

Even within most sessions, there is a way to integrate developmental and social initiatives with academic concerns. Orientation sets the tone of the campus environment and, no matter how many developmental sessions are done, the subtle messages can undo every educational mission. Peer leaders or professionals who snicker about binge drinking, visitation violations, alcohol abuse, or even the cafeteria food, negate hours of carefully planned programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles centered around academic goals.

Therefore, with all the assessment we do to evaluate our programs at the *tail end*, perhaps it is time to take a hard look at the program from the *front end*. Can we justify the programs and activities as student success promoters, even if we look at the programs through the eyes of our greatest critics? At this time of year, most of us are putting finishing touches on our planning, and it is a good time to get back to the basics. We need to determine, first and foremost, if our programs promote long-term student success despite the fact that the students are having just too much fun!

ARTICLE

The Dynamics of Creating a Freshman Year Program: A Decade of Reflection

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The development and growth of successful freshman orientation courses often require nurturing campus-wide networks and building administrative support through both academic and student affairs. This article chronicles the evolution of such efforts at a large midwestern public university that begins as a pilot project with only thirteen students enrolled in a course limited to specific majors, and evolves to a campus-wide program involving an extended orientation course, a mentoring program, and a faculty and staff training workshop. The article specifically reflects on the dynamics of developing campus-wide partnerships in the curricular development.

In his book, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, Ernest Boyer (1987) reported findings of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that addressed the importance orientation plays in assisting students in their university experience. Boyer ultimately proposed that "all colleges offer a short-term credit course for new students" (p.48), and Terenzini (1993) concluded that this would help "create a more supportive atmosphere during students' first year of college life" (p. 11).

Over the years, researchers (Banziger, 1987; Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Cuseo, 1991; Gardner, 1989; Gordon & Grites, 1984; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolffe, 1986) also have advocated the freshman orientation course as a means to assist students in their transitions to and successes in college. Moreover, extensive research supports the fact that freshman orientation courses and seminars increase student retention and success (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993; Fidler, 1986; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; House & Kuchynka, 1997; Murphy, 1989; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993). Not surprisingly, Barefoot & Fidler (1996) reported that 72% of 720 institutions responding to the 1994 National Survey of Freshman Seminar Programming indicated their campuses offered extended orientation or college survival seminars.

Clearly, a body of literature supports the concept of freshman orientation courses and the valuable role they play in student integration and retention. Even so, faculty and administrators frequently encounter difficulties when developing and implementing freshman orientation courses for college credit. The course may be challenged by campus politics and by common objections that such courses "coddle" students and are "remedial" (Gardner, 1989).

In this regard, some literature has focused on the process of developing and implementing freshman orientation courses, especially as it relates to campus politics. Gordon

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and Grites (1989) presented general guidelines for implementing and planning a freshman seminar course. While their primary focus was on course content and structure, they briefly addressed the political structure of an individual campus. This political process of establishing a new freshman course was also explored by Smitheram (1989) and by Von Frank (1985). Von Frank shared a detailed overview of program planning for freshmen and several "lessons" learned in implementing a freshman course at a small liberal arts school. Among these lessons were the importance of involving faculty and staff campus-wide, gaining administrative and financial support, and starting small. He stressed the importance of faculty development in the implementation process and the necessity for ongoing program assessment.

Gardner (1989) and Barefoot and Gardner (1993) presented a more comprehensive, sequential model for starting a freshman seminar program. Their model encompassed (a) finding campus support and advocates, (b) relating the program to specific institutional programs, (c) bringing together student affairs and academic affairs, (d) developing a task force, (e) presenting a course proposal through appropriate campus channels, (f) piloting the course, and (g) recruiting and training faculty instructors. This comprehensive model emphasized the importance of allying campus support via administrators and campus linkages. Arguably, the development of a freshman orientation course is not simply to assist students in their adjustment to college, but to transform the campus culture to one that values new students and is more sensitive to their needs. This transformation and the successful implementation of a freshman orientation course cannot occur without understanding campus politics and issues of power.

Cervero & Wilson (1994) provided a framework for understanding program planning as primarily a "social" activity that involves the "negotiation of interests within relationships of power" (p. 185). The negotiation of interests applies to five specific groups of "stakeholders" which include the institutional leadership, the planners, the teachers, the learners, and the affected public (p. 153). In this case study, the "stakeholders" specifically included the university administration, faculty, student affairs staff, and students. Cervero & Wilson's conceptualization of program planning is directly applicable to planning freshman orientation courses, as it is critical to balance the interests of the stakeholders while negotiating, networking, and planning for the objectives of the course.

Likewise, Forester (1989) suggested that planning is "deeply communicative and argumentative" (p. 161). It is simply not enough to implement a program; it is critical to involve the stakeholders in the process. The process of planning then involves negotiating, mediating, and shaping the needs and values of the campus community to collectively create the desired program and hence successful outcomes.

In the context of developing freshman orientation courses and in understanding campus dynamics, the remainder of this paper presents a case study of how one large midwestern public university implemented a freshman orientation course and, in the process, developed partnerships that positively influenced the campus climate relative to new students.

Pilot Project

At a large midwestern comprehensive public university, planning and negotiation efforts spanning more than a decade have led to a campus-wide program called "Freshman Connections" that (a) includes an extended orientation course, a mentoring program, and faculty and staff training workshops and (b) involves faculty and staff across campus working in concert to meet the needs of new students. A pilot course initiated by an academic counselor in fall 1985 emerged the following year as a one-credit hour elective course for students in one of the university's six undergraduate colleges. The course developed largely due to the vision of the academic counselor, who, with the administrative support of one dean, was committed to developing a course proposal. Preliminary data compiled by the university's office of institutional research revealed that students enrolled in the course during the first two years had significantly greater first to second year persistence rates and higher cumulative grade point averages than students who had not enrolled in the course (House & Kuchynka, 1997).

Program Maturation

The Early Years

Based on this preliminary data and on similar national data, the senior dean of the college offering the course negotiated financial support from the provost to sponsor a university-wide faculty and staff training workshop in an effort to nurture campus-wide attention for first-year students and to enhance understanding about the orientation course. The workshop was held as a day-long retreat at an off-campus site in spring 1990. One immediate outcome of the retreat was expansion of the course to six sections to be taught by volunteer faculty in fall 1990. Another positive outcome and continuing priority of the workshop was improved campus-wide dialogue, which fostered heightened awareness among many campus constituents as to the issues confronting new students and the barriers to their success.

By fall 1990, the concept of offering a credit-bearing freshman orientation course was clearly supported by the university administration, one senior dean, and the faculty within one of the undergraduate colleges. Support across campus was not clearly established, and, in fact, pockets of resistance to this endeavor remained in several quarters. Campus-wide faculty support, however, was critical to implementing a university-wide course because of the complex faculty governance and committee structure. The power to officially develop a university-wide course (UNIV 101) rested exclusively with faculty curriculum committees. Allying well-respected, tenured faculty and utilizing their support became increasingly important.

The Growth Years

One step in negotiating this support came in spring 1991, when the course objectives were reviewed and endorsed by a campus-wide committee that oversaw the undergradu-

ate academic environment. Committee membership represented all of the stakeholders including provost's staff, faculty from all six of the undergraduate colleges, staff from student affairs, and students. Intentionally, one of the students had been selected for the committee because of personal experience in the course and one of the faculty representatives had served as a volunteer course instructor. Their experiences in the course played a pivotal role in attaining the support and backing of this committee to again expand the course in fall 1991. At this time, the course became available to all freshmen, regardless of major. More significantly, these expansion efforts were financially supported by the provost's office.

Over the next five years, the course continued to expand from six sections serving 110 students in one academic college to fifteen sections serving almost 300 students campus-wide. Faculty and student affairs staff continued to volunteer as course instructors, and assessment through the office of institutional research reported consistent positive trends for students enrolled in the course over students not taking the course (House & Xiao, 1995). Yet, while the course was expanding and was being offered campus-wide, it continued to lack a legitimate recognizable, university-wide course title and number.

In spring 1995, the associate provost convened a university task force on the freshman year course. The task force included a diverse group of faculty representing each of the undergraduate colleges and student affairs staff from student activities, housing, counseling, orientation, and academic advising, and many of the task force members had previously served as volunteer course instructors. The task force formalized much of what had evolved over the previous decade by preparing a comprehensive course proposal for "UNIV 101" that articulated course objectives, specified course content, delineated qualifications for course instructors, mandated training, presented recommendations for compensation for instructors, and provided a sample syllabus. The proposal also specified course content to include (a) being successful in the academic environment, (b) living in a culturally diverse community, (c) planning and decision-making for an academic major and career, and (d) understanding the university community and organizational structure.

Once the proposal was drafted, it was widely circulated among faculty (especially those serving on curriculum committees) by having task force members meet with colleagues to present and discuss the proposal. In fall 1995, the university curriculum committee approved "UNIV 101: University Experience," as a one-credit-hour elective, extended orientation course for new students.

Continued Growth

The course content continues to reflect guidelines as delineated in the task force proposal, while allowing for flexibility based on instructor preferences. Moreover, the course instructors continue to volunteer from both faculty and staff ranks, with the training workshop still being required. To date, a common text has not been used across sections.

Even with the current stability, several significant changes have recently evolved.

Course sections have grown from fifteen to 45, serving 750 students (approximately 27% of the fall 1997 freshmen class). Some course sections are available as part of freshman learning communities both within and outside the residence halls. The course also has been expanded to include required sections for special admission students. These initiatives have invited the cooperation of the residence life staff as course instructors and have allowed for new partnerships with administrators, faculty, and staff. These changes have been facilitated by administrative oversight moving to the Provost's Office with program coordination managed by the Office of Orientation. This office also coordinates a variety of new student programs and services.

Ongoing assessment of the course examines student outcomes relative to performance and persistence, as well as evaluating instructors. The course evaluations consistently reflect high levels of student satisfaction with the course and with their instructors. Overall mean ratings for fall 1997 were 4.56 on a 5.00 scale. In addition, student anecdotal comments reflect equally high levels of satisfaction especially in relation to establishing connections with peers and faculty. Moreover, their written comments provide opportunities to reflect on future growth for the course.

Future Directions

Clearly, in its brief history, the freshman year program has succeeded in bringing together many segments of a diverse university community in a common effort to serve the needs of first year students. As the program continues to develop, it is evident that the dynamics of negotiating, networking, educating, and collaborating across the campus will be essential tools. Future plans call for an aggressive expansion of sections linked to learning communities, sections offered for special populations such as honors and commuting students, the development of a corps of upperclass students to assist in course instruction, and the creation of a customized text for UNIV 101 sections. Ongoing goals are to increase the number of tenured faculty who teach the course, to enhance the recognition within the university's rewards system of those who teach, and to expand the diversity of both students taking the course and the faculty and staff teaching it.

Conclusion

This case study provides one applied example of the model presented by Barefoot and Gardner (1993) and moreover demonstrates the significance of understanding issues of politics and power in the planning process as suggested by Cervero and Wilson (1994) and Forester (1989). The evolution and growth of this course from a single section available to only a limited number of select students into a university-wide freshman orientation course (and faculty and staff development workshop) could not have occurred without gaining administrative support for the program objectives and financial assistance. Yet, administrative support notwithstanding, the course could not have matured and developed without nurturing campus relationships among faculty and student affairs staff. Moreover, understanding the curricular process, the influences of decision-making power, and the political structure of campus committees played a critical role. Clearly,

the process of planning (negotiating, networking, and allying campus support) is essential to successfully implementing a freshman orientation course that will be fully supported by the campus community and will enhance the first year experience of most students.

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