Collaborations for First-Year Student Engagement: From Ideas to Assessment

CAE Conference
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Purpose & Outcomes

• Share techniques for collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs

• Practice developing learning outcomes

• Discuss strategies for assessment
Reasons for Collaboration

- Overall challenges
  - Lack of understanding on part of students and parents: What are the goals of the first year initiatives? Do they reinforce each other, and if so, how?
  - Lack of consistent data collection
    - Not asking questions about certain areas
    - Not asking the same questions from year to year
- Focus on learning outcomes and assessment
- First Year Initiatives at Fairfield University
  - Cornerstone Program
  - First Year Experience (FYE)
  - Living & Learning Residential Communities (LLCs)

Action Steps

- Regular meetings
- Review of existing data
- **November**: Quality of Life survey – included questions on Cornerstones
- **December**: Focus group with Cornerstone faculty on their ideas for integrating the initiatives
- Meeting with Christine Siegel, Associate VP of Academic Affairs (our university’s assessment expert), on how to assess these initiatives
Action Steps

- At Siegel’s suggestion: Development of learning outcomes for each initiative
- **January**: Presentation to several campus leaders on how to take initiatives to the next level – further integrate them
- **February and March**: Revision of materials to be sent to incoming students – to stress the integration and coordination of initiatives
- **May**: Decision to place incoming LLC students in a Cornerstone in their residence hall

Activity

- Individual or small-group work on learning outcomes for any FY initiative, using Siegel’s backward design exercise
Debrief/Discussion

- How hard was it to work on the learning outcomes?
- What challenges do you think you might face as you try to implement these outcomes for your program?

Possible Future Action Steps

- Redo surveys of first-year students to see whether the learning outcomes are being met
- Coordinate our assessment instruments with those of other campus partners
- Discuss learning outcomes for Cornerstones with faculty members
- Consider different models for FY initiatives, such as combining Cornerstones with FYEs (same group of students)
Challenges

- Continue to get institutional support for collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs
- Continue communicating the purposes of the programs, especially to our students
- Work on technical problems: hope to combine questionnaires given to incoming students (Orientation registration, housing application, Academic Interests Questionnaire)

Reflection and Wrap-up

- What have you learned today that you can use in your work?
- What questions do you still have?
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