A Proposal

For

The Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience Program

Submitted

To

Dr. Larry Robinson, Provost
And Vice President for Academic Affairs

Developed

By

Dr. Dorothy F. Henderson, Dean
And the Executive Team of the School of General Studies

January 26, 2004

Dr. Larry Robinson, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dr. Fred Gainous, President
Florida A & M University

The Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience (FSYE) Program

Introduction

Retention, academic progression and graduation are major concerns of colleges and universities throughout the nation. Leading experts have studied these issues and have published their findings in highly recognized refereed journals and in books. Additionally, they have sponsored national and international conferences. Among the most prominent leaders are Alexander Astin, Noel Levitz, and Vincent Tinto. In addition, various colleges and universities have studied the retention, academic progression, and graduation rates of their students and have implemented programs such as the Freshman Year Experience to reduce student attrition rates.

In “Developmental Education in Postsecondary Kentucky: FYE Resources News” Joe Cuseo of Marymount College summarized the major reasons for students leaving college in “Student Retention: Understanding the Causes of Student Attrition and Implementing a Prevention Plan.” According to his summary, the most common causes of college attrition are

- Academic Underpreparedness
- Academic Boredom
- Transition to College Adjustment Difficulties
- Uncertainty about Educational or Occupational Goals
- Isolation
- Irrelevancy
- Low Commitment
• Financial Problems

Student attrition affects both the student and the institution from which the student withdraws. It impacts the institution's operations and finances through the loss of tuition and the cost of recruiting additional students. Student attrition also affects the institution ethically. Stryker (1999) states, "It is the obligation of the institution to support, educate, and provide guidance to each student it admits." Vince Tinto holds that good retention is more than just keeping students in the college, "Education, the social and intellectual development of individuals, rather than just their continued presence on campus should be the retention effort" (Tinto, 1993). The third reason for retaining students is the potential for negative impact of the institution's reputation as a result of high dropout rates. Retention programs are effective.

College students' experiences during their first two years are very critical to retaining them in the University. Students who are engaged in activities that enhance their adjustments to college are more likely to remain at the University than those who do not participate in activities. Through interaction with other students and with faculty, staff, and administrators, students become more comfortable in the academic setting.

Like other colleges and universities, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) is concerned with the retention, academic progression, and graduation rates of its students. Too many students are not progressing from lower division to upper division in a timely manner. Although they have enrolled continuously in classes for two or more consecutive years, they still must take lower
division courses during their third and fourth years at the University. This poses problems for both the students and the University. Students lose financial aid and fall behind in their requirements for graduation. The lack of financial aid contributes to student attrition. Similarly, the University is affected because of its inability to predict adequate course enrollment and because of the loss of funds received from the Florida Department of Education. The loss of funds triggers many other problems, such as not being able to hire enough full time faculty members or adequately fund academic support programs.

To enhance retention, academic progression, and graduation rates, Florida A&M University will implement a Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience (FSYE) Program to devote more attention to first and second year students. The proposed program will utilize full-time professional advisers to advise students during their freshman and sophomore years and will use faculty advisers to advise students during their junior and senior years.

Mission

The mission of the Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience Program is to promote retention and academic progression of first and second year students at the University. The FSYE Program is committed to the belief that the academic, social, and professional experiences of first-time-in-college students and second year students are enhanced when appropriate attention and resources are provided to meet the needs associated with their transition from high school to college and with the preparation for their major course of study. Ultimately, these experiences will lead to improved
retention and academic progression. Thus, the FSYE Program will provide effective services, programs, and resources to decrease the number of students leaving the institution without a degree and to increase the number of students graduating in a timely manner.

Goals of the Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience (FSYE) Program

To provide a smooth adjustment to college for first-time-in-college students.

To provide a structured program to enhance retention, academic progression rates of first and second year students;

To ensure that students are prepared for upper division at the end of four or five semesters of continuous enrollment;

Objectives

- To establish a university-wide academic advisement center staffed with full-time academic advisers from each school, college, or institute;

- To provide intrusive academic advisement for first and second year students;

- To integrate academic advising and career counseling;

- To increase student involvement in the learning process;

- To provide social activities that promote student-faculty interaction, student-student interaction, and co-curricular involvement;

- To provide a congenial well-informed introduction to campus life;

- To provide accurate information, assistance, and reassurance to parents/guardians as they support their son/daughter through the transition from high school to college;

- To initiate and support a cycle for success by integrating the multiple dimensions of student development, including intellectual, cultural, social, emotional, and physical development;
To develop and coordinate opportunities for connection between first-time in-college students and sophomore students;

To identify, promote, and meet the needs of students in different cohort groups, such as international students, transfer students, at risk students, honor students, and nontraditional students;

Components of the Freshman/Sophomore Year Experience FSYE Program

The primary component of the Freshmen/Sophomore Year Program will be a university-wide academic advisement center. This center will be composed of academic advisers from each college, school, and institute who will be responsible for all phases of academic advisement during the students' freshmen and sophomore years at the institution. It is proposed that the university-wide academic advisement center becomes operational at the beginning of the fall of 2004 semester and that it serve the summer 2004 and fall 2004 freshmen as its initial cohort.

University-Wide Academic Advisement Center

Sound academic advisement is the cornerstone to students' successful matriculation through the University in a timely manner. Therefore, each school, college, and institute will select at least one twelve-month academic adviser to advise its students. Larger schools and colleges will be required to provide sufficient advisers to accommodate their students. Because of the advisers' responsibilities, it is recommended that an adviser be assigned no more that two hundred and fifty (250) advisees. All first-time-in-college students will be assigned to selected advisers who will be held accountable for the academic advisement and, to a certain extent, the academic progression of their assigned advisees. Advisers will assist students with
• Enrolling sequentially in the General Education Sequence as specified by the students' majors;
• Planning pre professional and major program of study;
• Selecting a minor if required or desired;
• Setting degree goals and objectives;
• Engaging in the Freshmen/Sophomore Experience Program;
• Certifying readiness for upper division.

Advisement for first-time-in-college students: All academic advisers will be provided folders containing student information to be utilized during academic advisement. The folders will be processed under the direction of the director of the university-wide academic advisement center. The folders will be labeled with the student's name, social security number, major, prospective entrance date, admission status (regular or profile assessor), and college preparatory status. The folder will contain a folder checklist of material included in the folder, a student profile sheet, a SASS degree audit, an adviser/advisee agreement, and an advisement log sheet.

To prepare advisers for academic advisement and registration, the director of the university-wide academic advisement center will hold academic advisement workshops each semester. The director will also prepare information packets with advisement instructions and special guidelines for advisement. Using the guidelines and the student data, the academic advisers will assist students with course selection. Because the academic adviser knows specifically the courses that students need based upon their major, they will be held accountable for ensuring that students enroll in the
appropriate courses. A signed copy of each advisee's advisement form will be placed in the student's folder. In addition, the adviser will explain the student's SASS degree audit and will discuss the advisor/advisee agreement. At the end of the advisement session, the student will sign the advisement log sheet and complete a short customer satisfaction survey.

To facilitate a smooth academic advisement session for FTICs and to expedite time, advisers will be encouraged to use modules, which are complete schedules that can be given to several students. It is understood that modules will have to be modified for students who have to meet special requirements.

At the close of registration, advisers will update their advisees' folders as needed. They will determine the enrollment status of each of the students whose folders were not used. If the students are enrolled in the University, the advisers will locate them to determine where they were advised. If the students indicate that they desire to change their majors, their advisers will initiate the change of major process. Folders will be transferred to the advisers of the new major upon the students' acceptance into the major. Students who are not accepted into their desired majors can be assigned to the School of General Studies until they meet the qualifications for the intended majors.

The academic advisers will also develop a two year Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each of their advisees so that during subsequent advisement sessions for registration, the advisers and the advisees will know the courses in which the advisees will enroll; therefore, they will need to select sections and class meeting time only. The
ILPs will keep the students on track and will ensure that the students have met prerequisites for enrolling in specific classes.

**Early Bird Advisement** will be held at least one month prior to university-wide academic advisement to ease crowding during regular advisement. Students who select to be advised during this time can devote more quality time discussing personal issues and concerns with their advisers. Additionally, advisers will have an opportunity to learn more about the students because there will not be a rush to meet registration deadline.

Academic advisers will be required to hold **mid-term conferences** with their advisees in an effort to reduce the student failure rate. The faculty will be asked to assist with this activity by completing mid-term progress reports for all freshmen and sophomores and by returning the forms to the director of the university-wide academic advisement center. Advisers will use the forms to discuss the instructors' assessment of the students' performance and for assigning students to tutoring and other support services.

At the end of each semester, advisers will identify at risk students and will submit their names to the deans of their respective schools. At risk students are students who are on academic warning, academic probation, or who have earned less than a 2.3 cumulative grade point average (GPA). The deans will send letters to the students' permanent addresses informing students of their academic status and of their mandatory attendance in the School of General Studies Academic Study Skills Center and/or other specialized tutoring centers. Advisers will also submit the names of at
risk students to the coordinator of the SGS Study Skills Center who will be required to keep advisers informed of their advisees' attendance.

It is important to acknowledge students who are performing well; therefore, academic advisers will submit to their deans the names of students who make the honor roll. The deans will determine the method of recognition of honor students. It is suggested that deans send congratulatory letters to the students' permanent addresses.

Although sound academic advisement is important for academic progression, retention, and graduation, first-time-in-college students also need to make a smooth adjustment to college. They quickly learn that there are many differences between high school and college, but many first-time-in-college students do not know how to make adjustments in a timely manner; therefore, they realize too late that they have not met the requirements for passing their classes, or they have not performed as well as they are capable of performing. To assist students with making a smooth adjustment to college, the Freshmen/Sophomore Year Experience Program will offer SLS 1101: College Orientation for students whose majors do not offer a similar course. Studies on student retention show that students who participated in college orientation courses exhibited a greater probability of retention than those who did not participate. Whether the students enroll in college orientation or other courses designed by majors, it is recommended that the following topics be covered:

- Goal Setting
- Study Skills
- Note Taking
- Test taking skills
- Time management
The Freshmen/Sophomore Year Experience Program will also include the following components:

- **Lyceum Program**: A nationally distinguished scholar will be invited to speak to the freshmen and sophomores; however, other students may attend.

- **Fall and Spring Lecture Series**: This activity will utilize faculty, students, and people from the community to share their experiences and to motivate students to stay in school and to stay engaged with their studies and other activities.

- **Scholarly Competition**: Students will be encouraged to participate in essay writing contests, oratorical contests, brain bowls, debates, etc. to improve their intellectual skills. Awards will be given to the winners of each contest.

- **Special Recognition**: Deans will send congratulatory letters to students who make the honor roll at the end of each semester. This will assure the students that the University is proud of their accomplishments and will encourage them to continue to excel in their studies.

- **Talent Show**: Students will have an opportunity to display their talents in an annual Freshman/Sophomore Talent Show.

- **Civic Responsibility and Participation**: Students will be reminded of their responsibilities as a citizen of the United States and of the State of Florida. Special emphasis will be placed on areas that are most applicable to freshman
and sophomore students, such as the right to vote, common criminal charges against college students (date rape, underage drinking, using illicit drugs, road rage, conflict with others, and using guns). In conjunction with the Student Government Association, the FSYE Program will provide avenues for the students to register to vote and will encourage them to vote in all elections.

- **Community Service/Volunteerism**: Students will be encouraged to provide service to the community - local schools, tutoring programs Boys/Girls Club, etc.

- **Financial Planning Seminar**: The lack of financial support and financial problems caused by the use of credit cards are among the reasons for students leaving college; therefore, all freshmen will be required to attend a seminar on budgeting avoiding the credit card trap sponsored by the School of General Studies. Additionally, a representative from NAFEO will be invited to provide free seminar on the effects of bad credit on the students' future.

- **Academic Support**: At-risk-students, as determined by academic advisers, will be required to attend the various academic tutorial laboratories on campus. Uniformed procedures for monitoring student attendance will be developed by the coordinators of the various laboratories. The Academic Study Skills Center in the School of General Studies will be the principal tutorial center. The center will be comprised of an English laboratory staffed by a full time English instructor; a mathematics laboratory staffed by a full time mathematics instructor, and a study skills laboratory supervised by the coordinator of the
School of General Studies Academic Study Skills Center. The center will also consist of part-time professionals and peer tutors.

Students who want to improve their grade will be able to use the center also.

**The study skills center will offer the following services:**

1. Small Group Tutoring
2. Individualized tutoring
3. Seminars on Study Skills, note taking, and study skills
4. Small group study area

- **Kick-Off Picnic for Freshmen Students and Teachers:** To provide an opportunity for students to interact among themselves, and with faculty, staff, and administrators, a kick-off picnic will be given at the beginning of the fall semester. The Division of Student Affairs and the SGA will be asked to sponsor this activity.

- **Monthly Majors Meetings:** To provide an opportunity for students to interact with other students in their selected majors and with faculty and staff in their selected majors, academic advisers, in conjunction with their dean of the deans' representatives, will plan at least two monthly majors meetings per semester. The schools, colleges, and institute will determine the format of these meetings.

- **Peer Mentoring:** Successful sophomores who participate fully in the FSYE Program during their freshman year will be asked to serve as peer mentors for freshmen students in their majors. A peer mentor/mentee meeting will be held during the fall and spring semester to discuss peer mentoring and to assign
mentees to mentors. The intent is for these relationships to continue until graduation.

- **Intramurals:** To promote interaction among students, the Division of Student Affairs will provide the leadership for freshman and sophomore students to organize themselves for competitive sports within the University.

- **Parent Orientation:** An orientation session for parents will be conducted during Freshman Orientation. Selected representatives will discuss issues that affect all students, and parents will have an opportunity to receive clarification on academic policies. Among the topics to be discussed are the use of admission test scores and college placement test scores in placing students in appropriate entry level English, mathematics, and reading. The College Preparatory Statute, the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), the General Education Sequence, Gordon Rule, academic progression, academic advisement and registration, holds that will prevent students from registering, academic support, excusable and non excusable absences, the Buckley Amendment, *etc.*

- **Student/Parent Manual:** A packet containing university deadlines and other pertinent information shared in the Parent Orientation Session will be placed on the FSYE Program’s Web site so that all parents and students will have access to the information.

- **FAMU Flash:** The *FAMU Flash* will be an electronic newsletter from the FRESHMAN-SOPHOMORE YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM. This monthly correspondence will be generated from the School of General Studies and will
provide information to the University family concerning the events and activities of the program. The communication will be sent to parents, students within the program, and to the University staff and faculty. The following topics are some of the issues that will be covered in the \textit{FAMU Flash}:

There will be an article directly from the Dean of the School of General Studies concerning the FRESHMAN/SOPHOMORE YEAR EXPERIENCE. This letter from her will emphasize and highlight her concerns and/or achievements of the program. The following are examples of the kinds of articles to be included:

1. Upcoming Campus Dates and Priorities;
2. Words from the Director of the University-wide Academic Advisement Center
3. Recognition of students who achieve Honor Roll status
4. Highlights of freshman and sophomore students for community service or extra curricular achievements.
5. Placement of a question concerning Black history or FAMU traditions that will allow the winner to receive a corporate sponsor award or gift.
6. Highlights of events and speakers in the \textit{Adaptation to College Development} series.
7. Financial aid and registration tips for the returning students.

This newsletter will be cost effective because it will be distributed via e-mail.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{RECLAMATION COMPONENT:} Florida A&M University has a reputation of being an institution based on caring and concern for the students who comprise
its constituency. This component of University-wide advisement will be another facet that illustrates the concern the University has for its students. The University already utilizes dropout intervention techniques, but students still withdraw from the University. This component is designed to determine the reasons for these withdrawals and to try to encourage the students to return to the institution.

- The determination of the causes for withdrawal will allow the University to prepare a pre-emptive course of action that will encourage students to remain at the institution. This will allow the development of a model to assist in intervention planning.

- As part of the withdrawal process the student’s adviser will meet with the advisee to obtain as much information about the student’s reason(s) for leaving and to determine if the University can help the student remain at FAMU.

- The student’s adviser will attempt to keep in contact. The adviser will make a phone call to the student within two weeks of his departure from the University. If the adviser does not make contact within two weeks, he should continue calling the student until contact is made.

- The dropout student will be a part of the reclamation component of the program. This student will be counseled about his future. The groundwork will be laid for the students return to the Florida A&M University campus. Phone contact should be made with the student at least once every other month for a period of
one year in an effort to encourage the student to return to school and to provide assistance for him to reapply for admission and financial aid.

- **Attrition/Retention/Progression Study**: The FSYE Program’s initial study will follow that suggested by Ernest Pascarella. The reasons for the study will be

1. To determine retention rates that can serve as benchmarks for monitoring the effects of subsequent institutional or program changes;

2. To determine the causes of retention/attrition and identify correlates of retention;

3. To develop an early warning system to identify students who are potential dropouts;

4. To increase understanding of the withdrawal process;

5. To identify those students who will survive only if special support is provided and to determine what support is needed;

6. To ascertain students’ reported reasons for dropping out (Which research suggests are often different from the real underlying reasons);

7. To show dropouts the university’s concern for them (exit interviews have been found to help change the minds of some students who are in the process of dropping out);

8. To assess the cost versus benefits of different retention program strategies;

9. To evaluate special retention program efficiency and/or effectiveness.

- **Faculty Development**: A faculty committee will be formed to compile training materials for academic staff to help them to understand student transition and enable them, within their discipline, to develop suitable strategies to improve the experiences of first and second year students. The training material will also help to facilitate a faculty culture to foster more collaborative teacher-student
learning contexts, and staff will be introduced or reoriented to background issues associated with strategies, such as peer study and mentoring, collaborative learning, etc. These student activities are important in helping students to settle in their new learning environments and should help their academic performance and ultimately increase both retention and the completion rates.

- **Faculty Awards:** Faculty members who demonstrate successful innovative teaching strategies to engage students in the learning process will receive preference in their applications for tenure and promotion, Teacher of the Year Awards, support for travel to present at conferences, sabbatical leave, etc.
Reduce the Number of Adjunct Instructors Assigned to the General Education Sequence.

Although many part-time faculty members have excellent credentials and do excellent professional work, there are many disadvantages to using them in lower division courses in which all students are required to take.

1. Dependence upon part-time faculty results in a lack of program coherence and reduces faculty involvement with students and students' leaning;

2. Inadequate facilities, such as office space and telephone, accessible to part time faculty members create structural impediments that part the most talented teachers at a severe disadvantage.

3. A high reliance on part-time faculty appointment robs departments of qualified people needed to perform crucial functions, such as developing courses, researching, and designing general education courses, etc.

4. Entering and less prepared students may be further disadvantaged because of the lack of essential out-of-class support and because of the instructors' lack of knowledge about the institution.

5. A high reliance on part-time faculty diminishes faculty professional development and denies many students access to quality education.

"Statement from Conference on the Growing use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty. American Association of University Professors."
Retention Intervention Timeline (Proactive)

- Summer Transition/Bridge Programs
- New Student Orientation and Convocations
- Extended Orientation Course
- Early-Alert/Early Warning System
- Red Flag Procedures
- Exit Interviews/Surveys (Administered during the process of withdrawal
- Already Withdrawn/Departed Surveys
- Re-Recruitment of Withdrawn Students (Converting “dropouts” to “stopouts”)
Student Satisfaction Survey

Students will evaluate academic advisers periodically using the following model:

Advisers

Are consistently available

Keep regular office hours

Get to know students personally

Make appropriate referrals

Have a positive, constructive attitude

Are on time for appointments

Have the information needed

Discuss personal and academic goals

Keep students up to date on their course of study

Students desire advisers who are knowledgeable and caring. This underscores the need for a professional, well-trained advisement staff deserving of student attention and respect. Funds should be available to employ full-time professional advisers. The same adviser should advise students until they enter the third year or upper division.

Supervisors need to create an environment where advisers are encouraged to participate in the development of procedures. They need to be provided flexibility and opportunities for innovation so that they can play meaningful roles in the development of instrument and assessment procedures.
"Advisers must be caring, nurturing, approachable, and compassionate."


"The adviser serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and academic progress review, and as an agent of referral to other campus agencies as necessary."

American Testing Program.
Essentials for the Freshman/Sophomore Experience Program to Succeed

1. An adequate number of academic advisers must be provided to accommodate students from each college, school, and institute.

2. Academic advisers must have an open line of communication with their department-chairs and deans.

3. Chairpersons and deans must give continuous feedback on the success or the failure of their academic advisers in meeting the needs of their students and their college, school or institute.

4. Academic advisors must function under uniformed standards in the university-wide academic advisement center. Deans or their designees will assist with determining the standards.

5. A sufficient number of paid tutors, both student and professional, must be provided in the academic student support laboratories.

6. Student support laboratories must be equipped with appropriate equipment, technology, textbooks and tutorial software for tutoring sessions.

7. Students must take responsibility for their learning. They must follow-up on advisers' recommendations for improving their performance.

8. Common course syllabi that delineate the material to be covered and the student outcomes must be developed for each course in the General Education Sequence.

9. Periodic assessment of students' performance is crucial. Instructors should give several quizzes, tests, and other graded assignments so that they, along with the students, can properly evaluate the students' progress throughout the semester. Freshmen and sophomores need to take more than a mid-term and final examination.

10. Sufficient General Education Sequence courses in each subject must be available each semester so that students can take courses sequentially.

11. Freshman and sophomore instructors must support the completion of mid-term conference reports in order for advisers to assign students to tutoring in a timely manner. Students who are failing at mid-term should not be doomed to failure.

12. All areas of the University must be committed to the program.