The First Year Experience (FYE) will improve student learning by helping to prepare students for college success during the critical first year at NOVA. A variety of sources indicate that the first year in college provides the foundation for persistence and later college success. Many community college students find the beginning weeks of college to be an alien experience. The goals of the FYE include easing the transition from high school to college, acclimating students to NOVA, providing guidance in course selection, and support for entering students. The components of the FYE program include: early advising prior to registration, mentoring, New Student Orientation, a FYE student success course, and a core group of courses identified for first year students which utilize Early Alert and participation in student activities.

In Achieving the Dream focus groups about barriers to success for students, NOVA faculty and students identified the following: lack of information about policies, procedures and resources at NOVA; unclear expectations about the requirements for college success; unclear personal goals; poor study skills; and 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. This group has the lowest success rate for all AtD gatekeeper courses. Across the nation, research has indicated that providing specialized assistance to incoming students increases persistence and success of those students.

According to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2008 (CCSSE) there are five benchmarks areas identified by CCSSE that are critical to student success. These areas include 1) Active and Collaborative Learning; 2) Student Effort; 3) Academic Challenge; 4) Student-Faculty Interaction; and 5) Support for Learners. The NOVA First Year Experience Program is built upon the 3C’s that promote student success. This program is a vehicle that can be used to meet the CCSSE benchmarks. 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: connection, critical thinking, and community building.
Students participating in the voluntary FYE program will be provided with specialized support in making the transition from high school to college by learning NOVA policies and procedures and gaining a clear understanding of college-level academic expectations. Additionally, they will develop improved time-management, goal-setting, and study skills. They will be encouraged to develop plans for the future, to take responsibility for their academic performance, and to feel confident as college students. Students will be guided in appropriate course selection, based on their placement scores. Entering FYE students will receive mentoring from faculty and peers, providing support and a connection to the college. First year students will be encouraged to develop a sense of pride in themselves as NOVA students.

The expected outcomes of a comprehensive FYE program are: increased persistence of the identified group (first-time students entering directly from high school), improved success in gatekeeper courses, such as developmental math and English and courses identified as required for progress toward certificates and graduation, more rapid movement from developmental courses to credit courses, and ultimately increased graduation rates.

**Enrollment Projections**

The projected enrollment numbers for Fall 2010 are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>2010-2011 FTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annandale</td>
<td>1,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudon</td>
<td>1,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manassas</td>
<td>1,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Education</td>
<td>30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodbridge</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,689</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number based on new students to MEC who are undeclared for Nursing and Allied Health programs

I. **NOVA First Year Experience Guiding Principles (The 3 C’s)**

**Connection**

NOVA students must be connected to the campus, the resources, and people they need to negotiate NOVA. Connection also involves helping students to explore majors and career options.

**Critical Thinking**

NOVA students will be challenged intellectually, academically and personally through academic and student development experiences both in and outside of the classroom.
Community Building

The community building process begins with the New Student Orientation. NOVA’s first year students (FYS) will be acclimated to the community through intentional student development and co-curricular programs while on campus, such as student activities, peer mentoring, social events, and meaningful service learning opportunities.

II. First Year Student Process

Veenstra (2009) stated fifty eight percent of entering freshman graduate from the same college within six years; however, most attrition occurs during the freshman year. Veenstra (2009) captured the first year process and the four decisions of retention as a continuous process. The goal of FYE is to intersect those decisions and assist first year students with making informative and relevant choices. Figure 1, on the following page, captures the first year student decision path and milestones along the way.

Figure 1: First Year Student Milestones

Chronological FYS Milestones Overview
These are the milestones first year students would complete while attending NOVA:

1. Early Group Advising offered June, July and August.
2. Enroll in the FYE Program and FYE SDV during these sessions.
3. Attend NSO Engagement and continue enrollment for the FYE Program.
4. Meet/Assigned a Peer Mentor
5. Begin FYE SDV and other college coursework.
   i. Participate in the FYE common reader program
   ii. Attend FYE Convocation
   iii. Attend FYE Social Events (emphasis will be placed on Advising Week and the week prior to Final Exams)
   iv. Early Advising for upcoming semester

III. Critical Components for the NOVA First Year Experience

The FYE Working group has identified five critical areas for the college wide program. The working group recommends the critical components exist on every campus and include the Common Reader Program, Peer Mentoring, FYE Convocation, FYE Learning Community, and FYE social networking opportunities.

1. Early College Advising and Planning

According to Marchand (2010), the six benchmarks listed in the report offer staff members and administrators ideas about how to help more students stay in college and graduate or transfer. They are fostering "college readiness" programs for high-school students, connecting early with students, encouraging faculty and staff members to have high expectations for students, providing a clear academic path, engaging students in the learning process, and maintaining an academic and social support network.

2. Peer Mentoring and Support

Each FYS would be paired with a peer mentor/community. This pairing could take place during NSO’s and/or after an FYS has enrolled in a section of the FYE SDV. Each campus would recruit peer mentors for all students enrolled in the FYE learning community sections and those who agree to participate in the FYE program. The peer mentor would attend critical FYE campus events, such as FYE Convocation and social events with the first year students as well as share information on Student Services and other resources.

The power of peer support may be explained, at least in part, by the following factors:

a. It allows new students to seek and receive support from a similar-age peer who is likely to be perceived as more approachable and less judgmental than an authority figure (Gross & McMullen, 1983; Rice & Brown, 1990).

b. Both students and their peer leader are at proximal stages of social and cognitive development, which facilitates student identification with and comprehension of the peer leader (Bandura, 1986; Ender & Newton, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978).
c. Campus-specific research reports indicate that students who participate in peer mentoring programs persist at higher rates than matched control groups of students who do not participate (Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998; Black & Voelker, 2008).

3. First Year Experience Convocation

The convocation is the official welcome for all new 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 a particular campus. The convocation also promotes graduation and earning the associates degree. During convocation students will receive an entering year pin. Other purposes for convocation include:

a. to celebrate new students’ entry into higher education,

b. to officially welcome new students to the college,

c. to formally induct new students into the college,

d. to build a sense of group identity or community among members of the entering class,

e. to articulate the institution’s mission and expectations to new students, and

f. to create a favorable first impression of the college entering students

4. 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, need career exploration, or other services. Any faculty who is teaching during that semester can utilize the system. A web based program has been piloted and is capable of supporting college wide use. Once the form has been submitted you will receive an electronic confirmation. The form will be forwarded to the Retention Counselor in Student Services Center. The Retention Counselor will either make the appropriate referral or begin working to contact the student and offer assistance utilizing College resources.

5. FYE SDV

Sections would be marketed during the New Student Orientation. These sections would be compromised of first year students only with special emphasis on social events, peer mentoring, career and major exploration, and study skills for the population. The FYE SDV would also include developing partnerships with the Library Services and Tutoring Centers on each campus. These two areas would serve as major components of instruction and support for students enrolled in the course.

6. 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 be the same college wide and the students would be exposed to the program during the New Student Orientation.
time teaching faculty would lead and/or serve as co-leaders with Student Services to select the book and integrate across curriculums and disciplines.

7. Social Events

These events would be planned through partnerships between the campus and college-wide Student Activities Coordinator and the FYE counselor. The events would provide a vehicle for first year students to meet their classmates, faculty, and staff while gaining a greater appreciation for campus/college student activities, clubs, community service, and other opportunities.

8. First Year Advisors

FYE SDV instructors would serve as advisors for students enrolled in the course. This would include first year students enrolled in the learning communities. Additionally, the FYE campus contact would work to recruit full time teaching faculty who would also serve as FYS advisors for the first semester and preferable for the first year.

9. FYE Curriculum Cohort

FYE Block Curriculum Cohort would be used to further support FYS through identifying FYE courses that would be taught by faculty recruited to teach this population. Some of the courses would be team taught similar to a learning community format. Embedded tutors, academic advising support, and participation in FYE events would be required. An example of an FYE Block is below. These would be offered for the full year and include developmental options as well as options for occupational tech and transfer degree seeking students. It is recommended that students in developmental education be recruited to enroll in the block model as a pilot group. The success of this program hinges on academic and student services. These courses would be redesigned to support the learning outcomes of SDV related to the discipline.

FYE Curriculum Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block #/Name</th>
<th>Fall Semester</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Cr.</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Ed Block</td>
<td>ENG 3</td>
<td>Preparing for College Writing II</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>12-1:40PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENG 5</td>
<td>Preparing for College Reading II</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>10-11:40AM</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDV 100</td>
<td></td>
<td>College Success Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MTW</td>
<td>3-3:50PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTH 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>4-5:40PM</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Implementation Plan

The plan will be implemented in three phases. The timeline for the implementation and completion of Phase I would be Spring 2011, Phase II implementation and completion is tentatively scheduled for Spring 2012. Phase III implementation and completion could be over the course of three to five years.

The diagram below lists the milestones for NOVA first year students. In order to implement the plan the FYE Working Group recommends seven steps for implementation.

Implementation Steps - Phase I

Step 1: Summer 2010 Early Advising and NSO and FYE registration
Step 2: Fall 2010 FYE SDV and FYE Convocation, utilize Early Alert

During the Fall 2010 each campus will offer at minimum 1 section of the FYE SDV on each campus and up to 2 MTH/SDV learning communities which can be used to pilot the FYE program. The Pathways to the Baccalaureate will also participate with the FYE Program.

Step 3: October 2010: Social Networking and Peer Mentoring Activity
Steps 4: November 2010: Early Advising for Spring 2011, Planning for FYE Cohort, College wide Early Alert Fall 2011, Advocate for policy change FYE SDV for all FYS by 30th credit hour.

Step 5: Spring 2011: FYE SDV (for remaining FYS)
Step 6: Spring 2011: Common Reader Culminating Events
Step 7: Spring 2011: Recognize FYS
FYE PILOT BUDGET REQUEST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Per Student</th>
<th>Target College Wide FYS</th>
<th>Total Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Events</td>
<td>$8.00</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Reader</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>$7,500.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convocation</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>$6,250.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>FYS Advising Stipends</td>
<td>$100.00 per advisor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$1,200.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$19,950.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Common Reader text can be purchased by students. Existing campus events can be attended.

VIII. Assessment

The FYE Program will be assessed using these tools and techniques:

a. Fall 2010-College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) between August and September in class
b. Fall 2010-Student Focus Group (December)
c. 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.

IX. Goals and Outcomes

a. Students participating in FYE will have a higher persistence rate from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011 than the general population of first time students.
b. Students participating in FYE will have a higher persistence rate from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011 than the general population of first time students.
c. Students will successfully complete SDV courses at a higher rate than the general population of first time students within their first two semesters of college.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will learn how to:

a. Identify and utilize the resources at NOVA which support student success
b. Develop critical thinking skills for academic success
c. Acclimate themselves to the social community of the college
Program Outcomes

a. Students will participate in more intentional opportunities at connecting in and outside of class
b. FYE cohort students will have a higher persistence rate from Fall 2010 to Spring 2011
c. Students will connect with peers and faculty/staff members
d. Students will experience an effective transition from high school to college

The First Year Experience Working Group consists of representatives from each campus. The group is led by Dean Michael Turner and Tanya Ingram, Counselor. The other members of the group include Carol Onandson-MA, Emmanuel Bartalotta-ELI, Sherri Anna Robinson-MEC, Dr. Joann Credle-AN, Joshua Richey-AL, Mary McElhinny -LO.
References


