

"we must first understand the diverse populations on our campus [in order to] enable students to make an effective transition to our institutions" (Jacobs, 1993, p. 79).

Video conferencing offers a creative, unique way to connect new students and their families to institutions. While a collaborative effort from numerous campus offices is necessary, video conferencing provides a much-needed forum for important information concerning college life to be transmitted in a more personal, student-based format. It will be important for campuses to assess video conferencing to determine how much, if any, improvement is made in the matriculation, satisfaction, and retention of students oriented through video conferencing. However, the positive results experienced at UNC should be motivation to other campuses which enroll a significant number of students from a concentrated, distance location to explore the use of new technology in the orientation of out-of-state students.

References

- Austin, D. M. (1993). Orienting activities for the families of new students. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College* (pp. 97-110). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph No. 13).
- Gavin, T. (1997). *Fact Book of the University of Northern Colorado*. [Brochure]. Greeley, CO: University of Northern Colorado.
- Jacobs, B. C. (1993). Orienting diverse populations. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College* (pp. 79-96). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph No. 13).
- Perigo, D., & Upcraft, L. (1989). Orientation programs. In M. L. Upcraft & J. N. Gardner (Eds.), *The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, B. F., & Brackin, R. (1993). Components of a comprehensive orientation program. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College* (pp. 35-48). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph No. 13).
- Strumpf, G., & Sharer, G. (1993). Trends and issues in orientation. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College* (pp. 27-34). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for the Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph No. 13).

ARTICLE

First Year Orientation Programs at Four-Year Public Institutions: A Brief History

Michael J. Johnson

Examining the history of orientation programs provides student affairs professionals an idea of past successes and failures and possible avenues to improve future programs. The more insight orientation professionals have, the more they may see the need to include aspects of college life that have been forgotten in the past.

The following article is a brief history of orientation programs since 1950 at four-year, publicly controlled institutions of higher education in the United States. An analysis of the early types of programs offered and the components of various orientation models throughout the history of American higher education will be highlighted. Historical trends will indicate that orientation programs in the future will move toward student retention and a deeper awareness for services that meet the needs of a diverse population of students.

After a tentative beginning, first-year orientation programs during the 1980s, became a generally accepted forum for colleges and universities to communicate information about services they offer and to acquaint their new students with their surroundings. Such programs are now seen as an asset, if not a required part, of a college community. Orientation programs in their best form can directly support the academic mission of the institution. Often, an orientation program is the first major introduction a student has to the campus community, and because of this placement in the curriculum, it can greatly enhance the perception students have about their academic endeavors during their typical four or five year stay.

Definitions of Orientation

The American Council of Education in 1960 defined an orientation program as "the process of inducting students into the community of learning" (Brown, 1972). In 1986, the Council for the Advancement of Standards published *Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs* which outlined that the goals of orientation are to "provide . . . services that will: aid new students in their transition to the institution, expose new students to the broad educational opportunities of the institution, and integrate new students into the life of the institution" (p. 97). Other definitions share common themes of developing the new student and acclimating him or her to the institution (Brackin & Smith, 1993), even though there have been differing opinions on the preferred length of

Michael J. Johnson is the Assistant Coordinator of Greek Life at the University of Toledo.

the program. There were also those during these early years who wanted to expand the definition of orientation to be a longitudinal process which should begin in high school and persist throughout the entire college experience (Strang, 1951; Mueller, 1961). Such programs, they contended, provided both traditional students and their parents with the necessary information required to promote a successful transition from high school to college and, in the case of non-traditional students, a transition from the "real" life to campus life.

Historical Overview

The following is a brief history of orientation programs since 1950 at four-year, publicly controlled institutions of higher education in the United States. An analysis of the early types of programs offered and the various components of several orientation models throughout the history of American higher education will be highlighted. Hopefully, this information will provide orientation staff members better access to the information regarding the forces and factors that guide their profession. Insight and knowledge of the history of orientation programs and how they originated can facilitate greater understanding among orientation staff. By reviewing practices and components of orientation, practitioners will be better able to develop an efficient way to best serve their students' needs. Since factors such as average cost and activity are more congruent at four-year colleges and universities, the literature regarding the orientation practices at two-year and private four-year institutions is not included in this review.

Early Developments

The first orientation program began in 1888 at Boston University when an orientation day was sponsored for incoming students (Rentz, 1988). Many institutions shared a common ideal of helping the new student adapt to the college and university environment, and orientation programs were viewed as an efficient manner to accomplish such a goal (Drake, 1966). Therefore, an early focus centered on the student's acclimation to campus (Rentz, 1988). With the transition from high school to college, orientation became the stepping stone for *en loco parentis* and facilitated the shift of the primary care giver role from the parent to the institution. Orientation was a student's first look at the university empowered with assuming responsibilities previously held by their parents. As multiple institutions began to realize the benefit of acquainting new students to the campus environment, orientation programs grew exponentially (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993).

Orientation programs have undergone many developmental changes throughout their brief history. From the early 1920s to the mid-1940s, a freshman week was common across college and university campuses. First introduced at the University of Maine in 1923, freshman weeks consisted of providing information, testing, counseling, social events, and campus tours for new students (Rentz, 1988). The predominant method of conveying information during these weeks was the lecture style, and typically included a convocation as part of the program. The convocation was a formal ceremony highlighted by a speech presented to the entire university community. In this speech, usually the

president of the college or university informed students of their right to acquire knowledge at the institution and the responsibilities they had to their campus community. Williamson and Biggs (1975) may have been referring to the convocation when they indicated that students should be informed of "their multiple roles as members of the academic community, civic community, and the family" (p. 199).

At a conference in Columbus, Ohio in 1948, the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) was formed to detail the "aims and objectives of orientation week." NODA expressed the commitment colleges and universities by this time had made to professional orientation. Preliminary steps in the development of NODA as an association occurred rather haphazardly. As ensuing conferences were held after 1948, the members present would simply volunteer to host the meeting the following year, and information from previous conferences was passed on in an informal manner (Rode, 1998).

With support for the freshman week waning by the late 1940s, the trend toward a more structured orientation was well underway. By the early 1950s, many orientation programs were fashioned around the concept of a freshman orientation course (Drake, 1966). Drake also found that the freshman course lasted from one quarter to two semesters and was offered as a credit or non-credit class. This format usually had one of two goals: to introduce new students to broad areas of study, or to assist new students with problems specific to their programs. However, such a model would have a short life in the spotlight. Beginning in the 1960s, studies were conducted to analyze the effect of small group discussions among freshmen in assisting them with the challenges they faced during the first year. Smith (1963) found that regular meetings in small groups aided in student retention and registration for the second semester.

Also during the 1960s, the concept of the pre-college clinic was gaining popularity. The typical clinic lasted two to four days over the summer months. Included in the clinic were areas such as testing, counseling, social, and informational activities (Drake, 1966). A major objective of the clinic was to keep the number of students in each group small; therefore, the program was administered several times throughout the course of the summer. This style of orientation program was particularly popular with larger universities. Reported benefits of the pre-college clinic, according to Drake, ranged from an effective means of improving grades and initial adjustment to college to involving the student earlier in college life. Throughout the 1960s, the importance of counseling parents as a means of assisting their sons and daughters in their personal development was also suggested (Wall, 1962).

The 1960s also witnessed the emergence of including upper class students as peer mentors in the orientation process. At many residential universities, specialization in one's profession and the increase in pressure to "publish or perish" caused faculty to withdraw from advising roles and precipitated the birth of the student affairs profession (Geiger, 1992). As the world of academia began to change, the perception of the role of the undergraduate student in orientation changed as well. Students assumed new roles as participants and actively engaged in programming and staffing activities, and from this point forward, the contribution of the student to orientation would continue to grow. With the utilization of student orientation leaders, there was also a reawakening of the freshman week model as an extension of the summer pre-college clinic (Rentz, 1988).

During the late 1970s, some colleges and universities began to experience declining enrollments (Rentz, 1988). This problem was magnified by enrollment-driven state funding formulas for public institutions of higher education and by higher state tuition policies as America implemented the first mass system of higher education in the world. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), enrollment figures show an increase in the number of students from 3.6 million in 1960 to 13.5 million in 1990 (NCES, 1995). However, many institutions (particularly residential institutions) experienced declining enrollments due to a decrease in state support. In addition, state funding in current dollars declined from about 60% to about 48% from fiscal year 1947 to fiscal year 1994 (NCES, 1996a, 1996b). In Ohio, for example, in 1975, 241,698 students were enrolled at public colleges and universities while in 1994, 320,661 students were enrolled. While enrollment rose by 33%, adjusted for inflation per full time enrollment, funding declined 4.4% (NCES, 1996c). Therefore, for the first time ever, student retention became a major focus of orientation programs. Literature relating to orientation programs now supported the participation of the entire campus community in these activities (Rentz, 1988).

A shift to a targeted-audience orientation program occurred in the 1970s when a larger number of more diverse groups of students attained access to higher education for the first time (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993). The needs of these students were different from those of the previous, homogeneous student population (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993). In addition to acclimating students to campuses, orientation professionals were now being asked to provide programs and services that recognized students' multiple backgrounds.

Another milestone of this decade was the 1976 establishment of NODA to its present day organizational structure. The association saw the need for university-based directors of orientation to share their ideas in a more in-depth, structured setting (Rode, 1998). The unusual practice of encouraging the participation of student leaders at NODA conferences emerged during this time.

The 1980s brought the greatest increase in the number of orientation programs offered on college and university campuses (Barefoot & Gardner, 1993). Orientation was now viewed as a standard practice in the college community. During this time, the most consistent and popular type of orientation program was the first-semester freshman seminar and nearly two-thirds of American four-year institutions of higher education provided a course of this type by the beginning of the 1990s (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Barefoot & Fidler, 1992). Several studies indicated that students who participated in a semester-long course felt better acclimated to their campus environments and had a greater academic awareness than students who were involved only in pre-college orientation (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986; Rice, 1992).

Components of Current Orientation Programs

Williamson and Biggs (1975) indicated, "One of the primary goals of orientation is to develop intellectual curiosity as a peer group norm so that the potency of peer group influence is related to the goals of academia" (p. 190). Brackin and Smith (1993) related

the mission of the orientation program to the mission of the university. They stated that "to determine the components of a comprehensive orientation program, begin asking three basic questions: (a) What is the nature and mission of the institution? (b) What is the mission of the orientation program? (c) What orientation program content will accomplish this mission?" (p. 35).

Although orientation programs differ according to the size and mission of the institution, Upcraft and Farnsworth (1984) identified four areas that orientation programs should address. The first area is the adjustment to the student's academic environment. It is imperative that the student is provided information in such areas as academic policy, procedures, requirements and programs. Second, comprehensive programs aid in each student's personal adjustment to his or her social environment. It is important that students develop interpersonal skills to cope effectively with their new surroundings. Third, orientation programs provide family members with educational information and facts about the services offered at the institution. In this manner, orientation staff can inform families of possible changes their students may experience during their initial months away from home. Finally, effective orientation programs include a means of informing the institution of the needs of students attending (Upcraft & Farnsworth).

A complete orientation program addresses both academic and student development. As Brackin and Smith (1993) indicate, "A high priority of any orientation program is to provide opportunities for the student to begin to meet his or her personal and professional goals" (p. 38). Thus, sound academic advising includes contributions from both faculty advisors and a well-trained orientation program staff. Regardless of institutional size, the academic structure, academic requirements, and grades rank highest in priority among topic areas addressed during orientation (Brackin & Smith). Although academics rank highest at most institutions, student development is another major component of an orientation program. Development outside the classroom and the belief in a cocurricular or out-of-class experience is discussed by several theorists as a crucial element to the solidification of a sense of campus community and an attachment to the institution (Astin, 1985; Chickering, 1969; Kuh et al., 1991). Orientation directors need to include both academic and cocurricular components to achieve a highly successful orientation program.

The Past as Prelude

This article has examined the recent history of new student orientation programs at four-year, public institutions and provided an analysis of the various models of orientation programs. It is hoped that this information will promote sound educational practice among those involved with orientation planning in order to ease student transition, particularly for first-time college students. This can be accomplished by adjusting current practices to accommodate the new blend of students on college and university campuses (Brown, 1996).

As the number of public institutions of higher education in the United States that are enrollment driven (and particularly, tuition driven) increases, student retention will continue to be a major focus of orientation. Further, an awareness of services for

students, given increased student diversity (e.g., students with disabilities, first generation college students, non-traditional students with diverse learning styles, etc.), will be a point of increasing importance (Jacobs, 1993). Ideally, this information will enable faculty, staff, and students involved with orientation to assess more accurately what will be needed in the future. An understanding of what was offered in the past should thus enable orientation professionals to better determine which programs will most effectively meet the needs of the students they serve.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1985). *Achieving educational excellence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Barefoot, B., & Fidler, P. (1992). *1991 national survey of freshman seminar programming: Helping first-year college students climb the academic ladder*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph No. 10).
- Barefoot, B. O., & Gardner, J. N. (1993). The freshman orientation seminar: Extending the benefits of traditional orientation. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *The Freshman Year Experience. Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College*, Columbia, S.C.: National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph Series No. 13).
- Brackin, R., & Smith, B. F. (1993). Components of a comprehensive orientation program. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *The Freshman Year Experience. Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College*, Columbia, S.C.: National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph Series No. 13).
- Brown, R. (1972). *Tomorrow's higher education: A return to the academy*. The American College Personnel Association.
- Brown, S. V. (1996). Responding to new demographics in higher education. In Rendon, L. I., & Hope, R. O. (Eds.), *Educating a New Majority: Transforming America's Educational System for Diversity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services / Development Programs. (1986). *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Services / Development Programs*. Iowa City: ACT.
- Drake, R. W., Jr. (1966). *Review of the literature for freshman orientation practices in the U.S.* (Report No. CG 004 110). Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO: American College Personnel Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 030 920)
- Geiger, R. L. (1992). *Research and relevant knowledge: American research universities since world war II*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jacobs, B. (1993). Orienting diverse populations. In M. L. Upcraft, R. H. Mullendore, B. O. Barefoot, & D. S. Fidler (Eds.), *The Freshman Year Experience. Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College*, Columbia, S.C.: National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience. (Monograph Series No. 13).
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. S., Whitt, E. J., Andreas, R. E., Lyons, J. W., Strange, C. C., Krehbiel, L. E., & MacKay, K. A. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mueller, K.H. (1961). *Student personnel work in higher education*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1995). *Digest of educational statistics*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1996a). *State comparisons of education statistics: 1969-70 to 1993-94* (Table 53, pp. 138-201 and Table 54, pp. 141-143). Washington, D.C.: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1996b). *Digest of educational statistics*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1996c). *State comparison of education statistics: 1969-70 to 1993-94* (Table 83, pp. 199-201). Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Rode, D. L. (1998). NODA: A brief history. *The New Member Handbook*. Bloomington, IN: National Orientation Directors Association.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Wolfe, L. (1986). Orientation to college and freshman year persistence/withdrawal decisions. *Journal of Higher Education*, 57, 155-175.
- Rentz, A. L. (1988). Orientation. In A. L. Rentz & G. L. Saddlemire (Eds.), *Student Affairs Functions in Higher Education* (pp. 203-225). Springfield, IL: Thomas.
- Research Associates of Washington (April, 1989). *Higher Education Tuition* (Table 13A, pp. 112).
- Rice, R. (1992). Reaction of participants to either pre-college orientation or freshman seminar courses. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 4 (2), pp. 85-100.
- Strang, R. (1951). Orientation of new students. In C. G. Wrenn (Ed.), *Student Personnel Work in College* (pp. 274-292). New York: Ronald.
- Upcraft, M. L., & Farnsworth, W. M. (1984). Orienting programs and activities. In M. L. Upcraft (Ed.), *Orienting Students to College*. New Directions for Student Services, No. 25. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wall, H. W. (1962). A counseling program for parents of college freshman. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 40, 774-778.
- Williamson, E. G., & Biggs, D. A. (1975). Orientation as induction into the collegiate experience. *Student Personnel Work: A Program of Developmental Relationships*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.