

Report of the Task Force on the First-Year Experience

University at Albany

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Introduction

In the Summer of 2008, Interim Provost Susan D. Phillips commissioned a Task Force on the First-Year Experience (FYE) to review the programs currently offered to freshmen students at UAlbany, explore First-Year Experience programs offered by peer institutions, and make recommendations on the future design and delivery of the First-Year Experience at the University at Albany. (See Appendix A for Committee Charge.)

The Committee divided its work into two main avenues of investigation: 1) to inventory and offer recommendations about the current range of FYE offerings at UAlbany; and 2) to inventory the FYE offerings at regional and national competitor institutions. Information gathered through these reviews and subsequent deliberations informed the development of three models of FYE for UAlbany, as requested by the Provost.

This document contains the Task Force's findings, and is organized as follows:

- I. A summary of current FYE options at the University
- II. A summary of FYE options at other institutions
- III. Models: three possible models, each identifying potential opportunities for enhancing the First-Year Experience at the University at Albany. The models range from a lower-end, resource-neutral model through a high-end model that would require additional resources.
- IV. Evaluation Plan
- V. Implementation Plan
- VI. Appendices:
 - a. Charge from the Provost
 - b. Internal Offerings Report – a comprehensive overview of the programs that the University at Albany currently offers its freshman students;
 - c. External Offerings Report – selected offerings at peer institutions;
 - d. Guidelines of an FYE Course
 - e. Sample Course Outline for a Proposed FYE Course

We are pleased to submit the Report of the Task Force on the First-Year Experience with the unanimous support of its members.

I. Summary of Observations Regarding the Current FYE Offerings

In the University at Albany concern for the FYE took on a new impetus during the 1990s. During that decade there were major structural changes in Advisement and in Undergraduate Education, and our first large programs and courses aimed *specifically* at first-year students were developed (including Project Renaissance, Presidential Scholars' courses, new EOP summer programs, and various initiatives in the new College of Arts and Sciences including Freshmen Seminars). Residential Life explored new housing arrangements for frosh, including interest groupings and the living-learning arrangements associated with Project Renaissance. In 1998 a Retention Task Force recommended (*inter alia*) development of disciplinarily varied but "intellectually rigorous" freshman seminars. It also proposed appointment of a FYE Coordinator (ref). Since that time, without the strong central coordination envisioned by the retention group, a significant array of curricular and residential initiatives has developed for first-year students. Project Renaissance proved remarkably durable. Academic elements of the Presidential Scholars' program evolved into a fully-fledged Honors College. New courses have been designed specifically for frosh including university seminars (UFSP 100/101) and interdisciplinary courses UNI 100 (=ECPY 120). New advisement, academic support, residential, counseling, and athletic services continue to evolve to serve to new students.

The Advisement Services and the Academic Support Services Centers engage in a wide variety of academic and developmental work with first-year students, including orientation, provision of courses, advisement, major choices, counseling, intervention, liaison with departments, and management of a very successful EOP program. For many years the Division of Student Success has also been intimately involved with first-year students not only in summer orientation and housing but through programming and liaison with academic departments (e.g. Food for Thought). Student Success promotes ideals of community involvement and multiculturalism, supports many clubs and organizations, and provides counseling and services which promote the health, well-being, and success of frosh. A recent report of the University Retention Committee (2006-7) provides a detailed account of many academic and extracurricular initiatives including the University Seminar program developed in 2006 for first semester students, and the Freshman Focus program in the second-semester.

Some of these programs -- arguably the most successful ones -- serve first-year students only. But one of the principal challenges in isolating and assessing the effect of first-year initiatives is that some are necessarily embedded in courses and programs that involve other students, too, and therefore cannot be shaped exclusively for frosh. Thus although it is possible administratively to restrict sections of 100-level courses to first-year students this is not usually done. It is common for 100-level courses to enroll all levels of students including seniors (ref *Appendix*). The same is true of General Education and some writing courses. Except in the case of Project Renaissance and a few frosh-only offerings, General Education requirements are satisfied through regular departmental courses. Although students are expected to deal with General Education requirements early in their college careers, invariably some upper division students take 100-level courses to make up Gen Ed requirements.

The most striking feature of FYE initiatives at UAlbany is the variety of programs available and the lack of overall coordination between units. Some programs have had limited life spans, some have endured; objective and first-year-specific assessments are mostly lacking. Some colleges, schools, disciplines, and professional fields are mainly focused on training their own majors (sometimes with an early admissions process). Schools and colleges vary widely in their contribution to General Education and other lower division programs. The College of Arts and Sciences plays a unique role due to its size, its role in providing the bulk of General Education seats, and its variety of disciplines and majors. An unusual feature of the University at Albany compared with most of its peer institutions is the existence of a Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (evolved from a deanship). The Vice Provost has responsibility for many aspects of the pre-major academic experience, including Honors and General Education. Many first-year initiatives at UAlbany, including Project

Renaissance, originated in Undergraduate Education rather than in disciplinary schools and colleges, which has produced some friction over jurisdiction and resources.

The Task Force requested Vice Provosts, Deans, Directors, and other appropriate officials to provide information on programs with a significant impact on first-year students. Those responses are captured in Appendix B. The following summaries draw on their responses:

- a. *Variety of Programs.* The materials obtained by the Task Force, as well as existing reports of Institutional Research, retention groups, external reviewers and others, indicate a wide awareness on campus of the distinctiveness of first-year students' experiences and a recognition that the success and satisfaction of first-year students are crucial to our overall institutional success. There are many possible approaches to the FYE, and many FYE-oriented practices at UAlbany. Indeed the Task Force discussed the "Hawthorne effect," which suggests that almost any thoughtful, personal attention to first-year students will have good, although perhaps only temporary, effects.
- b. *Incomplete Coverage of First-year Students.* Despite the range of initiatives at UAlbany, our efforts are not yet inclusive. Some groups of first-year students are quite well served (e.g. EOP, Honors College, Project Renaissance). But many other students who are unaffiliated with any special program can evade FYE interventions altogether. Clearly resource constraints are a problem, but so too is the voluntary nature of some of our FYE programs. One of our sources proposed a goal of exposing *all* students to "at least one high impact experience in the first year." The Task Force endorses this idea, and feels that when core elements of FYE are developed, some of them should be made compulsory for all first-year students.
- c. *Unclear Goals.* The goals of individual FYE programs at UAlbany vary in clarity. Some, such as those of the Educational Opportunities Program and Project Renaissance, are quite clear and have been thoughtfully refined over time. Other programs appear more ad hoc and are of shorter duration. The Task force heard many ideals for the FYE ranging from developing students' self awareness and community responsibility, to critical thinking and engaged research, to the acquisition of basic academic skills including writing. On one hand, first-year students should be encouraged to explore intellectual worlds they have never encountered before; on the other, they are eager to find the right major(s). For some units on campus lower division, first-year, and General Education teaching provides an avenue to inform and attract potential majors. Other units, notably the professional schools, have less engagement with the first-year population in general, and are mainly concerned with streamlining early admission of students whose major decision is already made. These diverse and contradictory objectives are inevitable considering the multiple purposes the FYE must serve, but we feel that there should be articulated a clear set of goals for the FYE at UAlbany, reflecting our own and other institutions' best practices, the intellectual and personal development the FYE is supposed to foster, and the principles guiding the effort (e.g. "challenge and support," or "transition, connection, engagement"). The current array of poorly funded and scattered efforts have worked very well in some cases, but in aggregate they send a signal to both faculty and students that our FYE objectives are confused and incoherent.
- d. *Lack of Coordination.* We feel that the key to a successful and coherent FYE program is coordination and that this is notably lacking at UAlbany today. We echo the task force of 1998 in calling for appointment of a FYE Coordinator, perhaps with an advisory board. The Office of Undergraduate Education may be the natural place for such an appointment. The task force note the very significant impact the that Student Success and Residential Life have had on the Freshmen Year Experience and affirms that their inclusion and collaboration are required for a comprehensive, coordinated FYE initiative.

- e. *Learning Communities.* The task force discussed the notion that the thoughtful formation of learning communities, as found in other successful freshmen year experiences such as EOP (though not a residential option) or Project Renaissance, may be a fruitful strategy/vehicle to foster the University's FYE objectives and goals.
- f. *Lack of Resources.* In a sense this is *the* problem, particularly in the present budget and economic climate. There are many claims on the time, effort, and resources of deans, departments, faculty and support professionals, and at a graduate research university FYE will at best be one among many competing voices. However, the Task Force feels that many FYE programs at UAlbany are poorly resourced, and that a truly effective FYE will require a significant readjustment of priorities and reallocation of resources, as well as a significant cultural change among some faculty.
- g. *Defining "Faculty" for FYE.* The Task Force discussed at length the question of how FYE may best be delivered. The question of "rigorous teaching" and "challenging" material, and the merits of regular and adjunct faculty, were particularly salient in our discussions of Project Renaissance. The Task Force concurs in the consensus of the literature that FYE courses should be challenging, engaging, and should provide students with adequate support. Our survey of FYE practices at UAlbany found that appropriately motivated and rewarded tenure track and term-appointed faculty, support professionals, advisors, graduate students and undergraduate preceptors can all play a role in successful courses. We note that many chairs strive to insulate untenured regular faculty from the intensive demands of FYE, and that many more senior faculty are very happy to engage in it.
- h. *Lack of Consistent and FYE-specific Assessments.* Obviously articulation of goals is a prerequisite.
- i. *The Conduct of Lower Division Courses.* We noted that the presence of upper division students taking lower division courses -- perhaps reluctantly, to satisfy a requirement -- is a formula for disengagement, and it sends the wrong signal to new students. Some members of the Task Force favored development of Code of Etiquette [*this is the phrase in the Minutes, but Etiquette is hardly le mot juste, JP*] to guide both students and faculty in the classroom; other members were suspicious of something that might be perceived as an intrusive mandate. We note that dealing with first-year students embedded in large mixed, 100-level courses is a challenge. We found examples of success and failure in this endeavor.
- j. *Challenges of Class Size.* There is consensus that most academic objectives of FYE are best served in relatively small classes (<25). These settings provide the most effective learning environment for students. Other things being equal most instructors probably prefer such courses. However, there are very strong constraints on our ability to provide such courses considering the sheer volume of students in large disciplinary and General Education courses, the opportunity costs such courses involve in deploying faculty, and our severe budget limits on faculty, assistantships and other necessary resources. The Task Force noted that large classes can be effectively handled by experienced faculty with appropriate assistance. In fact UAlbany faculty have many found creative ways to provide some elements of a "small class" experience to quite large classes (e.g. alternation of plenary lectures with break-out groups, use of undergraduate mentors in designated groups). The Retention Report of 2006-7 details some of the strategies that may be useful. Any feasible FYE for UAlbany will necessarily entail a mix of large- and small-course experiences for frosh. We feel that it is important that all first-year students be exposed to at least one relatively small, "high impact" class.

II. Summary of Observations Regarding Offerings at Other Institutions

Through the resources and investigation of many institutions, it quickly became apparent that the creation and implementation of a First Year Experience opportunity, whether in the form of a course, a series of courses, a residential theme or a combination that incorporates all of these elements, is an institutional decision. There is no perfect program or example. In each case, the program must meet the expressed goals of the institution and have the commitment and support of the faculty and administration. This insures that everyone at the institution fully understands the purpose and intention of the offering. Details of each program reviewed appear in Appendix C.

M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner, and B.O. Barefoot in *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College* (Jossey Bass, 2005) provide several observations of what contributes to the success or failure of FYE initiatives. They identify the following as key requirements in the creation FYE initiatives that benefit new students:

- Challenge and support. High standards and expectations established for academic performance. Academic integrity must be inherent in all courses.
- Institutional commitment throughout, top to bottom. Faculty must be involved in all levels of discussions. Deans and Departments must be committed with time and resource allocation.
- Strategies and skills for learning along with assumptions of individual responsibility for success. Focus on student learning inside and outside the classroom.
- Partnership between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.
- A permanent FYE evaluation process must be established.

Each of these elements is considered to be essential by the authors to insure the success of any FYE initiative.

Understanding what students believe to be important during their first year is valuable for the design of any offering. The **University of Wisconsin** surveyed their students and discovered that they were most interested in learning about libraries and campus resources; time management, exam preparation, and effective study skills; and academic advisement and career exploration. This was accomplished through the creation of Freshmen Interest Groups (FIG)s. These FIGs are characterized by small groups of students (20) who enroll together in courses linked by a common theme.

The small class concept is prevalent throughout first-year initiatives and can be found in the **University of Minnesota's** Freshmen Seminars. Offered in the fall, these three-credit courses with 20 students are lead by faculty members and are considered part of a faculty member's regular teaching load.

As mentioned previously, so much of what makes a program work are the institutional goals that are at the heart of the design. In "Exploring the Evidence: Initiatives in the First College Year", monograph number 49, Troxel and Cutright, editors, 2008, the examples are many and varied. Experiences range from programs designed to get at Early Intervention issues (**University of South Carolina**) and First-year advising (**Bridgewater State College**), to linked Learning communities (**Wright State University**). Many have civic engagement and service learning as a focus (**Georgia State**) and others are discipline based (West Virginia) or focused on student faculty interaction (**Western Illinois**).

Several UAlbany competitors offer some type of first-year experience for entering freshmen. Within the State University of New York System (SUNY), many have adopted first-year opportunities for freshmen. At **Binghamton University**, first-year freshmen are offered the chance to become involved in "Discovery" courses. Taught by a mix of full-time faculty and adjuncts, the courses emphasize collaborative learning, problem solving and critical thinking. Some Discovery courses offer a linked course option, two courses joined to explore key themes from varying perspectives. These courses

have an academic focus. Freshmen transitional issues are covered in Human Development 105 which “explores what it means to be a freshman”. Binghamton also offers Learning Communities in dormitories centered on common themes.

At **SUNY Stony Brook** all freshman are required to enroll in a Freshmen Seminar for the year. In the fall, the seminar focuses on transitional issues including study skills, health and well-being, citizenship, introduction to campus resources, and more. The focus of the spring seminar is to introduce freshmen to thought provoking and interesting subjects. Taught by faculty, these courses are diverse and include a broad range of academic disciplines.

In addition to the Freshmen Seminar requirement, all Stony Brook freshmen are required to choose an Undergraduate College based on areas of interest and are housed together based on these college assignments. Commuters are also required to select a college. The system is intended to let students explore a wide range of interests, both within their majors and outside across other academic areas.

University at Buffalo provides a one-credit voluntary course that covers 10 topics considered essential for freshmen success as they transition to the University. These sections are small, 10-25 students, and are taught on an S/U grading system. Instructors are not full-time teaching faculty.

Smaller competitor institutions within SUNY also provide academic and/or transitional opportunities for new freshmen. **SUNY Oneonta** provides a First Year Seminar one-credit course graded on a Pass/Fail basis. Each faculty member (no adjuncts involved) is assisted by a peer educator. Seminars are transition courses that end mid-way through the first semester prior to registration for the spring semester. Any student who is enrolled in this optional course can opt to live in the FYE Hall.

SUNY New Paltz provides FIGs linked to general education or introductory courses related to programs of study. This optional opportunity attempts to reinforce interdisciplinary understanding of common themes. They also promote active learning by participants. Students can live in a residence hall with classmates who are enrolled in the same courses during the first semester.

SUNY Geneseo requires all first-year students be enrolled in a three-credit Writing Course. Instructors are full-time faculty and class size ranges from 22-24 students. The Dean of the College, along with the Departments, is responsible for insuring the rigorous nature of the Writing Program.

Several competitors of UAlbany outside the SUNY system provide first-year courses, programs, etc. The **University of Delaware** requires that all first-year students complete one FYE course. These courses are small, 20-30 students, and vary in the number of credits awarded. Faculty, staff, and students can be found teaching these courses. Delaware also offers learning communities organized around an academic course and a transitional course. (LIFE)

Rutgers University provides both a one-credit 10-week first semester course and one-credit FIG courses for new freshmen. The Byrne Seminars, limited to 20 students, are taught by distinguished faculty members and focuses on their specific interests. This seminar exposes freshmen to a seminar experience and introduces them to the idea of cutting-edge research. FIG courses, also small with no more than 25 students, are taught by juniors and seniors on a pass/fail basis for 10 weeks. The focus of these courses is on transitional and student success topics.

In addition to these courses, Rutgers also provides freshmen with the opportunity to participate in a learning community. Discovery House residents enroll in three courses together -- a FIG, an Expository Writing, and an introductory course. Residency is not required in order to participate in this opportunity.

Syracuse University uses learning communities to promote academic and social benefits for new freshmen. While not every community requires an academic course, each has a significant academic

focus and provides contact with students with similar academic goals. These communities also provide common courses and residences, introduction to community resources, faculty mentoring and more. Communities are partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and intentionally integrate academic components with co-curricular experiences.

The “Psychology in Action Learning Community” is an example. Open to all first-year undergraduates in the College of Arts and Sciences, students are required to enroll in Foundations of Human Behavior (three credits) and Practices of Academic Writing (three credits). Students also participate in a number of co-curricular experiences that enhance their knowledge of the field of psychology.

Hofstra University utilizes a program that integrates academic and social approaches that connect first-year students in small learning communities. Students take courses limited to 20-25 in different disciplines and each course complements the others. Students work closely with a professor on a topic of the professor’s particular area of research. Additionally, each incoming student is assigned an assistant dean from University Advisement who acts as a resource for the transitional issues that may arise during the first year.

Pennsylvania State University - University Park, requires all entering freshmen to enroll in a three-credit course. The course must carry a general education credit and focus on a specific discipline. (e.g., English, psychology, history, etc.) Class size is limited to approximately 20 students. While the fundamental focus of the course is on content and academics, the course also attempt to include important college success and transition skills into the curriculum.

The **University of Massachusetts at Amherst** offers a one-credit First Year Seminar (OASIS) once a week. Conducted by an academic advisor the course explores transitional issues. Additionally, all freshmen are required to take a Writing Course that must be completed in their first year at the University.

Residential Academic Programs (RAP) offer unique living and learning opportunities for first-year students as they transition to college. In RAP, students live with others who share similar academic interests or majors, enroll in specific classes together, and live in designated residence halls. Classes satisfy general education requirements and are existing courses. More than 40% of first-year students join RAPS. For example, the Health Science RAP allows first-year students who have declared a major or an interest in a major related to Health Sciences to explore personal and professional opportunities related to the topic. Students must select one course from a list that includes Introduction to Biology, General Chemistry, or College Writing. RAP classes are small.

Fordham University offers a Freshman Advising Program for all first-year students. Specially trained faculty meets at least twice a semester with freshmen. Topics of these meetings include the college bulletin, study skills and time management, academic integrity, course scheduling and selection of a major. These faculty also receive the mid-term grades of their advisees. (16 advisee maximum)

Boston University provides incoming students with a Freshman Resource Advisor (FRA). The FRA is an upper-class student who meets with the freshmen at the opening weekend and throughout the academic year. This peer relationship is meant to help with both the academic and social transition to the University.

New York University offers all freshmen the opportunity to live in residence halls with programming events appropriate for these new students. Freshmen can also be a part of FYE Exploration Communities. These communities have themes that include the arts, film making, the dead poets’ society, musicians, pre-health and others.

Northeastern University provides new freshmen with Educational, Year-long, Experiential Seminars. (Husky Eyes) These seminars meet 1-2 times a month focusing on transitional issues including living in Boston and the academic expectations of the University. Seminars are voluntary, not graded, and carry no academic credit. Students have the opportunity to choose from 12 living-learning communities in residential halls.

The articulated benefits of the initiatives identified by these institutions include:

- Bring together like-minded students and faculty
- Create a small community with the larger university education
- Promotes collaborative and cooperative learning with peers
- Introduces students to University resources
- Creates a bond among students, allowing them to make a connection to the institution
- Builds partnerships among faculty, staff, and students
- Can connect the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students if done correctly
- Facilitate college transition
- Fosters student active commitment to the institution which translates into creating a stronger alumni
- Builds academic and social exploration through courses and residential area.
- Small class sizes are valued by both the students and the faculty member teaching the class
- Critical academic skills necessary for success can be developed through providing students the opportunity to work closely with faculty, particularly in seminars
- Courses that provide both faculty and peer mentors can help insure the goals of academic content and rigor along with the introduction of college transition topics
- The use of advisors help monitor the first year progress of new students both inside and outside the class room and take steps if necessary when problems arise

Oversight of first-year offerings is very important to their success and varies among institutions. Formal structure is necessary to insure the initiative is achieving the desired outcome(s). Whether led by a director, an advisory board, or a committee, some entity must be concerned with defining the content, learning outcomes, and an assessment plan for the initiative.

It is common to find initiatives organized/reporting within Academic Affairs, assigned to Undergraduate Education, Deans and Departments, etc. At institutions where the responsibility is assigned to Student Affairs, the responsibility most often rests with Residential Life. Units created out of joint responsibilities between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs can also be successful, i.e., Office of Learning Communities.

III. Recommended Models and Learning Objectives

Based on the internal assessment of offerings for freshmen as well as the models of excellence from other institutions, it is clear that a concern for the University at Albany is the uncoordinated offering of courses and other services for freshman that can impede the University from achieving improved educational, social and retention goals. In order to address this deficiency, three models for the Freshmen Year Experience (FYE) are proposed that will achieve the University at Albany goals of: intellectual inquiry, engagement in the academic community at the University and in the community at large, and transitional skills needed to progress from high school to University that include the appreciation of diversity in thought and background, and skills acquisition to accomplish educational goals and to gain basic knowledge of University degree requirements.

The models contain several common elements. First, each model attempts to provide an experience that touches all freshmen, with the exception of those enrolled in the Honors College, Project Renaissance, and the Educational Opportunity Program, because these programs have demonstrated

that they effectively achieve the learning objectives of an FYE program. Thus, each model is built on the assumption that the approximate number of freshmen we will accommodate is about 1,710 of the 2,350 incoming freshmen, with 100 others in the Honors College; 140 in EOP; and 400 in Project Renaissance. Wirth the centerpiece of each model presented is the assumption that the course or the living learning community is a part of an integrated effort for the Freshmen year and the entire undergraduate experience across a variety of disciplinary, social, cultural and athletic offerings that the students will be encouraged to explore. It is also understood that there is no average program that will fit all students' interests or pursuits. Therefore, in addition to the centerpiece course or living-learning community, students will be made aware of other events or activities and offerings on campus so that they will have the maximum exposure to University life and pursue their interests at their own comfort levels.

Second, each model assumes the need for an FYE coordinator given the structure of the courses and proposed approval and assessment processes. This function can reside under the office of the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education.

Third, each model assumes the establishment of a new FYE committee of the Undergraduate Academic Council which would review the academic FYE offerings for their suitability in being listed as satisfying a "FYE requirement," in much the same way that General Education courses are reviewed and approved as satisfying General Education components. This committee would be selected through the Undergraduate Academic Council of the Senate in the same manner as the other committees of this council. This committee would oversee the proposals, and periodic evaluations of the FYE would be conducted through the Provost's Office.

Fourth, each model includes the services of a full-time librarian to assist the faculty and students in the FYE courses or living-learning community in developing competence in information literacy in a framework similar to that of the Honors College.

Fifth, each model includes the services of a professional mentor to assist the faculty member in developing, and coordinating the FYE course or living learning community. These professional mentors will be chosen based on their willingness to teach and ability to communicate to groups on a variety of issues. It is preferred that these individuals will have some presentation or teaching experience, but it may be waived if their area of expertise and training is in a needed area of the course content and they can help to shape the course with the faculty member.

Sixth, and perhaps most important, each model would support the same learning objectives, though the mode of delivery of the FYE components differs among the models. The following represent the learning objectives that freshmen should have achieved through the FYE experience:

1) The development of intellectual curiosity

- a) Students should be able to access and utilize information resources at the University as measured through successful completion of research papers in the FYE
- b) Students should understand the University standards of academic integrity, including an understanding of the seriousness of plagiarism.
- c) Students should be able to learn appropriate library and computer skills through the FYE components
- d) Students should be able to successfully communicate orally and in writing as seen in the FYE

2) The development of academic and social goals in the research University

- a) Students will be mentored by their professors in the FYE
- b) Students should engage in discussion groups in the residence halls and in clubs and organizations concerning topics in courses, and on research issues

- 3) **The engagement of the student with the University and community at large to develop civic responsibility**
 - a) Students should have access to, and communicate with their instructors of the FYE and to their residential assistants in order to achieve academic engagement in the University community
 - b) Students will be encouraged to join in at least one organization or club in order to engage with the student community and the community at large
 - c) Students will be encouraged to attend athletic and cultural events and utilize the physical education facilities formally and informally in order to engage with University spirit and reduce stress brought on by higher standards for educational attainment

- 4) **The understanding of an ethical framework for working with others**
 - a) Students will read and sign a form affirming that they have read a handbook concerning ethics in research and in the community.

- 5) **The development of an appreciation for diversity and cultural competency**
 - a) Students will be exposed to diversity issues in the FYE and in other organizations in the University community

- 6) **The development of themselves as independent persons**
 - a) Students will have successfully transitioned from high school cultures to University culture as seen through the intellectual growth from the FYE, acceptance of diversity in the residential areas and in organizations
 - b) Students will learn successful study habits for success in University life
 - c) Students will learn about resources available to them for studying, writing and coping with higher education pressures through the summer planning conference
 - d) Students will gain a basic understanding of the degree requirements, how to read their degree audit and how to register for classes

Model 1: Limited Model

The components of this model include the following:

1. Greater faculty participation in existing Great Danes Beginnings Welcome Weekend
2. Continued or enhanced exposure to athletic pursuits, Residential Life programs, and organizations, clubs and cultural events
3. FYE course

The summer planning conferences and welcome weekend programs are multi-day experiences designed in order for students to become more familiar with faculty, the life at the University as well as become more versed in library and computing resources at the University. It is expected that the Division of Student Success, Division of Athletics, Residential Life and various organizations would continue to have introductory sessions at the summer planning conferences, and Great Dane Beginnings (Welcome Weekend) accompanied by e-mails sent to freshmen to notify students of events, organizational meetings, and aspects of the facilities in which they reside.

During this time, it is expected that faculty will have various interactions with students through informal lunches and talks, and visits to residence halls. Also, it is expected that no-credit mini-classes will be offered to assist students in learning more about research resources, athletics and other aspects of the University community. These are skills-based classes that are expected to be taught by staff in the various areas.

The keystone, a three-credit FYE course, is proposed whose components are to be infused within existing General Education courses. These FYE components would support the FYE learning outcomes outlined above. This definition would allow current instructors to modify their existing General Education courses to include some of the FYE components specific to the course itself, thus becoming an FYE course. Such revised courses could then be reviewed by the proposed FYE committee for their suitability in being listed as satisfying a “FYE requirement.” Such courses would have, for example, an “F” suffix and students would be able to register for one FYE course section in an existing course with such an offering. For example, an anthropology course can have registration options for the general course or an “F” –suffix section of the course. The student wishing to take this course to satisfy the FYE requirement would register under the “F”-suffix section. The student can only take one course with an “F” suffix in order to satisfy the FYE requirement. Guidelines for an FYE course and a sample course that is currently offered that satisfies many FYE course requirements are included in the appendix of this report. It should be noted that the course outline that is presented is a truncated version of the full FYE course that is proposed but has the flavor of many of the aspects of the FYE course that is envisioned in this document.

Further, this course would be taught in consultation with a “professional mentor” -- a professional staff member from such areas of the campus as Advisement Services, Academic Support Services, or any the units in the Division of Student Success. There are many in the ranks of professional staff who have advanced degrees in various disciplines who would welcome an opportunity to co-teach a course. Further, this support will allow the course to complement and add to the overall FYE through other components of the students’ experience. This partnership with the professional mentor would begin at the design of the course, with periodic consultation throughout the course between the instructor and the mentor. This FYE course would also include, but not be limited to, lunches with faculty and students in the Quads or at the Patroon Room, that can be facilitated by Quad staff. It is also recommended that students in the FYE classes would be required to attend mandatory workshops (mini-classes) throughout the semester. These workshops of the FYE course could have a non-credit component, possibly a discussion section, that would include mandatory attendance and would cover topics such as library resources, academic integrity/plagiarism, time management, how to read their audit and how to register for classes for the first time. These workshops would span approximately 6-8 sessions in a semester, and be led by the professional mentor under the coordination of the faculty member teaching the course.

Information literacy is critical for the students' development at the University and the FYE course will be taught with faculty and students working with library staff in order to start to achieve the learning objectives in this area. Research efforts will be coordinated with the library staff and faculty in a similar manner to that in the Honors College. This infusion of the library component is seen throughout the various models.

By considering this approach, the impact on teaching faculty would be negligible (e.g., no additional courses; no overload teaching required; no new cadre of instructors required), but the students would be exposed to the FYE content considered important. It would be strongly encouraged that existing General Education courses be modified to include the additional FYE components. However, this model also allows for new disciplinary or multidisciplinary forms FYE/General Education courses from being created.

Resources:

Minimal new resources will be involved since the FYE course will be infused in existing General Education courses. Also, given the structure of the courses and proposed approval and assessment processes through the University Senate, there may be a need for an FYE coordinator. These aspects depend on the number of classes that need to be launched at an assumption of 30 students per class in order to maximize the student participation while keeping resource costs minimized.

It is estimated the new component, an FYE course (which is a modified General Education course with additional FYE components), would cost approximately \$330,000. This includes:

- \$55,000 for FYE coordinator
- \$15,000 for administrative needs
- \$150,000 for instructor incentives (@\$2,500 per FYE course revamp for 60 FYE courses for 1,800 students, assuming that current full-time faculty are teaching these courses)
- \$60,000 to fund the 60 "professional mentors" who would conduct the associated FYE workshops.
- \$50,000 for full-time librarian

Costs could be minimized further if the Provost wishes to mandate that faculty teach this course as part of their academic responsibilities. The costs can be minimized further since these FYE courses are modified existing General Education courses. Any additional resources required will be in the ability to meet demand. The instruction is assumed to come from existing full-time faculty lines with the costs of the incentives plus the costs of the workshops added into the budget. It should be noted that there may be additional lines required depending on the response to incentives to develop these FYE courses.

The above estimate includes the assumption that for the first two to three years, incentives may also be needed to have FYE courses revamped or developed. This incentive structure may be modeled in a similar fashion after the Honors College, where faculty would be given \$2,500 to develop and teach and FYE course. This would allow for greater faculty buy-in to the initiative, and would be coordinated by staff in the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education's office. This is an important aspect of the program to promote diversity of thought and intellectual commitment, and it assumed that in the worst case, all 60 courses offered will include an incentive for the first offering.

Main Benefits of this Model:

This model requires a small amount of new resources and works within the existing structure as it stands with reasonable modifications in the Senate and the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education's office.

Main Criticisms of this Model:

The main criticism that would be mounted against this proposal would be that a lesser proportion of the course content would be devoted to FYE components with most of the course content devoted to the General Education components (instead of the current 100% devoted to General Education components). While some faculty may balk at this split saying that they cannot afford to take anything out of their current courses, other faculty may find the split quite reasonable. Those courses that cannot be modified will remain solely General Education courses, but cannot qualify for FYE certification.

Model 2: Intermediate Model

The components of this model include the following:

1. Greater faculty participation in existing Great Danes Beginnings Welcome Weekend
2. Continued or enhanced exposure to athletic pursuits, Residential Life programs, and organizations, clubs and cultural events
3. FYE course
4. Living Learning Communities

As in the minimal model, it is expected that faculty will have various interactions with students through informal lunches and talks, and visits to residence halls during the Great Danes Beginnings Welcome Weekend. Also, it is expected that no-credit mini-classes will be offered to assist students in learning more about research resources, athletics and other aspects of the University community. These are skills-based classes that are expected to be taught by staff in the various areas.

Under this model, the three-credit FYE course as proposed in the Limited Model would be available for most students. As resources become available, this course will be offered less, as students will be advised to join an expanding set of options for living-learning community. As part of a living-learning community, students would also be assigned the same academic advisor for their section of this class. This model is working well with the Honors College students since one advisor has the same group of students and can conduct group meeting within the residential halls.

The keystone, a living-learning community framework, is proposed to be expanded as resources become available. This model has been successful in other institutions as per the external assessment of our peers and has success at our own University in terms of academic achievement and retention of students in Project Renaissance as per Institutional Research data. Further, it allows students to become fully engaged in the University culture and research of mentoring faculty. The framework will be similar to Project Renaissance with the following: full-time faculty with excellent teaching records will also have incentives to participate in the living learning communities. This framework includes a 6-credit commitment from the students in each living-learning community: a 3-credit FYE course with workshops and another 3-credit course in the area of interest that would be taken by the students in the community.

A living-learning community is a group of students who have chosen to expand their education through shared learning experiences that go beyond the classroom. Each community centers on one topic. Members work closely with a faculty coordinator and a professional mentor to plan and implement a program of discussion groups, lectures, off-campus experiences and other activities. Participants have the option to live in a dedicated wing of the residence halls that they define and decorate. Commuter students are welcome to stay over after late-night events and are invited to enjoy breakfast as a guest of the faculty member and professional mentor.

The living-learning community program offers students a unique opportunity to explore their place in a culturally diverse world. Students enjoy personal attention and mentoring, a built-in support system, opportunities for leadership, an enhanced sense of community, and specialized learning experiences that are ideal for career preparation.

Membership in a living-learning community is open to all students – residents and commuters alike, on a first-come, first served basis as resources become available. There are no additional costs associated with student participation in living-learning communities, and living in a dedicated residence hall is optional. Resident students who choose to live in a dedicated wing will incur standard resident fees only, and commuting students will incur no additional fees for participation.

Courses offered in the living learning communities will be reviewed by the new FYE committee of the Undergraduate Academic Council for their suitability in being listed as satisfying a “FYE requirement.” And, as with the minimal model, the FYE course and the living-learning communities would be taught in consultation with a “professional mentor.”

By considering this approach, the impact on teaching faculty would be moderate, but the students would be exposed to the FYE content considered important. As in the Limited Model, note that this model would not preclude new disciplinary or multidisciplinary forms of FYE+General Education courses or living learning communities from being created. Residential Life has also been contacted concerning this initiative and is comfortable with a slow integration of the living-learning community framework.

Resources:

Moderate new resources will be involved since the living learning communities are resource intensive. It is estimated that the new components, the FYE course and living-learning communities will cost approximately \$382,500:

- \$55,000 for FYE coordinator
- \$15,000 for administrative services
- \$187,500 for 30 courses at \$2,500 incentive per FYE “standard” course, and at \$2,500 incentive for 45 living learning FYE courses. This assumes that 50% will be enrolled in an FYE course and 50% will be exposed to a living learning community. It also assumes that existing faculty will be primarily responsible for delivering the courses in both the traditional and living-learning community courses.
- \$75,000 for 75 professional mentors to conduct mini workshops included in both the standard and living learning community courses
- \$50,000 for one full-time librarian

As in the minimal model, the above estimate includes the assumption that for the first two to three years, incentives may be needed to for both the standard or living learning community frameworks. This would allow for greater faculty buy-in to the initiative, and would be coordinated by FYE coordinator. Since this is an important aspect of the program to promote diversity of thought and intellectual commitment, it is assumed that in the worst case, all courses will need to have an incentive for redevelopment to occur.

Main Benefits of this Model:

This model requires a moderate amount of new resources and allows students to become more fully engaged with the University. The FYE standard course and living learning community frameworks work within the existing structure as it stands with reasonable modifications in the Senate, with a new coordinator in the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education’s office.

Main Criticisms of this Model:

As in the Limited Model, the main criticism that would be mounted against this proposal would be that a lesser proportion of the course content would be devoted to FYE components with most of the course content devoted to the General Education components (instead of the current 100% devoted to General Education components). While some faculty may balk at this split saying that they cannot afford to take anything out of their current courses, other faculty may find the split quite reasonable. Those courses that cannot be modified will remain solely General Education courses, but cannot qualify for FYE certification. Further, there may be difficulties in matching students to residential halls associated with various tracks in the living learning communities. This would have to have careful consideration and coordination with Residential Life and the office of Student Success. These issues are beyond the scope of the FYE proposal since they are more general concerns raised by the University students or community members.

Model 3: Maximum Model

The components of this model include the following:

1. Greater faculty participation in existing Great Danes Beginnings Welcome Weekend
2. Continued or enhanced exposure to athletic pursuits, Residential Life programs, and organizations, clubs and cultural events
3. Living Learning Communities

As in the minimal model, it is expected that faculty will have various interactions with students through informal lunches and talks, and visits to residence halls during the Great Danes Beginnings Welcome Weekend. Also, it is expected that no-credit mini-classes will be offered to assist students in learning more about research resources, athletics and other aspects of the University community. These are skills-based classes that are expected to be taught by staff in the various areas.

The standard three-credit FYE course as proposed in the Limited Model and Intermediate Model would be replaced by living-learning communities. The keystone, a living-learning community framework, is proposed to be the main FYE vehicle as resources become available. This model has been successful in other institutions as per the external assessment of our peers and has success at our own University in terms of academic achievement and retention as per Institutional Research data. Further, it allows students to become fully engaged in the University culture and research of mentoring faculty. A fuller discussion of living-learning communities can be found under the intermediate model framework.

The framework would be similar to Project Renaissance and full-time faculty with excellent teaching records will be offered incentives to participate in the living learning communities. Courses offered in the living learning communities would be reviewed by the new FYE committee of the Undergraduate Academic Council for their suitability in being listed as satisfying a “FYE requirement.” Further, as in the minimal model, the living-learning communities would be taught in consultation with a “professional mentor” so that the course would complement and add to the overall FYE. This experience will include, but not limit to, lunches with faculty and students in the Quads or at the Patroon Room, that can be facilitated by Quad staff.

By considering this approach, the impact on teaching faculty would be high, but the students would be exposed to the FYE content considered important.

Resources:

A high level of new resources will be involved since the living-learning communities are resource intensive and this is the main form of FYE. Given the structure of the courses under the living learning communities, there would be a need for an FYE coordinator. There would also be a need to have additional stipends for new courses that may be multidisciplinary in nature or are new disciplinary courses with new FYE components. These aspects depend on the number of classes that need to be launched at 20 students per class for the living learning communities.

The new components and living learning communities will cost approximately \$435,000

- \$55,000 for FYE coordinator
- \$15,000 for administrative support
- \$225,000 @ \$2,500 for incentives for 90 courses in living learning communities for full-time faculty.
- \$90,000 for professional mentors who would conduct the mini workshops for 90 courses.
- \$50,000 for one full-time librarian

As in the minimal and moderate models, the above estimate includes the assumption that for the first two to three years, incentives may be needed for the living learning community framework. This would allow for greater faculty buy-in to the initiative, and would be coordinated by FYE coordinator. Since this is an important aspect of the program to promote diversity of thought and intellectual

commitment, it is assumed that in the worst case, all courses will need to have an incentive for redevelopment to occur.

Main Benefits of Model:

This model requires a high level of new resources and allows students to become more fully engaged with the University. The living-learning community framework works within the existing structure as it stands with reasonable modifications in the Senate, with a new coordinator in the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education's office.

Main Criticisms of Model:

There will be difficulties in matching students to residential halls associated with various tracks in the living learning communities. This would have to have careful consideration and coordination with Residential Life and the office of Student Success. Further, the resources required for the institution of living learning communities for all Freshmen could be difficult to sustain in the longer term.

These issues are beyond the scope of the FYE proposal since they are more general concerns raised by the University students or community members.

IV. Evaluation Plan

As noted within the models, the assessment of the FYE course, living learning communities, and other components of the FYE will be coordinated through the Office of the Provost. Viable and useful assessment studies require considerable resources, including money, staff, expertise, and time. The availability of these resources needs to be considered when developing assessment plans.

Global Criteria: Measuring First-Year Student Success

FYE programs have one overarching goal: to promote first-year student success. From the university's perspective, the ultimate question boils down to a cost-benefit analysis of FYE: do the benefits of the program outweigh the costs? Criteria need to be identified by which student success and program utility can be evaluated. At the undergraduate level, a university's reputation is based on its ability to attract, retain, and graduate high caliber students. Therefore, the following three criteria are recommended as measures of the overall effectiveness of the FYE at promoting first-year student success (*note: these are not learning objectives, but organizational measures of effectiveness*):

1. Retention: An effective FYE will promote retention to the sophomore year and increase graduation rates of entering first year students.
 - a. Overall retention rates from freshman to sophomore year will be used to assess the immediate impact of the FYE. Retention rates for subsequent years and graduation rates will be used to measure long-term impact of FYE on retention.
 - b. Retention rates of Groups 1 and 2 students will be compared to other students.
2. Academic Success: An effective FYE will promote academic success and progress toward the degree.
 - a. Grade point average, credits earned, and percentage of graduation requirements met in the freshman year will be used to assess FYE impact on academic success.
 - b. The FYE coordinator or Advisory Group will work with Institutional Research to develop long term assessment of academic success.
3. Personal Growth: An effective FYE will facilitate intellectual and social growth in students.
 - a. A first-year student survey will be developed to assess intellectual and social growth in students participating in FYE. This survey will include measures of academic motivation (e.g., challenge, goals), intellectual inquiry, community involvement, citizenship behaviors, personal adjustment, social adaptation, social tolerance, and other relevant constructs. It will be administered to students as they enter UAlbany and at the end of their first year. This pre-post test design will provide evidence of change over the first-year in college. The survey will be similar to measures of student adjustment (e.g., Student Adaption to College Questionnaire) and student engagement (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement), but be tailored to the specific components of the FYE program.

The first-year survey will also provide assessment for several of the FYE's learning objectives (see below). Although standardized surveys of the first year in college exist [e.g., HERI Your First College Year (YFCY)], a locally developed survey is preferred for several reasons. First, national surveys are administered at the end of the first year, thereby making it difficult to assess *change* as a function of participation in FYE. Second, surveys such as the YFCY are expensive (approximately \$5,000) and not practical for continuous use. Third, the YFCY was reviewed by the committee and several weaknesses were noted. UAlbany has the faculty expertise to develop an instrument that has stronger psychometric properties. Fourth, involving UAlbany faculty from different departments in the development of an FYE assessment instrument may increase campus-wide involvement and "buy-in" of the FYE program.

Assessing Specific Learning Objectives

Evaluation of the specific learning objectives of the FYE are measured through the following:

1. Students will gain a greater understanding of diversity issues and cultural competence through the FYE.
 - a. Students will be exposed to diversity issues in the FYE and in other organizations in the University community. Measurement will be through a review of course syllabi and activities in the living learning community.
 - b. Awareness and understanding of diversity issues will be measured using the pre-post student survey.
2. Students completing FYE will be able to demonstrate an understanding of an ethical framework for working with others.
 - a. Students will read a handbook concerning ethics in research and in the community. Student understanding could be measured by a web-based quiz developed by FYE coordinator or instructors. Alternatively, understanding could be based on successfully completing the Collaborative IRB Training Initiative.
3. The development of behaviors and attitudes that are necessary for successful intellectual inquiry.
 - a. Students will demonstrate the ability to access and utilize information resources at the University, as measured through student performance on research papers or projects in the FYE course or living learning community. FYE instructors will be responsible for identifying the products to be assessed, and the rubrics for evaluating them.
 - b. Students will demonstrate appropriate library and computer skills through the FYE components. Measurement will be through graded assessments of components of the FYE course or living learning community related to this objective. FYE instructors will be responsible for identifying the products to be assessed, and the rubrics for evaluating them.
 - c. Students will demonstrate the ability to successfully communicate orally and in writing as seen in the FYE. Measurement will be through completion of components of the FYE course or living learning community. Assessment will be based on actual writing and oral activities sampled from students in the FYE courses. The FYE coordinator will collaborate with experts on campus to defining mastery criteria and scoring rubrics.
4. The development of academic and social goals in the research University.

- a. Students will be mentored by their professors in the FYE. The mechanisms by which mentoring will take place will be determined by the FYE coordinator and instructors. Measurement will be through the pre-post student survey.
 - a. Students should engage in discussion groups in the residence halls and in clubs and organizations concerning topics in courses, and on research issues. The pre-post student survey can also be used.
5. The engagement of the student with the University and community at large to develop civic responsibility
- a. Students should have access to, and communicate with their instructors of the FYE and to their residential assistants in order to achieve academic engagement in the University community. Measurement will be through the number of contacts with the instructors and residence assistants obtained through student surveys.
 - b. Students will be encouraged to join in at least one organization or club in order to engage with the student community and the community at large. Measurement will be through the number of organizational contacts or functions attended obtained through student surveys.
6. The development of themselves as independent persons
- a. Students will have successfully transitioned from high school cultures to University culture as seen through the intellectual growth from the FYE, acceptance of diversity in the dorms and in organizations. Measurement will be through the pre-post student survey.
 - b. Students will learn successful study habits for success in University life. Measurement will be through test scores and other deliverable scores in the FYE course of living learning community.
 - c. Students will learn about resources available to them for studying, writing and coping with higher education pressures through the summer planning conference. Measurements will be through the test scores and number of times met with counselors and services obtained through the pre-post student surveys.

V. Implementation Plan

The Committee recommends that the leadership for this initiative be under the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. The Task Force Co-Chairs and the current Senate Chair, a member of the Task Force, have met with the Senate Executive Committee, the Undergraduate Academic Council, the University Life Council and the University Planning and Policy Council of the University Senate for initial feedback concerning the proposal.

The current Senate Chair (2008-09), John Delano a member of the Task Force, and the co-chairs and subsets of the Task Force are willing to work collaboratively with the Senate Chair (2009-10), Michael Range to implement the program as deemed fit for the mission of the University.

For maximum buy-in at the grass roots level, the Committee proposes that the Provost and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education meet with the Deans of the colleges and schools to discuss the pros and cons of the model chosen. In turn the Deans would meet with their associated leadership group to discuss the plan and solicit volunteers to teach the course and/or participate in living-learning communities. The departmental support of the plan is crucial to the success of the initiative. Therefore, incentives must be in place in order for faculty to become interested in the new venture.

Given the budgetary climate, the Provost may mandate or direct faculty to contribute to the initiative as needed. Further, the Provost should be made aware that faculty will be resistant to change under the current budget situation, and that there will be resistance to new programs that entail additional resources. Therefore, it is suggested that any alternative be implemented as a pilot project in order to test the cost-effectiveness of the alternative as well as work out any logistical issues involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of the course, living-learning community and overall Freshmen year experience.

The approval process through governance would occur simultaneously with the administrative approval process. This would allow faculty representation in the Senate Executive Committee, Undergraduate Academic Council, University Life Council and University Planning and Policy Council to determine if curricular, student life and resource issues, respectively, have been addressed. The simultaneous review would allow for a less protracted approval process, where issues could be addressed in both administrative and governance circles and revisions could be made in order for improvements to be made to the First Year Experience. In order for the Undergraduate Academic Council to review the curricular issues, selected faculty will be asked by the Provost to provide 2 -3 examples of standard FYE courses and a living learning community course for review, amendment and approval.

Once the initiative is approved, the coordination of the model's implementation would be under the direction of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, or the First Year Experience Coordinator as appropriate. Incentives for faculty to participate would be allocated through this Office, as well as assessment measures as outlined in the evaluation plan.

The Committee has also had discussions with the Office of Student Success, in order to entertain questions about the models as well as solicit advice about the implementation plan. The Office of Student Success is supportive of the models proposed and also suggested that theme houses could be further developed with little additional cost as living-learning communities are introduced.

VI. Summary

Three models have been presented, all requiring some level of new resources. The Limited Model required the least and its centerpiece is the FYE course. The Intermediate Model requires a continuum of living-learning communities and FYE standard courses, with the course being phased out as resources become available. The Maximum Model's centerpiece is the living-learning community, and is the most resource-intensive. These centerpieces, in conjunction with student success efforts, other curricula, athletics, and other cultural offerings at the University will provide the students with an integration into the academic community as noted in the evaluation plan.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Charge from the Provost

Appendix B: Internal Offerings Report, the First-Year Experience at UAlbany

Appendix C: External Offerings Report, Selected Offerings at Peer Institutions

Appendix D: Guidelines for an FYE Course

Appendix E: Sample Course Outline for a Proposed FYE Course

Appendix A: Charge from the Provost



TASK FORCE ON THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Charge from the Provost

June 3, 2008

For well over two decades, the literature in higher education focusing on the “freshman year experience” has been extensive, resulting in a body of research demonstrating that the success of undergraduate students is significantly influenced by their experiences in their first year in college. Evidence and best practice continue to accrue indicating that a comprehensive, integrated, and “intentional” set of curricular and co-curricular experiences for first-year students, with significant involvement by faculty both inside and outside of class, as well as other members of the university community, has a positive impact on student learning, attitudes, and behaviors. This impact can also be seen in improved retention/persistence, as well as in the successful recruitment of new students.

In line with this research, the University at Albany has introduced or enhanced many efforts over the past two decades to improve the student experience in the first year, including initiatives in the curriculum and beyond, such as Project Renaissance, Freshman-Year Experience, and University Seminar, academic advising, academic support services, honors, and Residential and Student Life. While there have been many measurable positive effects, the array of promising initiatives has not had the benefit of coordination and integration and does not appear to have been comprehensively designed nor fully connected with the core academic experience of first-year students. We have not had, as an academic community, a University-wide conversation or strategic planning effort about our collective goals for students in the first year at UAlbany or the most effective methods to achieve those goals.

It is time to undertake this larger institutional task, and therefore, I am commissioning a **Task Force on the First-Year Experience** at the University at Albany. This task force is charged to serve as the study group that will undertake a review and analysis of First-Year Experience, and will make recommendations about the future design and delivery of the First-Year Experience at the University at Albany. (*Note: in this context, “first year” refers to*

what is commonly referred to as “freshman year.” It is recognized that students transferring to UAlbany also have unique needs during their first year; those needs are not the focus of this work, although there may be recommendations for meeting those needs that come from the work of this Task Force.)

In conducting its study, the group is asked to consider best practices evident in the literature, in comparable institutions, and at our own institution. This study will necessarily entail, but not be limited to, a review of what we currently do, and how well, across the array of First-Year Experiences currently in place (such as Project Renaissance, UFSP 100, UFSP 101). It would also likely include learning about other current support initiatives available to freshmen that do not necessarily end with the first year (such as Academic Support Services, EOP programs, Athletics, and the Honors College), as well as efforts in the Division of Student Success, especially Residential Life programs, aimed at first-year students. The group will design, from its review and analysis, recommendations for a strategic plan for the First-Year Experience at the University at Albany.

The task force is expected to begin its work in June 2008, provide an initial report of progress and findings in Sept/Oct 2008, hold (as needed) forums to inform its work in the Fall 2008 semester, and complete its final report to the Provost by the end of December 2008.

The strategic plan and recommendations about what the First-Year Experience at the University at Albany should include:

- 1 A conceptual map of the overall First-Year Experience goals and objectives;
- 2 An organizational model and detailed plan of the activities, experiences, opportunities, and/or courses that would be constructed to meet those goals and objectives;
- 3 A series of three proposals that would reflect different levels of resources (one, an “all resources available” model; two, a limited resources model, and, three, a model somewhere in between);
- 4 An implementation plan, to include, as appropriate, course design teams and timelines, review processes needed, and overall phase-in of implementation; and
- 5 A plan for assessing the effectiveness of the First-Year Experience (and its components).

Appendix B: Internal Offerings Report, the First-Year Experience at UAlbany

INTERNAL OFFERINGS REPORT THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AT UAlbany

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1. INTRODUCTION

The perennial concern for the academic achievement and personal growth of new students in American higher education has become more focused as research has accumulated revealing that the first year, the first term, and indeed the first weeks on campus are crucial to students' satisfaction and ultimate success (refs). Students "new to campus" are a varied group. An increasing proportion are transfer students (about 33% of undergraduates at UAlbany). Transfers possess various degrees of experience with the university environment and have partially clarified their disciplinary interests and career goals. However the majority of new students are admitted as traditional first-year students ("freshmen"). Their ages are similar, they face a similar set of challenges in dealing with their first encounter with higher education, they are probably living away from home for the first time, and they are dealing with a wealth of unfamiliar academic options and social opportunities while their own life and career goals remain uncertain. It is clear that the success of these students is essential in any university aspiring to high intellectual goals and seeking to attain high standards of quality, retention, and graduation. A wealth of academic research and institutional programming has therefore focused on the "Freshman" or "First-Year Experience" (refs).

In the University at Albany concern for the FYE took on a new impetus during the 1990s. During that decade there were major structural changes in Advisement and in Undergraduate Education, and our first large programs and courses aimed *specifically* at first-year students were developed (including

Project Renaissance, Presidential Scholars' courses, new EOP summer programs, and various initiatives in the new College of Arts and Sciences including Freshmen Seminars). Residential Life explored new housing arrangements for frosh, including interest groupings and the living-learning arrangements associated with Project Renaissance. In 1998 a Retention Task Force recommended (*inter alia*) development of disciplinarily varied but "intellectually rigorous" freshman seminars. It also proposed appointment of a FYE Coordinator (ref). Since that time, without the strong central coordination envisioned by the retention group, a significant array of curricular and residential initiatives has developed for first-year students. Project Renaissance proved remarkable durable. Academic elements of the Presidential Scholars' program evolved into a fully-fledged Honors College. New courses have been designed specifically for frosh including university seminars (UFSP 100/101) and interdisciplinary courses UNI 100 (=ECPY 120). New advisement, academic support, residential, counseling, and athletic services continue to evolve to serve to new students.

The Advisement Services and the Academic Support Services Centers engage in a wide variety of academic and developmental work with first year students, including orientation, provision of courses, advisement, major choices, counseling, intervention, liaison with departments, and management of a very successful EOP program. For many years the Division of Student Success has also been intimately involved with first-year students not only in summer orientation and housing but through programming and liaison with academic departments (e.g. Food for Thought). Student Success promotes ideals of community involvement and multiculturalism, supports many clubs and organizations, and provides counseling and services which promote the health, well-being, and success of frosh. A recent report of the University Retention Committee (2006-7) provides a detailed account of many academic and extracurricular initiatives including the University Seminar program developed in 2006 for first semester students, and the Freshman Focus program in the second-semester.

Some of these programs -- arguably the most successful ones -- serve first-year students only. But one of the principal challenges in isolating and assessing the effect of first-year initiatives is that some are necessarily embedded in courses and programs that involve other students, too, and therefore cannot be shaped exclusively for frosh. Thus although it is possible administratively to restrict sections of 100-level courses to first year students this is not usually done. It is common for 100-level courses to enroll all levels of students including seniors (ref *Appendix*). The same is true of General Education and some writing courses. Except in the case of Project Renaissance and a few frosh-only offerings, General Education requirements are satisfied through regular departmental courses. Although students are expected to deal with General Education requirements early in their college careers, invariably some upper division students take 100-level courses to make up Gen Ed requirements.

The most striking feature of FYE initiatives at UAlbany is the variety of programs available and the lack of overall coordination between units. Some programs have had limited life spans, some have endured; objective and first-year-specific assessments are mostly lacking. Some colleges, schools, disciplines, and professional fields are mainly focused on training their own majors (sometimes with an early admissions process). Schools and colleges vary widely in their contribution to General Education and other lower division programs. The College of Arts and Sciences plays a unique role due to its size, its role in providing the bulk of General Education seats, and its variety of disciplines and majors. An unusual feature of the University at Albany compared with most of its peer institutions is the existence of a Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (evolved from a deanship). The Vice Provost has responsibility for many aspects of the pre-major academic experience, including Honors and General Education. Many first-year initiatives at UAlbany, including Project Renaissance, originated in Undergraduate Education rather than in disciplinary schools and colleges, which has produced some friction over jurisdiction and resources.

The purpose of the following sections is to provide brief summaries and assessments of recent FYE programs and initiatives across the University. During Summer 2008 the Task Force requested Vice Provosts, Deans, Directors, and other appropriate officials to provide information on programs with a significant impact on first-year students. The following summaries draw on their responses.

2. REPORTS FROM SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

a. *College of Arts and Sciences*

(Source: CAS)

First-Year Enhancement Activities for Students in CAS and Challenges

General aids to new-to-campus students

The College of Arts and Sciences provides instruction for the majority of undergraduates in the University. Both in majors and in General Education, our 23 departments seek to serve all new-to-campus students as best as they can within current resources. Of critical importance to new student is the availability of courses. Therefore, departments reserve a percentage of seats as identified by the Advisement Services Center and the Provost's Office for incoming frosh and transfer students. To complement this effort, the College receives funding with which to mount high-demand General Education courses primarily restricted to new-to-campus students. All departments cooperate in this effort and as a result students' past concerns about course availability have been largely allayed. With the advent of Brio, departmental personnel have also become more sensitive to and adept in enrollment management.

More and more departments are heeding the call to rotate tenure-track faculty between different course levels. Thus, not all lower-division courses are taught by adjuncts and teaching assistants. This gives freshmen an opportunity to interact with our research-active faculty and, from the departmental perspective, having the best senior scholars teach these courses provides an opportunity to attract majors and minors.

Departments also participate in Open Houses and other recruitment events where tenure-track faculty have the opportunity to explain their disciplines to students and their parents, either by participating in the disciplinary panels or staffing the table sessions. In addition, departmental personnel attend training sessions on the latest technologies available for student advisement and course registration. Departmental advisors also meet with administrative personnel on the possible deployments of new software packages, like AdvisorTrac, to meet institutional objectives. With assistance from the College Office, departments maintain and update web pages that list faculty rosters with email links and help orient new students to what the departments offer.

Department-specific initiatives for new-to-campus students

Beyond these general aids to assist new-to-campus students, other activities take place at the departmental level to make new students feel welcome in classes and offices. The College has stressed the importance of "customer service" and continues to remind faculty and staff of their responsibilities to students, both new and continuing. Faculty try to be a resource for new students, particularly transfers, as these students typically have larger classes with attending adjustment issues.

Departments offering certain Gen Ed courses that have proved most challenging for students have devised ways to ensure more student success, such as: providing peer tutors, staffing tutoring rooms with graduate students (MAT), and offering clearer web-based materials (pdfs) to accompany lectures. While such enhancements are helpful to more than just new-to-campus students, these improvements made to so-called "gateway courses" have demonstrably contributed to greater student attainment, as witnessed by improved median grades (e.g., ATM 100 used to have median grades in the 50s and 60s: now the median grade is in the 70s).

Departments also provide get-togethers of majors and potential majors before the fall preregistration opens. A suggestion here would be to ask all departments to use a query to identify intended majors and to reach out to those students early on. Some departments, particularly smaller ones, also invite

students who perform well in classes to meet with faculty and discuss the possibility of majoring or minoring with them. Some departments have welcoming sessions, open houses, invitations to events appropriate to the discipline (lectures, demonstrations, readings, and even field trips). The emphasis is on creating a departmental culture that is open and responsive to student interests and concerns. A key element is careful advising and mentoring. We continue to work with Academic Affairs on reducing the need for faculty to perform technical advisement so that faculty can focus more on mentoring.

Challenges Encountered

Frosh and transfer students have different expectations and therefore present different challenges.

- Availability of Gen Ed courses and staffing issues

The greatest challenge is to have a sufficient number of seats available. In a time of fiscal constraint our ability to mount sections of sufficient size and quality is limited. The problem will become exacerbated if we cannot hire new faculty or replace faculty who has left. This will result in a higher percentage of courses/students taught by non-tenure-track faculty. While our PT faculty deliver excellent instruction, a high PT:FT faculty ratio may be viewed as problematic in external reviews and assessments. Of course, in most underfunded large public research universities a tension exists for FT faculty to deal with the competing demands of research productivity versus undergraduate teaching.

- Infrastructure needs of departments

Purchasing and maintaining the latest technologies for our students can be draining. As expenses for materials, supplies, and lab specimens increase, maintaining the integrity of lab, workshop, and studio instruction will become more challenging. This, in turn, may have a detrimental effect on attracting better students, particularly in the sciences. Thus, our challenge in CAS will be to assist faculty to be as effective and productive as they can in an environment that will see an erosion of resources for the next several years. Only in this way will we be able to attract more of the better students to Arts and Sciences disciplines.

Summary of Specific Responses from CAS Departments regarding FYE Initiatives

- Faculty member who teaches a large 100-level course with 450-500 students informs students that he will promptly and competently answer all emails with the course number in the subject line.
- Faculty in a 100-level course with 100 students makes it clear that "...I am on their side and that they can look at me as a resource for information about the University..."
- Faculty teaching upper-level courses states: "I find that I am frequently helping transfer students learn the ropes. This involves a lot of informal chatting during or outside of office hours."
- Faculty of a small department (100+ majors) state that they do not have the "critical mass" to develop a "systematic approach to a true first-year experience." Nevertheless, the department tries to address students' needs in these ways:
 - In a 100-level course, designating most seats as "freshmen only"; the goal is to provide a class free of the "jaded views and intimidating presence of upper classmen" and attracting students to the major.
 - Annual fall meetings before Advance Registration for majors and potential majors. The meeting is announced in all (dept.) classes, and freshmen interested in majoring do attend.
 - Major professor also teaches in the Honors College to attract highly motivated freshmen to the major.
 - Dept. participates (as do all departments) in the various recruitment fairs and open houses.
 - All faculty in the department are encouraged to keep an eye out for freshmen who show particular interest or ability in our subject areas with the goal of fostering it.
- Department's main efforts have been focused on recruiting strong students into the majors. (Students who identify early with their departments have a more satisfying experience).

- We believe that our success regarding retention (85%) and student satisfaction, at least partly, stems from the quality of our advisement.
- Two other factors include (i) the friendly group dynamic that develops within each set of students – that we encourage and (ii) the vocational nature of the majors: students come in with a very strong motivation to take our majors.
- Chair of a science department states that “Faculty X is a great ambassador for our courses – so quality of gateway teaching needs to be high.”
 - Instructor uses an interactive calendar grid that provides students with overviews of what is covered on days they miss class.
 - Lecture topics are delineated there so that students can partially catch up on missed work.
 - Exams are based on lectures, so attendance is important.
- The department participates in scheduled college fairs for entering students. In addition, the Director of U/G Studies sends form letters to undeclared students who take courses in the department and perform well, inviting them to come to the department and talk to our faculty about majoring or minoring in the discipline.
- Small department: Dept. X is committed to giving First-Year students the best orientation possible so that they will remain enrolled here (rather than transfer) until they complete their formal education. The Department engages in the following activities to enable students to feel comfortable and at home:
 - Chair has an open-door policy for students to stop by and learn more about the department and the university.
 - Faculty members are also accessible to greet students in their offices, halls, CC.
 - The Director of Recruitment and Public Relations is greets students at EOP Opening Sessions and shares meals with students on campus
 - The department has an Open House for all students, attended by all faculty
 - The department offers strong advising.
- Theatre Dept: The Student Group Theatre Council provides mentors for new students as requested. New students are encouraged to get involved in the productions. Our secretaries have even walked new students to their classrooms.
- Large department: U/G Director does a freshman prospective-majors session via advisement services, where he discusses the opportunities within the major--very much like the open house sessions. Majors and intended majors are invited to departmental Open House sessions in the fall.
- Small department: We seek to welcome and integrate new students in several ways, including an annual fall welcome party for U/G students and faculty (we reach out to new students with a welcome email from the Chair and personal contacts from faculty); we organize field trips, book launching events, etc.
- Midsize department: Anthropology, linguistics and human biology are subject areas that are rarely taught in high school and we find that most of our students who start out as freshmen at UAlbany come to us via our intro courses.
 - We have both senior and junior faculty (many award-winning) teaching our intro courses which are geared toward introducing new students to our field.
 - We save seats (through ASC/US) for freshman in relevant introductory classes and staff courses with competent and caring Teaching Assistants who, like the professor, are available during regular office hour sessions. They also routinely offer review sessions and one-on-one help.
 - We participate in all of the outreach programs that are organized by the Vice Provost and Advisement Services Center.

- Our faculty regularly meet with aspiring anthropology students from their classes and through referrals from other advisors and professors.
- We regularly teach courses for the honors college. This attracts new students and some of these courses are converted to regular course offering for freshman and sophomores.
- The Anthropology department sponsors an honor society; they regularly program events and advertise to classes.
- Large Department: welcome students at an undergraduate major meeting each year; the department distributes literature explaining the major and advising to new students when they declare their major, and in every pre-registration period. Moreover, faculty are available (A Distinguished Teaching Professor states: "I am basically in my office every day and see students when they appear at my door, which is not infrequently. I always talk to them and inquire about their academic work; I always tell them to put everything they have into their studies; I want them to know that someone cares about them as individuals, and as students.")
- Small department: We tend to design our 100-level courses to help build students' study skills, e.g. creating assignments to work on such areas as basic library research, critical reading, building an argument, etc. Beyond that, as a department devoted exclusively to undergraduates, we make ourselves available to them, repeatedly emphasize this availability in our classes, and host at least a couple of open houses a year to give students informal opportunities to get to know the faculty.
- Large department: Department does not have any specific programs for new students. However, almost all majors take X-100 course in their first semester. The instructors in that course do emphasize the ways to study the material, the importance of keeping current with the material, the importance of attendance, etc. The course organizers do work with student services in creating study groups.

b. School of Business

(Source: School of Business)

The School of Business has only admitted freshmen through our direct admit program for 2 years. We believe that the direct admit program has been pretty successful. We tracked the numbers (e.g., % continuing from freshman to sophomore; % continuing from sophomore into the B-school as majors) and they look pretty good, although it is important to note that we have only one cohort, so there is not a lot of data. In terms of these direct admits, we do provide some special services:

- 1.) We offer a section of a required prerequisite in the fall (a Business Law class), which they all take and this has been successful- the class size is smaller than normal and we have an excellent instructor. We offer an additional special section in the spring as well.
- 2.) We have special receptions for the direct admits, where they can meet the dean, faculty, and student clubs.
- 3.) We have the direct admits on a special distribution list, which we use to send them reminders and invite them to guest speakers etc.
- 4.) The direct admits are also attracting a lot of attention for prospective employers. As you know, the accounting firms recruit heavily here in the fall. As an example, we have a large group of alums (and current student interns) at Ernst and Young. Ernst and Young is especially interested in targeting our direct admits for early internships and have also provided financial support for a business communications course for the accounting students.

c. School of Criminal Justice

(Source: School of Criminal Justice)

The School of Criminal Justice, over the past five years, has been involved in four initiatives designed to have an impact on students' first-year experience.

- 1) **Advising for prospective majors.** Because students apply to get into the criminal justice major at the end of their sophomore year, they are typically not assigned a School advisor until their junior year. Through focus groups with students we learned that they felt a need for more advising about preparing to enter the major. We have done two things to provide advising for them:
 - a. **Fall semester meetings for prospective majors.** Three years ago we began notifying students who listed criminal justice as their intended major, as well as widely advertising on campus, an evening meeting on the uptown campus for students intending to become criminal justice majors. At those meetings the dean, the undergraduate advisor, and usually one or two faculty members, speak to the group and answer questions about the process for applying to the major. We also give them the contact information for our undergraduate advisor and make it clear that she will be happy to meet with them to advise them on course selection and any other issues related to getting into the major.
 - b. **Uptown hours for undergraduate advising.** Physical separation of the uptown and downtown campuses is always a challenge for connecting with our students. We successfully lobbied for space on the uptown campus in which we could schedule advising hours for students. We advertise these hours and encourage intended majors to stop in to get to know our advisor and have their questions answered.
- 2) **Albany Criminal Justice Association.** We worked with a group of majors to create an undergraduate student association that would provide a social connection as well as professional development opportunities for our students. This organization is open to any student interested in the field of criminal justice, and each fall, the officers reach out to freshmen who express an interest either through declaring criminal justice as their intended major or through attending our information session, and encourage them to join the association. This provides a connection to existing criminal justice majors as well as to faculty sponsors and our undergraduate advisor.
- 3) **Annual career forum.** For the past two years we have organized a criminal justice career forum with panel members from various criminal justice agencies to talk about the range of career options available to graduates. We invite all the new students who have expressed an interest in criminal justice to attend this forum.
- 4) **Introductory criminal justice courses.** We teach three large introductory courses that are now required for entry into the major. Each class typically enrolls 100-120 students. We explicitly reserve a number of seats in these classes for freshmen. In order to provide a richer experience for the students, we now structure each of these classes with six discussion sections staffed by criminal justice Ph.D. students. We are thus able to offer settings that facilitate discussion as well as provide opportunities for answering questions and reviewing course materials. These courses are generally quite popular and receive strong ratings from students.

d. School of Education

(Source: School of Education)

The School of Education does not have any undergraduate majors, but there are over 700 students in the Education Studies minor. In 2007-08, 62 of the minors were freshmen. The following narratives provide an overview of various activities involving first-year students.

Successful First-Year Initiatives:

- University Programs – We regularly participate in important university initiatives, including the Open Houses targeting incoming freshmen. It provides a means for us to make sure first-year students have information about teacher certification in New York State and how to access education advisement during their first year. In addition, we participated in the Freshman Focus presentations that targeted first-year students, providing an overview and opportunities for various education careers.
- Orientations and Information Sessions – Each semester, we provide three orientation and information sessions for students interested in the Education Studies minor or Pathways Into Education opportunities. These sessions include first-year students (though open to any student) and detail the programs and certifications necessary for educators. Attendance at these sessions range from about 10 – 30 students.
- Pathways Into Education (PIE) Center – In 2006, we opened the Pathways Into Education Center in the School of Education. This initiative has been quite valuable in providing accurate information and advisement to any potential or current student who is seeking information on education pathways and teacher certification. PIE also houses the advisor for the Education Study minor. It is critical for first-year students interested in teacher certification to have the “crosswalk” forms that outline what subject areas courses they need for a particular certification area (e.g., biology, English). This Center provides daily access for new students to get the information they need in a timely manner. In 2006-07, the PIE Center had over 1800 information requests from undergraduates (via email, phone, or site visit).
- Future Educators Club – Undergraduate students organize and operate the Future Educators Club with an advisor from the School of Education. Although the club includes all undergraduates, the members do actively recruit freshmen who are interested in any education career (classroom teaching, school psychology, administration, etc). This experience provides students with a cohort of people/community in which to consider an education career. In addition, this group is actively engaged in community events (e.g., volunteering in schools, “shadowing” in classrooms) to give students a sense of what being an educator involves. This organization provides a regular means for faculty to present workshops on topics such as resume building, career paths, and teacher certification exams. There are generally between 15 – 30 students at each Future Educators Club meeting, with some of the workshops having 45 students in attendance.

Main Challenges or Problems:

- The University Advisement Center, individual faculty, and our faculty/staff at the Open Houses have all been quite helpful in advising students to visit the Pathways Into Education Center. When first-year students attend our events or talk to one of the advisors, it helps the student to have all the necessary information to make informed decisions about subject-area courses and teacher certification requirements. However, we still find some students who do not seek this advisement, or know about the opportunity, until into their second or third year at the university. While the conversation at that point is still quite helpful to students, we continue to strengthen the communication routes for students to learn about education careers during their first-year.
- Although not a School of Education program, we have many upper-level and graduate students who participate in the coursework and volunteer opportunities associated with the Middle Earth program through the Counseling Center. Since this is a program that targets freshmen, we are somewhat surprised to talk with juniors and seniors who have not heard of the program. We continue to provide information about Middle Earth through our PIE center

and will be happy to support any additional efforts suggested by the task force or the Counseling Center.

e. School of Social Welfare

(Source: School of Social Welfare)

We know that students bond with the University and community when they are engaged. The Community and Public Service Program (CPSP) has long served the University and is nearing its 40th year. Data from the satisfaction survey of UA undergrads (collected by SUNY Central) show how vital the internships and community service experiences are for students. Our CPSP data also show the same findings-students find their majors, careers and summer jobs from this program. This year we are most fortunate to have Dr. Loretta Pyles arrive as our faculty director of the program. She will be taking the program to new heights and this means that we can play a key role in the freshman experience. For example, in addition to the Honors College (where Loretta plans to teach civic engagement) we hope to offer residential experiences for engaged students and to bring student supports to a possible community service oriented dorm.

As you know, most high schools require community service and UA in a capital city is well poised to build on this. Currently we serve 600 students a year.

Many Universities have far more robust engagement opportunities than ours and there may be ways to expand on what we already have. Our CPSP program along with ITLAL and the Honor's College are also helping faculty build more service learning into courses which may also help to strengthen the first year "bonding". A survey being undertaken by the CPSP right now will depict more responsive ways in which such community service experiences and group projects might be developed.

3. UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

a. Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership

Dr. Bill Roberson met with the Task Force and provided an outline of the activities of ITLAL and his perspectives on designing and effective FYE. He suggested that "inquiry" rather than "content delivery" was a useful principle for first year courses. Inquiry-based courses typically involve observation, collaborative research and analysis, along with argumentation and writing. Dr. Roberson noted that a substantial faculty commitment of time and energy was needed for effective inquiry-based instruction, which would require compelling incentives for faculty to participate, along with some training. He noted that appropriately trained graduate and undergraduate students are a useful and cost-effective resource to assist in FYE. Overall he emphasized to the Task Force the importance of administrative simplicity and a simple, direct, and concrete assessment plan in developing and sustaining a successful FYE (ref to *Appendix*).

b. Honors College

The Honors College provides a wide range of activities focused on helping honors students start their university experience in a positive and thoughtful way.

During the first semester:

The Honors College Director hosts a reception for honors students and their families on moving-in day, allowing parents and their students to ask any questions they may have. That afternoon, the Honors College Director also gives a "lecture" to the students and their families, describing his vision

of the Honors College, how being a member of the Honors College will benefit each student, and the students' academic and community roles in The Honors College. At the end of the lecture, students go with several current honors students to ask questions and parents stay with the Honors College Director to do the same.

During the semester, there is a series of meetings with second-year honors students and first-year honors students, by discipline, allowing the first-year students to learn from the second-year students some helpful strategies for doing well in particular courses (e.g., honors physics) and how to plan courses for their first year. In addition, third-year students are asked to serve as mentors to the first-year students.

Jean McLaughlin, the Honors Librarian, also leads three sessions to introduce Honors College students to the University Libraries: Order or Chaos: Tour and Explore the Library; Find it Here or There: Library Catalog, Databases, Interlibrary Loan, and WorldCat; and Help! Literature Reviews, Bibliographies, and Style Guides.

Throughout the semester, the Honors College director holds a series of dessert receptions in his residence. Each lasts about one hour and students are invited by the suites in which they live in the honors residence hall. This allows the students to get to know the Honors College Director a bit better. In addition, a professor in each area in which we have many students—currently biological sciences/public health, business, and political science/public administration—have been asked to present an evening program in which they describe the types of research done in their disciplines, the roles of undergraduate research assistants, and how students can connect with professors with whom they might do research.

During the second semester:

Several graduating honors students describe their research and the process they went through identifying a research advisor and writing their thesis. Usually, two presentations are given during an evening presentation and we have about three presentations (the number of presentations will increase as our first large graduating class becomes seniors next year).

Throughout the year:

The Honors College Director emails first-year students periodically to describe strategies they can be using to stay on track academically, particularly during their first semester. He makes of point of engaging students in conversations as he sees them in the dining room or the residence halls about their courses and their academic performance (meals in the dining rooms are particularly useful for this, as a group discussion can result), and encourage them to initiate conversations with him about academic or social issues as they arise.

Finally, the Honors College Director keeps a supply of Pez Dispensers in his office in Steinmetz Hall, and, when he finds students studying in the study area during times when most students are not studying (e.g., Friday night), he gives them a Pez Dispenser and comments on their commitment to doing well academically.

c. Project Renaissance

One of several programs undertaken by UAlbany aimed specifically at improving the quality of the first year experience for students, Project Renaissance is a year-long, freshman-only living-learning community that has grown to serve approximately one-sixth of the entering freshmen class per year [is this right?]. Now in its 12th year of operation, Project Renaissance has undergone a recent program review for which a self-study was completed in 2007. Much of the information provided here is taken from the self-study document produced as a portion of that program review.

Project Renaissance was designed by two senior faculty members for the purpose of creating at a mid-size research institution some of the advantages of studying in a small college setting. The target audience for Project Renaissance (ProjRen) participants is the entering first year student cohort; admission to the program is determined on a first-come, first-served basis from students who have paid their admission deposit. The program annually enrolls approximately 400 students and is avidly sought, maintaining a waiting list that consists of 300-400 students.

Students in Project Renaissance live together on 20 residential floors of Mohawk Tower, each of which is divided into four residential suites that house individuals of a single gender with genders mixed by floor. Odd-numbered floors include a room occupied by an upperclass student employed as a Resident Assistant (where possible a former ProjRen student). Even-numbered floors contain rooms that are used as offices for ProjRen faculty and as classrooms for the program. Social and academic life is heavily organized around “the floor.”

Of the 15 credits or 5 course load typically taken by freshmen at UAlbany, participating students take 6 credits in Project Renaissance courses each semester, for a total of 12 hours in the program. These credits typically cover three or four General Education graduation requirements and also meet the Information Literacy, Oral Discourse, and lower-division Writing Intensive skill requirements.

ProjRen courses are organized in two different ways. Some ProjRen courses are modeled as year long courses taught by an interdisciplinary team of faculty who each teach a small seminar-style section (organized as the students who live on a single floor and taught in Tower classrooms) but who also gather together in plenary sessions throughout the year, thus bringing all participating seminars (and floors) together. Small classes mean that students have frequent direct contact with one faculty member and a consistent cohort of fellow students, while at the same time providing regular access to the interdisciplinary perspectives of the rest of the team.

Other ProjRen courses are taught as small seminar-style courses offered as complements to regular large lecture course taught on the podium. The combination of large lecture course linked to a complementary seminar is expected to provide an interdisciplinary perspective comparable to the team-taught model. The course pairs are organized into 5 tracks: Arts and Humanities, Pre-Business, Pre-Health, Pre-Law, and Psych/Soc, which are also mapped onto corresponding residential floors. For example, the Arts and Humanities track would feature an Art History lecture course from the podium in the Fall and a History lecture course from the podium in the Spring, each of which is paired with a complementary seminar style course taught by a Project Renaissance faculty member for students who occupy one or more particular floors in the Tower.

In the earliest days of Project Renaissance, courses were taught in interdisciplinary teams of senior Department faculty, most of whom were involved in the program’s original conceptualization. However, faculty participation from the podium has declined over time for numerous reasons. As a result, the program has recruited a dedicated staff of seven faculty from writing, comparative literature, history and political science, five of whom have been involved in the program since 2000. Six faculty members possess doctoral degrees (Ph.D., D.A., and J.D.), and five are appointed as adjunct teaching faculty in University Departments.

Of all first year experiences available at UAlbany, Project Renaissance is arguably among the most successful in offering students an enriched, satisfying, and educationally positive first year experience and in retaining them. Data provided in the self-study indicate the Project Renaissance courses receive instructor ratings that are comparable to or higher than those for other 100 and 200 level courses evaluated by all freshmen. Other self-study analyses suggest that ProjRen students consistently achieve higher GPAs in comparison with non-ProjRen courses in the same podium lecture course. The retention rate for Project Renaissance Participants is 89% from the 2nd to the 3rd year, in comparison with 81% for freshmen classes in general (excluding EOP students) and 90% for Presidential Scholars, and is 59% for 4-yr graduation in comparison with 50% for freshmen in general

(excluding EOP) and 69% for Presidential Scholars. Finally, comparison of data from ProjRen students with Non-ProjRen UAlbany students on several benchmark measures of the National Survey of Student Engagement documents that ProjRen students score significantly higher on measures of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and enriching educational experiences at UAlbany (see Section 12c of this report). These data, while not definitive, suggest there are compelling reasons to examine more closely the characteristics of Project Renaissance as a model for the first year experience at UAlbany.

d. Pilot First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses

Prepared by Sheila Mahan; Data analysis (preliminary) by Bruce Szelest

Enrollment

- In Fall 2006, approximately 450 freshmen enrolled in 28 sections of “University Seminar,” (UUNI 150) taught by 25 instructors.
- In Fall 2007, a modified version of “University Seminar” was offered to students under the course number UFSP 101. There were 550 students enrolled in 34 sections of this course. An additional 22 students were enrolled in three sections of UFSP 100 Freshman Seminar.

Course Details

Two one-credit freshman seminar courses were offered through this pilot in Fall 2007 course.

UFSP 101 “University Seminar,” was essentially the same course as UNI 150 “University Seminar” offered in 2006, although the syllabus was revised in response to student and instructor assessments following the Fall 2006 pilot. Both courses targeted enrollment of students “in the middle”—not Presidential Scholars or EOP, and not already enrolled in Project Renaissance or other FYE course. Overall, learning objectives, course topics, assignments, etc., were essentially the same both years. Instructors were also drawn from the ranks of academic advisors, and Academic Affairs and Student Success professional staff.

The learning outcomes for this one-credit course are as follows:

1. Understand the nature of a University community and the need to balance individual and community interests
2. Understand academic expectations of the University and the opportunities for education in a research university
3. Identify academic behaviors and learning strategies essential to their success, including tools for time management and study skills, etc. as well as an understanding of University requirements and procedures
4. Reflect on personal, academic and career goals and develop a preliminary plan to achieve those goals
5. Discuss common concerns and contemporary issues and controversial topics. A special emphasis will be placed on a discussion of diversity, civility, tolerance, and community.
6. Understand common pitfalls that interfere with student success and academic achievement
7. Learn about resources of the University (e.g., Academic Support Services, University Libraries, Counseling Center)
8. Learn how to use course software, MyUAlbany, and University email.
9. Become aware of and engage in University community activities and learning opportunities beyond the classroom
10. Establish a more personal connection with other first-year students and instructor in a small-class setting

UFSP 100 “Freshman Seminar” is a course that was initially offered at UAlbany in the 1980s and 1990s, but has not been taught in many years. It is a one-credit seminar course organized around a disciplinary topic and taught by a member of the teaching faculty. In an effort to expand FYE

offerings, and to pilot a model common at many universities, three sections of this course were offered in Fall 2007. These courses, while focusing on the topics indicated, also incorporated many of the same learning outcomes as the UFSP 101 course. They were:

- Challenges of Going Green (John Delano)
- Campaign 2008 (Ann Hildreth)
- Human Motivation (Kevin Williams)

Academic Performance and Retention Outcomes

With two years of the pilot completed, the following characteristics are reportable regarding the impact of the University Seminar on student success and persistence:

- On average, students who took the “University Seminar” **performed better academically** in their other courses during their first semester than similar students who did not take the University Seminar.

Fall 2006 cohort: In fall 2006 traditional admits had an average GPA of 2.75 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.70 for non-seminar students. Special admits (“admit with consideration”) had an average GPA of 2.59 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.43 for non-seminar students

Fall 2007 cohort: In fall 2007 traditional admits had an average GPA of 2.62 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.52 for non-seminar students. Special admits (“admit with consideration”) had an average GPA of 2.42 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.32 for non-seminar students.

- On average, students who took the “University Seminar” **persisted at rates higher** than similar students who did not take the “University Seminar.” Persistence rates are higher first-semester to second semester and first year to second year.

Fall 2006 cohort: The second-semester return rate for traditional admits was 92.4% for Seminar students compared to 93% for those who did not take the course. Students who were special admit (“admit with consideration”): 96% for those who took the course versus 92% return rate for those who did not.

The freshman-to-sophomore year return rate of traditionally admitted University Seminar students was 83.3% compared to 81% for those who did not take the course. For students who were special admit (“admit with consideration”) the freshman-to-sophomore return rate was 81% for those who took the course compared to 78.2% return rate for those who did not.

Fall 2007 cohort: Preliminary data on the second semester return rate for traditional admits was 95% for Seminar students compared to 91.2% for those who did not take the course. For students who were special admit (“admit with consideration”) 99.1% for those who took the course versus 93.8% return rate for those who did not.

- With one cohort of 22 “Freshman Seminar” students, those who took the course perform even better and persisted at an even higher rate:
 - Freshman Seminar traditional admits students had an average GPA of 2.7
 - Freshman seminar admit with consideration had an average GPA of 3.0.
 - All 22 Freshman Seminar students returned for the second semester – a 100% return rate.

4. OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

(Source: Office of Academic Support Services)

The Office of Academic Support Services houses several services and programs that provide support and/or impact the “freshmen year experience.” These include the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP), TRIO Student Support Services Program (aka Project Excel), Collegiate Science Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), Science Technology Entry Program (STEP), campus-wide study groups, study skills workshops, faculty mentoring program, tutorial services, early warning system, and Freshmen Year Experience courses. These programs and offerings, while available for various class years, are particularly mindful of first year students (transfers and freshmen). The following is a cursory overview of some select services and programs.

Educational Opportunities Program (EOP)

Commencing here at the University at Albany back in 1968, this 40 year old program seeks to provide admission opportunities for economically and educationally disadvantaged students who wish to enroll in one of many undergraduate departments at this University. Having the second largest EOP in the SUNY system with 650 students being served, a retention/graduation rate of 65% of its students, and well over 5,000 accomplished alums throughout the world, the main objective of the EOP is to see that each student admitted is provided with all the services and assistance necessary for success in whatever degree program he or she seeks to complete. To this end, students enrolled in the Educational Opportunities Program are provided with supportive services designed to help students who need assistance in academic, financial, social, or personal matters. Specifically, the following services are provided to EOP students by a staff of professional counselors and departmental faculty members:

- developmental coursework in reading/writing, and math skills
- a Math and Writing Lab to assist EOP students with help in these areas
- a freshman year experience course
- one to one personal counseling/academic advisement
- free one on one tutorial assistance
- 5-week EOP Pre-College Summer Residential Program
- monthly EOP Newsletter
- financial aid packaging
- EOP Computer User Room
- peer tutorial services
- study skills materials
- induction into the Chi Alpha Epsilon Honor Society for students completing two consecutive semesters of GPA's at 3.0 level or above. Academic excellence must be maintained to remain in the honor society (for Project Excel and C-STEP students as well).
- academic recovery program for students on Academic Probation
- Faculty Mentors for students desiring one and for students on Academic Probation
- graduate school advisement and EOP graduate school tuition waiver.

Project Excel (TRIO Student Support Services)

Project Excel is a federally funded TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program charged with aiding first-generation college, low-income, and/or disabled students. Project Excel serves approximately 200 students annually and is currently in its eighth year at the University at Albany. Located in the Office of Academic Support Services, alongside EOP, CSTEP, and STEP, students are members of a community of faculty, staff, and peers who believe in their ability and success. This community of different backgrounds and disciplines all striving for similar goals fosters a welcoming and “home away from home” environment; this combined with extensive services and academic counseling provides support and knowledge conducive to academic success. Services include supplemental

advisement, peer and professional tutoring, peer mentoring, limited scholarships, holistic counseling, and information on available academic, professional, and personal resources. A noteworthy objective of the program is to assist students with their transition to campus and providing a community where students feel comfortable seeking assistance and support. Funding is contingent on meeting objectives as well as a competitive grant proposal each 4-5 year cycle; currently Project Excel exceeds a 70% six-year graduation rate and 85% retention rate. (No EOP students are also SSS Project Excel participants.)

Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP)

The Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) has a long rich history with the University at Albany. In the last 6 years, UAlbany's CSTEP program moved under the OASS umbrella. The purpose of CSTEP is to increase the number of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged undergraduate and graduate students who complete professional or professional education programs of study that lead to professional licensure in careers in mathematics, science, technology, and health-related fields. CSTEP is funded by the New York State Department of Education and serves approximately 200 University at Albany students. Services include individual academic, career, and personal counseling, tutoring, study groups, math and writing labs, book loan program, graduate school information, and career enrichment trips. Of note, CSTEP also oversees UAlbany's Summer Research Program (UASRP); CSTEP also oversees the University at Albany Summer Research Program (UASRP); UASRP has enabled 20 students every summer for the past 10 years to work alongside a faculty mentor and participate in meaningful research projects. Students present their findings at a national conference and many CSTEP/UASRP students have continued on to pursue master's, doctoral, and medical degrees.

Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP)

Similarly, the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) has an extensive history at the University at Albany. In the past few years, UAlbany's STEP program also moved under the OASS umbrella. The purpose of STEP is analogous to that of CSTEP, but at the middle and high school levels. While the focus of the STEP initiative is on pre-college students, it is important to note that many UAlbany students participate in STEP activities as tutors, mentors, local tour guides, as well as chaperones at national conferences. In this manner, UAlbany undergraduates are exposed to an educational setting that provides professional edification and small stipends for financial support. These experiences help shape student development in myriad ways.

Study Group Sessions

OASS campus wide services include study group sessions for over twenty undergraduate courses that are often considered "gateway" classes into popular and rigorous disciplines at UAlbany. As such, a significant number of course offerings are freshmen level and introductory classes. These study groups are facilitated by graduate students recommended by their respective academic departments. For two 2-hour sessions (four hours weekly), study group facilitators are available to assist students with class content, parallel problems, and clarification of concepts. This offering is a drop-in service, for maximum flexibility.

Study Skills Workshops

OASS also provides study skills workshops on a variety of skills deemed critical to student success. These workshops are held weekly on topics ranging from time management, note taking skills, test taking strategies, and overcoming procrastination. Students are strongly encouraged to attend as many sessions as possible and can also request an individual session, when necessary.

Faculty Mentorship Program

Through participation in this program, students and faculty or professional staff members are matched in a mentoring relationship. Matches are made according to the student's preference in terms of career, academic, or personal interests. Once matched, it is up to the student and the faculty or professional staff member to decide the level of interaction that will take place. Applications for participation in this program are available in the Office of Academic Support Services located in LI 94 or on-line at www.albany.edu/oass

UNI 100 Freshmen Year Experience courses

The Office of Academic Support Services (OASS) initially enrolled incoming EOP students in the ECPY 120 course (about 160 students). The OASS also offered this course during the academic year (approximately 5 – 7 sections, 30 students each section). After UA Senate approval, beginning in the spring 2001, the OASS started the Freshman Year Experience course (UNI 100U). This course was further approved by the Senate to fulfill two general education course requirements: Oral Discourse and Information Literacy. The change from ECPY 120 to UNI 100U offered students a more expansive view of the transition from high school to college. The UNI 100U course continued to focus on academic and cognitive skills needed to succeed in the collegiate environment, but also offered students information on diversity in the college environment, financial literacy and issues involving alcohol and drugs (to name a few). In the fall, there is 1 section for students who are identified as Project Excel students, 1 section offered to English as a second language students (funded by the Intensive English Language Program), and 3 sections in which Academic Advisement pinpoints students during registration who are identified as having lower SAT scores, lower high school averages or students who self select by having reservations about their ability to handle the transition from high school to college. Two sections are offered in the spring in which Academic Advisement enrolls students who had academic difficulty their first semester. Typically these students are on academic or terminal probation.

The purpose of the Freshman Year Experience course (UNI 100U) is to maximize a student's potential to achieve academic success and to help students adjust responsibly to the individual and interpersonal challenges presented by collegiate life. Students will develop skills that contribute to academic success which include being able to set realistic academic goals; evaluate and use effectively a variety of study strategies; identify university resources and policies necessary for the accomplishment of personal and academic goals; and articulate personal and academic interests and link these to University at Albany opportunities. Students will develop self-management strategies and will be able to develop and evaluate a realistic time schedule and evaluate behavior, habits and attitudes which interfere with successful performance (i.e., diversity, stress management, attitudes toward sexual issues; and awareness of sexuality, drug and alcohol issues). Finally, students will develop strategies to process information and communicate information clearly and effectively. The successful student will be able to develop strategies to find information using a variety of resources; develop skills on how to evaluate the quality of information; identify and analyze the source, authority and perspective of information sources; and learn about academic dishonesty and how to avoid it.

In 2002, Academic Support Services administered the First Year Initiative Survey through Brevard College's Policy Center on the First Year of College. This is benchmarking surveys that gave us the ability to assess and improve the FYE course. The data pointed to absolute and relative strengths and potential weaknesses, which we used to improve the course. We found that the top three predictors that produce the greatest impact on student satisfaction and course effectiveness are in the following areas: engaging pedagogy, managing time/priorities, and academic /cognitive skills. Of the 208 students who completed the survey, 72% felt the course significantly contributed to their ability to adjust to the college social environment and 67% felt the course significantly contributed to their ability to succeed academically. When asked if they would recommend this course to other first-year student, 88% said they would.

5. ADVISEMENT SERVICES CENTER

(Source: Advisement Services Center)

In 1998, Provost Judy Genshaft and Dean of Undergraduate Studies John Pipkin initiated plans to transform the Advisement Services Center both in terms of its resource base and philosophy. In keeping with national research on student retention (success and satisfaction), the Advisement Services Center was changed from a transactional office staffed primarily by part-time graduate assistants to one focused on **developmental advising** staffed by full-time professional advisors. Since that time, the following strategies to support student progress, success and satisfaction have represented the major focus of ASC programs:

Academic Advising

- To the greatest degree possible, advisors assigned at orientation remain the students' advisors until they move to their major. In the context of this supportive, ongoing relationship, advisors are able to assist students in identifying their goals, interests and strengths, and are able to connect the student to the opportunities at the university that are most relevant to these. To inform and focus the goals of this advising relationship, student learning outcomes were identified and the work of the office became intentional and geared toward student success. (See attached).
- To support student progress, and course management, ASC worked with academic departments to create Major Academic Pathways (MAPs) detailing four-year plans for students in each major at the university. Students are reassured by these that they can accomplish major, minor and general education requirements in four years. Additionally, the MAPs provide a way to offer structure to first semester students without foreclosing on any options. (See sample.)

Support for Improved Course Availability

- Utilization of the MAPs also allows for data concerning course needs – if we expect 65 incoming freshmen to be intended Com majors, based on intended majors of prior incoming classes, then we know to have at least 65 seats of ACOM 100 available to the freshmen class. Ensuring course availability sufficient to meet the needs of the freshman class has highlighted the need to bring rational planning to the university course scheduling process.

Improved First-Semester Course Selection Process

- Finally, the MAPs also allowed for the creation of the new online process used by freshmen to facilitate their course scheduling for the first semester. ASC developed a website to allow incoming freshmen to learn about their options and involve their family in their decision making, before arriving on campus for Orientation. Fall schedules are created before the Orientation program, allowing for a more relaxed and positive Orientation for the student, during which the student and advisor now have time to focus their discussions more broadly on the upcoming academic experience.

First Year Programs – Freshman Focus

- Specific programming geared toward freshmen is offered under the umbrella of the Freshman Focus Program. This program encompasses Academic Fairs in different formats, to help connect students and faculty at a time when students are in the process of settling on a major. It has also included special opportunities for career testing and information about extracurricular opportunities for students.
- ASC advisors also hold special freshmen groups between the third and sixth week of the semester. This gives the students a chance to react in a group setting to the changes they are experiencing. The advisor also has the opportunity to discuss specific academic requirements, now that the student is actually engaged in their classes. Advisors also

begin the process of teaching students how to use the registration tools at the university: DARS audit, schedule of class search, etc. Groups are followed up by individual advisement appointments with each freshman, prior to spring registration. Freshmen are included on the Prelaw and Prehealth listservs managed through ASC, and special Prelaw workshops are held for freshmen each fall.

- Designation of one academic advisor for all Honors College students, to focus attention on unique needs of these students.

Constraints

- Caseloads at the start of fall semesters for full time advisors are approximately 400 students, half of which are new freshmen. The other half are sophomores, juniors and a few seniors. Many of the upperclass students are transfer students, most of which are working on admission to restricted majors. Caseloads of this size translate into the necessity to spend about one-half of the semester in advance registration advising appointments. Although these sessions are typically very productive, their brief duration (20 minutes) is less than what would be desired in the ideal relationship-building scenario.

6. OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

(Source: Office of International Education)

The main OIE contributions to the First-Year Experience are as follows:

Study Abroad and Exchanges (SAE)

Across the nation, university policies on first-year study abroad vary widely. Some schools exclude first-year from study abroad, while others strongly encourage first-year students to study abroad and a few even organize large-scale pre-entry international study tours for incoming freshmen. UAlbany and the SUNY Study Abroad Consortium encourage first-year students in good academic standing to consider studying abroad. Many programs are offered that first-year students may participate in during or immediately following their freshman year. As most first-year students enter UAlbany in the Fall Semester, the most immediate options for study abroad are Winter session three-week short courses, spending the Spring Semester abroad, or going on 3-12 week Summer Programs. A few of the programs offered will also take pre-freshman or “gap year” students.

First-year students in good academic standing can benefit from studying abroad in various different ways. They can earn lower-division credits and complete general education requirements while studying abroad, and before they are locked into a major. Their experiences while studying abroad may help them mature and understand new perspectives, and they may help in selecting a major and a likely career track. Quite often an early study abroad experience leads them to make plans for a longer experience, for example a full junior year abroad. The experience of studying abroad can be life-changing, and it is a considerable résumé enhancement for future careers.

Many short term programs are intensive foreign language courses that allow freshman to quickly move ahead in a language and return to UAlbany communicating on some level in the language and ready to move on to more advanced classes at UAlbany.

Few first-year students currently choose to participate in semester length programs, but the option is there for the particularly well motivated student with academic plans that might preclude study abroad later or who has specific academic goals that would be furthered by studying abroad in the freshman year. Freshman have more freedom from requirements to take specific core requirements in a major and are less likely to be tied down by jobs, cars, apartments, relationships, etc.

We believe that study abroad in the freshman year should be encouraged and that academic advisers should be advising freshman students to consider study abroad options early, especially Winter session and Summer study tours, survey courses, and intensive foreign language courses.

Significant Opportunities:

- Greater orientation and advisement discussion of study abroad as a freshman option.
- Greater media and marketing publicity for study abroad (a more prominent position on the UAlbany webpage).
- Greater emphasis on development initiatives to raise scholarship funding to help outstanding and needy students study abroad.

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)

As of August 4th 2008, 80 new international freshmen have been admitted for Fall 2008 (eight are former IELP students who have been here for at least one semester). This is a 45% increase over the number admitted for Fall 2007 (55, of whom 45 enrolled).

International students are citizens of foreign countries who are enrolled at the University at Albany, and who are neither U.S. citizens nor permanent residents. Most of our international students are here on non-immigrant student visas (F or J), but there are many other students in a host of other visa categories (G, H, L, O, R, etc.) which also allow the visa holder or dependents to study.

International Student and Scholar Services identifies newly admitted international freshmen in early May and sends them the international version of the Freshman Welcome Packet, in both paper and electronic form. The same information goes up on our web site at www.albany.edu/intled/issv, under New Students, Freshmen. They are encouraged to submit their course choices to Advisement Services so that they can be registered in a timely fashion, and are urged to attend a Summer Planning Conference if they happen to be in the U.S. already. They are also instructed to sign up for a dorm room, and ResLife assigns them rooms in the freshmen quads (Indian and State), in dorms that remain open during breaks in the school year. Last, they are informed of how to get to UAlbany and when to arrive to attend the International Student Orientation program, which runs for three days during the week before classes begin. (ResLife allows international students who have reserved dorm rooms to move into their permanent rooms the Sunday just before the Orientation program begins;- on August 17th this year.) For the first time this year, we are matching international students who request it with returning students (American or international) who will serve as “buddies” to help them learn their way around during the first two or three weeks of classes.

During the International Student Orientation program, freshmen attend the same sessions arranged for all international students, on immigration regulations, health care, health insurance and TB testing, use of SUNY card, Student Accounts, succeeding at an American university (academic integrity, where to find help with writing, ESL issues, etc.), living in the dorms, personal safety, sexual harassment, cultural adjustment, getting involved in UAlbany life, etc. In addition, there is a special group advisement session for freshmen, offered by an advisor from Advisement Services and John Pomeroy, the Undergraduate Admissions officer who admitted them and who has been responding to many of their questions by phone and email. One morning is set aside for the freshmen to meet with academic advisors in Advisement Services to discuss their schedules for the upcoming semester, and to review their overall academic plans. (Latecomers are also accommodated by the ASC as needed.)

After the Orientation program, international freshmen are encouraged to come to ISSS if they are experiencing any difficulties adjusting to life at UAlbany. We answer any and all questions relating to visa issues and make referrals to Advisement Services, Student Accounts, the Counseling Center or Health Center, Residential Life, academic departments or elsewhere, for issues beyond our expertise. We keep in touch with all international students by sending regular ISSS Announcements to students' @albany.edu e-mail addresses. We arrange a limited number of social events and occasional local

“field trips” for international students, we co-sponsor a Thanksgiving dinner with the GSO, and we publicize a wide range of UAlbany and Capital Region events and activities. Finally, we try to match students with U.S. students in our Friendship Partners program and with American host families for Thanksgiving and other occasional social get-togethers.

Significant Problems:

- Late arrivals and other freshman international students who, for one reason or another, miss all or part of the Orientation Program.
- Students who fail to understand how important it is to use and regularly check their @albany.edu e-mail addresses.
- Because most international students need to spend all or most of the year in Albany, the closing of some UAlbany facilities and residence halls during breaks, intersessions and the summer poses special problems.

Significant Opportunities:

- Increasing the number of volunteer “buddies” and host families so as to create enhanced opportunities for international students to make friends with American students and fully experience the American way of life.
- Greater coordination with Student Success, Athletics, Residential Life, the SA, Chapel House and other groups, to ensure that first year international students are more aware of the wide range of activities at UAlbany.

Intensive English Language Program (IELP)

The main function of the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) is to provide full-time English language instruction to non-matriculated international students who are not fluent in English and who study in the IELP for anything between one semester and a full year. Fall and spring enrollments have increased substantially in the last 18 months and currently stand at about 100 students per semester, divided between five different levels of English proficiency.

The IELP offers 16-week fall and spring semesters and an 8-week summer session. In addition, during the early summer, an 8-week Summer Academic Institute (SAI) is available for any international student who will be a matriculated student at the University at Albany during the fall semester. SAI has generally attracted graduate students, not freshmen, but this may change from 2009 onwards as IELP is introducing a 4-week late summer SAI immediately before International Student Orientation and the start of the fall semester.

A significant number of IELP students subsequently enter UAlbany as freshmen on transfer students. In fall 2007, in cooperation with Undergraduate Admissions, the IELP began International Conditional Admission, taking 20-30 students per year into full-time English study, on the understanding that they would be admitted to begin full-time undergraduate study as incoming freshmen once their English test scores had reached a satisfactory level. Conditional Admission students have been mainly from China, but also from Turkey and Korea. Two conditional admits and four other IELP students began full-time undergraduate study at UAlbany in Spring 2008, and 13 more conditional admits and at least four other IELP students will begin full-time undergraduate study in Fall 2008 (some as freshmen, some as transfer students).

As well as preparing international students for possible admission to first year study at UAlbany, the IELP offers courses to current UAlbany international students who are experiencing, or are expected to experience, academic difficulties because they are not fully fluent in English.

Two non-credit support courses, each equivalent to a three credit hour loading, are offered

during the Fall and Spring Semesters: **ESL 001** - Oral Communication for International Students, and **ESL 002** - Academic Writing for International Students. These courses are purposely kept small, 12-16 students per course, to maximize instructor/student interaction and student participation. Students generally hear about these courses at ISSS Orientation. Students who register for these courses are usually graduate level, but undergraduates and exchange students have registered.

One section of **UUNI 100U** – The Freshman Year Experience (three credits). First year students whose English is not fluent may be advised to take this section. Originally developed in conjunction with EOP, the course is taught by an experienced TESOL educator. The course follows the curriculum of the Freshmen Experience with the added component of TESOL. Class size is limited to 12-16 students per section so as to maximize instructor/student interaction and student participation.

Significant Problems:

- IELP always has difficulty obtaining sufficient classrooms.
- UAlbany students who take ESL 001 and ESL 002 have to pay for the courses themselves, and many international students who need these courses don't take them because they cannot afford to pay for them in addition to their required for-credit course loads.
- No budget is assigned for the teaching of UUNI 100U, so OIE funds one section a year as a service to UAlbany. More sections are certainly needed.

7. DIVERSITY-MULTICULTURALISM IN FYE

The committee acknowledges the value and importance of the integration of diversity and multiculturalism into the FYE program. However, a consensus was not reached on the content and implementation. Thus, this important element remains open for discussion and deliberation for incorporation into the next steps and phase of the FYE exploration.

8. WRITING IN FYE

A considerable amount of time has been spent by the committee discussing how to successfully merge writing into the FYE experience. It is of significant concern not only for this campus, but for colleges across the country. There was a task force charged by former Provost Susan Herbst which developed a proposal for how writing might be integrated into the curriculum. Final resolution has not been reached. However, it is anticipated that new FYE modules will explore the integration of a writing component.

9. MULTIDISCIPLINARITY IN FYE

Many universities find a place for multidisciplinary in the first year experience (e.g. UC Irvine, Portland State, UWashington, Guelph, UCLA, etc.). In the literature of higher education a good deal of research addresses distinct (and contested) notions such as interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, postdisciplinarity, etc. Some of these approaches are inappropriate for first-year students. For example interdisciplinarity work is often understood in a strict sense as the creation of new knowledge building on, but moving beyond, specific disciplinary perspectives. It is hard to envision achieving this with first-year students. However, appropriately structured multidisciplinary courses have a long and successful history at UAlbany (e.g. Project Renaissance 1995-present, Foundations of Great Ideas, 1998-2006, and various initiatives in CAS). The Task Force reaffirms the importance of such multidisciplinary courses as one element in the FYE at UAlbany.

Here we define a “multidisciplinary” course as one in which students are exposed to *selected* perspectives from different disciplines organized around one or more *central idea(s)*, in *one* course which involves faculty from different departments who are *together* in the classroom at least some of the time. It is *not* a leisurely by faculty who come and go, week by week, with minimal commitment to the course.

From the students’ point of view, to see faculty in different fields engaging with one another in person provides a sense of what a discipline is in a reflective and explicit way, and provides an experience qualitatively superior to the disciplinary perspectives that accumulate willy-nilly as students complete their general education requirements. It promotes a critical awareness of knowledge as a *contested* but *consensual* product (so modeled by the participating faculty). It shows in concrete ways how disciplines can contribute to understanding the endless list of issues that transcend the scope of any one academic discipline or department (environment, globalization, human health, urbanism, etc.) Exposure to the disciplinary elements in such courses also extends students’ knowledge of the contents and relevance of fields that have low “name recognition” in high school. Thus it both *facilitates* and *broadens* the choice of major.

Our experience shows that many faculty are enthusiastic about such multidisciplinary courses which they find very profitable intellectually. The direct encounter with colleagues and students in the same space is novel, exhilarating and challenging and it also provides a way to give beginning students (and potential majors) a flavor of what they and their departmental colleagues do.

10. DIVISION OF STUDENT SUCCESS

The Division of Student Success at the University at Albany seeks to provide an engaging environment, where students can learn and succeed. With this as our collective mission, the Departments and Offices that make up the Division offer a variety of programs and opportunities for students at every point of their academic career. More specifically, for the purpose of this task force, the Division makes a concerted effort to provide opportunities for the benefit of our first year students. This portion of the Internal Subcommittee report is a summation of the “Materials Presented to the First Year Experience Task Force Internal Analysis Subcommittee” compiled during summer 2008, under the auspices of Vice President Christine Bouchard. For a more complete understanding of the work done by the Division, please refer to that document in the Wiki.

Freshman Orientation

The mission of the Orientation Office is to prepare new students for educational opportunities and social responsibilities and to integrate students into the intellectual, cultural and social climate. The Orientation Office offers orientation sessions to as follows:

- For Summer/Fall entry: Eight 2-day Summer Planning Conference Programs wherein they typically reach on average of 90+% of the non-EOP freshman population. This is then followed by Fall Planning Conference which typically reaches the remainder of the class (number = admissions goal minus EOP freshmen or $2,350 - 150 = 2,200$).
- For Spring Semester entry: One 1-day Freshman Planning Conference with approximately 40 participants.

The Orientation sessions are major campus-wide undertakings that include the participation of SUNY Card, University Police, the Office of Student Involvement, the Bookstore, Undergraduate Advisement Services, the Department of Residential Life, faculty from a variety of disciplines and the UAlbany community at large, to name a few. Parents are invited to attend the Orientation sessions with their students and allowed to reside on-campus, as space permits, for the duration of the Orientation session.

Residential Life

The Department of Residential Life designates quads/buildings for freshmen and offers Living/Learning Communities for First Year Students. The Living/Learning Communities for First Year Students include Project Renaissance, which is discussed in detail in another section of this document, and the Honors College, which houses 125 Honors College participants on State Quadrangle. Additionally, the Department hosts programs and events in freshman living areas that are specifically geared toward the needs of freshmen.

The Office of Student Involvement and Leadership

The Office of Student Involvement and Leadership offers freshmen focused programming in the form of Danes After Dark and promotes involvement in student organizations and campus activities. Danes After Dark events are targeted to all students but particularly for on-campus students and especially first year students. The first Danes After Dark events of each year are offered to incoming freshmen during Orientation sessions to begin to introduce first year students to campus activities. Additionally during Orientation and during the first weekend of the semester, the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership exposes freshmen to the many student organizations available of campus.

Disability Resource Center

Over the summer the professional staff of the Disability Resource Center meets personally with every Frosh or transfer student who wants to be registered with the office. In most cases the Disability Resource Center meets with the student's family as well. These meetings serve as an opportunity to register the student, document their disability or chronic health condition, discuss reasonable accommodations, look at their technology requirements and establish a service plan. Sometimes, in the case of blind or wheelchair users the Center may also give a separate in depth tour that meets their disability needs. Every summer the Disability Resource Center registers between 30-60 students. The registration process goes on throughout the year as students continue to self-identify, and still other students are referred to the Center by faculty or staff.

Counseling Center Services & Programs

The Counseling Center offers two initiatives specifically focused on the needs of freshmen. The first, Project First Steps, is an evidence-based Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention (SBI) strategy which builds on the nationally-recognized *Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students* (BASICS) Model (Dimeff et al., 1999). All first-year students are invited to participate in an online alcohol screening during the first month of the Fall semester, and students who are identified as high-risk drinkers based in this screening are then invited to participate in a one-session BASICS intervention. The objectives of Project First Steps are:

- 1) To reduce student alcohol use among our first-year students, and,
- 2) To reduce “harms” (negative consequences) that result from excessive use.

The second initiative is, “Red Zone” Sexual Assault Prevention Programming. The “Red Zone” is a period within the first two months of the Fall semester during which students, particularly women and first-year students are at high risk for experiencing sexual assault. The objectives of Project First STEPS are:

- 1) To reduce incidents of sexual assault among our first-year students and to encourage reporting of sexual assaults should they occur,
- 2) To inform students who experience or know someone who has experienced a sexual assault of avenues for assistance and support;
- 3) To change the culture of sexual assault by empowering bystanders to speak up against such behavior.

Multicultural Student Success

The Office of Multicultural Student Success, in collaboration with a variety of other groups, offices and departments across the university community, has initiated a new program called - the *Harambee Circle*. The *Harambee Circle* is an initiative designed to address issues facing male students of color

through mentorship and fellowship. It is being developed specifically to increase the persistence and retention of African and Latino males at UA. Membership in the circle is open to all African and Latino heritage males at UA.

- Due to emerging perceptions of conflicting mentorship programs, Harambee members and African & Latino male freshmen in general are encouraged to sign up for mentorship through the faculty mentorship program in the Academic Support Services office.

Division-Wide Efforts

Great Dane Beginnings is University at Albany's opening weekend in the fall semester. Throughout the weekend a variety of events and programs are planned to ease the transition of first year students to the college environment. Highlights of the weekend are the Welcome Candle Lighting Ceremony, Library Palooza, the Welcome Brunch and the Student Association Block Party. This is a time for students to make friends and get a great start for the academic year ahead.

Food for Thought is a program that offers informal sessions, where students and faculty meet over lunch in a Quad cafeteria. The student to faculty ratio at these lunch meetings are usually no more than 5:1, in an effort to foster an intimate setting where interested students could ask questions about the course or get additional information about the faculty member and their work.

Handbook - Lastly, Student Success is producing a new student handbook/planner entitled *Success Within Reach* to be distributed to all incoming Freshmen and Transfer students this fall, 2008. This publication will be a combination of important academic and student services information as well as a useful planner students can utilize year long. The purpose of this initiative is to provide an easy resource to incoming students that will assist them in being successful.

11. ATHLETICS

The Athletics Department maintains an academic support unit that welcomes student-athletes to campus and facilitates students' integration into campus life in the following ways: (1) Academic support staff work with the Advisement Services Center to create fall schedules that enable student-athletes to get a healthy start on their academic programs while avoiding conflict with athletic obligations; (2) first year student athletes are required to spend 6 hours per week in study for the fall semester (this requirement is waived for student-athletes in the spring who receive a fall GPA of 3.5; and (3) student-athletes playing football (and therefore reporting early in August to campus) receive an NCAA-mandated orientation that consists of six hours of instruction on topics such as balance of work/play, sports psychology, time management, sexual responsibility, etc.

Once on campus, students are expected to participate in a new program of leadership workshops initiated by the Associate Athletic Director for Student-Life Enrichment and Equity. Freshmen students are expected to begin to take leadership workshops during their first year, and continue across the course of four years at UAlbany. These workshops will take place once a month in the form of presentations, small group discussions, and exercises, and will be designed to enable students to explore the nature of leadership and obtain more information about the practices and processes of leadership. The first year of this new leadership workshop is expected to focus significantly on the development of one's self-identity as a leader.

12. INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS ON FYE

a. Academic Performance and Experiences of Freshmen at UAlbany

Our first step was to get a general impression of general academic experiences of freshmen at UAlbany. This would provide context for interpreting FYE programs. Using data obtained from IR, we examined the classroom performance, retention, and subjective classroom experiences of freshmen at UAlbany in recent years.

Academic Performance. We examined grades for freshmen in all 100-level lecture and seminar courses in fall 2006 and fall 2007. Across all courses, approximately 1/3 of grades were A or A-; an additional 35% were in the B range (B-, B, or B+). One concern is how freshmen in 100 level courses compare to upperclassmen. Data indicate that freshmen perform as well as upperclassmen in 100 level courses (in fact, the average GPA for freshmen is slightly higher than that for upperclassmen (2.87 vs. 2.79).

A finding of note, however, was that students who enrolled as freshmen in the middle of the academic year performed substantially worse in the fall 100 level courses than those who enrolled in the fall. In other words, second-semester freshmen performed worse than first-semester freshmen in these courses. This suggests that the academic experience may be different for students enrolling midyear than in the fall; alternatively, academic preparedness may be different for those entering in mid-year compared to those entering in the fall.

Academic Experiences. The University participated in National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in spring 2008. The NSSE is designed to assess “the extent to which students participate in empirically-derived effective educational practices and what they gain from the college experience.” The NSSE may be used to track intra-institution changes in learning by comparing survey responses of freshmen to seniors. It may also be used to compare institutions on learning experiences. Given our interest in the first year experience, we concentrated on responses from the UAlbany freshmen. Comparisons were made between UAlbany students and students in three comparison groups: our peer institutions, applicant overlap institutions, and Carnegie peers. A total of 1,052 UAlbany students participated in the survey last spring, including 538 first-year students and 514 seniors. The response rate for the UAlbany survey was 21%.

The NSSE assesses five academic benchmarks: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Analyses compared responses of UAlbany freshmen to those of freshmen at our peer, applicant overlap, and Carnegie peer institutions. UAlbany freshmen scored significantly lower than all three groups on academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and enriching education experiences. An examination of the *d* effect size statistic reveals that these differences are moderate to large in magnitude. An inspection of individual items on the NSSE revealed that the largest (negative) differences between UAlbany and peer institutions occurred for the following items: “prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before tuning it in”; “worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources”; “preparing for class” (reading assignments ahead of time, etc.); “number of written papers between 5 and 15 pages in length”; and “received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance.”

b. Retention of Freshmen

For the freshmen cohorts entering UAlbany from fall 2003 through fall 2006 (N=9116), 94% enrolled in their second semester, and 84% enrolled for their third semester (sophomore year). This retention rate falls within the average range for our peer institutions.

An analysis of students beginning as freshmen in Fall 2006 or Spring 2007 sheds some light on reasons for leaving the University. One significant predictor of retention from first to second year is grades: for example, first-semester freshmen performed worse in 100-level courses than those who stayed (mean GPA = 2.70 vs. 3.07, respectively). Among those who left the University in good academic standing (GPA > 2.0), the most cited reasons for leaving were “programs were not available,” “college experience not as expected,” “changed academic goals,” and “family responsibilities.” By contrast, the three most frequent reasons for leaving for those with GPA < 2.0 were “withdrawn, not good standing,” “medical/psychological difficulties,” and “dismissal.”

Students in good academic standing tended to transfer to other SUNY schools. The three most popular transfer locations were: Stony Brook, Binghamton, and New Paltz.

c. First-year and First-semester Students in 100 Level Classes

(1.) Project Renaissance

Retention. The retention data provided by Institutional Research to the FYE Committee indicates that among traditional admits, students who participated in Proj Ren from fall 2003 through fall 2006 were retained at higher rates than those who did not participate in Proj Ren. The average 2nd semester retention rate for Proj Ren students was 95.9% compared to 93% for non-Proj Ren students. The average 3rd semester retention rate for Proj Ren students was 86.9% compared to 82% for non-Proj Ren students.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted for the fall 2006 cohort in which registration in fall 2007 (yes/no) was predicted from personal and family variables (ethnicity, sex, parental education), academic preparedness (high school GPA, SAT scores), and participation in Proj Ren or Project Excel. Four significant predictors emerged from the analysis: high school GPA, Hispanic status, African-American status, and participation in Proj Ren. These results suggest that the odds of enrolling as a sophomore significantly increase for students who are Hispanic, African-American, or enrolled in Proj Ren.

Academic Experiences. Although the results of the NSSE survey indicate that UAlbany freshmen scored lower on academic challenge and enrichment than freshmen at our peer and applicant overlap institutions, the results also indicate that students enrolled in Project Renaissance report significantly more enriched and challenging experiences than their UAlbany peers. Table 2 compares traditionally admitted Proj Ren students with traditionally admitted non-Proj Ren students on the five NSSE benchmark assessments. Significant differences were found between the two groups for 3 of the scales: Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, and Enriching Educational Experiences. As indicated by the effect size statistic, these differences were moderate to large in magnitude (.4 to .8 standard deviation unit difference). The effect for Enriching Educational Experiences was particularly strong. There were no significant differences between Proj Ren and non-Proj Ren students on Student-Faculty Interaction or Supportive Campus Environment.

Table 2. Comparison of Project Renaissance and Non-Project Renaissance Students on NSSE Benchmarks.

	Project Ren	Non-Proj Ren		
Benchmark	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Signif (p <)	Effect size (d)
Academic Challenge	51.1 (13.0)	45.7 (13.1)	.005	.41
Active and Collaborative Learning	37.0 (13.6)	30.7 (15.1)	.002	.42
Student-Faculty Interaction	28.4 (18.5)	25.6 (15.9)	.232	.18
Enriching Educational Experiences	32.3 (11.4)	23.1 (11.6)	.000	.80
Supportive Campus Environment	57.7 (17.7)	56.1 (18.3)	.566	.09

In sum, our analyses indicate that participation in Project Renaissance is associated with positive outcomes – students are retained at slightly higher rates and they report more challenging and enriched academic experiences. One explanation for the higher retention rate for Project Renaissance students

may be a more positive social environment (e.g., theme-based housing), but the results of the NSSE survey suggest that classroom experiences may also be a contributing factor. One note of caution, however, is that the statistical analysis could not completely rule out selection effects (i.e., students who enroll in Proj Ren are more likely to stay with the university for non-program reasons).

(2.) UFSP101/UNI150 University Seminar

Retention. The University Seminar course was designed for freshmen who do not participate in any other FYE program (i.e., EOP, Presidential Scholars, Project Excel, Proj Ren). An analysis conducted by IR examined the retention rate students in the University Seminar compared to their non-FYE peers. Among this group, the second-semester return rate for traditional admits was 92.4% for seminar students compared to 93% for those who did not take the course. Among students who were special admit (“admit with consideration”), 96% of those who took the course were retained versus 92% of those who did not.

The freshman-to-sophomore year return rate of traditionally admitted University Seminar students was 83.3% compared to 81% for those who did not take the course. For students who were special admit (“admit with consideration”) the freshman-to-sophomore return rate was 81% for those who took the course compared to 78.2% return rate for those who did not.

Academic performance. Analysis of the first two cohorts of the University Seminar (UNI150 in fall 2006; UFSP101 in fall 2007) revealed that students who participated in these courses performed slightly better than their peers who had no FYE experience. Among traditional admits in fall 2006, students who enrolled in the University Seminar had an average GPA of 2.75 compared to an average GPA of 2.70 for non-seminar students. Special admits (“admit with consideration”) had an average GPA of 2.59 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.43 for non-seminar students. For the Fall 2007 cohort, students in the University Seminar had an average GPA of 2.62 compared to an average GPA of 2.52 for non-seminar students. Special admits (“admit with consideration”) had an average GPA of 2.42 for University Seminar students compared to an average GPA of 2.32 for non-seminar students.

In sum, there are slight retention and performance effects that can be attributed to the University Seminar, although the strength and significance of these effects were not reported by IR.

(3.) UFSP100 Freshman Seminar

The Freshman Seminar was piloted in fall 2007 with three sections (N=22). The program is too new to be comprehensively assessed, but for the initial cohort, retention was 100% and average GPA was 3.0 (versus 2.70 for non-seminar participants).

13. SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

a. *Variety of Programs.* The materials obtained by the Task Force, as well as existing reports of Institutional Research, retention groups, external reviewers and others, indicate a wide awareness on campus of the distinctiveness of first-year students’ experiences and a recognition that the success and satisfaction of first-year students are crucial to our overall institutional success. There are many possible approaches to the FYE, and many FYE-oriented practices at UAlbany. Indeed the Task Force discussed the “Hawthorne effect,” which suggests that almost any thoughtful, personal attention to first-year students will have good, although perhaps only temporary, effects.

b. *Incomplete Coverage of First-year Students.* Despite the range of initiatives at UAlbany, our efforts are not yet inclusive. Some groups of first-year students are quite well served (e.g. EOP, Honors College, Project Renaissance). But many other students who are unaffiliated with any special

program can evade FYE interventions altogether. Clearly resource constraints are a problem, but so too is the voluntary nature of some of our FYE programs. One of our sources proposed a goal of exposing *all* students to “at least one high impact experience in the first year.” The Task Force endorses this idea, and feels that when core elements of FYE are developed, some of them should be made compulsory for all first-year students.

c. *Unclear Goals.* The goals of individual FYE programs at UAlbany vary in clarity. Some, such as those of the Educational Opportunities Program and Project Renaissance, are quite clear and have been thoughtfully refined over time. Other programs appear more ad hoc and are of shorter duration. The Task force heard many ideals for the FYE ranging from developing students’ self awareness and community responsibility, to critical thinking and engaged research, to the acquisition of basic academic skills including writing. On one hand, first-year students should be encouraged to explore intellectual worlds they have never encountered before; on the other, they are eager to find the right major(s). For some units on campus lower division, first-year, and General Education teaching provides an avenue to inform and attract potential majors. Other units, notable the professional schools, have less engagement with the first-year population in general, and are mainly concerned with streamlining early admission of students whose major decision is already made. These diverse and contradictory objectives are inevitable considering the multiple purposes the FYE must serve, but we feel that there should be articulated a clear set of goals for the FYE at UAlbany, reflecting our own and other institutions’ best practices, the intellectual and personal development the FYE is supposed to foster, and the principles guiding the effort (e.g. “challenge and support,” or “transition, connection, engagement”). The current array of poorly funded and scattered efforts have worked very well in some cases, but in aggregate they send a signal to both faculty and students that our FYE objectives are confused and incoherent.

d. *Lack of Coordination.* We feel that the key to a successful and coherent FYE program is coordination and that this is notably lacking at UAlbany today. We echo the task force of 1998 in calling for appointment of a FYE Coordinator, perhaps with an advisory board. The Office of Undergraduate Education may be the natural place for such an appointment. The task force note the very significant impact that Student Success and Residential Life have had on the Freshmen Year Experience and affirms that their inclusion and collaboration are required for a comprehensive, coordinated FYE initiative.

e. *Learning Communities* The task force discussed the notion that the thoughtful formation of learning communities, as found in other successful freshmen year experiences such as EOP or Project Renaissance, may be a fruitful strategy/vehicle to foster the University’s FYE objectives and goals.

f. *Lack of Resources* In a sense this is *the* problem, particularly in the present budget and economic climate. There are many claims on the time, effort, and resources of deans, departments, faculty and support professionals, and at a graduate research university FYE will at best be one among many competing voices. However, the Task Force feels that many FYE programs at UAlbany are poorly resourced, and that a truly effective FYE will require a significant readjustment of priorities and reallocation of resources, as well as a significant cultural change among some faculty.

g. *Defining “Faculty” for FYE.* The Task Force discussed at length the question of how FYE may best be delivered. The question of “rigorous teaching” and “challenging” material, and the merits of regular and adjunct faculty, were particular salient in our discussions of Project Renaissance. The Task Force concurs in the consensus of the literature that FYE courses should be challenging, engaging, and should provide students with adequate support. Our survey of FYE practices at UAlbany found that appropriately motivated and rewarded tenure track and term-appointed faculty, support professionals, advisors, graduate students and undergraduate preceptors can all play a role in successful courses. We note that many chairs strive to insulate untenured regular faculty from the intensive demands of FYE, and that many more senior faculty are very happy to engage in it.

h. *Lack of Consistent and FYE-specific Assessments.* Obviously articulation of goals is a prerequisite.

i. *The Conduct of FYE Classes.* We noted that the presence of upper division students taking lower division courses -- perhaps reluctantly, to satisfy a requirement -- is a formula for disengagement, and it sends the wrong signal to new students. Some members of the Task Force favored development of Code of Etiquette [*this is the phrase in the Minutes, but Etiquette is hardly le mot juste, JP*] to guide both students and faculty in the classroom; other members were suspicious of something that might be perceived as an intrusive mandate. We note that dealing with first-year students embedded in large mixed, 100-level courses is a challenge. We found examples of success and failure in this endeavor.

j. *Challenges of Class Size.* There is consensus that most academic objectives of FYE are best served in relatively small classes (<25). These settings provide the most effective learning environment for students. Other things being equal most instructors probably prefer such courses. However, there are very strong constraints on our ability to provide such courses considering the sheer volume of students in large disciplinary and General Education courses, the opportunity costs such courses involve in deploying faculty, and our severe budget limits on faculty, assistantships and other necessary resources. The Task Force noted that large classes can be effectively handled by experienced faculty with appropriate assistance. In fact UAlbany faculty have many found creative ways to provide some elements of a “small class” experience to quite large classes (e.g. alternation of plenary lectures with break-out groups, use of undergraduate mentors in designated groups). The Retention Report of 2006-7 details some of the strategies that may be useful. Any feasible FYE for UAlbany will necessarily entail a mix of large- and small-course experiences for frosh. We feel that it is important that all first-year students be exposed to at least one relatively small, “high impact” class.

Appendix C: External Offerings Report, Selected Offerings at Peer Institutions

EXTERNAL OFFERINGS REPORT SELECTED OFFERINGS AT PEER INSTITUTIONS

The External Review Subcommittee of the First Year Experience Task Force examined all materials provided to the Task Force by its organizers to (1) begin its investigation into what constitutes best practices and (2) what first-year new freshman initiatives exist at other institutions. The members of the sub-committee were also asked to review the websites of competitor institutions and attempt to contact them directly. The sub-committee chose to limit its investigation to initiatives at other institutions directed/focused on benefiting first-year new freshmen.

Through the resources and investigation of many institutions, it quickly became apparent that the creation and implementation of a First Year Experience opportunity, whether in the form of a course, a series of courses, a residential theme or a combination that incorporates all of these elements, is an institutional decision. There is no perfect program or example.

In each case, the program must meet the expressed goals of the institution and have the commitment and support of the faculty and administration. This insures that everyone at the institution fully understands the purpose and intention of the offering.

M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner, and B.O. Barefoot in “Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College”, Jossey Bass, 2005, provide several observations of what contributes to the success or failure of FYE initiatives. They identify the following as key requirements in the creation of FYE initiatives that benefit new students:

- Challenge and support. High standards and expectations established for academic performance. Academic integrity must be inherent in all courses.
- Institutional commitment throughout, top to bottom. Faculty must be involved in all levels of discussions. Deans and Departments must be committed with time and resource allocation.
- Strategies and skills for learning along with assumptions of individual responsibility for success. Focus on student learning inside and outside the classroom.
- Partnership between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.
- A permanent FYE evaluation process must be established.

Each of these elements is considered to be essential by the authors to insure the success of any FYE initiative.

Understanding what students believe to be important during their first year is valuable for the design of any offering. The University of Wisconsin surveyed their students and discovered that they were most interested in learning about libraries and campus resources; time management, exam preparation, and effective study skills; and academic advisement and career exploration. This was accomplished through the creation of Freshmen Interest Groups (FIG)s. These FIGs are characterized by small groups of students (20) who enroll together in courses linked by a common theme.

The small class concept is prevalent throughout first-year initiatives and can be found in the University of Minnesota's Freshmen Seminars. Offered in the fall, these three credit courses with 20 students are lead by faculty members and are considered part of a faculty member's regular teaching load.

As mentioned previously, so much of what makes a program work are the institutional goals that are at the heart of the design. In "Exploring the Evidence: Initiatives in the First College Year", monograph number 49, Troxel and Cutright, editors, 2008, the examples are many and varied. Experiences range from programs designed to get at Early Intervention issues (University of South Carolina) and First Year advising (Bridgewater State College), to linked Learning communities (Wright State University). Many have civic engagement and service learning as a focus (Georgia State) and others are discipline based (West Virginia) or focused on student faculty interaction (Western Illinois).

Several UAlbany competitors offer some type of first-year experience for entering freshmen. Within the State University of New York System (SUNY), many have adopted first-year opportunities for freshmen. At Binghamton University, first-year freshmen are offered the chance to become involved in "Discovery" courses. Taught by a mix of full-time faculty and adjuncts, the courses emphasize collaborative learning, problem solving and critical thinking. Some Discovery courses offer a linked course option, two courses joined to explore key themes from varying perspectives. These courses have an academic focus.

Freshmen transitional issues are covered in Human Development 105 which "explores what it means to be a freshman". Binghamton also offers Learning Communities in dormitories centered on common themes.

At SUNY Stony Brook all freshman are required to enroll in a Freshmen Seminar for the year. In the fall, the seminar focuses on transitional issues including study skills, health and well-being, citizenship, introduction to campus resources, and more. The focus of the spring seminar is to introduce freshmen to thought provoking and interesting subjects. Taught by faculty, these courses are diverse and include a broad range of academic disciplines.

In addition to the Freshmen Seminar requirement, all Stony Brook freshmen are required to choose an Undergraduate College based on areas of interest and are housed together based on these college assignments. Commuters are also required to select a college. The system is intended to let students explore a wide range of interests, both within their majors and outside across other academic areas.

SUNY Buffalo provides a one credit voluntary course that covers 10 topics considered essential for freshmen success as they transition to the University. These sections are small, 10-25 students, and are taught on an S/U grading system. Instructors are not full-time teaching faculty.

Smaller competitor institutions within SUNY also provide academic and/or transitional opportunities for new freshmen. SUNY Oneonta provides a First Year Seminar 1 credit course graded on a Pass/Fail basis. Each faculty member (no adjuncts involved) is assisted by a peer educator. Seminars are transition courses that end mid-way through the first semester prior to registration for the spring semester. Any student who is enrolled in this optional course can opt to live in the FYE Hall.

SUNY New Paltz provides FIGs linked to general education or introductory courses related to programs of study. This optional opportunity attempts to reinforce interdisciplinary understanding of common themes. They also promote active learning by participants. Students can live in a residence hall with classmates who are enrolled in the same courses during the first semester.

SUNY Geneseo requires that all first year students be enrolled in a three credit Writing Course. Instructors are full-time faculty and class size ranges from 22-24 students. The Dean of the College, along with the Departments, is responsible for insuring the rigorous nature of the Writing Program.

Several competitors of UAlbany outside the SUNY system provide first year courses, programs, etc. The University of Delaware requires that all first year students complete one FYE course. These courses are small, 20-30 students, and vary in the number of credits awarded. Faculty, staff, and students can be found teaching these courses. Delaware also offers learning communities organized around an academic course and a transitional course. (LIFE)

Rutgers University provides both a 1 credit 10 week first semester course and 1 credit FIG courses for new freshmen. The Byrne Seminars, limited to 20 students, are taught by distinguished faculty members and focuses on their specific interests. This seminar exposes freshmen to a seminar experience and introduces them to the idea of cutting-edge research. FIG courses, also small with no more than 25 students, are taught by juniors and seniors on a pass/fail basis for 10 weeks. The focus of these courses is on transitional and student success topics.

In addition to these courses, Rutgers also provides freshmen with the opportunity to participate in a learning community. Discovery House residents enroll in 3 courses together-a FIG, an Expository Writing, and an introductory course. Residency is not required in order to participate in this opportunity.

Syracuse University uses learning communities to promote academic and social benefits for new freshmen. While not every community requires an academic course, each has a significant academic focus and provides contact with students with similar academic goals. These communities also provide common courses and residences, introduction to community resources, faculty mentoring and more. Communities are partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and intentionally integrate academic components with co-curricular experiences.

The “Psychology in Action Learning Community” is an example. Open to all first year undergraduates in the College of Arts and Sciences, students are required to enroll in Foundations of Human Behavior (three credits) and Practices of Academic Writing (three credits). Students also participate in a number of co-curricular experiences that enhance their knowledge of the field of psychology.

Hofstra University utilizes a program that integrates academic and social approaches that connect first-year students in small learning communities. Students take courses limited to 20-25 in different disciplines and each course complements the others. Students work closely with a professor on a topic of the professor’s particular area of research. Additionally, each incoming student is assigned an assistant dean from University Advisement who acts as a resource for the transitional issues that may arise during the first year.

Penn State, University Park, requires all entering freshmen to enroll in a three credit course. The course must carry a general education credit and focus on a specific discipline. (e.g., English, psychology, history, etc.) Class size is limited to approximately 20 students. While the fundamental focus of the course is on content and academics, the course also attempt to include important college success and transition skills into the curriculum.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst offers a 1 credit First Year Seminar (OASIS) once a week. Conducted by an academic advisor the course explores transitional issues. Additionally, all freshmen are required to take a Writing Course that must be completed in their first year at the University.

Residential Academic Programs (RAP) offer unique living and learning opportunities for first-year students as they transition to college. In RAP, students live with others who share similar academic interests or majors, enroll in specific classes together, and live in designated residence halls. Classes satisfy general education requirements and are existing courses. More than 40% of first-year students join RAPS. For example, the Health Science RAP allows first-year students who have declared a

major or an interest in a major related to Health Sciences to explore personal and professional opportunities related to the topic. Students must select one course from a list that includes Introduction to Biology, General Chemistry, or College Writing. RAP classes are small.

Fordham University offers a Freshman Advising Program for all first year students. Specially trained faculty meets at least twice a semester with freshmen. Topics of these meetings include the college bulletin, study skills and time management, academic integrity, course scheduling and selection of a major. These faculty also receive the mid-term grades of their advisees. (16 advisee maximum)

Boston University provides incoming students with a Freshman Resource Advisor (FRA). The FRA is an upper-class student who meets with the freshmen at the opening weekend and throughout the academic year. This peer relationship is meant to help with both the academic and social transition to the University.

New York University offers all freshmen the opportunity to live in residence halls with programming events appropriate for these new students. Freshmen can also be a part of FYE Exploration Communities. These communities have themes that include the arts, film making, the dead poets' society, musicians, pre-health and others.

Northeastern University provides new freshmen with Educational, Year-long, Experiential Seminars. (Husky Eyes) These seminars meet 1-2 times a month focusing on transitional issues including living in Boston and the academic expectations of the University. Seminars are voluntary, not graded, and carry no academic credit. Students have the opportunity to choose from 12 living-learning communities in residential halls.

The articulated benefits of the initiatives identified by these institutions include:

- Bring together like minded students and faculty
- Create a small community with the larger university education
- Promotes collaborative and cooperative learning with peers
- Introduces students to University resources
- Creates a bond among students, allowing them to make a connection to the institution
- Builds partnerships among faculty, staff, and students
- Can connect the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students if done correctly
- Facilitate college transition
- Fosters student active commitment to the institution which translates into creating a stronger alumni
- Builds academic and social exploration through courses and residential area.
- Small class sizes are valued by both the students and the faculty member teaching the class
- Critical academic skills necessary for success can be developed through providing students the opportunity to work closely with faculty, particularly in seminars
- Courses that provide both faculty and peer mentors can help insure the goals of academic content and rigor along with the introduction of college transition topics
- The use of advisors help monitor the first year progress of new students both inside and outside the class room and take steps if necessary when problems arise

Oversight of first-year offerings is very important to their success and varies among institutions. Formal structure is necessary to insure the initiative is achieving the desired outcome(s). Whether lead by a director, an advisory board, or a committee, some entity must be concerned with defining the content, learning outcomes, and an assessment plan for the initiative.

It is common to find initiatives organized/reporting within Academic Affairs, assigned to Undergraduate Education, Deans and Departments, etc. At institutions where the responsibility is assigned to Student Affairs, the responsibility most often rests with Residential Life. Units created out of joint responsibilities between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs can also be successful, i.e., Office of Learning Communities.

Summary of Findings: Competitor Institutions

Institution: SUNY Stony Brook

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

From the website:

Freshman Seminar 101(1 credit)

In the fall, each freshman is enrolled in a College-specific seminar. It's a semester-long opportunity to get acquainted with Stony Brook, taught by staff who know and understand the campus community. The course is designed to give new students the skills they need for success — both academic and social — while exploring aspects of the Colleges' respective themes. Some of the topics covered in the course include: study skills, test taking and test anxiety, health/well-being and success in college, academic citizenship, time management, academic and career planning, introduction to campus resources, and how to get involved on campus.

Freshman Seminar 102 (1credit)

The Undergraduate College Spring Seminars are small, interactive courses designed to introduce first-year students to thought-provoking and interesting subjects. The seminars offer a unique opportunity to explore ideas, learn from peers and get to know faculty in small, intimate classroom settings. Faculty from departments across campus will instruct seminars that focus on a current intellectual interest. These topics are quite diverse and include a broad range of academic disciplines. By taking these seminars, students will learn in a small community with faculty and other students who share their interests.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

Stony Brook's Undergraduate Colleges are small but vital communities, offering individualized support while tailoring the first-year experience for students with similar interests. Each incoming freshman is assigned to one of six Undergraduate Colleges: Arts, Culture, and Humanities; Global Studies; Human Development; Information and Technology Studies; Leadership and Service; Science and Society.

All Undergraduate Colleges include customized advising and support, special educational and social programs, and opportunities for close interaction with faculty and fellow students around themes of common interest. Both commuter and residential students are welcomed into College life. First-year resident members of each College are housed together in the same residential quadrangle. First-year commuters have a centrally located home on the Academic Mall.

The colleges are named for distinct themes around which academic and social life revolve: the system is intended to let students explore a wide range of interests, both within their intended majors and across the academic spectrum.

Oversight, etc.

A committed team of faculty and staff. The Faculty Director is an esteemed member of the faculty who provides intellectual and academic leadership for the College. The College Advisor provides academic support and guidance for each freshman in that College. The Quad Director and Residence Hall Directors provide expertise in the areas of student development and student life at Stony Brook.

Benefit(s) Provides a university education and experience with the close connection to a small community.

Institution: Binghamton University

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

They teach “Discovery” courses, which are pitched to first year students. These courses are “taught by faculty who maintain a student-centered perspective that emphasizes collaborative learning, critical thinking and problem solving, and reflection and self-assessment.” Some of these courses are “linked courses”—“two courses in a link explore key themes from varying perspectives.” These are taught by a mix of full-time faculty and adjuncts.

They also teach Human Development 105 which is pitched to first year students. This is taught in the dorms and “explores what it means to be a college freshman from a human development perspective. Along the way, you’ll meet faculty and staff from all over campus, discover what they do and how you can get more involved.”

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

There are “Learning Communities” in the dorms. Students room with other students in same academic area—e.g. pre-law, globalization, etc. There are workshops and study sessions in the halls. Guest speakers are brought in.

Oversight, etc.

There is a faculty member who is the Discovery academic advisor. In addition there are 4 Discovery assistants.

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

First Year Seminar. Optional, 12 sections of 20 students. Pass/fail, 1 credit. Lasts half the fall semester, until the registration period begins for spring semester. Each faculty member (no adjuncts are involved) teaching a course is assisted by a peer educator, to make personal connections with the students. Seminars are academic transition courses, the faculty teaching them together select the readings, though there can be some individualization.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

There is a group project that spans all sections of the FY course, about students' first 6 weeks at college. A dinner is held where each has a poster session. The college president and other administrators attend.

Any FYE student can opt to live in the FYE Hall

Oversight, etc.

Academic Affairs for the FY Seminar.

Other initiatives are overseen by the First Year Experience Office, including a success series of lectures, 75% of which are held in the dorms. This office also hires the peer mentors for the seminars. More information about the office is available at: <http://www.oneonta.edu/development/firstyear/>

Their provost provides funding for the 12 sections of the course. It is uncertain whether the provost would fund additional sections so that all students could participate

Benefit(s)

For the seminar: they feel that a relationship with a faculty member is critical for first year students, but they also wanted to highlight the social transition issues

Institution: SUNY New Paltz

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

Not required of all students. First Year Interest Groups consist of linked general education (or the introductory courses of related programs) courses. Integrative coursework to reinforce an interdisciplinary understanding of the common themes, cooperative study by the students of linked courses through social interactions outside of the classroom, and active learning by all students.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

Students can live in a residence hall with classmates who take two courses in common during each semester of their first year.

Oversight, etc.

N.A. No information available on their website and no response to e-mail requests.

Institution: University of Delaware

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

All incoming first year students must complete one FYE course:

1. LIFE Univ 101: pass/fail, taught by upper classmen, transition issues, 22 students per section
2. First Year Seminar: taught by a faculty member with a peer (student) mentor. Small, 20-30 students. Some are 1 credit, others three credits. Combines academic topics about succeeding in a major with transition topics. Currently being piloted with 500 students. Enrollment will be 1,000 students in 2009 and all students in 2010.
3. Honors Program: courses involve more work with primary documents and encourage seminar-like discussion. The required FYE course in the program is the interdisciplinary *Honors Colloquium*, which provides a broad, interdisciplinary exposure to intellectual and cultural issues.

Pathways Course: Problem-based learning, team-taught. Only 2 majors currently participating, and the program is being phased out.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

LIFE is a living-learning experience, with learning communities organized around an academic course and UNIV 101. There are thematically-related activities outside the classroom, and students develop a collaborative project. The LIFE cluster and learning community are under the leadership of an advanced undergraduate peer mentor and a LIFE mentor. The cluster involves study groups, discussion groups, tutoring, service learning projects, field trips, lectures, and social activities.

Oversight, etc.

Office of Undergraduate Studies

Faculty teaching are compensated by their departments.

Faculty teach FYS in addition to teaching in their departments.

Benefit(s)

Want students to have the opportunity to work closely with faculty, hence the move to all students taking a faculty-led seminar. However, the affiliated peer mentor will introduce material from a student's viewpoint (transitional issues). Have been able to take some small (20-30 students) first year classes and call them FYS classes.

Institution: Rutgers University

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

Byrne Seminar: 1 credit, 10-week 1st semester seminar taught by distinguished faculty members and focused on their specific interests (such as erosion of the Jersey shore, oral history of WWII). Designed to expose students to faculty members and a seminar-like experience. Designed to introduce students to cutting-edge research in a field. Each section limited to 20 students. Optional program, 139 seminars offered 2008-2009. Students encouraged to register for a Byrne seminar on top of their usual course load.

FIG courses: 1 credit, pass/fail, 10 weeks long, taught by selected juniors and seniors, includes transitional issues and topics, including library skills, general exploration of a subject area. Each section limited to 25 students. Optional program, 57 sections offered Fall 2008.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

Discovery House: Learning community, students take 3 classes together: FIG, Expository Writing, and an intro level content course (Psychology, Health & Medicine, Law & Leadership, or Business), some learning communities don't require residency. Residential life does provide programming around FIG topics

Oversight, etc.

Office of Undergraduate Education

Byrne Seminar is funded by the donation of an alumnus, faculty members are paid a stipend into their research fund, and it covers enrichment activities such as field trips.

FIGS: Extensive infrastructure for training and oversight of peer instructors.

Benefit(s)

FIGS: To encourage reflections on experiences during first semester; provide opportunities for collaborative learning; help students learn about resources of Rutgers, research, and the options in an academic field of their choice; to build community among those with shared interests. Peer instructors can provide valuable advice, having once been in the first-year student's shoes

Institution: Syracuse University

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

There is no specific First Year Experience Course required for freshmen.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

Source: website

Example:

Psychology in Action Learning Community

Psychology in Action is designed to provide first-year students with an up-close look at the world of psychology. What do psychologists do? Where do they work? Join other students who share your interest in exploring the intriguing domain of human behavior. Students will have the opportunity to challenge themselves to new ways of thinking and experiencing the world as they learn about the fascinating field of psychology through interaction and discussion.

- Open to first-year undergraduate College of Arts & Sciences students.
- Students register for PSY 205: Foundations of Human Behavior (three credits) and WRT 105: Practices of Academic Writing (three credits).
- Students participate in a number of co-curricular experiences that enhance their knowledge of the field of psychology.

SU offers a wide variety of learning communities, and while not every community requires an academic course, they all have a significant academic focus.

Oversight, etc.

Residential learning communities (Office of Learning Communities) at Syracuse are partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs that **intentionally integrate academic components and co-curricular experiences** to promote, enhance, and support students' academic, personal, and professional growth and success. Non-residential learning communities are also available.

Minimum Requirements for the establishment of a Learning Community:

- Learning outcomes
- Academic component
- Assessment plan

Benefit(s)

- Build partnerships among faculty, staff, and students to increase interaction, involvement, and learning inside and outside the classroom
- Connect the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students to create a seamless learning experience
- Facilitate college transition by fostering small communities
- Promote opportunities for individuals to make meaningful connections with members of the community
- Contribute to the enrichment of the intellectual climate
- Foster students' active commitment to the SU community as alums.

<p>Institution: Hofstra University</p> <p>About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.</p> <p>The program is an integrated academic and social approach that connects first-year students in small learning communities. Students take courses in different disciplines, but each course complements the others. Students work closely with a professor on a topic in that professor's particular area of research. Class sizes are limited to approximately 20-25 students.</p>
<p>Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.</p> <p>There are several three-day/two-night summer orientation sessions in June, July and August. New students are invited to stay in the residence halls as they learn all about the University - from academic resources to computing services.</p> <p>Each incoming student is assigned an assistant dean from University Advisement, who reaches out to new students throughout the first semester, answers questions regarding general academic concerns. They act as a resource, providing direction to campus support services that can aid with the transition to the college environment.</p>
<p>Oversight, etc.</p> <p>N.A. No information available on their website and no response to e-mail requests.</p>
<p>Benefit(s)</p> <p>Small class size is a benefit for both students and faculty.</p>

<p>Institution: Penn State</p> <p>About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.</p> <p>A one course requirement for all students. A three credit hour course in a specific discipline (e.g., English, psychology, history, philosophy, anthropology, political science, etc), the courses must also carry general education credit.</p> <p>Class size is limited to approximately 20 students. The focus is on academics but does include some college skills components.</p>
<p>Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.</p> <p>Not part of the requirement.</p>
<p>Oversight, etc.</p> <p>Program is coordinated by a “small staff with many other responsibilities.</p> <p>No indication that there is any separate assessment aside from student ratings of teaching.</p> <p>Small grants to help faculty enhance student opportunities within their FYE courses.</p>
<p>Benefit(s)</p> <p>Students have access to a small class.</p> <p>Faculty receive the benefit of teaching a small class.</p>

Institution: University of Massachusetts at Amherst

About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc.

OASIS First-Year Seminar is a 1-credit course for freshmen that meets once a week and works with an academic advisor exploring transition to college issues. Additionally, all freshmen are required to take a Writing Course in their first year.

Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc.

Source: website

Residential Academic Programs (RAP) offer unique living and learning opportunities designed to help first-year transition to college. When students join a RAP, they become a part of a small community on a large campus. They live with others who share similar academic interests or majors, enroll in specific classes together, and live in a designated residence hall. Classes satisfy general education requirements and are existing courses.

More than 40% of incoming students join RAPS. (For fall 2008, approximately 1,800 students will join a RAP. Additionally, several RAPS (Focused) have a special feature of the OASIS First-Year Seminar, a 1-credit class that meets once per week and works closely with an academic advisor exploring transition to college issues.

Example: Health Sciences RAP Fall 2008

This RAP is ideal for first-year students who have a declared major or an interest in a major related to health sciences. This community explores the personal and professional opportunities available through majoring in Kinesiology, Communication Disorders, Nutrition, Pre-Dental and Pre-Med.

A student will:

- Choose from a variety of courses that provide an opportunity to learn about majors and current topics in health sciences
- Share a living-and –learning experience with a community of peers dedicated to improving the quality of health-related research, services, and education.
- Enhance their understanding of the health sciences and the many positive effects this field has on people and the world.

In the Fall, students will enroll in Medical Ethics, a small class that will be taught in the residential area.

Students will also enroll in one of the following classes taught on the main campus with lab sections reserved for students in the Health Science RAP (based on Math Placement, test scores, academic goals and advisor recommendations.)

- Introduction to Biology
- General Chemistry
- College Writing

Oversight, etc.

The Residential Academic Programs are organized within the Undergraduate Advising and Learning Communities unit of the Provost’s Office reporting to the Associate Provost for Planning and Assessment.

Benefit(s)

- Ease of registration. Each RAP includes specific courses and provides 4-10 credits.
- Smooth transition. Builds academic and social exploration through courses and residential area.
- Supportive community. Form study groups and work cooperatively with peers.

Institution: Fordham University
About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc. None found.
Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc. There is a Freshman Advising Program. All first year students get a “specially trained faculty advisor” and are required to meet with them at least twice each semester. Each faculty has 16 advisees. They discuss: the college bulletin, study skills, time management, <i>academic integrity</i> , course scheduling, and major selection. All faculty required to submit midterm grades for frosh. These grades given to advisors who then meet with advisees to discuss them.
Oversight, etc. None mentioned. Not clear from website.
Benefit(s) This will really insure that underachieving students don’t fall through the cracks. If someone is having problems, then it’s caught no later that half way through the semester.

Institution: New York University
About the FYE Course(s) including learning objectives, intellectual achievement, engagement, size, library skills, transitional issues, study habits, satisfy requirements, within existing courses, etc. None found
Learning Communities and Other Components including Residential Life, Summer Planning Conference, Exposure/Participation in clubs, organizations, athletics, etc. There are 7 all-frosh residence halls. Events of all kinds held there—e.g. sex ed, alcohol consumption, social justice, etc. Students can be part of FYRE Exploration Community: arts community, filmmaking, dead poet society, women writers, musicians, community outreach, pre-health, photography. No academic component to FYE found.
Oversight, etc.
Benefit(s) Events bring like-minded freshmen together.

Appendix D: Proposed Guidelines for an FYE Course

**Proposed “FYE course” for discussion only
(John Delano: 13 August 2008)**

Design elements

- Sustainable curriculum (i.e., academic theme) for buy-in by faculty (and administration)
- Associated with existing GenEd program (*not* a stand-alone FYE program)
- 1-credit course expected by Deans of most departments and programs
- 1-credit should not be an onerous burden for most faculty
- 3-credit course-reduction in a semester after three, 1-credit courses
- Tenured faculty (not TAs; not adjuncts) responsible for course ± undergraduate ‘preceptors’
- Review of course proposals on an individual faculty basis (not generic course approval): GenEd Comm.
- Faculty reminded that reasonable grade-distributions expected (not >90% A’s)
- Teaching these 1-credit courses would become a merit criterion for discretionary salary increases
- Director of program may not be necessary (since there’s no program)

Characteristics of proposed course

- 1 credit (GenEd, perhaps either Information Literacy or Lower Division Writing Intensive)
- Developed around specific academic theme, possibly associated with a 3-credit GenEd course
- Blend of topics among weekly reading assignments: academic theme; cultural skills; research concepts
- Research concepts needed for term paper are infused throughout the course
- Discussion-rich class format
- <30 students, preferably ~20 students
- Semester grade composed on following % components:
 - Research paper due at end of semester (20%) with comments and revisions
 - Weekly writing assignments (~45%)
 - Attendance counts (e.g., 5%)
 - Quality of oral participation in weekly discussions counts (~10%)
 - Two scheduled quizzes (20%)

Appendix E: Sample Course Outline for a Proposed FYE Course

UFSP 100 (call #8148) Freshman Seminar (1 credit)

It's not easy being 'Green'

Course website: <http://www.atmos.albany.edu/UFSP100>

Thursdays at 4:15 – 5:10 PM in Earth Science 325

Instructor: John W. Delano, Ph.D.

Distinguished Teaching Professor

Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

The University at Albany (SUNY)

Telephone: (518) 442-4479 e-mail: jdelano@atmos.albany.edu

Office hours (Earth Science 313)

Mondays at 10:00-11:00 AM; Wednesdays at 9:00-10:00 AM; and by appointment

Message to students: *Welcome to the University at Albany and to this class!* This course will examine the emerging technologies for renewable energy and the scientific data bearing on human-induced climate change. In addition, we will discuss the academic culture and expectations of this research university. With respect to climate change, we will learn about and discuss what is involved in going 'green' (i.e., becoming environmentally sustainable; making our carbon footprint small). This quest requires us to not only be aware of scientific and technical information, but also develop a strong sense of global responsibility since 'everyone is downwind of everyone else' on this planet. During the semester, you will be invited to Professor Delano's home (transportation will be provided for the 30-minute drive) on a weekend afternoon to enjoy lunch in the countryside with his family, and to see his family's on-going commitments toward environmental sustainability (i.e., solar panels for electricity; solar thermal system for domestic hot water; recycling; enjoying locally grown foods; flexitarian eating). While your attendance on that weekend trip is not required, you are most welcome and encouraged to attend.

Two axioms to be aware of during the semester (and beyond):

Herbert Stein's Law: *That which is not sustainable ... will end.*

Native American proverb: *We do not inherit the environment from our parents ... we borrow it from our children.*

(a) The reading assignments will be posted at the course web site (<http://www.atmos.albany.edu/UFSP100>) for you to download to your computer. Since the format of each class during the semester will involve *discussion of questions* associated with the assignments, it is important that you have carefully read and thought about the assignment before coming to class. The quality of your participation in these discussions will be assessed at the end of each class and be worth 10% of the semester-grade. (b) Please be sure to regularly check your UAlbany e-mail accounts for messages from Professor Delano throughout the semester. (c) Attendance will be worth 5% of the semester-grade. (d) As shown in the syllabus on the next page of this document, weekly writing-assignments will occur throughout the semester. These writing assignments, which will typically be 1 page in length, will be graded according to criteria explicitly discussed in class by Professor Delano. These writing assignments will be worth 45% of the semester-grade. (e) There will be two quizzes with 10 multiple-guess questions each during the semester that will be worth 20% of the semester-grade. (f) There will be a final writing assignment on a specific theme: *My Carbon Footprint: What is it, and how can it be diminished?* This paper will be 4 pages in length, and be well-researched, including frequent citations throughout the text. The majority of those citations should be from peer-reviewed publications and books, rather than internet sources. Start now to research this paper. It is worth 20% of the semester-grade and will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday, December 4. (g) The

grading system for the course is a simple and familiar one: 90's are A's; 80's are B's; 70's are C's; 60's are D's; and <60 are E's. The grading system also assigns '+' and '-' within each of those numerical intervals (e.g., B- is 80-83; B is 84-86; B+ is 87-89).

Welcome to this Freshman Seminar!! I look forward to our working together this semester!!
Throughout the semester, I encourage you to read carefully, think critically, and make connections!!

Important dates in the Fall 2008 academic calendar:

September 8: Last day to drop semester-length courses without 'W' on transcript.

September 22: Last day to file for either A-E or S/U grading option.

November 7: Last day to drop semester-length courses with 'W' on transcript

John W. Delano,

- August 28:** Introduction; Academic expectations of the University; Opportunities for education at a research university. Articles (2) to read for next class: Rick Anthes (2007) "*The global trajectory, take two: What's changed since 1993?*"; Elder and Paul (2004) "*Becoming a critic of your thinking*"; Estimate your carbon footprint by going to the following web site:
<http://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>
- September 4:** Writing assignment #1 due on Anthes (2007); Discussion of Anthes (2007) + Elder and Paul (2004) + results of your carbon footprint. Articles (2) to read for next class: T. Boone Pickens at <http://www.pickensplan.org/theplan>; Hayden et al. *WISPR: A Constructivist Approach to Information Literacy Education in Blended Learning Environments*
- September 11:** Writing assignment #2 due on the Pickens' Plan; Discussion of the Pickens' Plan + WISPR. Articles (2) to read for next class: 2007 article "*Sorry, no solar panels in this neighborhood*"; Williams and McEnerney "*Writing in College, Part I*".
- September 18:** Writing assignment #3 due on solar panels article. Discussion of "*Sorry, no solar panels in this neighborhood*" and "*Writing in College, Part I*". Articles (2) to read for next class: Daniel Yergin (2006) in Wall Street Journal "*How much oil is really down there?*"; Emiliano Feresin (2007) in Nature "*Europe looks to draw power from Africa*".
- September 25:** Writing assignment #4 due on Feresin (2007). Discussion of Yergin (2006) and Feresin (2007). Article (1) to read for next class: Michael Grunwald (2008) in Time "*The Clean Energy Scam*".
- October 2:** **QUIZ #1.** Writing assignment #5 due on Grunwald (2008). Meeting with representative from Advisement Services Center. Discussion of "*The Clean Energy Scam*". Articles (2) to read for next class: Drake Bennett (2006) in the Boston Globe "*Oil futures*". Woolsey and Korin (2007) in the National Review Online "*Turning Oil into Salt*".
- October 9:** (no class)
- October 16:** Writing assignment #6 due on Woolsey and Korin (2007). Discussion of Bennett (2006) + Woolsey and Korin (2007). Article (1) to read for next class: Alexei Barrionuevo (2007) in New York Times "*Rise in ethanol raises concerns about corn as a food*".
- October 23:** Writing assignment #7 due on Barrionuevo (2007). Discussion of Barrionuevo (2007). Articles (2) to read for next class: John Fialka (2006) in Wall Street Journal "*After decades, a solar pioneer sees spark in sales*". "*Set America Free*" – proposed strategy for decreasing U.S. dependence on imported oil.
- October 30:** Writing assignment #8 due on "*Set America Free*". Discussion of Fialka (2006) + "*Set America Free*". Article (1) to read for next class: Cornell University IT (2006) "*Thoughts on Facebook*".

- November 6:** Writing assignment #9 due about Facebook. Discussion of “*Thoughts on Facebook*”. Articles (2) to read for next class: Patrick Barta (2007) in Wall Street Journal “*Jatropha plant gains steam in global race for biofuels*”; Bjorn Lomborg (2007) in Wall Street Journal “*Storm surge*”.
- November 13:** Writing assignment #10 due on Barta (2007). Discussion of Barta (2007) and Lomborg (2007). Articles to read for next class: “*What UAlbany faculty expect from their students*”; “*Standards of Academic Integrity*”; “*How to study math*”; “*Let my loss be your gain*”.
- November 20:** ***QUIZ #2.*** Writing assignment #11 due. Discussion of assigned readings. Assignment: Complete the writing of papers due on December 4.
- November 27:** (no class)
- December 4:** Paper due; Capstone discussion: Offer a critical perspective on competing points-of-view, including the challenges of being ‘green’; What can we as individuals, and we as global citizens, do to live both well and sustainably?

First-Year Experience Task Force Co-Chairs

Diane Dewar, Associate Professor, Health Policy
Wayne Locust, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, Office of the Provost

First-Year Experience Task Force Members

Robert Andrea, Director, Undergraduate Admissions
Samantha Bernstein, Vice President, Student Association
Lee Bickmore, Associate Professor, Anthropology
Courtney D'Allaird, Undergraduate Student
John Delano, Distinguished Teaching Professor, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
Christopher Fernando, Coordinator, Project Excel / Academic Support Services
Glyne Griffith, Associate Professor, English
Teresa Harrison, Chair and Professor, Communication
Trudi Jacobson, Head of User Education, University Libraries
Kimberly Kerker, Senior Academic Advisor, Advisement Services
Leandra Payne, Assistant Director of University Apartments, Residential Life
John Pipkin, Distinguished Service Professor, Geography and Planning
Barbara Rio, Assistant Chair, Undergraduate Program; School of Social Welfare
Robert Rosellini, Distinguished Teaching Professor, Psychology
Kevin Williams, Professor and Chair, Psychology
Elga Wulfert, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences / Professor, Psychology

First-Year Experience Task Force Staff

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Internal Subcommittee (Chair: John Pipkin)

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Barbara Rio, Assistant Chair, Undergraduate Program; School of Social Welfare
Gregory Stevens, Assistant Dean, College of Arts and Sciences / Director, University in the High School Program
Kevin Williams, Professor and Chair, Psychology
Elga Wulfert, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences / Professor, Psychology

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First-Year Experience Task Force Consultants

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Barbara Brown, Program Coordinator/Academic Advisor, Advisement Services
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Michelle Forte, Lecturer, Project Renaissance
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High School Program
Bruce Szelest, Assistant Vice President, Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness
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