

## **First Year Engagement Plan Survey Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The First Year Engagement Plan (FYEP) Ad-Hoc Committee administered a survey in June 2008 to full-time faculty and students. The purpose of the surveys was fourfold:

- (a) ascertain student and faculty perceptions about the first year seminar,
- (b) determine if the First Year Seminar (FYS) should be offered,
- (c) identify campus resources that would help meet the UP FYEP goals and objectives, and
- (d) seek additional comments and suggestions about the FYEP at Penn State Berks.

The survey respondents were asked to participate via the faculty and student list serves. Sixty (54.5%) full-time faculty and 102 students (3.9%) completed the survey. These response rates are reasonable considering that the intent of the survey was informational and two-thirds of the survey items were open-ended.

### **Results**

- When asked if the input used to develop the FYEP should be either student or faculty focused, over one-half (52.3%) of the faculty and one-half (47.0%) of the students indicated the input should be faculty focused.
- Both faculty and students stated that the FYS should be retained as an option. Specifically seventy-three percent (72.9%) of the faculty and seventy-seven percent (76.7%) of the students indicated yes.
- Unintended consequences of the FYS that were identified include:
  - Negative impact on faculty evaluations,
  - FYS can be time consuming taking time away from other areas of responsibility,
  - Staffing,
  - [Some FYS sections are] not organized,
  - Not integrated with the major, and
  - Wastes student's time.
- Several suggestions were offered to improve the FYS. Among those suggestions were:
  - Emphasize campus resources,
  - Allow students to develop own "learning" plan,
  - Consistency in assignments and student expectations,
  - Help students write at college level,
  - Involve full-time faculty,
  - Set up modules for integrating campus support areas,
  - Involve support service areas in planning FYEP,
  - Consult other campus "best practices", and
  - Integrate skills of FYS into "regular" course work.
- The faculty and staff were asked to identify campus support services and resources to needed to help meet the UP FYEP goals and objectives. Below is a partial list of these support services and resources:

- Orientation,
- Student Handbook,
- Tutoring,
- Learning Center, Advising Center, Career Services,
- Peer mentors, faculty mentors,
- Seniors/alumni talk with Freshmen,
- Clubs, volunteer opportunities
- Interaction with faculty,
- Library,
- Study groups,
- Courses,
- Visits from departments, and
- [use] history of higher education, history of PSU.

- Additional comments and suggestions were varied but mainly focused on content and format of the FYS. Some of those suggestions and comments are listed below.

#### *Content*

- Implement writing intensive seminars,
- Design discipline specific seminars,
- Develop a course that emphasizes critical thinking,
- Consider non-traditional student issues and experiences,
- [include] time-management,
- [include] tutoring,
- Introduce students to library resources,
- Have student research on a subject of interest to them,
- Have students explore career options,
- Academic integrity.

#### *Format*

- Develop small seminar classes,
- Hold at least one class in an informal environment,
- [make as part] of at least two academic classes in the first semester,
- [sections should have] 20 or fewer students,
- Taught by a student oriented faculty member with appropriate expectations.
- Do much of the Common Reading at Orientation,

#### *Collaborations*

- Collaboration between Student-Academic Affairs,
- Develop and Advising Team that organizes presentations & workshops,
- Involve the Writing Center, Learning Center.

#### *Other*

- Emphasize “caring” and helpful environment,
- Pair upper class students with Freshmen.
- FYS is fine.

### **Limitations**

Although the students solicited for the survey were those enrolled in either the fall 2007 or spring 2008 semester (or both), the survey was administered during the first summer session, 2008.

Administering the survey during the fall or spring semesters may have yielded a different set of full-time faculty and student survey respondents.

In addition, about two-thirds of the survey contained open ended questions. Open ended questions tend to be perceived as more burdensome by respondents than multiple choice, checklist, or short answer items. Nonetheless, the number of surveys returned for both faculty and students demonstrates that the number of open-ended questions was not an apparent deterrent to completing the survey.

### **Recommendations**

- Continue dialogue with faculty, students, and key support areas.
- Replicate the survey in the fall 2008 semester. Incorporate suggestions from the June 2008 survey administration.
- Develop a FYEP that considers both flexibility of delivery and consistency of content and student expectations.
- Catalogue the “best practices” of peer-institutions and adapt to the Penn State Berks FYEP.
- Incorporate responses of this survey and future inquiries into the FYEP.
- Reinforce the importance of the first year in college and the relationship between sound academic habits and future educational, career, and personal success.

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