

**First Year Experience (FYE)**  
**Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee Report**  
**April 30, 2019**

## **Introduction**

An ad hoc committee of nine members of the faculty senate representing all four schools, the library and student wellness services met to examine past and current practices concerning the First Year Experience at CCSU. This report provides a summary of the committee's findings collected through interviews, attendance at the 2019 FYE Conference, examination of available statistics concerning FYE, and examination of other programs. The report concludes with recommendations by the committee on how to move forward to build an FYE program that will connect, support and benefit our students.

## **History of FYE at CCSU**

While there were some FYE courses at CCSU in the 1980s, a new model for FYE began in 1994. According to the First-year Experience Survey 1994-1998, compiled by Douglas Engwall of the Psychology department, the first round of FYE courses (5 sections in total) were offered in Fall 1994. "The curriculum was designed to integrate an extended first-year orientation program into regular academic programs courses that fulfill general education requirements" (quoted from a November 2008 article in the *Courier*). Under the direction of Assistant Dean of Arts & Sciences Ross Baiera, the program expanded to 51 sections (and 23 different courses) by Fall 1998. When the General Education program was revamped in 1998, an FYE requirement was added, such that every new student with fewer than 15 transfer credits must take an FYE course.

The program continued offering FYE courses that met various general education requirements to a majority of incoming first-year students. After Ross Baiera, Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences Rick Roth oversaw the program. In 2007, Chris Pudlinski was appointed Faculty Director of FYE and Meg Leake was appointed FYE Coordinator, creating a partnership between Academic and Student Affairs and expanding FYE courses to all four undergraduate colleges. From 2007-2013 FYE courses were a mixture of majors-only courses (e.g, ENGR 150), general education courses (e.g., ENG 110), and First Year Seminar (FYS) topic-specific courses.

During that time a few living-learning communities were also integrated into FYE. Academic year 2007 marked the beginning of the new (optional) one-credit FYE 101 which was added to existing courses bearing two to three credits. About half of the course sections providing FYE added this one-credit course. The other sections continued with an embedded model, placing FYE content into existing courses. At its peak in 2009-2011, over 95% of students were placed in an FYE course.

## **Recent/Current Practices**

The existing FYE program was eliminated without the consent of the Faculty Senate in 2014 and a new version, FYE 100, with a large online component, containing 8 modules, was initiated in

Summer 2015 at the direction of the Provost. This new version was test piloted with the students that were part of the First in the World Grant, during the 2016-2017 academic year. A second pilot was run during the 2017-18 school year. Four sections of the course were offered in the Fall 2018, one per school. At this time the grant has expired and the FYE 100, 8 modular model, is no longer being offered.

Although the formally coordinated program was eliminated in 2014, some departments continued to offer majors-only or general education FYE courses, for example in Fall 2018, 29 FYE sections following the original model were offered, of which 26 followed the embedded model and 3 were offered as a course with a 1 credit add on.

There have also been two instances of FYE courses that included high school students. FYS 100 Introduction to Teaching was offered in the spring for three years (2016-2018) to New Britain High School students. It was converted to EDF 215 without FYE in Spring 2019. Anecdotally the students expressed a desire to receive an on campus FYE experience. In addition a Fall 2018 section of ENGR 150 using an FYE format had a dual enrollment of New Britain High School and CCSU students.

A list of FYE and FYS courses offered between Fall 2010 and Spring 2019 can be found at the following link: [INSERT LINK](#)

In summary, at the time of this report, the following types of FYE courses are being offered:

- Embedded FYE content = no extra credit, 1 CRN.
- Add on (Stand Alone) FYE 101 = 2 CRNs, 1 extra credit attached to a course
- FYS = topic specific course, embedded FYE = no extra credit, 1 CRN

## **Assessment**

Data collection during 2009 – 2011 is available on the FYE website at:

<http://web.ccsu.edu/fye/assessmentandresearch.htm>

More recently, there was an attempt to collect and analyze data from students enrolled in either an embedded or 1 credit add-on course. A Preliminary Assessment Report prepared by Dr. Marianne Fallon in January 25, 2018 identified some emerging trends however there was no statistical significance. In addition, the number of students sampled and the specific characteristics of the students from the First World Grant makes the data ungeneralizable.

In the opinion of the FYE Ad Hoc committee there is no useable data at this time. While the early assessments are 10 or more years old, the survey questions from them and the more recent assessment may be useful when designing assessments for the future.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Comprehensive FYE program with coursework as one component vs course-only approach.
  - Follow the Faculty Senate course approval process for all FYE courses (required).

- Partnership between faculty and staff from both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.
- Program design based on a current understanding of who our students are and what they need.
- Clearly stated FYE mission and measurable outcomes - aligned with the university mission and strategic plan.
- Professional training for individuals involved in facilitating the program including those teaching courses, leading campus activities etc.
- Support for annual attendance of academic and non-academic individuals to the National FYE Conference, related conference and/or to visit exemplary programs at similar institutions.

## **IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS**

- Establishment of a task-force with academic and non-academic representation to develop a comprehensive FYE program as soon as possible. Ideally this group would begin work during Summer 2019.
  - Possibly bring the Gardner Institute to campus to assist in FYE program development.
  - Define “Best Practices” and appropriate outcomes to ensure a consistent experience and program for our students.
    - Conduct literature review
    - Identify and study successful FYE programs in similar institutions.
    - Use theory-based practices
  - Create a sustainable mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the FYE program for the students.

### **Potential Questions for the Taskforce:**

*In the course of the Ad Hoc committees discussion questions came up for which there were no immediate or obvious answers. The committee poses these to the task force for their consideration.*

- Which is better for CCSU, a common experience or a program that offers variety within the FYE experience, or a combination (i.e. a common book read but variety of learning communities and types of FYE courses)?
- How is a first-year student defined? While this study has focused on the traditional first year undergraduate student, should the needs of first-year transfer students, first-year graduate students and high school students taking university courses be considered in the development of a comprehensive FYE program?
- If credit-bearing FYE courses are offered, how should they be designed, taught, graded? How can they be fully integrated with the rest of the FYE program? Should they be integrated into academic programs and/or general education so as to fit into existing credit requirements?
- Gateway courses often become de facto FYE courses due to their high number of first year students. How can we use this to our advantage?
- Can FYE impact student involvement in research?
- What campus programs/activities (orientation, learning communities, residence hall programs, etc.) should be part of the integrated FYE?

- Should the FYE program play a role in helping students develop cultural awareness/sensitivity that will improve inter-group relations and decrease potential for micro-aggression?
- What role can campus groups such as the student-focus centers and athletic academic center play to support the mission of the FYE?
- What role can FYE play in helping students develop as healthy well-adjusted young adults?
- If a tenant of FYE is to create a sense of belonging to our campus community how can FYE accomplish this?

*In addition to the above questions, additional information gleaned from FYE experts is provided below the conclusions for consideration moving forward.*

## Conclusions

At this time, there is no formal structure that monitors the content taught in FYE courses or assesses the effectiveness of these courses. The content is, in many cases, decided upon by the department or faculty member teaching. In some cases, academic support specialists are invited to speak on topics such as information literacy, student wellness, and financial literacy; although online modules and accompanying classroom activities and assignments had been developed for such topics to be used at the discretion of individual faculty members. In academic year 2018-2019 three approaches were offered: the embedded FYE (for general education and/or majors only), FYS, and FYE 101. These courses, while they may be effective in isolation, are not part of a more robust program that follows the students beyond the single classroom. At this time, there is no clear adherence to a FYE mission statement or university-wide outcomes. The FYE website provides a mission statement, outcomes, and resources which are outdated, but which merit consideration as a resource when building a new up-to-date program. In order to provide an effective program that addresses the wide backgrounds of our incoming students, it is critical that program leadership, or directorship be established and comprised of both academic and non-academic personnel. Two issues that must be addressed prior to designing a comprehensive FYE are: 1) clearly identifying the needs of our student population (traditional, non-traditional, first generation, socioeconomically diverse, transfer, high school etc.) in order to create effective program; and 2) appropriating resources to support the program that may include faculty lines, reassigned time for director(s), facilities, etc.

Only with clarity on the type and level of resources available can a vision of FYE become a viable and prosperous program.

---

## Information for the Task Force to Consider: Model Types & Design Considerations

There appears to be **consensus** among FYE experts on certain issues:

- FYE should be credit bearing. Ninety percent of universities give credit for these courses.
- On the ground FYE courses are preferred to online courses, except for those students who take their entire degrees online.
- Almost all experts agree that FYE courses should be at least 3 credits. They do not think one or two credit courses are sufficient to cover everything needed.

- They warn against loading an FYE course with too much material that can't be done well.
- Coursework alone is not a sufficient First Year Experience. The university should take a holistic approach and develop a program (not just a course) that is comprehensive for the whole university. This plan should coordinate everything the university does for student success.
- The philosophy of FYE is important. The university should have a set of values and beliefs, or an FYE "Mission." This mission should align with the University's mission and goals, and its specific student body. Caution should be taken concerning making retention the main focus of a program.
- Assessment should be kept in mind when designing an FYE program. There should be a definition of success and metrics to determine outcomes that are determined before the design.
- Peer or near-peer mentors should be included throughout the program including peer teaching in the courses.

There are a number of **different options** for FYE courses that are used at various universities:

1. Content can vary. For example, an FYE can include
  - Life Skills only
    - ex. study skills, time management, financial literacy, introduction to campus resources, wellness
  - Academic Skills
    - This can include a course with discipline specific content, often on a narrow or specialized topic, with an emphasis on academic skills, such as research, critical thinking, team work, oral presentation.
  - General Education and Life Skills
    - This could be a discipline specific content courses that counts for General Education with some life skills as above
  - A Combination of Academic and Life Skills
2. Curriculum and who designs it also differs at different universities.
  - Some universities use a standardized curriculum; the same syllabus, learning outcomes, assignments are used in all sections of FYE course throughout the university. This may include a common read.
  - Other FYE programs encourage faculty to design different curriculum based on their areas of expertise so that different topics are covered in various sections.
3. Who teaches FYE courses also varies across universities.
  - In some cases, any member of the faculty can teach a course.
  - In other cases, the courses are taught by research faculty only, or by part-time faculty only
  - A few universities have FYE courses taught by faculty experts in the skills being taught, for example faculty in educational or developmental psychology
  - Staff in some universities teach FYE and the regular teaching faculty are not involved.
  - Finally, there can be a combination where teaching faculty design and teach discipline specific content and staff teaches life skills and about university resources.

4. Who directs program can vary.
  - Some universities hire a dedicated FYE director who runs an office or school, and has significant support staff.
  - In many cases one faculty member is given reassigned time to direct the program.
  - Sometimes a committee of faculty or faculty and staff oversee FYE.
5. Who takes FYE courses is not the same at every university
  - 50% of colleges require FYE; while at the other 50% it is voluntary.
  - FYE can be offered to all students including transfer students, some students, or only to first year students. Specialized FYE experiences can be offered for groups such as first generation students, undeclared majors etc.
  - FYE courses can be school-based, department-based, or uniform across the campus

Some **things to be considered** when designing an FYE program

- It is best to decide why FYE is being offered in advance. For example, it could be for one or a combination of reasons like these:
  - Retention: skills to succeed in all aspects of school
  - Help choosing career, major
  - Academic excellence: Academic transition to college work – critical thinking, research, independent thinking, academic rigor
  - Connections with faculty
  - Personal attention: Sense of being in small school
  - Connection with university as whole: teach students to love our university – make connections with it and others in it.
  - Make college central to their life: engagement in academics and non-academic life
  - Teach them to become leaders or commitment to social justice or help them be healthy individuals
- Success: does the model have documented success at other institutions?
- Cost: how much is the university willing to spend?
- Are there enough qualified teachers?
  - Faculty buy in = will they participate?
  - Faculty availability = will departments release full-time faculty teach FYE, will part-time have time to do it?
- Is faculty training necessary?
- What other staff will be necessary to the program AND do they have the availability to participate? (i.e. Student Affairs staff, school-based advising center staff, others)
- Assessment: Who will assess and how difficult will it be to collect data?
- Consistency: Is it important that all students have the same experience?
- Should a cohort model, aka Learning Communities (cohorts taking one or two classes together) be used?
- Should faculty be expected/encouraged to engage with students out of class (ex. take them to performances/lectures) as part of FYE?

FYE Ad Hoc Committee Members: Jan Bishop (Chair), Lisa Frank, Justine Gamache, Martha Kruey, Gladys Moreno-Fuentes, James Mulrooney, Chris Pudlinski, Thamma Ravindra, Louise Williams