CHAPTER 6

BUILDING A CASE FOR INTEGRATIVE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

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In the late 1990s, the University of Cincinnati (UC), challenged by its large, highly diverse undergraduate population and modest retention and graduation rates, sought to improve students' collegiate experience and success. In response, the University turned its attention to the first-year experience (FYE). A large body of research has amassed findings that indicate FYE interventions can increase retention and student engagement (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005; Leskes & Miller, 2006; Taylor, 2003; Tinto, 1997; Tobolowsky, 2005). Appropriately, UC launched its initiative with a visit from John Gardner, arguably the FYE movement's most influential leader, who served as a retreat consultant in October 1999. This retreat launched an organised effort to identify key elements of a successful first year at UC and to promote college-based, as well as centrally-administered, academic and social supports to help students achieve their educational goals. FYE has since emerged as the foundation of the University's new, overarching approach to undergraduate education.

The University of Cincinnati offers a case study of innovative integration – a model for linking FYE efforts across a large and varied undergraduate population, and for leveraging FYE as the base of a comprehensive academic plan. Given its scope, we develop this case at three interwoven levels. We begin with the University's FYE initiative, examining its evolution and resulting programme. Next, we place that initiative within its broader context, as the foundation of the University's revised undergraduate experience. We then shift to a specific, college-level example. The College of Business illustrates the potential for a purposeful and creative FYE to energise programmatic revisions and enhance students' experiences and professional performance. Coming full circle, we then present the university-level results of this integrative approach. Our conclusion explores the implications of this case, identifies related opportunities and challenges and proposes future directions.

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The University of Cincinnati's FYE initiative: Great Beginnings

At the University of Cincinnati, FYE efforts developed through collaboration and serendipity. Early support grew out of simultaneously occurring but independent pilot projects and related conversations among UC faculty and staff, as well as state-level stakeholders. These included freshman-level learning community projects in several colleges, drafting of the Strategic Enrolment Management Team's blueprints for increasing undergraduate retention and graduation rates, and introducing the Ohio Success Challenge project (competitive government funds to help at-risk students successfully earn baccalaureate degrees). Energised by the John Gardner retreat and fueled by Ohio Success Challenge funding, these parallel efforts merged. The formal FYE initiative began in conjunction with campus-wide implementation of learning communities. Together, these efforts sought to provide students the feel of a small, personalised programme, and the benefits of a large, urban, research institution.

Initially, FYE and learning communities were separate efforts. The 2002 FYE Model was developed by a steering committee led by associate provost Linda Cain, UC's initial champion of FYE, with representatives from the Provost Office, Student Affairs and Services, college offices, and faculty, and was reviewed by the Faculty Senate, deans, and associate deans. The committee identified the key components of FYE as: new student orientation; engaging and enriching classroom instruction; accurate and timely academic advising; guidance regarding study; learning life management skills; career counselling; and social and academic activities outside the classroom.

In 2004, happenings again converged. Linda Cain retired, shifting FYE responsibility to Pamela Person. Change at the FYE helm coincided with the arrival of a new university president and the start of extensive strategic planning. The Center for First-Year Experience and Learning Communities, a unit within the Office of the Provost, was opened and quickly thrust into the strategic planning process initiated by the new President. The goals for FYE became further specified through the campus-wide process of re-visioning the University.

Like the programme itself, financial support for FYE evolved through varied, interwoven channels. Initial funding came entirely from Ohio Success Challenge funds. UC defined at-risk students to include all first-year students. This meant that all efforts designed to help first-year students achieve a baccalaureate degree became eligible (competitively) for support from monies the University received through the Ohio Success Challenge initiative. In the early years, some of the money allocated for use by the Associate Provost and then by the Center for First-Year Experience and Learning Communities for central development of programmes was redistributed to colleges and units to support teaching first-year seminars or to hire staff to coordinate college-level FYE programmes. Funding responsibility has since shifted. Most courses, as well as college-level staff support, are paid for by the colleges and units with resources under their direct control, which may include Success Challenge allocations. Several one-time, external and university grants provided much needed seed money to pilot and expand FYE efforts. For example, Pamela Person, Director of Learning

Communities and now also FYE, and Marianne Lewis, Associate Professor and then Associate Dean in the College of Business, received a grant from the Ohio Learning Network in 2002-03 that supported pilot learning communities in the College of Business. That project evolved into the college's innovative Fast Track programme (described later in this chapter). As part of the University's strategic planning process, in 2006, and again in 2008, the Center received one-time, internal grant allocations to support programme enhancements and further incorporate FYE as an integral part of UC's undergraduate experience. Starting in 2009, the Center will receive permanent monies from general funds to continue implementing and expanding the strategic plan. Ohio Success Challenge funds still provide the core funding for Center initiatives and personnel.

Resulting FYE programme

FYE at the University of Cincinnati grew incrementally yet purposefully, moving from separate initiatives to the foundation of the University's revised undergraduate experience – from early adopters to mainstream faculty, and from small, more easily managed professional colleges to the large, liberal arts core of the university. This growth pattern enabled increasing faculty buy-in, a manageable ramp-up of financial support, and the accumulation of a sizable cadre of professors and administrators who recognised how the ideas embraced by the FYE programme could be expanded across campus. As a result, today nearly all first-year students participate in multiple, high quality interactive academic and social experiences aimed at engaging them with the university, contributing to integrative learning, fostering civic and professional responsibility and forwarding intellectual and self-management skills needed for lifelong learning. The unique, university-wide approach that now underpins all centralised as well as unit-based FYE programme components is titled 'Great Beginnings.' The 'Great Beginnings Statement' describes the comprehensive, ambitious, and yet achievable programme built around responsiveness to ongoing student reflection and a common set of targeted learning areas (see Appendix 1. For the complete Great Beginnings Statement, see: http://www.uc.edu/fye/documents/Great_Beginnings_Statement.doc.pdf).

FYE in the broader context of the undergraduate experience: Integrated Core Learning

In September of 2003, Dr Nancy Zimpher began her appointment as President of the University of Cincinnati. She immediately initiated systemic academic planning, involving hundreds of stakeholders, faculty, staff and students (<http://www.uc.edu/uc21/>). The process led to a commitment to increase student centeredness and academic excellence, as well as to other research and community-related priorities.

A core group of faculty and administrators, led by Pamela Person and then Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Gisela Escoe, worked to integrate ideas for improving student learning and university best practices. The resulting vision, Integrated Core Learning (ICL), describes the University of Cincinnati's signature approach to undergraduate education. ICL was named to reflect its call for the

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thoughtful integration of the General Education core, major course work, experiential education (e.g. undergraduate research, practicum, clinical placements, cooperative education, and service-learning experiences), co-curricular activities, and faculty-guided reflection throughout the undergraduate curriculum. ICL underscores the University of Cincinnati's strengths and places them into a holistic framework that supports student learning from their first year through graduation. By purposefully weaving high impact practices and experiences with high quality, rigorous instruction, ICL emphasises the application of liberal learning in real-world contexts and is the essence of a 21st-century urban research institution. The curriculum itself is built around three touch-points in the undergraduate experience. These points provide all students with key opportunities to develop, review, and act upon a learning plan for degree completion. It begins with a significant first-year experience as its cornerstone and continues with opportunities for self-reflection and on-going support through mid-collegiate coursework and experiences. Culminating with a senior-year experience, ICL provides students with the necessary tools to transition to a profession or graduate programme and continue to assume ownership for life-long learning and social responsibility (see Appendix 2). These three touch points are summarised as follows:

- ▣ *Great Beginnings*: The foundation of UC's FYE approach is responsive to ongoing student reflection and a common set of targeted learning areas as described previously.
- ▣ *Mid-Collegiate Launch*: Purposeful mid-collegiate programming and student reflection provide on-going support as students proceed through their college career.
- ▣ *Finale*: ICL culminates in a senior year experience that aids students' transition to a profession or graduate school and toward the pursuit of life-long learning and social responsibility.

ICL calls for the thoughtful integration of the many facets of an undergraduate's academic, co-curricular and non-academic life. By forging key dialogues and partnerships among the student, advisor, professor, employer, and the community, ICL provides a framework for chronicling the student's development from convocation through graduation and beyond. It also calls for students to purposefully reflect upon their own pathways and to continually maximise their progress as they face various important academic and life decisions.

Implementing the integrative approach: FYE innovation in the College of Business

The University of Cincinnati's FYE efforts offered valued guidelines and support, while providing considerable flexibility. This blend empowered its 13 different colleges and their respective programmes to implement FYE in ways appropriate to their wide-ranging needs. Innovations at the College of Business serve as illustration.

In 2002, the College of Business was a first-mover in FYE on campus, motivated by two factors. First, unacceptable retention and student satisfaction rates highlighted the need to better socialise incoming students. The freshman year was seen as a

vital time for setting student expectations and building curricular foundations. FYE efforts, such as Learning Communities, also offered opportunities to engage students, building stronger links among students and between students and the institution. Yet our programme, like most at that time, included only a single business course in the first year, as students focused on completing general education requirements across campus. Second, survey and qualitative feedback from business faculty and employers suggested that our students lacked professional development, particularly in the 'soft skills' of management. That same year, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), which is an accrediting body of business schools, published an extensive study mirroring these concerns (AACSB, 2002:19). Specifically, the report identified communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills as the best predictors of business success. Yet these same skills were found to be least developed in business programmes. The College turned to FYE as a means of emphasizing and starting to build these soft skills.

Initial implementation

College implementation began with a Learning Communities pilot project in 2002. A dedicated team of faculty and staff, university- and college-level leadership, and funding from an Ohio Learning Network Grant fueled the effort. Starting small, we initiated three learning communities comprised of 20 to 25 students each taking courses together. The learning communities included the lone business course, Management Skills Practicum (MSP) and two general education courses (such as English, Math, Psychology and/or Communications). Yet interestingly, the most important outcome of the pilot was the development of a learning community *among the involved faculty, staff, and administrators*. Their ongoing conversations spurred creativity and higher aspirations for FYE.

This team acted upon their new insights by expanding the college's FYE efforts dramatically. First, they determined that all first-year Business students would participate in a learning community. Second, they focused on revising MSP to enhance the student experience within the college. This lecture-based course had been taught two days a week in a large auditorium. To enable both efficiency and socialisation, the team developed a creative solution. One day a week, the class would meet in 70-student sessions (combining three learning communities) for lectures and guest speakers. The other day, students would meet with their learning community in breakout sections dedicated to cases, discussions and problem-solving applications. In addition, each learning community breakout section was led by two student mentors, an undergraduate teaching assistant and a team leader.

The most innovative element of the expanded FYE, however, is Project Fast Track. The development team sought an experiential project that students could complete with their learning community, and that would demand application of the softer managerial skills. The result, Project Fast Track, paired each learning community with a leading corporation to conduct intensive research. Greater Cincinnati is home to some of the world's most admired corporations from Procter & Gamble and Chiquita to Kroger

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and General Electric. The opportunity to learn about and from such business leaders offered a tremendous learning opportunity. Participating firms provided freshmen a 'live' context for exploring vital business concepts and best practices. The firms also provided the freshmen with opportunities to interact professionally with their managers in different business functions.

Indicators of progress

Raising student retention between their first and second year was a central goal of the college's FYE initiative. More specifically, the faculty, staff and administrative participants sought to raise retention dramatically from 78% in 2002 to a rate more in line with the 86-89% rates posted by the most selective and prestigious colleges on campus. The team saw a slow but steady increase. Four years after its launch, retention had risen to 83% (entering class of 2006, returning autumn 2007).

The much more challenging goal was evaluating the development of students' 'soft skills' in business. Thankfully, the college had a unique resource at their disposal: cooperative education (co-op). Cooperative education is managed by UC's Division of Professional Practice and is central to the University. Indeed, cooperative education was founded at the University of Cincinnati in 1906 (Reilly, 2006). Involving alternating quarters of coursework and professional experience, co-op offered the potential for employers to evaluate students' skills. At the end of each co-op rotation, students' supervisors completed an extensive survey, gauging student performance.

Working with UC's cooperative education faculty in our Division of Professional Practice, the College of Business FYE team explored the question: Does the integrative first-year experience positively impact students' performance on their first co-op experience? A students' first co-op occurs in their sophomore (second) year, offering excellent timing for assessment. Focusing on the initial FYE implementation, the college FYE team compared the performance of students who had no FYE to those with the new programme. Appendix 3 provides the items measured and the change in mean performance and standard deviation. The hope was to see the mean increase (indicating improvements in the skill area) and the standard deviation decrease (indicating greater consistency among students' performance).

Although the sample size was small, the results provided insightful direction moving forward. The items indicating communication, work management, leadership and teamwork indicated nearly unanimous improvement. In particular, Project Fast Track seemed a highly successful addition. Several items showing the greatest and statistically significant improvements could be linked to this hands-on and intensive team project, as students seemed more capable of working with others, functioning in teams, and managing projects. However, the results of the professionalism items suggested areas for further revision and improvement.

Continuous improvements

Within two years of its launch, the College of Business FYE was expanded by adding a second business course – the 'Pathways to Business', which is taught in each learning

community. This course emphasises academic planning and personal development skills. Academic planning elements include advising, campus engagement including co-curricular opportunities, and career goal refinement. Personal development components of the course, however, seek to enhance students' professionalism in terms of image management, social networking, accountability and personal motivation. Early student feedback and retention data suggest that the addition is making a positive impact. Yet more rigorous assessment is needed, and will occur as these students enter their initial co-op positions (mostly in corporate settings) enabling performance comparisons before and after the expanded FYE.

Broader impact: results of this integrated first-year experience

Moving back to the university level, we now examine the impact of these integrative efforts. More specifically, we will discuss the following evidence of positive momentum at the University of Cincinnati:

- ▣ First to second year retention has increased by nearly 10% in less than 10 years with a corresponding upward trend in graduation rates.
- ▣ Student engagement has increased dramatically from below to above the average for similar institutions as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
- ▣ Student satisfaction similarly has increased to levels above those experienced by peer institutions as measured by the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI).

Such momentum is the powerful result of integration (of integrating FYE efforts across a large and varied undergraduate population) and of leveraging FYE as the foundation of a comprehensive academic plan. Data from the global measures (retention/graduation/academic success data, NSSE, SSI) are well disseminated throughout the University to inform deans, divisional managers and unit heads about the University's strengths and challenges in creating effective learning environments. Additionally, these and other measures of the learning environment are available on the UC website (<http://www.uc.edu/institutionalresearch>) for individual units and personnel to review when considering changes to curriculum, pedagogy, instructional resources, and student services.

Retention, graduation and academic success rates

The University of Cincinnati's first to second year retention rates for first-time full-time baccalaureate students has steadily increased from 73% in 2000, when Success Challenge programmes including learning community and FYE programmes were launched, to the current rate of 82%. Until standards changed slightly for students entering in fall 2006, this rise was accomplished *without* a corresponding increase in admissions standards.

Graduation rates have been increasing in a corresponding manner. Much of this trend is attributed to the retention and academic enhancement programmes supported through Success Challenge. Preliminary analysis of six-year graduation rates appears

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to bear this out: Success Challenge participants from the 2000 class posted a 57% graduation rate, whereas the overall graduation rate for the 2000 cohort is 52.3%.

The Center for First-Year Experience and Learning Communities has tracked the apparent impact of learning community enrolment since 2002 on retention and academic success. A comparative analysis of the 2002-03 participants versus a control group of comparable sample size, admission requirement status (selective/open college), gender, race, credit load (full-time), and non-majors (declared/undecided), score on the ACT college entrance exam, and high school grade point average found the following:

- ▣ Students enrolled in a learning community in 2003 fall were retained at a significantly higher rate than the control group in subsequent academic terms: winter 2003, spring 2003, and autumn 2003.
- ▣ Students who enrolled in a learning community for three quarters (one academic year) had a significantly higher next-year retention rate (90%) than the control group (72%).
- ▣ Students enrolled in a learning community had significantly higher GPAs for fall, winter, and spring and earned significantly more cumulative credit hours than the control group.
- ▣ Students who enrolled in a learning community for three quarters (one academic year) had significantly higher fall term, winter term, and cumulative GPAs and cumulative hours than those students who enrolled for only one quarter.

In response to these findings, and in particular the dramatic impact that three quarters (one full academic year) of learning community enrolment appeared to have upon student success, the Center has aggressively sought:

- ▣ to increase learning community enrolments across the University; and
- ▣ to enhance programme features that encourage students to remain enrolled in their learning community for their entire first year of college.

We have been able to increase the number of students enrolled in learning communities from 450 in 2001-02 to 1,750 for 2007-08, while also increasing the percentage of those students who enroll in their learning community for three quarters from 8% in 2001-02 to 50% in 2007-08. As the total number of students enrolled in learning communities has grown – to the extent that in some colleges, like the College of Business, it is equivalent to the total first-year student enrolment – there is no longer a significant difference in retention rates between students enrolled in learning communities and those who are not. Yet, the overall retention rate for first-year students has steadily climbed – an expected outcome given the pervasive reach of learning community enrolments. Furthermore, each year since 2002, including through last year's 2006 entering class, students enrolled in learning communities for three quarters have been retained from first to second years at an 89% or higher rate.

Student engagement

The University of Cincinnati, along with approximately 1,200 other colleges and universities in the United States, participates in periodic administrations of the NSSE. The NSSE is designed to assess students' engagement with their institution around good educational practices that have been empirically demonstrated to impact student success. The results then reflect behaviours by students and institutions that are associated with desired 'outcomes of college' (retrieved August 30, 2008, from http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick_facts.cfm). The NSSE has become a highly respected, standardised benchmark instrument that figures prominently in current national debates about institutional accountability for student success and learning outcomes. The results reports enable institutions to benchmark against themselves from one administration to another to track continuous improvement, as well as to compare the engagement behaviours of their students to those of students at peer institutions. The NSSE is a valuable measure of FYE impact because it measures student engagement of two student classification subgroups: first-year students and senior students. Institutions, then, can track first-year student engagement over time from a cohort's first-year through their senior year as well as engagement behaviour from one cohort of first-year students to another cohort, some years hence.

The University of Cincinnati's student engagement improved vastly between the 2002 and 2005 administrations of the NSSE. Results of the 2005 and 2007 administrations were similar to one another with a slight decrease in first-year engagement and a slight increase in senior-year engagement. Beyond the aggregate engagement rates, we further examined those specific items that showed substantial increases between the 2002, 2005 and 2007 administrations. These items posted a strong level of statistical significance ($p < .001$) and a moderate to large effect size (.4 or greater). The results of our examination are summarised as follows:

The first-year student:

- ▣ uses e-mail to communicate with an instructor;
- ▣ receives prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance;
- ▣ experiences contributing to writing clearly and effectively;
- ▣ experiences contributing to speaking clearly and effectively;
- ▣ experiences contributing to working effectively with others;
- ▣ experiences contributing to voting in local, state, or national elections;
- ▣ experiences contributing to developing a personal code of values and ethics; and
- ▣ experiences contributing to the welfare of the community.

The senior-year student:

- ▣ experiences contributing to voting in local, state, or national elections.

UC's environment:

- ▣ emphasises helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities; and
- ▣ emphasises support to thrive socially.

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Two other notable changes likely had a positive impact on first-year engagement. The first was the introduction of OneStop, an integrated approach to registration, financial aid, bill paying and other related student services. Cross-trained specialists located in a centralised location provide customer-service functions. The OneStop website similarly offers integrated on-line functions. The second significant event was the conclusion of the University's master building project. The opening of new as well as renovated buildings provided student organisation event space, recreational facilities, and ready access to student services, resulting in more vibrant co-curricular opportunities. The addition of new 'smart' classrooms provided faculty with more resources and options to design engaging course-based learning experiences that incorporate the use of technology.

According to the 2007 NSSE administration results (NSSE, 2007), the University of Cincinnati's engagement rates are in keeping with our peers – even a bit higher than the average rates at our doctoral extensive peer institutions. The University of Cincinnati's learning environment can be distinguished from our peers' by examining specific, statistically significant items with an effect size approaching moderate to large practical significance for any one of our Association of American University, Carnegie, and Urban Institution peer categories:

The first-year student:

- ▣ prepares two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in; and
- ▣ participates in a learning community.

The senior-year student:

- ▣ has or plans to participate in practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment.

Student satisfaction

Complementing measures of student engagement with the university are measures of students' satisfaction with their university experience. The Student Satisfaction Survey (SSI) indicates the degree to which students are satisfied with various university services, programmes, and experiences relative to the importance students have placed upon those aspects of their interaction with the university (retrieved August 30, 2008 from <https://www.noellevitz.com>). Like the NSSE, SSI is used by hundreds of institutions across the United States and provides another set of benchmarks by which to measure programmatic impact and continuous improvement.

The University of Cincinnati's student satisfaction rates were stable between 2003 and 2006 administrations of SSI, but rose significantly on every scale between 2006 and 2008. Of the 12 scales measured by the SSI, students indicated that instructional effectiveness and academic advising matter most to them. These are, arguably, also the areas that most influence the overall learning environment.

Instructional effectiveness

Scale items representing the most significant improvement (.001) in terms of closing the gap in students' desired level of UC performance versus their satisfaction with UC performance, in descending order from greatest to least (but still highly significant) amount of gain are:

- ▣ commitment to academic excellence on campus;
- ▣ competence of graduate teaching assistants as classroom instructors;
- ▣ ability to experience intellectual growth at UC;
- ▣ faculties care about students as individuals;
- ▣ faculties takes student differences into consideration as they teach a course;
- ▣ content of courses within majors is valuable;
- ▣ there is a good variety of courses provided; and
- ▣ faculties are usually available after class and during office hours.

Academic advising

Scale items representing the most significant improvement (.001) on this scale, again in descending order of their impact on closing gaps between students' ratings of their desired and experienced levels of satisfaction, are:

- ▣ help from academic advisor to set goals to work toward;
- ▣ academic advisor's concern about success as an individual;
- ▣ academic advisor's knowledge about requirements in the major; and
- ▣ major requirements are clear and reasonable.

Conclusion

The purposeful yet organic process described in this chapter has yielded college FYE programmes that have developed in common, university-wide directions that can be supported by faculty, staff, and administration. Varied strengths of programmes, areas of emphasis, and the needs of particular student cohorts are pursued in unique, unit-specific ways. Yet these variations simultaneously address the central goals and vision laid out in our *Great Beginnings Statement*.

By allowing FYE to address unit-specific concerns, we found a relatively large number of faculty, staff, administrators and other stakeholders interested in helping design, implement, and refine FYE initiatives. As we have seen, in the College of Business this approach gave rise to a coherent vision for learning communities and innovative corporate partnerships that help students build important business-related 'soft skills' and confirm their major selection via experiential learning. Other UC colleges have developed similar multi-pronged yet integrated approaches. For example, the College of Allied Health Sciences' programme emphasises faculty mentoring and academic advising. This programme also utilises learning communities to integrate a year-long, first-year seminar, a service-learning component, and a non-credit course facilitated by a peer leader. The result is a rigorous set of first-year Science and General Education courses.

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By tying FYE into the greater context of Integrated Core Learning, we assure an open flow of ideas between General Education faculty and faculty in specific majors. This leads to a natural linking of various pieces of the undergraduate curriculum. Experiential learning opportunities, such as professional-academic collaboratives, service learning, and undergraduate research – which had traditionally been concentrated in upper-division work – are increasingly found in the first year. Likewise, common first-year experiences, such as focused student reflection, general education courses linked with major-based courses or experiences, and opportunities for writing, are now more prevalent in the later college years.

Challenges

Of course, the somewhat opportunistic and decentralised approach described also comes with challenges. Faculty support developed naturally as we appealed to faculty interests and skills and to their commitment to increasing student success within the major. Our approach, however, did not result in the central funding that often accompanies such an initiative. From the university administration viewpoint, this meant that significant, successful programming was built with very limited permanent funding. Yet, at the local level (for example, from the view of a department contributing faculty to FYE programming) this may feel like an uncompensated overload or an externally generated initiative that replaces some other departmental or collegiate priority.

Future directions at the University of Cincinnati

The University of Cincinnati's faculty recently voted to modify the University's General Education Core. The new programme formally infuses the philosophy of Integrated Core Learning throughout all baccalaureate programmes. As such, it specifically requires each college to have first-year curricular components that are informed by the *Great Beginnings Statement*. The revised General Education Programme was developed by a faculty committee with representation from each college, our Honours Programme, university libraries, and faculty senate.

Lessons learned

In compiling the history for this case, we became increasingly aware of important factors that enabled the innovative integration of FYE efforts across our institution's large and varied undergraduate population. Most broadly, we found that a successful FYE programme evolves organically and must reflect the unique mission, characteristics, and personality of the sponsoring institution, its students, faculty, and staff. More specifically, the following factors seemed to fuel this development:

- ▣ *Provide solid groundwork:* Workshops and development opportunities efficiently encourage faculty and staff to become well versed in the international FYE movement, to compare local best practices, and to develop common language and goals around which future efforts can revolve. Such efforts support the beginning of a community of practice, where like-minded, student-focused individuals can explore common concerns and practices.

- ▣ *Cultivate and encourage champions*: Well-respected, passionate ‘doers’ are central to successful expansion and integration of FYE efforts. Faculty and staff leadership should include respected instructors, advisors and other educational professionals, who interact on a day-to-day basis with first-year students. The leadership should also include administrators, whose responsibilities include various aspects of the undergraduate experience.
- ▣ *Dream a big dream*: As campus interest in and focus on FYE expands, it is important to articulate an ambitious, overarching vision of where the institution wants to go and what the student outcomes will be. Increased retention may provide important revenue streams, and thus have institutional appeal, but the true goals of FYE should be much more aggressive.
- ▣ *Charge a single individual, committee, or office with implementing the FYE vision*: A successful FYE programme involves numerous faculty and staff across campus. Clearly identified leadership is essential for motivating, coordinating, and continually promoting this effort.
- ▣ *Be adaptable and tenacious*: Pursuing the FYE vision will require starts and stops, changes in scale, and the creative pursuit of resources (time and money). Do not give up.
- ▣ *Take advantage of institutional transitions to position FYE efforts in a broader context*: Times of institutional change, such as the installation of new leadership, the creation of a new academic plan, or the kick-off of a university capital campaign, provide outstanding opportunities for the integration and expansion of campus FYE efforts.
- ▣ *Recalibrate your efforts as students and faculty change*: Student needs, pre-collegiate preparation, expectations and educational goals continue to evolve as do the pedagogies, educational technologies, and the desired learning outcomes of the faculty. It is essential that a plan be put into place to assess these changes and to continually update FYE efforts.

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Appendix 1: Visual of FYE Programme at the University of Cincinnati

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Appendix 2: Integrated Core Learning at the University of Cincinnati

Appendix 3:

Leveraging employer feedback to assess soft skill development in the FYE

Measured parameter	MEAN		STDEV		n		MEAN		STDV	
	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Δ	Conf.	Δ	Conf.
Professionalism [Alpha = 0.935]										
Exhibits good listening and questioning skills	4.29	4.15	0.71	0.99	28	20	-0.14		0.28	> 90%
Responsible/accountable for actions	4.50	4.35	0.65	0.75	26	20	-0.15		0.10	
Possesses honesty/integrity/personal ethics	4.59	4.70	0.75	0.57	27	20	0.11		-0.18	
Shows initiative and is self-motivated	4.41	4.30	0.80	1.08	27	20	-0.11		0.28	> 90%
Demonstrates positive attitude toward change	4.35	4.30	0.63	0.86	26	20	-0.05		0.24	> 90%
Understands/contributes to organization goals	4.27	4.42	0.60	0.84	26	19	0.15		0.23	> 90%
Demonstrates flexibility and adaptability	4.48	4.60	0.64	0.60	27	20	0.12		-0.04	
Communication [Alpha = 0.926]										
Writes clearly and concisely	4.00	4.11	0.76	0.76	25	18	0.11		-0.01	
Speaks with clarity and confidence	3.96	4.20	0.84	0.70	28	20	0.24		-0.14	
Makes effective presentations	4.06	4.36	0.94	0.67	18	11	0.31		-0.26	
Exhibits self-confidence	3.96	4.32	0.85	0.75	27	19	0.35	>90%	-0.10	
Work Management [Alpha = 0.923]										
Manages projects/resources effectively	4.08	4.37	0.84	0.60	26	19	0.29		-0.25	> 90%
Sets goals and prioritizes	4.04	4.06	0.89	0.73	25	18	0.02		-0.16	
Manages several tasks at once	4.27	4.22	0.83	0.73	26	18	-0.05		-0.10	
Allocates time to meet deadlines	4.23	4.26	0.95	0.73	26	19	0.03		-0.22	
Leadership [Alpha = 0.893]										
Gives direction, guidance, and training	4.08	4.00	0.86	0.50	13	9	-0.08		-0.36	> 90%
Motivates others to succeed	3.93	4.00	0.88	0.60	15	12	0.07		-0.28	> 90%
Manages conflict effectively	4.06	4.25	0.83	0.75	17	12	0.19		-0.07	
Teamwork [Alpha = 0.782]										
Works effectively with others	4.41	4.75	0.75	0.44	27	20	0.34	>90%	-0.30	> 90%
Functions well on multidisciplinary team	4.28	4.65	0.61	0.61	25	17	0.37	>90%	-0.01	

Group 1: No First Year Experience (control group) / Group 2: Integrative First Year Experience

Bold indicates statistical significance

Source: Lewis et al., 2008:86-95