

Spring 2024 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 and transfer student respondents of the spring 2024 First Term Survey.

Population and Respondent Information

The spring 2024 First Term Survey was sent to all 319 new first-year students and 83 completed the survey (26% response rate). For transfer students, all 441 were invited to complete the survey and 119 responded (27% 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 uploaded to Dedoose with demographic data. The demographics connected with the responses were gender, race, College, rural status, First-Generation status, and Spring Connect status. Using an inductive approach, DASA Assessment staff, an undergraduate assistant, and two graduate interns 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. Additional analysis was conducted based on academic factors; results were disaggregated by college. Questions with enough responses to show themes or patterns are included in this report. Not all qualitative questions had enough responses for patterns of themes to be seen.

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?” 28 first-year and 23 transfer students responded to this question. First-year and transfer students shared how impactful it was to meet so many new people in WWW and to build friendships with those they met. First-year students also shared how they met people like them and how they really enjoyed the WWW activities. Transfer students shared how impactful WWW was through learning about NC State and campus and for their transition to NC State.

- **Met new people and made friends** – First-year and transfer students shared the impact of meeting other students at the WWW events and the friends they were able to make.
 - “As a transfer, particularly as a spring semester transfer, it can be hard to find friends. So meeting people during winter welcome week was the most helpful.”
 - “The most impactful thing was making a new friend who has been there throughout the semester. Having someone supportive is important.”
 - “Going to TransferPack welcome week was impactful because I met two of my good friends there.”
 - “The most impactful experience was connect with the pack event. As it helped introduce me to people who have now become friends to me. I did not meet anyone at orientation so this event was very helpful to me.”
- **Met new people like me** – First-year students describe the importance of meeting others with common interests.
 - “I found just being a part of the community, seeing all the clubs and organizations, made my arrival here great. It was awesome to meet individuals with my niche interests.”
 - “I met new friends from same country, that helped me a lot because we speak same language and it can be better for us help each other.”
- **Fun activities** – First-year students discussed their enjoyment of WWW and the events across campus.
 - “I had a great time meeting new people and exploring clubs I was interested in. The events were enjoyable and fun.”

- **Helpful for the transition to college** – Transfer students discussed the impact of WWW helping them transition to college and NC State.
 - “The experience that was most impactful to me was spring transfer orientation because it was my first look into how I was going to go around campus navigating class locations, study areas, food places, and overall taking in the university life experience. There was a tremendous amount of useful information that helped me narrow down what I wanted to focus on during my time here at university and the atmosphere was pretty welcoming and non-judgmental. Overall I got to explore new locations, talk to new individuals, and see how the wolfpack as a community works on a day-to-day basis. It also lessened my nerves for when classes began on the first week.”
 - “Just meeting new people and engaging in some really good conversations. This helped by making me feel more at home and acknowledging that I am not the only one who is nervous from those conversations.”
- **Learning about NC State/Campus** – Transfer students shared how impactful it was to learn more about NC State’s campus, culture, and resources.
 - “I loved going to the tours and learning about the campus and going to the events with free coffee and other things because it allowed me to get accustomed to the school and meet new people.”
 - “Being able to go to different parts of campus and see what there is to do here”

Useful Information and Experiences in Preparing for the Spring

First-year students were asked, “What information or experience would have been useful for you in preparing for the spring semester?” 61 first-year students responded. They shared how they wished for more information on housing, about the transition to college, and more opportunities to meet other students. Quite a few students who asked for more opportunities to meet other students also asked for more events during and before the Spring semester.

- **Information about Housing** – Respondents asked for more communication and information related to spring 2024 and fall 2024 move-in, meeting and living with roommates, and housing related resources.
 - “When I began my time at NCSU in the spring, most of the information I received came from my roommate. I didn't know how to put in a work order, I didn't know where we could have mail sent, it was a lot of small things that I just wasn't prepared for. I felt like I was thrown in the mix rather than eased into college life, and I feel like fall semester students probably received much more detailed attention than spring admits.”

- **More information about the transition to college** – Students ask for more information on how to adjust to being away from home, family, friends, and to learn more about day-to-day student life.
 - “It would have been helpful to know the little tips and tricks to help navigate campus life. The basic knowledge that seems obvious to students who came in the fall, but Spring Connect students literally have no idea.”
 - “Orientation being so close to move in day was extremely stressful. Transitioning right into classes when we moved in made it hard to adjust and everything felt rushed with little time to settle in. [...] I think on campus engagement before the start of the spring semester would be helpful, like maybe a panel that people can sign up to go to and they can ask any questions that they are unsure of or anything that they want to know before they come in the spring.”
 - “The KEYS TO COLLEGE that I'm learning in my Introduction to Humanities and Social Sciences has been so useful so far. Something like that would definitely have been useful to prepare for the spring semester.”
- **More opportunities to meet other students** – Students asked for more events or opportunities to meet other students on campus.
 - “More events to meet my classmates. Missing the fall put me behind socially”
 - “It would have been helpful if there were more opportunities to meet other people coming in the spring as spring connects. I wish there were more things for spring connects to do in the fall for being involved on campus like having the chance to join clubs if able.”

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.” 5 first-year and 16 transfer students responded.

Transfer students shared how they had an opportunity to form a sense of community through meeting people like them.

- **Met new people like me** – Transfer respondents shared how their sense of community grew through meeting others who had a common interest or shared identity.
 - “I was able to be in small groups with fellow transfer students, and even students in my college and major, and meet people that I eventually met in classes that we had together.”
 - “I was able to meet students in certain groups that had things in common with me and was able to find support and resources.”

Missing from Wolfpack Welcome Week

Students were asked, “Based upon your Wolfpack Welcome Week participation, what was missing from your Wolfpack Welcome Week experience?” 28 first-year and 24 transfer students responded. Most said that they couldn’t think of anything that was missing. First-year respondents also shared that they would have liked more opportunities to get involved and meet other students.

- **More opportunities to get involved** – First-year students shared how they wished they knew more about clubs or had more opportunities to interact with clubs throughout WWW.
 - “More info about clubs.”
 - “Coming into the middle of the semester, most clubs already have attendance policies and other things that prevent students coming in the spring from joining. There were some clubs that we were not as able to participate in as we had already missed a semesters worth of meetings.”
 - “Most spring admit students moved in that Thursday. There was nothing for us to really do over the weekend, we were just stuck in our rooms until classes started. And then when classes started, most of the activities throughout the day were mostly all the same (like cookies and chat or free coffee), and the ones that were different were in the middle of the class day. I felt like all of the clubs had gone into hibernation. If there are hundreds of clubs at NCSU, I only came into contact with about 50-60 during welcome week and since. I didn't really feel a sense of community or belonging, I felt like it was kind of halfway done with due respect.”
- **More opportunities to meet other students** – First-year students shared how they would have liked more events or opportunities to meet other students. They also shared a few ideas for events.
 - “More opportunities to meet other Spring Connect students in my college/major. Not just that but other first year students as well.”
 - “I wish more group events also included students who were already here. I understand it is the winter, so planning events is harder, but an event like Packapalooza which happened in the fall. All the events I attended were making individual products for yourself, like vision boards, which don't really help you get to know people.”
 - “I think that there should be something like speed dating involved and you get to move around and tell the people about yourself to make friends with new people. It is more inviting than having to go up to someone randomly and talk to them, since the activity is focused around making friends.”

Increasing Inclusivity of Transfer Students' Needs

Transfer students were asked, "How could Wolfpack Welcome Week be more inclusive of transfer students' needs?" 22 transfer students responded to this question. The most popular theme was students asking for more events around transfer students.

- **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'm [a] transfer student who's also older than the majority of students. Having events for older students would be nice."
 - "Having specific events for transfer students to team up and get to know each other within the same degree programs."
 - "Have more workshops tailored to transitioning from a community college environment to NC State"

Struggles and Support Needs

Student Struggles

Students were asked, "What have been your biggest struggles at NC State so far?" 58 first-year and 89 transfer students responded. First-year students mostly shared that they struggled to make friends. Transfer students shared how they struggled with transportation and navigating around campus, adjusting to the academic rigor of NC State, and other troubles that are specific to non-traditional students. Additionally, a portion of those who shared their challenges as a non-traditional student also shared that they felt disadvantaged due to their enrollment type.

- **Making friends** – First-year students shared how they were struggling to make friends at NC State.
 - "My biggest struggle has been [finding] ways to meet people and making friends."
 - "My biggest struggles at NC State so far is making friends. I am an outgoing person and I am on the club soccer team, but I still feel closed off when it comes to making friends. I get afraid that they won't like me because they have been a team together for multiple seasons. Also people in my classes don't really talk so it is hard to make any friends with them too. I have friends here from back home which is good and I appreciate but it is making new friends that has been difficult"
 - "making friends and finding organizations to be involved in"

- **Transportation & Navigation around campus** – Transfer students shared their challenges getting to campus, parking, walking around campus, and the bus system.
 - “navigating around a University that is much bigger than the community college [I] previously attended. and going to class in person: [I] took online classes for the majority of my time at community college.”
 - “Using the bus system and getting around campus.”
- **Adjusting to academic rigor** – Transfer students discussed their challenges with the different workload from their prior institution.
 - “Transitioning, missing friends and family, adapting to a new academic style.”
 - “Adjusting to the different workload”
 - “I think the workload compared to a community college is way more. Along with that you could connect with professors more in a community college since it's smaller.”
- **Challenges for non-traditional students** – Transfer students share challenges that normally impact commuters, military-connected students, and students returning to school or starting school later in life.
 - “Being virtual, I struggle with connecting with other students about the course material. Web discussions are okay but I miss face to face discussion.”
 - “Struggling my home life and school life as a mother.”
 - “Balancing academic responsibilities with a part-time job and a long commute to both work and campus.”

NC State Improving Sense of Belonging or Community

Students were asked, “What can NC State do to improve your sense of belonging or community?” 33 first-year and 49 transfer students responded. The most popular themes among first-year students were the interest in more opportunities to initiate connections with other students and for more events during WWW. The transfer students wished for more events for students like them and shared their personal challenges with building community during WWW. A portion of the students who wanted events for those like them also wanted additional opportunities to initiate connections with other students.

- **Initiate connections with other students** – First-year students asked for more small group activities that would help them build connections with other students around them. Suggestions included implementing a buddy system and hosting more small group activities inside and outside of class.
 - “Give more access and options to distance education students to connect with others and things happening on campus. If there's anything I can do to help build this idea please

reach out, I'd love to help others who can't be on campus feel connected with the community along with myself!"

- "More activities to meet people and show spirit."
- **More events** – First-year students asked for more events for them to attend.
 - "Again I think that just doing more social events that are going to attract everyone and doing more things in wolfpack plaza that will draw in students just from seeing it"
 - "More big group activities like there was in the fall. I feel disconnected to people who have been here since the fall."
 - "I would like to have activities to meet more people and hear about opportunities to get involved in person."
- **Events for like-students** – Transfer students asked for more events with others who share an identity, similar life stage, or major in common.
 - "More opportunities for transfer students to meet with other transfer students to feel a sense of belonging together."
 - "More African American events would be great especially for new black students."
 - "Maybe do events catered to transfer students after the first week of classes. It's already difficult navigating a new campus and schedule, finding time to socialize isn't a priority for me in the first week of classes."
 - "Send information to students like myself that are off campus, older Adults... I'm 38, that are full time trying to navigate children, full time school. It would also be good to know what clubs are out there to join. Again I don't live on campus and the majority of my courses are DE but I would still be interested in a Club."
- **Personal challenges** – Transfer students shared how they are struggling emotionally with their sense of belonging or community on campus. Some students take personal responsibility for their feelings and clarify that they were prioritizing other things over belonging and community.
 - "There isn't anything NC State itself can do, it depends on the students. I believe that due to my race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic standing I am at an uphill battle."
 - "It's not something NC State can do to improve, NC State has already provided many resources and opportunities to join a community. It's more about getting along with people on a personal level and trying to actually form connections rather than just a group of people gathering for something."
 - "I think the resources are there I just need to reach out and take advantage. I am trying to ease into the community because I become overwhelmed easily."
 - "I should attend more events although it is hard to find time."

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?” 51 first-year and 78 transfer students responded to this question. The main theme for the first-year students was asking for more tutoring support. Transfer students shared how they’d like more academic and advising support. Transfer students also shared how NC State faculty and staff are doing a great job at supporting students. There was a portion of first-year and transfer students who could not think of a way for faculty and staff to support them in their first year.

- **Tutoring/Academic Success Support** – First-year respondents shared their wish for tutoring or resources to help them succeed in class.
 - “Tutoring for classes like Philosophy which is not offered but is often confusing”
 - “Tutoring opportunities, when necessary.”
- **Academic support** – Transfer students ask for general support with their classes, GPA, and class related opportunities.
- **Advising (general)** – Transfer students ask for more opportunities to receive academic advising and resources. This includes the request for more in-person meetings to have in-depth discussions. They also ask for guidance in finding a major, planning for future classes, and learning more about jobs/internships within the field.
- **Faculty/Staff are doing great** – Transfer students shared their contentment with their current support and highlighted some faculty and staff who are doing well with supporting their students.
 - “I feel supported by the faculty and staff here I’m very grateful.”
 - “I feel as if the support I have received so far has been wonderful. My advisor and my teachers have made my transition very successful.”
 - “I think NC State offers lots of support and I have definitely reached out for it.”

Themes Based on Colleges

Students were asked, “What have been your biggest struggles at NC State so far?” From these responses, a third of the students who were struggling with the academic rigor of their degree were in the College of Engineering. A little less than a third of the first-year and transfer students who shared that they struggled to make friends were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Half of the first-year and transfer students who shared their challenges as non-traditional students were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Students were asked, “What support do you need from NC State faculty and staff to be successful during your first year at NC State?” A little less than half of the respondents who thought that faculty and staff were doing great were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Students were asked, “What about your Wolfpack Welcome Week experience was most impactful to you and why?” More than half of the first-year and transfer students who shared that they met new people like them were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Students were asked, “What can NC State do to improve your sense of belonging or community?” A little more than half of the first-year and transfer students who shared their personal challenges with their sense of belonging and community were from the College of Agriculture and Life Science

Students were asked, “Please describe how the events you attended provided you with an opportunity to form a sense of community with fellow students.” A little less than half of first-year and transfer students who shared how their sense of community grew through meeting others like them were from the College of Agriculture and Life Science.

Additional Theme to Note

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)*. 7 first-year and 22 transfer students responded with the *Other (please describe)* option. The most popular theme among the transfer students was the decision not to attend or inability to attend due to being a non-traditional student. This included students being older than the traditional student and not feeling like they’d fit in. It also includes students with families and other responsibilities. Other students are unable to attend due to commuting, being online, or being a distance education student. Additional themes showed that some chose not to attend due to their own disinterest or for personal challenges in their lives. Almost all the students who shared personal challenges were from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Half of the students who shared their non-traditional student experiences also shared that distance played a role in not attending WWW.

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](#).