

Early College Report & Recommendations
Submitted by:
Transfer Services Team

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Introduction

Cooperative Innovative High Schools in North Carolina, commonly referred to as Early Colleges (EC), provide an academically rigorous course of study to high school students who have the opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma and two years of transferable credit or an associate degree at the same time. In the Spring of 2016 we had 326 Early College students at Appalachian State University coming from 90 different Early College programs. These Early College programs vary greatly from where they are housed (high schools to community colleges) to the social development opportunities (sports and clubs) that are offered to students. This means that an Early College student may come to Appalachian without the same level of social development as a typical first-year student in college, but simultaneously be treated academically as a junior level student. The following challenges have been identified by a committee that was researching the development of a general transition course for transfer students:

Early College student challenges

- Social isolation and integration
- Academic preparation and adjustment
- Number of credit hours with which students enter Appalachian
- Academic level at which students enter
- Difference in material covered at previous institution relative to Appalachian
- Prerequisites or program requirements not completed
- Knowing where and what resources are available
- Acclimating to the Appalachian system prerequisites or program requirements not completed
- Maturation differences
- Differences as compared to 18+ year olds
- Differences as compared to older students in their classes
- No common early college experience so academic and social needs differ
- Expectation as compared to reality of completion of degree time difference

Early College students do not fit cleanly into either freshmen or transfer categories - they apply as freshmen and are guaranteed on campus housing (since they are a recent high school graduate) but they primarily attend Transfer and Early College Student Orientation (although EC students may opt into the first-year orientation if they ask - 9% of incoming Fall 2017 Early College students opted into the 2-day orientation). This can create a very confusing and isolating experiences for the students. To date, while there has been some dedicated efforts across departments to help this subpopulation (like University College Advising who has specific advisors assigned to Early College students and have offered transitional workshops for EC students), there has not been a coordinated campuswide effort to provide support, organization, or advocacy for Early College students. To begin addressing this gap, the Office of Transfer Services and the Office of Leadership Development teamed together to submit a grant to Parents and Family Services aimed at creating a peer group of Early College students while

also learning more about the student's transitional experience in order to suggest improvements to Appalachian's leadership.

The grant funded two events: a dinner social and a weekend retreat. These events are described in more depth below.

Early College Data

Data compiled by Institutional Research and Planning in August 2017 (see attached report) indicates that Early College students are a growing segment of our population with preliminary data showing a 27% increase in students for Fall 2017 over Fall 2016. Data collection for Early College students began in Fall 2013 and this population has trended female, white, and non-first generation. The favored majors over the last four years have been biology, psychology, and education and the percentage of students entering Appalachian after completing an Associate degree has continuously risen to a high of 76.6% in Fall 2016. However, only 9% are able to graduate within two years as most take three years or more to finish at Appalachian.

Early College Scan

The Transfer Services Team is a group of faculty, staff, and students who work to identify the needs of transfer students. In 2016-17 the Team split into three subgroups with one group focusing on Early Colleges to gain a better understanding of the structure, resources, and information provided to our Early Colleges and the students coming to Appalachian from those schools. The subgroup contacted ten plus early colleges to find the following information:

- Describe the location and facility of the Early College program. Does the program share a facility with other other programs, such as a community college or high school? What are they? What kind of experience has the early college transfer student come from?
- How many classes are the early college students taking with college students?
- How many mixed classes H.S./or CC and EC?
- What type of academic advising are they doing for early college students, specifically focusing on their academics and career? Is there someone have a conversation with early college students about what they will do once they leave college? Are they advising in or out of the classrooms, or talking with counselors? What kind of advising are the early college students receiving? Academic, career, or transfer?
- Is there a model you follow?
- How do you address milestones of the early college experience? (ex. Typical H.S. experience, prom, sports, etc.) How do you address milestones of early college students that they typically would not be able to participate in that they may would have at a traditional high school? What opportunities for co-curricular involvement exist for Early College?

The Committee had limited response back from the schools. The following schools replied:

Lee Early College is located on the campus of Central Carolina Community College in Sanford, NC. LEC students typically take about 60-70% of their college courses with traditional college students. Students are assigned to an advisor (teacher) for their first two years. They meet as a group every day for 25 minutes, providing the students a great deal of exposure to college and career exploration. Once they get closer to taking a more college heavy schedule they try to focus on matching their electives to their four year school major/career. The school counselor makes sure they are successfully receiving their HS diploma requirements, while the liaison assures the same for the Associate degree that is most appropriate to their career path.

The Challenger Early College program operates on the campus of Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory North Carolina. Early college students at Challenger are completely integrated into the community college courses. Early college students are allowed to join co-curricular clubs/organizations offered for traditional college students as early as their sophomore year in Early College.

Isaac Bear Early College High operates with UNC-Wilmington. Isaac Bear Early College High School only offers honor level courses. Also, along with honor courses students have the opportunity from their junior year and senior year of high school to take college level courses.

The Early College of Forsyth program operates on the campus of Forsyth Technical Community College. Beginning in 9th grade, students take half high school-level classes and half college courses, which are fully integrated with the community college. By 12th grade, students are typically enrolled in one high school course and the remainder are college courses. Students receive three forms of advising: high school academic, college academic, and transition/career advising and support. Students at the Early College of Forsyth are eligible for all extracurricular activities that are open to community college students.

The Brunswick Early College is located on the campus of Brunswick Community College, however, they have dedicated classrooms for the high school. The classes they take are integrated with traditional college students. They receive advising on degree requirements and career goals during the fall and then in Spring advising also includes college admissions tests and financial aid. During the Spring, parents are also involved with advising.

While more data needs to be gathered, it is clear that early college students do not come from one background or system. Areas to look into include:

- Discrepancy between application numbers and admission numbers for some Early Colleges
- Male/female ratio and involvement
- Recruitment of underrepresented students

Early College Social

Early College students were invited on February 9, 2017 to a dinner social which was promoted as a way to connect with other Early College students at Appalachian. 51 students RSVP'd; unfortunately the night was one of the few snowy nights this past winter so only half of the students attended. In addition to staff from the Office of Transfer Services and the Office of Leadership Development, we were joined by the Interim Vice Chancellor of Student Development and the Director of Admissions.

Students began the evening by socializing and eating. Each table had an administrator that helped facilitate the conversation and listened to what the students had to say about their transition and adjustment to Appalachian. In addition to an ice breaker and information on the upcoming retreat, students were asked to provide feedback on the difficult aspects of transitioning to Appalachian as an Early College student and things they wish they had known prior to coming to Appalachian. Below is a summary of the themes students discussed:

- Classified and housed with first-years and 18 year olds, but in junior level classes
 - Age and maturity gaps
 - Difference in intensity of junior level classes from Early College classes
 - Social isolation since not in classes with students their age
 - Most did not need to take a UCO 1200 class
 - "I feel ahead while also behind"
- Came in undeclared and pressured to choose a major right away since General Education classes are completed; did not feel prepared to choose a major yet
- Requesting transcripts that reflected college level courses, high school graduation date, etc. was difficult and unclear
- Financial ambiguity (Early College classes/textbooks free)
- Early Colleges did not adequately communicate what University life would be like
- No point of contact at ASU for Early College students to answer questions, direct to resources
- Was told would be able to graduate in two years (while at high school) but once arrived at Appalachian they discovered that was not true for many

Early College Retreat

To follow-up on the social dinner and have more in-depth conversations, a group of 18 Early College students participated in an overnight retreat at Camp Broadstone on March 4-5. Staff from the Office of Transfer Services and the Office of Student Engagement and Leadership planned the retreat while Transfer Student Mentors and Leader Educators facilitated the events. The purpose of the retreat was again to get to know other Early College students and make connections, but also serve as a starting point in creating a recognized Early College community. The students participated in teambuilding and get-to-know you activities, personality assessments (True Colors), and brainstorming of what can be done for Early

College students. Students also planned each meal, cooked for the group, and cleaned up after the meals.

Students were broken into two groups based on meals (dinner, breakfast). While one group was cooking, the other group worked to identify strategies to combat some of the transitional issues Early College students face. At the end of the retreat they came together and combined the two lists. Below is a list of the themes identified:

- New Student Early College Orientation
- Early College RLC
 - Designated floor, preferably on east campus
 - Maybe just a RD or RA and not a true RLC (specific halls/floors for early college students but not attached to a course)
- Early College Club/Student Association
- Mentorship Program
 - Mentors are second year early college student
 - Students may opt in or opt out
 - Mentor is from a different early college
- Non-academic Events
 - Retreats
 - Overnight retreats
 - Social gatherings
 - Mixers with traditional first-year students and transfer students
- Early College Transitioning Class
- Career Counseling specific for Early College Students
 - Group counseling sessions
- Early College Academic Advisors
- Office of Early College Students/Space in the Student Union

Outcomes from Social and Retreat

Students recognized that many of the goals identified would take time and money to implement, however, they have already been able to make progress on some of the strategies. Students created an Early College Facebook group shortly after the retreat to create an online community where they could post questions or events they were attending. Other Early College students who did not attend the retreat were invited to join the page. Students also quickly began work to create an Early College Student Association and by the end of Spring 2017 the Association was approved by Club Council. Creating the Student Association gives Early College students an ability to connect socially with other students who may have encountered similar experiences since beginning at Appalachian as well as to help future incoming classes through the transition.

In addition to student-initiated strategies to address transition issues of Early College students, the Office of Transfer Services and the Office of Leadership Development made a

recommendation to University Housing that these students should be able to live with other Early College students. Since the students are treated as freshmen in some aspects of enrollment, they are guaranteed housing on-campus during their first year at Appalachian. Housing agreed to pilot an Early College designated floor in a residence hall. The Office of Transfer Services communicated with incoming Early College students about this opportunity and quickly filled the floor. 33 students will live on 5th Floor Coltrane in the Fall with an RA who served as an Orientation Leader for Early College students (an official Early College RLC was approved in July 2017 and the RLC Leadership Team will be chaired by a staff member in the Office of Transfer Services).

Recommendations

The recent work with Early College students has led to the following recommendations:

1. Early College Point of Contact: Appalachian has recognized the benefit of subpopulation advocates on campus and as such has developed the Office of Multicultural Student Development, Office of Transfer Services, Student Veteran Services, and the Office of International Education and Development to name a few examples. However, currently Early College students do not have one person they can go to that will understand and advocate for their needs. Early College students have expressed that they don't see themselves as transfer students but are also not true first-year students. Having someone familiar with their needs, that will advocate for them across campus, and who can communicate with them throughout their first year (and beyond) at Appalachian is essential for this population. This person would also organize programming such as Career Exploration workshops, social/retreats beyond the ability of what a student association could organize, and academic advising as well as advise the Early College Student Association.
2. Form an Early College Advisory Group: An advisory group of faculty, staff, and students would allow for the continued identification of issues and needs of Early College students, educate the University community about Early College, and help guide the direction of how the University works with Early College students. It's essential to choose representatives for this group from across campus and include departments that have already begun to address Early College issues.
3. Early College Mentor Program: Like many of our subpopulations (Veterans, transfer students, multicultural, LGBT) a peer mentor program for this population would allow students who have had a similar background and been through a similar transition be available to assist new students through communication and meetings. In order for a mentor program to be successful though, a staff member must be involved to provide structure and training. That again is why recommendation #1 is important.

4. Review Early College Orientation: Currently Early College students participate in the one-day Transfer and Early College Student Orientation rather than the two-day First Year Orientation. Students at the retreat expressed displeasure with this arrangement since they felt they missed key components of socialization and information regarding resources. Early College students are not typical transfer students and while they don't need all that is covered at the two-day First Year Orientation they may need more than is covered during Orientation for transfer students.
5. Share data with Early College programs. Identified transitional issues from discussions and research with Early College students should be shared with Early College programs and the Department of Public Instruction in an effort to better align the transition of students from Early College to higher education.

Other Recommendations that have already been addressed:

- a. Early College Student Association: As mentioned above, the students came away from the retreat ready to form a student organization. Since then they have met multiple times a week to identify their mission, craft a constitution, and elect officers. By the end of Spring 2017 they had received Club Council approval and are looking forward to welcoming Fall students into the association.
- b. Early College Residential Learning Community (RLC): During the initial arrival at a new college being surrounded by people in similar circumstances is especially important. Early College students have expressed that in their current first-year halls they feel an age gap between themselves and their hallmates due to maturity difference and are discouraged because they don't have similar classes (RC 1000, UCO 1200, etc). Housing Early College students together would allow them to experience the start of Appalachian together. Programming to address their specific needs (career counseling, socialization, etc.) would make their transition more successful.

Based on this feedback and idea, the Office of Transfer Services approached University Housing and they agreed to set aside a floor for this group of students. The floor's Resident Assistant will be trained on the characteristics of Early College students and encouraged to do some programming for this group. During Summer 2017 a formal RLC application was submitted and approved.

Early College High School Fall New Student Cohorts

Fall Term	Count	SEX	2012	2013	2014	2015
2012	83	F	52	86	75	113
2013	120	M	31	34	42	58
2014	117	Total	83	120	117	171
2015	171	%F	62.7%	71.7%	64.1%	66.1%
2016	111	%M	37.3%	28.3%	35.9%	33.9%
2017 *Preliminary as of 8/1/17	141					
	Fall Term					
Race/Ethnicity	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
American Indian/Alaska Native			1		1	
Asian	6	3	3	9	4	
Black/African American	4	5	4	16	10	
Hispanic/Latino	4	7	7	7	10	
Native Hawaiian/Other Pac Islander					1	
NR Alien			1			
Two or more races	1	7	3	7	6	
Unknown		2	2	4	2	
White	68	96	96	128	77	
Grand Total	83	120	117	171	111	
Total Under-Represented*	15	22	19	39	32	
Percent Under-Represented*	18.1%	18.6%	16.5%	23.4%	29.4%	

*Does not include unknown

First Generation	2012**	2013	2014	2015	2016
Yes	22	50	67	75	50
No	61	70	50	96	61
Grand Total	83	120	117	171	111
Percent First Generation	26.5%	41.7%	57.3%	43.9%	45.0%

**Note: More thorough data collection regarding FG began fall 2013.

Have Completed AA or AS Degree	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Yes	41	81	77	125	85
No	42	39	40	46	26
Grand Total	83	120	117	171	111
Percent With Degree	49.4%	67.5%	65.8%	73.1%	76.6%

Major Declared First Term (By Census)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Yes	28	25	15	24	8
No	55	95	102	147	103
Grand Total	83	120	117	171	111
Percent Declared	33.7%	20.8%	12.8%	14.0%	7.2%

Retained to Next Fall	2012	2013	2014	2015
Yes	71	103	97	138
No	12	17	20	33
Grand Total	83	120	117	171
Percent Retained	85.5%	85.8%	82.9%	80.7%

Graduated in 2 Years	2012	2013	2014	2015+
Yes	8	19	12	15
No	75	101	105	156
Grand Total	83	120	117	171
Two Year Graduation Rate	9.6%	15.8%	10.3%	8.8%

+ Preliminary - does not include Aug. 2017

Graduated in 3 Years	2012	2013	2014+
Yes	39	56	12
No	44	64	105
Grand Total	83	120	117
Three Year Graduation Rate	47.0%	46.7%	10.3%

+ Preliminary - does not include Aug. 2017

Graduated in 4 Years	2012	2013+
Yes	52	56
No	31	64
Grand Total	83	120
Four Year Graduation Rate	62.7%	46.7%

+ Preliminary - does not include Aug. 2017

Provided by IRAP 8/2017

Top 10 Major Departments

Department	Count
BIO	66
PSY	56
C&I	47
COM	37
ENG	33
ART	29
GJS	25
MGT	25
HES	22
CHE	19
NHM	19

Fall 2016 Cohort Only

Department	Count
BIO	21
PSY	14
ENG	7
COM	6
ART	5
C&I	5
MGT	5
ANT	4
MKT	4
C S	3
MAT	3
S W	3

First Year GPA Information - Means

Fall Cohort	Fall TERM GPA	Fall Cumulative GPA	Spring Cumulative GPA
2012	2.74	2.76	2.93
2013	2.82	2.82	2.92
2014	2.77	2.77	2.82
2015	2.74	2.74	2.83
2016	3.02	3.02	3.00
All Cohorts	2.82	2.82	2.89