

Exploratory Studies Learning Community and Living-Learning Community Proposal 2012-2013

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Currently, UNCG is running two pilot learning communities using developmental advising/coaching to assist students in the exploration of majors and disciplines at the University. These two programs combine the need to support two populations with high attrition risks after their first year at UNCG into one program – Exploratory Studies. The current pilot focuses on two groups: the truly undecided student and students majoring within PreHealth.

Undecided students:

Students who arrive at UNCG without a selected major are more likely to leave the University after their first year. According to the Retention SWOT data, compiled in Fall 2009, UNCG retains 74.1% of students who enter the University without a declared major into their second year. Of this group, 24% of undecided students declare a major in the spring of their first year. Students, who declare a major in the spring of their first year, have a slightly higher cumulative GPA than those who do not declare a major. Moreover, of this undeclared population, 54.2% (of the 2004-2008 undeclared cohort) enter their sophomore year without declaring a major (Retention SWOT, 2009). It was the hope of this pilot, that by providing undecided students with an opportunity to explore majors at UNCG in a structured environment, a larger percentage of these students would attempt a major in spring of their first year at UNCG.

The current cohort of undecided students in this pilot consists of 21 first year students, from a variety of backgrounds. These students have participated in developmental advising with a trained College of Arts and Sciences Advisor, who also taught the Foundations for Learning (FFL 101) course and the American Politics (PSC 100) course in which the students were enrolled. Additionally, the students were enrolled in a Religious Traditions and Care of the Earth (REL 250) course. In these three courses, students used advising tools, group dialogue and career interviews to explore various academic opportunities on campus. As this pilot is still in progress, the Office of Learning Communities cannot provide data beyond anecdotal feedback from current participants. Current participants have expressed their desire to declare a major for spring of their first year, as well as a significant connection to their faculty advisor.

PreHealth students:

PreHealth majors at UNCG, are students who have a desire to major in Pre-Nursing, but do not meet the minimum SAT/ACT and high school GPA requirements for Pre-Nursing majors. These students encompass two groups identified by the Retention SWOT team in 2009 as high risk attrition populations.

1. Students who are academically underprepared and struggle to perform, defined as those who come from the “low admit band” and have an entering predicted GPA between 2.0 and 2.9 and SAT score between 800 and 1000. Particularly at risk are those with the predicted GPA of 2.0 to 2.5.
2. Students in pre-professional majors who do not have the academic proficiency to enter the major or are unlikely to be admitted to the major.

“As identified in the SWOT report (across freshmen cohorts from 2004-2008), pre-nursing students are 16% less likely to be retained at UNCG from the first to the second year, as compared to the overall freshman cohort. This population has been identified by the SWOT report as the most “at risk” freshman student population to be retained from the first to second year (Moore, 2010).”

Currently, the Exploratory Studies: PreHealth Living-Learning Community pilot consists of 75 students majoring in PreHealth from a variety of backgrounds. The students were co-enrolled in a Foundations for Learning (FFL 101) course and a Personal Health (HEA 201) course. In both courses, students explored various career opportunities within the Health field, completed personal success and academic success plans, and worked with advisors in Pre-Nursing, Students First and Health and Human Sciences to explore majors available within the various health professions. As noted with the general undecided group, the Office of Learning Communities can only provide anecdotal feedback from students, as the current pilot is on-going. Many of the pilot participants have declared majors in Nutrition, Public Health, Human Development and Family Studies, or Pre-Nursing (if they have met the University GPA requirement). Additionally, the students have expressed interest in exploring multiple health and wellness opportunities at UNCG.

Desired expansion of the current pilot:

Due to the early success of both the Undecided and PreHealth pilot communities, the Office of Learning Communities has begun creating opportunities to expand the Exploratory Studies Learning Community to a larger population of students in Fall 2012. Through partnerships with the Students First Office, who will be advising Exploring majors (previously Undeclared majors), the Office of Learning Communities would like to expand Exploratory Studies from 100 students to 300 students. This expansion will allow OLC to provide students who are undecided or wishing to explore multiple majors the opportunity to explore majors at UNCG in a supportive and structured environment, with faculty and staff mentors.

The proposed structure was developed to address three challenges faced by students who are undecided in their choice of major upon entering UNCG:

- Completing General Education requirements, without penalizing a student's progress to degree completion
- Connection to a major or disciplinary area
- Development of decision-making skills

Additionally, upon completing their Exploratory Studies Learning Community Experience, students will be able to (intended Learning Outcomes):

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the variety of academic majors and careers associated within a given academic disciplinary track (ie, Business, the Humanities, etc)
2. Identify personal and academic strengths as they relate to career and major selection
3. Apply knowledge gained from career exploration activities to the major selection process
4. Identify and explain the benefits (personal, academic, and professional) of establishing relationships with faculty, staff, and peers in the UNCG community
5. Recognize the value that a college education brings to their personal definitions of success
6. Articulate the interdisciplinary connections between different courses, majors, and co-curricular activities at UNCG
7. Use key campus resources and services to support curricular and co-curricular learning

8. Identify and explain the impact of cultural diversity on issues related to their chosen disciplinary track
9. Explain how personal values, interests, and abilities impact career/major decision- making
10. Utilize effective oral and written communication strategies in both curricular and co-curricular contexts

Each of these outcomes will be measured through on-going critical reflection in the Foundations for Learning/Introduction to Business courses in which the students will be enrolled. Both courses require the completion of personal success plans (Learning Outcomes measured: 2, 3, 7, 9, 10), on-going written reflection (Learning Outcomes measured: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10), group and team-based assignments (Learning Outcomes measured: 10), and a significant capstone presentation project (Learning Outcomes measured: 1-10).

Structure of the expanded Exploratory Studies Program:

Exploratory Studies will provide students with both non-residential learning community and living-learning community options. This will allow students who are commuting to campus to be included in this learning community experience. The Learning Community will contain six tracks (each with 50 students – 25 in a living-learning community and 25 in a non-residential learning community), allowing students to explore six distinctive disciplinary areas and the majors they maintain. In these tracks, students will be co-registered for a minimum of two courses:

- Foundations for Learning course (FFL 101)/Introduction to Business (BUS 105)– exploring the transition to the University, containing developmental advising and career advising, providing faculty mentoring, and including co-curricular learning opportunities related to disciplinary themes. Each track will have two sections of these courses (as the maximum student enrollment is 25 for each course).
- General Education course(s) – specific to the student's chosen disciplinary track, while remaining transferable to other disciplines as the student explores their major options at UNCG. An option for an additional General Education course to be included will be given to faculty members who would desire to have students explore significant challenges/problems as related to a given topic within their disciplinary theme.

The six tracks will include:

- **A General Undecided Track:** For the truly undecided, this track will explore all disciplines at UNCG. This includes exploring what declaring a major means for the student experience, exploring a variety of majors through interviewing potential majors of interest, while completing general education requirements.
- **Business:** For the student considering majors within all areas of business, this track will explore the Bryan School of Business and Economics, along with other programs at UNCG. This includes exploring what is required of business majors and programs, while fostering skills needed for successful completion of a business degree.
- **Biological Science:** As the largest declared major of incoming first year students within the science discipline, this track will allow students considering a biology major to explore options within biology outside of the traditional premedical opportunities.
- **Humanities:** This track will explore all areas of fine arts and the humanities. Allowing students to engage in dialogue on the human condition, while exploring careers and majors that support the analytical and critical inquiry of larger challenges.

- **PreHealth and Wellness:** Part of the original pilot, this track will continue to support students desiring to peruse the Nursing Program at UNCG, but who may struggle to obtain admission to the program. This community currently serves 75 PreHealth students, and has provided those students with a platform to explore opportunities in Wellness professions, beyond Nursing. This track will be expanded to offer a learning community opportunity to any student wishing to explore areas of PreHealth and Wellness.
- **Social Sciences:** This track will explore the majors and disciplines related to society and engagement. The track will allow students to begin exploring areas of political science, linguistics, sociology, history and beyond.

Each track will participate in co-curricular opportunities that focus on their disciplinary area, as well as several large-scale co-curricular and curricular opportunities focused on the decision-making process. Students, who are undecided or exploring multiple majors, often struggle with the process of decision-making. The understanding of how to gather all the information required to explore an opportunity and the process of selecting the best option is a point of challenge for many students, but particularly challenging for this population. Each track will include the following co-curricular programs facilitated by the Students First Office, the Career Services Center and the Office of Learning Communities:

- The completion of interests and values inventories (Learning Outcomes supported: 2, 3, 4, 7, 9)
- Alumni career and major panels (Learning Outcomes supported: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)
- Occupational/major interviews with faculty and fellow students (Learning Outcome supported: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10)
- TeamQuest (Learning Outcomes supported: 2, 4, 5, 6, 10)
- Excursion to topic related programs (ie, Business tracked students may attend a visit to a local company with the Sustainable Entrepreneurship LLC, etc) (Learning Outcomes supported: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Faculty mentoring/advising and selected courses:

The Office of Learning Communities is currently recruiting faculty from each disciplinary track to serve as an academic mentor and coach, who will work in conjunction with the Students First Office to advise and guide the 50 participants in their chosen track. This will provide each student with significant and meaningful interactions with their faculty mentor.

Additionally, this faculty member will teach one section of Foundations for Learning and the General Education course related to their chosen disciplinary area, continuing the coaching and mentoring relationship with the faculty advisor and the student. The faculty member will be encouraged to incorporate high impact pedagogy in both the General Education course and the Foundations for Learning courses- including: Service Learning, Undergraduate Research, critical reflection, etc. From this model, three options exist to coordinate the structure of the LC (cost outlined in table 1):

Option 1: Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load. Staff member teaching one FFL section. The faculty member would be paired with a University staff member, who will be teaching the second section of Foundations for Learning course. The Office of Learning Communities in conjunction with the faculty member would select a University staff member with a background related to the assigned disciplinary track. The faculty/staff pairings would facilitate disciplinary specific assignments and integration between the General Education course and Foundations for Learning courses, as well as disciplinary specific co-curricular activities. This pairing will allow for students to visual observe the benefits of establishing relationships with faculty and staff members at UNCG (Learning Outcome 4), as well as

observing the application of a college education to multiple occupations (Learning Outcome 5).
Estimated cost: \$77,400

Option 2: Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load. Addition of a second GEC course not in faculty load. Staff member teaching one FFL section. Similar to option one: including a faculty and staff team for FFL 101. This option would require an additional General Education course be added to the course pairing. This course would allow for integration beyond one disciplinary track or focus, offering the student opportunities to explore how potential careers or majors connect with multiple disciplines (Learning Outcome: 1 and 6). As well as, observe the benefits of establishing relationships with faculty and staff members at UNCG (Learning Outcome 4), as well as observing the application of a college education to multiple occupations (Learning Outcome 5). **Estimated Cost: \$98,400**

Option 3: Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load. A second faculty member teaching the second FFL section and teaching an additional GEC course not in faculty load. Staff member serves as a co-curricular liaison. This option is the most costly, as it would require that both FFL 101 sections be taught by faculty members, thus incurring the cost of additional faculty add-pays. Having two faculty members to coordinate the advising, co-curricular and mentoring will allow for students to receive more direct contact with faculty and specific disciplines. The University Staff member would be able to serve as a co-curricular liaison and mentor for the students in the LC, still allowing student to observe the benefits of establishing relationships with faculty and staff members at UNCG (Learning Outcome 4), as well as observing the application of a college education to multiple occupations (Learning Outcome 5). **Estimated Cost: \$119,400**

Optional Spring Component

In the current pilots, students have requested the addition of an optional spring component. It is important that this remain optional, as student focus, degree path and interest can change significantly from the fall. In the current pilot for Undecided students, a spring options does not exist and students have requested that a second course with their faculty mentor be added. In the current pilot for PreHealth students, a spring option was offered to students that included Human Development Across Life Spans (HDF 211) partnered with Career and Life Planning (CED 210). In the PreHealth pilot, only 36 of the 75 students have elected to take either course (both courses were purchased by OLC for this population at a cost of \$10,000).

For the expansion of the Exploratory Studies Learning Community, it is suggested that one or two General Education courses be reserved for students wishing to continue their experience in the spring. This course should be paired with a second Foundations for Learning course (either FFL 102- a research based course or FFL 103- a service based course). However, only on FFL section should be maintained for each disciplinary track. **Estimated spring cost: \$28,000**

Estimated cost for a full academic year program:

Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Fall Option 1:	\$105,400
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Fall Option 2:	\$126,400
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Fall Option 3:	\$147,400

Fig 1. Budget (Please note: The estimated cost for these courses includes the cost of buying-out General Education courses, and the final cost could be less if departments will allow OLC to use existing course sections.)

Administrative Items for All Exploratory Studies LCs	Estimated cost
Large Scale Co-curricular programs for all 300 students	\$4,000
Cost of Peer Academic Mentors:	
- 6 Live-in Mentors (\$850 per a semester=\$1700)	\$10,200
- 6 Non-Live-in Mentors (\$350 per a semester=\$700)	\$4,200
Cost for faculty advising of 300 students (50 students per a faculty member, 6 faculty members at \$2,000 per a year).	\$6,000
Co-Curricular budget for each LC Disciplinary Track (\$2,000 per a year)	\$6,000
Marketing and recruitment cost	\$5000
Required Administrative Cost Total:	\$35,400
Academic Course Cost – option 1:	
Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load.	
Staff member teaching one FFL section.	
Cost of faculty to teach FFL 101 (\$3,500 per a course * 6 sections)	\$21,000
Cost of 6 General Education courses at a \$3,500 average	\$21,000
Total Academic Cost:	\$42,000
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost:	\$77,400
Academic Course Cost – option 2:	
Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load. Addition of a second GEC course not in faculty load.	
Staff member teaching one FFL section.	
Cost of faculty to teach FFL 101 (\$3,500 per a course * 6 sections)	\$21,000
Cost of 12 General Education courses at a \$3,500 average	\$42,000
Total Academic Cost:	\$63,000
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost:	\$98,400
Academic Course Cost – option 3:	
Faculty member teaching one FFL section and one GEC course not in load. A second faculty member teaching the second FFL section and teaching an additional GEC course not in faculty load. Staff member serves as a co-curricular liaison.	
Cost of faculty to teach FFL 101 (\$3,500 per a course *12 sections)	\$42,000
Cost of 12 General Education courses at a \$3,500 average	\$42,000
Total Academic Cost:	\$84,000
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost:	\$119,400
Spring Cost Option	
Cost of faculty to teach FFL 101 (\$3,500 per a course *6 sections)	\$21,000
Cost of 2 General Education courses at \$3,500 average	\$7,000
Total Academic Cost:	\$28,000
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Option 1:	\$105,400
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Option 2:	\$126,400
Total Cost with Administrative and Academic Cost Option 3:	\$147,400

Any of the three options would allow for the Office of Learning Communities, along with partners from across campus, to build a structured experience for undecided students at UNCG. In this structured experience, students would explore majors, disciplines and relationships across campus. This exploration will open student perspectives to a multitude of opportunities at UNCG, both in and out of the classroom. Moreover, the proposed model focuses on the three distinctive areas suggested in research to impact retention: connection to faculty, supportive advising and connection to the university.