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Pilot Program Uses Cocurricular Transcripts for Sophomore Career Preparation

Clarion University's Transitions program, created in 1999 with the purpose of improving student retention rates and performance, is a partnership among the Division of Academic Affairs and the Division of Student and University Affairs through which new university-wide, cross-divisional, and collaborative planning, implementation, and outcomes assessment are shaped. The Transitions team comprises key staff from the Student and University Affairs division (i.e., career services, residence life, campus life) and key faculty and administrators from the Academic Affairs division (i.e., assessment, academic enrichment, university governance, enrollment management). This team serves as the advisory board to the Transitions coordinator and provides recommendations regarding implementation, assessment, and continuous improvement.

The goal of Transitions is to help students stay in college and develop

permanent ties to Clarion University through cocurricular programming and activities. The sequencing of activities is timed so that each activity occurs when it is most needed by students, rather than in a "front-loaded" fashion. Each component of Transitions has multiple student learning outcomes and assessments that are cross-referenced to specific goals (see www.clarion.edu/transitions).

Transitions comprises five elements: (a) Orientation (one-day precollege orientation sessions for first-year and transfer students); (b) Discovery (three days of programming for new

See PILOT PROGRAM, p. 2

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The National Resource Center proudly announces the 2008-2009 Paul P. Fidler Research Grant recipient: Maryellen Mills



Mills' mixed methods study examines the nature of success course influence on engagement between course-takers and non-takers, and part-time and full-time community college students. She was announced at the 2008 Students in Transition conference in Columbia, South Carolina and will be presenting her findings at the 2009 conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. Mills is the fourth winner of this annual grant competition and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Texas at Austin.


The grant recipient gets \$5000, travel funds to two Students in Transition conferences, and the opportunity to publish the results of their study in a NRC publication. For more information on the Paul P. Fidler Research Grant go to www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant/index.html. The deadline for the 2009-2010 award is July 1, 2009.

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students during the weekend prior to their first semester); (c) Exploration (credit-bearing, peer/faculty-facilitated cocurricular programming during the first college year); (d) Sophomore Focus (career experiences during the sophomore year and an official cocurricular transcript); and (e) Academic Mentoring (career preparation during the junior and senior years). This article describes Sophomore Focus and the strategy we devised to document and assess its effectiveness.

The goal of Sophomore Focus is to engage every sophomore in at least one cocurricular activity in the areas of leadership, citizenship, volunteerism, career experience, and/or personal growth. We identified these areas as the ones most likely to support a successful transition to life after college and defined them as follows:

- *Leadership.* Activities through which students develop their knowledge about leadership and practice leadership skills
- *Citizenship.* Activities through which students develop a heightened sense of civic responsibility
- *Volunteerism.* Activities through which students serve others with their time, resources, or skills, without expectation of financial compensation
- *Career experience.* Activities through which students gain first-hand experience with a career
- *Personal growth.* Activities that expand students' horizons culturally, emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, or spiritually to help them become well-rounded individuals



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Co-Curricular Transcript

Name: Chris P. Smith

CAT	AFFILIATION	ACTIVITY	CAT	AFFILIATION	ACTIVITY
-----2004-2005-----					
CE	James Jewelers	Job Shadowing	CE	Kids Come to College Day	Mentor
CE	Student PA State Education Association	Member	CE	Mary Walters Leadership Development Series	Student Coordinator
CT	Red Cross Blood Drives	Donor	CE	VMA Accounting Firm	Internship
LR	Student Senate	Senator	CT	BACCHUS GAMMA	Event Organizer
LR	University Activities Board	Lecture Chair	LR	Order of Omega	Secretary
PG	Clarion University Athletics	Softball	LR	Panhellenic Council	President
PG	Delta Zeta	Member	LR	University Activities Board	Lecture Chair
PG	Phi Eta Sigma	Member	PG	Delta Zeta	Member
VL	Read for the Cure	Reader	PG	Kappa Delta Pi	Member
-----2005-2006-----					
CE	Clarion Call (Newspaper)	Copy Editor	VL	Clarion County Humane Society	Dog Walker
CE	Delta Zeta	New Member Educator	VL	Red Cross Blood Drives	Walker
CE	Kids Come to College Day	Organizer	VL	Special Olympics	Mentor
CT	League of Women Voters	Voter Registration			
LR	Mary Walters Leadership Development Series	Participant			
LR	Student Senate	Vice President			
LR	University Activities Board	Lecture Chair			
PG	Order of Omega	Member			
PG	Clarion University Athletics	Softball			
PG	Kappa Delta Phi	Member			
PG	Panhellenic Council	Delegate			
PG	Phi Eta Sigma	Member			
VL	Red Cross Blood Drives	Walker			
VL	Special Olympics	Mentor			
-----2006-2007-----					
PROFESSIONAL STATEMENT (MAX. 150 WORDS)					
<p>While at Clarion University I have endeavored to develop leadership skills, character, and discipline. As my co-curricular transcript indicates, I have been involved with numerous civic, volunteer, and professional activities, often in leadership roles. These experiences have allowed me to work with and lead individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and races. I have enjoyed the opportunity to develop personal responsibility and a commitment to community. Through these co-curricular experiences I have used my creative energies to develop practical talents that will help me to be more effective working with people in various settings.</p>					

TRANSCRIPT CATEGORY LEGEND

CE CAREER EXPERIENCE
CT CITIZENSHIP
LR LEADERSHIP
PG PERSONAL GROWTH
VL VOLUNTEERISM



OFFICIAL SIGNATURE
VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AND UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS

OFFICIAL SIGNATURE
PROVOST AND ACADEMIC VICE PRESIDENT

Clarion University's cocurricular transcript documents a student's service activities and accompanies the academic transcript.

Echoing the literature on sophomore-year retention, engagement in cocurricular activities has been identified by the Clarion University community as a most effective way to help students avoid the *sophomore slump*. In addition to minimizing sophomore slump, the University also believes that creating sophomore career experiences, including job shadowing, field experiences, volunteer work, and other similar experiences, will help sophomores develop skills and attitudes that comport with their chosen career paths. A university-wide inventory of these types of experiences found that the University sponsors hundreds of career experiences through numerous student organizations, mandated cocurricular activities related to class assignments or degree requirements, and affiliations with more than 100 external agencies for which students provide volunteer

and paid services. The inventory also revealed that the issue was not whether the University provided sophomores career experiences, but rather, how to provide students with a concrete representation of the intangible benefits associated with these kinds of experiences. Our solution was the development of the cocurricular transcript.

Clarion University's cocurricular transcript (CCT) officially documents a student's cocurricular experiences in a format similar to the academic transcript and is sent with the academic transcript to potential employers and to graduate school admissions offices. Campus organizations, faculty, and external organizations submit, via the web, cocurricular activities in the areas of leadership, citizenship, volunteerism, career experience, and personal



The Big Picture

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Got Faculty? Promoting Faculty Involvement in FYE Programs and Initiatives

The issue of increasing faculty involvement in first-year experience (FYE) programming has received regular attention on the FYE-Listserv, and it ranked first in a recent, informal, needs-assessment survey of *E-Source* readers. Such observations reinforce an argument that was made in the first issue of this column, namely: FYE professionals are not only new-student advocates but also agents of change.

It has been said that attempting to produce change in higher education is “harder than trying to move a graveyard” (Fife, 1982, p. xv). In particular, faculty resistance to change can be so intense that it once prompted the former president of the University of Chicago to caustically claim that, “Every advance in education is made over the dead bodies of 10,000 resisting professors” (Robert Hutchins, quoted in Seymour, 1988). However, this article rests on the assumption that there are faculty who may be intrinsically interested and willing to become involved in FYE programming if they knew exactly what roles

they could play and why they should play them. Here, I will focus on strategies targeted at faculty to promote change or buy-in with respect to FYE programs and initiatives.

Why? The Case for Faculty Involvement With First-Year Experience Programs

While it is unfortunate that many faculty do not become involved with first-year students outside the classroom, it is understandable since graduate education does not provide instructors with preparation for (or mention of) this role, and upon entering the professoriate, new-faculty orientation and professional development often do not encourage it.

The research evidence supporting faculty involvement with students outside the classroom is formidable, and the positive outcomes empirically associated with it are multiple. One would be hard-pressed to find any other college-experience variable with as much empirical support for as many positive educational outcomes. In short, research indicates that

faculty-student contact outside the classroom promotes the following:

- Retention/persistence to graduation
- Academic achievement/performance
- Critical thinking
- Personal and intellectual development
- Educational aspirations
- Satisfaction with faculty
- College satisfaction
- Perceptions of college quality (Astin, 1977, 1993; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1991, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993)

Furthermore, the positive effects of faculty-student contact outside of class have been found to have a direct effect on educational outcomes that is independent of other college experiences and student characteristics. Thus, its association with positive outcomes cannot be simply dismissed as being caused by the tendency of already high-achieving students to engage in more frequent out-of-class contact with faculty.

What? A Variety of Meaningful Faculty-Student Interactions

The wider the range of options offered to faculty for contributing to the FYE, the greater will be their sense of control or ownership of the process and the greater the likelihood they will find an activity that represents a “good fit.” Listed below is a range of activities that may already be available, or could be made available, to faculty for involvement with FYE initiatives.

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CUSEO Cont. from p. 3

- Faculty participate in new-student orientation by leading small-group discussions relating to summer reading or short reading given during orientation.
- Faculty interact with students at a reception following new-student convocation to provide students with information about their disciplines and careers related to their disciplines.
- Faculty, particularly those not involved in academic advising, serve as mentors or coaches for first-year students.
- Faculty sponsor or moderate student clubs or organizations for activities that reflect the faculty members' avocational interests (e.g., cycling, chess, theatre).
- Faculty sponsor departmental clubs for new students interested in or majoring in their field.
- Faculty members visit student residences to conduct small-group discussions relating to course content, test-review sessions, tutoring, or academic advising.
- Faculty make themselves available as interviewees for new students. For example, students interview a faculty member in their major or a potential field of interest as an assignment in their FYE course.
- Faculty sponsor service-learning experiences for students in areas relating to their academic discipline.
- Faculty join students on college committees, task forces, or

councils (e.g., student retention committee, FYE advisory council, or student involvement task force).

- Faculty utilize student research teams, enabling talented first-year students to gain experience as research assistants with the added potential of developing a product for use as a senior honors thesis, joint conference presentation with a faculty member, or professional publication co-authored with a faculty member.

The wide range of strategies cited in the foregoing list suggests that meaningful faculty involvement in first-year program initiatives may occur in multiple and varied contexts.

Given the plethora of positive outcomes that are empirically associated with faculty-student interaction outside the classroom, a multi-faceted approach to stimulating such interaction is likely to promote synergistic effects on first-year student success.

How? Avenues for Delivering the Involvement Message to Faculty

Two key routes for enlisting faculty in FYE initiatives and informing them of their options for involvement are new-faculty orientation programs and faculty development programming. In addition to presenting information in person to faculty in these settings, material may be made available to faculty in print (e.g., a brochure detailing the variety of opportunities for faculty involvement with first-year students).

New-Faculty Orientation

This may be a timely opportunity to deliver a short presentation to

newly hired faculty, at which time a case may be made for their involvement with first-year students. Orientation might also be a propitious time to "educate" faculty about what student affairs professionals do, why they can do it better by collaborating with faculty, and how working together works in the best interest of students at the college. New faculty may be especially good candidates for involvement in FYE programming because they may be eager to make a good impression and have yet to fall into any professional habits that might interfere with their involvement.

Faculty Development Programming

Periodic workshops, seminars, or brown-bag lunch discussions may be offered that outline ways in which faculty may become involved with students outside the classroom, and why this involvement is so important to first-year student success. Many college faculty do not realize how much impact they have on student retention, nor are they aware of what specific things they can do inside and outside the classroom to reduce student attrition. In addition, academic affairs and FYE professionals may collaborate on orchestrating faculty development efforts in conjunction with, or as a component of, the college's faculty development program since both departments share a common interest in promoting faculty behavior that contributes to student learning and student success.

Conclusion

This article focused on strategies aimed at increasing faculty members'

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intrinsic motivation to become involved in FYE programming by appealing to evidence and student-centeredness. The next issue of this column will focus on the role of administration in providing extrinsic motivation via faculty-centered rewards and incentives that appeal to faculty professional advancement and self-interest.

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Mutual Expectations Program Improves Teaching and Learning

To create a more powerful, effective, and energetic classroom experience, the University of Missouri recently founded a program that helps open the lines of communication between faculty members and students through engaging dialogue sessions. One professor who participated in the program stated its importance simply:

“It is far too infrequent that faculty and students sit down together and have a civil discussion about teaching and learning issues. The Mutual Expectations dialogue provides a unique opportunity for just such a discussion and for approaching a common understanding of the education process,” (Survey response, September 29, 2008).

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The Mutual Expectations program develops shared understanding between faculty and students that is essential for a positive learning environment. As Melvin George (one of the founders of the Missouri program) and Kenneth Sufka (2000) noted, “When expectations are not in place, misunderstandings frequently arise, establishing a relationship is problematical, and, in the case of a student-faculty relationship, achieving an ideal learning environment is greatly jeopardized” (p. 48).

The Mutual Expectations program is an interactive experience,

which encourages the kind of student-professor relationships that foster a more productive academic environment by addressing classroom issues that are of concern to both parties. The program, founded in 2005, grew out of the Wakonse Conference on Teaching and Learning. Since its introduction at the University of Missouri, there have been four large campus-wide sessions, the first of which attracted more than 150 students and faculty members. There have also been several smaller sessions, tailored for individual departments, divisional units within a college, or first-year learning communities. To emphasize the importance of mutuality, the program is currently run by a team of undergraduate students and faculty members, who share equally in the planning and facilitation responsibilities of all events.

Students and faculty members who participate in a Mutual Expectations dialogue session go through a series of large- and small-group discussions during each 90-minute session. The participants are divided into small groups with an almost equal number of faculty and students and are given time to individually brainstorm what they expect of each other in the classroom. Then they share their expectations within their small group. Within the context of the large group, common themes or expectations that surprised or challenged students or faculty members are discussed.

The program has received strong support from both faculty and students who have benefited from participating in various ways.



The first Mutual Expectations Event at Missouri attracted over 150 faculty and students. (photo courtesy of the author)

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Professors have reported changing the way they present information, design their syllabi, and reach out to students via e-mail and during office hours. For example, many professors have opted to have office hours in the evening or in local coffee shops to be more approachable for students seeking help. Faculty have also increased the use of technology in the classroom, including videos and PowerPoint presentations.

The program has also given professors a better understanding of the challenges their current students may be facing, such as the need to work part-time to finance their education or participate in extracurricular campus activities, and the number of hours students typically have available to study due to these additional pressures. George points out that the program “has been particularly helpful in encouraging new students to talk with faculty without being intimidated, and it provides opportunities for faculty to understand more fully today’s students, not yesterday’s,” (personal communication, September 15, 2008).

Equally helpful for students, the program has encouraged more students to approach professors not only for help but also to establish a relationship with them at the beginning of each semester. The program gives students an opportunity to think about how they can shape their classroom experience themselves, by understanding professors and the techniques they use in the classroom. Vicky Riback-Wilson, also a faculty founder and coordinator of the program, sums up one of the main outcomes of the program: “By



Student co-founder Sarah McKay leads her group through a series of reflection questions about their expectations in the classroom. (photo courtesy of the author)

providing a designated time and space for dialogue, Mutual Expectations focuses attention on the teaching/learning process as a shared responsibility. It forces both students and instructors to recognize that they can create a relationship and affect educational outcomes,” (Personal communication, September 14, 2008).

One of the main objectives of the Mutual Expectations program is to encourage positive teaching and learning practices across the campus through individual expectation sessions in each class. Professors are encouraged to have open conversations with their classes at the beginning of each semester regarding both their expectations of the students, and the students’ expectations of them and the class. By replicating these dialogues in individual classes, everyone becomes personally responsible for the learning environment and the success of that environment, and a higher level of accountability is introduced.

Here are some strategies for using the principals of Mutual Expectations dialogue within individual classes:

- *Use the dialogues to shape class policies.* Have the conversation on the first day of class, before you hand out the syllabus. Students are not always receptive to “rules and regulations” outlined in a syllabus. By taking into account their expectations of you as an instructor and of the course, and then integrating those thoughts into the syllabus and the semester planning, you are embracing the idea of shared responsibility. The syllabus becomes more of a contract that has been discussed and agreed upon by both parties, rather than simply a list of one-sided rules.
- *Leave time for reflection.* Let students brainstorm individually

See EXPECTATIONS, p. 15

Innovative Programs for Promoting Engagement in the Second Year

Many higher education researchers and professionals now agree that the sophomore year is just as pivotal as the first and last years of a student's college experience. As Schaller (2007) notes,

[T]he sophomore year may be particularly difficult because the newness of college has worn off. Sophomores face at least three years of hard work in front of them, with increasing financial burdens over the first year. At the same time, these students may be struggling to determine career goals and to deal with personal development issues. (p. 7)

Often, the key to ensuring that the sophomore year does not become the "forgotten year" lies in

the programming and resources offered by the institution (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Some colleges host on-campus welcome-back events for their sophomores; others invite them to go on exclusive outdoor retreats. No matter what the venue, more and more colleges and universities are recognizing the importance of paying special attention to sophomores, thus making them feel like a valued and integral part of the student community.

Whereas retention was previously the number-one goal driving the development of second-year programs,

campus professionals and faculty are also working to help sophomores stay engaged in their college experience, helping them overcome what is often referred to as the "sophomore slump." This article highlights innovative programs aimed specifically at increasing sophomores' academic and social engagement.

Beloit College

Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin, boasts the longest-standing sophomore program in the nation. Since 1991, Beloit has offered its Sophomore-Year Initiatives Program, which emphasizes sophomores' independence and self-knowledge. The program offers students an outlet to think about and discuss their choice of major and directs them to extracurricular activities to remain engaged in the campus community. Activities include a welcome-back dinner at the beginning of the fall semester and a two-day off-campus retreat in November, both of which allow for the discussion of internship and study abroad opportunities with faculty members, as well as fostering relationships with faculty, staff, advisors, and peers. There is also a majors fair in the spring semester, often considered "crunch time" for those sophomores who have not yet chosen a course of study (Dubois, n.d.).

When asked what makes Beloit's program unique, Joy de Leon, assistant dean for academic advising and co-director of the Sophomore-Year Initiatives Program, said it is the program's partnership and continuity with academics and faculty relations. Impressively, the same faculty

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The University of South Carolina's Spring Major and Information Fair provides sophomores a one-stop information center.

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members who lead first-year seminars also lead a second-year seminar and attend the welcome-back dinner and the fall retreat for sophomores. "At conferences, people ask how we get the faculty to agree to do that," observed de Leon. She added that faculty members receive a small stipend for their participation but asserted that they are more motivated by maintaining the culture of close-knit faculty-student relations than money. "We believe that this continuous faculty-student connection from the first year to the second is the key to the students' success."

Colorado College

Colorado College, located in Colorado Springs, offers a Sophomore Jump program and includes a campus activities night; a welcome-back Hawaiian luau dinner; study abroad and volunteer fairs; and various workshops on scholarships, internships, and personality assessment. Programs are intended to increase students' self-knowledge and encourage students to use these new insights to make informed choices regarding their futures. As a part of the Jump program, the college is piloting a four-day outdoor adventure retreat for sophomores this fall designed, in part, to increase students' leadership

abilities by allowing them to take on new challenges and responsibilities in the great outdoors as opposed to the normal classroom setting. "The attempt is to use the many metaphors of the outdoors to address the struggles that sophomores face. For example, sophomores are trying to find direction in their life, and when outdoors, they have to use a compass to find their way," explained Julie Stockenberg, director of first-year and sophomore studies and advising.

The retreat, which includes a whitewater rafting excursion, will implement a curriculum designed to allow sophomores to re-identify their strengths and values and engage in self-reflection. According to Stockenberg, each student will be given "a journal that includes readings, quotes, prompts, and space for reflection." Having the retreat in the middle of the fall semester allows participating students to reflect not only on their first year of college but also on their experience thus far into their second year.

Although space is limited for the retreat, all sophomores are encouraged to apply, explaining why they want to attend and what they hope to gain from the experience. There is a nominal charge to attend the retreat, and the college has dedicated funds to cover the majority of costs and provide scholarships.



A sophomore obtains information on study abroad opportunities at the University of South Carolina Spring Major and Information Fair.

Loyola College

Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland, also hosts an outdoor program for its sophomores as well other offerings throughout the academic year. Programming focuses on fostering new relationships, defining a life purpose, and broadening minds and includes discussion and guidance in the art of Ignatian discernment—a decision-making process using spiritual exercises. Beginning with Sophomore Week in September, students are introduced to a number of upcoming programs available to them. Coffee, Cake, and Conversation gathers students together four to five times a year to discuss various topics. For a small fee, the Mystery Bus event encourages participants to interact with one another while finding their way around a mystery location. In October, students are invited to attend and participate in a one-day conference entitled Navigating Your Sophomore Year, and January's offering, prior to the beginning of the spring semester, is the Road Trip, a three-day retreat led by faculty, administrators, and upper-class students with an emphasis on developing

For more information on the sophomore programs describe in this article, visit

Beloit College at www.beloit.edu/syi/

Colorado College at www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/sophomore/

Loyola College at www.loyola.edu/sophomoreinitiatives

University of South Carolina at www.sa.sc.edu/tsi/

National Resource Center at www.sc.edu/fye/resources/soph/

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lasting relationships; discovering one's joys, gifts, and talents; and learning how to respond to the needs of the Baltimore community.

In addition, the Best of Baltimore immerses sophomores in cultural and sporting events happening in their community, and Ad Infinitum is structured for small student groups to assess their strengths in the context of a living/learning community. To end a year filled with engaging activities, Loyola offers, in collaboration with the department of recreational sports and under the leadership of staff members from several different divisions of campus, the Discovery program—an outdoor retreat for sophomores to wind down the year together by kayaking and camping after finishing their spring exams. Director of Sophomore Initiatives Michelle Cheatem explained, “This allows [sophomores] to reflect on their

last two years and to think about their calling in life.”

University of South Carolina

The University of South Carolina in Columbia, a large flagship university, is taking cues from the ways smaller colleges cater to their sophomores' needs. South Carolina's The Sophomore Initiative (TSI) is gaining momentum. In addition to programming designed to assist sophomores in deciding on a major and enriching their campus experience, TSI also focuses on posting resources for post-graduation education options on the University web site.

The University hosted its first sophomore fair last spring, and it is following up this fall with the Sophomore Information and Majors Fair for students interested in learning about studying abroad; internships; and declaring, changing, or adding a major. Also, this fall South Carolina piloted its first welcome-back event for

sophomores—the Sophomore Beach Bash, a gala at the campus fitness and wellness center with food and activities to encourage students to reconnect with peers and campus life.

Summary

While this article has highlighted only a few of the many programs higher education institutions are offering to ensure that sophomores remain engaged in their community, many more colleges and universities are starting to pay attention to the sophomore-year experience. Scholars are also generating new research on this important topic. The National Resource Center, has published two monographs on sophomore issues (see www.sc.edu/fye/publications/catalog/bfcy/index.html).

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Sophomores had a chance to rekindle and start new friendships at the University of South Carolina's Sophomore Beach Bash.

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Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.

Related articles in E-Source

- Schaller, M.A. (2005). Supporting sophomores in making the transition to an internally directed life. *3(3)*, 7.
- Williams, J. (2003). Vocational focus supports students during the "sophomore slump." *1(2)*, 1.

E-SOURCE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Audience: *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields interested in student transitions. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

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The Capstone Experience: Fulfilling Multiple Goals for Student and Institutional Success

Many schools use senior capstone experiences as a way to prepare their graduates for life outside the university; to springboard into the professional workforce or graduate school; and to evaluate specific programs, curricula, missions, and the overall success of the institution in educating and preparing students. These programs, their learning outcomes, and assessment methods vary. After posting a call for information on the senior-year experience listserv hosted by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition to identify nationally recognized capstone courses, the websites of eight capstone experiences were reviewed (S. Kerrigan, personal communication, July 29, 2008). These programs included capstone courses and more loosely designed structures offered in the senior year. This article focuses on five initiatives that are representative and highlights common themes and purposes that were identified. These include institutional assessment, professional preparation, interdisciplinary learning, and hybrid capstone courses.

Institutional Assessment

In addition to furthering student learning, some universities use capstone courses as a way to measure their own success in educating students, adhering to mission statements, and meeting institutional and programmatic objectives.

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Portland State University (PSU) requires capstone courses of all seniors and offers more than 230 capstones. Each course must address the four main goals of Portland's general education program: "communication, critical thinking, ethical/social responsibility, and appreciation of the diversity of the human experience" (Kerrigan, 2007). Additionally, each course must meet three course-specific objectives: (a) linking field of major-study to community issues, (b) completing service-learning requirements in the community, and (c) creating a culminating project that addresses a specific problem recognized in the community. PSU uses several assessment strategies, including student evaluations/response, meetings between capstone faculty members, and observations, to measure the outcomes of each course, ensuring that the overall mission and goals of the whole university and general education program are being successfully addressed. Linking capstones with several evaluative measures provides PSU with a self-guided measure that promotes growth and responsibility for the whole university.

Lynchburg College builds assessment into its Senior Symposium. Specifically, the symposium is used as a

way to assess writing and higher-order thinking. Faculty members independently assess the work of the students in their sections. Peggy Pittas, assistant dean of the Lynchburg College Senior Symposium and Senior Symposium Readings Program, noted, "We use the data to help assure the development of good essay questions and also to spot writing problems. This information is shared with the appropriate faculty."

Truman State University assesses seniors using a senior portfolio tool. The portfolio, produced over the duration of a student's career, provides evidence of critical thinking and learning in six key categories: scientific reasoning, historical analysis, aesthetic analysis, interdisciplinary thinking, critical thinking and writing, and most personally satisfying experience. Students gather examples for each category from previously completed work and respond to reflecting questions, designed by the portfolio faculty team, related to the selected piece. For example, students may submit a work representative of the aesthetic analysis category and, prompted by a reflection question, describe the analytical thinking involved in the entry and discuss their thoughts on the quality of the work. In addition, students compose a cover letter summarizing their choice of works and/or their comments on the portfolio process.

These portfolios are independently created, without the structure of a traditional capstone course, and evaluated by a team of Truman faculty. A report is generated from the findings of each year's portfolios,

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outlining portfolio scores, as assessed by the faculty team, and filtered by key category and major, while also providing student excerpts from cover letters and reflection questions to identify student perceptions of their Truman education and the portfolio project. This assessment method allows for institution-wide evaluation and growth while also promoting student reflection.

Professional Preparation

Major-specific capstone courses are used at many institutions. They give students the opportunity to link learned job skills with knowledge of general professional concepts and behaviors, an area often overlooked. These types of capstone courses can offer students structured time to think about their career preparation, reflect on their college experiences, and prepare for the job search.

At the University of South Carolina-Aiken, a general capstone course, known as The Senior Year Experience, is offered along with those in specific areas including education, communication, biology, and sociology. In all capstone courses, projects are geared toward the senior's major

and career goal. Career-specific capstones and assignments offer defined goals, such as understanding the job market and identifying one's own professional skills, related to their field. More general professional topics are also discussed. For example, one Senior Year Experience syllabus at USC-Aiken includes discussions in goal setting, ethics in the workplace, interview preparation, conflict resolution, and even proper etiquette when eating, all helpful in the job search and in new professional situations (C. Feraldi, personal communication, June 27, 2008).

Interdisciplinary Learning

While the capstone courses at USC-Aiken focus on specific career-related ideas, some institutions take a more generalist approach. At these institutions, a variety of issues, such as the environment, are used as catalyst for discussion and writing. These topical conversations are often meant to encourage critical thinking and promote a broader world view.

In the Lynchburg College Senior Symposium, students attend weekly interdisciplinary public lectures that are aligned with weekly readings and opinion papers. They follow up in small discussion sections and

are challenged to continue learning beyond Lynchburg and polish formal educational skills such as writing, speaking, and analyzing in an effort to better consider modern and post-college issues such as environmental concerns and other moral, ethical, and civic-minded questions. Students may choose to write about these topics with major in mind, linking the general ideas offered by the readings and speaker to other disciplines and majors.

Hybrid

Not all capstones have one clear focus or fit. Some take a hybrid approach, including ideas from multiple areas, using the capstone course as a way to prepare students for professional and post-college life, as a way to wrap up the educational experience, and as a way to promote critical thinking.

The Senior-Year Experience Program at Kennesaw State University (KSU) offers such a hybrid program. Billed as, "The First Class for the Rest of Your Life," Kennesaw's program discusses a wide variety of topics related to the transition out of college. Reflecting on skills acquired in college, students design a career plan and grow in the areas of career search, networking, and professional skills. They also discuss the transition out of university life, learning about the traditions of commencement at Kennesaw, life cycle changes, and civic and social responsibility. KSU's Senior-Year Experience program even highlights the approaching alumni relationship to the University and its importance, encouraging students to stay linked to their alma mater.

For more information on the capstone programs highlighted in this article and on the National Resource Center web site, visit

Truman State University at <http://assessment.truman.edu/components/portfolio/>

Lynchburg College at www.lynchburg.edu/lcsr

Kennesaw State University at www.kennesaw.edu/university_studies/sye/index.shtml

Portland State University at www.pdx.edu/unst/capstone.html

National Resource Center at www.sc.edu/fye/resources/syr/index.html

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growth for inclusion in the activities clearinghouse. Once approved, these become visible to students through the University's "My Activities" web site, hosted by Samaritan Technologies, Inc. Students can search the site for activities that are of interest to them and then register for that activity online. When a student completes an activity, a completion verification form is submitted through the same web site. These forms are reviewed by designated faculty and staff each semester. Once a student's participation has been verified, the activity is automatically posted to the CCT.

Students also write a 150-word professional statement, which is reproduced at the end of the CCT. Students are encouraged to work with a faculty member or other professional on campus to create this statement, which allows them to reflect on their experiences and discuss how their cocurricular experiences have contributed to their professional growth. Professional statements change and mature as students participate in more cocurricular activities. The professional statement becomes final when the student graduates and the CCT, along with the academic transcript, is closed.

Transitions most heavily promotes the CCT during the first and second years, when involvement in cocurricular activities has the greatest potential for a positive impact on student retention. However, the CCT documents cocurricular activities throughout a student's term at the University, including internships, research, and other preprofessional experiences which, as documented on the CCT, are especially valued by employers and graduate/

professional school admissions offices. Students can print unofficial transcripts or request a formal transcript from the registrar (i.e., printed on security paper, bearing the university seal, and signed by both the provost, and the vice president for student and university affairs).

CCT was launched in March 2008, and in just three months, more than 500 registered activities were verified for students, and official cocurricular transcripts were printed for graduating students who requested them for submission to potential employers. After the first full year of implementation, summative assessment of the CCT will be completed by comparing the retention and academic performance of students who engaged in cocurricular activities with the retention and academic performance of students who did not. Analysis will attempt to identify any correlations between engagement (as documented on the CCT) and student performance (i.e., GPA, credit hours attempted and earned, probation or suspension, retention, and graduation rate). Demographic variables such as high school GPA, high school position (i.e., high school rank divided by high school size), SAT total scores, and college GPA have been designated for use as control variables for the analyses. Formative assessments will focus on content analysis of the professional statements written by students, which will be analyzed using a rubric designed to assess levels of professional maturity. The rubric results will be correlated with levels of engagement as documented on the CCT. Given the encouraging results during the first three months, positive findings are anticipated for the Sophomore Focus CCT pilot program.

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- on a blank piece of paper or a note card before you open up the conversation for group discussion. Most students are not used to being asked what their expectations are; therefore, use prompts and guides such as what are your expectations of your professor; how do you expect your professor to treat you; what can your professor do to help create a positive learning environment—to stimulate reflection and discussion. Collect the note cards or papers at the end of the class for more thoughts and feedback that can help shape the course.
- *Be open to feedback.* If you ask for expectations, you must be open to hearing what your students have to say. More importantly, you must be ready to meet their expectations as best as possible or to offer an honest answer about why you cannot.
 - *Allow adequate time.* If the conversation is rushed, then it will not feel genuine and will not serve its purpose. Allot enough time to solicit constructive comments from your students. For larger classes, consider breaking the students into smaller groups to discuss their expectations. Afterwards, allow each group to share one or two expectations that their group feels is most important. Also, do not forget to allot time to share your expectations of the students and the class with them.

- *Follow-up.* Adjust your syllabus according to the expectations discussed during the first class period, and make sure to hold both yourself and your students accountable to those agreed upon expectations. Check in with your students and see how those mutual expectations have shaped their class experience.

The University of Missouri's Mutual Expectations program has promoted dialogue sessions in both large and small group formats and has found that this fits well with their campus environment. The program has been well received and supported over the past three years, yet this design may not be applicable on all campuses. The model can be replicated in individual classes at any institution—even if a larger program is not in place—as a way of opening up the lines of communication and taking an active role and responsibility in the classroom environment.

Jennifer Powell was the founder and former student coordinator of the Mutual Expectations program. For more information on the program, send an e-mail to mutualexpectations@missouri.edu.

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Summary

Although capstone experiences are administered in a variety of ways, all can offer a wealth of information to students, as well as teachers, researchers, and administrators looking for data to focus and drive development of their institutions. Capstone courses offer students the opportunity to reflect and assess while laying the groundwork for future development. After reviewing the many purposes, goals, and types of capstone courses, it is clear that there is no one right way to create or use a capstone course; rather, there are many good ways.

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Related articles in E-Source

- Smith Arthur, D. C. (2005). Capstone courses provide community involvement. 3(2), 3.
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What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Research

The National Resource Center will be launching the 2008 National Survey on Sophomore-Year Initiatives in early November. If you have sophomore programs, please respond to the survey. Your responses make the survey findings valuable to other educators focused on sophomore-year transition. A summary of the findings will be available on the web site in summer/fall 2009.

Conferences

28th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience®

February 6 – 10, 2009

Orlando, Florida

Early registration deadline is January 5, 2009.

For more information on this and other National Resource Center events, please visit our web site www.sc.edu/fye/events/

Publications

The National Resource Center recently released two new monographs, the first of which explores the transition to graduate school. Attrition rates among master's and doctoral students are often alarmingly high, and the authors of *Graduate Students in Transition: Assisting Students Through the First Year* argue that we need to pay the same kind of attention to these new students as we do to first-year undergraduates. The monograph describes the challenges associated with entry into graduate study and offers information about new initiatives and programs designed to ease their transition—from unique orientations and mentoring structures to transition courses and graduate student centers.

A complete analysis of the data from the National Resource Center's triennial survey of first-

year seminars is now available in the 2006 *National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Continuing Innovations in the Collegiate Curriculum*. Major chapters focus on seminar characteristics,

instruction and instructor training, and course objectives and related assessment efforts. With more than 200 tables offering analysis of survey responses, this monograph offers the most detailed picture of first-year seminars to date.

With our partners at the National Academic Advising Association, the National Resource Center recently published a second edition of *A Family Guide to Academic Advising*. Designed to help parents of first-year college students understand the critical role of academic

advising in student success, the second edition includes an expanding discussion of career development and a new section on first-generation college students. Available in English- and Spanish-language versions.

To order these and other resources from the National Resource Center, please visit our web site: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/index.html>

