

**Review Team Report
Program Review, Academic Success Program
Western Carolina University
Fall 2010**

I. Description of Site Visit

The Administrative Program Review for the Academic Success Program at Western Carolina University took place on November 17-19, 2010. The review team consisted of Tammy Haskett (director of Orientation) and Niall Michelsen (associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences), both of Western Carolina, and Chris Caplinger, director of First-Year Experience at Georgia Southern University. The team met with Linda Stanford (provost), Fred Hinson (senior associate vice chancellor), Melissa Wargo and David Onder (assistant vice chancellor and assessment coordinator, both in Institutional Planning and Effectiveness) and representatives of the following functional areas and groups of students:

- Student Affairs, Admissions, Orientation and Financial Aid
- Success Centers (writing and tutoring) and Supplemental Instruction leaders
- Advising, Student Support Services and Disability Services
- Current ASP students
- Faculty and chairs from departments that offer ASP courses in the summer
- Current ASP Peer Mentors
- Residential Living

The review team also met several times with Janina DeHart (coordinator of the Academic Success Program) and toured the Academic Success Program facilities.

II. Academic Success Program Overview

Program Purpose and Mission

The Academic Success Program (ASP) provides structure and support for a group of conditionally admitted students at Western Carolina University. Students invited to participate in ASP do not meet that year's requirements for regular admission, but have a profile that suggests they could be successful at the university.¹ The program has undergone significant changes in its 35-year history. The review focused on ASP since 2007 when the program became its own administrative unit.

ASP aligns well with both Western Carolina's and the UNC General Administration's missions, particularly as they relate to access and academic preparedness. ASP gives students the opportunity to earn admission to Western Carolina. In turn, it allows the university to increase its enrollment in a fashion designed to maximize student success and retention.

Program Structure

ASP is a bridge program, designed to help students make a successful transition to Western Carolina. ASP begins with a mandatory summer term in which students take seven credit hours over a six week term. Students may continue in fully-admitted status in the fall semester if they earn a 2.0 GPA during the summer.

¹ Recommendation 4.2.6 of *WCU's Response to Major Findings and Proposed Initiatives for UNC Tomorrow* indicates that ASP is intended for "promising underprepared students." We caution against the use of the term "underprepared" here, as it is usually associated with remediation. Since the seven credits students take in ASP are each credit-bearing toward graduation, using "underprepared" here may be misleading.

The six-week summer session is intensely structured. Key attributes include:

- Block-enrolled cohort structure around a theme that includes service and experiential learning components;
- A uniform schedule for students;
- Small classes (capping at about 20), each of which enforces a mandatory attendance policy;
- Supplemental Instruction (SI) in social science courses;
- Mandatory study hall for students who do not participate in SI on a given day;
- Common residential living experience;
- Required and optional programming; and,
- Two required meetings with academic advisors where students complete the Academic Hope Scale and the College Student Inventory Report, which are used to assist students in playing to their strengths and in improving in areas where they may struggle (additionally, ASP solicits letters of reference from high school teachers to assist the advisement staff in working with ASP students).

ASP students sign a participation agreement prior to their enrollment that outlines their responsibilities, which include adherence to a strict conduct policy. Students who violate this policy during the summer are removed from the program.

In the fall semester, students who continue from the summer are assigned a peer mentor, who is a former ASP student successfully retained as a Western Carolina upper-class student. ASP students meet at least three times with their academic advisor. Faculty also provide periodic academic progress reports for ASP students in order that ASP staff and academic advisors may intervene. Students have the option of taking a Western PEAKS transition course, and those who remain undeclared in the spring are encouraged to take COUN 150: Career and Major Exploration.

Program Assessment and Planning

The ASP self-study identified assessment as an area of weakness. We find that most assessment is related to satisfaction rather than outcomes, although some improvement in assessing outcomes has been made recently.

Historically, ASP has asked students to complete a program evaluation at the end the summer term. Overall, student satisfaction with the program has been strong. Since 2007, 92 percent or more of respondents have answered “true” to each of the following global questions:

- I am glad that I participated in the summer session.
- Being in summer classes has helped me feel confident about starting college this fall.²
- I believe that the summer session has helped to prepare me to be successful in college.
- I would recommend this program to other students.

² The program may wish to re-phrase this question if it plans to continue its use. ASP is itself a collegiate program, not a precursor to college. At least some students do see the program as something other than college (one student made reference to “when college starts in the fall” during our meetings). This should be a perception that the program seeks to change.

This evaluation also measured students' satisfaction with component parts of the program. Below are the percentages of students who evaluated the specified component "good" or "excellent" in 2010:

- Summer Class Schedule: 51%
- Study Hall: 45%
- Service Learning Experience: 70%
- Class Field Trip: 74%
- Meetings with Academic Advisor: 82%

The ASP coordinator has also met informally with both faculty and students to assess aspects of ASP which have resulted in changes to program design. In Fall 2010, ASP has formalized a student feedback mechanism through the creation of the ASP Student Advisory Board. The group is making substantive recommendations, including one for changes to the class schedule for Summer 2011.

While ASP can document student satisfaction with the program and is responsive in areas where satisfaction is lacking, the level of assessment of outcomes is lower. This has been particularly the case for individual component parts of ASP. For instance, we found no evidence of systematic assessment of the case-management system of advising, which is an area singled out both by the *UNC Tomorrow* report and the ASP self-study. We also found no plan to assess the efficacy of the peer mentor program. Two new program components, however, are being assessed: an extensive evaluation of the Supplemental Instruction program in 2010 (included as Appendix X of the self-study) and the evaluation of ASP Electronic Portfolios (which align with the ASP learning outcomes) now underway.

ASP does track, with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, retention and GPA data (summer and cumulative). One year (fall-to-fall) retention has risen for each year from the 2007 to the 2009 cohorts (from 63% to 76%). Summer GPA for ASP also improved, from 3.17 in 2007³ to 3.41 in 2009, but dropped substantially in 2010 to 2.88. First-year cumulative GPAs have likewise trended upward for ASP students, from an average of 1.85 in 2007-08 to 2.24 in 2009-10. Care should be taken in evaluating these longitudinal trends, however, since the demographics of ASP have changed over the years and academic and retention data typically vary by demographic (the review team requested a demographic breakdown of ASP; data for the 2009 and 2010 cohorts are attached to this report as Appendices A1 and A2).⁴ The review team also requested information on term GPAs (attached as Appendix B). These data, which also included a Spring cumulative GPA for each cohort, do not seem to align with Appendix W or GPAs reported on pages 14 and 16 of the self-study and so may warrant further investigation. Nonetheless, they demonstrate stark drops between summer and fall GPAs (for example, in 2009, the GPA mean dropped from 3.44 in summer to 2.21 in fall).

We concur with ASP's self-study that the program can make significant improvements in the area of assessment and will make recommendations in Section VI below.

³ See page 16 of the self-study; page 14 reports 3.01.

⁴ Comparing ASP with the regularly admitted, non-honors entering cohort can also be illustrative, although as above, caution is warranted in making these comparisons because ASP differs demographically from the regularly admitted cohort. In 2007 and 2008, the retention rate for ASP was eight and seven percentage points lower than the rate for regularly admitted, non-honors students in those respective cohorts; in 2009, ASP's retention rate was four points higher. Unlike retention, the difference between mean fall, spring, and first-year GPAs is pronounced. For 2009-10, the average cumulative GPA was 2.24 for ASP students and 2.92 for regularly admitted, non-honors students.

III. Staffing

Qualifications

We find the qualifications and skill sets of the program staff a good fit for ASP. The coordinator plays two distinct roles: one highly administrative and another that is heavily counseling-oriented. In the event that Janina DeHart were to leave the position, it may be difficult to replace her given the current classification as a coordinator.

One area for improvement is in professional development in assessment, which often doesn't receive the attention it requires in many graduate programs. We'll make a recommendation about this in Section VI.

Resources and Support

The self-report notes that there are periods of significant stress for the staff in administering ASP and that additional staff is necessary. We acknowledge that being able to allocate additional staffing resources may be difficult in the current budget climate. We must also acknowledge, however, that our proposals recommend spending significant additional time on assessment and that the coordinator cannot add these responsibilities without changes. We'll make two recommendations about this in Section VI: one to add a graduate assistant and another to consider whether a broader organizational restructuring could present opportunities for synergy and reduce overlap.

Professional Activity and Service

The ASP coordinator has been involved at a high level in NACADA, serving as Region 3 conference chair, a member of the Region 3 steering committee, and as the state representative for North Carolina. This service allows her to develop relationships with other advising professionals and bring best practices back to Western Carolina, and is therefore valuable for ASP. Her terms of service to NACADA are ending, and this may be an opportunity to refocus on other professional development activities, such as participation in conferences on assessment or FYE, which often have sessions on bridge programs such as ASP.

IV. Operational Facilities and Budget

Like many well-run programs, we find that ASP could do more with more resources, but as noted above, we note the constraints in providing them. In addition to funding the graduate student position our primary recommendation in Section VI is to change the Summer School funding mechanism.

V. Summary of Unit Strengths and Areas of Improvement

Throughout our meetings with administrators, faculty, various functional areas, and students, we found strong support for the Academic Success Program's mission, staff and implementation. Praise from students was often effusive, with several noting how the program had changed their lives for the better. One said that ASP was the best thing that ever happened to him. On the whole, students didn't point to one area of the program that was especially helpful, although they were clear about the value of SI sessions and their appreciation of Janina DeHart. More than anything, it appears that the intensity of

the summer ASP experience drives a level of student connection that makes a lasting impression on them.

The faculty members with whom we spoke are strong supporters of ASP as well. The recommendations that we make in regard to the funding mechanism for Summer School is designed in part to preserve this positive relationship, by ensuring that faculty and their departments don't have a disincentive to participate in ASP.

We find objective support for participants' enthusiasm in the data presented, which demonstrate an impressive level of success for the program in the summer. The sharp decline in student performance after the summer is not unusual for a conditional-admission program, although it is nonetheless troubling.

As we noted above, we concur with the self-report's finding that assessment is an area of potential growth and improvement for ASP. Better assessment is both an issue of program efficacy and also resources, as being able to demonstrate that the program has a positive effect on retention will become even more important than it is already especially as the UNC General Administration begins to tie funding to retention. Almost half of our recommendations relate directly to assessment. While most specifically treat ASP, others involve broader institutional assessment.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendations related to assessment:

1. Collect and analyze data to answer this question: "What factors best predict student success at Western Carolina?" Success can and should be defined several ways including term and cumulative GPAs and credit hours earned at various intervals. However, given the UNC General Administration's focus on retention and graduation rates as determinants of future funding, being able to answer this question in terms of these measures is essential.

- Entrance criteria: The aggregated data presented in the self-study report suggest that, in keeping with national norms, un-weighted high school GPA is a significantly stronger predictor of success than SAT scores. Being able to demonstrate this through a more rigorous statistical analysis that quantifies the percentage of variance explained by each variable independently could persuade decision makers to weigh high school GPA more strongly in admitting students into ASP (or in reality, to Western Carolina generally).
- Long-term, CatWalk gives Western Carolina the ability to collect a broad array of input variables (for instance, amount of time spent studying in high school, first-generation status, etc.) that might be difficult to collect otherwise and could lead to a more nuanced analysis of what predicts success.

2. In a similar vein, build retention and GPA models for determining what predicts long-term success for ASP students. This information might prompt a decision to raise the GPA students must earn during the summer in order to continue in the fall. We strongly suspect that students who earn summer GPAs in the 2.0-2.5 range are at significantly higher risk of attrition and for ending up on academic probation. There is broad-based support among various campus stakeholders for raising the summer GPA students must earn to continue. This decision would, of course, decrease the rate of success for students in the

program in the summer and the headcount that continues into the fall, but it would likely raise the retention rate reported to the GA. And just as importantly, it would not string students along who have a very low probability of earning a degree.

3. Assess student learning and program outcomes for key individual initiatives in ASP, especially those designed to support ASP students in the fall. As noted in Section II above, the case-management system of advising and the fall peer mentor program need to be assessed. While assessing student satisfaction is certainly appropriate, it should not be a replacement for more substantive assessment of outcomes.

4. Use information generated above in #1, #2 and #3 to target interventions on improving performance in the fall semester.

- ASP's success rate in the summer is very high, but GPAs fall precipitously in the fall. As noted in part V above, this is not atypical for conditional-admit programs, but it does create perhaps the best opportunity for significant improvement in ASP.
- Currently, many ASP interventions are designed for all ASP students. Better data about who needs the intervention the most (or perhaps, who is most likely to respond to it) could lead to more targeted intervention, more effective use of limited staffing and financial resources, and an increase in program effectiveness.

5. As noted in Section III, seek out opportunities for professional development in assessment for ASP program staff.

- To the extent funding is available, one option might be to attend an assessment workshop, such as one offered by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- The program should also seek feedback on constructing assessment instruments from Institutional Planning and Effectiveness or others with survey design expertise. Particularly on the overall evaluation, ASP may want to eliminate some questions for which there is very little variation from year to year and to convert true/false questions to a Likert-scale (perhaps: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).

Other recommendations:

6. Build permanent funding for a year-round graduate student into the ASP budget. Currently the ASP coordinator is stretched thin, and this review recommends a significant increase in assessment activities that will fall primarily to the coordinator. A well-trained graduate assistant could assume some of the student-staff supervision and other responsibilities now shouldered by the coordinator, allowing her to re-direct energies to the assessment activities we recommend above. Monies should not be redirected from Supplemental Instruction (which is assessed positively and highly regarded by students) or the peer mentor program, at least at this point (as we note above, the peer mentor initiative needs additional assessment, but is a significant intervention in the fall, and so should not be abandoned unless assessment results argue for doing so).

7. Work toward stability in program size and admissions criteria for ASP. Once determinants of success are more rigorously identified (see recommendations #1 and #2 above), admissions standards and enrollment should remain as constant as possible. The changing nature of the composition of ASP,

both in program size and admissions criteria, creates challenges throughout planning and implementation of the program that could be detrimental to student success. What works well for 180 students might not work as well for 60. Students with lower high school GPAs might need a different sort of intervention than those with higher high school GPAs. Changes also make it very difficult to assess program efficacy from year to year.

8. Consider whether study hall should be required during the summer. Students in our meetings reported that study hall time was not productive. It was also the area in which students reported the least amount of satisfaction in 2010. The self-report does not provide any evidence that it is effective in helping students be successful, although it is possible that it is. We're aware that the ASP Student Advisory Board has recommended shortening the study hall period and moving it to the morning in 2011. This may make it more effective; we recommend more substantive assessment of study hall if implemented in this fashion. Some general observations:

- The study environments most effective for specific students vary widely. It may be that study hall is hindering rather than helping some students study, even when implemented just as intended.
- The mandatory nature of study hall may be one factor that contributes to the sense of some students that ASP is not really college.
- We acknowledge that mandatory study hall might be improving the attendance in the Supplemental Instruction sessions, which do seem to be much more effective.

9. Consider ways to more gradually step-down the structure in place for ASP students. Currently, ASP in the summer is intensely structured. Students take classes together, live together in the residence hall, have strict attendance policies in their courses, and participate in mandatory study hall/SI sessions as well as a series of required programs outside of class (Catamount Basics, What's HOT?). Several students articulated that ASP was more like summer camp or high school than like college itself. In the fall, students have follow-up with peer mentors and required meetings with advisors, but the rest of the structure falls away, and does so in a way that students perceive as very abrupt. It may be that the "Fall Crash" in GPAs is exacerbated in part by this transition from intense structure during the summer to the relative freedom of the fall.

- One method for stepping-down the structure could include lessening the formal requirements as ASP progresses in the summer while simultaneously articulating 1) students' responsibility for doing these things on their own initiative; and, 2) the rationale for stepping down the structure (it won't be there in the fall). Some areas to consider are:
 - Mandatory attendance in class.
 - Mandatory study hall (if continued; see #8).
 - Optional programming might also be lessened.
 - We would be hesitant to de-emphasize the SI sessions, which were highly evaluated both in the formal assessment and something students singled out as particularly helpful in our meetings with them.
- Another method might be to provide slightly more passive structure in the fall, such as clustering ASP students in small groups in the residence halls (and maybe assigning peer mentors based on those clusters).

10. Preserve ASP's funding from student affairs and orientation and revise the funding mechanism from Summer School tuition. The benefits of ASP in terms of increased continuing headcount accrue to

Western Carolina as a whole, and therefore the costs of supporting ASP should be spread out as much as practical as well. Currently ASP earns a “profit” on the difference in the tuition charged to ASP students and the direct costs of instruction of ASP classes. This “profit” is then used to support its programmatic mission. Departments who offer classes in ASP are not rewarded at all for teaching in ASP, and in fact may lose the ability to offer other courses for which they would receive profit sharing because faculty teaching ASP are not available. We propose:

- Tuition generated by ASP students would no longer be deducted from the profit sharing formula for the departments delivering the ASP courses.
- ASP faculty would be paid in the same manner as other faculty, and the Summer School profit sharing model would reward departments offering courses in ASP.
- The non-faculty programmatic expenses necessary to support ASP (SI leaders, peer mentors, supplies and operating expenses, professional development for the coordinator) would be treated as a general expense of Summer School and would be deducted from tuition received prior to the distribution of profit sharing to the colleges and departments. This funding mechanism effectively spreads the programmatic costs of ASP across all departments offering Summer School. As a practical matter, it would reduce the profit sharing available for distribution to all departments (had it been in place for 2009, our computations are that the reduction would have been roughly 16%; in 2010, it would have been closer to 8%). Not receiving a reduction in revenues, of course, would be those departments offering courses in ASP. As noted above, they would receive profit sharing for these courses for the first time.

11. Examine the extent to which the personnel in ASP could be combined with the Advising Center and/or the Student Success Center. There is significant overlap in what the ASP and both of these units do in advising and mentoring students. We felt we did not have sufficient interaction with the other units to evaluate whether combining them with ASP would be a good decision. We do, however, make the following observations:

- Potentially, combination of units could lessen the stress and workload on the ASP coordinator during peak times.
- Reorganization might also present an opportunity to reclassify the coordinator position at a higher level should responsibilities and budget permit.
- On the other hand, reorganization would potentially create reporting distance between ASP and the Provost’s office that could adversely affect ASP.

12. Consider expanding eligibility into ASP.

- *Students not mandated to participate in ASP:* In the past, regularly-admitted students had the option of volunteering into ASP. The rationale for allowing regularly-admitted students into the program is that they could provide positive role models for other students, although according to Janina DeHart, her analysis of the data didn’t support that they made higher GPAs. This practice was discontinued for 2010. There was some discussion in our meetings about allowing students to opt-in again. We noted that several of the students we met with mentioned to us without prompting that they weren’t required to attend ASP but did so voluntarily. In our final meeting (with Residence Life), we posed the question about whether students’ identifying themselves as “opt-in” students created friction with those who were required to attend as a condition of admission. Brian Boyer noted that it did create divisions, that other students perceived it as annoying. This should be investigated further before opening up ASP to regularly admitted students once again. In the event that Western Carolina does make the decision to

expand the program in this fashion, it might be prudent to directly address this potential friction with “opt-in” students.

- *Athletes:* Currently, athletes are excluded from ASP. One advisor indicated that this was an NCAA requirement. We learned later that it is not. It may be that for financial or other reasons excluding athletes from ASP is a sound decision, but other institutions find that the conditional-admit process works well for athletes.

Appendix A1: Fall 2010 New Student Demographics

	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>% of Male Students</u>	<u>% of Female Students</u>	<u>% of Minority Students*</u>	<u>% In State</u>	<u>Avg SAT Verbal</u>	<u>Avg SAT Math</u>	<u>Avg HS GPA</u>
Honors	158	38.0%	62.0%	5.7%	91.8%	633	625	4.30
Regular	1175	47.75	52.3%	15.5%	91.5%	506	519	3.46
ASP	107	56.1%	43.9%	23.4%	91.6%	462	468	2.86

Top Ten Origins For ASP Students

Mecklenburg	14
Forsyth	9
Wake	9
Gaston	7
Catawba	6
Haywood	4
Buncombe	4
Union	4
Harnett	3
Henderson	3

ASP Racial Breakdown

African American	17
Asian	3
Hispanic	2
Multiracial	3
Native American	0
Native Hawaiian	0
Non Resident Alien	0
Unknown	3
White	79

Top Ten Origins for Regular Students

Mecklenburg	103
Wake	83
Buncombe	62
Catawba	49
Gaston	44
Cabarrus	40
Forsyth	38
Haywood	37
Guilford	36
Iredell	32

Regular Student Racial Breakdown

African American	92
Asian	8
Hispanic	15
Multiracial	105
Native American	5
Native Hawaiian	1
Non Resident Alien	6
Unknown	19
White	969

Top Ten Origins for Honors Students

Catawba	11
Wake	8
Guilford	8

Honors Student Racial Breakdown

African American	3
Asian	1
Hispanic	0

Mecklenburg	8	Multiracial	5
Haywood	7	Native American	0
Buncombe	6	Native Hawaiian	0
Georgia	5	Non Resident Alien	0
Lincoln	5	Unknown	2
Johnston	4	White	147
Burke	4		

*Minority students are being defined as any student who does not define as white, unknown, or NRA.

Appendix A2: Fall 2009 New Student Demographics

	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>% of Male Students</u>	<u>% of Female Students</u>	<u>% of Minority Students*</u>	<u>% In State</u>	<u>Avg SAT Verbal</u>	<u>Avg SAT Math</u>	<u>Avg HS GPA</u>
Honors	169	33.7%	66.3%	4.1%	94.1%	627	620	4.29
Regular	1220	46.5%	53.5%	11.1%	91.4%	503	519	3.44
ASP	166	48.8%	51.2%	15.7%	89.9%	445	458	3.05

Top Ten Origins For ASP Students

Mecklenburg	16
Wake	14
Catawba	10
Guilford	9
Buncombe	9
Gaston	9
Forsyth	6
Rutherford	6
Union	6
Cabarrus	6

ASP Racial Breakdown

African American	22
Asian	2
Hispanic	1
Multiracial	0
Native American	1
Native Hawaiian	0
Non Resident Alien	1
Unknown	14
White	125

Top Ten Origins for Regular Students

Mecklenburg	86
Wake	76
Buncombe	73
Forsyth	62
Catawba	54
Jackson	49
Gaston	44
Cabarrus	37
Guilford	36
Cleveland	34

Regular Student Racial Breakdown

African American	93
Asian	7
Hispanic	21
Multiracial	9
Native American	5
Native Hawaiian	0
Non Resident Alien	9
Unknown	91
White	985

Top Ten Origins for Honors Students

Wake	12
Buncombe	11
Gaston	10

Honors Student Racial Breakdown

African American	1
Asian	2
Hispanic	1

Guilford	9	Multiracial	3
Mecklenburg	9	Native American	0
Jackson	8	Native Hawaiian	0
Union	6	Non Resident Alien	0
Cleveland	6	Unknown	11
Haywood	6	White	151
Henderson	5		

*Minority students are being defined as any student who does not define as white, unknown, or NRA.

Appendix B: Term GPAs for First-Year New Students by Admit Type

	Summer		Fall			Spring		
	#	Term	#	Term	Overall	#	Term	Overall
2007 Cohort								
Honors	0	-	125	3.252	3.252	112	3.279	3.308
Regular	14	2.893	987	2.529	2.534	866	2.587	2.630
ASP	147	3.117	147	1.865	2.526	128	1.898	2.208
2008 Cohort								
Honors	2	3.809	166	3.566	3.566	162	3.494	3.517
Regular	22	3.070	909	2.711	2.714	821	2.683	2.756
ASP	149	3.403	149	1.902	2.634	130	2.132	2.444
2009 Cohort								
Honors	1	4.000	169	3.425	3.425	154	3.331	3.384
Regular	57	2.783	1220	2.525	2.532	1061	2.597	2.671
ASP	167	3.436	167	2.211	2.772	154	2.163	2.575