

# *Enhancing University Summer Session Programs: The Role and Effect of Visiting Faculty*

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## INTRODUCTION

**M**any college and university summer session deans and directors face significant challenges in providing quality summer courses. At research institutions, for example, the number of regular tenured and tenure-track faculty who want to focus on research, scholarship, and other activities during summer affects the composition of the summer session faculty. As a result, summer session programs may employ fewer tenured and tenure-track faculty and more instructors, graduate students, and on occasion, visiting faculty from other universities.

In 2002, the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU-Boulder) established the “Faculty in Residence for Summer Term” (FIRST) program to enhance the range and quality of summer session courses by systematically encouraging CU-Boulder academic departments to invite distinguished scholars from other US and international universities to teach. Over a six-year period from 2002–07, 63 visiting faculty members received invitations

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with the expectation that these visiting faculty would expose students to academic content and culture from other universities and countries. In some instances these visiting faculty members collaborated with CU-Boulder faculty in their research and scholarship, provided department colloquia, outreach programs, and public lectures. However, these activities had not been systematically studied or well understood. Using the case study method, a research project that is the basis of this article investigated the role and impact of CU-Boulder's visiting faculty program upon summer session students, faculty, and academic departments.

### **RELEVANCE OF THE ISSUE AND PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

Summer session deans, directors, and other university leaders generally recognize the importance of providing a quality program to students. While summer programs attract a range of student groups, they typically serve the degree students of the home institution, enabling them to accelerate their time to degree (Martin). Further, the quality of summer session courses can affect course enrollment and the ability to generate net revenues to supplement campus budgets. While resident faculty often teach summer courses, these programs may be enriched by employing visiting faculty from other universities. Still, the role and effects of visiting faculty are not well understood or well documented.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the FIRST program, describe what was working well, and identify improvements for the program. However, the lessons learned and recommendations may assist the leadership of other universities in determining whether a systematic visiting faculty program may be appropriate for their institution. That is, the particular experiences of the faculty, students, and staff involved with the FIRST program may inform a broader understanding of a visiting scholars program. Program evaluations may also demonstrate the value and service to the public interest (Ashcroft).

In addition to accelerating their time to degree, summer programs influence undergraduate students' ability to persist and graduate (Taylor and Doane). According to a 2006 US Department of Education report, students were more likely to complete a bachelor's degree if they had earned more than four credits during the summer. Eighty percent of all students who earned more than four summer credits obtained a bachelor's degree, compared to 68 percent of students who earned from one to four summer credits, and 56 percent who did not earn any. Among black students, the effect is even more striking—78 percent of black students graduate if they

earned more than four summer credits compared with a figure of 43 percent for students earning from one to four summer credits and 21 percent for those who did not earn any summer session credits.

In addition to serving its degree students, these programs generate tuition revenues sufficient to cover instructional costs and often, additional net revenues (Johnson, 2000). These net revenues may be distributed to academic departments or allocated centrally by the campus to support its various programs. Programs that enhance the quality of students' summer session experience may encourage enrollment that advances the summer program's ability to generate net revenues.

### **CU-BOULDER'S SUMMER SESSION AND FIRST PROGRAM**

The organizational structure of summer session at CU-Boulder provides context for the FIRST program. Established in 1876, CU-Boulder is a public research university that enrolls 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Its summer session principally serves its upper-division undergraduate students. Approximately 7,500 students annually enroll in CU-Boulder's summer session, that includes one three-week term (Maymester), two five-week terms held in June and July, one eight-week term in June and July, one ten-week term from July through August, and a limited number of intensive terms of one or more weeks.

CU-Boulder's summer session is academically decentralized and administratively centralized, that is, each school and college designates an assistant or associate dean who serves as the summer session dean for the school or college and is responsible for working with the academic departments to plan their summer program, courses, and faculty. The summer session deans from each of the schools and colleges serve on a summer session committee, chaired by the director of summer session. This committee works on a range of enrollment management and policy issues that facilitate coordination of summer session campus-wide. The director is responsible for campus coordination of the summer program and its marketing, including its catalogue, website, and other promotional activities. The director of summer session reports to the associate vice chancellor for summer session, who is also dean of continuing education and professional studies. Together, the director and associate vice chancellor manage the summer session budget for the campus, allocate funds for the school's and college's courses, and distribute funds for various grants, including the FIRST program.

Beginning in the fall semester of 2002 and each subsequent fall, CU-Boulder's office of the associate vice chancellor for summer session has solicited grant applications for the FIRST program from the university's academic departments. The call for proposals is distributed in various ways, including an e-memo to the campus community, a presentation during the provost's breakfast meeting with the academic chairs, and at meetings with the deans and summer session deans of the schools and colleges. Given the range of summer session terms, FIRST scholars are invited to teach in one or more of the terms and in any of the university's academic departments, with preference given to recognized scholars who hold the rank of associate or full professor or practitioners noted in their field. Class minimums are 14 students for an undergraduate course and seven students for a graduate course.

In response to the call for proposals, the department chairs submit nominations to their school or college summer session dean, who ranks the proposals and submits them to the Office of Summer Session. The director and associate vice chancellor for summer session select 10 to 12 of the highest-ranked FIRST proposals for funding. FIRST award recipients are notified in November of their invitation to teach for the subsequent summer to provide sufficient time for planning. The FIRST courses and faculty descriptions are then highlighted in the summer session's catalogue and on its website. From 2002–08, grants of \$10,000 were made based upon teaching load of one three-credit course. The grants covered salary, transportation costs, and other expenses associated with the visiting scholar. In some of the professional schools such as law, engineering, and business, the grants were augmented with additional funds from the school's summer session budget. Beginning in 2009, the award will be increased to \$15,000.

Over the six-year period of the study from 2002–07, 73 FIRST courses were offered. Of these, 57 courses (78 percent) were held and 16 courses were cancelled (22 percent). Half of the courses that were cancelled occurred in the first two years of the program, including three in 2002 and five in 2003. While international FIRST scholars encountered difficulty in obtaining visas after the bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001, other reasons for cancellation dominated. Over the six-year period studied, six courses were cancelled because of low enrollment and five courses for health reasons, either because of the illness of the FIRST scholar or a family member. The low-enrollment courses that were cancelled featured special topics of apparently limited interest to students. After the first two years of

the program, preference has been given to FIRST scholars teaching courses that meet major or core requirements, resulting in fewer cancellations in recent years.

During the six years of the study, the average enrollment of the courses was 18 students. Since CU-Boulder's Summer Session students are primarily juniors and seniors, 97 percent of the FIRST courses were upper division. Sixteen of the 57 courses (28 percent) were cross-listed courses as both undergraduate and graduate courses, which broadened the student population.

Examples of the courses and institutions represented in the FIRST offerings during the six years studied included an upper-division psychology course, *Developmental Psychology*, taught by a professor from the University of Otago in New Zealand; an upper-division and graduate-level classics course, *Greek and Roman Comedy*, taught by an associate professor from Michigan State University; an upper-division political science course, *Western European Politics*, taught by a professor from University of Montessquieu-Bordeaux; an engineering course cross-listed at both the lower- and upper-division levels, *Fundamentals of Human Space Flight*, co-taught by a former astronaut and by a CU-Boulder engineering faculty member; an upper-division and graduate-level journalism course, *Reporting Seminar: China*, taught by a practicing journalist and CNN editor; and a law course, *Federal Tax Politics*, taught by a US tax court judge.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

The research employed the case study method to evaluate the effects of the FIRST program from 2002–07. The components of the project were not rigorously quantifiable, given the complexity of the context and the multiple variables that affect project activities and outcomes. Case studies are useful in describing and understanding a specific situation and can offer insights about a program's functioning (Merriam).

A research proposal for a Theresa Neil Memorial Research Grant was submitted in February 2007 and subsequently funded. Human research subject approval was obtained in August 2007. The sources of data were surveys and interviews of the FIRST scholars and the CU-Boulder department chairs responsible for nominating the FIRST scholars. Students' evaluations of FIRST courses were also examined by reviewing the faculty course questionnaires (FCQ's) used by the Boulder campus.

The director of summer session, two department chairs who had nominated scholars, and the provost reviewed draft questionnaires for the scholars and chairs. A copy of the final questionnaires is contained in the appendix.

Questionnaires and return envelopes were mailed to the faculty and chairs in December 2007 along with a cover letter from CU-Boulder's provost describing the purpose of the study. A second request was emailed to the faculty and chairs to provide the option of completing the questionnaire online. A third and final request was made via email in February 2008. Subsequently, telephone interviews with selected FIRST scholars were conducted from March to May 2008 to probe their experiences. The scholars were selected for interviews based on a preliminary analysis of questionnaire responses that were particularly interesting, rich in description, broad in appeal, or suggested areas for improvement. Chairs from each of the schools and colleges who had hosted multiple scholars were selected for interviews. Those interviews were conducted from July to October 2008 to further probe the effects of the FIRST scholar upon the department, including its students and its faculty members' research and scholarship. FCQs of the FIRST faculty were also studied. The research findings were analyzed in October and November 2008 for general themes useful in understanding the benefits and problems of the program.

## RESULTS

In total, 89 questionnaires were sent to scholars and chairs, and 57 (64 percent) questionnaires were completed. Initially, 63 potential FIRST scholars were identified for participation in the study but one had died and another specifically declined to participate. Of the 61 questionnaires mailed to the FIRST scholars, 38 completed the questionnaires for a return rate of 62 percent. Of the 28 department chairs contacted, 19 (68 percent) completed the questionnaires.

Interestingly, differences emerged between the FIRST scholars and the department chairs regarding their preference for completing a hard copy of the questionnaire that was mailed to them versus the online version of the questionnaire that was sent via email. Of the FIRST scholars, 50 percent completed the questionnaires online, 47 percent completed the questionnaires using the hard copy that had been mailed to them and 3 percent returned the questionnaire via fax. Of the chairs, 85 percent completed the hard copy of the questionnaires and returned them through campus mail,

15 percent completed the questionnaires online. This finding may be useful to researchers who are contemplating using only one method to distribute their questionnaires.

Differences also emerged regarding the number of prompts needed to obtain the high rate of return for the questionnaires. Among the FIRST scholars, 8 percent returned the questionnaire after the first request, 82 percent after the second, and 10 percent after the third. Among the chairs, 40 percent returned the questionnaire after the first request, 55 percent after the second, and 5 percent after the third.

A total of 21 interviews were subsequently conducted, including 15 telephone interviews with FIRST scholars and six personal interviews with the CU-Boulder department chairs responsible for nominating scholars. Following is a discussion of the findings from the questionnaires, interviews and analysis of the FCQs completed by students. Quotes from the scholars and chairs are provided below.

#### *Effects on students*

A major benefit of the FIRST program is to give summer students access to prominent academicians and practitioners from around the US and the globe. For instance, FIRST scholars from Italy, France, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Hungary, Canada, Germany, and New Zealand have participated. In some cases, these specialists offer courses not available during the academic year. The scholars give students an insider's look at current issues as well as a global perspective, the latter a particularly valuable contribution for students not able to join study abroad programs:

FIRST is an enormously valuable program that introduces an international component in our curriculum .... Our students benefit enormously from teachers from other parts of the world to gain ... different perspectives on various political science topics.

One of the most striking results of the study was the exceptionally high instructor rating given by students to the scholars: 70 percent received a ranking of more than five on a six-point scale. This result is interesting because the scholars are best known as exceptional researchers and practitioners, with some of the latter having limited teaching experience.

Many scholars remarked, at times with surprise, on the high quality of CU-Boulder students. This is an additional way that a program such as FIRST can increase the reputation of the institution and enhance post-graduate opportunities for its students.

Equally, if not more valuable for students is the extent to which scholars forge ongoing relationships with students. In several cases, students and scholars exchanged emails for several months following the course. Some of these exchanges resulted in letters of reference, service on thesis committees and, in a few cases, graduate school and internship placement.

*Effects on scholars*

The overall experience of the scholars with FIRST was described in the questionnaire responses as “excellent” by 67 percent and “very good” by 32 percent. Further, the scholars were principally motivated by the opportunity to teach rather than the opportunity to collaborate on scholarship. Teaching was the major reason given by 76 percent of respondents, with 26 percent listing collaboration as their first reason. Several scholars noted additional aspects of teaching that appealed to them, including the opportunity to teach a new group of students, to develop a new course, to try teaching in English, or to convey the skills they have acquired as practitioners:

Bring me back! It was a truly memorable experience. I worked hard, I played hard and it was all good.

One of the very best teaching experiences I’ve had in 30 years of university education.

As a European...it was a way for me to work in comparative politics and come back to very basic issues such as the interpretation of history and the interpretation of politics when you don’t share the same perspective.

Most scholars benefited from both teaching and research activities—83 percent of the scholars noted a positive effect on their scholarship, including the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues at CU-Boulder on books, scholarly papers, conferences, etc.:

It offered me an opportunity to teach about sustainability and environmental sociology in a new environment, thus allowing me to meet and work with different students... [and] to interact with outstanding faculty.

The one-course teaching load gave me time to write; a book I worked on with one CU faculty member came out in 2007. I also got excellent feedback on other writing in a research colloquium.



When asked about other effects, 79 percent of scholars reported a wide variety of positive experiences—networking with colleagues, receiving invitations to teach elsewhere and to serve on committees such as the Fulbright Commission. On a more personal level, scholars appreciated the opportunity to refresh and gain new perspectives, and in more than one case, to hike in the Rocky Mountains.

More than three-quarters (79 percent) noted that their positive experience depended on assistance from the host departments, colleagues, and summer session staff. Almost all scholars and chairs noted that finding short-term summer housing is a perennial problem.

*Effects on chairs and academic departments*

The three principal reasons that chairs elected to participate in the FIRST program were the opportunity to bring in distinguished faculty, the chance to expand their department's course offerings, and the resources to invite researchers of interest to the department. In most cases, departmental faculty nominating the scholar had previous interaction with the FIRST scholar. Chairs noted that the stipend provided for the scholar and the administrative support given to the department contributed to their positive experience: 87 percent of chairs reported an excellent experience and 12 percent as very good:

These scholars have been top-notch artists, authors and teachers .... A boon to undergrads, grads, and our faculty. They bring unique and special knowledge to our program and our curriculum.

In at least three cases, the chairs commented on the program's secondary effects in advancing departmental priorities. One chair noted that the "reputational boost" of hosting eminent scholars enabled her school to strengthen its offerings in a deficient subject area and to bring in other experts in the field. In another case, the relationships fostered through the FIRST program contributed to a successful proposal by a department for an international center. A third chair noted a positive effect on the overall environment and tone of the department, reinvigorating faculty and students alike. Further, chairs noted that some FIRST scholars referred potential graduate students to CU-Boulder departments.


Some department chairs hosted colloquia for their students and faculty featuring the FIRST scholar. On occasion, public lectures by the visiting scholar were provided to the Boulder/Denver community. However, some scholars resist the suggestion to give public lectures and one unit is reluctant

to arrange this unless an audience commensurate with the reputation of the visitor can be ensured.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study profiled the benefits and problems encountered in a faculty visitation program, primarily through the reported experiences of FIRST scholars and nominating chairs. The questionnaires were useful in documenting general trends and the subsequent interviews enriched an understanding of the scholars and chairs experiences. A limitation of the study was that students were not interviewed. However, interviews with the scholars and chairs combined with the students' FCQ data contributed to a general understanding of the students' experience.

In conclusion, the FIRST program provides multiple benefits to students, visiting scholars, host departments, and the university. Findings of the study suggested some areas for improvement that are incorporated in the following recommendations for a faculty visitation program:

- Attract prominent faculty for the benefit of the students and the department.
- Provide an adequate stipend to attract these accomplished faculty.
- Provide logistical support such as assistance with housing, visa, and transportation costs. In some cases, a student assistant might be beneficial.
- Distribute clear guidelines with sufficient lead-time for nominating scholars and specify the responsibilities of the host departments such as designating a faculty liaison to assist the visiting scholar.
- Encourage scholars to teach in their area of expertise and courses that meet major or core requirements to help maximize enrollment.
- Provide orientation to the university's guidelines for classroom behavior, grading, and syllabi.
- Provide a packet for scholars containing information about housing, visas, and resources available in the university and in the community for the scholar and family.
- Host a reception for the scholars and chairs. Invite chairs, departmental faculty involved in nominating scholars, deans, and the provost, when possible.
- Assist departments in arranging colloquia and/or public lectures, as appropriate. 

*This research was supported in part by the Research Consortium for the Theresa Neil Memorial Research Fund, financed by the Association of University Summer Sessions, North American Association of Summer Sessions, North Central Conference on Summer Sessions, and the Western Association of Summer Session Administrators.*

## APPENDIX

### FIRST Program Questionnaire for Visiting Faculty

1. How did you learn about the FIRST program?
2. Why was it of interest to you?
3. In general, how would you describe your overall experience with the FIRST program? (Extremely Poor, Poor, Fair, Very Good, Excellent)
4. What facilitated your participation?
5. Did you encounter any obstacles to participate? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (If yes, please describe.)
6. How would you characterize your teaching experience? (Extremely Poor, Poor, Fair, Very Good, Excellent)
7. How would you describe the students' experience in the learning process? (Extremely Poor, Poor, Fair, Very Good, Excellent)
8. Did your experience with FIRST affect your scholarship (teaching, research, creative work)? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (If yes, please describe.)
9. Did your experience with FIRST affect your faculty position at your home university? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please comment.)
10. Did your experience with FIRST affect you in other ways, professionally and/or personally? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please describe.)
11. Did you present a public or departmental lecture, symposia or other outreach activity? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please describe.)
12. Do you have any suggestions to improve the FIRST program? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please comment.)

### FIRST Program Questionnaire for Host Departments

1. How did you learn about the FIRST program?
2. Why was it of interest to you?
3. In general, how would you describe your overall experience with the FIRST program? (Extremely Poor, Poor, Fair, Very Good, Excellent)

4. What factors facilitated your department's participation? (Factors may include academic relationships, logistical support, etc.)
5. Did you encounter any obstacles to participation? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (If yes, please describe.)
6. How would you characterize the teaching of the FIRST scholar? (Extremely Poor, Poor, Fair, Very Good, Excellent). (Please comment.)
7. Other than the course taught by the FIRST scholar, was the scholarship (teaching, research, creative work, etc.) of your department affected? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (If yes, please describe.)
8. Was the FIRST program helpful in recruiting new faculty or students to your department? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please comment.)
9. Did your experience with FIRST affect your department in other ways? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please describe.)
10. Did your FIRST scholar present a public or departmental lecture, symposia or other outreach activity? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please describe.)
11. Do you have any suggestions to improve the FIRST program? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no (Please comment.)

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