First Year Success Program
Mission Statement

The Texas A&M International University First Year Success Program is dedicated to enhancing the educational, career, and personal success of first-time students. Student success is promoted by coordinating an array of services that are responsive to our students’ unique needs, and by personally linking the students to the appropriate service, such as tutoring, counseling, career services, test preparation, financial aid or other university support services. This is accomplished in bi-weekly individual sessions with student mentors throughout the freshman’s first year.

Program Description

This program began with a Title V grant 5 years ago designed to improve undergraduate retention. The Title V grant was under the auspices of the Office of the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. As the grant neared its final year, the university agreed to continue First Year Success as part of the Programs for Academic Support and Development. The program has been in the PASE department officially for approximately one and one half years, after a two year integration process, when the student mentors of the support services program and the academic advisors of the FYSP program were combined.

The program now exists as a group of 17 student mentors who serve all freshmen in the University Seminar Courses 1101 and 1102. The mentors are assigned students from the UNIV classes and meet with each student individually for at least one half hour bi-weekly for the two semesters of the students’ freshman year. The purpose of these meetings is to assist the new student with the variety of adjustments to college life. This entails various discussion topics as well as visits to different places on campus, in order to familiarize the student with the campus and all that is offered. The mentor establishes a rapport with each student, so that the student is comfortable discussing issues he or she may not want to discuss with anyone else.

The students who are hired as mentors are exceptional students, both academically as well as personally. They are junior, senior, or graduate level students and are required to maintain at least a 3.25 grade average as well as be involved in various activities or groups on campus and/or in the community. The mentors receive training on a number of topics, with heavy emphasis on recognizing potential problem areas as they meet with their students. An agenda is established prior to the semester start, and there is time allotted for off subject discussions.

The mentors are also responsible for providing a number of workshops throughout the semester for the University Seminar classes. The topics vary, but include motivation and budget planning. They also may arrange for outside speakers. At the end of each
workshop, and at the completion of the semester, each student who has participated is requested to complete a survey form indicating their satisfaction rating of the services performed.

Survey Results

The surveys continue to indicate a good level of satisfaction (89% or higher), but we did not meet our criteria of at least 90% on the 3 areas of satisfaction as described in the University AIER report. The number of surveys returned was low considering the number of freshmen served, especially during the fall semester. The FYSP department also had a 70% turnover rate in mentors due to graduation of staff. Prior to the Fall 2007 semester, the staff had been fairly constant over the last three years, with a larger number of existing mentors who served to assist the new mentors. We had 5 returning mentors for the 2007 fall semester and 12 new mentors. If we separate the surveys from the spring and fall semesters, the results from the spring semester indicate a higher satisfaction level than the fall. There was also a substantial difference in the number of students each mentor met with during the semester. In the spring, each mentor had less than 10 students weekly, and in the fall, each mentor had 25 students bi-weekly, for a total of 50 students. Couple the increased number of students with the majority of the mentors being brand new to the position and the results are less than the goals for the year. Consequently, training for the mentors will be increased over the Spring Semester 2008 and the timing of the delivery of the surveys will be changed to the classroom instead of the last mentor session.

Mentoring
In the spring of 2007 we worked with 66 freshmen from the GENU classes, weekly. This was prior to the change to UNIV. Of those 66, 92% or 61 students were satisfied with the services they received from the mentors. In the fall of 2007, we served approximately 600 students bi-weekly. We logged in 3,385 sessions through the implementation of the ACCUTRAK data collection system. We received a total of 219 surveys which indicated an 89% approval rating.

University Seminar 1101 Instructor Satisfaction with Mentor Performance
Data was not collected from the spring semester and 5 of 14 surveys were returned from the fall semester. The returned surveys did indicate 100% satisfaction, but we would like to increase the number of surveys returned. We will distribute the surveys at several of the last weekly meetings of the UNIV instructors instead of through the university email system.

Workshops
The mentors conducted several workshops for the General University and University Seminar classes. The returned surveys indicated a 90% satisfaction rate, which is below our goal. We will improve our training on the presentations we have as well as increase the variety of presentations we offer.