

Final First-Year Experience Committee Report

Narrative

The charge of the First-Year Implementation Team is part of a second phase of the Student Success Initiative task force. The committee was asked to focus on recommendations related to “Develop a comprehensive orientation, transition, and first-year experience program for new students at Illinois” by using the following framework to recommend an implementation plan:

- 1) What do first-year students need to know or experience?
- 2) When do first-year students need to know it or experience it?
- 3) Who is best to deliver this information or provide the experience?

The purpose of the charge was to keep undergraduate students as the main priority while including transfer students. Committee membership consisted of campus professionals with experience and expertise supporting students across various campus units. These units represented help with the success and development of students at The University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and include:

Faculty/Staff

- Mariana Ortega, La Casa Cultural Latina, co-chair
- Michelle Ellis, Division of General Studies, co-chair
- Jessica Arnold, Division of General Studies
- Marni Boppart, College of Applied Health Sciences
- Andy Borst, Office of Undergraduate Admissions
- Scarlett Briones, International Student and Scholar Services
- Mari Anne Brocker Curry, University Housing
- Amanda Carey, Disability Resources and Educational Services
- Shari Clapp, Division of Intercollegiate Athletics
- Domico Cobb, Office of Minority Student Affairs
- Mary Edwards, College of Fine and Applied Arts
- Jon Elugbadebo, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Michael Foellmer, College of Education
- Gretchen Forman, Grainger College of Engineering
- Grace Giorgio, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Brianna Gregg, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
- Lisa Jackson, Student Success and Engagement
- Elise McCarren, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- Corey Thoss, Gies College of Business
- Tony Torres, School of Information Sciences
- Rebecca Salzman, Illini Union, Student Affairs
- Kimberly Yau, International Student and Scholar Services
- Jim Hintz, Student Success & Engagement and Office of Inclusion & Intercultural Relations, ex-officio

Students

- Annie Althaus, undergraduate student in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
- Oneida Byrd, undergraduate student in Elementary Education
- Jack Casey, undergraduate student in Special Education
- Ryann Chomiak, undergraduate student in Global Studies
- Jonathan Cu, undergraduate student in Urban Studies and Planning
- Danielle Schleyer, undergraduate student in Advertising

The committee met monthly from October 2021 through April 2022. Four groups were created to focus on the questions the committee needed to address in phases of the monthly meetings. Sub-groups were tasked with answering the three main questions stated in the charge centered around the needs of first-year students of when, what, and who revolving their success in the first year. Throughout the meetings there was continuous discussion around the first FYE SSI task force and references to recommendations found in the final report. Some committee members voiced concern that recommendations were previously made and nothing new has surfaced from the FYE SSI final recommendations report. Ultimately, the committee determined that focusing on a centralized unit could strengthen the current orientation model and further increase retention rates among our students.

Comprehensive First-Year Experience (main recommendation)

Centralized unit on campus (sub-header recommendation #1)

After a robust discussion about the existing decentralized structure and practices related to the First Year Experience, the FYE Implementation committee recommends that the centralized unit should manage, and coordinate campus wide activities and programs related to the first-year experience. The committee proposes that the current Office of New and Transfer Student Programs should serve as the centralized unit responsible for the First-Year Experience (FYE). With the expertise of New and Transfer Student Programs, the expectation is that the unit would be able to share best practices and collaborate with academic, enrollment management, and student affairs units on the implementation and assessments of activities and programs.

As the centralized unit designated to coordinate the FYE, New Student and Transfer Programs (NSP) could serve as the lead in consistency of programming across colleges and units. The colleges would still have a significant role in determining the outcomes needed for new students related to success in the unique aspects of the colleges. NSP would be responsible for coordinating a comprehensive experience that would include the following:

- New Student Registration
- Orientation
- Fall Welcome
- FYE courses
- First year programming and activities for first-time freshmen and transfers

Collaboration Across Units

It is not expected that NSP would be solely responsible for these activities but would be central to the development of programs and activities in coordination with both the student affairs and academic units who work with the populations served by FYE activities and programming. Currently, NSP coordinates the summer experiences of InBound and RISE as well as the Fall Welcome Days for the campus community. This is coordinated with various units, including the academic units to discuss plans for welcome programming for their respective units.

The FYE Committee proposes that this happens on a wider scale, with NSP taking the lead on gathering units together to not only plan the Fall Welcome Days but other activities and programming related to the first-year experience. Competencies and learning outcomes related to the first-year experience can be developed collaboratively to provide a guide for the experiences. The competencies are meant to serve as a guide for FYE experience programs (i.e., FYE courses) and serve as a means of assessments of those activities.

Consistency

The first-year experience is inconsistent from student to student. The FYE Implementation Committee worked in subgroups to discuss ways in which those responsible for FYE activities and programming could provide consistent information to first-year students regardless of their declared major or college. Each subgroup worked together to answer the following questions:

- 1) What do first year students need to learn?
- 2) When do they need to learn it?
- 3) Who is responsible for this information?

The workgroups presented to the larger committee to provide discussion and common themes.

(See chart in Appendix A)

New Student Registration and Orientation (sub-header recommendation #2)

The FYE Implementation Committee also recommends that the university decouple registration from orientation activities. Currently, new students complete New Student Registration (NSR) and Orientation activities during a full day on campus visit. Not all students attend New Student Registration and/or they do not participate in the various optional orientation type activities while they are on-campus. Virtual NSR/Orientation options exist for students who live outside of a certain radius of campus (typically International and out of state students). This approach created inequities for students and parents/family members who cannot attend the summer experience.

The committee discussed noted examples from other Big Ten institutions who have decoupled the registration and orientation activities and noted benefits such as:

- More time for advising and registration
- Opportunity for different modalities of advising experience (in person or virtual)
- Greater expansion of other orientation programming (i.e. summer bridge, early arrival, etc.).

The committee discussed a possible decoupling structure where incoming students would participate in advising/registration over the summer either in person or virtually and attend orientation activities prior to the start of the Fall term. Moving orientation activities away from the registration process would allow more time for students to participate in activities that help them learn more about campus life and feel a sense of belonging as they transition to a new residential experience. If orientation experiences were moved and made “mandatory” then all students would benefit from a common experience. Ultimately, a decoupling structure suitable for Illinois would need to be discussed and vetted by appropriate units. Please see sample models at other Big Ten institutions below.

Decoupling Models

University of Nebraska: [Freshmen | New Student Enrollment | University of Nebraska–Lincoln \(unl.edu\)](#)

University of Iowa: [Student Orientation Overview | New Student Services \(uiowa.edu\)](#)

Areas of improvement for underserved communities:

Supporting underrepresented student groups and their success in the first year was discussed. In these conversations, committee members shared ideas to best support underserved students and various ways to look at how campus engages with them. There are many boutique experiences for students across campus. Students with multiple identities often have to choose which experience(s) to participate in since there is overlap. This needs further review to identify gaps and avoid overlaps.

Various supporting models

Welcome Week

Consider offering a week of orientation activities, prior to the start of the term, where students can engage in the following: register for classes (if necessary), meet their academic college, attend a structured orientation experience that builds sense of belonging. This model will offer a student with limited or no access to technology the opportunity to register upon arrival to campus, prior to engaging in orientation and social activities. If students are allowed to move into university housing at least two weekends prior to the start of the term, this model could expand on family programming to allow families the opportunity to engage in their students' experience. If it is expected that ALL students attend the “orientation” experience, then attendance could be higher, especially for first-generation households.

Registration online

Consider moving registration to an online format with options of potentially having academic colleges host hours at the Chicago Satellite Office, UIC Campus, and Extension Offices. This will allow academic advisors to focus on the registration piece while allowing the outside the classroom experience to be a focus during the week before classes begin.

In addition, this allows first-generation, low-income, undocumented, DACAmented households to not have to worry about the financial expense of coming to campus twice. Furthermore, some first-

generation students attend registration days alone and this would contribute to not allowing them to feel isolated versus their peers who attend with family members. For international students this will also allow them to not feel left out from the first-year engagements that are in person if they are not able to attend until August.

Inclusive selection of activities

To be more inclusive of the diversity in the first-year class, the artists, activities, and events need to represent diverse identities to show all students belong at Illinois. One idea to add more diversity, specifically black and brown communities, is to bring in some Chicago talent to campus.

Implementation Recommendations

The First-Year Experience committee recommends the following:

- A centralized unit (i.e. New Student and Transfer Programs) should be charged by the Provost Office and Student Affairs to lead the First Year Experience. It would be the driving force behind all first year & transfer student initiatives to provide a more comprehensive approach for all students.
- A committee including all the academic colleges, Undergraduate Admissions and Student Affairs units should be formed to provide input and guidance to New and Transfer Student Programs.
- First-year students move in at least a week prior to the start of classes (two-weekends before the start of classes).
- Common outcomes for the FYE programming and courses should be developed and assessed
- Develop a weeklong orientation and welcome back model.
- Transfer students are considered new students and should have a unique experience created for them in both Fall and Spring semester.
- Registration days to be removed from Undergraduate Admissions and those financial resources to be shifted to NSP.

Appendix A

First Year Inventory of Needs

What Do First Year Students Need to Know or Experience? *

Prior To Arrival	August/First Week	September and Beyond	As Needed/Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation for NSR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NSR Sign Up ○ Setting Up NetID & Password ○ Placement Exams ○ College Homework • Housing Information • Connecting with roommates, advisors, college personnel • Campus Safety Information • McKinley Health Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Immunization Requirements • Financial Aid • DRES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convocation/College Welcome Activities • Advising Structure and requirements • How to be a college student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Obtaining books ○ How to read a syllabus ○ Navigating LMS • Navigating Campus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learning class schedule ○ Using bus system • Exposure to Campus Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dean of Students ○ Counseling ○ Tutoring ○ OMSA • Campus Social Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sights & Sounds ○ Quad Day ○ RSOs ○ Cultural Houses ○ Campus Rec 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add/Drop Deadlines ○ Holidays/Breaks • Academic Expectations • Student Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students Rights & Responsibilities ○ Academic Integrity ○ Campus Policies • Running a DARS audit • Learning Skills & Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using the Library ○ Study Skills ○ Time Management • Health & Wellness • Mandatory Programming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FYCARE ○ ACE IT ○ Diversity E-Text • Connecting with communities of identity and engaging with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting with campus support resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counseling ○ Tutoring ○ Dean of Students • Enrichment Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Research ○ Studying Abroad ○ Internships • Exposure to C-U Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Volunteer Opportunities ○ Food Pantries • Transportation Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Travelling locally ○ travelling back home • Health Insurance • On Campus jobs • Scholarships • Transferring Courses/Course Articulation

* While the experiences outlined above are assigned to a specific time frame, many experiences and resources will be shared with students on an ongoing basis (i.e., Counseling, Tutoring, Dean of Students, etc.)