

## Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates 2006



From left to right: Shani Fisher, Houghton Mifflin; Dolores Bertoti, Dean of Advancement, Alvernia College; Adrian Rodriguez, Dean of Student Life, Butler Community College; Adele Pittendrigh, Associate Dean, College of Letters and Science, Montana State University-Bozeman; Peter White, Dean, University College, University of New Mexico; Joni Webb Petschauer, Director, Freshman Learning Communities in General Studies, Appalachian State University; Jennifer Ounjian-Auque, Senior Administrative Analyst, Student Life Supervisor, Contra Costa College; Zaide Pixley, Dean of Advising and the First-Year Class, Kalamazoo College; Dorothy Harris, Associate Dean of Academic Advising, Trinity University (Washington); Aaron Brower, Professor of Social Work, University of Wisconsin Madison; Laurie Hazard, Director, Academic Center of Excellence and the Writing Center, Bryant University; and Stuart Hunter, Director, National Resource Center.

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The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and Houghton Mifflin Publishing have announced the 10 educators who are the 2006 Outstanding First-Year Advocates at the 25th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience in Atlanta, Georgia.

These 10 educators share a common goal of improving the educational experience for entering college students. They have been awarded this distinction for their exceptional work on behalf of first-year students and for the impact their efforts have on the students and culture of their institutions. Their achievements can be viewed at <http://sc.edu/fye/centerinitiative/advocates/currentyear/index.html>

 **Spotlight** 

## Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates Share Their Strategies

**Asheley Bice**

*This is the second article in a series from luminaries in the field who share insights regarding their campuses and higher education in general.*

To celebrate the 25th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, we interviewed three former recipients of the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates Award. They shared their thoughts on the nature of advocacy and why first-year students still need advocates.

According to **Jay Chaskes**, a 1996 recipient from Rowan University, advocates must possess passion, persistence, leadership, and a sense of humor. He observes that advocates

*are people who have a heartfelt desire to help students. They do it not simply because it's a job, but rather they do it because they think it's the right thing to do.*

**Sally Roden**, a 1998 recipient from the University of Central Arkansas, adds,

*The one thing that I really had to do was to be a risk-taker. It's a calculated risk, of course, and you look at everything, you measure it, you think about it, and you say what's best for the student, what's best for the university, and then you say, "Okay, we're going to try this."*

However, the risks advocates are willing to take are not always embraced by their colleagues. **Ralph Anttonen**, a 1991 recipient from Millersville University, remembers the challenge of implementing a first-year experience program.

*In the beginning, it was very difficult just to get them to understand and buy into the concept of a first-year experience. As I've gone on in the years, it's gotten easier in the sense that more and more people understand the need for a first-year experience.*

Thus, advocacy often involves selling the program to faculty and staff. But it may also involve selling it to students. Anttonen views the advocate's role as helping educate students

*in the process of being a college student. If you take care of the students, retention takes care of itself.*

In addition, as first-year experience programs evolve and grow, the need for new advocates arises. Chaskes confirms this by saying,

*I think one of the most important reasons why we still need advocates today is that higher education is not static, it's really dynamic. There are constantly*

*new and better ways to approach this teaching/learning enterprise.*

Roden agrees, noting,

*Our job is never done. We've got to continue to get them in, to recruit them, and then to do everything that we possibly can to keep them here. What I mean by that is providing opportunities for them to succeed. I think that's our job.*

As we begin the next 25 years of conferences, collaboration, and advocacy, we must take time to reflect on our mission of advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions. Advocacy remains at the core of our programs and, though our support has grown, our efforts should continue to be tireless and always in the best interest of the students.

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## Strategies for Working With College Students From Foster Care

John Emerson

Casey Family Programs, Seattle, WA

Students from foster care are overwhelmingly first-generation college students. What really sets foster care children apart from most underrepresented students is their status as independent young adults. College students coming from foster care are formally classified as “independent” for financial aid purposes. They are on their own at an age when their peers, even first-generation college students, have an extended family or community network that can be counted on for financial and emotional support. Facing the realities of independent living at this age leaves little time to plan for and achieve college aspirations. Every year, 20,000 young adults emancipate from state foster care and 70% want to go to college (McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). Since less than 13% of them enroll and less than 11% graduate, higher education must improve their advocacy, outreach, and support to these students.

Students from foster care benefit from the same pre-college and college programs designed to support other first-generation students. However, they also have unique social-emotional, health, living, and academic needs. Pecora et al. (2005) report a disproportionate number of former foster youth with clinical levels of depression, social

phobia, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or drug dependence. These rates are substantially higher than those for the general population of college-age adults. It is also important to recognize that child welfare systems focus primarily on safety and health matters—not education. Because of frequent home placement changes (with corresponding school transfers), children in foster care often perform poorly in school and rarely are well prepared for college.

Initiatives at the federal, state, and institutional level are now offering these students more options to help them better prepare for and enroll in college, and receive needed financial aid, guidance, and support services. Innovative public and private collaborations work to improve postsecondary educational opportunities for young adults from foster care. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Walters, 2005) presents evidence that these initiatives are increasing postsecondary services to youth from foster care.

Other programs, not mentioned in the *Chronicle*, are increasing at colleges. These programs’ retention and graduation rates equal to or exceeding those of all college students:

- *Guardian Scholars* campus-based support programs exist (www.orange

woodfoundation.org/programFrame1.asp) in a growing number of California and Indiana colleges and universities. California State University Fullerton’s program (www.fullerton.edu/guardianscholars) has developed a comprehensive model and reports a retention rate of 70%, which exceeds that of the school’s general student population.

- *Renaissance Scholars* at **California Polytechnic State University** was **started in 2002** and operates under the Office of the Associate Vice President for Student Services. These *Scholars* collaborate closely with Educational Equity Services and draw upon the legacy and resources of the University’s Educational Opportunity Program.
- *Orphan Foundation of America’s v-Mentor* (virtual mentor) provides scholarship recipients with an online college mentor (www.orphan.org). This virtual mentor program has an overall retention and graduation rate of about 70%—far exceeding the 22% for independent students nationally (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 2003).
- *The Governor’s Scholarship Program* in Washington (www.waedfoundation.org/gs/index.htm) annually provides 30 four-year scholarships to state colleges for students from foster care. They hold a summer program for all recipients to prepare them for college coordinated by a full-time independent student officer, who is not a peer. They report a 68% retention rate.
- Students at Texas A & M University-Kingsville have formed a new group that offers peer support to students from foster care on their own and other campuses.

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College students coming from foster care usually present personal and academic profiles that require strong advocacy and focused attention by college advisors, financial aid counselors, health center staff, and support services (see side bar). A new and free resource is now available to child welfare and education professionals to better support and guide students from foster care as they enter postsecondary education (Casey Family Programs, 2006).

Schools can query their FAFSA database to identify students who may be coming to college from the foster care system. Question #53 asks, "Are both of your parents deceased, or are you (or were you until age 18) a ward /dependent of the court?". The University of Washington's financial aid office recently identified 61 students from foster care using their FAFSA database. Students were informed about a new scholarship opportunity and invited to see a counselor who has expertise in assisting former foster youth.

For youth in state foster care, postsecondary education and training has the potential to be a positive counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence they may have experienced throughout childhood. Positive school experiences enhance well-being, help students make more successful transitions to adulthood, increase their likelihood of achieving personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, and improve their ability to contribute to society. Colleges need to

play an increased role in reaching out to these students and providing the supports that will help ensure retention, degree completion, and career success.

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### Strategies for Supporting Students From Foster Care

- Ensure students have regular contact with a trusted academic or program advisor who is knowledgeable about foster care and can help them navigate college support systems.
- Assist students in finding a stable college mentor or coach who is experienced working with independent students. This can be a community member, alumni, college staff, friend, relative, or peer.
- Promote active and collaborative peer learning and studying opportunities among foster care students. College students from foster care often find trusted support from others coming from foster care experiences. They often share a special bond.
- Guide students to disabled student services where accommodations can be arranged. Many former foster youth have diagnosed and undiagnosed disabilities and can benefit from such services.
- Stress the importance of frequent interactions with their teachers, instructors, support staff, and other campus personnel. Students from foster care may be reluctant to trust and approach staff because of early abuse and neglect.
- Ensure someone regularly monitors academic progress and guides students to follow-up advising and support services, as these students do not have parents monitoring their progress.
- Promote active involvement in first-year student orientation and other initiatives designed to help students make a successful transition to college.
- Ensure students have access to and support for technology, especially a stable e-mail account. For most of these students, cell phones and e-mail accounts provide critical links to resources and trusted adults.
- Promote involvement on campus, residential living, and support services as the residence hall may be the most stable home base they have experienced.
- Promote academic and study skills assessments and course planning. Many students have learning gaps as a result of interrupted school experiences.
- Help students find and pay for health insurance. Students from foster care are not covered by family health plans and cannot afford health insurance.



## Studying Abroad: Meeting the Reentry Challenges

Elise Hammonds

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Studying abroad creates multiple transitions for students. One of the most challenging, but not always apparent, transitions is returning home. One study (Kauffman, Martin, & Weaver, 1992) found that increased levels of immersion in the host culture led to more difficult readjustment at home. Such readjustment challenges are unexpected because students view returning from abroad as returning to the status quo. They do not expect to return to a familiar environment with an altered viewpoint (Werkman, 1980).

Interviews with study-abroad students at the University of South Carolina (USC) echoed these findings. Students returning from language-intensive programs faced greater challenges with the transition of returning home. Katie, a senior at USC, participated in a year-long program in Spain where she lived with international students from around the world. While abroad, she limited her contact with friends and family from home and forced herself to speak Spanish. When asked about coming home, Katie said, "I didn't want to come home and I still really want to go back [to Spain]. I'm not as happy here as I was in Spain." Katie expressed that her difficulty readjusting stemmed from her immersion into the Spanish culture. "I changed so much that I didn't feel like I fit [in] at USC."

One way of understanding the re-adjustment challenge is through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) which identifies four sets of factors influencing any adjustment process: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy. Of the four sets of factors, the study-abroad programs can best impact the factor of support, and through support, influence the development of the other three factors. Using counseling and programming, the study-abroad programs can smooth the transition back into the campus culture while using a student's immersion into his or her host country as a tool for the transition.

When asked how the university could best support the process of returning home, one student responded, "They just need to be there." While not specific, the student alluded to the idea of availability. As a counselor to study-abroad returnees, the primary task of the Office of Study Abroad staff at USC is to be available. Because the staff is small, being available is sometimes challenging, but creative strategies can provide students with the support they need without overburdening the staff. One suggestion given during the interviews was to pair students with other program participants so they could share their experiences and their

strategies for readjusting rather than compartmentalizing them. Other ideas include holding a reentry orientation for all returnees, sending preparatory e-mails about the transition process to parents and students, and organizing monthly support groups led by past returnees.

Giving students the opportunity to incorporate their experiences abroad into their experiences at home institutions can also facilitate the readjustment process. One USC student said, "We can be resources now that we have had these experiences." The University of South Carolina has incorporated study-abroad returnees as resources into University 101 classes. Returnees share their stories from abroad with first-year students and provide firsthand information on the benefits of studying abroad. Another program USC has embraced is the Carolina Global Community (CGC). The CGC is an on-campus living environment housing international students with American students, many of whom are former study-abroad students. This unique residential community allows students to connect across cultural differences and gives the returnees an opportunity to connect with international students who may share some of their experiences of studying abroad. Programs such as these smooth the transition process as they weave the abroad experience into the American academic setting.

Study-abroad programs help students integrate the international experience by identifying the long-term

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outcomes of studying abroad and by preventing students from compartmentalizing their experiences. Counseling and programming services help alleviate the dramatic change between cultures because they incorporate the returnees' international knowledge as an instrument for readjustment. As study-abroad offices create these programs and counseling tools for reentry, they should ask the following question with Schlossberg's Transition Theory in mind: What can our office do to provide resources for the factors of situation, self, support, and strategy? By focusing on the transition and the resources needed to move through the transition, study-abroad offices can effectively move their students back into the American campus culture.

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## E-Mail Newsletter Connects With Transfer Students

JoAnn Moseman

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Transfer students are an increasingly significant population on many campuses. More than half (59%) of the students graduating in 1999-2000 attended more than one institution during their undergraduate education, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005). All entering students face concerns about registration, housing, and other social and academic issues, yet, the concerns of transfer students are unique in many respects. They may be older, first-generation college students, have insecurities about the transfer process, and work full time (Bell, 2004). Additionally, transfer students lack the campus-based knowledge and local mentors that benefit their peers who stayed at one institution. As a result, transfer students are essentially invisible once they matriculate.

Unlike first-year students, who are the beneficiaries of a number of intentional, institutional initiatives to assist them in their transition (e.g., courses, living-learning communities), transfer students must quickly learn to navigate a new campus on their own. Their efforts are not always successful. In fact, results of the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) show that "senior transfers were less involved in ...four (of five) benchmarks of positive student engagement" than their non-transfer peers (Jacobs, 2004, p. 4).

The challenges facing transfer students may be particularly daunting on a large campus.

Although educators search for ways to provide students with information about the campus, its resources, and opportunities, the invisibility of this population makes it challenging for staff to find ways to assist transfer students. After struggling to connect with newly enrolled transfer students on my campus, I decided to create an informal weekly e-mail newsletter called the *Transfer Connection*. More than a simple newsletter, the *Transfer Connection* is part extended orientation and part personal connection. Three things are essential to the success of the *Transfer Connection*: (a) customized information, (b) a supportive conversational style, and (c) consistent communication. All three helped humanize the newsletter and allowed me to become a personal contact on our campus of more than 20,000 students.

Beginning with the name, *Transfer Connection*, students recognize that the content is tailored to them. The newsletter discusses application of transfer credit, answers common newcomer questions, and includes features for commuter and non-traditional students. Writing the newsletter in a conversational tone makes it personal. Because of this, students refer to it as e-mail—never a newsletter. It conveys

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the powerful message that a campus professional cares about each student's success, and students respond to that sense of caring. One student commented, "This is an excellent source for transfer students—you do an excellent job of informing and, well, caring about us! Thank you very much!" Another transfer student wrote, "Thank you for the information you sent me. I commute, so it's really hard to get involved. I do feel like a stranger on campus, so I will check it out."

The conversational tone also helps me develop a relationship with students. Once a relationship has been established, I can challenge them to become intentional learners, to reflect on what they learn each semester, and relate that learning to their goals.

A consistent communication provides just-in-time assistance, promotes campus programs and resources, and informs students about upcoming events. For example, the newsletter may highlight the Career Services Office as students prepare for a campus career fair or provide test taking tips just before finals week. The newsletter can also provide links for further information. The asynchronous format allows students to access the newsletter and its embedded links at their convenience.

Students also have the option of replying to the e-mail and asking questions. Their questions often lead to a more comprehensive discussion of issues that interest them.

The *Transfer Connection* is e-mailed weekly via an electronic mailing list to transfer students and is archived on the Office of Undergraduate Studies web site ([http://www.unl.edu/ous/student\\_programs/transfer.shtml](http://www.unl.edu/ous/student_programs/transfer.shtml)). It is shared with chief academic advisors in each college on campus and with residence life staff in upper-class halls.

An electronic newsletter is a cost-efficient tool for communication. Rather than bulk e-mail, which is often filtered out as junk, an e-mail (generated by an electronic mailing list) appears as a personal message to each student. An electronic mailing list can be set up through campus information services. Names and e-mail addresses can be obtained from the registrar's office. The *Transfer Connection* is sent to more than 1,400 students. To keep the list manageable, I remove each student's e-mail address after two semesters.

While it is difficult to know how many students read the *Transfer Connection*, questions and requests for information are received weekly. Beyond transfer credit issues, students ask how to use online registration, change their majors, locate academic advisors, and where to find assistance with a variety of issues. Each semester, 25 to 30 students ask to continue receiving the newsletter beyond two semesters. The resource has been so valuable that transfer advisors at area community colleges have requested the newsletter to help prepare their students for transfer.

An electronic newsletter is an inexpensive, efficient way to invite students to take advantage of the myriad opportunities available on campus. A consistent, informative, personal correspondence from a campus professional can engage students, provide them access to tools they need to be successful, and help connect them to the academic community. This newsletter is written for newly enrolled transfer students, but the concept could be easily adapted for other student populations. So, as you strive to reach specific groups of students, whether first-years or athletes or students on probation, consider creating a personal e-mail newsletter so that your students, too, can benefit from

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attention and information tailored to their needs.

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### Sample Newsletter *Transfer Connection*

October 20, 2005

Greetings,

I hope you took advantage of the break from classes for a little down time and took a few moments to browse through your planner and remind yourself of important exam and due dates for the rest of the semester.

Do you ever think about the kinds of opportunities you have at the University of Nebraska that you wouldn't have somewhere else? While students can obtain online degrees, they don't have face-to-face contact with exceptional faculty; they don't cheer on nationally competitive athletic teams; they don't get the chance to hear from visiting faculty lecturing on everything from The Complexity of Information Markets to the Physics of Superheroes. Even students who are only on campus for classes miss out on opportunities like working with faculty on research; attending brown bag discussion groups; participating in intramurals; and attending student and faculty art shows, recitals and performances.

Many of these possibilities factored into your decision to come to UNL. Ask yourself whether you are taking advantage of them. Are you getting your money's worth by attending student-sponsored events and using campus facilities like the University Health Center and Campus Recreation? Have you looked at the film schedule at the Ross for those movies that people across the country are talking about but aren't often shown at downtown theaters? All of these opportunities add value to your education dollars and help you strike that balance between classes, studying, and your other responsibilities.

If you are confused about Priority Registration beginning Monday, October 24th, see the Registration and Records web page for instructions. [http://www.unl.edu/regrec/registration/reg\\_instr.shtml](http://www.unl.edu/regrec/registration/reg_instr.shtml)

There is more information in the "Priority Registration" PowerPoint on the Undergraduate Studies web page: [http://www.unl.edu/ous/student\\_programs/transfer.shtml](http://www.unl.edu/ous/student_programs/transfer.shtml) (scroll to the bottom of the page). If you are not sure who your advisor is, I can help.

### Events

*Hurricane Katrina Panel Discussion*, Friday October 21, 3:30 pm, Nebraska Union. Panel discussion on the Hurricane Katrina aftermath. Representatives include three UNL professors and a New Orleans resident.

**FREE at 6:** *Kusi Taki*, Friday, October 21, 6:00 pm, Lied Center for Performing Arts. Featuring such traditional South American instruments as the quena, sikus, and charango, Kusi Taki aims to raise awareness and appreciation of the indigenous music and cultures of Latin America.

#### Culture Center Events (333 N. 14th Street)

*Sexpectations*, Tuesday, October 25th, 6:00 - 7:15 p.m, Culture Center

What do heterosexual men and women want from each other? What do we think the other gender wants from us? Learn to build relationships based on reality rather than on stereotypes at this entertaining, interactive workshop co-sponsored by OASIS, the Women's Center, Sigma Lambda Beta, and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Incorporated.

**Academic Support Series** from OASIS: *Become a straight "A" student*. Thursday, October 27, 2005, 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm, Culture Center

**Movie night:** *Hotel Rwanda*, Tuesday, November 1, 6:30 pm, Culture Center

Advice from successful transfer students, the REAL survivors: *Don't be afraid to talk to an advisor. Do it often.* —Jacinda

Cheers,  
JoAnn



## Second-Year Outreach Program for Students on Academic Probation

Janet E. Bahr

Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, OK

Although student retention has been a concern for those in higher education for many years, only recently have institutions begun to focus on what happens after the first year. As a part of our retention efforts at Northeastern State University (NSU), a second-year outreach program targeting first- and second-year students on academic probation was developed.

The number of new and continuing first-year students at NSU for fall 2004 was 2,529 students compared to just 1,408 sophomore students. These numbers reflect the serious problem of retaining students to the sophomore year. Our student profile indicates that approximately 40% are first generation, 50% are low income, 15% are nontraditional, and more than 38% are minority or international students. The students may belong to more than one of these categories. These demographics, along with other high-risk factors such as coming from single-parent households, mean that some students may need additional support beyond the first year in order to successfully complete a bachelor's degree.

To launch a program called "Second-Year Outreach," NSU applied for and received a \$75,000 Brain Gain grant from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The purpose of this new program is to focus on retention after the first year and help students stay on track

to graduation. The primary group targeted for assistance were high-risk students who had completed 18 to 60 credit hours but were on academic probation (i.e., earned GPA below 1.7) or academic notice (i.e., earned GPA of 1.7 to 2.0 and fewer than 30 credit hours completed). Students with more than 30 credit hours are placed on academic probation if their GPA falls below 2.0. Nearly 160 students met these criteria and were contacted by two Academic Commitment Specialists, who offered additional academic advising, academic and career planning, resource identification, and general support for academic achievement. In addition, the specialists encouraged these high-risk students to declare a major when qualified; assisted them in selecting an advisor; helped them enroll in a timely manner; followed-up on financial aid preparations for the next semester or year; provided career planning and counseling for undecided students; and, in general, helped these students manage financial, academic, and social aspects of their college careers.

Of the 159 students contacted, 58 made three or more visits to Academic Commitment Specialists for these services; 20 students came in twice, and 24 students made only one visit. Slightly more than one third (57 students) did not come in at all. Chi-square tests revealed no significant differences between level

of participation in the Second-Year Outreach program and gender, ethnicity, or probation status.

Students who visited the Academic Commitment Specialists were more likely to achieve academic forgiveness and be removed from probation and less likely to officially withdraw. Academic forgiveness at NSU is achieved by either repeating courses in which the new grade replaces the previous grade or forgiving an entire semester of bad grades if the student has grades of C or better since the semester of poor performance.

A non-parametric test, the Kruskal-Wallis, was used to analyze relationships between the number of visits (0, 1, 2, and 3), age, GPA at the beginning of the semester, GPA at the end of the semester, and hours completed at the end of the semester. A further analysis using the Mann-Whitney U showed how the groups differed. For students participating in the program, older students were more likely to meet with the Academic Commitment Specialists on a more frequent basis (2 or 3 or more visits). Significant differences existed between 0 and 2 visits ( $p = 0.010$ ) and 0 and 3 visits ( $p < 0.001$ ). With regard to end-of-semester GPA, students earned higher GPAs when they made more visits (1.74 for zero visits, 1.82 for one visit, 1.91 for two visits, and 1.94 for three visits). There were statistically significant differences between 0 and 2 visits ( $p = 0.010$ ) and 0 and 3 visits ( $p = 0.001$ ). Similarly, students who made more visits were more likely to complete more credit hours (4.56 for zero visits, 6.75 for one visit, 7.20 for two visits, and 7.79 for three

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visits). Again, statistically significant differences were found between 0 and 2 visits ( $p = 0.015$ ) and 0 and 3 visits ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, those who made two or more visits achieved a higher GPA and completed more credit hours than those who did not participate. GPA and credit hours tended to rise with increasing number of visits. These were the results we were hoping to achieve.

In summary, the needs of continuing first-year students and sophomores are much different than those of beginning first-year students. The Second-Year Outreach program identifies students early in their academic careers who are at high risk or have been at the university for a longer time than expected for their classification. By providing academic support services, we see a higher retention rate for sophomores, which we hope will lead to higher retention for our junior and senior students. Our ultimate goal is to increase the number of students graduating within six years. The initial results show that the Second-Year Outreach program is making a difference in GPA and hours completed, both of which greatly impact the retention and graduation of students. Because of this, we are taking more aggressive steps in trying to reach students and help them succeed.

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## Essay by Victor Saenz and De'Sha Wolf

As educators directly involved in the first college year, it is likely that we each have a unique perspective on the first-year experiences of the students on our respective campuses. February 16 FYA-List essay provides readers with a preview of the latest compilation of national first-year student data.

In this essay, Victor Saenz and De'Sha Wolf highlight initial findings from the 2005 administration of the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey. They offer insights into students' academic and social experiences, adjustment issues, and overall satisfaction with their first year of college. Due to YFCY's connection to the CIRP Freshman Survey, Victor and De'Sha also shed light on how students change over the course of their first year.

The complete essay can be found at <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/essays/Saenz-2.16.06.html>. Additional essays can be found at <http://nrc.fye.sc.edu/resources/FYalist>.



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## 19th International Conference

on The First-Year Experience

July 24-27, 2006  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

### Proposals Are Invited

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students In Transition now welcomes online submission of conference session proposals. If you would like to submit your proposal online, you can take advantage of our interactive submission process (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/international/proposal.html>). However, we encourage you to read all of the information and directions for completing a proposal before getting started.

Concurrent, roundtable discussion, institutional initiative, and poster session proposals are invited on topics addressing student transitions in the first year of college. Any quality proposal that sufficiently and seriously addresses student transitions in the first year of college is welcomed for review.

**Proposal Deadline**

**March 26, 2006**



## Finding the Steps to Success: Support Programs for At-Risk Students

Andrew Grant

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Walsh University's focus on student support began with its participation in the Policy Center on the First Year of College's "Foundations of Excellence" (FOE) initiative in late 2003. FOE participants completed an inventory and self-evaluation designed to help them learn about the first-year class and its connection to the institution. One of the things we learned by using the FOE self-study was that, after admission, the weakest students were given little added attention and support. They were expected to enter college, navigate the system, and succeed with no specific training or academic assistance. Consequently, the University developed, piloted, and is presently operating two support programs for at-risk first-year students.

Walsh typically accepts students with high school GPAs of 2.1 and ACT scores of 17. Students who are less prepared often have low reading scores and test into remedial English and Math classes. One third of these students leave Walsh at the end of fall semester, and half may leave by the beginning of their second year. The loss of half the at-risk students in a class of 300 (20-25% of the class) by the end of the first year signaled the need for change.

In the past, the University responded to the needs of at-risk students by offering a special program for students who did not meet the standard admis-

sions criteria. These students were enrolled in a five-week summer bridge program on campus, which included remedial English and math courses and study skills training. None of the course work was credit bearing. Students lived on campus and attended daily counseling sessions and classes. Activities were monitored, and repeated infractions led to dismissal. If students completed the program successfully, they were admitted conditionally to the University. The program enrolled 8 to 15 students each summer and ran for 10 summers. Some 70% of the students in the program were retained to the sophomore year and 50% reached graduation. While successful, the program was considered too costly given the numbers of students it served and was discontinued.

A new administration, a reshuffling of mid-level administrators, and the influence of the FOE initiative led us to revisit the summer bridge program. We believed a five-week bridge program was too short for at-risk students to process and internalize what was needed for success. Thus, we created "The Structured Education Program (SEP)," lengthened it to a full semester, added a study-skills element, and made it a three-credit course. As all courses at Walsh need an academic home, and we do not have a credit-bearing General Studies Program, the course was attached

to the English Department. The study skills course meets twice a week for one hour. A third one-hour period offers tutoring in English and math. Like other first-year students, students in this program take 15 to 16 credit hours. Nine credit hours are pre-determined (one course each of English, math, and study skills). The rest of the schedule includes courses in general education and the major field.

The English Department determined that at-risk students would be more successful if they took remedial English and regular first-year English sequentially. Therefore, students in this program take the remedial course in the fall and move into the regular first-year course in the spring. Students have the same instructors and tutors for the entire year, providing continuity. Most importantly, students have shown marked improvement in learning.

The SEP was piloted (in the fall of 2003) with 20 students, who were placed into both remedial math and English. At the end of the pilot, 18 students in this program enrolled for spring semester, an increase of 20% over previous years. Of this same group, 14 students or 70% enrolled for the fall semester (sophomore year)—another increase of 20%. In the second year, 39 students enrolled in SEP. The fall-to-spring enrollment for this group was 92%, and the fall-to-fall retention rate was 79%. In fall 2005, 63 students enrolled in the program.

However, we did not stop there. Historically, first-year students with a GPA of less than 1.75 at semester's end are

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put on probation and offered academic counseling. Of this group, 66% leave at the end of spring semester. We decided because of the success of the SEP that we also needed a spring semester program to help first-year students who were placed on academic probation as a result of their fall grades. In spring 2005, a new program was piloted with 32 students. These students received the same study skills course as the fall SEP students and additional tutoring in areas identified by fall course grades. For these students, the modified program was made a condition of academic probation. The goal was to retain half the participants to the following fall. By the start of the next fall semester, there was a return rate of 63%, almost double the previous return rate.

Through the first few semesters of this program, the results have been promising. Many have referenced the problems of transitioning to college. People readily cite the statistic that 41% of incoming first-year students take at least one remedial course in their career. We are attempting to fill the gap and promote student academic success through this program. We are confident that continued efforts in this area will enhance the results shown in this report.

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## What's Happening at the Center?

### Teleconferences: Transforming Campuses

*The Forgotten Student: Understanding and Supporting Sophomores*  
March 9, 2006

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm EST

*Cultivating Campus Cultures That Value Student Success*  
March 30, 2006

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm EST

*Shattering Barriers: Transforming the College Experience for Students of Color*  
April 20, 2006

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm EDST

For teleconference details, please visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/teleconference/index.html#first>

### National Resource Center Announces Competition for Research Grant

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition invites applications for 2006-07 Paul P. Fidler Research Grant awarded for original research with the potential to have a national impact on college student success. The Center invites applicants to submit proposals addressing a wide variety of topics, including students of color, community colleges, advising, transfer and articulation, administrative policies, and

other issues related to college student transitions.

The grant competition is open to faculty, staff, and graduate students who plan to conduct research on issues of college student transitions. Cross-institutional research teams are especially encouraged to apply for the Paul P. Fidler Research Grant.

The comprehensive award package includes:

- Stipend of \$5,000
- Travel to the 13th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 2006, in St. Louis, MO, at which the award will be presented
- Announcement and recognition at 2006 Students in Transition conference luncheon
- Travel to the 14th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 2007, in Cincinnati, OH, at which the research findings will be reported
- Announcement on The National Resource Center web page, listservs, and print publications
- Priority consideration for publication by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

The application and proposal form may be downloaded at [www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant](http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant) and must be submitted electronically to [NRCresearch@gwm.sc.edu](mailto:NRCresearch@gwm.sc.edu) by **June 1, 2006**.

More information about the grant, including application procedures, is available at [www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant](http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant).

