



Recommendation Report:
PSY 115 Self-Assessment and Career Planning and
ORT 110 Orientation to College and Career

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Quinsigamond Community College
Psychology Department
Lizette Cordiero

A fundamental objective of Freshmen Experience is to expose students to the various opportunities and resources a college offers. Freshmen Experience is offered as an opportunity for students to learn more about campus resources, identify opportunities for individual growth, define short and long term goals, and meet staff and faculty who were in positions to help them.

Glass and Garrett (1995) examined the relationship between completion of an orientation course, higher retention, and GPAs for new community college students. Findings indicate that completing an orientation course during the first term of enrollment promotes retention and improves grades among community college students. Retention and GPA were found to be unrelated to gender, ethnicity, age, employment status, college attended, or college major.

At Quinsigamond Community College, we are invested in creating a college climate and culture where all are warmly welcomed, accepted and valued for their individual dignity and worth. PSY 115 and ORT 110 play a critical role in creating a welcoming environment where our students can begin to feel a sense of belonging to our QCC community. In conjunction with the plethora of student resources we offer, these courses support our students to accomplish their educational, career and personal goals.

The General Studies APR proposal, recommended that best practices for PSY 115 and ORT 110 be evaluated. One of the current goals of the General Studies program is to facilitate students' educational and career planning. PSY 115 and ORT 110 courses are a critical component of student success in the General Studies program. In the Fall semester of 2016, I conducted research regarding best practices in Freshmen Experience, and during the Spring semester of 2017, I worked to make recommendations regarding any changes to QCC's current curriculum and programming.

This was an exciting and interesting process! As a fairly new full time faculty member, this assignment provided me with the opportunity to understand and appreciate the different facets of QCC. I utilized this time to connect with faculty and key staff members reflecting on the status and history of our freshman experience courses. I met with representatives from working groups including: the retention committee, entry and outreach committee and new student orientation. Very soon in the process, I recognized that for us to deliver a successful freshman experience course we had to commit to a holistic approach and collaborate with other departments. It is imperative for these courses to be delivered with the foundation of a welcoming orientation, informative on-boarding and registration process and continuous connection to the vital student resources on campus.

Glass and Garrett identified the Freshman year as a critical time for identifying and initiating work with students who needed support and upgraded skills in order to persist (1995). It is important for community colleges to focus on those students most at risk for adverse academic outcomes because these students are more likely to withdraw from school (Osborne, 1997). By re-envisioning QCC's First Year Experience course, we can be an integral part of building a community of successful learners. In response to a thorough review of First Year Experience literature, looking at how other community colleges and state universities offered similar

courses, and obtaining feedback from the Psychology department, PSY 115 and ORT 110 faculty, Advising, Transfer and Student Life offices, I have identified the following challenges:

1. Students do not take the course at an optimal time. Therefore, the course does not always meet the specific need of the student. Every semester, we have graduating students completing PSY 115 to fulfill their Generals Studies requirement. The degree audit states "Before students complete 20 credits they must complete one of the following: ORT110 Strategies for College OR PSY115 Self-Assessment & Career" but there is no process to make sure this policy is adhered to.
2. The college does not have a concrete process for deciphering who would benefit from ORT 110 vs PSY 115 other than the PSY 115 prerequisite. It is evident through faculty experience and our student needs that both populations could benefit from the academic orientation and learning strategies instructed in ORT 110 and the self-assessment and career planning instruction that occurs in PSY 115. As a result, a majority of PSY 115 and ORT 110 faculty reported delivering both courses with almost identical curriculum.
3. ORT 110 and PSY 155 have inconsistent learning objectives delivered based on faculty values and comfortability with course content.
4. Limited teaching resources are available. Unlike other courses, there is not an abundance of publisher content available for FYE courses. We currently utilize a custom textbook created by the Psychology department. The last editorial revision of the book, focused mainly on removing publisher content. There are content areas, such as Global Learning (ethics, leadership, citizenship, diversity and inclusion), Life Skills (health and wellness, financial responsibility, relationships and decision making), critical thinking, and technology (The Q and Blackboard) that could benefit from supplemental materials.

My recommendations with supporting data are as follows.

Recommendations (Fall 2018):

1. Develop a new course: First Year Experience. Retire PSY 115 Self-Assessment and Career Planning and ORT 110 Orientation to College and Career Success. The new course objectives would focus on learning-strategies interventions, academic-socialization interventions and self-exploration in career planning. To successfully meet these three objectives, it is recommended that we keep it a three-credit course due to necessary course content.

(1) Through the development of a new course: First Year Experience, we can ensure incoming students are provided with an evidence based course that focuses on learning strategies interventions, academic socialization interventions, self-assessment and career planning.

The Learning strategy intervention model will provide our students with the tools to become successful learners. These objectives will focus on study skills, time management, lecture note-taking methodology, textbook reading techniques, test preparation and techniques.

The Academic socialization intervention model will integrate our students to the culture of the QCC. Often first generation and non-traditional students are less attuned to the culture of academia. To help them acclimate our college environment our objectives will focus on identifying college resources, activities, and events, discussing civility and academic integrity at QCC, demonstrating the use of QCC technology: student email, The Q and Blackboard, describing requirements to earn a college degree and identifying institutional policies. We will introduce the students to the resources available to help them succeed- bringing in special presenters (transfer, financial aid, career center) and visiting the library, tutoring and student center.

Through self-assessment and career planning students will examine psychological theories and use them to clarify their own values through discovering the relationship between various occupations and your personality type and work style, interests, career values and skills.

2. Collaborate with advising and registrar to ensure that students are taking FYE before completing 15 credits. Create a block in the registration system that would not allow students to register for additional classes until FYE was completed.
- (2) *Research shows the first year of college is critical to the success of students. Students who have become “socially integrated” or “connected” with other members of the college community are much more likely to complete their first-year of college and continue on to complete their college degree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). By addressing academic under-preparation and transition problems within 15 credits, we will help empower our students to succeed in future semesters. Having more students participate in FYE and being retained to the second semester could have cost-benefit implications for the college.*
3. Evaluate options for course materials such as Open Education Resource, textbooks, Kuder and Self Directed Search.
4. Create a course map and template on Blackboard.
5. In collaboration with QCC professional development office develop a training for faculty teaching FYE.

(3-5) Several faculty members expressed a concern over content available for PSY 115 and ORT 110. Most invested time in looking for supplemental materials to adequately cover the course objectives. Some faculty members disclosed skipping content areas because of lack of expertise. Investing time in training FYE faculty and providing them with a variety of resources for each content area will provide instructors with the confidence to meet all the student learning outcomes. Recognizing that faculty are not experts when it comes to all the resources QCC has to offer, we will work to align content areas with specialized presenters. This will also allow our students to create a connection with key staff members in the transfer office, advising, library, financial aid and career center.

6. Develop and implement an assessment plan consistent with the FYE outcomes

(6) Currently QCC doesn't generate specific data to support the value of PSY 115 and ORT 110. Moving forward, it is important to evaluate not only the students' progress in the course but it's impact on academic performance, retention and attrition.

Recommendations (Fall 2019):

1. Create a learning community cohort for students testing into more than one developmental course.

Learning communities build a sense of academic and social community and increase engagement among students and faculty, all of which lead to a variety of positive outcomes. These may include improved academic achievement, as measured by GPA, credit accumulation, and self-reported learning. By sharing common course schedules, students make friends, form study groups, and discuss and socialize together outside of class. This help the students create a small community within the larger college.

2. Develop a First Year Experience (FYE) Peer Leader Program. Each FYE course would have a student who serves as a role model and mentor. Peer Leaders assist first year students with the transitions into college life by connecting students to the college community.

Peer leaders can help establish a comfortable and safe classroom environment for students. The leaders can use their knowledge and perspective as experienced peers to connect new students to the people, resources and information essential for success in the first year. Students are more likely to approach and discuss issues of academic and personal concern with peer advisors than to seek out faculty or professional staff (Hamid & VanHook, 2001). Peer leaders are significant in shaping first-year students' transition, motivation and satisfaction, which contributes to students' persistence to the second year and beyond.

3. Examine the option of making FYE required for all first time, full-time and part-time students. In some cases, design a curriculum based FYE course, such as General Studies Health Care.

Results show positive correlations between participation in the FYE classes and various outcomes; such as, student retention (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Titus 2004), graduation rates (Bean 1990), academic success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and social and academic integration to college (Tinto 2012). QCC requires students in General Studies, General Studies Health Care, Phlebotomy/EKG Technician Certificate and Emergency Medical Technician Certificate to complete ORT 110 or PYS 115. After implementing and evaluating the new First Year Experience course in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019, it is worth examining if we should be requiring all students to complete this course. A student declaring a major upon admission, doesn't necessarily convey they have the necessary skills to transition into the college community and adapt to the rigors of college.

Conclusion

Investing the time and resources in developing a comprehensive First Year Experience course will have a positive impact on our students' academic and social development. Many of our students arrive at Quinsigamond Community College unprepared for college level work. The intention of this newly developed First Year Experience course will equip our students with the knowledge, skills and, confidence to meet their academic and career goals.

References

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