

A photograph of the University of Colorado Denver Downtown Campus. The scene shows a wide, paved walkway leading through a green lawn area with many trees displaying vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and red. In the background, several modern high-rise buildings of the Denver skyline are visible under a clear blue sky. People are seen walking along the path, and a few benches are scattered on the lawn.

**University of Colorado
Denver
Downtown Campus
Foundations of Excellence
Final Report**

*A Path Toward Excellence for
First-Year Students*

June, 2009



“The future depends on what we do in the present.”

Mahatma Gandhi

A Dedication

To the students, faculty, and staff who built the current UC Denver foundations for learning

The Foundations of Excellence® (FoE) in the First College Year program would not have been possible without the strong institutional commitment from students, staff, faculty, and administrators who contributed their valuable time, talents, and unique insights to the project.

The part-time student who took 10 years to complete the baccalaureate degree, the undergraduate leader/scholar who earned a prestigious Harry S. Truman or Barry M. Goldwater scholarship, the 25-year staff member who supported undergraduate students, or the 10-year faculty member who successfully integrated teaching and research—each contributed to the strong sense of commitment and passion for student success at the University of Colorado Denver.

Since enrolling its first student in 1912, the University of Colorado Denver has remained committed to the current motto, “changing lives, saving lives, and building futures.” And so, it is with a great deal of respect and gratitude that we dedicate this Foundations of Excellence report to all those members of the University of Colorado Denver community who have nurtured the vision, made the improbable happen, and dedicated many years to this institution.

Our ability to enhance student learning in the future through recommendations contained in this FoE Final Report is a direct result of this foundational history.

John Lanning
Peggy Lore
FoE Co-Liaisons

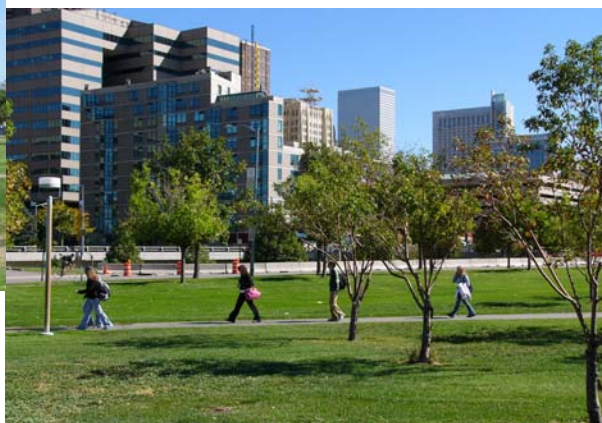
Denver, Colorado
June, 2009

University of Colorado Denver Downtown Campus Foundations of Excellence Final Report A Path Toward Excellence for First-Year Students

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I. Executive Summary



The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) project has been a nearly year-long process of examination and evaluation leading to this Final Report. The overall goal of these activities is to create a climate of excellence in the foundational first year of college at the University of Colorado Denver Downtown Campus. This report relies heavily on the results and recommendations from nine dimension committees and a steering committee composed of representatives from all quarters of the Downtown Campus.

The University of Colorado Denver Strategic Plan 2008-2020 calls for UC Denver to be “...a leading public university with a global reputation for excellence in learning, research and creativity, community engagement, and clinical care...” Median-level rankings among our peer institutions for retention and graduation rates, lack of permanent funding for first-year programs, and fiscal constraints that challenge our ability to adequately support the increase in the first-year student population must be seriously and systematically addressed for UC Denver to attain this vision of excellence.

The University of Colorado Denver is a dynamic urban research university. Over the past 18 years, the number of graduate students at the Downtown Campus has declined 9%, while the number of undergraduates has increased 48% and the number of first-year students has increased 286%. Two-thirds of the students at the Downtown Campus are now undergraduate students. The percentage of minority undergraduate students has steadily increased to nearly 30%, and the percentage of minority students among first-year students is currently 37%. Over the last five years, the Downtown Campus has been in a multi-transitional state defined by the significant growth of first-year students, the consolidation with the Health Sciences Center (renamed Anschutz Medical Campus), and a shift from being a totally commuter campus to one with limited student housing.

The environment for higher education in Colorado is also changing. The greater demand for public accountability for higher education is here to stay. The economic impact of Colorado's budget problems in support for higher education (being near the lowest in the nation), coupled with a national economic recession, suggest difficult times for the foreseeable future. UC Denver recognizes the need to take a hard look at the current practices, programs, and structures for the undergraduate experience as it pursues the goals of the Strategic Plan. The Foundations of Excellence project has provided a vehicle for an in-depth institutional self-study. UC Denver's participation in the FoE project has yielded a wealth of data from which well-grounded recommendations and several compelling urgent action items have been developed.

The FoE evaluation of the current situation for first-year students at UC Denver contains several positive messages. UC Denver has a high quality first-year experience for new students, high quality first-year instruction, and strong enthusiasm among staff and faculty. UC Denver has a comprehensive list of student support programs, and the institution has added a significant number of new academic and support programs over the last five years. The recent addition of student housing and expanded out-of-state and international student recruitment enhances the growing diversity of our campus. The influx of new faculty brings energy and innovative ideas to the learning environment.

There are considerable opportunities for improved student success based on the FoE evaluations. Weak advising during the transition to the university, inconsistent assessment of first-year programs, and a growing tension among faculty related to the importance of focusing on first-year students versus increasing demands for research and creative activities. Some of the support programs for the first-year student do not have proper staffing, adequate space, or permanent funding. Our entrenched, decentralized structure impedes communication and collaboration. Previous student support practices utilized by hard-working faculty and staff may not be as effective in this new, changing student environment.

The recommendations in this FoE Final Report constitute a robust action plan for achieving excellence in the first year of college at UC Denver. The nine dimension committees produced 75 recommendations, which, after internal discussions, were regrouped into 17 specific recommendations across eight categories. This FoE Final Report identifies recommendations in Chapter VI and highlights action items for implementation in Chapter VII.

While several FoE recommendations can be implemented with minimal fiscal implications, several urgent action items require campus commitments for space, staff, and operating resources. The FoE project identified the following integrated action items, totaling approximately \$240,000, that are essential now for improved UC Denver student success.

- Permanent funding for the First-Year Seminar program
- Full faculty participation in Early Alert system to address high D, F, W, and I grade rate in first-year courses
- Resources for student support programs such as Center for Learning Assistance, Writing Program, Math Laboratory, etc.
- Required FY student orientation and its coordinated linkage with FY advising, FY seminars, and convocation
- Dissemination of FY philosophy to students, staff, and faculty
- Campus-wide evaluation of transitional advising for FY students

The implementation of action items from the FoE recommendations is very important; however, there are two critical areas required to sustain first-year student success: structure and budget.

The current UC Denver administrative structure spreads first-year programs across academic colleges/schools, student affairs, and academic affairs units. Undergraduate Experiences, the Quality Undergraduate Education committee, and the Undergraduate Working Group provide some communication and collaboration among these units. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of coordination of first-year programs falls on steering and advisory committees that rely on individuals who have significant responsibilities in their home unit. The sustainability of quality first-year programs must have an administrative structure focused on first-year programs.

Academic units, student affairs, and academic affairs are large units with broad responsibilities that make it difficult for first-year academic or support programs to achieve prominence in the UC Denver budget process. First-year programs must achieve a priority in the budget process.

The structure and budget issues are inextricably linked. Structure and budget options for FoE recommendations include:

- a university college headed by a dean
- an associate VC position that reports directly to the Provost
- an assistant VC position designed to specifically bridge academic and student affairs

Institutions of higher education with excellent reputations have evolved, usually over decades, to a point where fundamental values of the institution, the things that define what it means to be a graduate of that institution, are embedded in the culture, curriculum, and expectations of their undergraduates. At UC Denver, our reputation has been firmly linked to the connections students feel with their specific disciplines or as graduate students. It is our vision that the FoE process will stimulate a cultural transition, one that moves us quickly in the direction of defining ourselves by our undergraduate first-year students, rather than by disciplinary identifications.

II. University of Colorado Denver



History

The University of Colorado established an extension division in Denver in 1912. The Extension Center was housed in a variety of office buildings in downtown Denver until 1938, when the Extension Center acquired permanent quarters in Denver at 509 17th Street. A single, full-time faculty member ran the school with the help of part-time teachers. In 1940, several hundred students were expected to enroll; 1,500 showed up. After WWII, veterans swamped CU's Extension Center for its undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, and vocational training programs. In 1947, the Extension Center moved into the Fraternal Building at 1405 Glenarm Place. The Denver Extension Center acquired a new home in 1956, when the University purchased the Denver Tramway Company Building at 14th and Arapahoe Streets.

Enrollment at the Extension Center continued to grow, and in 1964 it was renamed the University of Colorado Denver Center with authority to offer complete undergraduate degree programs. Following a state constitutional amendment in 1972 that provided for multiple University of Colorado campuses, the Board of Regents in 1974 established the CU System, with a system president and chancellors at each of its four campuses: Boulder, Colorado Springs, Denver, and the Health Sciences Center. Between 1973 and 1976, the State of Colorado built the Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC) on a 127-acre campus in downtown Denver shared by the University of Colorado at Denver, Metropolitan State College of Denver and the Community College of Denver. [Excerpted from "Twenty-Five Years: From Arapaho Camp to Denver's Urban University," Thomas J. Noel, Professor of History, University of Colorado Denver.]

What was to become the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center (UCHSC) began with the establishment of the School of Medicine in 1883 on the Boulder campus. By 1924, a permanent campus

was established at 9th and Colorado Blvd. in southeast Denver. By 2006, the HSC began to transition to its new campus located on the former Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora, approximately 12 miles east of downtown.

The Health Sciences Center and the Downtown Denver Campus were consolidated by the CU Board of Regents in 2004. The University of Colorado Denver now consists of two campuses with separate geographical facilities: the Downtown Campus and the Anschutz Medical Campus.

The Downtown Campus is devoted to the academic needs and educational interests of the residents of the Denver metropolitan area and the broader Rocky Mountain region. A solid academic foundation for undergraduates is provided through a comprehensive general education Core Curriculum based on a liberal arts philosophy of education. Diversity of the student body is a hallmark of the UC Denver Downtown Campus, with ethnic minorities making up 24% of the student body, 30% of undergraduate students, and 37% of the fall 2008 entering freshman class. Today, the Downtown Campus is home to approximately 14,000 students from every state in the nation and 128 countries around the world. The urban location allows a wide variety of research, internships, and job opportunities within a 25-mile radius of the Downtown Campus.

This Foundations of Excellence report focuses on the Downtown Campus. With the phasing out of the dental hygiene baccalaureate program, the only undergraduate students on the Anschutz Medical Campus are in the College of Nursing, and the undergraduate nursing students are admitted as upper division students, not as freshmen first-year students.

Strategic Plan, Role, and Mission

The Downtown Campus role and mission statement approved by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in the 2005 University of Colorado Performance Contract states:

“The Denver campus has a statutory role and mission of an urban comprehensive undergraduate and graduate research university, with selective admission standards, which offers baccalaureate, masters, and a limited number of doctoral degree programs, emphasizing those that serve needs of the Denver metropolitan area, and with statewide authority to offer graduate programs in public administration and exclusive authority in architecture and planning.”

The University of Colorado Denver Strategic Plan 2008-2020, approved by the Board of Regents in spring, 2008 identifies the Mission, Vision, and Values for the combined Denver campuses:

Mission - UC Denver is a diverse teaching and learning community that creates, discovers, and applies knowledge to improve the health and well-being of Colorado and the world.

Vision - By 2020, UC Denver will be a leading public university with a global reputation for excellence in learning, research and creativity, community engagement, and clinical care.

Values - To be a university greater than the sum of its parts, UC Denver embraces excellence in:

- Learning and Scholarship
- Discovery and Innovation
- Health and Care of Mind, Body, and Community
- Diversity, Respect, and Inclusiveness
- Citizenship and Leadership

Dynamic Nature of the Downtown Campus

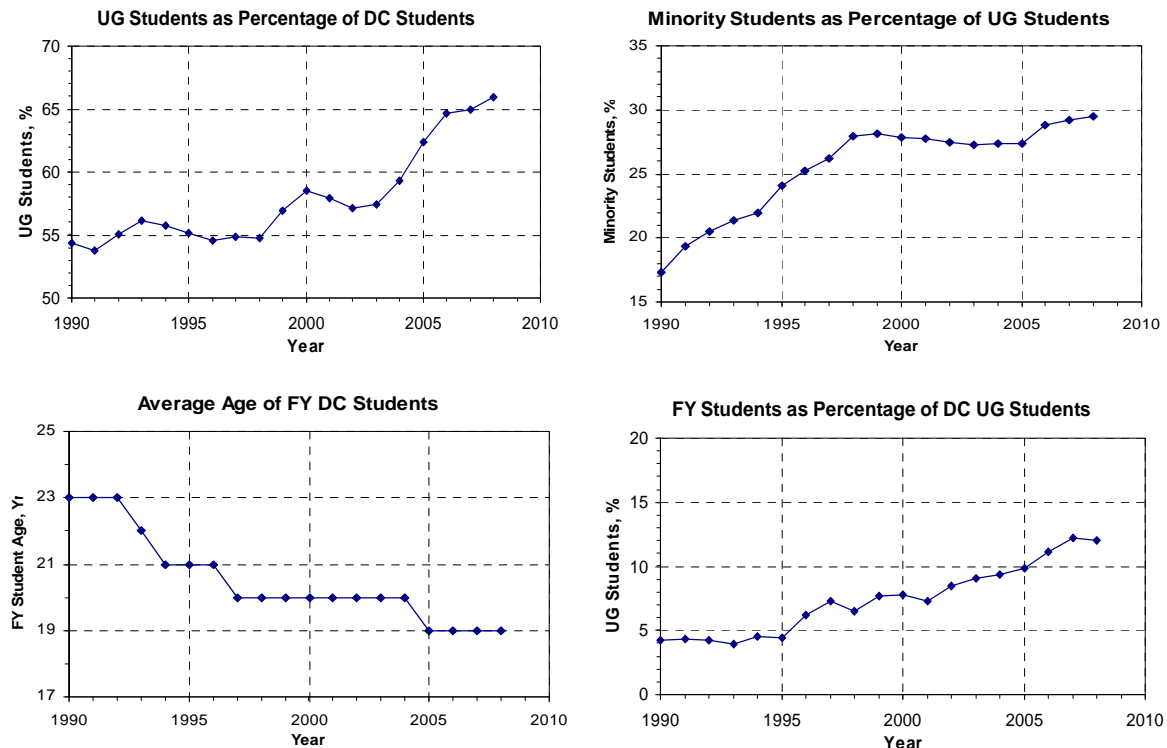
The University of Colorado Denver campuses enroll 16,019 (fall 2008) on-site, degree-seeking students, of which approximately 58% are undergraduate, 34% graduate, and 9% first professional. The Downtown Campus alone enrolls 13,073 (fall 2008) on-site, degree-seeking students, of which 66% are undergraduates.

It is common for 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education to tout their unique nature, yet it is fairly rare to find an institution which has difficulty finding peer institutions. The Downtown Campus struggles to identify a list of peers such that the campus maintains three lists: urban universities without a medical school, urban universities with a medical school, and a combined campus list of major research universities.

Results from UC Denver's participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicate that, when compared to other urban colleges and universities, UC Denver students are employed off campus more hours and have more obligations for dependent care of children or parents.

The dynamic nature of the Downtown Campus will continue given the current committee discussions about campus name and branding, Division II athletics, tenure-track faculty rewards, a clinical teaching track, and post-tenure review.

The Downtown Campus has been an official university campus for only 35 years. The campus no longer focuses on graduate programs, no longer focuses on evening classes for working students, and no longer serves primarily as a transfer-in and transfer-out institution. The following graphs demonstrate the dynamic nature of undergraduate students, especially the first-year (FY) student, on the Downtown Campus (DC) over the last 18 years.



An examination of the growth rate for student headcount population produced the following data over the 18-year period from 1990 to 2008 (fall data):

	<u>Annual Average</u>	<u>Overall Change</u>
Total student population	+ 1.10%	+ 22.3%
Graduate student population	- 0.51%	- 8.8%
Undergraduate student population	+ 2.21%	+ 48.4%
First-year student population	+ 7.79%	+ 286.0%

The Downtown Campus of the University of Colorado Denver is becoming more traditional in student populations: a higher percentage of undergraduate students, a higher percentage of new freshmen compared to new transfer students, and a higher percentage of new freshmen in the total undergraduate population.

The tremendous growth in first-year students has placed a strain on the undergraduate curriculum, especially in general education, and on student support services and offices. An assessment of first-year programs is needed to evaluate the overall impact that accompanies these dynamic changes on the Downtown Campus.

III. Foundations of Excellence



The FoE process provides a comprehensive review of first-year programs to identify those programs that are working and those that need to be modified. The FoE model is built around nine aspirational standards of excellence, called dimensions. The FoE process is internally conducted but externally guided by the FoE Policy Center. This FoE Final Report becomes the basis for the action plan for implementing recommendations required to attain excellence in the first year of college at UC Denver.

Participation

Seventy-seven members of the UC Denver community participated in the FoE process (see Appendix for a detailed list of participants).

The organization of the Foundations of Excellence includes multiple levels of responsibility:

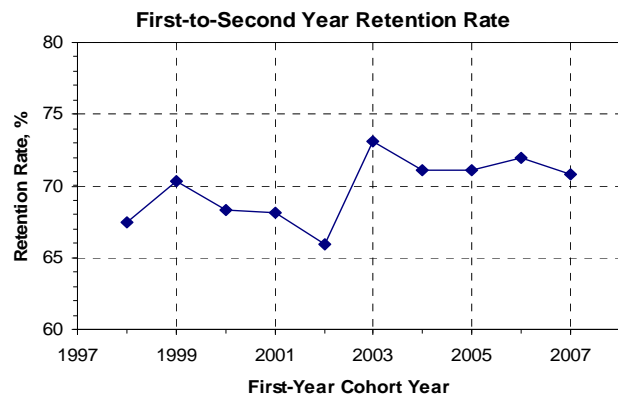
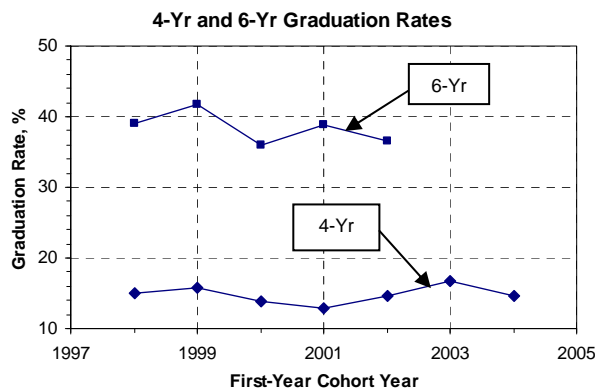
- Liaisons (Two) – FoE oversight and communication with Policy Center
- Task Force – cross-campus academic, student affairs, and financial responsibilities
- Steering Committee – expertise in working with first-year students
- Dimension Committees (Nine) – faculty, staff, and students for data collection and evaluation
 - Philosophy Faculty Diversity
 - Organization All Students Roles and Purposes
 - Learning Transitions Improvement

The chairs and members of the nine dimension committees are the core of the FoE process.

The Foundations of Excellence data collection focused on two surveys – the first for students and a second for faculty, staff, and administrators. Data for FoE were collected and entered into FoE software for processing and analysis. Each of the nine dimension committees evaluated data and prepared a report on the current situation, opportunities, challenges, and recommendations (summary dimension committee reports in Appendix). This FoE Final Report is based on the dimension committee reports and reviews carried out by the FoE Steering Committee and Task Force.

The University of Colorado Denver has had a strong commitment to the first-year experience as a cornerstone for student learning, from the opening of the first student support offices, prior to becoming an official campus in 1974, to the first Freshman Seminar in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in the early 1990s, to the establishment of the Undergraduate Experiences office in 2006. Starting with former Provost Mark Heckler and continuing with current Provost Rod Nairn, the senior administration has solidly backed UC Denver’s participation in the Foundations of Excellence. Their support has made the process of engaging associate vice chancellors, deans of undergraduate colleges, program directors, advising directors, faculty, and staff less difficult and, in turn, has generated a great deal of enthusiasm and motivation for campus participation.

In 2005, as a result of legislation, the University of Colorado and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education entered into a performance contract. While most of the provisions in the performance contract are based on system-wide performance, individual campuses are required to improve student retention and 6-year graduation rates. Section 2.5 of the performance contract states that UC Denver will attain a 72% retention rate by 2009 and a 42% 6-year graduation rate by 2016. UC Denver retention and graduation data are graphed below.



The table below compares UC Denver graduation rates and retention to other urban research universities.

Institution	Fall 2007 FT, FY Students	Fall 2007 25th %ile ACT-Comp	Average 4-Yr Grad Rate, %	Average 6-Yr Grad Rate, %	Average Retention Rate, %
University of Colorado Denver	883	18	14.5	39.0	71.0
University of Akron – Main Campus	3205	NA	11.8	35.3	65.5
University of Alabama Birmingham	1487	19	14.3	37.0	76.0
Cleveland State University	947	16	10.0	29.8	59.8
George Mason University	2391	20	28.8	55.0	83.5
University of Illinois Chicago	2830	20	19.8	49.0	78.0
University of Maryland Baltimore County	1419	22	30.3	57.5	82.5
University of Memphis	2022	17	18.3	34.3	72.5
University of Missouri Kansas City	929	19	16.3	44.5	65.5
University of Missouri St. Louis	477	19	21.0	43.3	70.5
University of New Orleans	951	18	6.3	24.5	58.5
Portland State University	1283	NA	13.5	35.3	66.8
University of North Carolina Greensboro	2401	18	27.8	50.8	76.5
University of Texas Arlington	1941	19	14.0	39.3	65.3
University of Texas Dallas	1053	25	32.5	55.5	80.8
University of Texas El Paso	2447	16	4.3	28.3	67.8
University of Toledo – Main Campus	3137	NA	16.0	44.0	68.0
Virginia Commonwealth University	3457	NA	19.5	43.8	80.5
Wichita State University	1160	20	15.0	38.0	68.3
Non UC Denver Average	1863	19.1	17.7	41.4	72.6

- Notes:**
1. Data source: IPEDS, <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/>
 2. Average data are for 4-year period ending fall 2007.
 3. FT refers to full-time students taking 12 or more hours in the fall semester of their first year (FY)
 4. Peer institution list from UC Denver Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Analysis

When compared to other urban institutions, UC Denver has a much smaller number of first-time, full-time students. The fall 2007 25th percentile ACT composite score, the average 4-year and 6-year graduation rates, and the average first-to-second year retention for UC Denver are slightly below the peer average.

As outlined in Chapter II, the dynamic nature of the Downtown Campus of the University of Colorado Denver is due, in large part, to increases in the first-year student population. A number of UC Denver programs and positions has been developed over the last five years to strengthen first-year student learning and retention:

- Campus Village – residential housing near campus
- Campus Wellness and Safety – new director and assistant director positions in Student Affairs
- Career Center (CC) – reorganized to include support for FY student career counseling
- Community Standards and Wellness – new position in University Life
- UC Denver Core Curriculum – revamped undergraduate general education core
- Dean of Students – new assistant vice chancellor position in Student Affairs
- Denver Bound – scholarship program in Admissions to attract out-of-state FY students
- Early Alert system (EA)– fifth week intervention program for performance, participation or behavior issues
- Experiential Learning Center (ELC) – reorganized for internships, research, and service learning

- Fall Convocation – engage first-year students
- First-Year Seminars (FYS) – campus-wide initiative for FY students
- International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) – support for international students
- Learning and Living Communities – multiple classes for cohort student groups
- Learning Resource Center (LRC) – reorganized student support, ESL support, and tutoring office
- Quality Undergraduate Education (QUE) – advisory committee for undergraduate initiatives
- Student Success – new assistant vice chancellor position in Student Affairs
- Student Success and Academic Advising – reorganized for pre-major advising of FY students
- Supplemental Instruction (SI) – support initiative in LRC for biology, chemistry and physics
- Undergraduate Working Group (UWG) – discussion committee for undergraduate student issues
- University Honors and Leadership (UHL) – campus-wide honors and leadership program

The first reason for participation in the Foundations of Excellence program is to bring the University of Colorado Denver first-year programs into a cohesive, collaborative planning process. It is the opinion of the Quality Undergraduate Education (QUE) committee that UC Denver has a strong commitment to quality first-year undergraduate programs, but that the institution lacks a cohesive integrated plan and structure to effectively impact retention of undergraduate students. The institution has implemented numerous academic and support programs over the last five years, but there is no commensurate increase in student retention or graduation rates. Changing institutional behavior and culture is important to our first-year student learning objectives.

The second reason for participation is to incorporate this FoE Final Report into the UC Denver self study to the Higher Learning Commission for the 2010/2011 North Central Association (NCA) of Schools and Colleges accreditation process.

UC Denver’s participation in the FoE program is an exciting opportunity to work within the recently approved campus strategic plan, to incorporate meaningful assessment in the upcoming NCA accreditation process, and to move the undergraduate curriculum and student support services to a high level of excellence. FoE will greatly assist UC Denver in becoming a “first choice” institution for undergraduate students and to meet retention and graduation goals.

Objectives

The FoE Steering Committee developed objectives that represent expectations as to how implementation of the Foundations Final Report would impact the Downtown Campus. Here is a summary of UC Denver objectives for participation in the Foundations of Excellence program:

- Influence updates to the University of Colorado Denver Strategic Plan 2008-2020 to increase the focus on the first-year student, and to place a stronger emphasis on student success.
- Clearly define the role of faculty in the first-year experience to address the conflicting priorities of trying to simultaneously be a small college and a major research university.
- Promote a change in organizational structure to provide better communication between diversity, student affairs, and academic affairs units.
- Develop a separate vehicle (outside student affairs and academic affairs) for first-year student issues to gain a higher priority in the UC Denver budget process.
- Promote a process to bring about rapid implementation of FoE first-year initiatives that do not involve budget allocations.
- Invigorate QUE with a new prioritized agenda for student success.

IV. Importance of the First Year



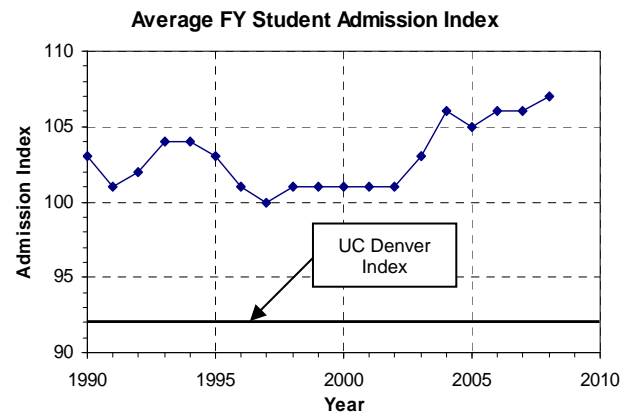
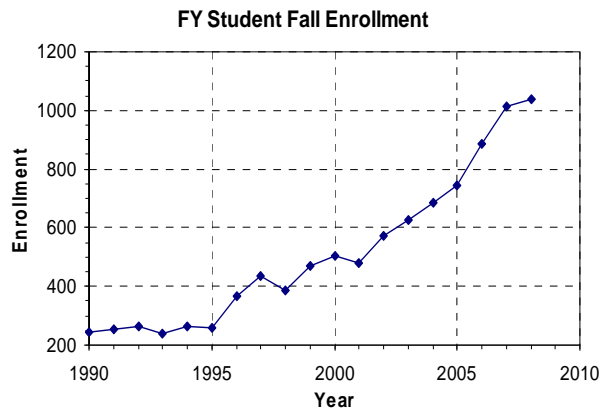
Background and Research

Numerous scholars such as Upcraft, Gardner, Tinto, Kuh, and Barefoot, have produced strong research-based data that support the first year of college as the most important in the academic life of the undergraduate student and is, consequently, the focus of institutional resources to improve student retention and graduation rates. The UC Denver Foundations of Excellence Steering Committee is firmly committed to the belief that the first year of college is the foundation for undergraduate student learning and success.

The University of Colorado Denver, like all 4-year Colorado public institutions, faces many challenges in admitting adequately prepared first-year students. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education requires an “admission index” incorporating the high school GPA, high school class rank, and standardized ACT/SAT examination scores (UC Denver has a 93 institutional admission index). This admission system allows for varying institutional selectivity of first-year student admissions, but does not ensure that students have sufficient college-preparation course work or that students are adequately prepared for the academic rigors of the university. Under the guidance of the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado high schools have incorporated content-based standards into the high school curriculum since the mid-1990s; however, only course titles and grades based on Carnegie units and seat time are transcribed and presented to colleges for admission and student advising. In 1988, the University of Colorado added a secondary set of admission standards, Minimum Academic Preparation Standards (MAPS), which require specific course content for admission of first-year students. While considerable efforts are under way to improve high school content standards and to better define the college admission process, admission of first-year students to the University of Colorado Denver is not a guarantee of adequate academic preparation or of student success.

UC Denver First-Year Students

As presented earlier, the dynamic nature of the Downtown Campus of the University of Colorado Denver is linked to the substantial growth of first-year students and support programs designed to assist first-year student learning.



Category	Fall 2008	1990-2008 Average
First Generation	17.4%	17.4%
Minority Population	36.0%	39.0%
Female Students	54.0%	56.0%
Pell Grant Recipients	25.0%	22.0% (slightly increasing)
High School Grades	3.33	3.3
Student Admission Index	107	103 (increase since 1997)
Remedial English, ACT <19	19.0%	25.2% (substantial decrease)
First Semester UCD Grades	2.7	2.7
First Semester A,B,C Grades	81.0%	81.0%
First Semester < 2.0 GPA	19.0%	21.0% (slight decrease)

Notes: 1. First Generation refers to students with parents who did not attend college.
2. Pell Grant percentage refers to recipients rather than eligibility.

Based on the increase in student admission index, decrease in English remediation rate, and slight decrease in first-semester probation, the academic quality of first-year students is increasing. At the same time, the percentage of first generation students, minority population, and Pell Grant recipients has remained steady.

Critical Importance of First-Year Grades

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the UC Denver Undergraduate Working Group has been examining the impact of student grades and academic status (good standing, probation, or suspension) on graduation rates. This assessment is consistent with research on the impact of grades on student retention. [Ref. Braden J. Hosch, "The Tension between Student Persistence and Institutional Retention: An Examination of the Relationship between First-Semester GPA and Student Progression Rates of First-Time Students, Annual Meeting of Association for Institutional Research, May, 2008.]

A summary of the impact of UC Denver student grades on graduation rates is given below. Data are based on the 2002 cohort of 633 first-time, full-time students.

Six-year graduation rate of 437 students never on probation	46%
Six-year graduation rate of 176 students with one term on probation	36%
Six-year graduation rate of 20 students with two or more terms on probation	15%
Percentage of FY students on probation after first semester	21%
Retention rate for students with first semester GPA ≥ 2.0	75%
Retention rate for students with first semester GPA < 2.0	13%

For the fall 2008 semester, there were a total of 798 students (out of 8,500 undergraduates) on probation or suspension at UC Denver. Of these 798 probation/suspension students, almost 50% were freshmen. As expected, there is a decrease in the percentage of students on probation/suspension progressing from the freshman to senior years. While it is difficult to predict “at-risk” students, there is evidence that a successful first semester of college is highly correlated to student persistence and graduation rates. Therefore, an emphasis on quality support programs for all first-year students is expected to have a positive impact on student learning and student success at the University of Colorado Denver.

V. Summary of UC Denver Strengths and Weaknesses



The nine dimension committees evaluated the current UC Denver situation, identified opportunities and challenges, and provided a letter grade for the current situation. While the FoE program confirmed some previous perceptions, it also identified many strengths and weaknesses that would have gone unrecognized in the absence of the FoE evaluation process.

This chapter summarizes the current situation that exists for FY students, and to some extent all undergraduate students, at the University of Colorado Denver. The student survey, the faculty/staff survey, and evaluations within each dimension committee identified strengths and weaknesses which were the basis of recommendations that follow in the next chapter of this FoE report.

Strengths and weaknesses from the FoE student survey are summarized:

Strengths:

- overall FY experience at UC Denver
- student conduct and codes of behavior
- quality of FY instruction
- campus environment
- transitions: pre-enrollment

Weaknesses:

- transitions: advising (inconsistent with faculty/staff survey)
- institutional organization (inconsistent with faculty/staff survey)
- course placement
- exposure to and interaction with diverse populations
- opportunities to make connections with students and faculty

Strengths and weaknesses from the FoE staff, faculty and administrator survey are summarized:

Strengths:

- learning in FY instruction
- academic advising (inconsistent with student survey)
- course goals toward learning
- institutional organization (inconsistent with student survey)

Weaknesses:

- exposure to and interaction with diverse population
- motivation and goal setting of students
- educational learning environment
- FY structure and organization
- learning assessment
- professional development
- communication with administration and among academic units

Strengths and weaknesses identified in the dimension committee reports and Steering Committee discussions are summarized:

Strengths:

- consolidation with Anschutz Medical Campus brings opportunities
- stable upper administration leadership
- UC Denver (both campuses) strategic plan moving toward implementation
- energy and talent of UC Denver faculty and staff
- array of best practices (FYS, SI, Early Alert system, UHL, etc.) in place, at least for basics
- consistent general education Core Curriculum across all colleges and all majors
- communication tools (QUE) exist to bridge student affairs and faculty affairs
- recent increase in hiring of tenure-track faculty
- commitment to making experiential learning part of baccalaureate program
- commitment to implementation of FoE recommendations

Weaknesses:

- lack of focus on undergraduates and first-year students in UC Denver strategic plan
- lack of common learning goals across FY curriculum
- strong disciplinary/college independence impedes communication and coordination
- lack of faculty rewards and recognition by primary unit of the value of participation in FYE
- large size, >50, in some FY courses
- significant number of non-freshmen in FY courses
- best practices (examples include: FYS, SI, Early Alert system, UHL, etc.) are not adequately assessed
- assessment results are under-utilized and under-publicized
- lack of staff, space, and budget in student support services
- varying coordination, communication, and participation in transition programs (orientation, advising, FYS, extended orientation, and convocation)
- lack of required exposure to diverse world views
- lack of instrument to assess student experience with diverse world views
- untapped institutional pride that exists in UC Denver baccalaureate graduates
- lack of broad understanding of basic elements of FY student success

Each dimension committee provided a letter grade of the current situation at UC Denver. While it is easy to be self critical, the dimension grades ranged from D to C+, with a FoE cumulative GPA of 1.72. This barely passing internal evaluation indicates there is considerable room for improvement, and is the driving force for recommendations in the next chapter of the FoE report.

VI. Recommendations



The heart of the Foundations of Excellence Final Report is the list of recommendations that have risen from a comprehensive review of data from the dimension committee reports. These recommendations define the action plan to promote change for increased student learning and student success.

UC Denver used an internal vetting process to move toward consensus on the list of recommendations. From 75 original recommendations from dimension committee reports, the Steering Committee and Writing Team compiled the 17 highest priority recommendations into eight categories identified below. While most of the eight categories are integrated across dimensions, the philosophy and diversity dimensions are very important and stand as individual categories.

The student survey results were coupled with NSEE survey information, other student data, and dimension committee discussions to provide a broad context for the recommendations. However, uncertainty exists in some recommendations due to the low FoE student survey participation rate of 12% (250 out of 2,100).

The recommendations below for UC Denver developed by the FoE process are arranged by category and are not ranked.

First-Year Steering Committee

1. Create a permanent First-Year Experience (FYE) Steering Committee

Responsible Unit: Quality Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs
Resources Required: Moderate, with all objectives developed

A common theme from several of the dimension committees is the need to create a steering committee to keep the momentum of the Foundations of Excellence process going, to oversee implementation of recommendations, and to help communication across administrative and academic units.

There are several recommendations from dimension committees that would become the objectives for such a FYE Steering Committee.

- Work with Provost and University Planning and Accreditation Committee (UPAC) to incorporate FYE goals and objectives into the University of Colorado Denver Strategic Plan
- Market the UC Denver First-Year Experience within the pending university name, logo, and mascot, which should lead to increased institutional identity
- Create a comprehensive training program for new and continuing faculty and staff involved with first-year programs
- Coordinate and centralize funding requests for FYE academic and support programs
- Evaluate the administrative structure to initiate and sustain FYE initiatives

2. Develop an administrative structure to maintain FY initiatives and prioritize FY initiatives in the UC Denver budget process

Responsible Unit: Proposed FYE Steering Committee

Resources Required: Substantial, when all objectives developed over a period of time

The administrative structure and budget roles outlined for the FYE Steering Committee are critically important and are afforded their own recommendation. The current administrative structure for FY programs across academic units, student affairs and academic affairs makes it difficult to achieve high FY budget priorities and to sustain FY initiatives because of the broad mission of these large units. To implement and sustain FY recommendations, it is essential to develop an administrative structure that competes effectively with major units in academic and student affairs.

The FoE Steering Committee does not reject a “university college” concept, but recognizes that given the budgetary issues that face the institution, this concept may not be realistic at this time. It is the conviction of the FoE Steering Committee that many coordination, assessment, and budget functions of a university college can be implemented without the political and financial expenses associated with the administrative structure of such a college.

There are at least three administrative structure options to bring FY funding initiatives to a level consistent with major UC Denver units:

- a university college headed by a dean
- an associate VC position that reports directly to the Provost
- an assistant VC position designed to specifically bridge academic and student affairs

A funding option outside the UC Denver budget process is to assess academic units in support of FY initiatives carried out across the campus.

3. Improve resources and services in FYE academic and support programs

Responsible Units: AVC Student Affairs, AVC Academic Affairs, FYE Steering Committee

Resources Required: Substantial funding over several years

While UC Denver has an extensive list of FYE academic and support programs, some are funded with temporary funds, while others lack the space and support staff to provide adequate services. In particular, this recommendation addresses:

- Academic Advising (staffing and cross-unit coordination)
- Career Center (staffing and space)
- Experiential Learning Center (staffing)
- First-Year Seminar Program (temporary funds)
- Learning Resource Center (space and staffing)
- Student Support Services (temporary funds for federally funded TRiO program)
- Writing Center (space and staffing)
- Undergraduate Experiences Annual Symposium (temporary funds)

4. Increase communication about FY programs

Responsible Unit: FYE Steering Committee, Integrated University Communications
 Resources Required: Minimal (for marketing and brochures)

The responsibility for increased communication was so prevalent across several dimension committees that a separate recommendation is warranted. UC Denver, like most research universities, has a decentralized structure and well-developed “silos” that impede communication across and among academic and student affairs administrative units.

Many FYE issues can be resolved with a simple increase in communication, which ultimately should be the responsibility of the proposed FYE Steering Committee.

First-Year Philosophy

5. Disseminate the UC Denver philosophy developed under the FoE program

Responsible Unit: Quality Undergraduate Education
 Resources Required: Minimal (for marketing and brochures)

While many of the UC Denver campus units have mission statements, prior to FoE there was no overall philosophy statement for the first-year experience. The UC Denver philosophy statement recommendation is given in the Philosophy Dimension Committee summary report (see Appendix).

Inherent in the introduction of a FYE philosophy for UC Denver is the widespread dissemination of the philosophy focused on creating a new culture and new traditions around the FYE. The Philosophy Dimension Committee recommends the utilization of the philosophy statement in:

- communication with students and parents
- first-year student orientation
- first-year seminar courses
- student “road maps” that identify key milestones and campus resources
- learning and living communities
- student support offices
- new faculty and staff orientations

Until such time that the proposed FYE Steering Committee is implemented, it will be the responsibility of the Quality Undergraduate Education committee to review, approve, and disseminate the UC Denver FY philosophy statement.

Student Advising

6. Review current structure of academic advising for first-year students

Responsible Unit:	Undergraduate Experiences, School and College Advising Directors, and Academic Success and Advising Center Director
Resources Required:	Moderate to Significant (funding to develop and analyze a survey and funding to create and print a handbook)

Academic advising for students with declared majors is carried out by professional staff and by faculty in the student's home school/college. Students who have undeclared majors are advised by professional staff in the Academic Success and Advising Center, a unit housed in Student Affairs. The number of advisors differs in each entity, but generally speaking, each unit is somewhat understaffed. The combination of professional staff advisors mixed with faculty advisors creates risks for gaps in the delivery of consistent information to students. In the FoE student survey, dissatisfaction was expressed about advising in the transitional stage when students first enter the university. In reviewing NSSE data, students who persist and remain at UC Denver appear to be satisfied with the advising they receive.

Recommendations suggest an overall need to develop standard and coordinated practices when addressing first-year students. Two specific recommendations are presented.

- Develop a survey across of all advising offices to evaluate and improve first-year student advising
- Create a first-year advising handbook for faculty and staff, based on results of survey

Additionally, a recommendation to broaden and strengthen the Early Alert system speaks to both the inconsistency in advisor practices in utilizing Early Alert as well as the need to continually orient and promote the system to faculty.

Transition Experiences

7. Develop a seamless transition experience for the first-year student

Responsible Unit:	Student Affairs (University Life and Student Success), Academic Advising, Undergraduate Experiences
Resources Required:	Significant (funds for new staffing and space as needed or re-configuration or re-allocation of existing staff and space)

All of the advising offices require that first-year students meet with an advisor before registering. Advising and registration starts at different times for the various offices. Most advising offices see students on a rolling basis, at "pre-orientation" advising sessions, or at orientation. While this varied approach may address internal constraints or challenges, there is external confusion for students, parents, counselors, and others seeking to obtain information for new students.

Practices for advising new students and participation in the orientations are somewhat dictated by factors which include staff resources and varying student populations. An example would be the difference in numbers of traditional first-year students; the Business School and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences have lower numbers than the other colleges because many of their new students are admitted at the sophomore or junior level.

The FoE student survey responses for this dimension clearly illustrate the need to review and address the following recommendations in order to provide a smoother transition for traditional age FY students.

- Establish a comprehensive one-stop first-year (traditional age and transfer) student services/orientation center
- Develop a seamless first-year experience that incorporates closer collaboration and linkages between orientation, First-Year Seminars, convocation, and first-year advising
- Require FY students to attend orientation (currently ~80% FY students attend orientation)
- Review and enhance the current orientation by providing a multi-day experience
- Add staff coordinators for orientation, learning/living communities, and Supplemental Instruction
- Evaluate, modify, and further develop the First-Year Seminars (See Recommendation 16)

Students and Learning

8. Create and coordinate a broad range of learning opportunities which recognize the developmental needs of FY Students

Responsible Unit:	Undergraduate Experiences, Academic and Student Affairs, Core Curriculum Oversight Committee, Center for Faculty Development
Resources Required:	Moderate (resources to enhance faculty development)

The Downtown Campus is undergoing a transformation from a commuter campus to one with residential facilities located adjacent to the campus. With this change, the institution finds itself with a growing traditional age student body that comes with different personal and social needs, and with high expectations from both students and parents. For faculty members who have primarily taught non-traditional, commuter students for years, the changing student population may present challenges.

UC Denver's First-Year Seminars and the University Honors and Leadership program are two initiatives that specifically seek to engage first-year students. The seminars have existed intermittently for over ten years, taught by a core of regular faculty. Beyond the seminars, the general education classes have not been intentionally drawn into many of the discussions about teaching the first-year student. Developing common learning goals and objectives for these students that extend beyond the seminars is a recommendation that serves three purposes: 1) cultivating a different campus culture that intentionally considers the needs of first-year students; 2) building a bridge to review and further develop the entire undergraduate experience, and 3) focusing and coordinating resources.

Responding to concerns identified in the FoE student and faculty surveys and the discussion of various dimension committees are recommendations that address individual student development and the establishment of a campus community. The recommendations are to:

- Establish a student-to-student mentoring system that pairs trained juniors and seniors with first-year students.
- Examine best practices models for incorporating programming to address the social and personal development of first-year students
- Further create and fund projects that connect students with each other, the faculty, and the community
- Further create and fund projects like the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program and Research and Creative Activities Day that provide forums for students and faculty to engage outside of the classroom

Faculty

9. Increase faculty and staff awareness of student issues and challenges through a FY academic and student services program

Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Experiences, Student Affairs/University Life, Center for Faculty Development
Resources Required: Minimal (for staffing and scheduling)

The need for increased faculty and staff awareness of and participation in FYE programs and services is a strong theme that emerges from the FoE surveys and the work of the dimension committees. Various ways of meeting that need are suggested throughout the dimension committee reports. A focus on faculty awareness and participation needs to extend from pre-FY and pre-collegiate pipeline programs, through matriculation and orientation, to the completion of FY course work and advising. This recommendation has the specific objective of setting up a FY support program in the Campus Village residence hall targeted at FY students living there. It would give participating faculty an opportunity to understand the challenges FY students face through a workshop and speaker series.

Support staff members in the academic units and at Campus Village are the front-line contacts for students. Extending the training and communication network to include and update these resources will address the need to increase campus awareness of UC Denver's philosophy for the undergraduate experience.

10. Increase faculty (tenure and non-tenure-track) involvement with FY students and FY courses

Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Experiences; Schools and Colleges, Center for Faculty Development
Resources Required: Moderate to Significant (depending on methods used to reallocate teaching and advising assignments, the extent of involvement, and an adequate budget for stipends and other incentives)

Students generally comment on the lack of community (in, for instance the NSEE surveys), but is there a feeling of community among faculty? Lack of community experienced among the faculty will impact the feeling of community among the students. Community building activities among the faculty should be implemented to increase involvement and reward those who participate through the merit system and in other ways. As an example of such an activity, a gathering of faculty members who teach first-year students (perhaps in spring to balance the Undergraduate Experience Symposium in the fall) could be organized to share experiences and best practices for involving and rewarding participants. Each undergraduate school and college could designate an internal first-year committee of faculty who use a "train-the-trainers" model. Coordination with Student Affairs could create teams of faculty and staff who attend an annual FY conference and who then disseminate information at a fall symposium.

11. Document and analyze the reward system for faculty who teach FY courses and who are involved with FY programs. Evaluate primary unit RTP criteria for faculty involved with FY programs

Responsible Unit: Provost, Academic Deans, School RTP committees
Resources Required: Minimal – if this analysis is included in the recommended comprehensive FYE assessment toolkit (see recommendation #14)

There is no evidence that the current RTP system actually rewards faculty who teach first-year students or interact with them outside of class. This deficiency needs to be investigated and documented more

thoroughly. One way to do this would be to include FY teaching in the current review of tenure criteria prompted by the recent CU system report on tenure-related policies and practices. However, this will not capture information on the non-tenure track faculty who are teaching large numbers of freshman; thus, a separate study of non-tenure track faculty incentives and rewards should also be undertaken.

Diversity

12. Increase and strengthen FY students' interactions with faculty, staff, and other individuals on and off campus to incorporate and promote diversity/inclusion dialogue, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity.

Responsible Unit: AVC for Diversity and Inclusion, Student Affairs, Undergraduate Experiences, college curriculum committees, Experiential Learning Center, Faculty Assembly

Resources Required: Moderate (to include additional/current content and expand traditional learning, experiential learning, and service opportunities)

FY students at UC Denver now have access to a variety of learning and service opportunities through the core curriculum, FY seminar courses, and programs for experiential learning, undergraduate research, and honors and leadership. In addition, 500+ FY students live in the Campus Village residence hall. These academic and social components can provide many opportunities to increase and enhance diversity-related content in campus interactions, didactic learning and teaching settings, and service opportunities. With the establishment and support of top-level administrative leadership (AVC for Diversity and Inclusion) and the annual reports from the University of Colorado Blue Ribbon Commission on Diversity, dedicated attention to this recommendation is timely and feasible.

13. Develop an inventory and description of all diversity programs and activities to be included in student, staff, and faculty orientations

Responsible Unit: AVC for Diversity and Inclusion, Student Affairs (University Life)

Resources Required: Minimal to Moderate (to develop inventory/data base describing new and ongoing activities, courses, services and to create a dynamic website to house the information collected)

This recommendation seeks to address some of the student survey responses that touch on communication, lack of knowledge about resources, and lack of exposure to diversity. While there are a number of events, speakers, and student organizations that address and foster diversity, communication regarding what the campus offers can be improved through the intentional collection and dissemination of information about diversity activities, and active promotion of events will improve participation.

14. Increase the quantity of underrepresented students through coordinated efforts among existing university programs; Implement measures to assess the impact of this recruitment

Responsible Unit: AVC for Diversity and Inclusion, Student Affairs (Office of Enrollment Management), Pre-Collegiate Programs,

Resources Required: Significant (additional staffing and funding needed to expand and enhance recruiting through the university pipeline programs)

The university currently offers a number of programs to recruit underrepresented students: Pre-Collegiate, Educational Opportunity Programs, Daniels Fund Scholars, Denver Scholars, and other pipeline programs. These programs have attracted numerous underrepresented students to apply for admission to UC Denver and other University of Colorado campuses. With additional funding, staffing,

and planning, these programs could expand their outreach and teaching activities to have a greater impact on successful recruiting and on the positive growth of the undergraduate population, including increased numbers of students for whom the Downtown Campus is their “first choice” for college.

Expanding these programs also would provide more opportunities for increasing faculty interest and engagement in a critical FYE component that involves prospective students and their first exposure to the UC Denver campus environment.

Assessment and Improvements

15. Create a comprehensive FY evaluation and assessment toolkit and data repository

Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Experiences, Student Affairs, Assessment Office

Resources Required: Moderate (to design and implement data instrument, collection, analysis, distribution and results storage)

A comprehensive FYE evaluation and assessment toolkit would include methods for measuring the effectiveness of and recommending improvements for several FY components, including:

- Recruiting operations and the pre-collegiate programs
- FY Seminars (see Recommendation #16)
- University Honors and Leadership program
- New student orientation
- Early Alert system
- Probation/Suspension system
- Supplemental Instruction
- Learning Resource Center
- Centralized and school-based advising practices
- RTP system for faculty
- Experiential Learning
- Undergraduate Research Program

A centralized, accessible repository of evaluation and assessment data would be maintained to facilitate dissemination of assessment information and improvement interventions.

16. Design and implement alternative methods to collect climate survey data

Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Experiences, Student Affairs, Institutional Research

Resources Required: Moderate (to design and implement data instrument, collection, analysis, distribution and results storage)

The low student participation in the FoE survey hindered our ability to make stronger recommendations in some areas of this FoE report. Several alternative methods to web-based questionnaires were discussed by the FoE Steering Committee, including focus groups and in-class paper surveys. Currently, there is no obvious solution to this low student participation issue, and further study is warranted.

The Steering Committee also discussed the implementation of a regularly administered, campus-wide climate survey to track longitudinal data for academic and support programs, including FY programs and diversity. Several dimension committees discussed longitudinal data, but no one dimension committee made a longitudinal study a high priority. Changes in philosophy, goals and objectives, communication,

diversity, and culture for academic and support programs need to be tracked through a climate survey for FY students, undergraduates, graduate students, staff, and faculty on the Downtown Campus.

An on-going climate survey is necessary for UC Denver to monitor improvements generated by implementation of recommendations in this FoE report. The UC Denver campus should evaluate NSSE, EBI (administered FoE surveys), and other survey instruments to determine which, if any, meet the needs for longitudinal data for the UC Denver campus.

17. Modify the First-Year Seminar Program

Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Experiences

Resources Required: Moderate to Significant (move to permanent funding)

A recent publication by the Association of American Colleges & Universities identifies first-year seminar programs as a high impact educational practice with nearly universal positive impact on student retention, graduation rates and grades. [Ref: G.D. Kuh, High-Impact Educational Practices: “What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter,” Washington, DC, Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008.]

The UC Denver First-Year Seminar program received positive comments in several dimension committee reports. However, early assessment results of students in the UC Denver FYS program demonstrate slightly lower first semester grades and slightly lower first-to-second-year retention rates for seminar participants compared to non-seminar participants.

The UC Denver campus-wide FYS program is only three years old, and significant changes have been made to the FYS format and faculty development workshops each year. Additionally, the FYS assessment is preliminary and needs to be expanded to look at reasons students select the seminar course. While UC Denver believes the FYS program is a foundational program for transitional students, in-depth assessment and modifications are required for program continuation.

VII. Implementation



Implementation of recommendations contained in any type of strategic plan is just as important as the plan itself. After a review of all the FoE Steering Committee discussions, the nine dimension committee reports, and campus internal vetting of the draft FoE report, the UC Denver FoE “team” has devised the framework for a multi-stage implementation plan, for which many details have yet to be finalized.

During the FoE process, there were two important issues that could not wait to be resolved until the completion of the FoE Final Report:

- low number of participants in the FoE student survey (consistent with other UC Denver student survey participation rates)
- large number of requests of students for assessment information through electronic surveys

As a result, UC Denver has established two internal committees for immediate action: 1) to review e-mail options for students at both the Downtown and Anschutz Medical Campuses, and 2) to examine the frequency and nature of survey requests of the Downtown Campus students.

Improved organization and communication are at the heart of several recommendations developed by the dimension committees. Recommendations (numbers from Chapter VI) expected to have minimal financial implications are to:

1. create a permanent FYE Steering/Advisory Committee
4. increase communication about FYE programs
5. disseminate UC Denver FY student philosophy
6. review current structure and practice of academic advising for FY students
9. increase faculty awareness of student issues and challenges
11. analyze reward system for FY faculty
13. develop an inventory of diversity activities for student, staff, and faculty orientations

Several recommendations in Chapter VI require a commitment of funds and/or space on the part of UC Denver. These action items, including the urgent action items identified in the Executive Summary, are vital to a successful conclusion to the FoE process and must be viewed as a necessary investment for the successful future of UC Denver. Following is a summary of action items and their preliminary cost estimate:

\$180,000	academic advisors for transitional advising of first-year students
\$200,000 + space	additional staff support for Career Center, Experiential Learning Center, Learning Resource Center, Student Support Services, etc.
\$130,000	permanent funding for modified First-Year Seminar program
\$ 15,000	permanent funding for Undergraduate Experiences annual symposium
\$ 5,000	implementation of campus-wide advising survey
\$ 35,000	implementation of student-to-student mentoring system
\$ 30,000	additional support for Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program
\$150,000 + space	one-stop FY student services and orientation center
\$ 20,000	required, two-day orientation for FY students and parents
\$210,000 + space	staff coordinators for orientation, living/learning communities, and Supplemental Instruction
\$ 10,000	development of FY materials for faculty and staff orientations
\$ 10,000	development of FY assessment tool kit and data repository
\$ 5,000	development of campus-wide climate survey

Undergraduate Experiences sponsors an annual symposium focused on undergraduate issues. The Fifth Annual Undergraduate Symposium, to be held on the Auraria campus on Friday, 2 October 2009, will address the implementation of and budgetary planning for FoE recommendations. The goal of this year's UE Symposium will be to have broad student, faculty, administration and student discussions on the FoE recommendations, to prioritize action items into short- and long-term implementation, and to devise implementation strategies focused on the UC Denver planning and budget processes.

It is very important that the positive momentum resulting from collaborative discussions during the FoE process be maintained during various stages of implementation. The tendency to lower energy after completing the dimension committee reports, after completing the FoE Final Report, or after the conclusion of the Undergraduate Experiences Symposium must be avoided. To continue the FoE momentum, the following short-term implementation steps will be taken:

1. meet with the Provost and the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance to summarize the FoE recommendations, to encourage immediate support for action items that require minimal institutional resources, and to seek access to the UC Denver budget process for prioritized action items requiring resources
2. continue convening the FoE Steering Committee until the proposed FYE Steering Committee is sanctioned and charged with specific responsibilities
3. quickly communicate with the academic deans of all schools and colleges in order to solicit support for all FoE recommendations, but specifically for action items requiring resources
4. initiate regular conversations between the Assistant Vice Chancellors for University Life, Student Success, and Undergraduate Experiences as part of the coordination and planning for the October Undergraduate Experiences Symposium

VIII. Conclusion



The University of Colorado Denver Downtown Campus’s participation in the Foundations of Excellence program provided for the first time an in-depth evaluation of first-year academic and support programs. The deliberate and extensive FoE process validated some of our perceived strengths and weaknesses; more importantly, it exposed a number of unknown strengths and weaknesses in our programs, policies, and practices that impact student success at UC Denver. Additionally, the breadth of the FoE involvement has greatly extended the base of students, faculty, staff, and administrators who strongly believe the first year to be the foundation for student success at the baccalaureate, graduate, and professional levels.

The recommendations in this FoE Final Report constitute a mandate for first-year student excellence. The recommendations do not focus on improving our ranking among peer institutions, but rather, stress foundational excellence in student learning. When implemented, the recommendations provide a clear action-oriented path to improved student success.

There are always concerns about the financial implications of recommendations from any planning process. It is important to re-emphasize that the FoE process has been invaluable in galvanizing energies to focus on the FY experience for UC Denver students, to point out that not all FoE recommendations have significant fiscal implications, and to suggest that action items requiring resources can be implemented using short- and long-term strategies and multiple funding sources.

This Foundations of Excellence Final Report is the first step in an extended implementation enterprise. The UC Denver FoE “team” will work with campus leadership to ensure that the FoE recommendations attain the highest possible priority for implementation. The path to excellence outlined in this FoE Final Report is an investment in the future of UC Denver students, staff, and faculty.

IX. Appendices

Committee Members and Participants

Seventy-seven members of the UC Denver community participated in the Foundations of Excellence process: 4 students, 29 staff, 26 faculty, 17 administrators, and one community college administrator.

Co-Liaisons:

John Lanning, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Experiences, Professor of Chemistry
Peggy Lore, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success

Philosophy Dimension Committee:

Committee Chair:

Peter Bryant, Professor of Decision Science and Information Systems

Committee Members:

Kenneth Bettenhausen, Associate Professor and Director of Business Management, FYS Director
Lissa Gallagher, Director of Experiential Learning Center
Laura Goodwin, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Ann Martin, Associate Professor of Accounting
Carol Morken, Assistant Dean and Director of Student Advising in College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Samantha Ortiz Schriver, Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Life, Dean of Students
Paul Rakowski, Assistant Dean of College of Engineering and Applied Sciences Student Services
Frank Sanchez, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Tammy Stone, Associate Dean of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Professor of Anthropology

Organization Dimension Committee:

Committee Chair:

Lynn Mason, Senior Director of Student Services at Anschutz Medical Campus

Committee Members:

Laura Argys, Associate Dean of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Professor of Economics
Jean Claude Bosch, Associate Dean for Operations in the Business School, Professor of Finance
Kent Homchick, Professor of Theater, Film, and Video Production
Lisa McGill, Director of Disability Resources & Services
Rachel O'Toole, Executive Assistant to Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity & Inclusion

Learning Dimension Committee:

Co-Committee Chairs:

Ann Martin, Associate Professor of Accounting
Lissa Gallagher, Director of Experiential Learning Center

Committee Members:

Sean McGowan, Assistant Professor of Music & Entertainment Industry Studies
Kim Penoyer, Coordinator of Academic Technology/Extended Learning
Brad Stith, Professor of Biology
Suzanne Stromberg, Senior Instructor of Communication
Sam Welch, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering
Jake Adam York, Associate Professor of English

Faculty Dimension Committee:

Committee Chair:

Tammy Stone, Associate Dean of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Professor of Anthropology

Committee Members:

Tod Duncan, Senior Instructor of Biology

N.Y. Chang, Dir. of Center for Geotechnical Engineering Science, Professor of Mechanical Engineering
Mary Lee Stansifer, Senior Instructor of Business

All Students Dimension Committee:

Committee Co-Chairs:

Samantha Ortiz Schriver, Assistant Vice Chancellor for University Life, Dean of Students
Charles A. Ferguson, Associate Professor of Biology

Committee Members:

Elibeth Arce, Undergraduate Student
Eman Ismael, Undergraduate Student
Vincent Thompson, Undergraduate Student
Quinston Daugherty, Community Manager of Campus Village Apartments
Teresa DeHerrera, Director of TRiO program
Karin Hunter, Academic Advisor in College of Arts & Media
Jonne Kraning, Director of Career Center

Transitions Dimension Committee:

Committee Co-Chairs:

Khushnur Dadabhoy, Interim Director of University Life
Carol Morken, Assistant Dean and Director of Student Advising in College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Committee Members:

Lynn Bennethum, Associate Chair and Associate Professor of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences
Kenneth Bettenhausen, Associate Professor and Director of Business Management, FYS Director
Debra Blanton, Lead Service Center Representative
Abenicio Rael, Assistant Director of Pre-Collegiate & Academic Outreach Programs
Thomas Sheridan, Assistant Director of University Life

Diversity Dimension Committee:

Chair:

Zen Camacho, Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion, Vice Provost

Committee Members:

Rachel O'Toole, Executive Assistant to Associate Vice Chancellor of Diversity & Inclusion
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Catherine Beuten, Senior Internal Communications Specialist
Donna Langston, Director of Ethnic Studies
Lisa McGill, Director of the Office of Disability Resources and Services
Omar Montgomery, Director of Black Student Educational Programs and Opportunities
Anu Ramaswami, Professor of Civil Engineering
Regina Rodriguez, Financial Aid Advisor
Manuel Serapio, Associate Professor of Marketing
Karolina Villagrana, Undergraduate Student
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Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee:

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Committee Members:

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Tammy Stone, Associate Dean of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Professor of Anthropology

Improvement Dimension Committee:**Committee Chair:**

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Committee Members:

Bill Clark, Assistant Professor of Music & Entertainment Industry Studies

Doris Kimbrough, Associate Professor of Chemistry

Dave Gavisk, Assessment Coordinator in School of Education & Human Development

Karen Sobel, Reference and Instruction Librarian of Auraria Library

Steering Committee Members (in addition to Dimension Committee Chairs):

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Roxanne Byrne, Associate Professor of Mathematical and Statistical Sciences, Chair of Faculty Assembly

Barbara Edwards, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management

Mary Francavilla, Director of Scholarship/Resource Office, Chair of Staff Council

Steve Krizman, Associate Vice Chancellor of Integrated University Communications

Patrick McTee, Director of Financial Aid

Christine Stroup-Benham, Director of Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Analysis

Web-Enabled Survey System (WESS) Administrator:

Christine Stroup-Benham, Director of Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Analysis

Task Force Members (in addition to Steering Committee Members):

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Teresa Berryman, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance

Frank Sanchez, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

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Other Participants and Reviewers:

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Ann Rutherford, Office of Undergraduate Experiences

Jolene Fukahara, Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Analysis

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Dimension Committee Summary Reports

The nine dimension committees correspond to the nine aspirational standards of excellence in the Foundations of Excellence model. Each dimension committee collected data, identified opportunities and challenges, provided a letter grade evaluation of the current UC Denver situation, and developed specific recommendations to maintain current strengths or to improve first-year (FY) student success. Detailed reports for each of the nine dimension committees are available electronically at www.cudenver.edu/foe, and a summary report for each dimension is provided in this appendix.

The dimension committee summary reports rely more heavily on internal jargon, acronyms, and FoE numeric scales than the bulk of the Final Report. The numeric scale referred to in several of the summary reports is based on the 1(low) to 5 (high) scale used for questions in both the student and faculty/staff/administrator surveys. Within the FoE model, a “target” score of 3.5 on the 5.0 scale was utilized to distinguish strong from weak.

Philosophy Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

There is no campus-wide UC Denver philosophy statement on the first-year (FY) student. Many of the various campus units have statements of mission, values, and related ideas, and based on its review of the associated documents, the Philosophy Dimension Committee found a variety of elements relevant to a philosophy of the first-year experience (FYE). Some are specific or relevant to the first year. Undergraduate Experiences (UE) and First-Year Seminar (FYS) program reviews come closest to providing the components of a philosophy. The UE mission is “to 1) promote access for all undergraduate students to high quality and innovative UC Denver programs; 2) improve the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students; and 3) coordinate programs between academic and student affairs to better serve and engage undergraduate students.” Overall, the UE is charged with developing and maintaining new programs that will revitalize the undergraduate programs in order to make UC Denver a “first choice” institution for students.

As part of a 2006 review of FY programs, the FYE Working Group recommended a FY seminar program as well as the following:

- a required orientation for all new students
- campus-wide adoption of a comprehensive, developmental approach to academic advising
- introduction of an electronic portfolio (to be used throughout students’ undergraduate education to help them see connections and develop long-term academic and career goals)
- development of a "student road map" specifying key milestones and campus resources available to students as they proceed from orientation to graduation to engaged alumni
- development of learning communities based on concurrent enrollment in three classes, consisting of a freshman seminar, an English composition course, and a large enrollment, introductory class that complements the subject matter of the freshman seminar
- promotion of traditions that provide shared experiences and support students' identity with UC Denver

The goals originally established for the First-Year Seminar program were to:

- provide students with an introduction to the university community

- convey and establish high expectations for rigorous academic engagement
- serve as a first step to a student's academic career
- allow academic departments the opportunity to engage students during their first semester on campus
- establish a sense of community on campus and downtown Denver
- establish a connection to academic units and the disciplines they represent
- instill an appreciation for the diverse resources available on campus and in the community
- encourage students to become engaged in campus life
- create a stronger identity with the Downtown Campus of UC Denver, and instill enthusiasm for and commitment to UC Denver
- enable students to return to their communities armed with the tools of their academic training

While many ideas and concepts have been developed in the context of developing FY seminars, none has been codified into anything that could be called a philosophy at this point.

The Philosophy Dimension Committee felt it important to develop a philosophy statement that offers broad general principles connecting the FY philosophy with our more general philosophy of undergraduate education, as well as more specific activities and commitments that would be appropriate to the FYE in particular.

The following Philosophy Statement from the Foundations of Excellence project is proposed for UC Denver:

We believe undergraduate education transforms and enriches lives, and contributes to healthy societies. The foundations built in the first-year experience are critical to successful undergraduate experiences. We value the uniqueness of each student, and we will:

- *Create and maintain an environment emphasizing relationships between faculty, students, and staff.*
- *Instill the values and expectations of the UC Denver community, including inquiry, reflection, critical thinking, collaboration, engagement, and lifelong learning.*
- *Provide University resources and support services that promote student academic, social, and personal success.*
- *Provide opportunities for development as individuals, as leaders, and as citizens of our local and global communities.*
- *Create a culture of inclusivity and diversity.*
- *Support all members of the UC Denver community through compassion, respect, and ethical behavior, and recognize the importance of exploration in identifying one's life's work.*

Opportunities and Challenges

The FoE faculty and staff survey results show only moderate rates reported by 30% or fewer of the respondents on questions covering the perceived availability of campus-wide and department-based philosophy statements. Faculty-only scores were a couple of percentage points lower than this. These results, moreover, are only for the slightly more than 200 people who responded to these questions. The bulk of the nearly 800 faculty/staff respondents did not answer these questions, presumably because they had no direct involvement with FY students. Their awareness of FY issues is presumably no greater than that reported by the respondents. We have an opportunity to use the philosophy development process to increase awareness of the needs and importance of FY students and contribute to raising awareness of the

increasing importance of undergraduates to our university mission. The increasing emphasis on undergraduate education at UC Denver brings with it the need to overcome a certain amount of institutional inertia associated with our previous emphasis on graduate education.

The Philosophy Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C– to this dimension. The absence of a campus-wide statement of FY philosophy suggests a low grade, but the committee recognized that numerous bits and pieces (such as those illustrated above) of such a statement have been developed.

Organization Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

At the UC Denver Downtown Campus, multiple administrative structures cooperate to administer and align a small number of FY policies, services, and programs. Despite some attention and resources devoted to its growth over the past few years, the existing first-year organizational structure (FYOS) has a shallow history and tenuous foothold at the campus, and the degree to which the existing FYOS results in an integrated approach that crosses division/unit lines at UC Denver is moderate at best. Collaboration is creative and productive on a few levels and among a few dedicated staff and faculty, but modest or inconsistent in other respects. FoE survey responses and other findings also reveal instability, gaps, and opportunities for improvement in FYOS faculty/staff training and development, use of evaluation methods to improve the first-year experience (FYE), and FY finances and resources.

The FYE at UC Denver is managed primarily through the office of Undergraduate Experiences (UE), directed by an Assistant Vice Chancellor in Academic Affairs. A separate division of Student Affairs, administered by an Associate Vice Chancellor, provides other programs and services benefiting FY students. A close working partnership has developed between student and academic affairs (in particular between UE and the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success in Student Affairs). Other intra-university ties are created between UE, Student Affairs, and the schools and colleges through orientation, advising, course instruction, and faculty/staff participation on six undergraduate experience committees that include FY issues in their work. Orientation and advising received by new students vary in content and intensity from term to term, and there is no centralized office or director dedicated to orientation services. The current ratio of advisors to students in Student Affairs and in the schools and colleges (1:400-600) is too low to support a viable FYE.

About 10 FTEs devoted to the FYE and FY student services are shared among 30 upper- and middle-level administrators (Provost, AVCs, and program directors). In this group, no one administrator devotes 100% of his or her time exclusively to the FYE, and only five individuals devote 50% or more of their time to the FYE.

Awareness of and participation in FY programs, issues, activities, and interventions among UC Denver staff and faculty are limited. Responses to five FoE survey questions relating to student referrals to/for a variety of resources suggest that only 14% to 22% of the Downtown Campus faculty and staff understand enough about the FYOS to be in a position to assist new students routinely with referrals. Among faculty and staff respondents, there exists a negative perception of the extent to which the institution is organized to develop an integrated first college year that supports routine communications among discrete functions, and collaboration between academic and student affairs. Only 18.5% rated communications “high/very high,” while just 19.5% rated collaboration “high/very high.”

Only 250 FY students responded to the FoE survey -- just 12% of those surveyed. They were asked five questions about how well they understood institutional organization in finding assistance or answers to administrative questions, course work, academic rules, non-academic matters, and campus-sponsored organizations or events. The most positive responses were for degree of understanding in knowing where to go for administrative answers: 46.9% “high/very high,” and 21.2% “not at all/slight.” The area rated the lowest for level of understanding was for obtaining information about institutional organizations and events: just 23.1% “high/very high” and 41.7% “not at all/slight.”

Student survey questions about how well the institution has connected the FY respondents to other students, faculty members, and extracurricular activities all received substantially negative ratings: 46.1% “not at all/slight” for opportunities for involvement in extracurricular activities, 46.3% “not at all/slight” for connections to faculty members outside of class, and 58.8% “not at all/slight” for connections to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. An intervening factor may be student choice of UC Denver as an institution. Close to 50% of FY respondents indicated they are not attending their first-choice institution, and for them academic commitment and social ties to the campus community may be weaker at the outset.

The degree to which evaluation methods and results used to improve the FYOS and its performance is low to moderate, and dependent upon available staff, faculty time, and monetary resources. Basic evaluation methods have been developed and used to some extent in the new student orientation program and in the FY Seminars program. The Early Alert system and Honors and Leadership Program were recently implemented, and evaluation methods are pending. A comprehensive set of evaluation measures for assessing the FYE needs to be developed.

FYE training and orientation materials for faculty and staff designed to increase understanding of FY issues reach some faculty and staff who work with FY students, are intermittent from year to year, and have not been evaluated across all units for quality or effectiveness. There is no centralized or coordinated process to present a comprehensive message of the FYE and associated resources to new UC Denver faculty and staff, and each college and school disseminates FY information differently. Some information related to FY students is provided in the recently implemented new faculty orientation developed by the Center for Faculty Development.

Funding and other resources for FYE programs and services vary widely in adequacy and consistency and are not allocated in any centralized decision-making process. In general, most FY-oriented programs and services are funded minimally to provide basic services, but they are not able to offer service levels that are competitive with our peer institutions. A few key programs – most notably the FY Seminars program – are supported only with one-time funding and are vulnerable to budget cutting.

Opportunities and Challenges

There are now opportunities to enhance the FYOS by upgrading its organizational features and by increasing 1) awareness of it, 2) wider faculty and staff participation in it, and 3) financial resources for it. These are made more feasible by the consolidation of two campuses (the former UC Health Sciences Center and the University of Colorado at Denver), stabilized leadership, a new strategic plan (based in part on an earlier master plan for the Downtown Campus) that includes expansion of the undergraduate population, the energy and talent of a small cadre of staff and faculty, and the intended impact of the Foundations of Excellence (FoE) project and final report.

The challenges to be addressed in order to achieve these envisioned enhancements are several and include:

- Creating a more visible institutional structure and organization committed to FY programs and services – thereby establishing the foundation for a FYE tradition.
- Making an explicit commitment to FY programming and support services in the UC Denver *Strategic Plan 2008-2020*.
- Promoting broader and deeper faculty and staff understanding about, interest in, and commitment to FY programs and services.
- Overcoming disincentives embedded in the system of faculty promotion and tenure that discourage faculty from participating more extensively in FY activities.
- Developing adequate, stable funding for FY staffing, programs, and services managed through a centralized and coordinated decision-making process.
- Dealing creatively with unfavorable economic conditions and potential reductions in financial resources for essential student programs and services related to the FYE.
- Resolving weaknesses or vulnerabilities in the campus infrastructure needed for FY student success: e.g., core course access and wait listing, limited instructional space and understaffed student services.
- Recruiting and admitting a significantly higher portion of the FY cohort for whom UC Denver is the first choice of a university.
- Finding additional ways to connect FY students to campus life resources and opportunities for socializing.
- Coordinating and disseminating information about FY students more widely and proactively among faculty and staff.
- Increasing resources for and coordination of more comprehensive student orientation services through a centralized planning process.
- Crafting a comprehensive orientation and training module for educating new and continuing faculty and staff about FY student needs, issues, services, opportunities, and resources.
- Increasing the ratio of advisors to students in Student Affairs and the schools and colleges.
- Creating and maintaining a clearinghouse of information regarding FYE evaluation tools and their findings.

The Organization Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C+ to this dimension. The committee agreed that while the FYOS at UC Denver is average or in some respects below average in its integration, stability, resources, and overall impact on FY student life, it contains several “bright lights” (including some very dedicated faculty and staff and signature programs like the FY Seminars) that signify the potential for a FYE widely recognized for its excellence.

Learning Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The University of Colorado Denver is an urban, largely commuter university. UC Denver also can be characterized as having a high percentage of students who care for families, and over a third work more than twenty hours per week [NSEE, 2008]. These characteristics tend to affect the time and energy that our students can devote to their classes. UC Denver also has a high percentage of non-traditional students – first generation, returning, minority, lower income, and from immigrant families – who are ESL students. Despite selective admission standards, UC Denver serves a significant number of academically

challenged students. Approximately 25% of the fall 2008 first-year students needed some form of remediation in math or writing.

UC Denver's emphasis on student learning can be found in many campus documents, from our mission, vision, and values statements to our University-wide and college-specific strategic plans. UC Denver is the only state university in Colorado with a common core curriculum across all colleges and majors. The Core Curriculum Oversight Committee requires all core courses to include a description of the learning goals, the student objectives that will be assessed, and the assessment techniques. The five higher enrollment first-year (FY) courses (PSY 1000, ENGL 1020, FA 1001, MATH 1010, and BIOL 2051) are included in the Core.

However, the Learning Dimension Committee found little evidence of stated learning goals, strategies, and outcomes specifically for FY students. Currently, UC Denver does not have an established set of common learning goals for the first year, nor are there formally stated learning outcomes for all FY students. While some courses designed primarily for FY students may have standardized learning goals, this is more of an exception than the norm. However, both faculty and students appear to be satisfied with current practices related to course materials and instruction, according to the FoE surveys.

Opportunities and Challenges

With the significantly growing numbers of traditional age FY students and data collected for the FoE self-study, opportunities have arisen to:

- further develop programs such as the First Year Seminars (FYS), the new University Honors and Leadership Program (UHL), Supplemental Instruction (SI), and Early Alert system (EA)
- discuss and create “common learning goals or outcomes” that could be applied to FY courses campus-wide, and to shape the university’s academic culture more broadly
- review and reinforce the policy that all syllabi contain documentation of the general instruction methods to be used in a course
- review and perhaps amend the Faculty Course Questionnaire given to students at the end of each semester to rate course and instructor effectiveness
- utilize the resources of the Center for Faculty Development to more broadly disseminate information and to support those faculty teaching FY students
- seek better tools for course placement
- develop new or strengthen existing partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs units to create or support out-of-class learning opportunities for students

UC Denver faces challenges in implementing, enhancing, and/or sustaining the opportunities. These challenges include:

- Convincing faculty of the necessity of developing learning goals for FY courses and the effort to define and incorporate them, although doing so may lead the way to establishing a system that could impact both the first-year experience and more broadly, the university culture.
- Overcoming a sense of disciplinary independence, which may make some faculty and even some departments reluctant to join the effort to implement common learning goals,
- Reviewing the faculty reward system, in which according to the FoE Faculty/Staff Survey, a majority of faculty members feel that their efforts with FY students are not rewarded or valued by upper administration or their departments.
- Overcoming the poor communication within the institution.
- Examining and removing disincentives, whether real or perceived. Existing budget models have pitted departments and schools/colleges against one another for limited resources.

- Modifying syllabi requirements to include information on each instructor’s teaching methodology and philosophy.
- Building a mentoring program for non-tenure track, full-time instructors would be very beneficial, since UC Denver utilizes many of these instructors in undergraduate instruction.
- Improving the utilization of the Center for Faculty Development; providing training and assessment for faculty.
- Completing the design and implementation of procedures for documenting and evaluating student learning outcomes for the first-year courses.
- Securing budgetary and staffing resources to develop and supplement best practices to address the completion rates in high non-completion (high DFWI) courses.
- Assessing students for course placement should be reviewed.
- Documenting and supporting students in their out-of-classroom learning experiences, which would include a greater campus understanding of experiential, service learning, study-abroad, and internships, and providing more undergraduate research opportunities.
- Extending the communication about and assessment of co-curricular activities.
- Recognizing changes occurring in the campus movement from a commuter campus to a semi-residential one; addressing the impact of both on faculty, staff, and students.
- Adopting a philosophy to guide the development of the undergraduate experience needs to be accomplished.

The Learning Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C– to this dimension. The committee finds that UC Denver has a strong infrastructure for learning. While there are key elements already in place at UC Denver which contribute to a good FY experience, there is still much to be done in setting priorities necessary to assemble the “puzzle pieces” into an integrated whole.

Faculty Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The Faculty Dimension Committee found significant disconnects between the faculty perception of the first-year (FY) programs and the policies and programs in place. First, there is a lack of communication between the administration and the faculty with regard to the programs and policies that are present, most notably with respect to goals and objectives for the programs. For example, current faculty hiring and orientation processes do not contain appreciable information on either the first-year experience (FYE) or the academic and non-academic challenges our students face. Second, the FoE faculty survey indicates that faculty members who participate in the FYE feel grossly undervalued by the administration and their colleagues, and insufficiently rewarded by the administration for their efforts in dealing with a historically challenging student demographic. The Faculty Dimension Committee believes these feelings are likely to continue and perhaps increase as UC Denver moves firmly into the Research I status, unless they are addressed by the administration. Third, the Faculty Dimension Committee concludes that faculty members lack a sense of community on campus, in part because of the abundance of FY classes taught by lecturers and teaching assistants.

Three hundred ninety-eight (398) faculty members answered the FoE faculty/staff survey. More than half indicated that their efforts with FY students are not rewarded or valued by upper administration or their departments, and that frequently their work is not valued by their colleagues. Specifically, faculty responses on the survey revealed that while unit leaders think working with FY students is important (45.3% responded high or very high), their work is not acknowledged, recognized, or rewarded by the

department (41.3% said not at all or slight), faculty colleagues (51.1% said not at all/slight), or institutional leaders (65.5% said not at all or slight). The perception is that faculty teaching missions related to FY students are not emphasized in the hiring process or in new faculty orientation. In the faculty survey (screened for only faculty), 68.5 % said that FY students are addressed not at all or only slightly in job descriptions, 65.4% said FY students are addressed not at all or only slightly in candidate interviews, and 65.1% stated that FY students are addressed not at all or only slightly in new faculty orientation. A chi-square analysis revealed little or no correlation between faculty rank and responses to the faculty dimension questions.

Survey questions related to the philosophy of FY students demonstrate that the faculty members do not believe that the goals of FY programs are well communicated by upper administration or within their departments. Given that the sample for the survey was self selected, resulting in a likely bias toward those faculty members with a particular interest in FY students, the perception of the importance of the FYE was likely even lower than that indicated by the survey results.

Faculty perception about the FYE recorded in the faculty/staff survey is supported to a large degree by an examination of policies and committees at the University. According to the current evidence library, there are no committees directed specifically toward faculty issues in teaching FY classes, and the only policy is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) team teaching policy, which is not exclusive to FY classes.

There are statements in all of the school and college strategic plans/visions/missions (supposedly written by or approved by the faculty) about the importance of innovative undergraduate teaching, though no statements are directed specifically at the FYE, the specific role of faculty in that process, or the reward system tied to those activities. Anecdotal information from discussions within the committee representing the various schools and colleges suggests that some primary units (schools in some cases and departments within schools in others) award merit points for teaching in the undergraduate core (both freshman and sophomore level), but those data have not been systematically collected. (Note: the committee did request this information from schools and colleges, but it was not available at the time of the writing of this report). The committee also requested information from schools and colleges about the importance of teaching and advising FY students in the context of post-tenure review and retention, tenure, and promotion, but none was forthcoming. The reasons for this are unclear at this time and warrant further investigation. It may be the schools and colleges have not collected this information or, if they have, it has not been analyzed to determine if patterns exist.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Philosophy Dimension Committee drafted a philosophy statement for FY students that the faculty committee found refreshing, and it made recommendations about where that statement should be distributed. In terms of implementation of the philosophy and its infusion into faculty orientation, the Faculty Dimension Committee cautions that there is still a very large proportion of non-traditional students and students that transfer in and out of the institution, so not all FY students are the “typical” 18-year-old. Faculty members also are largely unaware that assessment of new students indicates 25% are in need of remediation in reading, writing, and/or math, based on CCHE standards. Additionally, many freshman-level classes are large, so individual contact with students may be limited (or faculty may be overwhelmed by the time requirements of classes of 100-200 students). Finally, there often are non-freshmen in the 1000-level classes, since there is no restriction on registration at UC Denver. The committee believes that these factors may result in a disparity between what faculty members (especially new faculty) expect of freshmen and what skills and knowledge students actually have when they enter

the University. The faculty perception is that this is not addressed in new faculty orientation, according to the survey results.

One of the bright spots, in the committee's opinion, is the FY Seminars (FYS) program. However, this program encompasses a small portion of the freshman-level class, and the seminars are not mandatory for FY students. Additionally, a thorough assessment of the program for learning and student and faculty satisfaction should be undertaken before we make a recommendation to expand the FYS program. Faculty course questionnaire results for the last two years suggest a high level of satisfaction with the seminar courses: average instructor rating is 4.8 on a six-point scale, and course rating is 4.3 on a six-point scale. There does seem to be variability through time, however, and a mid-semester assessment in fall 2007 indicates a 3.3 on a 5-point Likert scale for the question "How satisfied are you with your overall First Year Seminar Experience?" A survey of just 9 faculty members at the same time shows faculty satisfaction with the experience. Additionally, it's not clear how many other faculty members not directly involved in the classes are aware of them. The Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program and Research and Creative Activities Symposium are also exciting opportunities, but they are general undergraduate programs, and the committee suspects that freshman participation is limited based on deadlines for applications and the need to have developed networks with faculty to participate.

Another exciting opportunity noted by the committee involves the assessment activities that exist at the program level and for at least one college wide effort (CLAS graduation requirements). Again, however, these activities are not limited to freshmen but look more broadly at the educational mission.

The Faculty Dimension Committee assigned a grade of D for this dimension. There are significant disconnects between the faculty perception of the FY programs and the policies and programs in place.

All Students Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The All Students Dimension Committee reviewed all available data, which indicate that the University of Colorado Denver is doing an adequate job of identifying various first-year (FY) student groups who may have unique academic, social, and/or personal needs. At the same time, it appears that the university is not adequately addressing the needs of FY students with respect to social and community issues.

Students feel that their academic needs are being met, and the quality of instruction is very good (average score of 3.82 on the FoE survey 5-point scale). However, students are very unsatisfied with how the University is helping them to meet and interact in a meaningful way with other members of the University community. This includes opportunities to mingle with students from different backgrounds and cultures, to interact with faculty outside the classroom, and to work within the off-campus community.

As with many institutions, the committee also finds there are sub-populations of students who have unique needs that the institution must meet to help these students be successful. These include: 1) 529 UC Denver (378 first-year) students living in Campus Village; 2) non-traditional students who are often older students with family and work obligations; 3) students with disabilities (physical, mental, and emotional); 4) students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as first generation students, financially disadvantaged students, and students from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds; 5) international students; 6) honor students; 7) students who are unprepared for the academic expectations of being a college student;

8) students for whom English is a second language; 9) community college transfer students; and 10) students who are veterans.

Due to the nature of the various housing arrangements for students attending the Downtown Campus, it is difficult to organize any type of academic programming for all students in this setting, so at this time there is little in the way of formal UC Denver academic programming for students living in campus housing. However, the campus housing staff is working to try to offer classes and occasional evening advising hours in student housing, to offer academically-oriented programming, and to start talking about living communities centered on common majors or areas of academic interest. Further, the housing staff offers an abundance of programming relevant to community and personal development.

This campus also has a significant population of older, “non-traditional” students who are often working part time or full time, have personal families to manage, and/or have extended family that they need to care for. These students are often attending classes in order to change or to enhance their current career path, or to simply gain a college education for personal reasons. All of the colleges and schools on this campus provide a wide variety of courses aimed at the working student, starting at 5:30 pm and continuing until 9:30 or 10:00 pm.

A number of Student Affairs programs exist to serve the needs of students, which include: Disability Resources and Services, Educational Opportunity Programs, TRiO/Student Support Services, GLBT tri-institutional services, The Counseling Center, the Learning Resource Center, and Veteran Student Services. While none of the programs has specific services for FY students, the institution offers programming through the Office of Undergraduate Experiences, which is housed in Academic Affairs. The University Honors and Leadership program and First Year Seminars are coordinated through Undergraduate Experiences. The Office of International Affairs, which reports to both Student and Academic Affairs, has expanded services for international students.

Social and personal needs of FY students and students in general are not well addressed on this campus through formal or organized programs. The Office of University Life offers some programming through its office, including campus-wide events, such as the Spring Fling and similar social events, as well as a variety of lectures and programs focused on current events and issues. Programming is also offered through student housing to encourage students to come together in a more organized and formal manner. The Educational Opportunity Programs offer a variety of culturally-based events and programs that are open to all students. Academically-related and social interest student clubs are also available.

Lastly, students as a whole feel safe on this campus, physically as well as psychologically. Females reported a somewhat lower response rate compared to males (3.68 versus 3.91) but again, these numbers are well above the threshold of 3.5 desired for this study. While there are some areas of minor concern, overall students perceive UC Denver as a safe campus.

Challenges and Opportunities

Several key challenges have been identified in the Student Survey, including:

Academic advising for the first-year student: With the exception of the College of Engineering (only 16 student participants), all other colleges and schools were below the 3.5 threshold for academic advising. Two in particular, The Business School and the College of Arts & Media, were significantly below this threshold. It is probably safe to say that at least one significant contributing factor to the success of the College of Engineering are favorable advisor/student ratios.

Transition support: This included initial academic advising, orientation to available campus services, and early access to faculty. Again, with the exception of the College of Engineering and non-resident alien students, all other groups and stakeholders on campus feel there are significant issues, including: whether UC Denver is a good place for students like them (3.36), is a place where they feel they can succeed (3.32), provides adequate overall attention and support (3.18), and how well our institution has helped them with their transition from high school (3.09). This is again borne out by student survey data showing that among all student groups, students do not feel they get accurate information about where to get assistance with various academic and non-academic issues. This includes administrative issues (3.38), help with courses through tutoring or other academic support (3.31), where to go regarding academic policies (3.09), where to go about non-academic issues such as money management or family issues (2.91), or how to get involved in clubs and other institutional organizations (2.73).

Student perceptions of their preparation for their first year classes: All student groups were below the 3.5 threshold in their perceived preparation for their first year courses with respect to computing skills (3.25), writing skills (3.22), reading skills (3.17), library research skills (3.17), and mathematical skills (3.02).

Students making connections to UC Denver: In all areas of this category, the institution did not even reach the 3.25 threshold. This includes connections with outside academic support (3.18), connections with other new students (2.75), communicating the importance of outside of class activities (2.71), creating opportunities for outside of class activities (2.70), connections with faculty outside of class (2.63), helping a student's family feel part of the institution and their education (2.37), and helping freshmen connect with upper classmen (2.26).

There are many students who feel that they do not belong and that their social needs are not being met. This is particularly true for students living off campus away from their families, students who are working more than part time, and students who did not pick UC Denver for the strength of its academic programs. There is a lack of involvement with faculty, other students, and community organizations and individuals that produce opportunities to interact with people of differing cultures and ways of thinking. The student survey scores for this area were all below the 3.5 threshold for this survey, and in many instances were below the 3.25 threshold. Students scored the institution very low with respect to opportunities to interact with faculty and community organizations.

There is also some evidence that the institution is not doing well in communicating about financial aid opportunities or policies, as shown in the comments made by students in the survey instrument. This is particularly seen in black (non-Hispanic) students (average score 3.25) and students who are first semester true freshman (average score 3.38). Student comments indicate that the institutional Web site is inadequate with respect to making information accessible, providing accurate information, and providing timely and accurate feedback to individual students through the student portal.

While a number of challenges have been identified, opportunities are clear and include: intentional coordinated community building activities; evaluation and better alignment of the undergraduate academic advising system and transition services; examination and review of communication channels, such as the Web; review of staffing, fiscal resources, and space needs of programs in Student/Academic Affairs, Financial Aid, and those that serve FY students; and review of the faculty reward system to include rewards for first-year activities.

The All Students Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C- to this dimension. The primary reasons for this grade are the concerns about social and community-building issues.

Transitions Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The Transitions Dimension Committee focused on student transitions from high school through the first year at the University of Colorado Denver. For this report, the discussions on transitions included UC Denver methods for communicating curricular and co-curricular expectations, student and institution responsibilities, and the programming in place that builds community for students, thereby connecting them to and within the university.

From evidence gathered in the Foundations of Excellence process, the Transitions Dimension Committee found a number of excellent University resources available to students to help them to transition in the first year. CU Succeed, Pre-Collegiate, Day of Dialogue, pre-college workshops for scholarship recipients, open houses, and college fairs are all examples of outreach currently being done to connect early with students and to help prepare them for college. Once here, students are served by Academic and Student Affairs resources, which include: University Life, First-Year Seminars, Learning Resource Center, Disability Resources and Services, and all the academic advising offices.

However, there are gaps in current practices, as indicated in the student survey results. UC Denver's academic advising from staff and faculty during the transition, and overall transition support, were below the mean in comparisons to peer and Carnegie institutions. Those surveyed indicated that more could be done to explain the requirements for specific academic majors, to assist in course selection, to discuss what it takes to be academically successful, and to explore future enrollment options.

Additional examples of gaps are found in the surveys, where 57.2% of the respondents reported that as first-year (FY) students, the institution did not connect or only moderately connected them with academic support outside the classroom (e.g., tutoring, advising). The University fared poorly in helping FY students make connections with other new students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors: 58.8% of the students reported that the institution did not help them make these connections, while 28.4% of the respondents stated that the University made moderate attempts to help them make these connections.

Opportunities and Challenges

UC Denver has an array of academic and student support services available to FY students and undergraduates in general, but they suffer from limited staffing and resources. There is evidence that programs like Pre-Collegiate and campus open houses provide important communication with students and parents before they come to UC Denver. Best practice strategies such as the First-Year Seminars program and Early Alert system are in place. The elements for student success exist. However, communication to students about the variety of activities that affect their transition to the institution needs review and repair. Coordination of existing transition efforts, including orientation, early academic advising, and opportunities for students to connect to the campus, also needs review.

The Transitions Dimension Committee identified a number of opportunities to enhance the FY experience, including:

- Adopting a philosophy statement for the FY and undergraduate experience as the University adopts a new brand, logo, and consolidated identity.
- Examining the current organizational structure and all the resources directed at a successful undergraduate experience (including academic advising, orientation, campus life, experiential learning, etc.) that begins with a transparent transition to and from the first year and to provide recommendations gleaned from data for future programming and the Strategic Plan.

- Reviewing practices such as requirements around advising for FY students, participation in orientation, and the Early Alert system to better serve students.
- Developing new campus programs, such as mentoring of FY students by more seasoned students, and creating UC Denver traditions that welcome new students to a campus community would begin to address some of the communication issues raised by students.

The Transitions Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C– to this dimension. The committee found that without a more concerted and purposeful effort to link the existing programs and activities of faculty and staff, transitional gaps will persist and may grow as the first-year student numbers grow.

Diversity Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The Diversity Dimension Committee recognizes that diversity is one of the priorities of the University's Strategic Plan. The goals cited under the plan are to: 1) recruit and retain a critical mass of traditionally underrepresented and international students; 2) recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff throughout the university; 3) expand research and community-based programs to reduce health and educational disparities; and 4) demonstrate and communicate the University's commitment to diversity. UC Denver is the only public university in the metropolitan Denver area, and as such has historically responded to changing demographics and social concerns. The ethnic diversity and internationalization of the campus have increased steadily in the last ten years.

The fall 2008 first-year (FY) class comprises 37% students of color, a growing out-of state population, and international students from over 70 countries. The Auraria campus, where the UC Denver Downtown Campus is located, is home to one of the largest numbers of ethnically diverse students attending college in the state of Colorado.

Following is a sample of recent diversity efforts in Administration, Academic, and Student Affairs:

Administration:

- The University created the Vice Provost/Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion position in 2007.
- The CU System President convened a Blue Ribbon Commission on Diversity, and the goals in the report issued by the Commission serve as a guide for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Academic:

- The UC Denver Core Curriculum (general education requirements) contains both cultural diversity and international perspectives requirements.
- The Ethnic Studies Department, which grew out of the Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), is seeking approval for a new ethnic studies major.
- The Fourth World Center for global indigenous peoples studies, created in 1985, is housed in the Political Science Department.
- The Social Justice minor was approved in 2009.

Student Affairs:

- The EOP programs (American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic), created in the late 1960s and early '70s, continue to provide support services, cultural programming, and community outreach.

- The Disability Resources and Services office was created in 2003 after the tri-institutional program was dismantled.
- The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender program is a tri-institutional program serving UC Denver students.
- The CU-Succeed program, created in the 1980s, enables high school students to take college-level classes at their own schools and then transfer them as college credit.
- The Pre-Collegiate Program, TRiO Student Support Services, and the Denver Transfer Initiative primarily serve under-represented, low-income, first-generation, and disabled students.

Opportunities and Challenges

Despite concerns regarding the low FoE student survey response rate, some survey results suggested challenges for the institution. For example, in survey question 30, 18.1% of faculty and staff indicated that they did not believe UC Denver includes appropriate attention to diverse ideas and world views in the curriculum and co-curriculum; 41% indicated that they do not feel that out-of-class activities for FY students include appropriate attention to diverse ideas and world views. Although UC Denver is an urban campus with strong racial, ethnic and cultural diversity, students, along with faculty and staff, gave a low to fair rating to FY students' interaction with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures.

The challenges identified include developing better communication and “marketing” strategies for current programs and activities to the entire university, expanding offerings in the Core requirement for diversity, providing more training opportunities, and rewarding faculty members who want to integrate diversity into their curriculum. Results from the survey indicated that UC Denver has not fully utilized all of the diversity resources on and off campus. As indicated above, opportunities for engaging in diverse activities and with diverse students exist, but the 2008 NSSE survey showed that a large and significant percentage of the student population work or care for dependents. While UC Denver is transitioning from a commuter campus to one with limited student housing, most students still commute and have responsibilities that pull them away from campus as soon as they finish classes. The campus, as a whole, is only beginning to grapple with the implication of these changes.

The opportunities that come with the challenges are many. Some demand more fiscal and human resources, but others can be achieved by re-focusing efforts while developing new collaborations. With the findings of the surveys, the need for a campus climate survey was confirmed. The mission of the Experiential Learning Center to develop partnerships with the diverse groups that make up the greater Denver community creates exciting educational experiences for all students. Under-utilized community and campus resources could be brought into the classroom to supplement the academic content.

The Diversity Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C to this dimension. While the ethnic diversity of UC Denver students has increased significantly over the past ten years, goals such as the recruitment and retention of minority faculty and the University’s demonstrated commitment to diversity are not where they need to be.

Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee Summary Report

Current Situation

The term "learning" at UC Denver is larger in context than the statement provided in the Roles and Purposes portion of the FoE project. Learning includes academic, developmental, and emotional/life skills aspects. First-year (FY) students at UC Denver include both traditional and non-traditional populations, each of which has unique needs. Regardless of the complexity in working with such a diverse group of students, the Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee agreed that all students at UC Denver should come away from our institution with a learning experience that addresses all of the points outlined in this dimension.

The Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee recognized the importance of learning the distinction between developmental advising and more prescriptive advising, such as curricular and program advising. The committee concluded that the points outlined in this dimension are best achieved through both an academic and developmental approach to advising and learning.

The following information summarizes where UC Denver currently is and where the committee recommended the institution needs improvement to succeed in meeting the goals outlined in the dimension.

Purposes: To what degree does the campus effectively communicate to FY students its vision for the following four purposes of higher education?

1. Knowledge acquisition for personal growth. UC Denver's career development and experiential learning programs encourage self-reflection and personal growth. For example, the Career Center's Career Discovery Program guides students through a process of identifying and assessing their personality traits, values, and interests to assist them in making informed career decisions. FY students are encouraged to participate in career development activities at orientation and in class presentations. All sections of the FY Seminars (FYS) program currently include a session on career planning.

Experiential learning activities offered through the Experiential Learning Center (ELC), such as internships, service-learning, and faculty-mentored research engage the whole person – intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. While the majority of students engaged in this type of learning are upperclassmen, some activities are organized specifically for FY students. The best example is the service-learning requirement embedded in the FYS curriculum. An additional ELC goal is to promote a culture of active and reflective learners by providing options for students to learn through service.

2. Learning to prepare for future employment. The ELC offers information, resources, and support in the development and coordination of academic internships and co-ops, service-learning courses, volunteer opportunities, and undergraduate research experiences. Particularly valuable to FY students are MyMajors.com and eDiscover, which allow students to research majors and careers. Over 400 students participate in academic internships and cooperative education experiences each year in a variety of businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Currently, less than 2% of enrollees are FY students, but the ELC hopes to pilot an exploratory internship program for FY students in 2010-11.

3. Learning for engaged citizenship (i.e., participation in civic, community, and political life).

The ELC offers students opportunities in community engagement, undergraduate research, and international experiences, through which students learn how their involvement and ideas can impact their communities in civic, political, and social ways. In addition, such academic courses as The Urban Citizen in Political Science emphasize experiential learning and classroom discussions focused on social, political, and economic resources, issues of equality and inequality, and possibilities of constructive change.

4. Learning for serving the public good (i.e., working for the betterment of society within a framework characterized by justice, freedom, and equality). The UC Denver Core Curriculum general education program provides a variety of choices for students in the humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and arts. As part of the Core Curriculum, the Cultural Diversity and International Perspectives knowledge areas allow students the opportunity to learn about global issues that impact their personal lives, the community, and the global environment. Additionally, a new Social Justice minor, an interdisciplinary program offered through the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is launching in fall 2009 to equip students with knowledge, skills, and experiences to affect social change.

Motivation: To what degree does the institution intentionally provide opportunities for FY students to examine their personal motivation for pursuing higher education?

Beginning with new student orientation, students are given the opportunity to explore their motivations for pursuing a higher education. Through various speakers, new student orientation sessions introduce students and their parents to the many opportunities UC Denver offers. Orientation is not required, yet 80-85% of the fall 2008 freshmen attended orientation.

The FYS program, the ELC, and Career Center provide further opportunities to assist students in the process of personal evaluation of what a higher education means to them both personally and professionally.

Rationale: To what degree does the campus effectively communicate its rationale for the following?

1. Required courses (e.g., core curriculum, distribution, and general education). The UC Denver Downtown Campus revised its general education core and implemented new requirements beginning in fall 2006. The undergraduate Core Curriculum is based on the philosophy of a liberal arts education and is designed to promote intellectual competencies and a broad skill base in such areas as the social sciences, humanities, behavioral sciences, art appreciation, cultural diversity, and international perspectives.

2. Required competencies (e.g., library skills, computing, and writing). UC Denver's general education Core Curriculum requires two semesters of English composition for students in all majors. The FYS program offers students information literacy skills through the Auraria Library.

3. Requirements for entry into a major. Student advising for the major differs across the schools and colleges, and general information is readily available in the Catalog and on department web sites. FY students can select a major on the UC Denver Admission Form without direct advising contact.

Opportunities and Challenges

The Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee identified several opportunities to better assist our students with a quality FYE. Furthermore, the committee recognized the importance of retention in securing future financial support from alumni. If UC Denver provides students with a high-quality, unique, and supportive experience, an increased sense of institutional pride will be fostered that will undoubtedly translate into a better attitude when it comes to institutional fundraising.

Recommendations include:

1. Create, print, and implement a Developmental Advising Handbook for all faculty and staff on the Downtown Campus. By providing a consistent and accurate handbook to all faculty and staff with advising and other program responsibilities, students receive correct information.
2. Further develop the "Service Learning" component of the FYS program as a means to encourage life-long civic engagement. With our campus at the doorstep of downtown Denver, our proximity provides hundreds of opportunities for students to engage in service-learning, internships, and community-based research. Coordinated efforts by Student Affairs, the ELC, Career Center, and faculty can easily increase options for students.
3. Develop a Student Ambassador Program that encourages students to become peer leaders. A UC Denver Student Ambassador Program would comprise students who demonstrate leadership and academic excellence. The goal would be to engage students with a sense of institutional pride, further develop service learning, and advance professionalism among the UC Denver community and alumni.

Student Ambassadors could potentially:

- Convey UC Denver's history and express knowledge of faculty, personnel, student programs, and its facilities.
- Serve at official UC Denver functions and at scheduled events, such as Commencement and Freshman Convocation.
- Develop freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior clubs.
- Create student-initiated faculty/staff award programs.
- Explore a "Life Coach" model to provide added personalized student support.
- Help to instill a sense of institutional pride. Consider developing intramural sports teams, adopting a UC Denver mascot, further expanding the freshman convocation, etc.
- Plan and expand co-curricular activities.

The Roles and Purposes Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C– to this dimension. As part of an urban research university, UC Denver students have tremendous potential for learning outside the traditional classroom, laboratory, or studio. UC Denver needs to explore more thoroughly the options for student learning.

Improvement Dimension Committee Summary Report

The Improvement Dimension Committee addressed four components: 1) assessment practices, 2) assessment uses, 3) understanding elements of student success, and 4) strategies to improve the first year (FY) through consultants and conferences.

Components #1 and especially #2 (how the assessments are used to advance the learning and experiences of FY students) are at the heart of the Improvement Dimension from the committee's perspective, and carry more weight in the dimension rating process than components #3 and #4. This view is based on the increasing emphasis placed on "outcomes assessment" in both university and specialized professional accreditation and the fact that our university has seriously underutilized assessment results to understand and advance the first-year experience (FYE).

This dimension differs from the other dimensions in that it reports on overall "assessment practices and uses" as well as rates the assessment practices and uses for specific major FYE initiatives at the University. At UC Denver Downtown Campus these include: 1) orientation, 2) academic advising, 3) FY Seminars (FYS) program, 4) Early Alert system, 5) Supplemental Instruction (SI), and 6) uniform probation/suspension policies.

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Overall, the committee ranked "Assessment Practices" as medium (3) on a five-point scale of very low to very high. Similarly, in the FoE survey, faculty rated the institution's "assessment practices" as 2.80 (slightly on the "less effective" side of the FoE 5-point scale).

There are a variety of useful and potentially valuable assessments of FY students' academic performance and experiences in place at the university, including:

- Placement tests (e.g., math, English)
- Early Alert system
- D/F/W/I rates
- FY Seminars program student grades
- ACT/SAT test scores for academic placement
- Standardized Measure of Critical Thinking and Writing Proficiency (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, fall 2009)
- Remediation data from Institutional Research (IR)
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- FoE survey of students
- FoE survey of faculty and staff
- Faculty Course Questionnaires (FCQs)
- FY student orientation survey

The following assessments and their ratings on the five-point scale have been identified for the initiatives selected for the FoE focus:

Orientation: medium. Included in each orientation packet for students and parents is a satisfaction survey. Beginning fall 2008, an electronic survey was sent to all FY students who attended an orientation. Embedded in an electronic newsletter provided to all FY students are mini-surveys. Negative responses on these surveys trigger an alert and email that is sent to the Academic Success and

Advising Center. Students receive a response directing them to appropriate resources and inviting them to continue correspondence if needed.

Academic Advising: medium. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Academic Success and Advising Center have done satisfaction surveys (leaving forms in the waiting room in the past), but neither program does them now because of the low return.

FY Seminars Program: medium to high. Assessments include FCQs, grades, and surveys of student perceptions. Through the Office of Institutional Research, quantitative data on student grades, first- to second-year student persistence, and follow-up persistence are monitored. A recent finding is that student GPAs and retention rates are slightly lower for the 30% of FY students who take the seminars than for those who do not. Also, students report low levels of satisfaction with the seminars, and they particularly do not like the sessions in which all of the sections are put together into a large group session.

Early Alert system: medium. The Early Alert system includes data on number of faculty participating, number of students alerted, number of students contacted, number of students responding, and number of students referred to support offices. The Early Alert system does not track the number of students who follow through with the referred services.

Supplemental Instruction: medium. SI was offered recently for the first time in general biology, chemistry, and physics courses. Student and faculty surveys are given at the end of each semester by the Learning Resource Center. The Center is also collecting data that compares the final grade and grade point average of students who regularly attended SI to those in the same class who did not attend sessions.

Uniform Probation/Suspension Policies: too new to evaluate.

ASSESSMENT USES

Overall, the committee ranked “Assessment Uses” as low. Some of the FY initiative assessments are put to effective use, while other assessments add little to the understanding of the FYE. On the plus side, the placement tests have helped place students in appropriate-level courses and resulted in a 30% reduction in low grades, withdrawals, and incompletes. Also, the Early Alert system is a valuable vehicle for identifying FY students who are low performing and in danger of failing a course. However, some students do not take advantage of the advising available with Early Alert, and faculty members are not given follow-up information about students. While the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered at some cost, many faculty members are unfamiliar with the report, and the results are not disseminated and applied to guide the FYE. The upcoming fall 2009 standardized assessment (MAPP) of the critical thinking and written communication of FY students potentially will provide data for informing pedagogy and curriculum, but its value may not be realized unless faculty are engaged in a meaningful way.

On the FoE faculty and staff survey, each of the ten “use of assessment” questions received scores below a 3.0 rating, including the two overall questions about using results for improvement (2.79/5.00) and disseminating results in a timely manner (2.74/5.00).

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

The committee considered the degree to which recent assessment activities have improved campus understanding of specific elements of student success. Using the FoE student and faculty survey responses, NSSE data, Campus Village surveys, and reports prepared by other FoE dimension committees, the committee rated “understanding” of the following elements as follows:

- Student allocation of time: low
- Student/student connections: low
- Student/faculty connections: medium
- Use of campus services: medium
- Student attendance: low
- Student involvement: low

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE FIRST YEAR THROUGH CONSULTANTS AND CONFERENCES

The committee considered the degree to which four strategies have been used by the campus to improve the first year and rated them all medium on the five-point scale:

Attendance at higher education meetings. In the FoE survey, faculty reported that they do not often attend “national or regional conferences or meetings” that address the FYE, nor do they focus on “presenting at conferences or contributing to publications.”

Participation in multi-campus initiatives. There are considerable intercampus discussions and initiatives. John Lanning represents UC Denver on the statewide General Education 25 Council (transfer and general education issues). Development of and findings from the Early Alert system have been presented at national meetings of the National Academic Advisors Association and at the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. There are ongoing discussions among the undergraduate campuses of the University of Colorado dealing with Campus Solutions (new student information system) implementation, course equivalencies, general education transfer, and other academic policies and procedures that will affect FY students.

Broad campus exposure to external experts. Four annual Undergraduate Experiences Symposia have been held at UC Denver and have included a campus visit by FoE’s John Gardner to assess UC Denver’s FYE. However, in the FoE survey, faculty and staff indicated that they attend “conferences or workshops at this campus” infrequently.

Broad exposure to campus-based knowledge/expertise about the first year. UC Denver is developing an administrative structure that deals with undergraduate issues and focuses on the FYE. Components include the Quality Undergraduate Education (QUE) committee (a bridge between academic and student affairs), the Undergraduate Working Group, a steering group to oversee FY student orientation, and an Early Alert system steering committee. Discussions within these groups are leading to the development of new programs (e.g., Supplemental Instruction), modified policies (e.g., a registration deposit to reduce wait-listed students), adoption of campus-wide policies, and greater assessment efforts.

The Improvement Dimension Committee assigned a grade of C– to this dimension. The rating across three of the four dimension components is at the “medium” level, but the use of assessment information and results is so important to the dimension that its “low” rating reduces the overall grade.

Links to FoE Information and Reports

Undergraduate Experiences maintains a UC Denver web site for the Foundations of Excellence. This web site contains information about the FoE process, the definition and objectives of each of the dimension committees, and the complete report from each of the nine dimension committees.

Please use the following UC Denver web addresses for more FoE information:

<http://www.cudenver.edu/ue/foe>