

Fall 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 open-ended 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 fall 2023 First Term Survey.

Population and Respondent Information

The fall 2023 First Term Survey was sent to all 5,559 new first-year students and 1,906 completed the survey (34.3% response rate). For transfer students, all 1,442 were invited to complete the survey and 354 responded (24.5% 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 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 thematic 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 Wolfpack Welcome Week

Students were asked, “What about your Wolfpack Welcome Week experience was most impactful to you and why?” 955 first-year students and 124 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer student responses showed that they enjoyed the events, the opportunities to meet new people, discover different student organizations of interest, and learn more about NC State. First-year students discussed the new friends that they made at the Wolfpack Welcome Week (WWW) events. Transfer students shared that WWW helped create a sense of community for them.

- **Met new people** – First-year and Transfer respondents shared the value of WWW fostering a space for them to meet new people.
 - “I liked meeting new people and having natural conversations nothing was forced. Everyone was friendly and understanding as well.”
 - “Seeing the number of students who were new to campus and taking the opportunity to explore and meet new people through Wolfpack Welcome Week events was the most impactful for me. It can be very isolating when you are in a completely new environment with thousands of people that you have never met so seeing how many others were in the same situation and attempting to make new friends and acclimate to their environment was encouraging.”
 - “Highly recommend [the WWW] experience as a way to engage with the campus. The whole week is filled with events, so if I wasn't able to attend one event there were more throughout the week for me to experience. It is also a way for me to socialize and get to meet fellow Wolfpack peers.”
 - “Just meeting new people during Wolfpack Welcome Week was very helpful to my transition into NC State. Not having friends or people to talk to and do things with was one of my biggest fears about transferring.”
- **Discovered student organizations and groups of interest** – First-year and transfer respondents shared their enthusiasm to meet and learn more about student organizations during WWW. This was the most popular response from transfer students.
 - “The most impactful welcome week experience for me was packapaloosa because there were so many student organizations in one place which gave me the opportunity to see what I might want to get involved in.”
 - “I think getting to see all of the clubs at NCSU was most beneficial because I was able to join a club that I never [k]new about.”
 - “Meeting new people and get involved around campus was the best thing that I did during Wolfpack Welcome Week.”

- “I was able to find a group of people that had similar interests and was able to find clubs and organizations to join. This also made the transition to college life a little less overwhelming.”
- **Learning about NC State/Campus** – First-year and transfer respondents expressed the importance of WWW events showing them more of the physical campus and learning more about NC State in a broad sense. This includes campus resources and culture.
 - “I really enjoyed seeing how diverse and large the campus was. It was a great way to familiarize myself with the culture.”
 - “Wolfpack Welcome Week was valuable to me because it gave me the chance to explore the school, its various resources, and make new friends during my first week on campus. College was pretty intimidating to me, and I'm glad I had Wolfpack Welcome Week to help ease me into my first year in college.”
 - “Visiting the library to learn about it and explore it because I know I'm gonna be there a decent amount so knowing about the resources available to me is a good idea.”
- **Enjoyed the activities** – First-year and transfer respondents shared how much fun they had at different WWW events and how the experiences helped with their transition into NC State.
 - “My Wolfpack Welcome Week was most impactful by easing the transition into college life by providing fun activities to introduce rising freshman to the campus's resources and NC State's values. This ultimately made my transition much less stressful, as I looked forward to exploring campus and all it has to offer.”
 - “I think Talley takeover really helped me let loose and have fun with other freshmen. We were able to hang out, relax, and have fun.”
 - “Attending Packapalooza was the most impactful to me, as I was able to meet so many new people and take part in a lot of fun activities.”
 - “Rec fest was very fun because I got to explore the club options. I also enjoyed convocation because #yayschoolspirit”
 - “I liked having a lot of things to do the first week to distract me from being homesick. The transition to college was not perfect at all, but it was a huge adjustment and no amount of events could change that. My favorite part was probably the movie night because I got to meet a few people and it was very cool.”
- **Made new friends** – First-year respondents emphasized how impactful it was to build close friendships with the people they met during WWW.
 - “During Wolfpack welcome week I was able to meet new people that I still hang out with now. As an incoming freshman it can be scary going into a new experience alone and meeting new people is very important for one's mental health and well-being.”
 - “Probably making friends, i still talk to the people I met at the pride symposium”

- “Wolfpack Welcome Week allowed me to gain a sense of community, and it helped the transition into college feel fun and easy. Before I came to NC State, I thought the transition of going into college was going to be slightly difficult, however, the fun events around campus made me stay busy, and I created lots of friendships.”
- **Sense of community** – Transfer students shared their feelings of unity, community, and sense of belonging at NC State due to WWW events.
 - “NCSU is my dream school so the welcome and community that I felt just made me feel at home.”
 - “Getting to see the campus more and meet others, gave a big impact of a sense of belonging especially with all the other transfer students”
 - “Getting to spend time on campus with fellow students was the biggest experience for me. I’ve always had the notion that I could get my degree anywhere, at the end of the day it’s a piece of paper any institution could give you for putting in effort and work but I wanted a sense of community and belonging and I believe I got that here at State.”

Sense of Community in Wolfpack 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.” 550 first-year students and 62 transfer students responded to this question. The majority of first-year students respondents shared that their sense of community was developed through meeting new people at the events. First-year and transfer students both highlighted the importance of *meeting new people like them* in WWW. Respondents also shared how attending the events gave them a space to build relationships with those around them.

- **Met new people** – The majority of first-year respondents shared how WWW provided them an opportunity to form a sense of community by meeting new people.
 - “As an out-of-state student, these events helped me meet new people. Having other people to talk to (besides my roommate) helped me begin to form a community here.”
 - “I was able to meet people not only in my dorm but those near by in classes and dorm buildings.”
 - “I participated in Talley takeover, packapoloza and Rec Fest. These events provided me with an opportunity to meet new students for sure. I was able to play games and participate in events such as the packapoloza concert and fireworks. It automatically opened me up to new students and relationships.”
 - “I met lots of people and was participating in events with lots of people.”
- **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 met students with similar interests to me at events for my village.”
- “I was able to meet people from all over that have similar interests in me through various sports such as, soccer, basketball, and spikeball. Sharing these similar interests opened up new opportunities for conversation about topics we all enjoy.”
- “I felt like I wasn’t that different from the people I talked to and surrounded myself with. I also felt like I belonged there. I felt more comfortable with talking to random people and making new friends.”
- **Provided an opportunity to build relationships with friends and peers** – First-year and transfer respondents shared that the events were set up well to foster relationship growth. Their sense of community grew in events that allowed for bonding or connection time between peers and new friends.
 - “It allowed me to meet so many new people while engaging in the event activities. I also like to go to these events with friends which helps strengthen our connection. I would rather have a close group of friends rather than having a bunch of surface level friends.”
 - “I really didn’t know anybody at NC State, but welcome week was an opportunity to both meet new people and form stronger connections with those who I was able to become friends with. It gave us a space to go to do fun things and bond.”
 - “While participating in welcome week events, I was forced to open up myself to getting to know those that were doing the events right next to me. I would go to the events that I was interested in, knowing that most of those there were interested in similar things. This helped me to find common ground and jump started conversations.”
 - “It provided me with a sense of opportunity to form community with fellow students because it united students with common interests in the same area and allowed them to talk and form connections they wouldn’t otherwise have the chance to make.”

Missing from Wolfpack Welcome Week

Students were asked, “Based upon your Wolfpack Welcome Week participation, what was missing from your Wolfpack Welcome Week experience?” 923 first-year students and 120 transfer students responded to this question. While most students couldn’t think of what could be added to WWW, the second largest theme from student responses asked for more events around specific interests or groups. First-year students went on to ask for more events in general. They also reported that many of the events were during class their time and they were unable to attend. Respondents’ other concerns included the events being too large and how they wished for smaller groups or events.

- **More events around specific interests or groups** – Most first-year and transfer respondents shared how they wished for more events in WWW around their specific interests or identities.

These interests could be sports related, location related (housing), major specific events, craft orientated events, or for clubs/organizations.

- “I feel like there should have been a west campus mixer or something so that way you can get to know people from the residence halls near you. I know there are already sort of activities like that but something for welcome week might have been nice.”
- “I wish our dorm had some more activities to get to know each other. We still don't know each other that much and I feel like if we bonded more in the beginning that would improve our sense of community.”
- “Something that was missing from my Wolfpack Welcome Week experience was the opportunity to connect with people in my major specifically, either upper class men or other first-year students.”
- “More events to interact with people of color”
- “... I [wish] there were more information/clubs about non-traditional students though. Off-campus living, commuters, students that are older than usual etc. Need more inclusivity for non-traditional students like me!”
- **More events** – The third most popular theme for first-year students was their hope for more events in general. Some shared that they were unable to attend some events and wished they happened at a different time. Other students asked for more variety of events, more celebratory events, or for WWW to last longer.
 - “I would only ask for more. I enjoyed the events so much, and would have loved to do even more, or providing more t-shirts. I also don't recommend holding large welcome events in Talley, it cannot support the whole student body.”
- **Scheduling conflict with class** – First-year students expressed how they couldn't attend all of the events they wanted to go to due to their class schedule.
 - “i felt that having classes during some events I wanted to go to was a bummer.”
 - “I wish there were more opportunities for student involvement fairs because none of them lined up with my schedule:(“
 - “A lot of the activities that I wanted to [attend] conflicted with my classes. Maybe starting school a week earlier so students have no classes to do the activities would be better.”
 - “More time to do things. I was so wrapped up in class and everything else, I couldn't take part in www as much as I wanted.”
- **Event sizes** – First-year students shared how the events felt overcrowded, overwhelming, and that the lines were too long. Students asked for smaller groups or events to connect with others.
 - “I thought every event was not prepared for the amount of people who attended.”
 - “The events were overcrowded and Talley Takeover was overwhelming.”

- “I do wish there were more tiny events than huge events at the Wolfpack Welcome Week just because sometimes it’s hard to meet people in such large and overwhelming groups.”
- “I think NCSU does really good at fostering the idea of big cultural identity with things like convocation and the sorts, but it struggles at the interpersonal things, kinda wish that during welcome week there were instances where I’d be forced into groups of 5/6 to just talk and possibly get to express myself...”
- “There needs to be a way to connect with smaller groups of people instead of just huge events.”
- “Everything from WWW was a big event with lots of people; I would’ve liked to have seen more intimate events hosted by certain clubs or organizations.”

Increasing Inclusivity of Transfer Students’ Needs

Transfer students were asked, “How could Wolfpack Welcome Week be more inclusive of transfer students’ needs?” 120 students responded to this question. Most respondents shared that increasing the events focused on transfer students would help to increase the inclusivity in WWW. A smaller group of students also shared that they could not think of any other suggestions or ideas to increase inclusivity.

- **More events around transfer students** – Students shared their wish for more events to meet other transfer students. Some of these events were targeted to more non-traditional students based upon their age, life stage, and commuter status.
 - “I think maybe transfer students social event or a transfer student convocation”
 - “It can be disheartening when one begins as a transfer student because so many of your fellow students are younger than you are. It may be beneficial to have an event organized specifically to bring together students that are a bit older than the standard 18-21 year old age range.”
 - “More accessible transfer student welcoming events (both at easier to attend times and locations) would be nice, but overall just having the rest of the events around campus be more recognizing of transfer students would be a profound improvement. It was extremely easy to tell which events were thought up, planned, and executed solely with traditional students in mind. Those events sucked as a transfer because it was very clear the event hosts had no idea what my experiences and expectations might be like as someone that *isn't* coming here straight out of high school with no idea what I want to do in life.

It’s also important to recognize that transfer students are an incredibly diverse population; while some transfers are essentially straight out of high school--coming in as early

college students who completed an associate degree--others are much older, returning from the workforce to change careers or trying to pick up a new degree while still working, taking care of kids, or other family obligations. I saw very few events that sought to cater to the latter, older demographic of transfers. Just because transfer students have higher graduation rates and are generally self-sufficient compared to traditional students doesn't mean it's okay to ignore us and assume we'll figure things out on our own. "

- "The transfer student orientation had a dinner experience that required a meal plan at the dining hall and I did not have a meal plan because I live off campus. So maybe just considering people who don't have dining dollars."

Struggles and Support Needs

Student Struggles

Students were asked, "What have been your biggest struggles at NC State so far?" 1,052 first-year students and 235 transfer students responded to this question. Most first-year and transfer students shared about struggling to make friends, time management, and classes in general. Transfer students' second highest theme was their challenges as non-traditional students.

- **Making Friends** – This was the most shared theme for first-year and transfer students. They emphasized their challenges of making friends and developing and maintaining strong relationships.
 - "Meeting new people after the first few weeks, and after welcome events are no longer happening."
 - "Making real connections, it's easy to engage people in class but continuing those connections outside are difficult."
 - "Finding like-minded individuals who I can develop long-term friendships with."
- **Time management** – First-year and transfer respondents share their challenges of managing their time well and creating/keeping to a schedule.
 - "One of my biggest struggles has been managing my time well. It feels like there are so many things I need to do for classes, so many things I want to take advantage of at NC State both socially and personally, and I don't have time to be part of everything."
 - "Managing my time so I'm not just doing school the whole day or just relaxing the whole day, and making deep and lasting connections with others."
- **Challenges as a non-traditional student** – Transfer students shared the challenges as non-traditional students.

- “Making friends, but that is mostly my own fault. I live 40 minutes away in [redacted] County and I am often not able to stay on campus long enough to attend club meetings. Also, I am a junior but I am 27 years old and I sometimes feel awkward because I am older than the majority students.”
- “Lack of community because I am obtaining my degree online. I am on campus for specific speakers this semester – but I don’t know anyone other than the instructors. Everyone has their clique established...and sometimes it gets really lonely. While I have other methods of connecting with people in my personal life, the experience of being off-campus has been a little isolating. I have one foot in the life of a college student and one foot in the life of a wife, a mother, and a business owner.”

NC State Facilitating Sense of Belonging or Community

Students were asked, “What can NC State do to improve your sense of belonging or community?” 449 first-year students and 100 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer students both wanted more events in general and events that facilitated the development of friendships. Transfer students also asked for more events to be created for students from similar backgrounds. Many students couldn’t think of anything NC State could do to improve their sense of belonging or community.

- **More Events** – This was the most popular theme for first-year students. First-year and transfer students shared how they wanted more events to attend.
 - “Continue events that bring many people together.”
 - “Continuous events throughout the year, not just the beginning”
 - “Have more opportunities to connect during the weekends”
 - “more community events”
 - “More social events on campus (party, karaoke, meet and greets).”
- **Events Fostering Friendships**– First-year and transfer students wanted more events that were specifically built to help foster friendships. This includes meeting more people from similar and different majors, academic years, and residence halls. Transfer students asked for more events to foster relationships with other non-traditional aged students.
 - “Have more get to know people events”
 - “Hold more events where students from different majors and years can connect”
 - “More resident hall events”
 - “Provide experiences to bring friends to (i.e. movie night)”
 - “More opportunities for transfer students, especially older students to be able to meet socially. People are often already grouped up and or don’t bother going to the first week of school orientations because there are a lot of young students or freshman. Also [living] off campus creates a separation”

- **Events for Like-Students** – Transfer students wanted to have more events for students like them. The students shared how they wanted more events with other transfer students, students in their degree program, and age range.
 - “During the orientation, I was grouped with people in a completely different major than mine. If I was grouped with my peers (within the same major or even just the same college), I would have been more prone to be able to make friends before ever starting. Coming in, everyone pretty much already has their friend groups so it would have been nice to have a "friend group" when I came in.”
 - “More events tailored to specific groups or majors more often.”
 - “Provide a way to connect specifically with transfer students because I know based on my experiences and chatting online with others that many transfer students are [feeling] the same way as I am.”

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?” 948 first-year students and 203 transfer students responded to this question. The most popular themes were sharing the wish of support and understanding from faculty & staff, tutoring and academic support resources, and advising support. Encouragingly, it was also a popular theme for respondents to state that faculty and staff are already supportive of students. Some students couldn’t think of ways that NC State faculty and staff could provide additional support.

- **Faculty, Staff, & University Understanding** – First-year and transfer respondents requested empathy from faculty and staff for how students are feeling. The students also ask for understanding as they adjust to college.
 - “The understanding that students have more going on than faculty may assume.”
 - “Simply open mindedness, respect and understanding as I adjust.”
 - “I feel like understanding is what I need because everyone has different backgrounds and upbringings so the first year at NC State is an adjustment for everyone.”
- **Tutoring/Academic Success Support** – First-year and transfer respondents identified wanting/needing tutoring or another outside resource to help them succeed in class. Students also asked for more availability, access, more individualized options, more class options, etc.
 - “Just letting us freshman know more about the tutor options”
 - “More tutoring open for all courses. More times especially more flexible schedule for TA help sessions.”
 - “I am not sure, right now with my academic struggles I think the most helpful would be tutoring as most of my classes do not have any tutoring offered. And I think it would be helpful if Moodle calculated and informed you of what your total current grade was.”

- **Advising** – First-year and transfer students requested general or unspecified academic counseling and resources.
 - “I think talking to my advisor more frequently would be helpful.”
 - “In person talks with advisors”
 - “One-on-one advising that I have received in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences has been the best tool to help me adjust.”
 - “Plenty of advising opportunities and guidance on how to create a realistic degree plan to graduate on time.”
- **Faculty & Staff are doing great** – First-year and transfer respondents also shared that they already feel supported by faculty and staff.
 - “I had a lot of support from my academic advisor which was really comforting, and as helped me a lot so far.”
 - “What you guys have been giving is good. You constantly send emails reminding us of resources available and my advisor is always there to help me”
 - “I am unsure of what support is needed. But the instructors I have do a lot to make sure that students aren’t left behind. I may make use of [honor society’s] tutoring session for my major specific classes.”

Additional Themes to Note

Students were asked, “What is the primary way you have connected with other students?” if they had previously indicated that they had made friends during their time at NC State. Respondents were able to select *Residence Hall or Village, NC State Events, Classes, Student Organizations, and Other (please describe)*. 109 first-year students and 22 transfer students responded with the *Other (please describe)* option. The most popular of these responses from first-year students identified the specific events they connected with other students. The second most popular response indicated that students connected with others through preexisting relationships before joining NC State.

Students were asked “Why did you not attend any activities during WWW?”, if they had previously indicated that they hadn’t attended any activities. Respondents were able to select *Scheduling conflict, Events didn’t seem interesting, Didn’t know what was happening, and Other (please describe)*. 8 first-year students and 29 transfer students responded with the *Other (please describe)* option. Transfer student responses indicated that most didn’t attend WWW due to feeling that the events were not accessible to them. Some of their barriers to attendance included the age gap between them and traditional students, they are online students, a parent, or they work full time and cannot attend activities during the workday. The second most popular response shared that the students were unable to attend due to distance.

These students noted that they are online students or commute too far away from campus and that it is not feasible to participate in WWW events.

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](#).