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A study of the effects on academic achievement of the summer orientation program at the University of Northern Iowa

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A study of the effects on academic achievement of the summer orientation program at the University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

Most colleges and universities have some type of orientation program for new students. There are three general types of orientation programs: the semester-long course, the freshman week, and the pre-college clinic. While one purposes of these programs may be to enhance academic achievement, the literature suggests that the pre-college clinic is generally not effective in this area.

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF
THE SUMMER ORIENTATION PROGRAM AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA.

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Department of Educational Administration
and Counseling

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education

by
John D. Rider
August 1989

THIS RESEARCH PAPER BY: JOHN D. RIDER

Entitled: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUMMER ORIENTATION
PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA .

has been approved as meeting the research paper
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Education.

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June 23, 1989

Date Approved

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The Problem

Most colleges and universities have some type of orientation program for new students. There are three general types of orientation programs: the semester-long course, the freshman week, and the pre-college clinic. While one purposes of these programs may be to enhance academic achievement, the literature suggests that the pre-college clinic is generally not effective in this area.

Drake (1966) stated that reports on pre-college clinics are generally favorable, but only a few are based on research findings. Griffore and Griffore (1983) agreed:

One of the shortcomings of many of the available descriptions of orientation programs is that they are not explicit about their effects on a range of outcome variables. Indeed, it is more typical for such accounts to assert that students enjoyed the program, or that achievement levels were augmented, even though no data are presented in support of such assertions.... Nevertheless, the basic reason for presenting an orientation program is to promote measurable beneficial effects in

students. If changes are important, they should be objectively measurable. (p. 35)

Upcraft (1984) agreed that there is a lack of objective research on the effects of orientation programs.

The literature review for the present study disclosed few studies that dealt with the effects on academic achievement of pre-college clinic orientation programs. Most research dealt with semester-long orientation courses, and those researchers who did include a pre-college clinic in their study usually did so as a comparison to a semester long-course.

Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to ascertain whether attendance at a pre-college clinic summer orientation program at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) had a positive effect on academic achievement as measured by first semester grade point average. The schedule of events for the 1988 summer orientation program at UNI (see Appendices 1 & 2) included several sessions focused on academic concerns. The "CLEP Tests" enable students to see how they compare academically to college sophomores and to gain college credit for knowledge gained from previous schooling. The "Success Is In Your Hands" session gives students and parents a

better idea of how college is academically different from high school and a concept of realistic academic expectations. The "Educational Planning," "Program Planning," and "Advisement and Registration" sessions fall into two categories: helping students to develop a schedule of classes for the first semester and then registering for those classes. These activities involve the student in academic planning, and also enable the student to complete the registration process in an orderly and timely fashion.

Since the orientation schedule included sessions addressed toward academic issues, this study was designed to determine whether the academic achievement of students who attended the summer orientation program at UNI was better than that of students who did not attend.

Hypothesis

The literature suggests that the pre-college clinic orientation program does not enhance academic achievement. This study tested the null hypothesis: There is no significant difference in academic achievement, as measured by first semester grade point average, between students who attended a pre-college

clinic summer orientation program at the University of Northern Iowa and those students who did not attend.

Limitations of the Study

The present study used data from one freshman class, for one academic semester, at one university. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to other institutions. Also, no attempt should be made to infer longer term academic effects, or a lack thereof, from these results.

Definition of Terms

1. Orientation: "...is any effort on the part of an institution to help entering students make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and to enhance their success in college" (Upcraft, 1984, p.27).
2. Summer Orientation Program: The day and a half of pre-college activities for new students and their parents at the University of Northern Iowa (Appendices 1 & 2).
3. Academic Achievement: First semester grade point average.
4. Attenders: New freshmen who graduated from high school in 1988, attended a summer

orientation program at UNI in 1988, and who were enrolled full-time in the 1988 fall semester.

5. **Non-Attenders:** New freshmen who graduated from high school in 1988, did not attend a summer orientation program at UNI in 1988, and who were enrolled full-time in the 1988 fall semester.
6. **Full-Time Students:** Students enrolled for 12 semester hours or more (including remedial mathematics or English courses) during the 1988 fall semester.

Review of Related Literature

The articles in this literature review addressed three general themes: the goals of orientation programs, perceived student needs, and the effect of orientation programs on academic achievement.

Goals of Orientation Programs

Drake (1966) stressed the importance of stated goals for orientation programs:

Orientation, then, is potentially a means of communicating to students the essential goals of the college experience and of enhancing the students' clarification of their own goals. It can be a first step in the right direction toward successful academic involvement. It has potential for good when properly conceived and carried out, but a proper conception of orientation is essential for the realization of its potential. (p. 18)

Guthrie (1960) suggested that four goals should be the basis for the freshman program at Ohio State University: (1) "orientation to the university and its purposes, to establish loyalty to it; (2) orientation to academic life; (3) orientation to extracurricular and to social life; (4) orientation to life aims and

purposes" (p. 21). In 1959, Werner (cited in Miller & Ivey, 1967) stated the need for more academic emphasis in orientation programs. Upcraft (1984) suggested four goals for orientation programs which incorporate both the academic and the personal adjustment of students, but also include the adjustment needs of the students' families and the needs of the institution.

First, and foremost, orientation programs should help students with their academic adjustment to college. This results in maximum academic achievement and retention.... Second, orientation programs and services should help students with their personal adjustment to college. They should also know about the student support services available to help students with problems and concerns.... Third, orientation programs and services should help the families of entering students understand what their sons, daughters, or spouses are about to experience. Families need to know the academic and personal adjustments entering students must make.... Fourth, orientation programs and services should help the institution learn more about its entering

students. It is as important for the faculty and staff of an institution to understand its entering students as it is for students to understand the institution. (p. 28-29)

Kramer and Washburn (1983) reviewed several orientation programs. They concluded that a "concern for the student as an individual should be an integral part of orientation...[and] the primary emphasis should be placed on academics" (p. 311).

Two authors indicated that there are reasons other than academic ones for the pre-college clinic. Fahrback (1960) suggested that pre-college programs are essentially administrative conveniences, though they may contribute to academic success in some instances. Crookston, in an unpublished paper (cited in Drake, 1966), suggested that while orientation programs were designed to meet both student and institutional needs, most programs had the greater emphasis upon meeting the needs of the institutions.

Student Needs

Moser (1955) found "that the five highest ranking fears of incoming freshmen were (a) ability to do college work, (b) course selection, (c) friendliness of college teachers, (d) finances, and (e) ability to make

friends" (p. 283). Tautfest (1961), in a survey of prospective Purdue University freshmen, discovered that they wanted an orientation program to inform them of academic responsibilities and study habits, assist them with academic program planning, and familiarize them with the campus.

In summary, it is apparent that orientation programs may have many goals and objectives, both cognitive and affective. However, facilitating academic achievement is a primary objective and an important student need.

Pre-College Clinics and Academic Achievement

Several previous studies are directly pertinent to this study. Pappas (1967), in a study of students randomly assigned to three different orientation groups, discovered that students in the pre-college clinic group had lower grade points than students in either the directive-factual group or the small group of on-going orientation. Alff and Boyd, in unpublished masters theses (cited in Black, 1964), concluded that a pre-college clinic did not have a significant effect on first semester grade point average. Prola and Stern (1984) found that enrolling in a one-semester orientation course did not have any effect on first

semester grade point but that students who attended did stay in college slightly longer than students who did not attend. Stupka (1986) ascertained that students who attended either a pre-college clinic or a short information session received lower grade point averages than students in a semester-long orientation course. Those who attended the pre-college clinic did get slightly better grades than those who attended the information session, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Design of the Study

This study employed a quasi-experimental design which is used when the researcher is studying intact groups and cannot assign subjects to different groups. Internal validity was established by using a matched pairs technique. A non-independent t-test (Ary, 1985) was used to test for significance of the differences between matched pairs. The results were interpreted at the 0.05 level of confidence.

Population

The subjects for this study consisted of the 1749 students who graduated from high school in 1988 and enrolled at UNI for the 1988 fall semester. Of these, 1575 attended one of the 1988 summer orientation sessions (Attendees), and 174 did not attend one of the 1988 summer orientation sessions (Non-attendees).

Matching Categories

The two groups consisted of full-time students who were matched on three characteristics: ACT composite score, high school percentile rank, and sex. ACT composite score categories were 1-13, 14-16, 17, 18-19, 20, 21, 22-23, 24, 25-26, and 27-36. High school percentile rank categories were 0-09, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, 80-89, and 90-99. The

categories for the first two characteristics are those used by the UNI Admissions Office for yearly comparisons (Bisby, 1988). In order to increase the numbers available for matching in certain categories of high school percentile rank, the researcher combined the five lowest categories to create two categories, 0-29% and 30-49%.

Sample

Since the number of Non-attenders was limited, every effort was made to match as many as possible with Attenders. Of the 174 Non-attenders, 33 were not full-time students, and 10 had no ACT scores. This left 131 Non-attenders to match with students from the Attenders group, but there were 5 more Non-attenders who could not be matched. Therefore, there were 126 matched pairs upon which to run the statistical analyses.

The Findings

Data reported in Table 1 indicate two areas for consideration, GPA and class load. As for GPA, when viewing the total population, the Attenders had a higher first semester GPA (2.436) than the Non-attenders (2.325). When looking at the individual ACT scores, in the lower ACT score range from 9 through 16, the Non-attenders at each of six score levels (no Non-attenders had scores of 12 or 13) had a higher average GPA than the Attenders. In the middle ACT score range from 17 through 23, the Attenders at five score levels had a higher GPA than Non-attenders, whereas the inverse was true at two score levels (20 and 22). In the upper ACT score range from 24 through 34, no Non-attenders had scores of 31, 32, 33, or 34. At six of the remaining seven score levels, the Attenders had a higher GPA than the Non-attenders .

The data on class load in Table 1 show a striking pattern. For the total population, the Attenders had a heavier class load (14.3) than the Non-attenders (11.7). At almost every ACT score level (except 16, 29, and 30), the Attenders carried a heavier average class load than the Non-attenders.

Table 1

Comparison of Grade Point Average (GPA) and Class Load of Non-attenders and Attenders in the Total Population.

ACT Score	Non-attenders			Attenders		
	N	GPA	Class Load	N	GPA	Class Load
NR	10	2.30		5	2.45	
09	1	4.00	3.0	1	1.93	15.0
10	3	1.81	9.0	6	1.77	12.3
11	3	1.97	10.7	5	1.58	13.2
12	0			8	2.04	12.4
13	0			14	1.85	13.6
14	6	2.15	8.2	26	1.87	13.6
15	11	2.10	10.7	36	1.98	13.1
16	7	2.07	13.4	55	2.04	12.9
17	5	1.46	12.4	75	2.06	13.7
18	13	1.96	11.0	103	2.20	14.1
19	10	2.09	12.1	103	2.20	13.9
20	12	2.37	11.4	136	2.19	14.1
21	14	2.40	13.7	146	2.42	14.2
22	16	2.39	12.8	169	2.36	14.0
23	22	2.48	13.6	154	2.52	14.3
24	10	1.91	8.9	124	2.59	14.6
25	6	2.80	14.3	117	2.64	14.8
26	11	2.71	13.1	95	2.83	15.2
27	6	2.53	12.1	77	2.99	15.1
28	5	2.86	11.6	55	3.25	15.0
29	2	2.97	15.5	32	3.40	15.4
30	1	3.06	17.0	17	3.59	15.3
31	0			11	3.84	16.4
32	0			4	3.71	16.0
33	0			0		
34	0			1	3.77	16.0
	174	2.325	11.7	1575	2.436	14.3

Key: ACT Score = composite score

NR = No ACT scores reported

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of matching the pairs and performing t-tests on the data. In all of the statistical comparisons, the results were not significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. This may be due in part to the relatively small number of subjects in some of the categories.

When looking at all of the matched pairs in Table 2, the Non-attenders had a higher GPA (2.395) than the Attenders (2.367). In the two lower ACT score ranges (0-13 and 14-16), Non-attenders had a higher average GPA than did the Attenders. In the middle ACT score ranges (17, 18-19, 20, 21, and 22-23), the results are mixed, with the Non-attenders and Attenders each having the higher GPA in two score ranges and the same GPA in one score range. In the upper ACT score ranges (24, 25-26, and 27-36), the Attenders had higher average GPA's than the Non-attenders at each score range.

Table 2

Comparison by ACT Score Ranges of Grade Point Average
(GPA) of Attenders and Non-attenders in Matched Pairs

ACT Range	N	N-att GPA	Att GPA	t-value	Sig
0-13	3	2.25	1.86	1.346	>.05
14-16	17	2.10	1.97	0.703	>.05
17	4	1.31	2.21	-1.248	>.05
18-19	16	2.17	2.13	0.167	>.05
20	9	2.52	2.06	1.779	>.05
21	14	2.38	2.38	-0.025	>.05
22-23	34	2.43	2.44	-0.055	>.05
24	4	2.21	2.64	-1.631	>.05
25-26	13	2.28	2.76	0.542	>.05
27-36	12	2.90	2.93	-0.146	>.05
	126	2.395	2.367	-0.352	>.05

Key: ACT Range = The ranges of ACT composite
scores used in matching pairs

N-att = Non-attenders

Att = Attenders

When the matched pairs were categorized by sex (Table 3), the results were mixed. The female Non-attenders had a higher GPA (2.396) than the female Attenders (2.321), but the male Non-attenders had a slightly lower GPA (2.395) than the male Attenders (2.403).

Table 3

Comparison by Sex of Grade Point Average (GPA) of Attenders and Non-attenders in Matched Pairs

Sex	N	N-att GPA	Att GPA	t-value	Sig
Female	55	2.396	2.321	0.747	>.05
Male	71	2.395	2.403	-0.101	>.05
	126	2.396	2.362		

Key: N-att = Non-attenders

Att = Attenders

Summary and Conclusions

The findings of this study support the acceptance of the null hypothesis: There is no significant difference in academic achievement, as measured by first semester grade point average, between students who attended a summer orientation program at the University of Northern Iowa and those students who did not attend. There is no evidence that attending the summer orientation program at UNI influences the first semester grade point average of freshman students. This study supports other studies (Alff and Boyd in Black, 1964; Griffore and Griffore, 1983; Prola and Stern, 1984; Stupka, 1986) which also found that pre-college clinic orientation programs do not significantly affect the first semester grade point average of attenders.

A review of the schedule of UNI's summer orientation (Appendices 1 & 2) shows that there are many activities presented during the one and one half day programs. Even though a number of these pertain to the students' academic interests, the actual contact time with each student is relatively short. Previous researchers who compared longer term orientation programs to pre-college clinic programs (Pappas, 1967;

Stupka, 1986) found that the short-term program did not have a measurable impact on academic achievement. This is not to say that programs such as these do not serve a useful purpose for students and institutions. It only indicates that participation in this type of program does not appear to affect academic achievement as reflected in first semester grade point average. Thus, there is considerable research evidence to indicate that one and one half days is not enough time to accomplish the administrative functions included in a pre-college clinic and to impact significantly on academic achievement.

Suggestions for Further Study

Even though the analyses of data did not reveal results that were statistically significant, the findings do raise some questions:

- 1) Is the pattern found in this study, i. e., Non-attenders in the lower ACT score ranges having a higher GPA than Attenders, unique to this study, or is it a recurring phenomenon?
- 2) Is the pattern of Attenders carrying a heavier load than Non-attenders unique to this study, or is this also a recurring phenomenon?

- 3) Does the advising process at the UNI summer orientation program contribute to these patterns, or did these patterns occur because of other reasons, e.g., attenders are more ambitious than non-attenders?

After reviewing the results and procedures, it is suggested that future research on this topic should be structured with the following differences. Subjects should be matched by using fewer ACT score categories (0-16, 17-23, and 24-36), by using the same high school percentile rank categories as this study, by using class load (0-5, 6-11, 12-15, and 16+), and by sex. Using such a design should provide a better idea of how class load is related to first semester grade point average, and may result in having enough subjects in each category to gain statistically significant results.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the University of Northern Iowa:

1. Look at the advising process at the summer orientation program to find out if students in the lower ACT score ranges are choosing

heavier class loads on their own or if these loads are a result of the advising process.

2. Classify its pre-college clinic summer orientation program as an administrative and introductory service and not suggest that it enhances academic achievement.
3. Investigate a more in-depth or longer-term orientation program, if enhancing academic achievement is meant to be a viable goal of the UNI orientation program.

Appendix 1
Student Program

First Day Morning

- 7:30-9:30 Registration
 Check-in at Bender Hall (7:30-7:50 a.m.
 only for those taking CLEP)
 Refreshments - Bender Lobby
- 8:00-8:30 CLEP Information Session -- 247 EdC
- 8:30-10:00 CLEP Tests -- 247 EdC
- 9:00-10:00 "Are You Ready for Your Future?" Dr. Ken
 Jacobsen, Career Services Coordinator
 244-246 EdC
- 10:15-10-:45 "This is Northern Iowa," Opening Session
 244-246 EdC Meet your Summer Orientation
 Staff (SOS)
 Welcome, Mrs. Myra Boots, Assistant
 Professor of Speech-Language Pathology,
 Chairperson, University Senate -OR- Dr.
 Jay Edelnant, Director of Theatre,
 Associate Professor of Performance
 Studies
- 10:45-11:15 Panther Potpourri
- 11:30-12:30 Lunch -- Towers Dining Center

Afternoon

- 12:30-1:00 Success is in YOUR Hands, Dr. Wayne King,
Director, Center for Academic Achievement
244-246 EdC
- 1:15-1:45 Education Planning, 245 EdC
- 145:-3:00 Program Planning, 245 EdC
- 3:45 Students move to University Hall, Maucker
Union
- 4:00-4:30 OpportUNITies in Student Activities,
University Hall, Maucker Union
- 4:30-5:30 Campus Tour -- This is a walking tour
leaving from Maucker Union
- 6:00-7:00 Dinner -- Towers Dining Center

Evening

- 7:15-8:00 Sneak Preview: Your First Look at Campus
Life, West Towers Lounge, Mary Ellen
Sinnwell, Assistant Director, Northern
Iowa Premiere, John Rider, Graduate
Student, College Student Personnel
Services
- 8:00-9:00 UNI After Dark, University Hall, Maucker
Union

9:15 Additional academic advising (optional)
-- Bender Hall
Campus Ministries Open House -- College
Street

Second Day Morning

6:30-8:00 Breakfast -- Towers Dining Center
Hot breakfast served 6:30-7:30 a.m.

8:00-12:00 Advisement and Registration

1. Proceed to Royal Oak Room, Maucker Union, 15 minutes prior to times listed on packet. You will receive this packet during the Education Planning session.
2. Meet with advisor -- University Hall, Maucker Union
3. Register -- University Hall, Maucker Union
4. Residence Hall Students -- Please have your meal ticket photo taken after registration on the stage of University Hall

8:30-10:00 Student Point of View -- Facilitated by
Dr. Sue Follon, Vice President for
Educational and Student Services -OR- Dr.
Tom Romanin, Associate Vice President for
Educational and Student Services --
Hemisphere Lounge, Maucker Union

Check-out time at Bender Hall is 2:00 p.m. or
earlier. Feel free to stay and have lunch at the
Towers Dining Center (\$3.50 per person) or visit the
Cedar Falls community.

After completing registration, you are encouraged
to visit the Donald O. Rod Library, Art Gallery,
Maucker Union or the UNI-Dome (open jogging from 5:30-
8:00 a.m.). You may also enjoy a visit to the local
merchants.

Appendix 2
Parent Program

First Day Morning

- 7:30-9:30 Registration
 Check-in at Bender Hall (7:30-7:50 a.m.
 only for those taking CLEP)
 Refreshments - Bender Lobby
- 8:00-8:30 CLEP Information Session -- 247 EdC
- 8:30-10:00 CLEP Tests -- 247 EdC
- 9:00-10:00 "Are You Ready for Your Future?" Dr. Ken
 Jacobsen, Career Services Coordinator
 244-246 EdC
- 10:15-10-:45 "This is Northern Iowa," Opening Session
 244-246 EdC Meet your Summer Orientation
 Staff (SOS)
 Welcome, Mrs. Myra Boots, Assistant
 Professor of Speech-Language Pathology,
 Chairperson, University Senate -OR- Dr.
 Jay Edelnant, Director of Theatre,
 Associate Professor of Performance
 Studies
- 10:45-11:15 Panther Potpourri
- 11:30-12:30 Lunch -- Towers Dining Center

Afternoon

- 12:30-1:00 Success is in YOUR Hands, Dr. Wayne King,
Director, Center for Academic Achievement
244-246 EdC
- 1:00 Parents proceed to University Hall,
Maucker Union
- 1:15-1:30 University of Northern Iowa's Parent
Association -- University Hall
- 1:30-2:30 Faculty Point of View -- Conversation
with members of Northern Iowa's faculty,
facilitated by Dr. Darrel Davis,
Associate Professor of Accounting,
University Hall, Maucker Union
- 2:30-3:15 Residence Hall Life -- Mr. Clark Elmer,
Director of Residence -OR- Mr. Bob
Hartman, Associate Director of Residence
-- University Hall, Maucker Union
- 3:15-3:30 Light Refreshments
- 3:30-4:00 "Dollars for College," Mr. Roland
Carrillo, director, Financial Aid Office,
University Hall, Maucker Union
- 4:00-4:30 OpportUNITies in Student Activities,
University Hall, Maucker Union

4:30-5:30 Campus Tour -- This is a walking tour
leaving from Maucker Union

6:00-7:00 Dinner -- Towers Dining Center

Evening

7:15-8:00 "Making the Transition," Hemisphere
Lounge, Maucker Union

8:00-9:00 UNI After Dark, University Hall, Maucker
Union

Second Day Morning

6:30-8:00 Breakfast -- Towers Dining Center
Hot breakfast served 6:30-7:30 a.m.

8:30-10:00 Student Point of View -- conversation
with currently enrolled Northern Iowa
students facilitated by Dr. Sue Follon,
Vice President for Educational and
Student Services -OR- Dr. Tom Romanin,
Associate Vice President for Educational
and Student Services -- Hemisphere
Lounge, Maucker Union

10:00 Coffee with Dr. Follon/Dr. Romanin and
Summer Orientation Staff -- Hemisphere
Lounge, Maucker Union

Check-out time at Bender Hall is 2:00 p.m. or earlier. Feel free to stay and have lunch at the Towers Dining Center (\$3.50 per person) or visit the Cedar Falls community.

After completing registration, you are encouraged to visit the Donald O. Rod Library, Art Gallery, Maucker Union or the UNI-Dome (open jogging from 5:30-8:00 a.m.). You may also enjoy a visit to the local merchants.

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