

Online Student Orientation

Question:

We're in the preliminary stage of designing an orientation for our online students at Case Western Reserve University. We're interested in learning the format that's used by other schools (e.g. four half-hour modules that each include video), the topics that are covered (e.g. disability services, library services), what tasks students must complete, and whether the orientation is a prerequisite for doing anything, such as registering for classes. I would greatly appreciate any information that you could share!

- Jim Petras, Information Technology Services, Case Western Reserve University
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Answers:

The California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative has developed a comprehensive, self-paced, readiness for online learning workshop, built in Canvas. The workshop includes a diagnostic assessment (SmarterMeasure), a series of multimedia tutorials, check-on-learning quizzes, student feedback surveys, and supplemental materials. We call the workshop Quest for Online Success.

The good news is that the tutorials were developed under a Creative Commons license and we welcome you to link your students to the full set of tutorials from <http://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei/students.html> or to pick and choose those you want to download from <http://apps.3cmediasolutions.org/oei/>

- Anita Crawley, California Community Colleges
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At Ohio University we have developed an online orientation that parallels the information traditional students receive when they come to campus for Bobcat Student orientation. We worked closely with the staff responsible for that program in developing the content. We think this is a very important part of preparing students for success and completion is required for undergraduate online students prior to registering. A registration hold is placed on a student's record upon admission and is not removed until the orientation has been successfully completed.

We have different versions of the orientation for undergraduate and graduate online students. Undergraduate students in online programs are required to complete and pass the orientation "final exam" with a 70% score before the registration hold is lifted from their accounts. This, also, is similar to



our traditional orientation process. We do have a process in place when needed for exceptions to this requirement. The orientation is optional for graduate students.

The sections included cover University policy, tuition and financial aid, advisor’s role, how to use the portal and Student Center (our interactive online services for student services), specific information about expectations for online students and their success, a list of tools, tips and links (these include the services you mention, such as library and disability services), and a section that includes info on life factors and learning styles. This final section includes information about how the student can complete the SmarterMeasure online readiness assessment to help them better prepare for success. Each section includes an end-of-section quiz of 3 questions, randomly assigned from a pool, incorrect answers do not prevent the student from proceeding, but do remind them of the correct answer and what to review. After completing the entire orientation the student must take the “final exam” and pass with a 70% score. They can retake the orientation multiple times if needed in order to pass. The content is primarily text at this point.

We communicate the expectation for completing orientation in an email communication sent shortly after a student has been admitted. They are able to log into the orientation with their assigned university ID and can finish it all in one session or may complete part and come back to it later, but overall it can take up to an hour.

We use Comevo as our platform, which provides us with data about student completion and helps identify in what questions/areas students may struggle so we can evaluate if those are being addressed most effectively. You can visit the orientation (without quizzes or exam) as a guest at: <http://www.atschoolorientation.net/default.aspx?th=ohio&>

We have a separate, orientation-type module to acclimate students to our LMS, Blackboard. A few weeks before their first term begins we encourage new students to go through this optional course, which takes about 45 minutes and shows how to use the typically required features in the LMS. Students can revisit this organization at any time during their academic career directly from Bb.

We’ve been requiring the orientation for about 2 years and have received some feedback that it is helpful...and no complaints about it being a requirement.

- Linda Lockhart, Director, Communication and Partnership Support, Ohio University

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NOVA has an online orientation program that you are welcome to explore. Take a look at <https://eli.nvcc.edu/orientation/> and see if this site offers any ideas.

- Dr. Wm. Preston Davis, Director of Instructional Services, ELI, Northern Virginia Community College

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We do a 3 credit course for undergraduates at APUS. It has been extensively revised over the years. Grad



students have an orientation for no credit yet it is required. Details are extensive and transparent at our website. We have found it greatly assists new students, and thereby, retention.

- Gary Berry, Ph.D., Dean, New Programs & Accreditation, American Public University System
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My team just finished creating one: <http://www.tri-c.edu/online-learning/elearning-orientation.html>

We used an open source solution for the digital literacy component. Some are videos but most are created in Storyline. We used an outside company to create them. Additionally, we have created an aligned assessment of these skills by category within Blackboard. Happy to share if anyone is interested, please contact me directly.

- A. Sasha Thackaberry, District Director, eLearning Technologies, Cuyahoga Community College
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We have multiple orientation activities:

1. Early Admissions Course – This is a non-credit series of web-activities that takes about two hours to meet the requirement, with about two hours of additional activities that are optional. Applicants must complete the seven required activities prior to enrollment. One of the activities is a didactic quiz that the students must score 100% on (they can take it as many times as they want) regarding areas that could be open to litigation if there were not verification that they were aware of these practices and policies.
2. Formal Orientation – This is currently set as what I think of as a traditional orientation. It takes students about 45 minutes to go through the orientation. Again, this is a requirement of enrollment.
3. For most students their first course is a student success course that repeats and expands on many of the functional aspects of online learning as part of the course.
4. Freshman Club – This is a volunteer series of six live webinars that occur during the first twelve weeks of enrollment where each of the critical learning areas and services including financial aid have a 45 minute presentation for new students. Attendance runs from 5-15%.

- Alan Hansen, Independence University
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Rio Salado College has an online orientation that is a free LMS course. We created in this format, so it also provides new students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with our RioLearn platform. We also conduct webinar-style online group orientations, as well as in-person when needed. We are exploring other methods with Skype, Zoom and other software. New students are automatically enrolled in the course upon registration for classes and have 6-8 weeks to complete it.



The orientation is not accessible on our public website, but the Start-at-Rio steps (steps to enrollment) provide the recommended processes that lead to the online orientation course.

<http://www.riosalado.edu/StudentOrientation/Pages/default.aspx>

My fellow colleagues and co-chairs of the NSO Initiative may want to provide additional insight and/or clarifications as well.

– Kevin

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For our cohort-based online degree and certificate programs (primarily graduate-level), we provide a self-paced distance learning orientation. The students are given two weeks to complete the orientation, finishing the Friday before their first “real” classes. Students are told that the orientation is required as a prerequisite to starting their classes. The orientation is conducted in a course site on our LMS, using the same template as the rest of the course sites for these programs.

The orientation consists of a set of four “Modules” (Using the LMS, Communication, Hardware and Software, and Other), each containing a number of short task-based tutorials and associated tasks/ assignments. For example, there are tutorials on how to take a quiz and how to view quiz results and a task to complete a practice quiz and view the feedback. The orientation provides an opportunity to accomplish three goals:

1. Familiarization with the tools and technologies used for distance learning
2. Cohort-building, getting to know and start interacting with other students in the cohort
3. Confirming that the students have the required hardware/software for participation in the program

While it is self-paced, students receive frequent feedback from the orientation facilitator. Evaluations have been consistently positive over the more than ten years we have provided the orientation.

– Suzanne David, E-Learning Technology Manager, Distance Learning, Tseng College: Graduate, International, and Midcareer Education, California State University, Northridge

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You will find our orientation at: <http://online.ucf.edu/learn-online/knights-online/> or <http://online.ucf.edu/learn-online/knights-online/prospective-knights/> It has three sections and includes videos.

– Linda S. Futch, Ed.D., Department Head, University of Central Florida



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