

The First Year Experience at the University of Guelph

Report of the
Student Affairs
First Year Experience
Committee

October 2007

Committee

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Executive Summary

Themes Identified through Feedback on the First Year Experience

Listed here are a number of themes identified throughout our research and discussion. A detailed description of each theme and related quotes from students can be found in Section 4 of this report.

- A. In general students find the University of Guelph to be a campus with a welcoming and positive, supportive atmosphere.
- B. The structure of our semester creates challenges for students.
- C. The academic adjustment is challenging and many new students feel unprepared for it.
- D. A number of first-year students are on probation in their second semester.
- E. Some students don't feel challenged enough academically.
- F. Students would like to meet people in their academic program more easily.
- G. Students need help to connect to academic support services and learn what to do to be successful.
- H. First year students do not make sufficient connections with faculty.
- I. Students quickly learn that, with respect to residence living, the people they meet and the lessons learned are more important than which building they live in.
- J. The impact of the behavior of others is a major challenge in residence.
- K. Alcohol is used heavily and the results impact everyone – however, some students feel that the rules related to alcohol are too restrictive.
- L. Off-campus students have more practical challenges – like transportation and parking.
- M. Finding a “home” on-campus is particularly challenging for OC students. The OCUS lounge becomes home for some but can be alienating for others and is only large enough to accommodate a handful of individuals at a time.
- N. There are specific challenges related to being a Varsity athlete.
- O. Students have a lot of interaction with family supports but the nature of their relationship is changing.
- P. First generation students don't get the same level of understanding at home.
- Q. Finding balance in their life and learning to say no to friends and pressures is an important lesson.
- R. Many students struggle to ask for help or to know where to go for help.
- S. The importance of involvement is evident and students seem to want more structured activities.
- T. Independence and accountability for oneself is an important lesson.

- U. Orientation and the first few weeks can be challenging for introverts.
- V. Students face challenges maintaining their health – both avoiding illness and maintaining fitness.
- W. New Students are already worried about making plans for graduate school, employment, etc..
- X. There is no one means by which we can communicate effectively with all students.
- Y. Students are not all as technologically savvy as we often assume.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A list of recommendations is provided here. For a more detailed discussion of each recommendation please see Section 5 of this report.

Enhancements to current programs and services within Student Affairs & Learning Commons

1. Expand the academic support services for first-year students offered by Learning Services.
2. Expand and enhance Learning Commons' web resources addressing academic transition issues
3. Consider Academic Learning Communities for everyone
4. Consider Off-Campus Connection for everyone
5. Improve parent information and support & the development of parental contact policies
6. Improve Alcohol policies and education
7. Add more leadership opportunities for first year students
8. Create a Formal Student Crisis Response Team
9. Make changes to Orientation week that further enhance the dimensions of supporting curricular activities, engage students in meaningful activities in the evenings, and set out the week's activities in an easy to navigate manner
10. Plan a special program of activities for new students the weekend after Labour Day focusing on academic preparation
11. Ensure that there is stricter enforcement of quiet hours in residence
12. Develop programs in residence that empower students to take responsibility for their role as a community member
13. Better advertise and promote Crimestoppers on-campus

14. Expand academic advising and academic support programs for varsity athletes

New initiatives and Partnerships

15. Establish a task force to examine the issue of students on probation
16. Create additional opportunities for students to study and learn in groups
17. Create and distribute a First Year Student Handbook
18. Create a Start on-campus program for students who live in the local community
19. Establish a summer program for new students focused on academic skills and preparation
20. Develop a pilot for a Mentor program beginning with first year off-campus students and/or first year first generation students
21. Extend Orientation into the first six weeks of the semester with the creation of campus wide theme weeks and programming
22. Establish a formal feedback mechanism for residence withdrawals
23. Establish targeted outreach program for new students from Co-operative Education & Career Services
24. Expand the close partnership between Residence Life and the Learning Commons to improve study supports in residence
25. Consider the creation of a Residence Community specifically for varsity athletes
26. Create the position of weekend programmer responsible for organizing campus events with Central Student's Association, Interhall Council, Residence Life & Student Life
27. Create more opportunities for faculty to get involved in the first year experience
28. Provide more opportunities for resources (Learning Commons, Wellness, etc.) to have drop-in sessions/office hours or specific programs in residence
29. Create a central function within Student Affairs that does research on students and assessment of Student Affairs programs and services and their impact
30. Extend community service-learning programming during the first six weeks of the Fall semester to accommodate all new students who wish to participate.

Suggestions regarding other areas of the university

31. Partner with academic departments to help students find study partners in their own discipline or in large first-year classes

32. Find ways to make the on-line undergraduate calendar more user friendly and intuitive to navigate
33. Review and enhance the use of the portal as a communication tool
34. Establish a coordinated website for computing support on campus
35. Find ways to streamline how students get help and ensure that this is communicated clearly to new students
36. Explore ways to adjust the semester schedule to reduce stress on students at midterm time
37. Change the parameters around dropping courses in web advisor such that students who are dropping their final one or two courses must do so in person thus providing enhanced opportunities for supporting students experiencing difficulties

Suggestions for ongoing campus wide focus on the First Year experience

38. Establish an ongoing First Year Experience Committee
39. Conduct timely and thorough exit surveys with students who withdraw
40. Survey students at the end of their first year or early in their second year about details of their first year experience to better inform programs, services and planned interventions
41. Ensure consistent ongoing training for all campus staff related to student development, customer service and appropriate referral skills – ensure that these items are also factors in evaluating staff performance

Section 1. Background and Mandate of Committee

A. Background

The Provost's White paper speaks to the importance of the first year experience for undergraduate students: "The first year is the critical year – students are more likely to leave the first year than any other year. The first year is also the year in which the University introduces its values and its expectations. We must introduce students to a rich learning environment right from the start. We need to expose students to diverse ideas, world views and people as a means to enhance their learning and provide a wealth of experiences that they can draw from throughout their lives" (See excerpt in Appendix A of this report).

The Provost has charged the University to focus its attention on first year programming. "Successful first year programs are highly structured, are interlocked with other programs, are based on a strategy of student engagement, and focus on affective and cognitive needs of students. They cannot be the sole responsibility of Student Affairs. The entire university community needs to focus on the first year experience. Mechanisms need to be found to better co-ordinate the efforts of all stakeholders to ensure that our new students receive the best possible opportunities for learning, growth and development – both inside and outside the classroom."

Guelph is in an enviable position in that 90% of our first year students live in residence, where a range of program offerings and delivery methods are possible. We also offer strong academic and personal support programs. However, a significant number of first year students who say they need assistance do not seek the service voluntarily. Others speak to confusion regarding where to go when facing problems. Not only do we need to provide support services to these students, these programs need it to be proactive and delivered in multiple formats during the first year.

B. Mandate

The Student Affairs First Year Experience Committee (FYEC) is mandated with reviewing all first year programming offered by Student Affairs. In particular it will:

1. establish an inventory of first year programs offered by units in Student Affairs;
2. determine effective ways to inform students of services and encourage their engagement in such services;
3. identify programs or services that need to be enhanced;
4. identify any gaps in services or communication.

C. Guiding Principles

The Committee will be guided by the following principles:

1. Student Affairs should have organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated and co-ordinated approach to the first year.
2. Students should know where to go for support on a wide range of support issues.
3. The provision of programs and services should be timely, being available when most needed by students.

D. Committee membership

Heather Lane Vetere, Executive Director, Student Housing Services (chair)
Marlene Pfaff, Manager, Wellness Education, Student Health Services

Kate Ferguson, Residence Manager, Student Housing Services
 Barry Townshend, Manager, Centre for New Students, Student Life & Counselling Services
 Maryann Kope, Coordinator, Learning Services, Learning Commons
 Grachella Garcia, Intramural & Sports Club Supervisor, Department of Athletics
 Bill Pires, Coordinator, Employee Relations & Events, Co-operative Education & Career Services (to Apr. 2007)
 Catherine O'Brien, Marketing Coordinator, Co-operative Education & Career Services (as of August 2007)

E. Schedule of Meetings and activities

The committee met 9 times on the following dates:

- October 31, 2006
- November 14, 2006
- November 15, 2006
- December 7, 2006
- January 9, 2007
- January 30, 2007
- February 13, 2007
- February 27, 2007

F. Listing of data & reports reviewed in course of our work

- NSSE 2005 Benchmark Report – University of Guelph
- University of Guelph Provost’s White Paper – Section 3.1 The First Year experience
- Lessons Learned for Orientation Week 2006 – Recommendations for the Future
- 2006 Incoming Survey Results and Summary – University of Guelph

Section 2 – What we know about our First Year Students and their needs

A. Overview of data from Incoming Student Survey

The committee reviewed the results of the incoming student survey which was completed by 54% of the incoming class in the Fall of 2006. A final report comparing 2006 responses to those compiled in 2002, 2003, and 2004 was circulated to members of the campus community by Anne Hollings, Resource Planning and Analysis.

What we know about our entering students is that...

- 68% of them are female
- As of the end of their first semester – 73% will be under the age of 19
- For 55% Guelph is within 100km of their permanent home
- For 12.1% Guelph is more than 500km from their permanent home
- 57% had a high school average of over 80%
- 68.6% intend to obtain a Master’s degree or higher

The following tables summarize some of the responses from the Incoming Student Survey that are of particular interest in a review of first year student needs and programs.

Respondents were asked how often they engaged in a number of activities in the year preceding their arrival at Guelph – responses to some selected activities below.

Activity Engaged in (in the past year)	Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all
Used a word processor	89.0%	9.2%	1.8%
Socialized with a different ethnic group	65.5%	30.3%	4.2%
Was bored in class	41.9%	52.9%	5.3%

Felt overwhelmed	40.9%	50.3%	8.8%
Studied in a group	32.6%	57.1%	10.4%
Did volunteer work	31.7%	55.0%	13.3%
Drank wine/liquor	27.9%	53.4%	18.7%
Drank beer	26.1%	40.9%	33.1%
Participated in an on-line chat	11.9%	29.1%	59.0%
Felt depressed	9.2%	49.2%	41.6%

The students completing this survey were also asked to identify concerns about starting university. The table below indicates the percentage of respondents who identified each item as a concern for them. Over 78% indicated concerns related to 3 or more of the following items and 47% indicated concerns with 5 or more items.

Item	% Indicating concern
Time Management	71.0%
My academic ability	60.2%
Understanding what is expected academically	54.8%
Managing stress	52.5%
Missing home	47.0%
Keeping healthy & fit	43.5%
Having enough money	43.2%
Ability to make friends	40.2%
Finding my way around campus	35.5%
Ability to fit in	28.2%
Exposure to drugs and alcohol	9.3%
Finding somewhere to live	5.1%

We asked Anne Hollings to provide us with some additional information beyond the summary from the Incoming Student Survey and she attended one meeting of the group. She told us that the overall retention at the university from first to second year was approximately 94.6% and had remained pretty much the same for the last couple of years. We asked Anne to look at retention based on a number of items in the survey and in most cases found there were no significant differences by age, sex, first generation students, reasons for coming to university and issues of concern. For two of the factors that we were interested in reviewing retention data the same sizes were too small to draw any conclusions, ie. citizenship (the sample of non-Canadian citizens was too small) and place of residence (where the sample of students not living in residence was too small).

B. Information from NSSE survey

The committee also reviewed and discussed the findings resulting from the 2005 administration, at the University of Guelph, of the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) originating in the US. NSSE looks at responses and comparisons with other institutions in five general categories – Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student/Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environments. The following table outlines the first year student means comparing the University of Guelph with an overall mean for other selected Canadian peers.

Category of Items	University of Guelph mean	Mean of selected Peers
Level of Academic Challenge	48.0	49.7
Active & Collaborative Learning	33.8	35.7
Student/Faculty Interaction	19.9	23.4
Enriching Educational Experiences	25.4	24.1
Supportive Campus Environment	60.8	52.7

The areas that are generally thought to be most related to Student Affairs work and the out of classroom experience include...

a) Supportive Campus Environment – a category of items where Guelph clearly scored higher than its peers.

This category included items such as...

- Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically.
- Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities.
- Campus environment provides support you need to thrive socially.
- Quality of relationships with other students.
- Quality of relationships with faculty members.
- Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices.

b) Enriching Educational Experiences – a category where Guelph scored slightly higher than the mean for peer institutions. The items in this category included...

- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.).
- Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment.
- Community service or volunteer work.
- Foreign language coursework and study abroad.
- Independent study or self-designed major.
- Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exams, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.).
- Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity.
- Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment.
- Campus environment encouraging contact among students of different economic, social and racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together.

c) Active and Collaborative Learning – Guelph scored lower than the mean for peer institutions in this category. While many of the programs and services offered at the University of Guelph by and between Student Affairs departments promote, encourage, and provide opportunity for active and collaborative learning, the items making up this category in NSSE are mainly course or classroom related.

- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussion.
- Made a class presentation.
- Worked with other students on projects during class.
- Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments.
- Tutored or taught other students.
- Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course.
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class.

C. Data from survey question included in Residence Life Staff (RLS) evaluations and Off-Campus Connection (OCC) evaluation

As part of all of the RLS evaluations in the Fall of 2006 and as part of a survey conducted of Off-Campus First Year students, students were asked: **“What could the University do to better support you in your transition to university academic and social life?”** A summary of the responses is provided here but a more detailed log of the comments received is included in Appendix B of this report

Of the 800 residence students who provided an answer to this open ended question, about 70 students indicated that there was nothing the University could do.

"The transition, I feel, lies mainly with the students: the university simply offers a backdrop"

"I do not feel that this is the job of the university"

Many of these felt that there was nothing additional the university could do since they felt well supported.

"I dunno...I have felt super comfortable throughout this entire transition, which I didn't expect since I have an anxiety disorder. Everyone has been incredibly supportive, which has been so helpful for me. Honestly – I dreaded coming to university just because I thought the change and new life would throw me for a loop, but I've actually been better (anxiety-wise) here than I was at home. So thank you very much!"

There were Off-Campus students who had similar opinions.

"I think that the resources are very much available for new students. The University if doing well, it's more individuals that simply need to choose to take advantage of them."

"I think the university has done everything possible to make new students feel welcome, and any further adjusting is really up to the student."

In response to the academic transition, students focused their responses in several areas. There were about 70 comments about academic support. Some students expressed interest in SLGs being extended to more courses, and having a schedule or calendar of SLG meeting times/locations. Others wished they had better opportunities to meet other students in their residence area that take the same courses or are in the same program so that they could create their own study groups. Finally there were others that felt that more 'how to study' type workshops would be helpful.

"The University could provide more learning tools(ie. SLG's) that help in the understanding of complex principles which would help the transition to university academic life. The social life transition is done well by the RLS/Hall Council.

"For me, I think it would be helpful to have study sessions in the building before big tests and midterms."

"I would say make some study halls in South residence or something. Such as BCOMM Wednesday's, B-ARTS Tuesdays, so those students can meet with other students and find study partners.. etc."

"Have specific tower-member gatherings, ie. those taking sciences, so that you can meet others who are taking similar classes and support each other."

About 20 students focused on adjusting to the work load and time management

"Warn high school about the workload and the fact that you will have multiple tests every week no matter what and that you have to keep up to date on homework while studying for tests as well"

"Maybe show us some of the work load that we are getting ourselves into and everything that needs to be accomplished!! We need ways of better organizing our time!!"

Finding a way to balance school and a social life especially while living in residence with noise and social distractions, is difficult for some.

"Probably balancing between partying and studying..noise is kind of an issue some nights."

"I believe the university is doing the best they can. It's almost impossible to balance the two right away and the only real way for students to learn is by experiencing it themselves."

The Off-Campus students who answered this question on the survey made less reference to academic concerns than social concerns but the concerns that were raised were very similar to the concerns of residence students.

"Maybe the university could set up group studies – for people in a particular class or maybe a reading group...because the amount of information (to study for) we have each class is tremendous. Please make sure that the profs are easy to understand...I have two classes that the profs are very difficult to understand...and I rely on the profs a lot...but I don't have time to discuss readings or lecture info with them at all times."

"A prep course on what university expectations are."

"It would be cool to have sessions according to the majority of people's majors."

With respect to the social transition, it was noted by many that there are various mechanisms in place that already do a good job. Orientation week, student governments, and residence events all provide opportunities to meet other students. Seventy two students noted social events beyond Orientation week as a way to ease their transition to University.

"I think the University should plan more social life programs- more dances, and parties. Too many people go home on the weekends or to other universities and it's empty a lot."

"More social events that involve everyone"

"I found that during my first year, a lot of events were planned during O-week. This made O-Week really fun and exciting. I found that events seemed to dwindle down after that point and maybe more could be done to keep throughout the semester."

For off-Campus students the social transition appears more challenging as does finding help or knowing where to go. They cited having difficulty with the free flowing nature of O-week, getting connected with other students, and finding resources.

"The transition wasn't all that easy for me, but that's my fault, not yours. The only suggestion I can think of if maybe trying to implement a wider range of activities during O-week. It might be a good idea to present an option for a more structured day as far as the O-week activities go. That is you sign up for a certain group and it is slated to do this, that and the other thing throughout

the day. That way you're with the same people for the entire day, instead of talking to somebody at a single event and then never seeing them again."

"More ways to involve off-campus students"

"I've tried to participate in OCUS and visit the lounge when time permits but every time I go I feel ignored."

"Have more activities to meet people."

"Tell us where things are. What you should start doing now to prepare for post-graduation."

Managing the residence community was noted by about 40 students. Noise, fire alarms and other events were felt to be disruptive to transition. There were also some students who felt that quiet hours should begin later than currently.

"Making sure quiet hours are respected would definitely help my transition into university. I find that people tend to be loud in respect to their conversations and music."

"The thing I had the most trouble with was dealing with the noise at night when I was trying to study. Either before or after quiet hours, people are going to be loud, and I'm guessing I'm just in a noisy area"

"Increase the quiet hours...11pm is too early!!!"

Finally, 21 students indicated that finances impacted their transition. A number (6 - 7) stated that they wished things (activities, text books, tuition, residence, food) were cheaper.

"Cut down on tuition and book costs and costs all around. It would relieve a tonne of stress"

"Make it less expensive so students aren't stressing 24/7 about how they're going to pay for this education."

D. Focus Groups with students

Three focus groups were held in late January 2007 with first year students – 2 in residence and 1 with off-campus students. The discussions in these groups were guided by the following questions:

- 1) What have the highlights of your first year experience been?
- 2) What about your first year experience has been challenging?
- 3) What do you wish you had known prior to arriving at University?
- 4) Tell us about your experience related to...
 - a. Your physical health
 - b. Your social adjustment
 - c. Your academic adjustment
- 5) What has your family involvement been in your first year experience?
- 6) Emotionally what has it been like coming to university?
- 7) What can we do to help you better prepare for what you'll do when you graduate?
- 8) What is the best way for us to communicate with you and other students?

Residence specific questions

- 9) What have you learned as part of your experience in a residence community?
 - 10) What has your experience been with the policies regarding student conduct?
- Off-Campus specific questions
- 9) What can do to help you?
 - 10) How can we make O-week better for you?

In the body of this report (Section 4) we have included a general summary of issues brought out in the Focus Group discussions. Some participants discussed issues related to a specific individual encounter or problem with a professor, course, staff member or residence. Those have not been included in this summary but the full notes of the focus group facilitators can be found in Appendix C of this report.

Some of the highlights that focus group participants noted of their first year included the campus atmosphere, orientation week and orientation volunteers, their specific residence or cluster, services like SLGs, fitness facilities, the OCUS lounge, people they have met, and feelings of safety & security on campus. Interestingly no one mentioned a course, class, professor or academic experience as a highlight other than the one comment about SLGs.

Most of the challenges faced by new students and discussed by the participants were in the three focus groups were similar to what we would expect first year students to face based on the wealth of literature available about the first year experience. These are included in the section 4 which attempts to bring various sources of data together.

Section 3 – Inventory of Programs and Services offered for First Year Students by Student Affairs Units

A full inventory was completed of programs and services offered in the Student Affairs units, virtually all of which are open to all students including first year students. Here we have included a listing of programs and services designed and offered specifically to meet the unique needs of first year students at the University of Guelph.

At the time of this committees' work the Learning Commons was part of Student Affairs so it is included in this report. The Learning Commons has reported to Academic Affairs since January 1st, 2007. Other Student Affairs departments include Student Health Services, Athletics, Student Housing Services, Counselling & Student Life, Co-operate Education & Career Services and the Campus Child Care Centre (not included in this committee or report).

A. Learning Commons

The Learning Commons supports and enhances student learning, writing, research, numeracy, and use of technology at the University of Guelph. Through collaborative partnerships, we provide expertise, services, and resources to support the University's strategic goal of being a learner-centered and research-intensive institution. The Learning Commons includes these units:

- Data Resource Centre
- IT Help Desk
- Learning Services
- Library Centre for Students with Disabilities
- Research Help & Information Literacy
- Supported Learning Groups Program
- Writing & ESL Services

First Year Specific Programs & Services

- Investing in Excellence website and podcasts
- Learning Commons website – section on Entering Students

- iU: An Introduction to University Learning (online workshop from Learning Services)
- Online FAQ for Entering Students
- Content for week on academics in Start Online
- O-Week Programming
 - workshops & panel discussions
 - displays at resource fairs
 - Library/Learning Commons Open House
 - Presentation at International Students' Orientation
- Fall workshops including:
 - Computing and software
 - Introduction to Studying Effectively at University
 - Learning from Lectures & Texts in the Arts & Social Sciences
 - Learning from Lectures, Texts, & Lab Manuals in the Sciences
 - B.Sc. Course Outlines: Use Them Before You Lose Them
 - B.A. Course Outlines: Use Them Before You Lose Them
 - Preparing for Midterms
 - How Not to Fall Asleep While Studying
 - Essay Writing in the Arts & Social Sciences
 - Lab Report Writing
 - Tips for Writing History Papers
 - Writing in English Literature Courses
 - Writing Essays in Sociology and Anthropology
 - How to Use Your Library
- Workshops on faculty request in a number of first-year courses
- SSWAT workshops and info sessions for students in residence
- Supported Learning Groups in these first-year courses:
 - ASCI 1000 - CHEM 1050 - ECON 1100 - HIST 1250 - PHIL 1050 - PSYC 1100
 - CHEM 1040 - ECON 1050 - HIST 1010 - MATH 1080 - PHYS 1020 - PSYC 1200
- Learning Services web resources:
 - Online Video - senior Peer Helpers provide advice for entering students
 - time management webshop *Learning Time* has a section for entering students
 - Top 40 Study Tips
- Publications - *Learning at University and Writing Your First University Papers*
- Individual assistance by appointment with Learning and Writing Peer Helpers or staff
- Library Tours

B. Student Life and Counselling Services

Student Life and Counselling Services is made up of a number of areas devoted to providing unique programs and services to University of Guelph students. The department is made up of the following areas:

- Centre for New Students
- Centre for Student with Disabilities
- Counselling Services
- Leadership Education & Community Engagement
- Multi-Faith Resource Team
- Neighbourhood Relations & Off-Campus Housing
- Office of Intercultural Affairs
 - Aboriginal Resource Centre
 - International Student Advisor

The department's mission states, "At Student Life and Counselling Services we foster academic success, personal development, and spiritual growth by engaging students in the life of the campus and greater community and supporting them through the many transitions they experience during their university career".

First Year specific programs and services

- START On-line – offered to all incoming students for 10 weeks prior to Orientation week
- Start International – one day program for Incoming International students before Orientation week
- Orientation week – week long schedule of events and programs for all incoming students planned by over 100 on-campus groups and offices
- New student advising on an as needed basis with individual students
- Parents and families website
- CampOUT – support for students dealing with coming out issues
- Project bounce back for first year students struggling academically after first semester
- Link program offered to all new International students in late August
- International student orientation and support
- Aboriginal student orientation and support
- UHIP registration
- Multi-faith workshop on mediation and de-stressing
- Individual counselling and Crisis counselling
- Support Groups covering a variety of topics – anxiety, assertiveness, depression, relationships, women of colour, coming out, bereavement, men's issues, eating disorders, etc.
- Student support network
- New student orientation for students with disabilities
- Preflight summer program for high school students with disabilities

C. Athletics

The Department of Athletics contributes to the education process, by delivering a diverse spectrum of physical activities, encompassing instruction self-directed recreation, group endeavors, lifestyle & health initiatives, and high performance opportunities. We are committed to building healthier bodies and stronger minds, leading to enhanced academic performance, personal growth, empowerment and the development of the whole person

First Year Specific Programs and Services:

- Athletics information days: During O-week
 - First year students are provided information about all the programs accessible to them.
- Intramural Orientation Challenge for First year students
 - Students get to try first hand some of the sports we offer
 - Information is provided in regards to sign ups
 - They are given a chance to meet other students
- Intramurals offer individual and team sign ups. Individuals are placed with other individuals who are interested in playing the same sports in the same divisions.
- Variety of sports are offered in a Fun and a Competitive level
- Fitness recreation centre staff offer free fitness and weight training advise.
- Fitness Freebie
 - All fitness and Aquatic classes and Fitness Centres are available at no charge to students during O-week and the first week of classes.

Other Services offered at no cost:

- Recreation program offers a range of free or very low cost activities. The activities run at specific times throughout Athletic Centre Hours, 7 days a week. Some of the activities are Swimming, Ice hockey, Badminton, Basketball, Volleyball, etc.

D. Co-operative Education & Career Services

The goal of Co-operative Education & Career Services is to help all students, graduates and alumni learn to self-manage their careers and successfully transition to the workplace or further studies. In doing so, we ensure they have access to range of employment opportunities as well as programming that will help them learn how to prepare for work and/or further education.

First Year Specific Programs and Services

- CECS website has information links for First Year students.
- CECS participates in First Year Orientation events such as the Resource Fair.
- Special mailings to residence targeting First Year students.
- CECS presentation to Residence Life staff during their on-campus orientation.
- CECS present workshops in residence as requested on topics such as summer job search, interviewing, resume & cover letter preparation.
- Co-op staff takes part in START – online chats, admission chats and the Parents Forum (run by Student Life).
- Co-op Co-ordinators are available to meet with first year students should they have questions regarding Co-op, continuation requirements, etc.
- The main contact for first year Co-op students is the On-Campus Co-ordinator.
- A new CECS/CME professional staff position is being finalized which will in part focus on First Year students in CME.

E. Student Health Services

Student Health Services' mandate is to provide comprehensive health promotion, disease prevention and primary medical care to full-time and part-time, undergraduate and graduate students and their families, as well as visitors to the campus. We contribute to the success of the University of Guelph's academic mission by meeting the health education and clinical care needs of our students.

First Year Specific Programs & Services

Wellness Team programming - Before & During O-Week

Before:

- resources to residence life staff (posters, pamphlets, condoms), training for student leader groups by WETT – Interhall Council, OV's, RAs
- information on SHS for new faculty
- START-online chat

During:

- WETT (Wellness Education Training Troupe) presentations - START One World, Wellness' Pep Rally Boogie, Let's Monkey Around, training for SHS staff, 2 sessions of Talkin' Back
- Wellness activities - cookie decorating, yoga retreat, 3 Drink-Tac-Toe sessions in residences, academic resource fair

Wellness has 13 teams that plan & facilitate Wellness-designated awareness weeks (every week in the semester) including info displays in the UC, collaborating with other campus groups to provide awareness events and workshops that are requested & facilitated often 2 nights a week.

Wellness Teams:

- ABC – low risk alcohol & other drug use awareness
- AWL – prevention of body image & eating disorders awareness

- Forward Minds – awareness of mental health/illnesses & the campus resources
- Leave the Pack Behind – tobacco awareness & support for smoking cessation
- NAKED – dispelling myths, promoting the facts of sexual health
- SAFE – promotion of respectful relationships, prevention of sexual assault and awareness
- SpeakOUT – prevention of homophobia, awareness & ally building
- Students In Touch – promotion of Guelph as a caring environment & stress management awareness
- WETT – use of social action theatre techniques to address wellness issues
- Wellness – promoting all other issues of wellness, ie food safety
- Wellness World Wide – new team promoting awareness of wellness issues occurring worldwide
- Natural Wellness – promoting alternative means of wellness
- HEAL – promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living awareness on campus

Additional Wellness Program:

- DrinkWise/DrugWise – early intervention program for those struggling with high risk use of alcohol and other drugs – facilitated by Manager Wellness Education – most of the students referred to this program are first year students

F. Student Housing Services

Student Housing Services is a department that manages residence buildings that house over 4700 undergraduate students, 11 houses with space for over 50 graduate students, and two complexes housing over 300 student families. This includes the assignment of rooms, the management of facilities and related services and the development of community and educational programs for residents. The general departmental mission statement is... “We are committed to providing residential environments and services which promote student success”. Approximately 90% of first year students live in residence and the majority of programs and services in Residence Life are designed to meet the needs of new students.

First Year Specific Programs and Services

- Community building - Provide warm and welcoming environment for students, encouraging interaction, involvement, and investment
- Roommate and community contracts to reduce conflicts, conflict mediation
- Every student has the support of a trained upper year student
- Programming - Social, educational, and academic - based on the Student Clock and Student Development Theory - connects students with residence, University of Guelph campus and resources, and Guelph community
- Managing student conduct – through Residence Community Living Standards - Clearly defined expectations regarding conduct and consequences – evening on call system to respond to complaints and crises
- One on one support, and peer counselling
- Residence Learning Communities
 - Living Learning Centres - Arts House, Eco House, La Maison Francaise, International House - provide opportunities for students to live in an environment that supports learning outside of the classroom, in the areas of the arts, environmental awareness, global issues, and French culture
 - Academic clusters - Students live in communities with other students in their program of study - Clusters for BioSci, Arts, Engineering, Computer Science, Environmental Science, Physical Science, Commerce, Agriculture
- Additional academic programming in all residences provided by cluster leaders, Academic Programmers and Sr. Academic Learning Community peer
- Accommodating requests through residence admissions process and room assignments - Students with disabilities - Students with spiritual needs - Dietary requirements - Roommate requests

- 24 hour desk coverage to provide information, mail delivery, guest passes, key sign out, work order submission, access to equipment and services, RLS dispatch and emergency response
- Provision and maintenance of laundry facilities in all residences
- Facility adjustments to allow access for students with disabilities – ie. automatic door closures, strobe alarms, room and washroom adjustments, arranging for installation of special equipment on an individual need basis.
- Leadership opportunities available through InterHall Council - First year students have opportunity to be involved in a position on their Hall Council, as community reps, through programming, and conferences

Section 4 - Themes Identified through Feedback on the First Year Experience

The following section outlines a series of themes or issues identified through the material collected and reviewed for this report. There were some similar issues highlighted from the survey question posed to new students, the feedback from focus groups, the additional material reviewed including the Incoming Student Survey and the NSSE data, and discussions at our Committee meetings.

A. In general students find the University of Guelph to be a campus with a welcoming and positive, supportive atmosphere.

The Committee felt strongly that the University of Guelph has a strong sense of community. The data from the NSSE survey supports this view as Guelph's mean score was higher than the mean for peers on the measure "supportive campus community". When students access the services offered by Student Affairs departments they are generally well served.

Comments from Students

- *"I have felt super comfortable throughout this entire transition"*
- *"I think that the resources are very much available to new students"*
- *"The university has done everything possible to make new students feel welcome"*
- *"Overall I think the university helps in the transition to university life well"*
- *"There are so many help programs and events that go on to bring people together socially. I feel really comfortable and happy here at Guelph"*
- *"I thought everything was done very well"*

B. The structure of our semester creates challenges for students.

Time management is a challenge for new students. Over 70% of them identified time management as a concern on the Incoming Student Survey. They have lost the structure of high school and this challenge is especially difficult in light of our relatively short semesters.

Comments from Students

- *"Guelph starts classes later and finished earlier than other schools"*
- *"Midterms are much harder than finals – because classes still going on"*
- *"I didn't realize how fast paced everything would be in terms of work and I procrastinated studying like never before...it's really hard to catch up"*
- *"I think that the university did a great job with Frosh week and welcoming students to the campus, but I don't think you can fully prepare someone for the work load or how fast the courses move along in the material"*

C. The academic adjustment is challenging and many new students feel unprepared for it.

In the Incoming Student Survey over 60% of new students indicated having concerns about their own academic ability. Students struggle with many things related to university study including marking schemes, multiple choice exams, faculty expectations, managing the workload, etc. Committee members felt that new students have an undeveloped understanding of motivation and goal setting as determinants of success. It is also important for faculty and staff to understand that new students are novice learners with inconsistent academic skills who need coaching and support.

Comments from Students

- *“Exams completely multiple choice – feel as though easiest way for professors, not students”.*
- *“Experienced a big drop in marks – was a big shock”*
- *“Grading is very different from high school”*
- *“Evaluation methods are not liked”*
- *“Marking scheme is messed up”*
- *“I felt really in the dark coming here about academics...I wasn’t really prepared. I didn’t really have to study in high school to get really good marks and I thought I could get away with doing that again”*
- *“I had no idea how to study. I had to learn the hard way”*
- *“I feel the university needs to do more in the transition to academic life. Students are thrown in the deep end and expected to find their way through”*
- *“Let us know that the workload is about 10 times more than high school”*

D. A number of first-year students are on probation in their second semester.

Although students on probation have access to a range of support services (learning and study support, program counsellors, personal counselling, Student Life, and the Stress Management Clinic) few choose to take advantage of them. The inability to self-assess and recognize needs, and a lack of proactive, help-seeking behaviour are common traits among students who are struggling academically. It is difficult for service providers to reach out to students on probation when (to our knowledge) there is no institution-wide means of identifying them or systematic method of informing them about existing services. There is also currently no systemic way to identify or contact first year students in academic difficulty in the fall so they can be referred to support services that might prevent them from being placed on academic probation.

E. Some students don’t feel challenged enough academically.

Despite the themes identified above there are also students who are well prepared for university study, have better developed academic skills, and are disadvantaged when they are not challenged or engaged sufficiently.

Comments from Students

- *“University work is less than in private school”*
- *“Classes are too general at first – don’t want to waste money, time and effort on things that are so general.”*

F. Students need help to connect to academic support services and learn what to do to be successful.

Despite excellent programs and services, too many students are not aware of the help available or are hesitant to make use of support services. Although there is extensive programming through the Learning Commons and other offices, many of the responses from students to the survey questions and in focus groups included calls for more academic supports, programs and sessions.

Comments from students

- *“There’s no one to tell you to study”*
- *“Provide organized intra-house study sessions for big exams like econ and chem.”*
- *“Create more programs to help us adjust to the work load and with time management”*
- *“I know SLGs are there, but didn’t realize the value of them until I was actually in one. I needed someone to take me to one for the first time, then I was fine”*

G. Students would like to meet people in their academic program more easily.

Students seem to have some difficulty finding connections with others in the same majors or forming informal study groups with others in their classes.

Comments from Students

- *“Other universities connect students who are in a similar program...wish we had something similar – haven’t met many students in my major”*
- *“Thought I would get to know people in classes, but really only meet people in labs”*
- *“More needs to be done such as weekly study sessions to help meet people in courses”*
- *“I would have appreciated getting to know more people in my classes”*
- *“Maybe having more academic-specific events (events exclusive to people in certain faculties) to help people make friends in their program”*
- *“It would be cool to have sessions according to people’s majors”*

H. First year students do not make sufficient connections with faculty.

On NSSE the University of Guelph scored lower than peers on measures of “student faculty interaction”. The importance of new students making connections with faculty can’t be underestimated as a factor in the engagement with the university community.

Comments from Students

- *“For academics I feel the university should make it even more known that the professors are there to help the student and that they do have office hours to do so”*
- *“Please make sure that the profs are easy to understand – I have two classes that the profs are very difficult to understand... and I rely on the profs a lot.”*

I. Students quickly learn that, with respect to residence living, the people they meet and the lessons learned are more important than which building they live in.

Residence Life at the University of Guelph has a great tradition that is evidenced through the passion and spirit developed in many residence communities. The learning opportunities and social connections possible through the residence experience are unparalleled in terms of friends, fun, and unique learning experiences.

Comments from Students

- *“When I moved into residence I was worried about living in South – it turns out it’s more about the people you live with than the building”*
- *“You have to share everything – I had to learn”*
- *“I think the major thing is finding people like RAs who are upbeat and positive, and who make the effort to get everyone involved in group activities and meeting new people”*

J. The impact of the behavior of others (fellow residents and their guests) is a major challenge in residence.

The structure of high school allowed for socializing during the day between classes, at lunch and during after school activities. Given varying schedules and night classes most of the social interaction happens after 10 pm. and late into the evening. New students are faced with a great deal of freedom that is new to them. They naturally test the boundaries and many are not responsive to rules and limits expected by residence staff. Encountering behaviour such as noise, vandalism, pranks and general disrespect is a reality of life in residence for most students. Many of these problems are created by residents' guests. The negative impacts of peer behaviour can be very challenging. Many also recognize that they need to be aware of how their actions affect others.

Comments from students

- *"People drinking in the lounge, playing poker, making noise when trying to sleep or study is an issue"*
- *"Some people don't respect others but expect respect back"*
- *"Rules should be more strict"*
- *"You keep people up as much as they do you"*
- *"Everyone is used to different schedules and rules so it is important to be sensitive to each other's needs"*
- *"Make sure quiet hours are respected – enforce quiet hours"*
- *"I think the rules should be more strict"*

K. Alcohol is used heavily and the results impact everyone – however, some students feel that the rules related to alcohol are too restrictive.

Alcohol consumption is still very much a part of student culture. In fact according to the Incoming Student Survey, 67% of new students have at least occasionally drunk beer in high school and 81.3% have at least occasionally drunk wine or liquor in high school. Many students feel that the residence alcohol policies are too strict while many feel that they are too lenient. The negative effects of alcohol consumption in students, staff and the community are significant.

Comments from Students

- *"When there are alternative programs to drinking people don't come"*
- *"Drinking rules are too harsh"*
- *"A level 3 sanction for "mass consumption" is too severe – a "life lesson" should be enough"*
- *"People don't take responsibility in my residence – one Saturday and Sunday mornings it's GROSS."*

L. Off-campus students have more practical challenges – like transportation and parking.

Off-campus students are impacted differently than residence students by practical challenges like, weather, parking, concerns about safety, overfull buses, etc.

Comments from students

- *"Not enough parking"*
- *"Security policies have not been explained"*
- *"Don't know how to use the emergency poles – how does safewalk work?"*

M. Finding a "home" on-campus is particularly challenging for these OC students - the OCUS lounge becomes home for some but can be alienating for others and is only large enough to accommodate a handful of individuals at a time

Off-campus students have a greater challenge developing well established social networks on campus. Feedback from the Centre for New Students described off-campus students who withdraw as feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Some off-campus students don't know where to make the first contact and

can find the campus unwelcoming. The OCUS lounge may serve the needs of some but it may be difficult to “break” into after the social group is established.

Comments from Students

- *“Where do people go who don’t feel comfortable in the (OCUS) lounge?”*
- *“Please find more ways to involve off-campus students”*
- *“Create smaller communities for off-campus students and facilitate their communication for the first semester or two”*
- *“I’ve tried to participate in OCUS and visit the lounge when time permits but every time I go I feel ignored.”*

N. There are specific challenges related to being a varsity athlete.

Varsity athletes have extensive additional demands on their time and lack the opportunity to make the same connections, both social and academic, as other students. Some processes and services may not be accessible to student athletes because of their schedules.

Comments from Students

- *“Few opportunities (as Varsity athlete) to bond with peers in residence – I don’t know them.”*
- *“Creelman is closed by 8pm when Varsity practice is over.”*

O. Students have a lot of interaction with family supports but the nature of their relationship is changing.

One of the main sources of support for our students is their families. Their parents have been very involved and continue to be very involved in their lives. The nature of the relationship may change, however, and the increasing independence of students may increase parental anxiety. On the other hand, faced with the stress and challenges of university, some students may need and rely on their parents more.

Comments from Students

- *“They respect me more now”*
- *“My parents read everything the university sends them and follow it closely...they are more intrusive this semester now that there is less info for them”*
- *“I didn’t tell my Mom my extension – she can only reach me on-line”*
- *“I took them for granted when I lived at home...now I appreciate them more”.*
- *“Closer bond with parents now that I’m far away”*
- *“Moral support – exactly what I need”*
- *“Mom looked over my shoulder the whole time”*
- *“Support system at home is helpful.”*

P. First generation students don’t get the same level of understanding at home.

Students whose parents or family members have not attended university may not experience the same levels of support and understanding as those whose parents have had the university experience. A recent study by Fred Evers and Janet Wolstenholme in Teaching Support Services addresses the differences in academic performance and confidence between first generation and non-first generation students.

Comments from Students

- *“They didn’t go to university – don’t understand and can’t relate.”*

Q. Finding balance in their life and learning to say no to friends and social pressures is an important lesson.

Many students struggle with finding an appropriate balance between work and play. Staying focused on academic commitments while faced with many social distractions is a real challenge for many students who may not have developed assertiveness skills or the ability to set limits with their peers.

Comments from students

- *“Trying to find a healthy balance between study and leisure time – up until 2 am. and up again at 8 am.”*
- *“Kicking people out of my room when I need to study/sleep can be a challenge”*
- *“Being able to say “no I can’t hang out right now”*
- *“Probably balancing between partying and studying”*
- *“It’s impossible to balance the two right away and the only real way for students to learn is by experiencing it themselves.”*
- *“Residence presents a lot of new challenges, but one that I definitely underestimated was the social distractions”*

R. Many students struggle to ask for help or to know where to go for help.

Students may not pay attention to the resources available to them until reaching a point of need or faced with a crisis. In the focus groups in particular, facilitators were surprised by the number of students who weren’t aware of the existence of many programs and services available to them. There was concern amongst the committee about students getting bounced from person to person or office to office and/or being treated with patience and sensitivity when they did seek out help or have questions.

Comments from Students

- *“Feel embarrassed sitting down to talk with someone”*
- *“Lesson learned...Knowing that I have to ask for help”*
- *“Let students know where or who they should turn to if they have problems.”*

S. The importance of involvement is evident and students seem to want more structured activities.

In response to the survey question many students indicated a desire for more structured social activities. There was some discussion at the committee about leadership opportunities for new students and the importance of encouraging involvement. We do know that if there is not enough to keep students busy in the evening and weekends they will socialize in ways that are not always positive or easy for residence staff and Campus Community Police to manage.

Comments from Students

- *“It’s all about trying and pushing beyond your comfort level”*
- *“Intramurals helps a lot to meet friends”*
- *“After frosh week there were no more events, there should be more events social and academic”*
- *“The university should hold more social events and get togethers (dances and games)”*
- *“I found that events seemed to dwindle down after that point and maybe more could be done throughout the semester”*
- *“Send e-mail updates about a spectrum of events going on on and off campus – like Sunday night cinema or the documentary week.”*

T. Independence and accountability for oneself is an important lesson.

In reflection on their first year many new students are able to articulate the challenges of being on their own for the first time and recognize their accomplishments related to looking after themselves and developing independence and maturity.

Comments from Students

- *"I'm more independent – feels good"*
- *"If I succeed or fail – it's up to me"*
- *"Now I need to be more accountable for myself"*
- *"People build up university – they say it's the best experience of your life – there were moments when I was horribly homesick"*
- *"University for me wasn't all academic – its about move out and grow up"*
- *"Of course it is hard but you begin to learn so much about yourself and find out who you are and the person you wish to become"*
- *"The transition, I feel, lies mainly with the students: the university simply offers a backdrop."*

U. Orientation and the first few weeks can be challenging for introverts.

Orientation with its large group activities can be very intimidating for students who are not particularly extroverted. For residence students this is often mediated by the opportunity to make friends one-on-one in their residence section. Attending events with others is easier than walking into a crowd alone. The challenges in this area can be more difficult for new students living off-campus.

Comments from Students

- *"(I learned) putting myself out there – have to be prepared to get out there and meet people"*
- *"Come prepared to be more outgoing – I didn't so it was a big set back"*
- *"After a couple of weeks it's hard to get into friend groups"*
- *"Need more orientation events geared towards more laid back – not outgoing people"*
- *"It might be a good idea to present an option for a more structured day as far as O-week activities go...you're with the same people the entire day – instead of talking to somebody at a single event and then never seeing them again"*
- *"Maybe even more OC students events so that OC students can kind of network together and not feel so left out"*
- *"Perhaps some more small group things – some people are afraid of big groups."*

V. Students face challenges maintaining their health – both avoiding illness and maintaining fitness.

The combination of academic stress, late night activities, lack of sleep, poor nutrition and communal living can make students prone to illness. Living in a new community without the structure of family and high school can change the eating and fitness habits of many students.

Comments from Students

- *"It's hard to be healthy during exams"*
- *"Weight gain is a big problem"*
- *"Hard when someone gets sick – it goes around – people don't wash their hands"*
- *"Stress, not enough sleep."*

W. New Students are already worried about making plans for graduate school, employment, etc.

On the Incoming Student Survey over 65% of new students indicated their intention to obtain a Master's degree or higher. Others plan to attend law school or teacher's college and are aware that decisions early

in their academic and work experiences can affect their ability to be successful in these pursuits. Others are less sure of where they are going.

Comments from Students

- *"I had a professor who discussed how to apply to graduate school – he suggested getting to know profs now. It was very helpful to know."*
- *"Getting into teacher's college – feel overwhelmed by what I need to do to gain the required experience – how am I going to do it all?"*
- *"We need a booklet that explains what you need and how to do it for grad school – send it to us by the end of first year"*
- *"What you do in summer really shapes what you can do with a career – student's don't know this"*
- *"What to do with my degree – help with options."*

X. There is no one means by which we can communicate effectively with all students.

Students cite many sources of information to find out about things on campus – WebCT, e-mail, posters, word of mouth, brochures, website, etc. There doesn't appear to be one clear source that would reach all students equally and that they would all give their attention to. Just because it is e-mailed to them, placed on the web, or distributed in print material, is no guarantee that the information is read and attended to. Many students indicate that they rely on their friends for information which may be a source of rumour or misinformation depending on the level to which their friends are informed. Committee members indicated that students think the on-line university calendar is difficult to find, hard to navigate and not user friendly – many students would prefer to have information in paper.

Comments from Students

- *"Don't send us stuff by e-mail – spam via e-mail is very troublesome"*
- *"Guelph website is ridiculous – very hard to navigate – too many clicks to find what you are looking for"*
- *"I almost missed the information that I needed in the undergraduate calendar until someone pointed it out to me – others hadn't heard of the undergraduate calendar"*
- *"One way of getting information out is by word of mouth via Hall Councils"*
- *"I hate how everything is on-line – I hate WebCT"*
- *"I swear by WebCT because I don't go to class"*
- *"Better communication and advertisement of academic support programs would help"*
- *"Redesign the website – it is confusing"*
- *"Course calendar is confusing"*

Y. Students are not all as technologically savvy as we often assume.

This generation of students is very accustomed to using computers and a variety of technological gadgets; however familiarity and comfort level should not be equated with skill level. According to the Incoming Student Survey 55% of new students had never participated in an on-line chat before attending university. They may need more computing support than we often assume.

Comments from Students

- *"Course selection is an abomination – I couldn't do it at home because it kept timing out – I needed someone to show me how it works"*
- *"I wish I knew about e-mail forwarding to a non-uoguelph account"*

Section 5 – Recommendations for Improvements to the First Year Experience

The committee developed the following recommendation for program/service enhancement, new initiatives and partnerships. Although the main focus of our work was within Students Affairs and the Learning Commons, we have also included some suggestions for other areas of the campus that impact the First Year Experience. Finally we have suggested some need for further organization and research initiatives related to the First Year Experience at the University of Guelph.

Enhancements to current programs and services within Student Affairs & Learning Commons

- 1. Expand the academic support services for first-year students offered by Learning Services.**
Students do not have enough awareness of what is offered (suggesting more promotion of services is needed) and access is limited (eg. waiting lists for workshops). More programming for entering students (especially in residence), individual assistance (particularly with time management and exam preparation/assessment), Orientation week programming, and web resources are needed.
- 2. Expand and enhance Learning Commons' web resources addressing academic transition issues.** Modify the primarily text-based online resource iU: An Introduction to University Learning (a simulated psychology course, that integrates learning strategies) by adding video and multimedia. Expand and adapt iU for students in other disciplines. Integrate content from three print publications to expand existing web resources.
- 3. Consider Academic Learning Communities for everyone** - Student Housing Services should conduct an analysis of the operational challenges and benefits of assigning all students in a way that clusters small groups of about 20 students together by academic program. This should include a full report of the pilot project taking place in Johnston Hall during the 07/08 academic year. Clustering students in residence by academic program could help to build community, help students find others in their major, and help the formulation of study groups and create more natural opportunities for faculty involvement in residence life activities. The Provost's White paper also suggests the enrichment of these communities.
- 4. Consider Off-Campus Connection for everyone** - Off-Campus Connection is currently an opt-in program. It is clear that first year off-campus students need additional support and they may not realize the benefits of such a program. We learned that at Wilfrid Laurier each off-campus student is assigned to a group and at minimum e-mail/phone contact is made by the group leader. Student Life should consider including all first year Off-Campus students in OCC automatically without requiring them to indicate an interest in participating.
- 5. Improve parent information and support & the development of parental contact policies** – We should enhance efforts already in place to provide information and resources to parents. They have close contact with our students and are an important referral agent to our services. They need information about the transition that their student will experience and who to advise their student to call when they need help. One simple suggestion is to hold information session for parents in residence on move-in day and provide printed materials (ie. parents' handbook for those who do not attend the President's welcome. While we want to assist and support parents in their roles as supports to our students we should have clear policies for staff (that are available for parents) regarding contact, questions, complaints and advocacy from parents. These would outline our relationship with the student, the extent to which we can provide information and a policy of contacting and informing the student that a parent has made contact with us on their behalf.

6. **Improve Alcohol policies and education** – this is one of the areas of student culture that will continue to provide us with challenges and will continue to have a negative impact on our community. We need to have strong policy and enforcement coupled with strong educational programs. We cannot look away as underage students drink heavily which means changing the way that Residence Life deals with underage drinking. They must develop a stricter enforcement policy that moves rapidly through clear stages with clear interventions and consequences. New and effective educational programs that speak to first year students must be developed in various areas on campus (Residence Life, Wellness, Campus Community Police) to address alcohol abuse, the drinking culture and underage drinking head on.
7. **Create more leadership opportunities for first year students** – Student Life and Residence Life should work with student organizations to create more opportunities for first year students to be involved on-campus and to encourage first year students to take on leadership roles in various aspects of campus life particularly within their residence hall.
8. **Create a Formal Student Crisis Response Team** - Although there are many excellent informal partnerships called together to address individual issues it may be time to formalize our approach to responding to difficult cases. This would create a team of colleagues to manage student cases containing very complex problems crossing a number of services. This team could meet on a regular basis to review coordination of services, debrief on resolved cases, develop responses for current cases, as well as for PD and the review and revision of policies. This team would be the university expert on issues such as suicide, mental health issues, student death, etc. The team may have senior reps from Counselling, Student Health, Student Housing, Campus Community Police, Judicial, etc. Others may be called to the team on an ad hoc basis to address specific issues and cases.
9. **Make changes to Orientation week that further enhances the dimensions of supporting curricular activities, engaging students in meaningful activities in the evenings and sets out the week's activities in an easy to navigate manner** – We would recommend changes to the schedule to shorten the week and to include more academic programming, particularly on time management and the transition from high school to university-level learning including workload expectations. Currently students arrive a full 7 days before they have any academic commitments which allows for a lengthy focus on fun and partying, making it difficult for students to shift gears once classes start and sets a tone for behavior in residence into the semester. The report of the First Year Experience Working Group to the 21st Century Curriculum Committee recommended, “a shortened Orientation week in September that has a focus on preparing the student for the academic experience...”.
10. **Plan a special program of activities for new students the weekend after Labour Day focusing on academic preparation** – We recommend that a program be created similar to a conference format with plenary sessions and concurrent learning and writing skills workshops to help students shift gears and prepare for their academic work.
11. **Ensure that there is stricter enforcement of quiet hours in residence** – Many students noted the noise problems in residence. More can be done to ensure that students know how to make anonymous noise complaints and to intervene sooner and consider stricter penalties for repeated noise complaints to the same areas.
12. **Develop programs in residence that empower students to take responsibility for their role as a community member** - Residence Life should develop programs and campaigns directed at resident involvement in community problems and solutions. By increasing students' understanding of their role as

responsible citizens, we may get closer to achieving goals of increasing attendance at residence programs, encouraging building pride and increased involvement.

13. **Better advertise and promote Crimestoppers on-campus** – This should be one part of a multi-leveled approach to reducing vandalism, harassment, assault and other crime on campus, particularly in residence.
14. **Expand academic advising and academic support programs for Varsity athletes** – The Learning Commons and Athletics should expand academic support – based on the successful football team model – to address the unique learning and time management needs of all student athletes. This was identified on page 6 of the Student Affairs Updated Integrate Plan 2007-2008: “Extend the Student-Athlete Development Program to include all varsity athletes.”

New initiatives and Partnerships

15. **Create a task force to examine the issue of students on probation.** With a number of first-year students on probation after the fall semester, specialized support services need to be expanded and developed. The Bounce Back program currently has a limit of 200 students. The issue of support services for students on probation also goes beyond first-year students so a range of stakeholders need to be involved. The mandate of the task force should include creating an early warning system to track students at academic risk in the fall.
16. **Create additional opportunities for students to study and learn in groups.** The SLG program runs in a very structured format in first-year courses selected and approved by specific criteria. Many students have expressed an interest in connecting with students in their programs and studying together at key points in the semester (eg. before midterms and exams.) A new program needs to be developed to facilitate students making connections with their classmates to allow collaboration at these key points. Learning Services, in partnership with faculty, the Library, and Residence Life, should develop a program to meet this need.
17. **Create and distribute a First Year Student Handbook** – We recommend the development of a comprehensive transition handbook for each new student including helpful hints, information about how to be successful, an overview of services, a who’s who list, and who to call under various circumstances. The 21st C FYE working group report included the following recommendation, “coordinated one stop access for students to key information, important dates and support services (ie. My Portico, student handbook)”.
18. **Create a Start on-campus program for students who live in the local community** – to help off-campus students meet each other, make connections before Orientation, and learn how to be successful in their first year, an on-campus start program should be developed for them, possibly including a residential experience.
19. **Establish a summer program for new students focused on academic skills and preparation** – Some other schools such as Western offer an intensive summer academic program. We should consider the creation of a summer “bootcamp” focusing on learning skills, writing skills, and research skills to give students a jump start on developing the skills needed for academic success in first year.

20. **Develop a pilot for a Mentor program beginning with first year off-campus students and/or first year first generation students** - Creating a mentor program involving staff and faculty would give students an opportunity to develop a one-on-one connection with a faculty or staff member interested in helping them set goals, in providing advice & support, and in referring them to appropriate campus and community services. The suggestion also appears in the Provost's White Paper.
21. **Extend Orientation activities into the first six weeks of the semester with the creation of campus-wide theme weeks and programming** – We recommend that the university community continue to develop and offer focused first year student programs into the first six weeks of the semester as an extension of Orientation week. Each week could have a theme to provide focus to the offerings of multiple areas of the university. Themes could include, transition from high school, health & wellness, writing in university, community responsibility, diversity, etc.
22. **Establish a formal feedback mechanism for residence withdrawals** – Students withdrawing from residence should be asked to complete a form outlining reasons for leaving, etc. when they turn in their keys. They should also be encouraged to meet with the Residence Manager of the building for an exit interview. This would help us better analyze how or if we could have intervened.
23. **Establish targeted outreach program for new students from Co-operative Education & Career Services** – New students could benefit from a targeted program regarding planning for Grad School, Teacher's College, choosing the best summer employment options to meet your longer term goals, etc.
24. **Expand the partnership between Residence Life and the Learning Commons to improve academic support in residence** – The Learning Commons and Residence Life should work together more to promote effective learning and good study habits in residence. This could include a process to connect students within the same classes, increased learning skills programming in residence (workshops and drop-in help) and provide intentional opportunities for students to learn in groups outside of the SLG program.
25. **Consider the creation of a Residence Community specifically for varsity athletes** – We recommend that Student Housing and Athletics discuss piloting a varsity athlete community in residence where athletes can live together in a mutually supportive community with other like-minded students.
26. **Create the position of weekend programmer responsible for organizing campus events with Central Student's Association, Interhall Council, Residence Life & Student Life** – More fun, compelling, attractive programming on campus may help take some of the focus off the drinking culture in residence. This is especially important since so many of our new students are under 19.
27. **Create more opportunities for faculty to get involved in the first year experience** through involvement in residence learning communities, club & organization advising, serving as mentors, etc.
28. **Provide more opportunities for support services (Learning Commons, Wellness, etc.) to have drop-in sessions/office hours or specific programs in residence** – There is a need for these services to come to residence when the students are available (weekends and evenings).
29. **Create a central function within Student Affairs that does research on students and assessment of Student Affairs programs and services and their impact** – The committee felt that

someone on campus needs to pull together info about new students and disseminate it more broadly and provide that information to people who work with new students in a way that is more useful. We need a central person or office that is the expert on data collected about students, develops and conducts timely useful research and assessment (both qualitative and quantitative) related to students and our programs and services.

30. **Extend community service-learning programming during the first six weeks of the Fall semester to accommodate all new students who wish to participate.**

Suggestions regarding other areas of the university

31. **Partner with academic departments to help students find study partners in their own discipline or in large first year classes** – They have an important role to play in finding ways to connect those in programs with each other.
32. **Find ways to make the on-line calendar more user friendly** and to ensure that first year students are aware of its importance.
33. **Review and enhance the use of the portal as a communication tool** – important questions such as - is it achieving intended outcomes? – how can it be enhanced as a communication tool? – what percentage of students are using it? – need to be answered to ensure that it is successful.
34. **Establish a coordinated website for computing support on campus.** Currently support services for the academic use of computers is fragmented among a number of areas – CCS, the Library, the colleges, the Learning Commons, etc. One collaborative website (similar to the one developed by the Graduate Student Learning Initiative) which provides information on all campus computing services and facilities should be created to streamline students' access to these services.
35. **Find ways to streamline how students get help and ensure that this is communicated clearly to new students** – Some students who need counseling get bounced around to differing services – can academic counseling and advising be made more accessible and user friendly? Students need a better understanding of whom to go to with which academic problem - program counselor, faculty advisor, UAIC, professor, TA, Learning Services, etc.
36. **Explore ways to adjust the semester schedule to reduce stress on students at midterm time.**
37. **Change the parameters around dropping courses in web advisor such that students who are dropping their final one or two courses must do so in person, thus providing enhanced opportunities for supporting students experiencing difficulties.**

Suggestions for ongoing campus wide focus on the First Year experience

38. **Establish an ongoing First Year Experience Committee** – A group that brings together all key players related to first year experience should become a standing committee to ensure the continuous sharing of information about the first year experience and enhancement of programs and services for new students. This committee should consider ways to centralize the dissemination of information about programs and services to students. This recommendation is in line with an initiative suggested in the Provost's White Paper – "Re-establish a university wide first year committee...this committee will look at all aspects of the

first year from curriculum to student support and engagement...will help to ensure that we have organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and co-ordinated approach to the first year". Members of the committee should be sent to the First Year Experience conference on a regular basis to collect ideas and info about best practice programs and services.

39. **Conduct timely and thorough exit surveys with students who withdraw** – we can only truly find effective ways to improve retention if we know why students who leave the university do so. No student should be able to just go on-line, drop all classes and withdraw without talking to someone or at the very least completing a survey which captures important information that we can use to understand our retention rates better.
40. **Survey students at the end of their first year or early in their second year about details of their first year experience to better inform programs, services and planned interventions** - To truly understand the first year experience we need a survey of students at the end or in their second year.
41. **Ensure consistent ongoing training for all campus staff related to student development, customer service and appropriate referral skills – ensure that these items are also factors in evaluating staff performance** - Training of staff at university regarding patience with new students, the time it takes students to learn the rules and community values and internalize as their own and to ensure that staff hear and respond to student issues with patience and sensitivity, and that staff have excellent referral skills.

Appendix A: From the Provost's White Paper

<http://www.uoguelph.ca/vpacademic/whitepaper/lightingofafire.shtml>

3.1 The First-year Experience

There is a great body of literature that points to the importance of a strong focus on the first year of study.^[16] The evidence also suggests that early involvement will help strengthen commitment to the institution.^[17] One of the key messages of NSSE is that students who are engaged are more likely to stay, and to succeed. And while the whole first year is important for retention, the first six weeks are the most crucial time. University is by no means a sprint, but a good strong start has a huge influence on the rest of the race.

Guelph is recognized as a leader in Canada in the area of first year programming, and was the first university to create an Office of First Year Studies. While the Centre for New Students continues to produce quality programming, responsibility for shaping the first year experience cannot rest solely with one unit. Rather, the totality of the experience should, in its seamless and intentional approach, be reflective of a larger institutional commitment to this critical transitional year. Programs must be highly structured and integrative in nature, based on a strategy of student engagement, and focus on both affective and cognitive needs of students. Specifically, they must:

- support students who experience difficulty in the transition to university life and study
- engage students in learning
- promote and reinforce an integrative learning environment

Some students struggle academically the first year. Given our high cut-offs, this lack of success is rarely due to sheer intellectual deficiency. Such students could be in the wrong program, or need help with study or time-management skills. Some may be dealing with personal issues—for some students the transition away from home can be overwhelming and even traumatic. Other may simply fail to make social connections with their peers, faculty, and other members of the community. Even if such vulnerabilities do not result in withdrawals, students who do not become engaged can waste their time at university, drifting from course to course and from year to year. If anything, these 'internal dropouts' are less visible to us than actual withdrawals, except as lower overall averages and participation rates.

Unfortunately, many first year students who could benefit from assistance do not seek it out voluntarily. We need to provide support to these students, and we need to be especially proactive during the first year. Guelph has the advantage that 90% of first year students live in residence, where a more interventionist approach is possible. However, we must take extra care to support non-residence students, who are at greater risk because they are not directly involved in residence life.

But it is not enough merely to provide extra support services to first year students. Academic programming designed to engage and assist first-years in their critical transition is also necessary. The recently established First Year Seminar program has been a particular success in this regard, qualified only by its resource-limited scope. Large lecture courses tend to concentrate at the introductory levels, but they are also the kind of courses that can be most intimidating and least engaging for those new to the university community. Small, discussion-oriented learning experiences are invaluable to the acquisition of basic university-level learning skills, but such courses are largely reserved to senior students—those most capable of controlling and directing their own learning efforts—because of the inherent specialization of interests that naturally occurs through the course of an undergraduate career.

The First Year Seminar forcibly inverts this organizational tendency, in order to capture the “hearts and minds” of first year students before they can fall victim to the depersonalization and alienation that might otherwise occur. It encourages them to confront faculty members regularly, in an interactive and personalized environment—and learn that faculty are human resources that can be drawn upon, not enigmatic and unapproachable talking heads. It requires students to become more engaged in their own learning, and apply that learning to real world experiences. In these classes, the professor knows everyone’s name. The seminar format provides for better feedback on performance, more research-based learning, more collaborative projects, and a greater focus on skill development, especially written and oral communication. The debriefing sessions we have conducted with participants reveal that students who complete these seminars are able to transfer these skills to their other classes and learning efforts. In fact, as participants in the early First Year Seminars begin to flow through to senior levels, they are more demanding, more active, more engaged learners—precisely the sort of behaviour that we want to encourage and spread.

First Year Seminars are intentionally challenging courses. Some students may have shied away from them—and other demanding courses—because of this, fearing the desperate consequences of a poor mark if their untested capabilities are not up to the demands they face. In order to get into university, students have been trained to focus very narrowly on their grade averages, and become risk-averse about a number which controls their future prospects. But just as universities in practice do not care about performance in grade nine, graduate schools and employers have effectively no interest in first and even second-year grades. Recent performance at graduation (and the overall trend) is much more important as a measure of success and employability. We should therefore consider whether formal numeric grades serve their purpose in the first and second years. As a means of feedback to the individual student they are surely worthwhile, but there are other ways to provide such feedback than just the permanent record of final marks. A pass/fail system in the early years might help release students from the tyranny of grades and free them to take chances and test their limits.

First Year Seminars also blur the boundaries between ‘academic’ and ‘support’ programs, because their format invites social as well as intellectual engagement. Ideally, seminar participants form a mutually-supporting network. In larger courses, the Supported Learning Group program is another excellent example of how faculty, students, and support professionals can work together to provide a similar web of assistance.

Finally, the first year is also the time when the University introduces its values, its expectations, and its mindset to students. The whole university needs to engage with the whole student by aligning and integrating first-year academic programs with advising, residence halls, faculty, and other campus resources. [\[18\]](#) The first year is an opportunity to introduce students to an appropriate learning environment right from the start. We need to expose students to diverse ideas, to world views and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and imbuing the classroom with relevance.

3.1.1 Suggested Initiatives

1. Re-establish a university-wide first year committee (formerly the University College Project). This committee, to be chaired by the Associate V.P. Academic and include the Associate V.P. Student Affairs, will look to all aspects of the first year from curriculum to student support and engagement. This committee will help to ensure that we have organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and co-ordinated approach to the first year.
2. Stabilize and extend the First Year Seminar program. Consider establishing the expectation that each department should mount at least two seminars per year.
3. Explore the feasibility of recording only binary grades (pass/fail) in the first and possibly second year.
4. Review opportunities to enhance first-year support programs. Examples include: mentoring programs (with faculty or with senior students); intervention programs, particularly in the first 6 weeks (ensure personal contact those weeks through emails, phone calls, new student newsletter); a fresh-start program

for students placed on probation in the fall semester. Ensure that appropriate support is extended to students living off-campus.

5. Enrich the learning communities in residence through the return of block registration for students living in these communities. Assign a faculty mentor to each community to complement the staff support.
6. Exploit means of engaging students in learning before they even arrive on campus, by (for example) re-introducing a summer reading program.
7. Explore delivery of more support services via the web Portal system and other on-line delivery mechanisms.
8. Have first-year students draft a personal learning plan to help structure their learning experience and help them acknowledge the responsibility they have for maximizing their own learning opportunities. Revise this plan as necessary throughout subsequent years, and possibly use it as a basis for the skills portfolio discussed below.

Appendix B: Survey Question Responses

“What could the university do to better support you in your transition to university academic and social life?”

Selected responses from Residence Students

- Overall I think the university helps in the transition to university life well. Social life comes through orientation week and grows from there but I feel the university needs to do more in the transition to academic life. Students are thrown into the deep end and expected to find their way through. Academic clusters are a great way to get through the transition of academic life in university but more needs to be done such as weekly study sessions or to help those who are not in an academic cluster to meet people in their courses.
- Have an SLG calendar so you know when they are going on at all times.
- I really wish there were slg for every class i had one slg for philosophy and it was so helpful I really would of liked to have an slg for all my classes :)
- The University could provide more learning tools (ie SLG's) that help in the understanding of complex principles which would help the transition to university academic life. The Social life transition is done well by the RLS/hall council.
- Meeting people within individual programs. They do a great job integrating you within your floor and residence. I would've appreciated getting to know more people in my classes in an unacademic environment.
- For me, I think it would be helpful to have study sessions in the building before big tests and midterms. I don't know if this already happens or not. I know that some sections are academic clusters, but for the rest of the building it would be nice to have.
- ... it would have been nice if there was more info available about the actually academic transition. Perhaps the University could hold a section information meeting session sometime during the first or second week of class by either our RA or some other “cool” older student. They could inform us on simple things such as: the importance of and how to effectively manage your time and just general academic success tips. Residence presents a lot of new challenges, but one that I definitely underestimated was the social distractions. It's awesome to live near a lot of people of course, but it just really set me off on a bad start to my academic career because I was so caught up in socializing and making new friends. I didn't realize how fast-paced everything would be in terms of work and I procrastinated studying like never before. I felt really in the dark coming here about academics too, but about nothing else - I wasn't really prepared. I didn't really have to study in high school to get really good marks and I thought I could get away with doing that again. I didn't think it was necessary to take advantage of the Learning Common presentations on study habits, etc. so I missed the boat on that type of thing. It would have been really nice for me to get that extra push right from the get-go, since it's really hard to catch up. I think it would have helped me focus.
- I'm happy with what is happening so far - possibly a few more opportunities to form study groups with people from similar classes and who live in similar parts of residence (I realize that the cluster in the tower beside me hosts study groups for courses that I'm in, but they only advertise for their tower). Other than that, everything is great :)

- Transition, for me I am used to it by now. Younger kids, I would say make some study halls in South residence or something. Such as BCOMM Wednesday's, B-ARTS Tuesdays, so those students can meet with other students and find study partners.. etc. I think Maritime
- Have specific tower-member gatherings, ie. those taking sciences, so that you can meet others who are taking similar classes and support each other.
- Organized Intra-house study sessions for big exams like econ and chem.
- The University could have more academic help offered around midterms. I had no idea how to study. I had to learn the hard way.
- Have homework and study classes to help learn how to study and do homework better
- Give good tips on how to study. Show the best places to study specific to your residence
- Let us know that the workload is about ten times more than high school
- Create more programs to help us adjust to the work load and with time management.
- Coming straight from high school into University is a big transition, one that I don't believe you can prepare yourself for. Of course it is hard but you begin to learn so much about yourself and find out who you are and the person you wish to become. I think that the university did a great job with frosh week and welcoming the students to the campus, but I don't think you can fully prepare someone for the work load or how fast the courses move along in the material. The biggest advice the university should tell students is to KEEP UP with the work.
- Warn high school about the workload and the fact that you will have multiple tests every week no matter what and that you have to keep up to date on homework while studying for tests as well
- To support our transition into university academic life the University can't really do anything except to warn us that there is going to be a lot of homework, and that it is important to keep up with it and attend classes. To better support our transition into social live, I think it is important that the university warn people that everyone is used to different schedules and rules so it is important to be sensitive to each other's needs.
- Maybe show us some of the work load that we are getting ourselves into and everything that needs to be accomplished!! We need ways of better organizing our time!!
- More workshops or better advertised on building study habits, skills and tricks.
- When it comes to academic life, maybe they could better prepare us for the work that we will be facing in the first week (I found it slightly overwhelming).
- Probably a good balance between social and academic, some courses are ridiculously hard.. Better learning sessions and help would be beneficial.
- Probably balancing between partying and studying..noise is kind of an issue some nights.
- I believe the university is doing the best they can. It's almost impossible to balance the two right away and the only real way for students to learn is by experiencing it themselves.

- Have more social events for first year students, for example, residence formals would be fun and a good way to meet people.
- I think the University should plan more social life programs- more dances, and parties. Too many people go home on the weekends or to other universities and it's empty a lot.
- More social events and more notice. Tickets being less money
- Advertise more for the social events that occur throughout the year.
- Have more social tower events, such as swims, or tower dinners together, not just stuff during o week.
- More social events that involve everyone
- After frosh week there were no more events, there should be more events social and academic.
- Have more social activities for all students. (aka dance parties)
- The University should hold more social events (dances or games) and get togethers (pot luck dinner?!)
- I found that during my first year, a lot of events were planned during O-week. This made O-Week really fun and exciting. I found that events seemed to dwindle down after that point and maybe more could be done to keep throughout the semester.
- Doing a good job now...but more events within residence...movie nights? Dinner nights? DANCES
- Making sure quiet hours are respected would definitely help my transition into university. I find that people tend to be loud in respect to their conversations and music.
- The thing I had the most trouble with was dealing with the noise at night when I was trying to study. Either before or after quiet hours, people are going to be loud, and I'm guessing I'm just in a noisy area
- I think that the rules of quiet hours should be more strict, because there are a lot of people who break it, and this should be dealt with more strictly, it is hard to study, at night, when it is suppose to be the optimal quiet time, but it isn't, due to the loudness in the lower sections of (xxx) another section
- Enforce quiet hours
- Increase the quiet hours...11pm is too early!!!
- Cut down on tuition and book costs and costs all around. It would relieve a tonne of stress
- Give me some bursaries PLEASE!
- LOWER MY TUITION COSTS!!!!!!!!!! Then I won't be so stressed and worried that if I do take time to engage in social time and let my academic life sit for a bit, I won't have that fact that I paid nearly \$4000 to come here and if I fail I lose that.

- Make it less expensive so students aren't stressing 24/7 about how they're going to pay for this education.
- If university didn't cost so much I might be able to have a social life!!!
- More scholarships and awards to reward students who work hard and play hard. Thank you.
- Maybe having more academic-specific events (events exclusive to people in certain faculties) to help people make friends in their program.
- If the university could cut my tuition fee in half, that would be super. Or it could find a way to stop spam e mails from getting into my Guelph account. I have never signed up for anything on the Internet, nor have I given out my account yet I get around three to four junk e mails a day. That's on top of all the e mails I get from different events around campus, so they pile up. It just seems I keep getting more and more spam.
- More academic programs, and better communication and advertisement of them.
- I dunno....I have felt super comfortable throughout this entire transition, which I didn't expect since I have an anxiety disorder. Everyone has been incredibly supportive, which has been so helpful for me. Honestly - I dreaded coming to University just because I thought the change and new life would throw me for a loop, but I've actually been better (anxiety-wise) here than I was at home. So thanks very much!
- Nothing. There are so many help programs like SLG's and events that go on to bring people together socially. I feel really comfortable and happy here at Guelph.
- The first best thing that the University could do is to see to our needs (meaning us muslims) concerning better, cheaper, and more halal food, a prayer space in all residences, a swimming pool for women only (or separate hours for women only), and to try to make roommate matches with other muslims.
- More scholarships and awards to reward students who work hard and play hard. Thank you.
- I do not feel that this is the job of the university.
- Warn us about the work load and advise us to get started before the semester starts. Inform us about WebCT earlier.
- The transition, I feel, lies mainly with the students: the university simply offers a backdrop.
- Give me 100% in all my classes and let me go to school for free
- Make the midterms less lame and lower the price of tuition cause it sucks. Also the workload is very stressful as well, so if you could not pile so much stuff in at the same time it would be super.
- More time management strategies without having to attend courses would be very helpful.
- I think I am pretty much finished adjusting thanks you've done great
- The university could make more information available about the transition to university workload available before we get here and make more mingling events to get to know people during the first while.

- Everybody makes the transition in their own way. I think the major thing is finding people in authority (like RAs) who are upbeat and positive, and who make the effort to get everyone involved in group activities and meeting new people. Academically, the university provides ample support for students.
- Try to minimize the bubble that students live in...Keep us informed of what's going on in the world and the community. Encourage people exploring the city...students become narrow-minded living on campus as they forget what else is out there.
- Put heated tunnels with horizontal escalators everywhere, (like they have in the airport), on campus so that we don't have to get cold while going from class to class. As well we should start all the classes like later say maybe 10:00 at earliest because waking up earlier than that sucks and there really is no reason for it.
- For academics I feel the University should make it even more known that the professors are there to help the student and that they do have office hours to do so.
- Explain differences between classes in high school & university (in terms of who marks your work, how you are expected to study, etc.)
- I am not sure. Although I know something is missing because almost every weekend, as soon as my classes are done I quickly pack up my stuff and head home.
- Make it less expensive so students aren't stressing 24/7 about how they're going to pay for this education.

Selected Responses from Off-Campus Students

- Tough call. The transition wasn't all that easy for me, but that's my fault, not yours. The only suggestion I can think of is maybe trying to implement a wider range of activities during O-Week. (I don't know if you're directly connected with OCUS, but if not you can pass on the message.) It might be a good idea to present an option for a more structured day as far as the O Week activities go. That is, you sign up for a certain group and it is slated to do this, that, and the other thing throughout the day. That way you're with the same people for the entire day, instead of talking to somebody at a single event and then never seeing them again.
- Knowing when intramural sign up for the winter takes place would be nice...
- I think maybe having more social mixer type events during o-week. Maybe even have more OC student events so that the off campus students can kind of network together and not feel so left out.
- Tell them where things are! What you should start doing now to prepare for post-graduation. Re-design the website! It's confusing!
- Be more active with first year students and stay in touch.
- perhaps some small group things some people are afraid of big groups
- Maybe the university could set up group studies? for people in a particular class or maybe a reading group??... because the amount of information(to study for) we have for each class is tremendous. Please make sure that the profs are easy to understand.. I have two classes that the profs are very difficult to understand.. and I rely on the profs a lot ... but I don't have time to discuss readings or lecture info with them at all times.
- Keep providing the learning commons services, like SLGs and writing consultations.
- Lower tuition rates and also book rates.

- a prep course on what university expectations are, however SLG's are very helpful
- I thought the university did a great job in all aspects. They should continue to run the START Online program in the summer, it made all the difference.
- If there are enough helpers, it would be cool to have sessions according to the majority of people's majors.
- More ways to involve off-campus students
- maybe set up opportunities to see what some of the upper year courses are like, to be sure were getting into a field we'll enjoy.
- Have more activities to meet people.
- Um, how about replying to my emails when I ask questions. This is the university in general, not OCC. Whenever I email someone (like an academic counsellor) who is there to help me I do not get a reply which I really do not appreciate. It's not as easy for me to get into campus while offices are still open and I am not in classes so email is my best form of communication.
- Let students know where or who they should turn to if they have problems.
- It would be nice for us to be able to know what is available in terms of help groups and things like that. I had no idea that deferrals were an option and I would have taken that option because two of my grandparents who I was really close with died within 3 weeks of each other, and that was right around exam time. Also if program counsellors had less students to work with it might let them help us more because they could take the time to answer our questions and help us with problems related to our courses.
- More casual hang out areas where senior and new students can talk
- Create smaller communities for off-campus students (like the on-campus students have with their dorm floor etc.) and facilitate their communication for the first semester or two.
- Things are done pretty well
- Explain more and help them to keep it up!
- Create a slightly more structured atmosphere, more activities relating to courses, more activities that invite healthy social gatherings.
- Give everyone these phone calls (OCC) because the people in residence, yes they have RA to go see if needed but the phones calls are useful. For one thing you can't see the person and don't know them so you can say things that you might be embarrassed to say when you are talking in person.
- Send them email updates about a spectrum of events going on on and off campus. Like Sunday night cinema, or the documentary week. You could post up intramural teams that are short players, so that off campus people can get in on the action. For off campus stuff, list things like the film fest or jazz festival, bar tours. etc. Emphasize the advantages of living off campus!
- Offering a social setting where the volunteers [OCC staff] could meet the people they called on the phone would have been nice. Just to match a face to the friendly phone calls!
- I'm not sure if this is related but....well I've tried to participate in OCUS and visit the lounge when time permits. but every time I go I feel ignored. Last night was the dinner at East Side Mario's. I sat down and tried to talk and no one would even respond to me. And then one of the leaders had the nerve to tell me that I should attend some meeting and tell how great OCUS is so they get more funds. I've been to a bunch of the activities now but that was the last one. The leader girl wouldn't even return my greeting but had the nerve to ask me to get her more spending funds? I'm sorry, but that's rude. I'm not returning

there again. It took me courage to go and know no one and not one of them had the courtesy to even talk to me.

- Give them more information about possible options if they are interested.
- I feel it is already very supportive. The breadth of activities, clubs, and volunteering opportunities at the University are very accessible and provide a great way for students to choose their own social transition. The many academic resources are available to anyone with the ambition to seek them out.
- Uh... can't really think of anything right now.
- I thought everything was done very well.
- I think that the resources are very much available for new students. The University is doing well, it's more individuals that simply need to choose to take advantage of them.
- Nothing...anything else would be overkill. People have to discover on their own as well.
- I think that the university has done everything possible to make new students feel welcome, and any further adjusting is really up to the student.
- I personally haven't had any problems so far
- Continue what they are doing now.
- Not much extra to what the University has already been doing. Academically, we had our program meetings and sample lectures and socially, all the Orientation week events for Frosh. The University makes these opportunities available to help smooth out the transition, it was up to us to use our independence and take advantage of it.
- I think the university is on the right page by offering things like study groups, social events, and 'ice breakers' for new students. If activities and various support groups continue I think that would be sufficient enough.
- I'm not sure.

Appendix C – Focus Group Notes

Residence Focus Group – January 22, 2007 – afternoon

1) What have the highlights of your first year experience been?

- Frosh week and Frost week – the fact that people are still putting on events
- Living in residence – some off campus friends still come and visit
- Proximity thing – know what's going on – can pick up and go
- Meeting people with similar interests in class
- Frosh week – good for its purpose
- Free flow frosh week – go and do what you want – flexibility
- Cluster thing – Arts – feel like I've gotten to know people
- I didn't chose a cluster but feel as though they've grouped all the science people together – maybe coincidence
- Help from the OVs during frosh week
- Felt like camp first week
- Intramurals have been awesome

2) What about your first year experience has been challenging?

- We live on campus – harder to get to class – keep sleeping instead
- High school – mom wakes you up – now nobody to make me get up
- Keep an agenda – way better – keeping on top of responsibilities hard
- Hate how everything is on-line – hate Web CT
- I swear by Web CT because I don't go to class
- Multiple choice – trick within itself – way knowledge is tested in tough – main struggle – have to go to the Learning Commons – heard through Ra – very resourceful
- Finals – so much to do! So different from high school
- I hated first year bio – pretty much everything about it – hate that there are 5 different profs – never link it together – never know what to study – not to do with whether you understand larger concepts
- Exam completely multiple choice – feel as though easiest way for professors, not students
- Trying to find a healthy balance between study and leisure time – up until 2 am and up again at 8 am
- Things aren't scheduled same way here – now hours of the day don't mean as much (as opposed to 9-3 routine of high school)
- Find it hard to do school work – hard to get up early to do stuff – hard to motivate myself
- Hard to balance varsity, volunteering and academics – after get into routine, it works out better
- Lots going on in Eccles – not advertised properly regarding academic sessions

3) What do you wish you had known prior to arriving at University?

- Bring an umbrella – how bad the weather is here
- Kleenex – bring it!
- More socks and underwear
- Dishes are now a concept
- Now need to be more accountable for myself
- My Program Counsellor is not nice and doesn't care – told me to change my major because I couldn't get into the right classes
- High school was different – more community
- Do we have guidance counselors?
- The RA helps a lot!
- What was going on when it first starts – orientation
- START online – helped – good tool – friends are now dating because of it

- Come prepared to be more outgoing – I didn't so it was a big set back - START on line maybe would have helped
- Deadlines – Costa Rica program – look in advance
- Activity at beginning that forces floor to do something together for alcove only (6 people)

4) Tell us about your experience related to...

a. Your physical health

- Didn't get sick all of 1st semester
- Bad habit in East – eating peanut butter and jam sandwiches from November until the end of exams
- Weight gain a big problem
- Want a nutrition guide/week – good places to eat healthy on-campus
- Creelman is closed by 8 pm when Varsity practice is over
- Easy to order stuff from take out places now that it's cold
- University and food function on 9-5 schedule, but students don't – open up something more nutritious later in the evening
- Varsity sports – thumbs up
- Intramurals – awesome
- Stairs in res deter you from going out – but is worth something
- Activities make a huge difference even though they are hard to schedule
- Activities should be enforced
- Academics overwhelming
- Drinking – lots of calories – not getting exercise, big problem – drink lots but don't work it off
- If they had exercise class in res would go
- Hard when someone gets sick – easier to quarantine at home
- Soap in washrooms – way better than antibacterial hand sanitizer
- Fund at beginning of the year to buy soap
- Antibacterial everything in the world is bad
- People don't wash their hands

b. Your social adjustment

- Not that big of a change – a lot like camp
- Tricky because after a couple of weeks it's hard to get into friend groups
- Thought that cliques would not be here, but they are
- Hard to find people to have meaningful friendship with
- More orientation events geared towards more laid back – not outgoing people
- Friends at home are different – need more time – after 5 years will find good lifelong friends
- Wish I would have met new people in the beginning of the year – spent too much time with friends from high school that came here too
- Intramurals helps a lot to meet friends
- Pick up games – Johnston Green
- Thought I would get to know people in classes, but really only meet people in labs
- Class – can't get a seat sometimes – way too many people; admin os doing ID checks because people go to the wrong section

c. Your academic adjustment

- Motivation
- Evaluation methods not liked
- Intro classes are boring – waiting to get to second/third year to get to what you want
- Classes too general at first
- Like that science is general – can switch major
- First year seminars are good

- I don't like the elective thing – in Arts – have to take a science course – why do I have to take that? I understand they want students to be well rounded but I came to university to get away from that – its dragging down my average
- I like having to take other courses not from my major
- Prejudice between arts, science and aggies
- International development – have to take a variety of course – like that
- Don't want to waste money, time and efforts on things that are so general
- Physics – teaches stuff from grade 9

5) What has your family involvement been in your first year experience?

- Laundry and groceries
- Didn't see parents at all first semester
- Talk on the phone – nice to get away
- Came here to get away – previously lived on my own – closer bond with parents now that far away
- Talk to my parents every day – come over once a week – we do dinner and groceries – now spending time with parents is an actual concept
- Didn't fight – my sister has taken my place now (she fights with parents)
- Families came in on move in day
- Took my dad to check out universities
- Parents didn't want to make the decisions for me
- Moral support – exactly what I needed
- Mom looked over shoulder the whole time
- Mom didn't want me to go away – wanted me to stay at home to go to school
- Banking and budgeting for first years
- Bar hopping is expensive
- Books, food, etc. to buy
- Had to call mom to help budget
- Didn't get OSAP – thought I was going to – I don't have a lot of money – my parent's money and my money are now the same thing
- Wish parents here to help me sign a lease – don't know what to look for

6) Emotionally what has it been like coming to university?

- Homesick first week – once met people – ok
- Nice to always have friends around
- Didn't like it at first – still haven't learned anything – maybe high school taught me lots – maybe because I am in science – came here for school – friends are good – waiting for next year
- People build up university – they say it's the best experience of your life – there are moments when I was horribly homesick
- University for me wasn't all academic – move out and grow up
- Feel really stressed – financial deadline too close – had to skip classes to go to the bank because didn't have enough money from co-op
- Midterms much harder than finals
- Finals easier – no class
- Midterms hard because class still going on

7) What can we do to help you better prepare for what you'll do when you graduate?

- I would like a career counselor – academic advisor don't tell you
- Guidance counselors like high school would be better
- People in OVC are helpful – if you know what you want to do you have lots of support
- Lots of e-mails for volunteer opportunities – good – but don't really take the chance
- What you do in summer really shapes what you can do with a career – student's don't know this

8) What is the best way for us to communicate with you and other students?

Not asked of this group??

9) What have you learned as part of your experience in a residence community?

- Sleep when you can
- You keep people up as much as they do
- Don't pick 8:30 am classes
- Hate living across from the lounge – loud – respect thing
- You can tell who respects each other
- Some people don't respect others by expect respect back – stupid people unscrew light bulbs
- People get IRs but they are still here – everyone wants them gone – LA – take 1 or 2 people to ruin things
- East isn't like that – people are quiet and respectful
- Keep your area clean is hard - lounges and rooms
- Johnston is crazy – people crap in showers and pee in halls – not people from the hall – prop doors and people come in
- Rules should be more strict – fines and IRs don't work
- Just brag about number of IRs
- Helps to be social
- Learn to live with people
- Put effort in to invite others – people aren't all the same
- Learn how to deal with certain situations – deal with people and how to get out of situations

10) What has your experience been with the policies regarding student conduct?

- Always a big tension regarding IRs
- Fighting IRs need to be altered
- Understand policy but people who cause problems should be written up
- Texas mickey cost efficient - should be able to have them
- Drinking rules are harsh
- Support vandalism rules but RAs need to pick their battles
- RAs are completely different – not consistent
- RAs are good but need to be on the same page
- Don't get rule of only being able to have one drink in lounge at a time
- East different - good

Residence Focus Group – January 22, 2007 – evening

1) What have the highlights of your first year experience been?

- Atmosphere on campus is friendly, “feels like home”, was attracted to Guelph because of campus atmosphere.
- Orientation Week: with regards to Hall Boogie – initially thought “I'm not doing that” then participated and loved it
- Participating as a member of our hall council helps to feel more a part of school – I get more out of my experience by being involved
- OV's checked-in – “are you okay?” Stopped me in the hall to see how I was doing. It was really appreciated.
- Macdonald Hall – Sunday night stand-off builds community, good way to meet people, promoted spirit
- Using services like the SLGs that support academics
- Free buses and the magic bus
- Smallness of the campus – walking from Axelrod to Macdonald Hall, or from Rozanski to the north end of campus doesn't take long – at UWO it takes a long time to walk across campus.

- Not having to go off campus, not having random houses that are not part of the university community on campus – not having to walk through non-university neighbourhoods
- Feel secure on campus – safe
- Accessing fitness facilities, though there is a cost for some, is still cheap
- Living away from home
- Ultra Food & Drug provides 24-hour grocery shopping
- Intramurals are good and cheap – you get a refund if you follow the rules
- Hockey is inexpensive to participate
- The downtown is easily accessible

2) What about your first year experience has been challenging?

- The Meal plan is confusing
- Plus plan is too big – I am student who is on campus a lot and an athlete and this was the plan that was recommended for me, but it was too much
- The quality of the food is good but it is too expensive
- A box of cereal is \$7 and this is way too much
- Not being able to use our meal cards in the UC before 2 pm. is hard when we are running between classes
- Not being able to “eat all you can” as is the case at other universities – at St. FX the meal plan is \$700 cheaper and it’s all you can eat.
- Vegetarian selection not good and expensive
- Salad too expensive
- Was sick for a long time and Student Health Services was not helpful – they said “you have mono” but it wasn’t mono
- Seeing a different doctor every time I come in is not good
- Dr. Nobel is good!
- Sometimes they don’t look at your file when you come in for help
- Not connected with other services on campus, doesn’t meet my needs with simply one trip – particularly getting dismissed from class when sick
- Some other schools will see you if sick, notify your instructors, and allow you to rest in a private room so that you don’t make roommates sick.
- Driers for clothes in residence are not good - Laundry is too expensive - Machines in East are not as nice as it reported
- Not having an Orientation week equivalent at the beginning of the winter semester – wanted time to reconnect with friends after being away from campus
- Guelph starts classes later and finishes earlier than other schools
- Varsity athlete – few opportunities to bond with peers in residence – I don’t know them
- It would be good to have athletes living together in residence, like an LLC for athletes
- Noise from non-athletes in residence is disruptive when trying to sleep
- Non-athletes are distracting when I need to get down to work
- My residence smells bad – we think it is the carpet - Have requested a fix many times (work order)
- Steam cleaning carpets was nice last semester

3) What do you wish you had known prior to arriving at University?

- I wish I had toured residence - Wish there was more detailed information on the web – easier to navigate
- Classes – I didn’t know that I didn’t have to take advanced calculus
- UWO – connects students who are in a similar program...wish we had something similar (ie. haven’t met many students who are French majors)
- When I moved into residence I was worried about living in South – it turns out it’s more about the people you live with than the building

- I thought coming to university would be like Grade 9 all over again, but it wasn't - I didn't have to start slowly – there are so many opportunities to get involved and to have my contributions respected (eg. writing for the Ontario)
- East residence – living in suites and dealing with dishes – would have been better if I had known the issues and could have chosen my own roommates
- Eco House Program Facilitator – hosts suite meetings and facilitates group discussions...this helps a lot.
- Experience depends partly on the RA – if you have someone who goes above and beyond, invests a lot, it is great
- There are no many groups on campus eg. religious clubs
- The “alumni send off” in my community this summer before coming to Guelph was good - They told me that I would meet people in my first week who will be at my wedding – and they were right – I have made very close friends
- It should be easier to find information about the Magic Bus and locate the stops

4) Tell us about your experience related to...

a. Your physical health

- East residence – lots of places to go to be active – skating, running etc, right out front door
- Feel better this semester because I am more active – last semester I was very lethargic and it was a vicious cycle
- Shared bathrooms not so great, especially when sick. “It’s not mine” (like when I was at home)
- It’s hard to be healthy during exams
- Heard about the “Frosh 15” and thought “no, not me!” so I joined the gym
- It’s easy to eat junk
- Getting sick – it goes around and everyone gets it - Wish there was a separate room to stay in when am sick/have a fever
- Air quality in South sucks
- People don’t take responsibility in residence - on Saturday and Sunday mornings my residence is GROSS!
- Access to pharmacy is difficult when sick – sometimes don’t know where to go

b. Your social adjustment

- Kicking people out of my room when I need to study/sleep can be a challenge
- People drinking in the lounge, playing poker, making noise when trying to sleep or study is an issue
- Brick double in South – I am in the small side of the room, I am more used to a larger room
- People find people from the city (ie. Toronto) snooty
- Some people study hard and get low marks, others party and get good marks – doesn’t make sense or seem fair
- Key checks during Orientation week was a barrier to hanging out with new friends
- Campus for Christ has helped with meeting people – good hanging out – we go to restaurants
- Have to work at making time to study and time to be social
- When there are alternative programs to drinking people don’t come

c. Your academic adjustment

- Experienced a big drop in marks – was a big shock
- More time on my hands as there is less class time
- There’s no one to tell you to study
- 3 hour lectures are too long – need breaks or shorter classes – easier to learn when broken up more
- It’s easier to learn at University than in high school because it’s all up to me
- Profs judge by the quality of your work, not by how hard you’ve worked or how well they know you – seems more fair
- I know SLGs are there, but didn’t realize the value of them until I was actually in one. I needed someone to take me to one for the first time, then I was fine.

- Cluster – going to class, eating and studying together is good.
- Inconsistent expectations between professors - Hard to know in advance what they expect of you
- Grading is very different than high school - Someone got a grade of -15 (negative) on a chemistry (assignment) – how is that possible?
- Some lab/help times are not helpful as the TA's weren't able to help me – they didn't know the answers either
- The physics grading scheme is unfair
- Grading schemes between high school and university are vastly different – government should set curriculum to create more similarities
- Why is it normal to have a large drop in marks? This is very discouraging
- University work is less than in a private high school
- Some US schools have 15 week semesters – would be good.

5) What has your family involvement been in your first year experience?

- Family lives far away – distance makes a difference
- They respect me more now
- Go home on Sundays and have dinner with family – parents harass me less now
- My parents read everything the university sends then and follow it closely. There was more in the fall than now and they seem more lost. They are much more intrusive this semester now that there is less information being provided for them - Second semester my mom is calling every day, just when I'm getting used to being away
- I didn't tell my Mom my extension – she can only reach me on-line
- Better relationships with family now that there is some distance
- Take them for granted when I lived at home, especially with regards to laundry and food. Now I appreciate them more.
- My mom listened to me and let me choose what I wanted to do with regards to schooling
- I'm the first of 4 siblings to go to university – my family is very proud – it's huge

6) Emotionally what has it been like coming to university?

- Hungry a lot
- Not much to say here
- I'm more independent – feels good
- Happier than in high school - People here have the same mind-set
- It's all about trying and pushing self beyond comfort level
- I'm in a single room and it's easier to cool off and have some space when I need it
- Went on a city bus for the first time ever last semester
- People here are more cultured, more sensitive to others
- I'm happier – have less mood swings - Can't be mad at people for no reason - Can't let myself sink down too far - Feel more resilient – nothing to do...can't sit in room and be sad
- If I succeed or fail – it's up to me
- Signed a lease on my own (with friends but no help from family) – feel like an adult
- I now know that I can do things that I couldn't necessarily do before

7) What can we do to help you better prepare for what you'll do when you graduate?

- Time moves quickly here
- It's a long way off
- Make sure people know about available volunteer experiences
- Had a professor who discussed how to apply to graduate school – she/he suggested getting to know profs now. It was very helpful to know
- To get into graduate programs, students need connections and volunteer experience

- Getting into teacher's college – feel overwhelmed by what I need to do to gain the required experience – how am I going to do it all?
- A place on campus is needed that they will say if my experience is acceptable for applying to graduate school
- Teachers college information session during Orientation week would be good
- Integrate giving us direction on how to plan for graduate school earlier in our undergraduate experience
- We need a booklet that explains what you need and how to do it for grad school - Send it to us by the end of first year
- I almost didn't talk to a program counselor, but am glad that someone strongly encouraged me – it helped.

8) What is the best way for us to communicate with you and other students?

- Don't send us more stuff by e-mail
- Post info on the web – I check on-line services regularly
- There should be a homepage for ResNet that has all of the information that I need to know
- Webmail is good
- Locked e-mail is confusing for many
- Spam via e-mail is very troublesome
- Phonemail messages are not effective in reaching us
- Can't undelete e-mail – I wish I could
- T22 forms – I almost missed the info that I need about these
- Guelph website is ridiculous – very hard to navigate – too many clicks to find what you are looking for
- Course selection is an 'abomination' – I couldn't do it at home because it kept timing out - I needed someone to show me how it works
- I almost missed the information I needed in the undergraduate calendar until someone pointed it out to me – others hadn't heard of the undergraduate calendar
- Being able to create a personalized homepage would be good
- I wish I knew about e-mail forwarding to a non-uoguelph account
- One way of getting information out is by word of mouth via Hall Councils (particularly the PR executive positions)
- I wish I saw my RA more than once per semester

9) What have you learned as part of your experience in a residence community?

- Residence...You have to share everything – I had to learn
- Sometimes the shower is in use when I'm in a rush to get ready for class – have to be prepared for that
- Learning to eat by myself
- Being able to say "no I can't hang out right now"
- Putting myself out there – have to be prepared to get out there and meet people
- Knowing that I have to ask for help
- Meeting people in East is hard because of the suites
- Having to leave within 24 hours of my last exam is inconvenient when I live in the Ottawa area. I wanted to carpool home for the holidays but we all had different check-out dates
- I should be able to sign-out a spare key for my room for the whole year and give it to a friend – paying a fee to sign out the spare is not good
- Vacuums in residence (available at the desk) are not good – don't work well
- Residence Life Staff are like watchdogs not helpers...
- Paying money for sanction is bad – eg. drinking games
- The consequences of breaking the rules in residence don't teach students in the same way that real life does – it's more like being in high school – we simply learn to avoid getting caught
- Depend on the RA – a friend was yelled at by an RA
- In my residence – we see them and know to run away – it's like the police

- Partying is just one part of what the RA deals with – residence life staff there are very approachable
- Some first year RAs let the power of “the vest” go to their head (God complex) – sets up an “us against them” mentality - Some RAs tell me what to do too much
- Problems with campus police – got a fine for doing something in the courtyard outside of my residence building that is okay to do inside (drinking in public) – I had no idea that it was a problem - Police spelled my name wrong on the ticket - Didn’t give me a warning - They over reacted and made me feel ashamed
- Sometimes its good when police say hello – depends on the officer

10) What has your experience been with the policies regarding student conduct?

- Tickets for parking are unreasonable – having a boyfriend visit who is not a student – it’s not clear where they can park (particularly on weekends and overnight) - Short term permits are too expensive - Visitor parking needs to be made more clear
- Policies are okay – it’s how they are enforced that is a problem - Knowing what’s going to happen when enforced would be good
- The cost of a single room is the same everywhere on campus, even though there are great differences in the quality of the room – this isn’t fair - Students with crappy rooms should be compensated with a discounted residence rate
- A level 3 for “mass consumption” is too severe - A “life lesson” should be enough
- Having to go back to one’s room (rather than drinking in the residence lounge) for each drink is inconvenient

Off-Campus Student Focus Group

1) What have the highlights of your first year experience been?

- O-Week
- Dance at end of Orientation Week in Rozanski Hall
- Made friends - On bus - START Online - Finding housing - Making hemp - OCUS
- OCUS Lounge - Meeting people - Nice to have space - Go there on breaks - Standing room only sometimes - Uncomfortable (outside of comfort zone), but worth it - Would like more space - Don’t go elsewhere - Good to hang out, not have to go all over
- OCUS exec play big role
- Didn’t hang out in lounge till end of November – would eat by myself in caf
- Intimidating at first, then welcoming
- Makes you feel like a part of something
- Use the library? - Yes – during finals - Can’t study in OCUS lounge
- Friends made during o-week: hang out at home, at lounge – would go but it was either busy or quiet, and no one would talk to me
- Can be overwhelming
- Passing!
- Clubs are fun
- Random trips to restaurants
- Having a place to go – in library, felt disconnected in cubicle
- Academic advantage to OCUS – philosophical discussions
- Mentorship from upper year students via OCUS
- Friends from high school? - Significant contact, but more electronically - Not much face to face

2) What about your first year experience has been challenging?

- Parking - Not enough spots - Medical spots never used! - Could we opt out of bus pass to pay for parking? - Pay for bus pass (and never use) then also have to pay for a parking space - Parking regulations not explained when received the pass
- Cold!

- Bikes - Article in Ontario – good - Not enough spots to lock bikes - Not enough security
- Saw creepy guy in parking lot checking out cars, writing down plates
- Don't know how to use the emergency pole
- Not enough emergency poles
- Security policies have not been explained
- How does Safewalk work?
- Does CAA come to campus?
- Applying self - Usually relies on mom - Could fail an exam/test/quiz, etc. no one would know
- Feel embarrassed sitting down to talk with someone
- Hard to find resources
- DE courses organized poorly – expected more
- WebCT - Everything online - Always have to check - Didn't have online programs in High School - More encouragement to make it part of the routine and to learn how to use
- Schedule erratic – hard to commute for night class
- Where do people go who don't feel comfortable in the lounge?
- OCUS lounge more accessible
- Buses - Drive by b/c full - Why'd they get rid of 52A - Not scheduled or not follow schedule - Really bad during exams
- Rozanski too hot or too cold! How come not more moderate?
- Got lost in Science Complex
- Write down every due date on wall calendar
- Used to take parents for granted
- Support system at home is helpful!
- Took only a week to learn the City

3) What do you wish you had known prior to arriving at University?

Not asked at this group?

4) Tell us about your experience related to...

a. Your physical health

- Wonderful
- Always tired
- Sprained ankle – went to SHS
- Sick, colds
- Tired & worn out
- SHS (Health) good – had an appt w/ Dr. helpful & nice
- Has mono now – had random symptoms
- Before Christmas – too much stress, not sleeping well
- Not enough Doctors at walk-in (90 min or more wait)
- Chipped shoulder @ Intramurals (called parents to pick up)
- More active, more walking
- Water polo, volleyball, ultimate Frisbee (play together as OCUS)

b. Your social adjustment

- Way better than in High School
- Everyone is at the same level
- More mature

c. Your academic adjustment

- More difficult
- Little effort, great grade or lots of effort, poor grade

- Marking scheme messed up – TA's very subjective
- Physics quizzes – depends on who marks it
- Biology - Exams random - Trivial questions - Nothing to do with what you are learning - Labs = crap
- It would be nice to have marking schemes (don't know expectations)
- TA in Physical Geography was useless – teach right from overheads
- Need to be more discriminatory in hiring TAs
- Very hard to learn from/understand Prof's who don't speak English clearly

5) What has your family involvement been in your first year experience?

- Tell them if something major happens
- Don't speak day to day (which is my choice)
- When you need money
- There to help – you regulate what support you need
- Phone calls – they live far away
- Only see on holidays
- Do they understand? - ½ yes - ½ no
- Called dad at 6am, he talked her through/calmed her down about passing exam
- Wants to be independent
- They didn't go to University, don't understand & can't relate
- Emotional support
- Helpful – can talk to, but they don't understand
- Perception that student should stay home and study all the time
- Talked every night last semester

6) Emotionally what has it been like coming to university?

- Stress, not enough sleep
- 4 hours of sleep seems like a lot
- Anxiety
- Bouts of depression
- Why am I here?
- Panicked

7) What can we do to help you better prepare for what you'll do when you graduate?

- Find me a job
- Hard to picture
- We need to do it ourselves
- Saw pamphlet – could make appt. to find out
- What to do with my degree – help with options
- More structure so I don't forget to take required courses
- Course calendar is confusing

8) What is the best way for us to communicate with you and other students?

- Email
- Ask each other
- Word of mouth
- Older students
- Program counselors daunting/intimidating
- OCC called too much – like telemarketer – though probably good for some other people

9) What can we do to help you?

- More resources

- More space
- More money
- More scholarships
- Advertising for lounge

10) How can we make O-week better for you?

- List OCUS events together
- Not a lot of room for improvement
- Felt more comfortable being here
- Not prepared for class
- More encouragement to go to academic events
- Didn't go – had a full time job @ factory
- Get sense of community
- Couldn't get into school mode
- Everything happening at once – had to do everything for myself
- Pressure to make friends
- Scary – didn't know anyone