

The First Year College Village: How Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Works Together

By John Ambrose, Karen Hauschild, and Kathleen Ruppe

Abstract

This article will highlight the partnership between First Year College and University Housing at North Carolina State. We will address how an academic college has evolved into a living and learning community including information about our Resident Mentor position, First Year Inquiry (FYI) courses and our linked course program, the Student Affairs/Academic Affairs partnership, the Village Advisory Council, our faculty involvement through the Faculty Fellows Program, and our assessment to date.

Living and Learning Villages

There are many definitions of learning communities such as Schroeder and Hurst's which states that learning communities are “. . .characterized by associational groups of students and teachers, sharing common values and a common understanding of purpose, interacting within a context of curricular and co-curricular structures and functions that link traditional disciplines and co-curricular experiences in the vital pursuit of shared inquiry” (1996, 178). Shapiro and Levine assert that “learning communities initiatives share basic characteristics:

- Organizing students and faculty into smaller groups
- Encouraging integration of the curriculum
- Helping students establish academic and social support networks
- Providing a setting for students to be socialized to the expectations of college
- Bringing faculty together in more meaningful ways
- Focusing faculty and students on learning outcomes
- Providing a setting for community-based delivery of academic support programs
- Offering a critical lens for examining the first-year experience” (1999, 3).

Both of these definitions/descriptions capture the essence of the North Carolina State University Housing and First Year College's living and learning community (Village). Along with many universities across the country, North Carolina State University Housing and First Year College have come to the conclusion that combining the academic and residence hall experiences and creating living and learning communities help create a seamless learning environment that positively impacts student persistence toward graduation. A student's primary reason for attending college is to gain an education and graduate, and the entire University community works toward assisting and supporting students with achieving this important academic goal. Throughout the

process of students attaining their degrees, the University faculty and staff also strive to develop the whole person – intellectually, socially and ethically. In a university setting, learning does not happen only in the vacuum of a classroom, but rather occurs both inside and outside of the classroom. Living and learning communities provide the value-added opportunity for students to connect with peers, faculty and the institution, which leads to Village participants being engaged learners and successful students. Living and learning community involvement helps students connect with their peers through classroom projects, discussions, and residence hall interactions. This, in turn, leads students to engage more readily in important topical informal hallway discussions, asking fellow students living down the hall for academic assistance, and forming study groups to prepare for upcoming exams. Through programming efforts such as Faculty Fellows programs, students have the opportunity to interact informally with faculty outside the classroom, which makes them more apt to approach faculty members for academic assistance. Living and learning communities help introduce students to campus resources and encourage student involvement that helps students connect with the institution.

University Housing and First Year College (FYC) believed so strongly in the living and learning concept that when FYC was created in 1995, their offices were established on the ground floor of Tucker residence hall and FYC paid the equivalent of residence hall rent; University Housing agreed to convert student bedrooms into offices and provide classroom space within the residence halls. One of the FYC Academic Advisers was assigned and embraced the role of FYC liaison to University Housing and was charged with developing the partnership and creating programs that supported the FYC students living in Tucker and Owen Halls, our Village Residence Halls. Early initiatives of the FYC and University Housing partnership included linked classes taught in residence hall classrooms, the establishment of a Resident Mentor program to offer an additional staff presence and resource in the classroom and on residence hall floors, and special programmatic initiatives such as Resident Mentor-sponsored and faculty-led Dinner Discussions and co-sponsored student spring break trips to Madrid, Spain and Rome, Italy.

In 2001 University Housing created a Task Force on Living and Learning charged with the responsibility of determining the best way to meet University Housing growth needs as well as enhance student learning. In 2002 the Task Force Report deemed that it was important for the enhancement of student learning to establish living and learning communities termed Villages featuring academic partnerships and Advisory Council steering committees comprised of staff, faculty and students. The Task Force also recommended that the FYC and University Housing partnership follow this model. All interested parties agreed, and from this the official FYC Village (FYCV) was born and the First Year College Village Advisory Council was established in March 2004.

The First Year College Village Advisory Council, chaired by the FYC Associate Director, agreed to meet for two hours every other week to discuss Village initiatives. The first order of business was to create a FYC Village mission statement, set goals,

and create an assessment plan. With a clear vision of the FYC Village's future, the FYC Advisory Council set out to promote the Village to prospective students and parents through creating a marketing campaign, which included designing a Village logo, creating a Web presence, producing brochures, printing student t-shirts, writing news articles, sending e-mail newsletters, purchasing logo clad give-a-ways, designing event and light pole FYCV banners all in an effort to establish the FYC Village identity and promote the Village to the University community and prospective students. Additional Village services were offered to ease the apprehension of incoming students such as providing an opportunity during Summer Orientation for FYC students to view a sample residence hall showroom as well as developing a resident roommate matching tool called "The Village Roomster" that helps incoming residents match themselves as roommate pairs. The goal was to fill the Tucker and Owen residence halls with First Year College students.

Additional FYC Village initiatives included programming that enhanced community building, promoted leadership development, and fostered the faculty/student relationship. Community building efforts include events such as Tucker and Owen Hall Battle for the Beach where the two FYC Village Residence Halls hold a day of friendly competition featuring a volleyball tournament, tug of war and a quiz bowl all for the "naming" rights of the Beach, a popular volleyball/BBQ quad area located between the two buildings. Additional programs include a kick-off event featuring carnival games and Ben and Jerry's ice cream, as well as an end-of-the-year Village banquet highlighting student participation such as a short film competition where participants capture their first-year experience on film. One of the FYC Village goals is to help develop future leaders so a Leadership Potential Retreat was established where students identified by Academic Advisers as having leadership potential are invited to go away for a weekend retreat facilitated by the FYC Village and CLEPS (Center for Leadership, Ethics and Public Service) where they explore their values, ethics and what it means to be an effective leader. The student and faculty relationship is cultivated through our Faculty Fellows Program featuring events such as Resident Mentor-organized informal faculty/student meals, "Pizza and a Prof." discussion series, student/faculty ping pong tournament, and Student Preview Dinner and Theater nights where faculty and students dress up and attend a formal dinner together followed by a Broadway South Series play.

A very crucial cornerstone that set the FYC Village up for success was creating a FYC Village Advisory Council subcommittee focused on assessment. The subcommittee wrote and administered an in-house Student Experiences Survey (SES) to help assess the FYC Village's overall effectiveness. The SES is administered in the FYC classroom once each semester and the results drive the future FYC Village Council decisions.

Hurdles

- FYC Adviser Office Space: University Housing converted student bedrooms into offices and renovated a community bathroom into a more typical office bathroom. University Housing also provided two classrooms, including technology, so that some

FYC courses could be taught in the residence halls. FYC provided the office furniture and agreed to pay rent equivalent to the same amount that two students would pay that year had they been renting the space as a bedroom. This arrangement provided FYC with office locations that were in as close proximity as possible to the students they advised and taught. The challenges with this arrangement were that it took bed space away from the housing inventory and put University Housing in a landlord type role. The space configuration was not conducive to creating a welcome reception area for students waiting to see their Academic Adviser. It also had a significant impact on the FYC budget since their rent increased at the same rate as student housing rates increased. University Housing and FYC made this arrangement work for many years, but it was not ideal. We had a desire to build a First Year College Commons building to better serve the Village. The success of the FYC Village contributed to University Housing, First Year College and the University as a whole investing in the FYC Village's future by financing and constructing the First Year College Commons, a three-story building located across the street from the Village residence halls and featuring classrooms, a computer lab, a twenty-four-hour student service desk, University Housing administrator offices, and FYC Academic Advisers offices. The new building is more conducive to holding advising meetings, teaching FYC classes, and hosting large Village community events. The building also houses other offices that support student learning and development such as Study Abroad, the Transition Program, and the Center for Excellence in Curricular Engagement.

- **Assessment:** Although FYC had a solid assessment plan, there wasn't much focus on assessing the FYC Village. FYC Village Council decided to put more emphasis on assessment by establishing an assessment subcommittee, which resulted in the creation of an in-house Student Experiences Survey (SES).
- **Student Leadership Involvement:** Another hurdle has been getting student leaders involved in Village planning and serving on the FYC Advisory Council. In the early days we had one student who faithfully attended all FYC Advisory Council Meetings and provided much needed insight and contributed greatly to accomplishing Village initiatives, but since that time, we have struggled to have consistent student representation. Student representation tends to ebb and flow with student interest level, class schedules and competing priorities.

How We Are Working Now

FYC Village is now known for its assessment strength. FYC has decided to incorporate the FYC Village assessment plan into the overall FYC assessment plan. Per the recommendation of the Boyer Center's 2004-05 report and the proven effectiveness of the Village, First Year College has decided to require their students who choose to live on campus to live in the FYC Village (Elkins and McDonald 2005, 33). We have addressed all of our space needs with the decision to construct a First Year College Commons. The First Year College Commons Construction Groundbreaking Ceremony was held in April 2006, and the FYC Commons Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was held in May 2007. It is a testimony to the strength of the partnership and the success of our FYC Village that we were able to construct such a building. We are proud of that accomplishment and thrilled that we are approaching the completion of our first year in the new space.

The Resident Mentors: A Historical Perspective

While Steven Ender and Fred Newton (2000) chronicle in their textbook, *Students Helping Students*, the historical perspective of the role of the peer educator on campuses since the 1900s, the role of the peer helper has continued to change and evolve just as our institutions of higher learning have changed and evolved. Ender and Newton define peer educators as “help[ing] others through functions such as assisting, coaching, tutoring, and supporting rather than the professional roles of teaching, training, interpreting, and counseling” (7). The text continues to discuss the importance of appropriate and timely training (8-14) and role modeling (14-16). This text is a good starting point and tool for a budding program and North Carolina State has used it since the inception of our annual course for all new Resident Mentors. As the scope of the position has evolved we have moved to a new text to be used beginning Fall 2008, *Exploring Leadership: For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference*, 2nd edition, by Susan R. Komives, Nance Lucas, and Timothy R. McMahon. As in past years, we will continue to provide the text to the Resident Mentor group at no cost and recycle it in subsequent years.

Alexander Astin argues that the “strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development is the student’s peer group...[which] has enormous potential for influencing virtually all aspects of the student’s education and personal development” (1996, 126).

Then and Now: The Resident Mentor Program

The Resident Mentor (RM) program in First Year College has significantly evolved since its early days of the Upper-class Residents (UCRs) program. Shortly after the establishment of FYC in 1995, the UCR initiative began.

This program involved having returning students live in the freshman residence hall in hopes of serving as a positive academic and social role model. These were volunteer positions and were very loosely structured and supervised. As time marched on, we discovered that the UCR applicants were mainly interested in the prime real-estate of the halls that housed our students and weren’t serving in the capacity in which we had originally hoped. Therefore, we took the program off-line and regrouped. In 2001, we wrote a formal job description and established lines of supervision. No funding was available to make this a paid position at that time.

The new position was initially titled Learning Assistant and was created in conjunction with University Housing. We hoped to rely on the spirit of giving back to others to help recruit students to this position despite the fact that no dollars were in our budgets to fund such a position. We received two applications. As a result we went back to the drawing board and spent a year further developing the position, recruiting materials and securing funding. The position was later retitled “Resident Mentor.” The purpose of the RM position was to help create a link between the curricular and co-curricular experience. The RMs lived and worked alongside the Resident Assistants in the FYC Village. The RM teams were required to plan three academic programs each semester and serve as

Teaching Assistants in our Introduction to University Education course (USC 101A/102A) each fall and spring, comprising approximately ten quality work hours per week. Students must have at least a 2.7 GPA and have completed thirty hours by the end of summer school before beginning employment. We launched recruiting efforts in the spring of 2003 and hired thirteen RMs for fall 2003. The RMs were jointly supervised by a professional FYC Adviser who was dually titled as the RM Coordinator and the graduate student Resident Directors (RDs) in the residence halls in which the RMs lived.

After having one year with the RMs in place, we had some scheduling, communication and philosophical complications in administering the program the way we had envisioned it. In addition, we surmised that the RMs needed more on-going training. For many years, the Resident Assistant position on campus involved those students taking a paraprofessional training course to better assist them in their role and to better facilitate communication about what was happening in the halls. As a result, again through our University Housing partnership, we developed a course similar in scope and context to the RA position but with a slightly different focus for the RM position. We worked with the Counselor Education program on campus to be granted the course offering under their course prefix and coordinated with Registration and Records to appropriately title, list and restrict the course for the next round of Resident Mentors for fall 2004. Since developing this course, it has been offered each fall to the newly-hired RM group. The instructor group consists of the FYC RM Coordinator, the Assistant Director for Housing, and the two graduate RDs who manage our Village residence halls. Once implemented, we have found the RM class to be an invaluable tool in not only developing the Resident Mentor as a peer helper but also as a communication and administrative tool.

Since fall 2003, our goal is to hire thirteen RMs each fall and we have hit that target fairly consistently over the years. University Housing supplies their bi-weekly paycheck for their \$2,000 annual stipend and FYC pays for \$8,000 of University Housing's related needs each year to help offset this cost.

Hurdles

- **Funding:** Initially we had no funding for these positions.
- **Academic Course:** Establishing a letter-graded course to better facilitate our outcomes.
- **Engagement:** RMs were more invested in the residence hall activities than their responsibilities in the USC classroom. As a result, we made changes to the RM course to better focus on the academic piece in an effort to promote a better balance. As a result, we've almost found a more opposite effect; RMs are more engaged in the classroom than the residence hall now, so we continue to work on balancing their work.
- **RM Retention:** High RM attrition to RA (Resident Advisor) positions, off-campus living or other leadership opportunities. The RA positions are more highly compensated and have a greater scope of responsibility.
- **Small Applicant Pool:** Small applicant pool each year. We have worked on better marketing the position and have added an early registration perk to the benefit package.
- **Compensation:** The \$2,000/year stipend has remained constant since the beginning of the program. About every two years, this has come up as an issue as well as the RM

request for a single room or parking permit. Unfortunately, budget constraints persist and our assessment to date doesn't currently inform a strong argument to increase salaries. So the question at hand right now is where to find the dollars.

- Staff Buy-In: Initially we had difficulty getting some FYC staff buy-in and adequately utilizing the RM in the classroom.
- Territory: In the early years of the program, there were some territorial issues between the RAs and RMs but this has been practically eliminated as a result of including the RMs in weekly staff meetings, recognition events and most importantly the RA overnight fall staff training retreat. Once we began including the RMs in this overnight retreat in the summer 2005, the staffs have become much more solidified.
- Programming Expectations: Scheduling three group academic programs each semester proved to be logistically impossible so we have since changed this requirement, which will be discussed later.
- Communication with Partner: Because there are so many "players" in this process, making sure we're on the same page regarding programming has been a challenge and we're still working on ways to better streamline.
- Role Definition: Defining the RM position as distinct and different but equally important as that of a Resident Advisor.
- Leadership Experience: We have found that this position typically attracts "introverts" and is often the first leadership position or job for these students. With that come some challenges for their personal and professional development.

How We Are Working Now

Since 2003, the RM position has evolved, but the core of what their role is in the Village has remained the same. For example, after three semesters we created some benchmark/legacy programs that the Village could count on and look to the RM team to coordinate and implement. What once began as three academic programs per semester has resulted in Dinner Discussions facilitated by a campus organization or faculty member. Our first Dinner Discussion was in the spring of 2004 and was a political debate between the Young Republicans and the College Democrats for the spring Presidential ticket nominations. It was a huge success! This Dinner Discussion was followed up in the fall of 2004 by another political debate just before the November elections. Our spring 2005 event was also a political debate but on the campus level featuring the Student Government Association leadership nominees. Since that time, the discussion topics have changed each semester and the frequency of these events has increased to two each fall and one each spring, which is now followed by the FYC Village Banquet.

In spring 2005, the Village Advisory Council hosted the first annual FYC Village Banquet. The Banquet was coordinated by FYC and University Housing staff through the VAC and was a good first attempt with approximately one hundred students and staff in attendance. This event is now coordinated by the RM team.

Programmatically, an RM is still responsible for living and working in the FYC Village alongside the RA staff to plan and implement programs, build community and keep the peace. Each RM is assigned to one USC 101A/102A course each year and works with

that Academic Adviser/course instructor to plan and implement the FYC curriculum. The RMs also have taken on an ambassador role for the First Year College by supporting our Visitation Days and the University Open House and assisting with two of our large curriculum-related events: the Majors Fair and Academic Networking.

Currently, we still employ thirteen RMs each year with the hope of securing funding to hire more in the future relative to our outcomes and assessment. We continue to lose most of them to other opportunities at the end of their contract period, although for the 2008-09 year, we have three RMs returning to the position with a small pay increase funded by the FYC budget, which is unprecedented. A Senior RM job description and contract is currently being created. We are in the process of creating a special topics or independent study course for these returning RMs. We are continuously striving to better define the role of the RM in the FYC Village.

The Linked Courses (FYI & FYC): A Historical Perspective

The concept of learning communities has been around since the 1920s when John Dewey, Alexander Meikljohn and Joseph Tussman laid the foundation upon which our modern day learning communities are grounded (Love, 5). Today's learning communities are broad and varied. At one end of the spectrum, one might see groups of classes taken by the same group of fifteen to twenty students, which makes up the majority, that "intend to increase interaction between and among faculty members and students but no explicit role for the seminar as integrator of learning" through common assignments (Henscheid, 3). On the opposite end one might find that same group of classes that are thoroughly planned and well-coordinated by the teaching faculty that integrates inside and outside the classroom activities and assignments (Henscheid, 2).

The 2002 First-Year Initiative Benchmarking Survey found that students in learning communities with linked courses had "statistically significant greater gains than students in stand-alone seminars" on each of the studied learning outcomes factors such as peer-to-peer connections (which had the largest gain), out-of-class engagement, knowledge of wellness issues, study skills, and time/priority management. Although posting smaller gains, factors such as knowledge of campus policies, knowledge of academic services, critical-thinking skills, connections with faculty and cognitive/academic skills were also assessed. (Swing, 9). This study concluded that linking classes even in just name only is a good thing. Nevertheless, important findings concluded that students found linked classes more engaging and ultimately improved academic achievement and persistence at the university (Swing, 14).

At North Carolina State, we have taken our linked program from the lower end of the spectrum (in name only) to the other end of the spectrum with well-defined, overlapping course activities and assignments. We have consistently found that students participating in links have statistically significant greater GPAs than those students not participating in a link. In recent years we have found that students are passing more

hours, even into the sophomore year, which we hope will help ultimately increase graduation rates. We will discuss our assessment outcomes in detail later in this article.

Then and Now: Linked Courses

In an effort to connect the curricular with the co-curricular, the First Year College joined forces with the First Year Inquiry (FYI) program to offer a special “linked” course program. This program has evolved from a pilot program to a well-established and anticipated opportunity for each new group for FYC students each fall. Our first “linked” courses began in fall 2001 with five First Year Inquiry courses linked to five FYC USC 101A courses and has grown to at least ten “linked” courses each fall.

First Year Inquiry (FYI)

The initial First Year Inquiry courses were offered in the fall of 1999 and were initially funded by the Hewlett Foundation. The Hewlett Steering Committee tentatively set twenty as the enrollment limit for the classes. The faculty was charged to find ways to make the small class size contribute both to unusually strong success in the cognitive content of the course and also to the over-all objective of beginning to develop skills in inquiry. This objective implied three assessable outcomes:

- Taking charge of one’s thinking—development of the ability to think critically
- Growing beyond dualism—intellectual maturity
- Taking responsibility for one’s own education

The FYI program is currently funded by the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs, which also administers the First Year College. North Carolina State faculty who are dedicated to undergraduate instruction, first-year students in particular, teach all of the FYI courses and have designed their courses to inspire small group discussion and critical thinking.

The first year we offered these “linked” courses, one of the unexpected impacts we encountered was the students’ grade point average, which showed a statistically significant increase when compared to other FYC students. As time has passed, we have shown that not only are students performing better academically than those students who don’t participate in a link, they are also passing more hours, even into the sophomore year.

For the 2002-03 academic year eight FYI courses were selected for enrollment from a random selection of approximately 180 FYC students within the FYC Village (enrollment for each course is capped at twenty first-year students as is the case for all FYI course offerings). However, not only are these students living together in the FYC Village and taking one of these FYI courses, but they are also concurrently enrolled in the same required FYC course (USC 101A), Introduction to University Education. The faculty member teaching the FYI course and the advisor work together to find connective tissue between their course content, which oftentimes results in collaborative, and in some cases overlapping, classroom activities and graded assignments. Although all of the “linked” FYI courses meet a General Education Requirement needed for graduation, students are not required to participate in the link if that is their preference.

In addition to the benefit of having these courses together, all USC 101A courses and several of the FYI courses are taught on the ground floor of our new building in classrooms which are just downstairs from the FYC Adviser offices. Oftentimes, these linked courses are offered back-to-back in an effort to facilitate field trips or other group activities that one class period time allotment cannot afford.

One link in particular that has created a seamless learning environment is a long standing link: ENT 203Q (Introduction to Honey Bees and Beekeeping) with USC 101A (Introduction to University Education), which is delivered by two of the authors. From the very beginning, we made every effort to attend as many of each other's class sessions as our schedules would permit. Because we know that the first six weeks of school are the most critical for students and their making a connection to the university, we target this time period in particular to be present. We also know from Astin's work that "student-oriented faculty" directly impact undergraduate students' cognitive and affective development, as well their overall college experience (1996, 127-8).

An early and fun addition to our link was the introduction of a honey-tasting in the USC 101A class a week or two before the State Fair experience. The faculty member who teaches the ENT 203Q comes to the USC 101A class with a selection of honeys. The faculty member gives a mini lecture about the honey on hand and then invites all the students to sample the honey varieties on top of a warm biscuit. While the students are enjoying the honey and sharing which are their favorites, the instructor for the USC 101A class begins preparing for the rest of the class session.

In addition to being in name only, this link required students to work at the North Carolina State Fair at the beekeepers' educational booth working with a Master Beekeeper and answering questions about bees from the general public. The instructor for the ENT 203Q gave the students a ticket to the fair and the students were required to work a three-hour shift; they received credit in their USC 101A course for this service experience. As time and our expertise in managing the link has developed, the level of seamlessness has evolved. Astin cites studies about the value of cooperative learning: students working together in small groups on classroom-related material serving as teachers to one another are ultimately more involved in the learning process. (1996). With this in mind, we further developed our link by adding in joint student group presentations. For example, in the USC 101A class, students are exposed to the concept of learning styles and how this applies to them individually relative to success in their course work. Students in USC 101A also take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Personality Inventory as well as the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) for which each of them receives a personalized report. In an effort to link these two courses, we divide the students into small work groups and require two of the four groups to prepare a twenty-minute PowerPoint presentation comparing and contrasting human learning to honey bee learning. The remaining two groups have to determine what they believe to be the MBTI and SII codes for a queen bee, drone bee and worker bee. These presentations are always outstanding and are often accompanied by food samples, music or interactive classroom activities such as crossword puzzles, quizzes, and game show spin offs.

As local events occur, we have tried to tap into the resources our city offers. Several years ago, a local artist was being featured at a downtown art gallery. The artist's medium was beeswax, so we took a group of students downtown on a Friday night to see the exhibit. The students really enjoyed it.

Beginning next year, these two courses will be scheduled back-to-back in the same classroom for the first time and the faculty involved are excited about what that opportunity might present to further develop the strength of this link.

We know from Astin's work that the "strongest single source of influence on cognitive and affective development is the student's peer group"... [which] has "enormous potential for influencing virtually all aspects of the student's general educational and personal development" (1996, 126). Another unexpected and interesting outcome of the link is the strong sense of connectedness to one another. Since the beginning of the linked program, we have found that students have an extremely strong sense of community, so strong in fact that at times we have to "rein" them in for class. We suspected for several years, even before we were defined as a Village, that these students continued to live together on campus or elsewhere. As our partnership with Housing developed and qualitative reports from linked faculty members about their students' relationships with one another continued to be shared, we were prompted to develop a symbiotic mechanism for students in the Village to live together on campus in groups of eight or ten in some of the most coveted suite-style halls on campus. This process is now affectionately known as the "Suite Deal." The first year we offered this opportunity to students, we had forty students take us up on the offer. The following two years, we had 144 students take us up on it. In February 2008, we had 301 FYC students return to campus residence halls and 160 of them utilized the suite deal.

Hurdles

- Educating FYI faculty about FYC: In the early years, we learned that not every FYI faculty member knows and understands FYC's purpose. As a result, we now host annual pre- and post –summer linked faculty meetings (April/May and August respectively) to communicate what FYC is doing, how the links fit into the process and what assessment we've done to date.
- Not all FYI faculty should teach first-year students: We learned that not only do some faculty not understand FYC's purpose, but they also don't understand first-year students and therefore shouldn't be teaching team. Through our partnership with the FYI program, we have solicited recommendations from the adviser teaching staff for potential "link" faculty for the FYI staff to target in future years based on their interactions with students or their personal observations.
- Communication: In the early years, some FYI faculty were assigned a link but that had not been communicated to them until FYC contacted them about the partnership, so this created some anxiety on the part of the faculty member. Although we didn't have any "turn us down" not all bought into what we were trying to accomplish in the link. The communication process is now much better and has eliminated this hurdle.

- **Evolving Expectations:** As the program has grown and changed, so have the expectations for the link. Initially, the links were just in name only and when we stumbled upon the unexpected outcome of increased student GPA and credit hours passed, we wanted to make sure our link was more than a group of students taking two classes together and living together. Therefore, our minimum expectation is that the FYI faculty member and the FYC instructor meet to exchange contact information and discuss ways for the two courses to overlap material. We also ask that the two courses are identified as “linked” courses in one another’s syllabus. We have past and continuing FYI faculty and FYC instructors share ways in which they have “linked” their courses at our bi-annual meetings.
- **Changing Faculty:** We have had three faculty members that have been linked FYI faculty partners since the program’s inception. We have an additional three that have been with the linked program for at least three years. The remainder of the FYI linked faculty have rotated in and out or are completely new to the program each year. This presents a communication and information challenge that is often resolved through our bi-annual meetings, one-on-one adviser contact, and e-mail communications to the program administrators.
- **Funding:** Some of the ways in which the links create seamless learning cost money. Thanks to our partnership with University Housing and our common goal to have students connect with faculty outside the classroom, we have developed a funding request process for FYI linked faculty or FYC advisers to request funds for field trips, meals together, or other group projects.
- **Time:** As with anything worthwhile, creating a well-developed link takes time. Initially, there are perhaps some extra meetings and creative syllabus-reworking, but ultimately this initial input is worth it. We have some FYI/FYC faculty/instructor links that are many years old, and those links just need a little tweak from time to time.
- **Availability of courses:** Although approximately forty FYI courses are offered each fall, right now, we are capped at ten links each fall, which captures about two hundred of our 550 on campus FYC residents. Total funding to offer more than forty FYI sections and thus increase our market share is a hope for the future. Our hope is that as the popularity of these linked courses increases and our assessment continues to prove their worth, we will be able to offer this opportunity to all of our FYC students living in the FYC Village.

How We’re Working Now

For the last several years, we have consistently had between nine and ten linked courses each fall enrolling between 180-200 First Year College Village residents. We continue to find that students who participate in the links post statistically significant grade point averages and pass more hours than those students who do not participate in a linked course.

Until fall 2007 when students living on campus were placed in the FYC Village, enrollment in these courses was guaranteed for the first 180-200 students respectively who signed up to live in the Village. Now that all of our on-campus students are placed in the Village, students are randomly assigned to linked courses.

University Housing and FYC Partnership

Partnerships between academic and student affairs are thought to be difficult to create and challenging to sustain which leaves us a long way from achieving the goal of a seamless learning environment. As Schroeder, Minor and Tarkow indicated, factors that inhibit effective collaboration include a general lack of understanding and appreciation for one another's unique roles, the organizational roles each serves, and different and competing assumptions about the nature of undergraduate learning. (1999, 61-62). In the early 1990s much of the "collaboration" focused on student affairs staff extending invitations to faculty to participate in specific programs with little to no student affairs involvement in the academic arena. Although these one-time events facilitated some student/faculty interaction, these were not true student affairs and academic affairs partnerships. As Bourassa and Kruger (2001, 10) indicate, writings such as *The Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994), *Reasonable Expectations* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1995) and *Principles of Good Practice* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997) prompted thinking about student learning, and the importance of collaboration evolved. The idea of establishing learning communities gained attention requiring universities to rethink student learning and establish academic and student affairs partnerships. Shapiro and Levine state that learning communities ". . . promote learning environments that unite the ways that students learn, within and outside the classroom, and they create a forum for the merging of the strengths, values, practices, knowledge, and expertise of all educators" (Shapiro and Levine, 1999, 115). In 2000 The Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Higher Education, NASPA and ACPA joined forces to conduct a national survey study of academic and student affairs collaborations. The results showed that learning was the most important reason for engaging in student affairs and academic affairs collaboration, and that cooperation, student affairs staff attitudes, common goals, and personalities made the most difference in ensuring successful collaborations. (Kezar 2001, 43-44). The most cited obstacles were lack of faculty and staff time, faculty disciplinary ties, faculty resistance, and lack of established goals. (Kezar 2001, 47). The focus on learning communities opened the door for a specific and comprehensive learning community known as living and learning communities, which joins together academic departments, academic courses and residence life. In 2000 North Carolina State full-heartedly embraced collaborating with academic affairs to establish living and learning communities that we term Villages.

University Housing and First Year College has had a long-standing working relationship. Although not an official living and learning community the way we define Villages today, since 1995 there have been champions within both departments charged with working together to develop programs that enhanced the experience of FYC students residing in University Housing. As the University Housing and First Year College relationship has grown, we have come to understand that partnership is more than friendly hallway hellos and a positive relationship when working on joint one-time projects. It is true that these are important ingredients in any working relationship, but our definition of partnership goes a bit deeper. In addition to a congenial, friendly atmosphere, we have found that an effective partnership includes a spirit of collaboration, respect for each organization's

primary mission, education of colleagues about the partnering organization and the promotion of the importance and benefit of collaboration and each individual's personal role in cultivating the partnership. It is equally important that both parties share resources and that a structure is in place to ensure regular communication and time devoted to creating and implementing Village plans, and the belief that both parties will mutually benefit from the arrangement. In the end, both partners must believe that they are stronger and can accomplish more by working together than separate.

With the joint University Housing and First Year College financial investment of constructing the FYC Commons, the merging of the First Year College and Village mission statements, goals and assessment plans, and FYC requiring their students living on campus to reside in the Village, University Housing and First Year College are joined at the hip for the foreseeable future. This union requires that we not only be able to roll up our sleeves and join together to produce a one-time quality event, but also that our partnership sustains itself over the long haul. When asked at presentations how FYC “gets around Housing,” one of the FYC Village leaders simply states that there is no need to “get around Housing,” but rather FYC and University Housing lock arms and skip toward our mutual goals together. Although this accurately describes the current relationship, it has been a process in getting there.

As Adrianna Kezar underscored in *Documenting the Landscape: Results of a National Study on Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration* (2001, 44), it can be extremely beneficial when the “right personalities” come together at the right time—people who believe in the benefit of living and learning communities, envision the possibilities, embrace the partnership, have a spirit of cooperation, enthusiastically commit to fully developing the Village, and are supported by departmental leadership. We were lucky in that we had a couple of people serving as champions of the living and learning community and partnership efforts; initially, this sentiment was not felt by all. University Housing and First Year College had to work through the trial and tribulations of relationship building.

In the early days the FYC Adviser who served as the University Housing liaison as her collateral assignment and the University Housing Assistant Director responsible for the buildings that housed the FYC, worked together to develop programs to enhance the living and learning community. Most of the partnership focused on their working relationship and endeavors. There wasn't much of a relationship to speak of between the rest of the FYC Advisers and University Housing. Any interactions that occurred usually focused on the landlord/lease arrangement rather than program collaboration possibilities.

Although neither staff initially fully embraced the partnership, with the encouragement of the University Housing Task Force on Living and Learning Report and the Boyer Center Report, the University Housing and FYC leadership agreed that the appropriate next step in the FYC living and learning community evolution was to formalize their partnership and become an official Village through developing a FYC Village Mission Statement, setting goals, creating a FYC Village assessment plan and establishing a FYC Village Advisory Council to serve as a steering committee.

Another important expectation of one another as partners is sharing resources. Our available resources may look a bit different, but overall there needs to be an equal contribution of the time, space and funding resources needed to accomplish Village goals. University Housing is receipt-based funding, and therefore, has more flexibility to purchase items such as food and event tickets for student programs than First Year College, which is financed through state-appropriated funds. Although First Year College cannot purchase items that may be deemed as entertainment in nature, FYC has the ability to purchase tangible goods that benefit the Village such as bulletin boards and related die cut machines. University Housing has the staff talent of a full-time marketing coordinator that can assist with Village publications and marketing outreach, where as First Year College has a staff member extremely skilled at assessment. Both are integral to the success of the FYC Village. University Housing has the RA student staff that produces numerous informal evening outreach programs that enhance the classroom learning, and FYC has the direct link to faculty members who are key to the success of the FYC Village's Faculty Fellows program. The resources that each department brings to the table may look a bit different and be more appropriate for specific FYC Village initiatives, but for a successful partnership, when all is said and done, both partners need to feel that resources were contributed equally. The overall outcome of University Housing and First Year College becoming partners and sharing resources is that we are stronger and can accomplish more to serve students together than apart.

Hurdles

- **Staffing:** Predominantly the responsibility for the FYC living and learning community development fell on two shoulders. One FYC Adviser and the Assistant Director of Housing for the area that housed FYC were pretty much the only staff planning initiatives for the living and learning community. Other FYC Advisers and University Housing Staff were not particularly interested or involved in shaping the future of the FYC living and learning community.
- **Relationship Building:** University Housing staff felt like they were not valued within the partnership for their role as educators, but were seen predominantly as landlords to address facility concerns of the FYC Academic Advisers who held offices in converted residence hall rooms. The University Housing Central Campus Associate Director needed to attend to the landlord/leasee aspect of the relationship, but not let that be the primary focus. Once the University Housing Central Campus Associate Director and FYC Director expressed a sincere desire to further the partnership and started meeting more regularly, additional ideas for collaboration emerged.
- **Creating Structure:** Initially there was no road map to follow. The FYC living and learning community was void of a mission statement, goals, or assessment plan so there was nothing to reference when deciding upon initiatives or how to best utilize resources.
- **Staff Time:** Although everyone has the best of intentions to dedicate time and energy toward ensuring that the Village is moving forward, the devotion of staff time to propel the living and learning community initiatives forward was more likely to ebb and flow depending upon other time demands. The creation of the FYC Village Council provided the accountability structure to ensure that initiatives continued to move forward in a timely manner.

- **Obtaining Staff Buy-in:** When the FYC living and learning community became an official Village, some FYC Advisers viewed the Village endeavor as “taking over,” becoming too much of the FYC department’s primary focus at the expense of the more important matters of teaching and advising, and potentially creating more work for everyone. We worked to educate those within both organizations who were not as intimately involved in the Village about the proposed next steps in the Village and partnership evolution. This was accomplished formally through a presentation at staff meetings and through follow up conversations within each department where concerns were aired and proponents of the Village were able to paint a clearer picture of how the Village fit into the overall department, how it was anticipated that the Village would benefit students, and how we planned to make the Village vision a reality. The steps we took to bring both departments along in their thinking by more clearly defining the intended future of the Village, listening to and calming fears, and reinforcing the positive outcomes helped us gain staff support for future Village development.
- **Culture Change:** Slowly yet steadily, through continual conversation, developing personal relationships between Housing Staff and FYC Advisers mostly through informal hallway chats and serving on hiring committees together, experiencing periodic staff attrition and being intentional about some of the new hires having living and learning community exposure, the culture shifted.

How We Are Working Now

There is now a Village Mission Statement, established goals, an assessment plan, and a Village Advisory Council that meets regularly to steer the Village’s direction. The Village Advisory Council made up of staff from University Housing, First Year College, and students, meets for two hours bi-weekly to create action plans that move Village initiatives forward. The Advisory Council has divided into subcommittees that meet on the “off” weeks to work on specific projects centered on marketing, assessment, service learning, and leadership development. We have found that the Village Advisory Council structure helps keep us focused by ensuring that on a regular basis everyone involved is giving the needed time, attention and energy to continually develop the Village. The Village Advisory Council structure also encourages free-flowing ideas and creativity, provides a regular opportunity for open communication to address any partnership concerns, as well as an opportunity for all stakeholders to come around the table and have a voice in decisions. Today, overall, the FYC and Housing Staff are enthusiastic about the Village, acknowledge that the partnership is beneficial, see antidotally and through assessment that the Village is contributing to student success and are more apt to embrace initiatives that further develop the Village.

Faculty Fellows Program: Then and Now (And Some Intermediate Steps)

Shortly after the First Year College was implemented in the 1995-96 academic year, the decision was made to add a program for faculty interaction and that component was named the Faculty Fellows Program. This program was initiated in late 1996 and has undergone a number of changes since then. One important point to emphasize is

that since its creation the term “faculty” in Faculty Fellows has included faculty and staff at North Carolina State University.

The literature contains numerous references to the value of faculty-student interaction as a factor in increasing student persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) demonstrated a positive correlation between student and faculty interactions (particularly outside of the classroom) and student retention. These findings were supported and amplified by research done by Lundquist, Spalding, and Landrum (2002-2003), which identified specific faculty behaviors that contributed to student persistence such as faculty being generally supportive of student needs and being approachable.

The initial plan for the Faculty Fellows (FF) Program was a somewhat traditional system in which co-chairs, later a single chair, were selected from the senior faculty of the traditional colleges to direct the program. For the first two years, these co-chairs were provided a one-course buyout to help compensate for their time commitment to the FYC. The co-chairs with the assistance of the FYC Associate Directors then solicited faculty volunteers from all of the ten colleges that made up North Carolina State University. The program became fully active in early 1997 and had four main components:

1. Faculty involvement in USC 101A-102A class sections: All FYC freshmen attended a two-credit, two semester orientation course that met once a week and was taught by the students’ adviser. The decision was made to incorporate some of the Faculty Fellows into those classrooms as co-teachers.
2. Faculty involvement in Forum Events and other activities outside of the classroom for FYC students: All FYC freshmen were required to attend at least three Forum Events during their first and second semesters. The forums covered a wide range of activities from educational to cultural to public service and were outside of and in addition to the USC class periods. Faculty Fellows were invited to attend some of the forum activities with the students and encouraged to socialize with those students just prior to or after the event.
3. Faculty involvement in serving as major or professional resources: The primary purpose of the FYC is to assist students in their selection of and movement into a major course of study and career. To that end, Faculty Fellows were encouraged to identify themselves as resources that would be willing to talk to interested students about the faculty member’s profession and major area of interest.
4. Night Owls: This was a project that actually pre-dated the FYC and was initiated by the First-Year Experience Program in 1993-1995. The purpose of the program was to involve faculty and staff in activities during finals week at the end of each semester that would show the students that there were individuals who were willing to reach out to the students during those “stressful” times. The program was fully embraced by the Faculty Fellows and the First Year College staff, and beginning in fall 1997 activities were planned and conducted on behalf of the students. The primary emphasis was on a cooperative endeavor with University Dining in which the University’s largest dining hall was opened for a late night meal for students for four nights during final exams. The students did have to pay for those “stress-relieving” meals, but faculty and staff volunteers manned the serving lines in the dining hall and some sort of an activity was also conducted such as demonstrations

of a robot by the engineering department, a golfing green provided by the physical education department., and an insect café by the entomology department.

Hurdles and Mid-Course Changes

By the 2000-2001 academic year, the decision was made that changes were needed to the Faculty Fellows Program. The Program did have some successes, but in general it was not living up to expectations based on input from the students and the Faculty Fellow volunteers. Some of the problems associated with the program were that the previous chairs of the FF had retired or transitioned to other positions that eliminated them for consideration in the program, the rewards culture for promotion and tenure at North Carolina State did not fully recognize the contributions made by the FF volunteers to student success, and problems/considerations related to each of the initial four components of the FF Program. Problems and considerations with each of the original four components included the following:

1. Faculty involvement in USC 101A-102A sections: There were some successes with this effort, but in general there were more problems than successes. The primary problem was the difficulty in coordinating a meaningful involvement of the FF volunteer in the classroom. Most of the FF volunteers did have teaching responsibilities in their own disciplines, but those teaching activities were usually very different from teaching or co-teaching in a freshmen orientation class made up of undecided students. Overall this could be described as a good idea in “theory” that didn’t really work in practice.
2. Faculty involvement in Forum Events: Unfortunately we ran into some problems with this effort from the inception. During the first semester that we involved FF members with forums, we experienced situations where students would initially sign up to attend a forum activity and then change their plans and decide not to attend. In several cases, the FF volunteer was the only person at a Forum Event representing the FYC. Word of those situations soon became widespread and the volunteers for this effort became very few. On the other hand, we did have a number of very successful joint activities by faculty and students, but it was the negatives that became best known.
3. Faculty involvement serving as major or professional resources: Over time this endeavor actually morphed into a much more effective system for our students, at least from the resource or informational standpoint. The downside was that we did lose some of the student-faculty contacts. The change was based on the organization of the FYC which identified specific FYC advisers to serve in the role of liaisons with each of the colleges at North Carolina State, as well as the minor programs and specialized programs such as ROTC. These FYC advisers became resources to the entire FYC staff and students and streamlined the process of sharing specific information about the various programs. Sometimes efficiency in one area reduces the value of an existing activity, and so the FYC advisers tended to replace the faculty volunteers who were resources for their colleges or disciplines. However, it is important to note that each of the FYC advisers who is assigned a college of responsibility does have an identified list of faculty and staff resources in those colleges.

4. Night Owls: This is one FF program which became so successful that it transformed into a University-wide activity. From its earliest stages, the Night Owls program attracted participants from all over the North Carolina State campus. In addition to the types of academic units previously mentioned, we also had involvement from the campus police, the counseling center, Student Affairs, and coaches from the athletic department. Student support can be demonstrated by the average number of over five hundred students who came to a late night (9:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m.) meal on each of the FF hosted sessions. Thus the decision was made in 2005 to transfer the coordination of Night Owls to Student Affairs, but the FYCV and its volunteers still host the Insect Café as one of the regular activities during each semester's final exam period.

New Developments and How Are We Working Now

After working with our initial set of Faculty Fellow activities, we decided to concentrate on our own strengths in the First Year College Village and at North Carolina State. In addition, we have incorporated a strong and ongoing assessment process in our activities. We now have a variety of Faculty Fellows activities in place with the emphasis of involving our students with faculty outside of the classroom.

Involvement of Faculty from Our Linked Courses Program. Elsewhere in this article there is a description of our Linked Courses Program. The instructors for these courses come from all over campus and some of them were involved in our original FF endeavors. Each year we have ten or so faculty involved in teaching the linked courses, so the decision was made to move those faculty into the FF Program. This has taken a variety of forms and includes such activities as a FF member and a FYC adviser and their students going to a shopping mall and examining how the merchandise in toy stores reinforces some of the stereotypes about gender differences in children, or taking a group of students to a church to hear examples of ethnic music, or going with a group of students to a setting where the students are actually encouraged to safely handle a swarm of approximately twelve thousand honey bees. Other activities include inviting the faculty instructors from the linked courses to participate in selected FYC activities such as a ping-pong tournament, a dinner and political discussion, an end-of-year FYC Village Banquet, or a Theater and Dinner on The Town.

Recruiting New Faculty Fellows Members. The First Year College has been very fortunate in that a number of faculty have maintained their involvement with the FYC and the Faculty Fellows activities over time, but still new blood must be recruited. To that end, the FYCV Director and Associate Director attend the annual university training session for all new faculty and recruit them into the FF Program. The key to the success of this effort is that a specified and limited time commitment is used in recruiting the new FF members. One of the specific areas of recruitment is to involve the faculty in two or three meetings during a semester with the students that involves a meal. The RMs coordinate this activity and match the faculty member's availability with that of a small group of students. The topic(s) of the dinner discussion may be almost anything with the exception of talking exclusively about the instructor's course.

These new FF volunteers are also invited to specific FYCV activities such as the FYC Village Banquet and the Theater and a Dinner on The Town.

Pizza and a Prof. Our newest FF initiative is entitled Pizza and a Prof. Newly-recruited and current FF's present a program on a topic of his or her choice, most often within his/her area of intellectual expertise coupled with a pizza. We advertised this event as Pizza and Prof on our Forum calendar with the topic to be addressed. These forums were fairly well-attended (between five and fourteen students) and ranged from major topic areas in Communication, History, Nutrition and Feed Science among others. These events were hosted in the FYC Commons.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Faculty Fellows Program. We are developing several quantitative and qualitative methods for assessing the effectiveness of the Faculty Fellows Program. One such program is the First Year College's SES, which compares student involvement and satisfaction based on several variables, one of which is the Faculty Fellows Program. This is an ongoing effort, and we fully expect our FF activities to continue to change over time. We also plan to assess the impact of our Faculty Fellows involvement on student persistence at the University. At the present time we retain 89-90 percent of our FYC students at the end of the first year. It is difficult to track any changes in such numbers, but we are looking at more discrete quantitative tools as well as additional qualitative tools to evaluate the effectiveness of our Faculty Fellows Program.

Assessment: Then and Now – A Transitional Approach

Assessment was an important feature of the First Year College (FYC) when it was implemented in 1995, and it is an integral part of the current First Year College Village (FYCV). In fact the decision to move into a Village format and then to move the entire student body of the FYC into the FYCV was based on assessment results.

Assessment is one of those terms that is often misunderstood and misused. A working definition of assessment that we use is that it is the collection of data on student learning and development and the use of that information to improve the processes/activities that contribute to that learning and development. Our emphasis has been on collecting “formative” assessment data that we can use to improve our programs as opposed to collecting “summative” assessment data, which is often used to evaluate the advisers or instructors that are delivering the programs to our students. However, it is important to note that we do collect some summative assessment data through semester-end course evaluations and adviser evaluations that are considered during end-of-year personnel evaluations.

Assessment Then – Early Years of FYC

The FYC at North Carolina State University was developed as an entry point for undecided students. Prior to that development in 1995 almost all of the entering freshmen were required to be accepted into one of the different colleges. Some of the consequences of that process were the impacts on student retention and time to graduation since many of the students who directly entered a college would later

decide that they should move into another major or even another college. So the initial assessment package for FYC emphasized the comparisons between FYC students (about 20 percent of the entering freshmen class) and those students who entered directly into a major. To allow for differences in students entering academic profiles, the comparisons were adjusted for high school GPAs, which seems to be one of our best entry indicators for at least our students' first-year success at North Carolina State.

The initial results were a little confusing. The FYC students seemed to have retention and time to graduation rates that were similar to the students in our matched cohort student group. It was encouraging that our students were not being delayed in their time to graduation by starting in the FYC, but we were losing as many FYC students as were being lost in the matched cohort group. It was at this point that the real assessment began to work. The decision was made to more carefully analyze the two findings.

A closer look at the time to graduation indicated another difference between our FYC students and the matched cohort. The FYC students were less likely to change their major after making the initial move into a major from FYC than were the students who had directly entered a major. The students in the matched cohort were more likely to have multiple major changes before graduation.

The question of student retention really involved two different situations including student suspensions and voluntary student withdrawal. Initially, the FYC consisted of two different student groups. There were first choice FYC students who selected the program because they (or their parents) realized they were undecided students who would benefit from the support of the FYC, and there were second choice FYC students who entered the FYC because they were turned down by their first choice of colleges, but they still wanted to enter North Carolina State and switch into that initial college choice. The first choice students were much more open to the benefits of the FYC and also tended to function at a higher academic level than the second choice students. When we compared only our first choice FYC students to the matched student cohort our retention rates improved significantly.

Our findings from those early assessment results were used for several purposes. One was to demonstrate to the other colleges that the FYC was a good investment, and it was a good source of students who would transfer into their majors and do well academically. Another use was that FYC put its efforts into filling its freshmen classes with first choice students who were really undecided about their choice of a college major and future career. It also became very clear that we should compare our FYC students against cohort groups and not the entire university undergraduate student population. The cohort group allowed for academic profile matching, but just as importantly we could match for gender, minority students, first-generation students, and students from rural areas.

Assessment – Middle Years of FYC

As FYC matured so did its assessment processes. Assessment tools included university-wide surveys that identified FYC students, focus groups, national

instruments such as the ACT Advising Instrument, and the incorporation of assessment questions into test questions of the final exam that was given to all FYC students in their USC 101A course. In addition we continued to utilize institutional data and analysis to assess our program and student success at North Carolina State.

One of the changes that we made at that time in the operation of the FYC program is an example of using assessment data to improve student learning and development. During the early years of FYC there was a tendency by some advisers to allow students to enroll in only twelve as opposed to fifteen credit hours. This was based on the assumption that the reduced course load might help ease the student's transition into the university environment. In 2000 and 2001 we began to assess that practice and the results were very interesting.

In comparing first semester students with twelve credit hours versus fifteen credit hours we found that the students with the heavier course load did better academically. It is important to note that we did correct for the student's expected academic performance in this study. Students with twelve hours were more likely to be on academic warning and less likely to be on the dean's list than were students with fifteen credit hours. One explanation for these findings might be that the students with the heavier course load "bought into" the university environment more quickly than those students with a lighter course load. Based on those findings the FYC moved on to a policy whereby all of our students were expected to register for at least fifteen credit hours.

Assessment—Moving from FYC to FYCV

In recent years we have had the opportunity to test several programs and assess their value to our students. One of those is the Linked Course Program. In this program a section of USC students are also enrolled as a group in a General Education course that is taught as a First Year Inquiry Course on an inquiry-model of teaching. All of the FYC students in the test group were also assigned to live in the University Housing residence halls for FYC students. The criteria for the linked courses changed over time, but they included a cohort of students enrolled in two courses and interaction between the FYC adviser teaching the USC course and the instructor of the General Education Course.

Over the last five years, the results have consistently shown that the students in the linked courses earned a higher overall semester GPA and completed more credit hours than a control group of FYC students. The students in the control group were also FYC students and they also took a General Education Course that was taught as a FYI Course, but the courses were not linked. The students in the linked courses earned a GPA that was .3 higher on a 4.0 scale than the control students and completed .5 additional credit hours based on a typical fifteen credit hour semester. These differences are significant and the differences tend to outlast the first semester of the students progress at the University.

A SES was also developed during this time to look at some of the developmental changes of the students. The FYC students were all asked to complete a questionnaire and the students were then divided into groupings depending on various factors. One of the most significant groupings was whether the FYC students were living in the FYC Village or not. Students in the Village tended to demonstrate some of the following characteristics: they were more likely to be engaged with faculty outside of the classroom, they were less likely to go home on weekends, they were more likely to utilize various university resources, and they were more likely to continue living together with groups of FYC students after they matriculated into a major.

Based on the assessment results from the Linked Course Project, this further solidified the decision to move to the FYC Village. Coupled with the data from the SES and the recommendation from the Boyer Center Report, the decision was made to require that all of our on-campus first-year students live in the FYCV beginning fall 2007. We are currently assessing this latest change.

An indication of the value of assessment to North Carolina State is that this past year, the FYCV received the Village of the Year Award and we were the first recipient of this now on-going award. According to the awards committee, it was the FYCV assessment program that made the difference. The FYCV has an Assistant Director with ongoing responsibility for assessment who leads our Village Advisory Council Assessment subcommittee, and this effort is supported by assessment offices in Student Affairs and the Division of Undergraduate Programs.

Conclusion

A few concluding words of wisdom we would share with anyone considering starting a Village include:

- Interpersonal dynamics are important. Feed off of the energy of the individual champions of the living and learning community and use that to build Village enthusiasm within both organizations. Focus on relationship-building between all staff within the partnering units, not just those key individuals leading the Village charge.
- As plans for the Village evolve, be sure to take the time to educate everyone in both partnering units about the future direction and their role in supporting the new initiatives and direction. Staff is more apt to support or contribute to an endeavor they understand and are kept informed about.
- With staff attrition, hire staff that understands the value of the living and learning community and will contribute to its success.
- Create a Village Council that meets regularly to serve as a steering committee for the Village. This provides the needed structure for planning, communication and accountability.
- Spend a majority of your time the first year creating a solid foundation such as writing a mission statement, setting common goals, creating an assessment plan, and developing marketing materials.
- Work to create cohesion between the Resident Mentor and Resident Advisor staff through role clarification, continual communication, and including both in as many joint

activities as possible from beginning-of-the-year staff retreats to continual teambuilding activities to attending staff meetings, and attendance at end-of-the-year celebrations.

- Work to obtain student representation on your Village Council. The student's voice is invaluable, plus student representatives can obtain the needed peer buy-in for initiatives just by endorsing the project and promoting it to fellow students.
- Provide each Village student leadership group including Hall Councils, Resident Advisors, and Resident Mentors with specific roles in accomplishing the Village mission. This cultivates Village ownership and investment and threads the Village mission through the entire community. With this level of involvement, student leaders are able to articulate and explain the Village mission to current Village participants as well as promote the Village to perspective participants.
- Strive to contribute resources equally. The resources contributed can be different but at the end of the day, the overall contribution of both partners needs to be equal.
- Prove your success and worth through continual assessment. With information that proves your Village's success, you have the clout to expand your program (and possibly even build your own building) more quickly. When changes are made, make sure they're made based on assessment data and not on whim.
- Generate enthusiasm about the Village by reporting successes through departmental reports, division and campus newsletters, University Admissions presentations, and national conference presentations.
- Partner with other campus constituents and campus Villages to move your Village initiatives. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience right in your midst that you can capitalize upon.
- We have found that the more intentional you can be when you "link" courses together, the better the outcome not only for the students but also for the instructors.
- Consider inviting outside experts to help evaluate your program from an outsider's perspective. Past reviewers for us, on separate occasions, have been John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot from the National Resource Center on First-Year Students and Students in Transition, The Boyer Center, and Bill Zeller, Assistant Vice Chancellor-Student Housing at University of California, Irvine.

Our Village is stronger today than it was five years ago, but we are still evolving. Possible future directions include strengthening the tie between Resident Advisor programming and the core Village mission, expanding our one-time offerings of a Leadership Potential Retreat and Service Learning Opportunity into the base for two new FYC Course offerings, continuing to develop our Faculty Fellows program and determining new initiatives that connect students with faculty, collaborating in new ways so that we are utilizing all available information to intervene in a timely manner to assist struggling Village students. As we look to the future and roll up our sleeves to tackle our next goals, the one thing that First Year College and University Housing know is that neither would like to go it alone. We are grateful that we have one another. We are very aware that we are stronger and can accomplish more together than separately.

References

- Astin, A. 1996. Involvement in learning revisited: Lessons we have learned. *Journal of College Student Development* 37 (March/April): 123-133.
- Bourassa, D. M., and K. Kruger. 2001. The national dialogue on academic and student affairs collaboration: Understanding the role of academic and student affairs collaboration in creating a successful learning environment. *New Directions for Higher Education* 116:9-17.
- Crissman Ishler, J. L., and M. L. Upcraft. 2005. The keys to first-year student persistence. In *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*, eds. M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, and B. O. Barefoot. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 27-46.
- Elkins, B., and B. McDonald. 2005. BPAP site visit observations final report. On file, First Year College North Carolina State University.
- Ender, S. C., and F. B. Newton. 2000. *Students helping students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Henscheid, J. M. 2004. First-year seminars in learning communities: Two reforms intersect. *Integrating the first-year experience: The role of first-year seminars in learning communities*, 1-4.
- Kezar, A. 2001. Documenting the landscape: Results of a national study on academic and student affairs collaborations. *New Directions for Higher Education* 116:39-51.
- Lundquist, C., R. J. Spalding, and R. E. Landrum. 2002-2003. College students' thoughts about leaving the university: The impact of faculty attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of College Student Retention* 4 (2): 123-134.
- Pascarella, E. T., and P. T. Terenzini. 1991. *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schroeder, C. C., and J. C. Hurst. 1996. Designing learning environments that integrate curricular and co-curricular experiences. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37:174-181.
- Schroeder, C. C., F. D. Minor, and T. A. Tarkow. 1999. Learning communities: Partnerships between academic and student affairs. In *Learning communities: New structures, new partnerships for learning*, ed. J. H. Levine. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition 26:59-69.
- Shapiro, N. S., and J. H. Levine. 1999. *Creating learning communities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Swing, R. L. 2004. The improved learning outcomes of linked versus stand-alone first-year seminars. *Integrating the First-Year Experience: The Role of First-Year Seminars in Learning Communities*, 9-15.

Author Information

Dr. Ambrose received his bachelor's degree from George Mason University in biology, his master's and Ph.D. from Cornell in entomology. Dr. Ambrose has been at North Carolina State University since 1975.

Karen Hauschild received her bachelor's degree in speech communication from Radford University and her master's in education from Appalachian State University. She has been with North Carolina State University since 2000.

Kathleen Ruppe received her bachelor's degree in business from the University of San Francisco and her master's in education from Texas Tech University. She has been with North Carolina State University since 2003.

John T. Ambrose
Associate Dean, Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs and Alumni
Distinguished Undergraduate Professor/Entomology, North Carolina State University
CB # 7105
Raleigh, NC 27695-7105
E-mail: john_ambrose@ncsu.edu
Telephone: 919-515-4415
Fax: 919-515-4416

Karen B. Hauschild
Associate Director, First Year College
Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs, North Carolina State University
CB # 7925
Raleigh, NC 27695-7925
E-mail: karen_hauschild@ncsu.edu
Telephone: 919-515-8266
Fax: 919-515-8267

Kathleen Ruppe
Associate Director for Central Campus, University Housing
Division of Student Affairs, North Carolina State University
CB # 7315
Raleigh, NC 27695-7315
E-mail: kathleen_ruppe@ncsu.edu
Telephone: 919-515-3078
Fax: 919-513-4789