

## Ethnic Community Centers Retain Students, Contribute to Development

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Stanford University's commitment to affirmative action is reflected in an undergraduate population that includes nearly 50% students of color. As one of the most racially and ethnically diverse universities in the country, Stanford is in a unique position to address issues of diversity and commit to affirmative action. Many factors contribute to Stanford's ability to recruit and retain these students. Four distinct ethnic community centers—the Asian American Activities Center (A3C), the Black Community Services Center (BSCS), El Centro Chicano, and the Native American Cultural Center—play a critical role in meeting this challenge. In contrast to the model of a single multicultural center, distinct centers that focus on particular ethnicities enable Stanford to support the specific needs of these students while simultaneously providing opportunities for all students to explore issues of diversity.

Although the centers have a common goal of helping students succeed academically and contributing to effective multicultural education and leadership development on campus, each center has a distinct mission statement, is funded separately, and determines its own priorities and allocation of resources. Staffing levels vary from two to three full-time professional employees. This model allows each center to address the complexities within these communities in a manner that may not be possible with the more limited resources and staffing of a single multicultural center.

Each center conducts its own needs assessments to determine its priorities for programming and resource allocation. An example of the distinct programming that occurs is the Native American Cultural Center summer immersion program. Newly admitted Native students participate in a week-long program with the goal of acclimating those whose educational experience may have taken place on a reservation or a setting much different

from the Stanford campus. Such a program, while critical to the success of many Native students, is not offered by the other centers.

In addition to the programming tailored to the individual communities, each center contributes to the academic mission of the University by collaborating with faculty and departments in the development of new curricular offerings, sponsoring speakers and programs open to the entire campus, and connecting students with research opportunities. Examples include the A3C's collaboration with faculty and students on a program to explore the parallels between and the constitutional issues arising from the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII and the present day detention of Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans and the BCSC's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration featuring such notable speakers as Johnetta Cole, the first African American woman to serve as president of Spelman College and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson.

The ethnic community centers also play a pivotal role in supporting the development of students and community organizations. They are hubs of advising, mentoring, and support for students and student organizations. The centers advise and support more than 100 graduate and undergraduate voluntary student organizations such as the American Indian Student Engineering Society, the Asian American Theater Project founded by Broadway playwright and Stanford alumnus David Henry Hwang, the Black Student Union, and the Chicano Graduate Students Association. Each center also provides students with meeting, work and study space, and computer workstations. The centers facilitate communication through the publication of magazines, newsletters, event advertisers, and community resource guidebooks with distribution to the entire campus community and alumni.

The centers and their affiliated student organizations sponsor dozens of events each year. These events play a central role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and community among students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Events range from small group sessions with visiting scholars and artists to annual events like the Stanford Powwow, a three-day celebration of Native American culture, which draws more than 20,000 visitors to campus every May.

For many students of color, participation in community service is a continuation of life-long commitment and responsibility. Through community service programs based in the centers, students of diverse backgrounds give back to their communities. El Centro's Barrio Assistance Program is one such program providing weekly bilingual tutoring and mentoring to elementary students from the surrounding community.

Once students graduate, the centers play a critical role in keeping alumni engaged and in facilitating contact between alumni and current students. Alumni are involved in center-sponsored mentoring programs, speaker series, and career panels and as members of the centers' advisory boards. The centers are also a key source of support for the alumni of color organizations such as the Native American Alumni Association and the Stanford Chicano/Latino Alumni Association of Northern California.

In addition to their individual programming, the four ethnic community centers work collaboratively in identifying and addressing common issues and concerns and in building cross-cultural community at Stanford. Staff from all four centers meet on a weekly basis and are often joined by staff from other campus units and divisions seeking advice and collaboration on multicultural issues and programming. Center programs provide students with opportunities to work together across racial and ethnic backgrounds, thus infusing their academic and intellectual journey with the diversity of ideas and experiences necessary to their development as multiculturally competent individuals and leaders.

For example, the four centers collaborate to offer LEAD, *Leading Through Education*,

## Liberal Arts and Food:

## Making Connections With a Novel First-Year Experience

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*Activism, and Diversity*, a joint cross-cultural leadership development program for emerging leaders. LEAD was launched in 1999 in order to develop the cross-cultural leadership skills of first-year students and sophomores and, thus, facilitate the ability of students of color on campus to work collaboratively for social change.

LEAD is based on the social change model of leadership developed by Helen S. Astin and Alexander W. Astin of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. This model draws on a set of seven leadership development principles that guide a group of students while they participate in a social change project. These principles encompass personal, group, and community values such as consciousness of self, controversy with civility, and commitment. Six students from each center are selected to participate in a two-quarter program culminating in the execution of a social change project. Past projects have included the successful advocacy for a new student staff position in the residence halls, the cultural awareness associate, who provides multicultural education and resources to residential students, including a one-quarter class exploring issues of race and ethnicity. LEAD has had a tremendous impact on the campus community. In addition to projects that have increased the level of discourse and exchange on issues of race and ethnicity, LEAD alumni have become Associated Students of Stanford University presidents, senators, and organizational leaders.

These are but a few brief examples illustrating the role of Stanford's ethnic community centers. With the relatively small number of faculty of color and limited ethnic studies courses, the centers have become a pivotal focal point for multicultural education on campus.

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Randolph-Macon Woman's College (R-MWC), a small liberal arts college, takes a strong stance on introducing students to the value and promise of a liberal arts education soon after their arrival. At R-MWC, all first-year students are required to enroll in an interdisciplinary course that focuses on one major topic viewed from multiple academic perspectives. The course was intended to provide a venue for students to address academic and personal transition issues and to become familiar with college resources and opportunities. Moreover, it was designed to give students a firm grounding in the liberal arts.

As envisioned by faculty and staff, the 2004 Interdisciplinary Forum takes a daily necessity, *food*, and examines it through the perspectives of various fields of academic study. Each week students meet for lectures with faculty from a broad representation of subjects within the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences (e.g., economics, political science, communications, chemistry, psychology, and history).

Every lecture investigates food and its meaning according to the discipline of that week. Lectures range from the ethics of genetically engineered foods (environmental science) to body image (psychology) to the politics of famine (political science). As stated in the course description, the Interdisciplinary Forum is designed "to deepen student awareness of the significance and complexity of food, a vital but often taken-for-granted part of their daily lives." Food, the overarching course topic, remains unchanged for two years and then a new topic will be explored in the fall of 2006. Proposed topics in the future include war, fashion, and marriage.

In addition to weekly large group lectures, students divide into smaller groups of 15-17 students and engage in active discussions about the topic of the week. Each week,

students read articles about the topic assigned and then meet with a staff member who serves as a discussion leader. The staff members are directors and deans throughout the college (e.g., staff in career counseling, international programs, and student affairs) who serve as another connection to available resources and support for new students. First-year students learn the names and faces of people with whom they will be working with for the next four years. Students are also required to complete a community service project, *Gleaning for Apples*, in order to connect classroom activities focusing on food with a real-world application. Student "gleaners" visited a local orchard and harvested apples in the early fall.

A summative evaluation was conducted to determine the value and utility of the Forum and establish the degree of congruency between stated course goals and outcomes. Key results are as follows:

- More than three fourths of students felt that the course was either completely or somewhat successful in illustrating the value of a liberal arts education.
- Almost two thirds of students considered the class completely or somewhat successful in providing a forum for the discussion of topics related to being a student at R-MWC.
- More than one half of student respondents thought the course was completely or somewhat successful in making connections across academic disciplines.
- More than one half of participants regarded the course as completely or somewhat successful in making them familiar with college resources and opportunities.
- More than one third of respondents felt that the course was completely successful in reflecting the position that exposure to different academic disciplines helps expand one's world.



Students were also given a chance to comment on several open-ended questions. One student maintained, “I think it [the Interdisciplinary Forum] was really great and should continue to be a required first-year class. It was very helpful for transitioning into the way college works.” Another student mentioned, “This is fine as a course because food is a universal thing and can be discussed from many perspectives.”

Focus group interviews were conducted with 11 students to reveal deeper meanings behind the survey findings. One student remarked, “Before I came here I didn’t know what the difference was between a liberal arts college and a regular institution. When I tell them [friends at other schools] about a liberal arts education, they don’t understand what the difference is. But now, I understand better and I can inform them.” Students also appreciated the ability of the course to provide connections to members of various departments. As one student claimed, “That was probably the best perk of the course...hearing the different professors give their speeches and think, ‘That’s the kind of guy I want to take a class from.’” A different student noted, “I liked [studying] the topic of food. I didn’t think I would, but now I see the connections.”

It is important for first-year students to have a common experience that binds them together as a class, while individually setting them on the path to academic and interpersonal success. The Interdisciplinary Forum at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College provides new students with a semester-long opportunity to learn not only about the liberal arts, the College, and their peers but also about themselves.

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## Study Identifies Common Goals in Faculty Training

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A research study was conducted to identify the attributes of four first-year seminar (FYS) faculty development initiatives. A mixed study design was used that incorporated aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative research design examined the relationship between instructional strategies used and students’ acquisition of higher order thinking skills in the three-contact hour FYS based on first-year students’ responses to the First-Year Initiative (FYI) Assessment in 2001 and 2002. And a document analysis was performed on course syllabi to determine if faculty applied methods learned in training to course design. Qualitative case study design was used to study FYS faculty development initiatives and provide a thorough description of the training practices used at four institutions where students reported they learned higher order thinking skills needed to be successful in college. The design consisted of four single case studies and cross-case analysis.

Site selection was based on quantitative analysis and the results of a questionnaire developed by the researcher. Using the FYI databases, a correlational analysis revealed that out of 25 colleges and universities that offered three-contact hour FYS, 18 institutions demonstrated statistically significant relationships between the instructional techniques used by FYS faculty and first-year students’ acquisition of academic and critical thinking skills. In order to select the institutions needed for qualitative analysis, a questionnaire was sent to the directors of the FYS programs at 18 institutions. Ten questionnaires were returned and the four institutions selected for this study met most of the criteria listed below:

- The institution provided a FYS faculty development initiative.
- The institution required faculty to attend training.
- The institution provided follow-up training sessions.
- The institution evaluated their faculty development initiatives.
- The results of evaluation were used to enhance faculty development initiatives.

Based on the results of the correlational analysis, we knew there was a relationship between the instructional strategies used and student outcomes. Therefore, we believed there was also a link between what was presented in the training (i.e., teaching and learning strategies and methods of assessment) and FYS faculty choice of instructional strategies. The criteria are important because we wanted to make sure the FYS faculty development initiatives reflected what is recommended in research on faculty development.

The structure of the four FYS faculty development initiatives at each of the four institutions varied. For instance, initial FYS training ranged from two and half to five days. Follow-up training varied from six to 25 hours. Three out of four institutions formally evaluated their development initiatives and used the results to enhance the training.

Information about FYS faculty training was gathered via semi-structured interviews with 59 FYS faculty who self-selected to participate in the study, and with five directors and one assistant director of the faculty development initiatives. FYS course syllabi submitted by FYS instructors and materials that pertained specifically to the faculty development initiatives were analyzed.



This research study found a strong relationship between the goals of the training and the effect of participation in the FYS faculty development initiatives on the way these participants designed and taught their FYS. To illustrate, cross-case analysis revealed study participants identified six goals for the initial training:

*To provide participants with experiential-learning activities.* The premise behind incorporating experiential-learning activities is for FYS instructors to encounter the training in the same way their first-year students experience the FYS (i.e., learn the perspectives of a first-year student). FYS instructors were required to participate in community-building and learning experiences that students encounter with the idea that the instructors would use them in their seminars.

*To expose participants to the main components of FYS* by discussing the mission, the goals, and the objectives of the seminar. Study participants understood there were specific content areas and course requirements to be included in order for them to achieve the goals and objectives of the seminar. For instance, one goal was that first-year students would develop academic skills, which included writing, oral communication, and information literacy skills. Study participants varied their approaches: Some participants required their FYS students to write research papers, some required oral presentations, and some required group projects.

*To provide information about working with first-year students.* This included first-year students' demographic and academic information so FYS instructors would be cognizant of the students' strengths and weaknesses.

*To expose participants to teaching and learning strategies.* Participants were taught about learner-centered pedagogy that engaged students in the learning process. This included methods for

- encouraging student interaction
- facilitating discussions
- planning group activities
- implementing problem-based learning
- implementing cooperative learning

Study participants also learned about personality and interest inventories and learning-

style differences, so they could develop teaching approaches and activities that worked most effectively with their students. For instance, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was used to help FYS students become more aware of their learning preferences and the learning environments that worked best for them. The MBTI was also used to help students communicate more effectively with their professors and their peers. Learning style inventories helped FYS instructors and students develop better insight into the best conditions for learning and provided guidelines to adapt to learning environments that were not complimentary to their types. Interest inventories were used to help students identify careers that matched their profiles.

*To expose participants to both direct and indirect methods for assessing student learning,* such as Angelo and Cross' (1993) classroom assessment techniques. Participants were also taught how to assess oral communication, information literacy, group work, and critical thinking skills.

*To provide training participants with the opportunity to learn from each other* by having experienced FYS instructors present on various topics and serve on expert panels.

In addition to these goals, participants wanted more time to process the information presented in the training. They also wanted the opportunity to share and discuss ways to structure and improve their FYS.

Document analysis was also performed on course syllabi submitted by 93% of the study participants and revealed that participants applied what they learned in training to course design. For instance, the syllabi included learning outcomes that assist first-year students in the acquisition of academic and critical thinking skills needed for success in college and beyond. These included 178 lower-order cognitive learning outcomes of knowledge, comprehension, and application (i.e., to develop knowledge about the institution's community of learners, including traditions, history, student services, academic processes, resources, and people to help students make a successful transition to the institution); 188 higher-order learning outcomes of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (i.e., to use informal writing to deepen understanding of a subject and to use formal

writing to inform and persuade); and 101 affective learning outcomes (i.e., to kindle students' curiosity, openness to alternatives, and sensitivity to divergent views).

Further document analysis revealed that study participants also incorporated learning approaches to facilitate the development of academic and critical-thinking skills. One learning approach, cooperative learning (e.g., team work), which is a high active, high problem-based learning approach was used by study participants at all four institutions. All course syllabi also incorporated high active learning and low problem-based learning approaches such as discussions and presentations. None of the study participants recorded using primarily low active and low problem-based learning approaches such as lectures.

Document analysis also revealed that study participants used both direct and indirect methods of assessment and applied the results to improve their FYS. The most common direct method of assessment used by 100% of the study participants was attendance and participation. Given the active nature of the class, study participants indicated it was imperative their students were present and participated in the seminar. Other common direct assessment methods used included presentations, exams, papers, and group projects. Indirect methods of assessment used 100% of the time by study participants were course evaluations. Another indirect method, written reflections, were used 100% of the time by study participants at two institutions, and 88% of the time at one institution.

Positive correlation exists between the instructional techniques used by faculty and first-year students' beliefs about their acquisition of academic and critical-thinking skills. In addition, the qualitative analysis provides information about the strategies used in creating and implementing FYS faculty development initiatives. Faculty and staff effectively applied what they learned in the training to achieve the FYS goals.

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## Aiding Transfer Students Through the Transition Process

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The number of transfer students attending four-year institutions is increasing rapidly across the country, making this segment of the student population one that needs attention (Cuseo, 2003). According to Kuh (2004), transfer students are typically older, have spent one or two years in college already, may have additional family or work responsibilities, and are more mature and developed than many first-year students. In a pilot study of a small group of transfer students ( $n = 4$ ) at a large, four-year institution, transfer student development and the transition process were examined. In spite of the low response rate, the results are worth noting.

Transfer students in this study were asked about their experiences with the offices of orientation, financial aid, and university housing. These students, like many transfer students nationally, noted significant problems with at least one of these offices.

In orientation programming, special sections for transfer students were well received. For example, the students interviewed appreciated having a shorter orientation that focused specifically on the institution rather than success skills and college preparatory information. The transfer students in this study appreciated knowing more about the school, administration of specific services (i.e., registration, financial aid), and the academic resources for advising and career planning. By participating in a new-student seminar that focuses on the issues transfer students face, students in the study reported bonding with and enjoying a place to relate to other students who were in the same situation.

Financial aid can be confusing for any new student, and transfer students seem to struggle with it in many ways.

Transfer students are often applying and making decisions later in the year than traditional, first-year students would. As a result, they sometimes miss priority deadlines or special workshops for financial aid. Additionally, students who transfer from out of state struggle with applying for state-funded scholarships, and many students have difficulties transferring scholarships from one institution to another. Every student in this study mentioned missing deadlines, losing scholarships, or having a delay in receiving aid. Perhaps receiving institutions could make efforts to reach out to local community colleges early and provide financial aid information to potential transfer students. Making special efforts to quickly identify transfer students as they apply for admission, and proactively contacting them with pertinent information about financial aid might also be helpful. Updating web sites with information specific to transfer students might be another way to reach this population.

Transfer students are also often the last to be considered for on-campus housing (Cuseo, 2003). Of the students in this study, the majority were unable to get a room in a residence hall. Students who live on campus receive many benefits such as access to information, connection to the campus and other students, and additional academic resources. By denying transfer students these opportunities, their transition to college is more difficult. Institutions could consider holding a number of rooms for transfer students so that they would have the same opportunities as other new students. Campuses might also establish a transfer student resource center to provide these students with access to information about the campus and events that can help connect them to campus. Since many transfer students become

commuter students, having a resource center in or near the student union or close to dining facilities might give them a place to go between classes or during free time instead of going home.

Helping transfer students connect to the campus should be the priority for institutions receiving transfers. Organizations specifically for transfer students, such as the Tau Sigma Honor Society, help transfer students meet other students and celebrate their successful academic transition to a new institution. Additionally, creating transfer centers or meeting lounges where these students can relax and find important campus information would be another way to help students spend more time on and feel more a part of the campus.

Understanding that these students have unique needs is also important. Because these students often have more experience with college, more responsibilities, and a more mature outlook, creating programs and activities that reach their specific needs would be helpful in making the transition easier and keeping them connected to the institution.

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## Addressing Student-Athlete Issues in a First-Year Seminar

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Many faculty and staff have the erroneous idea that because students are athletes, they already have sufficient assistance in place making the transition to college unlike other students. Indeed, student-athletes have some advantages that include increased financial support and an immediate access to community and friendships. However, student-athletes also face competing demands on their time, cope with increased academic pressure, become part of the college and community beyond athletics, and deal with the positive and negative stereotypes associated with athletes. Their unique situation requires specific assistance

At large universities, specific programs may be in place to help student-athletes succeed academically. For example, the University of Iowa has implemented the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills Program to focus on the “total development” of student-athletes. The program has five parts: (a) academic excellence, (b) athletic excellence, (c) personal development, (d) service, and (e) career development. Smaller, private colleges, however, may have fewer programs specifically designed for the student-athlete. At McKendree College, first-year seminars with a large population of student-athletes have a slightly altered curriculum to deal with student-athlete issues. Although we have no quantitative data, we have anecdotal evidence the first-year seminar helped student-athletes’ transition to college.

At McKendree College, approximately 43% of incoming first-year students are athletes. Their incoming GPA is 3.45 with a 23 ACT score. Non-athlete students have slightly higher GPA and ACT scores (i.e., 3.61 and 24, respectively). During their subsequent college years, we have consistently found that the GPA of athletes is higher (even though their incoming GPA

is lower) than our non-athletes. However, they still need to use academic resources (e.g., the Writing Center, the Learning Center) to ensure that they are successful in the classroom. Our learning center works closely with the coaching staff by tracking the attendance and academic performance of our first-year athletes and those athletes who have already displayed at-risk behaviors. After receiving academic progress reports, coaches often require their athletes to take additional tutoring or attend mandatory study hall. We believe that many of the issues covered in traditional first-year seminars, e.g., time-management advice, are particularly useful for athletes who have to add training and competitions to their schedules. The same issues also impact students involved in music, theater, and other time-consuming extracurricular activities.

At McKendree College, we try to address student-athlete issues in a variety of ways. First, we administer a survey to a sample of Introduction to Psychology students (both athletes and non-athletes) to assess their transition needs. We find it useful to survey the student-athletes during their first year and then, in subsequent years, to evaluate their changing needs. Ongoing evaluation helps us learn how the institution can better support its athletes. The Director of Multicultural Programs presents evening workshops on the challenges of attending college and how to become a successful student-athlete at McKendree before New Student Orientation (NSO). The Student Affairs Division offers programs during NSO that support first-year student-athletes. This past year, all first-year student-athletes were required to participate in NSO. The coaching staff have altered their practice schedules so that their athletes have time to integrate into the campus community. The Career Services

Office provides information to the coaching staff each semester on campus interviewing, job fairs, and other upcoming events that would be beneficial for student-athletes. The Residence Life programs offer a variety of programs and workshops. For example, faculty members go to residence halls and assist students with registration or other college success issues (e.g., goal setting). Also, as a four-time winner of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics’ Champions of Character award, we emphasize respect, integrity, responsibility, servant leadership, and sportsmanship in our student-athletes. These programs are successful because of ongoing dialogue between student affairs, faculty, and the coaching staff.

With so much time and energy devoted to athletics, student-athletes have fewer opportunities to do community service or attend lectures, plays, and other cultural events. The National Consortium for Academics and Sports (NCAS, 2005) advocates that students be good citizens and that colleges should “keep the student in the student-athlete.” In our first-year seminar, we require all student-athletes to attend at least one campus event (e.g., lectures, plays, or other cultural events) and participate in at least two hours of community service. They complete a short reflection paper on their experiences. We have found that, after the initial required assignment, many student-athletes continue to participate in service and campus activities. The football coach has been especially proactive with this idea and his players attend a variety of theater and musical events.

Some student-athletes select the school for the sports programs, but the reality is that many student-athletes need to think about careers other than professional sports. According to the University of Iowa, the odds of making it to the pros are 1 in 5,000. At smaller colleges, becoming a professional athlete is an even longer shot. Academic advisors and career services professionals should emphasize to the student-athlete that the skills learned in their sport such as teamwork, leadership, persistence, and time-management can be highlighted on résumés when applying for jobs or graduate schools



(Noel-Levitz, 2005). Introducing issues of career interests early into first-year seminars allows student-athletes to find majors that match their interests and to start thinking about careers and internships early in their college career. A student-athlete's interest in sports can easily be transferred to careers such as sports medicine, sport management, physical education, sport psychology, journalism, statistics, or occupational and physical therapy.

Retention is particularly important for student-athletes if they are no longer involved in their athletics program due to injury, not making the team, or lack of interest in their sport. If first-year seminars help student-athletes feel involved in the campus community and assist them in finding an appropriate major and identifying possible careers, then the student-athlete will be more likely to continue his or her studies. The role of an academic advisor is also essential to the success and retention of a student-athlete (The National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics, 2005).

There is evidence that programs such as the NCAA Champs are successful. According to the NCAA report, "62% of all NCAA student-athletes who entered Division I colleges and universities in 1997 graduated...the overall student body was 60%." The University of Iowa with their extensive CHAMPS project states that

Over the years, these programming efforts have not only assisted graduating Iowa student-athletes ten percentage points or more above the general student body (at 75% the departments' graduation rates also place it among the leaders in the Big Ten Conference), but have also helped students become more responsible citizens and contributors to society, making the office's motto: "Today's Hawkeyes are tomorrow's Leaders" a reality.

This also holds true for athletes at McKendree. For example, the graduation rates for basketball and football are 90% and 71%, respectively. These rates are also higher than the overall graduation rate. Of course, it is difficult to establish cause and effect when it comes to student-athlete re-

tention and graduation rates. A variety of factors create the success of a student. We believe, however, that a first-year seminar can be one of the factors that contribute to the academic, athletic, social, and personal success of a student-athlete.

### Resources

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### Athlete Stereotypes

In many first-year seminars, stereotypes associated with race, class, and gender are discussed but not those associated with athletes. The "dumb jock" stereotype is still prevalent among students, faculty, and staff. To assess the perceptions of student-athletes, 104 students in an Introduction to Psychology class at McKendree College were given an anonymous survey during class time. This class consists primarily of first-year students and has an approximately equal number of men and women, athletes and non-athletes. They were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal) whether the following characteristics describe a typical athlete and a typical non-athlete on campus (Table 1). Specifically, the adjectives used come from a psychological prototype measurement developed by Gibbons, Gerrard, and Boney McCoy (1995).

Table 1  
*Response From 104 College Students on a Scale of 1 (Not at All) to 7 (a Great Deal)*

Perception	Athlete	Non-athlete	Paired sample t-test p value
Smart	4.72	5.63	.001
Independent	4.98	5.32	.050
Confused	2.90	2.95	.754
Immature	3.67	2.90	.001
Careless	3.61	2.94	.001
Considerate	4.31	5.69	.001
Self-Centered	4.32	2.77	.001
Popular	5.74	3.70	.001
Cool	4.96	4.33	.001
Self-confident	5.94	4.79	.001
Unattractive	2.59	3.54	.001
Dull	2.53	3.40	.001

The athlete was viewed as less smart, less independent, more immature, more careless, less considerate, more self-centered, but also more popular, cooler, more self-confident, more attractive, and less dull than the non-athlete. Although it is difficult to assess the true degree of these adjectives (e.g., cool) in athletes, based on GPA and graduation rates, it is not accurate to say that the non-athlete is smarter than the athlete. Certainly, this could be a good discussion topic: there are "cool" and "dull" athletes just as there are "cool" and "dull" non-athletes. Discussing these issues can clarify expectations and negate stigmas.



## Using Peer Mentors in Setting and Attaining Health Behavior Goals

**Nanette Tummers**

Assistant Professor of Health and Physical Education, Department of Health and Physical Education, Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic

One particular characteristic for many of our students is that their most significant relationships are with their peers rather than their parents. Because our students may derive a great deal of information from their classmates and friends, peer mentors may help students develop interpersonal communication skills and the ability to assess information critically. Peer mentoring is defined as an “effective, personalized relationship where peers support each other to take action toward specific goals” (Burk, 2002, p. 8). Peer mentors are traditionally upperclass students who work with first-year students. However, to build an effective relationship that is reciprocal, peer mentors can also be first-year students working with other first-years in the same class.

In the fall of 2003, Eastern Connecticut State University started a learning community—classes built around a common theme and a community of students and faculty—with a peer-mentoring component. The learning community consists of 25 first-year students enrolled in “Foundations of Health-Related Fitness” and “Introduction to Education.” In the 15-week, semester-long course “Foundations of Health-Related Fitness,” one class per week is devoted to peer mentoring. Each class session includes a short lecture and a peer-mentor activity regarding a health behavior change theme. Students are randomly assigned to be each other’s mentors. Weekly themes include:

- Getting to know my peer mentor and active listening
- Learning communication styles
- Setting personal behavior change goals with short- and long-term objectives
- Developing action steps
- Formulating cognitive and behavioral strategies to overcome barriers

- Setting up a reward system
- Creating focus and motivation toward the goal process

Students first assess their health lifestyles and then select a personal health behavior goal. Students are given time to meet in class but are encouraged to discuss their goals outside the class with their mentors, either in person, on the phone, or through e-mails. Using a peer-mentoring workbook with journal questions, reflective answers, and progress reports, students monitor their health behavior goals and the peer-mentoring experience. Monitoring their own progress on a weekly basis keeps students on task and accountable to their peers.

Sara and Justin were randomly assigned to be each other’s peer mentor. After completing a health lifestyle assessment, Sara chose to eat healthier and Justin chose to manage his time better. The peers then signed a health behavior contract, including an agreement of confidentiality, indicating their overall goal and their commitment to support each other toward this goal. The peers then helped each other formulate weekly objectives. (These objectives are specific and measurable activities, thus accountable.) Sara started by monitoring what, when, and where she ate for a week. After discussing what she learned with Justin, they decided she should increase her vegetable intake from almost zero to three servings per day. Her action steps were to purchase vegetables for snacks, prepare salads in advance, and make sure her freezer had vegetables for her evening meals. Reviewing the plan with Justin the following week, revealed that off-campus volleyball games made it difficult to fulfill her action steps. Sara and Justin were able to come up with more realistic action steps for the following week.

Sara’s health behavior goal was fairly straightforward: eat three servings of veg-



*Team-building activities.*

etables. Many health behavior goals are not specific, e.g., to get more sleep, to have less stress, or to communicate better with parents. Justin’s goal of better time management is common among first-year students, but formulating specific objectives can be difficult. By assessing how he spent time and discussing what he valued with Sara, Justin narrowed his time allotment to three areas: friends, grades, and health. His action steps included using a weekly calendar to schedule time for studying, workouts with a partner, and social time with his friends. He wrote to-do lists every evening for the following day.

Both Sara and Justin felt the process of setting specific objectives along with weekly action steps helped them achieve their goals. Boredom, lack of results, unrealistic goals, and apathy can interfere with making health behavior changes. But, by breaking goals down into small, manageable steps each week and discussing ways to improve with someone else, these goals are achievable. It is important to emphasize that this project is not about attaining a goal, e.g., lose 10 lbs. It is about achieving weekly objectives (e.g., eating smaller portions and walking 30 minutes per day) and brainstorming strategies with peers that contribute to overall health and influence behavior long after the project is over.

The reflective journals document the students’ experience. Some examples include:





- “Peer mentoring has allowed me to learn not to judge, but to just listen.”
- “The first week showed me that wellness is beyond physical. The second week opened my eyes to other’s views and not just my own.”
- “We laid down ground rules and really found out what we would be doing. I feel that it gave me the drive to get moving and focus on what I need to do.”
- “Our mentoring with each other seems like a gradual process in not only learning more about each other each time, but also learning more about ourselves, and accomplishing our goals.”
- “I was able to become friends with someone I might not have approached otherwise.”

Due to the personal nature of some student’s chosen health behavior goals (e.g., problem drinking), a climate of trust and respect is necessary for the peer mentoring process to be successful. Therefore, the health behavior contract includes the agreement of confidentiality.

Peer mentoring as a student-centered activity provides students with skills that can be applied far beyond the classroom. Developing mentoring skills can be effectively transferred to business situations, coaching, teaching and working with children, and other important relationships. Finally and most importantly, peer-mentoring offers the opportunity to build relationships that are vital to first-year students’ academic and personal success.

## References

Burk, E. (2002). *College student’s guide to peer wellness mentoring: Mentoring for lifestyle success*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

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## Sharing the Effort for Underserved Student Success: The Pathways to College Network

**Karen Cheng**

Project Manager, Pathways to College Network

The Pathways to College Network was formed in January 2001 in response to a need identified by the U.S. Department of Education to address persistent gaps in college enrollment and completion rates among low-income and racial/ethnic groups. The vision was to bring together various organizations to promote college access and increase the number of underserved students.

The Network that resulted had two distinguishing features: (a) a commitment to use data and research to inform policy and practice, and (b) a firm belief in the value and necessity of collaboration. The Pathways to College Network is now an alliance of 38 organizations and funders with the same goal: to advance college access and success for underserved students all across the nation. For a complete list of funders and partners, see <http://www.pathwaystocollege.net>.

On February 19, 2004, the Pathways to College Network released a major research-based report on policies and practices that are effective in improving college access and

success for low-income students, first-generation students, underrepresented minorities, and students with disabilities. *A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Access and Success* is a call-to-action to leaders in all areas—higher education, K-12 education, government, business, and communities—to work together towards a shared vision of improved postsecondary success and educational equity.

More than just a call to action, *A Shared Agenda* also highlights important action steps that research has shown to be effective. As *A Shared Agenda: Action Alert for Higher Education Leaders* states, higher education has two crucial roles in encouraging college success for underserved students: (a) as a partner to K-12 schools in student preparation and teacher training and (b) as a provider of supportive learning environments for students once they arrive on campus. One recommendation from *A Shared Agenda* is that campuses strengthen their relationships with community colleges in order to facili-



At the February 19, 2004 *Shared Agenda* launch (l-r): Gerald Tirozzi, National Association of Secondary School Principals; David Roth, Occidental College; Bob Shireman, The Aspen Institute; Alberto Cabrera, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Ann Coles, The Education Resources Institute; Blenda Wilson, Nellie Mae Education Foundation; Roger Nozaki, GE Foundation; Vincent Tinto, Syracuse University School of Education; Carol Geary Schneider, Association of American Colleges & Universities



tate and encourage transfer. Colleges should also look for opportunities to partner with high schools to assist students and families with college and financial aid awareness and planning. Other steps include targeting low-income students for grant aid, offering more grant aid in the first two years, and providing proactive academic and social support services for first-year students. For a complete list of these recommendations, visit the Pathways web site at <http://www.pathwaystocollege.net>.

Over the next three years, the Pathways to College Network will be working to persuade postsecondary leaders to take steps to improve the retention and graduation rates of underserved students. The first step to improve college access is to encourage campuses to disaggregate their retention data by race and income. Having this kind of data is critical to making policy and program choices that support the students who are most at risk.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities is leading the Pathways work group that will focus on higher education. Along with the American Association of Community Colleges, American Council on Education, Council for Opportunity in Education, State Higher Education Executive Officers and others, they are developing a set of research-based tools to help postsecondary leaders collect data effectively and use it in creating supportive campus environments for underserved students. The tools are couched in a framework of collaboration among different campus groups and offices, with the understanding that change in one area of a college or university necessarily has ramifications for the whole. Collaboration, though not easy, is the essential foundation of sustainable systemic change in higher education.

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## What's Happening at the Center

### Conferences

18<sup>th</sup> International Conference on The First-Year Experience, July 11-14, 2005, Southampton, England. See <http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/annual/index.html>

Summer Institute on First-Year Assessment, July 24-26, 2005, Asheville, NC

### Teleconferences

The National Resource Center invites you to plan to join us at the following upcoming teleconferences:

*Facilitating Transfer Student Success: Creating Effective Partnerships*

March 3, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Frankie Santos Lanaan** - Assistant Professor of Higher Education, Iowa State University; **Mark Allen Poisel** - Interim Associate Vice President for Academic Development and Retention, Student Development and Enrollment Services, University of Central Florida; **Diane Savoca** - Coordinator of Student Transition, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley.

*Learning Communities: Pathways to Deep Learning and Campus Transformation*

March 24, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Jean Henscheid** - Fellow, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, Managing Editor of *About Campus*; **Jean MacGregor** - Senior Scholar, Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education; **John Tagg** - Associate Professor, English, Palomar College, San Marcos, California.

*First Encounters: Creating Purposeful Strategies to Engage New Students*

April 21, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Peter Magolda** - Associate Professor, College Student Personnel, Miami University, Ohio; **Gail Mellow** - President, LaGuardia Community College, New York; **Richard Mullendore** - Professor, College Student Affairs Administration, University of Georgia, former President of National Orientation Directors Association. See <http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/teleconference/index.html>

### Publications

#### Monograph 41

*The 2003 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Continuing Innovations in the Collegiate Curriculum* by Barbara F. Tobolowsky with Marla Mamrick and Bradley E. Cox

Since 1988, the National Resource Center has surveyed American higher education institutions every three years to learn more about the content, structure, and administration of first-year seminar courses. Monograph 41 reports on the latest findings from the 2003 survey.

#### Monograph 42

*Exploring the Evidence, Volume III: Reporting Research on First-Year Seminars* by Barbara F. Tobolowsky, Bradley E. Cox, and Mary T. Wagner, Editors

Monograph 42 offers the National Resource Center's third compilation of campus-based research on first-year seminars. The latest volume includes reports from 39 campuses including public and private, two-year and four-year institutions.

#### Monograph 43

*Facilitating the Career Development of Students in Transition*. Edited by Paul A Gore, Jr.

Monograph 43 focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of career development and the unique needs of different student populations such as underrepresented students, first-generation college students, community college students, and undecided students. Chapter authors explore vehicles for providing career information from career centers to experiential learning and first-year seminars. In addition, the monograph offers an array of instruments and exercises that assess student interests, skills, and values.

### Research and Resources

Over the past few months, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has developed a number of new and potentially valuable resources.



In response to several years of successful conference sessions on the sophomore-year experience, the Center has created a new listserv and web page dedicated to that topic. Already with nearly 300 subscribers, the SOPH-List connects leading scholars and practitioners committed to improving the second year of college. Proactive subscribers have already posted descriptions of programs on their campuses, a list of sophomore-related web sites, and details of a longitudinal study of sophomore experiences at two Midwestern schools. To join the list, visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/listservs/index.html>

The accompanying Sophomore-Year Resources web page is located at <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/soph/index.html>. The page includes profiles of more than a dozen sophomore-specific programs currently underway at a range of colleges and universities. These profiles allow readers to examine the varied approaches that may be taken to improve sophomore student success. In addition, the web page provides a link to the University of North Carolina-Charlotte's research on its sophomore students. Finally, the page includes calls for more research on the sophomore-year experience and introduces Monograph #31, *Visible Solutions for Invisible Students: Helping Sophomores Succeed* (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms031.html>), edited by Laurie A. Schreiner and Jerry Pattengale.

On the First-Year Resources web page, the Center has added 15 job descriptions that reflect the variety of college/university positions related to the first-year experience. Positions described include deans, advisors, orientation directors, and directors of first-year seminars. The National Resource Center presents these descriptions to assist people interested in developing or revising a position related to the first-year experience. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/position.html> to view the descriptions.

January's FYA-List essay addressed emotional intelligence (EI). In their essay, James Parker and Jon Duffy explain that EI is more than just a buzzword—it is an important component of college student success. After providing some background on the history of EI, the authors outline a few studies that relate emotional intelligence to both student grades and retention. A brief description of the BarOn EQ-i follows, and the essay concludes with a call for

new research about the integration of emotional intelligence into the college experience. To view the essay, visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/newessay/index.html>

Finally, on our Assessment Resources web page, the Center has added a paper outlining the key questions one should ask before assessing a first-year program. Entitled "Six Significant Questions," Joe Cuseo's essay walks readers through a series of progressively important questions that should shape all assessment efforts – even those beyond the first year. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/index.html> to read the essay.

### *E-Source for College Transitions* Survey

A web-based survey of *E-Source for College Transitions* subscribers and non-subscribers was conducted in August 2004. Unfortunately, the response rate was 7.4%, nevertheless, we value the feedback.

Respondents stated that the subjects which have been the most valuable were first-year seminars; institutions of excellence; learning communities; peer involvement; service-learning/community service; assessment, evaluation, and research; curriculum and teaching; residential life; sophomore students; technology; orientation; media; funding information; and library instruction. Community colleges was a topic deemed not valuable by respondents.

Subjects subscribers would like to read about in future issues are grants and funding for programs of all sizes, second semester and second-year information and assessment, working with parents, how to handle disruptive students, how to deal with roommate issues or students at a football game, summer readings, and transfer students.

What subscribers liked about *E-Source*:

- Good balance of shorter and longer articles
- Easy navigation
- Pleasing visuals
- Ready online access

The changes some subscribers wanted were a print version and for it to appear more often.

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