

University: **North Carolina State University**

Program: **First Year College**

Contact Person: **Dr. John Ambrose**

Title of Contact Person: **Director of First Year College and Assistant Vice-Provost of Undergraduate Affairs**

Address: **42 Tucker Hall, Box 7925, NCSU, Raleigh NC 27695**

Telephone: **919-515-1963** Fax: **919-515-8267** E-mail: [John\\_Ambrose@ncsu.edu](mailto:John_Ambrose@ncsu.edu)

Website for Program: [www.ncsu.edu/fyc](http://www.ncsu.edu/fyc)

### **Description of Program:**

The First Year College is a program of intensive advising and guidance for students who choose to enter NC State University without a declared major. Cross-curricular trained, full-time professional advisers also serve as instructors in the First Year College freshmen orientation / seminar class: Introduction to University Education. (One of the few models of a first year orientation course that is a two semester course, providing a continuity of contact with students throughout the entire first year.) A key to the success of FYC is its emphasis on building connections - among peers through small class sections, and among students staff and faculty through low adviser-student ratios and the college's multiple avenues to campus involvement and faculty contact.

FYC seeks to fully immerse first year students in the many academic, social, and cultural opportunities available at NCSU. Students receive credit in their FYC orientation course for participation in out-of-class campus cultural and educational events. For the fullest FYC experience, students may elect to live in one of two FYC residence halls which provide upper-class mentors, learning community options, and ready access to the FYC advising offices which are housed in the residential community buildings

The primary objectives of the FYC are:

1. To encourage students to make an informed and timely decision regarding an academic major by challenging them to seek self-understanding through guided reflection and career exploration;
2. To positively impact academic success, self-reliance, first year retention, and progress towards degree through one-on-one advising and structured experiential teaching and learning;
3. To collaborate with the entire NC State University community to enhance the University experience for first-year students who have not yet chosen a major;

4. To help students become engaged members of the campus community through experiences with the diverse campus culture;
5. To foster critical thinking through a challenging learning environment; and,
6. To practice the use of sound advising strategies in First Year College programs and courses, as exemplified in the National Academic Advising Association's Core Values.

**To whom is the strategy or initiative directed among first-year students?**

The college is particularly suited to students who prefer a year of general study accompanied with major and career guidance, after which, they will be able to easily make careful yet confident decisions determining their college future. The college attracts the full range of applicants to the University, including honors and scholars students.

**Among these targeted students, how many or what percentage participate or benefit? If not all targeted students participate, how are participants selected?**

FYC students typically constitute slightly less than one-quarter of the entering class of first year students. The numbers who apply to the program exceed the numbers who are admitted. (The Office of Enrollment Management for the University sets the entrance number and handles admission processes for all colleges at the University). Admission to the program requires that the student enroll in the program's seminar courses and meet individually with their academic adviser at least twice a semester. Higher levels of involvement are encouraged and are pursued by a significant number of the program's students.

Although FYC is designed primarily to provide students with a year of guidance before selecting an academic major, a number of students have been admitted into FYC after requesting admission to other NC State academic programs. Typically approximately 80% request admission into FYC as their first choice program; the remaining students request admission into other colleges such as Engineering, Design, and Management but are then placed into FYC when denied admission into these colleges (labeled FYC Second Choice students). Historically FYC Second Choice students have had lower academic outcomes than FYC First Choice students; therefore, their performance has been monitored separately. Not surprisingly, second choice students have lower entering academic index scores (predicted grade point averages) than first choice students, and many are understandably somewhat resistant to programming that attempts to help them determine selection of a major.

**What connections does the program or strategy have to formal classroom experiences and learning outcomes?**

The program is built upon a weekly seminar course (MDS 101/102), one-hour credit per semester, which meets throughout the first year. The course is taught by the student's academic adviser and is a letter-graded, university credit class. Course content includes vocational and career guidance, academic skills, critical thinking, and self-understanding. In the fall of 2001 a

learning community program was begun which paired the MDS course with a course from the student's general education program. The initial cohort of five paired classes (More than 100 students) has plans to double in the fall of 2002 and continue growth in the future. The paired classes in the learning communities program are all part of a parallel campus program, First Year Inquiry, which is built upon an inquiry guided educational model and includes an intensive assessment of student growth in critical thinking skills,

**What qualitative or quantitative assessment data are available to suggest effectiveness?**

Results from a five-year assessment of FYC suggest that this program has largely been successful at meeting the needs of first year students who desire a year of guidance and exploration before selecting a major. Most students have been academically successful, and a large majority are typically retained (90%) into their sophomore year. FYC students consistently perform as well as, or better than similar students at the university not enrolled in FYC on all academic variables measured (including retention, grade point average, and graduation rates). Considering the 'at risk' nature of an undecided population this is particularly significant data. The exception to this pattern of success has been second choice students (those who did not select FYC but were placed in the program by Admissions), who tended to have less positive academic outcomes.

Even when FYC students were not retained, they were more likely than comparison groups of similar students not entering the university in FYC to subsequently be enrolled in academic programs at another college or university. The rate of students transferring to other programs is not surprising considering, again, the undecided nature of the entering student. FYC advisers work with students to achieve their personal goals for a major, whether offered at NCSU or another campus.

Students also clearly became more decided about a career and major by the end of the year; however, by the middle of their third semester only approximately one-third have actually transferred to a major. Many students remain in FYC because they do not meet the necessary requirements to transfer to their intended major, although they are in good standing with the university. In some cases, colleges and majors require higher GPA's for transfer students than they require their students to maintain who enter the university in their program, thus putting some FYC students at a disadvantage regarding time to degree. This has been a source of ongoing concern since the creation of FYC, and FYC staff are pursuing a dialogue with other colleges to determine potential solutions.

Once FYC students select a major, however, they are significantly less likely than similar students not enrolled in FYC to subsequently change their major. Time spent in FYC presumably helps students make a wise and informed decision, and access to FYC advisers who are trained in cross-curricular advising likely helps students take the appropriate courses for their intended majors or take courses suitable for a variety of majors if they are still undecided. Other students without access to this type of advising would be at a disadvantage

without this type of advising, and thus be more likely to “major hop” until they finally settle on a degree suitable for them.

A substantial majority of students are satisfied with the intensive advising program they receive, and many have regular informal as well as formal contacts with their adviser throughout the year. Most students are also satisfied with the FYC seminar courses, particularly in the areas related to information and exploration of career options and NC State colleges and majors, and resources available at the university. Students also report that the out-of-class programming is valuable, encouraged them to participate in activities they otherwise might not have considered, and raised their level of involvement and sense of belonging with the university. Findings from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire are also consistent with FYC’s emphasis on out-of-class programming, and substantive interaction with faculty and advisers.

### **How long has the program strategy been practiced? How has it evolved?**

The First Year College (FYC) program at North Carolina State University began serving students in 1995-96. While the basic design of the program has maintained throughout its history, there has been evolution in program maturity and effectiveness. Student applications for the program have continued to rise through its six years of existence.

### **Have others emulated the practice, or has it received formal recognition for effectiveness?**

- The First Year College has been recognized by the Templeton Foundation in its 2001 publication of "Colleges that Encourage Character Development" as one of sixty exemplary first year programs.
- First Year College was a featured program in the University of South Carolina's First Year Experience teleconference on first year programs in 2001.
- In an external review of undergraduate programs at NC State, FYC received high marks for program design and effectiveness.
- NCSU / the First Year College has been recognized by the Policy Center on the First Year of College as one of ten “Institutions of Excellence” for universities over 20,000 in population.

### **What is the source of funding? Is the funding available?**

First Year College is maintained by state-appropriated funds and student fees directed through the Provost's Office. University Housing, a partner in the Residential Community portion of the college, contributes classroom space, equipment and technology as well as investing personnel time in support of the program.