University of Southern Maine
Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year

Draft Dimensions Report

1/22/2013

University of Southern Maine
Foundations of Excellence Dimension Committees and USM Enrollment Council
Preamble

Foundational Dimensions® statements constitute a model that provides institutions with a means to evaluate and improve the first year of college. As an evaluation tool, the model enables institutions both to confirm their strengths and to recognize the need for improvement. As an aspirational model, the Dimensions provide general guidelines for an intentional design of the first year. The Dimensions rest on four assumptions:

• The academic mission of an institution is preeminent;
• The first college year is central to the achievement of an institution’s mission and lays the foundation on which undergraduate education is built;
• Systematic evidence provides validation of the Dimensions;

Collectively, the Dimensions constitute an ideal for improving not only the first college year, but also the entire undergraduate experience.

Dimensions

• **Philosophy:** 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.

• **Organization:** Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.

• **Learning:** Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular 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.

• **Faculty:** Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty.

• **Transitions:** Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.

• **All Students:** Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.

• **Diversity:** 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.

• **Roles and Purposes:** Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society.

• **Improvement:** Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement.

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The Foundational Dimensions were developed by John N. Gardner, Betsy O. Barefoot, Stephen W. Schwartz, Michael J. Siegel, and Randy L. Swing of the Gardner Institute in collaboration with Robert R. Reason, Patrick T. Terenzini, Edward Zlotkowski, and 235 colleges and universities. The following campuses provided national leadership in the inaugural use of the Dimensions:

- Augsburg College
- Aurora University
- CUNY - Brooklyn College
- CUNY - Medgar Evers College
- Chadron State College
- Columbia College
- Endicott College
- Franklin Pierce College
- Georgia Southwestern State University
- Illinois State University
- Indiana University-Purdue University
- Indiana Wesleyan University
- Kennesaw State University
- Madonna University
- Maryville College
- Marywood University
- Missouri Western State University
- Nazareth College of Rochester
- Plymouth State University
- Saint Edward's University
- SUNY - Brockport
- Texas A&M University
- Corpus Christi
- University of Charleston
- University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

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# Table of Contents

**Executive Summary** ...................................................................................................................... 3  
Key Findings .................................................................................................................................. 3  

**Philosophy and Roles and Purposes Dimension Reports** .......................................................... 5  
Current Situation and Opportunities .......................................................................................... 5  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 7  

**Organization Dimension Report** ............................................................................................ 9  
Current Situation and Opportunities ......................................................................................... 10  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 12  

**Learning Dimension Report** .................................................................................................... 13  
Current Situation and Summary of Findings ............................................................................. 13  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 15  

**Faculty Dimension Report** ....................................................................................................... 17  
Current Situation and Opportunities ......................................................................................... 17  

**Transitions Dimension Report** ............................................................................................... 21  
Current Situation ......................................................................................................................... 21  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 24  

**All Students Dimension Report** .............................................................................................. 26  
Current Situation and Practices ................................................................................................. 26  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 30  

**Diversity Dimension Report** .................................................................................................... 32  
Current Situation and Practices ................................................................................................. 32  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 34  

**Roles and Purposes Dimension Report** .................................................................................... 36  

**Improvement Dimension Report** ............................................................................................ 37  
Current Situation and Practices ................................................................................................. 37  
Recommended Actions ................................................................................................................. 38  

**Appendix A: Recommended Actions by Dimension** ............................................................... 39  
**Appendix B: Recommended Actions by Theme** ..................................................................... 44
Executive Summary

A review of USM’s retention data reveals a pattern that, at best, is uneven. Yet, USM is not without activities and initiatives designed to promote student retention. The recent work supported by the MELMAC Educational Foundation and our own re-accreditation self-study echoed that USM has no dearth of ideas when it comes to supporting student success. What has seemingly been missing, as is noted in the reports that follow, has been coordination and communication among myriad efforts. USM’s struggles to effect and sustain first-to-second year persistence rates consistent with national data for institutions of our type and student mix, led USM’s Enrollment Council to consider involvement in the Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year program.

The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) program provides a framework through which campuses can holistically assess the first year of college*. The Dimensions were developed by the Gardner Institute in collaboration with 235 colleges and universities. Also involved in the development of the Dimensions were major researchers on the student experience. Initial support for this national project came from the Lumina Foundation for Education and The Atlantic Philanthropies. A retention analysis (Drake, 2010) for institutions participating in Foundations of Excellence between 2003-2008 found that institutions implementing their action plans to a “high degree” were successful in improving first year student persistence an average of 5.62 percentage points.

Each of the draft Dimension Reports that follows includes the names of USM faculty and staff members involved in reviewing and summarizing the existing evidence they found related to the elements of the Dimension. Guided by the performance indicators in the model, the campus audit included examining current practices, reviewing data from both the faculty/staff and student surveys administered by Educational Benchmarking, Inc., and culminated in recommendations for action that will inform a campus improvement plan. USM’s Enrollment Council served, and will continue to serve as we begin the review of our Transfer Student Experience, as the Steering Committee for the Foundations of Excellence project. The Foundations of Excellence is not a “student affairs” activity; it is a campus activity that acknowledges that student success is everyone’s business.

The Foundations of Excellence initiative focuses on the institution and its policies, practices and programs rather than on student-level input characteristics or learning outcomes. Learning outcomes data can be used as evidence to support achievement of the Dimensions.

The Foundations of Excellence initiative expands the conversation on student retention and focuses directly on the quality of the first year. Retention is considered a probable outcome of institutional excellence.


Key Findings

Drafted Dimension Reports were vetted through the USM Enrollment Council. While some modifications were made to individual reports, the Council thought it best to pull together a draft document for review and conversation by the USM community at large. Remarkably, but perhaps not unexpected, several themes emerged as a result of the discussions within the Dimension Committees as well as in the Enrollment Council. These themes ‘cut across’ Dimensions and include:
First-Year Philosophy – USM does not have a clearly articulated philosophy for the first year in college

Advising- academic advising, an activity when considered as a way to help students understand the connections between what they are studying and their future goals and careers, is known to positively influence student persistence and success, and remains uneven across our campuses

Student Learning and Engagement-as with academic advising, student involvement in high impact activities, i.e., those known to increase learning gains and satisfaction, remains uneven across our campuses

Faculty Engagement-USM has not clearly articulated (through policies, recognition, and reward structures) the important role that faculty play in supporting students during the first year of college Communication, Collaboration and Coordination –while many activities are occurring on our campuses, there is little in the way of communicating with each other and collaborating to support all students and improve all initiatives

Assessment-systematic use of existing data as a way to understand the student experience and to inform improvement is not coordinated

Diversity-developing a framework to support diversity initiatives remains challenging both in and outside of the classroom

Infrastructure-even as we embark on more effective use of technology in and outside the classroom, it remains that “place matters” and continued efforts to support improvements in this area are important

What follows are the individual Dimension Reports and associated recommended actions. Appendix A contains a summary of all the recommended actions by Dimension and Appendix B has used the themes noted above as the organizer for the recommendations.

The USM Enrollment Council looks forward to receiving feedback about this report in order to finalize it and to use it in developing and guiding an improvement plan.

References

Philosophy and Roles and Purposes Dimension Reports

Philosophy

*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.

Roles and Purposes

*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 knowledge acquisition for personal growth, learning to prepare for future employment, learning to become engaged citizens, and learning to serve the public good. Institutions encourage first-year students to examine systematically 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).

Committee Membership

**Co-Chairs:** Jan Phillips, Associate Dean, Lewiston-Auburn College  
Susan Campbell, Chief Student Success Officer

**Members:** Joe Austin, Internships and Career Placement, Student Success  
Kristen Beahm, Office of Academic Assessment  
Carolyn Hughes, Head of Serials, USM Libraries  
Caroline Pinkham, Research CEPARE  
Tracy St. Pierre, Director, Office of Marketing and Brand Management

Current Situation and Opportunities

Philosophy

While faculty and staff respondents to both the 2011 and 2012 Foundations of Excellence surveys believe USM is committed to the success of first-year students and strongly support the value of a formalized institutional philosophy for the first year at USM, at present no formal statement of philosophy exists at USM for first-year students. Practice regarding first-year students is decentralized in both who does it and what it is they do. As a result, there is little coordination across campus. Primary drivers for the first year rest within the curriculum, as evidenced by entry-year experiences, support courses, foundation courses such as College Writing and Quantitative Reasoning, and the outcomes articulated in both the USM Core and Lewiston Common Core (http://www.usm.maine.edu/core). Prior to a change in senior leadership on this campus, there existed limited top-level support to provide visionary guidance regarding expectations for the first year, nor any systemic oversight for the myriad activities that currently exist. Current campus leadership expects excellence during the first year of college and beyond and thus provides significant support for the Foundations of Excellence Project. It is clear that articulating why
our institution values the purposes made explicit in the statement is especially important given our role as a regional comprehensive public university, making college accessible and attainable for the residents of our state, especially south-central Maine.

Articulating what we believe about the importance of the first year, communicating that clearly, and then acting in ways informed by such a philosophy will ensure that the first-year experience at USM enables students to learn how to 1) learn, 2) create relationships with self and others, and 3) navigate a complex environment as curious, often critical learners with a disposition to seek support when needed and thereby gain problem-solving skills. It will underscore a resilience rather than pathology framework for not only our support of students but their own developmental efforts and progress. Additionally, a mindful, articulated philosophy of the first year experience will help everyone give voice to the fact we believe the first year is a foundational year, for college-going and also for achievement of life goals beyond college.

We will be able to say that, done right, the first year will help students develop skills as intentional and independent learners with the habits of mind and behaviors to make it possible for them to persist and ultimately graduate, and then succeed more generally in life pursuits. At the same time, a philosophy of the first-year experience will unify the work of the university, guiding decisions about which programs to keep or develop and how to adjust or revise them. It could thus provide an unwavering “North Star” for curricula, programs, and activities that enhance pivotal student experiences and success.

Roles and Purposes

As evidenced by USM’s National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), and Foundations of Excellence survey results, both faculty/staff and students feel there is considerable room for improvement in promoting student understanding of the roles and purposes of higher education. However, there is a noticeable difference between these two groups, with faculty and students often differing 10-20% in their NSSE vs. FSSE responses and sometimes as much as 50% or more. Similar disparity exists in the FoE survey results, with students tending toward a somewhat more favorable evaluation of USM’s integration of roles and purposes of higher education in the student experience (just over half, for example, believe USM has helped them understand how attending college increases their knowledge for future employment and personal growth), while faculty are uniformly critical of every marker of this dimension. Clearly, two very different conceptions of the student experience exist at USM. Without more intentionality and coordination helping to infuse college-going purpose throughout the curriculum, student affairs, and student services, this is unlikely to change.

Challenges

- Entering students across USM may be a very different developmental points, especially reflected in the differences between first-year and transfer students, the latter a significant percentage of USM students.
- An imbalance between full-time and part-time students impacts engagement in the community.
- Addressing increasingly challenged and sometimes academically fragile students who nonetheless draw upon their own resiliency in learning to navigate college services.
- Uncertainty about institutional will toward addressing in meaningful and lasting ways the importance of the first-year experience.
- The resources available to help students connect academic study, co-curricular activities, and community engagement with life goals and future employment are not yet exhaustive or universally available.
- The difficulty of multiple colleges across multiple campuses holding a singular philosophy.
- Setting both realistic targets for short-term goals and longer-term aspirational goals in light of resource constraints, conflicting priorities, and emergent university system performance metrics.
Sources of Evidence

Faculty/Staff Survey Evidence
Student Survey Evidence
NSSE and FSSE Data—2012 Summaries
USM Core and LAC Common Core outcomes
2011 Entry-Year Experience Outcomes

Recommended Dimension Grade: D+

Recommended Actions

Philosophy Recommended Actions

- Articulate a university-wide philosophy statement (Highest priority)
  USM should articulate a university-wide philosophy statement that need not be long but which should clearly state our beliefs about why the first year matters. In the end, this statement needs not only to be issued from the top but involve those at all levels who work with first-year students, to ensure that it is a lived philosophy and secures needed buy-in.
- Develop and implement a Communication Plan for circulating this philosophy statement for discussion and buy-in (High priority)
- Incorporate this articulated philosophy into college and school missions, goals and/or value statements (High priority)
- Determine how this articulated philosophy will be utilized to coordinate recruiting, admissions, enrollment, student success during and after college, and academic policies/practices aligned w/this dimension (High priority)
- Once a USM philosophy has been fully articulated, communicated and institutionalized, it should help guide practice and policy development as well as assessment.

Roles and Purposes Recommended Actions

Several high-impact practices could help more fully integrate college-going purpose throughout the curriculum, student affairs, and student services and make the first year at USM an even more foundational year in terms of students connecting their initial college experience with personal growth, future employment, engaged citizenship, and serving the public good.

Doing so necessitates:

- Completing implementation of “shared” advising, where joint student success and faculty advising provide more students more explicit career- as well as college-advising that enables students to link what they are learning with life goals and future employment, and
- Giving students greater exposure to opportunities for more focused, in-depth and thus engaging study such as active and collaborative learning in and out of class (e.g., making a class presentation, working with classmates outside of class on an assignment, participating in community-based learning), student-faculty interaction (especially when it involves talking about career plans, discussing course materials, or working on research), contact with people different from oneself (including through study abroad or study of a foreign language), co-curricular activities, and community-based learning or service
The need for improvement in many of these practices is evident in the NSSE and FSSE reports. Setting aside any comparison of USM with other institutions, improvements in these areas can serve as a bellwether to how we are doing as an institution on first-year student engagement and, most importantly, help us address critical recruitment, enrollment, and retention difficulties.

Draft Statement of Philosophy

In its role as the Foundations of Excellence Steering Committee, the USM Enrollment Council has adopted the following philosophy statement, which we believe could serve as the University’s philosophy for adoption. At the very least, we believe this statement suggests core elements for a philosophy of the first year at USM, and we anticipate its relevance to both first-time college students and transfer students in their entry years.

A philosophy statement for the first year in college should not only reflect beliefs about the particular period of time labeled “first year,” but also beliefs about the fundamental learning outcomes for the college experience. Toward this end, we agree with Baxter Magolda and King’s (2004) observation that there are three inter-related learning outcomes for higher education in the 21st century:

- **Cognitive Maturity**, characterized by intellectual power, reflective judgment, mature decision-making, and problem solving in the context of multiplicity
  - Knowledge as contextual or constructed from evidence from a particular context
  - Multiple perspectives exist

- **An integrated identity**, characterized by understanding one’s own particular history, confidence, the capacity for autonomy and connection, and integrity
  - Ability to reflect on, explore, and choose enduring values
  - Internally constructed rather than adopted to seek external approval
  - Serves as a foundation for interpreting experience and conducting oneself

- **Mature relationships**, characterized by respect for both one’s own and others’ particular identities and cultures and by productive collaboration to integrate multiple perspectives
  - Respect for one’s own and others’ identities and cultures
  - Productive collaboration to negotiate and integrate multiple perspectives and needs
  - Openness to other perspectives without being consumed by them in the world

Outcome success leads to **Self-Authorship**—the capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates engagement in mutual relations with the larger world. Baxter Magolda and King, 2004, p. xxii

While part of the journey toward **Self-Authorship** is shaped by experiences outside of higher education, we believe the first year in college is a critical foundational time during which expected habits of mind and behavior are shaped. Specifically, we believe that during the first year of college it is important that students

*Learn how to learn in order to achieve goals.*
*Learn about self and one’s relationships with others.*
*Learn how to navigate a complex environment.*
Organization Dimension Report

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.

Committee Membership

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Current Situation and Opportunities

The University of Southern Maine’s first-year students are supported through multiple campus entities. Each of which has discrete responsibilities such as admission, orientation, advising, student activities, housing, safety, etc. Although staff and faculty are working hard to best serve our students, there is a lack of a formalized communication and coordination structure that could enhance, learning outcomes during the first year student experience and beyond.

The reorganizations and new collaborative efforts of the past few years (Student Success, Student and University Life, Academic Affairs, Financial Resources) have resulted in significant improvements. In addition, individual departments have coordinated programs and presented on a variety of topics in courses and events attended by first year students (Enriched College Writing, Entry Year Experience Courses, Choices, Changes and Careers, Orientation, Accepted Student Days, Open House). This organic collaboration is valued but lends itself to the sporadic pockets of collaboration rather than a campus-wide organizational culture of collaboration.

Although structural changes have been made, a first-year experience built within a structural model does not exist. Departments continue to identify and fill needs through their own professional lenses with limited coordination and collaboration. Faculty and staff report a lack of organization and senior leadership encouragement to support true collaborations and partnerships between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Student Success.

Communication schedules followed for new, prospective and newly deposited students are organized and timely, especially those from Admission, Financial Aid, Orientation and Residential Life which provide the majority of communication prior to the start of a student’s first semester. Each of these areas follows their independent departmental communication schedule; however there is some communication within these structures during the admission and orientation phase. However, communication to students, the campus community, and between departments after the beginning of a student’s first semester is not clear. Communication regarding campus happenings, warnings and changes are sent by individual departments via population specific electronic lists. Although receiving these updates is helpful, the institution lacks a clear structure for the dissemination of information and changes in policy, procedures and staffing. This is evident from survey responses that report student, faculty and staff challenges with understanding organizational structure to request assistance and make appropriate referrals.

The collection and distribution of data are also issues. Data is collected by departments throughout the institution with a perceived low usage rate. It remains unclear on how the data is analyzed and used to improve performance; it is clear however that there are some departments that do utilize some of the data for decision-making purposes (i.e., Financial Aid, Student Success, Admission), which is evident in the Noel-Levitz work, the Student Success Center/Orientation Assessment Plan, and Student and University Life assessment process. Although individual assessment success is evident an institutional communication challenge exists between individuals that make decisions and individuals who collect the data. There lacks a process to support the identification of questions that programs have, data acquisition, and sharing of the results and best practices. There are pockets of individuals who have recently begun to reach out to stakeholders. The director of academic assessment has met with the Core Curriculum council to identify NSSE indicators and chart the first year to senior year progress to goals. Susan King from Student Assessment and staff from Professional and Continuing Education have also begun to meet with each College to discuss the course evaluation tool, current practices, and what future data would be helpful. These initial steps show institutional improvement and also highlight the need for consistent mechanisms to administer and collaborate on programmatic and institutional assessment.
Supporting student success is one of three primary Strategic Goals for the institution. The institution’s organizational structure provides a variety of student support services. These include academic advising, tutoring, academic support for students with disabilities, financial aid, student activities, registrar, health and counseling, career advising, etc. Students report being challenged with knowing where to go for academic, administrative, and involvement assistance. Providers report an uneven approach to offering services, including inconsistent office hours, multiple academic advising structures, competing events, challenges with the academic alert system and an unclear understanding of first-year students’ profile and needs across the campus.

Departments are primarily open for core hours throughout the day; while others are open late to accommodate students and events. These late hours are inconsistent throughout the institution. Academic advising has multiple structures depending on the student’s academic interest and admission status. The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science and the Student Success Center has recently piloted a shared advising model as a possible institutional approach to academic and career advising. Lewiston-Auburn College has also implemented a shared advising model and has career exploration imbedded into its curriculum. Each model utilizes the expertise of both professional advisors and faculty to advise and mentor students.

Academic alert reports reveal a low faculty participation rate. Faculty members have expressed a lack of trust in the current model and with the perceived labor intensity involved with the process. Data is provided periodically regarding the student population with no expectation of what to do with it. Professional development for faculty and staff focused on the needs of USM students is almost non-existent. The professional development opportunities are either mandated through Human Resources (sexual harassment, safety, etc.) or underutilized (Advising Network, Professional Development Center). Like collaboration, professional development is an organic offering that is created independently and is not cited as a consistent expectation of faculty and staff.

There is a lack of a clearly defined and broadly understood mission and institution-wide oversight and coordination for the first year initiative. Financial resources exist within the budgets of the different areas but they remain separate due to the lack of collaboration and individualized responsibility for the first year experience. Faculty and staff report a significant lack of financial resources as well as an individual and departmental voice in decision-making for the first year experience. The combination of the lack of mission, structure, shared resources, and faculty and staff ownership creates a collective challenge to the creation of a culture focused on creating an effective first-year student experience. New initiatives are currently underway to develop a common culture at USM but more time and attention will be necessary to create a new culture.

Culture, communication, and collaboration are the three primary areas that need attention if we are to create a campus-wide culture that supports and enhances the first-year experience. That culture must be based on a paradigm shift from fighting for one’s self to fighting for a student centered experience focused on learning and support.

Recommended Dimension Grade: To Be Assigned
Recommended Actions

1. **Develop better coordination and collaboration in the context of communication.**  
   **Timeline:** Spring 2013- ongoing  
   a. Develop a communication structure with clear expectations/goals that focuses on making a difference by efficient and effective sharing of best practices, existing resources and use of data. Be clear on the use and impact of our current communication with students, faculty and staff.
   
   b. Identify faculty and staff first-year student experience experts and leverage their expertise to develop a formal and informal structure and network for collaboration and communication. Identification on how to collaborate by sharing resources would be a critical first agenda item.

2. **Evaluate and make appropriate changes to existing programs for student success.**  
   **Timeline:** Spring 2013 for Fall 2013 implementation  
   a. Assess academic advising at USM. Establish a new model focused on student learning that is coordinated and collaborative.
   
   b. Assess the early/academic alert system. Create a new system that is efficient and focuses on the needs of students and faculty.

3. **Educate, set expectations and assess.**  
   **Timeline:** Spring 2013 for Summer/Fall implementation  
   a. Educate the campus on the first year experience from admission to orientation through first semester.
   
   b. Evaluate USM’s effectiveness: are we are making the most out of our time with students?
   
   c. Create a culture of engagement between students, faculty and staff.
   
   d. Provide clear expectations of faculty and staff roles in the success of our students and institution.
Learning Dimension Report

Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular 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 inside or outside the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

Committee Members

Andrea Thompson-McCall (Director of Community Service Learning)
Ann Dean (Professor of English, Director of College Writing)
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Current Situation and Summary of Findings

Based on the primary and secondary evidence reviewed for this report (our own data and the data generated by the Student and Faculty surveys) USM appears to be achieving and slightly exceeding our FOE goals with respect to the learning dimension for the first year. To summarize, USM has already implemented a variety of high impact practices designed to address the learning needs of our first year students. Both faculty and student FOE survey responses indicate awareness of these practices and favorable responses to them. However, our own data and the FOE survey data do indicate important areas for action, detailed further later in this report.

USM has implemented a variety of interventions designed to improve the first year experience, including Student Success Centers, Student Learning Commons, Entry Year Experience courses, modified College Writing and Enriched College Writing offerings, STEM Bridge program, Pioneers, and expanded learning community opportunities, the Gorham Experience, and other programs. Strikingly, faculty survey responses suggest that despite these efforts, USM has not made as much progress as desired in communicating intended educational goals for the first year of college. 35% of faculty respondents reported no or slight understanding of intended educational goals for the first year of college. This is especially striking since USM implemented its outcomes-based freshman seminar (EYE) in 2009. There is a thought-provoking contrast in this area between faculty and student perceptions. Only 15.5% of
students responded on the FOE survey that they had no or only slight understanding of intended learning goals for the first year of college. Perhaps there is a course vs. institution-level difference, since the vast majority (85%) of faculty did report that specific learning goals were developed for courses enrolling first year students. This suggests that we pay attention to our communication and achievement of broader institutional goals for the first year.

Both faculty and students reported mixed results at best regarding the institution’s encouragement of student participation in course-related-out-of-class events. The FOE survey data on this item mirror what we know from our own in-house surveys (E.g., EYE student questionnaire and NSSE)—we are not yet achieving our stated goals of expanding student co-curricular learning and the sense of community and connection those experiences are designed to foster.

In general, student FOE survey responses, like their responses on our in-house surveys and NSSE, show positive perceptions of academic learning experiences at USM. All of our data suggest that students find their academic experiences to be rigorous ones. Again, the issue of engagement emerges in students responses to the FOE survey question about individual attention from instructors: 57.7% of students responded that instructors often or always provide individual attention; 42.3% responded that they received such individual attention seldom or not at all. The FOE survey results are consistent with our EYE student questionnaire results on a similar item, although the latter provide better context for the response rates, indicating that many students simply chose not to avail themselves of the individual attention (e.g., office hours, tutoring sessions, etc.). However, this in itself is worth considering—why don’t they, and what are the consequences?

Students have tended not to use the college support structures available to them. Yet some students do return to their favorite high school teacher or advisor for advice and assistance in college-level work. We support USM’s work with the College Transition Advisory Group (which includes high school guidance counselors) and support this group’s work to bring USM student success advisors to high schools for college coaching and other activities.

Turning to the EYE data more specifically, it is clear that we need to begin direct assessment of student learning in these courses as planned in fall 2012. In addition, faculty focus group data suggest the need for a broader and deeper conversation about the purpose of EYE, how to better serve this purpose, and/or how to modify the goals and the courses themselves given what we have learned about their effects to date. Both EYE faculty and students report parallel frustrations with EYE. From a faculty perspective, the frustration resides with student behavior (e.g., absenteeism, failure to complete assignments on time, etc.). Student responses to our EYE questionnaire suggest that while for many the EYE learning experience is very engaging, for many the “point” of these non-department courses is unclear, especially for our students who are very interested in making progress in their majors, and report little interest in other required courses. Given faculty observation of a bimodal distribution curve in student achievement on introductory courses, including EYE, we should explore the alignment of the outcomes of our various first year courses (EYE, HRD 110, LAC 180) to determine whether and how they are serving student’s academic preparation needs.

Challenges of engagement, attachment, and adhesion are themes that emerge in all of the data sources reviewed for this report. USM offers excellent instruction in the first year (and beyond). Our data and the FOE surveys confirm this. They also indicate that students’ non-classroom-based experiences and their engagement in our broader learning goals (e.g., independent learning, contribution to their local and global communities) need greater attention.
Sources of Evidence

EYE outcomes and Assessment Reports
College Writing Outcomes
College Writing Assessment
Survey of Department Chairs on Student Learning Needs
OAA MAT/SAT studies
Orientation Outcomes and Assessment
Quantitative Reasoning Outcomes
FOE Student and Faculty Survey
USM Developmental Course Data

Recommended Dimension Grade: B-

Recommended Actions

The learning dimension committee is mindful of the fact that USM’s first year students are a diverse group, and that interventions and actions recommended here must reflect that fact, and be tailored to the multiple populations that comprise our first year students.

1. EYE (Entry Year Experience) related action items (high priority)
   - Complete direct assessment of student learning in relation to EYE outcomes (started fall 2012); should include both rubric based review of student work and one-on-one interviews with students
   - Clarify and align Learning Outcomes: 1. link EYE and CW outcomes and programmatic use of EYE to university-wide Strategic Plan; 2. focus greater attention on information literacy outcomes in EYE and elsewhere; 3. Assess relationship between EYE, College Writing, HRD 110 and FRS/LAC 180 and their learning outcomes, with the goal of identifying points of articulation and beneficial reinforcement as well as any areas of duplication or redundancy. [For example, such an analysis could address the question of who should take which of these courses, and when?]
   - Expand faculty participation in EYE instruction. Make it easier for faculty in small departments to participate since faculty members from small departments tend to have the most constraints on their curricular responsibilities.
   - Market EYE courses to explain their purpose to students.

2. Campus and community engagement (High priority)
   We must enhance students’ sense of campus and community engagement in the first year. Actions include:
   - Strengthen co-curricular learning by developing a menu of co-curricular experiences and ideas that faculty could draw upon in planning their own courses, especially activities that bring the community to the classroom and recognize that our students are the community. This resource could be produced, maintained and distributed by a re-established center for teaching (see # 3 below).
   - Increase participatory and applied learning which includes the benefit of participation in the campus and broader community, through student projects ranging from co-curricular learning (see above) to service learning, where appropriate for first year students.
3. **Center for teaching** *(High priority)*

Re-establish a center for teaching. If we want faculty to engage in high impact practices for first year students then we must provide a location for professional development. We should work with advancement to identify potential donors to support a CFT. A CFT can be a distinct entity or it can have its functions incorporated into the Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Education office. A CFT would also address the need to increase faculty motivation. [For example, a center could involve a structured recognition system for faculty who increase retention in critical or "gateway" courses in which students experience high failure rates.] A CFT would address the general need for faculty development and provide faculty with more training and support for curricular and programmatic planning and development, including but not limited to expanding faculty development for EYE instruction, including use of online and other information literacy tools provided by the library.

4. **Learning communities** *(Medium priority)*:

Investigate Learning communities and linked courses further. Proceed with caution with respect to linked courses, given diversity of our first year students in terms of residential preferences, transfer credits, etc., and in light of the failed EYE/College Writing/introduction to major linked course experiment for fall 2012. Block scheduling planned for fall 2013 is a good first step to investigating whether students’ sense of community is enhanced by improved scheduling rather than actual links. Regarding learning communities, important questions to consider include: How do the needs and preferences differ for residential vs. non-residential students, for first year students with no transfer credits vs. first-years with transfer credits/some college experience, traditional vs. non-traditional students, etc.? Are linked courses a viable mechanism for creating community or are they seen by students as precluding individual course selection associated with college-level learning?

**Suggestions for additional data:**

Possible additions to student surveys/focus questions:
- Do you have a comfortable place to study? Or, which place is most comfortable for you to study? (kitchen table/dorm room/bedroom/library/cafeteria/other)
- Professors usually approve of students who __________________ (fill in the blank or give list)
- What does community mean to you? (focus-group question)

Other data needs:
- Identify paths through the first year: who takes what and when?
- How do students get information about academic support options?
- Deeper investigation of why they do or don’t seek help
- What would make them feel motivated to take advantage of or even entitled to faculty attention, assistance, office hours, etc.?
Faculty Dimension Report

[NOTE: This report was written by Susan McWilliams, a professional staff member, based on the electronic feedback from dimension participants to survey and other data provided to them and based on feedback from faculty members who participated in the Learning dimension. Efforts to produce a more complete report during spring 2013 unavoidably coincided with a faculty labor action which made further participation by faculty in this dimension report unlikely. So as not to further delay the completion of USM’s FOE self-study, this summary has been submitted in lieu of a more complete report involving fuller faculty participation.]

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.

Dimension Participants

Professor Lisa Walker, Associate Professor of English; Peggy Moore, Lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics; Christopher Scott, Associate Professor of Sports Medicine

Current Situation and Opportunities

The most striking thing about the data regarding this dimension is the apparent inconsistency between the value and reward structure in relation to faculty engagement with first year students. Dr. Moore created a summary table of the relevant FOE data which capture this apparent discrepancy.

Foundations of Excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>To what degree is faculty involvement with first-year students considered important by: Institution Leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>207</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>To what degree is excellence in teaching first-year students acknowledged, recognized, and/or rewarded by: Institution Leaders</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>To what degree is faculty involvement with first year students considered important by: Your department/unit leader</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dimension participants echoed the survey findings, stating that the discrepancies revealed in the survey data are accurate reflections of their perception and experience of campus culture. Dimension faculty noted a number of ways in which this discrepancy manifests at USM.

As one faculty member summed up,

…at USM…there's lots of talk about faculty helping retain students, but there is no shift in the traditional emphasis on scholarship and teaching, where the evaluation of teaching is boiled down to student satisfaction.

As is discussed further below, one way to address the discrepancy between value and reward is to address this problem in promotion and tenure guidelines, and in the distribution of other valued resources. Faculty comments about the reward structure focused on a range of possible areas for corrective action.

First, faculty noted that, to their knowledge, position justifications for new hires make no reference to a rationale related to engagement of first year students. For example, one way to reward engagement with first year students would be to include a commitment to EYE instruction as one of the position justification components.

Similarly, faculty noted that, to their knowledge, job openings once approved and advertised do not include explicit reference to institutional emphasis on the first year student experience, or to EYE instruction as a part of that experience, or to other forms of faculty expertise that might enhance the first year experience (e.g., faculty experience/expertise in learning communities, co-curricular learning, etc.).

More significant for our faculty is the absence of explicit rewards associated with first year instruction and first year student engagement. Implementation of the new Core curriculum has involved access to professional development funds for EYE faculty ($1500 for new course development, $500 for first-time instruction of an additional section of an existing EYE and additional funds to support engaged student learning in EYE). However, faculty noted that beyond these incentives to develop first year courses, there is no recognition or reward system associated with such work on an on-going basis. Nor would such recognition have to be financial. As one member noted, for some EYE faculty, participation in EYE may actually be perceived as a liability for tenure and promotion, rather than as a valued asset, since some departments and administrators view promotion and tenure applications narrowly for evidence of
disciplinary expertise, and for scores on teaching evaluations which may not be sensitive to the challenges of teaching a class of all first-semester students.

Another faculty member noted that one way an institution demonstrates its commitment to the first year student experience is to have open conversations about how to reward faculty engagement in that experience, and to ask tough questions about it:

On the other hand, I can't think of any work that I do that is recognized in any special way (except if you publish a book, you get on the author's wall), or how faculty would be recognized or rewarded for teaching first-year students. I don't feel that my other teaching is recognized more than my teaching of first-year students. So I'm not sure the survey results wouldn't be similar for just about any teaching or service job you queried--like advising, for example. And how would we recognize this teaching? We sure don't need to spend money on plaques saying "thanks for your five years of teaching EYE."

However, responses to the FOE survey and other sources of faculty data (most notably EYE faculty surveys and interviews) suggest that time, money, and professional recognition do matter. Ways in which the institution might foster a culture which values and recognizes faculty engagement in first year student success include:

- Explicit statements in promotion and tenure materials (e.g., “face sheets” from the Provost’s office) which mention EYE or other first year instruction and/or professional activities (e.g. published articles or conference presentations) focused on first year student instruction and engagement

- Explicit statements from the Provost and Dean’s to departments emphasizing the institutional value placed on first-year instruction, and reminding departments that far from representing a shortcoming in promotion and tenure materials, evidence of sustained participation in first year instruction in EYE and other courses is a plus, especially given the challenges of teaching predominantly first-year classes.

- Other valued/limited institutional resources tied to first year instruction and engagement (e.g., setting aside any available travel or other money for faculty with sustained involvement in first year instruction; similarly, tying some portion of computer and other equipment upgrades to such sustained involvement).

In short, even when an institution does not have excess resources to devote to special rewards for first faculty who focus on first year students, leadership can send a powerful message about the value of this work by tying any number of institutional rewards to it.

In addition to this important discussion of discrepancies between values and reward structures, faculty also noted that the survey data here and on the learning dimension might suggest something completely different, and that is that “engagement” itself might be better understood (and rewarded) as happening outside the classroom. As one faculty member noted after reviewing the FOE survey data:

My interpretation: First year students should possibly be engaged first and foremost with social-type activities involving faculty as opposed to being in the presence of an academic all-American with excellent teaching skills.
Similarly, a faculty member noted that if first year student engagement is a top priority, institutional conversations about increased demand for on-line instruction must be balanced against that, since such courses “do nothing in terms of a social-type atmosphere/relationship seemingly needed for first year students.”

Recommended Dimension Grade: To Be Assigned
Transitions Dimension Report

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 co-curricular 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. (Transitions)

Committee Members

Co-Chairs: Craig Hutchinson, Chief Student Affairs Officer, Joy Pufhal, Special Assistant to the Chief Student Affairs Officer

Members:

Al Bean, Director, Athletics,
Lee Anne Dodge, Assistant Director, Substance Abuse Prevention and Wellness,
Jami Jandreau, Assistant Director, Financial Aid,
Melissa Kopka, Advisor, Division of Student Success,
Larisa Kruze, Assistant Director, Office of International Programs
Heidi Noyce, Associate Director, Transfer Affairs,
Heidi Parker, Assistant Professor Sport Management, School of Business
Toni Passerman, Coordinator of Transfer Student Recruitment,
Leigh Raposo, Assistant Director, Office of Marketing and Brand Management
Elizabeth Sarazin, Financial Aid Counselor

Current Situation

The most productive way to view the transition for a new student is to assume that the transition begins prior to enrolling at the University and in regard to first year students should be considered in three phases:

| Transition into the University | Transition into the first year | Transition from the first to second semester |

The Transitions Dimension Committee was tasked with populating and reviewing the Current Practices Inventory (CPI) and the FoE Faculty/Staff and Student Surveys (2011 & 2012) in order to evaluate the extent to which USM:

- effectively communicates the lived-experience of first-year students to prospective students, to secondary school personnel, and to current first year students including:
communicating our mission, academic expectations, disciplinary processes, out of the classroom engagement opportunities, employment on and off campus, and college costs and financial aid

- establishes connections with families (support networks) of first year students

- structures and implements a first year experience that establishes connections among first year students, between first year students and upper-level students, and support services, student affairs professionals and faculty

- provides quality academic advising and support

The Committee was pleased to find that there is an impressive array of programs and services which communicate the lived-experience to first year students prior to enrollment, facilitate connections among students with each other and with faculty and staff, seek to engage family members in the student’s experience, and provide quality academic advising and support.

Current programs and services noted by the Committee that should be continued and strengthened (as needed) that impact the transition periods of first year students included (but not limited to):

- Orientation (including Overnight Orientation)
- Welcome Events
- Resource Centers (Multicultural Resource Center, Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity, etc.)
- Student Success Centers
- Learning Commons
- Student Success Liaison Program with CAHS
- EYE courses
- Go Program
- Developmental Writing and Math
- Learning Communities
- Early Alert
- Community Service Learning
- Pathways
- Internship and Career Placement services
- Student Organizations
- Student Engagement Activities
- Athletic and Recreational Programs

These as well as many other programs and services are described in the Current Practices Inventory located at https://foetec.fyfoundations.org/foetec/cpi.aspx.

The Foundations of Excellence Transitions Dimension survey results (snapshot below) indicate that we are (at least) moderately successful in communicating academic expectations, tuition and living expenses, and financial aid availability prior to enrollment, in providing quality academic advising and academic support, and in communicating standards of behavior. **However, and perhaps of greater significance, the results indicate that the vast majority of students feel that the institution is doing little or nothing at all to facilitate connections between first year students,**
between first year and continuing students and faculty, and connecting family members to the Institution.

Snapshot of Student and Faculty/Staff Foundations of Excellence Survey Results for the questions related to the Transitions Dimension

The six questions that students scored us an average of less than 3 (moderate degree) are in bold and are the areas (within the Transitions Dimension) that are of the greatest priority for action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Scale:</th>
<th>Student Mean</th>
<th>Faculty/ Staff Mean</th>
<th>Percentage of 4s &amp; 5s (Very High/High)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enrollment - Degree to which the Institution adequately communicates:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic expectations</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>availability of majors</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuition &amp; living expenses</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial aid opportunities</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections after enrollment - To what degree does the institution:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate connections with other first year students</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate connections with continuing students</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate connections with faculty</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connect to academic supports</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>34.2/24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connected with families</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate the importance of out of classroom experiences</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide opportunities for involvement</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising – To what degree do faculty/staff:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>explain major requirements</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help selecting courses</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>51.3/87.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss what it takes to be successful</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>Not Asked</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss future enrollment plans</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>35.2/82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overall satisfaction with advising</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>45.6/43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have adequate training to advise</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td></td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of behavior – To what degree does the Institution communicate:</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>communicate standards of behavior</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>50.9/25.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>the importance of acknowledging sources of information</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>61.4/35.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>the importance of academic honesty</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>74.8/32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the importance of ethical conduct</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>61.9/24.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, we do many things in support of first year students and yet there is still opportunity to be more effective in helping students and their families feel connected to the Institution through relationships with other first year students, continuing students, and faculty and staff. The research is clear, students who are connected to the Institution are much more likely to be retained and persist to graduation. Our two highest priority recommendations for strengthening USM’s First Year TRANSITION Experience appear below (many others are explained within the Transitions Dimension Performance Indicators in FoEtec).
Recommended Dimension Grade: C+

Recommended Actions

1. **Strengthen the relationship-based culture between new students and their families/support networks with faculty, staff, and upper-level students.**

   Action Items for consideration include (in priority order):
   - Flag first semester students in Mainestreet on class rosters, and to student pictures in faculty portals, etc.
   - Explore the need for an office responsible for Family Member Engagement. What would the impact be on recruitment and retention and what resources would be needed to serve the need
   - Increase the capacity and resources of the Office of Internships and Career Placement. Look at realigning current resources and staff as a way to accomplish this
   - Register all first year students in the Pathways Program by the end of the second week of the semester; highlighting all the active learning, co-curricular, and career development opportunities available and their value
   - Assign a first year mentor (faculty, staff, or upper-level student) to every new student much earlier (ideally, prior to acceptance and no later than when accepted)
   - Use existing, qualified staff to increase advising capacity to reach students earlier; consider cohort and group advising sessions
   - Utilize more current Graduate and Undergraduate students in the recruitment process

2. **Invest in Infrastructure that encourages Student, Faculty, and Staff interaction, time on-campus, and the feeling of Community; Place Matters.**

   Action items for consideration include (in priority order):
   - Expand employee orientation and employee development opportunities
   - Link faculty incentives, evaluations, promotion, and tenure to demonstrated support/development of first year students
   - Strengthen the Early Alert Program to monitor, intervene, and eliminate barriers (academic, financial, behavioral, etc.
   - Reinstate a common, academic-driven program that faculty and staff can engage in where we communicate and affirm goals, values, and the student experience
   - Create a First Year Experience Web Portal including (but not limited to):
     - virtual campus tours
     - USM’s social networking sites
     - videos on how to validate a student email address, search and register for classes within MaineStreet, etc.
     - create a USM mobile app that allows students to pay their bill, register for classes, etc. on the smart phones and other devises
   - Increase the comfortable, attractive, functional, informal, gathering places as needed on all three campuses (involve students in this discussion)

**In conclusion,** the Committee gives USM’s current efforts in support of first year students an overall grade of “C+” to reflect our assessment that our programs and support services are slightly above average. Clearly, the surveys tell us that more of our attention and resources are needed when it
comes to our students and their families/support networks feeling connected to the Institution and to each other.
All Students Dimension Report

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. (All Students)

Committee Membership

Co-Chairs: Denise Nelson, Assistant to the CSAO for Student Retention
Adam Tuchinsky, Associate Dean, CAHS

Members: Kim-Marie Jenkins, Associate Dean for Student Services
David Nutty, University Librarian & Director of Libraries
Paul Dexter, Coordinator of Learning Assistance, Learning Commons, Glickman Family Library
Meredith Bickford, Assistant Director of Athletics/Senior Women Administrator
Jason Saucier, Director, Gorham Student Life
Clara Porter, Interpersonal Violence Prevention Coordinator
Chris O’Connor, Director, Portland Student Life, Student Involvement and Activities Center, Veterans Resource Center
Caroline Cutting, Coordinator of Veteran’s Services, Registrar
Ashley Collins, Enrollment Advisor/Coach, Professional & Continuing Education
Mary Beth Davidson, Assistant Director, University Computing Support
Deb Kalikow-Pluck, Student Success Advisor
Joan Mather, Assistant Professor, Theater
Joanne Benica, Director, Support for Students with Disabilities
Carolyn Hughes, Head of Serials, University Libraries
Lisa Belanger, Director, Health Services, University Health & Counseling Services
Gary Stephenson, Assistant Director, Facilities, Residential Life
Laura Nadeau, Administrative Assistant II, History & Political Science Department

Current Situation and Practices

Like most institutions of its size, the University of Southern Maine has a wide array of units and programs designed to integrate students into the institution, provide academic support, connect students to the community and the world of work, and develop opportunities for learning in and out of the classroom. USM also has programs and units devoted to student physical and mental health, safety, and well-being. USM, in short, has a committed faculty and staff that care about the student experience.

Despite the commitment of its faculty and staff, much of the work that is done at USM has failed to have a major impact upon major measures of student success such as retention and persistence. As an institution, USM lacks an overall philosophy governing the first year experience and our university is challenged with how to frame such a philosophy given the extremely diverse life experiences of our incoming first year student population.
Based upon its review of major surveys and assessments, the All Students Dimension committee concluded that in relation to the first-year experience, USM needed to address two main shortcomings.

1. *In the academic realm, USM needs to make participatory learning and community engagement a more common part of the student experience.*

According to the 2011 NSSE/FSSE report, just 9% of freshmen participated in a community-based service project and we are below our peer institutions on the measure "Worked with classmates outside of class to complete assignments." Student and faculty surveys indicate that there are too few mechanisms to bring faculty and students together on an individual basis during the first year. Several problems exist here. There are limited structures in place that encourage out-of-class engagement between students and faculty. There are few incentives for faculty to engage in this sort of activity, which is particularly troublesome because the perception is that it will be more work. Finally, although this approach will have value for students, there is a challenge in convincing the students that will be true.

What is striking in the FSSE and NSSE surveys, however, is that although USM is low in comparison to peer institutions on measures of active and collaborative learning and enriching educational experiences for first year students, the gap closes against our peers for seniors. In the 2011 graduating senior survey, students report broad satisfaction with the accessibility of the faculty in their major; the concern of faculty for their progress; and the quality of their learning; and only 11% were dissatisfied with their experience in their major. In the 2011 survey done of EYE students, faculty received comparatively low scores for helpfulness and concern for student progress and only 39% report enjoying EYE. In the same survey, students indicate that their primary goal is to graduate, but few students seem to see a connection between EYE, their first year courses, and their progress towards a degree.

Given these survey results, USM may need to reconsider the push for the interdisciplinarity basic to its recent reform of general education. Students seem to find community in their majors, and community seems to be a basic component of student success.

2. *In the student services area, USM’s major institutional shortcoming is the gap between student knowledge of support services and their use of them.*

On the web site and through campus events such as orientation, USM students are offered general information on student support services, but it is offered passively. USM needs to use technology and re-designed human systems to connect individual students to the support structures they need. In the academic realm, for example, recent surveys of EYE students have found that although USM offers an array of academic and advising support services, students seek them out at very low rates. Only 10% seek help from a tutor and 19% from an advisor. 40% seek help from a professor and a staggering 58% from a fellow student. Despite these low reported rates of student use of academic support services, in the NSSE survey, students report awareness that USM does have solid support systems in place for academic and non-academic issues. Most tellingly, in the FOE survey, students rated their knowledge of academic support (Q. 52) higher than their individual connection to it (Q. 28).

Similar to the campus culture with regard to academic support, USM provides abundant opportunities for campus involvement and sociability, but too few students take advantage of them. Historically information about student organizations was often difficult to get and rarely current, however the newly developed Pathways program is designed to address this concern. There also seems to be a lack of data about student participation in campus life and what might be inhibiting it, however, plans are underway to collect this information in spring 2013. The multi-campus structure of USM and the diverse life-
situations of the student body makes a coherent social life "on campus" challenging. Nonetheless, in the FOE student survey, students rate USM poorly in the area of extracurricular activities (Q. 31).

USM needs to do a better job connecting students with needs to the services and activities we provide. There are faculty (particularly adjuncts) and staff who are unaware of the services that exist for students and how to access them. The use of assessment could serve to better align services with student needs. USM conducts many assessments, but does not use them effectively to implement change. This would result in better customer service to our most important customers - our students.

As we will outline below, USM offers a comprehensive array of programs. When students arrive at USM, they are channeled through two major assessment mechanisms. Academic needs are assessed as part of the admissions process for new students. The admissions staff flags those individuals who, based on SAT scores, high school course selection, and grades, should be assigned to developmental math or English classes.

Academic needs are addressed via classes (LAC 180, HRD 110), honors classes, Office for Service for Students with Disabilities, research opportunities for Undergrads, proficiency level math and writing classes, Living Learning Communities like Pioneers, internship opportunities and academic clubs. We also have the TRIO academic support program, Student Success, the Learning Commons, ESOL, and Athletic Study Tables. The ESOL office utilizes English Language Placement Tests and TOEFL scores as a mechanism for determining class placement.

Social and personal needs are assessed with the administration of a voluntary student involvement survey to all students at orientation and follow that up with targeted invitations to clubs and organizations that may meet their needs. Social and personal needs are also met via the CSAO staff, Commuter Services, Gorham Student Life, Portland Student Life, Involvement Fairs, evening and weekend programming, The Well, The Campus Safety Project, Health and Counseling (Group and Individual), BASICS, USM Cares, Living Learning Communities, the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT), Financial Literacy Program and Job Fairs. We have a fairly comprehensive list of services, programs and opportunities for involvement on line. We don't provide much in the way of transportation to support the social needs of students and students report that they would like to see more large-scale events and programs on weekends. For students who have violated university policies, particularly governing the use of alcohol and drugs, the Office of Community Standards uses a number of self-assessment tools and then they build the appropriate referrals into the sanctioning process.

There are, then, numerous programs and departments that address the perceived academic, social and personal needs of students. Most, if not all, of those services are listed in the Current Practices Inventory. USM needs to improve in its use of student assessment as a means of referral to and access of those resources.

Grappling with USM's diversity is, in many respects, an institutional strength. In the realm of student populations, much of USM's diversity is "hidden." Faculty, tellingly, perceive USM as lacking diversity. In the most recent FSSE survey, faculty think that only 3% of USM students have had significant encounters with intellectual and social diversity. Students, however, report out at 32%.

USM reaches out to unique populations of students beginning with recruitment and continuing through accepted student days, general and group-specific orientations, and ongoing programs throughout the academic year. The Athletics Department, the Centers for Women and Community, Multicultural Students, and Sexualities and Gender Diversity, Office of Support for Students with Disabilities, TRiO Program, The Well, International Students Office, Residential Life, and Honors Program all participate in accepted student days and general orientations, providing students with program information and
opportunities for support, involvement, and work-study. There are specific orientation programs held for Veterans, Honors students, International students, and Athletes. There needs to be a dedicated orientation program for our immigrant student population or they need to be combined with our International Student orientation.

USM is consistently rated as an institution that is supportive of LGBTQA students, providing programming and supports including programming, housing, the Center for Sexualities and Gender Diversity and Safe Zone training. Residential Life provides living options for many of these subpopulations of students through Living/Learning Communities which include an academic component such as Honors, Russell Scholars, and Community of Aspiring Teachers and Life Style floors such as the Rainbow Floor for LGBTQA students, Quiet Floor, Greek Life, and Substance-Free Floor. Athletics seeks to build community and assure retention of first year students through a host of group and one on one activities including: priority registration for classes, barbecues, one on one meetings with each student, regular academic progress checks and mandatory study hours, and guest speakers. Athletes as a whole are also engaged in community service, the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), and the Courtesy Attitude Respect Everywhere (CARE) initiative.

Multicultural Student Affairs reaches out to new students to help them navigate the complex higher education system, providing a friendly, safe, and accepting environment and educational programming opportunities to celebrate their heritage and culture. Wellness: The Well offers resources and education to all first year students on topics including: emotional/physical/sexual/spiritual/cultural/financial/intellectual health. The Well also provides substance abuse prevention and intervention to students and the BASICS program (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) for students mandated through the Office of Community Standards or referred by Health and Counseling Services. Veterans: USM Veterans Services connects students with the Veterans Resource Center, the USM School Certifying Official (SCO), and assists them in navigating the USM Veterans Services website to ensure that they receive benefits. Students also attend the New Veteran Student Reception at the beginning of each semester. TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) works with students who are first generation college students, income eligible (150% of the Poverty level), or a student with a disability. The program offers individual meetings with a TRiO SSS Advisor and enrollment in the TRiO SSS class to assist them in navigating the college world, from financial aid through how to study and access additional campus services.

The Office of Support for Students with Disabilities (OSSD), seeks to identify first year students with disabilities to ensure that they have equal access to University programs and activities. Services provided by OSSD are designed to meet the needs of individual students based on their specific disability and within a philosophical framework that emphasizes student independence and self-reliance.

USM does have areas for growth in the area of diversity and special populations. Residential Life has been working to increase the number and array of these living options as well as working with academic departments to locate more first year classes on the Gorham campus in order to enhance the community experience. Enhanced co-curricular programming, university-wide cultural programming, additional ESOL courses and tutors, disability-specific coaching, and efforts to build a campus environment that is safe and accepting should be considered. Students who are parents are significantly lacking in support with the loss of the USM childcare center and the cuts to the Maine Parents as Scholars Program. The needs of active-duty military students also need to be formally addressed. Currently individual faculty seek to work with these individuals informally on-line. While USM has an impressive array of programs, there are students who remain underserved.

In the realm of student safety, USM provides standard measures to ensure physical safety of students including outdoor emergency direct-ring telephones, safety lights, safety escorts, and 24-hour patrol on
our residential campus. A majority of students surveyed report feeling safe on campus and respected by others. USM provides for the psychological safety of the campus community through orientation programming, free counseling to students, Safe Zone training and the wide posting of information regarding resources and supports. The Campus Safety Project addresses interpersonal violence issues and USM Cares is focused on the prevention of suicide. USM needs more patrol coverage on our main campus, efforts to make resource and support information available to all students, and the regular administration of the university-wide Campus Climate Surveys to evaluate progress particularly in areas related to bias and harassment.

**Recommended Dimension Grade: B-**

**Recommended Actions**

1. **To Develop Institutional Structures to Bring Faculty and Students Together in the First Year**

   Review the content, structure and purpose of EYE; align EYE offerings more tightly with academic disciplines *(High priority)*
   Develop immersion and community-building courses in every major that target students who are early in their college careers *(High priority)*

   - Support, encourage, and fund co-curricular learning aligned with EYE
   - Strengthen class selection process at orientation so students understand goals of EYE *(Medium priority)*

2. **To Develop Strategies to Encourage Student Utilization of Services/To Convert “Awareness” to “Use”**

   - Investigate and Implement programs like MapWorks *(High priority)*
     - This tool comes in the form of online technology and would be used by students to self-identify their needs both academically and socially. Once completed university faculty, staff and employees would offer targeted resources and support to meet those needs.

   - Educate Campus Community about the Behavioral Intervention Team also known as BIT *(High priority)*
     - This team is comprised of a number of experienced professional staff members representing a variety of student services. As this group is made aware of students of concern, a strategy is put in place to get each student connected with university resources as needed.

   - Redesign the early alert system to increase faculty/advisor/student utilization; in particular, deploy new software such as Starfish to increase ease of use. As referrals increase, build capacity in the appropriate support personnel areas
- Regularly administer the Campus Climate Survey in a first-year class and convene a group of USM faculty and staff to implement programs based upon the results (*Medium priority*)
- Comprehensive information/education for new students on safety issues (*Medium priority*)
- Design more targeted and intensive orientation programs to serve distinct student populations (*Medium Priority*)
Foundations Institutions ensure that all first year students experience diverse ideas, world views, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning experience 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 culture and the cultures of others.

Committee Members

Flynn Ross, Associate Professor, Teacher Education
Gabriel Demaine, Coordinator for Diversity & Inclusivity Programming
Rachel Morales, Interim Director Undergraduate Admission
Francesca Vassallo, Associate Professor, History/Political Science
Sarah Holmes, Coordinator, Center for Sexualities and Gender Diversity
Susie Bock, Director, Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, Head of Special Collections
Glickman Family Library

Current Situation and Practices

The Diversity Dimension Committee examined the institution’s performance in providing structures within which students experience diversity both within and outside of class (in the curriculum and in co-curricular & extra-curricular experiences). Additionally, the committee evaluated the level of opportunities for students to interact with others who are different from themselves, both on and off campus, and finally determined the level of conveying to students standards of behavior in an open and civil campus community.

The committee found it challenging to first define “diversity” as well as find resources and data about diversity across the institution. We worked to develop the following definitions to inform this report:

Definition of Terms

Diversity - The Diversity Dimension Committee agreed to use a definition put forward by the President’s Council on Diversity (2008) and adopted by the USM’s Strategic Planning (2011).

“USM recognizes the complexity of our identities and adopts the philosophy that we embrace, include, and accord all groups equitable, political, and social status. USM is committed to 1) Providing equal access to educational opportunities for all students. 2) Actively examining and exchanging diverse ideas and perspectives. 3) Respecting, encouraging, and fostering cultural and ethnic differences that lead to a dynamic sustainable academic society. 4) Investigating and implementing strategies that create and sustain innovative and intercultural structures, policies, and practices. 5) Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and student body.”

First Year Student – A student with fewer than 24 credit hours.
Curriculum – The Diversity Dimension Committee agreed to include academic as well as non-academic experiences in the definition of curriculum; and to include extracurricular activities and projects as co-curricular experiences.

Academic Curriculum includes a series of studies outlined in Faculty syllabi & inside the classroom.
Non Academic Curriculum includes a series of trainings and programs regularly scheduled &/or built into the student life experience.
Co-curricular experiences are activities integrated across the curriculum and directly linked to student’s course work (diversity programs and events, service learning)
Extra-curricular activities include projects (civic engagement, volunteering) and events which, though not directly linked to course, work support student exposure and interaction with ideological, social, and cultural difference.

Current Situation

There are many initiatives and activities in the academic and co-curricular undertakings at the university that address diversity. For the purposes of this report we focused on identifying those events that target or might be attended by first year students. This report also includes references to promising practices and resources that are available at the university that might be tapped to further support first year students. We will address the indicators specifically and highlight recommendations at the end of the report.

USM’s Portland campus is located in the state’s urban hub, which is also a federally designated refugee resettlement community in which the student population in the local schools is 25% non-native English speakers who represent over 60 native languages. Similarly, the USM Lewiston-Auburn campus is located in a community experiencing a rapid influx of secondary emigration. These community demographics offer great opportunities to the university community to promote student interaction with individuals from backgrounds and cultures different from their own.

Indicator 7.1 Diverse Ideas – assure that first year students experience diverse ideas & world views
From 2009 and 2012 the NSSE Freshman and Senior Comparison Report shows Freshmen reporting increases (less than 10%) in writing and speaking clearly and effectively, and thinking critically. But declines reported (9% and 10%) in understanding people of other backgrounds and better understanding someone else’s point of view.

Though there are places in the university where issues of diversity are integrated in the curriculum, EYE courses, courses with Ethical Inquiry and Diversity designations, International Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and Teacher Education for example, the statistics from the NSSE Reports highlight a clear challenge to better provide opportunities both with in the class room and outside of the class room for first year students to build cultural competencies.

Indicator 7.2 Interactions – opportunities for first year students to interact with individuals from backgrounds and cultures different from their own
To address this indicator we felt it was important to gather data on our student population:

Demographics of student body
• 995 first year students 2012-13
• 12.7% fall 2011 first time undergraduate minority students (slightly higher than total undergraduate population of 10.8% minority)
• 55% female, 45% male
• 67% age 24 and under
• 80% first year students in residence halls
• 20% increase in self-reported first year students from 2009-2011 (from 520 students to 624 students – this change was simultaneous with the change in self-reporting identity categories on admission forms so may be related to that change)
• 13% decline in Native American enrollment system-wide after Native American waiver guidelines changed in 2011-12

From 2009 to 2012 the NSSE Freshman and Senior Comparison Report shows no percentage change (35%) in Freshmen reporting about having conversations with others of different race, ethnicity, beliefs, or opinions, and an 8% decrease in Freshmen reporting being encouraged to contact students different than them.

Though USM emphasizes “examining and exchanging diverse ideas, encouraging cultural difference, and implementing intercultural practices” (definition of diversity per the 2008 President’s Council on Diversity), per the NSSE report this is not reflected in the first year experience.

The NSSE 2012 Freshman and Senior Comparison Report shows the demographics of USM first year students as predominantly white, with 15% reporting as non-white. But regardless of demographic composition, the university must expose students to diverse ideas and help them learn about cultures other than their own.

Provision of and encouraging greater attendance in co-curricular events focused on diversity issues that augment student’s course work, better integration of extra-curricular activities and signature diversity events (MLK Jr. Day, International Women’s Day, Gay Pride Week, EID Celebration for example) with course work and co-curricular events could increase student engagement in understanding difference and help build cultural competencies.

**Indicator 7.3 Behaviors – convey to first year students the standards of behavior it expects for participants in a diverse, open, and civil community**

The Office of Community Standards outlines a Student Conduct Code and a Student Academic Integrity Policy. In addition there are programs designed to convey to students standards of behavior including The Campus Safety Project, Safe Zone Training, and Residential Life Orientation training.

**Recommended Dimension Grade: To Be Assigned**

**Recommended Actions**

1. Support and coordinate affinity group orientation similar to those provided for international students for other groups of students including: students with disabilities; gay, lesbian, transgender students; and multicultural students.

2. Increase co-curricular activities and make extra-curricular more integrated with the curriculum.

3. Provide professional development for faculty and staff development around restorative justice models that promote, recognize, and reward desired positive behaviors, and address infractions in a manner that is communal and restorative.*
4. **Reinstate Ombuds function.** (Not clear whether the diversity & community outreach team serves this function.)

**Sources of Evidence**

1. NSSE 2009-2012 Freshman Survey Responses – Fall ’08-’10 Admits
2. NSSE 2009 Survey - Comparison Freshman & Senior: Breakdown of Student Response by College
3. NSSE-FSSE 2012 Student & Faculty Survey - Comparison Report: a Breakdown by National Benchmarks & Related Items
4. Office of Academic Assessment USM 2008 Faculty Diversity Survey
5. Institutional Research and Assessment “By the Numbers AY ’11-’12”

*Restorative Justice Model: We have local expertise on campus to draw from. Professor Powell teaches a course in the Law Cluster CRM 380 titled Restorative Justice, and reports on Juvenile Justice from the Muskie School highlight restorative justice models as promising practices in the community. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in a nationally recognized model endorsed by the Federal Department of Education and we have national trainers, Rachel Chidsey-Brown and Pat Red on our faculty.*
Improvement Dimension Report

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order 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.

Committee Members

Chairs: Cathie Fallona, Associate Professor, Education & Human Development
         Susan Nevins, Director, Program Development, Professional Dev Programs)

Members:
         Jennifer Dean, College of Science, Technology, and Health
         Vincent Faherty, Executive Director; Professor, School of Social Work
         Joyce Gibson, Dean, Lewiston-Auburn College
         Dan Jenkins, Assistant Professor Leadership and Organizational Studies
         Deb Kalikow-Pluck, Student Success Advisor
         Joyce Lapping, Director, Prior Learning Assessment
         Jeff Shields, Associate Professor, Accounting
         Dan Welter, Coordinator of Student Activities, Student Life Gorham

Current Situation and Practices

There are a number of first year initiatives. These include Orientation, EYE, Learning Commons, Residential Learning Initiative, and Learning Communities. The student experience at Orientation is assessed following attendance through a Survey Monkey survey. Results are reviewed and themes are identified. EYE has been assessed. There are assessment reports for the 2006-2010 EYE cohorts and a comparative 2006-2010 report. It's not clear how these reports have been used to inform change or improvement. With regard to Residential Learning Initiative, one of the committee members was aware that surveys have been used to assess the initiative. However, we were not able to obtain that data or information related to how the data is used to inform change or improvement. Learning Communities have been assessed. In particular, there is data on the two established Learning Communities, Russell Scholars and Honors. We do not know how this data is used for improvement. The Learning Commons Initiative also collects data. Data about the Learning Commons is included in the Academic Support Services Year End Report. This report includes a description of activities and data on Tutoring Services and Form B Exams. It also includes information about goals for this year based upon the data. As a part of the Learning Commons Initiative, the number of Group Study Room Reservations and Reference Appointments and Contacts are tracked and that data shows increased use over the last year.
Dissemination of demographic characteristics, the academic profile of entering students and their intended majors, as well as retention and graduation data is poor. On the faculty and staff survey, USM has a mean more than .25 lower than the institution's goal on all questions related to the Improvement Domain. The results indicate that faculty and staff believe that USM's assessment practices, dissemination of data and use of assessment data are not effective. Faculty and staff also do not believe that they have had the opportunity to engage in professional development activities that focus on working with first year or transfer students. In summary, although some first year and transfer initiatives appear to be systematically assessed, we were not able to identify how assessment activities are used to make changes to or improve the first year or transfer experience. Dissemination of data is poor and has not resulted in improved campus understanding of student allocation of their time, student to student connections, faculty to student connections, student use of campus services, student involvement or student attendance at class. Neither has faculty or staff been effectively engaged in professional development to increase their understanding or improve their work with first year and transfer students.

**Recommended Dimension Grade: D**

**Recommended Actions**

- **Data Dissemination (High priority)**  
  Actively disseminate data to the University community, not just post on web page.

- **Leverage Data for Improvement (High priority)**  
  It's unclear with most initiatives how data is being used to improve the first year or transfer experience. Assessment results should be used to communicate the needs of first year and transfer students and they should be used to improve the student experience.

- **Non-traditional and transfer students (High priority)**  
  The initiatives and their assessments lump first year and transfer students together. Greater attention should be paid to assessing the needs of different groups of students, particularly non-traditional and transfer students. The data should be broadly disseminated so that the University community better understands the varying needs of students.

- **Exit data (Medium priority)**  
  Follow up with non-returning, non-completing students.
Appendix A: Recommended Actions by Dimension
Philosophy Recommended Actions

- **Articulate a university-wide philosophy statement** (*Highest priority*)
  USM should articulate a university-wide philosophy statement that need not be long but which should clearly state our beliefs about why the first year matters. In the end, this statement needs not only to be issued from the top but involve those at all levels who work with first-year students, to ensure that it is a lived philosophy and secures needed buy-in.
- **Develop and implement a Communication Plan for circulating this philosophy statement for discussion and buy-in** (*High priority*)
- **Incorporate this articulated philosophy into college and school missions, goals and/or value statements** (*High priority*)
- **Determine how this articulated philosophy will be utilized to coordinate recruiting, admissions, enrollment, student success during and after college, and academic policies/practices aligned w/this dimension** (*High priority*)
- **Once a USM philosophy has been fully articulated, communicated and institutionalized, it should help guide practice and policy development as well as assessment.**

Roles and Purposes Recommended Actions

- **Complete implementation of a shared advising model**, where joint student success and faculty advising helps students make the connection between college and their career pathways through robust academic advising, faculty mentoring, and career development/exploration (*Highest priority*)
- **Improve student learning by engaging students in internships/service-learning, Learning Communities, and integrated, interdisciplinary courses like EYE** (*Highest priority*)
- **Rethink how to integrate the out-of-classroom experience** (e.g., working with classmates outside of class on an assignment, participating in community-based learning and service, and co-curricular activities) such that it is viewed as applied learning connected to the academic experience (*Highest priority*)
- **Increase access, optimize facilities use, facilitate student achievement, reduce cost, and support collaboration as part of or in conjunction with needed course and instructional redesign** (*High priority*)

Organization Recommended Actions

- **Develop a communication structure with clear expectations/goals that focuses on making a difference by efficient and effective sharing of best practices, existing resources and use of data with students, faculty and staff** (*Highest priority*)
- **Identify faculty and staff first-year student experience experts and leverage their expertise to develop a formal and informal structure and network for collaboration and communication. Identification on how to collaborate by sharing resources would be a critical first agenda item** (*Highest priority*)
- **Assess academic advising at USM, and establish a new model focused on student learning that is coordinated and collaborative** (*Highest priority*)
- **Assess the early/academic alert system, using this assessment to create a new system that is efficient and focuses on the needs of students and faculty** (*Highest priority*)
- **Create a culture of engagement between students, faculty and staff, which provides clear expectations of faculty and staff roles in the success of our students and institution** (*Highest priority*)
- **Evaluate USM’s effectiveness in order to learn if we are making the most out of our time with students** (*High priority*)
• Educate the campus on the first year experience from admission to orientation through first semester *(High priority)*

**Learning Recommended Actions**

- Complete direct assessment of student learning in relation to EYE outcomes, including both rubric-based review of student work and one-on-one interviews with students *(High priority)*
- Link EYE and CW outcomes and programmatic use of EYE to university-wide Strategic Plan *(High priority)*
- Focus greater attention on information literacy outcomes in EYE and elsewhere *(High priority)*
- Assess relationship between EYE, College Writing, HRD 110 and FRS/LAC 180 and their learning outcomes, with the goal of identifying points of articulation and beneficial reinforcement as well as any areas of duplication or redundancy. [For example, such an analysis could address the question of who should take which of these courses, and when] *(High priority)*
- Expand faculty participation in EYE instruction, making it easier for faculty in small departments to participate since faculty members from small departments tend to have the most constraints on their curricular responsibilities *(High priority)*
- Market EYE courses to explain their purpose to students *(High priority)*
- Strengthen co-curricular learning by developing a menu of co-curricular experiences and ideas that faculty could draw upon in planning their own courses, especially activities that bring the community to the classroom and recognize that our students are the community. This resource could be produced, maintained and distributed by a re-established center for teaching *(High priority)*
- Increase participatory and applied learning which includes the benefit of participation in the campus and broader community, through student projects ranging from co-curricular learning (see above) to service learning, where appropriate for first-year students *(High priority)*
- Re-establish a center for teaching, either as a distinct entity or incorporated into the Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Education office, to provide a location for professional development that can encourage faculty to engage in high impact practices for first year students *(High priority)*
- Establish a structured recognition system for faculty who increase retention in critical or "gateway" courses in which students experience high failure rates *(High priority)*
- Provide faculty with more training and support for curricular and programmatic planning and development, including but not limited to expanding faculty development for EYE instruction that includes use of online and other information literacy tools provided by the library *(High priority)*
- Investigate Learning communities and linked courses further. Proceed with caution with respect to linked courses, given diversity of our first year students in terms of residential preferences, transfer credits, etc., and in light of the failed EYE/College Writing/introduction to major linked course experiment for fall 2012. Block scheduling planned for fall 2013 is a good first step to investigating whether students’ sense of community is enhanced by improved scheduling rather than actual links *(Medium priority)*

**Faculty Recommended Actions**

- The institution might foster a culture which values faculty engagement in first-year student success through explicit statements from the Provost and Deans to departments emphasizing the institutional value placed on first-year instruction, and reminding departments that far from representing a shortcoming in promotion and tenure materials, evidence of sustained participation in first-year instruction in EYE and other courses is a plus, especially given the challenges of teaching predominantly first-year classes
• Explicit statements could be included in promotion and tenure materials (e.g., “face sheets” from the Provost’s office) which mention EYE or other first-year instruction and/or professional activities (e.g. published articles or conference presentations) focused on first-year student instruction and engagement
• Because time, money, and professional recognition do matter and leadership can send a powerful message about the value of first-year student work by tying any number of institutional rewards to it, USM should recognize faculty engagement in first-year student success by tying valued/limited institutional resources to first-year instruction and engagement (e.g., setting aside any available travel or other money for faculty with sustained involvement in first-year instruction; similarly, tying some portion of computer and other equipment upgrades to such sustained involvement)
• “Engagement” itself might be better understood (and rewarded) as happening outside as well as inside the classroom; first-year students should possibly be engaged first and foremost with social-type activities involving faculty
• If first-year student engagement is a top priority, institutional conversations about increased demand for on-line instruction must be balanced against face-to-face engagement and a social-type atmosphere/relationship seemingly needed for first year students

Transitions Recommended Actions
• Flag first-semester students in MaineStreet on class rosters, and to student pictures in faculty portals, etc.
• Explore the need for an office responsible for Family Member Engagement and its impact on recruitment and retention.
• Increase the capacity and resources of the Office of Internships and Career Placement, looking at how realigning current resources and staff might accomplish this
• Register all first-year students in the Pathways Program by the end of the second week of the semester, highlighting all the active learning, co-curricular, and career development opportunities available and their value
• Assign a first year mentor (faculty, staff, or upper-level student) to every new student much earlier (ideally, prior to acceptance and no later than when accepted)
• Use existing, qualified staff to increase advising capacity to reach students earlier; consider cohort and group advising sessions
• Utilize more current Graduate and Undergraduate students in the recruitment process
• Expand employee orientation and employee development opportunities
• Link faculty incentives, evaluations, promotion, and tenure to demonstrated support/development of first-year students
• Strengthen the Early Alert Program to monitor, intervene, and eliminate barriers (academic, financial, behavioral, etc)
• Reinstate a common, academic-driven program that faculty and staff can engage in where we communicate and affirm goals, values, and the student experience
• Create a First Year Experience Web Portal including (but not limited to) virtual campus tours, USM’s social networking sites, videos on how to validate a student email address or search and register for classes within MaineStreet, and create a USM mobile app that allows students to pay their bill, register for classes, etc. on smart phones and other devises
• Increase the comfortable, attractive, functional, informal gathering places as needed on all three campuses (involve students in this discussion)
All Students Recommended Actions

- Review the content, structure and purpose of EYE; align EYE offerings more tightly with academic disciplines (High priority)
- Develop immersion and community-building courses in every major that target students who are early in their college careers (High priority)
- Support, encourage, and fund co-curricular learning aligned with EYE
- Strengthen class selection process at orientation so students understand goals of EYE (Medium priority)
- Investigate and Implement programs like MapWorks that can be used by students to self-identify their needs both academically and socially; once completed, university faculty, staff and employees would offer targeted resources and support to meet those needs (High priority)
- Educate the Campus Community about the Behavioral Intervention Team also known as BIT, which is comprised of a number of experienced professional staff members representing a variety of student services who, once made aware of students of concern, put in place a strategy to get each student connected with university resources as needed (High priority)
- Redesign the early alert system to increase faculty/advisor/student utilization; in particular, deploy new software such as Starfish to increase ease of use and, as referrals increase, build capacity in the appropriate support personnel areas
- Regularly administrate the Campus Climate Survey in a first-year class and convene a group of USM faculty and staff to implement programs based upon the results (Medium priority)
- Provide comprehensive information/education for new students on safety issues (Medium priority)
- Design more targeted and intensive orientation programs to serve distinct student populations (Medium Priority)

Diversity Recommended Actions

- Support and coordinate affinity group orientations similar to those provided for international students for other groups of students including students with disabilities; gay, lesbian, transgender students; and multicultural students
- Increase co-curricular activities and make extra-curricular activities more integrated
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff development around restorative justice models that promote, recognize, and reward desired positive behaviors, and address infractions in a manner that is communal and restorative.*
- Reinstate the Ombuds function, particularly as it is not clear whether the diversity & community outreach team serves this function

Improvement Recommended Actions

- Actively disseminate data to the University community, not just post on web page (High priority)
- It's unclear with most initiatives how data is being use to improve the first year or transfer experience. Assessment results should be used to communicate the needs of first-year and transfer students and they should be used to improve the student experience (High priority)
- Since initiatives and their assessments frequently lump first-year and transfer students together, greater attention should be paid to assessing the needs of different groups of students, particularly non-traditional and transfer students, and the data should be broadly disseminated so that the University community better understands the varying needs of students (High priority)
- Follow up with non-returning, non-completing students should be done to collect exit data (Medium priority).
Appendix B: Recommended Actions by Theme
First-Year Philosophy

- Articulate a university-wide philosophy statement (Highest priority)
  USM should articulate a university-wide philosophy statement that need not be long but which should clearly state our beliefs about why the first year matters. In the end, this statement needs not only to be issued from the top but involve those at all levels who work with first-year students, to ensure that it is a lived philosophy and secures needed buy-in.
- Develop and implement a Communication Plan for circulating this philosophy statement for discussion and buy-in (High priority)
- Incorporate this articulated philosophy into college and school missions, goals and/or value statements (High priority)
- Determine how this articulated philosophy will be utilized to coordinate recruiting, admissions, enrollment, student success during and after college, and academic policies/practices aligned w/this dimension (High priority)
- Once a USM philosophy has been fully articulated, communicated and institutionalized, use it to help guide practice and policy development as well as assessment

Advising

- Complete implementation of a shared advising model, where joint student success and faculty advising helps students make the connection between college and their career pathways through robust academic advising, faculty mentoring, and career development/exploration (Highest priority)
- Assess academic advising at USM, and establish a new model focused on student learning that is coordinated and collaborative (Highest priority)
- Utilize more current Graduate and Undergraduate students in the recruitment process
- Assign a first year mentor (faculty, staff, or upper-level student) to every new student much earlier (ideally, prior to acceptance and no later than when accepted)
- Use existing, qualified staff to increase advising capacity to reach students earlier; consider cohort and group advising sessions

Student Learning and Engagement

- Strengthen class selection process at orientation so students understand goals of EYE (Medium priority)
- Investigate and Implement programs like MapWorks that can be used by students to self-identify their needs both academically and socially; once completed, university faculty, staff and employees would offer targeted resources and support to meet those needs (High priority)
- Educate the Campus Community about the Behavioral Intervention Team also known as BIT, which is comprised of a number of experienced professional staff members representing a variety of student services who, once made aware of students of concern, put in place a strategy to get each student connected with university resources as needed (High priority)
- Increase participatory and applied learning opportunities in the first year and rethink how to integrate out-of-classroom experience (e.g., working with classmates outside of class on an assignment, participating in community-based learning and service, and co-curricular activities) such that it is viewed as applied learning connected to the academic experience (Highest priority)
- Improve student learning by engaging students in internships/service-learning, Learning Communities, and integrated, interdisciplinary courses like EYE (Highest priority)
- Develop a menu of co-curricular experiences and ideas that faculty can draw upon in planning their own courses, especially activities that bring the community to the classroom and recognize that our students are the community. This resource could be produced, maintained and distributed by a re-established center for teaching (High priority)
• Focus greater attention on information literacy outcomes in EYE and elsewhere (*High priority*)
• Register all first-year students in the Pathways Program by the end of the second week of the semester, highlighting all the active learning, co-curricular, and career development opportunities available and their value
• Investigate Learning communities and linked courses further. Proceed with caution with respect to linked courses, given diversity of our first year students in terms of residential preferences, transfer credits, etc., and in light of the failed EYE/College Writing/introduction to major linked course experiment for fall 2012. Block scheduling planned for fall 2013 is a good first step to investigating whether students’ sense of community is enhanced by improved scheduling rather than actual links (*Medium priority*)
• Provide comprehensive information/education for new students on safety issues (*Medium priority*)
• Balance institutional conversations about increased demand for on-line instruction against face-to-face engagement and a social-type atmosphere/relationship seemingly needed for first year students

**Faculty Engagement**

• Foster a culture which values faculty engagement in first-year student success through explicit statements from the Provost and Deans to departments emphasizing the institutional value placed on first-year instruction, and reminding departments that far from representing a shortcoming in promotion and tenure materials, evidence of sustained participation in first-year instruction in EYE and other courses is a plus, especially given the challenges of teaching predominantly first-year classes
• Include explicit statements in promotion and tenure materials (e.g., “face sheets” from the Provost’s office) which mention EYE or other first-year instruction and/or professional activities (e.g. published articles or conference presentations) focused on first-year student instruction and engagement
• Expand faculty participation in EYE instruction, making it easier for faculty in small departments to participate since faculty members from small departments tend to have the most constraints on their curricular responsibilities (*High priority*)
• Develop immersion and community-building courses in every major that target students who are early in their college careers (*High priority*)
• Re-establish a center for teaching, either as a distinct entity or incorporated into the Assistant Provost for Undergraduate Education office, to provide a location for professional development that can encourage faculty to engage in high impact practices for first-year students (*High priority*)
• Provide faculty with more training and support for curricular and programmatic planning and development, including but not limited to expanding faculty development for EYE instruction that includes use of online and other information literacy tools provided by the library (*High priority*)
• Establish a structured recognition system for faculty who increase retention in critical or "gateway" courses in which students experience high failure rates (*High priority*)
• Link faculty incentives, evaluations, promotion, and tenure to demonstrated support/development of first-year students so that faculty engagement in first-year student success is recognized by tying valued/limited institutional resources to first-year instruction and engagement (e.g., setting aside any available travel or other money for faculty with sustained involvement in first-year instruction; similarly, tying some portion of computer and other equipment upgrades to such sustained involvement)
• Reinstate a common, academic-driven program that faculty and staff can engage in where we communicate and affirm goals, values, and the student experience

**Communication, Collaboration and Coordination**

• Educate the campus on the first year experience from admission to orientation through first semester (*High priority*)

• Create a *First Year Experience* Web Portal including (but not limited to) virtual campus tours, USM’s social networking sites, videos on how to validate a student email address or search and register for classes within MaineStreet, and create a USM mobile app that allows students to pay their bill, register for classes, etc. on smart phones and other devices

• Develop a communication structure with clear expectations/goals that focuses on making a difference by efficient and effective sharing of best practices, existing resources and use of data with students, faculty and staff (*Highest priority*)

• Flag first-semester students in MaineStreet on class rosters, and to student pictures in faculty portals, etc

• Explore the need for an office responsible for Family Member Engagement and its impact on recruitment and retention.

• Increase the capacity and resources of the Office of Internships and Career Placement, looking at how realigning current resources and staff might accomplish this

• Market EYE courses to explain their purpose to students (*High priority*)

• Identify faculty and staff first-year student experience experts and leverage their expertise to develop a formal and informal structure and network for collaboration and communication. Identification on how to collaborate by sharing resources would be a critical first agenda item (*Highest priority*)

• Create a culture of engagement between students, faculty and staff, which provides clear expectations of faculty and staff roles in the success of our students and institution (*Highest priority*)

**Assessment**

• Use assessment results to evaluate USM’s effectiveness in order to learn if we are making the most out of our time with students, to communicate the needs of first-year and transfer students, and to improve the student experience (*High priority*)

• Since initiatives and their assessments frequently lump first-year and transfer students together, pay greater attention to assessing the needs of different groups of students, particularly non-traditional and transfer students, and broadly, actively disseminate these data (not just post them on web page) so that the University community better understands the varying needs of students (*High priority*)

• Complete direct assessment of student learning in relation to EYE outcomes, including both rubric-based review of student work and one-on-one interviews with students (*High priority*)

• Review the content, structure and purpose of EYE; align EYE offerings more tightly with academic disciplines (*High priority*)

• Assess relationship between EYE, College Writing, HRD 110 and FRS/LAC 180 and their learning outcomes, with the goal of identifying points of articulation and beneficial reinforcement as well as any areas of duplication or redundancy. [For example, such analysis could address the question of who should take which of these courses, and when] (*High priority*)

• Assess the early/academic alert system, using this assessment to create a new system that is efficient, focuses on the needs of students and faculty, eliminates barriers, and increases faculty/advisor/student utilization, possibly deploying new software such as Starfish to increase
ease of use and, as referrals increase, build capacity in the appropriate support personnel areas (*Highest priority*)

- Regularly administrate the Campus Climate Survey in a first-year class and convene a group of USM faculty and staff to implement programs based upon the results (*Medium priority*)
- Follow up with non-returning, non-completing students should be done to collect exit data (*Medium priority*)

**Diversity**

- Design more targeted and intensive orientation programs to serve distinct student populations; in particular, support and coordinate affinity group orientations similar to those provided for international students for other groups of students including students with disabilities; gay, lesbian, transgender students; and multicultural students (*Medium Priority*)
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff development around restorative justice models that promote, recognize, and reward desired positive behaviors, and address infractions in a manner that is communal and restorative.*
- Reinstate the Ombuds function, particularly as it is not clear whether the diversity & community outreach team serves this function

**Infrastructure**

- Increase the comfortable, attractive, functional, informal gathering places as needed on all three campuses (involve students in this discussion)