LESSONS LEARNED:
1. Although they are on the University campus, the University Village Apartments are somewhat removed from the academic buildings. (Indeed, since the campus is built on a hillside and UVA is topographically lower, students began referring to leaving UVA and going to the classroom buildings as going “up top.”) With all of the San Marcos Experience courses being held in the University Village Apartments classroom, many students reported a sense of isolation from the general campus community.

2. Based on the Fall ’04 to Spring ’05 transition, we are now building our ’05/’06 San Marcos Experience learning community for an entire academic year. We have decided that it would be best if the Spring learning community courses fit inside the same time periods that the Fall courses occupy.

3. We have learned the importance of planning with our “department partners” to secure appropriate sections of our desired courses.

4. Earlier planning and collaboration between instructors will allow for tighter linkages between the learning community courses. This linkage should be reflected in the course syllabi.

Plans for the ‘05/’06 San Marcos Experience & Future Learning Communities:
1. In addition to the unit bearing learning community courses, we will be including a special block of time on Friday afternoons reserved for a “Roundtable” program. This program will include opportunities for students to network with faculty and staff, listen to keynote speakers, view films, go on field trips, perform community service, and other Student Affairs based co-curricular activities.

2. We have received a small grant from our Office of Community Service-Learning to develop a formal civic engagement theme for our San Marcos Experience and we are actively exploring a number of service-learning projects for our San Marcos Experience students.

3. To facilitate integration into the main campus community, some of the San Marcos Experience courses will be held outside of University Village (in the regular campus classrooms). We will also be offering more outside-of-class activities on the main campus.

4. First-Year Programs is supporting a “scale-up” in the number of learning communities. Our current goal is to add one new learning community each academic year. In future years, learning communities will be developed specifically for students who share common academic interests (e.g., Business Administration, future teachers) or who are undeclared or uncertain/undecided about their choice of major.

5. We are exploring the idea of requiring all of our residential first-time-freshmen to complete our first-year student seminar (GEL 101) during their first semester.

6. Based on a pilot with the ‘04/’05 San Marcos Experience, we will be offering a New York Times readership program in association with our Associated Students Inc.

7. A pair of year-long learning communities will cover only a fraction of the incoming first-year students living on campus in University Village Apartments. First-Year Programs is supportive of linking the remaining University Village based GEL sections with GEW sections to form “mini-learning communities.”