Adult Basic and Secondary Education: FIG Report

FIG Members: Christine Grutta, Patti Jackson, Anne Monroe, Aliscia Niles, Julie Pfaff, and Alouise Warner

Our Inquiry:

How can we use Orientation to improve our student retention and persistence and to meet Title II requirements?

What small, immediate changes can we make to the current Orientation process? What larger, long-term changes can we make (beginning Fall 2014)?

A Brief Literature Review:

In his chapter, "Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach Their Goals," Comings (2007) defines persistence as "adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow." Comings' review of the literature on persistence in adult education reveals several key findings:

- Adults' decisions to participate are often based on cost-benefit analysis

- Programs need to align their services with learner motivations and life contexts

- It is necessary to broaden the definition of participation beyond instructional hours which challenges the conventional notions of "nonparticipants"

- There is evidence to support the link between adult learner persistence and previous schooling experiences

- Engaging learners in discussion of motivational issues increased persistence

Of particular interest to our inquiry are these findings:

- Intake and orientation are critical to persistence

- Intake and Orientation should start with goal setting and students matched to classes that meet their needs

- The first 3 weeks of participation in a program are of critical importance to student persistence

From her review of the literature, Tracy-Mumford (1994) created a student persistence plan that she says must be integrated into all components of a program's structure. Her list of strategies translates theory into practical advice. Several of her strategies are particularly relevant to our inquiry, such as:

- Intake and orientation procedures should help students understand the program, set realistic expectations, build a working relationship with program staff, and establish learning goals.

- Initial assessment tools should provide students and teachers with information on both cognitive and affective needs, should be integrated with instruction, and should form the foundation for measuring progress.

- Programs and teachers should establish strategies for formally recognizing student achievement.

- Counseling services should identify students at risk of dropping out early.

- The program should have a system for contact and follow-up that helps students who drop out return to the program and solicits information on ways to improve program services.

- Non-instructional activities should help form a bond between the program and its students and their families.

- A student persistence team should coordinate dropout prevention activities, collect data on student persistence, and involve students and teachers in addressing this issue.

Current statistics show that most students entering adult education classrooms leave within the first three weeks of study (Ten Strategies for Improving Retention). In response to this discouraging statistic, Professional Development Support for Literacy and Basic Skills Educators in Ontario has identified ten strategies that have showed an impact on lowering student attrition rates. The very first strategy identified is, "Conduct a new student orientation." Suggested orientation topics include an overview of the organization including its mission and target population, program overview, class times and location, and student and program expectations. Additional recommended strategies that could be incorporated into a new student orientation are one-to-one personal interviews, welcome letters/phone calls/emails, and establishment of peer support systems.

The National College Transition Network (NCTN) published a list of 10 Promising Practices to aid ABE students making the transition to postsecondary education. The first practice addressed is Orientation. NCTN states, "An orientation program can help promote a sense of community and trust in the classroom while addressing the emotional and psychological barriers that many adult students face."

Kieran (2004) presents a detailed description of the GED/ABE Orientation process she and colleagues have designed and successfully implemented at Cape Cod Community College. The program orientation is a 2-day, 10 hour process. The agenda is:

Day One:

- Ice breaker/Community building activity

- Introductions from students and program staff, including all of the teachers, the counselors and administrative staff.

- Group activity designed to have each studetn articulate what he or she will need to feel comfortable and to thrive in the classroom

- Catered lunch. Informal discussion time between students and staff.

- Video addressing the issues that surround the importance of being able to make life changes.

- Homework Assignment.

Day Two:

- Activity based on the homework

- Time-management activity. Students receive a college planner. Students enter important dates into their planner.

- Catered lunch. Program graduates currently attending the college join the students and share their experiences.

- Review the program's syllabus and the materials students will need for class.

Kiernan notes the challenges of time and limited resources in implementing the orientation, but states the outcomes as very successful. She posits that the orientation creates "a strong sense of community and enthusiasm among the students. They build a support system for one another that will continue to develop, one that is supported and nurtured throughout the semesters. The students bring the planners that they received to each class, which helps with organization and with the students' sense of being responsible for their own learning."

Identifying the Problem:

- Leaks in the "Pipeline" (see Julie's diagram); Collaborate w/ Counseling/Advising to address some of these leaks

- Need to deliver financial info to students

- Need a way to track data

- There are "Hot Spots" – places in the term where we lose Ss

- Confusion of scores for Ss (too many numbers; different languages) – Simplify

- No buy-in ("Why am I here?") – need to change the message to "This is a good place for you" and show value of ABSE program

- Preparedness – lack of learner identity/student success skills

- Students have to call in for schedule – leads to a lot of misunderstanding and confusion first week of classes

- Need to deal with bus pass

- You will lose students if you do too much "touchy/feely" college success stuff

Other Orientation Models:

TRIO Orientation – 1 to 1 – Use Student Support Plan (see handout)

Orientation models from other adult ed programs around state – no one doing anything dramatically different; most revolve around testing and registration; CGCC has a PASS (Promoting Access to Student Success) program, an early alert program to catch students who may be at risk of failing or dropping out and then provides intervention services to connect them with resources for success; PCC Rock Creek HEP program conducts student interviews along with testing

Past LCC ABSE Orientation – 3 ½ days; included registration and assessment (testing) + learning style inventories, goal setting, identification of barriers, and 1:1 conferences between student and instructor

LCC's Women in Transition Program Orientation - Goal of orientation is for students to determine if program is the right fit for them; Placement testing info provided; Letter to applicants (gives date/time to call to confirm decision to enroll in program); Advising Session is second part of orientation (release holds and register; give MyLane demo); Students meet faculty and staff; Each student receives an LCC folder with important program info; There are several points of contact before students actually start classes

Orientation Objectives:

- Increase the number of students who persist from Orientation to the first day of class AND improve overall retention of attending students.

- Build student resilience - Students will make positive connections to faculty and advisors.

- Create a sense of community - Students will make positive connections to other students.

- Experience success through active learning - Students will try out our style of learning.

- See their learning path - Students will identify academic goals and see courses and testing in context of reaching their goals; Students will understand their skill levels and placement upon program entry and the skill level required to meet their goals.

- Get ready to learn - Students will learn how to succeed in our program.

Proposed Orientation Model:

Time	Day 1 - Thurs. *Staff*	Day 1 - Thurs. *Faculty & Advisors*	Day 2 - Fri. *Staff*	Day 2 - Fri. *Faculty & Advisors*
9-9:45		Welcome/Introduction (icebreaker/community building activity; introductions from students and program staff)		Shorter welcome
9:45 - 11:30	registration form testing goal-setting	Optional Effective Learning workshops	testing	Optional Effective Learning workshops
11:30 -12		Closing Activity		Closing Activity (Student/Teacher Conferences)

Proposed Midterm Orientation Plan:

Faculty will meet with students 1:1 and discuss the schedule, interpret test scores and explain flowchart on day 2 of Orientation

Ideas for Orientation Implementation:

- Separate testing from Success Strategy instruction

- Give students choices of workshops

- Keep "Goal" language limited to TOPS; Use "Student Plan" or other language for our purposes

- Group Activity – Solve a problem/ complete a task

- Need a safe, public forum for online peer connection – Instagram? Facebook?

- Students need to be Moodle ready when they leave Orientation

- Recruit students for Everything You Want To Know About College class

- Every student receives an LCC folder with appropriate paperwork on 1st day

- Provide FOOD – create community

- Have a "College Day" (Dene's idea) – could use as a "mini-orientation" for midterm load

- Use IPQs (Indicators of Program Quality)- (Cathy's idea) – there is a category for Orientation/Retention/Instruction

- Orientation should provide an immediate authority connection (teacher) and an immediate peer connection for all students

- Share "Train Analogy" (Class is a train; it's moving; if you get off (poor attendance) you can work really hard to get back on or you wait for the next train) – make it a department slogan – have graphic posted around, including in online spaces

Additional Ideas for Improving Student Retention:

- Letter to Employer – to encourage support for student juggling work and school

- Participation Policy (consistency, accountability, conforms to program mission)

- Letter to Self – Students self-address an envelope and write letter to self stating their reasons for attending school; mail when attendance is suffering or a consistent point in term (this could be a good activity for Orientation)

Resources:

Comings, J.P. "Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach Their Goals." *Defining and Improving Quality in Adult Basic Education.* Ed. A. Belzer, H. Beder. Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007.

Kieran, J. "Promising Practices: Orientation." SUCCESS College Transition Program, Cape Cod Community College. NCTN Promising Practice Series, Vol. 1 Issue 1. Sept/Oct 2004. http://www.collegetransition.org/promisingpractices.briefs.orientation.html

"Ten Strategies for Improving Retention in Adult Education Programs." Professional Development Support for Literacy and Basic Skills Educators in Ontario. http://www.lbspractitionertraining.com

For Future Additional Reading:

Mooney, J., & Cole, D. (2000). *Learning outside the lines: Two Ivy League students with learning disabilities and ADHD give you the tools for academic success and educational revolution.* New York: Simon & Schuster.