Relations will bring the book to alumni events for additional signatures. In the future, the book will be displayed in the university's library.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, exciting students were given a keep-



Students recite the pledge. Courtesy Elon University.

sake coin, made specifically for the class of 2010. The coin was inscribed with the words "Elon University" on one side and "Honor" on the other. Informal feedback indicates that students continue to carry these coins with them, as they are frequently seen separating their honor coin from other change while making purchases on campus.

A web survey administered two months after the Call to Honor asked

students to recall the four values described during the ceremony. The most frequent responses are listed in Table 1.

The survey also asked students about which elements of the ceremony contributed to its effectiveness. The highest ranking element was reciting the pledge with the president. Other elements mentioned included having students delivering the honor code message and receiving an honor coin. While nothing was identified as distracting from the ceremony's effectiveness, we will probably spend less time teaching students the tune and words to the alma mater. We may also need to reconsider the visual elements used in the ceremony, as the chief of campus security has discouraged the use of candles.

We will continue to choose students to deliver the message and keep the president as part of the ceremony. The ceremony was also the first time a first-year class had met their class officers, who were elected only the day before the ceremony. We might build on that in establishing a first-year class identity. We did hear from some students that they were tired of

See HONOR CODE p. 16

Table 1

Students Recall Values Mentioned During the Ceremony

Values	No. of students who responded
Integrity*	75
Honor	47
Honesty	44
Respect*	34
Responsibility*	25
Civility*	11

**Values mentioned by class presidents during the ceremony.*

HONOR CODE Cont. from p.15

hearing about the honor code by the time this ceremony took place. It had been hyped by orientation leaders, Elon 101 instructors, the president in his new student convocation, and several other places. With the ceremony now more of a tradition, we will not need to pay as much attention to the honor code in other settings. While it is too early to measure whether the number of actual honor code violations will be reduced, campus discussions show that the visibility of the honor code increased in the 2006 first-year class.

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Related articles in E-Source

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Guidelines follow for those who would like to submit articles related to significant student transitions for consideration.

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Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

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The Paul P. Fidler Research Grant is designed to encourage the development and dissemination of knowledge that has potential to improve the experiences of college students in transition. The grant is named in memory of Dr. Paul P. Fidler, a faculty member at the University of South Carolina, whose pioneering research on student learning and success had a vital impact on the work being done to promote the success of all students in transition. Proposals for the 2007-08 grant are now being accepted.

The Paul P. Fidler Research Grant award includes a cash stipend, travel to two national conferences, a presentation at a national conference, and priority consideration for publication. Specifically, the grant's comprehensive award package includes:

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- Travel to the 14th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 2007, in Cincinnati, OH, at which the award will be presented
- Announcement and recognition at 2007 Students in Transition conference luncheon
- Travel to the 15th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 2008, in Columbia, SC, at which the research findings will be reported
- Announcement on The National Resource Center web page, listservs, and print publications
- Priority consideration for publication by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

The application and proposal form may be downloaded at www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant and must be submitted electronically to NRCresearch@gwm.sc.edu by July 16, 2007.

Questions about the grant should be directed to Barbara Tobolowsky, Associate Director at (803) 777-5193 or via e-mail at barbarat@gwm.sc.edu

Publications

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