

Philosophy Dimension Report
Stony Brook University

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 first-year organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation.

First Year Matters - Philosophy Subcommittee

Committee Leaders

Dr. Mark Aronoff, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

David R. Scarzella, Quad Director, Division of Campus Residences

Committee Members[MA1]

Christopher D' Orso, Counselor, Admissions

Donna Di Donato, Assistant Provost, Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Daniel Kane Gillespie, Assistant Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Virginia Lynch, Quad Office Service Manger, Residential Programs

Beverly Rivera, University Registrar, Registrars Office

Jennifer Voelger, School of Business, Staff Assistant

Current Situation

An examination of the philosophy of the first year experience at Stony Brook University reveals a carefully designed curriculum enhanced by co-curricular programs and activities to promote student success. Various human resources are deployed to support this enterprise, including faculty, academic advisors, residential life personnel, and various liaisons from departments across the campus. To ensure that students succeed in the University community, students are placed in smaller academic communities the Undergraduate Colleges. These communities encourage involvement in University activities and provide opportunities for students to have intimate and meaningful interactions with faculty. The ideology works well as a framework for faculty and staff to be creative and innovative in the types of opportunities they can build for students.

While the philosophy is well grounded in research and theory, there are some areas that need significant improvement when evaluated by the principles put forth by the Foundations of Excellence Policy Center. It is clear that we have no written first year philosophy or rationale statement that articulates the Universities commitment to the first year experience. We certainly have a foundation behind many of the support services and structures for our first year students, but no document to summarize our institution's philosophy. Writing a first year philosophy statement needs to be a high priority action item. The committee believes strongly, that the first year philosophy statement needs to articulate our commitment to the Undergraduate College model and integrate academic departments. Our research indicates that some academic departments have invested significant time and resources in developing the first year academic experience, while others have not set the first year as a priority. The integration of academic departments is essential to the development of a campus first year philosophy that is widely disseminated and accepted by new and continuing students, faculty, and staff.

In our discussions with departments and administrative units it was obvious that more than a first year philosophy statement was required. The first committee recommendation is to charge a task force to develop explicit written goals, objectives and learning outcomes for the first year experience. The first year philosophy statement will articulate what the University values in the First Year and the goal document will express what we hope students will learn as a result of their first year experience. Lastly, it is recommended that a standing committee on the first year experience be formed to continue the discussions that have transpired as a result of the First Year Matters assessment project. It is imperative that the conclusion of this assessment project provide opportunities for continued discussions and not just end with recommendations.

Opportunities

The First Year Matters Philosophy subcommittee will draft a first year philosophy statement to provide a foundation for the first year student enterprise. The first year philosophy statement will be clear and concise. This presents an excellent opportunity to involve other academic and administrative departments in the creation of philosophy and goal documents. The creation of a first year experience standing committee is an additional opportunity to institutionalize a method of continuous assessment and improvement of the first year experience.

Challenges

Despite the tremendous commitment that many in the institution put forth in the first year experience, the University is a Research I institution in which faculty are recruited for their outstanding achievements in academic research not necessarily teaching or a commitment to undergraduate education. The first year philosophy statement needs to be sensitive to the other priorities of the institution, otherwise it risks losing credibility.

Sources of Evidence

Description of Undergraduate Colleges Document

Undergraduate College Website: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/sb/colleges/>

Various Orientation Documents

Residential Programs Programming Model

Stony Brook University - Five Year Plan

University Mission Statement

Recommended Grade: B

Recommended Action Items:

- Develop First Year Student Campus Philosophy Statement (*High priority*)

The institution has implemented several first year student programs that have a purpose and rationale, but the institution has not articulated the purpose or rationale in written form.

- Develop A Campus First Year Experience Goal Document (*High priority*)

In our discussion with the Undergraduate Council about the Universities' First Year Philosophy, it was demonstrated that in addition to a First Year Philosophy statement that a clear more detailed goal document is required beyond a First Year Philosophy document.

The Undergraduate Council consists of the following members: Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Vice President for Student Affairs, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Assistant Vice President for Campus Residences, Assistant Provost for Academic Affairs, Director of Undergraduate Colleges, Dean of Residential Education, Eight Faculty Director for each Undergraduate College.

- Create Standing Committee on the First Year Experience (*High priority*)

Develop a campus committee that oversees all matters relating to the first year experience. Constituents need to represent all departments and administrative units that interface with first year students.