First Year Experience – Center for Excellence in Peer Education  
Academic Resources and Student Support Services Use Assessment  

Introduction  

One of the key learning outcomes for the First-Year Experience (FYE) Program at the College of Charleston is introducing students of all levels to the academic resources and student support services that are available to them as a student here. As part of that introduction, Faculty-led FYE academic courses and Peer Facilitator-led Synthesis Seminars (FYES) actively engage students in the use of these resources at appropriate times during their first year at the college to model when and how these services should be used to improve on academic achievement. To facilitate this aspect of our program, all faculty and peer facilitators teaching in the program are introduced to available academic resources and they participate in discussions about integrating them into their course curricula during spring workshops. Peer Facilitators also introduce students to these resources during their required Synthesis Seminar. FYE also partners with the Center for Student Learning and the Career Center to advertise workshops, seminars, and ongoing weekly services in the academic course and in the synthesis seminar.  

Assessment Summary  

In the first two required years of 2011-12 and 2012-13, the Center for Excellence in Peer Education (CEPE) in conjunction with FYE implemented a pre- and post-test direct assessment within the FYES courses to provide a snapshot of our success in raising both awareness and use of these services (Results and Figures below). Our CEPE direct assessment indicates that students are aware of the campus locations for our academic resources by the end of the first semester. They actively engage with the Addlestone Library and the Academic Advising and Planning Center. They are also aware of the offerings of the Center for Student Learning and the Career Center, but there is still a need for improvement in encouraging students to use these Centers' resources during their first year. To remedy this, we have partnered with both offices to increase usage. With CSL, Study Skills Seminars have been introduced in the freshman residence halls. Career Center usage has been integrated more closely in the Synthesis Seminars, particularly focusing on career services first-year students use: part-time employment and summer internships.  

Paths Forward  

Recent research by Levine and Dean shows that, as compared to 20 or 30 years ago, current students increasingly value their college education as a way toward future employment more than as a path toward formulating life values1. This finding can seem at odds with our liberal arts and sciences philosophy of education as a path towards critical engagement in the larger issues of a field or major. Yet, this tension between the liberal arts and more vocational aims can find a happy medium. As FYE continues to evolve, we need to engage students to see the value of critical thinking, integrative learning, and synthesis that a quality liberal arts education can provide and create clear connections and opportunities to explore their future career path(s) while here at the College. Strategic partnerships between FYE/CEPE and CSL will help to improve our student’s achievement in their liberal arts curriculum beginning with their first semester. Closer alignment and  

collaboration between Faculty and Peer Facilitators with the Career Center, in both the fall and spring semester, will encourage students to apply their education to future career paths as soon as they step on to our campus. Initiatives from these partnerships over the next two years will strengthen our student’s academic preparation in the liberal arts while also helping them to build towards essential learning outcomes that will be valued by their future employers\(^2\).

Academic Resources and Student Services Pre/Post Test Assessment

When querying about the location of campus services during the Fall of 2011, students responded in the affirmative at higher than 90% on the post-test for all four of the offices/services examined: AAPC (pre: 86%; n=260; post: 98%, n=250), Library (pre: 99%; n=255; post: 100%, n=250), Career Center (pre: 49.5%; n=259; post: 90%, n=250), and the CSL (pre: 62%; n=259; post: 97.5%, n=240). Fall 2012 showed similar results, although we saw a dip in our post-test results for the Career Center (pre: 41.4%; n=146; post: 77%, n=146).

In 2011, we also saw a growth in actual reported use of these services by the end of the semester using this pre-post test instrument: AAPC (post: 92%, n=250), Library (post: 98%, n=237), Career Center (post: 33%, n=251), and the CSL (post: 53%, n=240). Our results in 2012 were consistent with the previous year’s assessment of actual use levels, although we saw a drop in reported use of the Career Center (post: 21%, n=146) and the CSL (post: 40%, n=146). The decrease in reported use is balanced by students indicating that they plan to use both services, so that the combined “have used”/”plan to use” category is above 85% for both offices.