

**The
University Of Iowa
First-Year Experience
Task Force**

**Phase One Report:
Review of Existing
Programs and
Identification of Best
Practices**

November 2008

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**PHASE ONE REPORT
OF THE
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE TASK FORCE
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

Introduction

The *First Year Experience Task Force at The University of Iowa* was established by the Executive Committee of the Student Success Team in summer 2008. Michael Barron, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Services and Director of Admissions, chairs the committee. See Appendix A for a complete list of task force members.

The task force has been given the following charge to be delivered in two reports:

- Identify programs and practices for first-year students;
- Describe elements specific to The University of Iowa regarding first-year student programs, practices, and experiences;
- Recommend a comprehensive first-year student experience program for The University of Iowa.

In this “Phase One Report,” the task force has:

- Developed a taxonomy of first-year experiences;
- Described proven practices for first-year students, including evidence of the practices’ effectiveness;
- Identified models for the assessment of the outcomes associated with first-year experiences;
- Completed an internal environmental scan of The University of Iowa, identifying and assessing current practices and programs for first-year students.

Background

The Student Success Team (SST) at The University of Iowa (UI) was created in September 2006 by Thomas Rocklin, Vice Provost, for the purpose of bringing attention and action to issues of undergraduate student success. To accomplish this goal, the SST formed Action Committees to examine areas to foster and improve undergraduate student success. The First-Year Experience (FYE) task force was established to review the SST committee recommendations, current Iowa initiatives and best practices from other universities. After reviewing this information, the task force will propose a comprehensive first-year student experience program to be implemented at UI. The task force members were selected based on their knowledge of the challenges/barriers to success that students face during their first year.

Process

The task force’s first meeting was on June 11, 2008, with guests Thomas Rocklin, Vice Provost, and Elizabeth J. Whitt, Director of Student Success Initiatives, delivering the charge to the task force. The task force began meeting every Monday for 90 minutes on June 30, 2008.

The Committee Chair consulted with Pat Folsom (Learning Communities Committee Chair) and Andy Cinoman (Orientation Services), two experts in the area of first year experience programs, regarding resources and initiatives for the committee to review. Karen Noggle (Office of

Admissions) completed an internet search on relevant first-year experience initiatives for the committee to review.

The meeting format consists of open discussion on provided materials/resources, subject matter expert guest speakers, and in-depth telephone interviews with Mabel Freeman, Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Admissions and First Year Experience, from The Ohio State University and Beth Lingren Clark, Director of Orientation and First Year Programs, from The University of Minnesota. The task force invited the following guest speakers to address the group on their area of expertise: Pat Folsom (Learning Communities Committee Chair), Greg Thompson and Michelle Cohenour (University Housing), Bill Nelson and Tara Edberg (Student Life) and Sarah Hansen (Health Iowa). Task force members that served on SST committees and/or were involved in existing Iowa initiatives provided information to the group regarding their area of expertise.

Karen Noggle (Office of Admissions) serves as the assistant to the chair of the task force. Prior to each meeting, Karen e-mails the agenda to the members. Karen takes minutes at the meetings, e-mails the minutes to the members, and posts the minutes to the FYE website (<http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/fye/index.html>). The task force members communicate between meetings via e-mail and blog. Special thanks to Sara Langenberg (Office of Admissions) for creating the FYE website and blog, and Nancy Nelson (Office of Admissions) for taking minutes for the October 13, 2008 meeting.

Initiatives/Reports Reviewed

The SST Executive Committee held a retreat in summer 2007 and prioritized the initiatives developed by the committee. The FYE task force reviewed the following proposal and committee reports that were identified as priorities by the SST Executive Committee:

- Camp Herky proposal
- Task Force on Learning Communities
- Committee to Implement the Message Project
- Committee on Opportunities for Student Engagement/Pick One Committee
- Committee to Communicate the Importance of Student Success
- The "One Community, One Book" Project
- Committee on Barriers to Student Success
- Task Force on Early Intervention for Students in Difficulty
- Committee on the Use of Peer Educators
- Committee on New Traditions
- Committee on Communication and Website Development

In addition to the SST action committee reports, the task force also reviewed existing first-year initiatives at The University of Iowa:

- Orientation activities
- Welcome Week activities
- Learning communities
- First-year seminars
- College Transition course
- Residence Life activities
- Iowa Edge activities
- AlcoholEdu and alcohol use on campus

Based on the Committee Chair's consultation with Pat Folsom and Andy Cinoman, The Ohio State University and University of Minnesota's programs were identified as exceptional, comprehensive first-year programs for the task force to review. The task force conducted in-depth telephone interviews with Mabel Freeman (Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Admissions and First Year Experience) from The Ohio State University and Beth Lingren Clark (Director of Orientation and First Year Programs) from The University of Minnesota (refer to Appendix C for complete question list). In addition, the task force completed a website review of the first year experience initiatives for the following universities: Indiana State University, Indiana University and North Dakota State University.

Literature Review

To gain a conceptual understanding of first-year experiences, the members received both internal reports and external materials.

Research on Iowa Student Experiences (RISE)

The Office of the Provost commissioned the University of Iowa Center for Research on Undergraduate Education (CRUE) to perform a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative study of undergraduate experiences at The University of Iowa. The center undertook the Research on Iowa Student Experiences (RISE) project during the 2005-06 academic year and the summer of 2006. Researchers collected quantitative data via a web-based survey instrument sent to all undergraduate first-year and senior students. They received completed surveys from 1,477 first-year students and 1,676 seniors, a response rate of 36.5%. To gather qualitative data, researchers conducted interviews with focus groups including 75 first-year students and 45 seniors who chose to participate (The University of Iowa, 2008, p.109). Key findings were:

- Involvement in academically-oriented initiatives and experiences outside the classroom (e.g., research with a faculty member, teaching or tutoring other students, career explorations activities, living-learning programs, honors programs, attending a racial or cultural awareness workshop, etc.), and in formal leadership positions in student clubs and organizations have significant benefits for a wide range of college outcomes and exposure to good practices. The research found that engagement matters and it matters early, however, engagement in educationally-purposeful activities and experiences is not widely-distributed across the UI student body nor is it evenly distributed across students' time (pp. 43-44).
- UI offers many opportunities for student engagement and success, but it is up to the individual student to find those opportunities and create a positive experience. Students relied mostly on other students (first-year peers and older students) to identify what an Iowa education could and should be, and made a wide range of decisions based on the example of other students (p. 40).
- Seniors were more engaged than first-year students in a variety of aspects of college life and were getting more out of their engagement. The research does not indicate **how** the seniors reached their level of engagement or how first-year students "with a lot of free time" became busy and engaged seniors (p. 44).
- Seniors indicated that having a positive experience in the first year—that is, making friends (particularly on the residence hall floor) and feeling part of a community quickly—was essential for their persistence at UI. Seniors were clear about the importance of "making the right friends," getting involved early with people who were positive role

models for student engagement and leadership, and who could pave the way to involvement in student organizations (pp. 43–44).

- Alcohol use—including excessive consumption and underage drinking—influences experiences and outcomes of UI undergraduates from entry to (almost) graduation. The research indicated a clear inverse relationship between binge-drinking frequency and grades for both first-year and senior students; as frequency of binge drinking increased, grade-point average decreased. Underage drinking was described as common, with a fairly widespread perception that “the University isn’t doing all it could or should” to address this “culture of drinking” (p. 43). Most students viewed this culture as negative, limiting social alternatives to alcohol consumption, creating negative environments for sleep and study in the residence halls, hindering academic challenge, and presenting UI—and, potentially, its graduates—in a negative light off the campus (p. 36).

Fulfilling the Promise: A Self-Study for the North Central Association Reaccreditation of The University of Iowa (2007-2008)

The University of Iowa has been accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), of which it is a charter member, since 1913. Every ten years, the University undergoes review and evaluation by the NCA’s Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to determine whether it has continued to meet the high standards required for reaccreditation. As a first step in this process, the University conducts a self-study. The resulting report informs the external evaluators and sets a direction for the University’s future by highlighting strengths and weaknesses in critical areas. Moreover, it serves as a status report for the University’s internal and external constituencies, thus helping the University to uphold its responsibility for accountability to the people it serves (Preface).

One of the five categories of self-study for this report was *Getting Involved: Education Beyond the Classroom*. This self-study found that there are extensive opportunities for productive engagement on this campus, however, these opportunities are not well coordinated among units and are not always carefully evaluated. Students may be isolated from these activities by either choice or lack of infrastructure. While marketing is important, peer influence and the establishment of small communities seem to be the most powerful ways of initiating students to these activities. If students do not become engaged early in their college careers through involvement in smaller communities, the gravitational pull of the bar scene (“the engagement activity of least resistance”) can be very powerful (pp. 33-34).

Joe Cuseo, Marymount College, CA

The task force also reviewed research by Joe Cuseo, professor of psychology at Marymount College in California. As a leader in this field, he is a member of the advisory board to the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and has written numerous articles on the first-year experience and student success. The task force reviewed the following articles by Joe Cuseo; the relevant content is cited later in this report:

- *Academic-Support Strategies for Promoting Student Retention & Achievement During the First-Year of College*
- *Intended Student Outcomes of a Comprehensive First-Year Experience Program*
- *A Taxonomy of Potential Assessment Outcomes*
- *The First-Year Experience Movement: What is Its Appeal? What are Its Ideals?*
- *A Comprehensive First-Year Experience: Target Areas for Program Development & A Blueprint of Best Practices*

My Freshman Year/What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student

To better understand the student's perspective, it was suggested the group read *My Freshman Year/What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* by Rebekah Nathan. Baffled by the behavior of her students, the author (an anthropology professor) decides to close the gap between herself and her students by enrolling in her own university as a freshman. This book offers insight into the contemporary college life and commentary on the ways in which the system has not kept up with the changing needs of its students. A complete list of references and resources is in Appendix B.

Report Format

The internal and external reviews of existing initiatives and best practices has provided the task force with the materials to complete the *Phase Two Report*, in which the task force will propose recommendations for a comprehensive first-year student experience program at the UI. The proposal will include the overall scope and scale of the proposed program, detailed descriptions of the initiatives, intended outcomes and means to assess their achievement, governance model, staffing model, and resource needs.

This *Phase One Report* includes the following:

- a taxonomy of first-year experience;
- the case for high-impact first-year experiences;
- a discussion of successful practices of established programs;
- a discussion of assessment practices;
- a discussion of various aspects of the UI environment;
- a brief summation; *and*
- various appendices.

I) Taxonomy

Charge: Create a taxonomy of first-year experience

This section provides a basic taxonomy of first-year experience as gleaned from the resource materials. Research on college impact and student success is clear: institutions are well-advised to focus resources on the academic and social adjustment of first-year students. Universities that seem to be effective at fostering student success are characterized by “coordinated, complementary programs for new students that start with pre-college socialization activities and continue through much or all of the first college year” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005, p. 286). The research also suggests that the cognitive and behavioral habits students develop during their first year of college may become their modus operandi for the entire college experience (Cuseo, p. 4).

First-year experience initiatives are designed to help students identify as members of their college community and understand expectations related to community membership. While most schools provide some initiatives aimed at easing the transition for first-year students, the size and scope of these initiatives vary greatly by institution. Some institutions provide a few activities during the initial week(s) of the semester, while others provide comprehensive, year-long programming for first-year students. The task force identified the following first-year experience initiatives; please note, these initiatives are not mutually exclusive. Institutions may have any combination of the elements listed below, and some initiatives may have elements from more than one category.

- **Summer initiatives**—these initiatives occur in the summer, prior to the beginning of fall classes. Summer Orientation sessions are usually required for students to register for classes and provide the student’s first introduction to the campus. Some universities offer optional outdoor activities (e.g., Camp Buckeye), that serve as a bridge between summer orientation and the beginning of the fall semester. These outdoor activities provide an opportunity to make social connections prior to the start of classes.
- **Immersion initiatives**—these initiatives begin just prior to the start of the fall semester and may continue through the first six weeks of the semester. Since studies have shown that engaging a student within the first six weeks increases their engagement with the institution and retention rates, these initiatives are designed to foster engagement and ease the transition from high school to college life. Initiatives focus on a variety of topics, including academic success, navigating the campus, financial and budgeting advice, alcohol education, and social activities. Welcome Week at The University of Minnesota is an example of an immersion initiative.
- **Formal courses**—these courses occur throughout the semester and students earn semester hours for taking them. College Transition and First-Year Seminars are examples of formal courses.
- **Campus engagement initiatives**—these initiatives are specifically designed to foster student involvement by providing opportunities for students to become engaged with other students, faculty, staff, and the campus. Activities range from one-time events (e.g., the President’s Block Party, Community of Color Welcome Reception, Field House Frenzy) to long-term, continuing activities (e.g., Honors opportunities, student organizations, fraternities and sororities). Pick One! and Learning Communities, including living learning communities, are examples of campus engagement initiatives.
- **Civic engagement initiatives**—these initiatives are off-campus service projects in which students can volunteer to participate. The Day of Service and Engagement at The University of Minnesota is an example of a civic engagement initiative.

Although the task force did not find one universal model for first-year programs, research suggests some common properties and principles dominate the design of the various initiatives. Below are the properties or principles of effective first-year program delivery:

- **Student-centered**—oriented toward, focused on, and driven by a genuine concern for the needs and welfare of students.
- **Intentional (purposeful)**—deliberately designed to emphasize active student involvement, social integration, personal reflection, and personal validation.
- **Proactive**—characterized by early, preventive action that addresses students’ needs and adjustment issues in an anticipatory fashion.
- **Intrusive**—initiate supportive action by reaching out to students and bringing or delivering the program to students, thus increasing the likelihood that programming reaches all students who would benefit.
- **Diversified**—tailored or customized to meet the distinctive needs of different student subpopulations.
- **Personalized**—delivered in a manner that recognizes each student’s individuality, and attempts to address personal needs.
- **Comprehensive (holistic)**—focused on the student as a whole person, addressing the full range of academic and non-academic factors that affect student success.

- **Durable**—institutionalized by being built into the organizational structure or blueprint and annual budget of the institution, thus ensuring that the initiatives have longevity and are experienced perennially by successive cohorts of students.
- **Collaborative**—involved cooperative alliances or partnerships between different organizational units of the college.
- **Empirical (evidentiary)**—supported and driven by assessment data (both quantitative and qualitative), which are used summatively to “prove” program impact or value and formatively to continually improve program quality (Cuseo, pp. 17-18).

II) The Case for High-Impact First-Year Experiences

Research has shown that some initiatives are more effective, or have a higher impact, than others. There are several reasons why certain activities are so effective with students.

- These practices typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks; most require daily decisions that deepen students’ investment in the activity as well as in their commitment to their academic career at the college.
- The nature of these high-impact activities puts students in circumstances that essentially demand that they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters, typically over extended periods of time.
- Participating in one or more of these activities increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves.
- Even though the structures and settings of high-impact activities differ, students typically get frequent feedback about their performance in every one of the activities.
- Participation in these activities provides opportunities for students to see how what they are learning works in different settings, both on and off campus. These opportunities to integrate, synthesize and apply knowledge are essential to deep, meaningful learning experiences.
- Certain activities (e.g. participation in service learning, conducting research with a faculty member, or completing an internship) can be particularly life-changing (Kuh, 2008, pp. 14-17).

The main recommendation from this research on teaching and learning practices is to make it possible for every student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate career, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field of the student’s study plan. Ideally, institutions would structure the curriculum and other learning opportunities so that one high-impact activity is available to every student every year (Kuh, 2008, p. 19).

The following teaching and learning practices (high-impact activities) have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial during the first year of college for students from many backgrounds (Kuh, 2008, p. 9).

- **First-year seminars and experiences**—these initiatives bring together small groups of students with senior-level faculty on a regular basis. These initiatives place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies (Kuh, 2008, p. 9).
- **Learning communities**—encourages integration of learning across courses and involves students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or

more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors (Kuh, 2008, p. 10).

These additional high impact teaching and learning practices often begin during the first year, and extend throughout the college career.

- **Common intellectual experiences**—a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (Kuh, 2008, p. 9).
- **Writing-intensive courses**—emphasizes writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. The demonstrated effectiveness of this repeated practice across the curriculum has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and on some campuses, ethical inquiry (Kuh, 2008, p. 10).
- **Collaborative assignments and projects**—combines the goals of learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences (Kuh, 2008, p. 10).
- **Diversity, civic, and global learning**—emphasizes courses that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies often explore difficult subjects such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power (Kuh, 2008, p. 10).

These additional high impact teaching and learning practices can begin (or be introduced) during the first year, but students typically engage in these activities after the first year.

- **Undergraduate research**—involves students with important research questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions (Kuh, 2008, p. 10).
- **Service and community-based learning**—give students direct experiences with issues they are studying in the curriculum and ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and to reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. Giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life (Kuh, 2008, p. 11).
- **Internships**—provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the fields (Kuh, 2008, p. 11).
- **Study abroad**—provide alternative learning environments for students to benefit from new academic perspectives and intercultural experiences.

This additional high impact teaching and learning practice can be introduced during the first year, but students will typically engage in these activities towards the end of their college experience.

- **Capstone projects and culminating experiences**—these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they have learned (Kuh, 2008, p. 11).

While high-impact activities are appealing especially because they engage students at high levels, these practices must be done well. In addition, institutions must be able to provide enough opportunities in each activity area so that every student has a real chance to participate (Kuh, 2008, p. 20).

III) Successful Practices of Established Programs

Charge: Identify successful practices of established programs

For a realistic comparison, the task force members reviewed first-year programs at institutions similar in size and type to the UI. The task force conducted in-depth telephone interviews with Mabel Freeman (Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Admissions and First Year Experience) from The Ohio State University and Beth Lingren Clark (Director of Orientation and First Year Programs) from The University of Minnesota. In addition, the task force completed a website review of the first year experience initiatives for the following universities: Indiana State University, Indiana University and North Dakota State University. The task force discovered some common successful practices during their review:

- **Orientation** (The Ohio State University, The University of Minnesota, Indiana State)—this is the student's first official introduction to the institution. Typically, the main focus is on building the course schedule for the first semester. Some institutions offer informational sessions for students and parents on a wide range of topics related to college life. Students usually have the opportunity to meet fellow students, advisors and peer leaders, and tour the campus.
- **Convocation** (The Ohio State University, The University of Minnesota, Indiana State)—this is a traditional welcome ceremony for entering first-year students (and transfer students). This rite of passage conveys the seriousness with which the universities regard the entry into the collegiate experience. Typically, the University President addresses the incoming class, and student peers are used to facilitate this initiative. Most universities require (or strongly encourage) student participation.
- **Immersion Initiatives** (The University of Minnesota, Indiana State University)—these on-campus initiatives are usually designed to complement the orientation experience. They take place prior to the opening of classes, after students have moved into their residence halls. Although specific content may vary across institutions, most initiatives focus on building social connections for students, learning about the university and its expectations, where to find resources and informational sessions (e.g., alcohol awareness, budgeting and financial issues, roommate issues, academic success, etc.). Student peers are used to facilitate these initiatives.
- **First-year Seminars** (The Ohio State University, The University of Minnesota)—these small, discussion-based seminars are taught by senior faculty, providing first-year students with the opportunity to work closely with faculty members. These initiatives place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies.
- **Linked-Learning Communities** (Indiana State University, North Dakota State University)—these are linked courses with the purpose of fostering shared learning experiences for a defined group of students. As part of a learning community, students enroll in two or more common courses. Learning communities provide academic support

throughout the semester and foster intellectual, personal, and social connections between students and faculty across multiple disciplines or areas of study.

- **Book Club** (The Ohio State University, Indiana State University)—students read a common book over the summer. During the fall seminar, there are book discussion groups and the book’s author is invited to speak on campus.
- **Communications** (The Ohio State University, The University of Minnesota)—some university websites provide specialized web pages for new students, current students, and parents. The Ohio State University and The University of Minnesota have “branded” their programs and market them as special programming for first year students. E-mails and newsletters are also utilized as methods for communication.
- **Annual Staff Development Conferences** (The Ohio State University, The University of Minnesota)—these conferences are for faculty and staff, and focus on the needs of first-year students. These conferences are important for faculty and staff buy-in to the first-year programming efforts.
- **Summer Camp Activities** (The Ohio State University)-these outdoor activities serve as a bridge between summer orientation and the beginning of the fall semester and provide an opportunity for students to make social connections prior to the start of classes.
- **Buckeyes Beyond Ohio** (The Ohio State University)—this lunch series for first-year students from out of state gives these students a chance to meet faculty and other students from their area of the country.
- **Distinguished Speaker Series** (The Ohio State University)—invites distinguished individuals who have risen to the highest levels of achievement in politics, public activism, or the arts and sciences to address the first-year class.
- **Success Series** (The Ohio State University)—short, one-hour workshops on common concerns and questions first-year students have during their transition to university life. Theme areas include academic engagement and exploration, alcohol and other drug awareness, anxiety and mental health, current issues, diversity, financial and debt management, health and wellness, leadership, and sexual health. There is typically a ‘one minute’ evaluation, consisting of two questions: “what did you hear about the course?” and “what did you take away from the course?”

IV) Assessment Practices

Charge: Include models for the assessment of the outcomes associated with first year programs

Both the Ohio State University and The University of Minnesota rely mainly on student surveys, interviews, and evaluations for feedback. The Ohio State University conducts random interviews during each quarter and has a student survey every other year. They have a “one minute” evaluation for their Success Series courses, asking the following questions: “what did you hear about the course?” and “what did you take away from this course?”

The University of Minnesota assessment model is an outcome-oriented, comprehensive first-year assessment plan. In 2007, they surveyed students who entered The University of Minnesota in fall 2007, one year prior to the implementation of their Welcome Week initiatives.

They used the collected data to help identify the themes and issues which impact student success and retention. The issues and themes identified were used to develop their Welcome Week initiatives. They will compare the 2007 data (pre-Welcome Week initiatives) with the 2008 data (initial year of Welcome Week initiatives) to determine the effectiveness and impact of their Welcome Week initiatives on the first-year students. See Appendix D for The University of Minnesota assessment model.

V) UI Environment Scan

Charge: Identify key features worthy of consideration in the design and operations of first-year programs at The University of Iowa.

SST Executive Committee Reports and Initiatives

The SST Executive Committee held a retreat in summer 2007 and prioritized the initiatives developed by the committee. The FYE task force reviewed the following proposal and committee reports that were identified as priorities by the SST Executive Committee:

- **Camp Herky proposal**—In the spring of 2005, then-University of Iowa Student Government President Mark Kresowik approached Admissions and Orientation Services about the possibility of making significant changes to Orientation programming to benefit new students. The Camp Herky proposal is a comprehensive immersion initiative designed to introduce first-year students to Iowa (similar to Purdue's Boiler Gold Rush). Currently, Iowa's Welcome Week occurs during the first week of class, however, some students feel too overwhelmed with classes to attend the events. The Camp Herky proposal would move Iowa's Welcome Week activities to a period between Thursday evening and Sunday evening just prior to the beginning of classes. The sessions would include informational and educational components as well as social activities. This proposal was presented to the SST Executive Committee in summer 2007, and the SST Executive Committee identified it as a priority.
- **Task Force on Learning Communities**—Research, including the RISE report, demonstrates that The University of Iowa's learning communities contribute to student success as measured by grade point average and first to second year retention. Learning communities are defined as *"programs intentionally designed to foster shared learning experiences for defined groups of students. Learning communities foster meaningful institutional engagement and student success and may include living-learning programs, linked course programs or combinations of these experiences."* The committee recommended that the UI Learning Communities be composed of two distinct types of learning communities that share a set of required components.
 - **Linked-Courses Learning Communities**—initiatives that involve at least two linked or clustered courses in which a distinct cohort of students enroll during a particular semester. The courses may be linked thematically, or by their relevance to a particular major, or as components of the general education program, or in some other way (Phase One Report, p.3).
 - **Living-Learning Communities**—initiatives that involve undergraduate students who live together in a discrete portion of a residence hall (or the entire hall) and participate in academic and/or extracurricular activities designed especially for them (National Study of Living-Learning Program, Section I, Introduction).
- **"Pick One" Committee to Encourage Student Engagement**—Data from RISE study and SST conversations indicate (1) the importance of student engagement for

persistence and satisfaction and (2) concerns about the extent to which first-year UI students are taking advantage of opportunities to get involved in out-of-class activities. Based on this research, the concept of “Pick One” is to encourage new students (at Orientation and throughout the fall semester) to pick at least one educationally-purposeful co-curricular or extra-curricular activity with which to get involved. The goal is to establish a culture of engagement. Students may select more than one activity. Student involvement is expected, but not mandatory; there is no penalty for non-participation. Fall 2008 is the initial year for “Pick One.”

- **The “One Community, One Book” Project**—According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Annual Report 2007, among the most promising “high impact” practices in higher education, in terms of desired outcomes such as persistence, are first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, service learning, and experiences with diversity (The National Survey of Student Engagement, Annual Report 2007, p. 7). The One Community, One Book project is a way for students to make connections as soon as they arrive on campus. It’s a common or shared reading experience in which students, faculty, staff, and community members will read the same book, and then come together throughout the year to share insights about its content. Fall 2008 is the initial year for “One Community, One Book.”
- **Committee on Barriers to Student Success**—Some aspects of the University (e.g., policies, structures, practices, educational philosophies) might serve as barriers to students’ success. This committee’s charge was to identify and address institutional elements that can inhibit student success. The committee discovered four themes:
 - A shortage of experiences that make a large university smaller.
 - A combination of the alcohol culture, low expectations/challenge for students, and decentralization, leading to an environment of “learned helplessness” among students, faculty, and staff, where no one really takes full responsibility for student success.
 - Trouble getting connected/delayed engagement: students leave because they didn’t “find their place”—there are many student organizations but not a good mechanism for connection students to them in a meaningful, long-term manner.
 - Bureaucracy: From requiring instructor signatures to drop classes to making it difficult to use space on campus for events, students perceive the institution as **saying** it value their time, energy, and engagement but not actually supporting these factors.
- **Committee to Implement the Message Project**—Research on effective environments for undergraduate student success demonstrates the importance of clear and consistent messages about what the institution expects of students. These messages can be communicated in informal and formal ways (e.g., traditions). Research and discussions about undergraduate students’ experiences at Iowa indicate a lack of a formal institutional message about expectations and any formal means to reinforce and celebrate the educational values of the University. This committee developed the “Message” based on analysis of a campus-wide survey; the New Traditions committee examined formal ways to convey these ideas to the university community. The “Message” still needs a title and implementation plan. Below are the key points:
 - **Excel**—Academic excellence means setting and meeting high standards for you as a student. Faculty, staff and other students will ask you to work hard and push

yourself intellectually. We expect a lot of you; you should expect only the best from yourself and The University of Iowa.

- **Stretch**—At Iowa, you will find diversity of people, ideas, opportunities, and experiences. That diversity is one of the benefits of being an Iowa student. Step away from the familiar, try new ideas, experience new cultures, and learn from people different from yourself.
 - **Engage**—You will be a more successful student and enjoy yourself more if you spend your time and energy on activities that matter. The University of Iowa offers almost limitless opportunities and the resources to help you become a leader in and out of the classroom. Take advantage of them.
 - **Choose**—Every day you make decisions that affect your education and your future. Take your choices seriously and use your freedom wisely. Your Iowa education is what you make it. Make it something you can be proud of.
 - **Serve**—As an Iowa student, you are a member of many communities, on and off the campus. You have the opportunity and responsibility to be a good neighbor and citizen to serve the community.
- **Committee on New Traditions**—This committee builds on the goals of the “Message” committee to develop traditions that teach, as well as celebrate, community and institutional values. The committee recommended the following:
 - Promote the *Top 25/50/47 Things to Do While at The University of Iowa*
 - Freshman T-shirt promotion—first-year students would receive the same t-shirt
 - Infusion of the Alma Mater and Fight Song into University programs and events
 - Official opening of classes—a renewed tradition with the UI President opening each semester with the ringing of the Old Capitol bell on the first day of classes
 - Welcome Convocation
 - Creation of a “Traditions” page on the UI homepage
 - Traditions Night at the President’s residence
 - **Committee to Communicate the Importance of Student Success**—This committee was charged with developing a plan to communicate the importance of student success in ways that foster conversations about, commitment to, and engagement in fostering undergraduate student success. Their recommendations include: a slogan (e.g., **You Matter!**) to promote this initiative, publish short articles/videos highlighting everyone’s role in student success, invite more frontline staff to join SST, staff development training days to reinforce the importance of staff in student success, establish an appreciation webpage, and establish an overarching “Key Communicators Group” of frontline staff members to enhance communication among departments.
 - **Task Force on Early Intervention for Students in Difficulty**—Research on institutional conditions for student success demonstrates the importance of “redundant early warning systems that identify and respond to students whose academic performance or other behaviors put them at risk of failure or dropping out” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 2005, p. 260). Below are some preliminary recommendations from this committee:
 - Work with faculty to enhance the current absence reporting system
 - Develop web-based self-assessment diagnostics (Mapworks program)
 - Create a web-based early intervention reporting system for faculty, staff, students, and parents
 - Increase one-on-one communication in residence halls

- Develop central comprehensive exit interview system
 - Track mandatory points of contact
 - Create database of early intervention resources
 - Create a formula that identifies those most at risk before student's first semester
 - Create funding to develop a centralized office/staff structure
- **Committee on the Use of Peer Educators**—Research on institutional conditions for student success highlights the important role of peers: “Peers are very important in helping students understand faculty performance expectations and standards, managing time commitments for academic work and other activities, and connecting students to the institution and other students in meaningful ways” (Kuh, Knzie, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 2005, p. 260). In addition, UI research demonstrates the impact of serving as a peer education on achieving desired outcomes of college (RISE, 2006). The committee recommended the following action items to increase the visibility and extent of peer education on campus:
 - Discussion forum for peer education on campus
 - Workshop on best practices
 - Detailed list of peer education initiatives
 - Funding support
 - **Committee on Communication and Website Development**—This committee was charged with conducting a comprehensive and systematic review of the communication, marketing, and website needs of current and, to the extent possible, future needs of SST initiatives. This committee is still meeting.

Current First-Year Initiatives at The University of Iowa

The task force has reviewed the following current first-year initiatives at the UI. This not an exhaustive list of UI initiatives; the task force will continue to review relevant first-year initiatives at the UI during phase two.

- **Orientation**—the majority of first-year students enrolling for the fall semester attend a two-day, overnight program, although one-day programs are offered prior to the beginning of the semester. Attendance at Orientation is mandatory for students; course selection, academic advising, and course registration occur during the program. There is also a wide array of informational sessions during Orientation that focus on issues of concern to incoming students and their families (e.g., residence hall living, understanding academic expectations, getting involved on campus). There are separate Orientation programs for students and parents. The Parent program provides information about the University, while helping parents gain a better understanding of the transitions they will face in the future. The Parent program also includes presentations about billing and financial aid, health and safety issues, and understanding FERPA and University policies.
- **Welcome Week**—its purpose is to provide students with educational, social, cultural and entertainment activities. Typical events include the President’s Block Party, Community of Color, Student Job Fair, and the Student Organization and Information Fair. Currently it occurs during the first week of classes; however, under the Camp Herky proposal, it would move to just prior to the start of classes.
- **Learning Communities**—are initiatives “*intentionally designed to foster shared learning experiences for defined groups of students. Learning communities foster meaningful*

institutional engagement and student success and may include living-learning programs, linked course programs or combinations of these experiences.” There are two distinct types of learning communities at UI:

- **Linked-Learning Communities (Courses In Common)**—enrolls a small group of students in the same two or three courses, but they are not the only students in most of the classes. The main purpose is to foster social integration; students occasionally formed study groups, but study groups are not a structured component of the community.
 - **Living-Learning Communities**—initiatives that involve undergraduate students who live together in a discrete portion of a residence hall (or the entire hall) and participate in academic and/or extracurricular activities designed especially for them (National Study of Living-Learning Program, Section I, Introduction). The UI’s Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) living-learning community is an example of this model.
- **First-Year Seminars**—The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers first-year seminars designed to introduce new undergraduates to the intellectual life of the University and help them make the transition to college-level learning. Each seminar (offered for one semester hour) gives 15-16 students the chance to work closely with a faculty member on a topic related to his or her current research. Many departments offer the seminars, giving students a wide range of choices. Some of the seminars use upper-class students as peer mentors (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 136).
 - **College Transition**—is a two semester hour course designed to introduce first-year students to the UI and help them feel comfortable with the experience of being a college student. This course examines the academic culture of a university, what it means to be in college, and ways to be successful at Iowa. Topics include the transition to college life, goal setting, decision-making, study skills, time management, campus resources, diversity, and choosing/evaluating a major/career. Enrollment in the course grew from 476 students in fall 2002 to 1,165 (27% of entering students) students in fall 2006. In end-of-semester evaluations, students rate the course very highly. More than 95% of respondents report that the course helps them feel more comfortable as new students at the University (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 134).
 - **Residence Life**—is committed to the holistic development of students. Residence Life offers initiatives intentionally designed to foster the academic, social, cultural, and personal growth. Residence Life is dedicated to the preparation of leaders and involved citizens in a safe and inclusive residential community. Paramount to this endeavor is the promotion of understanding and responsibility in a positive living-learning environment (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 257). In an effort to foster student learning, growth, and interaction, Resident Assistants plan initiatives around five outcomes:
 - Knowledge of individual and community needs
 - Focus on academics and expanding knowledge
 - Personal wellness and health choices
 - Attending to the well-being of others through social action
 - Commitment to career preparation (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 258)

MAPWorks (Making Achievement Possible) is a web-enabled software service designed to improve student success and retention through early intervention. It was developed at

Ball State; Rienow Hall is the pilot group for this new software. Students take a survey, and their responses are flagged as red, yellow, or green. Staff follows up with students who have either red or yellow responses. The students also receive a report, so they have some feedback from the survey. Approximately, 24-30% of students completing the survey required follow-up contact.

- o **Iowa Edge**—is a week-long immersion initiative for entering first-year students of color and first-generation/low-income students. The goals for Iowa Edge are to: 1) create a welcoming environment; 2) assemble a critical mass; 3) foster relationships between students, faculty, staff, and the community; and 4) empower Iowa Edge students to achieve their goals. Iowa Edge connects students with caring faculty and staff, essential academic resources, and positive out-of-classroom activities, thus enhancing student-institution fit, boosting student performance, and improving student retention and graduation rates.

Iowa Edge results:

	First semester average GPA	Persistence to second semester	Second semester average GPA	Persistence to second year
2006 (36 Participants)	2.85	97.22% -1	2.72	91.67% -3
2007 (42 Participants)	2.86	97.6% -1	2.90	92.86% -3
2008 (52 Participants)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

- o **Alcohol Use on Campus**—As indicated in the RISE report, the “culture of drinking” at UI influences experiences and outcomes of undergraduates from entry to (almost) graduation. Iowa has the “perfect storm” that leads to a higher rate of high-risk drinking/negative consequences: numerous bars within walking distance to campus, underage access to the bars, and geographic location. The upper Midwest has higher drinking rates overall than other areas of the country; the UI drinking rates have held steady over the last 15 to 20 years.

AlcoholEdu—Beginning in fall 2006, Iowa joined several other colleges and universities in administering to all first-year students an online, science-based alcohol abuse education and prevention program called AlcoholEdu. The program, based on recommendations outlined in the NIAAA *A Call to Action* report, focuses on alcohol's impact on the mind and body and gives students information and support they need to make smart decisions regarding alcohol use. In requiring first-year students to complete the course, the UI hopes eventually to instill in all students a common understanding about alcohol as it relates to expectations for being a member of the UI community (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 138).

A survey of fall 2006 AlcoholEdu participants found that after completing the course, 77% knew more (in contrast to when they started) about blood-alcohol concentration; 46% knew more about the ways in which alcohol affects someone's ability to give consent for sex; and 76% knew more than a “moderate amount” about the effects of alcohol, as compared to only 39% before the course. Most found the course a positive experience: 77% said it helped them feel more prepared to handle situations involving alcohol that might come up during college (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 138).

VI) Summary and Looking Ahead

The extensive body of research on college impact suggests a clear strategy to foster student learning, development, and persistence: focus on student engagement (RISE, 2006, p. 2). This task force was charged with (1) identifying programs and practices for first-year students, (2) describing elements specific to The University of Iowa regarding first-year student programs, practices, and experiences, and (3) recommending a comprehensive first-year student experience program for The University of Iowa. This report addressed the first two points of the charge. The task force did not find one universal model for first-year experience programs. Most institutions provide some initiatives aimed at easing the transition for first-year students; however, the size and scope of these initiatives varies greatly by institution. The task force identified five types of initiatives: summer initiatives, immersion initiatives, formal courses, campus engagement initiatives, and civic engagement initiatives. The task force also identified the following initiatives to be best practices of successful first-year experience programs: orientation, convocation, immersion initiatives, first-year seminars, learning communities, book clubs, communication and marketing efforts, staff development conferences, summer camp activities, lunch series for out-of-state students, distinguished speaker series, and success series courses.

As part of the internal environmental scan of The University of Iowa, the task force reviewed the 2007 Camp Herky proposal, as well as the findings from the following SST committees: learning communities, the “message” project, Pick One, communicating student success, One Community-One Book, barriers to student success, early intervention, peer educators, new traditions and communication and website development. The task force also discussed alcohol use on campus. Internal data indicates that the UI drinking rates have held steady over the last 15 to 20 years. In requiring first-year students to complete the AlcoholEdu course, the University hopes eventually to instill in all students a common understanding about alcohol as it relates to expectations for being a member of the UI community (The University of Iowa, 2008, p. 138).

Currently, UI has some of the best practice initiatives identified above already in place, including: orientation, welcome week, learning communities, first-year seminars, College Transition (formal course), residential life initiatives, and Iowa Edge. However, student responses in the RISE study indicated that, although the UI offers many opportunities for student engagement and success, it is up to the individual student to find those opportunities and create a positive experience. Although marketing is important, peer influence and the establishment of small communities seem to be the most powerful ways to engage students. If students do not become engaged early in their college careers through involvement in smaller communities, the gravitational pull of the bar scene (“the engagement activity of least resistance”) can be very powerful (The University of Iowa, 2007-2008, pp. 33-34).

The task force identified numerous factors that affect student attrition, including: financial concerns, the “culture of drinking” at Iowa, homesickness, health reasons, and academic difficulty. The task force will consider these factors when recommending the first-year experience program structure. As the task force moves to phase two, it will continue to review relevant resources including:

- **Social Networking software**—In the RISE report, *Facebook* was mentioned as both a significant first-year student activity and a critical element of first-year community-building, both on campus and off. First-year students described using *Facebook* as a way to make friends at UI, maintain ties with high school friends, and connect with

students at other colleges and universities in virtual communities of common interests. The task force will review custom social networking software at a future meeting.

- ***Fulfilling the Promise: A Self-Study for the North Central Association Reaccreditation of the University of Iowa (2007-2008)***—One of the five categories of self-study for this report was *Getting Involved: Education Beyond the Classroom*. This report contains a comprehensive list of UI initiatives currently in place, and the task force will continue to refer to this report during the second phase.
- **Student focus groups**—it was suggested that the task force interview students for their thoughts on student engagement. Bridget Szeluga, Vice President of The University of Iowa's Student Government, has volunteered to help with student focus groups.

During the second phase, the task force will consider which initiatives and best practices should be included in a comprehensive first-year student experience program for The University of Iowa. The *Phase Two Report* will include the overall scope and scale of the proposed program, detailed descriptions of the programs, intended outcomes and means to assess the achievement, governance model, staffing model, and resource needs.

Appendices

Appendix A.....First-Year Experience Task Force Member List

Appendix B.....References and Resources

Appendix C.....Selected Established Program Question Lists

Appendix D.....University of Minnesota Assessment Model

Appendix A

First-Year Experience Task Force Member List

- Michael Barron (Office of Admissions), Chair
- Alejandra Almazan (Student Financial Aid)
- Amy Bartachek (Tippie College of Business Undergraduate Program)
- Andrew Cinoman (Orientation Services)
- Brian Corkey (Academic Advising Center)
- Jane Dorman (College of Engineering)
- Valerie Garr (College of Nursing)
- David Grady (Student Services)
- Nancy Hauserman (Professor, Management/Organizations, Tippie College of Business)
- Peter Hubbard (Academic Programs and Services, College of Liberal Arts)
- Gloria Hurtado (Student)
- Kelly Jo Karnes (Office of Student Life)
- Robert Kirby (University Honors Program)
- Anne Kvinge (Student)
- Jodi Linley (Iowa Biosciences Advantage)
- Leonard MacGillivray (Associate Professor, Chemistry, CLAS)
- Aaron Parker (Student)
- Emil Rinderspacher (Office of Admissions)
- Gabriela Rivera (Center for Diversity and Enrichment)
- Kathryn Sojka (University Housing)
- John Solow (Associate Professor and Assistant Departmental Executive Officer, Economics, Tippie College of Business)
- Sophie Switzer (Student)
- Katherine Tachau (Professor, History, CLAS)

Appendix B

References and Resources

Printed References and Resources

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Cuseo, Joe. (no date). *The First-Year Experience Movement: What is Its Appeal? What are Its Ideals?* Marymount College.

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Appendix B (cont.) References and Resources

Internet References and Resources

Indiana State University. (2008). *First Year Programs*.

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Indiana University. (2002-2007). *Campus & Community Life: First Year Programs*.

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North Dakota State University. (2008). *Orientation and Student Success*.

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The University of Iowa. (2008). *Student Success at Iowa*.

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The University of Minnesota (2008). *Orientation & First-Year Programs*.

<http://www.ofyp.umn.edu/>

Appendix C

Selected Established Programs Question Lists

The Ohio State University

Program Development:

- How did the FYE program come about?
- What are its goals?
- How do you decide what events/activities to include?
- What are your most popular events and why?
- Are any activities required?
- Did you consider offering the program for credit? If so, why did you decide against that? Would you advise us to offer the program for credit?
- Do you include a specific diversity/cultural competency component in your program and if so, what is it and how is it implemented, and how is it received by students?

Program Outcomes:

- What are the participation rates for these events? Are you satisfied with the participation rates? If not, what have you done or what are you doing to increase participation?
- In how many events does each freshman participate?
- Do students who participate have a higher persistence rate? GPA? Graduation rate?
- What kind of evaluation do you do of your programs and events?

Campus involvement:

- Did you have to change the culture of the U to establish this program?
- Is there a university-wide planning committee?
- How have you raised awareness on your campus to the transition issues that first-year students face?

Faculty/staff involvement:

- How have you involved faculty in this program?
- Do FYE staff also do admissions work or are they focused solely on FYE activities?
- How do you reward the student peers/volunteers?
- Talk about the First-year Advocates—campus wide committee whose members are particularly attentive to needs of first-year students. Who makes up the membership of this group? How are they appointed? What is their role?
- Your website mentions the FYE conference. Who attends, what is the focus of the conference?

Financial:

- What is your budget? Staffing?
- Is the program self-supporting financially?

Reflection:

- What is the greatest challenge you face with the program?
- Is there anything you wish you had or were doing differently?

Appendix C (cont.)

Selected Established Programs Question Lists

The University of Minnesota

Program Development:

- How did the FYE program come about?
- What are its goals?
- How do you decide what events/activities to include?
- What are your most popular events and why?
- Are any activities required?
- Did you consider offering the program for credit? If so, why did you decide against that? Would you advise us to offer the program for credit?
- Do you include a specific diversity/cultural competency component in your program and if so, what is it and how is it implemented, and how is it received by students?

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- What are the participation rates for these events? Are you satisfied with the participation rates? If not, what have you done or what are you doing to increase participation?
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Faculty/staff involvement:

- How have you involved faculty in this program?
- Do FYE staff also do admissions work or are they focused solely on FYE activities?
- How do you reward the student peers/volunteers?

Financial:

- What is your budget? Staffing?
- Is the program self-supporting financially?

Reflection:

- What is the greatest challenge you face with the program?
- Is there anything you wish you had or were doing differently?

Appendix D

University of Minnesota Assessment Model

Fall Check-In Survey (*October 2007*)—Survey a random sample of 500 students and carry through the common questions and themes.

Conduct Leaver's Study (*December 2007/January 2008*)—identify students who were here on the tenth day and who did not re-enroll for spring semester 2008. Follow format of previous Leavers Study conducted in OFYP. Identify themes why students leave after the first semester.

Spring Check-In Survey (*February 2008*)—Survey a random sample of 500 students and carry through the common questions and themes.

Student Development Outcomes (*Spring 2008*)—Follow same format of pre-test, mid-test, and post-test for all Program Assistants.

Focus group (*May/June 2008*)—Identify students who completed the Fall and Spring Check-In survey and ask them to participate in a focus group to identify themes of transitional issues.

Call Leaver's (*May/June 2008*)—Call students who left and did not reenroll in spring on 2008.

Orientation Program Evaluation (*Summer 2008*)—Create common questions/themes for orientation evaluation process that can be duplicated on Welcome Week evaluations to create two points of reference in student's transitional experience.

Welcome Week Pre-Assessment (*Summer 2008*)—Implement four to five questions incorporated into the event selection process. Questions will focus on student preparedness and self-efficacy. Incentives will be introduced in an effort to get participation.

Leader Reflections (*August 27 to September 1, 2008*)—Work with leaders to identify themes, concerns, and issues that they observe when working with new students every day.

Student participation (*August 27 to September 1, 2008*)—Utilizing the Orientation Database to capture and track student attendance behavior to draw correlations between participation levels and assumed impact on the student experience, retention, and success.

Program Satisfaction Evaluation (*Post Welcome Week 2008 to Early September*)—Post on the portal or online an overall Welcome Week program evaluation for all NHS students to complete. Include common questions/themes from orientation evaluation process.

Fall Check-In Survey (*Post Welcome Week 2008 to Early October*)—Survey a random sample of students and carry through the common questions and themes. Add questions asking students to reflect on their Welcome Week experience; replaces six-week follow-up survey.

Focus Groups (*Post Welcome Week 2008 to Early October*)—Conduct focus groups; students who took Welcome Week for credit, athletes, band, international, honors, random sample, etc.

Leader Program Evaluation/Reflections (*Post Welcome Week 2008 to Early October*)—Conduct a satisfaction survey with leaders offering feedback for improvement of the leadership experience, as well as the experience for the students during orientation and welcome week.