

CYOC: Approaches for Enhancing the First Year Experience

June 23, 2010

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Alexis introduced herself to the group of 36 and shared that her role is to facilitate discussion and that she is not the subject matter expert.

Topic: What is the Vision of the Ideal First Year Experience?

- ◆ Since it can be hard for first year students to transition from high school to post-secondary it is essential that proper supports be in place to accommodate the transition.
- ◆ Students should have opportunities to be involved in the community, student government and leadership.
- ◆ Students with a career plan are more likely to be successful during first year.
- ◆ Have a minimum of 10 real friends (vs. Facebook) and a strong social network.
- ◆ Students should understand how they learn.
- ◆ Students should take ownership of their academic career.
- ◆ Know how to balance studying, socializing, health, work and other priorities.
- ◆ Students would feel connected to Faculty and Staff as well as part of the community, both on-campus and off.
- ◆ Ensure engagement and interest from students living off-campus.
- ◆ One Faculty complaint is that students don't have the right skills when they start school. Skills that need to be addressed are but not limited to: academic, writing, presentation, organization, and time management.
- ◆ Plant the seeds for social responsibility: how to be a contributing member of the community and how to be independent learners.
- ◆ Re-consider the amount and content of information distributed during Orientation week. Students are overwhelmed, overloaded and excited so we need to help better manage the dissemination of information and communicate it throughout key times during the year. Consider what is absolutely necessary during the first week.
- ◆ Have a financial plan and know how to find resources to help make informed decisions.
- ◆ First year would be an '11' on an awesome scale of 10.

Topic: What kinds of programs exist to support some of the above objectives/outcomes?

- ◆ Repeat workshops even if attendance is low. The promotion of workshops still creates awareness that information and resources exist (ex. little tent card signs on tables). Assiniboine offers the following workshops in the fall – Learning Styles, Study Skills (for mid-term prep), How to Write an APA formatted paper, etc. The workshops are run in the Fall and then repeated again in the Winter.
- ◆ HOST Program (Memorial U). Faculty is supportive of program so they allow Sr volunteer students to present for two minutes at the end of class sharing information cards with dates and descriptions of events each month. All first years have to take a specific course; this is the course that is targeted. The same student visits the same class every month for a semester, thus building relationship. The shared info is catered to the time of year and what the main issues are at that time in the academic cycle. This helps redistribute info from Orientation and spread it out.

- ◆ D2L – Desire 2 Learn (Memorial U) is an online tool designed to help meet students where they are. The technology is Web CT. Information is posted, and online questions and discussions are facilitated by student volunteers who check the forums daily.
- ◆ T2U – Transition to University (U of A) is an online program made available in April to grade 12 students. The program offers modules for social transition, academic support, etc. There is also a module for parents and international students. The modules are self-paced. Guest status to access T2U can be granted through U of A’s Academic Support Centre.
- ◆ Residence Student Leadership Program (Laurier) – Intention is for first year students to take ownership of program and to learn how to be accountable to their peers. Fun activities are paired with educational topics. For example, a Saturday session on dodgeball would be partnered with info on team-building and group dynamics. Students come for the fun group activity (and food), and get the extra info too. (GMU)
- ◆ Frosh Friday’s (U of T, Engineering) - every Friday, all Engineering students have no classes at the same time; weekly sessions are offered to all students on a variety of topics during this window. Students who fail midterms/finals are contacted by coordinator and told to come meet with them in-person; the student is then referred to relevant upcoming Frosh Friday sessions.
- ◆ Campus Life Line program (U of Windsor, uwindsor.ca/lifeline) has ‘just-in-time’ topics in five categories: such as Health/Wellness, Academics, Community, Learning and Personal. Available online to the public.

A common theme throughout the discussion was the dichotomy between Faculty and Student Services. Getting Faculty buy-in is difficult. Ideally Faculty needs to be a partner in the orientation process.

Some suggestions and existing policies to generate Faculty interest:

- ◆ Formal recognition for faculty who put in time to support student success (ex. volunteer in a program). Personalized thank you letters from senior-level authorities (such as Provost) noting contribution, number of hours invested, etc. The letters should be sent to the Faculty member as well as their Dean.
- ◆ One institution (SFU??) has an annual “campus partner award”; given to someone on campus who really supports Student Services’ efforts. They are given the award at a formal presentation in front of peers, and names go on a public plaque.
- ◆ Make a ‘University 101’ course part of the curriculum. Have professors and/or student services professionals teach the course. These kinds of courses do exist at other post-secondary institutions (east-coast military college – unsure of name).
- ◆ Faculty may not fully understand why we need their support. Providing data – i.e. retention is down, may provide the insight they need to understand how they add value to the process.
- ◆ At GMU, Faculty is required to provide a certain number of hours of service as part of their responsibilities; check if what you want Faculty support for can count towards their required ‘service’ contributions.
- ◆ Another CYOC session, “Partnering with Faculty and Other Units,” was held at the same time as this session. Facilitator suggested reviewing the notes from that session.

Also consider idea of peer-to-peer mentoring programs; they exist at some universities and match first-years with upper-level peers to provide social support.