

New Freshman Seminar Implementation Task Force Report

Task Force Members

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Presented to Faculty Senate and Provost Paul Ferguson

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Committee Charge

In November 2008, the Provost and Faculty Senate formed the New Freshman Seminar Implementation Task Force . The Task Force 's charge was to

1. Review and develop, as necessary, specific strategies for ensuring the successful implementation of the New Freshman Seminar (NFS):
 - In developing the specific implementation strategies, please address management issues such as whether responsibility for offering a NFS should be at the department or individual faculty member level, expected changes in course scheduling/course availability, impacts on particular student groups/majors, availability of departmental offerings, faculty requirements, needed resource reallocations, etc.
 - Please address the issue of NFS as a matriculation vs. a graduation requirement and how the requirement can be enforced.
 - Please address how to ensure that the goals of the NFS are clearly and consistently incorporated into each course and how achievement of the goals can be assessed. For example, how are the SIUE mission and values related to the NFS experience.

- 2 Recommend an estimated annual budget for NFS implementation based upon the specific implementation strategies.

3. Recommend a timeframe for implementing new strategies.

4. Work closely with other constituency groups such as the BRIDGE Implementation Committee and the University 112 Task Force to coordinate the implementation strategies.

Previous Work

Prior to this Task Force's inception, a separate group, New Freshman Seminar Committee, was formed to conceptualize the New Freshman Seminar experience. Some members of that initial Committee also serve on the Implementation Task Force. That Committee, chaired by Jeffrey Skoblowⁱ (Department of English Language and Literature), developed the framework for the New Freshman Seminar and the three goals of NFS. While the Implementation Committee recognized that we could recommend altering the original goals of NFS, after

much deliberation, we affirmed the three original goals as set forth by the NFS Committee. Those goals are:

1. to assist new freshmen in making the transition to college-level work and expectations;
2. to orient students to the services and culture of the University;
3. and to engage students in an intellectual community of students and faculty."

The Lincoln Plan report includes the following language: "The new general education proposal would add: i.) guaranteed academic content; ii.) a writing component; iii.) a collaborative group learning activity; iv.) an information literacy component; v.) two of the following three out-of-classroom activities [exposure to academic support services, exposure to university social and cultural resources; exposure to local/regional social and cultural resources]." (p. 30)

Further, it is important to note that the NFS Implementation Committee worked in tandem with the General Education Implementation Task Force, chaired by Paul Brunkow, which developed implementation recommendations for the Lincoln Plan. We quickly came to realize that many of the issues involving NFS were related or connected to General Education revision. Dr. Brunkow attended several meetings of the full committee as well as meetings with Lynn Maurer and Sharon James McGee. This report, then, reflects the Implementation Task Force's awareness of the Lincoln Plan and the revision of General Education (circa 2009). In addition, Julie Hansen, a Task Force member, was also a member of the UNIV 112 Task Force and served as a liaison between the two groups.

Recommendations

The Implementation Committee believes that NFS has the potential to affect significantly first-year students' integration into the university; therefore, NFS should be a central distinction of the SIUE Undergraduate Curriculum. At the same time, NFS should be implemented so that students can enroll in NFS courses easily and make adequate progress toward graduation. Further, NFS should be financially feasible to the University. After thoughtfully debating and critically examining multiple perspectives of NFS, the Task Force makes the following recommendations. We will divide these recommendations into categories of Guiding Principles and Implementation. Following each recommendation, we present a brief rationale.

Guiding Principles

The committee supports the following Guiding Principles:

- *The University should maintain an NFS program.*

Research suggests that New Freshmen Seminar programs (going under a variety of names including First-Year Experience and the like) are effective at increasing first-year students' successful transition to college (Fidler and Hunter 1989), retention rates (Fidler and Hunter 1989; Fidler 1991; Cone 1991), and likelihood of graduation (Schnell, Louis, and Doetkott 2003) as well as reducing drop-out rates (Cone 1991). We believe that a NFS program will benefit first-year SIUE students and should be maintained as a requirement of the curriculum.

- *NFS will be a 3 credit hour academic and substantive course*

The foundation of the University is intellectual inquiry and engaged learning. If NFS is to serve students as an orientation into the life of the University, it must reflect this central mission of higher education—the pursuit of knowledge. Thus, NFS must be a discipline-based course with academic content. [It should also be noted that the Lincoln plan states that NFS will have academic content.]

Currently, NFS can be fulfilled by a variety of courses, and we support the varied approach to NFS. In other words, courses as diverse as ENG 101, ANTH 111, ECON 111, and the like, can address both disciplinary academic content as well as the goals of NFS.

- *Participation in NFS will be expected of all the university.*

SIUE has made a commitment to NFS, which means that each school and college should share in the experience of offering NFS coursesⁱⁱⁱ. By sharing the mission of NFS, we lessen the burden on the College of Arts and Sciences to provide most NFS sections, as is currently the practice. Furthermore, when Schools across the University begin offering NFS sections, students may be able to use one of those courses as part of their course of study, thus helping students progress in their programs. Appendix A provides a model for how courses might be distributed across the University.

- *Responsibility for offering NFS courses should be at the department level not at the faculty level.*

While each School and College within the University should contribute to NFS, we recommend that NFS be a responsibility of departments and not faculty. The current practice of providing NFS courses is that individual faculty members propose an NFS course. This method has some advantages but it does not

encourage Departments to view NFS as part of their contribution to the University. Deans, in consultation with Departments and the Director of General Education, would be able to determine best which departments within a School or College would be most suited to providing NFS sections. The department would be responsible for providing the determined number of NFS courses and sections.

- *Senior faculty should be encouraged to teach NFS, but instructors and assistant/associate professors are also eligible and capable. Lecturers should not teach NFS sections.*

NFS courses provide senior faculty the unique opportunity to teach small classes of first-year students and to assist those students with their acclimation to SIUE specifically and the pursuit of higher education more generally. Having senior faculty teach NFS sections would further distinguish SIUE's NFS in that unlike some universities, first-year students will have access to senior faculty in a small, seminar-like environment. In all likelihood, senior faculty members have been part of the SIUE community for a long time, so they are well-equipped to help students learn about the campus and all that it has to offer and as engaged scholars, they can model for students intellectual curiosity. Senior faculty members should not see teaching NFS sections as "drudge work" but as an important part of their teaching load.

Associate and assistant professors and instructors are also engaged, committed faculty members and scholars who can stimulate students' interests in an academic area and reach the goals of NFS. Often, instructors have been part of SIUE for many years and are committed to the campus and its students.

- *Students must take and pass NFS within the first 30 hours at the University.*

As its title suggests, New Freshman Seminar is intended to be a course taken early in a student's experience at SIUE. Currently, the NFS requirement has no teeth: Students do not have to take and pass a NFS in order to continue in the University, and students quickly utilize the loophole. NFS is valuable for first-year students, and it should be taken within the first two semesters of enrolling at SIUE. However, we realize that even with the best of intentions, students' schedules are sometimes inflexible, so we recommend that students be allowed 30 hours in which to take and pass their NFS requirement. This recommendation parallels the Foundations course requirement in the Lincoln Plan^{iv}. Students who have not taken and passed the NFS requirement at 30 hours will not be allowed to enroll in classes or declare a major until the NFS requirement has been met.

- *NFS will be spread over fall and spring with approximately 2/3 of the needed courses offered in the Fall and the remaining 1/3 offered in the Spring. This arrangement will give students and departments flexibility.*

Because students will have 30 hours in which to complete the NFS requirement, this affords the flexibility of not needing to offer all NFS sections in the fall semester. The current practice of having NFS sections in the fall places a significant burden on faculty who may wish to teach an NFS section but are locked into other required courses within their departments in the fall or on departments to staff many sections of NFS. It can also place a burden on students whose schedules may be inflexible due to school, work, and family obligations or who matriculate in the spring semester rather than the fall. It also benefits students who enroll in but do not pass a NFS course in the fall semester. Further, the NFS Implementation Committee feels strongly that the NFS requirement should be able to fit within a student's general education plan and not require "additional" hours. By spreading classes throughout both semesters, we offer students chances to enroll in an NFS course that fits within their plan of study.

By spreading NFS options across fall and spring, we provide students, departments, and faculty needed flexibility. It should also be noted to students, then, that even if they want to, they may not necessarily be able to enroll in a NFS section in the fall. As students come to Springboard and enroll in classes, at some point all fall sections of NFS will be closed and students will need to be informed that they will have opportunities for NFS sections in the spring as well. Additional sections of NFS should not be added in the fall if it places an undue burden upon departments to staff those sections.

In Fall 2009, incoming first-year students numbered 1,922, the highest enrollment to date. Working with an enrollment of 2,000 first-year students, we would need to offer approximately 52 sections of NFS during the fall semester (assuming 25 students per section) and 26 sections in the spring.

- *Course caps in NFS sections should be 22-25, unless a particular course typically has a lower course cap.*

Small class sizes are needed in order to facilitate the goals of NFS. The original NFS Committee argued for a maximum class size of 18, to provide faculty and students with a more personal learning environment. Such a small class size cannot be economically sustained, unfortunately. Enrollment data suggests that often classes that began with 18 students would not necessarily maintain that enrollment by Day 10. Having a course cap of 22-25 still provides first-year

students with a small class (unlike many larger core courses) and makes economic sense. Some classes, such as writing intensive ENG 101, have a course cap of 20-23. In such cases, *we recommend keeping the lower course cap.*

This cap is also in line with universities across the country. According to survey results from the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 36.9% of universities responded that class sizes for NFS courses were 16-20 students; 29.8% of universities reported class sizes of 21-25 students (N=808). Only 7.5% indicated class sizes of 26-30 and 6.8% noted class size over 30. While the data does not suggest a “magic number” of class size, 22-25 students appears to be widely supported as the “typical” range for a NFS course. Further, empirical evidence does suggest that higher class sizes *decrease* the effectiveness of NFS experiences and dilute any positive results (Cuseo 2007)

- *The Director of General Education will take on oversight of NFS.*

At the time of this report, the announcement had already been made for the new position of Director of General Education. One of the stated responsibilities for this position is oversight of NFS. We included this recommendation, which we decided upon in Spring 2009, as a way to affirm our support of NFS coming under the new director’s purview.

- *Courses for NFS will be approved by the Director and a possible committee formed to help screen courses.*

Departments and faculty will propose NFS courses using existing courses, which is current practice. (A brand new course will need to be vetted through the University Curriculum Council and be approved at by Provost before it can be offered as a NFS course.) NFS proposals will need to be approved by the Director of General Education. We suggest that the Director form and utilize a committee to help screen the proposals so that faculty retain control over curricular matters. We also suggest that the Director develop a matrix or other document with NFS guidelines that will help departments and faculty as they propose courses so that the process is streamlined and easy to use.

The Director will be responsible for issuing a CFP (Call for Proposals) in the spring of each year so that the proposals can be approved before summer. This way, departments will have a list of approved sections available to them as they prepare their schedules in early fall for the following year.

In addition, we recommend that the Director of General Education and the faculty committee established (see previous recommendation) review all NFS

every three years to ensure that the courses have not drifted from the mission of NFS.

- *Faculty development needs to be an integral part of helping NFS faculty frame the course for effectiveness (peer mentors, discussions)*

Faculty development will be an essential component of ensuring the success of NFS. The Director of General Education, in consultation with the Provost's Office should provide ample faculty development opportunities and incentives for NFS faculty to participate.

- *UNIV 112 in its current form will not fulfill NFS requirement*

Historically, UNIV 112 has satisfied the goals of NFS. Most of its instructors have been part of SIUE for many years and are committed to the campus and its students. However, the structure of the course as it currently exists no longer meets the requirements on NFS as defined in the Lincoln Plan. We realize that there is a task force that is simultaneously examining the role of UNIV 112. We leave it to that task force to decide if UNIV 112 serves a unique role to certain students as it is or if it should be altered to serve as an NFS option.

Implementation

We offer the following recommendations for implementation.

- *Time*

The full implementation of NFS will follow the implementation of other parts of the new Lincoln Plan. We suggest reviewing proposals for NFS courses in Summer 2010, accepting courses by early Fall 2010, and begin implementation of the NFS program in Fall 2011. This timeline allows for early department planning. It is important to keep in mind that many departments prepare their academic schedules nearly a year in advance and NFS sections should be decided in a timely fashion. We recommend that the Director of General Education work closely with the departments to ensure a smooth transition.

- *Budget*

Budget can be lowered by having departments that "lose" distribution courses with the implementation of the Lincoln Plan offer more NFS courses to offset credit hour loss. As seen in Appendix A, some departments will have little to no budgetary impact given that they are currently teaching NFS courses at the course size recommended. Other departments may have budgetary impact.

Departments that offer NFS sections and have a budgetary impact cannot be expected to absorb that cost without support from the Central Administration in terms of increased faculty lines and the like. NFS should not be an unfunded mandate for departments to implement.

Full budgetary impact is difficult for this committee to assess without full details from the Lincoln Plan. Thus, we recommend that the full budget implications be reviewed by Associate Provost Thomas, the Director of General Education and a “reconciliation” committee, which was the approach used for the Lincoln Plan’s implementation.

- *Assessment*

This committee fully supports and encourages assessment of the NFS. We suggest data be collected at various points to provide information about ways to improve the program and to offer a clearer picture about the effectiveness of NFS. We also suggest that data be both qualitative and quantitative. Assessment matrices should involve direct and indirect data.

For the purpose of offering a starting point to thinking about assessing the NFS, we offer a rubric (Appendix B), which should be seen as merely a starting point to an assessment plan.

We recommend that the Director of General Education, the Director of Assessment, and the Committee on Assessment be involved with developing an appropriate assessment plan.

ⁱ The Implementation Committee acknowledges the hard work and commitment to NFS of the original committee.

ⁱⁱ Final Report of the Baccalaureate Reform through the Integrated Design of General Education (BRIDGE) Committee: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM, 29 November 2007. pp 29-30.

ⁱⁱⁱ Because the School of Dental Medicine does not offer courses at the first-year level, we recommend that it be exempted from providing NFS course(s).

^{iv} According to the^v Final Report of the Baccalaureate Reform through the Integrated Design of General Education (BRIDGE) Committee: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM, 29 November 2007, p. 31: “Students must complete two courses in Written Fluency [English 101 & English 102], one in Reasoning and Argumentation [RA 101], and one in Quantitative Literacy [QL 101] within their first 30 credit hours at SIUE; and a single course in Oral Communication [SPC 105] must be taken within the first 60 hours at the University.”

References

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE NFS COURSE DISTRIBUTION ACROSS UNIVERSITY*

Course	# of sections	# of students
ENG 101/10s <i>foundation</i>	9 Cap on these courses is 20-23 7 fall, 2 spring	~198
SPC 105 <i>foundation</i>	8 6 fall, 2 spring	200
RA 101 <i>foundation</i>	8 6 fall, 2 spring	200
IME 106	1 w/break-out sections Fall	90
HONS 120	3 Fall	75
CMIS 108	2 Currently cap for one section is 45. Fall	50
ECON 111	2 Currently cap for one section is 45. Fall	50
PSYC 111	4 Currently cap for one section is 90. Fall and/or spring	100
	Sub-total	963
Other courses These courses could be determined by individual departments. As there will be net credit loss for some departments as a result of the Lincoln Plan, some departments may want to increase CH production by offering NFS courses.		~1000 students
	TOTAL STUDENTS	~1963

* This table is illustrative and not meant to commit any department to NFS offerings.

APPENDIX B: NFS GOALS & OBJECTIVES--SAMPLE

This course will help students make the transition to college level work and expectations. Upon completing this course, students will be able to

- Utilize time management, note-taking, and/or test-taking skills appropriate for college-level work
- Reflect upon the importance of a liberal education
- Develop short- and long-term academic goals

To help students reach these goals, faculty may

- Assign informal writing assignments (or journal entries) in which students reflect upon their course work and its interconnectedness
- Make explicit connections to material in other classes/disciplines
- Integrate academic goal-setting into their course material
- Invite guest speakers to discuss academic goal-setting
- Model for students note-taking and/or time management skills

Note: There are many ways to help students achieve these goals.

This course will orient students to the resources and culture of the University. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

- Use their SIUE email account
- Use Blackboard
- Utilize academic support services (e.g. Writing Center, Speech Center, Lovejoy Library, tutoring)
- Utilize other university resources (e.g. counseling services, health services, University Theatre, etc.)
- Explain the historical and regional importance of SIUE

To help students reach these goals, faculty may

- Use Blackboard for course management
- Communicate with students only through their SIUE email accounts
- Require attendance at a University cultural or social event
- Encourage students to take their papers to the Writing Center
- Take a tour of a university resource that is applicable to the course being studied (e.g. Biology 111 to the University Gardens, etc.)
- Take a tour of a campus or community location

Note: There are many ways to help students achieve these goals.

This course will engage students in an intellectual community of students and faculty. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to

- Have a connection with one university faculty member
- Work collaboratively with other students
- "Use" [??] academic language
- "Read" [??] academic texts
- Make a brief oral presentation

To help students reach these goals, faculty may

- Assign a group project
- Provide opportunities for group homework assignments

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- Assign and discuss academic reading appropriate for the content area
 - Assign an oral presentation

Note: There are many ways to help students achieve these goals.