

***ad hoc* Provost/Senate Academic, Residence Life, and Student Affairs Liaison Committee (ARLSA)  
Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year  
Final Report to the Academic Senate  
October 23, 2007**

**Proposed Resolution**

The Academic Senate endorses the Foundations of Excellence Final Report from the *ad hoc* Provost/Senate Academic, Residence Life, and Student Affairs Liaison Committee (ARLSA), supports the spirit of each of the six recommendations and asks the Provost to provide assistance to ARLSA as it (a) investigates the feasibility of the recommendations, (b) addresses the financial feasibility of each recommendation, (c) reviews the responsible centers and (d) develops a sequential implementation plan to be reviewed by the Academic Senate on or before December 15, 2007.

**Foundations of Excellence™  
Executive Summary to the Academic Senate**

The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) self-study of the first year of college is an expansion of the work of the *ad hoc* Provost/Senate Academic, Residence Life and Student Affairs Liaison Committee (ARLSA), a joint committee of the Provost's Office and the Academic Senate. In response to the CMU 2010 vision plan, the ARLSA Committee's charge was revised to include evaluation of the impact of current efforts, identification and evaluation of opportunities, and formulation of recommendations for greater coordination and expansion of programs or efforts that institute and promote student engagement and academic success, particularly during a student's first year. The focus of the FoE self-study is meant to better understand this critical time for retention, learning, and development of the skills that support new students' future learning. Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year™ uses an aspirational model to evaluate achievement of excellence and construct an action plan for institutional improvement. More than 300 four-year and two-year institutions assisted in the creation of the model and process. Foundational Dimension statements provide institutions with a means to evaluate and improve the first year of college. As an evaluation tool, the model enables institutions both to confirm their strengths and to recognize the need for improvement. A key outcome from the self-study process is the cultivation of campus expertise about the first year of college.

More than 100 faculty, staff and students, over an eight-month period, investigated key aspects of the first college year, connecting ideas and evidence throughout the self-study process. The presence of these multiple perspectives increases the independence, depth and breadth of the study. This diversity and rigor also supports the integrity of the process and cultivates a broad campus network invested in both the study, and more importantly, the outcomes. With assistance from members of the task force as well as specific departments and offices, data served as the basis for decisions related to both the study of current realities and rationale for recommended actions to advance excellence in the first college year. Quantitative and qualitative analyses allowed the study to move beyond anecdotal or singular indicators. Incorporating students, faculty and staff from all departments reflected a commitment to shared governance and an attempt to promote trust and credibility.

The self-study revealed several areas that illustrate our commitment to students and their success during the first college year. While pockets of excellence exist throughout campus, independent committee work noted the following themes and components.

### **Strengths**

1. CMU offers excellent printed materials, programs, events and services that communicate and orient students and/or family members to the college environment.
2. A variety of events and/or services are supported by multiple divisions across campus to assist all students with achieving academic success.
3. Opportunities for co-curricular activity are available and communicated to students through multiple venues.
4. Several excellent opportunities exist that connect first-year students with experienced students, faculty and staff, both academically and socially, serve to educate students holistically.
5. Programs exist that positively impact student retention and persistence.

Just as the self-study highlighted the positive work taking place across campus, areas for continued focus and improvement also emerged. Independent committees working in each of the nine Foundational Dimensions noted the following opportunities for improvement in matters related to the first college year.

### **Opportunities for Improvement**

1. There is administrative support to encourage cooperative functions between Academic Affairs, Colleges, the Dean of Students and Auxiliary Services. With that said, it is recognized there is a need for improved communication among the many groups, including students, to inform, support and share ideas regarding the importance and link between in-class and out-of-class experiences.
2. CMU values the first year of college. This is articulated in the CMU 2010 strategic plan, and was identified by faculty and staff on numerous occasions throughout this self-study; however, we currently do not have a university-wide philosophy, program goals, or learning outcomes for the first year of college. This will hamper our ability to achieve success.
3. Development and training sessions that include faculty, staff and teaching assistants are recognized as important components to student retention, persistence and academic achievement. There is a need to provide greater awareness among many constituents by offering joint workshops, seminars, professional meetings, and other learning opportunities to assist personnel who support students in their first year of college.
4. CMU provides valuable information through organized learning communities and experiences for first-year students. Unfortunately, not all students take advantage of these. Requiring all students to participate in some organized learning experience would assist with the dissemination of key information about a) academic expectations and academic integrity, b) the importance of connecting with faculty and staff for advising and support, c) creating a community in which the exploration of diverse ideas is valued and accepted and d) providing a foundation for students to appreciate the value of both education and living in global, pluralistic communities. These factors could yield improvement in student learning, retention and persistence.

## Recommendations

The Foundational Dimensions Committees developed 50 priority action items for consideration. These were analyzed for major themes and elements. The resulting six recommendations were developed to continue CMU's tradition of excellence by meeting the learning and developmental needs of students.

**1. Create a First Year of College Office (recommended by members of the Organization, Learning, Faculty, Transitions, All Students, and Improvement Dimensions).**

Based on the findings of several dimension committees, there is a need to provide leadership and oversight in coordinating all of the first year student policies, practices and programs to assure consistency and continuity. It is recommended that a first-year office be created and appropriately funded to include a full-time (director or dean) position and support staff. The primary responsibilities of the office would include the following:

- work collaboratively with each area of campus and major programming geared for first-year students;
- assist with the coordination of a centralized academic advising process;
- develop an outcome assessment plan for the entire first year including academic and non-academic programs;
- create a culture of evidence which includes the dissemination of assessment data and discussion about the value and relevance of assessment data with faculty and staff;
- use assessment results for planning, resource allocation and decision-making;
- share results with the university community and other stakeholders.

Additionally, it is recommended that a First-Year Council comprised of faculty, staff and students be created and supported by the provost, vice president of financial and administrative services, and academic senate, to advise and assist the First Year of College Director/Dean in assuring the implementation of the first-year philosophy, learning goals and programs.

**2. Develop a University-wide First Year of College Philosophy and Learning Goals (recommended by members of the Philosophy, Organization, Learning, Faculty, Transition and Diversity Dimensions).**

The university community should develop a university-wide philosophy and a set of learning goals for the first college year. These should be widely shared with faculty, staff and students to cultivate a common vision. All departments and units should be encouraged to use the philosophy statement as a guide for developing strategies to assist with the transitional needs of first year students.

The Philosophy Dimension Committee has developed the following statement to serve as a foundation from which to begin the discussion and formation of a campus-wide philosophy and set of learning goals for the first college year.

*Central Michigan University endeavors to be a university that offers a combination of a comprehensive curriculum and auxiliary services for its entering first-year students that facilitates successful transition to college, retention of the student through graduation, intellectual engagement, student success in academic activities, self-direction and responsibility for the person's decisions and actions.*

- 3. Require all first year students to be involved with a learning community (recommended by members of the Organization, Transition, All Students, Diversity, and Roles and Purposes Dimensions).**

Requiring all students to be involved in a learning community would better prepare each student for their college experience. Information to assist first year students to succeed would be coordinated to help students with their transition to college, engage students in an exploration of the value of a college education, and connect first year students with faculty and other students to promote stronger feeling of community.

- 4. Create a Development/Training Program and Manual for faculty, staff and teaching assistants [recommended by members of the Organization, Faculty, Diversity, Roles and Purposes, and Improvement Dimensions).**

The purpose of this program and manual (which may include online materials) would be to better prepare all faculty, staff and teaching assistants to meet the changing needs of our first year students, and provide a consistent message regarding the importance of the first year. The development/training program and manual would be essential for all first year course faculty, staff and teaching assistants, and should be incorporated in the orientation program for new faculty, staff and teaching assistants. For example, materials and topics would include information such as a) campus resources, programs and activities; b) course development that focuses on pedagogies to best engage first year students; c) evaluation methods that provide early and regular feedback; and d) techniques to facilitate discussions that bring up diverse ideas and manage the challenges that come with issues of diversity.

- 5. Recognize faculty, staff and other personnel within the first year experience (recommended by the Faculty Dimension).**

Reward departments and units for making opportunities available for faculty and staff members to be involved with students in the first year, including the teaching of first year courses. Provide opportunities to engage faculty and staff on a rotating basis to teach first year courses, to be engaged in activities that focus on first year students and to engage in professional development to support continuous learning of teaching and engagement.

- 6. Enhance communication regarding the first year of college (recommended by the Learning, Transition, Diversity, and Roles and Purposes Dimensions).**

A more intentional communication plan is advised to provide information regarding the importance of the first year and CMU's commitment to student success and academic achievement to students, faculty, staff, administrators as well as prospective students, parents and the public at-large. Communication may include a broad spectrum of formats such as posting guidelines on the University's website, CMU portal, listservs, Blackboard and through printed material such as the viewbook and academic bulletin and Master Course Syllabi.

*Action Plan*

|     | <i>Recommendation</i>  | <i>Proposed Time Frame</i>  | <i>Suggested Responsible Party(ies)</i>                    | <i>Required Investment</i>   |
|-----|--|---|--|--|
| R-1 | Create a first year of college office with a full-time coordinator / director  | August 2008-<br>Ongoing<br><br><i>*Implement by July 2008</i>           | Provost  | Human Resources: create positions description(s), conduct search, etc.<br><br>Financial Resources: full-time position and support (250K +) |
| R-2 | Develop a university-wide first year of college philosophy statement and learning goals  | September 2007 – December 2007<br><br><i>*Implement by January 2008</i> | ARLSA  | Human Resources: committee work<br><br>Financial Resources: n/a  |
| R-3 | Require all first-year students to be involved in a learning community   | January 2008 – Ongoing<br><br><i>*Implement by Fall 2009</i>            | Provost  | Human Resources: committee work<br><br>Financial Resources: overload, course release, staffing   |
| R-4 | Create professional development/training program with manual and seminars for all FY instructors (faculty, staff, and teaching assistants) | March 2008 – Ongoing<br><br><i>*Implement by Fall 2008</i>              | ARLSA, FaCIT   | Human Resources: committee work<br><br>Financial Resources: support for workshops and professional conferencing                            |
| R-5 | Recognize faculty, staff and other personnel involved with students in the first college year  | January 2008 – Ongoing<br><br><i>*Implement by Fall 2008</i>            | ARLSA, Provost, VP for Finance and Administrative Services | Human Resources: committee work<br><br>Financial Resources: support for recognition, award(s), reception                                   |
| R-6 | Enhance communication regarding the first year of college.   | August 2007 – Ongoing<br><br><i>*Implement by Spring 2008</i>           | Vice Provost for Academic Affairs                          | Human Resources: committee work<br><br>Financial Resources: printed materials, graphic/web design, mailings                                |