



STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE CHARGE AND BACKGROUND

The charge for the FYE SSI Task Group was to “focus on the elements of the first-year experience with the ideal that the first year should provide all students with a solid foundation to support continued success. This focus should be balanced by the needs of those students who are most likely to leave the university before graduating. Your work should consider the exemplar programs and best practices already employed, as well as the exploration of innovative and novel approaches for improving graduation rates and enhancing the overall Illinois experience. Your task group is empowered to boldly consider opportunities to improve, expand, and better integrate our efforts to help students achieve a degree at Illinois.”

The Task Group met monthly from October 2019 through February 2020. We took a pause for the scheduled March meeting due to the pandemic but began meeting again monthly starting in April 2020 through July 2020. Four subcommittees were developed to focus on specific topics outlined in the first-year experience: 1) Orientation; 2) FYE Courses; 3) Academic Experiences; and 4) Co-curricular Involvement. The subcommittees were charged with looking at relevant data, gathering student input, examining best practices at Illinois and at peer institutions, and identifying relevant literature and exemplar institutions. Recommendations came from the subcommittees as well as discussions of the whole Task Group. These recommendations were shared with the Task Group for evaluation and review.

Much reliance was based upon the Council for the Advancement of Standards, Standards for functional areas in higher education; specifically, the CAS for Orientation Programs, CAS for First-Year Experiences, CAS for Campus Activities Programs, and CAS for Academic Advising Programs (<https://www.cas.edu/>).

There was continued recognition of potential overlap with other SSI Task Groups due to the breadth of issues examined in the first-year experience. However, our

group was specifically focused on students transition to the University of Illinois and success in their first year of college. Many of the recommendations suggest further review and discussion on specific areas and do not provide recommendations for implementation.

Overall, we have found this experience to be extremely helpful in bringing together professionals from across campus with different perspectives and focus areas to discuss student success. We would advocate for continued discussions focused on student success and student development to continue across campus regularly. One recommendation could be the development of an annual University of Illinois Student Success Conference. Such a conference could bring the entire campus together to discuss and share student success initiatives and would demonstrate an ongoing commitment to student success at Illinois. A segment of a Student Success Conference could be a continuation of the SSI conversations providing ongoing feedback, assessment, and discussion on the progress of Student Success at Illinois.