

Spring 2023 First Term Survey

Qualitative Analysis Report

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Overall Summary

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Background

The First Term Survey is part of the Division of Academic and Student Affairs' efforts to evaluate and improve the services provided to new NC State students. The survey helps us to gain an understanding of students' transition to NC State (both academically and personally), including how they are engaging with the university and their experiences with welcome programming. The survey contains a series of open-ended qualitative questions that help us better understand student thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

DASA Assessment reviewed the qualitative data and used coding techniques to organize the major themes of each qualitative question. After all data were coded, codes were reviewed and consolidated into larger themes. This report provides a summary of the major themes by question for first-year student respondents of the spring 2023 First Term Survey.

Population and Respondent Information

The spring 2023 First Term Survey was sent to all 364 new first-year students and 127 completed the survey (34.9% response rate). For transfer students, all 370 were invited to complete the survey and 112 responded (30.3% response rate). Students had the option to skip qualitative questions. As such, not every student responded to every question.

Analysis

The qualitative data were first exported from Qualtrics and then de-identified and uploaded to Google Sheets. Using an inductive approach, DASA Assessment staff and an undergraduate assistant read through all the responses and assigned them a general code (i.e. theme) if applicable. After all the data had been read and coded, DASA Assessment staff conducted a final review. At that point, codes were grouped into larger categories for reporting.

Important Limitations

- Nonresponse bias – The students who chose to respond to the qualitative questions may differ from the students who chose not to respond to the qualitative questions.
- Data reduction – The goal of this analysis was to reduce a large amount of data into smaller, more digestible, and subsequently more actionable data points. In reducing the data, you lose some of the student voice (e.g., verbatim quotations).
- Interpretation – In qualitative research methods, researchers are instruments. As such, different qualitative researchers may organize codes and themes in slightly different ways.

Welcome Programming

Impactful Experiences in Winter Welcome Week

Students were asked, “What about your Winter Welcome Week experience was most impactful to you and why?” 33 first-year students and 20 transfer students responded to this question. First-year students emphasized the importance of finding student organizations and groups of interest, learning about NC State and the campus, meeting new friends, and the value of having time to connect with other students in the events. Those 4 themes were all tied for the highest responses with first-year students. The transfer students also valued the opportunity to meet new friends but most of their responses focused on the importance of generally meeting new people and meeting new people like them.

- **Discovered student organizations and groups of interest** – First-year respondents described their desire to see and learn more about student organizations during Winter Welcome Week (WWW).
 - “The student involvement fair [was most impactful] because I want to get involved on campus, and it allowed me to see what clubs I'm interested in.”
- **Learning about NC State/Campus** – First-year respondents expressed the importance of WWW events showing them more of campus or to learn more about NC State in a broad sense.
 - “I went to an event where we took a tour of campus. This was quite useful as I was able to see more of campus and talk to some current students.”
 - “I liked that I was able to partake in fun events during the first week. It helped me transition better and learn more about NC State.”
- **Met new friends** – First-year and transfer respondents shared how impactful it was to meet new people at WWW and for the relationship to develop into a close friendship.
 - “I made a friend there who is my best friend months later!”
 - “What was most impactful was making new friends in my major. It was a big adjustment and I am really quiet and more introverted. I did not really expect to make new friends and I made so many friends and developed bonds with people in the animal science degree.”
- **Opportunities to engage with others** – First-year respondents found that the WWW events provided them the space to make connections with other students. This time gave them the opportunity to grow new or preexisting relationships with those around them.
 - “Being able to have fun before classes got harder, more hectic, and work piled up. I think it was nice to catch up with friends from Prague, get free things, and being able to try getting involved with campus culture.”
 - “What was most impactful about my WWW experience was realizing how easy it was to put myself out there and meet new people, as most people are looking to do the same as

well. These events really alleviated the pressure of meeting new people and provided good atmospheres to do so”

- **Met new people (general)** – Transfer respondents shared the value of WWW fostering a space for them to meet new people.
 - “Meeting new people, as that has always been hard for me. It was impactful to make some new friends to make the transition here from Michigan easier.”
- **Meet new people like me** – Transfer respondents described how important it was for them to meet and interact with others who had similar backgrounds as them in WWW.
 - “Going to the veteran center and meeting other people who have some similarities with me.”
 - “I enjoyed meeting other transfer students”

Sense of Community in Winter Welcome Week

Students were asked, “Please describe how the events you attended provided you with an opportunity to form a sense of community with fellow students.” 24 first-year students and 6 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer students both highlighted the importance of meeting others like them in WWW. First-year students also mentioned that they appreciated being able to meet people more generally.

- **Met new people like me** – First-year and transfer respondents shared how their sense of community grew through meeting others who had a common interest or identity.
 - “I had an amazing week attending various events on campus! [...] It was great to connect with other students who share my passions and interests. Being part of a club or organization gave me a sense of belonging and helped me build a community of like-minded individuals!”
 - “I was able to meet up with other spring connect students like me and we ended up making groups to hang out and build a community together with.”
 - “I met other transfer and first year students that were doing the same as me and just trying to find out what the school has to offer now that we have arrived. From what I gathered we were all loving the experience so far.”
- **Met new people (overall)** – A majority of first-year respondents shared how they valued meeting new people in WWW.
 - “I was able to participate and show up to certain events and meet people that I did not previously know and form connections with them.”
 - “They helped me meet new people and learn more about the campus.”

Missing from Winter Welcome Week

Students were asked, “Based upon your Winter Welcome Week participation, what was missing from your Winter Welcome Week experience?” 32 first-year students and 20 transfer students responded to this question. Transfer and First-Year students mostly discussed how they wished for a change of the event times. First-year students also shared some challenges of joining NC State in the spring versus in the fall. Transfer students shared how they wished that WWW included more events around a specific interest, group, or identity.

- **More time to attend events (scheduling comments)** – First-year and transfer students responded they were unable to attend some WWW events and how they wished for more accessible times.
 - “What was missing was more time to go to events, I feel like the first week should just be activities and time to walk and explore campus. I wanted to be able to explore and go to all events but I was limited due to my heavy schedule.”
 - “A lot of the events were held late at night and made it difficult for individuals like me who have to commute to attend.”
- **Perception of spring events being inferior to fall events** – First-year respondents described how they wished Winter Welcome Week had events that Wolfpack Welcome Week included in the fall. They also shared the challenges that they face by joining NC State in the spring.
 - “As a spring connect student I heard that new students in the fall were able to attend convocation, but we were not offered that experience at the beginning of the semester.”
 - “The people from fall that already had friend groups, it's definitely harder to know people who are already comfortable with their groups but it is out of anyone's control.”
- **More events around specific interests or groups** – Transfer respondents shared how they wished for more events in WWW around their specific interests or identities.
 - “More transfer-student oriented events separate from the spring connect students.”
 - “I would have liked an event centered around minorities. The adjustment to a new school is a bit different from the majority in my opinion as far as social interactions.”

Common Experience

Settings in Which Students Discussed CliftonStrengths

First-year students were asked, “During what specific class, course assignment, activity, or event did you discuss CliftonStrengths for Students? (e.g., ENG101, Exploratory Studies USC Courses)? (List all that you can recall.)”. 36 students responded to this question and provided the following responses:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1887 Scholars program • ALS 103 • ALS 110 • Career counseling • CH 101 • EI 201 • ENG 101 • ENV 100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENV 101 • FLE Courses • HSS 120 • Leadership Development Program (LDP) • LSC 103 • M 100 • MA 141 • University Studies Courses (USC)
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Primary Way Students Have Made Connections

Students were asked, “You noted that you have made friends with other students during your time thus far at NC State. What is the primary way you have connected with other students?”¹ This question gave the opportunity for students to choose between given options or to write in their own response in an “Other (please describe)” option. The themes listed below represent the thoughts of students who chose to submit written responses. 10 first-year students and 9 transfer students shared their written responses.

- **Through other friends** – First-year and transfer respondents described they developed new friendships through some of the first connections in the beginning of the semester and their pre-existing relationships before college.
- **Sports** – First year students also made friends through different athletic or sports activities through NC State.

Transition Experience

First-Year Transitions

First-year students were asked, “What information or experience would have been useful to you in preparing for the spring semester?” 77 students responded to this question. The most popular response was wishing for information about housing. Respondents also described how they wished they had more information about the transition to college and more opportunities to meet other students.

- **Information about Housing** – Respondents asked for more information related to move-in, housing opportunities, and/or roommate situations.

¹ This question was only shown to students who answered with a positive rating of “Made friends with other students” to “To what extent have you done each of the following during your time thus far at NC State?”, which was before this question in the survey.

- “Making sure the website was up to date on housing and such. Housing was a big stressor for me and the website only had information about fall move in until January.”
- “More information on housing and move in would have been helpful because I was not made aware that I could not pick up my one card after 5 pm and I needed it to obtain my dorm keys.”
- **More information about the transition to college** – Respondents requested more information to help them learn how to be away from home, family, and friends. These responses also wished to know more about how they could navigate at NC State and adjust to day-to-day student life.
 - “More information about preparing for classes and dorm living.”
 - “Some information that would have been useful includes: more information regarding how to get around campus and finding correct routes (Transloc), more information regarding how to check dining hall menus (OnCampus), how to file a work order, how to check the amount of dining dollars and how to use dining dollars, how and where to do laundry, how to use to-go boxes from the dining hall, and having access to mental health help.”
 - “What would have been useful information to have had to prepare me for the Spring semester is a list of recommended things to bring/buy if you will be living on campus.”
- **More opportunities to meet other students** – Respondents wanted more activities, social contact, or time spent with other students/organizations before the start of the semester.
 - “Getting new students in touch with NC state extracurricular groups several weeks before orientation would be helpful.”
 - “I would have benefited from having a way to connect with some of the other spring connect students so I could have connections before starting at state. I think a good way to do this would have been an open day sometime in the fall when we could have come to campus to meet each other.”
 - “More involvement for spring connect students in the fall to prevent feeling of disconnect/isolation”

Struggles and Support Needs

Student Struggles

Students were asked, “What have been your biggest struggles at NC State so far?” 77 first-year students and 79 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer students shared their difficulties with making friends, connecting with other students, and balancing the academic challenges of their courseload.

- **Making friends and connecting with other students** – Respondents discussed how difficult it was for them to establish friends and to find people with whom they connected.
 - “Because I came in the Spring I have not made any friends and i’m in my room alone all day. I’m scared to do things alone or go and try to make friends because everyone already established who their friends are in the fall and no one has tried to be friends with me.”
 - “Being able to build meaningful connections with peers outside of classes. It’s a struggle going from a 1000 student college to the massive community NC State is.”
 - “As a non-traditional student in my 30s, it’s been difficult to find other students to connect with.”
 - “Connecting with other students has been challenging at times only because I don’t live on campus.”
- **Academic Challenges** – First-year and transfer respondents shared how they struggled with adjusting to the academic rigor, time management, managing their workload, and balancing their academic and personal lives.
 - “Feeling overwhelmed with new information while also figuring out time management and balancing classes with trying to plan to get involved. Getting over social anxiety related to getting involved is also a struggle.”
 - “Just adapting to a new academic routine/keeping up with courses in regards to assignments, group work, deadlines at NCSU because I am a transfer student and my academic history is different along with polishing my resume, trying to go to the career center, attending events that my current major holds, etc. has been a challenge because I am trying to focus on succeeding in my courses but don’t necessarily find the time outside class/studying/tutoring as much as I would like to.”
 - “Keeping up. I want to get more involved in opportunities and connect but up to this point a few courses have keep me constantly on the verge of being behind. I might be getting the hang of things though, we will see how the next few weeks go.”

Increasing Inclusivity of Transfer Students’ Needs

Transfer students were asked, “How could Winter Welcome Week be more inclusive of transfer students’ needs?” 20 students responded to this question. Most students shared how more events or small group activities would help to build more relationships. They also asked for more information from NC State.

- **More events** – Respondents suggested more general or specific events in WWW.
 - “I would have liked if the orientation lasted multiple days and included more time with the other transfer students. I only got to meet a couple of transfer students in my small group and then i never got to see them again. so i would have liked more group activities. one thing that was great at my last school was that we got a day to get introduced to the

technical things with campus and checked back in with our groups in between sessions. and then the second day we had scavenger hunts and other events that we could do with the people in our group session. i found most of my friends in that group and it would be great to have a group like that coming in to nc state, especially as a transfer”

- “Maybe a pep rally or some type of event the whole college could attend if possible.”
- **More information/assistance needed** – Respondents desired more information or assistance in their transition into NC State.
 - “My previous college all the online resources were in on one website. I have felt like I have had to dig for different essential requirements such as moodle, panopto, parking permit website, outfitters website e.g. If there was a link with an essential's portal for all new students to know what each link does and what it is for the would be extremely helpful. The welcome email covered some of this but not all of it or explained it. A master link that held all of them with explanation for their purpose would be great!”
 - “I think information is a big one. As a transfer, I don’t have much info on anything going on on campus or the surrounding area.”

NC State Facilitating Sense of Belonging or Community

Students were asked, “What can NC State do to improve your sense of belonging or community?” 37 first-year students and 42 transfer students responded to this question. First-year students spoke mostly about wanting a larger range of events and easy access to information on upcoming events. Both first-year and transfer respondents shared that they wished NC State could help them initiate connections with other students through different events or activities.

- **Initiate connections with other students** – First-year and transfer respondents requested more small group activities or other opportunities to build relationships with students on campus.
 - “I think encouraging studying in small groups or any kind of small group activities would be nice. I know NCSU offers things like that already, but it is hard to attend once the semester starts. Maybe offering small group events based on the classes or major each student is in before the semester starts would be good? Possibly around orientation or in the first few days of the semester.”
- **More events and easy access to information on upcoming events** – First-year respondents asked for more events to help them meet people and participate in a variety of activities. They also suggested easier or clearer ways to find upcoming events and to learn more about the events.
 - “I think an increase in advertisements for clubs and sports would be beneficial as I still am not aware of some clubs that are held here. I am a spring connect student so I also think it would be beneficial if there were more events for those students to meet other.”

Support Needed from NC State

Students were asked, “What support do you need from NC State faculty and staff to be successful during your first year at NC State?” 66 first-year students and 76 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer students shared that they would have liked more tutoring and academic support. First-years also asked to have more contact with their advisor before their first semester. First year respondents expressed their desire for NC State community to share encouragement and for their faculty to have flexibility with them. Transfer respondents asked for more opportunities to find and use available mental health resources. They also suggested more resources to help them manage their time and to get organized with their new courseload.

- **Tutoring / Academic Success support** – First-year and transfer respondents suggested more class options and availability for tutoring. Students also mentioned wanting to learn how to study and to get one-on-one attention.
- **Availability of advisor** – First-year respondents shared a desire to be connected to their advisor earlier and to have more communication with them.
 - “I wished I had gotten assigned an advisor before registering for my classes instead of right before the start of the semester. Because all I got was a PowerPoint telling me what classes to sign up for and couldn't really ask questions cause I didn't really know who to ask.”
- **Encouragement / moral support (from advisors, faculty, peers, staff)** – First-year respondents shared that they would value more encouragement from their NC State community.
 - “Just encouraging words”
 - “Knowing that I can do it when times are hard”
 - “Maybe engaging more, encourage students to let them know they'll help them, advise them, and help them find opportunities. I know it's more of a students job, but it can be difficult.”
- **Faculty flexibility and understanding** – First-year respondents expressed a desire for their faculty to be more flexible with them when it comes to student's mental health and assignments.
 - “Being more lenient and considerate if students need breaks from feeling overwhelmed and over worked”
 - “Being more understanding on late work/occasional absences. Sometimes it becomes detrimental when you have 3 assignments due on the same day and late work isn't accepted.”
- **Counseling/ mental health support** – Transfer respondents asked for help finding and using the mental health resources at NC State to reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Help getting organized / time management** – Transfer respondents requested more resources to learn how to manage their time, stress, and to better adjust to their courses.

For More Information

The summary provided in this report, as with any summary of qualitative data, does not fully capture the comments of every survey respondent. To discuss how you can learn more from this qualitative data set, please reach out to DASA Assessment staff (dasa-assessment@ncsu.edu). You can also request access to the responses of a particular student population by submitting a [data request](#).