“Best Start” – The LSC First Year Experience
The First Time is the Best Time

Our first interactions and experiences with entering college students will maximize their potential for student success, build proper expectations, and make the first year the best year.

QEP First–Year Experience (FYE) Initiatives (dual-focus):

1. **Best Start Academy** for first year students, possibly including a reading experience
2. **First Year Experience Institute** for ongoing professional development and certification for employees supporting orientation, advising, and EDUC 1300.

FYE as a “Program” focuses on …

- Holistic, coordinated approach
  - Program-level Student Learning Outcomes
    - Student Learning Outcomes for each activity: (orientation, advising, EDUC 1300)
  - Student Behaviors, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge
  - Faculty Behaviors, Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge
  - Student Goals and Expectations
  - Connections, Relationships

Strategies for Implementation:

- **Align and map learning outcomes** for the Best Start Academy orientation, EDUC 1300 course, and advising.
- Foster a student success culture through the FYE institute training.
- Support a holistic approach for the FYE by establishing a First Year Experience Council and campus teams to support a collaborative approach toward planning, nurturing, and assessing the learning outcomes associated with each student’s first year experience.
- As part of the college system’s strategic plan, implement a system-wide Foundations of Excellence Self-Study via campus and system FYE Councils, resulting in the development and execution of separate strategic FYE implementation and improvement plans for each campus and the college system to insure the continuous improvement and sustainability for the first year experience.
QEP Development Process

As we continue to develop the QEP concepts, we are expanding to work with three groups of practitioners in order to develop a coordinated holistic implementation plan.

- Orientation Task Force (reviewing orientation learning outcomes)
- Advising Task Force (reviewing advising learning outcomes)
- EDUC 1300 Curriculum Team (maintains responsibility for course outcomes)

Together, these three groups will be assisting with the following:

- Work with the QEP Development Committee to collaboratively plan learning outcomes, implementation strategies, assessment, and professional development needs for their respective areas, for the First-Year Experience as a whole, and the two QEP initiatives.
- Provide guidance in developing a coordinated holistic approach to the delivery and assessment of the First-Year Experience, specifically the Best Start Academy’s academic orientation, mandatory half-day orientation, advising, and EDUC 1300 course.
- Provide leadership for developing a coordinated holistic professional development and annual certification program for faculty and staff supporting the following FYE and QEP initiatives: mandatory orientation, Best Start Academy orientation, advising, and the EDUC 1300 course.

First Year Experience Council (proposed)

We anticipate that the three task forces that assist in the QEP planning will logically be needed during the QEP implementation and beyond. Based on insights from Barefoot, Gardner and colleges that focus on the first-year experience, a foundational strategy underpinning the effective implementation of FYE objectives and best practices is the successful collaboration between academic affairs and student services.

To this end, the QEP Development Committee proposed the establishment of the First Year Experience Council to provide ongoing leadership, coordination, assessment, professional development, and planning for the Best Start Academy and FYE. Initial members would include the above task forces and potentially others.

We would like your ideas, suggestions, and questions regarding the concept of the FYE Council. Please submit these to Dr. Ryan Carstens: (ryan@lonestar.edu or 281.357.3707).

Background Information

Objectives for FYE

In a review of colleges focusing on the first year experience, we observed that their efforts typically focused on the following research-based objectives (Barefoot, 2000):

- Increase student-to-student interaction;
- Increase faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class;
- Increase student involvement and time on campus;
- Link the curriculum and the co-curriculum;
- Increase academic expectations and levels of academic engagement;
- Assist students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)
Best Practices for FYE

There are many creative initiatives observed among colleges focusing on student success in the first year. Best practices in pursuit of the above objectives include the following (Barefoot & Gardner, 2010):

- First Year Experience seminar or course (from 1 to 3 credit hours), with major roles for peer mentors and leaders;
- Learning communities between the FYE seminar and a freshman academic course;
- Supplemental Instruction (for freshman courses with high DFWI rates);
- Professional Development for FYE faculty;
- Summer bridge programs;
- Upward Bound and Trio programs;
- Early Intervention and attendance monitoring;
- Academically focused orientation for first year students that is connected to the first year seminar;
- Orientation that includes parents, family;
- Peer mentors and leaders;
- Ritual and ceremony (convocation) for arriving students;
- Efforts to build enthusiasm for the institution as students arrive;
- Connection built through long-term mentoring relationship with each student;
- True academic advising;
- Targeted advising;
- Faculty advising;
- On-campus student employment;
- Opportunities for out-of-class interaction with faculty;
- Honors programs;
- Learning/study skills centers;
- Service Learning;
- Strong partnerships between academic affairs and student services;
- Developmental coursework;
- Encouraging/requiring assistance seeking (example: SI or tutoring is required);
- Encouraging joining behaviors (study groups, co-curricular activities);
- Raising academic expectations;
- Encouraging full-time enrollment whenever feasible.

Summary

The Lone Star College System has implemented a number of initiatives that address many of the above-listed elements. Through the Achieving the Dream initiative we implemented early intervention and the Advisor II program for first time in college (FTIC) students placed into EDUC 1300 courses. We will shortly implement mandatory orientation and EDUC 1300 attendance beginning in the Fall 2011 semester for specifically identified student populations.

The QEP Development Committee identified the development of two QEP initiatives as additions to the LSC first year experience. The QEP activities and strategies will foster a holistic approach for the FYE, focus on learning outcomes, and support stronger connections among students, faculty, support staff, and the community to improve student learning and success.
Fall 2010 QEP Committee Membership:

CyFair:  Botkin, Rose  Librarian
        Lewis, Ted  Dean
        Osbourn, Peggy  Counselor
        Phillips, Claire  Dean
        Van Wie, Victoria  Psychology

Kingwood:  Adkins, Kathleen  Advising/Counseling
           Riley, Rebecca  VP, Academic Affairs
           Stubbs, Brenda  EDUC 1300
           Terry, Janis  Learning Center Mgr.

Montgomery:  Brandes, Nathalie  Geology
              Kainer, Daniel  Biology
              Peyton, Janice  Library Dir
              Stallings, Yvonne  Math
              Williams, Wendell  (alternate) VP, Student Success

North Harris:  Gant, Angela  Dev. Studies
               Lowe, Rachael  Counselor
               McFarland, Michael  SEA Center
               Puller, David  Librarian
               Thornton, Sue  Business

Tomball:  Carstens, Ryan  Dean
         Tsoi, Gerry  Technology
         Waters, Waters  Extended Learning Ctr

Sys Off:  Miner, Karen  AtD
         Rockefeller, Debra  Compliance/Assess.

Community:  Johnson, Jadi  Community member

References
