

Students helping students

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Student counselor aides are guiding incoming freshmen through orientation at Western Piedmont Community College this summer.

When the first session for fall students begins today, students didn't sit through the usual "information blasts"—overloads of too much information too soon.

Instead, nine counselor associates, all second-year students, worked in small groups with the new students. Their task was to assist in clarifying career goals, developing study skills and overcoming academic barriers, according to counselor Richard Morgan.

Dr. Morgan says the new approach to orientation is being tried to help combat a high drop-out rate at the college, which he feels is related to students' uncertainty about career goals.

Like other community colleges around the state, Western Piedmont has experienced declining enrollment

in the past. The figures are beginning to stabilize and now the college is focusing its attention on helping entering students stay in school.

The counseling service is combating what Dr. Morgan estimates as about a 58-percent drop-out rate, with the highest rate of attrition in the college transfer program.

Students in this program, he believes are less likely to have chosen Western Piedmont for their education.

For many, Western Piedmont may have been second choice after refusal by a four-year college. For others, parental pressure to stay close to home and to cut the cost of education may have influenced a student's decision to attend Western Piedmont.

The new counselor aides are the school's latest approach to helping these students find their place in the world of academia.

Services offered by the nine associates will branch in three directions: career development, or clarifying career goals; developing sound study skills; and assistance in making up academic deficiencies.

Incoming students attending one of four sessions held June 20-22 and June 27-29 will participate in eight-hour sessions conducted by the counselors. This will supplement five hours of general orientation to the campus.

"If we can show a significant increase in (placement) test scores after going through the course," Dr. Morgan adds, "we'll be on to something."

One motivation for getting students to participate in the summer orientation rather than "walking on" to campus in the fall Dr. Morgan says, is the chance for students performing poorly on the placement tests to be retested.

These students who would normally be required to take a no-credit developmental English course may place high enough when retested to enter a credit course.

The main idea behind the career counseling project is to help students focus on what they want to do in life and the best way of reaching that goal. This knowledge, Dr. Morgan predicts, will motivate them to better performance in school.

"This new program to help students assess their career goals and learn study skills before entering the college could be a major factor," says Dean of Student Services Dr. Nancy R. Moore, "in helping students enter with more confidence in their own ability and self responsibility."

Participating in the one-month pilot project are Jerri Berry, Drexel; Terri Fleming, Dearl Moody, Sandra Melton and Angie Murray, Morganton; Mike McKinney, Hildebran; Hilda Ross, Valdese; Mary Patton and Sheila Stevens, Marion; and Jane Taylor, Hickory.

Counselors Bev McClure and Dr. Morgan will direct the program.

The counselor associates were trained for their duties in a two-day workshop conducted at the campus by Nannette Pais, director of student counseling at Southeastern Community College near Whiteville and Dr. Les Stege of the counselor education department at Appalachian State University.



From the left, Angie Murray, Dearl Moody, Jerri Berry, Sheila Stevens, Mike McKinney, Mary Patton and Jane Taylor take a break with Dr. Richard Morgan, one of the counselors coordinating the

orientation project. Associate counselor Terri Fleming took the photograph during a recent training workshop.