

Interim Report to the President from the Adhoc Task Force on the First Year Experience
January 15, 2003

Introduction

The Adhoc Task Force on the First Year Experience is composed of two students, four staff members, one librarian and four faculty members. We were charged with three tasks:

1. assessing the effectiveness of our existing First Year Experience (FYE)
2. researching the developmental and academic needs of first year students
3. establishing new goals in keeping with the transformative change currently taking place at TCNJ

Assessing our current program

The committee began its work by examining how and why the current program was created. The task force then shared opinions and offered comments based upon their experiences from a variety of perspectives. Finally, the committee researched seventeen colleges and universities which were either selected as Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year or who were in the category of Semi-Finalist. These institutions were part of a project supported by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (located on the campus of Brevard College, Brevard, NC; <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/instofexcellence/data.htm>).

The task force found that many of the successful components of our current FYE are also found at the award winning institutions including:

- The day long June Orientation emphasizing advising, departmental orientation and workshops on adapting to college life.
- Welcome Week programming to assist the new students in adjusting to college life in terms of academics, community living and personal maturity and growth.
- Freshmen Residence halls to support student adjustment
- The Summer Readings Program
- The proposed First Year Seminar course is also found in most of the award winning institutions.
- The personal connection between faculty-first year students and upperclassmen role models-first year students (low student to staff ratios in the Athens and on the residence hall floor).
- Service Learning initiatives were found at some other institutions.

In the final written report, the committee will make recommendations to improve these programs based upon its research and the changing needs of TCNJ students.

Further assessments are ongoing and/or planned for early next semester. They include:

- Analysis of data obtained from students to determine to what extent student expectations were met during their first year at TCNJ
- Student feedback to be obtained in the Winter, 2003 by the Student Government Association Outreach Task Force
- One committee member just returned from the National Conference of Student Services with numerous ideas for further discussion
- Additional analysis of existing assessment tools

Researching the needs of first year students

The committee's research of institutions with award winning FYE programs yielded a number of Guiding Principles and Concrete Outcomes which the task force strongly believes will improve our ability to meet the needs of our first year students.

Institutions with high quality FYE programs invest a great deal of time, energy and financial support in their first year programs. This investment is observable in the following ways:

- There is a full-time coordinator for the First Year Programs who serves as a coordinator between academics and student life. This position is an upper level administrator.
- The First Year Seminar is taught by full-time faculty with the support of the administration who also serve as advisors in this crucial time period.
- All students receive a list of three or more KEY contacts (with phone numbers and email addresses) during the summer before they begin college. These individuals are upper class students, faculty and student life staff.
- There are ongoing assessments in place which continually evaluate the FYE programs.

The stated goal of high quality FYE programs is to initiate students into the wide range of elements of college life. These elements may be grouped into the following three categories:

- Adjusting to college level academics;
 - a Summer Reading connected to some on-going program at the College, possibly the CCIC theme
 - the First Year Seminar (FYS)
The FYS is viewed as a learning community and a wide variety of courses are offered by full-time faculty. The FYS demands reading/writing/critical thinking in a collaborative classroom of no more than fifteen students. The FYS faculty member also serves as an advisor and contact person for incoming students.
 - peer mentors within the major (once it is declared)
 - quality advising within the major (once it is declared)
 - mentorship for non-declared majors(Members of this task force and of the Adhoc Committee on Advising have begun meeting to discuss areas in which the charges of our two committees clearly overlap.)
- Managing the many non-academic issues involved in college life;
 - Student life "red zone" programs
 - Additional programs to assist students with topics such as time management, registration and career planning
 - Early alert program to identify first year students who may be struggling academically, emotionally or socially
 - Freshmen Resource Center
Professional advisors in the residence halls who serve as key resources before arrival on campus
- Learning to become a member of a larger community
 - Required attendance at series of extracurricular (performing arts, athletic, service learning, etc.) events

Technology is incorporated into the college experience from the initial summer orientation

- Email addresses of KEY contact people during the summer prior to Welcome Week
- An easily navigated website containing First Year info and including FAQ's and a list of the "Ten Things Your Professors Want You to Know about X College"
- All placement tests on the web
- Technological literacy for both students and faculty;
- E-mail list on webpage for only first year student

Multiple support systems

- Upper class mentoring is in place according to residence hall floor or FYS course or major.
- There is a system to provide mid-term evaluations for weak students.

Establishing new goals

At this halfway point in the work of the task force, there is support for two recommendations:

- The establishment of a Dean or Associate Dean of the First Year Experience should be created to oversee all aspects of this program. This person would serve as the head of a FYE Committee comprised of Assistant or Associate Deans from every school and from student life in order to assure a seamless FYE. This topic will be one of additional research to determine the responsibilities of this role and/or a committee of responsible individuals from various areas.
- A reexamination of the institutional eagerness to have students declare a major. A program should be designed to allow students to make knowing choices in the selection of their major.

Respectfully submitted,

The Adhoc Task Force on the First Year Experience

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Joseph Goebel	Modern Languages (chair)
Caroline Miller	Records and Registration
Reginald Motley	Academic and Career Enhancement
Mary-Elaine Perry	Dean of Student Life (convener)
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