

Organization Dimension Feedback California State University-San Marcos

Dear Evelyn, Janet, Cecelia, Ellen, Jan, Regina, Dean, Julie, Michael, Judith, Gabriela, Gregory, and Robert,

I have read your report on the Organization Dimension and would like to share my observations for your consideration. You have done an excellent job of reviewing data sources and constructing a report that I hope will be a catalyst for continued discussions about organizational structure to support the first year.

Your report presents a mixed picture of the current organizational structure at CSUSM as it relates to first-year students. As you note, in some ways things seem to work well. Both faculty and students essentially know how the organization functions and where to go for help (in most, but not in all, situations). You cite a number of examples of good collaboration – to quote you, units working “hand-in-glove” to integrate initiatives that support first-year students.

I agree with your observation that you have many models of partnership that you can use to build an even more integrated approach to the first year. Whether you develop a new organizational structure or continue with what you have at present, I hope that you will reconvene the FYPAC, perhaps with additional representation, to serve as a means of basic communication, sharing, and oversight. I don’t know whether the former or proposed FYPAC had or will have the power to recommend or mandate change. I hope that as you go forward, this group will at least have the authority to review policies and practices and to recommend change as needed to senior administrators who can act on those recommendations. And yes, one function of this council should certainly be to assess the various programs that support first-year students. I like your idea of an “all things freshmen” website. When I’m really bored ☺, I like to explore websites from the perspective of a prospective student, and often it is very difficult to find any information about what it’s really like to be a new student at a particular college or university.

Although we in the Policy Center can attest to the importance of bringing coherence to the first year through better organization, there is no single best organizational structure to support the first year. The most “structured” structure is the “university” or “first-year” college. You might want to explore this model at such places where it works exceptionally well such as: North Carolina State University in Raleigh; Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis; and the University of Texas, El Paso. While first-year or university colleges can be both efficient and effective, they don’t survive in some institutional environments. Often, turf issues get in the way especially when resources are slim. The fear is that these units will take resources away from academic colleges, but I’m not sure whether that fear is actually justified. Generally, university colleges are umbrella units that simply coordinate existing services such as academic advising or tutoring; programs such as orientation, mentoring or Supplemental

Instruction; and curricular initiatives such as first-year seminars and learning communities. But in any case, they're not the structure of choice in every circumstance.

Other campuses have a person or an office that coordinates many first-year functions such as first-year seminars or learning communities. Such offices can advocate for the importance of the first year and can also serve as a linchpin for lots of disparate efforts on both the academic and student affairs side of campus.

As I understand your report, you are recommending that Joanne's position (ADFYP) be slightly expanded (from 9 to 12 months), and that she (or the person occupying this position) would work not only with academic affairs, but also with student affairs except in personnel matters, when the reporting line would be through academic affairs. Am I correct in my interpretation? I agree that this could potentially be a huge responsibility for one person, depending on the range of activities offered and how the position is structured, and that any single person would require additional support. I'm not quite sure I understand the "FY Academic Support Coordinator" position – whether that position is occupied at present and assigned to student affairs. In any case, I note that you suggest moving that position (or adding a new similar position??) on the academic side. Sorry for my confusion – this is the disadvantage of being an outsider.

Whatever decisions you make, I hope you will first do "due diligence" on various ways institutions structure the first year. You can certainly start with your "neighborhood," the universities in San Diego and L. A. You'll probably identify both strong and weak ways of organizing the first year. But if you want more suggestions of places to investigate, let me know and I'll put together a list for your consideration. And I most certainly agree that periodic review of your future first-year structure is essential. No system or structure needs to be cast in stone!

As you are focusing on Organization, I hope you will think about the connections between all the Dimensions. Essentially, in one way or another, they all interconnect back to the way you structure and organize all the things you do to educate and support new students and the faculty who teach them.

You've done great work in this report! Best wishes to each of you.

Betsy

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