

STUDENT SUCCESS BEST PRACTICE: J. SARGEANT REYNOLDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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STUDENT SUCCESS CATEGORY --

- ACADEMIC PROGRAM
- STUDENT SERVICES
- WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
- COLLEGE BUSINESS PRACTICE
- TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION
- OTHER:

TITLE: "HERO: HOLISTIC AND ENGAGING REYNOLDS ORIENTATION"

PROCESS

The broad spectrum of quality student orientation services now available at Reynolds Community College represents the institution's adaptations to evolving student needs, changing resources, and emerging technologies. While the necessity for effective and wide-reaching student orientation services has long been established as a best practice within higher education, institutional ability to orient significant numbers of students and to provide a high quality experience that prepares them for the transition from secondary to post-secondary learning proves challenging for many colleges and universities. Reynolds established an orientation program in 2005, developed an orientation specific to online learners in 2011, and in Summer 2016, launched a comprehensive orientation process that engages both on-campus and online learners through technologies that are accessible, adaptable to institutional and programmatic shifts, and applicable to our community college student populations. Reynolds identified the need for a comprehensive orientation that responds to the breadth of its programming, the diversity of its students, and the efficient use of its existing resources. The new, inclusive orientation inducts students to the college's mission and values, to the transition to higher education learning experiences, and, for the new online learner, to the essential skills necessary for successful academic work in the online classroom.

Summary of the Data Analysis: National data and best practices confirm that orienting college students to the communities of higher learning is one of the most effective tools an institution can provide for its new students. Reynolds' SOAR program developed from a need to prepare students for their college experiences in response to several correlating initiatives. First, Reynolds participated in CCSSE and found that it needed to increase student engagement. Second, the VCCS issued "Dateline 2009" which sought to address student engagement through programming at the community colleges. As SDV 100's learning objectives were clarified to focus it as a college success skills course, it became apparent that students required knowledge and information prior to their college start. Parents and family members of Reynolds students also had information needs that a college orientation program could address. Similarly, CDL001: Orientation to Learning Online emerged from comprehensive college assessments of its online learners. Prior to the development of the orientation for online learning, college

data confirmed that a nearly 10 percent gap existed between student success in on-campus and online classes. Clearly, online learning posed challenges for many students as they initially adapted to the digital learning context. After the implementation of a major assessment that evaluated over 5000 students' readiness for online learning and their subsequent performance in online classes, Reynolds used the emerging data to ground its CDL001: Orientation to Learning Online on the skills critical for academic success: time management, goal setting, and personal responsibility.

Team of Developers: At every step of the process, the development of appropriate student orientation services has spanned multiple college divisions and has engaged the professional insights and creative talents of many faculty, staff, and administrators. Included on the development teams and in many of the processes have been representatives from across the college. The development teams utilized the talents of the: Dean of Students, Counselor for First Year Initiatives, Enrollment Services Specialists, English Faculty, Counselor for Retention Services, Instructional Designer, Manager Technology Training, Applications Programmer/Analyst, Reference Librarian, Enrollment Services Coordinator, and Coordinator Online Student Services.

STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION

To prepare first time in college students, Reynolds launched SOAR (Student Orientation Advising and Registration) in 2005. SOAR was modeled on national standards of best practices as outlined by CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) and NODA (National Orientation Directors Association). The college determined that SOAR would encompass an on-campus orientation experience which would include an introduction to college resources, programs and policies, information for parents of students, and a time for students to receive academic advising and register for classes. The college now provides 20 3-hour SOAR sessions each summer to over 1,000 students.

To orient its new online learners, Reynolds examined the orientation models presented at other institutions. Other models tend to be static summaries of essential technology skills for online students, or a list of resources that students could access on their own, or self-paced short modules for students to complete independently. Reynolds sought to develop a better and more robust orientation platform. The college identified the following essential components for its CDL001: Orientation to Learning Online: 1) the orientation should be facilitated and allow for interactive engagement among students, and between students and the facilitator; 2) all students new to online learning at Reynolds should have access and opportunity to the Orientation (the college enrolls approximately 6000 new online students annually); 3) students enrolled in high-risk courses should be required to complete the orientation; 4) specific technology skills should be targeted, such as how to upload or download files, complete online quizzes, or conduct electronic academic research; and most importantly 5) time management, goal setting, and independent learning skills should be emphasized. CDL001: Orientation to Learning Online was implemented in 2011, and, over the past five years, has been adapted and shaped further in response to emerging data, resources, and new opportunities.

To merge both orientation programs under a common umbrella, Reynolds adopted Go2Orientation. This new online program allows all Reynolds students to seamlessly access the combined orientation activities with one log-in, through one platform, and gain the skills they need for academic preparation and success. tations to faculty and staff. The Success Coach team attended the Workforce Professionals Academy, met in-person and via teleconference with Success Coaches from Paul D. Camp Community College and Mountain Empire Community College, and started collaborating with developmental education faculty and student

services with developmental education faculty and student services staff on campus.

ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

In developing HERO, Reynolds built upon the success of SOAR and CDL 001. Both programs have demonstrated their ability to positively impact student success. Better information about academic options at Reynolds led to 60% of SOAR attendees changing academic programs after the orientation consistently over the 10 years SOAR has been offered. Assessments of CDL001 impacts between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 reveal that 73% of the students who completed the orientation to online learning received grades of A, B and C; by contrast, only 40% of students who did not complete CDL 001 were successful in online courses.

Completion of orientation programming at Reynolds positively impacts student retention.

- Students who attend SOAR were retained at a rate of 54% (Fall 2015 to Fall 2016) versus 29% retention of students who did not attend SOAR.
- SOAR completion also positively impacts retention of part-time students (in 2015 - 2016, 84% of Reynolds students were part-time). Students who attended SOAR and subsequently enrolled part-time were retained at a rate of 49% (Fall 2015 to Fall 2016) versus those part-time students who did not attend SOAR who were retained at a rate of 28%.
- CDL 001 completers were also more likely to persist and be retained at Reynolds. Fifty-five percent of CDL 001 completers were retained Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 versus 31% of non-completers.

Launching HERO in Summer 2016 also has had a positive impact on student completion and participation rates in orientation programming. Overall, SOAR participation increased by 8%, and CDL 001 completion increased by 47%.

- SOAR Participation Fall 2015: 1,076 students, Fall 2016: 1,165 students, Go2Orientation Fall 2016: 1,397 students
- CDL 001 Completion Fall 2015 830, Fall 2016: 1,251

PLAN FOR SCALE & SUSTAINABILITY

The new orientation platform is designed to address the needs for large scale deployment and to be sustainable. It merges together the different platforms that the college previously employed: an on-site orientation for all students and a separate online orientation for students new to online learning. The new orientation process now 1) enables all incoming students to complete an online orientation, 2) allows staff at the on-site sessions to concentrate efforts on advising and assisting students select appropriate academic pathways, and 3) also provides new online students access to an engaging orientation that prepares them for the digital classroom. This new orientation process and program allows Reynolds to reach not only large numbers of incoming students but also prospective students with greater ease. Further, it employs technology resources that are adaptable to college and programmatic developments and that can be sustained by college staff and resources.

COLLEGE DESCRIPTION

Reynolds Community College is a three-campus institution serving the City of Richmond and the counties of Hanover, Henrico, Goochland, Louisa and Powhatan. During the 2015-2016 academic year the Reynolds served 16,236 credit students, 23% of whom were first generation college students and 84% of whom took a part-time credit load. Overall, in two of the past three years the college's race/ethnicity makeup was "majority minority." Individuals age 18 to 29 represent the majority (67%) of the college's student body, but those over age 40 do represent a meaningful 12% of the student population. The Reynolds service region represents a large geographic area with a 2015 population of 733,557. 13.9% of the region's population lives at or below the poverty line, as compared to 11.5% for the Commonwealth as a whole. Educational attainment for the region compares favorably with Virginia's overall profile, with both populations boasting a 44.5% attainment rate for associate's degree or higher.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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