Report from the
First Year Experience
Disappearing Task Force
January, 2008
INTRODUCTION

In the Fall of 2007, recognizing the need to address a number of concerns in the experience of first year students, Chancellor Jacqueline Johnson convened a task force made up of faculty, staff and students to review existing First Year Experience programs and initiatives at the University of Minnesota, Morris (See Appendix A). The goal of this Disappearing Task Force (DTF) was to review current and historical data and practices at UMM as well as best first year practices at other institutions in order to provide information to the UMM community about how the first year experience could be improved. This group was to share their findings and recommendations with the Chancellor in a report due back to her by the end of January, 2008.

Given the short timeline for this work and the unique governance structure of the University of Minnesota, Morris, the DTF realized that they could not solve all of the problems currently associated with the first year experience of UMM students. The DTF decided, therefore, to develop a “road map” toward improving the first year. The DTF felt that there were a number of major changes being implemented throughout the University in conjunction with the new strategic plan and that their report would be more useful as a guide for existing committees and administrative units to use in implementing these changes.

PROCESS

As a first step to get the process moving and provide some initial direction for how to navigate this charge, Dr. Randy Swing, the former Co-Director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College in Brevard, North Carolina; was invited to campus. Randy was invited to meet with a number of key faculty, staff and students while he was on campus (See Appendix B) and gave a public talk to which the entire campus was invited (See Appendix C & D). From these meetings he was asked to create notes that would give direction to the DTF (See Appendix E).

Following these initial directives offered by Dr. Swing, the DTF began its more direct exploration of the first year at UMM. Each member of the committee was provided with a copy of Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College by Betsy Barefoot, John Gardner, Marc Cutright, Libby Morris, Charles Schroeder, Stephen Schwartz, Michael Siegel and Randy Swing. Additionally, the DTF was divided into three work groups. The first group, under the leadership of Brenda Boever, set out to review best practices at similar institutions including the COPLAC, Morris 14, and other comparable schools (See Appendix F). The second group, led by Stephen Gross, began researching the historical and current first year initiatives at UMM, focusing primarily on the First Year Seminar (See Appendix G). The third group, chaired by Dave Swenson, was charged with reviewing existing and historical data about UMM students, focusing on the NSSE, CIRP and retention surveys that are held by institutional research (See Appendix H). Each group was asked to meet separately from the full DTF meetings, reporting back periodically and submit a final written report to be attached to the final DTF report.

The DTF realized that, though fairly representative of the campus at large, it was not a group that could speak for the entire campus population. It was clear that additional communication would
be necessary to give as many voices as possible the opportunity to be heard. Taking advantage
of current technology, the DTF developed both a blog and Facebook group. Questions were
regularly posted on these sites and the community was encouraged to provide feedback to the
DTF through this medium (All questions and responses are attached as Appendices I & J). For
further outreach to the community, the DTF decided to target a few more specific groups. At the
end of November, a forum was held to which all faculty teaching the current First Year Seminar
(FYS) course were invited. Though attendance at this forum was not as high as would have been
ideal, it provided a great opportunity for both the DTF members and the FYS faculty to share
thoughts and ideas about the first year seminar. In the beginning of December, several of the
DTF members met with the Morris Campus Student Association to share the current thinking of
the DTF and get additional feedback from student leaders. The final group to be consulted was
the Curriculum Committee of Campus Assembly. This committee was approached in the
beginning of December to discuss primarily the First Year Seminar program, as any
recommendations from the DTF would ultimately fall to this group, in conjunction with the
Dean, to be reviewed and developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the discussions and investigations conducted by the DTF a few problem areas became
quite clear. First, UMM has most of the elements of a successful first year experience, but lacks
the sort of central coordination that would allow these elements to work together in an
intentional way. Second, the existing First Year Seminar (FYS) program is in need of substantial
change. Though the DTF was charged with evaluating the entire first year experience, nearly
every conversation both within the DTF and with groups and individuals outside the DTF turned
to FYS as the single largest topic. As the most visible component of the first year experience, it
is natural that FYS should be a major focus of any discussion, but it was equally visible that
there were very few positive things being said about this program by any groups on campus.
Third, the first year experience at UMM currently ends after the first semester. There are no
initiatives aimed at first year students in the spring semester of their first year.

Through its review of existing programs and best practices, the DTF has prepared the following
recommendations for the UMM campus. These recommendations will be directed first at an
overall structure for the supervision of the First year Experience and then at the key programs
that are encompassed in this experience.

Structure
It is clear that the lack of any single individual or core structure to supervise the First year
Experience at UMM has resulted in a fractured series of programs that do not fully link together.
Though each of these programs has the best of intentions and goals for developing first year
students, without some sort of greater collaboration their efforts cannot be completely successful.
What this structure should look like at UMM is an interesting challenge, and the DTF discussed
several possibilities.

UMM’s history of shared governance lends to the idea of a committee charged with coordinating
the first year experience. However, the DTF was also concerned that in order to be successful

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January 2008
there needs to be one central coordinating individual who can build strong collaborative relationships with each of the key programs, develop regular assessment processes to monitor the program’s effectiveness, and be the central force overseeing the day-to-day operations of the experience. It is also the strong opinion of the DTF that this person needs to report through the academic affairs line, ideally with an Assistant or Associate Dean title. The DTF believes that without this level of academic influence it would be very difficult for someone responsible for these initiatives to assure the level of cooperation necessary from all facets of the UMM community. Clearly this will require a significant investment of new, or realignment of existing, resources for UMM. The importance of these initiatives as outlined in UMM’s strategic plan (Appendix K) and the importance of greater retention merit this level of investment by the University.

In addition to assuring cooperation from various campus programs and offices, an Assistant or Associate Dean would be effective in helping develop the pedagogy for faculty teaching the First Year Seminar. Studies done by the Policy Center on the First Year of College have shown that “Students are most satisfied with seminars that contain a high level of engaging pedagogy” (Appendix C). The DTF believes that there is a need to assist UMM’s faculty in developing more engaging teaching techniques to better connect with first year students. An Assistant or Associate Dean of First Year Experience would be able to help identify those faculty who have the greatest contact with first year students (instructors of FYS, College Writing and other first year heavy intro courses) and working in conjunction with the Faculty Center and other University resources, construct an institute or program to assist these faculty in developing pedagogy that is more engaging to first year students.

New Student Orientation
There are several concerns about the current New Student Orientation program, and there are many successful models that could provide guidance as we review this program. The primary concern of the DTF was that there needs to be more academic content to Orientation and more intentional interaction with faculty. The current goals of the orientation program are to: assist all new students in their transition to the institution, expose new students to the educational opportunities within UMM, orient new students into the academic and co-curricular life of the institution, contribute to the retention of new students, and integrate new students into the life of the institution. These goals continue to be appropriate but methods of achieving them should be reviewed.

The DTF encourages the following short-term recommendations to Orientation for implementation in the Fall of 2008:

- Conduct a thorough review of the existing program looking for sessions that are either redundant or better addressed at another time.
- Communicate more intentionally with Residential Life to assure that messages conveyed by Orientation Leaders match messages conveyed by Resident Advisors and are not duplicated in a way that becomes repetitive to first year students.
- Consider making FYS classes also function as orientation groups. This would reduce the number of peers student might connect with immediately, but would give the group a longer contact time and assist in greater bonding across social groups.

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• Review and possibly expand the existing Academic Choices program to better help students understand the opportunities available to them.

The DTF recommends that the following longer term issues be explored for possible implementation in 2009 in conjunction with other greater First Year Experience changes:
• Create additional structured opportunities for student and faculty interaction. One suggestion was to host a dinner for faculty and students similar to the graduation brunch where students could meet with faculty from a Division of their major.
• Consider expanding the length of the New Student Orientation program (the Twin Cities Campus’ new Welcome Week may be a model for a longer orientation), or developing a pre-orientation program similar to the University of North Carolina, Ashville Fusion program (detailed in appendix F) or Pomona College’s Orientation Adventure.
• Continue to further link New Student Registration and New Student Orientation in more intentional ways.

Residence Life
Being a residential campus is a core strength of the UMM experience. For many students their floor community is the primary group with whom they identify. Because 95% of first year students live on campus, the residential life program for first year students needs to be a key element of the first year experience. It is clear that the current residence life program works hard to build community between students in the halls, but there is need for greater focus on the first year student communities. This program also offers the greatest opportunity for continuing support and programming of the first year into the spring semester.

The DTF encourages the following recommendations for Residence Life at UMM:
• Continue to use theme floors as a tool to build community among first year students. Early feedback from the two theme floors established in the 2007-08 year has been very positive and shows great potential for further strengthening the residence hall experience.
• Communicate more intentionally with New Student Orientation to assure that messages conveyed by Orientation Leaders match messages conveyed by Resident Advisors and are not duplicated in a way that becomes repetitive to first year students.
• Work with the proposed new First year Experience management structure to develop and implement a more intentional approach to programming in first year halls that supports and coordinates with larger first year initiatives.
• Consider opportunities to further involve faculty in the residence halls. Randy Swing suggested the possibility of creating a Faculty in Residence program (appendix E).
• Consider broadening the role of one of the existing Hall Directors to focus more specifically on the First year Experience and lead these initiatives for the Office of Residence Life.

First Year Seminar (FYS)
The First Year Seminar at UMM was the largest issue of discussion by the DTF. Whether because it is the most universally recognized element of the first year experience, or because it has the most challenges, this topic seemed to become the focus of nearly every conversation. It
is clear that there is a lack of consistency between the existing first year seminar offerings, and this is the single largest complaint of students. Faculty complaints focused primarily around the concept that the number of extraneous expectations (including the common experiences of the convocation and jamboree) placed on them prevented them from having the time necessary to pursue the content of their course with significant rigor.

UMM has had a very progressive history of creating strong first year programs, with the first launched in 1967. A historical review of these programs (appendix G) has show that many of them have been very experimental in nature. There is also a very clear pattern that all seem to follow: new programs are introduced with much excitement and energy but by their fourth or fifth year, this energy has begun to wane and general dissatisfaction with the program has risen in the campus consciousness.

The DTF feels strongly that the First Year Seminar program should continue. However, there are several key characteristics and components of the program that need to be evaluated and addressed. With an understanding that the strategic plan for UMM calls for the campus to review and rethink its curriculum recognizing changing demands and needs, it is clear that a discussion of the First Year Seminar program could be central to this process. Toward this end, the DTF recommends the following changes to First Year Seminar for implementation in the Fall of 2008:

- Elimination of the Jamboree. There is no clear understanding or appreciation of this program among either students or faculty. The funds that currently support the jamboree would be better utilized to support the work of re-structuring the FYS.
- Evaluation of and possible elimination of the first year convocation. It is unclear what the first year convocation speaker does other than draw the entire first year class together for a single common experience. If the speaker happens to address a topic related to the FYS course it can be beneficial, but typically only a handful of the 22 or so topics do relate and this disconnect only supports the concern of inconsistency among students. The convocation could be used as support for a common reading and tied more to the FYS “lab” concepts discussed further in this report.
- Provide professional development to faculty teaching FYS. It is clear that engaging pedagogy is necessary for a first year seminar program to be effective. A special retreat or regular meetings to engage the FYS faculty in discussions of how to best teach to first year students would be an invaluable tool. Under the Inquiry program faculty who taught Inquiry met regularly to talk about these issues and found this interaction to be very stimulating and helpful. Some faculty still use techniques learned from these sessions when they taught in the Inquiry program.

There are a number of very strong models from which to draw when thinking of new or different possibilities for the UMM FYS program. Based on the research of the best practice group, the DTF strongly encourages the Curriculum Committee and Dean to consider the following concepts as they work to redevelop the seminar for implementation in the future:

- Develop a systematic method to deliver information to students about how to succeed in college. Though the DTF does not recommend that UMM change its seminar to a “college 101” type program, there is a clear need to systematically provide all students with the transitional support and information that they need to be successful. The
proposes the concept of a one credit “lab” to accompany a more academically rigorous FYS. By moving co-curricular and academic support content from the seminar itself and to a supporting “lab,” FYS faculty are free to focus on the content of their courses. This “lab” can then be coordinated by other university staff and student mentors to provide the transition and support content necessary without taking away from the faculty-driven content.

- Consider the possibility of having FYS faculty also act as advisors to their students for the first year. This poses a few challenges in that these faculty would have to be trained in how to advise students in programs such as biology and education in which failure to take the right classes in the first year can result in a mandatory 5th year of school. The positive impact of all first year students seeing their advisor at least twice a week and gaining the ability to make connections with them would be far greater than many first year students do currently.

- Develop clear and consistent outcomes for the FYS. The DTF believes that content should be left to greater faculty discretion, but that clear and measurable outcomes should be identified for this course. These outcomes would be a useful tool in helping to assure that all courses are consistent and resolve student concerns of work loads that vary greatly from one section to the next.

- Evaluate the success of the current common theme. There are arguments both pro and con to having a theme that is common to all sections of the FYS. Similar to work load, consistency of implementation of the current common theme is suspect. To a great extent the current theme of human diversity, characterized in the current FYS goals as “to help students become aware of the lenses through which they perceive and recognize that their perceptions are not universal,” is of great importance to UMM and represents one of our core values as an institution; however, this theme is not always relatable to all courses and as such is not always effectively taught to all students. A greater opportunity may be to identify several theme possibilities based on the current initiatives of the University and ask all FYS courses to relate to at least one of these.

- Consider the possibility of building an FYS program that links to other key first year courses in a meaningful way. The most obvious possibility would be College Writing, but there are other examples of successful connections that could be studied as models. An FYS seminar linked to a College Writing class would provide greater faculty support to help students develop their writing skills as they work on writing assignments in their FYS course and provide greater content matter for students to write about in their College Writing course. Studies by the Policy Center on the First Year of College, have shown that “seminars that are linked to other courses produce higher student-reported ratings on learning outcomes and satisfaction measures than seminars that are not linked.” (Appendix C). This could also be a viable way of extending the first year experience into the spring semester, if a course sequence was developed.

- The process of selecting FYS faculty needs to be addressed. There are many UMM faculty who would like to teach FYS but cannot due to staffing and load issues, while faculty in other disciplines are required to teach FYS in order to have a full load. The staffing issues that cause these situations are complex at best, but the FYS program should be an intentional opportunity for first year students to gain access to some of the more distinguished faculty UMM has to offer, and a chance for these exceptional faculty members to reach first year students rather than just teaching upper division courses.

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• Consider whether FYS should be a 4-credit course that could meet general education requirements beyond just the FYS requirement. This would help students to see this course as equal in importance to their other courses and support the importance of the course’s rigor. The DTF does express concerns, however, that this would create staffing problems with faculty course loads that would have to be overcome.

• The DTF would encourage the exploration of developing intro courses that are specifically designed for first year students that could become a second semester extension of the FYS into the spring semester. Paul Meyer’s Biology 1111 course is already a good model for such a course. Again the DTF approaches this suggestion cautiously as it would have significant impact on discipline staffing and the curriculum as a whole.

Additional Common Experiences
Portfolio
The student engagement planner currently being developed to accompany the grad planner offers an incredible opportunity to be a useful tool in allowing first year students to intentionally choose, track, and reflect on their curricular and co-curricular experiences. The DTF would like to see first year experience portfolio set up with this new tool that would help students capture their emotional, intellectual, and professional development. A series of reflective writings at key times such as Orientation, the end of their first semester and first year could be captured by this system and reviewed with advisors to help students better understand their interdisciplinary and co-curricular learning. This tool could be used to expand efforts of the first year into the spring semester and ultimately for their entire UMM experience.

Upper-class Mentors
Ask any student who they seek advice from on a regular basis and though they may say their academic advisor or a favorite professor, however, chances are that their first response and most utilized advisors are their peers. It is clear that we should attempt to capitalize on these relationships and set up positive peer mentoring systems. The first and most natural thought of the DTF was to capitalize on the existing relationships between Orientation Group Leaders and new student orientation groups. By connecting these groups more with FYS and involving the group leaders in the on going “lab” activities or perhaps even utilizing them at teaching assistants in FYS, we could extend these relationships and provide a more structured peer mentoring component to the first year experience.

Common Book
It is common at many schools to have a book that all faculty, staff and new students read each year. This sort of common reading would provide a number of exciting opportunities for UMM. A book selected by a campus committee in the spring for the following year would give a common theme to an entire class of new students. It could be used as a topic for writing in the student’s portfolio or courses. All students attending orientation would have something in common that they could talk about. Faculty could be invited into the residence halls to lead small group discussions of the book. The book could be the topic of a common FYS convocation (if that program is continued) or a first speaker in a Campus Activities Council Convocation series annually. Ideally, we would even be able to bring the books author to
campus. The idea surfaced that this book could be read over the semester break and be a focus for a series of programs aimed at first year students in the spring as well. This timeline did have some drawbacks and there were concerns that students would be less enthused about such a reading during that period.

Cougar Compass
There are many questions about how clearly expectations and standards of behavior are imparted to first year students. The implementation of the New Student Guide put out by admissions has been quite successful in helping students to understand everything that is expected of them and that they need to do before they arrive at UMM. The DTF has theorized that perhaps a similar guide book (the Cougar Compass) could be developed that would help students to navigate their first year. The Cougar Compass would be a user-friendly guide to university policies, expectations and life planning. It would contain helpful tips for academic and personal success at UMM. The DTF would like to see the student code of conduct included in this document expressed as ideals students should hold for themselves and encourages the UMM student body to think about creating an honor code that could more clearly pass along these expectations to each generation of students. Single page summaries from each discipline that help them to build an arc of development for each student and the discipline into a liberal arts education framework of life planning are also encouraged by the DTF. This would greatly help students to understand how their liberal arts education fits into a future career and life after college. This document could be relatively inexpensive to produce and could address everything from appropriate classroom behavior to how to change their major.

Learning Outcomes
UMM is currently in the process of developing learning outcomes for its students. The DTF feels that this is an essential process and will help the entire campus to better evaluate its goals and mission; within these graduation level outcomes there should also to be a series of benchmark expectations for first year students. If we can clearly articulate the outcomes for all UMM graduates, we should also set some measurable and achievable progress levels that first year students should achieve en route to these graduation outcomes.

CONCLUSION
It is clear from all research, that the first year of college is pivotal. Students will succeed or fail based on the connections they make and support they receive in this first year. It is imperative that UMM develop a strong and supportive first year experience if we are to meet our enrollment goals and continue to draw the caliber of students we would like. Many of the recommendations put forth in this report are focused only on the next few years but the DTF is confident that these will provide the necessary first steps required to build a truly exceptional first year experience for UMM.
Appendix A

Charge and membership of the First Year Experience DTF

Contemporary thinking in relation to improving student achievement and student retention focuses on the significance of experiences in the first year. In an effort to strengthen the UMM first year student experience and in an effort to promote student retention from the first to the second year, a “disappearing task force” will be convened in fall 2007. The DTF will consist of those current members of the First Year Experience Subcommittee of the Student Services Committee of Campus Assembly who agree to serve. It will also include additional faculty members, including several from the Curriculum Committee. The following comprises its specific charge:

1. Survey and chronicle current UMM initiatives related to the first year experience.
2. Review and summarize major findings from existing institutional data (from NSSE; from CIRP, for example) relevant to documenting student experience in the first year.
3. Provide an assessment and evaluation of our current and historic successes and challenges in relation to the first year.
4. Research and provide examples of best practice from other institutions in relation to the first year experience and place UMM first year initiatives in this context.
5. Consider the role of first year seminar in relation to the whole first year experience with the specific purpose of recommending the continuation, alteration, or discontinuation of seminar.
6. Make general recommendations regarding continued and changed practice in relation to the first year experience to the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellors for Academic and Student Affairs, the Curriculum Committee and the Student Services Committee.
7. Include in its recommendations those related to administrative structure and leadership for the first year experience and those related to resources.

Membership for the DTF
Director of Student Activities - Dave Swenson, Chair
VC Student Affairs - Sandy Olson-Loy
Associate Director of Residential Life - Julie Phelps
Resident Director – Heather Nicole Christian
Coordinator of Academic Advising - Brenda Boever
Multi-Ethnic Mentorship Coordinator – Chris Butler
Assistant Dean of Faculty - Leslie Meek
Faculty Humanities – Tammy Berberi
Faculty Science – Van Gooch
Faculty Social Science – Steve Gross
Faculty Education – Pam Solvie
FYS Coordinator – Tracy Anderson
Resident Advisor – Tegan Peterson
Orientation Group Leader/Curriculum Committee – Kim Ukura
Task Force Secretary and First Year Student – Katie Kuenn
### Appendix B

**Agenda for Randy Swing’s visit**

**Sunday, September 30, 2007**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
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<tr>
<td>3:36 pm</td>
<td>Arrive at MSP</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00 pm</td>
<td>Arrive Morris, check into LaFave House</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 pm</td>
<td>RA &amp; Student Focus Group</td>
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**Monday, October 1, 2007**

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<td>8:00 am</td>
<td>Breakfast with Vice Chancellors group</td>
<td>Prairie Lounge</td>
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<td>9:30 am</td>
<td>Student Support Services and Advising, Community Services</td>
<td>Community Services Conference room</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Behmler Conference Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30 am</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Prairie Lounge</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 pm</td>
<td>Lunch with Division Chairs</td>
<td>Prairie Lounge</td>
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<td>Retention, Academic Alert &amp; Scholastic</td>
<td>Moccasin Flower</td>
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<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>First Year Seminar Staff &amp; Curriculum Committee</td>
<td>Moccasin Flower</td>
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<td>4:00 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
<td>Dinner with First Year Experience Committee</td>
<td>LaFave House</td>
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<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Open Presentation: First Year Matters</td>
<td>Imholte 109</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30 pm</td>
<td>MCSA, OGLs, Mentors</td>
<td>Moccasin Flower Room</td>
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**Tuesday, October 2, 2007**

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<td>8:00 am</td>
<td>Breakfast with Student Affairs Staff</td>
<td>Prairie Lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 am</td>
<td>Faculty who work with first year heavy classes</td>
<td>Moccasin Flower Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 am</td>
<td>Student Services Committee</td>
<td>Moccasin Flower Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 pm</td>
<td>Lunch in TMC (anyone welcome to attend)</td>
<td>TMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Depart from Morris</td>
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Appendix C
Handout from Randy Swing’s meeting with Scholastic and Curriculum Committees
Selected Findings FYI 2001*
(National survey of learning outcomes - first year seminars)

One third of responding students were highly satisfied with their first year seminar; 55% were moderately satisfied, and 13% were not satisfied. Satisfaction ratings were about equal for males and females. As a satisfaction benchmark, 46% said they would highly recommend the course to others.

Students are most satisfied with seminars that contain a high level of engaging pedagogy including efficient use of class time, topics of interest to students, and meaningful homework.

Undergraduate teaching assistants are widely used in seminars at institutions that score highest on seminar pedagogy and overall course satisfaction.

Transition-theme and special academic-theme seminars are about equally rated on use of Engaging Pedagogy. A smaller percentage of discipline seminars are reported to use Engaging Pedagogy.

Students in 1 contact hour, compared to 2 or 3 contact hour formats, reported lower gains on all factors except increased knowledge of campus policies and campus services. Students in 2 contact hour courses reported higher or equal learning outcomes on most factors of student engagement. Mean scores were higher for 3 contact hour classes than for 1 or 2 contact hour formats for improvement in critical thinking and academic skills (writing, reading, oral presentations, etc.).

Only 18% reported that the seminar contributed highly (factor mean > 5.50) to gains in study skill strategies. Nearly 12% reported that the seminar provided little assistance in this area (factor mean < 2.50).

27% reported that the seminar highly improved their critical thinking skills in other courses.

89% reported taking the class increased their connections with faculty (62% moderately, 27% highly).

87% reported that the seminar improved their relationships with peers (54% moderately, 32% highly).

88% reported that the seminar improved the degree to which they established priorities and managed time (63% moderately, 25% highly).

Response to first year seminars varied across ethnic/racial groups. White students reported a greater mean level of satisfaction with their college/university than any other ethnic/racial group. Latino/Spanish students & African-American students reported the highest ratings on each of the course learning outcomes. The results were mixed for Asian-Americans, Native Americans, and other groups.

The Linked First year Seminar: An Educational Environment that Works!

Summary:

Seminars that are linked to other courses produce higher student-reported ratings on learning outcomes and satisfaction measures than seminars that are not linked. The gains from structurally linking seminars to another course are significant on every factor measured by FYI, with the greatest gains in improving connections between peers/others and increasing satisfaction with the seminar. Students at institutions where first year seminars are linked to other courses report a lower chance they will transfer to another college for the next academic year.

Although linking seminars with other courses is associated with positive outcome and satisfaction scores, only 11% of institutions in the FYI study report linking most (80% or more) of their sections to other courses compared to 46% of institutions that link few or none (20% or less) of their sections.

Key Findings:

1. Linked courses are associated with higher mean scores on every outcome/satisfaction factor.
2. Students at institutions where most seminars are linked to other courses reported a lower chance that they will transfer to another college for the next academic year – (ANOVA $F_{1,22511} = 101.24, p = .000$).
3. The greatest difference in mean scores for linked, compared to unlinked courses, is in “improved connections with peers/others”, and “overall satisfaction with the course.”
4. The smallest difference in mean scores for linked compared to unlinked courses is in “having a sense of belonging and acceptance,” “improved knowledge of campus policies,” and “increased out-of-class engagement.”

A larger proportion of students at institutions that linked courses gave high ratings to their seminars and university experiences than students at institutions that do not link the seminar with other courses. The percent of students reporting high levels of satisfaction or positive learning outcomes ranges from 1.4% to 17% more in linked than non-linked seminars as shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FYI Factors</th>
<th>Percent of students giving highest mean rating (5.50 or higher) to factors</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Connections with Peers/Others</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with College/University</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Satisfaction with Course</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Services</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Higher Order Thinking</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Included Engaging Pedagogy</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness &amp; Spirituality</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Managing Priorities/Time</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Student Skills &amp; Practices</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>21.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of Belonging/Acceptance</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Connections with Faculty</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Improved Academic/Cognitive Skills</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 20% or fewer sections are linked with another course
** 80% or more sections are linked with another course

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10 LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course Improved Academic/Cognitive Skills .......................................................... Reliability: 0.84
Q4. Course Improved: Writing skills
Q5. Course Improved: Reading skills
Q6. Course Improved: Decision-making skills
Q7. Course Improved: Computer skills
Q8. Course Improved: Oral presentation skills

Course Improved Critical Thinking ....................................................................... Reliability: 0.85
Q18. Course Improved: Ability to see multiple sides of issues
Q19. Course Improved: Identifying solutions for complex problems
Q20. Course Improved: Evaluating the quality of opinions and facts

Course Improved Connections with Faculty (in my other courses) ...................... Reliability: 0.80
Q21. Course Improved: Understanding faculty expectations of students
Q22. Course Improved: Feedback sought from instructors
Q23. Course Improved: Communications with instructors outside of class

Course Improved Study Strategies ..................................................................... Reliability: 0.85
Q1. Course Improved: Understanding of academic strengths
Q2. Course Improved: Test preparation skills
Q3. Course Improved: The ability to find items through the library
Q13. Course Improved: Reviewing class notes before the next class meeting (in my other courses)
Q14. Course Improved: Completing homework assignments on time (in my other courses)
Q15. Course Improved: Studying with other students (in my other courses)
Q16. Course Improved: Taking effective notes in class (in my other courses)
Q17. Course Improved: Coping with test anxiety (in my other courses)

Course Improved Connections with Peers .......................................................... Reliability: 0.87
Q9. Course Improved: Efforts to get to know students in classes
Q10. Course Improved: The ability to meet new people with common interests
Q11. Course Improved: The ability to establish close friendships with peers

Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement ..................................................... Reliability: 0.85
Q53. Course Increased: Participation in campus-sponsored organizations
Q54. Course Increased: Contributing to the success of campus-sponsored organizations
Q55. Course Increased: Volunteering time for worthwhile causes
Q56. Course Increased: Attending campus cultural events

Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies ............................................. Reliability: 0.86
Q24. Course Increased Understanding of: College/University rules regarding academic honesty
Q25. Course Increased Understanding of: The grading system
Q26. Course Increased Understanding of: Academic probation policies
Q27. Course Increased Understanding of: Registration procedures
Q28. Course Increased Understanding of: Financial aid procedures

Course Improved Knowledge of Academic Services ......................................... Reliability: 0.87
Q29. Course Increased Understanding of: The role of the academic advisor
Q30. Course Increased Understanding of: How to obtain academic assistance
Q31. Course Increased Understanding of: How to obtain a tutor
Q32. Course Increased Understanding of: Available library resources

Course Improved Managing Time/Priorities ...................................................... Reliability: 0.88
Q37. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of establishing personal goals  
Q48. Course Increased: Participation in classroom discussions  
Q49. Course Increased: Preparation for tests well in advance  
Q50. Course Increased: Establishing an effective study schedule  
Q51. Course Increased: Setting priorities to accomplish what is most important  
Q52. Course Increased: Organizing time to meet responsibilities  

Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness  
Q12. Course Improved: The ability to deal with stress  
Q33. Course Improved Understanding of: College students' sexual issues  
Q34. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of alcohol consumption  
Q35. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of drug use  
Q36. Course Improved Understanding of: The impact of exercising regularly  

3 Measures of Course Delivery  

Usefulness of Course Readings  
Q45. Course Readings Were: Relevant  
Q46. Course Readings Were: Interesting  
Q47. Course Readings Were: Helpful  

Course Included Engaging Pedagogy  
Q38. Course/Experience Included: A variety of teaching methods  
Q39. Course/Experience Included: Meaningful class discussions  
Q40. Course/Experience Included: Challenging assignments  
Q41. Course/Experience Included: Productive use of classroom time  
Q42. Course/Experience Included: Encouragement to speak in class  
Q43. Course/Experience Included: Encouragement for students to work together  
Q44. Course/Experience Included: Meaningful homework  

Overall Course Effectiveness  
Q65. Overall Satisfaction with Course: Included interesting subject matter  
Q66. Overall Satisfaction with Course: Contributed to the ability to succeed academically  
Q67. Overall Satisfaction with Course: Contributed to the ability to adjust to the college social environment  
Q68. Overall Satisfaction with Course: Covered topics important to student  
Q69. Overall Satisfaction with Course: Student would recommend this course to other first year students  

2 Measures of Satisfaction with the College/University  

Sense of Belonging/Acceptance  
Q57. The Degree That: Student is accepted by students at this college/university  
Q58. The Degree That: Is it easy for make new friends at this college/university  
Q59. The Degree That: Student is able to identify other students with similar interests  

Satisfaction with the College/University  
Q60. The Degree That: Student wants to return to this college/university for the next fall term  
Q61. The Degree That: Student would recommend this college/university to a friend  
Q62. The Degree That: Student's college experience was a high-quality learning experience  
Q63. The Degree That: Student's college experience was a positive experience  
Q64. Comparing Expense with Quality of Education: Rate the value of the investment made in the education at this school
Appendix D
PowerPoint Slides and hand out from Randy Swing’s open talk.

First Year Matters: Building a Strong Foundation for Undergraduate Success

University of Minnesota Morris
October 1, 2007

Randy L. Swing,
Co-Director & Senior Scholar
Policy Center on the First Year of College

Why do I care about first-year students?
Because education changed my life!

- First-generation high school graduate
- First-generation college graduate
- "High Risk" First-Year Student
  - Enrolled at a community college
  - Academically, marginally prepared
  - Worked full time
  - Undecided major
  - Low income family

My favorite question for students...

Who at (Institution) knows your name?

Think back to the 6th week of your first college year....
Predictors of Student Success...
Who Students Are
What Students Do
What Institutions Do

ut characteristics
Region, Economy, Opportunity
Engagement, time on task, work
Policies, practices, structures

Imagine An Institution...
What we CONTROL
Institutional Policies, Structures, Practices, Procedures
What we can CHANGE
What students do
Student success
What we can CONTINUE

Foundational Dimensions
Nine Aspirational Statements of Excellence
Cognitive Growth in College

• Community colleges may be fostering about the same learning and cognitive growth as four-year colleges and universities.
• Work under 15 hours (on or off campus) has no negative impact on cognitive growth.
• Exposure to diversity of people produced greater gains in cognitive development, especially critical thinking in first-year students.
• Faculty organization and preparation for class is associated with higher gains and cognitive development.

Who advises students at UM Morris?

Answer:
The Power Of Peer Effects

Randomly assigned lab partners

"Peer effects are real and significantly influence how much students learn."

"Students with academically strong [lab partners] simply do better academically than their own SAT's would predict. They tend to "overperform" significantly."

Source: Gordon C. Winston – Chronicle Review, 11/2/05/07

How campuses use undergraduates (peers) in first-year services

- Tutoring
- FYS
- Advising

Percent of campuses

* data from NSSE, NSC Study, 2006-2007
  Source: Center for Postsecondary Research/NSC, Center on the First Year of College
Going to class improves student grades!

Early Interventions
University of Mississippi
Freshman Absence-Based Intervention (pilot)
Experimental design (treatment & control groups)
Students missing 2 classes/8 weeks reported
Graduate student made personal contact

Cum GPA = C or better (end of term)

A Study of Attendance Patterns (Part II)
University of Mississippi
Pilot taken campus-wide
Students who missed 2 classes/8 weeks were reported
Residence Hall Advisor made personal contact

Cum GPA = C or better (end of term)
A Third Study...

The first class absence, especially if it occurred within the first 4 weeks, was the greatest predictor of lower GPA and non-persistence.

(Especially if it was because of a “minor illness.”)


Special Attendance Policy for First-Year Students

- 66% No-Policy
- 7% Attend all classes
- 7% Attend most classes
- 10% Attend some classes
- 10% Attend few classes
- 4% Attend rarely

Student Engagement

Robert Pace - George Kuh -

How students spend their time.... Participation in meaningful educational activities....

Time on task = learning
Economies of Time

Research by Karl & Karen Schilling
FIPSE grant
Miami University of Ohio
+7 other institutions
Cross Sectional study
1st year and 4th year students
Students kept time logs

Comparison of Economies of Time

1st Year Students
- Economies of time do not change from the 1st to 4th year.
- Students exchange time within segments, rather than across segments

4th Year Students

created data from Schilling study

Academic Momentum

Credits in First Year
"Less than 20 credits by the end of the first calendar year is a serious drag on degree completion."

Continuous Enrollment
"Continuous enrollment increases the probability of degree completion by 43%."

Cliff Adelman The Toolbox Revised
Academic Momentum

Withdraw without penalty
Withdrawal from 1 of 5 courses attempted... "cuts the probability of completing the degree in half"

Summer Term
"More than 60%...enrolled in summer terms"

End of first-year Grade Point Average
GPA above 2.25 and upward trend

Return or Purposeful Transfer
Transfering is not necessarily bad.


How much failure should we tolerate?

1. Identify the 5 courses that annually enroll the largest number of new students.
2. Determine the DFWI rate for each course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4-yr colleges &amp; universities (concerned, active in FYE movement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2-yr institutions/systems (25+ campuses – concerned, active in FYE movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five Course with
Highest Enrollment of New Students

Average DFWI Rate:
24% (4-yr) 35% (2-yr)

Range of DFWI Rates:
1% to 70% (4-yr) 9% to 68% (2-yr)

Percent of Courses Over 33% DFWI:
21% (4-yr) 60% (2-yr)

Source: Kathy Merkey, Policy Center on the First Year of College – unpublished 2005
Retention and GPA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Year GPA</th>
<th>Bachelors in 6 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2.25</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.25 – 3.25</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3.25</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Descriptive Summary of First-Year-Beginning Postsecondary Students: Six Years Later (NCES 2000-031)

Student Time on Task

Engage Student Workers
Work Study Funded Internships
Meaningful Campus Employment
Feedback and Training

First-Year Initiative Benchmarking Survey

72 colleges & universities
Over 41,294 students
Over 1,961 course sections

FYI is owned by Educational Benchmarking, Inc.
http://www.webesi.com
How many contact hours per week are best?

Answer...

It all depends...
on your goals for the course.

FYI Findings....
1 contact hour courses
   Orientation to Services

2 contact hour courses
   Study Strategies
   Peer Connections
   Faculty Connections

3 contact hour courses
   Academic Skills
   Critical Thinking

Details....
(OVER ACHIEVING 1-hr courses)
Some 1 contact-hour courses had results that were equal to the average for 3-hour courses.

(UNDER ACHIEVING 3-hr courses)
Some 3 contact-hour courses had results that were as low as the average for 1-hour courses.
Structures did NOT account for most of the variation in outcomes...
Something else mattered more.

Engaging Pedagogy
- A variety of teaching methods
- Meaningful class discussions
- Challenging assignments
- Productive use of classroom time
- Encouragement to speak in class
- Encouragement for students to work together
- Meaningful homework

Testing Cycles
Compared two courses in two different years - same teacher, pace, book, labs, and same final exam.

Year 1 Class
- Exam 6th week (75 minutes)
- Exam 12th week (75 minutes)
- 2 hour final exam (40% of final grade)

Year 2 Class
- Exams 2nd, 4th, 6th week (25 minutes each)
- Exam 8th, 10th, 12th weeks (25 minutes each)
- 2 hour final exam (40% of final grade)

1.5 letter grade higher

Source: Myers, C.C. and Myers SM, 2006

Students like frequent testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>9 Exams</th>
<th>Bi-Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawals</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this instructor compare...</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% responding “One of the best”</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this course compare...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% responding “One of the best or better than most”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Myers, C.C. and Myers SM, 2006
Spaced learning is better than massed practice (cramming)

- More is learned when students space their study (Bowerman & Rederovitch, 1999)
- What is learned is retained longer (Wiegand, 2001)
- Advantages vary by learning styles
  - Frequent testing increased grades for procrastinators and lowest GPAs

Should all teachers test more frequently?

- Habaryan, 2003 – weekly quizzes in biology
  - did not improve performance
  - average grade of 66% discouraged students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Re-thinking testing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grading students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing student/faculty communication &amp; connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback to faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building academic confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Myers, C C and Myers SM, 2006

Ideas to Consider...

1. Could UMM leverage student WORK to increase student success?

2. Could UMM increase the time students spend on educationally meaningful activities – in and out of the classroom?
Ideas to Consider...

3 What if UMM actively managed the most powerful learning resource on campus (students) to increase student learning and success?

4 What if UMM intervened when students missed the first class?

Ideas to Consider...

5 What if UMM focused on policies and structures that increase academic momentum?

6 What if UMM focused on DFWI rates in high enrollment freshman courses?
Appendix E

To: Dave Swenson
From: Randy Swing
Date October 31, 2007
Re: Notes from visit to University of Minnesota Morris

Let me start with a little context. I hope that this message will be helpful to you by capturing in writing some of the thoughts that I expressed while I was on campus. While I think that the intention of my visit to UMM was to serve as a resource by answering questions and sharing information about how other institutions organize the first year of college, I couldn’t help but form some opinions about UMM along the way. I didn’t see my role as evaluating the campus and preparing a formal report, so I offer these comments with full understanding that these are general impressions. For example, I have some thoughts about your first year seminar, but I did not review syllabi, assignments, etc. as would be required in a true program review. I hope these comments will spur local consideration of issues as I trust the judgment of the “locals” to be better than what I might offer from my brief visit to campus.

In the spirit of sharing impressions, let me jump right in.

The first year seminar doesn’t appear to be functioning very well as students have lots of complaints about the course and faculty don’t seem to agree on the purpose of the course. I assume that other academic units undergo a periodic internal program review process and wonder if first year seminars are scheduled for such in the future. At the least, I would recommend that a faculty/student affairs committee review the past year’s syllabi to determine the degree to which shared objectives are present.

It would be easy to suggest that there is need for a strategic re-thinking of the course and to move toward a more uniform offering. However, I don’t want to automatically assume that UMM needs a first year seminar. I don’t know the needs of your students well enough to be sure if there are shared needs that any one course could address. A bolder move would be to assure that new students have common experiences in small class settings within in the core curriculum such that the need for first year seminar vanishes. Whether to revitalize first year seminar or address student needs in the regular curriculum should be based on a deep understanding of what your students need to improve their chances of successfully adapting to college and life at UMM. I think that UMM could have a first year experience that gives the institution a unique marketing advantage, but doing so while having a common course numbering system with UM will require considerable creativity.

Note that changing first year seminar could have impact on your US News ranking since number of small classes is one of the criteria. Your IR Officer should be able to determine if the impact would be significant.

I’m not sure that UMM is maximizing the incredible opportunity it has in being a highly residential campus. Students staying in large numbers on the weekend is only a dream at many other campuses. I would like to see student learning goals for all out of class activities and more involvement of faculty in campus life outside the classroom and on weekends. Could faculty
apartments be added to residence halls so that there was some faculty-in-residence? Could there be a more seamless interface between academic and student affairs? How could students “live the life” of a liberally educated person while at UMM? Could more upper-level students be housed on campus so that there were additional chances for new students to have juniors and seniors as role models? Should UMM actively communicate why your offerings combine to form a special kind of first year that can only be found at UMM?

I heard about the work UMM has done and is doing to define learning outcomes expected of graduates. To what degree have benchmarks been set for learning in the first year? How does the campus know if first year efforts are adequately moving students toward the larger goals set for graduates?

I’m use to hearing complaints about food service, but I was easily convinced that UMM is not facing the “usual” student complaint about food. On a residential campus, food matters. I hope you take these complaints seriously.

How can the campus get more bang for the entire campus from study abroad experiences? You have a lot of students with international experiences that are not shared with other students in a meaningful way. My sense is that UMM could make international experiences something more than individual experiences for students by providing opportunities for students who have completed international trips to share their experience with other students. Could students have greater opportunity to participate in the classroom as peer-teachers?

I heard from students that life centers on their residence hall. On the one hand this is great news that students are finding friends. On the other hand it means that the campus feels fragmented from the student perspective. Additional focus groups might reveal the degree to which students do mix between residence halls and what challenges and opportunities exist to build a “one campus” feeling.

My sense is that students very quickly divide into two camps – those that become very involved with clubs and organizations and those that do no. I’m not sure if persistence and graduation rates can be determined by which camp new students join, but that is a researchable question.

Because of the importance of residential life at UMM, I encourage the campus to invest in graduate trained staff for all residence halls. I’m confident that students are housed in a safe residential environment, but I’m not as confident that staff members with 4-year degrees are adequately prepared for maximum contributions to the higher goals of developing critical thinkers and incorporating principles of liberal learning in the residential experience. My comment is generic and not a reflection of any individual as I meet only a few members of the Residence Life staff. The campus may wish to consider using individuals with Masters in liberal arts disciplines rather than limiting to student affairs degrees as those individuals might also be credentialed to teach a class or two. There may be a substantial number of new MA holders who would like to experience college teaching and life on a campus before entering a doctoral program and who would be interested in a year or two at UMM.
Students quoted the faculty/student ratio to me from the marketing material but felt that no first year student experienced the statistical “average.” I came away with the feeling that students think that admissions is over promising and the campus is not living up to pre-enrollment expectations. There is much more to know about this as my exposure was to only a small sample of students. Certainly there is no advantage to communicating that students will have small classes in the first year if they will find themselves in large classes (psychology, biology, etc.)

Because such a large percent of your graduates go to graduate school, it is imperative that the campus track and evaluate their success after they leave UMM. Thinking of UMM as the best preparation for a graduate degree could provide context for the liberal arts focus and be of interest to parents and honors students.

Some 24 hour, non-residence-hall space for gathering was a constant request from students. What would happen if you abandoned the traditional Saturday morning breakfast and put in place a late night (Friday after 11 pm) meal? Could there be some lounge space that draws people across residence halls? Could UMM create a vibrate night life, at least on Friday nights, on campus?

I heard mixed thoughts about the role of alcohol on the campus. I think UMM’s residence life staff does a good job enforcing the rules (are RA’s too engaged in “policing” rather than mentoring?) but the result is that alcohol use has just been moved into uncontrolled off-campus environments (student apartments). My gut feeling is that an alcohol-based social life may prove unsatisfying and lead to academic problems that tip the decision to leave after one year. More should be known about the role that alcohol plays in the life of UMM new students.

I sense that an on-going challenge for UMM, like many regional institutions, is finding the right balance between teaching and research. I think your students expect the focus to be on teaching excellence (given the promise of a 14:1 ratio), and yet faculty understand that the connection to UM includes research responsibilities. My sense is that UMM has not fully found its place yet. It isn’t clear to me that the institution can afford to have the number of faculty that it has in order to have as wide of coverage in special areas of so many branches of each discipline. If students stay until they receive a degree they will have experienced small classes and close connections with faculty – but is that the first year experience?

I only met a small number of athletes. Are athletes well integrated into campus life or do they remain unique sub populations? When students decide to stop being part of a team, do they transfer or return the following year?

My notes above have overly focused on my concerns. Let me balance that with observations about UMM’s strengths. The campus has great curb appeal. This is a beautiful campus setting that inspires great dreams of a “go away to college” campus. I can easily see why students who visit fall in love with the campus. Rituals like the annual rope pull are powerful events that stimulate tight bonds. There is an active intellectual culture on the campus. I wanted to take home with me the students who hosted me and their colleagues in the focus groups. I’ve never enjoyed interaction with students more than I did at UMM.

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I see UMM having all the pieces for being a highly successful campus in terms of recruiting new students. I’m not sure that the current organizational structure can adequately coordinate and support the first year at UMM. My sense is that someone needs to be charged with coordinating initiatives which most involve new students. In essence, someone needs to wake up everyday thinking first about new students and without competing responsibilities for juniors and seniors.

Another opportunity for UMM is to expand the campus ambassadors program. On many campuses a position as an ambassador is the most highly sought after student role. It takes a dedicated advisor and personal attention from the campus CEO to bring prestige to these roles. There are national meetings of student ambassadors which could help the campus train current ambassadors and aid in building a vision for the program so that truly outstanding students have opportunities for leadership and to be highly visible role models for new students.

I do hope these notes prove useful. Let me repeat that my time on campus was far too short for me to have high confidence that my impressions are all correct. I offer these thoughts for discussion and hope the campus will reject impressions that are off the mark without dismissing those that are worthy of further discussion.
Appendix F

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE DISAPPEARING TASK FORCE
Best Practices Sub-Committee Final Report
Submitted by: Tammy Berberi, Brenda Boever (chair), Heather Nicole Christian, Pam Solvie, and Kim Ukura

Best Practices for a First Year Experience Program at UMM

Part One: Administration

1. Develop a formal administrative structure for the program reporting directly to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean.
   We recommend the formation of a standing committee that oversees all issues associated with the first year and it should include representation across the campus: faculty, staff and students, and from all aspects of students’ lives: residential life, student activities, faculty, advising, etc. This committee will develop a list of components of both FYS and first year magnet courses, evaluate the program on a regular basis, and sustain the momentum of the program. Day to day work of the first year experience should be coordinated by a newly created staff position and supported by the work of a student intern (MSAF position).
   
   Models:
   - Carleton College: Each year (cohort) has a webpage and a Dean designated to work with that class.
   - Midwestern State University: The Infusion program is a first year experience program with a very attractive webpage that puts all first year resources and programming details at a first year student’s fingertips. The office is housed in student activities and has a standing director.
   - Sonoma State University: Program is run by a tenured faculty member that coordinates efforts between all departments. They set guidelines and learning outcomes for the program.
   - College of Charleston: Has just redesigned FYE and established a Director of First Year Programs position with connections in academic and student affairs; a standing committee helps direct the program.

2. First Year Experience Program must be evaluated on a regular basis.
   We recommend soliciting feedback about the first year program on a consistent basis from students, faculty and staff. This information should be evaluated to insure that outcomes of the program are in concert with the goals established.
   
   Models:
   - Kalamazoo College: (not in our comparison group, but comparable to UMM in many ways and a worthy example) assesses FYS instructors and outcomes to determine best teaching practices for this course. They also use national assessments: Cooperative Institution Research Program survey and participation in the First Year Initiative benchmarks their FYE and how to improve it.
• St. Olaf College: has recently completed a comprehensive self study on their first year initiatives and has redefined the program outcomes. Detailed information about their process can be found here: http://www.stolaf.edu/stulife/deanofstudents/fye/

3. Create a summer institute on first year students to train faculty and staff on goals of the first year experience and issues affecting first year students.
We recommend an annual one-day institute that is required for all faculty and staff and student mentors involved in supporting first year students and optional for others.
Models:
• Kalamazoo College: The data collected from their benchmarking assessments is used to remind faculty who their students are and how they can best be served is addressed at a faculty workshop.

NOTE: Additional information regarding the structure of First Year Experience programs, engaging faculty and best practices for a thriving program is available from the National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition.
http://www.sc.edu/fye/index.html [click on resources]

Part Two: Campus-wide Programming

4. Require a reflective portfolio for all students with entries beginning in the first year.
We recommend using a common portfolio system to capture the emotional, intellectual, and professional development of each student as they progress towards their degree. A first essay might be due during the Orientation experience. Each student would then update the portfolio after their first semester and at the beginning and end of each academic year (at a minimum). Other entries that might be encouraged include: reflective, analytical responses to artistic/cultural events, etc. Portfolio kept by adviser.
Models:
• U Mary Washington: requires letter to oneself at the end of the first year that looks both back and forward
• Kalamazoo College: (not in our comparison group, but comparable to UMM in many ways) requires a reflective portfolio that students begin during Orientation with a “Foundations Essay” and add to it until the spring semester of their senior year. A complete portfolio is a requirement for graduation. (see Institutional Excellence pp. 130-131).

5. Develop a mentor program using upper class students to work with first year students all year.
We recommend utilizing upper class students as mentors for first year students to model good campus citizenship, and behaviors for academic success. The current OGL program might be adapted to continue these connections for the entire first year. The scope of the mentors’ involvement with the program can vary greatly.
Models:
University of North Carolina at Asheville: Their Colloquia (version of FYS) includes a peer mentoring program where junior or senior level students attend every class, facilitate activities outside the classroom, and serve as a peer adviser for the students. Peer mentors receive $350 and 2 academic credits.

Midwestern State University: Mustangs Career Educators are peer leaders who advise and teach career topics such as interview techniques, dress for success, resume writing, and career selection. In addition, the Career Management Center also coordinates an Alumni Mentoring Program. This program provides students with job shadowing opportunities with successful alumni. Big Brother, Big Sister Greek Life Program- As part of the Greek community, new Greek members are paired with an upper class fraternity/sorority member. The main goal of this initiative is to provide guidance and support to "new Mustangs" participating in fraternities and sororities with a particular focus on academics, community service, leadership and social development. This program could translate as student leader mentorship or even upper-class and freshmen class partnership.

6. **Assign a common reader (book or collection) that includes discussion and programming for a given year to a common theme.**

   We recommend a common reading experience for all students, faculty and staff each year beginning during Orientation or for the second semester (after the completion of FYS). Events and activities (movies, convocation speaker, special events and social activities) should be designed around the theme of the book that will draw connections from the book to world events and personal lives. This will help instill unity among the cohort. Journal entries or essays could be required and added to the portfolio.

   **Models:**
   - Fort Lewis College (CO): A book, selected each year by students and faculty, is sent to each new student during the summer before they arrive on campus. Students read the book before arriving on campus. All events, films, speakers, etc. are tied to the theme of the book.
   - St Mary’s College of Maryland: Each student is given a copy of a book to read over the summer. They participate in online forum discussions lead by faculty and staff, an opening weekend film, and further programs throughout the year. www.smcm.edu/studentwelcome/frankenstein.html
   - Hamline University: A summer reading program: book selected by students and faculty. New students are expected to read it and have reflected on it before Orientation begins. Students write about the book and that writing is used as part of the on-going writing evaluation process.
   - Midwestern State University: Utilize a common reader (book or collection) that binds discussion and programming to a common theme. Reading and discussion should begin during Orientation and reflective journal entries or essays should be added to the portfolio.

7. **Create a more intensive/intentional and residential orientation program that will unite all units and activities of the campus to bond first year students to the institution.**
We recommend implementing a comprehensive Orientation program (perhaps longer than the existing program) to address goals specifically designed for the program. Transitional issues (social and academic) should be covered thoroughly to firmly establish the core values of our campus culture and priorities for student success.

Models:

- University of North Carolina at Asheville: Orientation program is in two phases. Phase I, in June, is the "taking care of business" event where students are introduced to campus and community culture, take placement exams, learn about academic requirements, meet with an adviser, and register for classes. Phase II, the weekend before classes start, introduces students to other students, faculty, and staff through social events and activities. They also have Fusion, which is a program that includes a number of day trips right before Phase II. (www.unca.edu/orientation/freshmen.html)

- Sonoma State University: Summer orientation in 2 day form, provides students an opportunity to register, learn about academic departments, stay in the residence halls overnight and learn about activities. They are split into sessions according to departments of interest i.e., humanities, social sciences; science and technology; business and economics etc, and a session for all majors or undeclared. Their orientation is split up with 2 days in between; they occur in June and July. There is also a track for parents.

- University of Minnesota, Twin Cities: (not in our comparison groups, but a worthy example.) This campus has completely re-designed their “Welcome Week” – a weeklong, required experience for all new students. Programs and activities are college specific and campus wide to create a sense of community and expectations for student success.

8. **Introduce interdisciplinary thinking, travel and other academic enrichment opportunities systematically.**

   We recommend the development of a campus wide process for disseminating information about academic enrichment opportunities. Special emphasis should be placed on these options during Orientation and in the First Year Lab (see # 14) to encourage first year students to pursue them so that early planning will help students maximize these opportunities.

Models:

- Eastern Connecticut State University: faculty and staff across campus work to show students how the get the most of their liberal arts education.

- Concordia College: has Cobber Expo, huge fair devoted to engagement

9. **Draft a widely disseminated “code of conduct” that clearly defines standards and expectations of the campus culture and why they are useful and important.**

   We recommend implementing this Code as a means to “getting each student off to the right start”. It might address academic rigor expectations, class attendance and tardiness, what to do in case of illness and late assignments, grades and what they mean, how to communicate with professors and staff members, why face to face communication matters and appropriate behaviors in the classroom and at “home” (in the residence halls and off-campus), etc. Elements of this code are reinforced through presentation and discussion at Orientation and in the first year “lab” (see #14)
Models:

- University of Wisconsin-Superior: Uses a “Staying on Message” approach—programs convey what the institution wants to express to incoming students about liberal arts education and habits to be successful at college; FY travel opportunities; development of freshmen class cohorts.
- Kalamazoo College: uses mandatory orientation sessions to prepare students for the transition to a rigorous academic program. Student affairs and academic affairs staff work together to create a holistic student development approach to first year transitions.

10. **Strengthen residence hall experiences via use of additional theme floors or programming.**

We recommend the continuation and growth of residence hall experiences to further establish strong bonds to the institution.

Models:

- College of Charleston: Learning communities are for both residential and non-residential students using first year seminar cluster courses. Peer facilitators guide students through first year.
- Sonoma State University: Freshmen Interest Groups (FIG): FIGs are residence hall communities that exist to help students outside of the classroom. They are required to participate in seminars and study groups taking place in the residential community, faculty members being present in the village, and specially trained peer advisers help integrate the academic and social experience of our students. By being a member of the FIG, students make a year-long commitment to the academic program and the residential living community.

11. **Strengthen the liberal arts message and appreciation of its connection to career paths and lifelong learning.**

We recommend clearly articulating the meaning of the liberal arts, including its relationship to academic study and careers. Career advising must begin early and students should be made aware of the resources that will aid them.

Models:

- University of Wisconsin-Superior: runs a program lead by peer mentors that expresses what the institution wants incoming students to know and understand about the liberal arts, good habits for college success, and to develop cohort identity.
- Kalamazoo College: (not from our comparison list, but a worthy example) Introduces students to information about liberal arts, majors and their connection to careers in Orientation sessions and by peer leaders visiting FYS courses. They feel this lays the foundation for career planning later.

12. **Create an inexpensive and portable booklet, “The Cougar Compass” that is distributed to all students.**

We recommend creating a booklet or portfolio (8.5x11) to be distributed to all students providing information about majors, information on how to navigate the choosing a major process, changing majors, study abroad and making preliminary career decisions.
Part Three: Curricular Support

13. Maintain the UMM First Year Seminar

We recommend maintaining the First Year Seminar as a key component to students’ early experiences on campus, but we hope to see it streamlined and strengthened by eliminating Jamboree completely and relegating all sessions devoted to general college success to the programming described below (see # 14). We recommend revisiting UMM’s Inquiry to revive key elements of it that were successful.

Models:
- An FYS course is very common practice throughout our comparison group and across the U.S. There was a strong sense on the committee that elements of past UMM models ought to be revisited and restored, especially Inquiry, and that, without regular assessment, any iteration of FYS has a lifespan of 4-5 years. Ongoing attention to its strengths and weaknesses ought to extend its vitality and usefulness.
- SBSJU: has a year-long course, consisting of Voice and Expression (fall) and Advocacy and Argumentation (spring)
- Eastern Connecticut State University: has year-long sequence similar to SBSJU
- Other schools in comparison group that require an FYS include Ramapo, Sonoma State, St Mary’s College of Maryland, Truman State University, UNC-Asheville, Carleton, Hamline

14. Provide a systematic method to deliver information students need to be successful at the University.

We recommend providing a systematic method to deliver information students need to be successful at the University. Transitional skills, writing skills, study skills, public speaking skills, liberal arts, expected behaviors, clarify expected outcomes in a “University 101” type of experience (Could be delivered in a 1 cr. “lab” component of FYS.) This class might also require attendance at up to 8 artistic/cultural events during the first year, and these could be processed through writing in the reflective journal.

Models:
- University of North Carolina at Asheville: The Liberal Students Introductory Colloquia program at UNC Asheville has two different versions of the class. LS 179 has an advising component (faculty teaching are also the students' advisers), a writing intensive component (minimum of 15 pages of writing, no fewer than three writing assignments including one essay exam, and instruction in writing), and a First Year Experience Component (events where students confront issues like time management, college resources, etc.). The LS 379 version includes the writing intensive component and information literacy components (introduces students to the library and its resources, and
discuss copyright, intellectual property, etc.).

- Carleton College: Special courses are offered for first year students. They are specially designed for first year students and: only enroll first year students, have limited enrollments, emphasize discussion, instructors (when possible) serve as the adviser, many also fulfill other "Gen/Ed" requirements.
  (apps/carleton/edu/students/new/academic/overview)

- Macalester College: All first year students must take a first year course. The course has: enrollment of no more than 16, instructor is the students' academic adviser, instruction in writing, and the course is offered for regular department credit. Disciplines usually set aside some introductory courses to be first year courses, or develop new courses to fill the requirement. Some first year courses are also residence courses, and all students taking them live on the same residence hall floor.

- Sonoma State University (CA): Univ. 102 –Each major has a FY magnet course set to address the major and what to do in the major including field trips but mostly covers first year experience things such as classroom etiquette, study skills, career exploration, relationship skills and time management. Ex: (Synopsis of a First Year Marine Biology Course) Welcome to the First Year Experience! Students often feel somewhat disoriented and overwhelmed during their first year in college. These feelings arise for a variety of reasons, such as living away from home for the first time, having unrealistic expectations of the ease of achieving success, having underdeveloped study skills, having time management problems, and the new, significant differences of being in university courses compared to high school courses. Designed to foster a supportive learning community, provide mentoring, enhance academic skills, personal skills (self-awareness, responsibility, relationships with others), and knowledge about campus resources to facilitate successful transition from high school to college. Other aspects covered are choosing a major, career exploration, health and social issues (sexual assault/harassment, alcohol/drug abuse), information competencies, code of conduct, and diversity/multiculturalism. Could be used in conjunction with a FYS course. Meets once a week for two hours and forty minutes. This class includes a Freshmen Interest Group leader that lives in the residence hall.

- SUNY Geneseo: Same as Sonoma State: Bio FYE, Physics FYE: one FYE class for each major only it meets once a week for only 1 hour and covers mostly components of the major such as career exploration, study skills, basic principals and research. The only issue that it isn’t required for majors or general education.

- Truman State University: FYS has peer leader, discussion oriented, no textbooks. They have developed a disciplinary model for each major that introduces them to the major, engagement, developing a 4 year plan. Three faculty members teach the section at different times. The students are required to attend 2 seminars for their major and 3 general. There doesn’t seem to be the same requirements for each course.

- SBSJU requires attendance at 8 artistic and cultural events as part of the first year
15. **Offer magnet/first year courses in each major.**

We recommend the First Year Council develop a set of components for a “magnet,” introductory course in each discipline that is designed for first year students, has a low enrollment cap (when feasible), and addresses fundamental skills such as writing, scholarly research in that field, and career/graduate school connections to the major in consistent format across all disciplines. Creating a strong cohort (class) identity around common academic interests has been shown to improve retention. This class might ideally be offered in the spring as a bridge between FYS in the fall and the second year. The course should carry GER designations as well as fulfill a requirement for the major. (count for the major or GER, not both; useful for students who change majors).

**Models:**
- SUNY College at Geneseo (NY): offers discipline-based FYS courses that orient students to study in a particular field.
- University of Mary Washington: uses discipline specific courses for first year students and cohort specific events throughout the four years.
Appendix G
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE DISAPPEARING TASK FORCE
History Sub-Committee Final Report
Submitted by: Steve Gross (chair), Van Gooch, Julie Phelps, Tegan Peterson.

Brief History:
The University of Minnesota Morris has throughout its history offered a number of courses designed for first year students. The intent behind these programs has varied over time, as has their design, structure and level of campus support. The following are a series of questions that might be used to interrogate that history as a way of constructing a usable past for future planning.

Questions:
• Nature of past programs. Were they voluntary or mandatory? What were their common elements? How were they individualized? What were some of course titles? Who taught/participated in the program? Were they division/discipline based or interdisciplinary? Number of credits? What were the auxiliary elements, such as films, convocations, etc?
• What was the impetus, thinking, story behind the creation of the program?
• What were the assessable goals of the course?
• What was the level of institutional support? Financial and/or otherwise? How was workload distributed?
• What was the organizational or administrative structure? Who—in terms of office or committee—oversaw the program? Who reported to whom? How much power did the office/committee enjoy? Which groups were represented?
• How did students assess the program? How did this change over time? What factors influenced these assessments?
• How did faculty assess the program? How did this change over time? What factors influenced these assessments?
• Where did the program succeed? Where did it fail?
• What was the effect of the program on other areas of student and academic life? Did it affect retention? Was it effective in socializing students? Did it facilitate the development of broader academic and life skills? Did it promote a sense of community? What has been the impact on faculty?
• What were the reasons for the program’s abandonment?

Freshman Seminar Program
UMM first launched an experimental honors program for fall quarter of 1965. Two years later it launched a mandatory fall-quarter course for all first year students. According to a campus newsletter, “The Informer,” this program, named the “Freshman Seminar Program,” was intended to “help introduce [the student] to the full significance of university life and to a realization that he is an active learner, not a passive object in the process of an educational system.” Each seminar was assigned about fifteen students. An upper-division student advisor was also attached to each seminar, and the faculty leader also served as each group’s academic advisor. Sections met once a week, and attendance was mandatory. The program functioned as a
gateway into the honors program, and first year students were encouraged during fall term to apply for admissions into honors. Neither grades nor credit were awarded to participants in the honors program—at least for the first three years—although it is unclear whether this was also the case for the Freshman Seminar Program.

Consistent with the times, the Seminar Program was loosely designed and operated according to laissez-faire principles. Individual seminars seemed not to have been designed around specific themes; instead, the students, upper-division mentor and faculty advisor were free to ad-lib and move the seminar in the direction they chose. Clearly, the emphasis was on creativity and spontaneity. At its best, the program was capable of producing amazingly rich and rewarding experiences for students and faculty alike. For example, in the spring of 1970 Fred Seidl, a sociologist, and Roland Guyotte led a freshman honor’s group to Chicago where they toured the South Side, stayed at a black Methodist church and met with representatives of Mayor Richard Daley’s staff. Less positive experiences were also possible, especially in winter and spring quarters as the formal, mandatory, part of the program transitioned into Freshman Honors. Student absenteeism seemed to have been a real problem; in the middle of February, 1970 one faculty member and upper-division group leader wrote the director of the program, “Last week it finally happened: we came to our regular meeting and no-one else showed up.” These and other problems prompted the Seminar-Honors Program Committee in May, 1971 to eliminate “all existing provisions of the Seminar-Honors Program.” It spared the Freshman Seminar Program but noted:

Much concern has been expressed over the attrition rate and the lack of student commitment, particularly during the fall quarter freshman seminars, although these conditions have been obtained in other units as well. The concern is often linked with a concern over the non-selective nature of the freshman program, viz., that all freshmen are initially admitted to the program and that participation is based upon student self-selection. Another related concern is the placement of the freshman student, i.e., that the placement is essentially random, with no concern for the student’s potential or his areas of interest, and based almost entirely upon his fall quarter class schedule.

An “Ad Hoc Committee on the Freshman Year Experience” provided some support for the Seminar Program but seemed more concerned with other areas of first year student life. In order to relieve scheduling difficulties for seminars and to provide more room for co-curricular activities, the committee proposed a weekly “Open Tuesday” (eventually becoming “Wonderful Wednesday”) in which the campus would honor a formal moratorium on all other classes and labs. Not surprisingly, this garnered little support. It also designed a handbook for first year students that contained chapters that ranged from planning a course of study to dealing with the draft to “Sex and the UMM Student” and “Drugs and the UMM Student.” Finally, the committee was responsible for organizing and assessing orientation, and the archive still holds a set of descriptive statistics and student comments. It is unclear following the redesign of the Honors Program in 1971 how long the Freshman Seminar Program remained in existence.

Connections
In the fall of 1980 a Freshman Seminar Planning Committee proposed a new first year seminar, entitled “Connections” to be offered on an experimental basis the winter and spring of the 1980-81 academic year and then all three quarters of the following year. The courses were listed under Interdisciplinary Studies, counted for a single credit each, were entirely voluntary, and students could register for up to three credits. Sections would meet for an hour per week. As the title of program indicated, the various courses were designed to be intensely interdisciplinary, and one primary goal was to “help students look for the connections between their various courses and between their curricular experiences and their personal development.” Other goals were to:

- “enhance the intellectual orientation of the student,”
- “increase student familiarity with and participation in the academic community,“
- “improve student understanding of the nature and value of a liberal education,”
- “encourage student concern about the welfare of humanity,”
- “structure interaction among faculty…,”
- “enhance the Intellectual/Aesthetic [sic] environment of the campus.”

A call from the Morris Campus Planning Committee in 1979 to develop a freshman experience to assist students to recognize “between various academic courses and the purposes of liberal education” provided much of the impetus for the program. At the same time a self study (Norma Thorp, Survey of twenty Present and Preferred Institutional Goals at the University of Minnesota, Morris) indicated a wide consensus for “informal student faculty sessions” that would allow for “the discussion of ideas and mutual interests.” Initially, the program called for a maximum of fifteen seminars to be spread throughout the academic year, and enrollment for each seminar was projected at about fifteen students. Because the program came into existence during one of a series of budget crises, the Planning Committee recommended that faculty serve without compensation, although some participants might have seen reduced committee work.

Some initial seminar proposals included “A Question of Energy” by Bert Ahern, “Current Arab Culture” by Laird Barber and “Human Biology and Culture” by Dennis Templeman. By 1982-83 faculty were offering a more ambitious set of seminars including “The Nature of Religious Experience,” “The History of Nature” taught by Jim Togees and Dwight Purdy’s “Talented People.” Participating faculty were advised to maintain a “thematic” rather than a “disciplinary” focus, to keep their course relevant, to maintain a Socratic approach, to “explore the interconnectedness of life” and to model “liberally educated individuals.” The Seminar Planning Committee, a creation of the larger First Year Experience Committee, was chaired by Bert Ahern and was initially funded by a grant from the Educational Development Program.

The grant also provided funds for assessment. A study of the program’s first year noted that the students attracted to the program comprised “an extraordinarily able group.” And the course initially drew significantly more women than men; approximately two thirds of the 1980-81 seminar participants were women. Their mean cumulative grade point average was 3.12 compared to 2.80 for the first year class as a whole. Despite the selection bias, student surveys testing the seminar participants’ general satisfaction with UMM with that of their peers indicate little difference. Faculty, at least for the first year, seemed to have remained quite enthusiastic, although most reported having devoted about ninety hours to their seminar. Most faculty were confident that students were as a result of the experience “more aware of connections, more familiar with and a part of the academic community and more insightful about the nature and value of a liberal education.” But faculty also felt that the program did not do enough to promote
critical thinking or “rigorous intellectual inquiry.” And many noted the lack of “interaction among the students of various seminars,” although the program did offer a series of convocations. Not surprisingly, as the sections were taught as an overload, faculty were concerned about the amount of work.

Again, participation in Connections was voluntary, and enrollment varied throughout the duration of the course. In 1982-83 school year 132 first year students or 27 percent of all freshmen registered for a fall “Connections” seminar. Slightly over 70 percent finished the course and earned credit. In general, the program attracted between one fifth and one third of all first year students, although this varied year to year. In the first year of the program students enrolled in the class were significantly more likely to return to UMM for their sophomore year than non-enrollees (97 percent compared to 77 percent); this gap narrowed in time and by the last years of the program had disappeared.

**Inquiry**

University President Kenneth Keller charged UMM in 1985 to develop a new integrated core curriculum more reflective of the campus’ role as a small liberal arts college. The result was ProsPer, a new general education program, and an important constituent part of this program was an interdisciplinary core course, called “Inquiry: Values in a Changing World,” for incoming students. In the summer 1987 a broad course plan was written by a planning committee consisting of Professors Dwight Purdy (English), Mimi Frenier (History), Jim Van Alstine (Geology) and Richard Richards (Music). Later a steering committee, composed of faculty, staff and students, in consultation with the first Inquiry faculty group refined the course and made decisions regarding convocation speakers and topics, reading materials, movies, etc. It was first offered in the fall of 1988. Stated goals included:

- “Introduce students to liberal education;”
- “Model multi-disciplinary, integrative learning;”
- “Address “process” area of thinking, reading, and listening in lecture and discussion settings;”
- “Assure close student/faculty interaction in a small class setting early in college;”
- “Build intellectual community among faculty by involving them in the development and teaching of a common course;”
- “Assist faculty in referring students to additional enrichment opportunities;”
- “Give attention to and models the processes of intellectual inquiry;”
- “Encourage the use of the active learning mode;”
- “Require students to grapple with ideas which may be new and disturbing;”
- “Focus on “great questions” which are considered central to human society.”

The first Inquiry class consisted of 39 sections. The schedule was divided into four discrete units: First Unit, “Introduction: The Individual, the Process of Inquiry, and Entering into a Community of Learning,” one week; Second Unit, “The Family in Non-Western and Western Cultures,” three weeks; Third Unit, “Nature vs. Nurture, The Human Animal and Genetics,” three weeks; Fourth Unit, “Values in a Changing World,” three weeks. Within these broad units faculty enjoyed a certain latitude in choosing specific course topics and in assigning readings. A
convocation accompanied each unit, and speakers that first year included Richard W. Paul, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique at Sonoma State University, Rabbi Barry Cytron and UMM’s Van Gooch who spoke on genetic engineering. Students were required to keep a journal and to write four papers, one for each unit. Again, the intent was to avoid a rigid, lock-step approach, and the faculty was given considerable room within this general structure to customize their individual sections. Beyond the stated goals referred to above, the course’s primary emphasis, although it seems often unstated, was on critical thinking.

Student evaluations of the course for the first four years became more positive in time. In 1988, for instance, the mean score for the item, “I enjoyed the course,” on a six point scale was 3.7 but had grown to 4.3 by 1991. Students grew increasingly to appreciate the discussion sections, the reading assignments and the convocations. But in 1992 scores on student evaluations dropped dramatically, and the decline was uniform across virtually all the evaluation forms. Scores rebounded slightly in the next few years but remained low especially in comparison to the 1990-91 and 1991-92 academic years. By the end of Inquiry’s history (its last year was 1995-96) student complaints had assumed a familiar form. Many questioned the point of the course, were critical of the readings and the convocations, were unhappy about the workload and worried about fairness in work and grades across sections. However, students continued to comment positively on the small-group, seminar format, and despite some decline in how students rated their instructors, these remained positive.

It is difficult to determine the exact reasons for this decline. One possible explanation is the revamping of the assigned readings in 1992 and a subsequent fall in mean scores for individual readings from about 4.2 in 1990 to 3.3 in 1992. Interestingly, student unhappiness was contagious and extended to every aspect of the course. Students in 1992 assigned lower scores to convocation speakers, even to repeat performers, than had their peers in earlier years.

Coincidentally, student dissatisfaction was matched by growing faculty dissent, some of which involved questions of adequate rigor and clarity of purpose. The appointment of a Common Course Task Force in 1994 was unable to arrest the momentum toward Inquiry’s demise, and a short-term budget crisis in 1995 prompted the administration in conjunction with the Campus Assembly to suspend the course and begin the process of constructing a new common course to coincide with semester conversion.
Appendix H
First Year Experience Disappearing Task Force
Data Sub-Committee Report
Submitted by David Swenson, Sandy Olson-Loy, Chris Butler and Leslie Meek

The Data Work group conducted a review of available institutional data look for a number of key factors:

- Changes in the student profile
- Factors that indicate potential for student success at UMM

Reviewing the CIRP (Cooperative Institution Research Program) Survey from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California – Los Angeles data from the past twenty years, it would appear that on the whole, our student profile has remained relatively consistent with a few exceptions.

The profile has consistently shown:

- 55-70% of students received As in high school.
- 75-85% of students rate themselves in the top 10% in regards to their academic ability and drive to succeed.
- 50% rate themselves in the top 10% in regards to their writing and leadership abilities.
- Over 80% have performed volunteer work in the last year.
- Less than 10% report that they have smoked cigarettes in the last year.
- Academic reputation continues to be the strongest reason why students choose to attend UMM.

Exceptions that have been identified include:

- The percentage of students whose parents have a college degree has risen from 21% of mothers and 25% of fathers in 1985 to 50% of mothers and 53% of fathers in 2006.
- Student’s religious preferences have changed showing a decline in students identifying as catholic (41% in 1985 to 23% in 2006) and Lutheran (33% in 1985 to 21% in 2006) and an increase in students who identify as non-Christian (1% in 1999 the first time the data were tracked by UMM to 10% in 2006) and None (1% in 1985 to 22% in 2006).
- An increase in the number of students who plan to achieve a Ph D. or Professional degree (20% in 1985 to 39% in 2006) and a decrease in students whose highest degree planned to earn is a Bachelors (38% in 1985 to 21% in 2006)
- There has been a strong and steady decline in students reporting that there was a “very good chance” that they would transfer (37.1% in 1985 to 10.5% in 2006).

The CIRP survey also showed some interesting results when a crosstab analysis of students who said there was “some chance” or a “very good chance” that they would transfer was run along with other key questions. These data showed that students were more likely to transfer if:

- their home neighborhood was predominantly non-white
- their religious preference was not Christian
- they traditionally watched one hour or less of television per week
- UMM was not their first choice
The Scholastic Committee has been reviewing data on student academic success in the first year. These data have identified the classes that post the largest number of failing grades for first year students and support the national findings that students who do not succeed are far less likely to be retained.

The Spring 2006 NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) data continued to question whether first year students at UMM are as academically challenged as their peers at other institutions. Mean responses to the questions “Made a class presentation” and “Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas for information from various sources” were significantly lower for first year students at UMM than the other schools in our Carnegie class or the all NSSE means.

A further analysis of the NSSE data was run by dividing the data into two groups; first years who did return in the Fall of 2006 and first years who did not return in the Fall of 2006. Though the n for students who did not return was not significant (n=10), these data clearly supported current thinking that student engagement increases the chance that students will be retained. Questions about the quality of relationships with Faculty and Peers showed a one point or greater difference (on a 7 point scale) between those students who returned for the following fall and those who did not.
Appendix I

FYE Blog Questions and Responses

Question 1
What is the most important experience of students at UMM?
I echo the sentiments regarding the importance of meaningful connections and relationships during the first year (and ideally the first month) of college. In my work with transfer students I am often privy to the frustrations that they are experiencing at their previous institutions. Rarely do students transfer to UMM solely because of our academic reputation. Rather, they are frustrated by their current environment that is too big, too impersonal, or the feeling that nobody cares about them. When they experience the environment at UMM they immediately strike by anyone on campus who will go the extra mile to help. Although students who are new to the college experience do not have another college as a comparison, they do have expectations for their college experience. If they don't feel connected to UMM at an early stage there is room for the natural doubts and struggles that are often connected to college life to take hold. With a support system in place it is much easier to face those challenges and persist.

Posted by: Jennifer Zych Hermann | December 11, 2007 10:29 PM

I think the most important experience for first year students is making connections on campus--as several others have mentioned. It might be with their roommate, faculty member or work study supervisor, but by the end of first semester, students need to feel CONNECTED to someone.

Posted by: Jillian | December 11, 2007 09:06 PM

College gives you the chance to really explore who you are and your world around you! While at Morris, you should take advantage of the numerous clubs and organizations which interest you! Attend a random meeting, make a friend from another culture or region in the US, travel to a rural/urban area...
This is your life so live it your way...

Posted by: Sheri Snetsinger | December 5, 2007 09:36 PM

The most important experience, given the mission of UMM, is becoming immersed in the academic life with faculty and students, discovering the broader world that learning brings. The social connections that have been mentioned are important to help students connect with others, but the intellectual focus is fundamental.

Posted by: Bert Ahern | November 13, 2007 10:37 PM

The most important experience as a first year student is to realize what it is like living away from home, and stepping out of their comfort zone to meet new people. It is important to take a variety of classes to really figure out what you want to do with your life.

Posted by: Taryn | November 6, 2007 12:53 AM

I agree with anydy and Chris, but I also think we have to do much more to help students succeed academically. The correlation between failure and attrition is too important to miss.

Posted by: Tammy | November 4, 2007 08:18 PM
I agree with Andy Lopez.
I think the most important thing is a personal connection of some kind... whether with friends, faculty or work. Everything else falls into place after that.
I think for most students, college is like hitting puberty again. They're in a constant state of comparing themselves to everyone else, fearing they're falling behind (socially, academically) or, at least, not matching up.

CB

Posted by: Chris Butler | November 2, 2007 09:41 PM

Many students come to UMM not understanding what the liberal arts are. I would like to see the FYS include a component studying the liberal arts, their history and their importance in today's world.
I also agree with the people who wrote that students need to learn what professors and UMM expects of them, academically and socially.

Posted by: Sarah Buchanan | October 31, 2007 06:48 PM

As a librarian and FYS instructor I have several perspectives. I think making the transition to an academic environment is an important experience to first year students. Equally important is the transition socially and personally. Both facets should probably be addressed in a FYS.

Posted by: Peter Bremer | October 29, 2007 10:36 PM

Simply finding a place where they fit in. Academics are important, but students need to find a social group right away with whom they can identify and of whom they can be a part.

Posted by: Eagan Heath | October 29, 2007 08:12 PM

As a librarian at Briggs Library and as a first-time FYS teacher I see several perspectives. First year students at UMM need to make the transition academically to a college environment and all that is expected of them. They also need to make transition socially.

Posted by: Peter Bremer | October 29, 2007 05:13 PM

Connecting with other students, faculty and staff that they are excited about them and can get along with them.

Posted by: Andy Lopez | October 26, 2007 10:07 PM

Of course since I work in Residence Life, I would like to see students understand what it's like to live with a roommate, on a floor and in a residence hall, but that's just me being biased toward the benefit of living in a residence hall. I would say the most important experience for UMM students would be to simply be acclimated to college life... INCLUDING basic life skills and getting to know professors. Most students coming to colleges and universities today have never been away from home for an extended period of time before or lived in the same room as another person or shared a bathroom. In order for students to be successful in classes, they must first be acclimated and comfortable within their surroundings: on-campus, campus community, Morris and for some students, even the state of Minnesota.
Since I work where freshman students live, I hear them complain a lot about not knowing what college life is like, not having time management skills and not understanding what is expected from them from professors, staff, other students, family, etc. They also find the current FYS
classes somewhat confusing regarding what type of First Year Education they are getting. They
don't necessarily always understand the connection between what they are being taught and how
the courses are to help them through their college career. We need to help them become
comfortable and acclimated first of all before we can expect them to be successful.
Posted by: Becky Eid | October 24, 2007 10:50 PM

The most important first year experience is, like Maria pointed out, the connection to faculty and
academia in general. I regret not getting to know my advisors better as I feel that it may have
made my first year experience much richer. This would also transfer into a deeper experience
through graduation.
Posted by: Anonymous | October 24, 2007 10:05 PM

The most important experience of First Year Students at UMM is the intellectual transition and
maturation from high school to university. This is exemplified by, but not limited to, the
transition from being able to memorize and repeat facts, to being able to see for themselves the
connections between these facts. When a student can do this across his/her classes and subjects
they have "arrived" intellectually.
Posted by: Anonymous 104 | October 24, 2007 08:18 PM

Service Learning courses.
Posted by: Anonymous | October 24, 2007 07:30 PM

The most important experience is to connect with faculty / a department that is relevant to the
student. A student can get involved in an activity, but that is easily replaceable at another school.
Often, they are not leaders within the organizations right away either. When a student connects
with a faculty member or gets involved in a department, it ties in their education with a sense of
belonging, which is not easily replaceable and transferring would entail a great loss.
I was prepared to transfer after my freshman year. I had applications all but sent off. But, through
my FYs and classes, I got connected with my adviser and started to work with a faculty member.
This reassured me that I was on the right track, that I was getting a good education, that I had all
the resources I would need to do well at Morris, and most of all, Morris began to feel like home.
Posted by: Maria B | October 24, 2007 04:35 PM

Question 2
Are first year students at UMM a cohesive group? If not, what sub-populations exist that
we should look at?
Great comments so far--sorry I'm coming on late! I really agree with Sarah here--as a Gustavus
graduate, I have always been (and probably always will be!) a GUSTIE. I know it. My friends
and family know it. It's really who I am. Since I started here, I've been trying to help create that
same feeling about UMM because being a Gustie is more than just being a music major or
MCSA representative. Everyone is a Gustie--and that's our own sub-culture to the world at large.
I'm the nerd that writes all of the Admissions e-mails that get sent out to prospective students and
I'm constantly telling them how great their life would be as a Cougar--I just wish it would catch
on more and be seen as MORE than just an athletic mascot. UMMers (again--I agree with Sarah-
yuck!) need that group identity!

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From the counseling perspective, let me offer up for consideration the sub-group of students [trying to cope] with chronic mental illnesses. At any given time, roughly a quarter to a third of our students have mood and/or anxiety disorders. Others have ADHD, bi-polar, and a variety of diagnosable personality disorders.

I have seen an increase over the past 8 years in students I treat for social phobias. Many of these students fear group projects, talking in class, and, if they miss a class or two, returning to class because of a fear that the professor will think less of them, even if the reason for the absence is legitimate, rather than talking directly with the faculty member about their situation.

Due to confidentiality (and students' own stigma), faculty and staff won't know which of their students belong to this sub-group. But I think it's important to keep these students in mind as we have this discussions.

Most complaints that I hear about FYS come from students centering around the perception that the required FYS either is not the one the one they wanted or is seen as waste of time because it is only two credits and does not fit into their major. I see first year students as a defined group in need of academic and social guidance. Of these it is the latter that may need more emphasis in FYS. Perhaps this could be somehow melded with academic content that rises a bit more formally from the disciplines.

I agree that sub-divisions exist and are important. At the same time, we need to work to help students connect across sub-divisions and see new possibilities. While the major is a natural area, we should not elevate it in the first year since so many students will for a variety of reasons, most of them good, change majors by the end of the first year. Major communities emerge naturally and most healthfully in the junior and senior years.

To me - and maybe this is a music-specific phenomenon - students group and bond within their major(s). And right there is where I could envision a better use of First Year Seminars: If FYS could be specific to certain majors and taught by faculty members of those majors, these courses could become much more applicable to students. I realize that it is great to have freedom of choice, but at the same time I have heard multiple complaints from students about the fact that their FYS did not relate to what they are aiming to accomplish at UMM - and thus, they experienced them as a "waste of time".

In terms of cohesion, what really bugs me about campus is our (lack of) common spaces. We (I'm talking about fac/staff/students) are always running off to a particular activity, then going home. There are few if any spaces on campus that allow us to come together and just hang out and chat. TMC is now too austere and brightly lit to give one a feeling of real (communicative) intimacy. I want a big game room (pool, table-hockey, a whole wall of board games, clustered, comfy seating, a coffee bar and snacks) or someplace central where all students can just sort of be, instead of always multi-tasking, scurrying from one thing to the next. While we're at it: how
about a Faculty Commons? I only see my colleagues in Committees or a Campus Assembly. We need a place to chill out, too.

Posted by: Tammy | November 4, 2007 08:12 PM

A difficult question...
I think minorities are an obvious group, though I don't know if their attrition rate after the first year is any higher than non-minorities.
I agree with Sarah's point about lacking that sense of being an Ole or a Cobber.
I would guess that mostly comes from tradition and having parents and other authority figures who attended those schools. So being so young, relatively, it's hard to foster this idea about being "a Cougar"--though I wish it were so.
I think that dynamic feeds itself very well. Look at Notre Dame or Dartmouth or any other school where the students are fanatic about being just that.
Still I don't know how you start the traditions that these other schools have. They might just have to evolve. The Gay-Indy tug of war is one; the drag show; CNIA Pow Wow. What else?

Posted by: Chris Butler | November 2, 2007 09:48 PM

One challenge that I think we face at UMM is trying to create a rallying identity for UMM students. Other schools' students readily identify as Cobbers, Oles, Macs, etc. Do our students identify as Cougars? As UMMers (yuk)?
Despite the wide range of diversity in our students, I think our goal is to have our students identify with UMM and feel that they are part of this place. What is the core of that unifying force?

Posted by: Sarah Buchanan | October 31, 2007 06:53 PM

A Chronicale of Higher Ed article said that student ID themselves by activities their freshman year-- sports, music, theater, saddle, club, dance. From my observations, I agree with that.
In sophomore year they seem to identify more as a bio or chem or English major than they do as a dancer or a football player or whatever.

Posted by: Kathryn Klopfleisch | October 29, 2007 10:32 PM

I believe minorities are an important group to give additional guidance/assistance to in order to keep them here.

Posted by: Siobhan Bremer | October 29, 2007 09:05 PM

Sub-population Nerds. I have a thousand ideas for freshmen seminar courses. None of which really fit under the diversity umbrella. I think that this is particularly limiting to subjects relating to science.

Posted by: Len Keeler | October 29, 2007 09:04 PM

I remember certain people being involved in sports, others being notorious party kids, hard-core studiers, the super involved with student groups, church groups, some shut-ins and floor regulars. There are obviously others, too.

Posted by: Eagan Heath | October 29, 2007 08:17 PM
Question 3
Do our facilities support the needs of first year students? What sorts of spaces do we need to better meet first year students’ expectations?

Again--Sarah and I are on the same track! I would love to see UMM have a place like "The Dive" at Gustavus--lounge space during the day with a small cafe and every Friday and Saturday night it turns into the night club of every freshman students dreams! :) Louie's Lower Level/The Oracle is a)too small b)too cramped and c)too hidden to really serve that purpose. On Saturday nights, I want there to be somewhere for students to go hang out--playing music, games, etc. We are big time lacking here!

Posted by: Jillian | December 11, 2007 09:20 PM

I completely agree with the comments about the mall activities. Getting more people out there playing is important.
Now that the drinking age is 25, it is difficult for students to go out clubbing to let off steam. What about having an on-campus night club, complete with an up-to-date sound system, light show, dance floor, and fancy, non-alcoholic drinks? Louie's LL just doesn't cut it. It is not an inviting space.

Posted by: Sarah Buchanan | November 7, 2007 08:02 PM

If I interpret "facilities " in a general sense, I believe UMM is woefully lacking. There is a need for much more informal activity to open up a wider world for students. We need a Debating Club (Union) with funds to invite leading state figures as principal debaters. We need more exposure to cultural activities. Why not fund a program to bring artists/musicians from other colleges in the state to present or perform at UMM?
Recently UMM has improved its athletic opportunities. Now make the campus vital and interesting with better extracurricular activities which also contribute to a liberal arts focus.

Michael O'R
Posted by: Michael O'R | November 6, 2007 01:03 AM

Phase III addition to the HFA would be the best space we need for concerts, recitals, and even graduation.

Posted by: Kati H | November 6, 2007 01:01 AM

I believe this was posted in an earlier question, but I agree that we have a lack of general gathering spaces that are functional. TMC is okay, and the new booths really help create a space for conversation, but it would be nice to see something students can gather around, like air hockey or something, or even a tv lounge that isn't as hidden...I think if there was a space, completely casual, where people felt they could just join in the activity that other students are engaged in, there would be a greater sense of community overall and it would create more mingling.
I also think it would be a neat idea to get more activity out on the mall during the first month of school. Some of my best memories are from when a bad mitten set was set up or there was some sort of activity on the mall, because I felt like I could just jump in and join even if I didn't know anyone playing at the time. People here are friendly, and if new students figure that out sooner rather than later, I think that's key. I'm not sure how one could promote more activity on the mall, but maybe having bad mitten sets / balls etc like the res halls have more accessible would help.
Question 4

What learning outcomes should we expect the First Year Seminar program to meet?

Regarding the previous post: My apologies for reading the 2005-2007 catalog incorrectly. I understood that the "development of successful advanced work" was the point to FYS, which instead it is the reasoning behind taking General classes in your first and second year.

Even so, the purpose of FYS still needs to be re-routed to focus on the skills a student needs to survive in college and beyond.

Is this class unfair to the students who have exceptional writing and studying skills and are still forced to pay for the class? An intelligent student just told me when I asked her about FYS, that her professor tried to cram way too much information into the class, had essay question tests, and the student didn't learn absolutely anything from the class. This student is also wasting their money on a class that they didn't retain any information from.

Although I never had to take FYS because I was a transfer student, I have heard an overwhelming response from Freshman that FYS is a "joke." For a campus that claims to pride itself in diversity, Gordon is absolutely correct in saying that "diversity is great as long as everyone thinks alike."

The purpose of FYS is to "emphasize the development of the intellectual skills, the communication skills, and the framework for learning needed for successful advanced work." From the many students I've had conversations with, "development of successful advanced work" is far from what they receive from FYS. Instead of a brief over arch of skills, why aren't the basics taught, such as: note taking skills, studying and reading techniques, scholarly writing skills, resume writing skills, internship/job searching skills, et al. These skills are what students REALLY need to succeed in their college life and beyond.

FYS should be focused on transitional skills for college. The class should make sure students make use of their time and understand the skills needed to succeed in college.

We were just having this conversation at lunch--I think FYS needs to really focus on the transition skills of college. Maria summed up my thoughts very well--writing skills are essential, as well as knowing HOW to use the library (and the invaluable librarians!), demystifying the Academic Assistance Center, etc. I am constantly encouraging my incoming students to think about taking Learning to Learn (which needs a name change, in my mind!) because it teaches them the SKILLS they need to survive the transition to college. I don't care if you are a 35 ACT or a 17 ACT, time management and study skills change when you are in college. I wish FYS could incorporate some of these things (as well as all of the fabulous things others have mentioned--let's make it a 6 credit class!) :)

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We were just having this conversation at lunch--I think FYS needs to really focus on the transition skills of college. Maria summed up my thoughts very well--writing skills are essential, as well as knowing HOW to use the library (and the invaluable librarians!), demystifying the Academic Assistance Center, etc. I am constantly encouraging my incoming students to think about taking Learning to Learn (which needs a name change, in my mind!) because it teaches them the SKILLS they need to survive the transition to college. I don't care if you are a 35 ACT or a 17 ACT, time management and study skills change when you are in college. I wish FYS could incorporate some of these things (as well as all of the fabulous things others have mentioned--let's make it a 6 credit class!) :)

Posted by: Jillian | December 11, 2007 09:30 PM

The First Year Seminar program as presently constituted should be abandoned. The small (11-30 students) IS classes in the fall semester have received the lowest SOT scores for Question #5. "How much would you say you learned in this course?" annually since at least 2003. The SOTs are presented at http://www.morris.umn.edu/academic/reports.html
If any individual instructor has such a record of habitually low SOT evaluations, the individual would be expected to seek mentoring and change his or her approach to teaching.

Since I hold the unique position of having been removed from the FYS faculty by Dean Schwaller at the request of coordinators Dr. McPhee and Dr. Meeks I think I can question its commitment to diversity of thought and approach. I was removed because I stated that I would not use the common reader then in effect, and that I would give tests. In FYS diversity is great as long as everyone thinks alike.

Years ago the Inquiry course was described as a "politically correct boot camp" in The University Register. I think FYS has the same danger of being a politically correct groupthink indoctrination. I suggest the committee review the SOT written comments of FYS students to see if this position is supported or not.

I think the resources of FYS should be returned to the disciplines. The disciplines should then be charged with developing a small class experience for their majors or students interested in their discipline that would integrate the ideas of the discipline with the broader goals of the liberal arts. Such a course could emphasize writing and discussion.

Posted by: Gordon McIntosh | November 15, 2007 02:40 PM

There have been many thoughtful and insightful comments already so I'm afraid I don't have a lot to add to the discussion. Important learning outcomes could include:
1) Improved writing ability
2) Orientation to academic and research expectations
3) Social support and guidance to first year students
4) Critical thinking
5) Exposure to the multidisciplinary interaction of a liberal arts education

One area for further consideration might be how any learning outcomes are measured. By what mechanism will we know if the program, and specifically the students, meet the stated outcomes? Some of these, after all, cannot be measured effectively by grades alone.
In order to garner more student input perhaps more in-depth questions could be asked on Evaluation Day concerning the FYS experience.

Posted by: Peter Bremer | November 14, 2007 03:43 PM
I think the design of the FYS course is best suited for two things: adjustment, and writing skills. There is relevance in learning to be a student, and more specifically, a college student. FYS is one of the only times students, coming from high school and under their parents care, have the chance to have the guidance from a faculty member and other students in their same situation about adjusting to college life. Moreover, its a place where, because the classes are small, a student can connect with a faculty member and learn about resources such as tutoring that can make them a better/successful college student.

FYS is also the perfect time to help improve a student's writing skills. Grading for an FYS class, I noticed that at the beginning, a lot of students lack strong writing skills, especially when developing an argument. The small, discuss based nature of FYS is the perfect setting to combine discussion and critical thinking with writing assignments. I was amazed to see the improvement in the papers that I graded as the course progressed, and realized that my FYS did the same for me.

Posted by: Maria B | November 13, 2007 11:12 PM

I agree with Nic's suggestion that we place too much on the FYS. To me the most valuable goals of the FYS are a small, discussion-oriented course that pursues a meaningful question and demonstrates the integrative nature of a liberal education. It needs to be rigorous and to strengthen student's skills in critical thinking and communication, but most importantly it must communicate the nature and value of a liberal education.

Our students do not bring an awareness of the distinctive nature and strengths of such an education. The world around them constantly encourages a narrowing of thinking both ideologically and vocationally. The other courses they take can help but are based on a particular discipline or skill. FYS needs to model broad and integrative thinking in the context of a specific and manageable topic about which the instructor is excited.

What then are the outcomes:
1. a sense of satisfaction of understanding a specific problem more thoroughly
2. improved writing
3. improved critical thinking
4. an appreciation for the open-ended and integrative nature of liberal education

Posted by: Bert Ahern | November 13, 2007 10:58 PM

This is, I think, a $100M question, and one the campus really needs to have a conversation about. I think there have been many goals proposed, desired, and/or assumed, and they probably more than a little 2 credit donkey can pull to everyone's satisfaction. Little of it's been formalized in terms of learning outcomes, however, so I'll drop them here as goals and let the committee wrestle with where to go from here :-). (In fact, it is arguable that some of these goals are more political than educational, which makes it hard to describe them via learning outcomes.) Past goals that come to mind (and I may be forgetting some, and I'm not addressing possible future goals) include:

A better understanding of human diversity. This is the official umbrella topic of FYS. Opinions are mixed as to its appropriateness or success. In some ways I think this was addressed more consistently in the previous Inquiry course, but there will be those who disagree.

- Introduction to university academic life. I think there's something potentially valuable to be done here, but I don't think anyone's ever pinned it down well.

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• Allow/encourage/expect faculty to teach an academically rigorous course in a relevant area they are personally interested in.
• Provide a common academic experience for first year students.
• Ensure that first years have at least one small, discussion oriented course.
• Introduce first years to the concepts of the liberal arts.
• Include an information literacy component.

This is a lot for any course to carry, and I think essentially impossible for a 2 credit course with a fairly fluid faculty and uncertain support from the campus at almost every level.

I am a firm believer in the value of a good first year course. I loved the Humanities course at Reed (and took the optional 2nd year Hum course). I've really enjoyed teaching Inquiry and then FYS at UMM. But I think UMM still struggles to find something enough people can really get behind and support in the way we need for it to be effective.

Personally, I think this issue is central to the first year experience, and I'm glad that it's come up in your discussions.

Posted by: Nic McPhee | November 13, 2007 09:19 PM

Question 5

Does our current orientation program meet the needs of first year students?

Instead of having the orientation days focusing on a random group of first year students thrown together, the orientation days should be more focused on floor bonding or with the people in your residence halls.

Posted by: brianne | December 14, 2007 05:11 PM

When I was a first year student, I hated being singled out as a first year student. I wanted to be a member of the campus community, not constantly reminded that I was new to college. Once orientation was over, I was glad that there were not special events especially because I was new. I think orientation should have events that include not only activities for new students, but also activities that include upperclassmen and even faculty so one can become acquainted with them as well.

Posted by: Britney Appier | December 6, 2007 05:36 AM

I think it is really vital to give students a clearly articulated list of expectations during orientation. Too many students think that attending class is optional, that due dates are only suggestions, and that family vacations or weddings are excused absences.

To my mind, we need to urge students to view their education as their job. If an employee didn't come to work for a week and turned in a report two weeks late, how would her boss react? The orientation program is the ideal time to let students know that professors and UMM have certain expectations of them.

Posted by: Sarah Buchanan | November 27, 2007 11:20 PM

Although the two previous comments may be insightful, I have to ask: did you folks even read the question?!? It asks "Does our current orientation program meet the needs of first year students?". We are (or at least should be) discussing new student orientation. Please see the previous questions on this blog in order to comment on our current FYS program.

Posted by: Anonymous | November 27, 2007 08:53 PM

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I have asked many students informally about their courses, and thus far I have yet to find a student who has said that first year seminar was a worthwhile experience. The universal response I hear from students is disturbing. Either something is wrong with the fundamental design of the program or the student expectations are off base, or BOTH.
I would hope that students would be sufficiently challenged academically and gain an appreciation for informal discussion based learning. I have not taught FYI and do not have direct experience with or a solution to this problem, but there is a problem. Perhaps a small discussion class consisting of 10 freshmen (unaccustomed to such learning modes) would benefit from a few upper classmen to help "seed" classroom conversations.

Posted by: Keeler | November 27, 2007 07:26 PM

Aside from student development one thing that could have more time devoted to it is Academic Planning- in particular a session using the Graduation Planner tool.

Posted by: Clare Strand | November 27, 2007 07:15 PM

I think, Sarah Buchanan suggested that the city could stock more African American products. When talking with a black man who has to get products from Alexandria and has to drive to Minneapolis for a haircut, he suggested that if the city has not picked up the ball, one of the campus organizations should. Personnel from the Black Student Union, or the MSP program, or the bookstore could drive to Alexandria, buy supplies of the products, and re-sell them on campus for enough to cover the overhead. There are barbers in Minneapolis who have gone on the road on Mondays, their traditional day off, and cut hair on site. Why not work on providing services from our campus resources, if the city does not have an interest in doing so?

Dorothy (don't know how to post on the blog)

**Question 6**
**What sorts of initiatives with the City of Morris would be beneficial experiences for first year students?**

A number of years ago there was an attempt by a local stylist to serve the needs of the African American population. The issue was that the students didn't shop there once - it is believed that they still used their stores and stylists "back home". If there is a real need here I can bring it through the Chamber.

The 24 hour restaurant is at the top of my agenda this year.

I would like to see a program that really introduces the city to the students. Not just a picnic at the park but really getting to know local businesses, art galleries, people, etc.

Also, there are many misconceptions that students have had over the years that I believe should be addressed. First, that the city rejected Walmart/Target (or some variation thereof). This has never happened.

Second, the church owns the town - the Apostolic Church I mean here. There are MANY misconceptions about the church as well. The lack of understanding of our own city residents leads to a cultural gulf - with consequences that we see nearly every year. I believe this exchange would be a great addition to a first year experience.

Posted by: Ben Winchester | January 3, 2008 03:37 PM

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Karen--I TOTALLY agree with you! I'm participating in the Leadership Morris program right now and I am learning so much! Students are often unaware of the resources available in town and the Chamber has some really great things to share. I'm also right there with Sarah--African American hair products seem simple, but it would make a world of difference.

Posted by: Jillian | December 11, 2007 09:34 PM

One program that first year UMM students might benefit from would be a short, student-oriented version of the Leadership Morris program offered through the Chamber of Commerce. I attended this program the first year that we moved to Morris, and it was a great opportunity to learn about elements of the Morris community beyond the UMM campus.

Posted by: Karen Cusey | December 6, 2007 03:40 PM

I think one thing that we do not have in Morris that many students would be very thankful for would be a 24 hour restaurant. Ideally, though I believe that no act of God could accomplish it, would be to get a Target and some clothing stores for younger people. Though I do not believe that this is an initiative the students could bring on, I do think that it would bring more students to Morris.

Posted by: Britney Appier | December 6, 2007 05:25 AM

Ah, and by "icing" I meant salting.

Posted by: Catherine Nordstrom | December 6, 2007 01:57 AM

It would be really great if more stores stocked beauty products for African American women: make-up, hair-care products and the like. Also, do any of the salons have expertise in Black hair styling? If not, it would be helpful if someone would take a course or two in this area, so that our students do not have to travel so far to get their hair done.

Posted by: Sarah Buchanan | December 5, 2007 09:12 PM

Do you mean existing initiatives of Morris, or new ideas of things the students might like to take on that coordinate with possible initiatives? One idea for something new might be to promote safe Internet usage. With newer technologies like facebook, lots of people could benefit from some kind of workshop to understand how to use them (and things to be careful about or teach their children).

Posted by: Kristin Lamberty | December 5, 2007 08:55 PM

Sufficiently icing the roads.

Posted by: Catherine Nordstrom | December 5, 2007 08:33 PM

**Question 7**

**Does the current advising system meet the needs of first year students?**

I think we have many excellent programs in place for first year students (Deciding Project, Grad Planner, APAS, major Worksheets, areas of concentration, etc.) , but the inconsistency in advising could be a concern. By inconsistancy I mean both how individual faculty approach advising as well as the advising needs of particular students. I do not mean it as a negative. As long as faculty advisors are not significantly rewarded for their advising efforts, they
will continue to put their efforts where it will have the most reward for them and the majority of their students--teaching and research. This makes sense to me. I bet many students are quite happy to simply email a list of courses to their advisor when registration rolls around, because that is all the advising they need or want (I would have been annoyed to have someone vet the courses I want to take, so I would definitely have fallen into this camp as a student). For the group of students who have serious issues with transitioning to college, close interaction with their advisor will most likely never be enough to get them the help they need to succeed at UMM--advisors simply aren't trained to assist students who have big issues to deal with. Advisors at UMM are not professional advisors, and (I can't say it enough) advising is only a small component of an advisor's job. Some faculty are better at it (or enjoy it more, as Andy said) than others. Getting students who are in serious trouble in touch with the support they need can be done just as well (or better) by an instructor, RA, tutor, staff person who knows them, etc. as an official advisor. I feel that expecting all advisors to work closely with all their advisees is an unrealistic expectation from both the advisor and student perspective.

To reply to the question posed--I have no idea if the current system meets the needs of first year students because I have very little idea of what a first year student needs (I guess that's what your group is trying to find out--thanks for working on this!). Like any system, it probably works well for some students and advisors, and not so well for others. I like the suggestion of having first year students assigned an advisor who is also one of their instructors, an idea which could probably be tweaked to be somewhat equitable in terms of advising/teaching loads.

Posted by: Barry McQuarrie | December 12, 2007 10:32 PM

I have been dealing with this a lot lately as I have students I recruited coming to me for help because they a) can never connect with their adviser or b) aren't getting help from their adviser. I'm unsure if some advisers understand the serious financial implications students can have if they do not perform well. I really like Pete's idea of matching students with their actual professors. When I was a student at Gustavus, my First Term Seminar professor (equivalent to FYS) was my adviser until I decided I wanted to change it. That meant I not only had to check in with him before I register for classes, but I saw him at least 3 times a week in class. That level of interaction assured that he would connect with students if things weren't going well, or if things seemed "off."

Right now I am working with a first year student who has never met with his adviser because his adviser simply required him to e-mail a list of the classes he wanted to take for second semester. No face-to-face meeting, no four-year planning, no actual "advising." Just "send me your classes and I'll give you the OK." Well, it turns out this student is having some serious problems academically and personally and doesn't feel like he can go to his adviser for help. Serious, serious problem in my eyes.

Posted by: Jillian | December 11, 2007 09:42 PM

I feel strongly that first year students should be assigned advisors who also have them in class. Under the current system, I do not see my new advisees on a daily or weekly basis, and by the time news gets to me about an advisee's troubles, it is often too late to help them salvage their semester.

Posted by: Pete Wyckoff | December 11, 2007 08:31 PM
Matching advisors based on something other than "in my presumed major" may encourage students to approach advisors more often. Don't ask me how one would implement such a plan. A "find your advisor" ballroom dance? (kidding)
Posted by: Len Keeler | December 11, 2007 05:55 PM

I think it depends on the adviser and the student. As an adviser, I send two to three e-mail messages to my 20+ advisees per semester and the overwhelming majority of them are ignored. On the other hand, there are other advisees that come to see me almost every week when they have questions or issues to discuss.
I am currently teaching three IS courses with many first year students. Many of them do not even know who their adviser is. This is particularly true for those students having problems in my classes.
I think advising is hard work and very rewarding for those of us that enjoy it, but it is a 'chore' for those that do not enjoy it as much.
Posted by: Andy Lopez | December 11, 2007 04:20 PM

Honestly, some advisers here are amazing and others are not. Some take the time to sit down and help you plan your schedule and do real planning and others don't even learn the name of their advisees. Other than placing holds on students' registration based on credit hour completion, there really isn't a system at all that forces students to interact with their advisers--something that I think is incredibly important.
I think what would help is mandating what some major fields do, which is having worksheets where students can make a theoretical plan and design their entire course load during their college years. It forces them to look at their options, and gives advisers something to actually look at that reflects what a student wants.
Posted by: Maria B | December 11, 2007 03:41 PM

Question 8
How would you characterize the involvement of faculty with first year students? What sort of involvement would you like to see?

Question 9
How and where do we teach the meaning of the liberal arts to our first year students?

Question 10
Are we living up to the promises made in our admissions materials for first year students? If not, where are we under delivering?
I am not sure what explicit promises are made in our admissions materials regarding career help for first year students. However, my conversations with students, parents, and other constituents lead me to believe that they have some expectations about the delivery of quality and timely career services from a “quality liberal arts college.” As a result, I believe that UMM seriously
lacks in the number, quality, and timeliness of these services, especially for first- and second-year students and transfer students.

Many students entering college today do not come with carefully thought out academic and career goals. Some students come to college without the benefit of high school career guidance to help them make informed decisions about majors and careers. Therefore, it is not surprising that students, especially first- and second-year students in traditional liberal arts majors, are likely to change their major and think they have to leave UMM to meet their educational goals. Many “undecided” or “provisionally decided” students struggle with making an academic/career choice. The anxiety that results from this dissonance may force them to transfer to a college with a more “vocational” major because they do not understand the relationship between a liberal arts education and careers. They simply may not be aware that there are other ways to meet their career interests through a liberal arts education and staying at UMM. As an institution, we do not do enough to help first- and second-year students make this “beyond UMM” connection.

Since regular academic advisers – our teaching faculty – are busy teaching, conducting research, and participating in outreach activities, they often need to rely on others – usually professional career services staff - to help students with self-assessment; making career/educational decisions; guiding students through career exploration resources; assisting students to develop internships, part-time and summer jobs, and other experiences; and teaching students about graduate school and job-search techniques. Due to limited Career Center funding/staffing and a traditional separation of academic and student support services at UMM, it has been difficult, at best, to meet the educational/career development needs of students, especially first- and second-year students. Recent benchmarking data on career services indicates that UMM lags way behind other institutions we like to compare ourselves to in terms of professional staff, number of support/clerical workers, budget, and facility, that adversely effects programming for students. UMM students, especially first- and second-year students, are not getting the same level of professional career assistance as students at comparable Minnesota colleges. UMM lags way behind other comparable colleges in career dollars spent per student, number of individual appointments and workshops, use of career assessments, on-campus interviews, among other services. Since first- and second-year students usually are the most undecided/uncommitted, timely career services- undecided workshops/services, career/educational assessment, individual career counseling, career planning workshops, alumni networking, internship/experiential information, etc. - are not available to the majority of those who most need the help.

Deliberate early career interventions are important to helping students persist in college and eventually graduate. This point is consistent with the position of Noel-Levitz, an admissions and retention-consulting organization. According to Noel-Levitz, “intrusive, pro-active strategies must be used to reach freshmen before the students have an opportunity to experience feelings of failure, disappointment, and confusion.” Noel-Levitz also states, that “successful retention practices provide students with the tools they need to survive – before they know they need them.” UMM needs to develop and provide more quality and timely educational/career planning services for first- and second-year students and, at the same time, work to systematically integrate them into the academic fabric of the college.

In the last few years, all of the Minnesota State Universities have added professional career services staff, many specifically assigned to develop career services aimed at first- and second-year students with the sole purpose of increasing retention. All of the public and private institutions who have added additional staff are doing more in-depth programming that supports their academic mission and have developed specific services for each major and student group.
The Task Force on Undergraduate Reform for Student Support (2005) at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities has made the recommendation to “invest in and strengthen academic and career advising services across the campus” and to “develop campus-wide goals, communications plans, standards and expectations for professional, academic, and career advising and services.” There is a national trend to add professional career services staff to assist the academic program by creating and systematically delivering career/academic services specifically for first- and second-year students.

In order to help first- and second-year students and transfer students, UMM needs to provide more programming and staff consistent with national and regional trends in order to:

- Expand internship and experiential educational opportunities.
- Conduct “class” meetings/programs for each year (Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors – e.g. Senior Year Experience).
- Increase individual career counseling and advising sessions for more students, especially first year students.
- Increase paper and Web-based career interest inventories and self-assessment activity for educational and career planning that could be incorporated into summer registration, orientation, first year seminar course, and individual career counseling sessions.
- Develop more structured, intentional career interventions for multi-cultural students and special groups (GLBT, non-traditional aged, international, etc.).
- Integrate at least one career class presentation delivered by professional Career Center staff in each of the introductory courses for each of the majors on campus.
- Develop and regularly teach a credited career planning course (with perhaps multiple sections) available to all students, but with a focus on first- and second-year students.
- Develop corporate/non-profit partner programs for students and faculty that would involve field trips, campus visits, and research, internship and service learning opportunities.
- Develop and continually promote an integrated “academic, career, and volunteer planning system” introduced at orientation or first year seminar and used throughout the collegiate experience.
- Integrate career programming in each first year seminar course.
- Develop and deliver career programs in residence halls, especially those populated by first year students.
- Develop, promote, and maintain alumni career networking, e-mentoring, and shadowing programs and integrate into first- and second-year student programming.
- Develop career components that could be integrated into various “parents programs.”
- Provide more in-depth career assistance for all students, but especially first- and second-year students.
- Create new and additional partnerships with professional associations, K-12 schools, employers that support internships, teaching, and the educational/career needs for all students.
- Develop and deliver etiquette programs for all students.
- Create and maintain a first/second year student academic/career Web site.
- Create and manage educational career Web sites for certain professions and alternative careers for UMM majors (e.g., science and pre-health science).
- Reintroduce and manage a Peer Career Assistant (PCA) Program that involves first & second
year students.
• Develop a “Majors and Interests” Education/Career Fair targeted at first- and second-year students.

Most, if not all, of the above initiatives are typical programs and services offered by other colleges that UMM does NOT offer because of lack of staff/funding and the perceptions of faculty and administration about the (in)appropriateness of career programming at a traditional liberal arts college. The historical separation of UMM “academic affairs” and “student affairs” has lead to a turf protection stance by administrators (and some faculty), which has limited support for career services and, ultimately, has effected the delivery of services to students, alumni, faculty, and other constituents. UMM students deserve better!

UMM needs to offer a comprehensive career services program consistent with those found in top national liberal arts colleges (and other public colleges/universities in Minnesota), in order to help with recruitment and retention issues, and to provide a well-rounded, quality undergraduate liberal arts experience. UMM needs to assist students, especially first- and second-year students, and faculty advisors to help students see the connection between their liberal arts education and “life after UMM.” UMM needs to develop more intentionally targeted career programs and services that will help create realistic goals for students -especially first- and second-year students - to help them persist to graduation, perhaps attend graduate/professional school, or find personally satisfying employment.

Posted by: Gary Donovan | January 15, 2008 05:39 PM

Morris has exceeded my expectations! I have received all the help that I have needed and have felt safe.
From the quality and friendly professors, to the opportunities on campus, Morris has provided a fulfilling, interesting and though-provoking first semester. I am very pleased and would like to thank all the staff and faculty who make Morris the terrific place that it is.

Posted by: Brynn Stember | January 4, 2008 09:31 PM
What is the most important experience of first year students at UMM?

- **Nathan Swanson**: Wow, difficult question. I'm going to give two answers that I think are equally important. First, one important experience is the introduction to the academic life of the college. Often this derives from the first week of classes, FYS, and the FYS Convocation. I think to maximize this aspect, UMM should add another event (or enhance a current one) by using an event early on in the semester that is academically-orientated but beyond the usual curriculum so that students can be empowered and informed about the exciting opportunities that lay beyond December. Perhaps ACE could play a role in this, for instance, by showcasing UROPS or something like that in a sort of mini-URS at the beginning of the year. The other important experience is the construction of the social network. In fact, this may very well trump the academic side of the equation. It's all about meeting new people, casting a wide net of friends, remaining open to meeting students different than you, etc. It's all about the social capital!! (as Robert Putnam would say).

Do our facilities support the needs of first year students? What sorts of spaces do we need to better meet first year students’ expectations?

- **Nathan Swanson**: UMM needs more spaces for first year students to come together--expanded lounges in the dorms for instance. They're the group of students that like to hang out in bigger groups the most, largely because they want to get to know a lot of people. Expanded space would also allow for academic collaboration too. On the other hand, UMM needs to give students more personal space in regards to the residence halls. I think today's student has moved beyond the small 2-person dorm that our parents and grandparents were familiar with. I think students expect more in terms of the residence halls than we currently have or likely could ever have. Perhaps adding more "suites" that other colleges have would cater to that interest.

Are first year students at UMM a cohesive group? If not, sub-populations exist that we should look at?

- **Julia Schmit**: I think that they are cohesive in the sense that they all recognize that they have started and will end their college career together (for the most part) and they realize that they have that common bond but sub-groups still exist (athletes, musicians, the hippie-type, student leaders etc.). ...does that even answer anything?

- **Nathan Swanson**: I think to some extent first years are a cohesive group--although there are the usual divisions such as what dorm they live in*, which clique they're a part of, and such, students do have a base level of shared experiences that bind them together. The institution could perhaps do more to encourage the class to think of themselves as the "Class of 2008," for instance. *I would say this lends is perhaps the biggest factor that breaks down cohesion. Although students make cross-dorm connections through classes, student groups, and social activities, the seclusion of students in their own buildings at times almost breeds parochialism, causing students to miss out on the cohesion and
potential friendships until later in their college career.

**What learning outcomes should we expect the First Year Seminar program to meet?**

- **Joy Heysse:** I don't know about learning outcomes but from talking to my residents (and from my own experiences) it sounds like First Year Seminars seem to have different requirements. Like some involve reading numerous books and writing about each one, while others aren't quite as intensive. I think it would be nice if they followed more of the same level of strenuousness.

**What sorts of initiatives with the city of Morris would be beneficial experiences for first year students?**

- **Dan Kennedy:** An off campus orientation would be nice. Morris would benefit itself by getting a Target or similar store and I don't care when people try to tell me Pamida is close enough it isn't. Also a place that has a dance club (that minors can get in to.)
Appendix K
Direct mentions of the First Year Experience or entering students from the UMM Strategic Plan:

“Provide an honors environment that includes an exceptional student experience, which begins with a culture of accomplishment, and culminates with graduation and development of active alumni. Our strategic goals include a comprehensive First Year Experience, campus wide expectation of graduation in four years, and opportunities for all students to participate in activities to enrich academics, research, and outreach in a personally engaging community environment. “ (page 2)

“Student Initiatives: Develop a cohesive, year-long First Year Experience…” (page4)

“Expect that all UMM students participate in first year and senior capstone seminars, as well as achieve higher participation in service learning and leadership experiences. “ (page 12)

“Offer ‘life planning’ support to students entering college who have limited recognition of the relevance of a liberal arts education, including top quality academic counseling such as the deciding project, career guidance, internships mentoring programs, alumni networking, campus community building programs and other resources. This will improve student retention, satisfaction, graduation rates and future success.” (page 15)

Strategic Plan initiatives that need to be addressed in the First Year Experience

- Green initiatives and sustainability
- Understanding of the liberal arts/liberal learning
- Civic Engagement
- Cultural competence (understanding of domestic multiculturalism and global perspectives)
- Student life planning