January 21, 2015

To: University Senate

From: Kelli Custer, PhD
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    Academic Coordinator, First-Year Experience

Re: Update on First-Year Experience Initiative and FY Competency

Purpose
The purpose of this document is to provide background on the First-Year Experience Initiative and the FY Competency per the new General Education Framework. It will also provide a description of activities and objectives for the three-year grant from the Davis Educational Foundation. It is meant to serve as an introduction to the FY initiatives and a platform for further questions and collaboration.

Background
“First-year Experience” is an umbrella term for a collection of practices found to be effective in supporting the transition of first-year students into college. As we continue toward the creation of WCSU’s FYE program, we are following Koch and Gardner’s (2006) definition for the term first-year experience:

The first-year experience is not a single program or initiative, but rather an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts within and across postsecondary institutions ... [that represent] a purposeful set of initiatives designed and implemented to strengthen the quality of student learning during and satisfaction with the first year of college—the stage in American higher education during with the largest proportion of university dropout occurs. (Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013, p. xxx)

Davis Educational Foundation Grant
In July of 2014, the university received a grant (through a proposal written by Dr. Kelli Custer and Dean Missy Alexander) to help develop, implement, and assess a First-Year Experience program at WCSU. The three-year, $174,331 grant is from the Davis Educational Foundation established by Stanton and Elisabeth Davis after Stanton Davis’s retirement as chairman of Shaw’s Supermarkets Inc. The grant allows us to build upon earlier efforts toward establishing first-year programs at WCSU.

Through the grant, this incarnation contains elements of past FY program initiatives that are financially and programmatically feasible and in line with current FY research. This program focuses on creating materials to support the incorporation of specific outcomes into existing courses; to provide workshops and support to faculty as courses are revised; to effectively focus existing resources; to assess the program and make necessary adjustments; and, ultimately, to create a sustainable model for the support of first-year students. (See below for a summary of how the grant funds are being used.)
**Outcomes for courses with an FY competency designation**

With the implementation of the new General Education Framework in Fall 2015, students will be required to take a course with the FY designation in their first 30 semester hours. (Transfer students will be required to take a 1-credit Transfer Year (TY) course, under development, in their first year.) The FY navigation component may be embedded into any introductory-level course. In early December, the Committee on General Education *ad hoc* Committee on the Defining the First-Year Competency approved the following definition and outcomes. (These outcomes are slated for approval at the upcoming General Education Committee meeting on February 6, 2015.)

**Committee-developed definition**

First-Year Experience programs take a variety of forms to provide academic and co-curricular support as students begin university life. Completion of this competency allows first year students to transition into the university and to appreciate the values, culture, and resources of the academic community. WCSU’s student body is especially in need of such support because of its diversity, including traditional first-year students; students from at-risk communities; active and military veterans; those at varying levels of academic and social preparation; first and second generation Americans; and students who are the first members of their families to attend college. Our students need a program that orients them to the expectations, resources and requirements, and rewards of their WCSU experience.

**Outcomes**

After completing the FY competency, students will be able to:

- Understand the physical and virtual WCSU campus
- Identify university community resources, including faculty, staff, and administration
- Understand the necessary procedures that contribute to academic success and graduation at Western
- Understand the culture and expectations of academics at the university level
- Apply habits and practices necessary for continuing academic success

*Committee members*: Kelli Custer, FYE Coordinator, chair; Matthew Busse, Student Government Association, second member from General Education committee; Amanda Lubell, Mathematics; Martha (Marcy) May, History.

Courses with the FY designation must address all of these outcomes. Separate from the outcomes, resources are being developed to support the incorporation of the outcomes into courses. (See below).

**Grant distribution**

Funds from the Davis Educational Foundation are supporting the following:
• Collaboration between Media Production and Writing for student interns to write and produce videos that support first-year students and provide a context specific to WCSU of other resources. This work is being coordinated by JC Barone and Kelli Custer. For example, students are creating one video regarding the expectations of students and faculty in the advising process. This video will be used to introduce materials currently in place regarding advising and registration. Another video focuses on self-advocacy and students engaging in their own education. These videos will be available on the WCSU YouTube channel so that students and faculty can access them as often as necessary.

• A paid faculty workshop with Betsy Barefoot, an internationally recognized leader in the field. This workshop will be held on March 27, 2015. Attendance will be limited. Request for interested participants will come through departments.

• Support for a faculty member (Kelli Custer) and a University Assistant (Mary O’Neill) to coordinate and administer all elements of the program:
  
  o Creation of a central source of links and current resources.
  o Indexing and/or clarification of existing resources.
  o Overseeing the creation and implementation of quantitative and qualitative assessment of the program, including student focus groups.
  o Presentation of faculty workshops coordinated through the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching regarding incorporation of FY materials into existing courses.
  o Individual support of faculty in incorporation of FY elements into courses.
  o Creation and administration of a separate course for transfer students.
  o Coordination of in-kind involvement from campus resources: Student Affairs, Academic Advisement Services, the Registrar, Admissions, Information Technology & Innovations, CELT, Institutional Research, and University Libraries.
  o Contributions to Accepted Students’ Day and Summer Orientation regarding academic expectations at WCSU.
  o Continued administration through Year 3, working toward self-sustainability of the program.

**Upcoming Events**

**February 25:** Faculty workshops regarding incorporation of first-year elements into current courses, led by Kelli Custer and Mary O’Neill, in coordination with CELT.
March 27: Opening lecture from Dr. Betsy Barefoot, Senior Scholar with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. Open to all faculty, staff, and administration.

Day-long workshop for select faculty (as designated by deans/department chairs) with Dr. Barefoot.

April 9: Faculty workshops regarding incorporation of first-year elements into current courses, led by Kelli Custer and Mary O’Neill, in coordination with CELT.

Ongoing (and through the summer): Individual consultations regarding incorporation of first-year elements into current courses, upon request.

Summer 2015 and 2016, AY 2015-2016: Additional workshops and consultations; piloting of FY materials in selected summer courses.

Resource