

Transitions Dimension Report  
Stony Brook University

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The Foundations of Excellence Policy Center on the First Year of College asserts that

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This report assesses strengths and weaknesses of Stony Brook University's "Transitions Dimension," and makes specific recommendations for improvement.

The Committee

The Transitions Dimensions Committee was co-chaired by Perry Goldstein, Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Music and inaugural director of the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities from 2003-2007, and Heather Robertson, Director of Student Orientation and Family Services. The committee included:

Jessica Bechard, Sophomore residential student

Jennifer Green, Academic Advisor, College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities

Xian Li, Sophomore commuter student

Ellen Lopez, Senior Staff Assistant for Undergraduate Biology

Wanda Moore, University Academic Integrity Officer

Debra Orbell, Guidance Counselor, East Islip High School

Randy Thomas, Assistant Director of Senior Advising

Matthew Whelan, Assistant Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid

The committee was chosen to include a wide range of knowledgeable people in the areas of high school guidance, admissions, orientation, academic integrity, first-year student programming, and first-year student advising. Two students, one residential and the other a commuter, were included on the committee to help contribute student perspectives.

The Foundations of Excellence Center on the First Year of College identifies five areas of importance in assessing an institution's success with first-year students in the transitions category. They are listed below under "performance indicators" ("PI"'s for the rest of this document). They are: PI 5.1 Communications to Students To what degree does the institution effectively communicate the lived experience of first-year students through the institutional website, admissions print material, and campus tours; PI 5.2 Communications to Students To what degree does the institution communicate effectively with first-year students about the institutional mission, the institution's academic expectations, out-of-class engagement opportunities, entry requirements for specific academic majors, college costs and financial aid (during recruitment and admissions, and college costs and financial aid (during the first year in order to plan for subsequent years); PI 5.3 Communications to Others To what degree does the campus communicate to the following groupsâ€”secondary school personnel, families of first-year students, and other support networks such as organizations and groups (e.g., churches, community organizations, local businesses) that have on-going connections and influence with first-year studentsâ€”their role in facilitating student success in the first year of college? PI 5.4 Establishing Connections To what degree does your campus structure and implement a first year in which students establish connections with faculty (especially out of class), upper-level students, other first-year students, and academic support services?; and PI 5.5 Academic Advising What is the overall quality of academic advising in preparation for the freshman and sophomore years? A detailed report on these performance indicators follows.

Toward the goal of understanding several processes—recruitment, admission, orientation, the role of the Undergraduate Colleges in the first-year student experience, etc.—the expertise of various members of the committee was shared through bi-weekly "mini-sessions." At one such meeting, for example, the guidance counselor for East Islip High School discussed the perception of Stony Brook University at regional high schools, focusing on Stony Brook's recruitment materials. At another, the Assistant Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid gave a presentation on the various means—printed material, website, phone bank outreach, among others—through which the university communicates its messages to the general public. In another session, the Academic Integrity Officer for the university discussed the ways in which first-year students are taught about plagiarism and cheating. Other topics covered were orientation, the Undergraduate Colleges, advising, and additional areas of relevance to the first-year experience. Many staff outside the Transitions Committee were interviewed to create as well-rounded an understanding of the transitions process as possible.

In addition, several surveys were used to assess perceptions among first-year students, faculty, and staff. These included the Foundation of Excellence's student survey, taken early and late in the academic year; a faculty/staff survey conducted once (in the Fall); and two surveys, also conducted once, designed by the Transitions Committee, one for sophomores who had been through the first-year experience, and one for faculty who have taught the 102 (first-year) seminars. The information gathered through the expertise of the committee members, through interviews with staff, through the surveys, and through documentary evidence, provided a comprehensive overview of the transition process.

PI 5.1 Communications to Students To what degree does the institution effectively communicate the lived experience of first-year students through the following:

Evaluate Each	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Institutional website	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Admissions print materials	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Campus tours for prospective students	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

#### Discussion Notes on Current Situation

##### A. Institutional Website

Stony Brook's comprehensive website has clearly delineated sections for undergraduate students *and first-year students* (separate from transfer student information). The website is interactive. Prospective and admitted students may choose to "converse" with Stony Brook bloggers through e-mails and instant messages. Online chatrooms are available for students in specific groups, such as *EOP/AIM* and certain majors. Students can chat with a "virtual advisor," or take a "virtual tour" of sites on campus, including the Stadium, Wang Center, academic buildings, etc. Students may elect to become V.I.P.'s, through which they receive e-mails, newsletters, and other communications about activities at Stony Brook. The website also offers on-line registration for campus events, such as Open Houses and Admitted Student Receptions.

The website has greatly improved over the last several years, with eye-catching photographs and more attractive design as well as important information. Campus ethnic diversity is reflected in the choice of photographs. The relatively recent addition of more inclusive campus calendars gives students and others a central location for information about the wealth of campus events. Pages are attractively laid out in important categories, such as "How to Apply," "Academics," "Financial," "Campus Visits," "Student Life," and "Facts," among others. The website offers a summary of student life on one page with short descriptions of each area with links to other sections of the website.

##### B. Admissions Print Materials

Admissions currently offers a diverse selection of print materials. There are general materials relevant to all undergraduates, such as the view book ("Red Hot Stony Brook") and return mailing card ("Red Hot Future"). There are also more specific materials about specific university colleges and programs, such as Engineering, Journalism, Music, and Marine and Atmospheric Sciences. The general university materials have been designed by the Office of Communications to have a uniform style, using the "Red Hot" theme throughout the documents. These are attractive, image-heavy magazine-style publications that have snippets of information. Their purpose is to attract, while informing minimally. The materials highlight different majors (arts, humanities, social sciences, engineering and sciences) and the diverse student population. Special attention has been paid to combat the notion that Stony Brook is only a science-research institution, and the materials provide images (such as a performing violinist) that promote awareness of a wider range of academic offerings. The materials contain profiles of Stony Brook students, and show pictures of residence halls and campus traditions.

Acceptance packages are still mailed to new students, although students now have the option of mailing in acceptances/deposits or completing the acceptance process online. The university offers different Admissions packages for first-year students and transfers. The package for first-year students trumpets the benefits of the Undergraduate Colleges. (The Undergraduate Colleges were developed six years ago, first with the College of Information and Technology, followed the next year by the addition of the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities and the College of Science and Society, and joined the following year by the final three: the Colleges of Leadership and Service, Global Studies, and Human Development. The

Colleges are thematic rather than academic, offering two required courses, one in each semester, and a wide array of social, educational, and cultural programming.) Admissions packages acknowledge housing limitations and state the possibility of tripling.

### C. Campus Tours for Prospective Students

Stony Brook offers campus tours two times per day, six days per week (Monday through Saturday) for most of the academic year. Campus tours are run by students trained by professional staff and experienced tour guides. They link prospective students with current students, who can relay the "lived experience" at Stony Brook. The "STARS Program" (Student Admissions Recruiters) trains students as Admissions Ambassadors both on campus and in the community to discuss their experiences at Stony Brook. Campus tours include academic buildings, residence halls, and social/recreational activities. The Admissions Office also offers a "Student for a Day" program; students can come to campus for a day and sit in on classes. They are accompanied by a student Admissions Ambassador to a lecture of the prospective student's choosing. During summer orientation, new students receive a campus tour, led by student Orientation Leaders who provide a peer perspective. Campus tours have yielded positive results for the university. The table below outlines results of campus tours evaluations, as provided by Lyle Wind, Assistant Director of Admissions and Campus Tours Coordinator.

#### Tour Attendees Spring 2007

• 1154 students attended a tour.

• Of those who attended a tour, 517 (44.8%) identified themselves as 2007 graduates of high school, listed as seniors below.

• 452 (87.4%) of the seniors group applied for fall admission.

• 435 (84.1%) of the seniors group were accepted.

• 217 (41.9%) of the seniors group submitted deposits.

#### Information Session Attendees Spring 2007

• 489 students attended an information session.

• Of those who attended an information session, 205 (41.9%) identified themselves as 2007 graduates of high school.

• 182 (88.8 %) of the seniors group applied for fall admission.

• 180 (87.8%) of the seniors group were accepted.

• 74 (36.1%) of the seniors group submitted deposits.

Admissions trends indicate that all activities (web, print, tours, etc.) are helping to produce positive application and admissions outcomes. From 2006 to 2007, the number of applicants increased by 11.7%, to 23,783 from 21,296. 46.5% of our applicants were admitted in 2007, as compared to 47.2% in 2006, indicating slightly increased selectivity. These 11.7% increase in applications from 2006 to 2007 suggest that institutional outreach and publicity are having the desired effect of attracting qualified students to Stony Brook.

### Discussion Notes on Opportunities and Challenges

#### A. Institutional Website

While the website is attractive and information, there are some areas that can be improved. Admitted students complete the New Student Preference form online, and steps are being taken to prevent students from finishing exiting before they've finished filling it out. Previously it has been a problem that students exit the form without completing all information. Starting in 2008-2009, first-year students will be required to complete an Advising Planning form online. This will streamline the process by which students sign up for writing and math assessments in one location. While the Admissions website is effective, the Transitions Committee recommends that other offices, such as Orientation, emulate the look, feel, and responsiveness of the Admissions site through the use of personalized email or electronic newsletters.

#### B. Admissions Print Material

While post-admissions print materials are colorful and effective, they are not always disseminated in a timely manner. Often mailed in mid-April, they require students who deposit in January, February, and March to wait too long to receive the materials. The format of the publication, and orientation itself, has also changed every year for the past three years, causing staff to be retrained each year on the proper steps needed to prepare for orientation. Settling on a consistent, yearly strategy for orientation would greatly benefit staff, returning student orientation leaders, and, ultimately, new students. Orientation publications should model Admissions materials to the extent possible in that they are attractive, informative, and succinct. All offices, including Admissions and Orientation, should consider using more sustainable print publications, increasing web-publications, and minimizing the amount of print waste that the university generates.

### C. Campus Tours for Prospective Students

Stony Brook does not offer an overnight admissions program, which may be beneficial for prospective students, according to the Dean of Admissions, Judy Berhannan. The university also does not offer an overnight orientation program as it has in the past, which is common on other campuses, according to the Assistant Vice Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid, Matthew Whelan. Campus tours, including residence halls, are not offered to parents during the orientation. Orientation surveys indicate that such tours would be desirable to parents. The Transitions Committee recommends that the Orientation office consider an overnight orientation program, as well as offering parents campus tours at orientation. It also suggests that Admissions consider organizing overnight campus visits for prospective students to give them a better sense of the institution.

The Office of Admissions space/lobby/waiting area is very small. During campus tours and information sessions, the lobby and waiting room are overcrowded and confusing. The Transitions Committee recommends creating a larger space, with updated décor. Often, the Admissions space is the first place on campus that prospective students and parents see. It should be comfortable, attractive, and impressive.

#### Discussion Notes on Sources of Evidence.

- Review of University Admissions print materials
- Presentation by Matt Whelan, AVP of Admissions & Financial Aid, including a demonstration of interactive websites and online newsletters
- Interview with Judy Berhannan, Dean of Admissions
- Observations of Heather Robertson, Director of Orientation & Family Programs
- Review of Orientation parents' evaluations
- Review of the report "Freshmen Admit-Accepts as of July 2007: A Three-Year Comparison" created by Institutional Advancement

PI 5.2 Communications to Students To what degree does the institution communicate effectively with first-year students about the following?

Evaluate Each	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Institutional mission	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Institution's academic expectations	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Out-of class engagement <sup>1</sup> opportunities  <sup>1</sup> Out-of-class engagement includes traditional co-curricular offerings and other educationally effective experiences such as internships, student on-campus employment, leadership, and volunteer activities.	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Entry requirements for specific academic majors	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
College costs and financial aid (during recruitment and admissions)	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
College costs and financial aid (during the first year in order to plan for subsequent years)	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

#### Discussion Notes on Current Situation

Stony Brook University has an institutional Mission Statement that is posted on the University website and in the 101 student text book. (All first-year students are required to take a first-year seminar section of 101.) The Mission Statement is easy to access on-line if one knows where to look, by going to "About SB" from the home page and then clicking on the "Mission Statement" link. However, searching the university website for "mission statement" will not bring up the university's mission statement on the first page entries. Over 25 entries from various departments appear first. Searching under "University mission statement" will access the statement at the thirty-second entry located in the 2006 Campus Climate Report. The mission statement is not in the Student Handbook and it is not addressed with new students through the orientation office. Neither the Student nor the Faculty/Staff Survey addressed the mission statement.

Currently, Stony Brook's Academic Expectations are a component of the First-Year 101 seminar. The 2007-2008 textbook had 6 out of 13 chapters dedicated to Academic Success, including Technology & Library Resources, Time Management, Note Taking, Test Taking, Academic Planning (Advising), and Academic Integrity. In addition, Advising and Academic Integrity are required lessons for 101 instructors; instructors must teach those topics during a student's first semester at Stony Brook. The 101 curriculum requires that two class periods be devoted to Academic Advising and one class period be devoted to Academic Integrity, almost three hours of total classroom instruction devoted to those two areas. Academic integrity is also covered in the orientation program, which is mandatory. In addition, students receive information about academic integrity in Stony Brook Family Feud, as well as in their Experience Stony Brook (ESB) Schedule book and their Student Handbook. Stony Brook Family Feud is an interactive part of their mandatory orientation programs, which addresses all state-mandated information including Academic Integrity/Judiciary, Campus Judiciary, Fire/Police Safety, Sexual Assault, and Counseling Services.

The Faculty/Staff FYM Survey and the Student FYM Survey address the issues of academic expectations through a variety of questions. Most are worded exactly the same in each survey. The table below indicates the Faculty/Staff and the Student responses in the "high" or "very high" range for the degree to which SBU addresses the following topic areas with new first-year students. Areas such as academic honesty, sources not their own, and ethical conduct saw similar responses by the two groups. Differences were noted in student and staff perceptions of academic success; however it is important to note that only Academic Advisors answered the question, "what it takes to be academically successful." No faculty members or other staff members were required to respond to that question, thus results may be skewed higher since this is a primary advisor function. However, the university has recently standardized a plagiarism statement that is distributed to instructors campus-wide and is expected to be included on all syllabi. Despite all of the attention paid to academic honesty and academic success, the students responding that the institution puts a "high" or "very high" emphasis is only in the high 60 percent range. This should be improved. The table below gives percentages of "high" and "very high" for questions about academic success and integrity.

Topic	Faculty/Staff Responses of "high" or "very high"	Student Responses of "high" or "very high"
Academic honesty	67.6%	77.5%
Acknowledging sources of ideas not their own	63.4%	66.1%
Ethical conduct	57.4%	65.2%
What it takes to be academically successful	85.9%	42.6%

A variety of out-of-class engagement opportunities exist at SBU, and these are addressed with students as early as the prospect stage. Admissions materials highlight a variety of clubs and organizations (there are over 300 at Stony Brook) and include profiles of involved students. The philosophy of the Undergraduate Colleges supports out-of-class engagement opportunities through programs such as artistic performances, service projects, academic colloquiums, and other activities. This philosophy is communicated to new students and parents during New Student Orientation and Family Orientation by both the Undergraduate College Faculty Director and the Director of the Undergraduate Colleges. In addition, the information fair at orientation features various opportunities for out-of-class engagement for students and parents to see, with representation from Student Activities, Campus Recreation, Undergraduate Student Government, Hillel, SB Volunteer Ambulance Corp, Muslim Student Association, and the Marching Band. The Undergraduate Colleges have programs about cultural and educational opportunities at Stony Brook. For example, the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities has a mandatory convocation in September to which is invited event planners from the most important venues on campus: the Staller Arts Center, Wang Center, Campus Recreation, Department of Theatre Arts, Department of Music, Stony Brook athletics, among others, to inform students about campus activities. Opening Activities offers a campus-wide Involvement Fair that showcases over 300 clubs and organizations to new students once they've been on campus for a few weeks. In addition, out-of-class involvement is an optional lesson that may be taught by instructors of the 101 First-Year seminars. There are chapters in the 101 textbook dedicated to the Undergraduate Colleges, Stony Brook Traditions, Stony Brook Resources and Leadership, all of which address campus involvement. Faculty Directors of the Undergraduate Colleges individually require students to engage in out-of-class activities. Each year from 2004-2007, for example, the Director of the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities required all students in the 101 and 102 classes to go to one event per month for seven months, chosen from a list of approximately twenty-five approved events per month. The Director of Stony Brook's Staller Center for the Arts reported a large jump in student attendance in those years compared to previous years.

The Faculty/Staff FYM Survey and the Student FYM Survey address the issues of out-of-class engagement, academic support services, and academic integrity, as follows. In the Student Survey, 38.8% said out-of-class engagement discussed by SBU is high/very high, while 33.3% said moderate. In the Faculty/Staff Survey, academic support outside of the classroom has 36.5% responding high/very high, 36.9% responding moderate. Of the 119 cases of academic dishonesty reported to Academic Judiciary in the fall of 2007, 17% were first-year students. This is lower than certain groups (i.e. Sophomores 18% and Transfers 39%) but higher than others (Seniors 12% and Juniors 11%). These results indicate that our efforts to educate first-year students about academic integrity are effective, yet also offer opportunity for improvement.

Entry requirements for specific academic majors are addressed on the University website and are immediately accessible from the Undergraduate Admissions webpage by clicking on "Academics" and then "Majors and programs." Links to the Undergraduate Bulletin are provided for every major and separate links are provided to most departmental majors. All Admissions print materials also include a list of majors but academic requirements of majors are not included. A list of academic majors is also included in the Orientation print materials that new students receive, entitled "Advising Planning Guide." The statement "Note that you must apply for admission to enter majors listed under the College of Business, College of Engineering & Applied Sciences, and the programs in the Health Sciences Center (with the exception of the Health Sciences major). Refer to the Undergraduate Bulletin for more information at [www.stonybrook.edu/ugbulletin](http://www.stonybrook.edu/ugbulletin)." is included before the list of majors. The FYM Student Survey indicated that 57.1% of first-year students felt that SBU "very highly" or "highly" communicated available majors at pre-enrollment. 43.4% of students felt that SBU "very highly" or "highly" explained the requirements for specific academic majors. New students also interact with Orientation Leader and academic advisors, who are

trained to help new students understand major requirements. Orientation Leaders receive over eight hours of training on academic advising and major/departmental advising.

College Costs and Financial Aid are covered during recruitment and Admissions in several formats. In Stony Brook Admissions print materials, tuition rates are posted boldly in all documents, and often separated from other text in tables or blocks. As Stony Brook's tuition is relatively low, the emphasis on tuition is considered a "selling point." The Office of Admissions also sends out a mailing to all admitted students in April that includes cost-comparison information, advertising our tuition costs and the affordability of education. All Admissions Open Houses feature a panelist from Financial Aid and occasionally an individual program on Financial Aid. The Undergraduate Admissions website has its own prominent "Financial" section on which students can get information on tuition or connect to links to Financial Aid and Scholarships. The Family Orientation during the summer contains an hour-long presentation on Financial Aid and Student Accounts for the parents and family members of new students. Students and parents also receive federal and SBU-specific handouts in this presentation. In addition, the office of Admissions conducts Financial Aid seminars for the Suffolk County community throughout the year. These are open to all students and family members, not only to those attending Stony Brook University. From the first FYM Student Survey, 62.6% of students indicated that the University's communication of tuition and living expenses was "high" or "very high," while 41.1% indicated that our communication regarding financial aid was "high" or "very high." The Financial Aid website clearly outlines the Financial Aid application process.

College Costs and Financial Aid during years subsequent to the first year are covered only sporadically. Various groups and organizations may offer credit awareness programs or sound financial management workshops. SBU has a variety of policies on campus that welcome professional financial institutions, for example, and while banks and financial institutions are able to advertise or staff tables on campus, they may not promote or accept applications for credit cards. The Financial Aid website has pages and resources specifically for parents and students. Information from the office of Student Financial Aid indicates that SBU students have a lower debt ratio than other institutions. According to the office of Financial Aid, SBU students graduate with an average of \$14,177 of loan debt in federal loan programs.

#### Discussion Notes on Opportunities and Challenges

The Transitions Committee recommends incorporating the University Mission Statement into the Student and Parent handbooks and suggests better differentiating the University Mission Statement from the Statement of Community, which is prominent at orientation events. In addition, the committee recommends that the website search engine lists the general university mission statement before the mission statement of individual departments.

Academic expectations were said to be communicated "slightly" or "not at all" by 10% of first year students. Though that is a small percentage, the Transitions Committee recommends that academic expectations be communicated to all new students and that mechanisms to catch students before they are in academic jeopardy (g.p.a.'s ranging from 2.0 - 2.5) be put in place. Midterm grades might be useful as a warning tool. Material covered in the university's "Q" course, taken by students who have integrity violations, should be covered with all first-year students.

There does not appear to be a universal understanding across campus of the importance of out-of-class activities/engagement for first-year students. In the Student Survey, 27.9% said discussion of out-of-class engagement was Not at All/Slight. In the Faculty/Staff Survey, 26.7% said discussion of academic support outside of the classroom was Not at All/Slight. There is a need for us to improve our emphasis on the impact of out-of-class engagement to students, faculty, and staff. The Transitions Committee recommends that the Undergraduate Colleges standardize the number of out-of-class requirements for all students in the colleges, rather than leaving such decisions to the individual Directors of the Undergraduate Colleges. The surge in attendance at out-of-class activities of all kinds has been the product of individual directors requiring students to attend such activities. This should be implemented across all colleges. In addition, the committee recommends that department chairmen stress to all instructors teaching lower level classes that they emphasize academic support services to their students.

Entry requirements for specific academic majors appear to be covered in a variety of areas, however over 25% of first-year students stated that faculty/staff explanation of specific major requirements was Not at All/Slight. The Committee recommends that the university devise more opportunities for new students and prospective students to interact with departmental major advisors throughout their first year. One way to do this would be through the 101 classes, which almost all first-year students take.

College Costs and Financial Aid (during recruitment & Admissions) are well communicated to new students. The Committee suggests, however, that students also be provided with Financial Aid and Student Accounts information with their parents (only the parents currently get this information) at Orientation. College Costs and Financial Aid (during the first year in order to plan subsequent years) should be addressed in a more organized approach throughout a student's four years at the university.

#### Discussion Notes on Sources of Evidence

The following sources were used in the collection of information contained in this report:

- Interview with Academic Integrity office
- Interview with Dean of Admissions
- Results from the FYM Student Survey
- Results from the FYM Faculty/Staff Survey
- University website
- 101 First-Year Seminar curriculum
- 101 textbook
- Admissions print materials

- Orientation print materials
- Student handbook
- Experience Stony Brook Schedule Book
- Undergraduate Bulletin
- Student & Family Orientation programs
- Orientation Leader Training Schedule
- Orientation Evaluations - Summer 2006
- Opening Activities schedule
- E-mail interviews with the Director of Financial Aid

PI 5.3 Communication to Others To what degree does the campus communicate to the following groups their role in facilitating student success in the first year of college?

Evaluate Each	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Secondary school personnel	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Families of first-year students	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Other support networks <sup>1</sup>	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

#### Discussion Notes on Current Situation

##### A. Secondary School Personnel

Stony Brook University regularly hosts campus tours for groups of high school students. These tours include information on the Undergraduate Colleges, the connection of the Undergraduate Colleges to residential quads, and the role of the Colleges in facilitating student success. Ryan Donnelly, admissions counselor, explains that admissions counselors also participate in SUNY Op-Info sessions, which include guidance counselors from schools in a particular region. Information is presented on Stony Brook University and its role as a SUNY Center, including the vast research facilities and other programmatic opportunities available to students. In this forum, counselors may serve on panels or in sessions that specifically discuss first-year issues or changes in the SUNY system. Stony Brook admissions counselors visit high schools locally, nationally, and internationally, and participate in college nights, college fairs, and information panels. At these information panels, SBU admissions counselors regularly represent SUNY (or large state schools) and are often asked how SBU personalizes the student experience at Stony Brook. Counselors explain the Undergraduate College concept (unique to Stony Brook among SUNY institutions) and how it makes the community smaller for new students. Stony Brook counselors also discuss the importance of campus involvement and use examples such as the Involvement Fair during Opening Weekend to facilitate this process. In addition, the Office of Admissions hosts Out-of-State Counselor receptions each year. These receptions include presentations from Honors, WISE, University Scholars, and Undergraduate Colleges as programs that provide support for new students.

##### B. Families of First-Year Students

###### Current Situation

A Family Programs office does exist on campus. This office is available for phone consultation as a resource to all parents, not only first-year students. The Family Programs webpage has links to important information such as FERPA, College Parents of America, and recommended reading.

Orientation offers a full-day orientation experience for first-year parents/family members, which is different than the half day program offered to transfer parents/family members. For the family of first-year students, more emphasis is placed on campus safety and security, as well as on the Undergraduate Colleges. The Undergraduate College Director, Faculty Directors, and Advisors discuss ways that families can support student success in this critical period away from home. Family members also have an opportunity to ask questions of current SBU students (orientation leaders) about their experiences.

Orientation provides a Parent/Family Calendar & Handbook to the parents of new students at orientation. This includes information on dates and deadlines and information about university policies and a phone listing of University offices. The calendar also contains information on Stony Brook Traditions and tips from the National Orientation Directors Association on ways to help students succeed in their first year of college.

In 2007, a Parent/Family Day, where parents were invited to campus after the beginning of the new term, was offered for the first time in almost five years on campus. This platform gave parents an opportunity to connect with their children on campus during the academic year. Faculty lectures were available, as well as participation in a sporting event. This event will occur each year, the next of which is scheduled for November 1, 2008.

##### C. Other Support Networks





Upper-level students	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Other first-year students	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Academic support services	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

#### Discussion Notes on Current Situation

One can glean from statistics on student and faculty surveys (discussed below) that the current situation regarding the degree to which first-year students have meaningful contact with fellow first-year students, other students, staff, faculty, and support academic support services is positive overall. However, there is no question on the First Year Matters (henceforth referred to as "FYM") Student Survey that deals with overall satisfaction experienced by students in the combined connections with the above-named people. (The FYM Student Survey was administered in the Fall semester, and re-administered in the Spring semester.) As a result, and so that more experienced students, who have a better vantage point after a completed year, could also respond, a second "Supplemental Survey" was created by the Transitions Committee and was administered to nineteen sophomores. In addition, this survey fleshes out the empirical survey, and adds a written component to identify improvements. In the Supplemental Survey, to the question, 1) "Were you satisfied with the contact you had with first-year students, other students, staff, and faculty," 67% of the nineteen students surveyed (12 of 18) reported that they were satisfied, while 33% reported that they were not. On the question, 2) "During your first year at Stony Brook, did you have contact with faculty outside of the classroom?", 68% (13 of 19) replied that they had, and all who did reported that the experience was "positive." However, on the two FYM Student Surveys, 49% of students in survey no. 1 and 44% of students in survey no. 2 reported having out-of-class contact with faculty. (It should be noted here that positive responses were slightly down in the second survey compared to the first, an anomaly that may be explained by the fact that the number of responses to the second survey was approximately half of the number of responses to the first survey.) In addition, according to the Supplemental Survey, only 21% (4 of 19) students reported having contact with their Undergraduate College Director. On Supplemental Survey question 3), "Have you had contact with sophomores, juniors, or seniors in any meaningful way," 68% (13 out of 19) of students said they had, though only about 37% of those (7 of 19) credited the university with having helped to broker these relationships. Most students responded that they met non-first-year students in the residence halls, in classes, or in clubs. In the FYM student surveys, the numbers were less encouraging, with only about 55% (in the first and second surveys) responding that the institution had connected them with sophomores, juniors, and seniors. On Supplemental Survey question 4), "Have you had much contact with other first-year students," the answer is yes among 89% of those answering, with students mentioning orientation, Undergraduate College 101 and 102 classes, and other institutionally-mandated programs. On the first FYM Student Survey, the percentage is not quite as high, though is still acceptable, with a little over 75% on the first survey and 73% on the second responding that the institution had connected them with other new students. To Supplemental Survey question 5), "Have you had contact with academic support services, such as the Writing Center, Career Center, Academic Advising, the URECA program, or any other such programs," the vast majority, 89% (17 of 19), reported that they had. In the first FYM student survey, the answer is still largely positive, with over 70% of the students on the first survey and 60% on the second survey reporting that they had been connected to academic support services. Though students don't mention it, it is to be assumed that they are being taught effectively in their 101 classes that these services exist, and, clearly, students are taking advantage of these services. It can therefore be deduced that the 101 classes are doing a good job in making student aware of such campus programs.

#### Discussion Notes on Opportunities and Challenges

Though to the question, "Were you satisfied with the contact you had with freshmen, other students, staff, and faculty," 67% (12 of 18) of the students surveyed reported that they were satisfied, there were many suggestions for improvement by both satisfied and dissatisfied constituencies. Suggestions include instituting more small classes to provide greater interaction between students and professors; creating more opportunities to develop relationships with professors and to interact with graduate students; greater advice for professionally-minded students; greater opportunity to interact with upper-division students and to meet fellow students, graduate students, and faculty at departmental get-togethers, banquets, etc. Students also suggested that more professors teach classes (as opposed to teaching assistants); that more teaching assistants "speak English"; that departments demonstrate more concern for first-year students; and that faculty reach out to first-year students. These suggestions, which may be impractical due to limited resources, nevertheless demonstrate that students are giving thought to the quality of their first-year experience, and thinking about how it may be improved. The Transitions Committee recommends that the university come up with a policy of expectations that is communicated to departments to increase the specific programs and attention that first-year students receive.

Assuming that it is useful for students to meet professors outside of classes, the numbers are not encouraging. On the first FYM student survey, only about 50% report having seen professors out of class. If more out-of-class student/faculty contact is a goal, the institution has little communicated it to departments. There is a consensus among faculty that beyond the Undergraduate College 102 courses, there is little institutional or departmental encouragement to meet with freshmen. The Transitions Committee recommends that Stony Brook communicate a clear policy to all academic departments that includes expectations for the treatment of first-year students. Some faculty go so far as to suggest that faculty in their departments avoid teaching 100-level courses, which are largely taught by TA's and adjuncts. There appears to be little university or departmental will to have lower-division courses taught by faculty, though this may certainly be a function of resources.

Students are meeting sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and are reporting their advice on classes, in study groups, career advice, etc. is useful. But there is a strong sentiment that the university does little to foster these relationships. The

Transitions Committee suggests the establishment of a peer-mentoring program, in which every first-year student at the university is connected with a non-first-year peer mentor.

First-year students seem satisfied that the institution connects them with other first-year students. These relationships should continue to be fostered, and the Undergraduate Colleges should continue to build on these successes.

Of great concern to the Transitions Committee is the morale among teachers of the UGC 102 courses, the first-year seminars in the Undergraduate Colleges. In a survey of eleven such teachers, all teaching in the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities, many of whom are noteworthy for their interest and success in teaching freshmen, their views on the UGC 102 courses border on bleak. (Another survey, conducted by the FYM Committee on Faculty was more encouraging.) Though the questions about establishing connections are student-directed, the success of the faculty-student connection, and in fact, the future of the Undergraduate Colleges and their first-year seminars, are tied to the perceptions of faculty who teach these courses, and their continued willingness to do so. There is widespread sentiment among the faculty surveyed that the university is not adequately concerned with the quality of undergraduate (and first-year) education. This is in part created by the perception, supported by recent statistics, that the student body is increasing while the percentage of faculty (as opposed to graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty) is decreasing. Alarm about the upper administration's commitment to quality undergraduate education, exacerbated by threatened draconian budget cuts, has created a climate of distrust about the 102 courses. Most faculty report that their experience, and the experience they believe their students received, was not particularly productive. Several faculty who have shown great dedication to the 102 courses, teaching it for several years, say that neither the modest compensation nor the quality of the experience encourage them to continue teaching such courses. Many report a moribund student population, going through the motions in the seminars, and having no real interest in the seminar topics. The majority of students are reported by these faculty as "unengaged." Some faculty feel that it is impossible in one-credit courses, meeting a mere 55-minutes a week, to create the kinds of community and address the goals expected of the first-year seminars. They aver that if the university took the goals seriously, it would make these courses three credits and compensate fairly.

The Transitions Committee can see a crisis looming if the institution is going to continue to count on the goodwill and volunteerism of faculty. Many surveyed or spoken to informally are not having a particularly good experience in the classroom, and have doubts about the efficacy of these courses to inspire students and engage them on any level that makes it worthwhile. They rarely see students outside of class (and rarely feel encouraged to do so) and only infrequently feel that the goal of faculty becoming mentors of first-year students is being met. Some faculty who have taught the seminars for several years now are saying "never again." Clearly, this is an issue that is going to have to be dealt with before the 102 ranks are seriously thinned, or exceptional and committed teachers defect because they don't believe this is an effective use of their time, or that the university truly values these services.

#### Discussion Notes on Sources of Evidence

- F(irst) Y(ear) M(atters) Surveys 1 and 2 of first-year students
- FYM Survey of faculty
- Supplemental Survey of nineteen sophomores
- Supplemental Survey of eleven faculty teachers of Arts, Culture, and Humanities 102 courses
- Observations of Perry Goldstein, inaugural Director of the College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities

PI 5.5 Academic Advising What is the overall quality of academic advising for the following tasks and in the following time periods? This performance indicator focuses on only two advising periods. The task force may elect to consider other advising time periods, such as advising for the second quarter or semester.

In preparation for the first year of college	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Selecting courses <sup>2</sup> /schedule planning  <sup>2</sup> Selecting courses refers to the mechanics of building a schedule of classes. High quality advising helps students select courses that are appropriate for the student's goals, at the appropriate level of difficulty, and arranged in an appropriate time schedule.	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Exploring the rationale for selection of courses <sup>3</sup>  <sup>3</sup> In high quality advising both the student and advisor discuss the rationale for the selection of courses so that the role of each course in the student's overall educational plan is known, understood, and based on educationally sound reasoning.	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Exploring life and career goals related to higher education	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
In preparation for the second year of college	Very Low/None 1	Low 2	Medium 3	High 4	Very High 5	N/A
Selecting courses/schedule planning	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Exploring the rationale for selection of courses	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Reviewing academic progress <sup>4</sup> to date						
<sup>4</sup> Academic progress includes reviewing each student's grade point average, monitoring time to graduation, and discussing the student's progress toward his/her immediate and long-range academic goals.	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn
Discussing student intentions about future enrollment plans (stay, drop-out, transfer)	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn	jn

Discussion notes on current situation

A. Selecting courses/schedule planning:

In helping students prepare for their first-semester, SBU strengths include a cooperative effort between Orientation and Undergraduate College advisors to communicate with students prior to the scheduled orientation. In addition, students receive proactive outreach from Undergraduate College Advisors, Faculty Directors, and Residence Hall Directors. Advisors meet with students at orientation to create their schedules, as opposed to creating them in advance and assigning students to classes. In helping students to prepare for the second semester, SBU strengths include a mandatory First-Year Student (hence, FYS)\* 101 curriculum to disseminate academic and programmatic information. Through the FYS 101 course, students receive advising information through a consistent presentation. Students have ample access to Undergraduate College Advisors.

\*First-Year Student 101 refers to a standard course taught across all six undergraduate colleges under the rubrics of the various colleges, i.e., GLS (Global Studies) 101, LDS (Leadership and Service) 101, etc. The First-Year Student 102 courses are seminars taught across the colleges by faculty in first-year students' second semester, also appearing under each College's rubric, i.e. ACH (Arts, Culture, and Humanities) 102.

B. Exploring the Rationale for Selection of Courses - Strengths:

The FYS 101 course explains the connection between the general education requirements, the majors, and graduation requirements.

C. Exploring Life and Career Goals related to Higher Education - Strengths:

The Career Center staff will have substantial participation in FYS 101 courses. The Career Center staff wrote the chapter in the 2008-2009 FYS 101 textbook for Career Development. They also provide sample lesson plans about career paths to FYI 101 instructors. FYS 102 provides the practical application of research interests or the opportunity to explore an academic interest.

Preparation for the Second Year of College

A. Selecting Courses/Schedule Planning—Third Semester - Strengths:

Students have access to tenured faculty through FYS 102 courses and continued contact with Undergraduate College Advisors. These advisors are available to assist students with schedule planning for their third semester.

B. Exploring the rationale for Selection of Courses - Strengths:

Course options are explained through FYS 101 and are reinforced through a meeting with an Undergraduate College advisor.

C. Reviewing academic progress to date - Strengths:

Outreach is made to students who are at risk. Advising staff work with the student to identify factors that may enhance or impede academic performance.

D. Discussing Student Intention about Future Enrollment Plans (stay, drop out, transfer) - Strengths:

FYS 101 courses and other programs on campus identify and communicate the varied opportunities available to students academically, culturally, and socially (i.e. through the Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Program (URECA), the Living Learning Centers, Honor Fraternities and Sororities, Internships, and other programs).

Discussion Notes on Opportunities and Challenges

Preparation for the First Year of College:

A. Selecting courses/ schedule planning

First Semester - Opportunities for Improvement:

The Transitions Committee recommends a better transition from Admissions Office recruitment to Orientation to the UGC advisor. Specifically, students who express interest in specific majors should be given more information about the major, the name of the Director of Undergraduate Studies, and an office location. Giving students access to their advisors prior to their arrival on campus would facilitate a smoother transition. Advisors should provide clearer understanding and explanation of the general education requirements and major interest at orientation. More Undergraduate College Advisors are needed to better serve the incoming freshman class. Advisors' loads are too great to see every student. Currently, there are nine advisors for six colleges. The Transition Committee recommends expanding that number to twelve or even eighteen advisors. In addition, this year, there was no Faculty Director for the College of Science and Society. This is a situation that erodes the success of the Undergraduate Colleges.

Second Semester - Opportunities for Improvement:

The Transitions Committee suggests greater incorporation of technology (in cooperation with the Teaching Learning and Technology Center) to disseminate academic and programmatic information. For example, utilization of Podcast technology can reach a larger cohort. The committee also recommends developing a more strategic plan to identify potential at-risk students in large introductory courses (i.e., psychology, mathematics, chemistry, linguistics).

B. Exploring the Rationale for Selection of Courses - Opportunities for Improvement:

A revision of the 101 textbook is recommended such that the text is more activity- and resource- based, as opposed to a heavy text-laden publication.

C. Exploring Life and Career Goals related to Higher Education - Opportunities for Improvement:

The Committee recommends continued definition of the relationship among the Undergraduate Colleges, the Career Center, and academic departments.

Preparation for the Second Year of College

A. Selecting Courses/Schedule Planning - Third Semester - Opportunities for Improvement:

Improve academic advising transition of students from UGC advisors to Academic & Pre- Professional Advising Center and academic department by assigning and introducing first-year students to their advisor in the Advising Center.

C. Reviewing academic progress to date - Opportunities for Improvement

The Transitions Committee recommends developing creative methods to follow up with at-risk

Students. Currently, at-risk students meet with an academic advisor to discuss plans for improvement. Earlier outreach, perhaps mid-semester, by either faculty or advisors could help connect students in academic jeopardy to available resources on campus. The committee also recommends enhancing and strengthening the tutoring services provided by the university, as current academic support services are disseminated across the university. This could be addressed by housing all support services in a central location, or by having a centralized contact

point where students can get information about all tutoring and other academic support services offered on campus.

D. Discussing Student Intention about Future Enrollment Plan (stay, drop out, transfer) - Opportunities for Improvement:

The Transitions Committee suggests that every academic department maintain a department website, posting information about student and faculty accomplishments, jobs obtained by graduates, and opportunities for future plans in graduate school or in the work world. Each academic website might also include profiles of students who have graduated and what they are currently doing, with links to contact such ex-students. Stony Brook has tenuous relationships with its graduates. Greater connection between students and successful alumni would strengthen the alumni base and give current students a sense of network and possible future paths. The current department websites are a hodgepodge of styles and have no uniform

content.

## Discussion Notes on Sources of Evidence

- Undergraduate College model
- Undergraduate College Curriculum, FYS 101 and 102
- FYS 101 Textbook
- Undergraduate College advising structure
- Academic and Pre-Professional advising structure
- University 5 Year Plan

## Conclusion

After a six-month investigation into the issues raised above, it is the contention of the Transitions Committee that the university has improved notably over the last six years in the various transitions processes. These include the Stony Brook's communication of the lived experience of first-year student; communication of academic expectations, out-of-class engagement opportunities, and academic major entry requirements, among others; communications with others, such as family members, secondary school personnel, and other support networks; facilitating the establishment of connections with students, faculty, and staff; and academic advising. The committee sees room for improvement in various areas, however, and the recommended action items below summarize those recommendations.

Recommended Grade: B+

### Recommended Action Items:

- Catching Students Before Academic Jeopardy (*High priority*)

Mechanisms to catch students before they are in academic jeopardy would be helpful (GPAs ranging from 2.0 - 2.5). The university implements practices for students whose first semester GPA is below a 2.0 but does not contact those whose GPA is in the borderline range. These students often don't realize they are in jeopardy until they are on warning. Early assistance/outreach may avoid this result.

- University-sponsored mentoring program connecting freshman to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. (*High priority*)

Freshmen are unanimous in responding that students in years above them are helpful in giving advice about negotiating the university in various ways. Formalized programs would help institutionalize this.

- Address first-year student perception that SB doesn't encourage connections with other students. (*High priority*)

There is a widespread notion (almost ubiquitous among those surveyed) that the university doesn't encourage connections between first-year students and sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This needs to be addressed.

- Continue and expand on success of institution in connecting first-year students to each other. (*High priority*)

First-year students are generally satisfied that Stony Brook connects them with each other. Efforts should be made to foster and build upon these inroads, including more activities through the Undergraduate Colleges designed for freshmen.

- Expand first-year students' awareness of the URECA and Study Abroad programs. (*High priority*)

Students are aware of, and mostly satisfied with, help received by Academic Advising, the Career Center, and the Writing Program. This can be expanded to inform them about other programs, such as UREKA and Study Abroad programs.

- More clearly identify goals of the 102 courses among students and faculty. (*High priority*)

More guidance is needed spelling out the goals of the 102 courses to students and faculty.

- Address low morale among faculty teaching 102 courses. (*High priority*)

There is widespread opinion among faculty that the university does not truly take seriously the education of undergraduates and that the 102 courses are not effective in meeting their goals. A task force should be formed to address morale among the 102 faculty.

- Improve Academic and Tutoring Support (*High priority*)

Develop a more strategic plan to identify potential at risk-students in large introductory courses. (i.e., psychology, mathematics, chemistry, linguistics). Develop creative method to follow up with at risk students. Change perception of reactive outreach to proactive support. Enhance/strengthen the tutoring services the university provides

- Catching Students Before Academic Jeopardy (*High priority*)

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GPA is in the borderline range. These students often don't realize they are in jeopardy until they are on warning. Early assistance/outreach may avoid this result.

- UGC Staffing Needs (*High priority*)

More UGC advisors are needed to better facilitate the incoming freshman class; preferably 2-3 UGC advisors per undergraduate college. Also, we need to ensure each undergraduate college has a faculty director.

- Send Admissions print materials to admitted students in a more timely manner. (*High priority*)

Print materials to admitted students generally go out in mid-April. To reach earlier accepting students, materials should be sent by February 1. (*medium priority*)

- Technology & Academic Information (*Medium priority*)

Incorporate technology in the dissemination of academic and programmatic information. For example, utilization of Podcast technology can reach a larger cohort. Coordinate implementing technology with the TLT Center. All academic departments should have a more uniformed "look" and more streamlined navigation through their websites.

- Consistency of web & print materials post-admissions (*Medium priority*)

The institutional website has improved greatly over the last few years. Suggested improvements, however, would be for other offices, such as orientation, to emulate the look, feel, and responsiveness of the Admissions site through the use of personalized email or electronic newsletters and similar publication styles.

- Offer overnight admissions and orientation programs; expand tours for parents. (*Medium priority*)

Consider offering overnight admissions and orientation programs. Other institutions offer overnight visitors to the campus and overnight orientation programs. Tours are currently not offered to parents during orientation. Surveys suggest that parents want to tour the campus. (*medium priority*)

- Transition from Admissions to Orientation (*Medium priority*)

There exists a need to better transition students from Admissions Office recruitment to Orientation to UGC advisor. A clearer understanding/explanation of the general education requirements and major interest should be communicated from the earliest interactions.

- Out-of-class engagement (*Medium priority*)

There is a need for us to improve our emphasis on the impact of out-of-class engagement to students, faculty and staff.

- Financial Education over Four Years (*Medium priority*)

College Costs and Financial Aid (during recruitment & Admissions) are well communicated to new students, although there exists an opportunity to improve our communication, specifically regarding Financial Aid opportunities. Another improvement could be providing students with the Financial Aid and Student Accounts presentation at orientation, as opposed to only their parents. College Costs and Financial Aid (during the first year in order to plan subsequent years) should be addressed in a more organized approach throughout a student's four years at the university.

- Expand Admissions Reception Area (*Medium priority*)

The office of Admissions space/lobby/waiting area is very small. When they are running campus tours and information sessions, their lobby and waiting area is packed and confusing. Admissions could benefit from more space, a larger waiting area, and updated décor for greeting students and guests.

- Consistency of web & print materials post-admissions (*Medium priority*)

Suggested improvements would be for other offices, such as orientation, to emulate the look, feel, and responsiveness of the Admissions site through the use of personalized email or electronic newsletters and similar publication styles.

- Expand Family Programs (*Medium priority*)

Expand Family Programs to include a newsletter, a parents' advisory board, parental volunteers, parental representation at orientation and other campus events. To date, we have not had the staffing or support for these items.

- Family Residence Hall Tours during Orientation (*Medium priority*)

Parent orientation does not offer tours of the residence halls, which have been requested on parent evaluations.

- Distribution of Mission Statement (*Low priority*)

Future plans may include incorporating the University Mission Statement into the Student and Parent Handbook. It may also be important to differentiate the University Mission statement from the Statement of Community, which is covered during orientation activities and is often confused with the Mission Statement.