

Blueprint for Excellence: Improving Student Success in the First Year

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

**Foundations of Excellence® / SIUC First Year
Experience Task Force, June 2009**

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Steering Committee:

Mark Amos (Co-chair)

Julie Payne-Kirchmeier (Co-
chair)

Jim Allen

Jake Baggott

Alejandro Cáceres

Terry Clark

Carla Coppi

Willie Ehling

Phillip Howze

Peter Gitau

Heidi Jung

Jeannie Killian

Meera Komarraju

Lori Merrill-Fink

John Nicklow

Lisa Peden

Virginia Rinella

Jim Scales

Larry Schilling

Katie Sermersheim

Rosemary Simmons

Julia Spears

Lori Stettler

Carmen Suarez

Victoria Valle

Mark Watson

Tamara Yakaboski

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Foundations of Excellence® / SIUC First Year Experience Task Force

In a recent expression of its commitment to undergraduate education, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) sought to advance its ongoing work towards a First Year Experience by applying to join the 2008-09 cohort of the Foundations of Excellence®. Developed by the Policy Center on the First Year of College – a non-profit, Higher Education, policy, advocacy, and research center, founded and headed by John Gardner, one of the pioneers of the First Year Experience – the Foundations of Excellence® project provides an aspirational, evidence-based protocol for self-study. Throughout, the collaborative, campus-based, inclusive and transparent self-study was linked to SIUC's vision, mission, values, and strategic goals. SIUC's participation in this initiative received strong support from the Offices of the Provost and of the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. The importance of this administrative support must not be understated, as current research indicates it is crucial to the success of retention and student-support efforts. SIUC was accepted into this year's cohort of twenty, four-year institutions.

A task force was assembled under the direction of Mark Amos, associate professor of English, and Julie Payne Kirchmeier, director of Housing. More than ninety members of the SIUC campus community were recruited from faculty and academic affairs professionals, student affairs professionals, graduate and undergraduate students, assessment professionals, admission and recruiting professionals, and others who interact with first-year students. Advising this task force is Dean Scott Evenbeck of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), a school renowned for its excellent First Year Experience.

A Steering Committee and nine Foundational Dimension® committees were formed, each including faculty, academic affairs professionals, student affairs professionals, and graduate and undergraduate students. The study was data-driven, assembling and drawing upon a Current Practice Inventory, an Evidence Library, two surveys, and current research in the field. This data was then evaluated against institutional and external performance indicators. The extent of this collection and analysis of extant institutional data is broad, and unique in the history of SIUC.

The Foundations of Excellence® process has facilitated a collaboration among faculty, staff, and students coming together for the self-study, and an equally broadly-constituted committee will guide the program as it develops. As the process of its development was data-based, so too is its evolution, for the outcomes of curricular and co-curricular components of the program will be evaluated. This empirical emphasis will provide platforms consistent with faculty interests for research on enhancing student learning and will feed into faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and

learning. The roles of students as mentors for other students in the programming will foster a culture of learning as mentors increase time on task for entering students.

The result of this self-study is a five-year, detailed, intentional action plan for enhancing the effectiveness of the first year. This coordinated, comprehensive, intentional program will benefit our first-year students in all aspects of their lives here at SIUC. The program's realigned and newly created first-year structures, programs, and activities will improve student engagement and success, as measured by continuous student enrollment and retention gains.

The significance of campus ownership – both symbolic and actual – of the first year experience can be seen in the Faculty Senate's unanimous endorsement of the program's goals and its philosophy:

Philosophy of the First Year

We believe that the First Year is a critical time in the lives of our students, as well as their families. It is a time of transition from high school into college life, and a time for growth, transformation, and holistic development. Living away from home can be unsettling for some students, just as others embrace their newfound independence. All, however, must acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and coping mechanisms required of the successful student. None should leave us without learning, experiencing engagement, and connecting to others. The First Year at SIUC begins a relationship between the student and our campus community from our very first interaction.

We believe that first year students will rejoin us for a second year and more if they are successful and if we help them feel that they are a part of SIUC. For this to happen, SIUC must adopt and implement a strategically coordinated first year experience that integrates a student-centered orientation and applies the principles of caring, cohesiveness and connectedness. First year programs and opportunities should purposefully support students in building academic competence, becoming information literate, encountering diverse viewpoints, forming good habits, gaining self-awareness, getting involved and learning the value of service.

Recommendations of the Foundations of Excellence® / SIUC First Year Experience Task Force

Based upon the self study and corresponding dimension committee reports, the steering committee for the Foundations of Excellence process recommends that SIUC:

Centralizing Organization

- Commit significant, ongoing, and dedicated resources to the SIUC First Year Experience.
- Establish an Office of the First Year Experience, a Teaching Resource Center, and a Student Success Center located in Morris Library.
- Develop and institute an organizational structure that crosses institutional units to enable the OFYE – under the advisement of a university-wide committee – to set program goals and objectives, develop a comprehensive assessment plan, coordinate current first-year programs and services, and to develop and launch new first-year initiatives. The program should be directed by one person from Academic Affairs and one from Student Affairs and should report as directly as possible to the Chancellor.
- Establish a communication system interconnecting divisions, units, and programs relevant to SIUC's first-year students and extend that system beyond the campus community.

Broadening Academic Support Services

- Develop student learning goals and measurable outcomes, coordinate current successful academic programs and services for first year-students, and increase support for successful first-year programs.
- Develop and implement new FYE programs to fully support incoming students, including a mandatory first year seminar as part of the University Core Curriculum.
- Coordinate and expand current tutoring services for first-year students in subject areas identified as critical to first year student success.

Deepening Student Support Services

- Institute and support ongoing student orientation to the expectations, opportunities, and resources for success at SIUC and beyond.
- Establish a comprehensive student support system including an early warning system, early feedback processes, followed up with supportive intervention.
- Coordinate and support first-year co-curricular programs with significant diversity components that explore differences in cultures, thoughts, and ideas.

Disseminating Teaching and Learning Resources

- Establish and support a Teaching Resource Center to design and implement training and development programs for new and continuing faculty and staff. These programs will address developmental and pedagogical issues, collect and disseminate information resources, and train tutors/instructors in first-year courses.
- Develop a system of incentives to reward faculty and staff for developing and delivering FYE curricular and co-curricular initiatives.

Ensuring Assessment and Improvement

- Coordinate with the Office of University Assessment to gather data on incoming students, make data-based decisions on their needs and placement, and act on those decisions.
- Measure student learning outcomes after all first-year courses and programs to make data-based decisions on revisions to the first-year curriculum and related activities

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE FOR FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

To chart a course that will bring to reality the recommendations of the SIUC Foundations of Excellence[®] Task Force, the Steering Committee developed a general timeline for phasing in the various elements of the five-year comprehensive plan. This timeline first requires an implementation team, and, subsequently, a campus-wide committee to coordinate and supervise the SIUC staff responsible for implementing the First Year Experience program.

It is critical to note that the implementation must team be developed and begin work in June 2009, in order for the first phase of the First Year Experience program to be operational by Fall 2009.

Year One (2009-2010)

Overarching

- Publicly launch the FYE program to the campus community, the local community, and area and state legislators
- Collect data and establish benchmarks (see below)
- Contribute to the development of comprehensive overtime policy for the University so that FYE instructional faculty and staff may be compensated

Centralizing Organization

- Establish and staff an Office of the First Year Experience
- Coordinate faculty and staff development opportunities to transition to a Center for Teaching and Learning Success
- Coordinate tutoring and plan for a Center for Learning and Student Success

Broadening Academic Support Services

- Define program goals including the following:
 - recruit and retain faculty of color
 - develop relationships between student affairs practitioners and faculty
 - foster cooperation and coordination between divisions and units
 - deploy faculty/staff focus groups to determine areas of expertise and to generate ideas for collaboration
 - encourage greater faculty participation and collaboration in the first year advisement process
- Generate specific first-year learning goals and measurable student outcomes
- Review existing orientation programs, infuse with FYE information
- Coordinate current first-year specific coursework in English 101, Communication 101, and the introductory Mathematics courses (Math 107, 108, 113, 120)
- Support the development of college-specific first-year seminars that meet first

year learning goals and offer measurable student outcomes:

- examine existing first-year seminar courses and assess their success
- develop protocols for vetting potential college-specific first-year seminars
- develop methods to provide for co-teaching with a Student Affairs colleague or to increase levels of TA and UTA resource support for first year classes
- Develop curricular revisions that require certain sequential courses for all first-year students

Deepening Student Support Services

- Establish first-year information clearinghouse with an e-mail address and website
- Establish first-year listserv, Facebook group, Twitter
- Coordinate campus resource packet / coordinated calendar
- Begin first-year events series, with follow-up brownbag discussions
- Study best practices for advising of first-year students
- Market availability of resources to students

Disseminating Teaching and Learning Resources

- Establish and staff a Center for First-Year Teaching and Learning Success
- Collect and disseminate teaching and learning information resources
- Provide training for first year instruction and support services
- Develop a repository of pedagogical issues, including centralized diversity syllabi
- Coordinate and expand current tutoring services available to first-year students
- Design a training and development program for new and continuing faculty on pedagogical and developmental issues
- Develop a tangible reward system for faculty and staff who design and deliver first-year seminars, who support first-year initiatives, and who update first year course content to engage first year pedagogies
- Design criteria and rewards for a First-Year Teacher of the Year Award

Ensuring Assessment and Improvement

- Develop appropriate assessment measures for all first-year activities
- Provide for electronic assessment/tracking of student progress through learning goals
- Evaluate the effectiveness of previous common reader programs and consider other common academic assignments and projects
- Investigate best practices for Early Warning systems and design appropriate interventions
- Investigate best practices of the Center for Academic Success, begin discussions to coordinate that program fully with the rest of the FYE
- Begin placement testing in Foreign Languages
- Determine placement testing procedures for English and Mathematics
- Institute early-feedback mechanism for first-year students
- Aggressively market FYE to prospective students
- Design a program to deploy graduate students in a mentorship program with first-year students

- Expand use of the Release of Information form for incoming students

Year Two (2010-2011)

Overarching

- Within every department on campus, identify the courses which enroll freshmen and involve the instructors of those courses in the FYE initiatives
- Develop ways to encourage the involvement of tenured and continuing faculty with the first year experience, both in terms of teaching first-year seminars and involvement in first-year programs outside the classroom
- Implement tangible reward system for faculty and staff who design and deliver first-year seminars, who support first-year initiatives, and who update first year course content to engage first year pedagogies
- Identify faculty recruitment models that foster excellent first-year teaching

Centralizing Organization

- Establish and staff a Center for Learning and Student Support including:
 - tutoring facilities, including tutoring lab space
 - small classroom spaces
 - casual study space
 - computer labs
 - on-line tutoring, accessible 24/7
- Appoint a Director of Tutoring / Learning Support
- Appoint Coordinator of the Early Warning System and Interventions

Broadening Academic Support Services

- Begin placement testing for English and Mathematics
- Launch college-specific first year seminars across the University
- Establish uniform Early Warning System across first-year curriculum and programs
- Formalize and expand early feedback mechanisms for students
- Expand Hobson's Retain, GradesFirst and MAPworks programs and make information available to broader audience
- Solicit dossiers for the First-Year Teacher of the Year Award

Deepening Student Support Services

- Launch university-wide Common Reader Program, centering on Communication 101, English 101, and University 101
- Ensure the best outcome for students by requiring that instructors of First Year Seminars
 - are enlisted on a voluntary basis (not assigned) from faculty and qualified staff
 - receive compensation for courses taught above an instructor's set load or in addition to a staff member's regular duties
- Begin first year lecture/event series
- Review flowchart for new students, including application, acceptance, financial aid, advising, and registration for inefficiencies, redundancies, and student-

friendliness

Disseminating Teaching and Learning Resources

- Review new faculty orientation programs for their relevance to the FYE and develop a campus-wide program that is a regular part of all welcome/training programs for all new employees to familiarize them with campus resources, particularly applicable to freshman success
- Market availability of resources to faculty
- Implement a thoroughgoing program of faculty training and development on pedagogical and developmental issues
- Launch teaching resource pages accessible to all faculty and staff

Ensuring Assessment and Improvement

- Institute assessment measures and protocols for all first-year programs and courses
- Analyze survey data, current practices inventory, and resource library to design first-year experience for transfer students
- Conduct focus groups to determine more clearly why students are not attending classes, why they are not successful
- Compare the retention and performance numbers for students who are enrolled in the FYE initiatives relative to students from previous years who did not have the opportunity of FYE courses
- Compare the academic self-efficacy of students at the start of the FYE courses and at the end to assess whether the FYE initiatives are increasing their confidence in being able to do well academically

Years Three to Five (2011-2014)

Overarching

- Launch Transfer Year Experience
- Launch specialized first year experience programs for specific populations (e.g. women, underrepresented populations, returning veterans)
- Develop a plan to transition into a University College
- Recruit administrators to lead the University College

Centralizing Organization

- Establish a University College (year 5)

Broadening Academic Support Services

- Implement Writing Fellows program
- Design a multicultural Living Learning Center / residence hall

Deepening Student Support Services

- Examine strategies including a incentive/reward structure to increase student

participation in co-curricular programming, especially by non-residence-hall students

- Expand co-curricular programming to bring in individuals of different cultures and backgrounds, non-traditional first-year student, as well as select populations (e.g. veterans, non-traditional aged students)
- Coordinate and extend efforts to bring in speakers and guest lecturers
- Return to and revitalize Convocation
- Explore how best to expand student leadership and service learning opportunities, both within and outside of the classroom
- Find new ways to engage students in the education process, broadly defined
- Develop a student mentoring program and a coordinated student leadership program for first year students
- Institute changes to make more student-friendly, and streamline the flowchart for new students, including application, acceptance, financial aid, advising, registration, and matriculation

Disseminating Teaching and Learning Resources

- Develop means by which faculty can spur students to participate in venues that promote interaction with others
- Provide training and support for 1) challenges with incivility in the classroom, 2) triaging for referral students w/ difficulties, and 3) assessment: how to collect, share, and use data on course outcomes and faculty issues to improve teaching and services

Ensuring Assessment and Improvement

- Formalize and use technology assessment platforms for data gathering and analysis

RECOMMENDATIONS

ORGANIZATION

[Recommendations adapted from Dimension Reports from the Philosophy, Organization, Learning, Faculty, Transitions, All Students, Diversity, Roles and Purposes, and Improvement Committees]

•**Recommendation:** The University should commit significant, ongoing, and dedicated resources to SIUC's First Year Experience.

To ensure the success of this program, the administration should make a long-term commitment of significant, dedicated resources to support an intentional, comprehensive program to increase the academic and social success of SIUC's first-year students.

•**Recommendation:** The University should establish an Office of the First Year Experience (OFYE), a Teaching Resource Center, and a Student Success Center, and locate them in Morris Library.

The responsibility for planning, coordinating, implementing, assessing, and overseeing all units, programs, and experiences critical to the successful experience of SIUC's incoming students should reside in a centralized Office of the First Year Experience. This office will be responsible for coordinating services to first-year students, beginning when they are prospective students investigating SIUC and until the time they achieve sophomore status. It will also be responsible for designing services for transfer students in their first year at SIUC. The program should be directed by a person from Academic Affairs and a counterpart from Student Affairs, and should report as directly as possible to the Chancellor.

To demonstrate the centrality – both physically and symbolically – of the FYE program to SIUC's educational mission, the First Year Experience's offices, the Teaching Resource Center, and the Student Success Center should be located in Morris Library. Morris Library offers a space which uniquely fulfills the following nine criteria: location, ease of navigation/access, usefulness, implied message, neutrality of program, hours of access, proximity to other student support programs, availability of parking, and safety/security.

•**Recommendation:** The University should develop and institute an organizational structure that crosses institutional units to enable the OFYE – under the advisement of a university-wide committee – to set program goals and objectives, to develop comprehensive assessment plans, to coordinate current first-year programs and

services, and to develop and launch new first-year initiatives.

The organizational structure must enable strategic planning that includes identifying overall curricular and co-curricular objectives – including a variety of literacies and treatment of issues of diversity. Objectives for specific units and programs should be developed from these, with goals stated in course syllabi. Using benchmark data, it will be possible to fully assess the achievement of Saluki First Year Success effectiveness in improving curricular and co-curricular student learning and quality of student life.

A committee comprising individuals from a number of different units will help to identify and benchmark best practices in Office of the First Year Experience structures at other universities, and to blend these with SIUC's particular structures.

•Recommendation: The University should establish a communication system interconnecting divisions, units, and programs relevant to SIUC's first-year students, and extend that system beyond the campus community.

With the goal of designing and implementing an effective communication system at SIUC – both internal and external – the University should support a program to identify and benchmark best practices in campus communication at other universities. This system should deploy multiple technologies – especially those most accessed by students – and include a website developed with three audiences in mind: faculty/staff, students, and parents/families. Learning goals for the First Year Experience should be disseminated both within the existing campus community and to new students and their families.

This communication network should broadcast important and timely information regarding FYE programs and services to a broader range of personnel and students at SIUC. Data regarding first-year student characteristics and assessment data should be disseminated widely to enable departments to create services and programs to address common challenges and opportunities.

BROADENING ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

[Recommendations adapted from Dimension Reports from the Learning, Faculty, Transitions, All Students, Diversity, and Roles and Purposes Committees]

•Recommendation: The University should develop student learning goals and measurable outcomes, coordinate current successful academic programs and services for first year-students, and increase support for successful programs.

To form a comprehensive first year experience, the OFYE should incorporate or coordinate the activities of a broad spectrum of programs including orientation programs (e.g. SOAR, Week of Welcome, Saluki Family Association), tutoring services such as the Writing Center and Supplemental Instruction, the Center for Academic Success' University 100 (UNIV 100), Pre-major Advising's University 101 (UNIV 101), the University Core Curriculum, Academic Advising, Early Warning and Intervention Systems, Career Services and Placement Offices, Instructional Support Services, TRIO programs, Student Leadership and Engagement Programs, and Service Learning Opportunities.

•Recommendation: The University should develop and implement new FYE programs to fully support its first-year students, including a mandatory first-year seminar that is part of the University Core curriculum.

The OFYE should establish specific first-year student learning goals and use these to design a First Year Seminar course similar to UNIV 100 and UNIV 101. The University Core Curriculum should mandate one of these courses, UNIV 100, UNIV 101, or the FYS course, for all first-year students. The OFYE should design criteria for such courses, including multiple literacies and treatment of diversity, and encourage individual colleges to develop and implement first-year, discipline-based seminars for their students. The Teaching Resource Center should train all instructors teaching a First Year Seminar in first-year pedagogies, and, when staffing permits, offer faculty development to those teaching any course focusing on first-year students.

•Recommendation: The University should coordinate and expand current tutoring services for first-year students in a variety of subject areas.

In addition to centralizing faculty pedagogical development, one function of the Teaching Resource Center will be to create a Student Success Center to serve as a clearinghouse of relevant information and services, and to provide

tutoring for students in courses with heavy first-year enrollments. A Mathematics and Science Center should be developed as part of the Student Success Center, and first year students should be encouraged to utilize Supplemental Instruction and the Writing Center, which should be expanded to accommodate the increased demand.

DEEPENING STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

[Recommendations adapted from Dimension Reports from the Learning, Transitions, All Students, Diversity, and Improvement Committees]

•**Recommendation:** The University should institute and support ongoing student orientation to the expectations, opportunities, and resources for success at SIUC and beyond.

The OFYE should provide incoming students with continuous orientation to university life throughout the first year. Grounded in best practices, the FYE Committee will develop learning criteria and communicate with both students and families information vital to first-year student success, discussing via the first-year website and newsletter first-year issues including academic expectations, multiculturalism and diversity, service opportunities, and resources available at SIUC. The OFYE should also partner with P-20 programs and secondary school personnel to promote student preparation and success.

•**Recommendation:** The University should establish a comprehensive student support system including an early warning system, early feedback processes, and follow-up with supportive intervention.

The University should investigate best practices in first year early intervention systems at SIUC and other universities and create and staff a permanent, university-wide early intervention system for all first-year students. This system should be assessment-based, include feedback mechanisms, and coordinate with existing and yet-to-be developed support systems and programs on the campus, including a mandatory, integrated program for assisting students when there are indicators of academic, financial, or social distress.

•**Recommendation:** The University should coordinate and support first-year co-curricular programs with a significant diversity component that explores differences in cultures, thoughts, and ideas.

Strategies to better engage students in the holistic educational process and to increase faculty participation in co-curricular programming should be deployed. Non-traditional first year students should be targeted in particular (e.g. underrepresented groups, veterans, parents, non-traditional aged students). Programs such as a student mentoring program or a coordinated student leadership program should be part of the effort to encourage students' self-responsibility, self-motivation, and healthy living. Existing programs should be enhanced by increasing the number of advisors, providing appropriate staffing for the Counseling Center, and increasing the resources for Supplemental Instruction.

DISSEMINATING TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

[Recommendations adapted from the Dimension Reports of the Organization, Learning Faculty, All Students, Diversity, Roles and Purposes, and Improvement Committees]

•Recommendation: The University should establish and support a Teaching Resource Center to design and implement a program of training and development for new and continuing faculty and staff. This program would address development and pedagogical issues, collect and disseminate information resources, and train tutors/instructors in first-year courses.

The Office of the First Year should create a Teaching Resource Center (TRC) to provide ongoing and systematic professional development for instructors, especially in regard to pedagogical support and issues of engaging and motivating students. The TRC will be responsible for maintaining a repository of pedagogical ideas – including centralized diversity syllabi – and a teaching resources web page accessible to all faculty and staff. Additionally, the TRC will provide professional development and administrative support. It will also encourage the involvement of tenured faculty with the FYE, both in terms of teaching first-year courses and being involved in FYE programs outside of the classroom.

To familiarize new faculty and staff with campus resources particularly applicable to freshman success, the OFYE will review orientation programs for their relevance to the FYE and develop a campus-wide program that is a regular part of all welcome/training programs for new employees. This training will foster a new and vibrant culture of service on campus that will make faculty and staff aware of new approaches to delivering services and to college level teaching (or old methods that work well) and inform them of

services and opportunities available to first-year students.

•**Recommendation:** The University should develop a system of incentives to reward faculty and staff for developing and delivering FYE curricular and co-curricular initiatives.

The University should design and institute a tangible reward system to encourage faculty and staff to participate in the intensive work of teaching and supporting our first-year students. This work must be recognized and rewarded in promotion decisions for non-instructional staff, and in tenure and promotion decisions for instructional staff.

ENSURING ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

[Recommendations adapted from Dimension Reports from the Organization, Learning, Faculty, All Students, and Diversity Committees]

•**Recommendation:** The University should coordinate with the Office of University Assessment to gather data on incoming students, to make data-based decisions on their needs and placement, and to act on those decisions.

The University should develop and use mechanisms to place all first-year students in English and Mathematics (and in Foreign Languages where relevant) into the courses appropriate to their abilities in these fields. Additionally, to help faculty, administrators, and staff better understand student engagement and student culture, SIUC should administer and disseminate the results of a nationally distributed instrument along the lines of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Beginning College Survey for Student Engagement (BSSE), or the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI).

•**Recommendation:** The University should measure student learning outcomes after all first-year courses and programs to make data-based decisions on revising the first-year curriculum and related activities, and to act on those decisions.

SIUC should develop and implement an assessment plan, specifically to measure first-year student learning outcomes, as part of an ongoing, evidence-based process of improving the quality of instruction and services. Assessment results will be used to ensure that first-year students are well served by the program. To learn more about students and their needs, the OFYE will conduct focus groups on a regular basis to complement the Early Warning, Hobson's

Recruit and Retain, GradesFirst, and MAPworks programs. For students departing the University early, the OFYE will also design and implement exit interviews and surveys to learn their reasons for leaving and to consider modifying the first year experience.