Welcome to boot camp.
College starts now.

By Keiko Weil ’87
Photos by Tim Dunn

College of Engineering freshman E-FIT participants prepare for the rigors of earning an engineering degree at Nevada during the physics portion of the program dealing with trebuchets and projectile motion.
As an incoming freshman from Las Vegas, Taylor Tindall received an email about NevadaFIT, the five-day residential academic program designed to increase success for incoming college students. Figuring her parents couldn’t afford the program, she dismissed the message.

Shortly before she was to begin her first year at the University of Nevada, Reno, Tindall’s parents told her to pack for a camping trip. But rather than pulling into a campground, they drove to campus, opened the door, and said, “Welcome to ScienceFIT!”

“I literally got booted to boot camp,” she laughs. “I was automatically overwhelmed with excitement and the program was more than I ever hoped.”

Tindall returned to the program in 2015, but this time as a mentor.

“I would definitely recommend this program over and over,” Tindall says. “It’s really helpful for anxiety over college, and even if students think they’re prepared, it is effective.”

“It was just five days but it changed me in a way that will carry me through my entire career,” Tindall says. “It helped me with my fear of failing, got me involved in clubs and helped me with performance anxiety.”

NevadaFIT, short for “freshman intensive transition,” is designed to increase success for incoming freshman college students. Appropriately referred to as a “boot camp,” the program offers a focused glimpse into the University’s rigorous academic expectations and college life prior to the start of the semester.

“NevadaFIT is part of the University’s commitment to creating a culture of student success and completion,” says University President Marc Johnson. “Our goal is to help students successfully transition from high school to college, and NevadaFIT provides a realistic orientation to the style, pace, intensity and rigor of college courses. After completing the program, students are better prepared for their first semester of college.”

Replicated at more than 30 campuses nationwide, NevadaFIT is modeled after “BIOS,” a program established at Louisiana State University (LSU) to help freshmen biology majors successfully transition into college. “BIOS” has received acclaim from organizations such as the American Association for the Advance-
ment of Science and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

Before joining the University in 2013 as executive vice president and provost, Kevin Carman was dean of the College of Science at LSU when “BIOS” was launched in 2005. He made implementing a similar program at Nevada his priority. “Academic boot camps dramatically increase academic performance and student success rates,” Carman said. “It’s exciting to see students recognize and embrace the hard work needed to be successful. Students who go through boot camp are twice as likely to graduate in their major. We give them tools for success.”

The first boot camp program at Nevada, BioFIT, was attended by 48 freshman biology majors in 2013. In 2014, more than 350 students attended the program, which was expanded beyond biology, making Nevada the first university to translate the academic boot camp to majors beyond the sciences. This fall, attendance in NevadaFIT topped 400 students in all eight colleges and across 40 different majors.

It is 3:30 p.m. on a sunny August afternoon, and many of the students in a lecture hall at the Davidson Mathematics and Science Center on the Nevada campus wear shorts and sunglasses on their heads, but they are not having a day at the beach.

With brows furrowed in concentration and not a single side conversation, they study a quadratic equation on the overhead projector and try to crack the problem at hand.

Incoming freshman Alejandro Cortez Ramirez, a pre-business major, says he chose to attend NevadaFIT to ensure he’s prepared for the academic rigors that lie ahead.

“Since I’m coming here from high school, I thought this would be a smart thing to do,” Cortez Ramirez says. “It’s giving me an advance look at what I’ll see in my classes, so it’s actual work.”

A typical day in the five-day program starts with a 7:30 a.m. breakfast, then a lecture followed by a lab class, lunch, a study session and an exam. After a writing study session, the students have dinner, another lecture and exam discussion. Throughout their busy schedule, the students also attend learning sessions to help them understand note taking and learning styles, how to deal with stress and test anxiety, as well as academic integrity and decision making.

“Students may be surprised by the intensity of the program,” Carman said, “but college is rigorous and can be stressful. We want to give students a realistic sample of what they will experience in college. Students’ confidence may be shaken as they go through the program, but when they complete NevadaFIT, you see students who ‘get it.’ They are more confident and have a greater understanding of what it takes to be successful in college.”

NevadaFIT students get hands-on exposure to lab experiences and lectures by faculty who will teach their first semester courses. They learn about career opportunities in their chosen fields of study and about research projects in their areas of interest.

For many students, personal interactions can often be as daunting as academic concerns, so NevadaFIT students have ample opportunity to meet and interact with faculty, staff and academic advisors. They also participate in team building and wellness exercises as important components of the program.

NevadaFIT students are grouped into “packs” of six students each and are guided
In a nutshell:
NevadaFIT 2016

Who:
Incoming freshmen students must have a declared major that corresponds to one of the available camps.

What:
A five-day intensive academic preparation camp. One-credit hour pass-fail course which counts toward students’ graduation.

When:
Aug. 21-25, 2016

Where:
University of Nevada, Reno campus

Why:
The transition to college can be overwhelming, even for the best high school students. This boot camp will give students a head start for success.

More Information:
http://www.unr.edu/nevadafit

Mary Feliz
NevadaFIT Coordinator
nevadafit@unr.edu
Phone (775) 682-7113

More than 400 incoming freshmen participated in the 2015 NevadaFIT program before the fall semester began to get a jumpstart on the academic expectations of college life.

Participants in Community Health Sciences, HealthFIT, get hands-on experience with the SimMan3G patient simulator in the University’s Clinical Simulation Lab. Kelly Farley, simulation coordinator in the Office of Medical Education, leads the demonstration.

University services like the math, writing and tutoring centers support academic success and timely graduation. These dedicated services are available for the entire student body, and during NevadaFIT, students have the chance to explore these resources, including presentations and demonstrations with center staff. They get hands-on experience using online course components, technology and resources such as WebCampus, the University’s online course management system, and they discover countless other opportunities such as scholarships, internships, clubs and organizations.

Students who are registered to live on campus during the academic year can move into their permanently assigned rooms during NevadaFIT. Meals during the program are provided in the campus’ buffet-style dining hall, the Downunder Café. The program is presented the week prior to the beginning of the fall term, so NevadaFIT students proceed directly into the school year. “Pack study groups continue into the fall semester where members are enrolled in one or more courses together,” said Carman. “They come to class the first day and see several familiar faces, and they know they belong. Peer mentoring by an undergraduate peer mentor. Many peer mentors, like Taylor Tindall, were NevadaFIT attendees themselves. Mentors share the same major as their pack members and help students through the program, including leading study sessions. They help students navigate campus efficiently and familiarize them with their new environment by conducting building and lab tours.

Participants seeking a degree in journalism in the J-FIT program listen as Reynolds School of Journalism Dean Al Stavitsky presents his lecture “All Things Media.”
mentors often stay in close contact with pack members and provide support throughout the year.”

Students pay a fee to attend NevadaFIT that assists with the cost of the program, including compensation for student peer mentors. Additional housing fees apply for students who move into campus housing during NevadaFIT. Private funds are raised to offer financial aid for students who might not otherwise be able to afford the fee or housing costs. This year more than half of registered NevadaFIT students’ fees were covered by donations. Beginning in 2016, NevadaFIT will become a one credit-hour pass-fail course which will count toward graduation and can be included in financial aid packages. In addition to the one-credit tuition, students will pay a course fee of $250. Private support will continue to be sought to cover fees and housing costs for students who have financial need.

“Many community partners, alumni and friends support NevadaFIT, and because of them, students who qualify have their full attendance paid,” Carman said. “We work hard to make sure any student who has financial need will be able to attend.”

Parents are invited to attend an opening information session with the Provost to hear more about the NevadaFIT experience and how they can help their student be successful in college. They are also invited to experience the beauty of the Nevada campus during the closing barbeque on the historic Quad at the completion of NevadaFIT.

The objectives of NevadaFIT are to increase college success, retention, grade-point average and on-time graduation. Just three years in, the effects of the program have been convincing. So compelling are the outcomes, that beginning in fall 2016, the College of Science has opted to make ScienceFIT a required one-credit course for all science majors. “The estimated 600 incoming freshmen pursuing majors in the College of Science deserve the best opportunity for college success. We are convinced NevadaFIT is that best opportunity. Accordingly, we have incorporated NevadaFIT into the College of Science curriculum beginning next fall,” says Jeff Thompson, dean of the College of Science.

The positive impact of the NevadaFIT

“From the time freshmen first step on campus, we take seriously our job to help them be successful students and citizens. NevadaFIT is the perfect approach to get students started on the right foot.”

- President Marc Johnson
Students who participate in NevadaFIT:

- Get a realistic exposure to a class that the student will take in the fall semester
- Participate in lectures from the faculty who will actually teach the course in the fall semester
- Get a jump start on course content
- Work closely with an undergraduate mentor in the student’s major
- Take actual exams and receive feedback on how to improve performance
- Form study groups (Packs). Pack members are enrolled together in one or more courses in the fall semester
- Learn about possible research and other experiential learning opportunities
- Develop and hone critical skills necessary to be successful in college (e.g., time management, note taking, test taking, and understanding complex material)
- Meet and interact with faculty, staff and students in the student’s major

NevadaFIT is available to these majors:

**Science: (ScienceFIT)**
- Life Sciences
- Biology
- Molecular Microbiology & Immunology
- Neuroscience
- Physical Sciences & Engineering
- Atmospheric Sciences
- Chemistry
- Geology
- Geophysics
- Geological Engineering
- Hydrogeology
- Mathematics
- Metallurgical Engineering
- Mining Engineering
- Physics

**Community Health Sciences: (HealthFIT)**
- Community Health Sciences

**EDUCATION (FIT2CARE)**
- Human Development and Family Studies
- Nursing

**Engineering (EFIT)**
- Chemical Engineering
- Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Computer Science and Engineering
- Electrical Engineering
- Engineering Physics
- Materials Science and Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Undeclared Engineering

**Journalism (JFIT)**
- Journalism

**Liberal Arts (PsychFIT)**
- Psychology

*Beginning fall 2016, NevadaFIT is required for all science majors. For all other majors, NevadaFIT is optional.*