

# Northwest Missouri State University Foundations of Excellence Self-Study Final Report and Recommendations

## Executive Summary

In 2009, the First Year Experience was identified as a topic for a AQIP Action Project with the objective of understanding the experience of our incoming students in order to identify obstacles to their success and ways to help them overcome those obstacles. The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) process, facilitated by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, provided a structure for a self-study centered on first-time freshmen (excluding transfer students).

More than 75 individuals participated in committees implementing the project, including faculty, staff, students, and members of the local community. Committee discussions were organized around the nine areas in the FoE model (referred to as “dimensions”). Those discussions utilized a number of sources of data, including an inventory of current practices as well as a faculty/staff survey completed by 489 individuals and a student survey completed by 1263 individuals. Members of the campus community were also invited to participate in focus groups throughout the process.

The committees’ work identified a number of strengths and weaknesses in current practices as well as action items to address those weaknesses. Looking across the dimension reports, the resulting recommendations represent eight themes:

1. Cultivate an organizational culture which encourages faculty engagement
2. Maximize synergy within the academic experience
3. Create and implement a philosophy of and structure for first year programming
4. Reduce barriers to authentic interactions between individuals from different backgrounds
5. Facilitate the active involvement of students in their development
6. Clearly communicate expectations related to the collegiate experience
7. Commit to professional development for faculty and staff
8. Investigate cross-cutting programming

The information in the body of this report represents a synthesis of the individual dimension reports. Additional details from those individual reports – including committee membership, noted findings, and dimension-specific action items – are included in the Appendix.

# Northwest Missouri State University Foundations of Excellence Self-Study Final Report and Recommendations

## Table of Contents

### Context

Objective .....	p. 1
Steering Committee Members .....	p. 1
Process .....	p. 2
Timeline.....	p. 3

Summary of Dimension Committee Findings .....	p. 4
---	------

### Summary of Recommendations

Faculty Engagement.....	p. 9
Academic Experience .....	p. 9
Philosophy and Structure.....	p. 10
Barriers to Interactions .....	p. 10
Active Involvement .....	p. 10
Communicate Expectations .....	p. 11
Professional Development.....	p. 11
Cross-cutting Programming .....	p. 11

Appendix: Dimension Report Summaries.....	p. 12
---	-------

# Context

## **Project Objective**

To engage the entire campus community in a self-study in order to deeply understand the experience of our incoming students so that we can identify obstacles to their success and ways to help them overcome those obstacles.

## **Steering Committee Members**

### Project Co-chairs

Leslie Chandler

*Coordinator of Orientation Programming*

Alisha Francis

*Director of Freshman Seminar*

### Executive Committee

Matt Baker

*Dean of Students*

Greg Haddock

*Vice Provost*

Nate Blackford

*Director of Strategic Research*

Bev Schenkel

*Dean of Enrollment Management*

Leslie Galbreath

*Director of Academic and Library Services*

### Dimension Co-Chairs

#### **Philosophy Dimension**

Sam Jennings

*Missouri Academy Director of Student Development*

Renee Rohs

*Associate Professor and Chair, Geosciences*

#### **Organization Dimension**

Lori Hopkins

*Assistant Athletics Director*

Matt Walker

*Assistant Professor, Communication, Theatre, and Languages*

#### **Roles and Purposes Dimension**

Steve Ludwig

*Assistant Professor, Accounting, Economics, and Finance*

Angel McAdams

*Director of Campus Activities*

#### **Learning Dimension**

Vince Bates

*Assistant Professor, Music*

Matt Symonds

*Assistant Professor, Health, Recreation, Physical Education, and Dance*

#### **Transitions Dimension**

Shelly Hiatt

*Assistant Professor, Psychology, Sociology, and Counseling*

Phil Kenkel

*Director of the TRIO Program*

Darla Runyon

*Assistant Director, Center for Information Technology in Education*

#### **Diversity Dimension**

Jeff Foot

*Director of International Affairs/ESL*

Brian Hesse

*Associate Professor, History, Humanities, Philosophy, and Political Science*

#### **Improvement Dimension**

Mary Ann Penniston

*Associate Director of Strategic Research*

Jenny Rytting

*Assistant Professor, English*

#### **Faculty Dimension**

Jeff Thornsberry

*Associate Professor, Biological Sciences*

Rose Viau

*Director of Residential Life*

#### **All Students Dimension**

Jamie Patton

*Associate Professor, Agriculture*

Joan Schneider

*Director of Career Services*

## Process

- “First Year Experience” was designated as an AQIP Action Project in 2009
- Utilized the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) process to guide the self-study in 2010-2011.
  - FoE is facilitated by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education
  - Based upon an aspirational model for the entire first year experience
    - The model is comprised of nine “dimensions” with performance indicators for each dimension
  - Focuses on first-time freshmen, excluding transfer students
- Each dimension was studied by a committee
  - 19 faculty and staff members served as co-chairs for dimension committees
    - Selected to ensure representation from a range of departments, offices, and divisions
  - An additional 56 individuals contributed to one or more dimension committees
    - Faculty, staff, and students were encouraged to volunteer
    - A number of committee members were invited to participate in order to ensure representation from key departments and offices
    - Representatives from local secondary schools were also invited to participate in the Transitions committee
  - Each committee prepared a report of their findings and recommendations for improvement
- Data included a faculty/staff survey, a student survey, data provided by institutional research, and qualitative input from the campus community
  - 236 faculty members, 48 administrators, 113 professional staff, and 92 technical, clerical, and service personnel completed the Faculty/Staff Survey (489 responses in total, 64.9% response rate)
  - 411 Freshmen, 284 sophomores, 242 juniors, and 324 seniors completed the student survey (1263 responses in total, a 25.5% response rate)

## Foundations of Excellence Self-Study Timeline

March and April 2010:

- Initial discussions about adopting FoE process

May 2010:

- Decision to adopt FoE

June 2010:

- Finalized application with Gardner Institute
- Discussion of dimension co-chairs begins

July 2010:

- Invitations extended to dimension co-chairs
- “Pre-launch” webinar with dimension co-chairs and Executive Team
- Project liaisons attended “Launch Meeting”

August 2010:

- Initial briefing to Deans Council
- Retreat with dimension co-chairs
- Project highlighted at opening meeting
  - All attendees received bookmark describing the project and inviting participation
- Briefing for NLT

September 2010:

- Continued orientation for dimension co-chairs by discussing definitions of student success
- Began gathering information for Current Practices Inventory
- Developed institutional-specific questions for faculty and staff survey
- Begin identifying dimension committee members

October 2010

- Faculty/staff survey distributed
- Developed institutional-specific questions for student survey
- Continued identifying committee members

November 2010

- Student survey distributed
- Project co-chairs met with co-chairs for each dimension
- Continued identifying committee members

December 2010

- Extended invitations to dimension committee members

January 2011

- Dimension committees began meeting
- Steering committee meeting to discuss FoETech system

February 2011

- Dimension committees continue to meet
- Steering committee meeting to update on progress
- All members of the campus community invited to a forum where dimension co-chairs shared progress to date

March 2011

- Dimension committees finish first draft of reports
- Steering committee discusses drafts
- Begin receiving feedback from FoE staff at Gardner

April 2011

- Steering committee discusses themes emerging from reports
- Briefing for Deans Council
- All members of the campus community invited to a forum to discuss action items and strategic programs suggested by those action items.

May 2011

- Executive committee discusses recommendations from steering committee, begins drafting strategic action plan
- Briefing for Academic Deans and Provost

# Summary of Dimension Committee Findings

Each of the nine dimension committees drew upon a number of sources of evidence in assessing the degree to which Northwest’s policies, procedures, and practices were consistent with the aspirational model established by the Gardner Institute. Those sources of evidence included results from student and faculty/staff surveys, our Current Practices Inventory, and supplemental information available to individual committee members.

The tables below represent the synthesis of findings from each dimension, including a self-assigned “grade.” Those grades represent the perspective of committee members considering only the data for their dimension and only Northwest’s current practices in the context of the criteria established in the FoE model. No normative data was utilized.

Additional details for each dimension are included in the Appendix.

Philosophy <i>Foundations Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sense of a common philosophy exists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That sense is based on the idea that First Year Experience is synonymous with Freshman Seminar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to get “bogged down” in language, philosophical discussion about the philosophy.</li> </ul>	C

Roles and Purposes <i>Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students feel we are effective in communicating the purpose of higher education for personal growth and preparation for future employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current structure for helping students develop a 4-year plan/plan for success (in Fr Sem) may not be effective in encouraging students to consider their motivations for pursuing a college degree and how to succeed</li> <li>• The rationale underlying Gen Ed courses is not communicated consistently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First year experience emphasis on “surviving” rather than “thriving.”</li> </ul>	C+

Transitions <i>Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOAR, Fr Sem, and initial discussion of syllabi communicate academic expectations and integrity</li> <li>• We provide a large volume of information about academic support services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The meaning underlying the new mission is difficult for faculty and staff to articulate in concrete terms.</li> <li>• Many students indicate they do not feel the institution provides opportunities to connect with faculty outside of class</li> <li>• Many students indicate they do not feel the institution provides opportunities to connect with other students</li> <li>• Faculty do not always feel they have adequate training to address the needs of first year students.</li> <li>• Academic expectations, behaviors necessary for success, and standards for integrity could be communicated in a more standardized manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commuter students may face barriers to learning about and accessing out of class activities</li> </ul>	B-

Diversity <i>Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data suggests we communicate standards for participating in a diverse community.</li> <li>• Multicultural Institutional Requirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students, faculty, and staff feel we offer relatively little exposure to diversity.</li> <li>• Little extra-curricular focus on diversity</li> <li>• “Disconnect” between messages and practice</li> <li>• Diversity messages not reaching first year students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are living in an increasingly diversified society – lack of exposure does not prepare our students</li> <li>• Survey data suggests diversity exposure is related to student satisfaction</li> </ul>	D+

Faculty <i>Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial phases of REEP implementation prioritized Gen Ed courses in hiring decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budget constraints have prohibited hiring to correspond with increasing enrollment</li> <li>Gen Ed courses are more likely to be taught by adjuncts and instructors, giving the impression these courses are not valued</li> <li>Stipends for Fr Sem instructors and program staffing reorganization suggest it is not valued</li> <li>faculty do not feel they are rewarded for interacting with students more than is minimally necessary</li> <li>Evidence of advisement is part of the P&amp;T application, but the quality of advisement is not evaluated.</li> <li>Mixed messages about engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course redesign could reduce student satisfaction with faculty interactions as more activities are online</li> <li>Perception that the only reward for high quality instruction in courses for first year students was more work.</li> <li>Perception that few, if any, rewards recognize excellence in advising</li> <li>Little emphasis on the role of Fr Sem in the curriculum.</li> <li>What constitutes highly effective teaching, excellence in advising, or interaction out of the classroom for first year students is open for interpretation. The relative importance of these facets of faculty evaluation is also greatly debated.</li> </ul>	D+

Organization <i>Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students generally indicate they know where to go for most issues and faculty/staff generally indicate they know where to send students.</li> <li>faculty/staff questions about communication, collaboration and partnerships received somewhat positive responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formalized FYE unit/admin structure</li> <li>Overload students with information during first nine weeks</li> <li>Programming tends to be focused in the first 9 weeks</li> <li>Relatively few professional development opportunities</li> <li>Faculty indicate they feel they have relatively little voice in related decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of formalized FYE unit/administrative structure creates the potential for redundancy and omission in programming</li> <li>Faculty's feelings regarding their voice in decision making could affect attitudes and behaviors</li> </ul>	C

Learning <i>Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial course schedules are based on assessment data and student interests</li> <li>• Honors program</li> <li>• Required Fr Sem class</li> <li>• Freshman Sem instructors and peer-advisors are rather effective</li> <li>• interest in study and discussion of engaging pedagogies</li> <li>• some departments hosting high enrollment courses have models that could be benchmarked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen Ed goals not communicated consistently or widely</li> <li>• student engagement and evaluations of teachers' effectiveness in encouraging engagement are not assessed</li> <li>• lack of consistent practices in documenting and evaluating student learning outcomes across sections of high-enrollment courses</li> <li>• Fr Sem curriculum could be more relevant, challenging</li> <li>• A number of high- and moderate- enrollment Gen Ed and gateway courses exceed the recommended benchmark for DFWI rates with 30% or greater.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to address high rates of Ds, Fs, withdrawals, and incompletes vary from department to department and, in some cases, focus on factors external to the course itself.</li> </ul>	C

Improvement <i>Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement.</i>			
Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of faculty and staff indicate we use evaluations, assessments, and feedback to influence our work.</li> <li>• We collect a variety of data about a variety of factors related to the First Year Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data utilization varies widely – in some cases, we do not gather meaningful data, in other cases we do not "translate the data into usable information," in other cases the information is not disseminated</li> <li>• Lack of systematic data about students who leave prior to graduation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of established framework for selecting, interpreting, and using assessment data.</li> </ul>	C+

All Students

*Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.*

Strengths	Weaknesses	Obstacles	Committee-assigned Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Alert Program assists in identifying social and academic needs</li> <li>• A variety of strong programs and units whose mission is identifying student needs and helping meet those needs</li> <li>• As a whole, the freshman population feels instructors provide individual attention and make themselves available outside of class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluations identify needs, but require the student to seek the resources,</li> <li>• While we have a number of programs that address student’s sense of physical safety, there is less programming related to psychological safety.</li> <li>• Faculty may not understand their role/the role of Early Alert in identifying needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students with lower high school grades are less likely to indicate their needs are being met.</li> <li>• Students who indicate their social needs are not being met are also likely to report they plan to transfer out</li> <li>• Black/African American students and students reporting two or more races less likely to feel they “belong” on campus</li> </ul>	<p>B</p>

# Summary of Recommendations

The Dimension Committees generated a number of action items specifically related to the aspirational model. In discussing those items, and considering issues spanning multiple dimensions, eight themes emerged. Those themes are described in the following sections, including related action items and entities on campus with span of control related to each action item.

## **Cultivate an organizational culture which encourages faculty engagement**

*Increase the degree to which our culture encourages faculty to positively contribute the first year experience, including high-quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom.*

1. Review current faculty evaluation and tenure/promotion requirements as they relate to student engagement. *(recommendation from multiple dimensions)*
  - Provost, Dean's Council, Faculty Senate
2. Achieve a DFWI rate of 30% or less in courses with high first year student enrollment
  - Provost, Deans Council, Faculty Senate (DCM), Department Chairs, Faculty
3. Improve and enhance recognition for outstanding advising and out of class engagement.
  - Deans and Chairs Councils
4. Communication between Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, and the faculty regarding the composition of our student body and the issues facing them.
  - Academic and Library Services, Enrollment Management, Student Affairs

## **Maximize synergy within the academic experience**

*Vigorously pursue alignment between the General Education curriculum, the demands of our external stakeholders, our educational philosophy, and the needs of first year students in order to ensure continued relevance and success.*

1. Complete General Education re-evaluation and implement recommendations
  - Faculty Senate
2. Integrate Skill and Knowledge Goals Across General Education *(recommendation from multiple dimensions)*
  - Faculty Senate, Department Chairs, Faculty Members
3. Review the Freshman Seminar Curriculum and Structure *(recommendation from multiple dimensions)*
  - Faculty Senate (DCM), Academic and Library Services, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management
4. Reduce the student to faculty ratio in General Education courses
  - Provost, Deans, NLT (resource allocation)

### **Create and implement a philosophy of and structure for first year programming**

*Develop intentional practices related to the first year experience and systematically implement those practices.*

1. Develop a First-Year Experience Philosophy Statement that is aligned with the university mission
  - FoE Executive Committee
2. Create an oversight unit/office/liaison to facilitate systematic deployment of the philosophy (*recommendation from multiple dimensions*)
  - NLT
3. Evaluate programming and staffing relative to student support needs
  - Institutional Research, Student Affairs, Academic and Library Services, Enrollment Management, Athletics
4. Increase transitional support for students reporting low admission index
  - Student Affairs, Academic and Library Services, Enrollment Management
5. Examine methods to connect first year students with academic support programs
  - Student Affairs, Academic and Library Services, Enrollment Management, Athletics

### **Reduce barriers to authentic interactions between individuals from different backgrounds**

*Ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures in a safe environment in order to foster a multinational, pluralistic living and learning community.*

1. Implement a zero-tolerance policy to any form of discrimination or intimidation
  - Student Affairs, Human Resources, Faculty Senate
2. Explore ways to incorporate intercultural competence as a topic in individual courses across the curriculum
  - CITE, IIC, Faculty, Faculty Senate Committees
3. Recognize efforts to advance intercultural competence across campus
  - NLT, Chairs, Deans, Human Resources, IIC
4. Investigate ways to assess programs intended to improve intercultural competence
  - Institutional Research, IIC, Faculty Senate Assessment Committee, Chairs (annual reviews)

### **Facilitate the active involvement of students in their development**

*Establish process and structures which allow and help students to be actively involved in their intellectual and interpersonal development.*

1. Actively promote teaching techniques and strategies which lead to student engagement and success
  - Deans, Chairs, Faculty, CITE, Program Directors
2. Provide meaningful opportunities for students to connect with faculty outside of the classroom
  - Provost, Deans, Student Affairs, Chairs, Faculty
3. Create an environment which requires students to demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills and supports the development of those skills (*multiple dimensions*)
  - All Employees, facilitated by Human Resources, Student Affairs, Deans, Chairs, Faculty
4. Examine current practices related to communicating with students regarding academic resources and co-curricular activities (*multiple dimensions*)
  - Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Academic and Library Services, Athletics
5. Implement DegreeWorks Planner as a mechanism for capturing the four-year plan in an electronic format that students can update and that advisors can access
  - Enrollment Management, Academic Departments

### **Clearly communicate expectations related to the collegiate experience**

*Deliberately and intentionally develop messages about expectations that are systematically and consistently delivered to all stakeholders.*

1. Standardize messages regarding academic expectations, integrity, and consequences at the university, departmental, and individual course level
  - Deans, Chairs, Faculty, Enrollment Management, University Relations, Academic and Library Services, Student Affairs, Athletics
2. Review procedures and structure to clarify expectations and address stakeholders' concerns for due process (i.e. academic dishonesty charges, conduct violations, financial appeals, medical withdrawals)
  - Provost, Deans, Chairs, Faculty Senate, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Human Resources
3. Effectively and consistently communicate the purposes and value of general education across campus and within individual courses (*multiple dimensions*)
  - Deans, Chairs, Faculty, Enrollment Management, Academic and Library Services, Student Affairs
4. Develop explicit statements about the role of multiculturalism within the university
  - NLT, HR, Deans Council, Student Affairs

### **Commit to professional development for faculty and staff**

*Contribute to our competence in developing and delivering a high-quality first year experience.*

1. Develop programming related to Engaging Pedagogies and Diversity/ Intercultural Competence
  - CITE, IIC (in collaboration with in-house faculty experts), Faculty Senate Intercultural Committee
2. Create in-house workshops for faculty and staff that incorporate current research on the first-year experience and best practices.
  - CITE, Human Resources, Freshman Seminar
3. Develop a Teaching and Learning Center that would provide pedagogical support to faculty (or rename CITE and emphasize the related aspects of that office's mission)
  - Provost, CITE (in collaboration with in-house faculty experts)

### **Investigate cross-cutting programming**

*Collectively, the findings suggest a number of opportunities for programming. Examples include:*

1. Continued Implementation of Living and Learning Communities
2. "Linked" Classes (independent of living and learning communities)
3. A Common Reading Program
4. Integrating Data From Retention/Degree Completion Services (e.g. ACT Student Readiness Inventory)

# **Appendix:**

## **Summaries of Individual Dimension Reports**

The information in the preceding sections represents a synthesis of the individual dimension reports. Additional details from those individual reports – including committee membership, noted findings, and dimension-specific action items – are included on the following pages.

## **Philosophy Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices. The philosophy/rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. The philosophy/rationale is also the basis for first-year organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Sam Jennings, Missouri Academy Director of Student Development

Renee Rohs, Associate Professor and Chair, Geosciences

### **Committee Members:**

Peter Adam, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Steve Bryant, Residential Life Hall Director

Jim Eiswert, Associate Professor of Hist/Human/Philosophy/Political Sci.

Carolyn Johnson, Information Librarian/Assistant Professor

Jackie Kibler, Missouri Academy Director of Counseling

Brad Landhuis, Assistant Director of Advisement

Gabrielle Martinez, Student

Bill Richardson, Associate Professor of Music

Deb Toomey, Instructor of Marketing/Management

Jeremy Waldeier, Associate Director of Admissions

Kenton Wilcox, Instructor of English

### **Committee-assigned Grade: C**

### **The committee notes that:**

- Based on the respondents, a feeling of a common philosophy exists.
  - Committee members took the data to those in their area. Those who reviewed the data included some who had completed the survey. It was felt that they (and arguably others) had considered primarily Freshman Seminar when responding to questions about the "first year."
  - The distribution of the General Education whitepaper may have also contributed to that feeling.
- A written statement does not exist at the department or institution level
- Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated the importance of an articulated first year philosophy. This suggests that faculty and staff are supportive of moving forward with defining a philosophy to guide the first year experience.
- Overarching concepts which may factor in to our philosophy:
  - Student responsibility for their education - we could ask for more from students in their classes. Finding the joy and pleasure in the labor of learning.
  - Availability of services and resources
  - Developing coping skills at multiple levels (multiple types) regarding the nature of stimuli with which a student must cope
  - Develop learning communities
  - Centrality of the educational experience
  - Augment academics to make students happy by encouraging involvement, balance of happiness and responsibility

**Recommended Action Items:**

- Develop First-Year Experience Philosophy Statement (*High priority*)

This task can be completed using grounded theory as well as benchmarking with other institutions. While it can be difficult to facilitate 100% agreement on such a statement, the committee recommends this action as the first step.

The committee offers the following philosophy statement as a starting point:

During the first college year, Northwest Missouri State University will prepare students for academic success by providing rigorous general education courses, helping students make connections to the Northwest community, educating students about campus resources, and promoting positive coping skills so students may realize their personal responsibility as life-long learners in a global community.

- Create First-Year Experience Plan (*High priority*)

After the First-Year Experience philosophy is created, it will be critical to deploy the philosophy. Setting specific goals to then allocate the appropriate talent, physical space, and financial support to meet or exceed the goals will be the only way to see that the First-Year Experience is articulated and improved.

## **Roles & Purposes Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society. These roles and purposes include knowledge acquisition for personal growth, learning to prepare for future employment, learning to become engaged citizens, and learning to serve the public good. Institutions encourage first-year students to examine systematically their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college/university. Students are exposed to the value of general education as well as to the value of more focused, in-depth study of a field or fields of knowledge (i.e., the major).*

### **Committee Leaders**

Angel McAdams-Prescott, Director of Campus Activities

Steve Ludwig, Assistant Professor of Accounting, Economics, and Finance

### **Committee Members**

Rod Barr, Instructor of Agriculture

Wayne Chandler, Associate Professor of English

Meghan Davis, Area Coordinator of Residential Life

Gregg Dieringer, Professor/Chair of Biological Sciences

Rebecca Hendrix, Associate Professor of Psychology/Sociology/Counseling

Allison Hoffman, Instructor of Marketing/Management

Jacqueline Lamer, Instructor of Mass Communication

Paula McLain, Human Resources Student Employment Coordinator

Amy Nally, Director, Volunteer Programs

Malinda Shanks, Instructor of Acct/Econ/Finance

Stacey Stokes, Career Services Career Development Coordinator

Patricia Thompson, Assistant Professor of Curriculum & Instruction

### **Committee-assigned Grade: C+**

#### **The committee notes that:**

- Student survey responses suggest students believe Northwest helps students understand how attending college increases their knowledge for future employment and growth. Similarly, students believe they are being prepared to be involved members in their community and contributors to society.
- Results were not as strong when asked about the role of faculty and staff in discussing how college can help them achieve life goals and in helping examine personal reasons for getting a college education.
- Survey responses indicate Faculty/staff feel that Northwest helps first-year students understand the purpose of higher education and explore their motivation for getting a college degree. Results for active engagement in community and contribution to the betterment of society were more moderate.
- There is room for improvement related to encouraging students to examine their motivation in pursuing a college degree. Our review within this area focused on the preparation of the student plan for success that is part of the Freshman Seminar course, including whether the structure of the course provides adequate time for this exercise and whether the student plan becomes a forgotten exercise as opposed to a dynamic tools used throughout the student's experience on campus
  - There was some question as to whether we could provide a better service to our students by having them assigned to advising specialists within a department rather than spread out across faculty members where students might not get the same experience.
- There is room for improvement related to communication required courses, required competencies, and requirement for entry into majors. A common concern in this area was whether we really provided a uniform rationale for first-year students to appreciate the value of general education courses.
- There are some schools that offer opportunities for experiences that might help them focus on broader roles and purposes. These might represent avenues for further future study.

**Recommended Action Items:**

- Electronic, manageable 4 year plan (*High priority*)  
A mechanism for capturing the four-year plan in an electronic format that students can update and that advisors can access. If this could be captured as part of the new degree audit program it would be great. Note: We learned during the forum meeting from Bev Schenkel that this tool does exist and they may begin piloting it with a single department in the future.
- Common exercise focused on role of Gen Eds (*High priority*)  
Use of a common exercise for first year students to establish future goals, understand the value of general education as part of a four-year degree, and develop a four-year plan of study. That will provide a mechanism for helping them understand why general education is important and help them to focus more broadly on why they should become engaged in their community and activities that benefit society as a whole.
- New tab on degree audit (*High priority*)
- Review Fr Sem structure (*High priority*)  
A review of the current Freshman Seminar structure to determine if it needs to be expanded beyond: eight weeks, a single trimester, a single academic year.
- Work across units in planning FYE initiatives (*High priority*)  
We are aware that the Northwest Leadership Team has identified a strategic initiative with regard to living learning communities and would like to ensure that representatives of the Freshman Seminar leadership are involved in the process for this initiative.

## **Transitions Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission. Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year, institutions communicate clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.*

Committee Leader:

Shelly Hiatt, Assistant Professor of Psychology/Sociology/Counseling

Phil Kenkel, Director of the TRIO Program

Committee Members:

Jill Blackford, School Guidance Counselor with West Nodaway R-1 School District

Tim Crowley, Director of Counseling Services

Jason Eggers, Principal at Maryville High School

Jaclyn Ekle, Graduate Student

Brad Landhuis, Assistant Director of Student Advisement

Jessica Murry, Counselor of Financial Assistance

Heidi Shires, Representative of Admissions

Kersten White, Wellness Services Counselor

Brad Whitsell, Residential Life Hall Director

**Committee-assigned Grade: B-**

**The committee notes that:**

- Methods of communicating about the student experience are up-to-date and attractive. The committee would, however, like to see the "academic experiences" showcased more prominently.
- The institutional mission is posted in numerous places across campus. However, the mission is newly developed and is not yet easily articulated.
- Students are made aware of academic expectations through a variety of methods, but more emphasis could be placed in this area. A more standardized approach to sharing information regarding academic expectations should be considered.
- Information collected from the Building Bridges project and feedback from Secondary Counselors and Administrators suggest that students and schools get mixed messages when the University publishes entry requirements, but yet a number of students are admitted that do not meet those requirements.
- Expectations related to academic integrity are shared in a variety of ways, but a more standardized method of relaying expectations would be beneficial. The committee also felt it was imperative to review the expectations related to on-line learning.
- Opportunities for out-of-class engagement are communicated well to the students, but there may be a "self-engagement" issue when it comes to actual involvement. Students who commute may also have their own set of barriers when it comes to being informed about out of class engagement activities.
- Survey data suggests room for improvement in communicating about costs/financial aid prior to enrollment. Committee members feel information may have been being communicated effectively, but students/families may not place as high of a value on this information as they should.
- Families of first year students are included in orientation and there are a number of mechanisms to help families feel a part of the college experience. However, according to student feedback, there still seems to be an element of inclusion missing for family members.

- Students strongly feel that they are not afforded the opportunity to establish connections with faculty outside of class. The committee could not identify a systematic approach on behalf of the university that supports a faculty/student connection outside of the classroom. Prior to implementing related programming, administration may need to review the current reward structure as it relates to encouraging faculty to be more engaged with students outside of the classroom.
- First year students indicate they view the current structure on campus as somewhat prohibitive in terms of being able to establish connections with continuing students. While there are opportunities for involvement in organizations and clubs that have non-first year members as participants, the majority of a first year student's experience is in the company of other first year students.
- The committee was surprised at the student rating related to facilitating connections with other first year students. The committee felt that the rating would be much higher as a result of the residential housing design NW has adopted.
- Student response indicates room for improvement in facilitating connections with academic support services. The list of support services is lengthy, but are students merely being informed of these opportunities as opposed to being "connected" to them?
- There are numerous supports in place for academic advising. The overall impression left by survey responses and committee discussion was that Northwest does this well. However, faculty response to having adequate training to address the needs of first year students was relatively low.
- While there was some difference between faculty and student perception related to whether faculty advisors discuss what it takes to be successful, responses from both groups rate the issue at the "more effective range". Committee discussion reflected an opinion that faculty do discuss academic success. The gap between the numbers reported by students may reflect that students need to hear this information on a more consistent basis.

### **Recommended Action Items:**

- **Communicating Academic Expectations (*High priority*)**  
Standardized message that should be emphasized during any of the following outlets: SOAR, Advantage Week (including Convocation) or Freshman Seminar. Must be a serious discussion that sends a message of importance. The current delivery of the institution's message related to Academic Expectations may be more fragmented than what is desired. Partnerships with the University's Building Bridges Program has potential to contribute to collaboration between university faculty and P-12 faculty and school counselors so that college expectations, in general, are better understood. Additionally, the institution may want to consider activities that uniformly introduce academic expectations to incoming freshmen such as a "Summer Read" tied to Freshman Seminar.
- **Academic Integrity (*High priority*)**  
Investigate a standardized communication option to inform all students about Academic Integrity and consequences. Examine practices/agreements that currently exist (e.g. Psychology Department Agreement) and consider adopting a university wide Academic Integrity/Honesty Agreement that is visible and explained in person to each student. Review the need for an altered form of an agreement for on-line courses.
- **Facilitating Connection With Faculty (*High priority*)**  
Research, develop and implement opportunities that would allow students to connect with faculty outside of the classroom. Look at Residential Life's Living/Learning Community Program as a possible outlet to pilot such a program, but strive to look at other avenues of engagement as well. Review current faculty tenure/promotion requirements as they relate to student engagement.

- Other First Year Students (*High priority*)  
Examine methods to empower first year students to feel confident interacting with other first year students. Additionally, review the current design of the new freshman residence hall (pod) and maximize efforts to assist students to reach outside of their small living/learning community to the entire freshman residence hall complex.
- Academic Support Programs (*Medium priority*)  
Continue to examine methods to connect first year students with Academic Support Programs. Research clearly shows that students who utilize academic support programs (Supplemental Instruction for example) perform at a higher level than those who do not utilize the service. Northwest should examine new and creative means to identify students who would benefit from added support early in their academic experience.
- Recommendation for showcasing academic experiences (*Medium priority*)  
When pictures of students are showcased (institutional webpage, etc.) label their name and major as a link and have the link direct to information about the major. Make the links to information about majors and major requirements more obvious.
- Connections with continuing students (*Medium priority*)  
NW's current housing paradigm affords all first year students the opportunity to live/learn with like-aged peers, we think this design may lead to first year students feeling isolated from continuing students. NW should examine methods to more fully integrate first year students with the continuing student population, especially taking advantage of connections that would prove to be beneficial to the first year student. (Mentoring as an example)
- Out of Class Engagement (*Medium priority*)  
Examine current practices related to communicating out of class engagement activities to students. Pay special attention to the success of the new pilot program "Living/Learning Communities" that is being introduced for a portion of NW's student population living in South Complex and consider implementing such a program for 1st year students if successful. Additionally, continue to search for opportunities to engage the commuter student. Continue to support the institution's internship program, making it an attractive option for students who may not be required to complete an internship program through their major course of study.
- Financial Assistance/College Costs--First Year/Beyond (*Medium priority*)  
Form a focus group of students who would be willing to share their viewpoints on how the communication of Financial Assistance/College costs could be improved.
- Family Inclusion in Other Activities For First Year Students (*Low priority*)  
The Institution should examine additional avenues to offer the families of first year students the opportunity to become more involved in their student's college experience.

## **Diversity Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Jeff Foot, Director of International Affairs and ESL Program

Brian Hesse, Associate Professor, History, Humanities, Philosophy, and Political Science

### **Committee Members:**

Aaron Baker, Student

Martha Breckenridge, Assistant Professor of Art

Ben Collier, Associate Professor of Acct/Econ/Finance

Eric Dickey, Assistant Professor of Communication/Theatre/Languages

Aaron Johnson, Assistant Professor of Geosciences

Phil Laber, Professor of Art

Fred Lamer, Assistant Professor of Mass Communications

Brenda Lewis, Instructor of English

Ming-Chih Hung, Assistant Professor of Geosciences

David Nelson, Instructor of Communication/Theater/Languages

Jeaneth Puriel, Coordinator of Study Abroad

Curtis Richardson, Assistant Professor of Hist/Human/Philosophy/Political Sci

Terry Robertson, Professor/Chair of HPERD

Glenn Williams, Assistant Professor of Art

Han Yu, Assistant Professor of Mathematics/Statistics

### **Committee-assigned Grade: D+**

#### **The committee notes that:**

- In light of the university's mission and core values, it is regrettable that "diversity" – even in the most sweeping sense of the word – is perceived to be lacking at Northwest Missouri State.
- The faculty/staff and student surveys included questions regarding exposure to different world religions, political perspectives, social classes/economic statuses, and to students, staff and faculty with differing backgrounds and cultures from one's own. In each case, a majority of respondents that students are exposed to diversity "not at all," or in only "slight" to "moderate" ways.
- A majority of survey respondents state that students are exposed to diversity "not at all," or in only "slight" or "moderate" ways in curricular and extra-curricular activities meant a) to provide appropriate attention to diverse ideas and world views, b) to facilitate interactions with others of differing backgrounds and cultures (both inside and outside the classroom, and from within the institution and beyond), and c) to instill an importance for respecting others with differing opinions.
- Perhaps ironically, nearly 62 percent of student-survey respondents, and nearly 55 percent of faculty/staff-survey respondents, claim the institution does an above-average job "of conveying to first-year students the standards and behavior it expects for participants in a diverse, open, and civil campus community."
- To have much worth, EXPECTATIONS should be coupled with OPPORTUNITIES to demonstrate high standards of behavior with regard to diversity - to put such expectations to the test. However, survey results suggest Northwest Missouri State is lacking when it comes to exposing members of the campus community to diversity.

## Recommended Action Items:

- Action Items for Diverse Ideas (*High priority*)
  - Have all faculty/staff make a "diversity statement" in their course syllabi. Such a statement could be specific,
  - detailing which parts of the course deal with diversity, or such a statement could be rather broad - as is the case
  - with the "diversity statement" found on the Residential Life homepage at
  - <http://www.nwmissouri.edu/reslife/index.htm>: "Northwest Missouri State University... is a community of people with respect for diversity. We welcome students with an array of differing backgrounds. The opportunity to make friends with people of different backgrounds and gain a better understanding of the world is one of the advantages of a diverse community. In the spirit of celebrating diversity, residents are encouraged to learn about and appreciate people of different races, genders, ages, ethnicities, ablebodiedness, sexual orientations, socioeconomic status, or religious affiliations. Each person has worth and will be treated with dignity and respect. Northwest and the Office of Residential Life practice equal opportunity and will not condone discrimination."
  - Be explicit in the catalog and elsewhere as to what general education requirements and institutional requirements are meant to achieve with regard to diversity;
  - Require faculty/staff in their end-of-the-year reports to departmental chairs and college deans to report how they addressed and/or promoted diversity;
  - In student evaluations, include a question, or questions, about how well the professor/instructor exposed students to diversity in the class
  
- Actionable Items for Diverse Interactions (*High priority*)
  - Formally recognize students, faculty, staff and others who make exceptional efforts to advance diversity at Northwest Missouri State University (e.g., a diploma could have a "diversity certification" on it with the equivalent of magna cum laude, summa cum laude, or cum laude level of distinction, obtained through, say, a measured mixture of service, scholarship and/or leadership relating to diversity; a "President's Award," "Dean's Award" and/or "Chair's Award" could be given to select individuals, etcetera)
  - Build on the fact that, as is evident in the nine individual FOE dimension committees' reports, there are overlapping conclusions and suggestions to make reality the actionable items in this report.
  
- Actionable Items for Creating Campus Behaviors (*High priority*)
  - Be explicit in as many public ways as possible -- e.g., in the university catalog, in the faculty handbook, on the university website, at all-university meetings, college meetings, departmental and/or unit meetings -- how the mission statement of the university intersects with "diversity";
  - At all-university meetings, college meetings, departmental and/or unit meetings, provide diversity training,
  - reaffirming how the mission statement of the university intersects with "diversity";
  - Require diversity training for all Freshman Seminar Instructors, and then ensure that the instructors meaningfully address diversity in their Freshman Seminars, imbuing students with an understanding as to the tangible and intangible benefits of diversity (e.g., having "intercultural competence" makes a person more competitive in the job market, promotes personal growth, etcetera);
  - Require all new hires receive "diversity training," reaffirming how the mission statement of the university intersects with "diversity"

## **Faculty Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty. These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year that is realized through high-quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Jeff Thornsberry, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Rose Viau, Director of Residential Life

### **Committee Members:**

Peter Adam, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Elizabeth Dimmitt, Instructor of Psychology/Sociology/Counseling

Carla Edwards, Professor/Chair of Psychology/Sociology/Counseling

Jennifer Kennymore, Health Educator

Chi Lo Lim, Associate Professor/Chair of Marketing/Management

Tom Spencer, Associate Professor of Hist/Human/Philosophy/Political Sci and Honors Program Director

Linda Standerford, Coordinator of Talent Development Center

Candice Wolf, Assistant Director of Campus Activities

### **Committee-assigned Grade: D+**

#### **The committee notes that:**

- The tenure and promotion processes do not make expectations of faculty members clear. The prevailing rule of thumb is to earn strong teaching evaluations – based upon a student opinionaire that is viewed with great skepticism – publish a couple of papers, serve on a committee every year, make yourself available as an academic advisor with little or no training, and try to serve students in some other way out of the classroom. What constitutes highly effective teaching, excellence in advising, or interaction out of the classroom for first year students is open for interpretation. Additionally, the relative importance of these facets of faculty evaluation is greatly debated.
- Results of the faculty survey made it clear that rewards for high quality instruction are a significant issue. There is no evidence to suggest that performance in courses populated with first year students holds any great weight in tenure and promotion nor in salary or bonus decisions.
- In many cases, the only reward one received for high quality instruction in courses for first year students was more work. Those that successfully offer courses for first year students are often asked to take on more of these sections, while faculty that do not fare as well are directed to other teaching assignments.
- Student service is included as a part of the tenure and promotion process. However, no emphasis is placed upon involvement with first year students. Survey results also suggest faculty do not feel that they are rewarded in any substantial way for participating at levels greater than the minimum level.
- Evidence of advisement is part of the tenure and promotion application, but no efforts are made to evaluate the quality of advisement or recognize excellent advising.
- The importance of faculty work with first year students was acknowledged by leaders of the institution, department chairs, and our colleagues. There is, however, mixed evidence regarding the degree to which the institution makes the first year a priority.
- As the institution planned to increase the size of the student population, new academic positions associated with general studies courses were given high priority. However, the institution has not been able meet goals associated with new hires, while the student population has continued to grow.
- Courses with high enrollments of first year students are more likely to be taught by adjunct and instructor level faculty, giving the impression that these courses are not valued as highly.

- It is difficult to argue that much value is placed on the Freshman Seminar program given the restructuring of staffing and given that stipends for faculty and student peer advisors have been stagnant. In addition, little emphasis has been placed upon the role of Freshman Seminar in the curriculum and faculty members seem to be of differing opinion about its role.
- Faculty members seem to be receiving mixed messages regarding the use of engaging pedagogies. A significant amount of discussion has occurred that has indicated a desire for greater levels of engagement. However, faculty are doubtful of being able to bring about real levels of engagement as class sizes continue to increase and a greater emphasis is placed upon online delivery.
- Few resources are available to improve teaching that focus upon issues of engagement. Most on campus training opportunities about teaching focus upon the use of technology as a delivery vehicle.
- We are confident that a great deal of data exists regarding the characteristics of first year students on our campus, as well as trends and issues in the first year, but very little of it trickles down to faculty. Faculty members are not sure what data they need to understand their students better or what they would do with this data if it were made available to them.
- Chairs expressed difficulty balancing the demands for academic freedom on the part of their faculty with demands for coordinated efforts to increase engagement and ensure highly effective teaching.
- Understanding and assessment of unit-level learning goals for entry-level courses seemed to be highly variable between academic departments.
- Results from the faculty survey indicate that newly hired faculty felt expectations regarding teaching and interacting with first year students were not clear. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the information they received during the hiring process regarding their involvement with first year students.

#### **Recommended Action Items:**

- **Resources for General Education (*High priority*)**  
Carry out a meaningful discussion of the general education package that is driven by the educational philosophy of the institution with the goal of maintaining rigor, increasing engagement, and developing effective assessment strategies. The findings of this discussion should determine future resource allocation. This should include plans to review number of faculty and staff with an appreciation of the fact that our student to faculty ratio is the highest in the state.
- **Resources for Freshman Seminar (*High priority*)**  
Improve resources allocated to the Freshman Seminar program, including instructor and peer advisor stipends.
- **Faculty Evaluation and Rewards (*High priority*)**  
Move forward with revisions of the faculty evaluation process. Develop an improved methodology for evaluation of teaching, especially in general education courses, and create a methodology that assesses advising and out of class engagement. Develop a culture that places these aspects of faculty life on equal footing with scholarly activity in the faculty rewards system.
- **Pedagogical Support (*Medium priority*)**  
Develop a Teaching and Learning Center that would provide pedagogical support to faculty. This would provide the tools and resources to faculty that would allow them to truly improve their teaching and serve as a valuable resource for new faculty.
- **Communication (*Low priority*)**  
Develop methods to improve communication between Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, and the faculty regarding the composition of our student body and the issues facing them.
- **Awards (*Low priority*)**  
Fully implement awards to recognize outstanding advising and out of class engagement.

## **Organization Dimension Report Summary**

*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.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Matt Walker, Assistant Professor of Communication/Theatre/Languages

Lori Hopkins, Assistant Athletics Director

### **Committee Members:**

Desi Campbell, Residential Life Hall Director

Emily Felton, Student

Mark Hetzler, Director of Auxiliary Services

Allison Hoffman, Instructor of Marketing/Management

Nissa Ingraham, Instructor of Communication/Theatre/Languages

Brad Landhuis, Assistant Director of Student Advisement

Glenn Morrow, Owen's Library Facilities Manager/Access Services Lead

Sue Myllykangas, Assistant Professor of HPERD

Bayo Oludaja, Associate Professor of Communication/Theatre/Languages

Jeremy Waldeier, Associate Director of Admissions

### **Committee-assigned Grade: C**

#### **The committee notes that:**

- Much of the oversight of the freshman population falls under the direction of the Freshman Seminar course and Residential Life, but there does not seem to be one unifying locus of control. This system has been adequate; however, with increased enrollment, a coordinating office/unit may be necessary.
- The current, shared responsibility structure does a remarkable job in addressing freshmen needs. Much of the problem arises because freshmen are faced with an onslaught of information – students see the information gathering/filtering process as rather daunting. Without assistance, they give up or rely on fellow freshmen for advice and information.
- There is little consistent integration of information or service delivery after about the third week of the fall term. Each area does a solid job at what its charges are; however, efforts are often lost when students are directed from office to office, and communications are slow and ineffective.
- Each unit evaluates its own performance each year, and the information is provided to each department head for analysis. There seems to be little sharing of evaluation results or best practices.
- Only a small portion of the campus staff/faculty is offered annual development in interacting with the first-year student.

#### **Recommended Action Item:**

- Create an oversight unit/office/liaison (*High priority*)  
The Organizational Committee recommends the creation of one singular coordinating/facilitating unit to allow for improved communication between current units that interact with first-year students. This office would be primarily responsible for coordinating faculty development, specifically improving interactions between first-year students and all faculty and advisors. Other responsibilities would include the collection and dissemination of the various activities and information from the individual offices that interact with first-year students.

## **Learning Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission. Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Vincent Bates, Assistant Professor of Music

Darla Runyon, Assistant Director of Center for Information Technology in Education

Matt Symonds, Assistant Professor in the Department of Health, PE, Recreation, and Dance

### **Committee Members:**

Lori Durbin, Instructor of Communication/Theater/Languages

Carla Edwards, Professor/Chair of Psychology/Sociology/Counseling

Robin Gallaher, Director of Writing Programs, English Department

Mark Hetzler, Director of Auxiliary Services

Karen Schaffer, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Scott Shields, Coordinator of Residential Life

Gina Smith, Assistant Director of Admissions

Tom Smith, Assistant Professor of English

Michael Steiner, Associate Professor/Chair of History/Humanities/Philosophy/Political Science

### **Committee-assigned Grade: C**

The committee notes that:

- There is some evidence of common learning goals for the first year in Freshman Seminar and in the General Education curriculum, leading to some sense of common learning goals for the first year. There is less evidence, however, that outcomes related to those learning goals are measured.
- Departments have not developed formal plans specifically to ascertain the level of student engagement in individual courses which enroll high numbers of first year students or to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness in encouraging engagement in those courses.
- Departments housing courses which enroll high numbers of first year students vary in the degree to which they evaluate learning outcomes across the sections of those courses, though most have some practices in place.
- There is no systematic process for addressing the causes of high DFWI rates
- High school transcripts, ACT scores, and college credit info are utilized to ensure course assignments for the first semester are appropriate for the student's level of preparation.
- Activities designed to assess learning outcomes for special learning opportunities vary depending upon the program.

## Recommended Action Items:

- **Continue General Education Re-evaluation (*High priority*)**  
We suggest that the Faculty Senate (and associated committees) continue with a re-evaluation of general education that was started during the 2009-2010 academic year.
- **Integrate Skill and Knowledge Goals Across General Education (*High priority*)**  
It is possible to integrate all four skill areas and multiple knowledge areas within most general education courses. Such an approach might more fully constitute "common learning goals." A re-evaluation of general education could reflect this more shared approach to addressing skill and knowledge goals.
- **Engaging Pedagogies (*High priority*)**  
We need to continue to explore the integration of new classroom techniques and strategies relative to student engagement. This could include specific ways to document and measure student engagement and teacher effectiveness relative to engagement (specifically as it pertains to critical thinking, valuing, communicating, and managing information). It is important to note that in an engaging curriculum, assignments and activities are not simply rigorous; they are also relevant, meaningful, authentic, varied, interesting, and intrinsically motivating.
- **Professional Development: Engaging Pedagogies (*High priority*)**  
We can always improve teaching methods and classroom engagement. Explore a variety of approaches to professional development (invited clinicians, sharing ideas across campus, discipline-specific in-service training) especially as it relates to engaging pedagogies. In keeping with the spirit of engagement, professional development should be encouraged rather than mandated.
- **Professional Development: eCompanion (*High priority*)**  
Help faculty become more aware of student tracking and test analysis capabilities as well as other possibilities in eCompanion.
- **Professional Development: Quality Matters (*High priority*)**  
Quality Matters is a peer review process for online and blended courses. There is a standard included that deals with learning outcomes and how to more fully develop an eCompanion or course management site. We could have professional development relative to this. This component could be applied across campus via department meetings.
- **Common Readings (*Medium priority*)**  
Require a book to be read across campus as a means to establish a common interest among first-year students? There are existing models for this program (the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Duke University, and several others have programs that have been in place for several years), and a logical time to make the book assignment might be during SOAR.
- **Review the Freshman Seminar Curriculum (*Medium priority*)**  
Develop ways to make the FS curriculum more engaging. Possibly include service learning and other authentic/engaging opportunities.
- **Diversity (*Medium priority*)**  
Explore ways to incorporate diversity as a topic in individual courses. Develop a repository of relevant resources on and off campus.
- **Communicate General Education Goals (*Medium priority*)**  
We need to more effectively and consistently communicate the purposes and values of general education within individual courses and across campus.

## **Improvement Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement. This assessment is specific to the first year as a unit of analysis—a distinct time period and set of experiences, academic and otherwise, in the lives of students. It is also linked systemically to the institutions' overall assessment. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and ongoing improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. As part of the enhancement process and as a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on the first college year.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Mary Ann Penniston, Associate Director of Strategic Research  
Jenny Rytting, Assistant Professor of English

### **Committee Member:**

Natalia Omelchenko, Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

### **Current grade: C**

#### **The committee notes that:**

- Individual programs vary somewhat in their assessment practices, but generally mechanisms are in place. The use of the resulting data may, in some cases, be more systematic.
- Most of the assessment efforts are done in silos, and results remain similarly segregated with no central point/office responsible for storage, interpretation, aggregation or publication. In addition, offices and units engaged in assessing and collecting data have little framework for benchmarking, collaborating, or communicating the results of their efforts.
- The "brightest spot," defined as the "highest number of good/excellent responses" to the faculty/staff survey, is the use of "student evaluations, assessments, or feedback" to influence work with freshman.
- Another "bright spot" appears in the general area of Northwest's "assessment capabilities relevant to the first year of college," where three survey questions asking about the relevance, dissemination, and use of such assessment all had relatively high scores. While it is not clear what specific assessments those who took the survey had in mind, the results indicate that many think we're doing a good job here.
- In considering survey questions about attending and presenting at outside conferences or contributing to publications "focusing on the first year"; 74% percent of faculty and staff answered "not at all" or "slight," which we feel fits Northwest's culture and fiscal situation. While there is value in national and regional conferences focusing specifically on the first year, we could efficiently realize that value by sending a small contingent of faculty and staff to keep abreast of developments in this area and report back to the rest of us.
- Less than half of the faculty and staff attend "conferences or workshops at this institution" relating to the first year or acknowledge the influence of "current practices at other institutions" or "professional/published research" on their work with first-year students.
- The majority of faculty members indicate that they do not use such demographic or academic skills information when working with first-year students. There may, however, be a stigma attached to making assumptions based on such data and, moreover, it is unclear what relevance it would have for faculty or staff interactions with students.

**Recommended Action Items:**

- Schedule regular reviews of assessment scores and subscores to drive curriculum and instruction improvement. (*High priority*)
- Research correlation between ACT subscores and retention/completion to see if admission/placement would benefit from using subscores. (*Medium priority*)
- Small cohort to attend external workshops & engage in first-year-specific research (*Medium priority*)  
Intentional consistency and follow-through for First-year-specific group to attend workshops and do research, then bring instructional practices and demographics to front-line faculty
- In-house workshops (*Medium priority*)  
Create in-house workshops or training sessions for faculty and staff that incorporate current research on the first-year experience and best practices.
- Benchmarking (*Low priority*)  
Research other institutions for an academic skills curriculum to consider integrating into General Education course instruction.

## **All Students Dimension Report Summary**

*Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs. The process of anticipating, diagnosing, and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to assessment and adjustment throughout the first year. Institutions provide services with respect for the students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Institutions also ensure a campus environment that is inclusive and safe for all students.*

### **Committee Leaders:**

Jamie Patton, Associate Professor of Agriculture

Joan Schneider, Director of Career Services

### **Committee Members:**

Kathleen Baudino, Records Specialist with the Intercultural/International Center

Nancy Foley, Associate Professor of Curriculum & Instruction

Robin Gallaher, Director of Writing Programs, English Department

Karen Kepka, President of the Association for Non-Traditional Students

Rhonda Lesley, Counselor with Wellness Services

Aimee Rea, Residential Life Complex Director

Kim Todd, Information Services User Consultant

Kate Walter, Student and Supplemental Instruction Leader

Evan Wilmes, Graduate Assistant for Student Athlete Success Program

### **Committee-assigned Grade: B**

The committee notes that:

- Academic and/or personal needs of students are self-reported to the appropriate offices/services and additional academic evaluation and identification resources are available. As such, we are relatively strong in identifying academic needs, but less so in identifying social/personal needs.
- Committee members believe the university does an above average job providing individual attention and academic support. Student survey responses indicate freshman feel instructors provide individual attention, explain the requirements for their major, help them select courses, discuss how college can help them achieve their life goals, and discuss how to be personally academically successful.
- Freshman report using academic support services on average 1 to 5 times a trimester and, as a whole, feel Northwest has connected them with academic support outside the classroom.
- The committee feels the university does an above average job at providing students opportunities for on campus involvement. Students report that instructors encourage them to participate in course-related, out of class events and the institution has communicated the importance of out-of-class activities. It is noted, however, that many of the organizations/events are not well publicized across campus.
- Student survey responses indicate freshman, as a whole, feel their instructors treat students fairly regardless of gender/race/ethnicity
- Faculty/Staff Survey results generally suggest the faculty/staff believe Northwest addresses the needs of students with academic deficiencies, students with disabilities, honors students and student athletes. However, results from some functional areas suggest those perceptions are not universal. In addition, results suggest faculty/staff believe Northwest sub optimally addresses the needs of racial/ethnic minority students
- Black/African American students and students reporting two or more races responded less strongly that they felt they belong on campus and that they felt physically safe
- Students who reported that their high school grades were "All or mostly C" responded less strongly that their academic and social needs were being met, that faculty treat students fairly based upon gender/race/ethnicity, and that they can express their beliefs safely
- Students reporting that they will be transferring to another institution were less likely to indicate that their social needs are met, less likely to feel respected by others, and less likely to feel they belong

## Recommended Action Items:

- **Directory of University Resources/Offices (*High priority*)**  
Creation of searchable, easy to use database of on-campus services would aid students, faculty and staff in finding the appropriate office/resource for a particular need. Website could list common freshman questions (i.e. "I don't like my roommate, how do I switch who I live with?" OR "If I drop a class and go below 12 credit hours, am I still eligible for financial aid?") and answers. The site could also list university resources and summarize their services.  
  
It is also important to train faculty and staff in what services are offered by each office. For example, faculty and staff should be versed in what situations to send the student to the Cashiering Office, Financial Aid, or the Student Services Desk. Sending students a consistent message on the procedures of the University is key in improving student satisfaction.
- **Transitional Support for At-Risk Students (*High priority*)**  
Students reporting high school grades 'Lower than a C' consistently report lower than average perceptions that their academic and social needs are being met, that they feel they belong, and that their ideas/beliefs are being respected in the classroom. Further investigation into the success of these students is warranted, as additional transitional/academic support may be beneficial to the welfare of these students.
- **Identification of Subpopulation Needs (*High priority*)**  
Little information is available regarding the listed subpopulations and the University resources specifically available to address their individual needs. Further targeted surveys/interviews will produce valuable data to aid the University in its response the needs of active duty military, veterans, GLBT students, commuters, adult students, first-generation students, ethnic/racial minorities, etc.
- **Increase Student Support Staff (*High priority*)**  
It is perceived that an increasing percentage of incoming students require assistance from the University Wellness Center, Talent Development Center, and other student support offices. This increase in demand (% wise), coupled with increases in total student numbers are putting a strain on the faculty and staff serving these offices. To ensure the emotional, academic and personal success of all students, additional staff (counselors, doctors, nurses, tutors, disabilities coordinators, etc) need to be hired. Such increases in staff were to be part of the REEP program, but the positions have not been created/filled.
- **Critically Evaluate the Naming of Offices (*Low priority*)**  
Often it is not clear to students, faculty or staff what services are offered by a particular office, as the office name may not be descriptive. For example, it may not be clear that a student with learning disabilities should seek assistance from the Talent Development Center or that Information Systems can assist students with their laptops. Renaming offices may assist students in seeking needed resources.
- **Additional Support for Non-traditional/Commuting Students (*Low priority*)**  
Commuting and/or non-traditional student needs may differ from those of 'traditional', on-campus students. The committee discussed the potential benefits of short-term housing for commuting students in times of bad weather, on-campus daycare, installation of lockers for secure storage of personal items, etc
- **Increased Electronic Communications (*Low priority*)**  
Advertisement of university events (guest speakers, service learning opportunities, etc) is often limited to print or webpage advertisements. Disseminating information via text messaging may improve student involvement