

A Vision of Excellence in the First College Year at Salisbury University

Overview

Salisbury University's Foundations of Excellence Task Force is a direct response to faculty concerns about academic emphasis in the current first-year experience. The task force acknowledges the centrality of faculty in remedying that. "More than any other group, faculty define the life of the college or university and should therefore be meaningfully involved in working with the newest persons joining the campus."¹

The first-year experience has long been recognized as the foundation of student success and persistence. How Salisbury University structures the campus environment for new students plays a **critical** role in determining how students spend their time, how they engage in learning, and whether they return for the second year or even the next semester. Focusing on the first year will not only improve students' experience as they begin their academic careers but will also improve the overall academic environment.

The Foundations of Excellence (FOE) in the First College Year Task Force surveyed Salisbury University's faculty, staff, and first-year students and found the following:

- 66% of SU students report studying less than ten hours a week. For peer institutions, the percentage is 45%.²
- Only 40.8% of new SU faculty indicated that teaching first-year students was discussed during interviews.³
- National studies show: "students typically study less, write less, and read less than they come to college expecting to do."⁴ SU Students concur in their self-reported survey.⁵

Salisbury University offers an array of initiatives to help students make a successful transition to higher education. The adoption and implementation of additional best practices identified by John Gardner's Foundation of Excellence in the First College Year model will lead our institution to a more comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the important first-year experience.

A summary of the Task Force recommendations follows:

- Develop an institutional philosophy statement that serves as a basis for an integrated approach for all first-year experience policies and practices.

¹ Scott E Evenbeck and Barbara Jackson. Chapter Fifteen in *Challenging and Supporting the First Year Student*. Ed. M. Lee Upcraft, John N. Gardner, and Betsy O. Barefoot. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. 257.

² Resident Satisfaction Survey, spring 2003. Nov. 13, 2003.

³ Faculty Survey carried out by Foundations of Excellence Task Force, October 2005.

⁴ George D. Kuh. "Student Engagement in the First Year of College." In *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*. Ed. M. Lee Upcraft, John N. Gardner, and Betsy O. Barefoot. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. 106.

⁵ See Foundations of Excellence Student Survey, November 2005.

- Extend outcome-based learning goals for first-year students that promote engagement and support general education goals and principles.
- Establish centralized coordination to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to the first-year experience.
- Encourage, support, and recognize faculty who support the philosophy and learning goals of the first-year experience.
- Create an integrated approach to all aspects of the first-year students' transitional and academic experiences, including but not limited to advising, information resources, and peer mentoring.

As a Maryland University of National Distinction with a commitment to student-centeredness, enrollment growth, and sustaining and enhancing academic excellence, Salisbury University has an opportunity to create a signature program that addresses these issues as well as some pervasive challenges for all of higher education:

- "...today's students arrive on campus with more problems as a result of dysfunctional family situations, with more worries and anxieties about the future and about the serious problems facing them in modern society..."⁶
- "...half of students are already drinking before they enroll in college."⁷
- Approximately nine percent of students entering college have a disability. The "most prevalent disabilities are learning disabilities..."⁸

The development of a model first-year experience program offers another benefit. It aligns with initiatives and conversations now underway: curricular enhancement, learning communities, general education assessment, enrollment growth, faculty reward systems, and marketing. Most importantly, however, it would characterize the University's distinctiveness, making the hallmark of a Salisbury University education an outstanding initial collegiate experience that prepares students for significant academic achievement and recognizes their full potential in and out of the classroom. After a year-long study and with the assistance and guidance of the Foundations of Excellence in the First-Year Experience, the leading international authority on the first-year experience, the FOE Task Force has identified a path to the creation of a model first-year experience.

⁶ Jennifer L. Crissman Ishler. "Today's First-Year Students." In *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*. Ed. M. Lee Upcraft, John N. Gardner, and Betsy O. Barefoot. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. 23.

⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

A Vision for Excellence In the First College Year

In 2005, Salisbury University was one of 27 four-year institutions selected from a national pool to participate in the Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year project. Foundations of Excellence is a guided self-study and improvement process for the first college year that enhances an institution's ability to realize its goals for student learning, success, and persistence. Participation in this project comes as an outgrowth of a Faculty Senate directive to enhance the academic orientation of first-year students, the January 2005 Faculty Development Workshop in which the freshman experience was explored, and in response to the Salisbury University Strategic Plan (AY 2004 – AY 2008) in which the goal to advance a student-centered environment included a directive to “develop and implement a more comprehensive orientation program for freshman and transfer students that improves academic and personal transitions and deepens their connections with their peers and the University.”

The Foundations of Excellence process is administered by the Policy Center for the First Year of College and partially funded by Lumina Foundations for Education. As participants in the Foundations of Excellence project, Salisbury University received a comprehensive array of products and services including: 9 Foundational Dimensions[®] with Performance Indicators, an electronic platform (FoEtec[™]) for recording data and findings, electronic surveys, off-site consulting support and feedback, and templates for the Current Practices Inventory (CPI) and action plans. Additionally, the Policy Center, in collaboration with Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI), provided the technology infrastructure and surveying instruments for faculty/staff and students in support of the self-study process.

The engine of the Foundations of Excellence process was a campus-based task force – a broad-based group of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The task force was divided into four working groups: the steering committee and three dimension committees. The work of the task force began with a campus audit of the first year of college at Salisbury University (Current Practices Inventory – CPI) and the administration of faculty/staff and student surveys. The work continued with a nine month review of SU's first-year experience using the Foundational Dimensions and Performance Indicators. The result is the development of this report and action plan.

The centerpiece of Foundations of Excellence is a model for first-year excellence comprised of a set of principles that are termed Foundational Dimensions[®]. These Dimensions, based upon 36 years of research and developed collaboratively with over 300 institutions, guide measurement of institutional efforts and provide an aspirational model for the entirety of the beginning college experience from initial contact with potential students through admissions, orientation, and all first-year curricular and cocurricular experiences. These principles define characteristics of institutional effectiveness and include the following: 1) philosophy, (2) organization, (3) learning, (4) faculty, (5) transitions, (6) all students, (7) diversity, (8) roles and purposes, and (9) improvement.

After examining the SU first-year experience, reviewing the researched best practices, and debating the application of these best practices to the SU experience, the task force created recommendations for enhancement of the SU experience. These recommendations are listed in detail within each dimension and are encapsulated below.

Summary of Recommendations

- I. Develop an institutional philosophy statement that serves as a basis for all first-year experience policies and practices. Use this statement to establish a common focus and direction for all campus programs that provide services to first-year students. (Philosophy Dimension)
- II. Extend outcome-based learning goals for first-year students that promote engagement and support general education goals and principles. (Learning Dimension)
- III. Establish a centralized coordinating authority that will provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first-year experience and that will promote partnerships among Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and other administrative units.
 - Coordinate all first-year initiatives. (Organization Dimension)
 - Initiate a study to determine why students leave SU during or after their first year. (Improvement Dimension)
 - Develop and coordinate shared goals for first-year programs in both Academic and Student Affairs. (Organization Dimension)
 - Create an assessment plan to evaluate the effectiveness of first-year student programs. Disseminate the analysis of the assessment data to the University community through the shared governance constituencies, administrative offices, and Student Affairs departments. (Improvement Dimension)
- IV. Encourage, support, and recognize faculty who support the philosophy and learning goals of the first-year experience. (Faculty Dimension)
 - Generate, implement, and sustain a forum for discussion of instructional methods that effectively engage students in learning. (Learning Dimension)
 - Consider developing a Teaching Across the Curriculum (TAC) program modeled after the SU Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, comprised of faculty who teach first-year students and supplement this program with a Web-based forum. (Learning Dimension)
 - Recognize faculty for their participation in the first-year curricular and cocurricular activities, use of pedagogies of engagement, participation in professional development activities related to the first-year experience, research and publication activities, and involvement in the assessment of first-year programs. (Faculty Dimension)
 - Identify effective advising practices for first-year students. Provide professional development opportunities for faculty advisors. Consider centralizing advisement for undeclared students. Develop an assessment program for evaluating advising services for first-year students. (Transitions and Improvement Dimensions)

- V. Create an integrated approach to all aspects of the first-year students' transitional and academic experiences, including but not limited to advising, information resources, and peer mentoring.
- Improve the first-year students' academic connection to the University through early advisement opportunities, departmental events, seminar series, learning communities, faculty participation in the first-year activities, and the integration of the Freshman Reader program into the first-year-course curriculum. (Faculty, Learning, and All Students Dimensions)
 - Provide first-year students with information and services to optimize student learning and adjustment to college. Establish an Academic Resource Center (ARC) where students will have access to intentional guidance and academic support to achieve greater academic success. Provide intervention programs for probationary students, inform students of academic requirements and expectations, coordinate a campus-wide early warning system, and provide programs for students needing basic academic skills. (Learning, All Student, and Transitions Dimensions)
 - Increase the number of learning communities in residence halls. Connect the learning communities with specific sections of classes taken by first-year students. (Transitions Dimension)
 - Increase opportunities for upper-level students to mentor first-year students. Develop a mentor training program for upper level students who work with first-year students in various first-year experience programs. (All Students Dimensions)
 - Increase opportunities for first-year students to interact with individuals and explore ideas from backgrounds and cultures different from their own through participation in University cultural events, the integration of University cultural events in the classroom, and through the understanding and adherence to the tenets of the Salisbury University Promise. (Diversity Dimension)
 - Provide opportunities for first-year students to examine their personal motivations for pursuing higher education. Identify ways in which introductory or foundational major courses could provide an early forum for the discussion of motivation for the pursuit of knowledge within the general education and major curriculums. (Roles and Purposes Dimensions)

Philosophy Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices.* The philosophy/rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. The philosophy/rationale is also the basis for first-year organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation.

- 1.1 There is a written, campus wide statement of philosophy that has been formally approved by the appropriate campus wide governance bodies and is specific and clear about the institution's established purpose for the first-year experience.
- 1.2 The philosophy statement influences current practices/policies for the first-year experience.
- 1.3 The University philosophy statement and the department first-year student statements are disseminated to first-year students, new and continuing faculty, and new and continuing Student Affairs staff.

Current Situation

There is no explicit campus-wide philosophy statement at Salisbury University for the first-year experience. There is a brief explicit philosophy statement used by the New Student Experience Office (NSEO) and an implicit philosophy that governs the "Manual/Casebook for Freshman English." The dissemination of any philosophy regarding first-year (FY) students appears to be low.

(The following statement has been approved by the First-year Experience (FYE) Task Force and will be presented to various campus constituencies for review and input.)

Philosophy Statement on the First Year of College Salisbury University

The faculty and staff of Salisbury University are committed to building a community in which first-year students have ample opportunity to be embraced and developed as scholars and individuals in order that they may contribute as active citizens, attain gainful employment, and practice life-long learning in a democratic society and interdependent world. The first-year programs are guided by the University's core mission values: excellence, student-centeredness, learning, community, civic engagement and diversity.

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

Toward this end, Salisbury University espouses the following goals:

Facilitate the transition of first-year students into the University community

- Prepare first-year students for academic success beginning with a strong foundation in the general education curriculum
- Integrate first-year students into the intellectual, cultural, and social environment of the institution and the surrounding community
- Assist first-year students in the examination of their personal motivation for pursuing higher education

Salisbury University is committed to creating, assessing, and constantly improving a first-year experience that assists all students during their critical first year.

Endorsements: Foundations of Excellence Task Force

Recommended Enhancements

- Develop an institutional philosophy statement that serves as a basis for FY organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department and unit philosophies, and resource allocation and publicize it in printed and electronic resources. Use this statement to establish a common focus and direction for all campus programs that provide services to FY students.
- Publicize the FY philosophy statement among faculty and staff; identify ways of incorporating it in University policies, procedures, and publications; feature it on relevant Web sites; and review University publications and Web sites for a consistent presentation of the FY student philosophy statement.

Organization Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.* These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

- 2.1 There is a comprehensive single unit/administrative structure that provides campus wide oversight and alignment of first-year efforts. The unit appears on the campus organizational chart, has a director, administers one or more components of both the curriculum and cocurriculum, and has a recurring operational budget.

Current Situation

The Director of the NSEO directs all components of the New Student Experience in addition to several other responsibilities that are not related to the first-year (FY) experience and has not been empowered with campus wide oversight for all FY efforts. The result is the lack of a comprehensive coordinated approach to the first-year student experience.

The NSEO is governed by the New Student Experience Leadership Team which includes faculty representing each of the Academic Schools, an Academic Administrator, Student Affairs Administrators, and students. Staff members are assigned to the committee on a permanent basis based on their job functions. Four faculty members representing each school are appointed by the Provost and serve on an *ad hoc* basis.

A centralized Web presence to promote all resources and services for FY students has been created (www.salisbury.edu/newstudexp).

Recommended Enhancements

- Establish a centralized authority that can provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first-year experience and promote partnerships among Academic Affairs, Student Affairs.
- Establish membership on the Leadership Team to include elected representatives from the FOE Senate, Staff Senate, and SGA. Identify permanent ex-officio members from both Academic Affairs and Students Affairs.

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

- Develop and coordinate shared goals for first year programs in both Academic and Student Affairs.

Learning Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and cocurricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission.* Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

- 3.1 There are established common learning goals specifically for the first-year experience that are written, endorsed by the institution, and shared widely.
- 3.2 The institution documents instructional methods used in each of the high enrollment courses and evaluates their effectiveness in engaging students in learning.
- 3.3 The institution documents and evaluates student learning outcomes across all sections of high enrollment courses.
- 3.4 The institution intentionally places students in appropriate courses that address deficiencies in academic preparation and provide sufficient academic challenges for above-average students.
- 3.5 The institution documents first-year students' learning outcomes for Student Affairs and Residence Life functions.

Current Situation

The University has yet to develop common learning goals for FY students. The foundation for building these goals exists, however, in the Goals and Principles of General Education. An additional resource for establishing common learning goals is the functional areas within Student Affairs where departmental learning goals have been established.

There was little evidence of documentation of the instructional methods used in FY courses or their effectiveness in engaging students in learning. In the five courses identified as having high enrollment for first-year students (i.e., ENGL 101, ENGL 102, HIST 101, HIST 102, PSYC 101), the English Department was the only one to report the documentation of instructional methods and their effectiveness, across sections, particularly sections taught by TAs. History and psychology have an informal consensus about common goals.

The committee did not examine the curriculum in its breadth in addressing the University's ability to address deficiencies in academic preparation and to provide sufficient academic

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

challenge for above average students. When looking for opportunities for students to address their deficiencies in academic preparation, the committee found some opportunities through various departmental tutoring programs and the newly developed Writing Center. However, tutoring is not available in all disciplines and there are very few resources to help students address basic learning, studying, and time management deficiencies.

The committee did examine the Bellavance Honors Program to find sufficient academic challenge for above average students and found that students have many out-of-class opportunities to interact with faculty, which produced a positive bonding experience. Student evaluations of the program indicate that Honors classes challenged their thinking and writing ability and allowed them to grow academically and as individuals.

There are several student affairs departments that evaluate and document the success of their out-of-class learning programs. These include: Residence Life, Career Services, Athletics, Student Activities, Health Center, Minority Student Affairs, Public Safety, and New Student Experiences.

Recommended Enhancements

- Develop outcome-based learning goals for FY students that promote engagement and support the goals and principles identified for the general education curriculum (skills, knowledge, and dispositions). Create a sustainable group that coordinates and assesses FY learning goals and communicates them to the entire campus community, discusses how to make the goals an integral part of the campus culture, encourages individual departments in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to develop plans to achieve those goals, and shares them with all concerned entities. Document and assess learning outcomes across all sections of courses with a high enrollment of first-year students.
- Create a forum of faculty who teach first-year students to discuss strategies for engaging students in learning. Consider developing a Teaching Across the Curriculum (TAC) program, modeled after the SU Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program and supplement this program with a Web-based forum.
- Provide FY students with information and services to optimize student learning and adjustment to college. Serious consideration should be given to establishing an Academic Resource Center (ARC) where students can receive information and services that would enable them to realize their highest possible academic level of success. This Center could coordinate academic support services from a central location, promote awareness of academic services available to SU students, and promote retention through programs and services. Services offered through the Center might include a study skills program for FY students who complete the first semester with a GPA below 2.0, an expanded early warning program for high risk learners, and a summer program aimed at addressing particular needs of high risk students. The centrality of information resources and services would provide both students and faculty quick access to the resources they needed.
- Establish goals to increase the retention rate of FY students in the Honors program.

- Increase the number of learning communities in the residence halls. Connect them with specific sections of classes taken by first-year students.

Faculty Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty.* These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year that is realized through high quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems.

- 4.1 Senior academic leaders encourage faculty to use pedagogies of engagement in first-year courses, understand campus-wide learning goals for the first year, understand characteristics of first-year students, and understand broad trends and issues in the first year.
- 4.2 Unit-level academic administrators encourage faculty to use pedagogies of engagement in first-year courses, understand unit-level learning goals for entry-level courses, and understand the discipline-specific trends and issues related to entry-level courses.
- 4.3 The expectations for involvement with first-year students are clearly communicated to new faculty during the hiring process.
- 4.4 The institution rewards faculty performance through the campus reward structure (e.g., promotion and tenure, annual salary) in the instruction of first-year classes, out-of-class interaction with first-year students, and advising first-year students.

Current Situation

The committee found that efforts for making the first college year a high priority for the faculty are sporadic at best.

The Chairs in History and English can articulate unit-level learning goals for entry level courses. However, these goals are not always clearly defined or assessed within individual courses. Both the History and English departments offer strong role models for discussing and addressing FY student learning needs. Faculty meet regularly to discuss curriculum and student progress; English teaching assistants meet weekly. Only those sections of English 101 and 102 courses taught by TAs and some adjuncts, however, have a common syllabus.

Fifty-nine percent of new hires (faculty or staff) indicated that responsibilities related to FY students were addressed during the candidate interview to a slight degree or not at all. Despite some levels of awareness and support, during the hiring process and after new faculty arrive on campus, except for being told that they will teach freshman students, faculty have no

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

sense, academic or otherwise, of what is expected of those teaching FY students. Currently, the University does not offer special rewards or acknowledgement to faculty involved with first-year courses or programs, out-of-class activities with first-year students, or advising first-year students. Thirty-three percent of new and experienced faculty who participated in the Faculty Dimension Survey said that they had “slight” or “none at all” interaction when asked, “To what degree are you expected to interact with first-year students outside of class?” When asked, “Do you participate in out-of-class activities that involve first-year students,” 36% responded “Not at all” or “slight.”

Over the past two years, in collaboration with Faculty Development Committee, the NSE Leadership Team designed a January Faculty Development Workshop; the V.P. of Student Affairs keynoted a presentation on the “Millennial Student”; and various members of the Foundations of Excellence Task Force attended the First Year Experience National Conference.

Recommended Enhancements

- Increase faculty participation in the development and implementation of FY student programs. Increased involvement by faculty will help connect them to FY student issues, increase their commitment to positive student outcomes, and assume a partnership of responsibility for FY students with Student Affairs personnel.
- Academic leaders need to encourage, support, and reward faculty who participate in FY curricular and cocurricular student activities, who use pedagogies of engagement, demonstrate an understanding of discipline specific trends and issues related to entry level courses, and support FY learning goals.
- The University expectations for academic and/or extracurricular involvement with FY students need to be communicated to new faculty during the interview and hiring process.
- Establish a clear reward structure for faculty who advise first-year students, engage in out-of-class interactions with first-year students, and who effectively engage first-year students in the instruction of first-year courses.
- Continue to promote faculty and staff professional development initiatives that advance FY student success.

Transitions Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.* Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first-year, institutions communicate clear curricular and cocurricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

- 5.1 The institution communicates effectively with first-year students about the institutional mission, the institution's academic expectations, out-of-class engagement opportunities, entry requirements for specific academic majors, and college costs and financial aid both at the time of admission and during the first year.
- 5.2 The institution communicates specific roles in facilitating student success in the first year of college to secondary school personnel, families of first-year students, and other support networks that have ongoing connections and influence with first-year students.
- 5.3 The institution structures and implements a first year in which students establish connections with faculty (especially outside the classroom), upper-level students, other first-year students, and academic support services.
- 5.4 The overall quality of academic advising is excellent when preparing for the first year of college (selecting courses, exploring rationale for selection of courses, and exploring life and career goals related to higher education) and in preparation for the second year of college (selecting courses, exploring rationale for selection of courses, reviewing academic progress, and discussing student intentions about future enrollment plans).

Current Situation

The University communicates effectively with first-year students about the institution's academic expectations, specific academic major requirements, college expenses and financial aid, and out-of-class engagement opportunities through the University Web site, publications, open houses, and orientation programs. However, the ability to communicate academic expectations and curriculum relevance to FY students could be enhanced. There is little, if any, institutional culture that connects the general education program with life and career goals or

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

academic development. Students do not, generally, see any connection between the general education curriculum and these, or any, larger issues.

The level of communication with secondary school personnel and families of FY students in facilitating student success is modest and could be enhanced. Currently the institution is working with high school grant-based mentor programs such as TRIO, DC CAP, Gear Up, and Upward Bound. The requirements for specific academic majors are provided to FY students and their families through a link between recruitment materials and major and minor checklists. Communication with parents is primarily done during the summer and winter “Transition for Parents” presentation, Family Weekend activities, Multiethnic Pre-matriculation Program, and Campus Visitations. Parents routinely evaluate these programs as excellent.

The University structures the first-year experience in a way that provides first-year students the opportunity to establish connections with faculty through advisement, with other freshmen through common first-year courses and freshmen residence halls, and to a lesser degree with upper-level students through clubs, sports, and organizations. Although some academic support services are available to first-year students, many are unaware of them and few take advantage of those that are available.

First-year students are assigned advisors prior to coming to the University and meet with their advisors to select classes (except in Perdue School) and review academic progress. The opportunities for students to create long range plans and explore life and career goals related to higher education could be enhanced. The availability of courses is often limited for first-year students, as they register last. Advising is not highly valued in tenure, promotion, or merit rewards for faculty. As a result, academic advising is of irregular quality. There are excellent faculty academic advisors and very weak ones. There is no accountability for either.

Recommended Enhancements

- Charge the academic departments to institute practices that help students connect the outcomes of the general education curriculum with their academic development and their career and life goals.
- Explore opportunities to establish connections with secondary schools to address first-year student transition issues.
- Increase the opportunities for trained upper-level students to mentor FY students. Develop a mentor training program for upper-level students that would provide trained mentors for the FY seminars, summer experiential learning programs, residence halls, tutoring centers, and transitional advising programs.
- Elevate effective advising practices in the teaching/advising category of faculty evaluations. Include accountability for effective advising practices in the promotion and tenure processes. Clearly define the role of faculty in the advising process to include activities beyond registration such as communicating the general education structure and its purpose, discussing academic concerns and goals, and answering career questions. Provide opportunities for student and faculty evaluation of the advising program. Provide

professional development opportunities to enhance academic skills and help make connections between advising and teaching.

- Provide opportunities for FY students to meet and interact with their assigned advisors within the first couple of weeks of school. Consider holding department open houses, teaching a unit of advisement in the FY seminar, and establishing e-mail correspondence between FY students and their advisors. (*The Pre-load Academic Day and Department Open Houses was piloted in Fall 2006 with positive results.*)

All Students Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.* The process of anticipating, diagnosing, and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to assessment and adjustment throughout the first year. Institutions provide services with respect for the students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Institutions also ensure a campus environment that is inclusive and safe for all students.

- 6.1 The institution identifies first-year student subpopulations that predictably have unique academic, social, personal, and safety needs.
- 6.2 The institution addresses the academic, social, personal, and safety needs of identified subpopulations of first-year students.
- 6.3 The institution assures that all first-year students experience individualized attention from faculty/staff, academic support outside the classroom, opportunities for campus involvement, and an inclusive campus environment.

Current Situation

Salisbury University prides itself on its “student-centered” environment. Various departments on campus provide student services intended to meet individual needs. The majority of these services depend upon the student to access the service rather than seeking out certain populations of students. A more proactive approach would be helpful in informing and encouraging FY students to participate in these services. Although there are many programs in place to meet the academic, social/personal, and safety needs of FY students as the University grows and begins to place greater emphasis on “access” and “diversity,” new programs may be needed to address the needs of students from a variety of subpopulations.

There are existing programs to meet the needs of “high achieving” student subpopulations (e.g., Honors Students, Student Athletes, music, acting, and performance programs) and subpopulations for whom specific laws require special programs (e.g., Disabled Students and students with learning disabilities), but there are few programs to help students with academic deficiencies or poorly developed academic skills. According to the survey of faculty and staff, 70% of faculty responded that the biggest academic difficulty faced by FY students was poor independent learning and study skills, yet there is no person or established Center to help students with basic academic skills such as note taking, studying, or test taking.

The Office of University Analysis, Reporting, & Assessment (UARA) collects demographic data

*Dimensions and Performance Indicators from *Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year*.

at the beginning of each semester that is reported annually in the SU Fact Book and shared in many venues. This office has the capability to search through the student database to answer specific questions, such as whether a student subpopulation is doing poorly in a particular academic area, but such “data mining” is not done routinely to monitor the progress of any particular subpopulation.

Salisbury University’s Mission Statement identifies “diversity of views” as one of its guiding principles. The University is committed to an inclusive campus environment. Many of the campus organizations and events are directed towards providing a diverse and inclusive environment for the students and the entire University community.

Recommended Enhancements

1. Encourage students to self disclose to faculty, administrators, and staff any special needs they might have. Clubs and organizations whose members are part of a particular student subpopulation should be encouraged to poll their members regarding any unique academic, social/personal, or safety needs they may have, and these needs should be communicated to appropriate faculty, administration, or staff members.
2. Consider establishing an upperclassmen mentoring program in which FY student subpopulations are paired with upperclassmen who serve as mentors to new students, welcoming them to the campus and helping them become involved in campus life. This could be offered to first-year student subpopulations initially and eventually extended to all first-year students.
3. Schedule meetings between FY students and their advisors early in the first semester, to assure all FY students develop a connection with their academic advisor. Academic Open Houses were held during the Preload Program in Fall 2006 to provide opportunities for new students to become acquainted with the departmental faculty/advisors prior to the beginning of the fall classes.

Diversity Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.* Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

- 7.1 The institution assures that first-year students experience diverse ideas and worldviews through initiatives solely based in the curriculum, initiatives solely based in the cocurriculum, and initiatives integrated across the curriculum and cocurriculum.
- 7.2 The institution structures opportunities for first-year students to interact with individuals from backgrounds and cultures different from their own through contact with faculty and staff at the institution, other students at the institution, and individuals outside the institution.
- 7.3 The institution conveys to first-year students the standards of behavior it expects for participants in an open and civil campus community.

Current Situation

One of the University's strategic goals, as presented in the Mission Statement, is to "foster inclusiveness as well as cultural and intellectual pluralism." Although it is difficult to assure that these initiatives are part of the curriculum, the General Education requirements include two semesters of World Civilization, in which students are exposed to a range of worldviews and their historical development, and other General Education electives, including Philosophy, Sociology, Communication Arts, and Political Science, that provide students with a variety of viewpoints and a broad range of intellectual diversity.

An active speakers program brings a range of presenters to the campus, speaking on topics ranging from education policies to world politics. Several departments sponsor their own seminar series (such as the Philosophy Symposium and History "brown bag" presentations) that further enhance the intellectual diversity of the campus. In an effort to increase exposure to

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diverse ideas, many of the faculty make attendance at seminars, symposia, and performances a part of their course requirements. The University also integrates the curricular and cocurricular initiatives through programs such as International Studies programs, service learning projects, civic engagement, and the New Student Reader program.

The University has made a considerable effort to increase the social, cultural, and political diversity of the campus, not only by promoting activities such as speakers, concerts, and events, but also in its hiring of faculty and staff and recruitment of a diverse student body. SU has made a commitment to increase the diversity of its faculty and staff by advertising positions in journals targeting diverse populations of candidates and offering special workshops entitled “Planning Ahead: Building Our Ranks: Diversifying Our Faculty/Staff” to search committees to help them develop strategies for obtaining a diverse pool of applicants.

The New Student Experience program includes diversity initiatives within its three-day orientation program prior to the start of fall semester and within the experiential orientation programs during the summer. First-year students living in campus housing take part in diversity programming provided by RAs who encourage interaction between students of different backgrounds. The programming is typically needs-based and is also done in response to acts of intolerance.

The recently adopted “Salisbury University Promise” emphasizes the expectation that students demonstrate “personal and academic integrity” and show respect for “diverse groups and individuals.”

Nevertheless, approximately 50% of faculty and staff feel that the University’s curriculum and cocurriculum offer only moderate (or less) attention to diverse ideas and world views (among African American faculty and staff, this percentage was as high as 75-80%). Nearly 70% of students feel they receive only moderate (or less) exposure to different worldviews as part of their classroom and out-of-classroom experiences. (There was little difference between the responses of white and African American student responses.) Although there seem to be many cocurricular opportunities for students to gain exposure to diverse ideas on issues such as culture, politics, religion, etc., relatively few FY students take advantage of these opportunities.

Recommended Enhancements

- Encourage students to experience diverse ideas and worldviews through curricular choices and cocurricular activities.
- Encourage faculty to insure students experience diverse ideas and worldviews through curriculum-based initiatives and promote the speakers, programs, and events that comprise the intellectual life of the University. A pilot program, “The Freshman Cultural Laureate program,” has been implemented for the Fall 2006 semester.

Roles & Purposes Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society.* These roles and purposes include acquiring knowledge for personal growth, preparing for future employment, becoming engaged citizens, and serving the public good. Institutions encourage first-year students to systematically examine their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college/university. Students are exposed to the value of general education as well as to the value of more focused, in-depth study of a field or fields of knowledge (i.e., the major).

- 8.1 The institution effectively communicates its vision to students for the purposes of higher education include acquiring knowledge for personal growth, preparing for future employment, becoming engaged citizens, and serving the public good.
- 8.2 The institution intentionally provides opportunities for first-year students to examine their personal motivation for pursuing higher education.
- 8.3 The institution effectively communicates its rationale for the required courses (e.g., core curriculum, distribution, and general education), required competencies (e.g., library skills, computing, writing), and requirements for entry into majors.

Current Situation

The committee found that the institution's role in promoting an understanding of the roles and purposes of higher education among first-year students could be enhanced. In response to the student survey question regarding the communication of the institutional vision for the purposes of higher education, 55% or more of students said that their knowledge was high or very high regarding: 1) knowledge acquisition for personal growth, 2) learning to prepare for future employment, 3) learning for engaged citizenship, and 4) learning for serving the public good. Except for employment and life goals, however, faculty perception of student awareness in these areas was significantly lower.

There are little or no identifiable, consistent efforts to provide opportunities for first-year students to examine their personal motivation for pursuing higher education. In the student survey, only 35% of students indicated that discussion with faculty and staff regarding how college can help achieve life goals was high or very high, and only 31% responded high or very high to the question about to what degree faculty and staff helped them examine their personal reasons for getting a college education. Beginning Fall 2006, a new curriculum unit has been

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incorporated in which FY students are required to write a Personal Goal Statement.

The degree to which the campus effectively communicates its rationale for general education, major requirements, and required competencies is generally low and certainly varies by department. Although there is a clear rationale for General Education in the catalog, there is little evidence that this is communicated anywhere else in the first-year experience. Regarding the “required competencies,” such as library skills, computing, and writing, there is no common agreement as to what the minimum skills are, except perhaps for writing, which is defined and assessed regularly in English 101 and 102 courses. There is a substantial variance in how departments provide rationales for their majors. The majority merely list requirements in the catalog or on checklists with little or no rationale for course requirements or sequencing. The exceptions are Accounting, which provides a brief rationale for its major in the catalog, and the Philosophy Department, which distributes to their students a comprehensive handbook that delineates the rationale for the major as well as career and graduate school opportunities.

Recommended Enhancements

- Provide consistent opportunities for FY students to examine their personal motivations for pursuing higher education. Consider including an admissions application essay question that addresses the students’ personal motives for attending college. Review advising procedures to determine if opportunities are present to examine students’ personal motivations. Examine opportunities for transfer students to explore personal motivation.
- Examine the flow of general education within the academic programs. Discuss ways in which introductory or foundational major courses could provide an early forum for the discussion of motivation for the pursuit of knowledge within both General Education and the major.
- Explore the possibility of including a rationale for all majors and general education in the catalog and other publications and Web sites.
- Explore the creation of major booklets, using booklets for the Philosophy and Physical Education Departments as models.
- Define computer skills and information literacy competencies and integrate them into the curriculum in a consistent and coherent manner.
- Develop a plan to convey the University’s vision of purposes for a higher education to first-year students.

Improvement Dimension

Best Practice

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations to achieve ongoing first-year improvement.* This assessment is specific to the first year as a unit of analysis—a distinct time period and set of experiences, academic and otherwise, in the lives of students. It is also linked systemically to the institutions’ overall assessment. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and ongoing improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. As part of the enhancement process and as a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on the first college year.

- 9.1 The institution systematically assesses first-year initiatives including academic support, academic advisement, preview advising and registration, the Preload program, ASAP and summer options, welcome week, and student learning outcomes in the top five first-year student classes.
- 9.2 The assessment results are used to improve or confirm existing practice.
- 9.3 Recent assessment activities have improved campus understanding of student allocation of time, student/faculty connections, student use of campus services, and student class attendance patterns.
- 9.4 Strategies that have been used to improve the first year include attendance at higher education meetings, participation in multi-campus initiatives focused on the first year, broad campus exposure to external experts, and broad exposure to campus-based knowledge/expertise about the first year.

Current Situation

All programs sponsored by the New Student Experience Office are regularly assessed by both students and parents. Evaluations are reviewed by the New Student Experience Leadership Team, and revisions are made based on the evaluation feedback. All program assessments are completed by the sixth week of the first semester. There is no assessment plan for the first-year student experience beyond the first six weeks.

The Office of University Analysis, Reporting, & Assessment (UARA), in collaboration with Student and Academic Affairs, conducts two different nationally standardized assessment surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey. The NSSE obtains information about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide to engage students in

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educationally effective activities for enhanced learning and personal development. NSSE is administered every third year and is normed with participating institutions nationally. The CIRP Freshman Survey provides a detailed profile of our entering freshmen class as well as national normative data for students in similar types of institutions along with the national normative profile. The CIRP is administered biannually through the New Student Experience Office. Additional statistical and analytical data are available in the Office of University Analysis and on their Web site, but the campus community is largely unaware of it and/or does not make use of it. However, there is some concern about widely publishing raw data that might be misconstrued by off-campus and/or on-campus constituencies. Some administrative units in student and academic services use these data more than the faculty or staff at large. Further, because the general campus community does not make use of these data, there is instead a tendency for the community at-large to form opinions and make decisions based on anecdotal evidence through their experience in micro-communities across campus.

Strategies for improving the first-year experience include: 1) the Director's annual attendance at the Conference on the First-year Student, 2) a multi-campus workshop (January 2005) which focused on the FYE and included a guest speaker from the Policy Center on the First Year of College, and 3) participation in the Foundations of Excellence Self-Study project.

Recommended Enhancements

- Create assessment processes designed to evaluate the effectiveness of current and new FY student programs and to guide future program development. Some suggested assessment initiatives include:
 1. Expand first-year assessment initiatives to include the administration of the "Your First College Year (YFCY)" national survey to students at the end of their first academic year.
 2. Expand New Student Experience Program evaluations to include questions specific to Academic Affairs.
 3. On a rotating basis, continue to administer the nationally normed NSSE and CIRP Freshman Surveys. Improve the distribution of the results to the University community in a strategic, purposeful way for the purpose of planning and improvement of existing First Year programs.
 4. Implement systematic assessment of the academic component of first-year students' experiences.
 5. Develop a systemic plan for assessing academic advising for the FY students.
- Develop and implement a plan to disseminate relevant data to constituents working with first-year students.
- Initiate a study to determine why students leave Salisbury University during or after their first year.

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