

Nomination for Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year North Carolina State University

Improving the first year experience at a large, Research 1, public University:

"Yes, they have big classes at North Carolina State University . . . But no, you don't have to be just another face in the crowd." These lines open to the feature article on North Carolina (NC) State's First Year College "A College-Within-a College: Freshmen Feel Secure at North Carolina State" in *USA Today*, Wednesday, February 6, 2002. At the national level, this article is one example of the recognition that First Year College (FYC) has received for its innovative and comprehensive model of advising and teaching first-year, undecided students. At the university level, the First Year College, has served as a catalyst and conduit for other first-year initiatives at NC State. The quality and expanse of NC State's educational

The innovation of the First Year College (FYC), launched in 1995, is a unique merger of intensive, professional advising with the teaching of a first year seminar/orientation course in the context of a supportive and involving community. Students in FYC carry an academic course load similar to that of any first year student at NC State. The exception is the addition of the yearlong adviser-taught course in which sections of twenty students or fewer earn a portion of class credit by participating in campus cultural, educational, and service events through the FYC Forum series. In partnership with the First Year Inquiry (FYI) program, FYC students may also elect a small 'inquiry-guided' class in their general education curriculum. The FYC model aligns the research on factors shown to be critical in first-year student success especially at large Research I institutions —the presence of caring adults, a positive peer community, involvement in the larger university, consistency of contact throughout the first year, and a balance of challenge and support. The growing proliferation of University Honors programs on many campuses is based on the argument that these programs are designed to increase critical thinking skills, provide small classes, introduce students to art, culture and ideas, and provide a residential community. The First Year College and its partner programs at NC State is structured with these same components – without the concern that it is an elitist program. The first year programs at NC State are about fulfilling the mission of the University, to see that all students are learning at a deeper level, developing character, and building the skills to make a positive difference in society.

Program Assessment:

A comprehensive assessment plan was developed in conjunction with the establishment of the FYC program to address both one-year as well as long-term desired outcomes of the program. In partnership with the program director, faculty, and advisers, an external evaluator has been responsible for program assessment. At the close of the program's fifth year of the program (1999-2000), sufficient data regarding the long-term impact of FYC on indicators such as retention and graduation resulted in a five-year report that highlights these findings to the University community and other interested parties. In 1999, an external review team visited campus to examine the program and add its own assessment and recommendations. Dr. Betsy

Barefoot headed the FYC review. National benchmarks for measuring the program are the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) and Your First Year College (YFYC) for student outcomes and NACADA Advising Survey for Adviser quality.

At the University level, NC State is gaining national attention for its scholarship and progress of continuous undergraduate academic program assessment. (An NC State Panel is a featured plenary session at the 2002 AAHE National Assessment Conference.) More information on NC State's Undergraduate Academic Program Review can be found at www.ncsu.edu/provost/academic_programs/uapr/UAPRindx.html. All campus units have begun a continuous seven-year review cycle for outcomes based program assessment. The thoroughness of the First Year College's assessment process prepares it to be among the first units to undergo the review cycle.

Evidence of Impact:

- The comprehensive 5 Year Assessment Report shows that FYC is a model that enables its students to enter a large, Research I, land-grant university undeclared, participate in a year of advising and guided exploration, successfully select a major, achieve academically on levels at or better than their peers, and graduate in a comparable time period as their peers.
- Through annual data of student reports on career decision-making, strong evidence suggests that FYC consistently helps students become more decided about their career path, more comfortable with their decision-making related to career choice, and more knowledgeable about themselves related to career choice.
- Data indicate that the out-of-class activities are fulfilling the intended purposes of introducing students to the variety of co-curricular campus opportunities and helping them become integrated into the co-curricular life of the campus community.
- Data from the FYC 5-Year Report indicates a significant number of students who report that the existence of the First Year College influenced their decision to apply to NC State.
- On the College Student Experiences Questionnaire, FYC students were more likely to report higher levels of engagement in areas that are a focus of FYC programming, such as faculty involvement, than students at similar universities.
- Students are highly satisfied with FYC programming and in particular are pleased with the quality of advising they receive. On the ACT national survey of academic advising (2001) FYC students were very positive regarding the quality of advising they received relative to students nationally who completed the instrument:
 - Approximately three-quarters indicated that the advising system meets their needs more than adequately or exceptionally well, compared with just 38% of students nationally.

- FYC students are much more positive than others nationally, that their adviser knows who they are, is a good listener, is approachable and easy to talk with, seems to enjoy advising, and that they would recommend their adviser to others.
- FYC students also tended to have more contacts with their adviser than students nationally; more than two-thirds (69%) of FYC students had four or more meetings with their adviser, compared with just less than one-quarter (23%) of students nationally.

Administrative Support for First-year Initiatives:

NC State administrators have consistently and clearly articulated a vision that first-year initiatives at NC State be exemplary in quality. This vision, matched with resources, has been a key to the growing breadth and depth of first-year initiatives at NC State. The First Year College serves approximately 20% of the entering 3,500 students in each year's freshman class. The administrative commitment is evidenced in the partnerships stemming from NC State's first formally organized first year initiative, First Year College.

- First Year College is valued in the administrative structure of the university, reflected in the assignment of an Assistant Vice Provost as its head.
- University administrators (including the immediate past chancellor) have been not only structurally and fiscally supportive of the program, but have also been involved to the point of being weekly co-teachers in a section of the small group orientation classes for FYC students.
- All colleges at NC State have an orientation course or seminar for their first year students, many of which are based on the FYC model.
- All students, regardless of their entering college, are eligible for the prestigious Parks and Caldwell scholarships at NC State.
- Campus-wide recognition of excellence in service to first year students is lauded through three annual awards: the departmental award for First Year Student Advocacy, the individual award for First Year Student Advocacy, and the Barbara Solomon Advising Award.

Campus-wide Involvement:

First Year College provides a structure for reaching and impacting first year students that serves as a conduit for other campus offices and initiatives to provide their services to this population. An extensive list of college partnerships is available at the FYC web site.

<http://www.ncsu.edu/fyc/>. Some illustrative examples include the following:

- Faculty Fellows – The First Year College Faculty Fellows include an extensive array of campus professionals – from University administrators, to full-time and part-time faculty, to student affairs professionals and staff. Faculty Fellows volunteer to mentor and build relationships with first year students. Since its inception in 1999, the Fellows program has included more than ninety volunteers who have been involved in one or more of the Fellows programs: Night Owl Meals, Faculty Mentors, Faculty Forum presenters, and College Resource people.
- The summer reading program for the First Year College is designed to introduce students to the concepts of a ‘liberal education’ and prepare them for the broad learnings of university education. Included in this reading is the statement and rationale for general education from the NC State Council on Undergraduate Education. A growing number of colleges and programs partner with First Year College in use of the summer reading.
- A significant impact of the First Year College at NC State has been the heightened awareness and education on first year issues that it provides to the campus. Concurrent with the initiation of FYC, a Hewlett Grant on this campus has directed significant attention from faculty to undergraduate education. In the fall of 1999, a faculty group initiated the ‘First Year Inquiry’ freshman seminar program at NC State. ‘FYI’ was created to bring an inquiry-guided learning experience into the first year by converting sections of existing general education courses across a cadre of colleges and departments. NC State participants in this program define inquiry-guided learning as “an array of classroom practices that promote student learning through guided and, increasingly, independent investigation of questions and problems, often for which there is no single answer.”

Faculty committed themselves to intensive training for redesigning their classes through an inquiry-guided pedagogy. The FYI program is designed to increase students' critical thinking skills. The success of the FYI program – in the development of both faculty and students – inspired the spin-off of two other seminar programs on the same model for special populations of students at NC State. Consequently, NC State now serves its diverse first year student population through a number of interrelated first year initiatives. As of fall 2002, a third of the entering first year class of 3500 students will be in some form of a first year seminar course. For more information see <http://www.ncsu.edu/firstyearinquiry>.

- **College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) First Year Seminars** is a parallel program to the FYI program that began in fall 2001. The CHASS First Year Seminar (CFYS) Program consists of small classes taught by faculty from among the wide range of disciplines and departments in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition to their small size, the CFYS classes are distinguished from other CHASS courses by their emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills and inquiry-guided learning. During the next two years, an assessment model that was piloted in spring 2002, will determine the effectiveness of the seminars. Several measures will be used: 1) A self-report survey of faculty teaching the CFYS courses; 2) a self-report survey of all students enrolled in CFYS courses during a given semester; and 3) an

analysis and assessment of early and later student writing samples, looking, in particular, for evidence of growth and development in the areas of critical thinking, inquiry, and self-reflection in relation to the general seminar theme. For more information see <http://www.ncsu.edu/chass/cfys/index.html>.

- **Service Learning** – Several classes within the First Year Inquiry program are also service learning classes. In addition to the other outcomes of service learning, first year students in FYI classes report that this enhancement enriches their sense of belonging and responsibility to NC State and the city of Raleigh. For more information see <http://www.ncsu.edu/fctl/Initiatives/Service-Learning/>. The Service Learning Assessment plan can be found at http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/projects.htm. 2002-03 assessment results are being analyzed at this time.
- **Assessment** – The Division of Undergraduate Affairs remains committed to assisting all academic and support service with the assessment of their undergraduate programs. Evidence of their commitment can be found at http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/projects.htm.
- **General Education Requirements (GER) Assessment** – Continuing with the commitment to improve GER, the Council of Undergraduate Education has launched its assessment plan, which can be found at http://www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/projects.htm
- First Year College students have the option of participating in the FYC Residential Community. In this partnership with University Housing, Housing staff and Resident Mentors (RMs) work closely to merge hall missions, programs, and communication with FYC advisers. Through an additional partnership with the First Year Inquiry program, students in these halls may be part of a Learning Community, with the pairing of their orientation course with one of their first year general education courses. The advisers and faculty in these pairings collaborate on class themes and activities.

The Living Learning assessment plan can be found at www.ncsu.edu/undergrad_affairs/assessment/files/projects.htm. 2001-02 assessment results are being analyzed at this time. However, preliminary findings show that students in the paired sections have been shown to have a significantly higher grade point average than their peers in non-paired sections. Further research into the Learning Community yields student reports of perceived higher levels of a sense of community, of commitment to learning, and student responsibility.

- The offices of the First Year College are uniquely located on the NC State campus. Out of the close partnership with University Housing, the ground floor of a residence hall was renovated to create offices and classroom space for the College. FYC advisers are located literally within the building in which the majority of their students reside. Research has verified that this location has raised the quantity and quality of student – adviser contact.