

**TO:** JULIA WALLACE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT/PROVOST  
**FROM:** RAP  
**SUBJECT:** RAISING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS  
**DATE:** 2/19/2009  
**CC:** RAP AD HOC WORK GROUP

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We appreciate the extra time to complete our work. Although we still have some additional analysis to do we wanted to give you a preliminary report, particularly because some of our recommendations converge on actions being contemplated by the Academic Senate and others. We also value your insights on these matters and the essential role your influence, and that of the deans, vice provosts and senate leaders, will play as we go forward.

Actions we are requesting at this time:

- A presentation of our preliminary recommendations to the Senate Executive Board so that members can be aware of our preliminary recommendations and be able to offer feedback on how best to move this report forward and coordinate with other related initiatives (e.g., general education).
- A conversation with the deans and First Year Experience Advisory Board regarding our preliminary recommendations and to solicit their reactions to these preliminary recommendations.
- A preliminary analysis by the Foundations of Excellence Implementation Committee regarding the feasibility of the preliminary recommendations in this document.
- An extension of the term of our task force until October 1, 2008, by which time we will make a final set of recommendations.

## **Background**

A task force of administrators, faculty, and students from across the university was convened. The members of this committee have significant experience with academic standards issues and most have served on other University committees that have examined various aspects of university life and CMU initiatives related to this charge (e.g., CMU 2010, Foundations of Excellence, General Education, ARLSA Committee, Academic Integrity, First Year Experience). A review of institutional data, relevant professional literature, and an environmental scan of other university's efforts to raise academic performance were all considered.

A comparison of our current institutional efforts to best practices identified in the literature and the activities of institutions identified as models for revitalizing undergraduate education reveal that Central Michigan University is already doing, in part, most of the activities recommended in both the academic and student affairs units. What is missing, however, is a coordinated effort tying these activities together into a coherent effort as experienced by CMU students, staff, or faculty.

To that end, this working group is making a series of recommendations with the targeted goal of creating a cultural shift among both students and faculty to prioritize undergraduate teaching and the value of liberal learning as a core feature of the CMU experience. To ensure that this institutional value is clearly communicated, that academic expectations are clearly articulated, and that resources available to support student learning and growth are introduced to CMU students clearly and consistently, the focus of these recommendations revolve around coordinated efforts to acculturate and orient all students to the academic

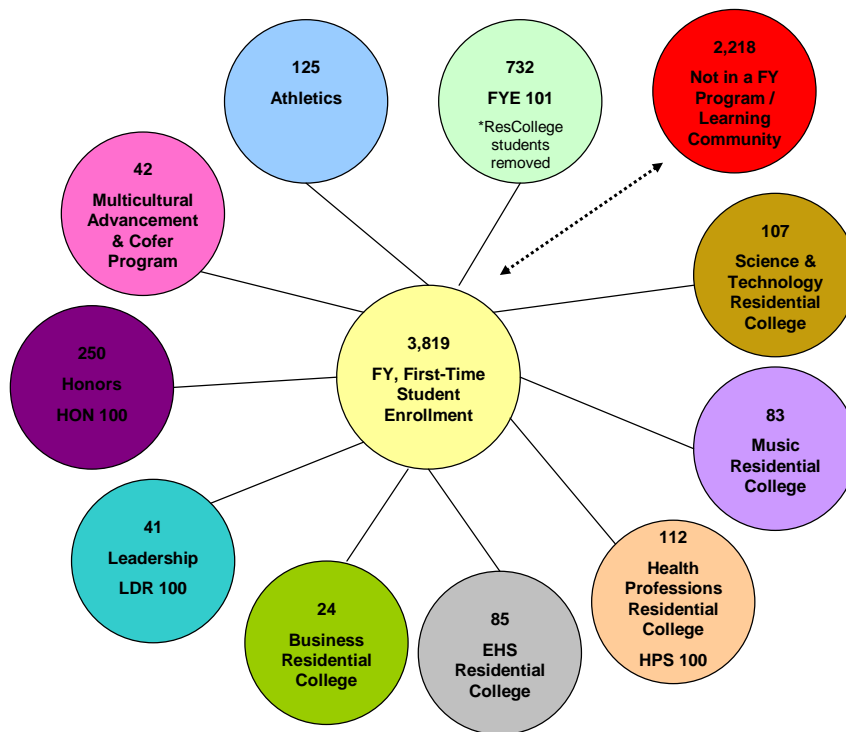
life of the university during their first year of studies. If implemented, we believe these recommendations would significantly transform the overall performance of all undergraduate students.

**Recommendation One: Establish responsibilities for oversight, coordination and evaluation of all first-year focused activities.**

- Consider linkages between potential new positions like the Director of General Education and the leadership of the first-year focused activities.
- Communicate to all stakeholders the importance of students' first year of college to their overall success.

**Recommendation Two: Ensure that all first-year students participate in one of the campus's first year programs**

- Currently, about half of first year undergraduates engage in first-year programs of some type. These programs and the number of students participating in Fall 2007 can be seen below. The red circle represents the 2,218 students we estimate are not participating in a first year program.



**\*Note** - In the current model there may be students who participate in more than one FY program / learning community; therefore, the number of students not engaged may be slightly greater than the model indicates.

- Our review of the literature and CMU research suggests that all first-year students can benefit from these intentional efforts to support their transition to college and their enhanced academic performance. Therefore, we recommend existing efforts be sustained at current levels or expanded so that all students could be accommodated. Program expansion would be in response to student demand and documented effectiveness.

- All first-year programs would have a common set of learning outcomes, similar to those of the current core outcomes of the FYE program. This would require some adjustment in most of the existing programs, as well as training for all instructors or program leaders. Beyond these standardized elements, there would be flexibility within which programs could be innovative and responsive to students' needs.
- All first-year programs would participate in a set of common assessment and program evaluation activities.
- We also recommend that a new first-year seminar be established in the form of First-Year Seminars. (Note this is not the same thing as the FYE course as will be described below.) This would be an additional option for students. If the seminars proved successful, our hope is that eventually all first-year students would experience one First-Year Seminar.

Some other details on the First-Year Seminar necessary to its successful implementation:

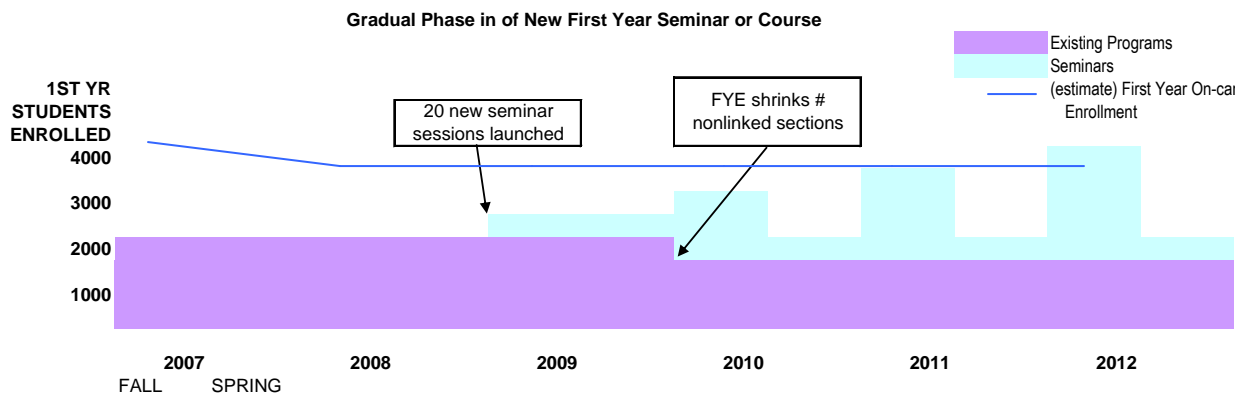
- The provost encourages the development of First-Year Seminars.
- First-Year Seminars are created by infusing extended orientation and academic skill building into existing general education or in entry-level courses in majors/colleges which lend themselves to such infusion. Infused into the courses would be the following learning objectives:
  - Increase students' understanding of higher education processes and the principles that guide the development of students during their collegiate experience.
  - Empower students to promote their own academic success and personal growth.
  - Engage students in the diverse intellectual and social life of the university.
  - Include a significant writing and reading components.
  - Explain college level standards for academic integrity (and the processes/consequences associated with violation of these standards).
  - Promote student civility and expectations for appropriate behavior in the college environment.
  - Discuss the meaning of academic freedom and the opportunities for faculty and students occasioned by the exercise of academic freedom.
  - Enhance awareness and utilization of academically oriented resources and supports (including the value of meeting with instructors out of class and the use of the writing and math centers)
- Many departments will be able to create First-Year Seminars, although there is no expectation that all departments will develop them.
- First-Year Seminars will enroll no more than 25 per section.
- First-Year Seminars will be taught by full-time faculty committed to providing a student-focused educational experience and who will receive professional development and ongoing assistance to support a student-focused/student success approach.
- Instructors of First-Year Seminars would teach the seminars 'in load.' Given that this will be a four-credit hour class, it may be necessary in some departments for one of the credits to be handled as an overload.
- Typically, the seminars would appear on students' schedules as a three-credit hour course, linked with a one credit hour lab, to reflect the FYE-type content. However, the traditional course and FYE-type content should be fully integrated. The FYE content would include academic success skills, and campus resources and events.

We continue to discuss three approaches to the First-Year Seminar. The first option is the easiest to accomplish because it involves little curricular change and a decentralized effort. The others would be more difficult, but possibly more transformative for CMU.

**1. Use Existing Courses for the First-Year Seminar (I thought we viewed this one as the most feasible)**

- a. Identify existing general education or entry level courses in the major and infuse those with ‘FYE content’ resulting in a four-credit hour First-Year Seminar.
- b. Allow only first year students to register for these courses. Students would only be allowed to enroll one of the Seminars.
- c. Select and give professional development to faculty and mentors prior to teaching the Seminar.
- d. Link a one-credit FYE 101 course to each section of these courses as a mechanism to supply mentors, professional development and student-focused assessment. FYE already uses this approach to some extent.

Recognizing the scope of these First-Year Seminar recommendations in terms of course identification, scheduling, and revision, as well as professional and financial resource development, we recommend a phased in approach over a number of years. We also recognize the value of Residence Life’s contributions to students’ academic pursuits and overall success and therefore would seek programmatic linkages of any of the above with programming in the Residence Halls.



**Recommendation Three: Improve the availability of high quality advising to undergraduate students (Note: this fits with Recommendation #2 because of FYE seminar)**

- Institute additional pre-term sessions for new students to improve their academic achievement. Such sessions might include summer “bridge programs” for students defined as “at risk” or might focus on the remediation of specific skills such as math. Consider innovative delivery formats using the week or two prior to the beginning of semester to offer extended orientation sessions or activities such as Leadership Safari. Work to link any such program to enhancing academic performance.
- Implement the automated degree audit system for undergraduates and their advisors. Assure appropriate notification of and training surrounding use of the system.
- Increase knowledge of professional advisors of individual majors.
- Institute mechanisms within each major to foster greater contact between faculty advisors and their advisees as well as group advising sessions on particular topics.

**Recommendation Four: Create an early warning system for first year students (This is being currently piloted by Lynn L’Hommedieu in Academic Advising #774-6601)**

- Make available to advisors the information collected by Residence Life and already being communicated to students regarding their risk factors and interest in services

- Implement an early warning system for all first year students through which students receiving a grade less than C would be notified and asked to visit with their instructors.
- Ask all faculty teaching first year students to use the functionality with Blackboard to identify students who have not signed into Blackboard by the beginning of the second week of classes and to review those students to appropriate campus resources.

**Recommendation Five: Expand the services offered by the Math Assistance Center to include support for all quantitatively intensive 100 and 200 level courses and continue support of the Writing Center and the Supplemental Instruction Program.**

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

- A teaching and learning environment that distinguishes itself relative to large public institutions of our type by seriously engaging students both academically and socially from their first year forward.
- Higher success rates of first-year students as measured by reduced DEW rates in general education courses and more hours completed by the end of their second term.
- Enhanced engagement of undergraduate students in the intellectual life of the university as measured by NSSE or related instruments.
- Cadre of undergraduate mentors whose own educational or career aspirations have been heightened by partnership with faculty.
- Students who make timely progress toward their academic goals.
- Increased student retention to their second year and through to graduation.

### **Resource Implications**

- Increase in resources required for transition of the introductory courses that become First-Year Seminars.
- Decrease in revenue from introductory courses that previously had enrollments larger than 25. Increase in revenue from conversion from three to four hours.
- Need to hire more faculty or increase enrollments in other general education or major courses
- Need for more faculty development and support for faculty teaching larger sections and teaching writing
- Increase in resources needed to expand orientation, automated degree audit training, and coordination of first year activities.
- Need for more sophisticated course scheduling procedures and increased coordination across departments and colleges.

### **Conclusion**

We believe these recommendations will significantly impact the performance of CMU undergraduates by a creating a shift toward a culture increasingly focused on teaching and learning. Without these or similar coordinated efforts that touch all or virtually all of our incoming students and create opportunities for more of our finest faculty to engage more fully with incoming students, we do not believe CMU will be able to raise in meaningful and consistent ways the performance of our undergraduates. However, with the investments required to implement the recommendations we propose here, we believe undergraduate performance will be raised in ways that further distinguish CMU as institution that effectively educates students from many backgrounds and levels of preparation for their chosen futures.