

Foundations of Excellence® in the First Year Final Report

Respectfully Submitted to the

President's Executive Team

By the

Foundations of Excellence® Steering Committee

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Mei Mei Burr, *Director of First Year Programs*

Darrin McMillen, *Faculty in First Year Programs*

Pat Moynahan, *Vice Provost*

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2010, the President of Northern Kentucky University partnered with the John Gardner Institute and the Foundations of Excellence® involving the university in an intensive self-study and improvement planning process related to the first college year experience. In July, A cohort of five university administrators: Vice Provost Pat Moynahan, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Lisa Rhine, Director of First Year Program Mei Mei Burr, Director of Orientation and Parent Programs Amy Wylie and Associate Director for Curriculum, Accreditation and Assessment Shawn Rainey travelled to the John Gardner Foundations of Excellence Summer Institute in Asheville, North Carolina. Participants learned about the project, were introduced to the FoE Tec technology platform, and interacted with Policy Center staff, task force advisors, and representatives from other campuses participating in the 2010-11 project. Upon return from Asheville, the group decided to add additional expertise to the steering committee and invited Director of IT Planning and Development Kathy Bennett and Faculty in First Year Programs Darrin McMillen to join the team.

THE PROJECT

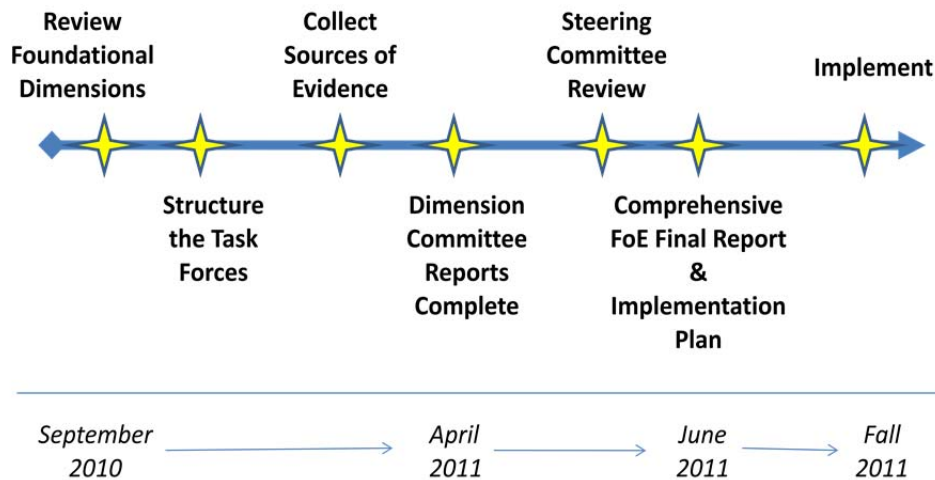
The First-Year Project involved what has been called an aspirational model of institutional excellence in the first year. This model can be used to measure levels of achievement and to initiate the design and development of plans for change and improvement based on institutional data. The model consists of nine standards of excellence termed Foundational Dimensions which were piloted in 2003 and 2004 by 24 public and private four-year institutions and have continued to be used by over 200 institutions of higher education. The driving core of the program is to encourage institutions to focus on improving the manner in which they handle the first year. Changes that might emanate from such a process would be based on information resulting from the systematic collection and evaluation of data using this first-year model. The result would be a plan that would guide the institution in its approach to the first year, both present and future.

The Steering committee began regular meetings during the summer of 2010 with an initial kickoff in October 2010 during which a full description of the project was presented by the steering committee with an overview of the proposed timeline from the Policy Center. Further discussion focused on how the committee would structure its work. As the driving force behind the First-Year Project, the Steering Committee determined how to organize itself in order to accomplish the specified goals of the model. After discussions among members of the steering committee following the meeting in Asheville, the decision was reached to solicit volunteers from across campus to serve on nine dimension subcommittees with a member of the steering committee serving as the liaison to each dimension subcommittee. The

subcommittees would then present their findings and recommendations to the steering committee for review, discussion, and approval, with feedback and support from the Policy Center staff via conference phone calls and email correspondence. The Policy Center partnered with Educational Benchmarking, Inc. to create a Web-based reporting system (FoE Tec) for use by First-Year Project participants to enter and share data resulting from research.

In the first phase and with initial groundwork completed, the steering committee and dimension subcommittees began the data gathering process for populating the Current Practices Inventory (CPI). The CPI required the collection of campus-wide information pertaining to the student experience of first-year students. Although the CPI was to be completed during the first several weeks of the project's beginning, it was understood that this was a work in progress that would be edited many times throughout the project duration.

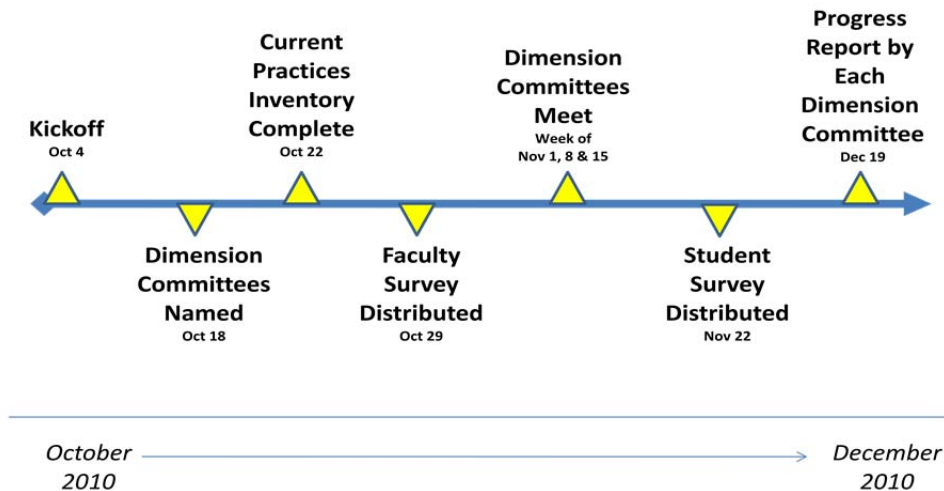
FoE Timeline



In the second phase, the steering committee addressed the timeline to be followed on the Foundations of Excellence first-year surveys, which would be an integral part of the self-study. One standardized survey for faculty and staff and one for students were available exclusively online through the Foundation's partnership with Educational Benchmarking, Inc. These surveys were designed to assist institutions in identifying, defining, and assessing existing protocols in regard to the first year. It should be noted that the NKU

was able to add institution specific questions to all of the surveys. All fulltime faculty and selected staff were asked to complete and submit the survey. The student survey was administered to [insert info here]

FoE Fall Semester Timeline



The third phase, Foundational Dimensions, was the centerpiece of the First-Year Project and the major data-gathering phase. This phase constituted a model that provided the opportunity to evaluate and improve the first year. Nine subcommittees were appointed and each were headed by two co-chairs, one from Academic Affairs and one from Student Affairs, for the explicit purpose of analyzing the nine Dimensions. All of the data generated from the CPI and the surveys were to be used in responding to the various questions contained in each Dimension.

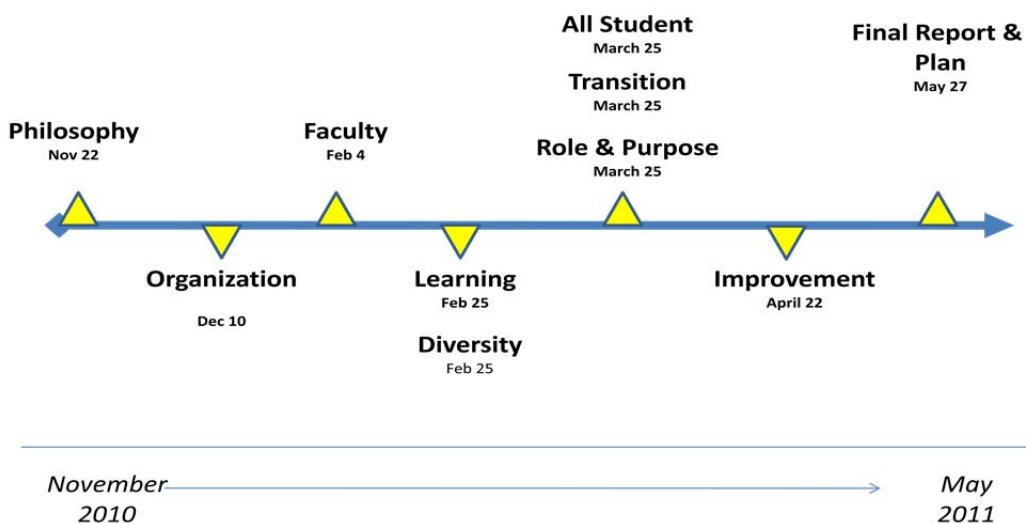
The nine Dimensions were as follows:

1. Philosophy
2. Organization
3. Faculty
4. Learning
5. Transitions
6. All Students
7. Diversity
8. Roles and Purposes
9. Improvement



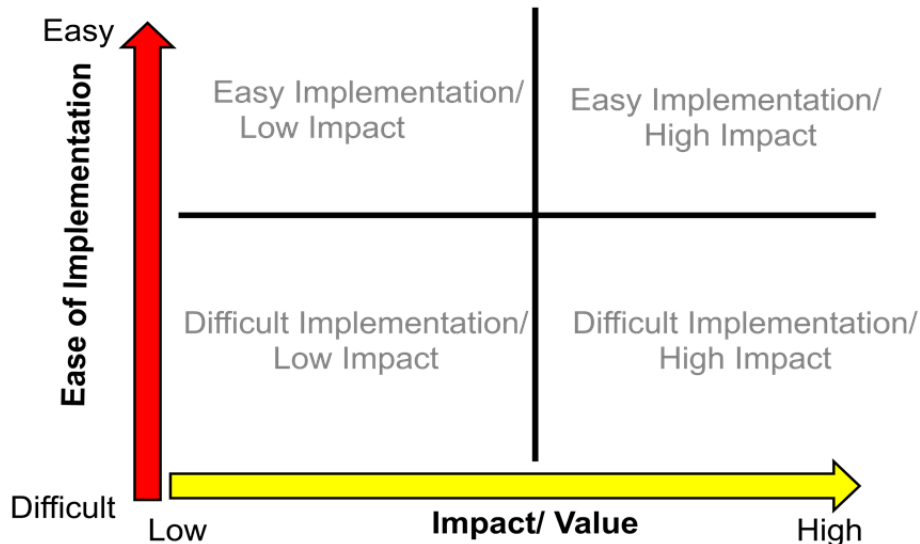
A common template into which the subcommittees could record their responses was provided for each Dimension. In addition to evaluating a number of performance indicators within each Dimension, subcommittee members categorized responses based on the following template: current situation; areas of concern; summary of evidence; a recommended grade on that Dimension; and a list of recommended action items ranked as high, medium, or low in priority.

FoE Dimension Committee & Final Report Deadlines



The Dimension Subcommittees completed all work on the nine Dimensions within the proposed time frame. As each subcommittee finished a Dimension Report, that report was submitted to the Policy Center's FoE Tec website, where Policy Center staff read the reports and offered suggestions on improvement. Where appropriate, these suggestions were incorporated into the Dimension Reports. Following the completion of this process, the steering committee pulled the action items from the nine Dimension Reports ranked as high or medium priority and invited participation in an exercise to allow further prioritize recommendation in terms of ease of implementation and level of impact.

Priority Matrix



The Steering Committee then took the 140 recommendations and categorized them into six categories:

1. Collaboration
2. Communication
3. Education and Training
4. Organization/Structure & Systems
5. Policy and Procedure
6. Assessment

Recommendations

The subcommittee combined and distilled 27 solid recommendations in the six categories from the 140 original recommendations for inclusion in this report.

THEME 1: COLLABORATION

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 1A. Develop a set of Guiding Principles for Collaboration that would facilitate more Joint Academic and Co-Curricular Activities.
- 1B. Create mentoring programs for students, faculty, and staff as a support system. An easy to implement example would be to continue to build opportunities at Northern Exposure to promote student help-seeking skills and strategies for building relationships with other students, faculty and staff.
- 1C. Centralized Structure: Centralize physical placement and administrative services between Enrollment Management and departments that deal directly with the needs of first and second year students (i.e., LAC, AARC, SAC, FYP, New Student Orientation, CDC, Bursar (request to physically keep it in its current location) and General Education (because of its primary relation to the academic needs of first and second year students). Top administrative support, in addition to a clearly defined philosophy that is enforced and promoted through action, is needed in order to provide a collaborative continuum for administration and first-year student success campus-wide.

THEME 2: COMMUNICATION

EASY IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 2A. Develop a First-Year Advisory Council. Approve and disseminate first-year philosophy statement. Create common learning goals for first-year students.
- 2B. Develop a one-stop First Year Student webpage - Interactive website that will inform students, faculty, and staff about services on campus and generate departmental outreach to the students (explore functionality of existing systems like Org Sync).

- 2C. Create a 3rd - 4th Week Temperature Letter to be sent to new students to gauge their experiences thus far and where they need assistance to be successful.
- 2D. Create partnerships between the Office of Student Financial Assistance and other on-campus offices to increase the number of students attending Financial Aid outreach events. Ensure all students receive communication regarding cost and payment options and include Financial Literacy Dissemination.

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 2E. Improve parent communication: Collect parent/guardian contact information (email address) at the time students are applying and store it in SAP or EMAS, ensure all parents receive communication regarding cost and payment options, provide institutional expectations to parents who do not attend orientation.
- 2F. Continue the development of the SAP to Retention Pro feeds to target communication to current students. parents who do not attend orientation.
- 2G. Develop a Clear (and interactive) communication plan across campus, and across divisional lines, regarding new initiatives, policies, and promising practice. This could consist of Bi-Weekly Updates for Faculty/Staff; a website forum to promote faculty/staff development; an outlet for sharing among campus partners to ensure consistency in best practices.

THEME 3: EDUCATION & TRAINING

EASY IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 3A. Further examine factors contributing to high DFWI rates in first-year courses to determine what instructional supports are needed.

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 3B. Provide comprehensive faculty and staff training to improve awareness of the needs of our first-year students and the resources available to them.
- 3C. Enhance the quality of instruction in first-year courses and level of faculty involvement with first-year students by offering incentives to tenure-track faculty to teach and engage with these students. In addition,
- 3D. Reduce the number of part-time lecturers and increase the resources for full-time renewable lecture positions. Strategically engage part-time faculty who teach first year-programs.

THEME 4: ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE & SYSTEMS

EASY IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 4A. Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and subsequent cost-benefit analysis to examine current levels of service and support to students including hours of operations and services on campus as they relate to meeting weekend and evening needs. Determine where gaps in service and support exist. Pay close attention to subpopulations and ensure services tailored to unique needs; investigation of feasibility of center for subgroups (LGBT, Women's Center, etc.).
- 4B. Determine feasibility of designating a faculty member as coordinator for every course that has multiple sections with significant numbers of freshman
- 4C. Examine and determine cost benefit analysis for expanding University 101 to reach more first year students.

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 4D. Increase investment in faculty teaching first-year courses: 1) Continue to align Foundations of Knowledge (FOK) to needs of transitioning students by ensuring adequate openings in FOK classes correlated with the numbers of incoming students through registration 2) Reduce the number of adjunct faculty teaching first-year students 3) Invest in hiring more renewable lecturers 3) Offer more developmental class sections 4) Create smaller class sizes for the of the 5 first year courses with the highest DFWI rates
- 4E. Strengthen diversity education for students by means of General education classes and new student orientation that focus on all forms of diversity. Increase awareness/attendance of diversity events on campus by requiring student participation.
- 4F. Increase investment in first-year support: 1) Add additional student worker positions 2) Create first-year advising specialists in academic departments or through another means to provide more advising to our first-year students

THEME 5: POLICIES and PROCEDURES

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 5A Review advising procedures and policies across departments to find

commonalities that can be standardized.

- 5B. Restructure advising at orientation to include more time and personnel to accommodate individual sessions.

THEME 6: ASSESSMENT

EASY IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

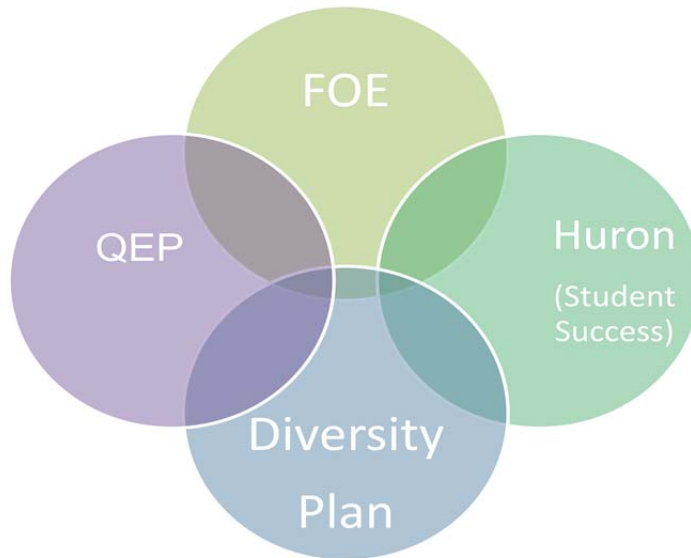
- 6A. Explore ways to translate the information we currently gather (e.g., BCSSE, NSSE, CAAP, ISSAQ) into "news we can use." Provide regular, targeted and broad informational sessions on current student demographics and student development workshops (e.g. interpretation of BCSSE and NSSE data). These should be identifiable by title and personnel as affiliated with the larger implementation program.
- 6B. Gather data on best practices of benchmark institutions to identify NKU's strengths and challenges with respect to responding to student subgroups

DIFFICULT IMPLEMENTATION-HIGH IMPACT

- 6C. Host focus groups and send surveys to secondary school personnel to get feedback on the perception of NKU and types of effective communication. Use that information to clearly inform the community on admission processes and procedures in addition to academic and co-curricular expectations.
- 6D. Develop in house assessment program for first year advising. This could include development of pilot programs that incorporate various advising models (centralized vs. department or major specific) and/or programs that may address particular student subgroups; these pilot programs would need to be accessible to a uniform assessment process.
- 6E. Conduct needs assessment of current students – of ALL students – to see where service gaps exist with special consideration to non-academic support elements (e.g. examine staffing of Health and Counseling Service with respect to services designed to address physical and psychological well-being)

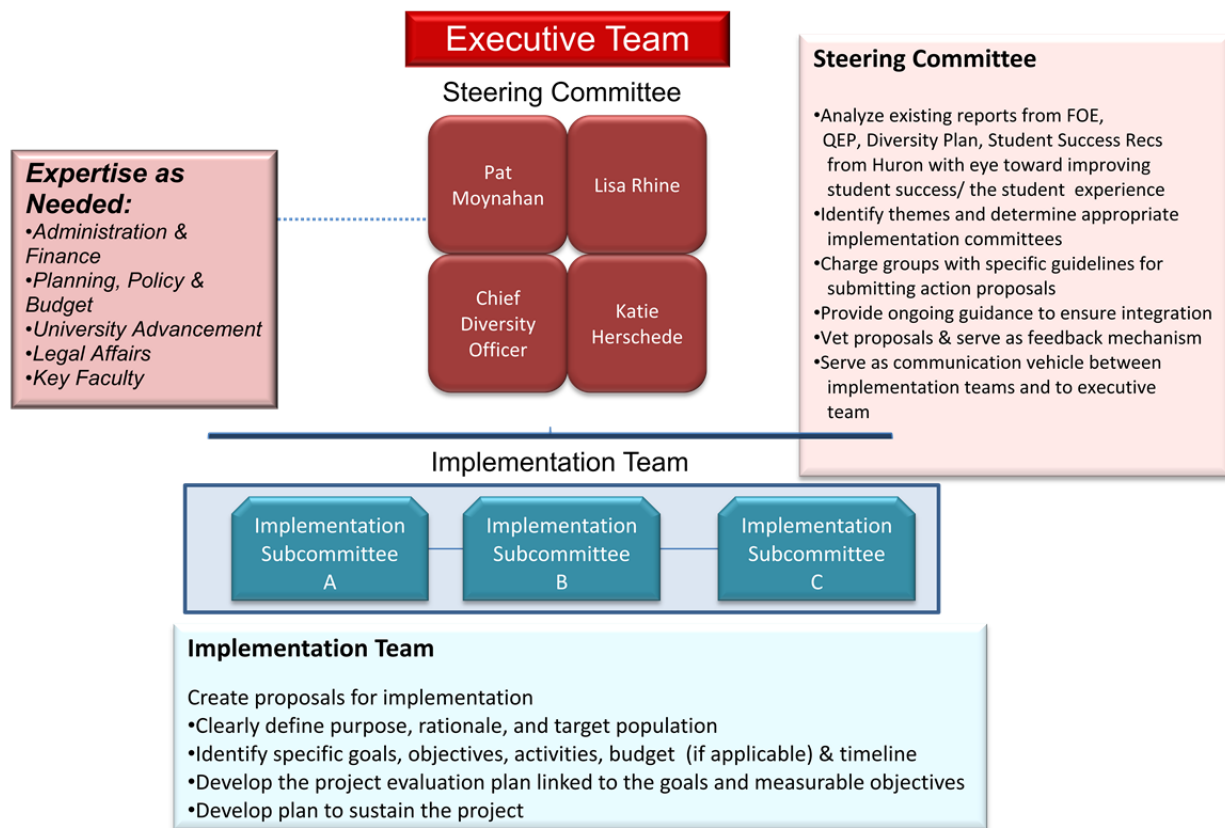
A Word or Two on Implementation

NKU has undergone a period of self and external study over the last few years. Integral and related studies including the Foundations of Excellence Project, Huron Consulting Group Study, the development of our QEP and newly created Diversity Plan have been completed. The FOE Steering Committee feels that the institutions is fully informed and positioned to use all that we've learned through this intensive study and move confidently toward implementation.



The Steering Committee would like to see all of the student success objectives of all four plans be teased out and implemented in a way that respects and considers all the inputs into a single student success implementation plan. Toward that end, the Steering Committee is suggesting a structure and process that would allow the work of the four groups to be integrated as we move toward implementation.

The model would appoint an Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) that would analyze the four existing reports and tease out relevant student success recommendations. The ISC would identify themes and determine appropriate make-up of implementation subcommittees to consider the recommendations, charge the subcommittees, provide ongoing guidance to ensure integration of the plans, vet proposals and serve as a feedback mechanism for the subcommittees. Importantly, the ISC would serve as a communication vehicle between implementation teams and to the executive team.



Integrating Student Success Initiatives
 FOE, Diversity Plan, QEP &
 select student success recommendations of the Huron Report

Implementation Subcommittees would review assigned recommendations and determine whether a plan or proposal would be submitted. Plans and proposals would require a clearly defined purpose, rationale, target populations, specific goals, objectives, activities, budget, timeline and evaluation plan. The ISC would serve as a feedback loop to ensure all required elements are in place for each plan or proposal submitted. Proposals requiring resources would be presented to the executive team for consideration and approval.