AN EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY ORIENTATION COURSE

Background

The content of the course, University Orientation, at The University of Akron, Wayne College, was based on data gleaned from placement tests, grades of previous students with the same background of students required to take University Orientation, and research at other similar institutions. The data indicated that these students needed a) learning strategies that were identified on one of their placement tests, Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) and b) to apply these learning strategies to specific courses to aid in transferring these skills to all their college work.

At our institution traditional students with a low high school GPA and a low ACT score who test out of our two college reading courses are required to take University Orientation. Furthermore, students who have low study strategies as indicated on the LASSI are recommended to take the course.

Course Content

Several textbooks were used during the beginning stages of designing this course. Currently, we use Dembo, M. H., (2000) Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success, and published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and are satisfied with this text. This text applies the information processing model for learning and requires students to analyze their studying by reflecting how they previously applied a strategy for a particular task and then asked them for a written description of how they will apply the content of the chapter to their own studying.
Topics: The following topics are included based on research of common needs of freshmen:

Methods of Learning
Motivation
Goal Setting
Management of Mood and Effort
Time Management
Management of Physical and Social Environment
Learning from Textbooks
Learning From Lectures
Preparing for and taking Exams

Portfolio: In addition, students are required to illustrate their mastery and application of the learning strategies in another class through a portfolio. Each student is required to purchase a three-ring binder. In this binder they must have dividers for each section of the portfolio. They also need to prepare a Table of Contents for each of the sections. The sections include: a) Weekly Goals—forms that they need to fill out each week, b) Weekly Journals—a choice of topics is provided in the syllabus, c) Notetaking—the notes students take in another class, d) Learning Strategy Application—any materials the students develop to demonstrate what they did to learn the material. For example, a web, hierarchy, matrix or diagram for a lecture or textbook reading. e) Test questions—questions the student generated as preparation for a test in another class.
f) Analysis of learning and study behavior – an essay analyzing their previous learning and study behavior written the first two weeks of the semester, g) Project, either a career project or a learning strategy project. A formal paper is the conclusion of this project. h) Analysis of Information in Portfolio.

**Assessment**

A quiz is given for each chapter to help the student evaluate their reading and studying of the chapter. A variety of types of questions, multiple choice, true/false and essay questions are used so that students have practice answering these kinds of questions.

Three individual assessments are scheduled during the semester with the student and the instructor. These assessments are held at approximately the 4th week, the 8th week and at the end of the semester. During this assessment, the student has an opportunity to explain the content of the portfolio and ask any questions he/she has on assignments or content of the course. The instructor evaluates the material in the portfolio through dialog and explanation using the Portfolio Rubric.

**Evidence of Success**

A data set of students receiving less that 20 on their reading ACT test was used for this study. The English Composition grades of students who took University Orientation were compared with those who did not take University Orientation. Students who took University Orientation received an average grade of 2.78, and the students who did not take University Orientation received a significantly lower grade of 2.41 (p = ≤ .05).