

Foundations of Excellence
Final Report - Organization Dimension
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Committee members

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Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.

These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

CURRENT SITUATION

Organization

- There is no coordinated, focused, campus- or division-wide collaborative effort to assist student success during their first year at UNI.

Specific comments supporting this from the open-ended question to faculty/staff identifying weaknesses include: (There is a) “lack of cohesive, communicating, unified body that is focused on the first year and improvements,” and “UNI obviously needs programming that directly targets first-year students in order to improve their personal and academic experience in order to improve their learning experiences and retention.”

This was supported by discussion and experience of committee members. Although targeted efforts for first year students were evident in specific areas of the Student Affairs Division such as Department of Residence (i.e. Dive-In Days, Pair Plus, and Springboard), Academic Advising (i.e. institution of first year professional advisors), these did not extend to the Academic Affairs Division. The Academic Learning Center does provide a slight bridge between the Academic Affairs Division and Student Affairs Division because it is located in the Academic Affairs Division while at the same time offering services primarily to students. It includes four services (Athletics Academic Advising & Retention Services, Examination Services and Student Support Services) and three centers (Math Center, Reading & Learning Center, and Writing Center). Although all services provided by the Academic Learning Center address all students, a significant number of first year students take advantage of these services. At the same time, although the Academic Learning Center

is “housed” in the Academic Affairs Division, it does little to bridge the gap between faculty in Academic Affairs and personnel in Student Affairs. There is little to no specific emphasis on the first year experience in **hiring** (69% of faculty/staff reported that little to none of the responsibilities to teach first year students are addressed during the hiring process), in **professional development** (67% felt resources are not adequate to support first year courses and over 33% of faculty/staff feel resources are not adequate to support academic support services for first year students) or in **focus** (only 10.9% of faculty/staff feel they have a voice in decisions about first year students.)

- Communication and collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs occurs in isolated segments and is not systematically supportive of the first year experience.
 - Only 18.6% of the faculty/staff feel there is routine communication to support first year experiences. (The FoE faculty survey population consisted of 2,155 faculty and staff members, including adjunct faculty and graduate teaching assistants who taught first year classes in fall 2007. Of the 2,155 invited to participate, 1,070 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 49.7%. 41.3% of those respondents identified themselves as faculty, 10.3% were administrators, 25.5% were professional staff, 22.1% were technical, clerical and service personnel, and 0.7% was graduate teaching assistants.)
 - Less than 25% of the faculty/staff feel there is collaboration between academic and student affairs (survey)
 - For faculty actively serving on this committee with a total of 15+ years of experience at UNI, this is the first time they have been asked to serve on a committee deliberately coordinated with student affairs members.
 - 39% of the faculty/staff feel the UNI’s senior leaders promote partnerships between student affairs and faculty *slightly* to *not at all*. An additional 33.4% would only give a “moderate” rating to the support of these partnerships by UNI leadership (survey)

Academic Advising and Liberal Arts Core (LAC) classes are two specific areas requiring collaboration and communication. Administering these through a unified organizational structure is the only guaranteed means to ensure this happens.

- Although the Liberal Arts Core (LAC) is designed to create a well-rounded student it is not specifically tailored to the needs of first year students.
 - 21% of the faculty/staff responding to the open-ended question on weaknesses at UNI identified weakness in the LAC. Of this population, 23% felt the LAC courses were not current or relevant; 30% felt the LAC courses were too large; 45% felt the courses needed to help with transition skills of learning in a college environment.

Specific comments from the faculty/staff open-ended question identifying weaknesses on the FOE survey are: (There is) “no specific systematic approach to the first year teaching. (It is) not valued in departments or recognized in (the) university,” “(There is) lack of supported, facilitated interaction among faculty/adjuncts/TA’s teaching the same FY course...(or) across FY courses and departments and colleges”; “Its failure to provide adequate faculty resources for instruction in the Liberal Arts Core. “

In talking with the Academic Advising who described the multitude of issues surrounding scheduling freshman into LAC classes (due to the fact that freshman schedule last when many classes are full) and reflecting on faculty responses above, the committee felt a workable solution to many of these issues would be to “layer LAC courses”, designating some LAC courses as “freshman LAC courses.”

- Academic advising plays a critical role in the first year experience of students and although changes have been made to focus on first year students there is still more work to be done. In 1996, an Academic Advising Task Force established the current status of advising. They stated, “The quality of an individual student’s educational/career decisions increases directly with the amount of relevant information available to advisors and advisees.” We still believe this to be true. Of the current status established in the 1996 report, the following items have changed only slightly:
 - “To perform effectively, advisors must be assigned a reasonable load of advisees. Too many advisees will inevitably result in unavailability, fewer and hurried contact, lack of personal involvement and in general, poor advising experiences for students.” Currently, the load for first year student advisors to advisees is approximately 1:300.
 - Advising is still done at least five different ways across the university.
 - In 1996, there was “no training done for advising.” Currently there are two opportunities for training for faculty advisors but it is on a faculty sign-up basis.
 - As in 1996, a “comprehensive, regularly scheduled, on going advisor development program” “is lacking.
 - As in 1996, UNI still “lacks a recognition/reward system for individual faculty advisors.”

Specific comments from the faculty/staff & student open-ended question identifying weaknesses on the FOE survey are: “Advising is not personal or individualized, schedule construction needs much more support.... “(faculty/staff), and “Academic advisors could reach out more, financial advisors could make more financial aid available, the groups for orientation should be smaller.” (student)

Integration

- In general, student satisfaction seems high. Because of this, we should be cautious of a full-scale overhaul.
 - High graduation rates
 - High “campus environment” rating (The FoE student survey population consisted of 3,005 new freshmen and transfer students new to UNI. Of the 3,005 eligible to take the survey, 1,130 responded, for a response rate of 37.6%. The 3,005 students selected to take part in the student survey comprised 23.3% of the total enrollment on the UNI campus in fall 2008.)
 - 61% of students understand where to go for an administrative question (student survey)
 - 52.8% of students know where to go for an academic question (student survey)
 - 75.8% of students felt that they were referred correctly by faculty/staff (student survey)
 - 57.4% of faculty/staff said they could appropriately refer a student (faculty/staff survey)

According to the open-ended questions on the faculty/staff survey, 52.5% commented that teaching is valued at UNI and faculty is often excited to work with first year students. Supporting this percentage are the following comments: “Our faculty and staff are great with

students. They tend to stay a long time and most like to build relationships with students.” “UNI instructors care about their students’ success. I think this is our greatest strength.” The student survey had similar responses with students commenting about their living environments, experience with orientation, and interaction with faculty.

Although it is evident UNI has the ability to produce positive results, this capacity would be multiplied if adequate integration across divisions (Academic Affairs and Student Affairs) were implemented. Through committee discussions (documented in the evidence library) it was the feeling of the committee that currently any communication or collaboration between divisions occurs primarily at the upper administration level (i.e. President’s cabinet.) This is the first committee in which both faculty and student services personnel have served jointly in the historical memory of the committee members, of whom the longest has served 27 years.

Faculty and Staff Development

In looking at the CPI, it is evident there are several councils, committees, and administrative units who make decisions and have oversight of matters that involve and impact FY students. However, none of them act with respect to specifically considering how their decisions impact FY students. Additionally first year experiences can, in a general way, be divided into “student life” (mainly supported by the Department of Residence) and “academic life” (which includes a myriad of people). Both of these frameworks are used in our analysis.

- The Department of Residence (DOR) provides organized staff training on numerous topics. Though none of the training is geared directly towards FY students, it is focused towards residence hall occupants. Of the out-of-high-school first year students at UNI, 93% live in the DOR. There is no organized staff training and development and no direct evidence related to the effectiveness of these programs. However, Lyn Redington strongly believes special attention, focus, and personal outreach to the students are critical factors to academic success and retention of first year students. Below are the programs provided and funded by the Department of Residence.
 - **Dive in Days** – for students living in an all freshmen environment.
 - **Peer Academic Advisors in Residence (PAIRs) (started in 2002) replaced (2008) by Pair Plus** - assists on-campus residents in higher levels of academic success through peer planned programming in the 9 residence halls. Specifics are reviewed during RLC training each July.
 - **Springboard** - involves all first year students living together in a community and focuses on enhancing the students’ transition, encourages identity development, and enhances social and academic success.
- The CPI lists many first year experiences, however few of them reach beyond the range of including 1%-4% of first year students. Several of them (1st Year Business Majors Seminar, Freshmen Intake Model, Proactive Student Success Program, etc.) are in their first year and their effectiveness cannot yet be judged. Some are specific to departments or specific subgroups of student (athletes, students from diverse backgrounds, etc.). Very little is known about faculty/staff development associated with these activities.
- Academic Advising provides high quality advisor training to faculty. However, data supplied by Jean Niebauer and the FoE Faculty survey indicate the following:

- 59.5 % of the faculty are either unaware of, too busy, or don't participate in advisor training which is available to them.
 - 39.3 % of the non-faculty responding (N= 28) have not participated, are unaware of or don't participate in training activities (though 50% have done new advisor training).
 - 20% of the faculty said "lack of training" made their advising job difficult.
 - Short answer responses to the faculty survey indicate a need for:
 - professional development
 - time
 - seminars for faculty
 - advising mentors
 - forums to learn about the needs of FY students
- The professional development of faculty/staff on characteristics of first year students and the specific pedagogy effective in engaging first year students is of paramount importance. Faculty/staff expressed in the short answer responses on the open-ended questions that they wanted to begin forums on the needs for first year students in terms of classroom engagement, developing relationships and enhancing learning. Students who are less engaged are going to be more dissatisfied. This was shown by the open-ended question on weaknesses on the faculty/staff survey.
 - Ensure that the faculty and staff development plans include:
 - Faculty/staff participation in decisions concerning training.
 - More frequent development sessions for all new advisors.
 - Requiring all new faculty to have formal advisor training.
 - Continuing development for experienced academic advisors (departmental, college-level and professional advisors in Academic Advising.
 - The facilitation of networking of all persons involved with advising first year students. (i.e., heterogeneous meetings with faculty/staff.)
 - More actively utilize technology for dissemination of advising handbooks, podcasts for topics, which can be accessed for faculty/staff development
 - Additional full-time tenured track faculty are needed to teach first year classes so class sizes are smaller and students are afforded more one-on-one time. (From Fall 2001 to Spring 2008 the number of LAC sections taught by non-tenure track faculty was 2342 (42%). There were 5562 sections taught of all LAC sections from fall 2001-Spring 2008.)
 - There are significant concerns of staffing first year student classes with adjuncts because: lack of review / evaluation of adjuncts; lack of integration into the departments; fulfillment of UNI mission (classes taught by adjuncts vs. tenure-track professors); and determining the requirements of adjuncts (i.e., office hours, commitment to students, pay and benefits). (The amount spent on adjuncts throughout the University for 08-09 is \$1,471,121 (179 adjuncts) for 07-08 it was \$1,327,249 (152 adjuncts).
 - With regard to faculty advising, the faculty survey provides insight to a lack of value and reward for tenure/promotion for those doing FY advising. This is supported by the faculty on the committee that UNI considers advising to be "service", while the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) considers it to be a form of "teaching".

- Faculty survey data on rewards for advising first year students applicable to tenure and promotion: 58.9% said “*not at all* or *don’t know*”, 18.4% said *slightly*.

Finance

- There are several funding sources for the programs supporting the first year experience here at UNI, but they lack coordination. The following data will be impacting the funding for programs for FY students.
 - The ratio of academic advisors to first year students is 1:300 (Academic Advising).
 - There are 13 first year class sections with 200+students.
 - From Fall 2001 to Spring 2008 the number of LAC sections taught by non-tenure track faculty was 2342 (42%). (There were 5562 sections taught of all LAC sections from Fall 2001-Spring 2008)
 - The amount spent on adjuncts throughout the University for 08-09 is \$1,471,121 (179 adjuncts) for 07-08 it was \$1,327,249 (152 adjuncts).
 - There is little financial support for faculty/staff to organize, plan and execute first year programs.
 - There are no dedicated funds for training and professional development for those who work with first year students.
 - Over 67% of the faculty/staff feel resources are not adequate to support courses that enroll first year students (survey).
 - Over 33% of the faculty/staff feel resources are not adequate to support academic support services for first year students (survey).
- The funding sources need to be coordinated through the organizational body that is responsible for the first year initiative. This organizational body must have the following characteristics:
 - Formal coordinating governing body that has a single person at the head that has the authority to implement change. This would be a hybrid between the Foundations of Excellence choices of: a) a single unit/administrative structure and b) a formal coordinating body overseeing a broad range of first-year efforts and has institutional authority for oversight and alignment of first-year initiatives.
 - This structure should not reside in either the Academic Affairs division or the Student Affairs division, but must reside in both, for it is the blend of these two divisions that will enable the university to provide the excellence we expect in the First Year Experience.
 - Curriculum control shouldn’t rest with an administrative unit. If it did, that would be a HUGE change with how UNI currently operates (unless it was just a FY course). This should not be the function of this formal coordinating body.

Evaluation

- Although many evaluations are being done, we need to take the next step of incorporating and using the results.
 - Many surveys are instituted at the start of the academic year (6 week new student survey, Academic Advising Survey, NSSE). Numerous units implement these surveys. (Academic Advising, Department of Residence, Dean of Students)
 - Some survey results are more structured in their review and reporting than others.

- Advising Council to the Provost meets and makes recommendations to the Provost about the Academic Advising Survey. Changes currently being deliberated include:
 - 77.4% of advisors indicate more intentional advising training would be of interest.
 - 42.8% of professional advisors advise 300 or more students per semester. Meeting the needs of their advisees “with difficulty” is reported by 42.9%.
- The Provost developed NSSE Task Force and a presentation was given to University Council. Workshops were developed and were announced on UNI Online with results available on the assessment office web page.
- The Six Week New Student Evaluation was shared informally with the Dean of Students, Vice President for Student Affairs as well as staff members working on Orientation. Feedback from students elicited changes.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- An organization is needed to develop adequate programs for first year students and the funding to execute these programs.
- Additional academic advisors are needed to be able to adequately advise new students to make the STUDENTS FIRST attitude and philosophy a reality.
- Most faculty /staff do not feel involved with decisions and initiatives regarding the first year experience.
 - Only 10.8% of faculty/staff think they have a voice in decisions about first year issues
- The value of advising is neither recognized nor rewarded for faculty.
- Most faculty are willing to work with first year students; however, in some cases, they may not be sure how to best structure their classes to meet the specific needs of first year students.
- There is a lack of an organized /cohesive approach to professional development related to enhancing the success of first year students.
- The FoE Faculty and Staff survey indicate that in the eyes of faculty members, administrators, professional, technical, and service staff, more opportunities need to be provided for professional development to properly train faculty and staff so they have the skills and knowledge to work with first year students. In addition, release time for faculty and staff is needed to collaborate with other faculty and staff who work with first year students.
- Students who are less engaged are going to be more dissatisfied. This was shown by the open-ended question on weaknesses on the faculty/staff survey.
- Additional full-time tenured track faculty are needed to teach first year classes so class sizes are smaller and students are afforded more one-on-one time.
- There are significant concerns of staffing first year student classes with adjuncts because: lack of review / evaluation of adjuncts; lack of integration into the departments; fulfillment of UNI mission (classes taught by adjuncts vs tenure-track professors); and determining the requirements of adjuncts (i.e., office hours, commitment to students, pay and benefits).
- A system for communicating survey data and developing action plans based on them is lacking.