

# Perfecting Online Student Orientation

Palm Beach State College Rises to the Challenge



Four campuses. Thousands of students. Time-consuming orientation lectures held by various college advisors. Inconsistency in their message. Palm Beach State College knew they could do student orientations better. And they did.

They knew they needed an orientation program that provided information consistently among their four campuses, professionally, and included a top-notch educational planning component.

It also had to compliment the school image and engage their new and returning students in the process in an interesting way.

The approach to this challenge began with a strategic plan that considered the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation requirements for distance learning. They knew that to acquire and maintain SACS accreditation, they had to provide everything for distance learning students that they do for students attending on campus. And they knew that orientation is mandatory for first time college students.

Staff members researched other school's approach to orientation. As they explored online, they found that competitive educational institutions offered static screens with stale text. Here again, they knew they could do it better.

They set out to provide their students with an exciting, visually appealing and interactive program. Decision time: Palm Beach State concluded that to implement the kind of online orientation they needed, they had to have creative talent and technically savvy professionals in charge.

### **Big Job. Where to begin?**

Palm Beach State's committee chose Advantage Design Group to create their program based on the merits of previous work done with the school's director of college relations and marketing.



*Advantage Design Group's video crew films Palm Beach student*

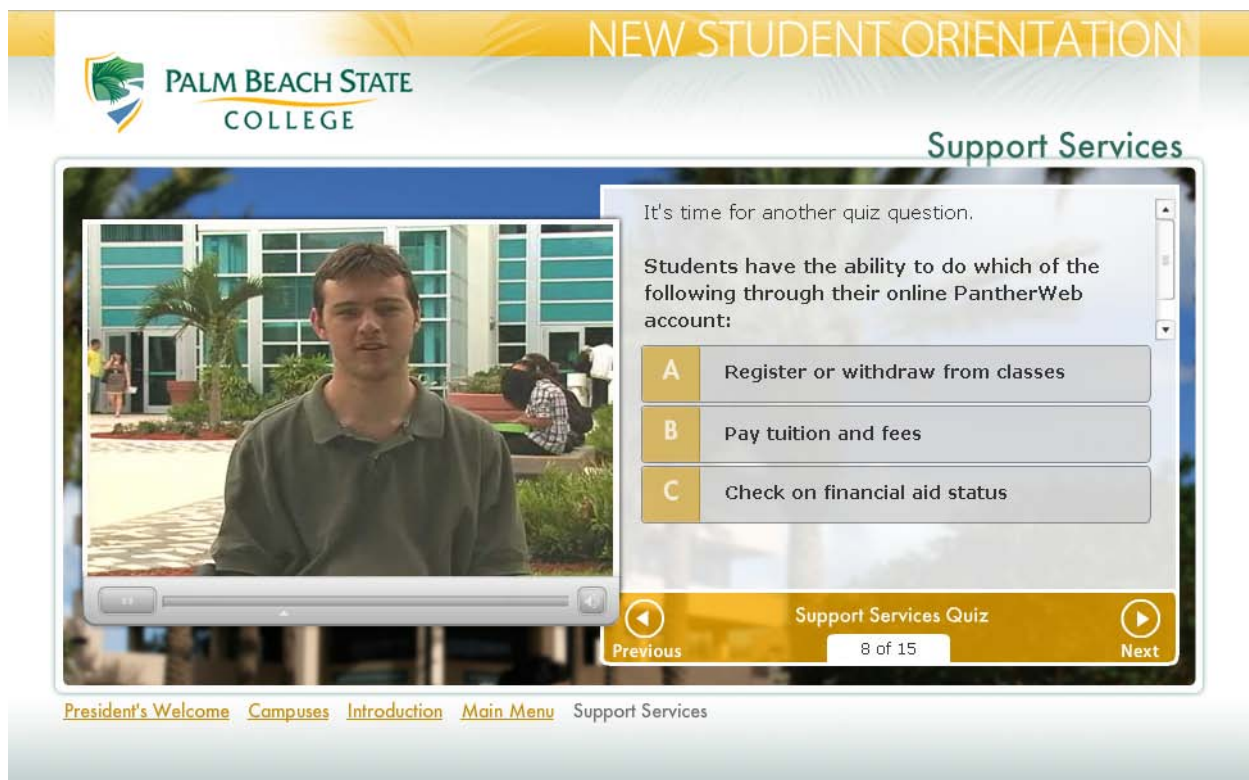
Advantage Design Group proposed an online orientation that featured students and staff telling their story only as Palm Beach State could. They created a Palm Beach State-branded Web design that included video, interactive modules, and easy access to more information so curious students could dig in more deeply. And, they developed program integration to connect students to their individualized academic records - streamlining the orientation, placement testing requirements, and course selection process.

Susan Lang, Director of College-Wide Student Programs, stated that she was "amazed" at how well the process worked with Advantage Design Group. Susan's internal process included consulting various departments for approvals at each step, "but Advantage Design Group's project manager and creative team really helped in keeping the process moving to completion." Palm Beach State College truly leveraged the talent available from Advantage Design Group not only in terms of creative design and marketing, but in technology as well.

### The Orientation Program Today

Palm Beach State achieved their objectives of creating and maintaining consistency in their message and providing an enhanced student orientation experience in line with their school branding. **But that's not all.**

Now, time is used more productively. Since the majority of topics are addressed online, the student gets more personal time with their advisor. Students can plan ahead for not only one term, but two. And the time is spent where they need it most - choosing the courses necessary to ensure their academic success.



Now, student orientation is intuitive. Once enrolled, students receive an email guiding them to the online orientation. Once registered, it remembers students and tracks responses. One valuable result - students are notified if they need to take placement tests before making

course selections, easing this administrative burden. And, if a student wants to return to the orientation after stopping before completion, the information is always there - right where the student left off.

Now, sensitive topics such as additional fees for excess credit hours and code of conduct issues are broached online, professionally and with authority. And now, they have a great tool for training new staff as well. Worth the effort.

Palm Beach State College reports virtually no issues concerning student access or usability. They have achieved not only the visually interesting component of their program, but a solid technical foundation as well. Now, online orientation just makes sense for Palm Beach State College.

### **Moving On**

The future at Palm Beach State looks bright, for administrators, advisors and students. Using the content management system installed by Advantage Design Group, select staff members can easily change content on the site. So, they stay on top of the frequently changing needs of online orientation.

A vocational program version has already been successfully implemented online. And, the administrators are confident that they can build upon the site without needing to schedule time with their IT department. They can get the job done when they need it.

**Palm Beach State College has secured its future and set the stage for  
academic growth with its online**