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Experiment in Orientation of Junior College Students

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AMERICAN colleges and universities have in the past several decades become more and more concerned with the personal and social development of students. A survey of 93 colleges and universities by Hardee (1954) revealed that most of these colleges offered credit courses in personal and social adjustment. Examples included: *Personal Living*—Columbia College; *The Individual and the College*—Dartmouth; *Personal Social Adjustment*—Virginia State; and *Introductory Psychology*—Orange Coast. Often included as a part of the general education program, these courses have varied objectives that range from communicating campus regulations to helping the student develop a satisfactory philosophy of life. All share a concern for the development of the non-intellective aspects of the student's personality.

One such course is required of all students entering Santa Fe Junior College in Gainesville, Florida. Listed in the catalog as *The Individual in a Changing Environment*, BE-100 is the result of an experimental course (Privette & Merrill, 1966) developed by the student personnel staff at Central Florida Junior College when the Santa Fe president and dean of students were located there. The course is based in part on the concepts of Glanz, Hayes, and Penney (1959).

BE-100 is not a psychology course in which the knowledge of facts and principles concerning psychology form the subject matter. It is not a traditional orientation course in which the student is introduced to the rules and regulations of the college. Nor is it an introduction to vocational development in which the student sifts through occupational information and writes a paper on a career.

BE-100 is a course in introspection; the experience of the student is the subject matter. It provides each student with an opportunity to examine his values, attitudes, beliefs, and abilities, and with an opportunity to examine how these and other factors affect the quality of his relationships with others. In addition, he examines the social milieu—the challenges and problems of the society—as they relate to his development. Finally, the course provides each student with an opportunity to broaden and deepen a developing philosophy of life.

A three hour credit course, BE-100 is one of six basic courses that comprise the Common Program required of all students. The six courses of the Common Program serve as a matrix for other courses the student may choose to complete his General Education Program.

All courses in the Common Program are taught in sections of 25 or less. Grades for these courses include A, B, C, or X. An X carries no penalty points and means that a student has not earned an A, B, or C and will need to do so before graduation. The system of grading was so popular with students and faculty it has now been adopted for all courses in the college. The six courses comprising the Common Program are part of the General Education Program of the college and will transfer to all state institutions under the agreement of the Florida General Education Compact.

METHOD

BE-100 is taught by counselors. Many sections meet in Basic Encounter Groups of six to eight students with a counselor as leader-participant. Basic Encounter Groups meet

once and sometimes twice a week. In addition, there are larger group meetings each week. Counselors carry a maximum load of two sections.

These groups focus on problems of interpersonal relations and self-development. Sensitive topics are frequently discussed: drugs, sex, religion, family problems, and racial prejudice are typical. As participants, counselors bring to the groups humanistic and existential points of view.

Individual counseling is also available. In some cases the student may choose individual counseling as a major project and receive credit for part of the work of the course. The college has extended this concept to allow a student to register for a Directed Individual Study course in which he could receive three hours credit for individual or group counseling. In this way the educational value of the work of the counselor is recognized with credit and a course title.

Another method that contributes to the effectiveness of the course is the reaction paper which students are encouraged to write on any subject. Students write about how they feel about a particular class or student in the class, how they feel about the instructor, or how they feel about some home or other personal concern; about rewarding or frustrating incidents they have experienced; or even about the difficulty they experience in not being able to write a reaction paper. No grades are assigned to the papers. It is through these communications that group projects are often organized, or individual counseling sessions are arranged. Reaction papers are also good devices for stimulating communication with students who are non-verbal in group sessions.

Community service and self-development activities are encouraged as class projects. Some examples of student involvement include:

1. One student organized a recreational program for children in a Negro community. Equipment was donated by class members.
2. A student from Arabia planned experiences in American culture once a week for a term. His experiences included going to a square dance, visiting the home of various class members, playing on the basketball team, and reporting to the class on his observations of the American family.

3. One student arranged a weekly children's reading hour in a nearby community.
4. Three students sponsored retarded children at a state institution which included weekly visits and gifts.
5. One student learned to use a sign language in order to communicate with a deaf mute whom he visited once a week in an institution.
6. Many students were involved in the creative arts of poetry and painting.
7. One student participated once a week as a teacher aide in reading with third graders.
8. A student who had been dropped two terms for poor attendance agreed to miss no classes as a project for BE-100. He subsequently attended all classes in all courses.
9. One student planning a divorce chose individual counseling as a project and also arranged for her husband to see a counselor.

No single textbook has ever been appropriate for BE-100. A book is now being prepared by the author and one of the staff members that should be appropriate for courses similar to BE-100. Counselors are now using books and articles written by Combs, Maslow, Rogers, Coleman, Gardner, Jourard, and others. Articles in contemporary journals and magazines are also used. In addition, counselors write their own material or use material written by students. Students often develop interesting lectures and visit other BE-100 sections as guest lecturers. During one term the most popular lectures by students focused on *The God Is Dead Issue* and *The Drug Scene*.

A self-determining grade system contributes a measure of security to the open-endedness of many of the activities of the course. Students develop their own personal objectives within the broad objectives of the course, indicate how they plan to reach the objectives, and develop evaluation procedures to provide evidence of successful completion. As one student said of BE-100, "All you have to do is accomplish your own goals."

A room where BE-100 students can meet has been designated by the college as the BE-center. A BE-forum is planned by students on a weekly basis in which students present their own viewpoints and lead their own discussions concerning issues relevant to them. In this way other students not enrolled in BE-100 can also participate in the discussions and activities.

EVALUATION

Since BE-100 is a "feedback" class, there are many opportunities to obtain course evaluations. From time to time, students are asked to submit unsigned papers evaluating aspects of the course. Students may be asked, for example, to describe the class to a new student. Instructors in other departments are asked to report student comments.

Students often over react to BE-100 in the beginning. It requires active participation—and studying one's self can be a threatening, frightening experience. Many students attempt by manipulation to structure the class in order to avoid a reorganization of their perceptions. ("We should have real tests." "The teacher should lecture." "Why don't you tell us how to behave.") The over-all evaluation of the course by students and by instructors in other departments has been decidedly positive, however.

The following comments by students are typical of student feeling for the course:

"This class is the only class that I enjoy. So it is the only class I come to."

"It was a little difficult at first being an older student but thanks to the instructor and my BE course I now feel comfortable being back in school."

"I have made many friends, and this has made Gainesville seem more like a home to me. From being in BE I have gained the most. I have learned more about myself than I can put down on paper."

"Santa Fe is different because of classes like BE. There seems to be much more personal interest in the student. One thing, as a student, I really feel about SFJC, is that it does care about its students."

"Nothing is forced learning, where I have to spend many, many hours learning facts, figures, etc. that will leave me very soon. The studies are related to things that are going on today."

"Here the student is given credit for having a mind of his own, and the privilege of exercising it."

"I've learned more about myself in these two months than I have all my life."

"To be completely honest I wasn't very happy about coming to school here. But now that I have been here I have changed my opinion. First impressions always play upon your likes or dislikes for something. For instance, my first impression of Santa Fe was one of extreme

dislike. The thought of my having to attend Santa Fe made me very angry, and I even went so far as to tell my parents school was out! My attitude seemed to be based around the thoughts: Who wants to go to junior college—one which isn't even on its feet—look at the location! and so on. For some reason, my parents disappointment probably, I decided I'd come to Santa Fe. With all sincerity I can now say I'm very happy and satisfied with the climate surrounding Santa Fe. The instructors, students, and all the many people connected with the junior college are wonderful. The learning situation is still new to me, but I'm gradually growing used to it. It gives the students a feeling of responsibility, as well as making them aware of themselves."

A staff-constructed course evaluation questionnaire was administered to all sections at the end of each of the first three terms the course was taught. Students were asked to compare BE-100 with other courses they had taken at the college and rate it on a five-point scale. At the end of the first term fifty-eight percent rated BE-100 "above average" or "excellent." The highest ratings for activities in the course were given to reaction papers, small group discussions, tape recordings, individual projects, and readings. Over half the students rated these activities "above average" or "excellent."

Students were also asked in the course evaluation questionnaire how BE-100 had helped them personally. Over half the responses indicated that BE-100 had helped students "much" or "very much" in understanding their own values and attitudes and those of others. Forty-three percent indicated that the course had helped them "much" or "very much" in exploring their educational plans.

Students had high opinions of BE-100 instructors, as shown in Table 1. The more average ratings on class preparation and organization might be related to the fact the course was new and none of the instructors had ever taught a similar course. On the other hand, the ratings could indicate a need for a more traditional structure.

SUMMARY

Santa Fe Junior College has committed a significant proportion of its resources to the development of the personal and social characteristics of its students. A three hour credit

TABLE 1
Student Ratings Of Instructors Of BE-100

	POOR %	BELOW AVERAGE %	AVERAGE %	ABOVE AVERAGE %	EXCELLENT %	N
1. Interest in his students	0	0	15	30	55	327
2. Understanding of his students	1	1	16	38	44	329
3. Preparedness for class	1	5	31	33	30	329
4. Knowledge of subject	0	2	12	31	55	325
5. Enthusiasm for subject	0	2	14	31	53	323
6. Organization	3	8	30	35	24	316
7. Willingness to look at a point of view different from his own	1	2	9	25	63	325
8. Being comfortable with his students	0	0	8	22	70	327
9. Alertness and sensitivity to others	0	1	14	26	59	322

course, *The Individual in a Changing Environment*, is the heart of the curriculum. The course is required of all entering students. A staff of highly competent counselors is employed to develop the course experiences. Ten full-time counselors were available for the total student body of 1,100 full-and part-time students during the first year.

Statements by students and staff indicate the institutional commitment to BE-100 has had an influence on the development of a campus climate that may be significant for junior college students. They are pleased to have their experiences and concerns recognized as an area worthy of study and course credit. They identify with the college as a place that cares. Confronted with the difficulties of all commuting students—achieving independence while living at home—they can focus on these difficulties in Basic Encounter Groups and in individual counseling. In addition, students experience independence by choosing their own objectives for the course and assuming responsibility for meeting the objectives.

The counselors who teach BE-100 are perceived by students as knowledgeable adults interested in their problems. Counselors are

also perceived as enthusiastic, sensitive to others, comfortable with students, and as persons willing to look at points of view different from their own. In that kind of learning environment students are willing to examine dimensions of their personality and, hopefully, to choose health-engendering alternatives for further growth.

In one term all students certainly do not benefit from the course. For most students, however, it is a remarkable first experience—an opportunity to learn about themselves and the roles they will play in the college environment and in society. They learn about others and how to relate to others in a more satisfying way. Finally, they learn that college is not such an impersonal place after all.

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