

## Organization Dimension Report Stony Brook University

*Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.* These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

### Introduction:

The Foundations of Excellence purports that "Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first-year. These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements." In this report the Organization Dimension committee will share our assessment of the current organizational structure at Stony Brook University and how well it supports our University's goal to deliver an outstanding first-year experience.

The Organization Dimension Committee was co-chaired by Dr. Manuel London, Professor of Business and Faculty Director of the Undergraduate College of Leadership and Service and Elyce Winters, Assistant Dean and Director of Undergraduate Student Services in the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences. The Committee met biweekly throughout the fall 2007 and the beginning of the spring 2008 semesters, our other members included:

- Megan Bowald, Senior Student, Psychology Major
- Judith Burke-Berhannan, Dean of Admissions
- Graham Glynn, Assistant Provost & Executive Director, Teaching, Learning and Technology
- Amanda Haxer, Quad Director, Eleanor Roosevelt Quad
- Jason Mastrogiovanni, Assistant Director of the Undergraduate Colleges
- Douglas Panico, Director of Management, Analysis and Audit
- Sandy Petrey, Professor of Comparative Studies, Faculty Director of the Undergraduate College of Arts, Culture, and Humanities
- Jeri Schoof, Assistant Provost for Human Resources
- Jerrold Stein, Dean of Students.

In general, our dimension committee found that the organization of the first-year experience was above adequate for meeting student's diverse needs. There is particularly good interaction between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs on Stony Brook University's campus and areas dedicated to the first-year experience also interact well, mainly due to the congeniality and dedication of the current leaders in each area. The committee found that the functions that support first-year students are dispersed across departments, including Admissions, Orientation, Dean of Students Office, Residence Life, Advising, Undergraduate Affairs, the Undergraduate Colleges, and the academic colleges and departments. Staff in these areas coordinate functions and events, some of which are one time annual events (e.g., Orientation and Opening of School) and others of which are on-going team functions (e.g., the teams within each of the Undergraduate Colleges). In most cases, the teams are matrixed, with members from different offices working together to achieve shared goals. These coordinated functions and teams work very well. Indeed, the university has worked hard for many years to be a model of integration, especially between the academic and student life sectors. As an institution, we need to recognize this positive culture of cooperation that bridges departments.

The Committee's recommendations for action focus on codifying how these functions operate in an integrated fashion so that the history and positive mutual respect and coordination between departments is not lost. This includes establishing a record of organizational charts and description of matrixed arrangements for specific purposes that support first-year students, detailing which offices are responsible for various functions, how the operations fit together, sources of funds, and methods for accomplishing this integration, such as teams and committees.

In addition, the Committee recommends documenting sources of information and resources so that staff across the university can answer first-year students' questions and so first-year students can find information to answer their own questions. In addition, the university needs to educate new faculty and staff to be aware of first-year students' needs and how they contribute to first-year students' experiences and success.

### Survey Results

The faculty staff survey indicated that about 63% responded high or very high to questions about being able to correctly refer new students regarding administrative and academic questions including help with coursework. Less than half the respondents (42% to 48%) indicated that they could correctly refer new students regarding help with personal issues (money management, family matters, etc.) and becoming involved with an institution-sponsored organization event. The first and second student surveys produced less positive results. About half the students indicated that they understood how Stony Brook is organized so that they know where to go for administrative questions (50% on survey 1, and 46% on survey 2). Regarding academic rules, 46% on the first survey and 38% on the second survey indicated responded high or very high to knowing what office to contact. Regarding help with coursework, 51% on the first survey and 46% on the second indicated high or very high to knowing how to obtain help with coursework. Only 38% on the first survey and 30% on the second responded high or very high to knowing who to contact for help with non-academic matters. Similarly, 36% on the first survey and 38% on the second responded high or very high to knowing where to go if they wanted to be involved with an institution-

sponsored organization or event. About half on both surveys indicated that they believed that faculty and staff referred them to the right office. Clearly, there is considerable room for improvement on all these indicators.

### Performance Indicator 2.1

Which of the following statements best describes your campus's first-year organizational structure (FYOS)?

- A Comprehensive Single Unit/Administrative Structure provides campus-wide oversight and alignment of first-year efforts. The FYOS 1) appears on the campus organizational chart, 2) has a director, 3) administers one or more component(s) of both the curriculum and co-curriculum, and 4) has a recurring operational budget.
- A Single Unit/Administrative Structure exists that meets some, but not all, of the conditions listed above.
- A Formal Coordinating Body oversees a broad range of first-year efforts and has institutional authority for oversight and alignment of first-year initiatives.
- Multiple Administrative Structures cooperate to administer and align first-year policies, practices, and programs.
- Discrete Structures exist that individually provide oversight for distinct aspects of the first-year (retention, orientation, advising, first-year seminars, etc.), but there is limited or no coordination among these structures.

#### Current Situation

There are several administrative structures across Academic and Student Affairs that cooperate in the first-year. The first-year experience spans Admissions, Orientation and Family Programs, the Undergraduate Colleges (UGCs), and other advising units which meet with specific cohorts of students (the Academic and Pre-Professional Advising Center, the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences (CEAS), the Equal Opportunity Program/Advancement on Individual Merit (EOP/AIM), and Athletics), Academic Departments, Campus Residences, as well as other special programs including the Honor's College, the Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program, and the Living Learning Centers (LLCs).

Overall, there is a good deal of coordination and communication with several committees comprised of members from each sector meeting to oversee specific first-year activities. However, there are areas that could use improvement in communication, mainly between departments that directly offer first-year student services such as the Undergraduate Colleges and the academic departments that teach large numbers of first-year students as well as among academic departments themselves. Some departments, such as Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and Psychology, have piloted new methods for teaching large first-year courses. These methods are not readily shared with other areas. An organized day of seminars or workshops in which best practices and teaching strategies can be shared would benefit most academic departments on campus and especially benefit new faculty members, staff and teaching assistants.

#### Opportunities and Challenges

The current structure functions well mainly because of the mix of specific personnel in each area who are dedicated to an integrated approach. These systems work well because of the excellent informal working relationships between competent and good-willed professionals. However this could change with turnover in staff. One challenge of these cross-functional initiatives is assigning lead responsibility and being sure that all parties involved have a clear understanding of where to direct students and staff with questions and/or issues. Another challenge is the rather large coordination problem in which lead actors must be sure to include all pertinent areas in their planning and execution of first-year activities. An organizational chart or other visual of responsibility and activity-by-area/sector would allow students and new staff to understand more clearly where to go for assistance and would reduce the learning curve of navigating campus.

#### Sources of Evidence

Most students and faculty who have been at the University for at least one year have learned and/or figured out where to go for help or direct students for help. This learning experience though seems mostly ad hoc. Staff members who teach the 101 seminars in the Fall receive training before classes begin, and they follow a standard curriculum and text, varying some content to reflect the theme of the students' undergraduate college. However, especially within academic departments, there are several sectors of employees who must "learn the ropes" on their own

### Performance Indicator 2.2

To what degree does the structure indicated in PI 2.1 result in an integrated approach that crosses division/unit lines (e.g., student affairs and academic affairs).

- Very Low/None
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very High
- N/A

#### Current Situation

There is a great deal of integration across campus offices in providing first-year programs and services. Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have made it a priority in the last few years to cooperate and coordinate effectively to improve the student experience.

#### Opportunities and Challenges

As stated under PI 2.1, the challenge with multiple areas and offices offering different services and also interacting with different student populations poses a considerable coordination challenge. We do it well, but it isn't easy. The lack of written evidence in the form of organizational charts with responsibilities or a comprehensive training guide to the first-year is worrisome. A document or web source that is comprehensive and easily accessible would aid new students and staff in navigating this large university.

#### Sources of Evidence

Survey evidence and discussions with faculty, staff and students provide feedback that there is a lack of understanding how different areas overlap and provide support for the first-year experience. Those closely associated with specific areas, such as Orientation and Family Programs or the UGC's, understand the first-year well, but others in academic departments that service large numbers of first-years or who teach first-year students often lack in knowledge about student support structures.

#### Performance Indicator 2.3

To what degree has the FYOS noted in PI 2.1 used evaluation results to improve its performance?

- Very Low/None
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Very High
- N/A

#### Current Situation

The campus engages in several annual program evaluations. These range from the Student Opinion Survey to surveys within Orientation, the UGC's, Campus Residences, to individual department teaching evaluations. There are few if any "assessment free zones" that is, areas that manage to escape scrutiny. However, the analysis, dissemination and use of these surveys to improve the first-year experience varies greatly from area to area. Results are not shared campus-wide and used to improve programs and curricula as much as they could be. Residence Life conducts annual student surveys, and this department deserves credit for examining the results carefully and making improvements. The Undergraduate College effort has assessed outcomes from the inception of the program. However, more can be done to share results across the campus as direction for improvement.

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#### Opportunities and Challenges

The main challenge in this area is analysis of the vast amounts of data collected on our campus each year. There is not sufficient access to survey data or executive reports across areas and the feedback loop in many areas is unclear. It is also unclear whether survey and assessment data is used in decision making processes at different administrative levels on campus. This isn't a matter of policy, but rather practice. This could change with some effort. For instance, the Student Opinion Survey results are reviewed by top administrative units, such as the Provost's Advisory Committee, but the results are not translated into action steps and do not filter down to lower levels for examination, generation of ideas for change, and implementation

#### Sources of Evidence

Our judgments are based on discussions with faculty and staff in the various sectors who provide first-year support. We invited heads of different areas on campus to our Committee meetings to share how they plan and coordinate first-year activities. Those interviewed in this informal setting included Heather Robertson of Orientation and Family Programs, Jean Peden of the Undergraduate Colleges, Judith Burke-Berhannan of Admissions, Rick Gatteau of the Academic and Pre-Professional Advising Center, and David Scarzella of Campus Residences, as well as the members on our dimension committee. In these discussions, it was clear that individual areas do try and perform regular assessment of their activities and make improvements from year to year, but it was not clear that information is shared with complimentary areas or that campus-wide assessment activities are coordinated and communicated.

Faculty who teach large courses were invited to attend Committee meetings or provide input in writing. We found that some departments regularly assess activities and make improvements from year to year, but it was not clear that information is shared with complimentary areas or that campus-wide assessment activities are coordinated and communicated.

#### Performance Indicator 2.4

Which of the following statements best describes the role of the FYOS noted in PI 2.1 in providing faculty/staff development to increase understanding of first-year issues?

- Reaches all or most faculty and staff who work with first-year students, is on-going year to year, and is of high quality as confirmed by appropriate evaluation.
- Conforms to most, but not all, of the conditions noted above.
- Conforms to only some of the conditions noted above.
- Is very limited (or not attempted at all).

## Current Situation

Orientation and training at the University level for new faculty and staff is incomplete with regards to working with first-year students. There is no uniform training provided to employees by Human Resources at the New Employee Orientation. In some areas, such as Orientation and Family Programs and the UGCs new instructors and staff are provided training and a handbook for interacting with first-year students. Academic staff and faculty teaching first-year students only receive support from their individual departments, and this level of support is inconsistent from department to department.

## Opportunities and Challenges

The variation of training and support for faculty, staff and particularly TA's who interact with first-year students is concerning. Some departments/areas provide excellent training and/or workshops for new employees, yet other areas assume that new faculty will self-learn how to manage large first-year classes. TA training in particular is lacking in uniformity and attention. Often these graduate students are not prepared to respond to the needs of first-year students and do not have information on where to guide students for help or receive help themselves. The new Teaching, Learning and Technology (TLT) coordinates TA training, but this can be strengthened and supported to recognize the needs of different academic disciplines. Many instructors are uncertain about such topics as FERPA law, regulations about academic standing, and petitioning for academic exceptions and even policies on grading.

## Sources of Evidence

Survey data as well as discussions with faculty, staff and TA's provided background for this assessment. Experienced faculty members have learned many of the academic policies that affect first-year students, and they have devised useful and effective teaching strategies for first-year students. New faculty members and particularly TAs would benefit from a uniform structure of orientation and/or development.

## Performance Indicator 2.5

Which of the following statements best describes the financial resources for the FYOS?

- o Funding is adequate and reasonably consistent from year to year to support the FYOS's mission of oversight for the first-year.
- o Funding varies somewhat from year to year and/or is not fully adequate for the FYOS's mission of oversight for the first-year.
- o Funding is either highly inconsistent from year to year, clearly inadequate, or fails in some other way to support the FYOS's mission of oversight for the first-year.
- o Insufficient evidence exists to judge the adequacy and consistency of funding (e.g., the structure(s) is/are newly established or highly dependent on external grant funding).

## Current Situation

Funding for first-year programs varies from year to year, but a baseline from the previous year is usually an accurate indicator of the coming year's allocation. As there is great overlap in the services provided to first-year students by different sectors on campus, funding for activities is usually collaborative, coming from a variety of sources. Results from the Foundations Faculty/Staff survey indicated there is general consensus that programs beyond the classroom (activities, events, student organizations) have adequate funding. Additional funding may be needed to support instruction for first-year students, including supplemental instruction in such areas a math, biology, chemistry, and writing.

## Opportunities and Challenges

The challenges in this area are similar to those that face most universities in allocating resources. Our first-year students would benefit from increased technology in the classrooms, (mounted projectors, etc). There is a general sense that classroom facilities have improved but could still use a good deal of work to have the look and feel of a top level research institution. It is promising that TLT is working on improving this situation.

There is also concern that the lack of large classroom spaces creates bottlenecks and unmet demand in certain high enrollment areas. Although the Academic Colleges and Dean have worked hard to alleviate unmet demand, some students often complain that they cannot get into the classes they need in a timely way.

A third concern is the funding of the 102 seminars. A greater incentive or a regularization of the teaching expectation is needed in order to entice more faculty members to teach these seminars. Faculty need to feel that teaching freshman seminars is important and "counts" within their department as service to the university.

## Sources of Evidence

Discussions with faculty and staff in the various sectors who provide first-year support provided the basis for this judgment.

Recommended Grade: B to B-

As we state in our summary above, Stony Brook faculty and staff work together well to coordinate activities and events that support first-year students. Documentation will help to clarify departmental responsibilities and inform students, faculty, and staff about where to go for assistance.

Recommended Grade: B-

Recommended Action Items:

- Written Responsibility, Policy, and Practice (*High priority*)

A central repository and easily accessible organization chart with list of responsibilities for all areas that interact in the first-year experience would be helpful to guide students to the proper offices and orient new staff. In addition, clear and written policies and practices from each function that pertains to the first-year experience (from orientation through the 102 courses) would provide continuity from year to year and ensure program continuation when there is staff turnover. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs and Vice President for Student Affairs should be responsible for developing this document.

- Codify Funding for the First-Year Experience (*High priority*)

We need a written understanding of how first-year activities are funded. Many programs are funded by different offices. This happens in a collaborative way, and is based on history. When new programs were conceptualized, different departments agreed to contribute funds to make them a success. As the programs continued, funds were not provided to sustain the program and a program's continuity depending on the understanding of various department heads. This may be a problem as budgets and the occupants of positions change.

- Expand the UGC Experience for Faculty and Staff as well as Students (*Medium priority*)

We also need incentives and socialization experiences to encourage more faculty to join the UGCs and teach freshman seminars. We need to develop reward structures that create a sense of community and belonging for participating faculty. Although individuals within the UGCs, particularly the UGC Faculty Directors, have done a tremendous amount of outreach, additional marketing to faculty would increase participation.

On campus communication about UGC activities would help. A yearly report or news letter/magazine highlighting the UGCs with photos and input from staff, students and faculty would increase awareness and spark greater involvement from other sectors of campus.

- Provide Greater Analysis and Close the Feedback Loop (*Medium priority*)

Individual areas performing assessment should be required to share assessment results with other campus areas. In addition, campus-wide assessments should be more readily accessible to faculty, students and staff with clear guidelines on how such assessments are included in decision making processes. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, the Director of Institutional Research, and the Vice President for Student Affairs should take responsibility for sharing results.

- Create a Campus-Wide Initiative for Faculty/Staff Development (*Medium priority*)

Establish a series of workshops or seminars with specific topics pertinent to the first-year experience, including demonstrations of effective teaching strategies for large first-year classes. The new employee orientation program run by the Human Resources Department should address how employees across the campus contribute to first-year students' academic and social success.