



## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT TRANSITION

### TASK FORCE REPORT

# REPORT

## The First Year Experience at NC State

Moving from a University of Strengths  
to a University of Excellence

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## Executive Summary

On November 21, 2007, the Undergraduate Student Transition Taskforce was charged by Dean Thomas Conway of the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs to "identify opportunities and structures for improving or enhancing the transition process" in a way that would "contribute to the persistence and successful completion of the undergraduate degree for each admitted student." The Taskforce was asked to complete three activities:

- explore the national and campus data on first-year students,
- analyze this data,
- make recommendations, including a set of objectives and outcomes

The Taskforce researched the national dialogue on the first-year experience through the guidance of Mary Stuart Hunter (director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina), through readings on first-year experience, through a peer benchmark, and through attendance at the First-Year Experience conference in San Francisco from February 16-19, 2008. Campus data and input were gathered through ten focus groups with Associate Deans, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Enrollment Managers/Advisors, First-Year and Second-Year Students, Senior Students, Deans, Counseling, Department Heads, and Faculty and through two student surveys.

After analyzing this data, the Taskforce proposes three major recommendations:

- **That units across campus coordinate more effectively so students receive unified messages and services**

Strategies include: Adoption of a single set of common first-year objectives and outcomes; formation of a first-year experience committee to perform ongoing education, coordination, and assessment; formation of a committee to review the college introductory classes in order to establish best practices and consider ways of benefiting from other university units and services; and development of a single website for first-year students.

- **That the campus begin to identify more successful intervention strategies in dealing with at-risk students**

Strategy includes a pilot with the College of Engineering, in conjunction with the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences, that would track first-year student success throughout the semester and provide support where needed.

- **That the campus increase, and better target, support for first-year student success**

Strategies to include: Ensuring sufficient seats and sections, increased faculty and staff interaction, and adequate support services.

## Introduction

In many ways, NC State is doing a good job with its first-year students. The first-year retention rate at NC State was 89% in fall 2007, well above the average UNC system rate of 80% (2006). We have many nationally acclaimed programs, such as the First Year College and the First Year Inquiry Program. Students themselves rate the university highly. In the spring 2006 sophomore survey, 92% of students rated their overall education at NC State as “good” or “excellent.”

However, there is a slight downward trend in NC State retention rates that is worrisome because it correlates with the rapid increase in first-year enrollment in the past four years, 2003-2007. In the same period in which NC State has increased its first-time first-year enrollment from 3851 students to 4791 students, the university’s first-year retention rate has dropped from 91% to 89%. This decrease is not a large one, but numbers had been steadily increasing, from 87.9% in 1997 to 91% in 2003. Focus groups with faculty and enrollment managers/advisors (see Appendix #3) further support that there is a connection between increased enrollment and dropping retention rates, since both groups report being overtaxed and unable to deal with the growing population.

In addition to immediate enrollment concerns, NC State is facing a future of major expansion. The university is projected to grow to 40,000 students by 2017. This growth rate necessitates a plan for increased enrollment that includes a long-term retention strategy. The university community must work together in a coordinated fashion in order for NC State to improve its retention rates while growing in such a dramatic fashion.

A comparison with peers also suggests that we could be doing better. In a study comparing the average freshman retention rate from 2002-2005, NC State ranks 11<sup>th</sup> out of 17 among its peers in freshman persistence. The following ten peer schools have retention rates better than that of NC State: Cornell (96%), University of Florida (94%), University of Georgia (93%), University of Maryland (93%), University of Wisconsin-Madison (93%), Pennsylvania State University (93%), University of Illinois (92%), Georgia Tech (92%), University of California-Davis (91%), and Texas A & M (91%). NC State, Michigan State and Ohio State have the same average retention rate for this period: 90%. Only four schools have weaker first-year retention rates: Virginia Tech (88%), University of Minnesota (86%), Purdue (85%), and Iowa State (85%). There is also a likely correlation between first-year retention rate and the 6 year graduation rate, where NC State ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of 17.

A second comparison, with universities noted for best practices in retaining first-year students, demonstrates that we are falling behind national trends in four key areas:

- Commitment to a Year-Long Developmental Model
- Campus Coordination,
- Support for *All* Students,
- Determination to Help All Students Succeed.

### Commitment to a Year-Long Developmental Model

Many universities now see the first year as an ongoing process that begins with application and ends with the second semester. These universities have developmental models that follow the student through the year, providing them with information and guidance as needed. At NC State, we are still focused on a programmatic approach that separates the first-year student's experience into discrete steps—admission, orientation, welcome week, and the academic year. NC State needs a more seamless model and a greater understanding of what information should be provided to students at particular times during the year.

### Campus Coordination

Many researchers on the first-year experience stress that a campus must develop “a comprehensive and intentional approach to the first college year” (Hunter 6), with all units working together in a seamless effort. As Hunter emphasizes, “Moving beyond isolated initiatives is no longer an option: it is a necessity” (6). Though NC State has many good initiatives, and many units have strong partnerships with others, our university does not have an over-arching set of objectives for the first year, nor does it have a structural mechanism for all partners involved to meet and assess efforts on a regular basis.

### Support for *All* Students

NC State's programmatic approach (as opposed to a university-wide approach) has the outcome of focusing on certain populations of students, rather than the university population at large. First-year researchers emphasize that a university should have a plan for *all* its students to succeed (Ishler and Upcraft 45). Not surprisingly, many at NC State are aware of this need but cannot affect change from the confines of their particular unit. A common refrain across focus groups was that there were special programs to help excellent students and programs to help weaker students, but none for the “average” student—the “great middle,” as one focus group participant named them.

### Determination to Help All Students Succeed

Universities of excellence often have early warning systems that enable various university personnel to intervene before a student fails, and also another set of mechanisms to help students who are failing but have not yet been suspended. Even large public universities, with many students, are taking steps to ensure that their students are not suspended, even if initial performance has not been promising. NC State has not yet taken this aggressive approach. Students do not receive mid-semester reports on a regular basis (only 10% of faculty complete a mid-semester report) and there is no consistent follow-up system for students who are doing poorly. NC State does have a follow-up system for students on academic warning, which requires that students see an advisor, but this meeting varies widely in quality and consistency across campus.

Because of the shift in our size as a university and the shift in the national dialogue, NC State cannot preserve the status quo, as the status quo will lead to a weakening of retention strengths. Instead, we must accept the challenge to move to the next level to make NC State a university of excellence for first-year students. This goal makes sense for NC State for a number of reasons—not only is it the “right thing to do” for the good of our students, but it is the most efficient and fiscally prudent approach as well.

NC State has all the pieces of the puzzle for a highly successful first-year strategy—an excellent faculty, a caring, knowledgeable staff, and many fine programs. We just need to put the pieces of the puzzle together in a more coordinated fashion, with resources used more intentionally.

### **Taskforce Charge**

The committee was formed by Dean Thomas Conway in order to “identify opportunities and structures for improving or enhancing the effectiveness of the transition process” in a way that would “contribute to the persistence and successful completion of the undergraduate degree for each admitted student.” The Taskforce was asked to complete three activities:

- explore the national and campus data on first-year students,
- analyze this data,
- make recommendations, including a set of objectives and outcomes by which the first-year experience might be assessed.

### **Data Exploration**

Despite the shortness of its timeline, the Taskforce was able to complete a review of all data requested in the charge. Taskforce members should be commended for their willingness to work outside official meetings—in subcommittees and on other tasks—in order to achieve this goal. The results of our research phase are elaborated below.

### **National Dialogue**

The Taskforce was able to benefit from the national dialogue on best practices in the first year in three ways:

- On December 10, 2007, Mary Stuart Hunter, director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, gave a presentation to the Taskforce and members of the university community. After this presentation, she also met separately with the chair of the Taskforce and then the Taskforce as a whole. She emphasized to the Taskforce that we should think of the first-year experience as a process starting with admission and continuing through the academic year. This process must involve coordination across

Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, and it should be assessed regularly by a diverse committee that meets often to discuss improvements.

- Members of the Taskforce represented expertise across a wide number of areas and the committee was able to use this diversity to its advantage. Various members and the chair suggested readings that the committee as a whole read and discussed. These are represented by the bibliography at report's end.
- Dean Thomas Conway sent three members of the Taskforce, representing the three major groups on the Taskforce (Faculty, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs), to the First Year Experience Conference in San Francisco from February 16-19, 2008. The three attendees at the conference brought back many strategies and approaches for the Taskforce on the following topics: intervention strategies, peer mentoring, using technology to better engage with students, orientation models, etc. A summary of this material is presented in **Appendix #1**.

### Peer Benchmark

Taskforce members completed a peer benchmark of first-year activities at our peer schools. This information, included in **Appendix #2**, was then discussed during a Taskforce meeting. The group was impressed by the single, unified first-year website at Cornell, the weeks of welcome approach at University of Florida, the First-Year Success Workshop Series at Ohio State, and the aggressive intervention strategy at the University of Illinois. These schools, among others, have impacted our thinking and our final recommendations.

### Focus Groups

In order to enlist the input of the campus, the Taskforce set up focus groups with the following: Associate Deans, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Enrollment Managers/Advisors, First-Year and Second-Year Students, Senior Students, Deans, Counseling, Department Heads and Faculty. See **Appendix #3** for summaries. These groups were very willing to meet with us and offered many creative suggestions. Their enthusiasm and vision is to be credited for helping the Taskforce move toward its recommendations.

The one group that we had difficulty engaging was students, since not many students turned out for our focus groups. We therefore decided to use one of the Taskforce members' first-year class (20 students) as a focus group. See **Appendix #4**. We also decided to add some student surveys to get a better picture of this very important group.

### Surveys

The Taskforce did two surveys of students: an email survey with the selected focus group population and a second survey, sent out by the Office of Advising Support, Information and Services (OASIS), that targeted students who had experienced difficulty in their first year. Only four students returned the first email survey; nevertheless, that data was

supportive of what we had heard from students in the focus groups. Nine of the forty-five students contacted returned the OASIS survey. See **Appendix #5 and #6**.

Focus groups and surveys often agreed on what was being done well at NC State—orientation, welcome week, college introductory courses, First Year Inquiry Seminars, etc. They also often agreed on what needed to be done better—coordination across units, coordination of information, better resources in select places, and more aggressive intervention strategies.

### **Recommendations**

The Taskforce benefited from relative consensus in both the national research and campus opinion. Because of this, agreement on recommendations was relatively easy to achieve and we were able to keep to our short timeline. Based on the information gathered, the Taskforce has three main recommendations, with various strategies listed under each. These are:

- *I. That units across campus coordinate more effectively so students receive unified messages and services,*
- *II. That the campus begin to identify more successful intervention strategies in dealing with at-risk students, and*
- *III. That the campus increase support for first-year students.*

#### **I. That units across campus coordinate more effectively so students receive unified messages and services**

##### Strategies

1. *Adoption of a single set of common first-year objectives and outcomes (See **Appendix #7 and #8**)*

Hunter and other researchers have stressed the importance of developing a campus-wide set of objectives to establish common agreement on goals and then regularly measuring those objectives through outcomes, in order to assess progress. Appendix #7 represents the Taskforce's consensus on a set of objectives and outcomes, but, in order for these objectives to receive campus-wide acceptance and usage, they must be vetted across campus, and revised where needed, by the Deans, Associate Deans, Department Heads, Student Senate, Faculty Senate, and Student Affairs. Appendix #8 represents a preliminary plan for how these objectives might be communicated to the campus.

2. *Formation of a First-Year Experience Committee to perform ongoing education, coordination, and assessment*

The majority of first-year researchers, including Mary Stuart Hunter, John N. Gardner, M. Lee Upcraft, and Betsy O. Barefoot, stress the importance of an ongoing

first-year experience committee or board whose job is to coordinate, evaluate, and revise practices where needed. This committee needs to have broad membership in order to be successful. We suggest that at least the following groups be included: Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs staff, Student Affairs staff, faculty, Associate Deans, and enrollment managers. Based on our conversation with the Deans, who stressed the need for a more physically inviting and spatially innovative campus, we would also like to see a facilities representative on this committee. This committee's job would be to educate the campus regarding first-year objectives, coordinate activities across units, and provide a yearly assessment of the first-year experience. The Taskforce recommends that this committee begin by establishing objectives for orientation, welcome week, and the college introductory courses that support the overall objectives developed by the Taskforce. In addition, we ask that the committee take up issues that we did not have the time to resolve, such as whether first-year students should be required to live on campus.

3. *Formation of a committee to review the college introductory classes in order to establish best practices and consider ways of benefiting from other university units and services*

According to Ishler and Upcraft, the first-year seminar, “designed to foster better understanding of the institution, enhance academic interest and integration, and provide opportunities for social integration,” “is one of the most powerful predictors of first-year student persistence” (41). Many institutions, such as University of South Carolina and University of Maryland, have been very successful in achieving better student performance through this mechanism. Our current model of this first-year seminar is the college introductory course, though several colleges, including Education, Natural Resources, and Humanities and Social Sciences do not have such courses. (Natural Resources is currently working on an interdisciplinary version of such a course, along with the colleges of Physical and Mathematical Sciences and Agriculture and Life Sciences.) We recommend that college personnel (including faculty), as well as representatives from the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs and Student Affairs, come together to discuss their goals for these courses and consider how other units, such as Student Affairs, might be useful in providing additional content through a supplementary workshop series. We also suggest that Education, Natural Resources, and Humanities and Social Sciences consider developing such courses, or experiment with formats other than the traditional course, in order to fulfill the main objectives listed above.

It is important to distinguish between this form of a first-year course and what we call our First-Year Inquiry Program, which has an exclusively academic content. This latter program is also very beneficial in that it promotes faculty-student interaction, which is another, important determiner of student success. The ongoing first-year experience committee (recommended in strategy #2) might discuss how this program and the college introductory classes could work together to better promote student success.

#### 4. *Development of a Single Website for First-Year Students*

Many different focus groups identified the need for a unified website for first-year students. This website would publicize the first-year student objectives and outcomes, act as the portal for all university interaction (with offices such as Financial Aid and Registration and Records), display a University calendar, and showcase important topics through short videos. The committee found the Cornell first-year website to be an excellent model. Right now, it is too difficult for students to find important information, or to even know that certain information exists. This website could be a particularly powerful retention tool for off-campus students, who may find it more difficult to establish a physical presence on campus. We suggest that a unified website be developed by a workgroup within the Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success (ACcESS), which is dedicated to student success and which has already begun work in this area. In order to achieve this goal, they will need additional resources for technological support. The workgroup developing this website should include faculty, students, advisors, and personnel from the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs, Registration and Records, Student Affairs, and Financial Aid.

## **II. That the campus begin to identify more successful intervention strategies in dealing with at-risk students**

Taskforce members were in general agreement that the campus needed to begin taking more aggressive steps to retain its first-year students, particularly at the mid-semester point before failure has occurred. Unlike many other universities, NC State's intervention policies are limited to students who have already failed—i.e. those on academic warning. At the mid-semester point, no intervention policy exists. Faculty are requested to submit mid-semester grades but are not required to do so. In addition, there is no requirement that advisors who receive mid-semester difficulty reports contact their advisees, nor is there any university-wide program to train those advisors to deal with the many issues, psychological and financial as well as academic, affecting the first-year student. The Taskforce felt that measures needed to be taken to deal with this lack of policy and training.

However, Taskforce members were also hesitant to increase the burden for faculty, by requiring mid-semester difficulty reports, and for the Associate Deans, by requiring that college offices (as opposed to the individual advisor) contact students. We also had no clear national data that intervention programs were effective in retaining students who would otherwise fail, given that many intervention programs are new.

### *Pilot with College of Engineering*

Therefore, the Taskforce recommends proceeding with a pilot, intended to measure whether increased intervention at the mid-semester point is actually effective. The College of Engineering has volunteered for this pilot because of its steadily decreasing grade point averages for first-year students.

The College of Engineering will develop and implement a pilot student intervention program in partnership with the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. The plan will be to obtain quiz and test grades for first-year engineering students in their Physical and Mathematical sciences coursework (courses in math and chemistry during the fall semester and courses in math and physics during the spring semester), in addition to mid-semester academic difficulty reports. Intervention activities will be triggered if students' test grades fall below a pre-identified minimum. Although the details of the intervention strategies have not been fully developed, they will involve a combination of email contacts, in-office advising and coaching sessions, participation in group workshops, and mentoring.

The program will be introduced to students during New Student Orientation and will be emphasized in the E 101 introductory course. Students who are identified through poor performance in test grades will be required to meet with an academic coach/advisor in order to identify the issues at hand and to develop an appropriate intervention strategy.

### **III. That the campus increase support for first-year student success**

Taskforce members suggest that the campus develop a resource strategy for the first year so that students receive sufficient support in three key areas: 1) Course Availability, 2) Faculty/Staff interaction and 3) Supplemental Services. We have ranked these items according to their importance to student success. Individual items within a category are also ranked in terms of priority, though there was no significant difference in ranking between items 1 and 2, in the faculty-staff interaction category.

#### Strategies

- **Course Availability: Ensure Sufficient Seats and Sections**

Focus groups report that some students are having difficulty creating their academic schedule during summer orientation and sometimes have difficulty exercising their first-year repeat option in the spring due to an insufficient number of seats and sections. All Taskforce members agreed that the bottom line for student success is that students have an appropriate academic schedule. We ask that this problem be rectified immediately. Not only does this situation present a poor first impression to students and their families, but it also threatens the most fundamental aspect of student life—their academic work.

- **Ensure Sufficient Faculty and Staff Interaction**

1. *Students should receive quality advising*

Advising models and advising loads vary across campus but the Taskforce agrees that quality advising is an important determining factor in academic success. A quality advisor is someone who is trained in and familiar with university resources and procedures, and who can make adequate referrals when advisees need further help or information. The

Taskforce urges the Provost's office to work with individual colleges to ensure that they have sufficient advisors, that those advisors are appropriately trained, that they are evaluated, and that they are rewarded for excellent performance. For example, some departments may decide to use primarily professional advisors for full-time academic advising and use faculty primarily as mentors.

2. *Students should have significant interaction with at least one faculty member per semester*

Studies on the first year suggest that interaction between faculty and students is of primary importance. The Taskforce therefore recommends that all students be assured of one small class in each of their two first semesters. Right now, students have one small class experience through ENG 101. For the other class, we suggest that the First Year Inquiry program expand to cover the entire population (with the exception of Honors students, who have their own small seminars). Assessment data from the First Year Inquiry Program demonstrates that First Year Inquiry is successful in a number of key areas: First Year Inquiry students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging at NC State, accrue more credit hours, and have higher grade point averages. This program is very well respected among all groups, including college administrators, faculty and students. At present, First Year Inquiry covers only 25% of the population. We request that it be expanded to approximately 90% of the population (with honors seminars covering the remaining 10%) and that the plan for this expansion increase the number of tenure-track faculty teaching in the program. Currently, only 50% of First Year Inquiry faculty participants are tenure-track faculty.

- **Ensure that Key Supplemental Programs are Sufficiently Funded**

1. *Students should receive sufficient tutorial support*

Right now, the Tutorial Center is receiving insufficient funds to cover its very essential services. In addition to expanding its budget to maintain a basic service level, we also ask that funds be allotted for some experimental pilots in conjunction with the colleges.

2. *Students moving between majors need appropriate advising support*

Currently, students who change majors do not always receive sufficient advising support. Advisors in the colleges are not always able to help students who want to transfer to other colleges because they frequently do not have the knowledge of the other colleges' programs and entrance requirements. The Office of Advising Support, Information and Services (OASIS) has stepped in to fill some of this need, but they cannot handle the entire university population of intracampus transfers with their current staff. We ask that the Office of Advising Support, Information

and Services (OASIS) be given the mission of supporting intracampus transfer students and that they be given the resources necessary to expand their staff.

3. *Students need increased contact between orientation and welcome week*

Student contact between orientation and welcome week varies widely, with some colleges providing a great deal of contact and others very little. The Taskforce therefore recommends reviving the Wolfcamp program, a supplemental orientation program. The Wolfcamp experience supports the transition of high school students to North Carolina State University. Suggested means of delivery of Wolfcamp is to develop a virtual format that utilizes electronic technology popular to today's youth, including social networks, university emails, blogs and podcasts. Students would receive electronic communications throughout the summer. These students would also have face-to-face interaction at the beginning of welcome week. We suggest that this program be optional at this point and that it be carefully assessed.

## **Resource Requests**

### **Goal I: Better Coordination**

- *Resources to develop introductory courses in all colleges*

The Dean of Undergraduate Academic Programs and the Provost will need to consult with Natural Resources, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Education as to what resources are required, depending on the form of their introductory course.

Natural Resources is in the process of developing an interdisciplinary introductory course, in conjunction with Physical and Mathematical Sciences and Agriculture and Life Sciences; this group will be coming forward with a proposal that includes resources requests this summer.

It is possible that Humanities and Social Sciences may want to return to its former definition of an introductory course, a first-year seminar, in which case it could be funded through the increase in First Year Inquiry resources recommended above. (Humanities and Social Sciences had to discontinue its introductory course because of budget cuts in 2004-2005.)

Education has not yet had the opportunity to develop an introductory course for all their undergraduate students, though teaching fellows participate in an introductory experience, and this program might be a guide for future program development.

- *Resources to improve introductory courses where needed*

Specific resource requests will be issued in spring 2009, after the committee to review the introductory courses has met and made its recommendations.

- *Resources for Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success to develop unified website for first-year students*

The Advisory Council for Enhancing Student Success (ACcESS) needs the support of a web developer to build the site and then ongoing technical support to maintain the site.

## **Goal II: More Aggressive Intervention Policies**

- *Resources for Engineering Pilot, in conjunction with Physical and Mathematical Sciences*

Required resources:

• One full-time and one half-time academic advisor/coach to develop program elements, plan activities, and meet with students.	\$80,000
• One half-time support staff member to schedule appointments, prepare program materials, etc.	\$20,000
• Student workers, peer mentors	\$10,000
• Two TA positions for PAMS to collect and transmit data	\$35,000
• Materials and supplies for program implementation	\$5,000
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TOTAL	\$150,000

The program will be housed and implemented in Engineering Academic Affairs space on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Daniels Hall adjacent to the E 101 classroom. The office will be staffed during daytime business hours and during the evening for program delivery.

## **Goal III. Increased Support for Students**

- *Increased Seats and Sections*

The Provost's Office will need to work with Registration and Records and the colleges to determine whether additional seats are needed to ensure that sufficient seats are made available at the time of orientation and that students have appropriate schedules in the spring semester. Funding for these sections will need

to be authorized in time for the pertinent departments to hire the necessary faculty.

- *Increased Staff and Faculty Interaction*

The Provost's Office will need to work with the colleges to ensure that first year students receive quality advising. It will also need to work with the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs and the colleges to expand the First Year Inquiry Program to 90% of the first-year student body. Most institutions with successful first-year seminar programs have established these programs through the distribution of tenure-track lines.

- *Increased Support for Supplemental Programs*

The Provost's Office will need to work with the Division of Undergraduate Academic Programs to expand resources for tutorial services and Office of Advising Support, Information and Services (OASIS). It will also need to partner with Student Affairs in the development of Virtual Wolfcamp. Resources needed to develop Virtual Wolfcamp include a full-time graduate assistant (\$18,000) and training resources (to be determined) for a volunteer peer mentor group and interactive programs to fund Welcome Week activities.

### **Steps Toward Efficiency**

Though the Taskforce has requested additional resources, it is also mindful of the need to be as efficient as possible in the delivery of services. Therefore, the Taskforce recommends the pilot of a one-day orientation model in summer 2009 to examine whether this structure might more efficiently deliver orientation services. Taskforce members voted unanimously (17 voting members) to endorse this model, but they also caution that this pilot should be assessed carefully for its efficacy in delivering important messages. Establishing specific objectives for orientation and welcome week, based on the overall objectives established by this Taskforce, are key in this assessment process.

### **Conclusion**

The above recommendations are intended to move NC State to a university of excellence with regard to the first-year experience—and to do so in the near future. However, increasing enrollment will require ongoing thinking. Hopefully, we have provided this mechanism through the standing first-year experience committee.

The major challenge NC State faces in the future is retaining and increasing quality as the University expands in size. The recent downturn in first-year retention indicates that we have failed to plan adequately thus far. In focus groups across campus, we heard a great deal of anxiety expressed about the future, particularly by those who are closest to the students and have already begun to deal with these increases in population. These groups

have not seen the University planning for student increases in a creative and visionary manner. After all, the path of least resistance to deal with expanding populations is to increase class size across the board, demand more of advisors, and reduce services. This strategy will not lead to positive retention benefits.

What the first-year experience literature teaches is that this strategy is not beneficial from *either* an academic or economic perspective. Expenditures on some smaller classes and supportive services may be the *most* efficient expenditures in that they preserve our most precious resource—our students. A university that retains and graduates its students is ultimately the most fiscally prudent and best university.

NC State has many good people working for the benefit of students, but faculty, administrators, and staff members need to grow more adept at working across programmatic divisions. Such coordination is particularly important as NC State faces its major expansion in the twenty-first century. The visionary solutions needed to face the challenge of enrollment growth demand the creativity of all NC State personnel—working together.

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