

Student Impact of the College Orientation for New Students

Los Medanos College

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Some evidence exists that College Orientations cut the attrition rate in higher education (Donk and Hinkle, 1971), provide students with a better understanding of academic expectations (Cole and Ivey, 1967), give a clearer understanding of the role of a student (Rising, 1967), and provide students with a view of the college environment (Foxley, 1969). As a student retention strategy, the primary purpose of college orientations is to ease the transition to college and to aid the student during the initial adjustment period (Titley, 1985) the purpose of this exploratory study is to examine any association of orientation participation with three educational outcomes and student self-reported benefit from orientation participation. It is important to note that this study is descriptive in nature and does not imply causation.

Fall 1994 first-time freshman orientation participants are compared to non-participants with respect to the following educational outcomes: First Semester Retention, First-to-Second Semester Persistence, and First Semester College GPA. Findings from two qualitative studies in reference to LMC's orientation are also summarized (*Student Experiences with College Life*, Fall 1994; and *Student Experiences with the Registration Process*, Fall 1996).

Operational Definitions:

Definitions for course Retention and Success rates used in this study are those recommended and adopted by the Research and Planning Group of Community Colleges in California (June 1996). They are:

Course Retention: Student is retained in the course to the end of term. A,B,C,D,F,CR,NC,I grade notations. Rate is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Retention Rate} = \frac{\text{A,B,C,D,F,CR,NC,I}}{\text{A,B,C,D,F,CR,NC,W,I}} \times 100$$

Course Success: Student succeeds in the course. A,B,C,CR grade notations and its rate is calculated as follows:

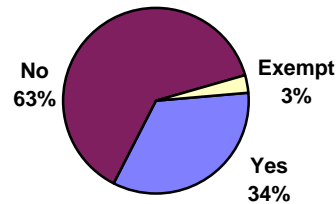
$$\text{Success Rate} = \frac{\text{A,B,C,CR}}{\text{A,B,C,D,F,CR,NC,W,I}} \times 100$$

Summary of Findings: 34% of first-time students attended LMC's Orientation for new students -- mostly are students with long-range goals. Those who participated in the orientation had higher first-to-second semester persistence rate than those who did not participate. A study on LMC's *Students Experiences with College Life* (Fall 1994), revealed that orientation is most helpful to students in selecting Math & English classes, in understanding LMC's enrollment procedures, and in understanding the college policies. In another study on *Student Experiences with the Registration Process* (Fall 1996), findings revealed that participating in the orientation helps students clarify their educational goals, become more aware of the courses and programs available, and select classes to meet their educational objectives. These descriptive findings suggest that college orientation seems to be an effective strategy to inform students about college services and expectations, and orientations should not be expected to be associated with long term student outcomes, such as persistence, retention and academic performance.

Results

Participants: There were 1142 first-time freshmen in the fall of 1994, as identified through LMC's research files. Of these, 386 (34%) participated in the orientation, 723 (64%) did not, and 33 (3%) were exempt (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Percentage of Fall 1994 First Time Students
who Participated in LMC's College Orientation
(n=1142)**



Participation Rates by Demographics: In comparing the demographics by group (participants vs. non-participants), the data show that Filipino and Asian students participate in the orientation in slightly greater proportions than other students do. Also, females and younger students are more likely to participate in the orientation.

Table 1. Student Orientation Participation Status: Demographics

	PARTICIPANTS (n=386) 34%		NON-PARTICIPANTS (n=723) 63%		EXEMPT (n=33) 3%		ALL STUDENTS (n=1142)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Ethnicity</i>								
Non-Respondent	17	20%	69	79%	1	1%	87	8%
Caucasian	201	34%	375	63%	22	4%	598	52%
Latino	78	38%	126	61%	4	2%	208	18%
Am. Indian	2	15%	11	85%	0	0%	13	1%
Asian	27	42%	35	54%	3	5%	65	6%
Af. American	37	31%	81	68%	2	2%	120	11%
Filipino	24	47%	26	51%	1	2%	51	4%
<i>Gender</i>								
Male	141	27%	365	70%	13	3%	519	45%
Female	245	39%	358	57%	20	3%	623	55%
<i>Age Group</i>								
19 and Younger	228	58%	161	41%	5	1%	394	35%
20-24	62	41%	82	55%	6	4%	150	13%
25-29	21	21%	70	71%	7	7%	98	9%
30-34	27	25%	77	72%	3	3%	107	9%
35-39	20	25%	56	69%	5	6%	81	7%
40 and Older	25	16%	126	80%	7	4%	158	14%
Unknown	3	2%	151	98%	0	0%	154	13%

Participation Rates by Educational Objective: It appears that students with long-term goals (e.g., transfer, earn a certificate or degree) are more likely to participate in the orientation than students with short-term goals (e.g., pursue personal interest) – Table 2.

Table 2. Student Orientation Participation Status by Degree Objective

	Participants (n=386) 34%		Non-Participants (n=723) 63%		Exempt (n=33) 3%	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Transfer with AA	33	54%	27	44%	1	2%
Transfer without AA	136	86%	22	14%	1	1%
Vocational Degree	22	36%	39	64%	0	0%
G.E. Degree	27	66%	14	34%	0	0%
Certificate	52	55%	40	43%	2	2%
Learn New Job Skills	54	36%	88	58%	9	6%
Maintain Certif. or Lic.	1	4%	21	91%	1	4%
Improve Basic Skills	6	9%	61	91%	0	0%
Pursue Personal Interest	3	3%	82	85%	11	11%
Update Current Job Skills	2	3%	64	90%	5	7%
Complete H.S. Credits	0	0%	40	100%	0	0%
Undecided	48	21%	182	78%	2	1%
Explore Career Interests	2	4%	43	93%	1	2%

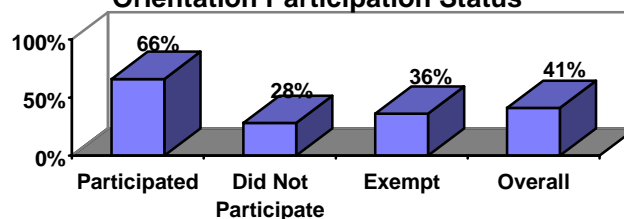
Overall Educational Outcomes:

No significant group differences were found with respect to first-semester retention rates. Non-Participants had higher first-semester academic performance than Participants. However, orientation Participants had higher first-to-second semester persistence rates than non-participants.

Table 3. Educational Outcomes by Participation Status

	PARTICIPANTS (n=386)		NON-PARTICIPANTS (n=723)		EXEMPT (n=33)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1 st Sem. Retention	353	91%	648	90%	30	91%
1 st Sem. Avg. Cum. GPA	2.64		3.06		2.88	
1 st to 2 nd Sem. persistence	253	66%	201	28%	12	36%

Figure 2. First-to-Second Semester Persistence Rate by Orientation Participation Status



Educational Outcomes by Ethnicity and Gender:

No significant differences were found for first-semester retention rates when controlling for ethnicity and gender (Tables 4 and 5). Consistent with overall findings, first-semester academic performance was found to be generally higher for Non-Participants when controlling for ethnicity (Table 6) and gender (Table 7). Semester persistence rates were higher for orientation Participants after controlling for ethnicity (Table 8) and gender (Table 9).

Table 4. First-Semester Retention Rates by Ethnicity

	Participated (n=386)		Did Not Participate (n=723)	
	n	%	n	%
Non-Respondent	16	94%	60	87%
Caucasian	185	92%	336	90%
Latino	70	90%	110	87%
Am. Indian	2	100%	11	100%
Asian	24	89%	33	94%
Af. American	33	89%	75	93%
Filipino	23	96%	23	88%
Overall	353	91%	648	90%

Table 5. First-Semester Retention Rates by Gender

	Participated (n=386)		Did Not Participate (n=723)	
	n	%	n	%
Male	130	92%	325	89%
Female	223	91%	323	90%
Overall	353	91%	648	90%

Table 6. First-Semester Average Cumulative GPA by Ethnicity

	Participated		Did Not Participate		Overall	
	n	GPA	N	GPA	n	GPA
Non-Respondent	14	2.54	39	2.69	53	2.65
Caucasian	162	2.76	198	3.36	360	3.09
Latino	56	2.38	69	2.80	125	2.62
Am. Indian	2	2.72	8	3.00	10	2.94
Asian	22	2.87	22	2.50	44	2.69
Af. American	21	2.16	48	2.80	69	2.61
Filipino	20	2.71	14	2.93	34	2.80
Overall	297	2.64	398	3.06	695	2.88

Table 7. First-Semester Average Cumulative GPA by Gender

	Participated		Did Not Participate		Overall	
	n	GPA	n	GPA	n	GPA
Male	109	2.54	232	3.16	341	2.96
Female	188	2.70	166	2.92	354	2.81
Overall	297	2.64	398	3.06	695	2.88

Table 8. First-to-Second Semester Persistence by Ethnicity

	Participated (n=386)		Did Not Participate (n=723)	
	N	%	n	%
Non-Respondent	13	76%	22	32%
Caucasian	137	68%	92	25%
Latino	52	67%	39	31%
Am. Indian	1	50%	1	9%
Asian	14	52%	14	40%
Af. American	19	51%	22	27%
Filipino	17	71%	11	42%
Overall	253	66%	201	28%

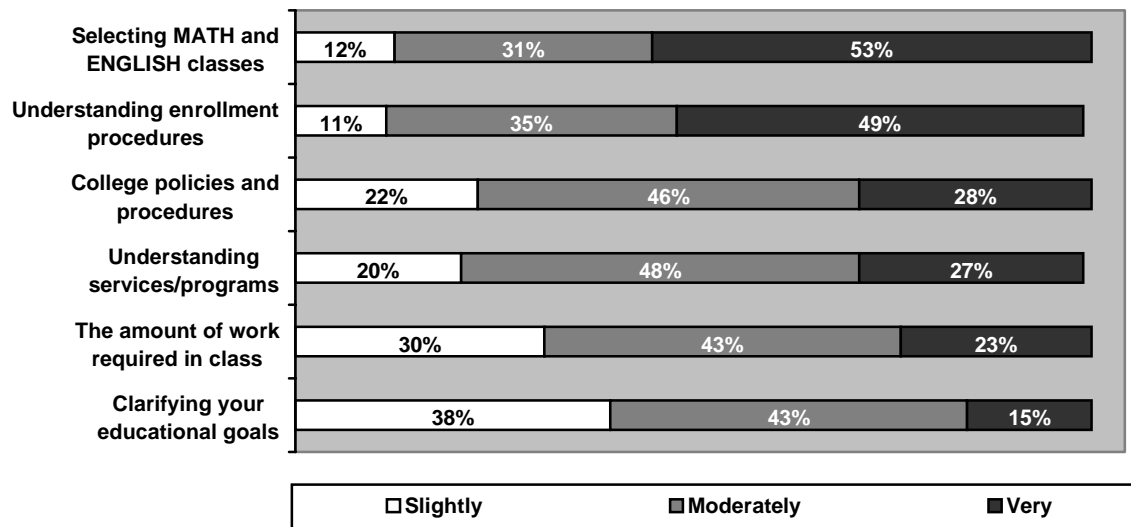
Table 9. First-to-Second Semester Persistence by Gender

	Participated (n=386)		Did Not Participate (n=723)	
	N	%	n	%
Male	93	66%	97	27%
Female	160	65%	104	29%
Overall	253	66%	201	28%

Benefits of College Orientation:

In a study about LMC's *Student Experiences with College Life* (Fall 1994), over 80% of the students reported that participating in LMC's orientation for new students MODERATELY or VERY much helped them in *selecting their Math and English classes*, and in *understanding enrollment procedures*; 74% reported that the Orientation helped them in *understanding college policies*, and in *understanding college services and programs* (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Extent to Which the Orientation for First-Time Students was Helpful in the Following



College Aspects (n=475)

More recently, a study on *Students Experiences with the Registration Process* (Fall 1996), revealed that most students who participated in the orientation felt that the orientation helped them clarify their educational goals, become more aware of the courses and programs available, and in selecting classes to meet their educational objectives (Table 10).

Table 10. Extent of Helpfulness of New Student Orientation
(From *Student Experiences with the Registration Process* study, Fall 1996)

ORIENTATION HELPED	VERY	MODERATELY	SLIGHTLY	NOT AT ALL	NOT COVERED
Clarify Educational Goals	47%	37%	16%	---	---
Understand Enrollment Procedures	47%	32%	11%	5%	5%
Class Selection to Meet Ed. Obj.	50%	33%	11%	6%	---
Awareness of Courses and Progs. Avail.	58%	21%	11%	11%	---
Awareness of Svcs. Offered	32%	32%	16%	10%	10%
Learning How to Succeed in College	21%	26%	37%	11%	5%
Become Aware of Class Work Required	27%	42%	21%	5%	5%
Become Aware of College Policies/Procedures	26%	42%	11%	16%	5%

Source: Student Experiences with College Life Study, Fall 1994.