

# **First Year Experience Committee**

## **Recommendations**

**Presented to Dr. Carolyn R. Mahoney, Ph. D.**

**April 19, 2006**

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### **Recommendations**

The interactions and institutional research conducted by the members of the Lincoln University Advisory Committee on the First Year Experience (FYE) revealed that the University currently has in place a myriad of programs geared to insure students' academic progress, but although increasingly successful, to date those programs have not been able to combat the "revolving door" reality faced by about 50% of our students between the freshman and sophomore year.

The campus-wide composition of the FYE committee provided for a comprehensive view of the institutional culture that has emerged from neglecting to enforce existing deadlines, rules, regulations and requirements. For first year students this has meant that in past years we have enrolled a large percentage of freshmen students who arrive well past the admission deadline, some without ACT scores, most without financial arrangements in place, and some without living arrangements for their first semester away from home. These practices further exacerbate the problem of freshman students' lack of preparedness felt by colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Lincoln University engages in a variety of services geared to enhance students' achievement and persistence. Nonetheless, there is not a comprehensive program with centralized leadership to coordinate the development, implementation and evaluation of a well defined First Year Experience. The FYE committee has concluded that the creation of an extraordinary First Year Experience is hinged on the establishment of a purposeful program for freshman students and a shift to an institutional culture in which deadlines,

rules and regulations guide practice and exceptions are only made under truly exceptional circumstances.

The following are the recommendations of the First Year Experience Committee as they pertain to:

- I - The First Year Experience Program
- II- Program Coordination
- III- Enrollment
  - a. Recruitment
    - i. Sing our praises
  - b. Contact with applicant
    - i. Website design
    - ii. Personal calls
- IV- Orientation
- V- Welcome Week
- VI- Mentoring
- VII- Advisement
- VIII- University Seminar - GE 101
- IX- Reading Course(s)
- X- Learning Communities
- XI- Program Evaluation
- XII- Transition from the Freshman Experience
- XIII- Faculty and Staff Development
- XIV- Academic Progress and Early Intervention
- XV- Monitoring Class Attendance
- XVI- Freshman Housing
  - a. Communication with Resident Advisors
  - b. Resident Mentors
  - c. Residence Halls
  - d. Deposit deadline
  - e. Residential Program

### **I- The First Year Experience Program**

We recommend that the University establish a First Year Experience Program to be led from a central position and aided by the First Year Experience Committee. We respectfully offer the following mission and objectives for the First Year Experience Program:

## Mission

The mission of the First Year Experience Program is to ensure the academic and social success of each entering Lincoln University student by coordinating a comprehensive freshman experience.

## Objectives

- To provide smooth entrance to the university
- To enhance students' academic experience and performance through enduring understanding, engaging pedagogy, and evolving worldview
- To increase retention
- To facilitate the transition to the sophomore year
- To enhance the social interactions with campus and community
- To support the professional development of faculty and staff involved in freshman-related activities

## *Rationale*

Without the creation of an actual FYE program, efforts will continue to be duplicated, human and financial resources underutilized and students underserved.

## **II- Program Coordination**

We recommend that all things freshmen be coordinated by a central position. The person leading this central position will work in collaboration with other University departments. His or her responsibilities include:

- Design and oversee evaluation of a freshman academic program concentrating on faculty development and curriculum enhancement
- Supervise the orientation course and developmental courses

- Supervise programs for at-risk students
- Supervise pre-collegiate programs for incoming freshmen
- Supervise planning of orientation programs
- Supervise the Honors Program
- Supervise freshman advising
- Supervise learning communities
- Supervise tutoring and other academic support services
- Supervise assessment of the freshman year

The FYE leader will be aided by an advisory committee of faculty, students and staff (currently the FYE committee), chaired by a faculty member.

We further recommend that the following conditions be incorporated into the search for this position:

- five years relevant [freshman-related\*] teaching experience at the University level
- three years in an educational leadership position

[\*Note: The term “freshman-related” is not a part of the qualification, but is meant to explain what we mean by “relevant.”]

### *Rationale*

The successful implementation of a thoughtfully proposed Freshman Year Experience program hinges on it being delivered in a consistent and cohesive manner. This type of delivery requires the leadership of an administrator capable of spear-heading campus-wide collaboration, and vested with the required authority to insure that the faculty and staff entrusted with the program implementation receive the training and

institutional support required to carry out the goals of the program and are in turn evaluated on the performance of said goals.

### **III- Enrollment**

We recommend that until the Enrollment Management Committee presents its recommendations, currently established enrollment criteria be observed. These criteria as listed in the *Lincoln University Undergraduate Bulletin* include:

1. Completed application for admission form.
2. American College Test (ACT) results. The ACT is required for advisement and course placement purposes, in addition to our own local testing. A high school transcript with a minimum of six semesters of work.
3. High school transcript documenting graduation from an accredited high school or General Education Development (GED) equivalency certificate.
4. Completed Missouri minimum core curriculum student reporting form with high school counselor's signature.
5. Non-refundable \$17 application processing fee
6. International students must contact the Office of Admissions for additional criteria which include a minimum score of 500 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL). Deadline for admissions materials from international students is thirty days prior to the first day of that semester's classes.

We further recommend that the University establish and strictly adhere to deadlines for admission and payment of a non-refundable \$75 deposit by July 1 for the Fall semester and November 15 for the Spring semester. The \$75 deposit will be applied as a credit to the accounts of students who in fact enroll at Lincoln during the semester for which they make their deposit.

#### *Rationale*

Failure to comply with existing policies can be directly linked to the current lack of preparedness by many freshmen and in turn their inability to successfully navigate the academic and social expectations of the freshman year.

A \$75 deposit would allow us to better forecast the true freshman enrollment. Efficient operation of freshman programs depends on timely knowledge of how many students are coming as well as who they are and what their special needs may be.

**a. Recruitment**

**i. Sing our praises**

We recommend that recruitment efforts highlight the great value of Lincoln, its size, and its commitment to personal interactions between faculty/staff and students as they impart outstanding instruction and offer strong support services for quality academic programs.

*Rationale*

While remaining true to our open enrollment classification, we should present Lincoln as an outstanding university that in addition provides unparalleled opportunities to all who come committed to their education.

**b. Communication with students during their enrollment period**

We recommend that a system of continuous communication with applicants be made a priority. This may be accomplished by the complete and effective implementation of the Datatel Communication Management Module, and may rely on faculty, staff, peer student mentors, and/or interested alumni for its delivery.

*Rationale*

Lincoln University serves a large population of first-generation students who may find it hard to comply with enrollment requirements and who would

benefit from the guidance that may be provided by a faculty or staff member, peer student mentor, and/or alumni member.

#### **i. Website design**

We recommend that the Lincoln University homepage be redesigned to reflect our interest in welcoming new students and providing an exceptional First Year Experience that begins with the students' first contact with the university.

##### *Rationale*

Electronic sources are increasingly the most visited by school counselors, prospective students and parents.

#### **ii. Personal calls/e-mail**

We recommend that incoming freshmen be contacted by phone or e-mail at different stages of their application/enrollment process. The purpose and script of these communications are to be established by the Office of Admissions in collaboration with the person leading the First Year Experience and the Enrollment management committee.

##### *Rationale*

In reaching out to students, there is no substitute for personal contact. These conversations can also help us deal with issues as they arise, ideally, before students come to campus.

### **IV - Orientation**

We recommend that orientations be delivered multiple times throughout the year and serve no more than 150-200 students at a time. The summer orientation periods should encompass information for parents and students about academic guidelines,

expectations and support services. The orientation program shall be mandatory for all traditional freshmen and transfer students with less than 30 credit hours. Transfer students with less than 30 credit hours will complete a special session tailored to their needs. Alternate orientations will be created for non-traditional students.

### *Rationale*

Lincoln University serves a unique population of first generation students who require specific attention and guidance. Currently, students are herded through orientation in large groups and advised/registered on one day by advisors who are rushed and overcrowded. By conducting smaller orientation programs the orientation planning committee and University community can focus on the distinct needs and concerns of new students and parents.

### **V - Welcome Week**

We recommend that freshman students be mandated to arrive on campus a week before regular classes begin. During that period students will complete a portion of the revised GE 101 course content, engage in team building exercises, activities to get them acquainted with the campus and the community, and a ceremony that will mark their arrival on campus. This ceremony may be a meal with the president or a symbolic rite of passage.

### *Rationale*

By bringing the freshmen to campus for a week of *carefully structured academic and social activities* we will have the opportunity to communicate to them an institutional culture of commitment, caring, support, and high expectations. Having the campus to themselves and the undivided attention of the faculty and staff engaged in Welcome

Week, students will be able to create supportive networks and meet faculty and staff who will be able to address risk factors made evident during the week's activities.

## **VI- Mentoring**

We recommend that a mentoring program be created and implemented to pair incoming freshmen with successful upperclassmen. Students will receive training and compensation for this service. Compensation may not necessarily be monetary.

### *Rationale*

Incoming freshman students can relate better to other students than to the adult faculty and staff on campus. Anecdotal evidence tells us that there is already in existence an informal mentoring program on campus. By making it official we would have better control over the information that students receive from older students upon their arrival.

## **VII- Advisement**

We recommend that freshman advisement be redesigned to better meet the needs of incoming freshmen and insure that they meet specific course requirements during the first year. (The FYE committee is currently constructing specific recommendations about advising).

In the short term, we recommend piloting an advising model that allows GE 101 instructors in some of the learning communities during fall 2006 to serve as advisors to those freshmen during their first year. Undeclared students will be assigned an advisor in their major at the end of that first year.

We further recommend that freshmen advisors be responsible for no more than 25 advisees, and that guidelines of responsibilities be created and evaluated for the advising practice.

*Rationale*

The creation of an effective advising model is absolutely necessary to ensure the proper assignment of classes to students and to create engaging relationships between incoming students and faculty members who will invest time and effort to stay informed about their advisees' academic progress and social adjustment to the university.

**VIII - GE 101: University Seminar**

We recommend that the university seminar course be redesigned to address the needs of current students and Lincoln University. We further recommend that the redesigned course include a portion to be delivered during Welcome Week at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters; as well as allow for presentations by Financial Aid office staff who will guide students in completing the FAFSA, and a stronger emphasis on institutional history.

*Rationale*

The last major revision to GE 101 took place several years ago and the course has not undergone a comprehensive evaluation. The FYE team feels that it should be redesigned to meet the needs of incoming freshmen and the objectives of the First Year Experience.

**IX - Reading**

We recommend that a developmental reading course or courses be designed and taught.

*Rationale:*

As an Open Admissions University, we have an obligation to serve our students whose reading abilities are not at the college level. A reading course or courses can

significantly improve students' ability to handle difficult texts by providing a variety of reading strategies as well as by engaging students in higher level thinking related to their reading.

OR

We recommend that all freshmen enroll in a college level reading class to be taught as a co-requisite to a general education freshman class such as General Psychology, World Civilization, Principles of Reasoning or Introduction to Philosophy. This requirement will be waived for students with an adequate ACT score in reading (to be decided by the persons in charge of developing this course.)

*Rationale*

A reading course would be of benefit to most of our students. By taking a college-level reading class that is linked to a content course, students will be able to receive guided instruction in complex reading that they can immediately put to use. Making the reading class a co-requisite will also de-stigmatize it.

**X- Learning Communities**

We recommend that learning communities be expanded to provide more faculty and students the opportunity to work in a collaborative and nurturing setting toward their academic goals. Ideally, learning communities would be developed to engage many faculty members and to appeal to a large number of freshmen.

*Rationale*

Learning communities provide a unique opportunity for faculty to work together and for students to develop a stronger academic and social network with their peers and involved faculty. Students enrolled in learning communities at Lincoln have repeatedly

displayed better attendance, better end of semester GPA's and a greater sense of belonging with their peers.

### **XI- Program Evaluation**

We recommend that yearly evaluation of the First Year Experience be conducted to insure that implementation of particular facets of the program are meeting pre-established goals, objectives and performance indicators/benchmarks, and that adjustments are made along the way as new situations arise. The summative evaluation of the program will be coordinated by the person leading the First Year Experience Program.

#### *Rationale*

Formative and summative evaluations conducted with the goal of program improvement are critical to maintain quality, and to ensure relevance and the appropriate utilization of resources, and relevance.

### **XII- Transition from the Freshman Experience**

We recommend that the First Year Experience be defined in terms of academic attainment. Students will be considered freshmen until they have successfully completed 30 hours of course work.

#### *Rationale*

The definition of what constitutes the target population for the First Year Experience program facilitates the evaluation of objectives and future program development.

### **XIII- Faculty and Staff Development**

We recommend that all faculty and staff who serve freshmen be properly trained and supported in their academic and extra-curricular efforts as they seek to better serve students at this crucial period in their college career.

#### *Rationale*

At present we rely on the good will of faculty members to serve the needs of our students. As student populations change, the faculty and staff who meet them face-to-face every day need to have opportunities to refresh, rethink and adjust their pedagogic and service standards.

### **XIV- Academic Progress and Early Intervention**

We recommend that all freshman instructors utilize Blackboard as a grade posting system and provide students with guidelines so that the students can monitor their own progress week by week and identify problems prior to mid-term.

#### *Rationale*

Presently all formal intervention efforts are hinged on mid-term grades and conducted mostly by people other than faculty. Although most faculty members conduct interventions of their own, efforts should be made to create a comprehensive intervention program that utilizes institutional initiatives and faculty interactions with at-risk students.

### **XV- Monitoring of class attendance**

We recommend that all instructors teaching freshman courses be required to record and report attendance on a weekly basis to the FYE program leader.

*Rationale*

Among freshmen, class attendance has been identified as a very strong predictor of student success. Having access to this information can facilitate timely interventions.

**XVI- Freshman Housing****a. Communication with Resident Advisors**

We recommend that the Residential Advisors (RA's) connect with the incoming freshmen before the freshman arrive at Lincoln University (telephone, mailings, etc.)

*Rationale*

For most students their freshman year coincides with their departure from home. Creating a connection between residents and resident advisors before students come to college might eliminate some of the anxiety, facilitate communication and enhance the RA's ability to guide students through some of the changes they are expected to encounter during their first experience of living away from home.

**b. Residential Mentors**

We recommend that two peer mentors be placed on each floor along with the Residential Advisor, each mentor would receive a stipend at the end of each month. The mentors would be recommended by an instructor (current or past). Resident advisors would go through an interview process with 2 or 3 FYE committee members serving on the interview committee.

*Rationale*

We know that students seek information from upper classmen and by providing peer mentors in the residence hall we have a certain degree of control as to where students go for advice and information. Mentors can also facilitate programs and create opportunities for freshmen to interact with one another.

**c. Residence Halls**

We recommend that freshman male students be placed in Perry Hall and females in Dawson Hall. The second floor of Dawson would be for students with at least a 3.0 GPA out of high school. Floors 3-5 would serve the rest of the population.

*Rationale*

Placing freshman male students at Perry would allow them to stay more focused and significantly decrease the conduct violations of freshmen as they would be somewhat removed from the female residents at Dawson and parking lot activity. Placing freshman students with higher GPAs on one floor of Dawson will provide an alternative to honors housing which is mostly reserved for upper classmen.

**d. Deposit Deadlines**

We recommend that the University strictly adhere to the established deadlines for collection of housing deposits for the fall and spring semesters.

*Rationale*

A monetary deposit is one tangible sign of a student's commitment to attend Lincoln and to be housed in the residence halls. Adhering to the deadlines

will decrease the likelihood of rooms being held for students who do not intend to come or who have made no financial arrangements, freeing those rooms for serious applicants.

**e. Residential Program**

We recommend that an eight week program be created for resident students to guide and foster their involvement in university activities. At the end of the program there would be a rite of passage ceremony or some type of acknowledgement of completion.

*Rationale*

Students who come to live at the university straight from high school find themselves with a lot of idle time. A structured program of activities during the first eight weeks of the semester would allow us to guide some of their activities, build relationships with other freshmen, and experience those aspects of campus life that we choose to highlight for them.

## **The First Year Experience Committee**

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