



Recommendations

5.13.15



May 13, 2015

Dear First Year Forward committee members, I wanted to thank everyone for their participation in the First Year Forward project. Participants dedicated hours to deliberate, discuss and debate how to deliver an intentional and purposeful first year experience for ASU freshmen in the college and across the university. The project is grounded in the normative belief we can make a difference in the lives of thousands of young people every year and our duty begins before they arrive on campus.

The guiding framework was to generate wide participation from people who interact with students in their first year and to ask participants to experience the first year through the eyes of the students. This framework has generated dozens of recommendations across a range of topics.

We now enter a phase where we need to synthesize key recommendations that can make the biggest impact on student retention and performance both in the short and long run. Our ultimate goal is to implement the most efficacious ideas as soon as possible.

The implementation phase will be possible only if you are ambassadors for these changes to your units. We will also need your guidance and energy in order to make these changes happen.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick J. Kenney".

Patrick J. Kenney
Vice Provost and Dean
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Foster in students a “gestalt” or “big picture” view.

Provide undergraduates with a metacognitive perspective on what college really means, why decisions matter, and how to make best use all that ASU has to offer. Excite their intellectual curiosity and show them how the various pieces of their education fit together. Provide them the tools to appreciate, navigate, and seek out meaningful curricular and co-curricular connections. Clarify and help students appreciate how the knowledge and skills they are learning apply to their interests, possible career paths, and real world circumstances.

2. Ensure students are in the “right” places academically.

Create a comprehensive advising and evaluation system to ensure that undergraduates are in the best majors suited for their interests and skill sets. When it is clear that a student needs to transition to another major, make sure that the movement between academic units is seamless, coordinated, and supported. Integrate this system into key courses (for example, ASU 101 and other freshman seminars, introductory courses to the major, etc.) within the first year curriculum.

3. Build stronger networks among faculty, advisors/student services staff, and students.

Create an intentional first year curriculum – courses and experiences outside of the classroom that allow students to get to know faculty, advisors, and other student services staff to a greater extent. Select faculty and advising staff to teach ASU 101, other first year seminars, and key introductory courses to the major who are engaged, enthusiastic, and want to work with first year students. Find ways to recognize/reward faculty and staff for these important engagement activities and service to their units.

4. Integrate services and identify obstacles earlier.

Evaluate student services programs for their effectiveness and efficiency; avoid program “siloeing” and duplication of effort; adapt, integrate, or expand services as needed. Create a common, centralized informational database for faculty, staff, and students, focused on providing students solutions. Use early and timely indicators to forecast potential difficulties and obstacles to student success. Communicate this information quickly and effectively to faculty, advisors, and other student support staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Ensure that “form follows function.”** Make certain that first year goals are understood and shared by faculty and staff and that the current organizational structure of ASU and our college allows us to assess students’ progress toward those goals.
- 2. Identify the roles, responsibilities, and strengths of the first year experience.** Identify the roles, responsibilities, and strengths for each academic and administrative piece of the first year organizational structure and develop a clear set of critical goals and responsibilities for each of the units involved.
- 3. Create mechanisms for information sharing.** Hold regular meetings to discuss core objectives, assessment findings, and priorities for the first year with academic units and other relevant stakeholders. Create more effective mechanisms for communicating across administrative structures to share goals, directives, ideas, and activities and to decrease overlapping or repetitive efforts.
- 4. Recognize the first year experience as important.** Convey to academic units that faculty and advisors’ time dedicated to first year students is expected, appropriate, and valued. Recognize first year teaching as a distinctive endeavor that requires appropriate faculty participation. Create mechanisms for faculty to share their experiences and include this work as important elements included on annual faculty activity reports. Assess whether the financial resources allotted to first year students are sufficient and whether the traditional model of large, less expensive introductory courses for first year students is appropriate for promoting long-term student success.
- 5. Ensure that information is appropriately conveyed to students.** Review how we communicate important information to our students. Create a priority scheme to categorize particularly relevant communication as “providing useful information” or “alerting a student to a distinctive challenge or opportunity” and develop more personally tailored and effective information delivery mechanisms.
- 6. Identify and respond quickly to at-risk students.** Develop a formalized early warning system that incorporates a broad range of information and allows for input from all of the various stakeholders involved in supporting the first year experience. Make the most “at-risk” students readily visible and reachable.
- 7. Redesign “Academic Status Reports” (ASR’s) to make them a more effective tool.** Review the purpose, implementation, and follow-up of ASR’s. Expand the usefulness of the ASR system to allow both more immediate and more general (non-academic) concerns to be reported.
- 8. Establish clear expectations for instructors and advisors.** Develop and communicate expectations of what first year instructors and advisors should know and communicate to students, and how student concerns when they arise should be reported. Create mechanisms to provide first year instructors and advisors with the necessary knowledge about available resources and alert them to potential problems or other issues that might impact student success. Ensure that academic advisors are an integral part of identifying and addressing individual student issues.
- 9. Improve the knowledge and utilization of academic support services.** Review the various academic support services currently available for their use and effectiveness; make certain that academic support services are appropriately aligned with introductory courses; and that the marketing of program availability is clearly communicated to faculty, staff, and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Redesign first year seminar course mechanics.** Increase first year seminar courses to 3 credits, coordinate these offerings with major-specific courses, and encourage low-risk attendance activities to promote student participation and engagement.
- 2. Redesign first year seminar course syllabi.** Include a standard set of learning outcomes as well as unit- or subject-specific objectives, and require that all students enroll in their spring term classes as a specific activity in their fall first year seminar course.
- 3. Provide improved training and resources to instructors who teach first year students.** Create automated email reminders for faculty alerting them to important academic calendar deadlines that may affect student success. Build an information repository cataloging the current student support resources available and provide opportunities for instructors to learn different instructional strategies for coping with variability in academic preparedness. Work with academic units and provide resources for developing peer mentoring or peer shadowing opportunities within their departments.
- 4. Provide interactive opportunities for instructors to develop expertise in working with first year students.** Develop a training “bootcamp” for faculty to learn best practices in working with new students and provide incentives to recognize faculty commitment to student success.
- 5. Increase focus on student and faculty interactions through first year courses.** Encourage individualized attention for freshmen. Minimize the gap between student-faculty perceptions of course expectations. Reduce the use of undergraduate students and TAs as first year seminar lead instructors.
- 6. Increase the amount and quality of coaching available to first year students.** Capitalize on the existing first year success center model. Require first year seminar students to meet with a success coach at least twice during the fall semester, and pair freshmen with same-major upperclassmen to facilitate academic-unit connections.
- 7. Implement college-wide policies that assign faculty and advisors to mentor low-CI or otherwise at-risk students.**
- 8. Implement and devote purposeful, programming resources to support low-CI and other academically at-risk students.** Develop specific first year seminar sections that focus on low-CI students or otherwise academically at-risk first year students. Create a single integrated “success” course that combines content in the major-specific first year seminar, UNI 120, and Finance 123. Expand the number of CLAS units that participate in the CLAS Early Start program and expand the range of CI scores served by these types of programs.
- 9. Increase focus on international freshmen and other non-native English speakers.** Review admissions English language proficiency requirements, assess each student's level of language-acquisition, review available mechanisms to support non-native English speakers, provide faculty additional training, support, and resources to mitigate challenges due to language or cultural barriers.
- 10. Provide adequate support to students with roommate or adjustment issues associated with out-of-state relocation.** Ensure that information provided through existing student feedback mechanism (ASU Connections Survey) are sufficiently reviewed, disseminated, and acted upon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increase professional development opportunities for faculty.** Provide training, resources, and workshops for faculty wishing to improve skills crucial to working with first year students.
- 2. Intentional course assignments.** Place instructors skilled in teaching and connecting with first year students into key introductory courses for majors.
- 3. Engage faculty by providing increased opportunities for recognition and targeted “perks” for working with first year students.** Designate one faculty member from each unit (based on student vote) to receive a “Freshmen Choice” award based on their work and commitment to first year students. Provide faculty with financial support to make targeted enhancements to their first year courses, course reductions, or professional development funds for teaching freshman courses.
- 4. Build new second term required freshman courses.** Develop new engaging “great books” style courses (offered during the spring term) to continue the process of integrating first year students into the overall ASU university experience.
- 5. Develop additional mentoring and engagement opportunities for faculty.** Provide additional opportunities for supporting faculty-initiated activities with students (e.g., faculty lunches, field trips, movie nights, etc.) utilizing resources available through already existing student engagement programs.
- 6. Facilitate access to faculty mentors.** Develop an electronic mentoring “matchmaking” system and website (for example, mentor.asu.edu) for students seeking mentoring or research relationships with faculty.
- 7. Develop “freshman only” courses.** Create targeted introductory courses reserved for first year students to focus (in part) on easing the transition from high school to college.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Re-design communication mechanisms.** Revise or create new websites and associated materials to more effectively communicate the lived experience of first year students.
- 2. Create “virtual welcome” message.** Develop targeted messages from the dean during Welcome Week that outline expectations, resources, and key contacts.
- 3. Redesign first year success courses.** Work with faculty and advisors in each of our academic units to ensure that first year success courses include effective academic curriculum and skill building content. Create a “boiler plate” syllabus, and a video of upper-class students giving advice about how to be successful at ASU. Create mechanisms for tracking students in the first year success courses (absences, ASR reports). Assign coaches to specific first year success classes so they can more easily develop relationships with their assigned freshmen.
- 4. Provide faculty and advisors relevant and timely information.** Ensure that faculty and advisors are aware of resources relevant to first year students. Designate a single-point of contact from each academic unit to help disseminate information to their faculty and advising colleagues and create new web-based resources that detail the range of currently available first year support.
- 5. Provide students with relevant information.** Make sure students know who their academic advisors are and how to contact them. Provide targeted information to students about the availability of important support resources (particularly for academically “at risk” students).
- 6. Create mechanisms for first year students to connect with upper-class students.** Encourage schools and departments to develop academic-unit based student mentor programs and share best practice in how to develop and manage these programs. Create networks of residents and community mentors by major and develop programs and other opportunities to help residents see their community mentors as academic resources.
- 7. Create mechanisms for first year students to connect with faculty.** Encourage students to meet with their instructors in person through attendance at office hours or other mechanisms (make this a course requirement – where possible – in courses for freshmen). Build out additional faculty-led programs as part of CLAS Residential College. Offer meal cards for first year course instructors to encourage them to share meals with students in the residence halls and meet with student as part of the Residential College experience.
- 8. Improve academic advising as a resource for first year students.** Implement a more systematic use of the retention dashboard as an advising tool by all advisors. Review advisor/advisee ratios and adding targeted advising resource where appropriate with the goal of improving the quality (type and frequency) of first year student advising. Develop an advisor “skill series” to establish expectations in how we support our first year students and share best practices on effective programs and policies.
- 9. Provide specific resources for students considering changing their major.** Develop a structure of trained advisors and Career Services resources to help students explore other degree programs and possible career paths, and to transition between majors (when appropriate).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Stop critically tracking students during the first semester.** Develop a more flexible tracking system that would allow students to come into the university without any denotation on their academic pages of being “off-track.” Ensure that our tracking policies and rhetorical do not make less academically prepared students feel behind before they even get started.
- 2. Create financial aid/scholarship programs that reward students based on their success after matriculation to ASU if they were not given merit based awards initially.** Instead of only giving out merit-based scholarships based on high school performance, allow students to gain scholarships based on their ASU performance.
- 3. Create or expand peer mentoring programs across all departments in the college.** The University already employs peer coaches, but those coaches are general and not specific to students' majors. Provide support to departments to develop or expand the use major-based peer mentoring systems (this would allow for easier student connections within academic units).
- 4. Create a know-it-all center for CLAS students.** Often students do not know where to go to begin asking questions. Develop a drop-in “know-it-all” center that would allow students a place to go to begin any process or question without having to schedule an appointment.
- 5. Create programming based on factors other than academic ability upon college entry.** Currently there is no specific programming for “at risk” students based on sub-populations beyond academic ability. Build additional programs based on such factors as first generation status, high financial need, out of state residency, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious identity, etc.
- 6. Expand and enhance collection of data about all our students.** Data collected from freshmen upon matriculation is incomplete and sometimes inconsistent. Expand the type of information collected (that is, increase the scope and range of social, economic, personal, and family variables gathered) so that can do a better job identifying all of the important subgroups of students (“all students”), conduct more sophisticated analyses to recognize students who may be struggling, and implement more targeted and effective interventions.
- 7. Create introductory courses or degree programs that accommodate the aspirations of all our student populations in an open access university.** Most degree programs in CLAS are geared towards preparing students for graduate programs, however, the majority of student do not take this path. Develop courses and majors that more appropriately prepare our students for the range of career paths ahead of them.
- 8. Prioritize effective undergraduate teaching for annual faculty reviews and decisions about tenure and promotion.** Pioneering research enriches the university and our society, and it provides unique opportunities for students at ASU, but it is not a substitute for classroom instruction. Make teaching a higher university priority in order to provide incentives for faculty for their participation in promoting student success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Faculty and administrators should more actively support and engage with student groups focusing on diversity.** Offer additional financial and logistical support for student groups that contribute to the experience of diversity on the ASU campus.
- 2. Create a website of diversity-related events.** Develop a centralized website for information about events and other experiences (across all ASU campuses) related to diversity.
- 3. Task academic units with creating diversity curriculum within their courses and majors.** Work with faculty in each of our academic units to develop and increase diversity-related content and experiences into disciplinary-specific courses and degree programs.
- 4. Develop new “Session B” courses with significant diversity content.** Create additional trans-disciplinary courses with significant diversity content to be offered during Session B terms for students falling short of semester credit goals.
- 5. Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff focused on diversity.** Increase access and availability of professional development and training opportunities for faculty and staff focused on diversity awareness and cultural sensitivity.
- 6. Place more public emphasis on opportunities to engage with diverse communities outside the university.** Enhanced messaging regarding internships, service learning and study abroad opportunities as ways to increase diversity experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Provide information about engagement opportunities to students throughout the first year.** Most information about clubs, events, and getting involved on campus is “frontloaded” and communicated to students only during the beginning of the fall semester. Develop better mechanisms to relay this information and the availability of engagement opportunities to students all year long.
- 2. Increase time management skills for students early in their academic careers.** Focus more closely on facilitating students’ ability to balance their time commitments and their understandings of what they can feel comfortable to take on during their first year. Currently, there is no standardization as to how things such as time management are taught to students. By spending more effort helping students develop these types of skills, students will be able find the time to become more engaged in the broader university community.
- 3. Tear down barriers between students, faculty, and staff (as appropriate).** Without promoting unprofessional relationships, explore ways for faculty to be known by first names instead of “doctor.” Doing so will increase student comfort and facilitate access to faculty and staff. By allowing students to see their faculty as “real” people we will increase students’ willingness to engage in activities such as research.
- 4. Be more pragmatic with the first year success courses to ensure that students are developing clear understandings of their purposes and roles as a student.** Reshape the curriculum of our first year success courses to make certain that every first year student begins their time at the university on level ground and with common knowledge of the expectations the institution holds for them and their reasons for being in college.
- 5. Create ways for students to filter events that appear in their myASU news feed.** Use myASU to allow students to target information of particular interest to them and to reinforce the mission of engaging students in the broader ASU community.
- 6. Develop ways of informing students about pathways to engagement programs so they can begin to plan early.** Currently, many students struggle to understand the various paths to successful engagement because the opportunities and connections appear to be vague or serendipitous in nature. Create specific engagement “roadmaps” so that students will know the directions they need to take to achieve success.
- 7. Develop new ways of communicating to faculty, staff, and students so that all can stay informed regarding opportunities throughout the year.** If faculty and staff were more versed in opportunities, they could communicate these opportunities more effectively to students and would serve as another resource to help students become more engaged in the wider ASU community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish a culture of assessment.** Within the college, emphasize the importance of using data to explore and understand first year experience successes and challenges, and to identify areas for improvement. Do this from the beginning, as an expectation of employment for all faculty and staff.
2. **Develop and implement organized strategies for effective dissemination of data related to CLAS students' first year experience.** Data related to the first year experience (survey results, internal research findings, information on ongoing programs and activities) must reach beyond upper leadership and be shared to all who work directly or indirectly with students. It should also be "presented" meaningfully and offered in a way that allows faculty and staff to act on the information provided.
3. **Promote organized and purposeful ways to share best practices related to the first year experience, utilizing existing communication structures where possible.**
4. **Update and improve existing data collection efforts.** Amend existing first year student surveys with CLAS-specific questions. Improve coordination of these and related data-gathering efforts to minimize duplication of effort and student survey burden.
5. **Establish an ongoing investment in information gathering and sharing related to the first year experience.** Incentivize key players in the college, as well as those with a special interest in this population to share their experiences and expertise. Allocate separate funding to all faculty and staff to explore additional aspects of the first year experience, with a requirement that those receiving funding formally share what is learned.
6. **Improve "Academic Status Report" (ASR) system.** Currently the system is not well-integrated into the Blackboard system, making it difficult to use for large courses. Integrate ASR's into the course grade-book to increase faculty use and the program's effectiveness.