Best Practices for Integrating Community College Transfers into Upper Division Classes

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An increasing proportion of the UCF student body is comprised of students who transfer from community colleges. In many UCF undergraduate science majors, pre-requisites are required for upper-division courses. For transfer students, continuity of faculty and content is not assured in such classes. Anecdotally, it appears that transfer students from community colleges often have a difficult time adjusting to the demands of upper-division science courses in their first year at UCF. These students are extremely challenged by upper division classes and may not be prepared for the level of instruction that they receive. Many feel lost and report to their professors and advisors that they simply do not feel prepared for the coursework. I have developed a summary of best practices to integrate community college transfers into upper division classes. I teach in Biology, however these practices may be appropriate for other programs.

Classroom culture

Explain to students the appropriate way to interact with you, for example, visiting during office hours, or scheduling appointments. They may also need to be instructed or encouraged to initiate contact with you, as they may assume you will initiate contact with them.

Communicate time commitment

On the first day of class, stress the level of studying that is required for your course. Be explicit. For example, I tell my students that they should expect to spend two hours outside of class for every hour that they spend in class.

Notetaking

Community college transfers may need explicit instructions on how to properly take notes in class. They may also need to be informed that even if you provide your Powerpoint slides, notetaking is necessary. SARC has a number of notetaking handouts that may be appropriate for your class (http://sarc.sdes.ucf.edu/handouts).

Provide studying tips

It is helpful to students to understand the nuts and bolts of studying for tests at the university level. You should provide explicit instructions on how to best study for your class. Additionally, you can make them aware of the Student Academic Resource Center (SARC) which provides tutoring and supplemental instruction services (http://sarc.sdes.ucf.edu/services).
Encourage group interaction

Many students new to the University may not have developed a cohort of peers to study with. Instructors can facilitate this by providing a discussion forum online and suggesting to struggling students that they set up group study times on campus.

Time management

Students are often working while earning their degree and are in critical need of time management skills. The Student Academic Resource Center (SARC) has useful handouts regarding time management, as well as test preparation, test taking, and notetaking (http://sarc.sdes.ucf.edu/handouts). Select the handouts you think are the most relevant to your course, and post them for your students on your online course. Quizzing your students on the content of the handouts is helpful.

Test taking

The format and content of tests CCTs have taken prior to arriving to UCF may be completely different than what is common here. For example, some CCTs have had all test questions provided to them on a ‘study guide’ prior to the exam. Thus, providing them with information on the types of questions they should expect, as well as what your study guides should be used for is helpful.

Writing

Encourage students to visit the Writing Center (http://uwc.ucf.edu/), prior to handing in written assignments.