First Year Experience
Northern Virginia Community College
Overview

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The First Year Experience (FYE) is designed to provide academic, career, and social support to NOVA freshmen.

There are three guiding principles that shape the goals and objectives of the programs or services developed within the program:

1. Connection
2. Critical thinking
3. Community building
Focus Group Data

In Achieving the Dream focus groups about barriers to success for students, NOVA faculty and students identified the following:

1. Lack of information about policies
2. Procedures and resources at NOVA
3. Unclear expectations about the requirements for college success
4. Unclear personal goals
5. Poor study skills
6. Poorly developed critical thinking skills

NOVA’s Achieving the Dream initiative has identified 18-21 year olds as a vulnerable group, with high rates of placement into developmental courses and a relatively low rate of academic success at the college.
In the Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2008 (CCSSE), there are five benchmarks areas critical to student success. These areas include:

1. Active and Collaborative Learning
2. Student Effort
3. Academic Challenge
4. Student-Faculty Interaction
5. Support for Learners

The CCSSE and SENSE data indicate the FYE program would help the college increase its score of 30 out of 50.
Implementation: Three Phases

Phase I
The timeline for the implementation and completion of Phase I will be Summer 2011. This phase includes the FYE website, FYS early advising, NSO, FYE common reader, social networking and convocation, and assessment of FYE program.

Phase II
Phase II will begin Fall 2010. The goal of Phase II is to implement Phase I, assess the phase, and make plans for Phase III.
Phase III

Implementation and completion could extend over the course of two years. This includes creating degree cohorts, embedded tutors, FYE learning communities, and utilizing the LASSI data to make the program more robust.

During the 2012 SACS visit, the goal is to have a vibrant FYE program with data to support its effectiveness.
These are the milestones first year students will complete while attending NOVA:

• Early Group Advising offered June, July, and August.
• Enroll in the FYE Program and FYE SDV during these sessions.
• Attend NSO Engagement and continue enrollment for the FYE Program.
• Meet/Assign a Peer Mentor or buddy.
• Begin FYE SDV and other college coursework.
  – Participate in the FYE common reader program
  – Attend FYE Convocation
  – Attend FYE Social Events (Emphasis will be placed on Advising Week and the week prior to Final Exams)
  – Early Advising for upcoming semester
During new student advising and engagement activities, student will receive assistance with choosing courses, resources to assist with reading the college catalog and schedule of classes, and access to support services.
FYE SDV

SDV Sections will be marketed during the New Student Orientation. These sections will be compromised of only first year students with special emphasis on continued advising, social events for FYS, attendance at convocation, graduation, peer mentoring, and career and major exploration.
First Year Experience Convocation

The convocation is the official welcome for all first year students. It marks the beginning of the collegiate journey, ushers students into the community of scholars, and gives them an in-depth look at NOVA’s history, as well as unique facts about particular campuses.
Peer Mentoring and Support

It allows new students to seek and receive support from a similar-age peers in a section of the FYE SDV.

Each section of the FYE SDV or learning communities will be paired with peer mentors to form a mentoring community. This pairing can take place during NSOs and/or after an FYS has enrolled. Those students who have not enrolled in the FYE SDV can sign up for a mentor when enrolling to participate in the program.
Early Alert

The Early Alert system is an electronic referral system which will allow faculty to notify the Student Services Center Retention Counselor of students who are experiencing academic and/or personal difficulty, the need for career exploration, or other services.

A web-based program is being piloted on the Woodbridge campus and under consideration at the Annandale campus.
Common Reader

The goal of the Common Reader is to introduce students to a piece of literature that will challenge them intellectually and help them make personal and academic strides toward the transition from high school to college.

The text would initially be used in the FYE SDV sections. The long-term goal is to incorporate the text in other academic courses and work with full-time teaching faculty to implement the program.
First Year Advisors

FYE SDV instructors will serve as facilitators for students enrolled in the course.

FYE campus contact will work to identify full-time teaching faculty who will also serve as FYS Advisors for the first semester and preferably for the first year.
FYE Curriculum Cohort

FYE courses that will be taught by faculty identified to teach this population. Some of the courses will be team taught in a format similar to that of a learning community. Embedded tutors, academic advising support, and participation in FYE events will be required.
The FYE Program will be assessed using these tools and techniques:

- Fall 2010 – College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ), in class between August and September
- Fall 2010 – Student Focus Group (December)
- Spring 2011 – Web-based survey (local) to assess student experiences and whether it met or exceeded expectations (May); Included will be program evaluation measuring students’ satisfaction with the FYE program.

FYE will work with OIR and ATD to set further benchmarks and initiatives.
Goals and Outcomes

It is expected that students enrolling in the FYE program will:

• experience more intentional opportunities at connecting in and outside of class
• will feel they have been connected to the campus community, officially transitioning from high school to college
• will be able to name/recognize at least one faculty or staff person they feel is a resource
• will have higher persistence and retention rates
• will have been exposed to literature that will influence their critical thinking skills
• will have had at least one intentional meeting with a faculty advisor
• will be able to name/recognize at least one peer they feel is a resource
• will have basic knowledge about how to navigate the resources and services at NOVA