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Job Club Helps Seniors Transition to the World-of-Work

In terms of the job search, the year 2009 was challenging for seniors transitioning into the world-of-work. Research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2009) revealed 51% of college career centers had an increase in student and alumni traffic. An informal survey conducted by the New England Employer Relations Consortium (2009) reported career fair registrations were down by as much as 40%, on-campus interviewing decreased 50% overall, and job postings were down over 58%. This climate produced difficulties for students, employers, and career service professionals, all of whom were trying desperately to navigate the waters of these challenging economic conditions. Unfortunately, experts are predicting more of the same for 2010.

Career service professionals monitor the rhythm of the job market closely to provide the most effective support for students, especially seniors who worry about their impending transition. White (2005) found the more interaction seniors have with career services, the more satisfied they were with their post-graduate outcomes. In response to the economic downturn, to increase outreach to transitioning seniors, and respond to the influx of returning alumni, the Career Services department at Nichols College piloted a summer Job Club in 2009.

Overview

Job Club was designed to resemble the necessary components of a job search "road trip" with (a) the individual student as the driver, (b) group members as passengers, (c) information as the fuel, and (d) the facilitator as the navigation system. Job Club was offered in two separate formats: on-site and virtual. To build on the research showing that peer influence can be a contributing factor to postcollege decision making (Brown, 2004), the on-site Job Club was designed as a direct, face-to-face support group for recent graduates and young alumni. For those not geographically positioned close to campus, the substitution was a virtual Job Club, facilitated through LinkedIn (i.e., a business-oriented social networking site). Both clubs were marketed and open to all graduating seniors and recent alumni active in a job search.

Purpose

Career Services outlined four goals for Job Club. The first was to offer participants guidance in dealing with the ongoing challenges of a comprehensive job search in a team environment. According to Sterrett (1998), job club participants experience a sense of hopefulness and empowerment, and are more likely to initiate job searching strategies that they learned in their groups, resulting in more success in obtaining employment. Second was to encourage the construction

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of a network and information database through the sharing of contacts, leads, and resources. Hall, Las Heras, and Shen (2009) believe career service professionals can assist individuals in developing and sustaining informational and supportive networks that, developed over time, can be instrumental in one's career advancement. The third goal of Job Club was to form a team for the purpose of encouraging members to move ahead with their job search successfully and with more confidence. Confidence that is specifically related to one's ability to perform tasks important to the job search process is known as job search or career self-efficacy. In a meta-analysis, Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001) concluded that higher levels of job search self-efficacy and social support were positively related to more intense job search behavior. The final goal was to utilize professional staff dedicated to monitoring the group's progress and providing assistance when needed.

Structure

Job Club was facilitated by Career Services staff. Participants met weekly during a designated two-hour block of time. Team capacity was set at 10 members to ensure maximum group cohesion and ample time for each individual to participate. Meetings followed a similar process each week, beginning with a recap of the participants' previous weeks' progress. Here, individual members shared an overview of their job search activities (e.g., positions applied for, application methods), networking activities, and events attended. Each participant was also encouraged to share at least one piece of good news (regardless of how small) or a resource team members could take with them and apply to their individual searches. From there, meetings turned to topic discussions, the focus of which was determined by the team members. Discussions included obstacles in the job search, dealing with family pressures, motivation, and specific job search resources. The last segment of the weekly sessions covered a variety of activities, such as

- Exchange of resources (e.g., contacts, job leads, helpful web sites)
- Self-reflection exercises such as Career Values card sorts (i.e., card-style tools designed to help individuals discover what they most value in employment) (Knowdell, 2009)
- Visits to the computer lab to create LinkedIn profiles and research employment opportunities
- Peer reviews of participant's résumés and cover letters
- Discussions about networking — how to do it and why it is important, including the "How to Work a Room" diagram (Ousborne, 2002)
- Audio taped and critiqued interview practice, creation of individual elevator speeches (i.e., a prepared presentation that grabs attention and presents an overview of an idea, service, project, or person in a few words — typically the length of an elevator ride)
- Creation of a personal job search organization system

At the end of each meeting, members were encouraged to develop personal job search goals for the coming week. Each member was expected to attend weekly meetings, actively participate, and maintain a positive, supportive attitude.

Results

The Job Club pilot program produced several areas of success. Some of the more notable were

...job club participants experience a sense of hopefulness and empowerment...

Audio taping. Although outside of the comfort zone initially, audio taping personal elevator speeches was worthwhile. Each participant was recorded several times, and there was marked improvement between the first and final attempts.

Cover letter exercises. In this economy, a position-specific, well-written cover letter can make all the difference. A common homework assignment was to create a résumé and cover letter tailored to a desired job posting. One member commented that this was the most valuable knowledge gained from Job Club.

Computer lab time. Spending time in the computer lab was a nice way to break up the sessions and to gather information for discussion. Participants commented that exploring web sites such as LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) and the Department of Labor's career resource web site (<http://www.careeronestop.org/>) were helpful to their search efforts.

As this was the first attempt at a job club, there were growing pains. Challenges included

Size. The maximum number of participants was set at 10 per session; however, regular attendance was often times lower, limiting the dialog and exchange of ideas.

Accountability. At times there was a lack of commitment both in attendance and in follow-through. Few members attended faithfully; others attended sporadically. Those who did attend did not always follow through with assignments.

Rolling admission. Because participation numbers were low, alumni were encouraged to join after the start date. Bringing new members up to speed was challenging.

Member expectations. Separate from Job Club, participants reported spending only between 2 to 5 hours each week on their job search; however, frequent discussions surrounded frustration in their search results.

Recommendations

Several recommendations were born from this pilot program. First, offering Job Club during the summer months may have discouraged participation, as students had already left campus. Establishing a job club during the fall or spring semester, when it is more convenient for students, may increase participation. To eliminate the problems created by rolling admission, it was recommended that groups start and end together to increase team cohesion. Finally, to address accountability, future job clubs will have the team enter into and sign participation contracts to discourage absenteeism and increase job search productivity outside of the group meetings. In addition, providing visible documentation, such as posting member goals and results on a Job Club bulletin board, may also contribute to participant output and accountability.

Discussion

Given the productivity of working groups, the structure of Job Club seems an ideal platform for college-to-career transitional support for seniors. This team structure also allows career service professionals to maximize their outreach,

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The Big Picture

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Much More Than a Stand-Alone Course: The First-Year Seminar as the Connecting Hub for a Comprehensive First-Year Experience

This is the fourth in a series of articles on the potential benefits of first-year seminars. Previous articles focused on the seminar's positive impact on student retention and academic performance, its capacity for enriching the quality of the curriculum, and its ability to serve as a stimulus for generating interest in effective teaching. This article explores the seminar's potential for promoting partnerships with other first-year student programs to create a more integrated and synergistic first-year experience. As Barefoot (2000) notes, "First-year seminar effects can be multiplied through connection with other structures and programs" (p. 1). Linking a first-year seminar with any of the campus initiatives or support services listed below can have an enhancing impact on both programs.

Learning Communities. The defining feature of learning communities is a cohort of students taking the same block of courses in the same academic term. Including the seminar as one of the courses in a learning community can create symbiotic relationships between the seminar and course(s) to which it is linked. For example, linking a skills development course, such as English or speech, with a seminar offers an opportunity for assignments to be coordinated between the two classes (e.g., using topic material from the seminar for English or speech projects). This linkage increases the amount of time students spend engaged with course content while providing meaningful context for students to write and speak about in their skills development courses. In theme- or discipline-based learning communities, the seminar can provide an environment to deepen learning on a topic and integrate assignments and content. The learning community model may also be adapted to include a residential-life component, where students enrolled in the seminar share the same living space on campus. At the University of Missouri-Columbia, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) of 20 students living on the same floor of a residence hall also enroll in the same block of four courses (Levine & Tompkins, 1996). Institutional research reveals that the FIG cohort earned a higher mean grade-point average than nonparticipants, and displayed a 12% higher three-year retention rate (Levine Laufgraben, 2005).

Cocurricular Programming. Barefoot and Fidler (1992) note that, "Many freshman seminars exist to bridge the gap between the curriculum and cocurriculum and to facilitate student involvement in all aspects of campus life" (p. 8). Connections can be made via course assignments in the seminar that actively involve

"First-year seminar effects can be multiplied through connection with other structures and programs"

(Barefoot, 2000, p. 1).

students in cocurricular programming, often requiring students to write short reflection papers on their out-of-class experience (Gardner & Davies, 1996).

Academic Support Services. Through intentionally designed assignments, the seminar can also promote involvement in academic support services (e.g., requiring students to visit and participate in learning resource or support center programs). Seminars are also frequently used to introduce new students to the college library via course-integrated library assignments (Cuseo, 2004).

Academic Advisement and Career Counseling. Seminar lessons can be designed to connect students with academic advisement and career counseling services to engage new students in long-range educational and career planning and to begin making meaningful connections between their college experience and future goals. Norwich University in Vermont uses its first-year seminar in this fashion by promoting student-advisor dialogue with respect to future plans. The syllabus at Norwich calls for students to meet with their advisor on three occasions during the first term, in addition to the initial course scheduling meeting. Midpoint in the semester, students complete a self-assessment report as a course assignment, and advisors use this report in a follow-up session to prompt a focused discussion with students about their present academic progress and future educational plans (Catone, 1996).

Service-Learning Experiences. An ambitious example of how service-learning can be integrated with the seminar takes place at the University of Rhode Island, where more than 2,400 new students are involved in service-learning as a required component of their first-year seminar course (Richmond, 2002). Since internship and practicum experiences are typically reserved for upper-division students, delivering service-learning experiences via the seminar is an effective way to expose lower-division students to the “real world” and provide them with an early opportunity for experiential learning that may help crystallize their major and career plans.

New-Student Orientation. If the seminar is extended to include new-student orientation activities as its first course sessions, the orientation program is strengthened by enabling it to become an integral component of a credit-earning course. This can serve to stimulate student attendance and the level of involvement in the orientation program, or any summer-preparatory experiences associated with it (e.g., summer reading). At Marymount College in California, entering students are informed via summer mailing that participation in the presemester orientation program is the first component of the required seminar. The two-day orientation involves a welcoming convocation ceremony and a series of small-group experiences, after which students complete short reflection papers that are counted as course assignments and forwarded to seminar instructors for course credit (Strumpf & Sharer, 1993). After the new-student orientation program was integrated with the College’s required seminar, there was a dramatic increase in the percentage of incoming cohorts who completed all components of the orientation program (Cuseo, 1999).

Conclusion

A powerful byproduct of integrating the seminar with other student support programs is that it increases cross-campus communication, collaboration, and community-building.

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Putting MORE in the SophoMORE- Year Experience: Lessons From a Public University

The sophomore year can be pivotal for college students. Research describes many second-year students experiencing a sophomore slump (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000) – a time when students feel forgotten and less engaged with their campus often due to fewer special programs, less contact with faculty, inadequate levels of support, and dissatisfaction with their academic major (Finning-Kwoka, Clayton, & Newman, 2007; Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). In addition, as Lipka (2006) reports, national statistics provided by the U.S. Department of Education suggest that approximately two thirds as many students who drop out of college do so in their second year compared to their first year. Similarly, the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (2007) reports that while 80% of first-year students at four-year institutions who started college in 2004 returned as sophomores in 2005, only 71% of these students were still enrolled as juniors in 2006. In response to these trends, colleges and universities have started to invest time, energy, and resources into establishing carefully constructed, intentional sophomore-year experiences.

University of Tennessee Sophomore Survey

As part of a research project to learn more about sophomores and promote their success, the University of Tennessee (UT) administered an electronic survey, with both quantitative and qualitative questions, to all 1,200 on-campus sophomores in the fall of 2008. Of those students, 190 returned completed surveys for a response rate of 16% (Table 1). The survey link was sent via e-mail to the sample only once, which may explain the low response rate. However, as no institution-specific data had been collected from UT sophomores, the insights gained from this sample still prove helpful. The survey assessed four key areas: (a) students' relationships with faculty members, (b) commitment to a major, (c) perceptions of University services, and (d) self-identified issues with which these sophomores dealt.

The results of the survey were revealing. Regarding relationships with faculty, 11% reported feeling uncomfortable approaching their instructors. Perhaps of most concern, only half of these sophomores agreed that their "relationships with faculty are meaningful and productive." Qualitative data suggested that some students felt faculty were disconnected and unhelpful as evidenced by one student's remark: "Try and learn how to teach yourself beforehand because a lot of the sophomore classes require you to teach yourself."

Results on commitment to a major suggest that although a large majority of students were confident that they would remain in their current major, more than half found it difficult to make connections between general education and major specific courses.

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Table 1

Demographics of Survey Respondents (N = 190)

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Male	28
Female	72
Grade point average	
0-2.49	5
2.5-2.99	15
3.0-3.49	30
3.5-3.74	18
3.75-4.0	33
Familial history	
First-generation college student	20
Not a first-generation college student	80

In the section eliciting information about students' use and perception of campus services, survey respondents ranked services provided by housing and residence life as being the most important. Although some research stresses the importance of career centers, study abroad opportunities, and academic support centers for sophomores (Boivin, Fountain, & Baylis, 2000), respondents in this study ranked these three resources as least important. Fewer than 50% of the sample ranked these three resources as most important. There are several possible explanations of these findings. First, relatively few first-year or sophomore college students participate in study abroad so that may explain why respondents view study abroad as less important. Second, as Table 1 indicates, the sample is fairly high-achieving and may not need to utilize academic support centers. Finally, the sophomore year may be early for students to explore career options and the services provided by the career center, especially for students who are satisfied with their major. Table 2 presents a complete summary of these results.

The last section of the survey asked students what they viewed as being their biggest struggles during their sophomore year. Time management was overwhelmingly the most challenging aspect of these students' lives. Qualitative data offer some insight into the challenges that sophomores face. For example, one student said, "I am trying to balance class work, schedules, certain lectures, campus activities, and still have a social life and find a way to exercise. It's hard." While it is not surprising that sophomore students struggle to manage their time, it is interesting to note the myriad activities and demands they must juggle (Table 3).

Creating the Sophomore-Year Experience at the University of Tennessee

The creation of a sophomore-year experience program is a major step in helping sophomores succeed personally, academically, and socially. Research recommends that effective sophomore year experience (SYE) programs include an academic, a cocurricular, and a residential focus (Finning-Kwoka et al., 2007). Findings from our survey lend empirical support to this conclusion.

Based on our survey results, in fall 2009, UT launched its sophoMORE program. Every UT sophomore received a summer mailing with invitations to welcome week activities that were geared toward sophomores, as well as a series of sophoMORE workshops to help students get MORE out of their second year. Each themed workshop brought together campus offices (e.g., study abroad, career services, housing, academic advising) so that sophomores were able to have their specific questions answered. In addition, the Student Success Center created

Table 2

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Campus Resources

Campus Resource	Percentage who feel resources are Somewhat and Extremely Important
Housing and Residence Life	77
Health and Wellness Center	65
Study Abroad Center/ International Education	48
Academic Support Center	47
Career Center	44

Table 3

Issues That Sophomores Experience on a Regular Basis

Issue	Percentage
Academics related	
Amount of reading	41
Amount of writing	15
Amount of work overall	51
Lack of faculty support	15
Low expectations in courses	7
Life-Skills related	
Time management	73
Reading comprehension	12
Ability to think critically	21
Relationship related	
Influence of peers and friends	30
Influence of family and relatives	11

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academic enhancement workshops specifically for sophomores to intentionally address their academic needs (e.g., choosing a major, maintaining good grades) and issues identified in the survey (e.g., time management strategies, critical thinking skills). Lastly, a sophomore web site was created to serve as a one-stop-shop for sophomores to find information about academic and social resources across campus (<http://studentsuccess.utk.edu/sophomore.html>).

Creating a SYE program is no small undertaking; university administrators must be willing to commit time, energy, and some resources to ensure the success of the program. Involvement of both academic and student affairs personnel, especially those in housing and campus health services, will enable practitioners to work together to create a holistic experience for students, as research shows that SYE programs are most effective when student and academic affairs work collaboratively (Bisese & Fabian, 2006; Stockenberg, 2007). At UT, representatives from across campus are working together to create a meaningful second year for students to promote their success. Our survey results also suggest the need for workshops and learning opportunities targeting faculty to describe strategies for serving sophomores more effectively, which is a long-term goal of the sophoMORE initiative.

Moreover, survey findings indicate the need to extend academic supports past the first year. Continued support beyond the first year is critical for sophomore student success (Mack & Fisher, 2007). By teaching skills to manage the amount of required writing and reading, through the sophoMORE workshops, UT is assisting students in getting ready for the sophomore year and beyond.

At the conclusion of sophoMORE programs at UT, students complete a survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions. Their responses allow for future initiatives to be developed that intentionally address the feedback received from students. For example, SYE students who attend a sophoMORE seminar should be able to better understand and access more readily the available UT campus resources. The results of assessment data collected at the end of a seminar could then be used to determine the extent to which desired outcomes were achieved.

Sophomore students face a myriad of challenges and experiences that affect their commitment to an institution, academic major, and academic success. Engaging sophomore students both inside and outside the classroom, in educationally purposeful ways, will likely improve faculty-student relationships, encourage students to use campus resources, and help them manage the academic and social challenges they face.

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delivering services to a larger number of students. For the 2009-2010 academic year, Nichols Career Services will modify the Job Club based on the above recommendations. Job Club promises to become a viable program of support for Nichols' undergraduate seniors.

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Providing Avenues for Success: Piloting a Developmental Learning Lab for At-Risk First-Year Students

Beginning in 1998, the number of at-risk students at the University of Dubuque (UD) noticeably increased, and it became evident that additional services were required to improve persistence and meet the special needs of this population, which included traditionally underrepresented groups, such as first-generation, low-income, and minority students. Most students arrived unprepared for the rigors of college; some had undiagnosed learning disabilities that prevented them from achieving the same success as their peers. In response to the growing need for quality higher education for this population, UD refined its mission and began intentional outreach to at-risk students. The Academic Success Center (ASC) was created at this time to support students in achieving their academic goals and includes a Writing Center, test proctoring, disability services, and tutoring provided by a team of full-time professional tutors and part-time peer tutors. Services are offered free of charge to all students.

Creating a System of Support for At-Risk Students

In 2007, ASC staff identified critical gaps in services for the at-risk population, in particular, the support system available for students placed in the remedial reading course, Reading and Study Skills.

This class teaches techniques necessary for college-level reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and study efficiency.

Historically, Reading and Study Skills instructors were adjunct faculty who were often unfamiliar with other campus support services. Although students were receiving high-quality in-class support, further out-of-class interventions, such as course-specific tutoring and study skill management, were also needed. In collaboration with English faculty, ASC developed a structured program of support directly connecting the Reading and Study Skills course with a Learning Lab offering targeted tutoring assistance.

Additionally, the lab was intended to make students aware of support services they could access throughout their college career. This was an ideal connection since all students categorized as at-risk (i.e., based on a variety of criteria including ACT scores and high-school GPAs) were placed in a Reading and Study Skills class.

Piloting the Developmental Learning Lab

Ninety students, identified as at-risk and representing 27% of the first-year cohort, were required to enroll in a three-credit Reading and Study Skills class with a concurrent Learning Lab in fall 2008 (i.e., six class and 10 lab section offerings). The Learning Labs, held in an ASC computer lab, were structured in two-hour blocks that provided dedicated tutoring time to small groups with a cap of nine students per section. These small groups ensured individualized

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photo courtesy of the authors

Students appreciate the support of their peers and Mr. Goerd in Learning Lab.

attention to each person's needs. An ASC professional tutor led each lab offering assistance with schoolwork, the development of study skills and basic skills, and the adjustment to campus life.

Assessing Our Success

To evaluate the success of pairing the Reading and Study Skills course with a concurrent Learning Lab, the program was assessed through online skill testing, GPAs, and student surveys. Students took a series of online tests developed by Houghton-Mifflin at three points during the semester (i.e., weeks 1, 8, and 15) to assess their grade level in reading, vocabulary, basic grammar, and punctuation. The tests also doubled as teaching tools providing online tutorials immediately following incorrect answers. The online assessment provided immediate feedback to the course instructor and Learning Lab tutor to help them better understand and address each student's developmental reading and language needs. Mastery in the online assessment was achieved by correctly answering 80% of the questions in a specific content area, representing proficiency at 10th to 12th grade benchmarks. At the beginning of the fall 2008 semester, the average score for the group on the Reading/Vocabulary assessment pretest was 61% (5th-6th grade level); by semester's end, it had risen to 85%. The average Writing/Language Mechanics pretest and ending scores were 54% (5th-6th grade level); and 77% (8th- 9th grade level), respectively.

The lab also helped students achieve academically in other courses. The average GPA for the 2007 cohort of at-risk first-year students, prior to the addition of the Learning Lab, was 2.1. At the end of the 2008 fall semester, GPAs rose to 2.7 for at-risk students who were required to take the lab. Based on these encouraging GPAs, ASC decided to offer a spring Learning Lab for students who had been in the fall course and lab. The spring lab was considered an extension of the fall offering, but functioned as a stand-alone lab meeting only one hour per week. The majority of at-risk students were required to enroll in the spring lab; however, 10 students were exempted due to outstanding academic achievement in the fall semester.

Planning for the Future

Scaling back the Learning Lab time and providing exemptions proved to have negative consequences for at-risk students. The GPAs for nine of the 10 students who were not required to take the spring session dropped significantly (i.e., an average 0.974 decrease). Qualitative assessment also demonstrated that these students had personal and academic issues that make the lab a crucial component of their first-year experience. In addition to the drop in GPAs of exempted students, there was an average 0.04 decrease in GPA from fall to spring for all at-risk students. While this decline could be partially attributed to more difficult spring coursework, it was also thought to reflect on the reduced available lab time (i.e., two hours in the fall compared to one hour in the spring).



photo courtesy of the authors

A student receives one-to-one tutoring from Mr. Goerdert in Learning Lab.

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Engaging Commuter Students: Three Innovative Programs

With commuter students representing “over 85% of today’s college enrollments” (Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, & Gasiorski, 2008, p. 1), colleges and universities have a vested interest in dedicating resources and programming to ensure the retention and academic success of this student population. Jacoby describes commuter students as those students whose “place of residence while attending college is not in a campus residence hall or fraternity or sorority house” (as cited in Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001, p. 2). Dugan and colleagues further divide this populations into those “living in the home of a parent, guardian, or other relative (dependent) and commuters who live on their own or with others (independent)” (p. 282). The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) also identifies two categories of commuter students: those living within walking distance of campus and those who must drive to campus (Kuh et al.). Regardless of how researchers subdivide this group, all seem to agree that commuter students will continue to “become more diverse as the number of part-time, adult, and minority students in higher education continues to increase” (Bonnet, 2007, p. 1).

Commuter students face unique challenges compared to residential students. Transportation and parking issues (e.g., traffic and road construction delays, car maintenance, high parking fees, limited parking, walking to their cars alone after dark) are two of the biggest stressors for commuter students (Baum, 2005). Many commuters also find it hard to be involved with extracurricular activities, such as clubs and organizations, because meetings often take place at night. In addition, many students have multiple life roles ranging from full- or part-time employees to caretakers for their families, restricting the amount of time they have to spend on campus, which in turn can “severely limit their opportunities to meet with professors, study, work on group projects, and get additional help” (Chapman, Munsell, & Caldwell, 1999).

This article highlights three innovative programs aimed specifically at meeting the needs of commuter students.

Mansfield University

Almost 60 % of the 2,900 students at Mansfield University, located in central Pennsylvania, are commuters. Due to long commutes and snowy winters, institutional officials became increasingly worried about the safety of students driving to campus. In response to this concern, the institution opened Commuter Connection in 2007, a residence hall wing that is dedicated to the commuter student population (Lipka, 2007). Beginning with a computer lab, two lounges, limited kitchen facilities, and seven overnight rooms, the space has evolved to 10 guest rooms (i.e., five for each gender, along with single-sex bathrooms) housed in a hall with “international students and student athletes, both populations that might need to remain in their rooms over holidays...reduc[ing] the likelihood that commuters might be left in a hall essentially alone” (Lorenzetti, 2009, p.1). When students decide to use the space, either in between classes or to stay over, they check-in at the Commuter Connection office to receive a guest card that allows them access at no cost. Coordination and partnership between Commuter

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[http://www.seattleu.edu/commuters/
collegia/](http://www.seattleu.edu/commuters/collegia/)

University of Maryland
[http://www.union.umd.edu/offCampus/
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Connection and Residence Life staff are key to the program's success, and both offices are working together to educate resident assistants about the presence of commuter students in the community and to ensure their safety. To date, assessment has been primarily anecdotal with positive student feedback. Yet, Lorenzetti noted,

It is too early to tell if the Commuter Connection will make a measurable impact on retention at Mansfield.... it is already certain that it sends a strong message that the university cares about the safety and comfort of its commuter students, as it allows students and their loved ones to sleep a little easier. (p. 2)

Seattle University

Seattle University, in Washington State, with 57% of the student population living off campus (i.e., 2,400 students), has taken a different approach to providing commuter students with a space on campus (Seattle University, n.d.). Using a learning communities model, the University's Collegia Program offers commuter students not only a comfortable gathering space (e.g., kitchen facilities, computers, snacks, and lounge and study areas) but also academic and support options (Schmitz, 2001). The communities are staffed by both undergraduate and graduate assistants who provide students with help, support, and information through one-on-one interactions and community building programs. Some of the Collegia communities are connected to academic disciplines, offering commuter students "a unique identity and sense of belonging" (Schmitz, p. 7). Faculty members are also available for students to talk to and receive help with class assignments. During the 2007-08 academic year, 1,100 undergraduate and graduate students were enrolled in Collegia. During that same year, the State of the Student Survey reported an 83% satisfaction rate with Collegia and an 80% satisfaction rate with the Collegia student staff. In anecdotal evidence, students have commented saying, "I love that this place offers me a warm, safe place to study and be with friends. The Collegia Program has always been a resource to me when I didn't know where to turn." Students also stated that Collegia provides them with a place to focus and refresh themselves before other classes, and helps them do better in classes (Commuter and Transfer Student Services, 2008).

University of Maryland

The University of Maryland, in College Park, has a very large commuter population with 25,000 out of its 35,000 undergraduate and graduate students commuting to campus each day. Because the population is so large and a vital part of the culture at the University, the school is dedicated to "enhancing the quality of life of off-campus students by assisting them in making well-informed decisions that enable them to enjoy positive on- and off-campus living experiences" (University of Maryland). To accomplish these goals, in 2004, an Off Campus Student Involvement web site was created containing a plethora of information and resources for commuter students to access. The resources are aimed at helping students transition from living at home or in a residence hall to living off campus. Living off campus usually involves spending more money on living expenses and worrying about transportation; therefore, the web site includes information on how to make a budget, money management tips, moving resources, securing an off-campus residence, transportation information, and community and neighborhood resources. To help the commuters feel connected to the campus, the web site also includes links to campus life information, a campus calendar, recreation services, and the health center.

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CUSEO Cont. from p. 5

As Gardner (1980) noted in one of his earliest reports on the University 101 initiative at the University of Carolina,

The program integrates faculty and professional staff at the university in a joint undertaking [which] tends to reduce the barriers between the faculty and staff camps, reduces stereotyping, and has promoted better relationships between faculty and especially student affairs staff. (pp. 6-7)

The research and practice reviewed in this article strongly suggest that the first-year seminar has the potential to serve as an integrative hub in a coordinated first-year experience, which can enable the program to exert a more systemic, synergistic effect on student success, and create a stronger sense of campus community.

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LEARNING LAB Cont. from p. 10

Finally, the students were the largest proponent of the need for a year-long lab. While some resisted the required lab time at first, most (i.e., 94% of spring at-risk cohort) ended the semester proud of their academic achievement and attributed the support provided by the lab with some of their success. As one student explained, "The lab was an awesome help for me getting caught up on homework, and I also brushed up my skills by using [the online program]."

Based on the success of this pilot and the assessment findings, the program has been continued with the recommendation to require, in conjunction with the fall Reading and Study Skills course, a year-long, two-hour Learning Lab to support the building of positive study habits. Furthermore, because of the positive assessment results, the institution is implementing a Math Learning Lab to run concurrently with the remedial math course. It is hoped that the positive impacts of the Learning Lab will help at-risk students graduate from the University of Dubuque and achieve their personal goals.

[HOME](#)
COMMUTER Cont. from p. 12**Conclusion**

A similarity between all three highlighted programs is that the institutions are dedicating "space" to commuters; in the case of Mansfield University and Seattle University, it is physical space, while at the University of Maryland, it is virtual space. The schools also are focused on (a) actively engaging commuter students within the campus community, (b) encouraging networking among these students, and (c) ensuring that this population has access to campus resources. These institutions are proactively working to meet the needs of their commuter students and provide useful models for other institutions to consider when developing programs to empower commuter students to become successful both in and out of the classroom.

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An Interview With Lee Cuba: Are Students Focusing Too Much on the Future?

In May 2005, the New England Consortium on Assessment and Student Learning, comprised of seven liberal arts schools in New England, initiated an ambitious longitudinal study aimed at understanding the intellectual, social, personal, and intrapersonal engagement of students as they transitioned from high school all the way through to college graduation. Using collaborative teams of faculty and students, with students serving as interviewers as well as interpreters of the data, the study has followed 252 students drawn from the seven schools (i.e., Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, Middlebury College, Smith College, Trinity College, and Wellesley College) over a four-year period.

Thirty-six students from the class of 2010 were selected from a race-stratified random sample at each college allowing schools to evaluate information gathered on their own campuses while putting it in context with the larger cohort. To “capture the [student] experience immediately and...authentically,” students participated in a series of interviews every academic year and completed sophomore, junior, and senior surveys. Of the original 252 students, more than 200 remain in the study as seniors, and funding has been secured to follow them for an additional year postgraduation.

The study has yielded a wealth of data on the benefits of engaging students as interviewers, challenges relating to managing multi-institutional studies, and the value and benefits of comparative, qualitative research on student learning, as well as prompting a variety of related ongoing projects on several of the Consortium campuses. Cuba, as principal director of the study, is particularly interested in how students made decisions shaping their college experience and outcomes and how standard advising practices, especially in the first and second years, frequently failed to support students in these life-impacting decisions. He found most students were heavily engaged in anticipatory decision making—creating far-ranging plans not necessarily grounded in or based on lessons to be learned or experienced in the immediate academic year—with this behavior exhibited even before entering college. This was in direct contrast to advising, which frequently was only focused on course registration for that semester. Cuba states, “[We] go too quickly to ‘what courses are you going to sign up for’ and don’t try to treat the student as someone who is making a big transition as a person.” He added that the initial advising conversation should not be about solving students’ problems but should center on getting students to articulate those problems and needs as well as their goals, interests, areas they would like to explore, and why they are here.

Using quotes drawn from Wellesley students participating in the study, and reflecting the larger cohort, Cuba summarized findings from the first three years of investigation through a student decision-making lens.

Toni Vakos

E-Source Editor

Editor’s Note: Lee Cuba, professor of sociology and former administrator at Wellesley College in Massachusetts and principal director of the New England Consortium on Assessment and Student Learning, was a featured speaker at the 16th National Conference on Students in Transition held in Salt Lake City, Utah, November 6-8, 2009. In his address and an interview with E-Source, Cuba discussed his views on anticipatory decision making for college students based on findings from the Consortium study.



Lee Cuba at the 16th National Conference on Students in Transition.

The First Year – Fall 2006

Students arrived on campus hoping to take some courses and avoid others, with first semester choices influenced by high school likes and dislikes. There was academic as well as cultural pressures to declare a major. Students expected to have a lot of faculty interaction, but did not. Interaction with advisors was frequently limited to course registration, and many students believed their advisors were mismatched (i.e., not in their specific fields of interest) and, therefore, had little to offer them. Students' experiences with these pressures and interactions were captured in the following statements:

I was thinking of majoring in East Asian studies, and Japanese, but still do pre-med. Partially because right now I don't know what science I'm specifically interested in because I haven't taken all the core sciences yet... so I figured—for now—just telling people that I'm an East Asian studies major, because I know I'm really interested in that.

Well he's [an advisor] in a totally different department. They put me with somebody kind of random that like isn't in any classes that I'd want to take, and so he really didn't know about the courses or the teachers that I was taking, so it wouldn't really have been applicable for me to ask him advice about it.

The Sophomore Year – Fall 2007

The pressure to declare a major intensified, and students felt like they were running out of time. A significant number had a sense of "bait and switch" (i.e., being told during the first year not to worry about a major and to follow their interests and then expected to immediately declare at the beginning of their second year). Students commented on the increased stress in their lives related to their majors, their futures, and trying to stay in the present while focusing on the future.

I have no idea what I want to do with my life. Last year I was like okay, I'm going to double in this and that. I was taking a bunch of different classes, but the entire time in my mind I was kind of like, okay. That's not true. I was definitely at one point okay. I'm going to be a doctor. Oh now I'm going to be a psychologist, but I've always really liked environmental studies and I'm sticking with environmental studies; however, now I don't know what I want to do. And it comes and goes depending on the week... I've not been on top of my work. And it's bugging me.

I felt like, wow, my [college] career's about to come to an end. Maybe that's kind of early to start thinking about it, but I felt like, wow, I only have my junior and senior year left.

I mean the convention is that everyone, if you don't know your major then you don't have your act together, and you don't know what you're going to do with your life, and you're not ambitious. And even if you communicate to someone that you're ambitious but you don't have a major, that makes you disorganized.

So I feel pressure, but it's something that I'm trying to notice and sort of ignore. Because what I realize is that my major is going to mean very little when I graduate... What's going to matter is how well I do here and the things I learn here.

I felt like, wow, my [college] career's about to come to an end. Maybe that's kind of early to start thinking about it, but I felt like, wow, I only have my junior and senior year left.

The Junior Year – Fall 2008

The focus was primarily on career, future internships, study abroad preparation, and job prospects in a worsening economy. The juniors' anxiety was captured in the following statements:

That's the sad part. I don't have a clue [regarding the kind of job she wants]. I hope to get in the field of media, but ... It's not a lucrative field. I would like to get into law but I feel like right now I'm not ready for that. To take up that role. So I'm not sure. Right now everything's up in the air.

...one thing at least that's most on my mind is looking at internships and you know, jobs and thinking about what I'm going to be doing after college. Whereas last year I was really kind of concerned about the courses that I was taking in that semester. So now I'm thinking more onward.

...that one internship you get after your junior year is really going to dictate what job you're going to get after.

Cuba noted that common themes in all the study years are that many students perceive their time in college as compressed. The focus is primarily on the future, which students described in anxious, stressful, and sometimes fearful terms (e.g., entering first-year students worrying about the sophomore year declaration of a major, new sophomores centered on studying abroad in the junior year; beginning juniors concentrating on job prospects after graduation). Cuba offered possible sources for this trend, which include (a) the high school and college application process; (b) parental/family expectations; (c) credentialing and college as a consumptive, rather than exploratory, experience (e.g., something to get through to get a job, hopefully in a school with a marketable name); (d) college practices and policies; and (e) a poor economy in an uncertain world.

Quick to point out that while anticipatory decision making is a necessary and productive part of the college experience, Cuba questions whether the heavy focus on future events at the expense of immediate planning:

- Makes sense in terms of how students view decisions they confront in college
- Limits exploration in college or is a form of exploration, in and of itself
- Diminishes students' abilities to make effective transitions in college
- Means that colleges need to rethink their practices and policies

As the study continues to provide rich data on the student transition experience, Cuba anticipates the findings will help institutions better understand how students make important academic and social decisions and improve the educational experience. He also hopes the research will initiate changes in advising practices within the Consortium schools and nationally. By focusing on open-ended questions (e.g., What is most on your mind as you begin this year? What would make this year successful for you? How can we make that happen?), Cuba would like to see the primary goal of advising be "[opening] up a conversation on the role of the college educational experience in the student's life right now."

For more information on the New England Consortium on Assessment and Student Learning, visit www.wellesley.edu/NECASL

...that one internship you get after your junior year is really going to dictate what job you're going to get after.

What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Resource Development

The Toolbox

The National Resource Center is now hosting *The Toolbox: A Teaching and Learning Resource for Instructors*, written by Brad Garner from Indiana Wesleyan University. *The Toolbox* is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year, and the online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox



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The National Resource Center is pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to learn about the results of research studies conducted by the Center:

Findings From a National Survey of Peer Leadership Experiences and Outcomes.

Concurrent research session at the 29th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience. Denver, Colorado; February 15, 2010, 10:45 - 11:45 am.

Peer Leadership: Measuring Personal Growth and Academic Achievement.

General interest session scheduled for presentation at the 2010 NASPA Annual Conference. Chicago, Illinois; March 8, 2010, 2:15-3:30 pm.

National Data and Best Practices for Sophomore Student Success.

General interest session scheduled for presentation at the 2010 NASPA Annual Conference. Chicago, Illinois; March 9, 2010, 12:30-1:45 pm.

E-Source Submission Guidelines

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Audience: *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields interested in student transitions. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

Style: Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style. *E-Source* does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

Length: Original feature-length articles should be 750-1200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

Please address all questions and submissions to:

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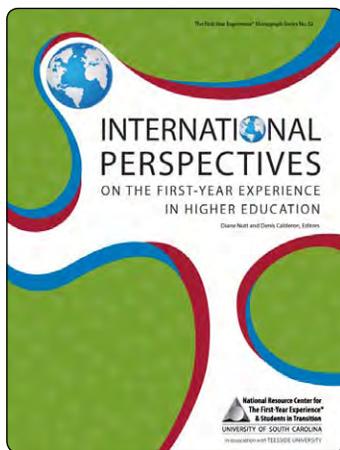
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*Diane Nutt and Denis Calderon, Editors
Produced in collaboration with Teesside University, United Kingdom*



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Awards

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, in association with the Association of Institutional Research (AIR), is pleased to announce this year's recipients of the AIR Fellowships. These individuals are knowledgeable about and interested in the first year of college and have presented plans to use information gained at the Conference to improve current first-year assessment on their campuses. This year's recipients were formally recognized on October 12, 2009 at the National Conference on First-Year Assessment.



Pictured from left to right:
Kriesta Watson, Shenandoah University
Erika Rose Thompson, Lipscomb University
Jon William Laird, Illinois State University
Liz Fitzgerald, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
Beth M. Lingren Clark, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (not pictured)

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