

College of Arts and Sciences: Retention Improvement Plan (May 2005)

I. Ongoing or Planned Action Steps

A. Continue Freshman and Sophomore Learning Improvement Project.

This program, started during fall semester 2004, identified 20 courses with low success rates and/or large numbers of unsuccessful students. Ten departments have developed learning improvement plans for these courses with the goal of achieving higher success rates. We anticipate seeing improvements in outcomes shortly, and will continue to work toward continuous improvement in the semesters ahead.

B. Participate in Freshman Year Experience (FYE).

The College will participate fully in FYE. We are currently recruiting faculty members with an interest and facility in freshman outreach who will participate as instructors in FYE. Lois Wims (plus other recruits) will teach FYE in the fall 2005 semester, and we will gradually expand our participation as we phase in FYE. We are also contemplating using FYE instructors to serve as one of the student's academic advisors in their first year.

C. Improve Advising (on-going).

The College is committed to improving advising efforts for all students. We are currently recruiting a new Advising Center Director, who will be charged to develop a plan to improve advising among majors and undecided students. Currently, revised uniform advising check sheets, which will be easier to interpret by students and advisors, are being developed for all undergraduate programs. The new Director will also be charged with developing an advising training plan for both veteran and new members of the faculty, and to facilitate improved communication between faculty advisors and the Advising Center.

D. Participate in an Early Warning System.

The College will participate fully in the development and implementation of an Early Warning System to be used in introductory level courses. The system will be used to notify the student and his/her advisor of difficulties with grades, attendance and assignments by the end of week five.

E. Expand Co-curricular and Extra-curricular Efforts (on-going).

Several departments have pledged to increase opportunities for student and faculty interaction with clubs, field trips, gathering areas, brown bag sessions, student paper competitions and similar efforts. Student organizations can be utilized as a link to engage students with the discipline and the faculty, and strengthen their identities as majors. Several departments use upper division students as teaching assistants/tutors/teaching interns to assist with the teaching mission, and engage other students in the academic life of the department. These

efforts have clear benefits, including improvement of learning outcomes, and strengthened ties between students and faculty.

II. Under Consideration by the College of Arts and Sciences

A. Strengthen Commitment to Continuous Improvement in Teaching and Learning.

Ideas under consideration include:

- Using Teaching Award Winners to lead teaching workshops on such topics as improving student motivation, using cooperative learning strategies, and facilitating problem solving skills;
- Investigating the concept of ‘master teachers’ designation for selected faculty members;
- Instituting faculty development stipends for achieving ‘master teacher’ designation and/or pursuing pedagogy training.

B. Investigate the Potential of Virtual Advising.

Virtual Advising may be useful as a means to give students ready access to information in advance of, and as a supplement to, face-to-face advising.

C. Implement Additional Efforts to Improve Advising.

Appoint advising coordinators for each program, weigh advising more heavily in faculty evaluation, and improve evaluation of advising effectiveness.

D. Implement New Freshmen Requirement for a Critical Thinking Course.

Develop a program during the freshman year to foster development of critical reading and analysis skills, and higher order writing performance. This might be modeled after the N.C. State Inquiry Based Learning Initiative. If such a requirement is introduced, we will do so without increasing the total number of credit hours needed for a degree.

E. Institute Common Reading Assignment.

To strengthen student engagement, a book may be assigned at Orientation for summer reading for all entering freshmen that can be reinforced with a thematic focus for the Freshman Year Experience course.

F. Promote Service Learning.

Encourage service learning and community involvement by students and faculty, perhaps linked to extra credit in courses.

G. Establish the College of Arts and Sciences as a Learning Centered College.

This could be accomplished by using learning community techniques in FYE and other freshman courses, linking courses across disciplines, and giving early, frequent feedback to students.

III. Recommended Actions University-wide

A. Establishment of an Academic Support Center.

Such a Center would be charged with coordinating delivery of services to students who have identified academic deficiencies. Such a Center could house the Writing Lab and Developmental Studies, and could coordinate tutorial services. Such a center could facilitate efforts by faculty, advisors and others to identify students with problems early, and facilitate delivery of needed services before students get into severe academic trouble.

B. Improvement of Academic Advising for At-Risk students.

Such students might be admitted into the University under a special status (perhaps provisionally). Initial courses and course loads could be restricted for such students to facilitate the transition to college level course work. Additionally, the University could provide enhanced and intrusive advising for such students.