From the Editors:

Regular readers of It’s Been Said will remember that in our Spring 2003 issue, we promised to look back at the freshmen entering in 2002 and see what has happened to these students since entering the university. We have the opportunity to do so in this issue, where we will compare the responses on the New Student Survey 2002 (NSS2002) with the responses to the Spartan Experience Questionnaire 2003 (SEQ2003). Although the 2002 freshmen were still in their first year at UNCG at the time they completed the SEQ in 2003, we still see opportunities for notable change in attitudes and behaviors.

The NSS2002 and the SEQ2003 are not versions of the same instrument, they are used for different purposes. However, some of the questions asked can be compared to each other because they use similar concepts, such as a question on the NSS2002 that asks whether or not a student plans to become involved in community service and a question on the SEQ2003 that asks if the student is currently participating in community service.

Clearly, we cannot report every response to both instruments in such a limited space. Our goal is to provide you with a picture of how UNCG has affected the students that have been a part of this community for almost a year. We have also included a first look at the NSS2003, so that we can begin to compare the freshmen of 2002 to those from 2003. As always, if you have questions or would like more detail about the results presented, feel free to contact Mark Davenport or Julie Atwood in the Division of Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office.

In this issue:

- A first look at 2003 freshmen p. 2
- The fall 2002 freshman class in their first year p. 3
- Creating community p. 3
- Community service and campus connection p. 4
- Leadership and campus connection p. 5
- Career Services and new students p. 5
- Student involvement p. 5
A first look at 2003 freshmen

First let us examine some preliminary results from the 2003 New Student Survey (NSS2003). We will focus on noteworthy findings related to student retention and academic issues. The NSS2003 was given to incoming freshmen during the SOAR program. We received responses from 1,775 of the 2,056 first-time freshmen students that ultimately enrolled at UNCG. This 86% response rate is a little less than the 92% response rate we had in 2002; a difference we assume was largely due to scheduling changes made in the 2003 program.

Figures 1 and 2 show a comparison of 2002 and 2003 freshman responses to questions about their choice of UNCG and their plans to transfer.

Figures 1

In Figure 3, comparisons of freshmen judgments of their primary academic strength and weakness (from a new item in the NSS2003) indicate that students tend to be more concerned about mathematics than any other discipline. It is particularly troubling (but, perhaps, not surprising) that almost half of the freshman class consider mathematics a primary weakness.

Two
Finally, we would like to report on another new item added to the New Student Survey in 2003: ‘I feel that the study habits I used in high school will help me to succeed at UNCG.’ Forty-nine percent of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement, only 28% agreed or strongly agreed (23% neither agreed or disagreed). The implication here is that students come to UNCG feeling underprepared. Predictably, the ‘underprepared’ respondents had significantly lower high school GPAs (3.43 vs. 3.63; Welch’s $F_{test} = 27.86, df = 2/947.05; p < .01$) and significantly lower predicted college GPAs (2.63 vs. 2.68; Welch’s $F = 10.98, df = 2/924.61; p < .01$) than did the ‘prepared’ group.

We offer only a brief view of the 2003 New Student Survey here and plan to present a more comprehensive summary in the near future. As the next several years roll by, we will be particularly interested in examining how these same variables change with time, reflecting the changing attitudes, perceptions, and needs of our freshmen.

**Creating community**

The mission of UNCG states that we are a “community in which people of any racial or ethnic identity, age, or background can achieve an informed appreciation of their own and different cultures” (UNCG, p. 9). To encourage such appreciation, we provide ways for students that have not had much social contact with people from other cultures to interact more with them in the course of their university experience. The data indicate that this goal is being achieved.

New freshmen entering in the fall of 2002 were asked to respond to the statement “My social contacts include people from other cultures and ethnic groups.” The results of that question are presented in Figure 4. While the majority of students did have some contact with individuals of differing cultural backgrounds, nearly 15% responded that they rarely or never had social contacts with people of a different cultural background.

![Figure 4](http://example.com/figure4.png)

The same students responded to the SEQ in spring of 2003, and were asked, “How often do you interact with persons from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds” … in several different environments. These responses were compared to the social contact question on the NSS2002. Of students who responded that they had rare social contact or no social contact at all with different ethnic or cultural groups (122 respondents), 54% now report that they interact often or very often with people of other cultures or ethnic background in their living environment, 66% in classroom situations, 37% at meal times, 38% at social functions, and 27% in student organizations.

We expected students to report multicultural contacts within the classroom environment. However, it is particularly encouraging that many students who reported that they rarely interacted with those from other cultures in high school are getting involved with those from other cultures in their living environment and at social functions in their very first semester at UNCG.
In a related question, students were asked how successful the UNCG community has been in providing them with opportunities to interact with or learn from people who are of different cultural backgrounds. Overall, 87% of the respondents report that UNCG was successful or very successful in providing those opportunities.

**Community service and campus connection**

Of the students surveyed with the NSS2002 that also completed the SEQ2003, 84% planned to complete community service. Yet of those planning to be involved in community service, only 21% are currently aware of and participating in community service activities. Forty-six percent are aware of opportunities but do not participate, and 33% are not aware of opportunities for community service.

The differences between those who participate in community service (blue bars) and those who do not participate (yellow bars) are shown in Figure 6. Of those who are currently participating in community service activities, 74% feel very much connected or quite a bit connected to UNCG, compared to 53% of those who do not participate. Not surprisingly, 25% of those who do not want to participate in community service feel very little connection to UNCG, while only 7% of those who do participate in community service feel very little connection to UNCG.

Figure 5 shows the responses of those students who reported that they rarely or never spent time with those from other cultural backgrounds while in high school. The percentages are the amount of time they now spend in their classrooms, living environment and at social functions with those from other cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Whether or not students are participating in community service has a relationship to other factors as well. Twenty-eight percent of those participating feel very much valued as an individual by the university, compared to 12% who do not participate. Those participating also report a higher quality of relationships with other students. Forty-eight percent report that their relationships with other students are characterized as very friendly, available, and supportive. Only 34% of those who do not participate in community service characterize their relationship with other students in the same way.
Whether or not students participate in community service is not a function of how many hours they work; more than 88% of the freshmen in this sample do not work on- or off-campus. Those who participate in community service still manage to study; there are no significant differences in reported study time between those who participate and those who do not.

Of some concern is the finding that of students who planned to participate in community service when they entered the university, 46% are aware of opportunities but do not participate, and 27% are not aware of opportunities but would like to participate. However, the students have had less than a full academic year on campus between these two measures, and may be focusing on academic success before adding community service to their schedule.

Leadership and campus connection

Students who participate in leadership activities also feel more connected to campus and more valued by the campus community; 34% of the students participating in leadership activities feel very much connected to UNCG, compared to 17% of those students who do not participate. Twenty-six percent of the students participating in leadership activities on campus feel very much valued as an individual, compared to 13% of those who do not participate in leadership activities.

The Office of Leadership and Service Learning has been actively marketing their programs during the past two years and it appears to be paying off; nearly two-thirds of the second semester freshmen (66%) are aware of opportunities for personal development and leadership on campus.

Career services and new students

The Career Services Center wants to establish relationships with UNCG students, and helping students to be aware of the services they offer is an important part of building that relationship. Of the students who responded to both the NSS2002 and the SEQ2003, 78% indicate that they are aware that CSC can assist them in choosing a major. Entering freshmen understand the value of internships, as evidenced by the more than 60% who responded on the NSS2002 that they plan to complete an internship during their study at UNCG. While most students have not yet arranged an internship, 58% of the people who answered the SEQ2003 are aware that the CSC will be able to assist in that process. In addition, 61% of the students are aware that CSC is available to assist with resume writing, and 64% are aware that CSC is available to help them find part-time jobs while in school.

Student involvement

The orientation staff and the student life staff encourage students to get involved on the campus to have a better college experience. The results of the SEQ2003 indicate that there are benefits to being involved. Of students who were involved in multicultural programs, 23% gave the highest rating in feeling valued as an individual by the university, compared to 14% of those who do not participate in multicultural programs. Of students that participate in student organizations on campus, 27% gave the highest rating of being valued as an individual, compared to 10% of those who do not participate in student organizations.

Figure 7 shows the extent to which students report feeling valued as an individual by the university. The blue bars represent those who participate very often in university functions; the yellow bars, those who do not participate very often in university functions.

Forty-four percent of students who report attending university functions very often also report feeling very much valued as an individual by the university, compared to 13% who do not participate in university functions very often.

We would like to believe that being involved in university-sponsored functions is related to feeling valued by the university. The results shown in Figure 7 support this belief, although other factors are surely involved as well and we cannot attribute the cause of ‘feeling valued’ to participation. The search for factors that influence students’ sense of connectedness with UNCG, (certainly an important correlate of student satisfaction, retention, and graduation) should, and will, continue.

References used in this publication: