FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

Purpose

The first year experience is crucial for college students. It is important that they connect with faculty and staff, feel a sense of belonging at STC, become familiarized with the vast resources at their disposal, and develop the skills and dispositions that will contribute to their success as life-long learners. With South Texas College being a "commuter college," the design of a "first year experience" for all first time in college (FTIC) students presents a variety of challenges. The purpose of this initiative is to intentionally design a first year experience appropriate to all of our incoming students' needs.

Rationale

We know that the activities conducted through pre-enrollment advising, new student orientation, and continuous advising, all contribute to increased student success. We also know that not all students are participating in these activities. Further, we are realizing more and more clearly that a single orientation event, and a few 'touch points' in advising, are insufficient in terms of skill and disposition development in our students, and that in such limited encounters the vastness and variety of information presented to students quickly reaches a point of diminishing returns. What is needed is a true first year experience, deliberately designed as such, and rendered extensive, rather than intensive.

Baseline Data

FTIC Advising
Items covered include: selection of a major; college readiness; selection of first term courses; degree planning; financial planning; transfer and career options; and progress to degree completion.
- Fall 2017 to Spring 2018: Students who received advising persisted at a higher rate (77%), than those who did not (72%).
- Fall 2018 to Spring 2019: Students, who received advising (3,120), were retained at 66% (2,049).
- Fall 2017 to Fall 2018: When advising becomes proactive/intrusive (three or more sessions), persistence improved from 64% to 84%.

Academic Advising Rates

FALL	FTIC who received academic advising	FTIC # after census	FTIC after census who received academic advising
2017	1,742	4,927	35%
2018	3,120	4,775	65%

New Student Orientation
Items covered during the First Year Connection (FYC) orientation include the importance of connecting to college life; academic resources available to students; student activities; student services; characteristics of successful students, important semester dates, etc. Students that attended the First Year Connection (FYC) orientation have a higher GPA and persistence rate than those that did not attend.

GPA & Persistence Studies

	Semester	Attended FYC Orientation	Did not attend FYC Orientation
GPA	Fall 2015	2.51	2.22
	Fall 2017	2.55	2.25
Persistence	Fall 2015-Fall 2016	66.9%	56.6%
	Fall 2017-Fall 2018	62.2	51.4

Sample size: Fall 2015: 1,027 (out of 4,288 students enrolled)
Fall 2017: 1,189 (out of 4,927 students enrolled)

FYC Orientations attendance (not including Spring)

FALL	FTIC who attended FYC orientation	# of sessions	Average Per Session	FTIC # after census	FTIC after census who attended FYC orientation*
2014	2,259	14	161	4,608	49%
2015	2,677	16	167	4,288	62%
2016	3,177	13	244	4,825	66%
2017	2,722	16	170	4,927	55%
2018	2,408	11	219	4,775	50%

Student Success Course(s)
Items covered include (some combination of): major and career exploration; navigating a college syllabus; degree planning; financial literacy; distance learning and LMS basics; reading/writing in different contexts; student support technologies and computer literacy; connecting to faculty; connecting to the College; College resources; personal responsibility; goal-setting and time management; motivation and agency; college etiquette; and life-long learning.

Potential Impact

- Encouraged by the various reinforcements of select elements in Orientation(s) and Student Success Course(s), Advising staff will feel empowered to gloss select elements in the advising process while deepening their treatment of others.
- Encouraged by the various reinforcements of select elements in Advising and Student Success Course(s), Student Life staff will feel empowered to gloss select elements in the orientation process while deepening their treatment of others.
- Encouraged by support and collaboration with Advising and Student Life, faculty teaching Student Success Course(s) will be able to engage students in the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make for successful life-long learning in ways that are immediately relevant for the students as they begin their journey through higher education while connecting to campus life and resources.

Description of Proposed Intervention

- Make FTIC Advising Mandatory, and revise advising processes to cohere with Orientation and Student Success Course.
- Make New Student Orientation (of some form) Mandatory, and revise/coordinate all orientation efforts (first time new, dual, online, program-specific, transfers, international, etc.) to cohere with Advising and Student Success Course. Currently various forms of orientations exist for different types of students. A Pre-registration orientation (could even be online) should be considered to cover everyone applying to STC regardless of their status.
- Design and implement a "student success course requirement" at South Texas College for FTIC student population. Courses that meet this requirement would reinforce items covered in Orientation and Advising through extended application to the student's own academic journey, thus also alleviating the Orientation and Advising staff from feeling that they have to "cover everything" (including hands-on application) that becoming a life-long learner entails in a single sitting. Departments would be actively encouraged to collaborate with staff in Student Life and Advising to build a more seamless and coherent first year experience for our students. In addition, departments will have the flexibility in deciding what will be in their chosen Student Success Requirement. They will be allowed to tailor the course to specific departmental needs, while ensuring certain components are kept.

Proposed Goals/Outcomes

- As a result of more targeted and meaningful advising experiences, students will select and define an educational pathway sooner.
- As a result of more targeted and coordinated orientation experiences, students will connect to the College, its faculty, and staff, in ways that will tend to increase their persistence at the College.
- As a result of experiencing an extended student success course, students will be better prepared to succeed in selecting and completing course work leading to a degree (or certificate).

Logic Model

Design	Current	Proposed	Outcomes
Mandatory FTIC Advising	▪ Items covered include: selection of a major; college readiness; selection of first term courses; degree planning; financial planning; transfer and career options; and progress to degree completion. ▪ A hold was placed on students not attending the Mandatory Advising.	▪ Make FTIC Advising mandatory to all students (develop requirement criteria ex. Traditional, Dual Credit) ▪ Registration for FYC Orientation at the end of advising session ▪ Develop placement model for student success courses (ex. Substitutions) ▪ Develop case load advising processes ▪ CRM communication during the 5th week, 10th, and before the semester ends ▪ Technology Specialist focusing on researching and implementing the most technologically innovative advising tools	▪ All FTIC will complete Mandatory Advising ▪ All FTIC will select a meta-major by end of session, and possibly major ▪ All student will have first year educational plan
First Year Connection	▪ Items covered during the First Year Connection (FYC) orientation include the importance of connecting students to college life, academic resources, activities, services, important semester dates, etc.	▪ Make FYC mandatory ▪ Revise FYC to cohere with advising processes to align efforts and eliminate redundancies ▪ Incorporate Meta-major information sessions	▪ All FTIC will participate in FYC ▪ Increased engagement ▪ Students will connect to the College, faculty, and staff ▪ Increase persistence Fall to Spring and Fall to Fall
Student Success Course	▪ Course(s) include: major and career exploration; navigating a college syllabus; degree planning; financial literacy; distance learning and LMS basics; reading/writing in different contexts; student support technologies and computer literacy; connecting to faculty; connecting to the College; College resources; personal responsibility; goal-setting and time management; motivation and agency; college etiquette; and life-long learning.	▪ Required for all FTIC student ▪ Coordinate SSC with other FYE processes to cohere ▪ Standard Course Shell with minimum requirements (CLO) ▪ Calendar of student success events ▪ Meta-major introductions/exploration	▪ Number of completed hours towards their degree during first year ▪ GPA ▪ Higher 3-year graduation rate ▪ Attainment of CLOs

Proposed Implementation Team

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