



**Foundations of Excellence™
In the First College Year**

Task Force Progress Report

Phase II – Year I



Nazareth College
Foundations of Excellence™

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Nazareth College – Foundations of Excellence™

Executive Summary

Project Update – Fall, 2004

In the spring of 2003, a Task Force was convened to discuss the undergraduate, first-year programming at Nazareth. The formation of the Task Force was in response to an invitation by the CIC to participate in a project to develop standards for measuring excellence in the first year of college. Along with 93 other CIC institutions, Nazareth responded to the six 'Hallmarks of Excellence' the Policy Center on the First-Year of College had developed. The Hallmarks were designed as standards against which colleges can measure the quality of their first-year programming.

Over the summer of 2003, the project name changed to Foundations of Excellence™ in the First-Year. Phase I results from the CIC institutions were fused into a final eleven Dimensions or standards of practice (please see attached page). Of the 54 institutions that applied for Phase II of the project, Nazareth College was chosen along with eleven other CIC schools to evaluate the usefulness and validity of the Dimensions as measures of excellence.

Phase II of the project proceeded over the 2003-2004 academic year. First, the campus leadership of the project went to the orientation meeting at the Policy Center in North Carolina. At that time, the final versions of the Dimensions were distributed to the participating schools, along with the Performance Indicators the Policy Center developed to measure each Dimension.

Early in the fall semester the Task Force was reconvened under the guidance of a Steering Committee, which kept track of the operational issues of the Task Force. Over the course of the year, eight reports were submitted to the Policy Center on behalf of the Task Force. After the initial organizational report, we submitted our Current Practices Inventory, a collection of the policies and activities that currently exist for our first-year students. Each month thereafter, we submitted responses to the Dimensions consisting of a rating given to each performance indicator, a narrative summarization of the Task Force's rationale, and copies of supporting evidence collected through the Current Practices Inventory.

Through the process of evaluating each Dimension, the Task Force was able to describe Nazareth's current practices and identify several issues pertaining to our first-year programming. The discussion of each Dimension brought specific issues to the surface, but several themes emerged throughout the project that characterize the conclusions of the Task Force.

First, excellent first-year programs are **intentional** in the planning and execution of all of its aspects. Second, the first-year curriculum and co-curriculum are **coordinated** through a single organizational structure. Third, expectations for students and faculty are **communicated** clearly and continually to all constituencies. Fourth, the

effectiveness of the program is **assessed** against its stated goals and objectives for continuing improvement.

Nazareth College has several aspects of excellent programming for our first-year students and a faculty and staff dedicated to providing a solid introduction to a college education. However, when looking at the activities as a whole, Nazareth does not fully meet the four characteristics listed above.

Over the summer, Nazareth received the results from the 2004 administration of the NSSE (National Study of Student Engagement) and the CSHE (Center for Study of Higher Education) Faculty Survey. A brief review of these data confirms data responses the Task Force had to the Dimensions. Further analysis will be provided by the Policy Center and CSHE later in the fall.

Meanwhile, during the Fall 2004 semester, the Task Force completed a report summarizing its work assessing Nazareth's first year programming. The Task Force recommends Senior Staff take the following actions:

- Ensure that first-year programming is an institutional priority
- Charge a college-wide committee, headed by the Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs and Student Development to:
 - Examine the Points for Further Discussion delineated in this report.
 - Develop an Implementation Plan for first-year activities.
 - Report regularly to Senior Staff on the progress of the work on the first-year program.
- Encourage a similar assessment of the initial experience for undergraduate transfer students and new graduate students.

Introduction

The Foundations of Excellence™ in the First College Year Project was launched on September 5, 2003 by the Policy Center on the First Year of College with funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education.

Leading up to the launch was Phase I (January, 2003 - August, 2003) of the project. Members of CIC (Council of Independent Colleges) and AASCU (American Association of State Colleges and Universities) were asked to participate in the initial work to develop standards for measuring the characteristics of excellence in a first-year college program. Participants were also asked to define what 'Sources and Forms of Evidence' would be acceptable, and available, to validate those characteristics.

In response to the request by the CIC for participation, a Task Force was convened at Nazareth College in the spring of 2003 to discuss the undergraduate, first-year programming at Nazareth. Along with 93 other CIC institutions, Nazareth responded to the six 'Hallmarks of Excellence' the Policy Center on the First Year of College had developed.

Over the summer of 2003, the project name changed to Foundations of Excellence™ in the First-Year. Phase I results from the CIC institutions were fused into a final eleven Dimensions or standards of practice. Of the 54 institutions that formally applied for Phase II of the project, the Policy Center chose Nazareth College along with eleven other CIC schools to evaluate the usefulness and validity of the Foundational Dimensions™ as measures of excellence. The final selection criteria for participation in the project included the readiness of the Founding Institutions to participate in Phase II, their prior commitment to first-year students, and their particular demographic/geographic characteristics.

Phase II of the project proceeded over the 2003-2004 academic year. First, the Nazareth leadership of the project went to the orientation meeting at the Policy Center in North Carolina. At that time, the final versions of the Foundational Dimensions™ were distributed to the participating schools, along with the Performance Indicators the Policy Center developed to measure each Dimension.

Early in the fall semester the Task Force was reconvened under the guidance of a Steering Committee, which kept track of the operational issues of the Task Force. Over the course of the year, eight reports were submitted to the Policy Center on behalf of the Task Force. This Progress Report is a compilation of those reports to the Policy Center.

Founding CIC Institutions:

Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN
Columbia College, Columbia, SC
Franklin Pierce College, Rindge, NH

Madonna University, Livonia, MI
Marywood University, Scranton, PA
Saint Edwards University, Austin, TX

Aurora University, Aurora, IL
Endicott College, Beverly, MA
Indiana Wesleyan University,
Marion, IN
Maryville College, Maryville, TN
Nazareth College, Rochester, NY
University of Charleston,
Charleston, WV

CIC Foundational Dimensions™

Foundational Dimensions™ statements, generally referred to as Dimensions, are specific characteristics that reflect excellence in the practice of providing an undergraduate, first-year program. They provide standards against which an institution can measure effectiveness of their programming in facilitating success among their first-year students.

The Dimensions resulted from a merger of effort between the Policy Center on the First Year of College and its partners from CIC and AACSB. Responses to the initial six statements led to the development of eleven CIC Dimensions and nine AACSB Dimensions. The Dimensions and their associated Performance Indicators became the basis for measurement and evaluation of the Founding Institutions first-year programs. By using the Dimensions and their associated Performance Indicators, the Founding Institutions are helping to test the validity of the Dimensions as markers of excellence.

Institutions had the option of adding Performance Indicators if the Task Force felt those provided did not adequately measure the Dimension, or did not adequately reflect the current practice of the institution. Nazareth's Task Force added several Performance Indicators during the evaluation process.

Current Practice Inventory (CPI)

One of the first tasks was to compile our Current Practices Inventory (CPI), a collection of the policies and activities that currently exist for our first-year students from all over the campus. The CPI documents the administrative structures that support these policies and activities. We collected descriptions of each structure, as well as handouts, brochures, and course syllabi. Individual items from the CPI were used as supporting evidence to justify our responses to the Performance Indicators for each Dimension.

Preview of Nazareth Results

In this report, the Task Force summarizes the Nazareth response to each Dimension.

Through the process of evaluating each Dimension, the Task Force was able to describe Nazareth's current practices and identify several issues pertaining to our first-year programming. The discussion of each Dimension brought specific issues to the surface, but several themes emerged throughout the project that characterize the findings of the Task Force.

First, excellent first-year programs are **intentional** in the planning and execution of all of its aspects. Second, the first-year curriculum and co-curriculum are **coordinated** through a single organizational structure. Third, expectations for students and faculty are **communicated** clearly and continually to all constituencies. Fourth, the effectiveness of the program is **assessed** against its stated goals and objectives for continuing improvement.

The final sections of this report contain the conclusions and recommendations that grew out of the Foundations of Excellence™ project at Nazareth College. They are presented in the context of the identified themes. The Task Force will also discuss the next steps of analysis and planning.

Policy Center on the First Year of College

The Policy Center has as its basic mission the improvement of the first college year. The Center's particular focus is the development and dissemination of a range of first-year assessment procedures and tools that can be used to strengthen or confirm practices in the curriculum, co-curriculum, and institutional policy. The Policy Center's work will help build a body of research on best practices in first-year programs.

The Policy Center on the First Year of College was initiated in October 1999 with a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, and is hosted on the campus of Brevard College in North Carolina. The work of the Policy Center is currently made possible by the generous support of two primary benefactors, The Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education, and is an extension of the work of John N. Gardner and his colleagues at the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. The two entities work cooperatively on issues of central concern for the success of first-year college students.

Acknowledgements

The Steering Committee and the Task Force would like to thank our Policy Center Liaison, Stephen Schwartz, Visiting Senior Fellow at the Policy Center on the First College Year for his assistance and feedback.

Dimension One Philosophy

Foundations Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy / rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices.

The philosophy / rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. The philosophy / rationale is also the basis for organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, and resource allocation.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force identified an implicit philosophy underlying the first-year programming across the campus. The Task Force response summarized that philosophy as follows:

“providing support to first-year students, assisting the transition to college life and ultimately encouraging student success.”

Offices providing services to first-year students express a commitment to building community, supporting the student, encouraging success.

The Task Force rated the influence of the philosophy on current practice and policies as moderate and communication of the philosophy to students and continuing faculty as medium.

Evidence:

Nazareth College has identified several areas that have explicit policy statements pertaining to the first-year.

- ***Freshman Seminar Program***
This program seeks to engage both faculty and students in meeting specific goals and objectives, compiled in 1995 and listed in the *Freshman Seminar Reader*. Activities are planned and resources are provided to faculty to assist in meeting these goals and help them consciously focus activities that will help students make the transition to college life.
- ***Freshman English Program***
The Freshman English Program developed goals and objectives in the 1998-1999 academic year.

- ***Residential Life First Year Experience Program***
This program places first-year students in living-learning communities within the residence hall while providing enhanced programming involving faculty, peer mentors and resident assistants. Typically, this program impacts one third of the entering class. The statement of goals was developed in 1999.

Several positions, programs and services were identified that reflect the implicit philosophy:

- ***Director of Student Transition and First Year Center***
This person works collaboratively with the Nazareth community on understanding first year transitional needs and implementing first year programs and services that enhance first-year student success.
- ***Coordinator of Freshman Academic Support Services***
This person administers and supports programs that address the academic needs of first year students and is the specific contact point for faculty with freshmen having academic concerns.
- ***Collection of Freshman Mid-term Grades***
The collection of mid-term grades for freshmen provides a progress marker for first-year students in both the fall and spring semesters. Students meeting specific criteria of low grades are contacted while there is still time remaining in the semester for an intervention to be effective.
- ***Undergraduate Retention Fund***
This fund provides resources for faculty, staff and student leaders to support specific activities aimed at building faculty and student relationships outside of the classroom.
- ***Peer-Mentoring***
Several peer-mentoring programs provide resources within and outside the major for students who need extra academic support.

The implied philosophy of the first-year is communicated to first-year students through the following programs:

- ***New Student Orientation***
During New Student Orientation, first-year programs and resources are documented in the Student Handbook, which is distributed to all new students. Programs are also highlighted in the workshops offered during the orientation process.
- ***New Student Convocation***
At the beginning of the fall semester, students, parents, and families are invited to attend the New Student Convocation, where the new students are asked to repeat the “Statement of Intent”, a commitment to their academic life at Nazareth. The convocation program, including the active statement by students, starts the formal transition process into college.
- ***HEOP/Excel Pre-Freshman Summer Institute***

The Summer Institute starts HEOP and Excel students in summer classes that provide additional academic support in the early stages of their college experiences.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has no explicit, college-wide philosophy addressing the first-year.
- Our programming is not intentional in reflecting our philosophy and communicating it to students, faculty and staff.
- Nazareth does not have an assessment process for first-year programming in place.
- Nazareth does not effectively communicate the first-year philosophy to students, parents, and faculty or prospective students and parents.

Dimension Two Organization

Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.

These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

At the Present Time:

The dimension states that the institution should “create structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated approach to the first year.” The Task Force identified several structures that address the first year from different perspectives, but they are not ‘integrated and coordinated’ beyond the commitment of the staff to communicate and work together.

The Task Force identified three positions having a high impact on the quality of the first-year on campus. These positions are the Director of Student Transition and the First-Year Center, Coordinator of Freshman Academic Support Services, and the Director of Freshman Seminar. The Task Force rated the impact of these positions as high on the overall quality of the first year on campus. The strength of these positions is that the incumbents communicate regularly on issues and are committed to working together.

The FIRST Team has evolved over the years from the former Retention Committee. The Task Force rated its impact on curriculum as low and student life as medium, the largest impact over time being the creation of the position of Director of Student Transition and the First-Year Center.

The third area of commitment is in the area of budget lines that support first-year activities; the lines that support the positions listed above, the Undergraduate Retention Fund and the First-Year Experience budget.

Evidence:

The Task Force identified several structures that address the first year from different perspectives, supporting the claim that there are ongoing first-year organizational efforts in place. However, the Task Force also noted that these structures are not 'integrated and coordinated' beyond the commitment of the staff to communicate and work together.

The Task Force identified three positions have a high impact on the quality of the first-year on campus. These positions are:

- ***The Director of Student Transition and the First-Year Center***
- ***Coordinator of Freshman Academic Support Services***
- ***Director of Freshman Seminar***

All three positions have a discrete focus on the first-year, and as such, the people in the positions interact regularly. These three positions encounter many of the same situations, but from differing perspectives, so sharing information, planning programs together, and coordinating efforts is critical to maintaining a cross-campus network of support for first-year students. The interactive nature of these positions allows Nazareth to be proactive and to respond quickly to student needs. This network of support has resulted in several enhancements to the first-year experience at Nazareth:

- A redesigned, more student-centered Convocation ceremony
- Establishment of a chapter of Phi Eta Sigma, a freshman honor society
- The addition of collecting mid-semester grades in the spring semester
- The establishment of common goals and consistency among class sections for the Freshman Seminar Program
- The establishment of a study skills short course for students below a 2.0 GPA at midterm
- Personal intervention at mid-semester for students below a 2.0 GPA
- The establishment of an integrated early warning system that addresses first year student issues from an academic *and* social vantage point
- Having resource people available for specific first-year questions or concerns
- The establishment of an emergency fund available to students
- The creation of a career development course for exploratory students
- The offering of study skills workshops
- The creation of the First Year Center, a resource for first-year students and their parents
- Increased emphasis on training and educating the College community on the transitional needs of students
- The creation of FYE (First Year Experience) Program in the residence halls
- Linking of Freshman Seminar sections with English and other core courses
- Peer leader support in selected Freshman Seminar sections
- A more personal approach to first-semester course selection
- A quick turnaround on processing information (i.e. transfer credit and AP posting)

- F.I.R.S.T. Team
Having evolved over several years from the former Retention Committee, the “FIRST” Team is an acronym for Focusing Initiatives towards Retaining Students in Transition. Meeting since January 2001 the group, while never having decision-making authority, has functioned mainly as an advisory group for existing initiatives and for ideas for the future, addressing recommendations for encouraging the first-year student success and retention.
- Undergraduate Retention Fund
Supports several course-based activities that are outside of the classroom.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has no institutional structure with the sole responsibility and authority to oversee all first-year curriculum/activities in a coordinated way.

Dimension Three Educated Person

Foundations Institutions begin a process by which students gain an understanding of what it means to be an educated person according to institutional mission and values.

Central to this understanding is the intellectual experience of the students' first year. Thus, institutions establish clear academic goals and chart progress towards those goals.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force found that our statements about what an educated person should be able to do in our institutional mission statement are not well communicated to our students as specific objectives of our first-year curriculum, the core curriculum, or first-year activities. The Task Force rated the College low in effectively evaluating our students' progress toward being an educated person.

Evidence:

The Task Force found that our institutional mission defines what an educated person should be able to do, not necessarily what an educated person is. However, the Nazareth community sees itself as a step in the process of helping students become educated people, but that the communication of these goals may not be as clear to the students as it should be.

The following documents contain goals/objectives that address the Nazareth concept of an educated person or what an educated person should be able to do:

- Mission Statement <http://www.naz.edu/welcome/aboutnaz.cfm>
- Prospectus (Admissions Viewbook)
- College of Arts and Sciences web site: <http://www.naz.edu/dept/cas/>
- Liberal Studies Core Curriculum design document, May 1988
- Philosophy 101 syllabus and website:
<http://www.naz.edu/dept/philosophy/phl101.html>
- Wellness Model on the Residential Life website: <http://www.naz.edu.dept/reslife/>
Ties in directly to the value of healthy living.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth is not explicit in connecting the goals/objectives in the college mission statement to the curriculum and activities of the first year.
- Nazareth has no evaluation tools to document progress toward these objectives.
- Nazareth has not implemented an ongoing evaluation of the students' progress for assessment of the effectiveness of first-year programming.

Dimension Four Transitions

Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate recruitment, admissions, and student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.

Institutions improve the academic and social readiness of students to make the transition to higher education environments by communicating clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and providing appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain linkages and curricular alignments between faculty and secondary school teachers, and they communicate with guidance counselors, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

At the Present Time:

Overall, the Task Force rated the admissions process, including materials, campus visits and departmental program descriptions, as providing prospective students with a moderate view of the institutional mission and academic expectations. The Task Force rated the communication of the expectations around student life on campus as high. Providing timely information on Financial Aid issues and procedures was also rated as high.

The Task Force noted difference in perceptions between students and faculty about the connections that faculty make with students. The various peer-mentoring programs within several majors, Residential Life and Student Activities serve in building connections with first-year student and upper level students.

Evidence:

The following materials and programs provide information to students regarding the mission of the College and the expectations of them in academic and student life.

- The mission statement is explicit in the Catalog and the website, as well as in the Prospectus, resources that are available to all students. The recruitment materials

also display the spirit of the mission in the presentation of ideas and programs, portraying the best of everything we are.

- The “Introduction” admissions brochure highlights several aspects of student life. Paired along with activity specific brochures and the college website, the Task Force felt that student life issues were successfully communicated. Written materials specific to clubs and organizations are also available to students who visit the campus.
- In admissions programs such as “Experience Naz Days,” prospective students attend classes and talk directly with faculty about academic opportunities available at Nazareth. Most of the information about the reality of hours needed to study and being an independent learner are part of the verbal interview process and not included in the printed materials. Campus tour guides give prospective students a chance to obtain information from a student about the Nazareth experience.

The Task Force found that there are several structures/policies in place that serve in building connections and easing the transition process for first-year students.

- The Summer Academic Orientation provides students with the opportunity to meet with faculty and start making connections with their academic life at Nazareth.
- Starting with the New Student Convocation, the programming for the New Student Orientation weekend includes opportunities to bond with fellow new students, upper class students, staff and faculty. The focus is to assist in the adjustment to being a college student and to their life at Nazareth.

The Task Force also noted that there were several structures are in place to facilitate activities outside of the classroom.

- All Freshman Seminar classes are required to have at least one out-of-classroom activity where the faculty member and the students can interact on a more informal basis.
- The Undergraduate Retention Fund supports out-of-classroom activities for any faculty member who wishes to support their teaching and their relationship with students with outside activities.
- Several peer mentor programs support the connections between upper class students and first-year students, as well as provide academic support for new students.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth is not intentional or clear in communicating curricular and co-curricular expectations to prospective and incoming students.
- At Nazareth, there is a disparity in perception between students and faculty about the degree to which faculty make connections with students.

Dimension Five Faculty

Foundations Institutions elevate the first college year to a high priority for the faculty.

Chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs articulate expectations for substantial faculty interaction with first-year students, both inside and outside the classroom. The institutions' system of rewards supports these expectations.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force noted that the expectation of interaction with first-year students is communicated to incoming new faculty, but is not reinforced over time with more senior faculty or part-time faculty. Out-of-classroom activities are supported and encouraged for first-year students and upper level students with the Retention Fund and the Faculty Associates. Interaction by discipline is variable, with larger departments being less effective.

The faculty reward system does not identify work with first-year students in a separate category for recognition from other activities.

Evidence:

The Task Force identified the following policies/structures as evidence that Nazareth instills an awareness of the importance of the first college year amongst its faculty:

- Each Spring, the Freshman Seminar Program holds a two-day workshop for faculty who will be teaching Freshman Seminar the following Fall, and all Freshman Seminar faculty participate.
- The English Department sponsors workshops for faculty teaching College Writing 101 and 102 every two to three years. This coordinates the focus of the course to maintain continuity across sections, as well as emphasizing the importance of the course to the faculty. The department also puts forth a concerted effort to keep the section intact, both students and instructor, from first to second semester, to maintain the relationships already developed.
- New faculty orientation is conducted through the Center for Teaching Excellence. The primary focus of the programming is acculturating new faculty members into the Nazareth community. Topics on teaching, resources for first year students and developing relationships with students are included in the programming.

The following funds support and encourage out-of-class interactions between faculty and students:

- The Undergraduate Retention Fund encourages out-of-class interaction between faculty and first-year students by supporting attendance to activities such as performances, special events on and off campus, dinners in the faculty home and Rochester area attractions.
- The Faculty Associates Fund supports the same efforts as the Undergraduate Retention Fund, but for upper-level students. Many times, for courses with first-year and upper-level students, the activity costs can be split between the funds. This encourages not only interaction between first-year students and faculty, but also interaction with the upper-level students as well.
- The Task Force found that each department differs in encouraging faculty/student interaction outside of the classroom. Smaller departments, with a higher major to faculty ratio, seemed to do better in encouraging a higher level of contact. Larger departments had the challenge of more students as well as more heterogeneity in the students in their classes.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth is not consistent in encouraging a culture of faculty-student interaction when integrating new faculty, through professional development activities with experienced faculty, or through faculty reward and recognition systems.

Dimension Six All Students

Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.

The process of anticipating, diagnosing, and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to assessment and adjustment throughout the first year. Institutions provide services with respect for the students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences.

At the Present Time:

While interview data from leaving first year students has garnered valuable information and has assisted in the identification of some sub-groups that need attention, we have yet to systematically exam the experience of students who remain at Nazareth. Without an overall structure for the first-year coordinating a cohesive, intentional program, evaluating the services provided to specific subgroups within the first-year students becomes very difficult. The Task Force generally rated our examination of subgroups as medium. The evaluation of meeting the specific needs of those groups is split evenly between medium and high. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the services to meet special needs is spotty.

Evidence:

The following structures are in place for honors students:

- The Honors Program is available to first-year students who have been identified as qualified candidates. They are encouraged to meet with the Honors Program Director to explore the possibility of joining the program.
- Phi Eta Sigma is for students with outstanding high school records or exemplary performance during their first year at Nazareth.

The following structures are in place for students with disabilities:

- The Academic Counselor for Students with Disabilities makes an effort to contact each self-identified freshman with a disability by the mid-point of the first semester to examine the following:
 - Usefulness of accommodations
 - Explore/discuss any unanticipated needs or concerns
 - Adjustment to academic expectations
 - Adjustment to residence hall, if appropriate
 - Explore knowledge of and comfort in accessing campus supports (tutors, adaptive technology, Writing Center, Counseling Center)
 - Need to make a referral to a campus or outside resource

- Campus accessibility

The following services are in place for HEOP/Excel students:

- HEOP/Excel students are fully involved in the academic, social, and on-campus experience at the College. The HEOP Office provides support for the students, along with the Academic Advisor for HEOP/Excel. Subjective and objective data concerning these students are used to monitor and support their progress.

The following is in place for academically under-prepared students:

The Task Force believes that progress has been made in addressing the needs of academically under-prepared students. Students who are identified as needing extra assistance in Math and English are placed in special labs for those courses. Also, a special course for students needing extra assistance in learning about study skills is currently under development for the Fall 2004 semester. Finally, there are interventions and services currently in place which include:

- Mid-Semester grade review
- Mid-semester grade follow-up (i.e. weekly meetings for students below a 2.0 GPA)
- Peer tutoring program
- Study Skills workshops
- Math Center, Writing Center, Logic Lab, Science Center
- Early Warning System and follow-up
- Students performing below a 2.0 at mid-semester are tracked in the social realm to be sure there are no issues affecting performance. Staff will intervene as necessary.

The following structures are in place for student athletes:

- Coaches meet with student athletes on a weekly basis to be sure students are attending class, not overwhelmed by coursework, comfortable with surrounding conditions, etc. First-year athletes are asked to complete logbooks to track their experiences as first-year students. Training programs for coaches are available during the first week of the semester to recognize the concerns and stresses that first-year students experience. First-year student athletes also benefit from taking the CHAMPS course, which gives them the opportunity to dialogue about their transition experience. A staff of peer health educators called SAMS (Student Athlete Mentors) are available to students.

Multicultural Affairs provides services and programming that focuses on minority students. Diversity programming is also included in New Student Orientation and the training of Residence Assistants.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has not clearly identified the subgroups of first-year students that need special attention to increase chances of success.

- Nazareth cannot yet confirm that the services offered to subgroups are designed to meet demonstrated needs.
- Nazareth has not developed consistent assessment processes for evaluation of effectiveness of services.

Dimension Seven Institutional Commitment

Foundations Institutions build commitment of first-year students to the institution through a clear articulation of its identity and ethos.

The process begins with recruitment efforts and continues in the first-year curriculum and co-curriculum through exploration of the values and heritage of the institution.

At the Present Time:

Nazareth College was founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1924. Thirty years ago, Nazareth became an independent, non-denominational college. The College is currently undergoing a period of rapid growth and change with the expansion of the campus and the increase of the student body to a targeted 2,000 full-time undergraduates. The Task Force found that Nazareth's history has had an impact on the natural development of institutional identity and tradition, but "the identity as a student-centered college with a commitment to service has remained central to our mission."

This commitment to the mission is evident within first semester programming that focuses on building a sense of community among first-year students both through curricular and co-curricular activities. The Task Force did note that the more intentional efforts diminish after the first semester.

The Task Force rated Nazareth low in providing opportunities for new students to participate in campus traditions, because our traditions are 'new' and not clearly identified by all campus constituencies.

Evidence:

- Admissions Brochures portray campus life in both the academic and the student life realms.
- New Student Orientation Program contains activities that build on the values of the founders through service to the community. The centerpiece is the Day of Service sponsored by Campus Ministry.
- Even though the Mission Statement for the College is contained in the Freshman Seminar Reader and given to all first-year students in their seminar class, addressing the history of the college as part of the course is an option only some of the faculty use in the course.

- Statement of Respect and Diversity was adopted by the Board to reflect the inclusive values of the College.
- New Student “Statement of Intent” repeated by all new students at the New Student Convocation in the fall stresses Nazareth’s tradition of commitment to academic excellence.
- Descriptions of the Open Houses and the Experience Naz Day from Admissions contain characterizations of campus life.
- The Student Development web site has statements of the goals of the co-curriculum. <http://www.naz.edu/dept/studentactivities/>

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has not been completely mindful of the effects of change on the nature of the institution during the current period of rapid growth.
- Nazareth is not fully intentional about how our identity is communicated to incoming students, faculty and staff resulting in a lowered awareness of the traditions left by the founders.
- Nazareth does not have an overall plan for the complete first year to carry through the efforts of the first semester into the second semester.
- Nazareth has not identified activities that are becoming ‘traditions’ and confirmed their alignment with campus mission and values.

Dimension Eight Engagement

Foundations Institutions engage students, both in and out of the classroom, in order to develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institutions philosophy and mission.

An explicit goal of first-year instruction across the curriculum, engagement promotes intellectual curiosity and excitement. Whether in or out of the classroom, engagement promotes critical thinking, lifelong learning, moral and spiritual development, and civic responsibility.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force invited input from several faculty in their discussion of Dimension Eight. Using the syllabi from several courses, and drawing on the expertise of the faculty on the committee, the Task Force attempted to evaluate the use of those techniques designed to engage students in active learning or “pedagogies of engagement.”

In the Task Force’s evaluation of the indicator regarding “pedagogies of engagement”, the College Writing courses were rated high in their methods of engaging students. Other rated disciplines of Psychology, Biology, and History were ranked as medium in engaging students. Out-of-classroom activities across campus were rated high in their design to achieve the institutions learning objectives. Efforts to encourage civic engagement were ranked as medium in the curriculum and high in the co-curriculum.

Evidence:

The following illustrate teaching activities designed to engage students in learning:

- **Writing Course**
College Writing 101 and 102 consists of writing as a process with significant interaction with the instructor. Individual conferences with the instructor, peer critiques, small group discussions and online discussions are the pedagogies utilized in the course.

- **Psychology**

Although lecture is still used to transfer some of the knowledge base within the course structure, the course uses a variety of strategies to engage students including collaborative learning projects and class discussions.

- **History**

The history department uses active learning strategies in a number of their history and political science courses. These include group work, involvement in a multi-year project on local history and the requirement to use primary sources in research.

- **Biology**

Recognizing the usefulness of active learning, the majority of biology faculty at Nazareth relies most heavily on the laboratory portion of the course for the active learning component.

The following activities are designed to achieve learning objectives:

- **Residential Life**

Residential Life embraces a philosophy designed to:

- promote and assist learning outside the classroom
- promote a living/learning environment
- provide opportunities for socialization and recreation
- provide opportunities for cultural learning and expression
- provide residents with self-development and growth oriented activities
- provide residents with opportunities to teach and learn from each other foster a sense of community among the residents
- give students a chance to interact with staff on an informal basis
- expose faculty, staff, and community members to residence halls

Programs include the FYE (First Year Experience) Program and programming designed to embrace Nazareth's commitment of service to the Rochester community

- **Intercollegiate Athletics**

Activities that are specifically designed to encourage learning are:

- CHAMPS Program
- Team Study Halls
- Required class attendance
- Safe Recruiting Workshop
- Participation in the Athletic Alcohol Prevention Programming and Leadership Education Conference at the University of Virginia

- **Student Center Activities**

Student Activities and Campus Ministry have several programs to support the learning environment for students.

- **Campus Cultural Events**

There is a campus-wide focus on cultural events including:

- Arts Center: Students given free tickets to all subscription performances
- Honors Lecture Series
- Department of Foreign Languages and Literature sponsors Hispanic Heritage Month through Casa Hispana, and Casa Italiana has a full schedule of events
- Students in Freshman Seminar are required to attend at least one Arts Center program during their first semester

- Undergraduate Retention Fund funds attendance at cultural activities in the community such as GEVA Theatre productions, Rochester's regional, professional theatre, and performances by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and students and faculty of the Eastman School of Music

The following structured activities encourage community involvement and civic engagement:

- **Curriculum**

Activities are built into the curriculum of the Freshman seminar and other academic programs to encourage engagement with the community:

- Several courses require students to attend a public meeting of an elected body or community group.
- Introduction to Political Science and some Freshman Seminar courses require students to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper on a topic related to government or politics.
- In ethnobotany, students actively engage in research that will benefit a community segment. However, this is primarily an upper level course.

- **Co-curriculum**

The programming in Student Development focuses on encouraging habits of civic engagement:

- Partners for Learning: students work in the city schools and community service agencies
- Alternative Spring Break: students and staff traveling this year to Maryland to provide a week of service over spring break
- Campus Compact at Nazareth sponsored a Week of Civic Engagement last year. Activities included a panel discussion on civic engagement, a Service Learning Forum, a Social Action Fair and a Day of Service. This year Nazareth is hosting the New York State Campus Compact Annual Student Conference.
- On Campus voter registration
- Math department clothing drive
- Book drive by the Freshman Honor Society
- Book drive for county jail by the English Department
- Athletic teams do community service projects

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has the opportunity to evaluate the perception of engagement against the NSSE results.
- Nazareth has not addressed the definition and role of engagement across the campus.
- Nazareth has not coordinated the efforts of the curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure they reinforce common learning objectives.

- Does Nazareth provides adequate facilities, such as public gathering spaces and common dining places, to encourage informal interaction of faculty and students?

Dimension Nine Diversity

Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.

Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people different from themselves, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force rated Nazareth high in providing opportunities for first-year students to experience diverse worldviews. The Rochester community views Nazareth very positively in its multicultural programming. However, student participation is less than we would like to see. The Task Force also noted a difference in the emphasis in participation between first-year students and the rest of the undergraduate population.

Interaction with diverse people was rated as low in both the curriculum and co-curriculum. In part, this response reflects the number of minority faculty and staff not yet being large enough to support a larger minority student population. There is also a tendency for homogeneous groups of students to resist interaction with other groups.

The opportunities provided to reflect on interactions with diversity and the encouragement to explore one's own culture in relation to other cultures, were rated as medium by the Task Force. It was noted that diversity discussions do not always include broader definitions to include economic or urban/rural diversity, less visible forms of diversity.

Evidence:

Diversity issues are central pieces of several campus programs:

- There is a diversity component of New Student Orientation.
- There is a diversity component of the CHAMPS Curriculum which is required for all incoming athletes
- Arts Center Programming has a variety of multicultural programs. Students are provided free tickets to Arts Center performances.

- Diversity issues are included in all Resident Assistant training.
- Resident Assistants use the Cultural Dimension of their programming guide to plan activities on residence hall floors.
- Throughout the year, there are several programs sponsored by Multicultural Affairs, including Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.
- For the celebrations of Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday, all classes are cancelled so faculty and students can attend the ceremony.
- Many activities of Campus Ministry focus on diverse beliefs and faiths.
- 25% of all clubs are based on diverse cultures/issues/activities.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth has not always been successful in encouraging interaction of students with diverse populations.
- Nazareth has not always been intentional in providing structured reflection on activities.
- With diversity a main theme of the ongoing Middle States Self-Study, Nazareth is examining diversity issues on campus. These discussions will inform the Campus Climate initiative in development of strategies for addressing diversity issues.

Dimension Ten Life Purpose

Foundations Institutions involve all students in an exploration of life purpose through instructional content and reflections on life experiences.

The first college year helps students clarify personal values and beliefs, personal strengths and areas of interest and, in turn, career goals. Academic planning and student development programming provide learning and advising experiences that facilitate the process of self-discovery and the development of intrinsic motivation.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force found that the curriculum and the co-curriculum provide students with opportunities to explore personal values and beliefs in their first year of college. The academic advising function (faculty and advisement staff) provides guidance as well as self-assessment for students, but this might vary across the faculty. While we provide significant information on career options, focusing on career issues in the first year is not a priority at Nazareth.

Evidence:

- **Curriculum**
 - Broad liberal arts curriculum requires students to take courses in eight different liberal arts areas, allowing them to identify and explore their own interests, strengths, and skills in these disciplines.
 - Nazareth offers a credit-bearing course entitled Exploring Self, Majors, and Career, open to freshman and sophomore students, which takes them through a systematic process of self-assessment and the exploration of major and career options.
 - One of the goals of Freshman Seminar is to explore values. The course is structured so students are asked to reflect on current and past life experiences in order to gain an understanding of themselves and the world.
 - In the required introductory courses in Religious Studies and Philosophy, the issue of life purpose is specifically addressed.

- **Academic Advising**
 - Academic Advisement Center supports a developmental model of advising, which takes into account students' interests and abilities and addresses educational and career/life goals.
 - Academic Advisement Center offers a series of advisor development workshops each year for faculty, which provides and promotes the skills/knowledge necessary for developmental advising.
 - Our undeclared students are advised by professional advisors in the Academic Advisement Center or volunteer faculty advisors who tend to have more expertise in helping students determine their interests and skills and to explore options than departmental advisors.
- **Co-Curriculum**
 - Residential Life uses the Wellness Wheel model for programming which includes a focus on values and life planning.
 - Campus Ministry offers weekend and mini retreats, Partners for Learning, and other community service programs, weeklong service projects during college breaks, spiritual direction, and Potter's Wheel (bible study).
 - CHAMPS program, run through the Athletic Department, is required for all first-year athletes and includes many self-assessment components.
 - New students are encouraged to attend a student club fair at the beginning of each semester and to join clubs/organizations of interest.
 - The Career Services Office and Academic Advisement Center offer career counseling and academic advisement opportunities. These offices, along with the First Year Center, also co-sponsor an Exploring Major Options workshop each year, which is tailored to freshmen and sophomores and includes a self-assessment component

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth intentionally provides programming in the first year to facilitate the process of self-discovery, but has not ensured a consistent experience for all first-year students.

Dimension Eleven Improvement

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement.

This assessment is specific to the first year as a unit of analysis – a distinct time period and set of experiences, academic and otherwise, in the lives of students. It is also linked systematically to the institutions' overall assessment. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making and ongoing improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. As part of the enhancement process and as a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on the first college year.

At the Present Time:

The Task Force rated Nazareth as low in collecting baseline data on oncoming students for placement and personal support needs, medium in out-of-classroom academic support. These efforts are basically anecdotal, dealing with individual issues as they arise.

The Task Force rated Nazareth low in measuring cognitive and personal development outcomes of our first-year students. This reflects the overall lack of outcomes assessment information across the campus.

The participation of faculty and staff in regional and national organizations has brought information to the campus through networking and attendance at conferences. Participation in the Foundations Project is our first focused contribution to the national data available on the first-year experience.

Evidence:

The following areas illustrate collection of baseline data on incoming students:

- **Placement**
Academic Advisement looks carefully at the academic history of each incoming student. Based on a combination of performance measures (high school English grades, NYS Regents scores and SAT verbal scores), students are placed in sections with or without required lab sections. The lab sections have more individual and small group instruction in the Writing Lab. Students are placed in mathematics sections based on high school preparation and math SAT scores. Students needing additional support are placed in a math lab section. Placement in language courses is based on a Nazareth prepared exam. Students are also screened for science course placement.
- **Out-of-Class Academic Support**
Mid-semester grades are collected on all first-year students for both the fall and spring semesters. The grades are forwarded to Academic Advisement and faculty advisors for evaluation. All students below a 2.0 are contacted for intervention. As appropriate, the students are encouraged to enter into a tutoring program, recommended to appropriate support services, or advised to drop the course. There is also an “Early Warning System” where faculty will notify Academic Advisement about concerns regarding students. This information is shared with The First Year Center and appropriate services are recommended. Students may also request academic support at any time.
- **Out-of-Class Personal Support**
The First Year Center receives early warnings from parents, faculty, and staff, and shares this information with Academic Advisement. The First Year Center also receives mid-term grade information on first-year students. In cases where students are having academic issues as the result of having personal difficulties, the Director of Student Transition and the First Year Center will work with Academic Advisement, Residential Life, the Student Behavior Consult Team and other appropriate personnel, to either refer students to the needed resources or design appropriate interventions. The third information source is the conferences that Freshman Seminar faculty have with each student in the first month. Faculty are encouraged to cover personal as well as academic issues, but this can be inconsistent from student to student, and faculty member to faculty member. Any problems are referred to the Director of Student Transition and the First Year Center for intervention or services. Students may also request personal support services at any time.

The following areas address the measurement of first-year outcomes:

- **Cognitive Development**

Individual examples of assessment of cognitive development probably exist at Nazareth. However, there is not organized program of assessment that is intentional and imbedded in the curriculum as a whole.

- **Personal Development**

There is an informal network of faculty and staff to discuss issues of development with much of the information relayed orally. General information regarding student development is based on anecdotal evidence rather than formalized data collection.

Nazareth was a long time participant in the CIRP survey from the Higher Education Resource Institute at UCLA. We have administered the YFCY (Your First College Year) twice to obtain some information on the impact of the first year. Our response rates with the YFCY were low, and the number of students responding to both surveys was lower yet. It was difficult to realistically evaluate the results based on the low response rate.

This is the second year we are administering the NSSE. On the questions of educational and personal growth, the results of our first administration did show improvement from the first to the senior year. The NSSE evaluates first-year students as the beginning point for the college experience, not as an independent entity. The assessment of students at the beginning and the end of the first year is not in place.

Use of assessment at Nazareth to improve first-year practice at Nazareth has been limited.

- Multidisciplinary programs such as our liberal arts core curriculum and the Freshman Seminar program participate in the Academic Review Process. These reviews include an evaluation of current practice and a five-year plan for growth/improvement.
- The Office of Student Transition and the First Year Center performs interviews with almost 100% of leaving first year students. These interviews are designed to ascertain reasons for leaving, as well as to assess students' personal experience with the College. While this information has been invaluable in the development of new initiatives, without the framework of a first-year philosophy and goals and objectives, it has had little impact on the improvement of curricular and co-curricular programs and services.
- Other assessment of programs and activities does occur at Nazareth. However, the College does not consistently use the information to effectively manage change or evaluate the impact of the program or service.

Points for Further Discussion:

- Nazareth does not have outcomes assessment tools in line with the development of the first-year program and the campus assessment efforts.
- Now that Nazareth has taken the opportunity to participate in the Foundations of Excellence project, the Task Force urges continued actions to improve our delivery of a cohesive first-year program.
- In this time of growth and competing concerns, the Task Force is concerned about the position the findings will take in the list of institutional priorities.
- With our participation in this study, Nazareth needs to have a presence in the national conversation about the first college year.

Final Comments

The Task Force has identified several opportunities for improvement while focusing on the first-year experience of our undergraduate students. Many of the findings can be broadened to include other populations and programs at Nazareth. Our undergraduate transfers and our graduate population have experienced many of the same transition issues raised about undergraduate first-year students.

- Nazareth has the opportunity to generalize what it has learned about incoming undergraduate students to improve the process of introducing undergraduate transfer students and new graduate students to their Nazareth experience.

Survey Results

The Task Force recently received the results of the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement and the 2004 Faculty Survey administered by the Center for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE, Pennsylvania State University) specifically for this project. In the Task Force's brief review of the results, there was nothing that stood out to contradict the responses to the Dimensions. The results did confirm some of the findings, but they also raised several questions that would benefit from further review. Further analysis of the data by CSHE is not yet available, but will be forthcoming later in 2004.

- Nazareth has the opportunity for further evaluation and analysis of the student and faculty survey data in the next phase of the project.
- The student data can be compared to the 2002 administration of NSSE.

Conclusions

Within the Foundations of Excellence™ process, the Task Force was able to describe the College's current practices and identify several issues pertaining to our first-year programming. The Task Force found that Nazareth has several aspects of excellent programming for our first-year students and a faculty and staff dedicated to providing a solid introduction to a college education. However, when looking at the activities as a whole, several themes emerged that characterize the findings of the Task Force.

Intentionality, Coordination, Communication and Assessment

First, an excellent first-year program is **intentional** in the planning and execution of all of its aspects. Intentionality is evident when an institution states the philosophy, goals and objectives of its first-year program. Then, the activities from recruitment to completion of the academic requirements of the first year become **coordinated** around those goals and objectives. They can be clearly **communicated** to the students, faculty and staff. Also, with a clear statement of what the first year program is, each program area and the institution can **assess** the effectiveness and success of its programming against that standard.

Nazareth does not have an explicit philosophy for its first-year program. The Task Force identified an implicit philosophy that underlies its first-year programming across campus, but without explicit goals and objectives, it is difficult to have the programming consistent across all offices and integrated with the curriculum.

The lack of explicit goals and objectives for the first year has the following effects on the campus:

- 1) There is no single clearinghouse, be it an office or a committee, which has responsibility for coordinating all first-year programs and services. As a result, there are gaps and inconsistencies present in the first-year experience because these programs are not tied together by articulated common goals and objectives. This situation has affected the transition process for some students who have fallen into those gaps.
- 2) Coordination and communication are not consistent so students may not clearly understand the expectations placed on them in both academic and social arenas. They may not become engaged in the academic and the social life of the campus. Ultimately, this impacts the success of students adjusting to college life.
- 3) It is difficult to assess the outcome of a program because there is nothing against which to measure progress. The Task Force identified many individual programs and activities that are good building blocks for an excellent first-year program. However, until they are unified with one vision of the first year and assessed based on common criteria, Nazareth will not meet the standard of excellence put forth in the Foundations of Excellence™ project.

Foundations of Excellence™ Process at Nazareth

Participation in the Foundations of Excellence™ project allowed the Academic Affairs and Student Development divisions at Nazareth to jointly assess the overall state of the first-year programming for the first time. Using the Dimensions and their associated Performance Indicators, the Task Force developed tools and learned techniques for assessing complex programs.

The evaluation to date has been primarily qualitative. The quantitative component is in the form of results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the faculty survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). When the two methods are merged, the final results will be strong evidence of the current state of our first-year efforts. The results will then be available to inform the College in improving the curriculum, the programming and their delivery to first-year students. These data will be received by the end of the Fall 2004 semester and will be added as an appendix to this document.

Recommendations

This report reflects the Task Force's conviction that a strong commitment to the first year of college will allow our students to build a foundation for academic excellence and a commitment to Nazareth values. This foundation will serve students throughout their career at Nazareth and beyond.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that:

- Senior Staff ensure that first-year programming is an institutional priority.
- Senior Staff charge a college-wide committee for the following purpose:
 - Examine the Points for Further Discussion delineated in this report.
 - Develop an Implementation Plan for first-year activities from recruitment to advancement to the second year.
 - The Task Force further recommends that the committee:
 - Be led by the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Vice President of Student Development.
 - The committee reports to Senior Staff on a regular basis on the progress of the work on the first-year program.
- Senior Staff encourage a similar assessment be done by the appropriate faculty and staff for other incoming student populations, i.e. undergraduate transfers and graduate students, so Nazareth can provide a solid foundation for all students beginning their Nazareth experience.



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