

## On-Line Presentation of a First Year Seminar

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The value of first year seminars has been realized and documented in a variety of contexts. These include, but are not limited to, increased retention, improved academic performance, and the use of student services (Fidler & Hunter, 1990). Recent statistics reported in *The 2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programs: Continuing Innovations in the Collegiate Curriculum* (2002) show that 74% of institutions now offer such seminars, and 80% of these institutions require some or all first-year students to enroll in the seminar. An important question to address, then, becomes what happens when students fail to successfully complete the seminar during this first semester of college. At North Dakota State University, an institution where general education requirements state that all students entering the university with fewer than 24 credits will complete "Skills for Academic Success," this concern has been addressed by the implementation of an on-line course.

Historically, "Skills for Academic Success" became a general education requirement in 1997, and is a one credit, graded course, designed to ease the transition for new students at the university. Students in the class learn skills and techniques used by successful college students. In addition to introducing them to campus resources and governance, topics include study techniques, time management, test taking, note taking, goal setting, wellness, stress management, and career orientation.

From the inception of the course, some students failed to enroll as required, and some failed to successfully complete it. The decision was made that these students would not be allowed to retake the class with the traditional new students. Subsequently, when a session was offered exclusively for these students, complaints and negative attitudes predominated.

Recognizing that advanced students had successfully mastered many issues of concern to first semester students, issues covered in "Skills for Academic Success," a decision was made to allow advanced students to demonstrate their acquired knowledge of basic information and challenge them to explore other topics in more detail. This decision resulted in the predominately on-line course described here.

The course consists of eight sessions, three of which meet in class and five of which are completed on-line through the use of Blackboard software. Blackboard is an on-line learning environment widely used by NDSU faculty and students. Among other functions, Blackboard permits posting of syllabi and assignments, sharing documents, administration of exams, and posting grades. The software also allows for the encouraging of communication between faculty and students and permits student-to-student communication.

In this primarily on-line version of the course, all students meet together in a large

computer cluster for the first session. Students enroll themselves in the course, are introduced to the on-line syllabus, and introduce themselves to the class using the Web Page function provided on Blackboard. Digital photographs are taken of each student for inclusion on this Web Page. Students next meet during session number four, during which time they tour the Career Center and Career Library and are introduced to the people and facilities available for career planning, resume building, and job searches. They meet again during the final session during which a final on-line exam is administered and a course evaluation is completed.

For the other five sessions, students complete on-line assignments. They complete modules related to the creation and storage of information, searching on-line databases, and evaluating web resources. They demonstrate their knowledge of the campus and the library by taking an on-line orientation quiz and working through a library virtual tour and tutorial. Students are provided with links and asked to evaluate web sites related to setting priorities, understanding self, learning styles, stress management, study skills, time management, and money management. They also write essays that reflect their current academic success and career plans.

Upon completion of the course, students have demonstrated successful mastery of the concepts stipulated by general education. In addition, compared to past experiences, student attitudes and feedback have dramatically improved. Comments received include statements such as:

*I felt that the information was easy to access, and the Digital Drop Box was a convenient way to hand in assignments. I felt that the exams were pretty self-explanatory, and they were informative.*

*The 189 Blackboard site was set up perfectly, and it was very easy to find information and assignments. The Digital Drop Box is a handy tool, and taking exams on Blackboard fits my style much better than writing the answers down on paper.*

*I am an older than average student and I learned a lot from this course.*

In summary, for students who fail to successfully complete the required first year seminar during their first semester, the on-line offering of the course has proven to be a successful alternative. Although some aspects of offering the course may be challenging, NDSU will continue to offer and refine the on-line version in the future.

## References

- Fidler, P. P., & Hunter, M. S. (1989). How seminars enhance student success. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, & Associates (Eds.), *The Freshman Year Experience* (pp. 216-237). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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## Developing an Online Orientation Program for Transfer Students to Arizona State University

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Arizona State University (ASU) is the fourth largest public university in the nation. Located in Tempe, Arizona, the main campus enrolled 36,761 students in Fall 2003, 3,978 of which were new transfer students. *U.S. News and World Report* ranks ASU second in the number of transfer students received annually. The majority of these transfer students come from community colleges in Arizona, and 3.5% come from out of state. Transfer students tend to be commuter students.

In response to a low (11%) attendance rate at orientation by students transferring to ASU, a campus-wide team was formed to create and implement a service to increase transfer student participation and successful completion of ASU enrollment. Online Transfer Orientation (OTO) was selected as the best solution to help Undergraduate Admissions (UGA) meet its goal of having all admitted students participate in orientation and offering them a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week resource. The purposes of OTO included encouraging early registration and orientation participation and keeping transfer students on track to meet professional program application deadlines. Also, OTO recognized orientation as a process, allowing for post-admission follow-up, and reduced phone calls and e-mail.

UGA Transfer Services, Marketing and Communications, and Orientation staff engaged support from advisors and Student Affairs Computing Services. The team facilitated feasibility meetings, planning sessions, testing, revisions, and evaluation. Survey results indicated that students found phase I of OTO (OTO I) easy to navigate and helpful in completing enrollment. Phase II of OTO (OTO II), launched December 2002, offered the first online orientation customized by semester of admission, major,