

# **Fall 2021 First Term Survey**

## **Qualitative Analysis Report**

**November 24, 2021**

**Overall Summary**

**Prepared by: DASA Assessment**

## 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 Week" 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 and transfer student respondents of the fall 2021 First Term Survey. Below are a few highlights about this project.

### Population and Respondent Information

The fall 2021 First Term Survey was sent to all 4,981 new first-year students and 39% (N=1,947) completed the survey. For transfer students, all 1,389 were invited to complete the survey and 30% responded (N=417). 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 organized into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. From there, the data were then de-identified and uploaded to Google Sheets. Using an inductive approach, DASA Assessment staff and a student worker read through all of 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 (i.e., 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?” 634 first-year students and 81 transfer students answered the question. Most students discussed the impact of having opportunities to interact and experience the campus.

- **Social opportunities (general)** – Most student comments included some mention of meeting new people, engaging with others, finding things in common with peers, or feeling a sense of community through new connections, as the way that Wolfpack Welcome Week was most impactful to them.
  - “What was most impactful to me was seeing everyone come together and being able to make new friends. This was impactful to me because it really helped me find my feet at college.”
  - “The friendships made because I didn’t know anyone beforehand really, and then I met people and began to hang with them regularly.”
  - “I think meeting new people was the most impactful thing since I was able to start forming a new community away from home.”
- **Being in spaces with people “like me”** - Some students elaborated on the social impact of Wolfpack Welcome Week by describing the comfort they felt being around others with common identities or experiences:
  - “I loved the transfer student event because prior to that, I didn’t know any transfer students.”
  - “The Black Student Bash was most impactful to me because it comforted me to see other students who look like me fill the auditorium and have a good time.”
  - “I really enjoyed the out of state activity because I met some great people who were also from out of state which made me feel more comfortable being here.”
  - “If the LGBT symposium was part of this, I think this was the most impactful because I felt safe and comfortable with people who identify similar to me and I was able to find clubs related to my identity and met new and cool people.”
- **Discovering involvement opportunities** – Many students reported that finding involvement opportunities on campus was impactful during Wolfpack Welcome Week:

- “The student organization fair was extremely helpful for me, as I joined email lists for many clubs, then was able to pick which clubs I wanted to be a member of from there.”
- “I think the activities in Talley was fun and showed a lot of different things that go on in the school.”
- “I found a lot of clubs I was interested in joining, which was nice because I really wanted to try to make friends here.”
- **Excitement and unity being at NC State** – Students also frequently mentioned the impact of being in a fun and communal atmosphere during the Wolfpack Welcome Week events:
  - “The excitement of students and staff that we were finally here. It made the long process worth it.”
  - “Definitely Convocation because I got to see how big my class was and it was really special to see that.”
  - “The Midnight Run; seeing so many people excited and happy to be there really helped it sink in that I was finally on campus.”

### Student 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.” 649 first-year students and 83 transfer students responded to this question. Most students who responded described the ways that they were able to meet new people and get involved through Wolfpack Welcome Week.

- **Connecting with new people, both “like me” and different from me** – Most students appreciated opportunities to meet and spend time with new people during Wolfpack Welcome Week. Many students specifically talked about the value in meeting others who were going through similar experiences as them (e.g., being a new NC State student, sharing an identity). Other students described feeling enriched from meeting diverse students with different backgrounds than them.
  - “I was able to go to these events and talk to many different people. Come to find out most of them were freshmen too and they had the same worries or excitement over the new school year. We really bonded over this and many more things which I think helped us form a sense of community.”
  - “Seeing, meeting, and speaking with people different from me but sharing a common interest helped me get a feel of the community.”

- **Opportunity for interaction and strengthening friendships** – Some students elaborated on the social benefits of Wolfpack Welcome Week by sharing that they formed new friend groups around the connections they made during Welcome Week, or that they were able to bond with roommates and other existing contacts during events that led to longer-lasting connections after events were over. Some students specifically mentioned their appreciation for activities that were fun and team-based.
  - “I attended with my roommate and our suitemates, so it made us feel more connected as a ‘family.’”
  - “The events I attended gave some of my new friends and I something to bond over and go do together rather than just walking around or talking.”
  - “I played capture the flag and that allowed me to meet new people while also exercising and having fun.”
- **Discovering opportunities on campus** – Students also described opportunities to learn about involvement and campus resources as an aspect of the sense of community they developed during Wolfpack Welcome Week.
  - “It honestly made me realize all that NC State has to offer in forms of involvement, sports, community groups and much else. It made me feel like an actual student. It made me realize ‘Wow, I’m a college student here. Look at all my options!’”
  - “By going to the WWW events, I was able to meet other new students, interact with those in my living and learning village, and figure out what kind of groups I wanted to be one of my campus communities. I also felt more connected to the school through the information I learned, the different places I was able to find my way around to, and the overall friendliness of other students that led to a development of a sense of community.”

### Missing from Wolfpack Welcome Week

Students were asked, “Based upon your Wolfpack Welcome Week participation, what was missing from your Winter Welcome Week experience?” 602 first-year students and 74 transfer students responded to this question. Many comments were about time conflicts with move-in and class, desires for different information, and the lack of Packapalooza/event cancellations.

- **Lack of time to attend events due to conflicts** – The most frequent responses to the question were about not having time to attend events due to the overlap with move-in and the start of classes. Some students who made these comments suggested scheduling changes or including more events to give more attendance options.

- “I feel like there wasn't enough time between move in and classes starting to gain a foothold.”
- “More events. Classes got in the way for some of the events I wanted to attend.”
- “I wish I had moved in sooner so I could have participated in more of the events.”
- **Information about campus resources and academics** – Some students expressed interest in hearing more information to prepare them for the academic transition to NC State, as well as other information about campus resources.
  - “I feel more needed to be explained about how classes worked and about how professors teach.”
  - “The experience that was missing was learning more about the college life.”
  - “I think that it would have been helpful to have a campus walkthrough so that we had a good idea of campus resources and their location. Wolfpack Wandering was great but I still felt a little lost on some parts of campus.”
- **Smaller groups/smaller events** – Some students described feeling that events were overcrowded or overwhelming, and that they would have liked to interact in smaller-group event settings.
  - “I think more events that were specialized and smaller would have been nice because I have difficulty meeting new people in large groups, which were what most of the events consisted of.”
  - “Just felt really crowded in some places, wish there were some quieter events.”
  - “I think what I missed the most was a chance to connect with people on an individual level, and feel more swept up in the crowd than anything.”
- **Packapalooza and event cancellations** – Some students expressed disappointment that Packapalooza was not part of Wolfpack Welcome Week in 2021, and that some planned events had been cancelled/rained out.

### Common Experience

First-year students were asked, “During what specific class, course assignment, activity, or event did you discuss CliftonStrengths for Students?” 536 students responded to this question and gave the following answers:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advising meetings</li> <li>● ALS 103</li> <li>● BCH 103</li> <li>● Career Identity Workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction to Humanities and Social Sciences</li> <li>● Leadership Development Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PRT 150</li> <li>● PSE 295</li> <li>● PA Pack Chat</li> <li>● SLC 101</li> <li>● SLE Events</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CH 101</li> <li>• COM 202</li> <li>• COM 112</li> <li>• COS 100</li> <li>• CSSC 290</li> <li>• E 144</li> <li>• E 102</li> <li>• Engineering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</li> <li>• ENV 100</li> <li>• ENV 101</li> <li>• ERE 290</li> <li>• EYE Extravaganza</li> <li>• FLE 101</li> <li>• GSP 250</li> <li>• HESS 237</li> <li>• HSS 120</li> <li>• Weekly summer meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LSC 103</li> <li>• M 100</li> <li>• MA 141</li> <li>• Meetings for New Student Athletes</li> <li>• MIE 201</li> <li>• MSA</li> <li>• Orientation class</li> <li>• Pack Bridge</li> <li>• Pack Promise</li> <li>• Panhellenic activity</li> <li>• Paper Science Engineering Classes</li> <li>• Park Scholars</li> <li>• Personal and Professional Identity Development</li> <li>• Pre-Health Club</li> <li>• PRK 101</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• STS 302</li> <li>• Student Resource Panel</li> <li>• T 101</li> <li>• TRIO</li> <li>• University Honors and Scholars Program</li> <li>• USC 101</li> <li>• USC 110</li> <li>• USP 110</li> <li>• Wilsons Strategies for Success</li> </ul>
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## Sources of Stress

### Student Struggles

Students were asked, “What have been your biggest struggles at NC State so far?” 943 first-year students and 255 transfer students responded to this question with a variety of responses.

- **Academic workload and adjusting to rigor**– Many students stated that managing coursework and workloads overall were a struggle for them, with some specifically mentioning studying and exams:
  - “My biggest struggle is the academics. The workload is a bit more extreme than what I did for 4 years in high school, even with AP courses.”

- “Balancing studying for multiple exams in one week with the rest of the normal homework load.”
- “Just keeping up will all the work. It's basically a relentless flow of work [that] never ceases, so it occasionally gets a little overwhelming.”
- “The biggest struggle I have had at NC so far is in the academic realm. I find it hard to diligently study well in advance for my exams.”
- **Time management and competing priorities** – Many students specifically named time management as a struggle, and some elaborated by describing difficulty balancing academics with their social lives, involvement, athletic teams, and/or employment obligations:
  - “My biggest struggles at NC State so far have been managing my time correctly because I tend to procrastinate.”
  - “Balancing work and academic life. I feel not part of the community at State because I have no time since I work a full time job and take a full time load.”
  - “Trying to balance academics, social, and personal life all at one time.”
  - “My biggest struggle at NC State so far is trying to time manage my time for classes, academics, tutoring while still being involved in things such as clubs and sorority.”
- **Social acclimation and sense of community**– Many students described struggling to make friends. Common related themes were feelings of loneliness, difficulties getting involved, and finding a sense of community.
  - “Feeling like I have yet to find a set group of friends.”
  - “Making new friends and stepping out of my comfort zone (getting involved).”
  - “Finding a sense of community, connect with others, and finding social groups or clubs for Latinos.”
  - “Being away from home and not making a lot of friends, i.e. being lonely.”
- **Personal wellness and stress** - Students mentioned various aspects of personal wellbeing they struggled with, the greatest of which being mental health and dealing with stress. Other students mentioned struggles with motivation, feelings of homesickness, and financial worries. Respondents described many of these issues as interrelated.
  - “I have mainly struggled with my personal mental health issues which has caused a lot of academic and social issues.”
  - “Finding motivation to push forward, and I constantly worry if I will receive any financial aid for the spring semester.”



- “Being homesick and finding ways to get rid of anxiety.”
- “Feeling depressed because even though I work really hard, I’m not getting good test grades.”
- “Feeling underprepared coming from a community college, trying to balance school/work/extracurriculars, finances.”
- **Other adjustments to NC State** – Various minor themes emerged about how students struggled with other aspects of adjusting to life at NC State:
  - Navigation around campus – Includes locating classes and other destinations on campus
    - “Getting around to the opposite side of campus as well as knowing where to go for certain things.”
  - Transportation to campus – Issues getting to campus, including driving, parking, and the bus system (note that mostly transfer students offered these responses)
    - “Transportation every day has been the biggest problem for me. I have to commute every morning from my house to campus, then after parking, the bus is sometimes really late, and I am sometimes rushing to get to class.”
  - Uncertainty about major – Some students expressed stress over not having a major or wondering if their major is right for them.
    - “Having enough time to be able to get all of my work done along with everything else I need to do. This with the added on the stress of not knowing what major I want to go into yet with class registration approaching quickly.”

## Sources of Support

### Support needed from faculty and staff

Students were asked, “What support do you think you need from NC State faculty and staff to be successful during your first year?” 847 first-year students and 222 transfer students responded to this question with a variety of responses.

- **Academic support resources** – The most common response from students was about the need for academic support and tutoring. Many students who responded to this question simply stated “tutoring,” “Academic Success Center,” etc., while others elaborated slightly more:
  - “I need more academic support and strategies.”

- “I may need to attend some tutoring sessions to bring my grade up in some classes.”
- “Opportunity for additional studying or academic guidance as I’m a non-traditional student.”
- **Advising support** – Some students described the need for advising support, specifically mentioning the need for help with decisions around their major and class selection.
  - “I need support from advisors in particular. It is stressful thinking about planning my classes for the upcoming semesters.”
  - “I think it would be good to have regularly scheduled advising meetings to help me through how to achieve my academic goals.”
  - “Help with planning for my major and the path into my major.”
- **Other campus resources** – Minor themes emerged around other campus resources such as counseling, financial assistance, and career guidance.
  - “I need to talk to someone who knows about any scholarships, and maybe even a faculty member to talk too.”
  - “I definitely need counseling on mental health, but I’m afraid if I reach out, I won’t have enough time to go to appointments and my reasons won’t be legitimate enough to receive help.”
  - “I think I need a little direction on what jobs will be available to me with my major after I graduate. And also where to apply for said jobs.”
  - “Maybe sending emails to some students that are struggling with any class and ask if they need office hours or any other type of support. Like counseling or others.”
- **Moral support and flexibility** – Some students reported the need for encouragement, flexibility, and understanding from faculty and staff, both inside and outside the classroom.
  - “I think I need them to be more understanding and flexible. This is us getting back into school life while also juggling the struggles of transitioning into college life. We can only do so much.”
  - “I would need understanding and empathy in the case I had a personal issue come up that interfered with my academic ability.”
  - “I just need to know that things will get better. NC State faculty have been great at guiding me along and letting me know that things are okay.”

- “Any amount of support or encouragement to keep going is greatly appreciated and goes a long way. To be specific, encouraging me to not stop what I am doing. Encouragement is the best thing I can receive.”
- **Clear communication and guidance** – Some students expressed the need for general guidance and communication from faculty and staff, while others specifically mentioned clarity and guidance in terms of academic work.
  - “Helping me out when necessary and being able to respond to emails in a timely fashion.”
  - “Better communication with the professors and clarity with the expectation of assignment.”
  - “More helpful time management tools and outlines for when things are due.”

## 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 Alison Krowiak ([amkrowia@ncsu.edu](mailto:amkrowia@ncsu.edu)) in DASA Assessment. You can also request access to the responses of a particular student population by submitting a [data request](#).