

STAY@FAU

OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION NEWSLETTER • UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

Learning Community Program Shows Positive Gains in Student Outcomes

After two years, the Freshman Learning Community (FLC) program is showing that student participation in a learning community can yield higher semester GPAs and greater retention rates. Students who participated in the fall 2002 and 2003 FLC programs attempted and completed more credits during their first semester and have higher retention rates into their second semester than freshmen who did not participate in the FLC (see chart below).

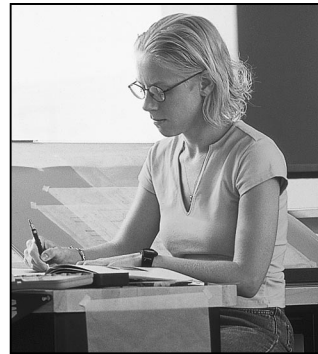
Students participating in the FLC are paired in a full-time schedule of courses with others in their major. Nearly 500 incoming freshmen participated in the program over the past two years.

As the data indicate positive outcomes, plans to increase the FLC program (and provide a residential component for fall 2005) are being explored. The fall 2004 FLC will expand from 12 to 15 learning communities, serving approximately 330 students. For more information about the FLC program or to teach the SLS course as part of the FLC, please contact

Dr. Jennifer Bebergal at stay@fau.edu.

	Fall 2002 FLC	Fall 2002 Non-FLC	Fall 2003 FLC	Fall 2003 Non-FLC
	n=220	n=1823	n=268	n=1888
Hours attempted*	13.0	12.4	12.8	12.1
Hours earned*	10.2	10.0	10.8	9.7
1st Fall GPA*	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.4
Retention rates for 2nd term (subsequent spring)	90.0%	86.60%	92.90%	87.30%
Retention to fall '03 from fall '02	74.50%	67.70%	n/a	n/a
Retention to spring '04 from fall '02	63.60%	59.40%	n/a	n/a

*all numbers are averages for the group



Undecided Student Task Force

At the fall 2003 Retention Committee meeting, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analysis provided insightful data into the outcomes of our students based on several factors. One of the outstanding findings was that students who were undecided about their major were 17% less likely to persist at the University than students with a declared major. Although this mirrors national findings, the Retention committee members felt that it was important to pursue this problem and look into potential programs and services to target this at-risk population. Therefore, a Task Force to look at expanding

programs and services for Undecided students is being developed.

If you are interested in serving on the Task Force, please contact Dr. Jennifer Bebergal at stay@fau.edu.

Residential Learning Community Plans Underway

The Offices of Retention and Housing and Residential Life have been collaborating on the creation of a residential component to the Freshman Learning Community program. The retention literature indicates that Living-learning communities are a great way to integrate what students are learning in and out of the classroom. Over the next year, meetings will be held with various academic units and a proposal process has been developed for interested units to begin plans for a Residential Learning Community to begin in fall 2005. If you are interested in more information or to submit a proposal for a Living-learning Community, please contact Dr. Jennifer Bebergal at stay@fau.edu.

Staff Orientation and Training

A key aspect of student satisfaction on campus is their interaction with staff throughout the campus. Students who believe that staff members in offices across campus are helpful and friendly rate their FAU experience higher than those who experience problems with staff in various offices. Therefore, the University Retention Committee has made a recommendation to require all new staff to attend the Orientation program provided by the Personnel Department. Additionally, the committee is imploring departmental directors to provide staff development training and development opportunities to all of their staff at least once each year. Please contact Don Wykis in Personnel for more information about staff training and development opportunities provided.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: New Student Support Services Building



In each issue of *stay@fau*, a particular office or service that works to improve student retention rates is highlighted.

Typically, this newsletter highlights an individual office or program. However, with the long anticipated opening of the new Student Support Services Building, it seemed appropriate to highlight how this building (and of course the people within it) can help students.

For nearly 30 years, plans have been on the drawing board to create a “one-stop shopping” arena for students to take care of all of their student service needs. After many years and many drawings, the plans have finally come to fruition! No longer will a newly admitted student be sent to 3 or more different buildings to get their Admission finalized, sign up for Orientation, turn in financial aid and immunization forms and take care of other business. Current students can similarly take care of numerous things in one easy location.

This new building is truly focused on the heart of FAU: our students. With the opening of the building, students will be the focus and serving them to the best of our ability will be our top priority. Please stop by and visit us soon!

Some Key Offices Located in the New Building

- Undergraduate Admissions
- Graduate Admissions
- Registrar
- Cashier
- Financial Aid (with Student Employment and Veteran's Affairs)
- Career Development Center
- Freshman Academic Advising Services
- New Student Orientation
- Office for Students with disabilities
- International Student and Scholar Services
- Testing and Evaluation
- International Programs
- University Ombudsman
- Dean for Undergraduate Studies
- Vice President for Student Affairs

“How Can I Help?”

A regular question that we hear in the office of retention is: “What can I do as a member of the FAU community to enhance student satisfaction and retention?” Therefore, each Retention newsletter contains “how can I help” tips for faculty and staff - little things that you can do to help to retain students.

Students often indicate to a faculty or staff member that they are thinking of dropping out of school before they actually leave. This may be expressed directly or indirectly. Predicting a student’s dropout proneness before the student drops out is key to providing the support needed to help him or her stay. If you feel a student is at-risk for attrition, please refer him or her directly to the Office of Retention at 561-297-2243. Let’s work as a team to enhance the student’s experience and help students stay@fau!

Title III-A (Strengthening Institutions) Grant proposal

In February, FAU submitted a proposal for a \$30,000 planning grant to the Department of Education. The focus of this planning grant is to explore strategies for strengthening the quality of FAU’s lower-division curriculum and services.

Although graduation rates for community college transfers average around 70%, FAU has struggled to raise graduation rates for freshmen. Fewer than 4 of 10 first-time freshmen graduate in six years. Recently, freshman retention rates into the sophomore year have declined to 68%, and FAU loses an additional 17% of each entering cohort between the sophomore and junior years.

Over the past 20 years since FAU opened its doors to lower-division students, we have not yet developed a comprehensive vision that fully embraces and supports these students. FAU could serve its students better if the institution had the time and resources necessary to bring disparate units together

to develop a coherent plan for restructuring its lower division.

Whether or not FAU is awarded the grant, a working group will be assembled during the next academic year to complete a needs analysis (through surveys and focus groups) and research on best practices in higher education focusing on the lower division. This group will then create and share objectives with the FAU community, identify the interventions FAU intends to develop to achieve its objectives (e.g., freshmen learning communities, curriculum revision, student support services) and create a five-year plan for implementing these interventions.

This is all in preparation for submission of a Title III-A Comprehensive Development Grant on Strengthening FAU’s Lower Division in February 2005. The FAU community looks forward to bringing its constituents together to develop a plan for coordinating initiatives that serve its lower-division students. For more information about the Title III-A grant process, please contact Dr. Tom Pusateri, Director of Assessment or Dr. Jennifer Bebergal, Director for Retention.

STAY@FAU,

the University’s Retention newsletter, is published bi-annually. Please look for future issues that will provide in-depth coverage of some of the key services that enhance student persistence and how YOU can help increase the retention rates of our students.

