

THE UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGES AT STONY BROOK

Structure

The Stony Brook Undergraduate Colleges are academic and social communities, each the size of a liberal arts college. Every year, between 400 and 450 new first-year students join each college. The colleges are named for the distinct themes that drive their academic and social lives. These themes are not tied specifically to particular majors, but broadly designed to appeal to a wide range of student interests. The six colleges and their themes are as follows: Arts, Culture, and Humanities (ACH); Global Studies (GLS); Human Development (HDV); Information and Technology Studies (ITS); Leadership and Service (LDS); and Science and Society (SSO).

The notion of organizing a university around colleges is very old. The college system of Oxford and Cambridge dates back to medieval times and the colleges still form the core of these institutions. In the United States, the undergraduate college or house systems of Harvard and Yale date to the 1930's. Among public universities, the University of California at San Diego, one of the best models by any measure, is organized around undergraduate colleges, each with its own distinct theme, flavor, and core curriculum. The University of California at Santa Cruz is also college-based, and was originally set up very much along the lines of Oxford and Cambridge. What all these institutions share with Stony Brook is the fact that the colleges are not an optional element or a special program for just a few students, but an integral organizing element of the university.

In order to get new students off on the right foot, professional academic advisors are assigned to each college. The Undergraduate College Advisor helps individual students to plan their course of study and is available to assist students with any academic questions or concerns that they may encounter. Each College Advisor also teaches a number of sections of FYS (First Year Seminar) 101 every fall. FYS 101 is a small one-credit seminar course in which new students are introduced to the university through positive interactions with students and staff. By the end of the first semester, each student will have developed a connection with their instructor and/or college advisor that should last throughout their undergraduate career.

Each College is headed by a Faculty Director who is a full-time tenured member of the Stony Brook faculty. The Faculty Directors are identified and appointed personally by the University Provost, who ensures that each is a respected teacher with a strong research program in a field closely related to the theme of their college. For example, the Faculty Director of the Undergraduate College of Leadership and Service could also be a faculty member in the College of Business or Political Science Department. Other Faculty Directors have come from the departments of Mechanical Engineering, Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, Biochemistry, Music, Ecology and Evolution, Sociology, and Africana Studies. The Faculty Director oversees all academic activities of the college, which include first-year seminars taught by members of the college faculty, the college Living Learning Centers for upper-class students, faculty-student dinners, and special academic events held throughout the year.

The College Faculty Director, college faculty, and Undergraduate College Advisors work closely with Student Affairs staff. For students living on campus, each college is linked to one of Stony Brook's six residential quads so that residential first-year students in the college live together in the quad associated with their Undergraduate College. Students of Information and Technology Studies reside in Mendelsohn quad, students of Science and Society in Roth quad, and so on. The Quad Director, the Residence Hall Directors, and the Resident Assistants all work together with the Faculty Director, college faculty, and Advisors in organizing college programs in the quad. All college activities, regardless of where they are held, are open to both residential and commuter students.

For first-year students, the primary academic component of their undergraduate college is the academic seminar program. In the fall semester, students are enrolled in FYS 101, a one-credit introduction to the university, taught in small groups by the college advisor or another staff member. In the spring semester, faculty members teach the one-credit seminars (FYS 102) for small groups of students. These seminars are less formal than other academic courses and seminar leaders are encouraged to explore topics of their own choosing that will appeal to first-year students. Both seminars foster contact and build relations between faculty and students that are expected to last throughout a student's career at Stony Brook.

Beyond the First Year

Undergraduate College life extends beyond the first year. Students interested in representing their Undergraduate College in an official capacity can apply to be Undergraduate College Fellows. Fellows plan programs, support orientation activities, and serve as teaching assistants for FYS 101 courses. Applications for the Undergraduate College Fellows program are due near the end of a student's first full semester. Upper-class students may also join one of the Living Learning Centers that have been an important part of Stony Brook life for many years. These have been fully integrated into the colleges, so that each college has within it one or more thematically linked Living Learning Centers (LLC). The College of Science and Society, for example, is home to the Environmental Studies Living Learning Center, while the College of Leadership and Service houses two Living Learning Centers: Leadership Development and Community Service Learning. Each Living Learning Center carries with it an academic minor featuring courses that are incorporated into the life of the Living Learning Center.

Once they join an Undergraduate College, students remain affiliated with it throughout their Stony Brook career. Not all students elect to remain as involved in college life beyond the first year as those in the College Fellows program or those who take part in Living Learning Centers, but all members of the college are always invited to participate in programs throughout their career at Stony Brook University.