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Orientation Programs and Practices: 1963 - 1981

INTRODUCTION

Although orientation seems to be common vernacular among educators, there appears to be some degree of diversity in understanding what specifically is meant by orientation. In one perspective, Mueller (1951) suggests that orientation is the final stage of the overall admissions process. There are others who consider orientation as the beginning of a "continuing" program of personal development of the student. There are those, too, who view orientation as merely a "frill" to the educational experience.

In a recent study, Moore, et al (1979) identified three goals for orientation programs: (1) to ease the entry process with regard to items like placement tests, advising, and registration; (2) to offer students the opportunity of realistically assessing campus life; and (3) to familiarize students with the student affairs component of the university.

In a more philosophical sense, however, orientation can be viewed as being both microcosmic and macrocosmic in scope and depth of purpose. (Dannells and Kuh, 1964). Wigent (1971) identified the microcosmic programs as those that are primarily concerned with the student's immediate relationship with the institution, while the macrocosmic emphasis is more concerned with helping the new student understand the philosophy and general purposes of higher education.

Perhaps this diversity is more understandable when one considers that various forms of orientation are found in all walks of life and under varying labels. For instance, the military has boot camp or basic training and business corporations have detailed management trainee programs. No matter what they are labeled, however, the underlying or fundamental purpose is the same: to bridge some existing gap between the familiar past and the unfamiliar future.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research was to follow up a 1963 study of orientation programs for new students in twelve selected colleges and universities across the United States. A secondary purpose was to expand the initial survey in order to obtain additional data on orientation practices as well as to increase the sample from the original twelve institutions. The 1981 survey resulted in 110 colleges and universities responding to the questionnaire.

METHODOLOGY

The 1963 study involved a survey of twenty colleges and universities selected from a review of the literature at that time. The institutions were selected

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based on various text and journal references made concerning the particular work being carried out in their respective orientation programs. From the initial sample of twenty, twelve institutions responded to the 1963 study.

These institutions were again surveyed in 1981, along with a random sample of 128 institutions across the United States. One hundred and ten of the 128 questionnaires (86%) distributed were returned in the 1981 survey, including eleven of the twelve original institutions responding to the 1963 survey.

Institutional Data Comparison - 1963 and 1981 Studies

Table One presents a summary of the eight "duplicate" items surveyed in both the 1963 and 1981 studies. The eight response items were selected from a review of the literature at the time of the 1963 survey. Based on this data, the following findings are noted:

1. Eight of the original twelve respondents to the 1963 survey indicated they had orientation programs. In the 1981 survey, eleven of the 1963 respondents reported having orientation programs.

2. In both the 1963 and 1981 surveys, eight of the respondents indicated having orientation programs lasting four or more days. It should be noted that two institutions increased the length of their program from 1963 to 1981 while three shortened their orientation program.

3. In the 1963 study, one institution reported having group counseling sessions; whereas in 1981, eight institutions conducted group counseling sessions during the orientation program.

4. Although two institutions responding to the 1963 survey held an orientation course for credit, the 1981 survey found that none of the institutions offered an orientation course for credit. It should be noted that five institutions offered an orientation course for non-credit.

5. Of the twelve respondents to the 1963 survey, only one indicated having a summer camp or pre-orientation program. The 1981 survey found that seven of the eleven responding institutions had summer camps or pre-orientation programs. (See Table Three)

Findings of the 1981 Survey

Table Two summarizes the composite findings of the 1981 survey as reported on the original questionnaire. The following observations are made with regard to these findings:

1. Of the 110 questionnaires returned, there were forty-three public and forty-four private institutions responding to the survey.

2. One hundred six (96%) of the institutions responding indicated they had an orientation program. The length of the orientation program was less than four days for forty-nine (45%) of the respondents.

3. In the orientation program, five of the institutions responding administered a personality test (4%), six institutions administered intelligence tests (5%), fifty-two institutions administered achievement tests (51%) and twenty-four (25%) administered interest inventories.

4. Eighty-three of the responding institutions (75%) indicated having a session for parents included in the orientation program. An additional twenty institutions (19%) did note that they held a "parent's day" sometime during the academic year.

5. Over eighty-seven percent of those institutions responding indicated the involvement of student affairs staff, faculty, and upperclassmen in the orientation program. Following is the breakdown: One hundred six institutions indicated involving the student affairs staff (96%); ninety-nine involved faculty (90%); ninety-six involved upperclassmen (87%); and twelve involved alumni

(11%). Titles of individuals who assume direct responsibility for coordinating orientation programs are presented in Table Four.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the original 1963 study was to obtain comparison data on orientation programs for selected colleges and universities. The particular institutions were selected based on the techniques and practices being utilized in their respective programs. The 1981 study was conducted partially as a follow-up to this original study because current literature suggests that the practices and programs being used in 1981 seem to have little difference from those used eighteen years previous.

The study revealed that despite institution differences and dissimilarities among orientation programs one of these commonalities is the fact that the majority of schools involve parents in the orientation activities. Previous studies have suggested that orientation programs acknowledge parents only for public relations purposes. (Butts, 1971; Cantor, 1974; Stematakos, 1963). The authors feel that although the aspect of good public relations constitutes one significant factor, there are others that need to be noted. In their attempts to respond to the helping and developmental component of the students' education, colleges and universities have begun to realize that "sharing information with parents, with discretion and adequate preparation of the parents, has a dual value. First, parents are taxpayers; they support or reject school programs in the light of perceived benefits. Second, parents can provide valuable data about developmental patterns" (Rothney, 1972). In addition to these two observations, it is suggested that educators responsible for orientation programs include parents in an effort to reduce parental anxiety and apprehension.

Another finding reveals that most schools conduct orientation programs involving both academic and non-academic personnel as well as upperclass students. A small percentage of the institutions responding (11%) indicated the involvement of alumni in their orientation programs. It seems that with the student pool of applicants becoming smaller each year, schools are utilizing whatever resources available for attracting and keeping students, including alumni and local business and community agencies. Also, identified as personnel who were involved with orientation were military commanders and parents of upperclass students.

The findings with regard to the use of testing in the orientation program were particularly interesting. In this area, it was found that the use of personality tests and intelligence tests was minimal while the use of achievement and interest inventories was more widespread. Perhaps this reflects the current emphasis being placed on vocational education among institutions of higher education. With regard to the personality tests specifically, it is felt that the decrease in their use may be related to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (the Buckley Amendment) and the impact this legislation has had on higher education.

As a possible explanation of the apparent minimal use of intelligence tests in orientation programs, educators generally express that these tests reflect mastery of middle class cultural symbols and values, and therefore, are not suitable for a heterogeneous college population. Recent research has further suggested that "I.Q. tests measure only a portion of the competencies involved with human intelligence" (Phye, 1979). Consequently, the overall value of I.Q. testing for college-age students is questionable.

CONCLUSIONS

The prompt and rather unusually high percentage of respondents to this survey (86%) suggests that orientation practices and programs are still a major

interest among educators in both today's college setting and the setting eighteen years ago. Although there is no "all-purpose" formula for orientation that can be applied to all institutions, the surveys revealed several commonalities being utilized. To further indentify the extent of these commonalities, there needs to be subsequent research to provide factual data on the value of orientation programs.

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TABLE 1
Comparison Data Between 1963 and 1981 Orientation Surveys

Institution and Year of Survey	ITEM 1 Do you have a Freshman week? (1981 Orient. Program?)	ITEM 2 To your Orient Program, less than 4 days? How many?	ITEM 3 Testing Programs (Intell. Test, Pers. Test, Career Test)	ITEM 4 Counseling (Individual, Groups)	ITEM 5 Orient. Course (Req., Recd., Elect.)	ITEM 6 Do you have a Parents Day? (when?)	ITEM 7 Do you have a Summer Camp or Pre-Orient.?	ITEM 8 Personnel (Only, 1st Year, 2nd Year, 3rd Year, 4th Year, 5th Year, 6th Year, 7th Year, 8th Year, 9th Year, 10th Year, 11th Year, 12th Year, Other)
William & Mary 1963	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
William & Mary 1981	yes	5	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Bollins 1963	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Bollins 1981	yes	1 week	no	yes	no	yes (1)	no	yes
Morgan State 1963	yes	7	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Morgan State 1981	yes	5	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Harvard 1963	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Harvard 1981	yes	5	no	yes	no	yes (1)	no	yes
Syracuse 1963	no	3	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Syracuse 1981	yes	7	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Univ. of Penn. 1963	yes	varies	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Univ. of Penn. 1981	yes	5	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Reed 1963	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Reed 1981	yes	7	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Columbia 1963	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Columbia 1981	yes	3-5	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Mount St. Mary 1963	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
Mount St. Mary 1981	yes	2	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Colorado 1963	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
Colorado 1981	yes	1 1/2-2	no	no	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Ohio State 1963	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
Ohio State 1981	yes	2	no	no	no	yes (2)	no	yes
Michigan State 1963	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Michigan State 1981	yes	no	no	yes	no	yes (2)	no	yes

LEGEND: --- indicates no response
 (1) during orientation program and during year
 (2) during orientation program only

TABLE 2

Composite Data of the 1981 Orientation Survey

For our purposes, orientation is defined as that period of time directly before the start of classes that is used to orient freshmen/new students to college life.

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

1. Type of institution: 2 year (15) 4 year (92) Private (44) Public (43)
2. Enrollment (full-time undergrad): Below 1000 (12) 1-2000 (19) 2-4000 (19) Over 4000 (58)
3. Student Body: Primarily residential (53) Primarily commuter (24) Comb. Res. & Comm. (31)
4. a. Do you have an orientation program? YES (106) NO (2)
b. If yes, is your orientation program mandatory for all new students? YES (55) NO (53)
c. How many days are devoted to your orientation? 1 Day (14) 2 Days (19) 3 Days (16) 4 Days (9) 5 or more (41)
5. Do you have a **pre-orientation** program prior to the official orientation program? YES (46) NO (58)
b. If yes, please describe: (see Table 3)
c. Is your **pre-orientation** program mandatory? YES (10) NO (46)
6. Does your orientation program include the following testing programs?
a. Personality Test YES (5) NO (89) c. Achievement Test YES (52) NO (48)
b. Intelligence Test YES (6) NO (85) d. Interest Inventory YES (24) NO (72)
7. Does your orientation program include:
a. Individual counseling YES (69) NO (25)
b. Group counseling YES (78) NO (22)
8. Does your institution offer your orientation program for:
a. credit YES (2) NO (97)
b. non-credit YES (41) NO (43)
9. Do you have a session for parents in your orientation program? YES (83) NO (21)
10. If Item 9 is "NO", do you have a Parents Day? YES (20) NO (19)
If "YES", indicate when: _____
11. Which of the following personnel are **directly** with your orientation program?
a. Student Affairs Staff YES (106) NO (2) d. Alumni YES (12) NO (57)
b. Faculty YES (99) NO (6) e. Other YES (32) NO (15)
c. Upperclassmen YES (96) NO (4) (please indicate) _____
Please indicate title of individual directly responsible for orientation:
(see Table 4)
12. Do you include a student evaluation for your orientation program? YES (77) NO (27)
13. Please feel free to offer any additional comments on the back of this sheet.

THANK YOU!!!

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE TO:

The Pennsylvania State University, Hazleton Campus
Hazleton, PA 18201

ATTN: J. Staudenmeier/J. Marchetti

Total No. of questionnaires distributed - 128

Total No. of questionnaires returned - 110

Percent Returned - 86

TABLE 3

**SELECTED RESPONSES FOR QUESTION 5, b.
(Describe Pre-Orientation Program)**

- All new students are invited to come to campus for two days over the summer to register for classes and for orientation to campus life
- A series of early orientation sessions, each three days long.
- Summer pre-testing program.
- One-day program through June/July, repeated 27-28 times, to advise and register students.
- For residence hall staff only.
- Summer academic counseling days for commuters.
- Voluntary day in May when parents and entering students may visit and see facilities.
- Are considering a summer orientation that would focus on academic advising.
- "Third World Transition Week", designed for minorities on a volunteer basis.
- Staff and students come back two days before new students arrive.
- Pre-orientation held for international students.
- Only to the extent of our summer mailings - (No on-campus programs)
- Summer orientation/registration programs in small groups.
- All new students are brought to campus in summer for one day of academic advisement and registration. 90% attend (non-mandatory)
- Register freshmen by individual appointments during the months of June and July.
- Pre-orientation takes place with a series of newsletters and an orientation program which we take into ten communities — it's called the **Road Show**.

(Several institutions responded by sending brochures describing various pre-orientation programs.)

TABLE 4

**RESPONSES FOR QUESTION 11
(Individuals Directly Responsible for Orientation)**

	# Institutions Responding
Assistant Dean for Student Development/ Assistant Dean of Students	21
Dean of Student Affairs	13
Director of Student Activities	11
Director of Orientation	7
Coordinator of Orientation	5
Director of New Student Programs	5
Director of Admissions	4
Associate Dean of Student Affairs	4
Commandant of Cadets	3
Dean of Freshmen	2
Vice President for Student Services	2
Director, Office of Residential Life	1
Pre-Admissions Counselor	1
Orientation Chairperson	1
Director of Counseling	1
Associate Dean of Admissions	1
Director of Auxiliary Services	1