

John N. Gardner

John N. Gardner, an educator, university professor and administrator, author, editor, public speaker, consultant, change agent, student retention specialist, first-year students advocate, initiator and scholar of the American first-year and senior year reform movements, resides in Pisgah Forest, North Carolina (Brevard, Asheville environs). This biographical sketch will describe his career and service in two distinct categories: 1) his work in his capacity as a public employee for the State of South Carolina at the University of South Carolina and most recently for a center funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Atlantic Philanthropies, and Lumina Foundation for Education, based in Brevard, N.C.; and 2) in his capacity as a private citizen as an author, educational consultant, and public speaker.

Part A:

Service as an Employee of the University of South Carolina and Policy Center on the First Year of College

John Gardner serves as the Executive Director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College, funded by a grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education. The Center, based in Brevard, N.C., was founded by John and his wife, Dr. Betsy O. Barefoot in October 1999 and in partnership with their colleague, Dr. Randy Swing who joined them in November of 1999. The Center works with colleges and universities to strengthen their resolve and processes to undertake assessment of the entire first college year experience as a means to improve student learning and retention. Currently, their work focuses on implementing a previously non-existent set of aspirational standards for excellence in the first year to be used both for the design of the first year and as a measurement process for effecting educational improvements. These new principles are known as "Foundational Dimensions® of Excellence in the First College Year. The Center has been funded in the amount of \$5,200,000 for the period 10/18/99 through 12/31/2004.

John is also the Senior Fellow of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina. The Center, founded by Gardner in 1986, organizes the popular and influential Conferences on The First-Year Experience, Students in Transition, and also disseminates information through an extensive series of scholarly publications, videos, national and international conferences, workshops, seminars, and teleconferences. Gardner retired in 1999 after 32 1/2 years of service to the people of South Carolina, but continues to serve them in a reduced and more focused way in his role of Senior Fellow. Previously, he served as Executive Director of both the first-year seminar course, University 10, from 1974-1999, and the National Center from 1986-99. He also served 13 years from 1983-96 as Vice Chancellor/Associate Vice Provost for Regional Campuses and Continuing Education. In his capacity with the National Resource Center, John Gardner provides advice, counsel, and intellectual leadership and vision as called upon by his beloved colleagues in the Center. He is actively involved in hosting and presenting at Center conferences, seminars, workshops, and teleconferences. He also remains very involved, as always, in the Center's scholarship and research activities as in its monograph series and other publishing activities.

Thanks to the US Air Force, Gardner was involuntarily sent to South Carolina in 1967

where he served his active duty assignment as a psychiatric social worker in the 363rd Tactical Hospital at Shaw Air Force Base. At the request of the Air Force he became a part-time adjunct instructor for the University of South Carolina while he was on active duty. After completing his military service, Gardner held a two year temporary appointment as Instructor of History at Winthrop College from 1968-70, and then began his faculty career at USC Columbia in 1970. He taught courses in American and South Carolina history, interpersonal communications for librarians, public speaking, higher education administration, and other special topics. He also regularly taught the first-year seminar, University 101 and a graduate course he developed for the College of Education on "The Freshman Year Experience." Most recently, from 1994-1998 he developed and taught University 401, Senior Capstone Experience (as a sequel to University 101, only for departing students).

Gardner is the recipient of numerous local and national professional awards including USC's highest award for teaching excellence, the AMOCO Award for Outstanding Teaching (1975) and the Division of Student Affairs Faculty Award "for outstanding contributions....."(1976) The University of South Carolina Alumni Association conferred upon him its highest award for a non-alum, the Honorary Life Membership "for devoted service in behalf of the University" in 1997. He was also named the 1998 recipient of the University's Administrative Affirmative Action Award "for an outstanding job in promoting equal opportunities at the University." Most recently, in 1999, he was the recipient of a University award created and named in his honor, "The John N. Gardner Inspirational Faculty Award" to be given henceforth to a member of the University faculty "who has made substantial contributions to the learning environment in campus residence hall life."

Gardner is the recipient of seven honorary doctoral degrees recognizing him for his contributions to American higher education (from his alma mater, Marietta College, 1985, Baldwin-Wallace College, 1990, Bridgewater State College, 1991, Millikin University, 1999, Purdue University, 2000, The University of Teeside, UK, 2000; and Rowan University, 2001. In 1986, he was selected by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) as one of 20 faculty in the U. S. who "... have made outstanding leadership contributions to their institutions and/or American higher education." In 1996 he was recognized by the Council of Independent Colleges with its Academic Leadership Award "for exemplary contributions to American higher education."

He has served on the Board of Directors for AAHE and the International Partnership for Service Learning; and on advisory boards for The American Council on Education, The Association of American Colleges and Universities, The New York Times, and Lumina Foundation for Education. He currently serves on boards of trustees for Marietta College and the Brevard Music Center. Gardner's work has been favorably reviewed in The Chronicle of Higher Education, The New York Times, The Times of London, U.S. News and World Report, Money magazine, and numerous other publications.

In the January 1998 issue of Change, Gardner was cited in an article naming approximately 80 people as the "past, present, and future leaders of higher education." The authors of this study drew on the results of 11,000 questionnaires to name the leaders whom The Chronicle of Higher Education dubbed "the movers and shakers." Gardner was included in a special category of eleven so called "agenda-setters."

Also in 1998 Gardner was named as one of the "top ten professionals who have most influenced student affairs practitioners." This was based on a random sample of practitioners throughout the country as part of a study entitled "The Professional Influence Project" sponsored by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Foundation and conducted by The University of Georgia. In 1999 Gardner was awarded by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) the Virginia N. Gordon Award for Excellence in the Field of Advising, to recognize his contributions towards the enhancement of academic advisement in American higher education. One of the nation's two major professional organizations for student affairs officers, The American College Personnel Association, recognized him with its highest honor, the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002.

Gardner is best known as the initiator (in 1982) of an international reform movement in higher education to call attention to and improve what he has coined "The Freshman Year Experience." Moreover, since 1990 he has developed a special focus on a second critical transition during the college years to improve and champion: "The Senior Year Experience." In 1995, he renamed the Center he directed at USC to The National Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, to signify a broader and more generic focus on the need for institutions to focus more intentionally on "students in transition."

In academic year, 1998-99, Gardner had the unique opportunity and privilege to participate in a research and planning process funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The focus in this project was to assess what had been accomplished to date by his USC Center to enhance the First-Year Experience, what steps were needed next to further improve this critical component of American higher education, and how could he best contribute to that process in some new and unique ways. That planning grant led to the founding of the Policy Center on the First Year of College.

Part B:

Service as a Private Citizen for the Larger Higher Education Community

Gardner's special area of expertise in higher education is the creation of programs to enhance the learning, success, retention, and graduation of students in transition, especially first-year students, for example through first-year seminar courses. He has served as a workshop leader or trainer in hundreds of faculty development events and has spoken on/consulted with over 400 campuses in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Canada, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Denmark, and Norway on issues related to first-year and senior students.

Gardner has authored/co-authored numerous articles and books, including: College is Only the Beginning (1985 and 1989), Step by Step to College Success (1987), Your College Experience (1992,1993,1995,1996,1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 in press with A. Jerome Jewler; with M. Lee Upcraft, The Freshman Year Experience (1989); Ready for The Real World (1994) with William Hartel and Associates; The Senior Year Experience, 1997, with Gretchen Van der Veer; with M. Lee upcraft and Betsy O. Barefoot, Challenging and Supporting the First Year Student, 2005; and, in press for 2005 with Betsy O. Barefoot and Associates, Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence For the First Year of College.

Conclusion

Thanks to the generous grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Atlantic

Philanthropies, and Lumina Foundation for Education, his primary commitment now is to develop the potential of the new Policy Center on The First Year of College as his primary means of continuing on a full-time basis his crusade on behalf of enhancing the first-year experience.

In his life outside his work, John has one son, Jonathan David Gardner, a 29 year old graduate of Elon University; and one stepson, Wynn Corley, a 37 year old graduate of the University of South Carolina; both live in Lexington, S.C. John is married to another distinguished scholar and leader of the first-year experience reform movement, Dr. Betsy O. Barefoot. Betsy, who is the former Co-director for Research and Publications of the USC National Resource Center, currently is a Co-director and Senior Scholar of the Policy Center on the First Year of College.