

# **CU101 PHASE I PILOT EVALUATION SUMMARY**



**Submitted to the Provost's CU101 Task Force**

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## EVALUATION SUMMARY OF THE CU 101 PHASE I PILOT

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### BACKGROUND

The Phase I pilot of “CU 101” or *The Contemporary Research University and Student-Citizens* (ARSC 1001) was held during the fall semester of 2006. The pilot course was developed by the Provost’s CU 101 Task Force in response to recommendations by university groups, including the President’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Diversity, the Chancellor’s Committee on Women, the Chancellor’s Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues, and the Chancellor’s Committee on Minority Affairs, among others. The purpose of the course was: 1) to advance entering first-year students’ knowledge of the university community as a site for intellectual, social and character development and 2) to develop understanding and acceptance of human differences in the university context. The course was implemented in two residential halls, Baker and Farrand, which offer Residential Academic Programs (RAPs). Thirty-one first-year students residing at these residence halls self-selected to participate in the pilot course. Currently, planning efforts are underway to determine the feasibility of a Phase II pilot, which potentially would expand the course offering to a larger student population.

### OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT EVALUATION

Phase I evaluation results are primarily descriptive and exploratory due to the relatively small total class size of CU 101. The University contracted with an external research organization, OMNI Institute, to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the Phase I pilot. The purpose of this evaluation was to examine: 1) common first-year student experiences and 2) evidence regarding the potential effects of CU 101 on student development. To do this, the evaluation was designed to offer some comparison between CU 101 students, other first-year students participating in Residential Academic Programs (referred to throughout this report as “RAP-only students”) and first-year students who did not participate in a RAP (referred to in this report as “non-RAP students”). Evaluation methods and sample limitations are described in further detail below. Despite limitations of the current evaluation, important groundwork was laid for future, potential evaluation of CU 101.

- All students participating in first-year student assessment activities during the pilot (31 CU 101, 25 RAP-only and 25 non-RAP) were encouraged to participate in the survey. The survey contained 50 items measuring self-reported attitudes and behaviors regarding diversity-related issues as well as the more general intellectual, social and character building environment of the university community. The survey also contained 10 demographic and background questions so that the groups could be compared. In addition, CU 101 students were asked 8 questions specifically about the course. Altogether, 58 students participated in the survey: 17 CU 101, 25 RAP-only, and 16 non-RAP.
- A subset of students from each of the three groups (20 CU 101, 10 RAP-only and 10 non-RAP) also was encouraged to participate in a face-to-face interview, typically conducted just before or after survey completion. The interview contained seven open-ended questions about personal transitions during the first semester at CU and perceptions about intellectual, social and character building dimensions of the university community. CU 101 students were asked an additional open-ended question regarding the course’s role in strengthening understanding about campus and social issues. In total, 31 students participated in the interviews: 15 CU 101, 9 RAP-only, and 7 non-RAP.
- *Demographic information indicated that CU 101, RAP-only, and non-RAP participants were relatively comparable, including in terms of parent educational levels, overall average grades reported for the first semester,*

and number of weekly hours typically spent working at a job during the first semester. The only differences observed between these three samples of students were: 1) CU 101 students were more likely to have out-of-state residency, and 2) RAP-only students were more likely to report spending more hours of study than CU 101 students. In general, the University has found that out-of-state students typically spend fewer hours of study than in-state students. It is unknown to what extent different study behaviors may have suppressed any potential effects observed between CU 101 and the other students.

## PHASE I PILOT FINDINGS

### Common Experiences among Participating First-Year Students

#### *Academic Experiences and Challenges*

##### Academic Transitions and Challenges

- 100% of students surveyed reported an interest in developing strong academic skills and intellectual interests. However, 91% reported they had attended classes without finishing readings or assignments; and, 38% reported that this happened “often” or “very often.”
- Student interviews indicated that it was common for first-year students (even those who reported studying a greater number of hours) to struggle with the academic transition from high school to college. Students found that it was difficult to adjust to less structured study-time and assignments than they had experienced in high school. Nearly half of the students interviewed mentioned that they or their friends had performed poorly during their first semester at CU; some students indicated that they or others they knew had been placed on academic probation.

...[T]he biggest challenge for me anyway is finding time for when you do actually need to get it all together and study for a test. Living in the dorms there is stuff going on all the time; people are watching movies down the hall or drinking down the hall or having a party; you want to be part of that too, but it's hard to not procrastinate and get homework out of the way. The hardest thing is separating social life from your study life (Male non-RAP student).

- Interviews also indicated that students felt they had learned from their first-semester mistakes and were able to make changes in their study habits. Twelve (39%) of the 31 students interviewed mentioned that they had learned to study more, and 13 reported that they had improved their ability to balance social and academic pursuits.

##### Class Size

- Although no questions were asked about class size, 11 CU 101 and RAP-only students described the positive experiences they had in their smaller classes during first semester. These students explained that the smaller classes had allowed them more opportunity to engage in classroom and out-of-class discussions, as well as to build more personal relationships with faculty and instructors.
- Survey responses indicated that CU 101 and RAP-only students, the student groups who we know had at least one small class, were more likely to “very often” or “often” ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions compared to non-RAP students. However, non-RAP students were more likely to report discussing social and cultural issues, as well as ideas from readings and lectures, outside of class than their CU 101 and RAP-only peers.

## *Social Experiences and Challenges*

### New Social Networks

- Student interviews indicated that the social environment of the campus and residence halls played a significant role in the transition of first-year students. For most students, this was the first time they had lived away from family, and students indicated that the friends they made had impacted everything from study habits to homesickness. As one student explained, establishing new friendship was an important part of students' first semester on campus, as loneliness could affect academic performance and decisions to stay at the University. Eleven (36%) interview participants stated that they or other students they knew had trouble making close friends during the first semester at CU.

*I often see people who are socially distraught and going through transition, kind of breaks them down and makes them think about where they are going to end in their life. Prior to university life, you don't really think about that. Dealing with the social pressure to party or fit in with the crowd, so to say, now there is not a set group of friends you are comfortable with; you have to pick a new group, which is challenging (Male RAP student).*

### Campus Groups

- Survey data showed that 79% of students believed that joining campus groups was an important way to enhance their college experience; however, only 43% reported current involvement. During an interview one student recommended that there should be greater promotion of campus organizations to first-year students. Those students who reported involvement in student organizations typically listed one of the following groups: Boulder Free Ride, The Herd, CU Gold, hall councils, intramural sports, and the Greek system.
- Over half of the students interviewed described positive experiences with campus organizations, saying that these groups helped them meet new people, made the campus seem smaller, and provided them with a greater sense of purpose. In addition, half of the students interviewed indicated that they planned to become more involved with student groups over the next three years.

### Alcohol use

- Alcohol use by freshman students was not a specific focus of the evaluation; only one survey question addressed alcohol and substance abuse and only one interview question asked CU 101 students about substance abuse awareness generally. Despite this, a major focus of student interviews was alcohol use on and off campus. Sixty-four percent of students interviewed discussed alcohol use at some point during the interview.
- Interviews indicated that alcohol is easily available and alcohol use is prevalent both on and off campus. Most students interviewed viewed alcohol use as an acceptable social norm, although half of these students discussed the challenges of balancing "partying" (a term consistently used to refer to social activities involving alcohol use) with studying. According to students, it was not unusual to "go out" most nights of the week. At the same time, many students reported that their own grades or those of their peers had been impacted by "partying habits."
- Survey results found that 52% of students reported missing a class or skipping an assignment, because they were "hung over, drunk, or high." Non-RAP students were the only students to report that this happened "often;" however, this represented less than 25% (3 of the 16) of participating non-RAP students. A small majority of CU 101 (59%) and RAP-only (52%)

students reported “never” missing a class or skipping an assignment due to being hung over, drunk or high.

### *Personal Values and Attitudes*

- Although student interviews suggested that the transition from high school to college was challenging, students also indicated that this transitional period played an important role in their development in terms of independence and maturity. In addition, survey results indicated that a large majority of students had developed a sense of their place within the university community:
  - 75% took an interest in what was happening on campus
  - 93% were willing to stand up for the rights of others
  - 88% cared about making the university a better place
  - 91% cared about how their actions affect others
  - 95% believed they were accountable to the campus community for their actions.
- Survey results indicated that most students appreciated the general importance of diversity on campus. The majority of participants responded positively to questions regarding their experiences last semester becoming friends with students from different backgrounds, ability to work with someone who has different opinions, and appreciation of diverse viewpoints and the benefits of a diverse university community.
- During interviews, when asked to expand on their viewpoints related to human diversity, student responses indicated that they did not perceive diversity issues affecting student experiences on campus. Eight of 31 students did not believe a person’s cultural background would have an impact on his/her college experience, and ten students thought that CU was a very diverse campus. Twelve students acknowledged that CU was a mostly “white campus,” but since they did not perceive the presence of overt racism, they did not view homogeneity to be a problem.

### **CU 101 Effects on Student Development – Preliminary Evidence**

- Survey results indicated that the class was a valuable experience for a large majority of the students, encouraging them to think critically and to consider what it means to be part of the university community.
  - 88% agreed or strongly agreed that CU 101 “helped me learn about what it means to be a member of a university community
  - 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the class “encouraged critical thinking”
  - 59% agreed or strongly agreed that “I have tried to share information that I learned with others not taking the CU 101 class”
  - 51% agreed or strongly agreed that “after taking CU 101, I am more likely to participate in class discussions about social issues”
  - 75% agreed or strongly agreed that “after taking CU 101, I am more likely to talk to others about diversity issues on campus”
  - 76% agreed or strongly agreed that “it was helpful to take CU 101 during my first semester on campus”
- Interviews with CU 101 students further confirmed the value students attributed to the class:
  - Students mentioned appreciating the small class setting which allowed for more in depth and “meaningful” discussions.

- Students also enjoyed the assignment to visit a campus group, which students reported made them more aware of the different groups on campus as well as the diversity issues facing students within these groups (e.g., the Muslim Student Association).
- When asked how and if CU 101 had strengthened their understanding of the university community, 10 CU 101 students discussed the importance of developing one's place in the larger campus community and being accountable to other members of the community. Several students reported that CU 101 helped them understand the critical roles of the university and student citizenship. They also discussed learning from CU 101 that they can have an effect on the university and the larger community.

*I think one of [CU 101's] strongest messages is that, just to get involved in a certain group. Because that's a really good way to identify with other people, whether it's something you feel strongly about or are just kind of interested in. So, I think [CU 101] kind of opened that door. Because it kind of showed us what was available and also, what sort of differences students can make (Female CU 101 student).*

- Based on an analysis of surveys and interviews together, there was some evidence of other potential effects of the CU 101 course:
  - Evaluation findings indicated that CU 101 may have had an impact on students' participation in discussions concerning ethical issues relevant to the university community. (60% of CU 101 students reported that they often discussed ethical issues relevant to the university community, compared to 24% of RAP-only and non-RAP students.)
  - CU 101 also may have had some effect on students' knowledge of campus groups. CU 101 students were more likely to report positive experiences with student groups and say that groups make the campus feel smaller and more like a community.
  - In addition, CU 101 may have had some impact on students' appreciation of human diversity, although the evidence was somewhat mixed. During interviews, CU 101 students were more likely to acknowledge a general lack of diversity on campus than their RAP-only and non-RAP peers. In addition, 12 of the 15 CU 101 participant interviews discussed learning about issues of diversity in the class. However, survey responses indicated that CU 101 students did not look very different from their peers on the majority of diversity related items. Moreover, the overall trend across items revealed that CU 101 students were consistently less positive (although small differences on these items) in their reported attitudes and behaviors concerning diversity.
  - Finally, given survey and interview data concerning alcohol and substance abuse, it may be notable that five CU 101 students were the only participants to express surprise and disappointment at the amount of alcohol use by their peers.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATIONS**

- Because the total class size and comparison groups were relatively small, statistically sensitive analyses could not be conducted with confidence. Should a second phase of the pilot be conducted, sample sizes must be increased so that group differences and the effects of CU 101 can be statistically analyzed.
- Another major limitation of the Phase I evaluation was that data were only collected at one point in time and up to two months following the completion of the first semester at CU. Therefore,

the evaluation was unable to compare groups on baseline responses and relied upon retrospective data.

- It is unclear how greatly the groups differed in terms of the desired areas of measurement upon entering CU as freshmen and, moreover, any measurable changes between baseline and follow up.
  - It also is unclear whether CU 101 had an effect in terms of the ways students responded to survey questions, particularly those related to issues of diversity. Research has indicated that awareness-raising (e.g., specific historical events, training, curriculum) can influence participant responses, making their own self-appraisal more critical than they would have been without greater awareness or compared to other groups who have not undergone similar awareness-raising.
- Despite these limitations, evaluation results suggest some preliminary recommendations that the University may wish to consider as planning for Phase II continues:
- Students reported finding it very challenging to balance academics with the social freedoms and opportunities that they experienced on campus. This was attributed to several different factors, including the absence of long established social networks (i.e., family and friends), differences between the instruction provided by college professors and high school teachers, as well as alcohol use. Given that CU 101 students found the concept of student citizenship so compelling, addressing these aspects of student life (social networks, academic instruction, and alcohol use) in this context may be an important means for supporting and shaping student intellectual, social and character development.
  - CU 101 and RAP-only students were enthusiastic about the advantages of small classes, which they said facilitated engagement in class discussion and dialogues. Therefore, the University may wish to consider the role of the small class format in facilitating student learning about the university community, student citizenship, and human diversity.
  - Students, especially CU 101 students, perceived the importance of campus organizations in the university community and the broad benefits of student involvement in these organizations. As one of the student participants recommended, it may be helpful to promote student organizations particularly to first-year students. Furthermore, the University may wish to consider keeping or expanding this emphasis in CU 101. Interviews suggest that expansion may prove a helpful way of addressing diversity concerns as well.
  - Although CU 101 appears to have had many positive effects, a single course alone is unlikely to comprehensively address all aspects of the different issues targeted. As the Task Force has discussed, infusing course goals in other aspects of the residence hall should serve to support the goals that the course was developed to achieve.