

STAY@FAU

OFFICE OF STUDENT RETENTION NEWSLETTER • DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Learning Communities at FAU

The end of the Fall 2001 semester marked the conclusion of FAU's first Freshman Learning Community (FLC). Through this project, 15 undeclared/undecided entering freshmen had the opportunity to participate in a small community within a big school. The FLC was designed to help create a productive and positive first semester for the members of the cohort. The 15 students were enrolled together in three general education courses and the SLS 1503, Learning Strategies and Human Development course. Additionally, they were each assigned a faculty mentor to help the students create a bond between themselves and the university faculty. Workshops and individual counseling sessions were also implemented to facilitate each student on the path to choosing a major. While two students had declared their major at the end of their FLC semester, many other cohort students had begun to formulate ideas in regards to their future academic plans. Selecting a major helps students to see the value in their educational journey and increases the likelihood they will persist.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the FLC was the connection made among its cohort students. "I was able to become friends with all the members of the Freshman Learning Community which made my first semester much easier," responded a FLC student. Student evaluations were extremely positive about the cohort experience. Highlights included the ability to make friends and form study groups. Students

appreciated the feeling of support from other students both in and out of the classroom. All 15 students completed the semester with above a 2.0 GPA and 9 of the 15 had above a 3.0 GPA!

Due to the success of the Freshman Learning Community, the FLC is being expanded for the Fall 2002 semester. Ten to fifteen new learning communities are in the works, each focusing on different academic areas. A "TLC" or Transfer Learning Community which will target at-risk transfer students throughout FAU is also being planned. This will help our transfer students to meet others and connect to the University in the same way that our FLC students can.

For more information about the learning communities, please call (561) 297-2432, e-mail stay@fau.edu or visit www.fau.edu/retention.

Keys to College Success

The Office of Retention is very excited to be working on a project with the Counseling Center to help students identify their weaknesses and learn keys to college success. The offices are joining efforts to develop an on-line survey which will assess areas that students need to work on in order to be successful, and then provide concrete examples about how to change behaviors to become successful. Some of the areas covered include: in-class behaviors, out-of-class behaviors, time management, study skills and test taking skills. The survey will be available in Fall 2002 on both the Counseling Center and Student Retention Web sites.

Students on Academic Probation

There are a number of reasons that students' grades fall below acceptable levels. Although this is often due to lack of student preparedness or commitment to their school work, there can be many underlying reasons for their failure. Poor time management, study skills, or test taking skills, lack of family support or career direction, and many other stressors may be affecting their work within the classroom. In order to provide support for these students, the University Retention Committee has recommended revisions to the letter sent to students on academic probation. The revised letter will give each student the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the student service and academic support areas available to help the student to get back on track. It also lists tips for students so that they do not fall into the same habits that put them on probation in the first place. For a copy of the revised letter, visit the Student Retention Web site at www.fau.edu/retention.

Student Focus Group Results

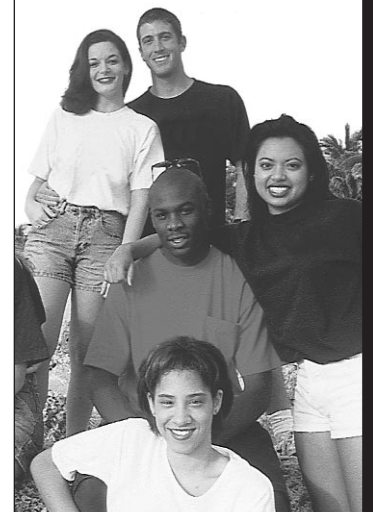
Six focus group interviews were conducted in Fall 2000 and Spring 2001 semesters. The groups interviewed included: residential students on the Boca Raton Campus, student athletes, students on the Broward Campuses, students on the Northern Campuses, students with disabilities, and students in the Honors College. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about the diverse student

body at FAU and how student experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, have influenced their desire to complete a degree program here.

Student accounts provide insight into institutional strengths and weaknesses as we attempt to identify keys to enhancing retention rates. The focus group interview allowed students to give more in-depth views of problems and concerns than by completing a simple questionnaire. The interviews also corroborated information generated through various student satisfaction surveys and surveys on student attrition and withdrawal.

Overall, most students who attended the group interviews appeared to be happy with their experiences at the University. They found that the institution provides quality academic programs delivered by quality instructors, however, students are not fully satisfied with several of the services available or that they would like to have available.

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Challenges and problems that students identified may compromise their chances for degree completion. This study generated four major themes that are problems which administrators can follow-up. These key issues are: course availability and scheduling, academic advising, out-of-classroom experiences, and communication with students.

For a thorough summary of the focus group findings, please visit www.fau.edu/retention. Full transcripts of specific groups are also available by e-mailing stay@fau.edu.

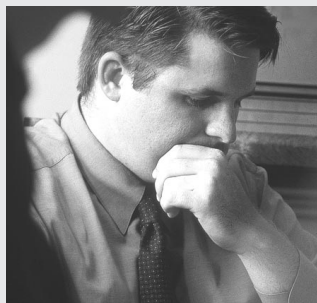
Entering Student Survey Initial Findings

All entering freshman and transfer students for the Summer 2001, Fall 2001 and Spring 2002 terms were surveyed during their orientation program as to their reasons for selecting FAU, intent to complete a degree at FAU, and their expectations related to their college experiences. A total of 1860 freshmen and 1570 transfers completed the survey. Of that group, less than 15% of freshmen and 3% of transfer students plan to leave FAU prior to completing the bachelor's degree. It is believed that a much greater percentage leave than expect to because of unrealistic expectations of their college experience and abilities as well as unforeseen circumstances that arise. Nearly all students entering the University feel prepared for the academic work required of them (both within the major for transfers and in math and writing for freshmen), although many of these same students are the ones struggling in our courses. Although students don't have many academic concerns upon entering FAU, over half of new freshmen and transfers worry about financing their education. On the positive, more than 95% of all students plan to pursue a graduate degree someday!

For a summary of the Entering Student Survey findings, visit www.fau.edu/retention.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: FAU Counseling Center

In each issue of stay@fau, a particular office or service that works to improve student retention rates will be highlighted. In future editions look for: a focus on advising, residential life, financial aid, and student involvement opportunities.



Florida Atlantic University's Counseling Center exists within the Division of Student Affairs to assist students in formulating and achieving their educational goals through psychological, psychiatric, psycho educational, and clinical social work services. The Counseling Center provides individual and group counseling to currently enrolled FAU students on all campuses. Its professionally trained staff seeks to assist students with social, emotional, and academic concerns in a sensitive, caring, and confidential manner. The staff seeks to provide a warm and caring office atmosphere in which students are treated with sensitivity and dignity.

The Counseling Center assists students in the identification and development of positive traits that will help them in their personal, social, and work responsibilities. The help may relate directly to academic performance. It may have to do with procrastination, writer's block, and fear of giving oral reports in class. It may involve test anxiety and "freezing" during examinations.

Help also may be requested by students dealing with problems in the social sphere. The Center can be of considerable value to students who feel isolated and socially disconnected. And it can be of value when students' relationships become troubled and stressful.

The Counseling Center provides services to students whose personal difficulties and problems interfere with their academic adjustment and ability to fully benefit from the University experience. The Psycho Educational Assessment Service assists students in identifying and formulating sound academic and occupational goals. The Center's approach is unique at the University and it employs the full range of psychological tools to help students develop their potentials.

Psychologists, clinical social workers, counselors, and a psychiatrist provide professional therapeutic services and assistance to students whose personal difficulties and learning problems interfere with their ability to benefit from academic and extracurricular experiences. Workshops are also provided on such topics as time and stress management, procrastination and being assertive.

Counseling at the center is held in strict confidence in keeping with accepted professional practice. Appointments may be made by telephone or in person at any campus. Counseling services are located in the Student Services Building, Room 229-S, (561) 297-3540 Boca Raton Campus; MOD 38-I, (954) 236-1210 on the Davie Campus; or in the Student

Affairs Office, (561) 799-8621 on the MacArthur Campus. Regular evening hours are available on the Boca Raton and Davie Campus and by appointment on the MacArthur Campus. Dr. Kranz, licensed psychologist for the Northern Campuses will also see students at the Treasure Coast Campus as necessary.

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.

The "how can I help" tip for the Spring semester is to identify students who you see are struggling and refer them to the Counseling Center for help. Students do not have to have a "major" problem to benefit from counseling. Even information about time or stress management can help a struggling student find balance. Students with non-academic problems struggle in courses because these other issues cloud their ability to concentrate on studies. Showing that counseling is a positive thing helps remove the stigma that many students feel about counseling services. Students who utilize this service are not weak – they are showing that they are strong by trying to help themselves. Referring students to the Counseling Center at your campus is a great way to help increase student retention.

STAY@FAU,

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