

Wabash National Study Application College of Charleston

1. Most Important Gains from Participation. In a time of rapidly diminishing state resources for higher education, the College of Charleston has nevertheless committed to moving forward on its new strategic plan, Gateways to Greatness. The plan encompasses five main goals, three of which are directly relevant to our participation in the Wabash National Study: (1) Provide students a highly personalized education based on a liberal arts and sciences core and enhanced by opportunities for experiential learning; (3) Provide students the global and interdisciplinary perspectives necessary to address the social, economic, environmental, ethical, scientific and political issues of the 21st Century; and (4) Establish and promote a vibrant campus-life atmosphere dedicated to education of the whole person through integration of curricular and co-curricular or extracurricular activities.

The strategic planning goals are easy to embrace; the more challenging task is creating the integrated learning infrastructure required to meet the goals. We have the component parts, but we need to focus on integration, connections across units, and coherence. Part of that task will be convincing faculty that there is much to be gained by expanding the space for learning beyond our immediate control. As faculty we don't have any problem recognizing that learning takes place outside the classroom--in fact, we make assignments predicated on that fact. However, faculty are perhaps less convinced that learning facilitated by student affairs professionals and community members is as effective as faculty-directed learning.

Examining the impact of our efforts to link the academic core to experiential learning opportunities will be critical to further development of several existing elements of our program and to creating ways for those elements to be expanded to reach all students. For example, we are particularly interested in the effect of high impact practices on student learning. Our SACS Quality Enhancement Plan focused on the First-Year Experience and we are currently exploring ways to include at least one additional high impact learning experience for all students as a graduation requirement. High impact experiences positioned later in a student's program include a capstone, global immersion, internships and field placements, undergraduate research, and community engagement. These opportunities are already available to students, but we don't have a sense of how their impact may vary across students. Honors students are heavy consumers of these opportunities, but what about the rest of the student body? Advocates of high impact practices suggest that they are particularly powerful experiences for underserved students. We will be interested in exploring the relationships between high impact experiences and student learning across the four years in college as well as across various constituencies within the student body.

The other area we would like to explore is related to the liberal arts and sciences mission and the realities of our size and institutional complexity. In many respects, the College of Charleston more closely resembles a regional comprehensive university: our size (10,147 undergraduate and 1,625 graduate students), two professional schools (Education and Business), and graduate programs (19 master's and 11 certificate programs) would lead to this conclusion. However the mission and the faculty culture are both squarely committed to the liberal arts, as evidenced by a 2006 campus-wide deliberation on our identity.¹ In what ways is the College fostering the conditions most likely to produce the positive impacts on student learning associated with liberal arts colleges? Which of our efforts (e.g. First-Year Experience, interdisciplinary study, high impact practices, and study in the major) produces the most positive benefits in student learning? How does the impact vary across the student body? How can the evidence help us

¹ "Discussing the Identity of the College as a Liberal Arts Institution," available at <http://www.cofc.edu/~senate/CollegeIdentity06/index.html>.

truly provide each student with a highly personalized education in the liberal arts by more intentionally tailoring what we provide to what students need at various points in their programs of study?

Ultimately, what we hope to gain from our participation in the Wabash Study is evidence that will help us “connect the dots” in producing a more coherent and integrated learning experience for all students and a process that will help us apply the evidence we collect to the challenge of improving student learning. It has become a bit of a cliché to talk about silos on college campuses, but that is exactly what we face. The good news is that we have a multitude of high quality discrete learning opportunities for students, but our challenge is to make them more visible and accessible to all students and to create a more integrated whole using all of our scarce resources to do so. Similarly, we have collected information in a variety of forms and through a variety of avenues, but we have not always effectively evaluated the data in ways that informed decision-making. The Wabash Study offers us the opportunity to very aggressively face those challenges with an evidence-based approach to institutional improvement.

2. Student Learning Outcomes. The College is interested in focusing our assessment work around four of the seven liberal arts outcomes:

- inclination to inquire and lifelong learning,
- integration of learning,
- intercultural effectiveness, and
- leadership.

These outcomes are most directly connected to our overarching strategic planning goals and they are at the heart of the interconnections between academic and student affairs. In particular, these four outcomes represent areas where the academic side of the institution traditionally lays claim (inclination to inquire and lifelong learning and integration of learning in particular) as well as areas traditionally associated with student affairs (intercultural effectiveness and leadership). The First-Year Experience and other high impact practices are designed to promote these learning outcomes. We need Academic and Student Affairs to collaborate in new ways so that all four learning outcomes are embraced by the entire campus and so that academic and student affairs are viewed as inseparable. These are also the learning outcomes least likely to be the focus of departmental or program assessment, thereby making this effort more essential and generalizable.

3. Areas for Assessment, Development and Improvement.

Several promising initiatives designed to address these four learning outcomes are either in the planning stages or in the early stages of implementation. Associated with our SACS reaccreditation process (2007), the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan focuses on the First-Year Experience. By 2011-2012 all entering students will be required to complete an inquiry-based First Year Seminar or a Learning Community. This “academic model” replaces the “continuing orientation model” in place since 1985. The design and adoption of the First-Year Experience was predicated on insights drawn from 2005 NSSE results. In particular, the College scored low on Student-Faculty Interaction and on Active and Collaborative Learning yet these had been areas widely viewed by faculty as strengths of our programs. Further investigation suggests that *some* students enjoy a high level of interaction with faculty but the experience is less common than we would like to think for the majority of students. In the areas where students report higher levels of interaction, the College of Charleston scores averaged only 79% or a C+. The gap in how we perceive our interactions and the reality reported by students supported the creation of a more rigorous, inquiry-based academic First-Year Experience. Now we need to more carefully examine the ways in which our model prepares students to rise to a higher level of academic challenge, engage in more active and collaborative learning, and seek out more forms of student faculty interaction.

Simultaneously, we have begun work to expand our focus beyond the classrooms in the first year to the ways in which the campus environment and high impact learning experiences contribute to deeper learning and positive intellectual engagement.

We will be interested in examining whether and how the learning outcomes identified for the first year will have spill-over effects on student performance in their academic majors and in interdisciplinary programs. At present, the general education requirements remain “un-reformed.” After two failed attempts at general education reform, one in 1999 and one in 2007, we are left with a fragmented system. As a result of the 2007 process however, we have a set of new general education goals and learning outcomes, a general education committee, and a requirement that all students complete a First-Year Seminar or learning community. The architecture of the core remains a distribution requirement without any points of integration and without a developmental framework for sequential learning. Rather than try again for a wholesale revision, campus leaders are moving to an incremental approach linked to the strategic planning goals. As we produce more evidence about which elements of the student experience enhance the four liberal arts outcomes identified above as well as academic performance in the majors, we will have a more compelling case to revisit the core requirements. At present we have not convinced enough faculty that general education is as important to educating students as the work they do in their disciplinary and interdisciplinary majors.

Finally, we will be interested in assessing the value-added of high impact learning experiences. We have a wealth of opportunities available for students but no real sense of how and when students take advantage of them or the ways in which success in these venues may enhance learning outcomes in other areas. This, perhaps more than our other areas of interest, requires active collaboration between faculty and student affairs professionals.

4. Areas of Existing Strength.

***A shared commitment to the value of liberal arts education is at the heart of the College of Charleston’s programs.** Therefore, the will to improve what we do and how we do it is very strong as evidenced by the faculty’s commitment to high impact practices for many students. The College has a tradition of strong departments as well as interdisciplinary majors and centers of excellence organized to link programs and resources. There are some inherent tensions between strong departments and the growth of interdisciplinarity, particularly in a time of scarce resources. This is healthy tension when it can be coordinated around positive student outcomes informed by evidence. Participation in this study will help us achieve that goal.

***First-Year Experience.** We have been collecting data on student and faculty satisfaction as well as on the learning outcomes and experiences in the areas of cognitive skills and values, active learning and experiential learning opportunities, contact with faculty, writing, and use of student support services. This evidence has been used to revise the faculty training provided for faculty teaching in the program for the first time as well as by the Director of the program to recommend program modifications as we move toward 2011-2012 when all students are required to complete a course in the FYE. Learning Communities link two or three courses with an additional one-hour a week synthesis seminar with a Peer Facilitator. Peer Facilitators are students who complete a two-credit training course prior to their service. Peer Facilitators provide much of the “college 101” material for students and provide academic and social support to first year students. Seventy-seven percent of first year students who participated in a synthesis seminar reported that the synthesis seminar led by a Peer Facilitator helped make their transition to college easier. In the area of cognitive skill development, 80 percent of students agreed that interacting with faculty contributed to the value of their academic experience; 77 percent reported that FYE coursework contributed to their becoming more intellectually curious about the world; and 74 percent said that they were developing an understanding of the value of a liberal arts and sciences education. Seventy-

three percent reported sharpening their analytical skills and 72 percent reported feeling more confident about tackling unfamiliar problems as a result of their FYE. A clear majority (70 percent) felt intellectually challenged and 57 percent reported having produced 20 or more pages of graded written work with another 30 percent having produced 10 pages of graded written work.

These data also show areas that could be improved in ways that are consistent with the areas targeted in the Wabash Study. For example, only 56 percent of students agreed that they had developed a personal code of values and ethics and only 46 percent reported to contributing to the welfare of their community. Sixty-five percent of students agreed that the FYE encouraged contact among students from different economic, social and racial/ethnic backgrounds and 60 percent reported that they had improved their ability to work as a team member.

There is a high degree of faculty investment and engagement with the FYE. The institution has invested considerable resources in the FYE and so while this is certainly an area of strength on campus; it is also a point of leverage for improving other aspects of the overall student experience.

***The Honors College.** In 2009-2010, the Honors College celebrated its 30th year on campus. The program is led by a Dean and Associate Dean and supported by a professional staff. Faculty who teach and advise in the program come from departments all across campus. In 2009 the program was externally reviewed and received very positive feedback. To quote the report, “We think that the Honors College students are getting an excellent education that matches or surpasses what they could get at the most prestigious universities in the country. They are also getting the kind and quality of personal attention from the faculty and staff of the Honors College that are rare in higher education.” The program now includes a residential living-learning community, a first-year seminar known as ICE (Interdisciplinary Creative Exchange), intentional advising toward nationally competitive awards and competitive placement in jobs and graduate school, access to more fellowships and scholarships, an active student association, and the William Aiken Fellow Society (a leadership and professional development opportunity for top students). All Honors students complete a rigorous curriculum including a twelve-credit interdisciplinary team taught Western Civilization course in the sophomore year and a six-credit bachelor’s essay in the senior year. Of the 135 Honors graduates in 2010, 48 percent studied abroad; 48 percent received Outstanding Student Awards in their home department at graduation; 46 percent graduated with Departmental Honors; and 83 percent graduated with Latin Honors. Twenty-seven honors students applied for nationally competitive awards last year and eighteen have received an award to date. The four-year graduation rate for Honors College students in the 2008-2009 academic year was 79 percent compared with 53.7 percent for the College as a whole.

***Academic Support Services.** The mission of the Center for Student Learning is to provide academic support programs for College of Charleston students as they strive for excellence and to promote opportunities for student leadership through peer tutoring experiences. Composed of labs and other tutorial services, the CSL provides students with individual or group assistance from trained and experienced staff, faculty, and peer tutors. Students may receive tutoring on a walk-in basis (accounting, math, Spanish and French, writing, speaking) or by appointment (subject area tutoring, all other foreign languages). Supplemental Instruction meeting times are set by semester, and study groups and study skills seminars are scheduled periodically throughout the semester. Standardized test preparation is available by individual appointment or by weekly group schedule. Students may call the office or Request a Tutor online. The Center for Student Learning is located within the Addlestone Library and is heavily used and supported by students, faculty and staff.

***New Student Programs.** The Office of New Student Programs includes Orientation (student and family), programs designed specifically for provisional admission students, special programs for transfer and returning students, New Student Mentors, Summer Preview (student designed, three day thematic

programs held prior to the move-in day), Block on Bull (a group of theme houses with specialized programming), and Living Learning Communities. New Student Programs provides support for the First-Year Experience as well. This office is housed within the Office of the Academic Experience and very effectively integrates faculty, professional staff, and students in welcoming and preparing new students for success on campus. This area has enjoyed rapid and energetic growth in the past five years and is poised for further integration into the academic mission of the College of Charleston.

***Student Affairs Civic Engagement and Leadership Emphases.** Student Affairs is a vibrant part of the College of Charleston campus. In many ways, the energy from Student Affairs has pulled faculty into new co-curricular areas. Since the learning outcomes we have identified lend themselves to collaborative work between Academic and Student Affairs, participation in the Wabash National Study will be important to shaping that work. Two departments in particular within Student Affairs are likely to play a vital role in expanding learning opportunities for students. The Center for Civic Engagement serves as a clearinghouse for students interested in serving with local non-profits in a variety of capacities. In addition, the Center sponsors a number of large-scale service events each year including the MLK Challenge (teams of students, staff, and faculty complete projects throughout the community). Successful Alternative Spring Break programs have spawned Alternative Fall Break and Maymester extended service programs. The Center also houses the Bonner Leaders program. Bonner Leaders participate in a four-year civic leadership and development program highlighted by regular leadership training and reflection activities. Likewise, the Higdon Student Leadership Center provides programs that create opportunities for student involvement and learning through individual and group leadership activities. These activities are designed to develop responsible student leadership on campus and in the communities while promoting positive citizenship. The goal of assisting students in their overall development is an integral part of the leadership efforts implemented within the Center.

5. Areas where Students Struggle Most.

We've noted above the challenges identified in the first year. Another manifestation of those is a high DFW rate in several first semester courses. Student performance in first semester science and math courses is the most significant predictor in the loss of South Carolina Education Lottery scholarships. Students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average to keep this \$5000 to \$7500 scholarship in their sophomore year. Approximately 55 percent of first year students who hold lottery scholarships (called LIFE and Palmetto) lose them after the first year. This phenomenon has obvious implications for retention and for our focus on delivering a highly personalized liberal arts education to every student. Without financial support, students who stay at the College are more likely to be employed off campus, creating competition for their attention and energies. Departments in the School of Science and Math have been aggressively exploring a range of strategies to address this problem including better math placement processes, an expanded and strengthened Supplemental Instruction program, study skills development within specific courses and for specific disciplines, and the possible addition of a Science Study Lab in our Center for Student Learning. A Howard Hughes Medical University grant to strengthen science education has resulted in more first year learning communities involving science and math courses. Faculty in this area are fully engaged in ongoing assessment of the efficacy of learning communities to improving student learning and student performance in the first year.

As noted above, general education is fragmented and homeless on our campus. Therefore students do not recognize its importance or the ways in which requirements in general education are designed to improve their academic skills and prepare them to undertake advanced study. Students struggle to see the relevance of general education since we lack any integrative mechanism. For example, students at the College are required to complete a foreign language through the intermediate level (typically this means

12 credit hours of study in a language) and there is an emerging emphasis on global perspectives, but there is little evidence that students make that obvious connection.

Advising is another area where students express some dissatisfaction. Given the fragmentation within general education and the disconnect between general education and the majors, advising is even more crucial in promoting coherence in student learning. The Academic Advising and Planning Center is primarily focused on first year and transfer students. Once students declare their majors, they are moved into the department and assigned a faculty advisor. The quality and character of advising varies widely across departments. Some departments require advising while others do not. Strong students are likely to seek the information they need regardless, but we have the sense that weaker students fall farther behind and may be missing out on opportunities that would be uniquely beneficial, such as high impact learning experiences.

Finally, we believe students struggle with the gap between expectations and performance; between what students say they value and what they actually do. Although we have evidence from NSSE that incoming students expect to be challenged in their first semester, the 2005 NSSE results found that only 7 percent spent more than 25 hours a week preparing for class and only 24 percent wrote five or more papers of 5 – 19 pages in length. Additional evidence of a gap comes from the CIRP Freshman Survey. During the period between 2004 and 2006, College of Charleston entering students described themselves as having creativity, leadership ability, drive to achieve, and intellectual and social self-confidence. They value self-understanding and understanding others; they rank “to make me a more cultured person” and “improving my understanding of other countries and cultures” more highly than their peers at other selective colleges among reasons to get a college education. However, the CIRP also reveals that our entering students were more frequently bored in class than their peers at other selective colleges; and 87.9 percent reported studying less than ten hours a week in high school while 40.8 percent reported partying 3-10 hours per week. Our understanding of these contradictions and the potential implications has been heavily influenced by Karen Maitland Schilling and Karl L. Schilling’s work on expectations and performance.² We need to know more about how interactions with faculty and the experiences available at college interface with pre-college characteristics so that we can move students toward higher expectations and concomitantly higher performance. Faculty and student affairs professionals need to understand how to capitalize on student intentions in re-shaping less positive behaviors and offering an appropriate level of academic and developmental challenge.

6. Structures and Processes for Institutional Assessment. This area of our campus is in a state of transition.

* **Campus Governance Structures.** There are at least three faculty committees that regularly gather and use assessment data:

(1) The Academic Planning Committee is a committee of the Faculty Senate charged with review of long-range academic programs and goals for the College. Their charge includes gathering information and data and applying the evidence to their recommendations.

(2) The Committee on Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness is a Standing Committee of the Faculty charged with working directly with administrative assessment offices on basic policies related to assessment, to regularly review the College’s plan for institutional assessment and make

² Karen Maitland Schilling and Karl L. Schilling, “Expectations and Performance,” in Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot and Associates, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

recommendations for revisions as necessary, and to review or initiate policy related to assessment of institutional effectiveness.

(3) The General Education Committee is a Standing Committee of the Faculty charged among other things with monitoring and reviewing the General Education Program and working directly with the Office of Accountability, Accreditation, Planning and Assessment and the Committee on Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness in conducting relevant assessment of the General Education Program.

***Institutional Research and Institutional Assessment.**

We have two offices with a role in institutional assessment. The Office of Accountability, Accreditation, Planning and Assessment (AAPA) is charged with the structure and coordination of institution-wide assessment initiatives. Headed by the Associate Vice President for Accountability, Accreditation, Planning and Assessment, this office includes the Director of Survey Research and the Director of Institutional Assessment (currently vacant).

The Office of Institutional Research is responsible for developing and maintaining the comprehensive data and information systems required for institutional study, management, and planning. At present, the Director of Institutional Research position is vacant but the office is staffed by an Associate Director of Institutional Research, the Assistant Director, and a Data Management Analyst. The Office of Institutional Research is highly supportive of assessment efforts.

The Provost has announced plans to fully integrate these two offices, streamline their functions, and fill the vacancies, with the lead position being an Associate Vice-President for Planning, Research, and Institutional Assessment. The timeline for filling vacancies and re-organizing these units into one is estimated at six months.

The College is also in the midst of changing student information systems and adopting a new system (Banner) that fully integrates all of the information systems across campus. By early fall we should be fully functional and able to pull data readily from the new system. We will also have the capacity to extract data from the student information system in Banner and link it with survey data through Cognos.

***Teaching and Learning Center.**

Similar to the other vacancies and transitions described above, the Center for Effective Teaching and Learning has been dormant for the past several years. However, the Provost has placed a high priority on the return of faculty development and the creation of a new Center for Faculty Development. Since faculty development related to teaching and learning is being revived at the same time the Institutional Assessment Offices are being re-organized, we have every intention of creating reciprocal relationships between the two efforts.

7. National Surveys or Standardized Tests currently in use for Assessment.

CIRP TFS/YFCF/CSS-Administered in the 2008-2009 academic year and scheduled to be administered every other year.

BCSSE/NSSE/FSSE-Administered in the 2009-2010 academic year and scheduled to be administered every other year.

ETS Proficiency Profile-Administered as a pilot study to a sample of seniors in the spring 2009 semester. Currently scheduled for administration to a sample of freshmen and seniors in the 2010-2011 academic year.

8. Rubrics currently in use for Assessment. Overall, it would be fair to say that the College of Charleston is just getting started using rubrics to assess student work. While there is plenty of evidence that individual faculty regularly employ rubrics for evaluation of student work and that departments have at times assessed student work in a program by using rubrics to evaluate student work, the campus as a whole has not used rubrics.

***First Year Writing, Department of English.**

During 2009-2010 academic year, the English Department conducted an assessment of the goals of English 110 related to the use of secondary materials in an academic paper. The First-Year Writing committee collected a sample of papers from each section of English 110 taught during Fall 2009. Using a rubric developed by two experienced Composition faculty members who articulated scoring levels of 1 – 5 based on the English 110 goals and illustrated by “anchor” papers that best matched the description of each scoring level, a group of faculty readers examined and rated the sample papers during a one-day assessment session. Each paper was read and rated by two faculty members and by a third in the event of widely divergent scoring. The results were then tallied and shared with the department. There were several findings that resulted in recommendations to the department. First, research assignments varied widely. The department will collect additional information from faculty about assignments and goals for student writing with an eye toward articulating shared expectations for research papers that would in turn be more clearly conveyed to students through assignments and grading rubrics. To facilitate this synthesis process, the department will hold a series of workshops where faculty will share assignments, strategies for addressing common writing challenges, and how to more effectively use library sessions to improve student writing. The department plans to repeat this assessment methodology following the 2010 – 2011 academic year.

***The First-Year Experience.**

The First-Year Experience program has utilized a rubric-based methodology to evaluate written communication skills as well as knowledge of information-gathering techniques and research skills. Information on the use of rubrics is included in the FYE training along with resources to assist faculty in finding or constructing assessment rubrics appropriate to the type of assignment given. For a report for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), samples of student work were randomly selected from courses for the first two years. As a result of this review, beginning fall 2010, FYE instructors will provide the Office of Accountability, Accreditation, Planning and Assessment (AAPA) with the following: 1) the assignment; 2) the graded rubrics; 3) clean copies of all actual student papers with student identifiers removed. Raters will be hired for summer 2011 to rate the papers from the 2010-2011 academic year. The establishment of inter-rater reliability for the papers for these courses should help to determine if students are meeting two of the FYE competencies (effective reading, writing, and speech; and familiarity with appropriate data, information and knowledge-gathering techniques and research skills in the discipline). This is another example of our need to learn how to “close the loop.” Faculty have been submitting this material from the inception of the FYE in 2007 with little by way of formative information in return.

9. Additional Campus Evidence to include in Wabash Study Assessment Portfolio.

We look forward to guidance from the Center in selecting additional evidence to include in the Assessment Portfolio. At present, we would include two additional forms of evidence:

FYE Outcome Survey-An internally created assessment survey administered at the end of each first year seminar or learning community course designed to capture experiences and learning outcomes associated with the First-Year Experience.

Writing Samples and Rubrics from FYE courses—Faculty teaching in the FYE are required to create and use a rubric to evaluate at least one writing assignment. A sample of rubrics and student writing is regularly collected.

10. Campus Leaders for the Wabash Study.

Dr. Lynne E. Ford, Interim Associate Vice President for the Academic Experience and Professor of Political Science

Dr. Kay Smith, Associate Vice President for the Academic Experience and Professor of English*

Dr. Karin Roof, Director of Survey Research, Office of Accountability, Accreditation, Planning and Assessment

*Dr. Kay Smith will be on a Fulbright Award in Hong Kong during the 2010-2011 academic year.