

A. QEP White Paper: Moving 150 Years Forward

Title: Utilizing Faculty to Build Rapport with First-Year Students to Improve Retention

Topic : Academic Advising/Retention: Orientation Courses

Introduction: The Department of Advancement Studies, which is housed in University College, is proposing Academic Advising/Retention: Orientation Courses as the focus of the University's Quality Enhancement Plan. The First-Year Experience course at Alabama State University (ORI 100) aids in offering new students a smooth transition from high school to University life because "making the transition from being a high school student to being a successful college student does not happen instantaneously, and it certainly does not occur by simple osmosis" (Hunter). These courses also provide support to transfer students who did not receive orientation credit at their previous institution(s) because "although transfer students enter four-year universities with prior college experience, transitioning to more advanced coursework at a new campus in a short time frame can challenge any student" (Shaw). *Small Enough to Know You, Big Enough to Grow You: Utilizing Faculty to Build Rapport with First-Year Students to Improve Retention* will consist of three QEP components:

1. To ensure a successful transitional matriculation experience and increase retention, Orientation will be separated into two half-credit sections, and students will take one part per semester with the same instructor.
2. The First-Year Experience course (ORI 100) will require students attend at least four University-sponsored events per semester (one sporting event will be allowed).
3. The First-Year Experience (ORI 100) course will require every student who completes the ORI 100 course sequence to complete an ORI 100 survey for present and continuous program improvement.

Student learning outcomes for First-Year Experience courses are as follows:

1. Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of Alabama State University's history.
2. Students will be able to perform the University's hymn.
3. Students will be able to create and apply time-management strategies.
4. Students will construct a well-developed resume.
5. Students will be able to identify and describe various student resources at Alabama State University that provide a smooth transition to University life.

Identification of the problem

Retention and persistence are two of the major areas of need at our University. This can be observed by examining participation in University-sponsored events geared toward student development, state-of-the-University updates, and student academic recognition. Across the

board, there is a lack of attendance by students at University-sponsored events. For example, Founders' Day Convocation, a spring semester event that should be well-attended by students, is primarily attended by faculty and staff, with a small number of students joining the group. Attendance at this event and similar events is imperative because they foster a sense of Hornet pride. Most ASU students enroll in the current Orientation 100 course during their first semester at the University. They attend several sponsored activities such as the University College Fall Convocation, the University Fall Convocation (president's address), and several programs and events organized by the coordinator and faculty of our orientation program. Additional time is needed to provide more relevant University-sponsored events for the new ASU Hornets. The lack of persistence and retention becomes a challenge in student learning because when students are neither engaged on campus nor attending enough University-sponsored events, they lose interest in the University itself; in addition, they may never gain a sense of pride for the institution, thus causing students to either leave the university, or, after graduating from the University, they are less likely to give back or support their alma mater.

Identification of the student population

New students and transfer students who did not receive Orientation credit at their previous institution(s)

Relationship to the University mission and goals

The Freshman Experience Orientation program is a pivotal academic program designed to integrate new students into the academic and cultural community of the University. For example, students who are entering college and leaving a strong, nurturing support system may fear that the familiar surroundings to which they are accustomed are not present in a university setting. In addition, at-risk students might also feel unsure about how they can become successfully engaged in the educational experience, which is why the Freshman Experience Orientation program is designed to provide these students “. . . with an understanding of the resources and tools available to them (Brady). The Department of Advancement Studies' Orientation program helps prepare all new students for college success by providing them with a variety of resources to foster active learning, independent living, and critical-thinking skills. We implement a variety of engaging strategies and activities that focus on time management, budgeting, study and life skills, information literacy through the Levi Watkins Learning Center and exercises on the University's history and hymn, which aids in strengthening students' pride, love, and respect for the University. The Orientation instructors are carefully selected and trained to delicately address the needs of their Orientation students by creating a positive, safe learning environment and utilizing a variety of exercises directed towards assisting each student in reaching his or her highest potential.

The First-Year Experience course instructor will be able to utilize class instruction to address visual, auditory, and hands-on learners. The method by which this is done creates an environment where students are exposed to nontraditional pedagogical approaches that allow students to understand the importance of the process by which learning occurs. For example, students will not only have personal experiences they build upon but they will also be provided with knowledge-rich environments that support the importance of sharing, also known as

“pairing and sharing.” Through these experiences, students will be encouraged to understand the significance of Alabama State University's history as well as the processes and procedures provided for students to ensure success in and beyond the classroom.

Strategies

The Department of Advancement Studies will employ a number of strategies to aid in retention-enhancement efforts at our University.

1. ***Extending Orientation:*** In order to ensure a successful transitional matriculation experience and increase retention, Orientation will be separated into two half-credit sections. Students will take one part per semester with the same instructor. This will increase retention because the Orientation instructors and their students establish a rapport, which aids in creating a positive learning experience; establishing a solid rapport creates trust. Trust yields accountability. Therefore, in order to improve retention, it will be stressed that students have the same Orientation instructor for two semesters. Retention will be assessed by using the data of the number of students to date and the graduation rate to date. Our goal is a 20% increase of student retention of freshman after completion of the ORI 100 course sequence.
2. ***Mandatory Attendance at University-Sponsored Events:*** Students need to have a sense of pride, love, and respect for Alabama State University. The First-Year Experience program will require that students attend at least four University-sponsored events per semester (one sporting event will be allowed). Students will be allowed to provide documentation of attendance by taking pictures and via social media outlets such as Snapchat and Twitter. In this time, students are more connected to their phones and social media outlets than ever before. Instead of weaponizing the platforms, we can integrate them into the classroom and use them as tools of retention and recruitment, thus showing students how to use social media to have positive impacts on the University, which is another important skill that students will learn in ORI 100.
3. ***Exit Survey:*** The recurring question is how effective is the ORI 100 course? In order to answer that question, an exit process will be implemented to show the correlation, statistically, between the students who attend Orientation 100 for two semesters and whether or not they persisted and graduate. Every student who completes the ORI 100 course sequence will complete an ORI 100 survey (at the conclusion of each semester enrolled) for data driven continuous improvement.
4. ***Assessments:*** The Student Learning Outcomes and effectiveness of the program will be assessed by utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods. Measures such as student testing, the Student Course Climate Evaluations, and a post First-Year Experience course survey will provide summaries of what is effective, what has been met, and what areas need improvement will be examined. A summative impact report will be a part of the SACSCOC accreditation criteria.

Departments

Department of Advancement Studies housed in University College

Research

The following sources are related literature that could be used in writing a full QEP proposal:

Brady, Jessica, et al. "First-Year Experience Proposal: Bearcat Link (BLINK)." *First-Year Experience Proposal: Bearcat Link (BLINK)*, Lander University, Lander University, www.lander.edu/docs/default-source/academic-affairs/qep/white-papers/qep-blink-proposal.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

Connolly, Sara, et al. "FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE FOR AT-RISK COLLEGE STUDENTS." *FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE FOR AT-RISK COLLEGE STUDENTS*, University of Bridgeport, University of Bridgeport.

Hunter, Mary Stuart. "Fostering Student Learning and Success through First-Year Programs." *Association of American Colleges & Universities*, 29 Dec. 2014, www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/fostering-student-learning-and-success-through-first-year-programs.

Shaw, Stacy T., and Christina S. Chin-Newman. "'You Can Do It!' Social Support for Transfer Students during the Transition from Community College to a Four-Year University." *Igenta Connect*, Igenta Connect, 1 Sept. 2017, docserver.ingentaconnect.com/deliver/connect/fyesit/15423077/v29n2/s4.pdf?expires=1528906862&id=0000&titleid=72010505&checksum=1045C7028AA97C35A01714080DBC0DC8.

Sidle, Meg W, and Janet McCreynolds. "The Freshman Year Experience: Student Retention and Student Success." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2009, doi:10.2202/1949-6605