



Davis Division Academic Senate

Request for Consultation Responses

First Year Experience Implementation Plan

January 20, 2015

The Blue Ribbon Committee on the Undergraduate Student Experience (BRC) report was reviewed last fall. In response to BRC Goal 5 (BRC Report pages 18-27), a subcommittee developed a First Year Experience Implementation Plan. The First Year Experience Implementation Plan is provided for Academic Senate consultation and feedback prior to adoption.

Admissions & Enrollment

January 15, 2015 8:16 AM

The Committee on Admissions and Enrollment was asked to review the First Year Experience Implementation Plan for University of California, Davis students. After reviewing the plan, the Committee on Admissions and Enrollment had three points of consideration:

- The evaluation process recommended by the Blue Ribbon Committee should look for admissions characteristics that correlate to a boost in a student's success at Davis, and that information should be fed back into the admissions process. For example, if the program dramatically improves performance for first-generation students who did not participate in outreach programs during high school but has much less effect on students who did College Bound or something similar, then the admissions evaluation should take that into account.
- The section on the first-year seminars requires clarification. It is unclear if the objective is to add a new type of first-year seminar in addition to current seminars, or to eliminate the current seminars and replace them with new curriculum.
- In creating resources for faculty and staff, faculty advising should focus on areas where faculty can make a unique contribution, such as curriculum advice specific to a student's goals and background or advice on graduate programs. Advising related to financial aid, visas, disability accommodations, general education requirements, etc. should be done by staff rather than faculty.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES)

January 2, 2015 11:24 AM

Our committee has some concern about Objective 4, the peer mentor proposal. We strongly agree that adequate training and screening is needed for peer mentors. There is concern that an incompatible mentor/mentee pairing could expose the University to liability.

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (ENGINEERING)

January 14, 2015 4:59 PM

Response continued on next page.

Wednesday, January 14, 2015

To: Andre Knoesen, Chair
Davis Division of the Academic Senate

From: Niels Grønbech-Jensen, Chair
College of Engineering Faculty Executive Committee

SUBJECT: First Year Experience Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee is concerned about parts of the document that pertains to expanding direct advising responsibilities of faculty as well as an ongoing erosion of faculty focus on its primary functions: teaching (including class room instruction and curriculum development), research and mentoring, and professional service. While faculty is concerned about general student welfare, the implied additional workload of attaining and exercising formal competency in areas of non-academic issues, e.g., social difficulties and physical/mental health challenges, is beyond the focused qualifications of faculty. We are further concerned about faculty interfering with the consistency and competency of staff advising, which needs to be *the* program authority on how students navigate the educational bureaucracy. The same concern is found with respect to faculty interfering with qualified campus assistance in cases of, e.g., social and medical difficulties.

We are specifically concerned regarding *Strategies to meet Objective 2, item 1*, where the three pillars (teaching, research, service) of faculty merit and promotion are proposed to be revised. We believe that normal faculty advising in form appropriate professional advise (distinct from staff advising) is already well positioned in either the teaching or service category. Overall, the report is engaging in many relevant considerations, but it is overstepping professional boundaries in places; e.g., when it specifically encourages (and thereby institutionalizes) social interactions (including incentivizing dinner invitations) between students and faculty.

College of Engineering Faculty Executive Committee

Council of School & College Faculty Chairs (LS: MATH/PHY SCI)

December 3, 2014 1:43 PM

The L&S Executive Committee discussed this report in our December meeting. Our members expressed some confusion and concern about Objective 2.

First, it was not clear whether this proposal was to *add* a first-year seminar on "skills and knowledge to better navigate the university," with the aim of eventually enrolling a large proportion of first-year students, or whether it was to *replace* the existing form of first-year seminars by such a seminar with a new set with "a common set of learning outcomes." We would be very uneasy with the latter interpretation.

The current discipline-specific seminars, which often focus on fairly narrow subjects, have been quite successful in introducing students fields of research and in "increasing interactions between faculty and first-year students" (objective 5). We see no evidence that this system is broken and needs fixing, except perhaps to increase the number of students. The report complains that the present seminars are "driven by individual instructor disciplinary interests" and "lack a common set of learning outcomes." While this is true, we do not see it as a problem. A diversity of offerings is a positive feature, not a bug.

If, on the other hand, the proposal is to *add* a first-year seminar on a topic like "navigating the university," we have no objection. We would point out, though, that if the aim is really to "serve most first-year students," this is going to very rapidly become very expensive, at least under the present incentive system for first-year seminars. We would, naturally, be very unhappy if there were an attempt to impose such a course on the faculty as a required, uncompensated teaching overload, and we imagine most departments would be equally unhappy to divert teaching away from existing discipline-specific courses to teach such a seminar. Some careful thought is needed as to who would teach such seminars and how they would be compensated.

We would also emphasize that curricular matters fall under the auspices of the faculty. If the proposed seminar is really intended to reach a majority of first-year students, it needs to go through the standard course approval system. An "ad hoc group of Senate faculty" may, of course, suggest any new course they want, but we would insist on formal approval through the standard mechanisms.

Finally, on a different element of the report, we are happy to learn from UT Austin. But are they really the only exemplars?

Courses of Instruction

December 15, 2014 1:58 PM

Members of the Committee on Courses of Instruction (COCI) have reviewed the First Year Experience Implementation Plan. The committee appreciates the plan's thorough attention to the challenges that face first-year students and we endorse many of the recommendations related to improving advising and mentoring described in Objectives 1 and 3-7. On the other hand, we have several concerns about Objective 2, which was the primary focus of our review, as it is the only objective that addresses issues related to COCI's charge of reviewing and approving courses for academic credit on the UC Davis campus. Objective 2 discusses piloting a first-year seminar on navigating the university, related to information provided to students during orientation and Welcome Week, with the intention of eventually serving most first-year students. While we recognize that information related to these issues could be incorporated into first-year seminars in some cases, we do not support the plan for this objective as described for the following reasons:

1) We are concerned that a course devoted primarily to issues related to navigating the university would not have sufficient academic rigor and content to qualify for academic credit. Most of the relevant topics seem to fall within the area of advising rather than scholarly inquiry.

2) We are concerned by the suggestion that the proposed first-year seminars should replace the existing first-year seminar program. We disagree with the generalization that the current course offerings for first-year seminars "are not clearly defined" and with the implication that lacking "a common set of learning outcomes" is a negative aspect of the current first-year seminar program. Instead, we think the diversity and flexibility of the current program are great strengths, allowing faculty to offer seminars, and students to work closely with faculty, on topics of current interest to them. To completely replace these diverse offerings with a more uniform set of seminars, even if there were some tailoring by discipline, would be a sad loss and would degrade the intellectual experiences of many first-year students. The proposal to do so also seems counter to Objective 5 of the First Year Implementation Plan, which is to increase interactions between first-year students and faculty, particularly if such interactions are meant to be intellectually meaningful. We suggest that, if there are perceived problems with the current first-year seminar program, the campus should find ways to fix those while preserving the strengths of the program, rather than replacing it completely.

3) We doubt that many faculty members would want to teach a first-year seminar for which the content had been pre-determined by a committee. Such a situation would likely be perceived as micromanagement of course content, which we expect would result in reduced faculty interest in teaching these seminars. Providing incentives might mitigate this concern to some extent, but we note that modest awards are already provided to faculty teaching first-year seminars in the current program. We doubt that such modest incentives would be enough to persuade faculty to teach a course that did not particularly interest them, and, in any case, we think the primary motivation for faculty to teach a first-year seminar should be interest in intellectual engagement with first-year students.

4) In spite of the concerns mentioned above, we acknowledge that, as noted in the plan, seminars of this type are offered at several universities for academic credit, suggesting that it should be possible to structure them appropriately. Offering some seminars of this type in addition to other options may be acceptable, but the plan fails to acknowledge that this is precisely what we are already doing. In fact, seminars on "Navigating the Research University" are already offered here at UC Davis, through the current first-year seminar program, as they have been for about a decade, since they were first developed and piloted by a group of Davis Honors Challenge students under the supervision of Fred Wood during his term as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. Reviewing these offerings on our own campus to see if they meet the goals mentioned in the plan and also have sufficient academic rigor to alleviate the concerns mentioned above seems like the best place to start for this objective. Depending on the outcome of these reviews, these courses

could be modified as needed.

5) Given the concerns and suggestions discussed above, COCI strongly recommends that any further exploration of the first-year seminar program and possible changes to it should include significant and broad representation of faculty members who have experience teaching first-year seminars on the campus.

Graduate Council

January 16, 2015 11:16 AM

No response at this time.

Undergraduate Council

January 23, 2015 8:23 AM

Undergraduate Council's response on the First-year Experience Implementation Plan should be understood within the context of recent comments on advising in general.

Although several ideas in the Plan seem worth pursuing, such as studying the experience at UT Austin or setting up a voluntary "buddy-system," the ideas for a revamping of the current freshmen seminars seem misguided. Even if freshman seminars lack a common set of learning outcomes, why does that necessarily imply a failure? Given the diversity in the faculty and student populations, isn't it possible that a diverse set of freshman seminars, with differing goals, is ideal? A program to guide students new to UCD is another topic than conventional freshman seminars. (There is also the issue that many upperclassmen take freshman seminars, often for balancing of schedules.) Left unsaid in the proposal is whether the orientation seminar is to earn academic credit. Undergraduate Council – more precisely its subcommittee on Special Academic Programs – would be skeptical of a course, say, "Navigating SYSWEB" or "Using First-Pass to Advantage", even if for a nominal 1-unit to encourage attendance. That just means the overall degree needs 179 units instead of 180. And what happens should a student fail this orientation seminar?

Everyone agrees that the current brief orientation before classes start often overwhelms new students. Could the solution simply be to repeat some of the material later in Fall Quarter, and again in Winter Quarter, for the subset that want to hear it again? The presentations could be slightly different, but substantively the same. Similarly, sometimes the best way to study is to re-read a complex paragraph or listen to a taped lecture.

Although transfer students are as new to the campus as are freshmen, these two groups are quite different. For example, around 33% of those freshmen who ultimately graduate do so in the major in which they entered, whereas that percentage is 75 for transfer students. Clearly, advice about selecting or changing a major needs to be different for the two categories, and probably that is true for all other aspects of advising these groups.