

Organization Dimension Report
California State University-San Marcos

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.

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"Organization Dimension Detail Statement," Foundations of Excellence Web-site.

Organization Dimension Task Force:

Co-chairs: Evelyn Andrews and Janet Powell

Members: Cecelia Blanks, Ellen Cardoso, Jan Cushman, Regina Eisenbach, Julie Mattingly, Dean Manship, Michael McDuffie, Judy Papenhausen, Gabriela Sonntag, Greg Toya, Bob Yamashita

Current Situation:

The Organization Dimension Task Force was asked to measure our efforts at CSUSM against the Foundations of Excellence criteria cited above. In some aspects, programs, support systems, and resources devoted to first-year students are highly coordinated, integrative, and closely aligned; personnel and offices across divisions work in close concert to provide coherent curricula and services to first-year students. In other areas, the breadth and depth of organizational coordination are found wanting. In the results of the FoE CSUSM survey relating to the Organization Dimension; overall approximately 67% reported they could correctly refer new students to assistance regarding administrative questions, academic rules, or where to find help with coursework (Questions 17, 18, 19). However, many more respondents from Student Affairs felt confident with answering questions on administrative and academic rules than those in Academic Affairs.

We find that our campus provides a considerable number of resources and oversight agencies in service to first-year students (e.g., the First-Year Orientation Program which is student fee supported, Undergraduate Advising Services, and the Office of First-Year Programs), but coordination among and between them is inconsistent---solid in some cases and porous in others. In some cases, partnerships between critical units are wanting, or exist only to the extent that individuals within those units work together out of practical necessity to provide oversight for distinct aspects of the first-year. For example, we found a need for better communication between certain Student Academic Support Services (such as SSS/EOP) and the academic side of the house, around the area of academic schedule-planning and information-sharing. This is supported by the FoE survey; when asked about the extent to which the institution's organization supports routine communications among discrete first-year functions (Question 22), a plurality of the respondents answered "not at all/slight"; a little under a third said "moderate", and 30.5%

said "high/very high". When this data is cross-tabbed with Unit Code (which tells us whether the respondent was from CoAS, CoBA, CoE, Library, Other AA, SA, outside SA and AA) it is interesting to see that in the two largest groups: 44% of CoAS respondents said "not at all/slight", but 44% of the Student Affairs respondents said "high/very high". Library is also interesting: 9 of the 12 respondents said "slight". It's also informative to cross-tab this question with "work role." One thing that stands out is that professional staff (advisors and other student affairs personnel) seems to be much more in the "moderate" camp than the other classifications. Even 40% of the administrators (whom one might expect to be on top of these routine communications) thought that the extent to which this was supported was "slight".

However, in other areas, we found what appeared to be discrete units working hand-in-glove to provide highly-integrative programs and support for first-year students. One good example is the planning and delivery of the First-Year Orientation Program, in which diverse Student and Academic Affairs offices and personnel collaborate closely to provide a key component of the first-year experience; another is the partnership between the Office of Undergraduate Advising Services and the Colleges serving first-year students. In this instance, units that are organizationally distant from one another, housed in separate divisions of the University appear to work in a successful collaboration. In spite of what we found to be examples of successful collaborations, it is troubling to note that only 38% of participants in the survey believed that there was collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs (Question 23) and only 39% believed that Student Affairs and faculty partnerships are encouraged by senior institution leaders (Question 27).

Currently there is no single office, oversight committee, or "formalized structure" charged with responsibility for envisioning, designing, delivering, maintaining, and assessing all of our "First-Year Programs." (Not even the Office of First-Year Programs may be accurately characterized as having such a charge; its purview is much more limited and focused, as discussed below.)

To illustrate the diverse and multiple dimensions of services, we gathered descriptions of services offered to first-year students in Academic Affairs (Appendix A), Student Affairs (Appendix B), and the Office of the President (Appendix C). While the committee is confident that these descriptions are accurate, we cannot guarantee the degree to which these services are actually utilized by students.

As mentioned, within Academic Affairs, the Office of First-Year Programs (OFYP) by its very title appears to be the administrative unit most closely associated with oversight for the first-year

student experience. The current Task Force, in attempting to identify the organizational hub of the first-year experience, turned naturally to the OFYP as a logical candidate. We soon realized, however, that the OFYP is rather limited in its sphere of operations and sway of influence over the many aspects of the first-year student experience. Despite the good work it does in its designated domains, the OFYP cannot be viewed as a comprehensive organizational nexus of the first-year program at CSUSM. This is not to say that our programs are disorganized, but only to point out that we have taken a more decentralized approach to the delivery of programs and services. While not every student benefits from every office in the same way, many units within Academic Affairs provide services and support to at least some first-year students, in different ways. However, even within the single Division of Academic Affairs, organization and communication can be difficult and the challenge is compounded when the multiple resources housed in Student Affairs are also taken into account.

Even so, we again want to recognize that multiple offices and resources are devoted to the success and support of first-year students or play critical roles in their well-being and ability to continue at the University. There are impressive partnerships, cooperatives, and teams of personnel working together in various local arenas, geared to the success of first-year students, and many of these efforts reach across and annul the apparent organizational distances between Divisions and Departments across campus.

Opportunities and Challenges:

At CSUSM, there is not one "First-Year Program," but rather there are many such programs, offered in various settings, to serve various purposes. The Task Force recognizes that a single, centralized, comprehensive coordinating council is needed. Perhaps its most productive role would be to identify and then foster communication and interchange between a number of still-disconnected operations and resources, taking as models those partnerships already in full swing producing good results. To date, the best attempt to create such a coordinating body to tie-together the operations of the multiple offices and resources within Academic Affairs and Student Affairs has been the formation of the First-Year Programs Advisory Council (FYPAC). FYPAC was first convened in spring 2007, but has been suspended during AY 2007-08 during the FoE self-study. (See Item #156 for a more complete description of the scope of First-Year Programs.) Our expectation is that this Council would be revived and recharged on the heels of this study.

This Council should include a wide range of representatives from Student and Academic Affairs to serve as a forum for more effective planning and communications between diverse units that contribute to the first-year student experience at San Marcos. We recommend Council membership be expanded to include the GEW Coordinator, GEO Coordinator, and the coordinators of the remedial math and basic language courses. The Council should make recommendations to Student Affairs regarding the development of co-curricular programs that compliment the First-Year curricular experience. The first steps of the Council should be to organize and assess existing learning communities and programs geared to support first-year students. One major project should be to create a comprehensive "All Things Freshman" website that builds on the OFYP website. Key to success is the need to make the website prominent and include all first- year programs and resources and could include such things as a First-Year Tool Kit - reminder/checklist of "To Do" lists for fall and spring semesters

The FoE Organization Task Force members recognize that while FYPAC could provide communication and guidance related to first-year programs, without a person devoted to track, organize, and follow up on recommendations, many may not be implemented. There is a need for a position dedicated to ensuring that all programs for first-year students are coordinated, coherent, and "known about." To this end, members of the Task Force strongly recommend the creation of a redefined and expanded position of Associate Director of First-Year Programs to work with both Academic and Student Affairs. Currently the position is a Unit Three faculty ten month contract, we recommend considering that the time base be expanded to 12 months so that the person can be more available for assistance and coordination of summer programs.

The person holding the position must be able to work well with the faculty - facilitating the development and implementation of the appropriate curriculum for freshmen (e.g. development of learning communities), recruiting and providing continuing professional development for faculty/instructors. The Associate Director must also develop multifaceted strategies that require consulting and working with various campus units (Enrollment Services, Advising Services, and Student Affairs), and develop and manage the various student services activities associated with the office.

For duties requiring supervisory or MPP-type responsibilities, the committee thought that the current reporting structure with the Associate Director reporting to the Associate Vice President for Academic Programs should be maintained. It also may be appropriate to consider either moving the First-Year Academic Support Coordinator position currently in Student Affairs to the OFYP, or at minimum develop a more direct line of communication between the two positions. One idea for facilitating communication would be to have the Associate Director and the First-Year Academic Support Coordinator co-chair FYPAC.

Given the budget realities facing us, the committee searched for recommendations that would not be resource intensive while still accomplishing the goal of enhancing the First-Year experience. The task force discussed alternatives for how the work of the FYPAC would be coordinated. We agreed that the current Associate Director position could be the person to perform these duties. However, we also agreed that the Associate Director position as currently structured is more work than one person can handle; simply adding to these responsibilities would not make sense. But, additional duties could be added to the position if there was administrative support to help the Associate Director and support the FYPAC. Thus, the committee recommends hiring an Academic Support Coordinator for the OFYP.

Such expenditures are supported by the FoE survey in which just under 40% believe that resources (personnel and fiscal) are adequate for courses that enroll first-year students, academic support services used by first-year students and extracurricular activities available to first-year students (Questions 24, 25, 26).

The Task Force also recommends that no matter what organizational structure is implemented, it should be reviewed every two years to make certain it is sustaining the type of coordination and communication necessary to make CSUSM's First-Year programs successful.