Foundations of Excellence Liaisons

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Assessment Process Summary

Consistent with the University of Houston’s mission “to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in real-world settings,” student success is one of our key strategic goals as we aim to create a learning environment in which student success can be ensured. The University is committed to enhancing the success of our undergraduate students and views the first-year experience as crucial to establishing a foundation on which to build academic success in subsequent years. Taking a strategic approach to comprehensively and collaboratively evaluating the experience of our students is essential for providing a foundational year. Our goal through participation in the Foundations of Excellence project offered by the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education is to build such a foundation enabling the University to enhance learning, promote retention and facilitate timely degree completion.

Following Dimension Committee formation, evidence collection and assessments conducted in 2013-2014, completed Dimension Committee reports were submitted to our institutional advisor, Dr. Betsy Barefoot, for feedback with the first report submitted in December 2013 and the last report submitted in May 2014. To facilitate Steering Committee discussion of Dimension Committee assessments, recommended action items, and institutional advisor feedback, two retreats were held in May, 2014. The first retreat included rich discussion of Dimension Committee reports and concluded with a charge to review and assess the collective list of report recommendations. The second retreat included the participation of Dr. Barefoot and included a discussion of common themes that emerged from Dimension Committee assessments and reports. After the second retreat, a smaller writing team was created through a Steering Committee volunteer request. The team began meeting in May 2014 and developed a concise set of emergent themes based on Dimension Committee reports and Steering Committee retreat discussion. The following themes then created an organizing framework in which to present a set of consolidated recommendations:

- **CULTURE**: Foster an intentional campus culture of community, engagement and inclusion to enhance the first-year experience for the success of all students.
- **INTEGRATION**: Ensure integration in experience across the campus community to maximize student success from application to graduation to career acquisition.
- **COMMUNICATION**: Actualize and leverage consistent and effective communication tools to convey institutional academic expectations, outline administrative processes, and connect students, faculty and staff to university resources.
- **LEARNING**: Provide an enriched global learning environment that engenders students for lifelong learning.
- **ADVISING**: Create an advising model for delivery of a comprehensive, collaborative, supportive, and caring student service experience that promotes timely degree completion.

The emergent themes were shared at the Gardner Institute’s Foundations of Excellence Summit meeting held in June 2014. Themes and descriptions were also sent to Steering Committee members along with a request to categorize each of the 120 Dimension Committee action items into the most representative theme. Utilizing the categorization data from Steering Committee members, writing team members redistributed action items across the themes and developed consolidated recommendations intended to represent relevant Dimension Committee action items and Steering Committee retreat discussion.
University culture is a critical factor in shaping the experience of our first-year students. Fostering a culture that supports student engagement and learning generated extensive committee discussion and attention. Action items focused on culture were proposed by six Dimension Committees including Philosophy, Faculty, All Students, Roles and Purposes, Diversity, and Transitions. As represented in the following recommendations, committees focused on developing guiding statements along with supportive infrastructure, policies and practices aimed at enhancing the first year.

1. Create and integrate a first-year philosophy statement that guides our approach to the first year and informs our institutional policies and practices

Finding that an institutional first-year philosophy statement does not exist at the University of Houston, the Philosophy Dimension Committee articulated the importance of developing such a statement through campus-wide collaborative efforts and proposed the following draft:

At the University of Houston we welcome entering students into a dynamic academic community that reflects the intellectual vitality, innovation, diversity, and can-do spirit of America’s fourth-largest city. We offer our entering students the thriving environment of a Tier One university, with opportunities for student research that are focused and relevant to today’s fields and markets. We encourage students to build on their core academic strengths, to become life-long learners in preparation for the challenges of the future. Critical thinking, cultural awareness, scientific and technological literacy, and effective communication are all essential to continued success; we intend to weave them into every student’s preparation for life so they can achieve, lead, and thrive.

We believe the University should be a proving ground for our incoming students, offering them challenges worthy of their own ambitions; but it should also be an Alma Mater that provides the academic and personal support suitable for them to grow into their careers and future lives. We aim to strike a balance between the strengths of tried-and-true approaches to education and the new possibilities for engaged learning in the digitized, globalized academy. We intend to expand our resource-rich and supportive environment so we can say to each new student: find your voice; find your discipline; find your path. We strive to connect our students to the wider world of possibilities that cluster around our vibrant city and extend out into the world. We hold ourselves accountable for always improving our effectiveness as educators, while also keeping an open place for the self-directed transformation that our students accomplish every day. We also want to maintain our tradition of providing affordable excellence in higher education, since learning should never become a mere luxury in today’s world. We proudly represent Houston’s rich diversity and ambitions, blending workaday practicality with Texas-sized optimism. Our entering students should find here a home for their hopes, a forge for their future, and a community of limitless learning.

COMMUNITY — OPPORTUNITY — EFFICACY
The concept of community was also highlighted by the Transitions as well as Roles and Purposes Dimension Committees in action items focused on promoting student engagement with community partners that will extend beyond early transition through the remainder of the college career and into our students’ professional lives. It was suggested that the philosophy statement implementation process include seeking review and feedback from key groups such as Student Government, Faculty Senate, Staff Council, Deans, Undergraduate Committee, advising leaders, Admissions, and Student Affairs. Following the development of a final draft, the statement should be processed through appropriate approvals for acceptance and adoption. In disseminating and integrating the statement, it is important to identify how the university will utilize the statement so that individuals, colleges and departments can understand the importance to their area.

2. Update the faculty evaluation and reward structure to reflect our priority on building a foundation for student engagement and learning in the first year that contributes to success throughout the undergraduate experience.

The Faculty and All Students Dimension Committees highlighted the importance of ensuring that faculty evaluation and reward structures support faculty engagement with students both in and out of the classroom starting in the first year. Suggested mechanisms for promoting engagement through teaching include broadening the definition of research to include research on teaching, establishing clear guidelines for the promotion and retention of non-tenure track faculty based on teaching, and linking annual merit review to promotion and tenure in a way that rewards teaching. Incentivizing faculty to be accessible to students outside of the classroom was also advocated.

3. Provide faculty, staff and teaching assistants with professional development opportunities focused on teaching, advising and mentoring first-year students.

Citing a lack of training focused on the first year, the Faculty, Organization, Roles and Purposes, Diversity, and Transitions Dimension Committees proposed action items related to professional development opportunities. Teaching, advising and mentoring students were noted as areas of need for faculty and teaching assistants that could be addressed by the new Center for Faculty Engagement and Development. The Organization Dimension Committee proposed strengthening and expanding professional development opportunities toward the goal of creating a core group of well-trained faculty who teach and support first-year students. New faculty orientation was identified as a venue for emphasizing the importance of engagement with this student population both in and out of the classroom. It was further suggested by the Faculty Dimension committee that the University develop a vertical teaming culture among faculty where upper level instructors communicate with those teaching foundation level classes to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared for success in advanced coursework.

Dimension Committees also recommended providing training focused on specialized student populations. Cultural training was suggested to help faculty and staff to understand the varied needs of our diverse student body. Diversity and inclusion training is viewed as important for Residential Life and Housing staff. Programs focusing on the roles and purposes of a college education were suggested for residence hall assistants. Providing training regarding the needs of veterans was also recommended to support the creation of a robust engagement program to ensure the success of this student group.
4. Develop and disseminate a diversity statement to communicate the University’s diversity vision and guide institutional policies and practices.

The Diversity Dimension Committee articulated the importance of developing a university diversity statement and proposed the following draft:

*The University of Houston, with one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation, commits to mobilizing the full range of skills and insights of our diverse student body; to expanding the range of research; and to preparing our students for life in a diverse world by fostering diverse, inclusive, and excellent learning and work environments for all students, faculty, and staff. The University’s ability to provide a fair and open learning community marked by mutual respect, appreciation, and equitable treatment for all is foundational to its success in its teaching and research missions, and in maintaining its standing among Tier One institutions of higher education. Our diversity strengthens us. Our goals include:*

- Providing an outstanding education for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, national origin, family structure or disability
- Recruiting, retaining and fostering a diverse faculty and staff
- Preparing all our students, staff and faculty to thrive personally and professionally in a diverse and interconnected global environment
- Enhancing the campus climate for inclusion

*The University of Houston has been recognized as both a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian-American-Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education. We are one of only three Tier One HSIs in the nation and the sole Tier One HSI in Texas.*

The committee also recommended revising the University mission statement to include “and in an atmosphere of inclusion and mutual respect” as follows:

*The mission of the University of Houston is to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in a real-world setting, and in an atmosphere of inclusion and mutual respect. The University of Houston offers a full range of degree programs at the baccalaureate, master’s, doctoral and professional levels and pursues a broad agenda of research and creative activities. As a knowledge resource to the public, the university builds partnerships with other educational institutions, community organizations, government agencies, and the private sector to serve the region and impact the world.*

A mechanism for coordinating and organizing the University’s diversity efforts was advocated and creating a Vice Provost for Diversity in Academic Affairs was offered by the Diversity Dimension Committee as one option for doing so.

5. Design and implement data-driven initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining a diverse student population.

Dimension Committees emphasized the importance of utilizing data to guide recruitment and retention efforts. Examining underrepresented student population patterns to inform the development of targeted interventions was identified as critical to increasing diversity with STEM fields noted as a particular area of need. The National Science
Foundation's Research Experience for Undergraduates Program was highlighted as an example of one potential diversity-focused recruitment initiative. Committee action items also underscored the importance of engaging in campus-wide recruiting discussions to integrate program-level needs, disciplinary expertise and community connections into existing university recruiting efforts. College representation at Family Weekend and other engagement events as well as adding student activities information to the UH Family and Guests page were offered as examples of critical family connections in support of successful student transitions.

Including breakout sessions focused on target subpopulations at New Student Orientation and creating diverse and inclusive opportunities for ongoing student engagement were suggested as potential interventions. Continuing support for student organizations and student resource centers focused on fostering and maintaining a culture of diversity was advocated along with examining current staffing to ensure adequate support for programming. Citing the importance of maintaining an inclusive and safe environment, Dimension Committees also proposed expanding existing sexual assault prevention programming (e.g. Coogs Get Consent) and conducting a campus climate survey to assess perceptions of physical and psychological safety.

Encouraging a cultural shift regarding accountability and compassion was identified as important for retaining subpopulations of students. Professional development workshops introducing faculty and staff to the basic principles of "Compassionate Communication" was suggested as a mechanism to support the cultural shift.

6. **Design and implement data-driven initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff.**

The Diversity Dimension Committee report and Steering Committee retreat discussion highlighted the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff to support the University’s mission and goals, noting the need to reflect the level of diversity in our student body. Reviewing and implementing best practices related to recruiting, diversity training, mentoring, leadership development and work/life balance was advocated along with examining the development of expanded benefits options.

The role of data was highlighted by Dimension Committee action items advocating ongoing and expanded monitoring and assessments of the effectiveness of diversity-building efforts. It was suggested that the Office of Institutional Research update and expand internal analyses of faculty salaries by gender and race/ethnicity, and conduct similar analysis of staff salaries. Data analysis aimed at identifying potential challenges in recruiting and retaining women and racial and ethnic minorities was also suggested.

Evaluating procedures and criteria for promotion and tenure with particular attention to promotion to full professor was also suggested to assist with developing programming to guide faculty through the process. Including the perspective of successful female (or other underrepresented) faculty was identified as an important component of these efforts. Monitoring the effectiveness of diversity-building efforts was advocated through continued data collection with the Office of Institutional Research playing a key role in analyzing data and identifying areas in need of intervention.
The following Dimension Committee recommendations along with Steering Committee input from retreats and action item assessments are intended to be represented in the Culture Theme Recommendations.

Create and integrate a first year philosophy statement that informs our institutional policies and practices.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Create a university philosophy statement. (PHILOSOPHY)
- Identify application of philosophy statement. (PHILOSOPHY)
- Identify key groups for feedback. (PHILOSOPHY)
- Identify a strategy for integrating the philosophy statement throughout the university. (PHILOSOPHY)
- Emphasize community engagement (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Invite Houston-area community partners to engage. (TRANSITIONS)

**Steering Committee Retreat (University Culture bullet points)**
- Philosophy statement
- Sense of community

Update the faculty evaluation and reward structure to reflect our priority on building a foundation for student engagement and learning in the first year that contributes to success throughout the undergraduate experience.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Broaden the definition of research to include research on teaching. (FACULTY)
- Establish clear guidelines for promotion and retention for the non-tenure track faculty who are successful teachers. (FACULTY)
- Departments should link their annual merit review to promotion and tenure in a way that rewards teaching. Doing so would ensure faculty are recognized for their work with ALL students when it comes time for promotion. (FACULTY)
- Update faculty reward structure to promote faculty/student interaction. (ALL STUDENTS)

**Steering Committee Retreat (Teaching/Coursework bullet points)**
- Faculty incentives/support/training
- Faculty engagement in the classroom (freshman classes)

Provide faculty, staff and teaching assistants with professional development opportunities focused on teaching, advising and mentoring students beginning in the freshman year.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Full support of the new Center for Faculty Engagement and Development and the projects being proposed: teaching, advising, and mentoring of students. (FACULTY)
- Develop a vertical teaming culture among faculty where upper level teaching faculty should communicate with foundation level since it is a common complaint among faculty that the students are not sufficiently prepared when they reach the upper levels. (FACULTY)
- Stronger TA training programs: which would come under the Faculty Engagement and Development programs. (FACULTY)
- Creation of a FYE Faculty and Administrator Corps (ORGANIZATION)
- Diversity training (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- RA training updates (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Staff/faculty training for veterans (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
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- Update faculty/staff orientation (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Develop diversity and inclusion training and programming in Residential Life and Housing (DIVERSITY)

Steering Committee Retreat (Teaching/Coursework bullet points)
- Faculty incentives/support/training
- Faculty engagement in the classroom (freshman classes)

Develop and disseminate a diversity statement to communicate the University’s diversity vision and guide institutional policies and practices.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Create & post a university diversity statement. (DIVERSITY)
- Add to mission: "and in an atmosphere of inclusion and mutual respect" (DIVERSITY)
- Create a VP for Diversity in the Provost’s Office. (DIVERSITY)

Steering Committee Retreat (University Culture bullet points)
- Accessible environment for all students

Steering Committee Retreat (Multicultural Environment bullet points)
- Diversity statement/reflection in University mission statement
- Implications for campus experience

Design and implement data-driven initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining a diverse population of students.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Include breakout sessions in New Student Orientation to target subpopulations. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Create more diverse and inclusive opportunities at Frontier Fiesta. (DIVERSITY)
- Take Actions to Recruit and Retain Diverse Undergraduates and Graduate Students (DIVERSITY)
- Engage in (continue) a centralized discussion of recruiting. (TRANSITIONS)
- Gather data on physical and psychological safety through a campus climate survey. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Encourage a cultural shift regarding accountability and compassion. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Inclusion in other events and networks as appropriate. (TRANSITIONS)

Steering Committee Retreat (Multicultural Environment bullet points)
- Implications for campus experience

Design and implement data-driven initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Improve Recruitment and Retention of Diverse Faculty and Staff. (DIVERSITY)
- Improve Retention and Development of a Diverse Faculty (DIVERSITY)

Steering Committee Retreat (Multicultural Environment bullet points)
- Implications for campus experience

Steering Committee Retreat (University Culture bullet points)
- Faculty support and assistance
The University’s current approach to the first year involves a variety of success initiatives and assessment tools at the department, college and institutional levels. Underscoring the need for a more coordinated and intentionally designed first year experience for freshmen and transfer students, action items focused on Integration were proposed by five Dimension Committees including All Students, Organization, Improvement, Roles and Purposes, and Transitions as reflected in the following recommendations.

7. **Develop a centralized organizational unit to coordinate First-Year Experience activities for freshmen and transfer students, ensuring integrated deployment of student success tools campus-wide.**

Citing a lack of coordination, duplication of efforts, dissatisfaction expressed in faculty, staff and first-year student Foundations of Excellence surveys administered in Fall 2013, four Dimension Committees recommended developing a centralized organizational unit. The Organization Dimension Committee identified this as their highest priority recommendation and suggested housing the office within Academic Affairs while fostering strong coordination and communication with the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services (DSAES). A strong connection with orientation is viewed as particularly critical to ensuring a successful student transition following admission. Committees also highlighted the importance of this office in serving the needs of both freshmen and transfer students as indicated by student survey responses.

Dimension Committees recommended that the centralized office serve as a repository for first year programs and resources, assist with identifying student needs to guide program development, engage in ongoing program assessment to ensure alignment with University goals, and facilitate campus-wide utilization of student success tools. The creation of a Student Success Task Force with representation from each college was suggested as a mechanism for coordinating the dissemination of data and sharing best practices. Expanding the use of MapWorks by colleges and advisors to facilitate interventions with at-risk students was suggested as an integration need. Committees also recommended developing better connections between career services, colleges, major departments, faculty and students. Tapping colleges as mentors for colleges who have not historically offered employment advice was also advocated.

8. **Create an integrated one-stop web resource for first-year freshmen and transfer students.**

Noting that the University has made improvements in providing students with flexible options for accomplishing a wide range of tasks in the first year, committee members advocated for an integrated repository of information to house information regarding key functional activities, timelines and deadlines. Explicit guidance on "how best to..." complete the numerous tasks expected of students and "where best to..." access the resources and services needed by students to succeed as university students was highlighted as a particular need that the recommended web resource could address.

9. **Streamline and coordinate Enrollment Services and Student Financial Services functions to facilitate effective and efficient processes for students and families.**
Evidence reviewed by Dimension Committees indicates that incoming students encounter numerous offices, policies and procedures during the recruiting, admissions, and post-acceptance processes, at times receiving inconsistent and imprecise information. As such, committees suggested increasing coordination among recruiting, admissions, orientation, and marketing at both the university and college levels to manage the quality of information that is sent to new and prospective students as well as their families. Given the complexity involved in successfully navigating post-acceptance processes including orientation, enrollment, financial aid, and bill payment, streamlining related functional activities is recommended utilizing the Organization Dimension Committee’s functional activities flow chart as a tool for identifying opportunities to reduce the number of essential steps and offices involved.

The following Dimension Committee recommendations along with Steering Committee input from retreats and action item assessments are intended to be represented in the Integration Theme Recommendations.

Develop a centralized organizational unit to integrate and coordinate First Year Experience (FYE) programs and activities.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Create an Office of First Year Experience. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Develop an Office of First Year Experience. (ORGANIZATION)
- Creation of a centralized office. (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Centralized office to address first-year student issues, concerns and goals. (TRANSITIONS)
- Student Success Task Force. (IMPROVEMENT)
- Addressing the needs of transfer students. (ORGANIZATION)
- Increased use of Mapworks. (ROLES/PURPOSES)
- Develop better connection between career services, colleges, major departments, faculty and students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Tap colleges as mentors for colleges who have not historically offered employment advice. (TRANSITIONS)

**Steering Committee Retreat (First Year Coordination and Integrated Student Processes bullet points)**
- First Year Experience Office
- Extended orientation/Cub Camp

Create an integrated one-stop web resource for first-year freshmen and transfer students.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Create an integrated one-stop web resource for FYE. (ORGANIZATION)

Streamline and coordinate Enrollment Services and Student Financial Services functions to facilitate effective and efficient processes for students and families.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Streamline registration, enrollment and financial aid processes. (ORGANIZATION)
- Coordinate the recruiting, admissions, orientation and marketing operations. (TRANSITIONS)

**Steering Committee Retreat (Integrated Student Processes bullet points)**
- Recruiting through graduation
- Onboarding and pre-admission messages, parent support
As indicated by reports submitted by the Improvement, Organization, Transitions and Roles and Purposes Dimensions Committees, effective two-way communication with internal and external constituents is viewed as critical to building a foundation for first-year student success. Incorporating action items from these committees with Steering Committee discussion, the following recommendations focus on identifying communication needs, ensuring the delivery of timely and accurate information, and utilizing data to inform improvement efforts.

10. **Systematically implement valid assessments of student experience and establish campus-wide feedback mechanisms to facilitate collaborative continuous improvement.**

Many programs exist across colleges and divisions aimed at promoting student success. The Improvement Dimension Committee highlighted the need to review, formalize, and systematically implement assessments consisting of valid student experience measures that can be administered across colleges yielding easily disseminated results. The need for training was noted to facilitate gathering data and utilizing results to support programmatic improvements. Establishing feedback mechanisms that are collaborative and involve all relevant levels of staff and faculty was identified as an important aspect of the assessment process. As noted by the Roles and Purposes Dimensions Committees, data on student placement following graduation is a particular need to facilitate the effective preparation of students for employment.

To understand the specific needs of our students, qualitative assessments were suggested by the Improvement Dimension Committee including student-based focus groups and panel discussions with participation by rising sophomores focused on describing their first year experience. The Transitions Dimension Committee highlighted the importance of identifying needs of upper-level students to guide program design in the first year and beyond. This committee also suggested conducting focus groups with families about their experiences with gaining information prior to their student entering UH to help identify communication gaps and aid in developing targeted communications outlining institutional expectations and procedures.

Of particular importance is improved campus-wide communication regarding students at-risk as noted by the Organizations Dimension Committee. This committee recommended an expanded role for the Office of Institutional Research in partnering with colleges to investigate the factors that affect student risk and how these risk factors may vary across academic units. Collaboration between Institutional Research and academic units was highlighted as important to gain a more complete understanding of discipline-specific risk factors along with strategies to mitigate their effects. It was also emphasized that increased communication from Institutional Research to departments about predictors of success and risk for first year students must be accompanied by a commitment to continued collaboration.
11. Provide updated relevant and accessible information, ensuring that our communications are responsive to the needs of prospective students, families and other external stakeholders.

The Transitions Dimension Committee emphasized the importance of providing effective communications regarding institutional expectations and procedures to prospective students and their families. In doing so, the committee suggested featuring the Social Media page more prominently at the top of the UH homepage, arranging social media sites of interest under one heading that can be anchor tagged to a new student information page, adding impacted major requirements in the Transfer Viewbook, providing a link to the Viewbook on the Admissions web page, and including key academic and financial dates on the Campus Events web page. Reviewing the current web structure and conducting a usability test to determine the best logical path to lead prospective students to the information they need was also advocated.

Having a discrete menu option for families, highlighting the Parents Guide on ART and NSO web pages, and discussing employment opportunities at Cougar Preview were identified as ways to appeal to families and enhance their engagement. Including links to Career Services, the Dean of Students Office and other resources of interest on the “Family and Guests” orientation website was also suggested along with providing additional coverage of FERPA rules at orientation and classroom experiences for families as part of Parents’ Weekend.

Regularly updated academic resources and guides were noted as key resources for prospective students. Transfer Equivalency Guides were identified as being at times incorrect, inaccessible and in need of revision. These guides are relied upon by prospective transfer students, their families, community college advising staff as well as by dual-credit and Early College High School students who enter the University of Houston under Freshman admissions requirements.

Citing the importance of effective campus tours and efficient scheduling processes, the Transitions Dimension Committee suggested augmenting the "Schedule a Visit" website into a central tour website for all university tour processes and eliminating confusion among touring visitors by beginning all campus tours at a central location and establishing a central events notification contact to coordinate all campus tours.

12. Develop interactive data-driven communication mechanisms to engage college faculty and staff in student recruitment, first-year experience preparation, and student success intervention delivery.

The Transitions Dimension Committee emphasized the need for college involvement in the student recruiting process. It was suggested that colleges receive clear information regarding marketing efforts including how and when prospective students are contacted by the University and recommended regular contact between Admissions and colleges supporting more coordinated communications.

The Transitions Dimension Committee identified communications to faculty about first-year issues, events, resources, needs and expectations as necessary to facilitate faculty participation in supporting the success of our students. Annual symposia focused on First Year Experience and “Facts at a Glance” were suggested by the Improvement Dimension Committee as mechanisms for promoting such communication. Disseminating assessment results toward the goal of improving existing practices was also advocated. As noted by the Organization Dimension Committee, communication within and between academic and administrative units regarding factors affecting student risk and the steps that can be taken to mitigate these risk factors is critical to promoting timely first-year improvements.
13. Coordinate campus-wide web resources and supportive marketing materials that provide students with information and tools focused on success in the first-year.

A web presence dedicated to providing information and resources for first-year students was proposed by the Transitions Dimension Committee which also recommended creating a task force to investigate the navigational link structure to ensure that all pages can be accessed as efficiently as possible and to carefully edit all webpage text for consistency in message and vocabulary. Suggested content for the recommended website includes a calendar of events, scholarship opportunities, a clear path to University and college career services websites, as well as academic and other student support resources. The Transitions Dimension Committee also highlighted the importance of educating our students on the benefits, risks, and realities of working while going to school. A study considering discipline-specific issues along with short and long-term implications of work for students was suggested. Coordinated information campaigns focused on issues of interest to first year students were suggested. Student engagement and involvement opportunities as well as financial aid policies and options were identified as important potential campaign topics.

The following Dimension Committee recommendations along with Steering Committee input from retreats and action item assessments are intended to be represented in the Communication Theme Recommendations.

Systematically implement valid assessments of student experience and establish campus-wide feedback mechanisms to facilitate collaborative continuous improvement.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**

- Assessment tools (IMPROVEMENT)
- Student panel/focus groups (IMPROVEMENT)
- Training and dissemination post-assessment to establish feedback loops (IMPROVEMENT)
- Improve communication about students at-risk (ORGANIZATION)
- Missing data on placement (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Targeted communications about institutional expectations and procedures. (TRANSITIONS)
- Create connections for Upper-level students. (TRANSITIONS)

**Steering Committee Retreat (Communication bullet points)**

- Timely sharing of information
- 360 degree feedback

Provide updated relevant and accessible information, ensuring that our communications are responsive to the needs of prospective students and other external stakeholders.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**

- Consider a way to incorporate the mission statement for prospective or first-year students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Cougar Preview (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Targeted communications about institutional expectations and procedures. (TRANSITIONS)
- Inclusion in orientation. (TRANSITIONS)
- Arrange social media sites of interest to new or prospective students under one heading that can be anchor tagged to the new student information page. (TRANSITIONS)
- Augment the "Schedule a Visit" website into a central tour website for all university tour processes. (TRANSITIONS)
- Determine the best logical path to lead new and prospective students to the information they need. (TRANSITIONS)
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- Review the web structure to ensure that prospective students are connected in logical ways to all resources that will support their consideration of UH as a “home away from home.” (TRANSITIONS)
- Eliminate confusion among touring visitors by beginning all campus tours at a central location, such as the Welcome Center. (TRANSITIONS)
- Establish a central events notification person or office to coordinate all campus tours and encourage college-based tours to participate in the central organization. (TRANSITIONS)
- Regularly update academic resources and guides. (TRANSITIONS)

Steering Committee Retreat (Communication bullet points)
- Information on websites
- Access to information
- Student centric website

Steering Committee Retreat (Integrated Student Processes bullet points)
- Onboarding, pre-admission messages
- Pre-campus experience
- Parent support

Develop interactive data-driven communication mechanisms to engage college faculty and staff in student recruitment, first-year experience preparation, and student success intervention delivery.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Inform colleges about and involve them with messaging to prospective students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Fall symposium on first year experience (IMPROVEMENT)
- Improve communication to faculty. (TRANSITIONS)
- Collaboration with Office of Admissions (IMPROVEMENT)
- Improve communication about students at-risk (ORGANIZATION)

Steering Committee Retreat (Integrated Student Processes bullet points)
- Onboarding, pre-admission messages
- Pre-campus experience

Steering Committee Retreat (Communication bullet points)
- Timely sharing of information

Design an integrated website and supportive marketing materials that provide students with information and resources focused on success in the first-year.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Create connections for Upper-level students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Create a clear path to the Career Services website for prospective and current students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Create connections for Other first-year students. (TRANSITIONS)
- Educate our students, on the benefits, risks, and realities to working while going to school. (TRANSITIONS)
- Consider an active campaign of all on-campus opportunities. (TRANSITIONS)
- Support the current financial aid communication efforts through a coordinated information campaign. (TRANSITIONS)
- Create connections for Academic support services. (TRANSITIONS)
- Create connections for Student Affairs professionals. (TRANSITIONS)
- Implement a Task Force to investigate the navigational link structure to be sure that all pages can be access in as few a clicks as possible, as well as to closely edit all webpage text for consistency in message and vocabulary. (TRANSITIONS)
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Steering Committee Retreat (Communication bullet points)

- Information on websites
- Access to information
- Effective functionality, design
- Student centric website
- Centralized calendar, incentives for event participation
Establishing a customized first-year experience that draws on faculty expertise and supports significant student-faculty collaboration throughout the learning process is critical to achieve learning goals supportive of student success throughout the undergraduate experience. As such, an intentional and coordinated first-year design that includes high quality academic components is needed. As reflected in the following recommendations, six Dimension Committees including Learning, Faculty, Roles and Purposes, Organization, Transitions and Diversity proposed action items focused on facilitating a foundational learning experience through early alerts, course innovations, a first-year seminar program and diversity curriculum.

14. Develop an early alert system that provides first-year students with course performance and progress assessments and promptly connects them with resources needed to support academic success going forward.

Communicating with students regarding their course progress before it is too late in the semester to improve their performance is essential for promoting student success. Students at risk for failure can benefit from referrals to appropriate campus resources to address academic challenges. A campus-wide system, tied to Blackboard or other extant learning management systems is one potential mechanism for supporting needed early alert communications between faculty and students.

The establishment of student learning data points to track progress and guide interventions is suggested to promote early alert communications and resource referrals. Continuing and increasing funding to support resources for students who struggle with gateway courses is advocated by Dimension Committees citing the need to develop resources tailored to meet students’ needs. Priorities for early alert implementation may include courses with high DWIF rates and those with high enrollments. It was also suggested that the University explore data driven initiatives to target students who benefit the most from transition support.

15. Facilitate the development and support of course innovations that allow departments to deliver high-impact teaching and engaged student learning in ways that are appropriate to their respective disciplines.

Dimension Committees advocated for the design of a first-year experience that provides high impact learning opportunities in a coordinated and systematic way, noting the importance of defining best practices for student engagement, disseminating successful strategies focused on lowering DWIF rates and providing sustainable instructional support. Needs assessments to determine effective course delivery methods were viewed as necessary components of this design and should reflect a commitment to course success as well as student persistence. Identifying first-year experience learning goals and creating an assessment plan to evaluate and track course outcomes are also critical initial steps.

Toward promoting course innovations, multiple dimension reports included action items related to developing accessible resources for instructor training on learner-centered, goal-focused, high-impact, engaging instructional methods with assessments utilized to guide professional development opportunities. Additional support for innovative
teaching approaches may also include enhanced technological assistance when using software and hardware as well as seminars on how to use technology effectively in the classroom. Consistent and sustainable funding was identified as important to support effective instructional methods, create mechanisms for sharing successful strategies campus-wide, and facilitate sufficient course offerings with appropriate class sizes to meet discipline-specific best practices.

16. Develop a vibrant and innovative first-year seminar program for students who are new to the University of Houston.

First-year seminars can help foster a successful transition to an institution’s academic climate and social environment positively impacting learning, engagement and retention. Indicating widespread support of this educational tool at the University of Houston, the development first-year seminars was recommended by five of the Dimension Committees including Learning, Organization, All Students, Roles and Purposes and Transitions. Committees highlighted the importance of campus-wide collaboration in creating a seminar program that reflects our institutional goals and addresses student needs.

Dimension Committees identified a wide range of potential seminar content aimed at addressing transition issues and laying a foundation for timely degree progress for freshmen as well as transfer students. College or discipline-specific seminars were recommended to provide students with access to key faculty and staff, facilitate preparation for future semesters, and to highlight major requirements and graduation paths. Another seminar approach may involve a focus on transition and developmental needs including learning strategies and study skills.

Regardless of approach, committees cited the importance of incorporating content related to campus resources, university traditions, engagement, financial literacy and service learning as well as the attainment of personal and professional goals. Consistent utilization of high impact teaching practices, the inclusion of student collaborations, and integration with faculty research were also recommended.

Faculty members were recommended as seminar leaders and a corresponding need for faculty support and participation incentives was noted in committee reports. Coordination with campus-wide student resources such as Student Life, Career Services, and Learning Support Services was also advocated. In designing the first-year seminar program, it is critical for the University to provide resources to assess course effectiveness, make appropriate improvements, and sustain positive program impact over time. The achievement of learning outcomes and the effects of timely and useful instructor feedback on student progress were suggested as assessment components.

17. Promote the inclusion of diversity components across undergraduate degree programs.

The diversity of the University’s student population is a key asset that is currently experienced in varying degrees creating opportunities to strengthen its impact through curricular components and student activities. The Diversity Dimension Committee recommended enhancing the undergraduate curriculum through the inclusion of required courses focused on diversity and global interaction with minors or certificates as additional options. Recommendations also highlighted the need for thoughtful discussion regarding the impact of globalization along with ethnic, cultural, racial and gender diversity on issues studied.

The Diversity Curriculum Committee recommended developing and implementing a diversity curriculum consisting of two required courses integrated with the Core Curriculum. An Introduction to Diversity course during the first year and a second diversity-focused class at the sophomore level or higher were proposed. The committee also suggested the
development of a community engagement or service requirement in both courses as a mechanism for creating positive connections with diverse communities.

The following Dimension Committee recommendations along with Steering Committee input from retreats and action item assessments are intended to be represented in the Learning Theme Recommendations.

**Develop a system that provides first-year students with early course performance and progress assessments and promptly connects them with resources needed to support academic success going forward.**

*Dimension Committee Action Items*
- Create an “early warning” system that allows first-year students to know if their progress is satisfactory in key courses and to get timely assistance if they are not on track to pass. (LEARNING)
- In support of establishing an “early warning” system—establish student learning data points that can be tied to an “early warning” system that helps track student success. (LEARNING)
- Explore data driven initiatives to target students who benefit the most from transition support. (FACULTY)

*Steering Committee Retreat (Teaching/Coursework bullet points)*
- Early alerts
- Resources for Core Curriculum
- Best practice sharing

**Facilitate the development and support of course innovations that allow departments to deliver high-impact teaching and engaged student learning in ways that are appropriate to their respective disciplines.**

*Dimension Committee Action Items*
- Support and sustain high-enrollment course innovations that allow departments to deliver high-impact teaching and engaged student learning in ways that are appropriate to their respective disciplines. (LEARNING)
- Design a first-year experience—design a first-year experience that would take advantage of these many special learning opportunities in a coordinated and systematic way. (LEARNING)
- Development of engaging instructional methods—develop accessible resources for instructor development and training on learner-centered, high-impact, engaging instructional methods. (LEARNING)
- Engaging students via instructional methods—define best practices for engaging students in learning via instructional methods for First-Year success at UH, for a variety of class styles, face to face, hybrid, and online modalities. (LEARNING)
- Evaluation of course outcomes across first-year courses—develop a means for and a methodology for consistent, broad tracking and evaluation of course outcomes across the university among first-year courses. (LEARNING)
- First-year student learning goals—In recognizing that specific learning goals for first-year students do not exist, and that this committee recommends designing a first-year experience, the University should identify learning goals specifically for a first-year experience focused on student learning (as opposed to engagement on campus, development of social skills, or other non-academic areas) and create a plan for assessing those learning goals for continuous improvement. (LEARNING)
- Make lowering the DFWI rates a university wide priority, disseminating successful strategies and providing sustainable support. (LEARNING)
- Methods for evaluating engaging instructional methods—develop effective methods for evaluating instructional methods for their effectiveness in engaging students in learning that are tied to
professional/instructor development rather than performance review and/or Promotion & Tenure. (LEARNING)

- Placement indicators for first-year students--the University should investigate a standardized value that considers high school GPA, class ranking, SAT/ACT scores, and/or perhaps TSI scores that can serve as a flag for advisors during NSO and second semester advising periods. (LEARNING)
- Resources to enable engaging instructional methods--allocate resources necessary to enable departments to offer enough sections of First-Year courses to meet students' needs and to adjust class sizes to meet discipline-specific best practices. (LEARNING)
- Scaffolding to help student success in unfamiliar disciplines--if a course is expected to be a student's first exposure to a discipline, support departments to make sure ALL instructors provide materials and scaffolding to help students understand and succeed in the course. (LEARNING)
- Support for evaluating learning outcomes across all FY sections--provide support and accessible resources for evaluating student learning outcomes across all sections of first-year courses. (LEARNING)
- Fuller engagement with the high schools and community colleges so that our students arrive better prepared. (FACULTY)
- Provide additional support for innovative teaching approaches. (FACULTY).
- Faculty training (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Incorporate career goals into classes (ROLES AND PURPOSES)

Steering Committee Retreat (Teaching/Coursework bullet points)
- Resources for Core Curriculum
- Faculty incentives/support/training
- Faculty engagement in classroom (freshman classes)
- Best practice sharing

Steering Committee Retreat (Technology bullet points)
- Availability
- Use/different uses, training
- Not a replacement for a person
- Priorities for student tools
- Energize and redefine technical leadership

Develop a vibrant and innovative first-year seminar program for students who are new to the University of Houston.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Develop a vibrant and innovative first-year seminar program for all students who are new to the University of Houston. (LEARNING)
- Faculty leaders in first-year seminars and research programs (LEARNING)
- Incentivize faculty to lead first-year seminars, first-year research programs, and other first-year focused programs in order to help students make connections between academics and special learning opportunities. (LEARNING)
- Develop a consistent introduction to college for first year and transfer students (ORGANIZATION)
- Provide a learning strategies course for first year students who earn an F in any course. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Required course for new students (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Develop a mandatory First-Year Seminar course for the University of Houston’s eight colleges that offer undergraduate degrees (Architecture, Business, Education, Engineering, HRM, CLASS, NSM, and Technology). (TRANSITIONS)
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- Programming for first-year students—Build off of current programs that offer special learning opportunities and develop specific programming for first-year students. (LEARNING)

Steering Committee Retreat (Freshman Seminar bullet points)
- Student-faculty and peer connections
- Impact on overall college experience
- Models: College/career specific (college example GENB), college success
- Voluntary vs. required

Steering Committee Retreat (Teaching/Coursework bullet points)
- Career focused

Promote the inclusion of diversity components across undergraduate degree programs.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Develop and institute a Diversity Curriculum of 2 required courses, overlapping CORE (DIVERSITY)
- Develop community engagement/service requirement in Diversity courses (DIVERSITY)
- Promote diversity element in all degree programs (DIVERSITY)

Steering Committee Retreat (Multicultural Environment bullet points)
- Implications for campus experience
- Integration into courses
High quality academic advising is important for ensuring that students successfully transition to the university environment and it is critical that academic units provide consistent advising experiences. Demonstrating the pervasive impact of advising on first-year student experience and the widespread support for change, advising-related action items emerged from five dimension committees including Organization, Roles and Purposes, Transitions, Learning and All Students. Drawing on the final reports of these committees as well as Steering Committee discussions and assessments, the following recommendations focus on creating an institutional advising model as well as making associated infrastructure and student monitoring improvements.

18. Develop and implement a best-practice institutional advising model focused on relationship building and goal attainment.

Dimension Committee assessments highlighted the need to ensure that students consistently receive high quality advising campus-wide. Committees recommended that beginning with orientation and continuing throughout the undergraduate experience, advising conversations focus on developing and attaining personal, academic and professional goals. Building connections between departments, colleges, career services and other resources as well as incorporating milestones indicating progress toward goal achievement were suggested as ways to support collaborative goal-directed advising relationships. Intrusive advising practices including potential advising holds and specialized first-year programming with an emphasis on course sequencing were also proposed as valuable tools.

Students who do not gain admission to their first choice major including those who begin their undergraduate studies in an undeclared program were viewed as being at greater risk for slow progress and failing to meet degree requirements. As such, these students have a heightened need for a more comprehensive collaborative advising experience focused on academic preparation and career aligned major selection toward the goals of increased major declaration, retention and timely degree completion.

19. Establish and implement structures and procedures to maintain effective staffing of academic advising positions, ensuring that selection, training, performance management and professional development systems support the institutional advising model.

Dimension Committee assessments and Steering Committee discussions yielded a number of suggestions aimed at supporting the consistent integration of high quality advising practices. Structurally, it is viewed as important to facilitate campus-wide coordination with a centralized advising unit and dual reporting to colleges and Academic Affairs offered as potential organizing mechanisms. Committees highlighted the need to provide academic advisors with goal-focused training, professional development opportunities and reward systems consistent with professional standards. Selecting and training a corps of peer advisors to assist freshmen with the development of goals and associated academic plans was also advocated.
20. Facilitate increased student-faculty interaction through academic and career advising experiences.

Dimension Committee reports and Steering Committee discussions emphasized the positive impact that interactions with faculty can have on student engagement. Student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom is particularly important during the first year with both NSSE and Foundations of Excellence student survey results highlighting engagement with faculty as a first-year enhancement opportunity. Involving retired faculty in advising discussions focused on personal and professional goals was suggested as one mechanism to promote early interactions with faculty outside of the classroom. The Transitions Dimension Committee recommended that academic colleges provide dedicated faculty advisors or counselors to coach students on strategies for overcoming academic difficulties.

21. Expand the use of analytics, student monitoring tools and early alert technology enabling advisors to effectively detect and address barriers to timely degree progress.

Detecting students at risk for non-enrollment or slow degree progress was cited by Dimension Committees as a critical for supporting the University’s student success goals. While some tools including MAPWorks have recently been implemented to identify and address students’ needs, multiple committees advocated for the increased availability, use, and assessment of early alert analytics and technology campus-wide. Systems that facilitate advisor-faculty collaborations and targeted resource referrals were highlighted as important needs in this regard. The Transitions Dimension Committee also suggested improving and streamlining online degree audits for effective use by advisors as well as students to assist in monitoring progress toward graduation. Administering student needs assessments and enhancing collaborations between the advising community and Institutional Research were suggested as ways to ensure the implementation of data-driven interventions.

The following Dimension Committee recommendations along with Steering Committee input from retreats and action item assessments are intended to be represented in the Advising Theme Recommendations.

Develop and implement a best-practice institutional advising model focused on relationship building and goal attainment.

**Dimension Committee Action Items**
- Develop a University advising center (perhaps a Students Retention and Success Office) to ensure that all colleges that offer undergraduate degrees are providing students with the same information. (TRANSITIONS)
- Student personal goals (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Include personal goals in academic advising (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Orientation changes (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- International student outcomes (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Mandate advising (TRANSITIONS)
- Unique needs of students in UScholars (ORGANIZATION)
- Focus on advising (ORGANIZATION)

**Steering Committee Retreat (Advising theme bullet points)**
- Relationship-building, intrusive—early alert
- Integrated career/academic, alternative degree programs
Establish and implement structures and procedures to maintain effective staffing of academic advising positions, ensuring that selection, training, performance management and professional development systems support the institutional advising model.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Develop a University advising center (perhaps a Students Retention and Success Office) to ensure that all colleges that offer undergraduate degrees are providing students with the same information. (TRANSITIONS)
- Support academic advising as a profession through improved resources, i.e. funding, professional development and opportunities for advancement. (TRANSITIONS)
- Peer advisors & Transfer Orientation (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Award for outstanding advisor outside of academics (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Improve and invest in resources to support student success initiatives (TRANSITIONS)
- Focus on advising (ORGANIZATION)

Steering Committee Retreat (Advising theme bullet points)
- Authority
- Ratios, availability
- Training, Compensation
- Advancement, recognition
- Administrative vs. advising duties
- Required dual reporting to Academic Affairs

Facilitate increased student-faculty interaction through academic and career advising experiences.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Ombudspersons for each college (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Retired faculty center for student advising (ROLES AND PURPOSES)
- Improve and invest in resources to support student success initiatives (TRANSITIONS)

Steering Committee Retreat (Advising theme bullet points)
- Interaction with faculty

Expand the use of analytics, student monitoring tools and early alert technology enabling advisors to effectively detect and address barriers to timely degree progress.

Dimension Committee Action Items
- Expand technology to support advising. (TRANSITIONS)
- Continue to monitor progress and success of MAP-Works. (ALL STUDENTS)
- In support of the general recommendation to establish an "early warning" system, the committee encourages the University to facilitate a process with faculty and advisors to identify students as at risk of academic failure early in their first semester and providing support for students before failure occurs. (LEARNING)
- In support of establishing an "early warning" system, refer at-risk students to campus resources as early in the semester as possible using a campus-wide "early warning" system. (LEARNING)
- Administer a needs assessment at the beginning and end of the first year. (ALL STUDENTS)
- Regularly update academic resources and guides. (TRANSITIONS)

Steering Committee Retreat (Advising theme bullet points)
- Intrusive—early alert
- Student surveys
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Implementation Process Overview

With the retirement of Dr. Barefoot, Dr. John N. Gardner is serving as our institutional advisor for the Foundations of Excellence implementation phase during the 2014-2015 academic year. The role of Dr. Gardner in this process is to provide feedback and guidance in developing and executing plans to implement final recommendations. Dr. Gardner will also visit the University of Houston in spring 2015 to meet with campus leadership and Foundations of Excellence participants.

In November 2014, campus liaisons will hold a meeting with Foundations of Excellence Steering Committee and Dimension Committee members to review the emergent themes and consolidated recommendations. A Work Group will be formed for each emergent theme with membership drawn from the Steering Committee, Dimension Committees, and campus outreach for new members. The preliminary report will be finalized and prepared for campus-wide distribution, supplemented with Dimension Committee reports, task force membership acknowledgements, and Work Group implementation assignments.

The charge of the five Work Groups will be to identify current University operations that interface with their theme and associated approved recommendations, develop detailed plans and implement the plans in collaboration with faculty and staff who may be directly impacted by the recommended action. Work Groups will begin in December 2014 and present implementation plans for appropriate approvals as they are completed during spring and summer 2015. The Steering Committee will meet monthly starting in January 2015 to receive updates from each of the Work Groups as well as to provide feedback and guidance. Upon completion of implementation plans and commencement of recommended actions, the Steering Committee and respective Work Groups will be transitioned into a Campus First-Year Experience Advisory Board tasked with ongoing monitoring and guidance of Foundations of Excellence initiatives.