WHAT IS FORTNIGHT?

A **fortnight** is a unit of time equivalent to 14 days. The term derives from the Old English *feorwertyne niht*, meaning “fourteen nights.” Inspired by the opportunities and challenges of Middle States Standard 14 and the desire to share information and best practices, **FORTNIGHT** is a communication vehicle, which is distributed online to the campus community.

FOUNDATIONS OF EXCELLENCE: THE COLLEGE HOSTS JOHN GARDNER IN SELF-STUDY LAUNCH

The College hosted Dr. John N. Gardner, Founder and President of the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education on Tuesday, November 27, as part of the kick-off for the institution’s participation in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) process. Gardner, an international expert in improving the early college experience, has worked with more than 300 institutions on improving first-year and transfer program implementation. Prior to founding the Institute, Gardner had a long career as a faculty member and high-level administrator at the University of South Carolina.

As reported in the previous issue of **FORTNIGHT**, the College will be joining its sister institutions, York, LaGuardia, and the New Community College, as part of this year’s select cohort of 16 institutions (11 four-year and 5 two-year) participating in the process nation-wide. The central CUNY Office of Academic Affairs will also be participating as a fifth institution in CUNY, with a focus on assisting campuses in their first-year initiatives.

Preparations for the Foundations of Excellence self-study have been in process for several months, with Dr. Gardner’s visit designed to launch the self-study, much of which will take place during the Spring 2013 semester. With its focus on nine Foundational Dimensions of Excellence identified by Gardner and his colleagues over several years of study and work with founding institutions (including two CUNY institutions – Brooklyn and Medgar Evers), the self-study is organized into nine dimension committees led by a steering committee. Dr. Gardner met with the President and Provost, co-chairs of the dimension committees, the Cabinet and Provost’s Council, the General Chairs Committee, and held a launch session with dimension committee membership.

During his visit, Dr. Gardner reiterated throughout the day that the main goal of the FoE self-study would be for the College to develop “an aspirational plan for an excellent beginning college experience.” He spoke of higher education institutions that have an “access” culture and those that have an organizational culture focused on “success,” and suggested that the College has an opportunity to broaden its culture to address both, including more success-based aspects. Impressed by our campus location and attractive setting, Dr. Gardner suggested that the self-study might address how the College can “integrate the curriculum into the host city environment” and explore ways in which use of outdoor space on the campus might be utilized and made more inviting to students. He also suggested that the self-study and aspirational plan might be useful in positioning the College for grant funding opportunities.

The campus will be engaged in several processes that are integral to the FoE self-study: developing a Current Practices Inventory (CPI) of major policies and committees that affect or are of some relevance to the first-year experience, surveying faculty/staff and students using two surveys tailored to the FoE dimensions, and utilizing other quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate our performance on the nine foundational areas. Information will be collected and housed in an easily-to-access data repository called FoEtec.
The Foundations of Excellence experience presents a unique and engaging opportunity to methodically assess the interwoven elements of our students’ early experiences on campus. At present, over 70 faculty and staff have signed on to participate; however, there is still opportunity to join in the process. Faculty members who have an interest in first-year or transfer student experiences, learning communities, service learning, or are curious about the FoE opportunity are encouraged to speak to their academic Dean as soon as possible. For more information about the Foundations of Excellence program, see the Gardner Institute website at www.jngi.org/foe-program and the campus website at www.csi.cuny.edu/foe.

CLOSING THE LOOP: SEEK PROGRAM REVISES CURRICULUM FOR FRESHMAN ORIENTATION COURSE USING ASSESSMENT DATA

The SEEK Program at the College of Staten Island offers a Freshman Orientation course (SKO100) which recently developed a set of unified learning outcomes and assessment tools. The teaching team reviewed and amended overall outcomes for the course and expected outcomes for each of the 15 weeks, and developed common lesson plans and assessment methods. This revamped course plan was implemented in Fall 2011.

During Spring 2012, instructors reviewed assessment results of the three sections from Fall 2011 and compiled a report, including recommendations. The modifications for the lesson plans and accompanying assessment instruments were incorporated in the Fall 2012 SKO course offerings.

CAMPUS UPDATES

African American Studies Program – African American Studies, an interdisciplinary degree program involving faculty in Performing and Creative Arts, History, English, and PEP, completed the second milestone of their academic program review process with a site visit on Friday, November 9. Professor Calvin Holder, the program’s Director, along with his colleagues, welcomed Dr. Charles Green, Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and member of the graduate faculty in Sociology at The Graduate Center, and Dr. Aubrey Bonnett, former Vice President for Academic Affairs at SUNY-Old Westbury and current member of the Department of American Studies.

Drs. Green and Bonnett met with Interim Provost Fred Naider, Associate Provost Susan Holak, and Interim Dean Nan Sussman at the start of their visit. Throughout the day, they spoke with Dr. Holder and his colleagues, and met with students. The visit concluded with a closing meeting with Nan Sussman and Susan Holak. We wish to acknowledge the efforts of Calvin Holder for preparing the self-study.

Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) – As reported in previous issues of FORTNIGHT (Volume 8, Issue 7 and Volume 9, Issue 1), the College is participating in the Collegiate Learning Assessment, along with most other CUNY schools. The CLA is used nationwide and was selected as an assessment process, in part, to replace the CUNY Proficiency Exam, previously used to measure progress by rising sophomores completing General Education. The College recently exceeded its goal of having 100 first-year students complete the first phase of the CLA; the second phase will involve 100 seniors completing a similar process beginning in February 2013. We would like to acknowledge the efforts of Alan Hoffner, Director of the Testing Office, and members of his staff for contacting students and facilitating assessment appointments.

CUNY NEWS AND EVENTS

The CUNY Assessment Council – The CUNY Assessment Council, an organization of assessment directors and staff, met on Friday, November 9, with University Dean for Undergraduate Studies Karrin Wilks. A major focus of this meeting was how different campuses are considering the assessment of Pathways courses – especially in relation to their existing General Education assessments – and whether a centralized set of assessment guidelines should be considered.

FORTNIGHTLY NOTES

British website www.totalfilm.com, which touts itself as “The Modern Guide to Movies,” is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the James Bond film franchise with a Bond Fortnight. Two weeks of Bond-related material leads up to the release of the newest Bond film, Skyfall, on 26 October.

Everyone is invited and encouraged to submit items related to departmental assessment projects, College institutional effectiveness activities, committee announcements, and best practices by December 7, 2012, for consideration to appear in the next communiqué.