

## 1. How did we focus on charge?

The charge to the faculty committee in ASU's First-Year Forward program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences follows the John Gardner Institute's rationale for the faculty dimension, namely the mildly stated "at many colleges and universities, there is a less than desirable level of meaningful interaction between first-year students and faculty." Our conversations, sometimes heated, responded to this with discussions of overall faculty expectations at ASU, department cultures, faculty preparation, and potential outcomes. Committee members quickly realized that there could not be an effective "one size fits all" response to the charge. We decided not only to accept the quantitative data provided through the Gardner Institute's survey, but to design and carry out a qualitative survey. Armed with information from both surveys, we focused on a limited set of tactical interventions that might increase useful contact between first-year students and faculty of all ranks. We had to take a close, and hard, look at issues of tenured/tenure-line faculty specifically. The contract faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at ASU are in most units the front-line faculty for teaching first-year students. This was seen neither as desirable nor as a problem: it's simply a fact on the ground, with many of our contract faculty (regardless of rank within that status) doing an outstanding job of teaching first year students, largely through standardized introductory courses with sections mixing first-year students, majors at a later stage of their careers, and non-majors at various stages of their undergraduate educations.

As we discuss below, the qualitative data provide insight into the broad brushstrokes of the data from the John Gardner Institute's survey. Both sets of data were mirrored by the sometimes intense conversations on our committee, which included disagreements on the kinds of reading material ASU first-year students are able to engage in the classroom to the issue of junior faculty needing to focus on research, with teaching following that primary need. Should our research-intensive faculty be required to spend time in introductory classes with students not prepared to support ASU's research mission? The age-old question of the relationship between teaching and research lies behind continued discussion of the role of our research-intensive faculty in the university's teaching mission. Perhaps inviting select students (whether in the Honors College or not) to work in a faculty member's lab might be better for that faculty member's career and, therefore, in the long term interest of Arizona State University. Should faculty teach their field of expertise? Or is there room for faculty engagement in more general courses that might be similar to "The Human Event," taught to all first-year students in Barrett, The Honors College? To what extent should faculty be "rewarded" for engagement with first-year students above the general expectations for teaching excellence in our promotion and tenure guidelines?

Thus we see largely structural issues that need to be addressed (not "solved") in order to serve students and also to serve faculty, who indicated a willingness (with wariness) to engage first-year students in meaningful ways. These structural issues seem equally divided between expectations for the various roles faculty play at ASU and the way we handle undergraduate education, particularly for students who arrive with less extensive academic preparation.

In this report, we address these structural issues with suggestions for small-scale local interventions, realizing that we cannot change the complicated set of faculty expectations at all ranks, particularly of the

tenured/tenure-track faculty. Before providing these recommendations, however, we provide analysis of the data gathered regarding faculty and campus culture.

## **2. What did we do to gather information and data? Our observations.**

### **Data gathered by John Gardner Institute**

The Gardner Institute's set of faculty data indicate that faculty see a conflict between the expectations for involvement with first-year students (set by the university, by unit leadership, and by colleagues) and the rewards and recognition provided for that involvement. Three quarters of faculty responding indicate that the expectations for involvement with first-year students at ASU are moderate, high, or very high, with the highest expectations registered for unit leadership. However, more than two-thirds of faculty believe that neither colleagues, nor unit leadership, nor institutional leadership "acknowledge, recognize, or reward" excellence in teaching first year students to a high or very high degree.

### **Data gathered by ASU Faculty Dimensions Committee**

In order to more fully understand faculty's opinions and views on freshmen and their relationship with freshmen, we decided to conduct a qualitative study to supplement the quantitative FoE survey. Although the survey we gave is in no way scientific or representative of the entire faculty at ASU, we judged the data to be more in-depth and nuanced, so that together with the FoE study, we can understand how faculty view their role with freshmen engagement and then make the appropriate recommendations based on both sets of data.

### **Sample and Demographics**

Data for our convenience sample of 30 tenured-track faculty within CLAS (n = 30) was collected between February 4 through February 26. Fifty-three percent of the sample were men, and 46% were women. Fifty-three percent of the sample held professorships for ten or more years, while 47% of the sample had been professors for less than ten years. Of these, 40% were full professors, 43% were associate professors and 16% were assistant professors. Twenty-seven percent of our sample held administrative appointments in their Schools, while 73% did not.

### **Findings**

Overall, we found that 53% faculty who do teach freshmen enjoy doing so. Additionally, 23% of faculty positively responded to teaching freshmen, if given the opportunity to do so. Finally, 66% of faculty thought that developing relationships with freshmen students was either "very important" or "extremely important" Another 30% deemed it "important." Only 3% of faculty in our sample thought it "unimportant."

When we ask whether faculty think they make an impact on freshmen, the preponderance of evidence suggests they believe strongly in the impact they make on freshmen. For example, one professor wrote, "Yes, not only through teaching them material in their courses but as mentors and role models. Professors set the tone for a class and the level of engagement of the students to some extent as well." Another professor wrote:

*"I do. In many ways. First, professors impact students by offering them guides to learn at higher levels than they have experienced previously. Second, professors impact students by expressing a passion that, in turn, generates excitement and passion. Third, professors make an impact on students by communicating as well as being compassionate and empathic, thereby dismantling barriers that impede learning. Fourth, professors make an impact on students by exposing them to processes, facts, and ranges of knowledge that are fundamentally and personally transformative. Fifth, professors make an impact on students by offering tangible learning and research experiences. Overall, the impact that professors make on students, regardless of the discipline, can and should be long lasting, providing tools and perspectives that students can bring to their future careers and lives."*

Finally, another professor wrote:

*“Of course, but this requires professors to be brilliant and engaging and students to be open to being inspired. Sometimes little things can make a difference, such as even showing a bit of care and concern. This I think is a symptom of the scale of ASU. But most of the impact I have generated has been through delivering quirky lectures. For example, I received this week an email from a former student who is a professor and received her first NSF-REU grant. She took my introductory level course in the subject, sat in the front and told me I had inspired her to go into the field. So that is impact. But the best thing faculty can do is to share a love of knowledge and an excitement about discovery. This transfers across fields and professions and is likely a major predictor of happiness and success in life.”*

There are many more answers that suggest the majority of our faculty do believe the work they are charged with is serious, they take their role seriously, and believe strongly that they make an impact on freshmen.

When we ask faculty what they think is important for freshmen students to know about their major, School, and ASU at large, we received varied responses. For example, one professor wrote, “Its important for students to know that ASU provides incredible opportunities that are there for the asking. Students need to know that taking the initiative to get engaged with faculty and their work will make their educational experience at ASU, and Psychology in particular, come alive.” Another professor wrote:

*“I think it is important to know that ASU, and my School, are vast and it will be very easy for them to get lost and leave without having gained much, other than frustration. I think they must know that they must be the ones who initiate contact with their professors and with their broader discipline and the ones who persist. Because, if they do, ASU is unparalleled in the opportunities it can provide them. I also would like them to know that education and training are not the same thing and that, despite the dire job situation etc., they should open themselves up to what may seem 'pointless' to them now. My discipline often provides courses that fulfill requirements for many different freshmen. I see it as a challenge to try to connect especially with the ones who will never encounter another anthropology class again. I try to show them how they are the products and the generators of both short and long term processes; how there are always trade offs; how they are connected not only with each other, but also with the rest of the material and immaterial world around them. I am frustrated by the context in which I have to teach freshmen. However, in that context I try, through my discipline, to connect our human past to their present and to do it in as personable a way as possible, so they see me as a potential person to approach for guidance in the vastness that ASU can be.”*

Finally, one professor wrote, “it is important for them to know that ASU is serious about its mission - access, excellence, and impact. The job of the professor is to drive and inspire them to excellence and encourage them to lead lives of impact on society.” As a whole, faculty want students to be aware of all the opportunities there are here to succeed not only in the classroom, but outside of the classroom, too. Faculty also view themselves as mentors and “guides” for freshmen. They are aware of the their role, it’s impact, and have definitive answers for what they think freshmen need to know to succeed. Such evidence supports the idea that many faculty make good efforts to connect and engage with freshmen students.

Next, we thought it important to ask the faculty what particular activity outside of the classroom they would engage in with freshmen. Therefore, we asked faculty on a scale of 1-5 where 1 equals “least desirable” and 5 equals “most desirable, which of the following they would consider doing with freshmen: having monthly lunches; having a monthly film showing and discussion related to their field of study, a brown bag colloquium, monthly field trip/other activity, or one on one mentoring.

Here are the average scores:

Proposed Activity	Average Score
Monthly Lunches	3.47
Monthly Film Showing/Discussions	3.43
Monthly field trip/activities	3.03
Brown bag colloquiums	2.60
One on one mentoring	2.47

As indicated, monthly lunches with freshmen students were the most desirable activity where faculty think they can engage, mentor, and learn more about their freshmen students. However,, no one approach is substantively a “better” way or the “only” way to connect with students.

### ***Current Practices/Protocols for Teaching Freshmen***

We thought it important to inquire about different Schools’ methods and procedures for faculty assignment to freshmen classes. The answers were varied. Mirroring the FoE data, there is not a standardized procedure in determining which faculty teach freshmen classes. Examples of responses to the question, “To the best of your knowledge, what is the procedure/protocol for determining which faculty in your School/Department teach freshmen students?” included the following:

*“Whomever has historically taught freshman classes usually continues doing so until conditions change (i.e. retirement). Then someone else is tapped. There is not a discussion of who or why in my experience and this discussion is not integrated into a broader strategic discussion about school curriculum (and I believe it should be).”*

Others wrote, “[I]n some instances it is stated preference by the faculty. For the most part, faculty are cycled through the courses every few years and are chosen quasi-randomly,” also, “[U]sually, only instructors or TAs teach freshmen in our department. Freshmen are seen as the “bottom of the barrel” in terms of teaching. I hope to see this change. We should have our best teachers working with freshmen students.” All in all, there seems to be *little* intentionality when determining which faculty teach freshmen students. Moreover, there is not a standardized practice to how School administrators determine this. Another professor wrote that “most teaching of freshmen is done by lecturers and advisors (for 191s)”; thus, freshmen do not encounter tenured track faculty in some freshmen only classes. Still another professor found that there is a difference between “introductory “ courses and courses designed for freshmen:

*“I don't know that this is a procedure at all because there is no clear relationship between course level and freshman status. In fact, I suspect most of the students in our intro classes are not true freshmen. The only specifically geared course is the 100 level, 19-student courses. I don't know of any procedure for that class besides asking who is willing to do the class that semester. But if we broaden this definition of freshmen to include lower division survey courses then I think you really have to have the right people doing this class. The university should invest in finding the most engaging lecturers and having those people really be the face of the university for freshmen.”*

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our recommendations follow directly on the qualitative data and our committee discussions. We divide our recommendations into two categories: curricular recommendations, which might provide enhanced opportunities for faculty to engage with first-year students in the classroom. And co-curricular

recommendations, which would help create engagement outside the classroom, when stakes are lower but outcomes can be great. It is outside of our charge, but we note that many committee members discussed the possible creation of a teaching and learning center.

### **Curricular recommendations**

- **Intentional course assignments**
  - Chairs and directors should think carefully and purposefully about assigning faculty to the first-year classroom. Excellence in teaching at the first-year level should be as important as an upper level course for majors. Chairs and directors set the tone for valuing strong teaching and engagement with students; if it's important to the Chairs and Directors, it should be important to the faculty as well.
- **Faculty Showcases for Teaching in the “traditional” classroom**
  - ASUonline has several support systems and design instructors to aid faculty in teaching online courses. Currently, faculty who teach “traditional” courses in-person have little resources to learn how to teach effectively. By creating “faculty showcases” or “best practices” for new professors (taught by effective teaching faculty) new professors can learn much on how to tackle teaching for freshmen students, teaching large introductory courses, and the like.
- **Engaging faculty with recognition**
  - Data show that ASU faculty doesn't believe they are recognized for work with first-year students. Perhaps an award for recognition by students themselves would help create a culture of excellence in engaging first-year students. Unlike traditional teaching awards, which are based on a deeply retrospective look at faculty members' careers with an emphasis on peer review and a few outstanding students' recommendations, we could do a “freshman choice” award, with students voting online for a teacher who has made great impact in their first year. One faculty member from each academic unit could be rewarded, and a reception could be held to bring together voters and winners.
- **Possible course reduction after teaching first-year courses for an extended period of time**
  - Faculty agreed that teaching first-year students is hard work. Faculty could be rewarded for consistent excellence in teaching first-year courses by a course reduction after a number of consecutive semesters teaching first-year students. (Four consecutive semesters might be an appropriate time for this.) Faculty workload is within the purview of chairs and directors of units. Deans should discuss with their chairs and directors appropriate application of such an initiative to the careers of both tenure/tenure-track and contract faculty.
- **Money for professional development**
  - Another possible reward could be in the realm of professional development funds. We want our scholars in the first-year classroom. Providing funding for scholarly endeavors could be providing the “right” reward for hard work in the classroom.
- **Course solutions:**
  - *First-time freshmen sections of large introductory classes.* Right now, most of the large introductory courses have mixed sections of students. First-year students often seem to feel overwhelmed by the college experience, and having more experienced students in courses designed to be introductory can be intimidating. Sections of these courses reserved for first-year students might prove to be beneficial both to the students and the faculty teaching the courses. Ideally, these would be smaller sections in which faculty members could get to know their students.

- *Courses specifically for first-year students.* Great books course similar to “The Human Event” or Honors 271 but taught in the second semester of a student’s first year. Two possibilities would be a “great books course” taught by faculty across disciplines or appealing courses in the subject matter of a faculty member’s expertise. Would such courses relate to Comm 100 and the LEAP program?

### **Co-Curricular recommendations**

- Fund for “classroom perks” to create engagement. Currently, many faculty pay for treats for students (whether bringing donuts to class or taking students out for pizza) with their own resources. A fund that would provide modest amounts for in-class or out-of-class treats to faculty teaching first-year students might encourage the more relaxed communication that can spark meaningful connection between faculty and students.
- A close (“mentoring”) relationship can be critical to a student’s success and a faculty member’s enjoyment of undergraduate teaching. Perhaps an electronic matchmaking system (mentor.asu.edu?) could set up students interested in pursuing research with faculty members who are willing to take on undergraduate students in labs or in other forms of scholarly work. At the very least, it’s important to better communicate/advertise programs we already have to faculty and students alike (e.g., SEED research programs).
- Several faculty have worked with residential life. Manzanita Hall houses many first-year CLAS students, and its dining hall is convenient. Setting up a lunch-time program in which first-year students would be encouraged to sit down with faculty members in Manzanita Hall might spark interesting conversations--and would let students know that the life of the mind does not begin with the classroom and end with homework. Humanizing faculty for students and humanizing students for faculty could result from this kind of opportunity. There is a current “faculty fellow” program in Manzanita Hall. There might be overlaps and we are investigating. Especially as the title “faculty fellow” becomes a recognition of work with students. A simple program to sit faculty down with students to break bread has a low bar to entry and could be scalable. Other opportunities might include a film series. However, some committee members see that there are currently opportunities to help with teaching and mentoring--should we be adding more options or making current options more widely available to multiple faculty? Currently, faculty does not seem to be utilizing the tremendous resources (and infrastructure) that residential life has to engage with students. Perhaps if faculty participated in such events, they can earn “badges” for making an impact on students. We think the key is marketing such opportunities to faculty.