

Task Force on Freshman Year Final Report

Introduction

Introduction to Issues and the Project

Northern Arizona University's distinct identity is to "provide undergraduate educational excellence in a residential learning community."¹ The freshman year is a critical year in the undergraduate experience: It is the time a student develops critical skills for learning and forms a connection with a university, its people, and its location. A high quality residential undergraduate learning community encourages freshmen to mature in their academic abilities, progress in their sense of self and relationship to others, and develop a connection between their education and their future.

Yet, are we meeting our goal of offering a high quality residential undergraduate experience? The number of entering first-time, full-time freshmen has decreased at Northern Arizona University while the increase in the number of freshmen enrolled elsewhere in the state is rapidly rising. Of equal concern is the steady decline in the university's total undergraduate population. The retention rate of first-time, full-time freshmen into the sophomore year hovers between 67% and 70%, compared to retention rates typically in the mid 70% range at other moderately selective public universities.² Characteristics of incoming students are strong predictors of retention and graduation rates. However, research demonstrates that institutional practices produce variable degrees of success with student variables held constant.³ Northern Arizona University is not likely to be able to substantially increase the academic preparedness of incoming freshmen. Indeed, demographic projections suggest that the traditional college age population in Arizona will become more diverse and include a greater proportion of first generation students who can be expected to have increasingly variable academic readiness for higher education. These changes in student populations in the future will challenge Northern Arizona University to develop strategies that support student achievement.

While student recruitment continues to be a paramount institutional issue, two years of study and review has revealed that the variables related to student retention which can be influenced by the university are closely tied to student learning⁴ and fostering students' ability to make personal connections on campus. Institutional actions to enhance the freshman experience must do so by transforming the core of the student's total encounter with the university – not by delegating this responsibility to one or more entities charged with student satisfaction. Such action starts with institutional leadership orchestrating broad efforts focused on institutional goals. The themes that emerged from the task force for institutional action can be grouped into the following domains:

- Themes for Institutional Actions
 1. Organization: Leadership and Coordination of Efforts Related to Enhancement of the Freshman Year
 2. Cultivation of Institutional Values/Culture: Institutional Practices and Reward Systems to Reinforce Institutional Values
 3. Focused Faculty Development and Support

¹ Northern Arizona University (2005). Strategic Plan 2005-2010, Goal 1, p. 9.

² Center for Institutional Data Exchange and Analysis, University of Oklahoma.

³ American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2005). Student Success in State Colleges and Universities: A Matter of Culture and Leadership. Washington D.C.; Kuh, G. D.; Kinzie, J. K.; Schuh, J. H.; Whitt, E. J.; and Associates (2005). Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter. American Association for Higher Education, Washington D.C.; The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2004). Raising the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students, Washington D.C.

⁴ Gardner, J. H. (2005). Keynote Address: National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience. Phoenix, AZ.; Ryan, M.P. and P.A. Glenn (2002-03) "Increasing One-Year Retention Rates by Focusing on Academic Competence: An Empirical Odyssey." Journal of College Student Retention. 4(3): 297-324.

- a. Key to the enhancement of freshman classes and instruction
- b. Reinforces, supports, and rewards a core value and goal of the institution
- c. Pedagogies of engagement and learner-centered approaches are key strategies in the advancement of student learning
- 4. Improvement of Freshman Academic Success through Targeting Barriers and Purposeful Expansion of Effective Support Programs/Initiatives
 - a. Target high DFW courses
 - b. Expand faculty development
 - c. Expand Supplemental Instruction
 - d. Expand bridge programs
 - e. Expand Student Support Services
- 5. Strengthen Academic and Career Advising
 - a. Personalization
 - b. Use of profile data for targeted services
 - c. Proactive advising for at-risk students
 - d. Transitional advising
- 6. Improving Institutional Effectiveness through Assessment, Evaluation and Data Tracking
 - a. Assessment of retention programs
 - b. Improve data collection and tracking
 - c. Benchmark to ABOR-approved, potential, and Education Trust peers
 - i. One-year retention
 - ii. Four-year graduation
 - iii. Six-year graduation

Task Force on the Freshman Year

The Task Force on the Freshman Year was charged in September 2003 to study and recommend actions to improve the quality of the freshman year experience at Northern Arizona University, and increase retention rates on the Flagstaff campus. A summary of the history of the task force and its efforts is presented in Appendix A. The task force issued an interim report in May 2004, which presents data about freshman students, factors related to retention, and retention programming at Northern Arizona University (http://www2.nau.edu/~d-ugstudy/_source/docs/fresh-year-report.pdf).⁵

Guiding Principles and Theoretical Assumptions for Freshman Retention Programming

To ground the work and eventual recommendations of the Task Force on the Freshman Year, several sources were considered for their conceptual frameworks for institutional study, analysis and recommendations to improve retention (e.g., Tinto's Principles of Institutional Action: College and

⁵ In addition to the work pursued by the Task Force on the Freshman Year, several institutional entities have been charged with program review and assessment in areas that partially or substantially overlap with the work of the task force. The report and recommendations of the Task Force on the Freshman Year should be considered in combination with ensuing efforts seeking to enhance the undergraduate experience. Groups or efforts sharing common interests with the task force are included in Appendix B.

University Retention Programs).⁶ The Northern Arizona University Task Force on the Freshman Year settled on the following set of theoretical assumptions for our report and ensuing recommendations:

- Effective retention programming should be rooted in an academic focus, coordinated, and integrated with intentional overlap among services.
- Our students are similar to college students at other institutions in some ways, but differ in other important ways. These differences need to be accounted for in retention programming.
- Both students' social and personal connections to the university are important for their retention.
- Successful retention programming must have a broader focus than just the freshman year and should consider students' experiences throughout their time at the university.
- Northern Arizona University is committed to programs whose effectiveness is supported by data; programs that demonstrate success should be funded whereas others will be abandoned if there is insufficient evidence of positive impact.

Recommendations

The task force presents thirteen recommendations to the university community to promote student success in the freshman year and progression to graduation. The recommendations address five areas of institutional practices:

- Institutional culture and leadership
- Courses and programs
- Faculty development
- Cultivating student connections
- Institutional research.

The thirteen recommendations are summarized in the following table. In the sections that follow, recommendations for each area are presented. The work of the task force proceeded in parallel with many other efforts to increase student retention and progression. For each recommendation, we provide information about progress that has already been made toward implementation.

⁶Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving College: Rethinking The Causes And Cures Of Student Attrition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

1. Institutions should ensure that new students enter with or have the opportunity to acquire the skills needed for academic success.
2. Institutions should reach out to make personal contact with students beyond the formal domains of academic life.
3. Institutional retention actions should be systematic in character.
4. Institutions should start as early as possible to retain students.
5. The primary commitment of institutions should be to their students.
6. Education, not retention, should be the goal of institutional retention programs

Barefoot, B.O. et al (2005) *Achieving and Sustaining Institutional Excellence for the First Year of College*. Policy Center on First Year of College- Foundations of Excellence:

- 1, Approach first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices.
2. Create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.
3. Facilitate appropriate recruitment, admissions, and student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission.
4. Elevate the first year to a high priority for faculty.
5. Serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.
6. Engage students both in and out of the classroom in order to develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission.
7. Ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.
8. Conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant organizations in order to achieve on-going first-year improvement.

Recommendations of the Task Force on the Freshman Year

1. Establish a clear institutional priority and culture focused on student learning and success with recognition of the importance of the freshman year and the special needs of freshmen.
2. Create a Freshman Year Coordinating Council with reporting lines to Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs to facilitate coordination, planning and assessment of the freshman year experience.
3. Expand Supplemental Instruction and other course-linked academic support and assess the impact of different academic support strategies on student success.
4. Focus orientation and advising during the first year to promote retention; increase advising support for first-year students with greatest needs.
5. Strengthen college-based advising.
6. Expand summer bridge programming opportunities to increase student diversity and academic preparation.
7. Provide institutional support for the Student Support Services (SSS) program to enable the program to serve more students than is currently possible with existing grant funding.
8. Increase faculty development focused on teaching and mentoring freshmen.
9. Research and expand upon promising programs that increase student engagement with the university and facilitate establishment of personal connections by the student.
10. Adopt the one-year retention and four- and six-year graduation rate goals for both the five-year and ten-year time periods
11. Fill gaps in institutional data related to high school credentials and tracking program participation to allow for further research
12. Develop a model for expected retention based on characteristics of incoming students.

Institutional Culture and Leadership Focused on Student Learning and Success

Recommendation: Establish a clear institutional priority and culture focused on student learning and success with recognition of the importance of the freshman year and the special needs of freshmen.

Recent studies of U.S. universities and colleges indicate that the most important characteristic that distinguishes those that show better performance in relation to retention and graduation rates is an organizational culture that centers attention on students and their success.⁷ There are four salient features of campus culture that promote student progression:

⁷ American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2005). Student Success in State Colleges and Universities: A Matter of Culture and Leadership. Washington D.C.; Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J. K., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. and Associates (2005). Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter. American Association for Higher Education, Washington D.C.; The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (2004). Raising the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students, Washington D.C.

- Students are the foremost priority of all members of the campus community
- A belief in the capacity of *all* students to learn and be successful
- Shared responsibility for student retention and success
- An understanding of contemporary students and the importance of the freshman year.

We believe that the university must establish student success as a top institutional goal. Equally important is the cultivation of a deep, broad-based commitment to working with the students who come to Northern Arizona University to enable them to realize their potential. Ideally, this focus on student learning and success would pervade all sectors of the university community. With a deep commitment to students, institutional policies, business practices, curricula, co-curricular programs, advising practices, pedagogies, and academic support strategies would meet the needs of students more effectively. To achieve this commitment, reward structures must be designed to reinforce institutional priorities and goals focused on the critical importance of the freshman year.

The task force recommends that two strategies be employed to affect change in the Northern Arizona University culture.

First, we encourage strong and intentional leadership at multiple levels. Leadership can shape institutional culture in a number of ways. The task force has identified several:

- Campus leaders should clearly and frequently articulate institutional values and goals.
- Rewards structures and evaluation of faculty and staff should be strongly aligned with institutional priorities and goals.
- Leaders at all levels should communicate explicitly expectations for faculty and staff commitment and behavior.
- Recruitment of new faculty and staff should ensure the selection of individuals with values and commitment consistent with university goals.
- Orientation of new faculty and staff should be intentionally designed to socialize new members of the community to shared values, goals, and expectations.
- Top leadership should bestow high profile recognition on individual's contributions to student learning and success.

Recommendation: Create a Freshman Year Coordinating Council with reporting lines to Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs to facilitate coordination, planning and assessment of the freshman year experience.

Our second recommendation for developing a strong institutional focus on students and their success in the first year of college is an organizational structure for planning, coordination, and assessment of the freshman year experience. We propose the creation of a Freshman Year Coordinating Council that would be co-chaired by staff from Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Membership would include staff and faculty from both these areas, as well as students. In light of the university's structure, the council should have dual reporting lines to the Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs and EMSA or their designees. The primary goals of the council we envision would be to:

- Promote the development of a shared vision of the Freshman Year Experience, including the development of a comprehensive university retention plan
- Promote communication and collaboration across organizational boundaries (e.g., between curricular initiatives and support programs)
- Promote shared responsibility and engagement with student retention issues
- Assess first-year programming, including the use of survey instruments and their applications
- Consider intentional student engagement activities beyond the freshman year

Collaboration is key to promoting student learning and success. Northern Arizona University has a history of lack of coordination between units that has undermined the development of a shared sense of responsibility for student success and progression. Organizational structure also limits communication between Academic and Student Affairs. Coordination between these areas is essential for implementing on-going improvement in institutional practices that increase student learning and student success. A council that engages staff and faculty across these divisions can establish collective priorities to ensure that redundant programs do not proliferate, identify programmatic gaps requiring reallocation of institutional resources, and conduct assessment of the freshman year and related retention programming.

Accomplishments / Progress

The composition of the Task Force on the Freshman Year demonstrates the potential efficacy of the organizational structure we propose. During the last two years, the task force has proved to be a venue that promotes better communication across divisions, collaborative efforts, and the development of a collective framework for efforts to foster the success of our students. The proposed infrastructure would strengthen efforts underway, such as advising, instructional approaches, learning communities, and academic support programs.

The Task Force on the Freshman Year initiated systematic assessment of retention programs with the development and implementation of a program evaluation protocol based on the assessment model developed by the task force and described in the interim report released in 2004. The council should continue to promote assessment of programs with common methodologies.

Enhance Courses and Programs to Promote Academic Success

Recommendation: Expand Supplemental Instruction and other course-linked academic support and assess the impact of different academic support strategies on student success.

This can be accomplished with an institutional investment in course-linked academic support to expand Supplemental Instruction and other related support programs focused on gateway (high DFW) courses with the highest enrollment and other courses as needed. The key factor that differentiates SI from other academic assistance is that the program is not designed for students with academic weaknesses, but rather for courses that are considered “high risk.”

High risk courses have a number of characteristics in common. First, they have historically had high DFW rates. They require large amounts of weekly reading from a difficult text and often, secondary reference readings. They have infrequent exams that focus on higher cognitive levels. Attendance is voluntary and unrecorded. The classes are typically large. These courses challenge even academically well prepared students.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) contributes to student success in multiple ways.

- SI is proactive. It begins the first week of class, as opposed to other types of academic support services that are accessed after a student has experienced academic frustration and difficulty.
- SI is attached to a specific course giving an immediate context to apply the reading, learning, and study skill information shared during the group sessions.
- SI leaders attend the class and model good academic behavior.
- SI is not a remedial program. It serves all students well.
- SI sessions are designed to promote interaction and support, thereby assisting in creating community among students.

Supplemental Instruction has demonstrated positive impacts on course-specific and overall academic performance and helps students make shared connected learning experiences that produce higher retention rates.⁸

Research demonstrates that supplemental instruction increases student performance in targeted courses and persistence:

- Students participating in SI in the targeted historically difficult courses earn higher mean final course grades than students who do not participate in SI, regardless of ethnicity and prior academic achievement.
- Regardless of ethnicity and prior academic achievement, students participating in SI within targeted historically difficult courses succeed at a higher rate (withdraw at a lower rate and receive a lower percentage of D or F final course grades) than those who do not participate in SI.

Students participating in SI persist at the institution (reenrolling and graduating) at higher rates than students who do not participate in SI.⁹

Accomplishments / Progress

The largest implementation of SI at Northern Arizona University is as a result of a National Institute of Health (NIH) grant in the sciences. SI is offered in selected lower division biology, chemistry, and physics courses. The actual number of sections varies from sixteen to twenty per semester. It has been in place for several years with a proven record of success quantified in the higher GPAs of the students participating in the SI sessions when compared to the students not participating and the overall class average GPA.

A pilot project between the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and the Learning Assistance Centers in FY05 offered SI in Sociology 101 and Psychology 101. SI was offered in four sections of Sociology 101 and three sections of Psychology 101. The pilot resulted in students who attended receiving higher GPAs than those who did not participate.

The LACs are the recipients of a Hewlett Grant through the College of Engineering and Natural Sciences that includes funding for SI to be offered in several engineering courses over the next three years. This grant was implemented in the fall 2005.

The Provost's Office and EMSA have secured funding from the president to expand SI to a greater range of high DFW courses beginning spring 2006. Implementation is expected in twenty-two sections of courses. The program director will provide leadership for expansion of SI to more high DFW courses and the development of other forms of class-linked academic support for courses not suited for SI.

Recommendation: Sharpen the focus of orientation and advising during the first year to promote retention; increase advising support for first-year students with greatest needs.

Following several reports¹⁰ and surveys of various Northern Arizona University student populations including sophomores, seniors, and alumni, completed from 1997 to the present, academic advising was identified as an area in need of attention and modification. In response, the university invested substantial resources in the establishment of centralized advising services for all freshmen (irrespective of major or undeclared status) through the creation of the Gateway Student Success Center (GSSC) in May 2003. In November 2003, the Offices of Career Services and Academic Advising Services were merged as one unit under the GSSC. Academic advising for all entering freshmen and all Career Services

⁸ Center for Supplemental Instruction, University of Missouri-Kansas City (2002, June). *Review of Research Concerning the Effectiveness of SI from The University of Missouri-Kansas City and Other Institutions from Across the United States*. University of Missouri-Kansas City.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Scannell & Kurz, (2003, March). NAU Report.; NAU Sophomore Survey (2002). Planning and Institutional Research, NAU.; Healy & Associates (2002, June). NAU Report; NAU Retention Advisory Council (2000-01).; Faulkner, M. (2000, November 26). NAU Report.; NAU Study Group of Enrollment Management (1997, September).

functions were integrated in a newly-renovated facility, led by a staff who seek to help students “start with the end in mind.”¹¹ As progress is made to enhance academic advising for entering freshmen, several key areas for improvement have emerged.

- Specific Goal: Proactive intentional advising leading to appropriate academic focus for students at-risk and in transition.

Entering students who are considered “at risk” have academic profiles with high school GPAs less than 2.5; or ACT scores below 20; or SAT scores below 900; or no test scores on record in combination with a HS GPA less than a 3.0. Since academic achievement (as measured by GPA) during the freshman year may be the single best predictor of student persistence and degree completion, academically under-prepared and undirected students present the greatest concern for the potential of lower academic performance. Students in transition have been denied admission to an academic program or major with one to two years of undergraduate prerequisites (e.g., nursing, dental hygiene, business, education) or are reconsidering their declared major or program of study. Students in transition need particular support and encouragement as they face the need to reformulate their academic and career goals.

Accomplishments / Progress

1. Implement proactive Advising for At-Risk and Undeclared Students

The Academic Standards Committee endorsed required enrollment in EPS 101 (Academic and Personal Development) during the first semester for incoming students who appear to be at risk based on their academic profiles. The Student Readiness Inventory, SRI (developed by ACT, Inc.), was administered during Summer Orientation 2005 to all new freshmen. The SRI generates a composite index based on responses to the inventory defining individuals who may be at risk for not being retained to their sophomore year, in addition to other indices. The SRI has been implemented in the following manner to provide additional, focused advising for students considered to be potentially at risk:

- a. The Learning Assistance Center used the survey results to identify a population of students likely to have academic difficulty and sent postcards to their home addresses over the summer advertising the services of the LAC.
- b. The Gateway used the results to identify approximately 300 students who had low retention scores on the SRI. They sent hand written postcards to these students during the semester’s first two weeks and sent regular emails throughout the semester announcing important deadlines, services, or events. These 300 students have also been enrolled in the Retention Alert Program so that advisors can contact them as soon as they are alerted to academic difficulties. Advisors are also inviting these students to social activities (e.g., movie night and ice cream social).
- c. The Multicultural Student Center peer advisors are going over the SRI profiles with each STAR student on an individual basis and making referrals to services based on the results. The MSC is also making special efforts to invite ethnic minority students with low retention scores to MSC activities throughout the year.
- d. Native American Student Services is using the SRI to identify students with low retention scores so that staff can make contact and encourage them to come in.

One intent of the Gateway is to provide excellent service to students who are changing majors and exploring alternatives. The training in the GSSC is structured to develop staff members who function as both specialists and generalists. Each advisor has a liaison assignment to a specific college or school so that they become the resident experts on majors in those academic units.

To better serve undeclared and transitional students all advisors are cross-trained for general academic advising, transfer advising, career planning, and employment service (job search support).

¹¹Mahoney, E. (2005, September 29). Personal conversation.

2. Increase Advising Support for Students in Transition

In addition to training all GSSC advisors in functional domains relative to choosing a major, the center has received funding for a new Career Specialist role that will work specifically with students in transition and undeclared students. At present, GSSC staff members who are working collaboratively with academic programs with entrance standards for early identification of enrolled students who are denied admission. Since program admission decisions are frequently communicated over the summer, a student who participated in early registration will likely need to reformulate his/her fall semester plan of study and may be open to academic and career advising as s/he considers alternative professional pathways.

3. Increase Advising Support for Students on Academic Probation

GSSC staff have found that students who go on academic probation for the first time have the greatest potential to return to good academic standing and may be receptive to targeted assistance from the university.¹² Currently, students who are placed on academic probation receive a letter with tips on how to improve their GPA and a list of campus resources to enhance academic achievement and have a hold placed on their account so that they are unable to add or drop a course without first meeting with an academic advisor. Effective fall 2005, a new section of EPS 101 entitled "Academic Fitness" was instituted for new students who were placed on academic probation as a result of their spring 2005 GPA's. Students in this section are mentored by graduate assistants ("coaches") from the Learning Assistance Center. GSSC staff seek to do more on behalf of students on academic probation as these interventions hold considerable potential for success.

4. Increase staff (to meet the minimum best practices "advisor to student ratio" as articulated by the National Academic Advising Association - 2001) to enable more personalized advising for certain individuals at critical transitions (e.g., between majors, after failure to obtain admission to programs, academic probation).
5. Coordinate a campus service network based on ACT, Inc.'s Student Readiness Inventory (SRI). Assess the utility of the GSSC using the Student Readiness Inventory results to design appropriate interventions for a subset of entering freshmen. A pilot project is underway in AY 05-06.

See accomplishments/progress details from previous section on Proactive Advising for At-Risk and Undeclared Students. In addition to serving students who are considered as potentially at risk, SRI results have been utilized in the following manner:

- a. Student Life, Campus Recreation Services, and Unions and Student Activities have collaborated to create postcards announcing social events aimed at attracting students who appear, based on some SRI construct scores, to need assistance connecting to the university.
 - b. The FYE 101 and EPS 101 instructors used the SRI as a teaching tool. The SRI results are being incorporated in class activities as a way to encourage students to use campus resources to ease their transition into the college environment and increase their likelihood of academic success.
6. Assess the effectiveness of the Retention Alert Program.

The Retention Alert Program (RAP) previously served all freshmen enrolled in high DFW courses by working with the instructors of those courses. Following unexplained absences, poor performance on a graded assignment or poor mid-term grades, or concern for the general welfare of a student, the course instructor could forward their concerns to the RAP Coordinator for individual follow-up by a volunteer member of the campus community. The high numbers of students, low response rates following intervention attempts, and lack of a previous relationship between the intervention agent and the student

¹² Harrison, T. (2005, October 3). Personal conversation.

led to a restructuring of RAP. RAP participants are now a subset of the SRI proactive advising effort. Those designated for inclusion in the current program have low predicted retention scores based on the SRI and are considered at risk by their academic profile at entrance or are a participant in STAR or programs sponsored by Native American Student Services. RAP volunteers are now students' advisors of record through the Gateway, NASS advisors, or MSC peer advisors. In addition, the College of Business is utilizing RAP to track the performance of their students on academic probation. If this proves to be a successful intervention for students on probation, it may be offered as a model to other academic units that have a centralized advising office. On-line notification by faculty of student issues and recommendations continues with this new cohort. RAP effectiveness has yet to be evaluated following recent program changes.

7. Evaluate the feasibility of transferring the Retention Alert Program to the GSSC or implement some other program for monitoring student academic performance in the context of first-year advising.

While RAP continues to be coordinated through the Office of Student Life, RAP advisors for all participants except those involved in programs through NASS or the Multicultural Student Center are current academic and career advisors with the Gateway Student Success Center. Student Life is supportive of the transfer of the program coordination to the Gateway, which is being piloted in AY 05-06.

- Specific Goal: Expand the academic focus of New Student Orientation and extend academic orientation into the first term.

Planning for 2005 New Student Orientation was undertaken at a time when there were vacancies in two administrative leadership roles (Directors of Admissions and New Student Programs) who would have been central players in the process. At the request of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, the planning committee reviewed the Orientation agenda, structure, and program content to position academics as the primary focus for the program. Mindful attention to competing priorities, such as documentation of immunizations and control for the participation of non-admitted students in Orientation, freed college and GSSC representatives to focus on issues more germane to the new students' decision-making and alignment of their academic and career pursuits.

Accomplishments / Progress

1. Goal exploration and development of academic focus

Through the utilization of the combined workforce of GSSC and college-based advisors, academic advising was facilitated with groups of one to three students per advisor per hour during 2005 New Student Orientation sessions. This contrasts with a historical Orientation advising ratio of twelve to fifteen students per two advisors per hour and reflects a significant adjustment to the schedule. Combined with increasing numbers of new students who participate in Priority Enrollment, the advising environment and content was transformed from conversations about creating and adjusting class schedules to deeper and more purposeful discussions concerning career clarification and academic goal-setting. Students' sense of self-efficacy related to registration processes and procedures was enhanced by their self-enrollment in courses (in contrast to our historical practice of having Orientation Leaders register new students), providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to adjust or correct their schedule, if needed. Distinguishing the recruitment function of the Open House program with that of Orientation (some "selling", but focus is on learning the details associated with the decision to enroll) has been helpful in streamlining the necessary content of Orientation.

2. Orientation to general education learning goals

As with previous years, leadership from the GSSC and introduced the academic experience at a general orientation session. In 2005, this session was moved to an earlier time on day one to set the tone and frame the overall focus of Orientation. Content of this session extended the traditional message of the

value of the Liberal Studies Program to skills developed through Liberal Studies classes with job-related skills valued by potential employers.

3. Managing multiple commitments/establishing priorities (academics, employment, social life)

At present, Orientation relies on the two academic presentations to outline the need to prioritize academics in a disciplined manner (e.g., number of suggested study hours per hours in class) when balancing them with competing demands on a student's time. Future plans are to have small group discussion with pre-developed questions led by an Orientation Leader to address these topics. During these communications, Orientation Leaders will prioritize ideas about being a member of the academic community with other life-roles and benefits to be derived from attending and graduating from college.

- Specific Goal: Further the integration of academic advisement and career planning.

Orientation is the "launching pad" for communicating the link between academic advisement and career planning. During Orientation, students are informed about important programs such as Career Day and are encouraged to participate as a step in their own career clarification process. The combined role of career and academic advising for GSSC advisors is a good model for advising conversations with students in college-based and free-standing advisement centers.

- Specific Goal: Increase opportunities for students to make connections with academic units.

New Student Orientation participants have the opportunity to meet with representatives from their college or school of interest during day one of Orientation. The 2006 Orientation program will add a campus tour of the various academic areas/complexes to provide students a context for where their academic work will begin. GSSC and the colleges should collaborate to develop further opportunities for first-year students to engage with faculty.

Recommendation: Strengthen college-based advising.

As stated in the section addressing increasing advising support for first-year students with greatest needs, previous surveys of various Northern Arizona University student populations revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with advising and identified (poor) advising as the most frequently-mentioned obstacle to academic success by students.¹³ Significant differences exist between the advising offices within each college, but within college variation between advisement from designated centers and faculty members may be even greater. The re-structuring of the university's eleven academic units into six colleges presents an opportunity to evaluate college-based advising and enrich the infrastructure for advisement beyond the freshman year:

- Specific Goal: Evaluate the nature and quality of advising beyond the first year.
- Specific Goal: Increase support, training, and development for advisors across campus.
- Specific Goal: Engage in on-going assessment of advising.
- Specific Goal: Increase professional advising staff in colleges where needed

Accomplishments / Progress

Simultaneous with the efforts of the Task Force on the Freshman Year, another group was formed to evaluate and recommend actions to strengthen advising and career planning throughout the university. The Advising and Career Planning Task Force was charged to evaluate the status of academic and career advising spanning the campus during spring semester 2005. This task force will issue a report at the end of the spring 2006 term. The report is expected to address the goals identified above (see www.nau.edu/gateway).

¹³ ASNAU Focus Group Interview (2001).

Recommendation: Expand summer bridge programming opportunities (including shorter options that are more affordable) to increase student diversity and academic preparation.

Upcraft et al.⁹ identify summer bridge programs as one of the more effective models to prepare students from disadvantaged backgrounds to meet the academic challenges of higher education. The STAR program has demonstrated success with this model for students at Northern Arizona University. Exposure for a broader audience of new students would provide an opportunity for increasing and improving student preparedness. Through summer bridge programs students are prepared for college level courses, the academic demands of these courses, and the expectations of faculty, and provided with opportunities to interact with peers and college faculty and staff. Waiting until students arrive on campus to begin building academic skills and confidence may, in fact, reduce their probability for academic success and persistence. As a first step in expanding the number of summer bridge participants Northern Arizona University has leveraged funding support differently in preparation for the 2006 STAR program in order to expand the program from its current level of 100 participants to between 150-180 participants, including the opportunity, for the first time in the program's history, for out-of-state students to attend.

Recommendation: Provide institutional support for the Student Support Services (SSS) program to enable the program to serve more students than is currently possible with existing grant funding.

The Student Support Services (SSS) program is fully funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It is administered by Educational Support Programs, a unit in Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. The SSS program is a proactive retention program that currently serves 240 low-income and first-generation college students per year. However, because federal funding remains stagnant, the program cannot expand to serve more students. Currently, more than 50% of Northern Arizona University students are eligible for services, and the pool of unmet need is deep. The SSS program model has proven highly effective at Northern Arizona University by setting high expectations for these higher risk students and providing the proactive, intensive services necessary to impact their persistence. Students who participate in the SSS program receive one-on-one mentoring and advising and access to intensive academic services, and participate in co-curricular activities and programs. Additionally, freshmen and sophomore students who meet certain program criteria and are Pell Grant-eligible receive additional grant aid from the SSS program. Upcraft et al identified student services with these characteristics as having the greatest impact on student persistence. During the 2003-2004 AY, 87% of SSS participants remained in good academic standing, and 82% were retained and persisted toward completion of their academic program. (Additionally, 78% of FTFT freshmen in SSS were retained). The task force recommends providing institutional dollars to supplement existing grant funding to increase the number of students who can receive services from SSS. Without such institutional support, the level of student participation in the program will remain flat.

Faculty Development Focused on Teaching and Mentoring Freshmen

Recommendation: Increase faculty development focused on teaching and mentoring freshmen.

The task force recommends expansion of faculty development programming focused on freshmen, student learning, and pedagogical strategies that have the potential to increase success of freshman students. As a result, faculty would be better positioned to design lower division courses and respond to individual freshman students having difficulties with a greater understanding of freshmen and the challenges they face during the first year of college. Programs are needed that better acquaint faculty with the characteristics of contemporary traditional-age college students and freshmen at Northern Arizona University and a range of pedagogical practices that can effectively engage freshman learners. Research

⁹ Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. H., Barefoot, B. O. & Associates (2005). Challenging & Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

suggests that teaching strategies and instructor performance in key areas affects academic integration and, ultimately, retention.¹⁰

Faculty should be supported in their efforts to develop a wide range of instructional practices that will be effective for diverse learners. Special attention should be focused on promoting practices that engage students in active learning and innovations that have the potential to increase student success in courses that are challenging to a substantial proportion of freshman students.

In addition to their key role in the classroom, faculty are in a unique position to provide valuable guidance and support to students. Their efforts to advise and mentor freshmen would be enhanced by dissemination of comprehensive information about resources that are available to support students and help them succeed in their academic pursuits.

Faculty development focused on teaching and working with freshmen should include:

- Annual workshops or retreats for faculty teaching freshmen
- A faculty handbook with information about freshmen, teaching/mentoring freshmen, and resources for students
- Increased training, orientation, and support for graduate assistants and temporary instructors who teach freshmen.

Northern Arizona University has a substantial track record of scholarship about learning and teaching that should be cultivated with expanded support for faculty research on teaching and learning that leads to the development of effective pedagogical strategies in freshman level courses. Widespread implementation of instructional practices informed by research on learning should be promoted with strong encouragement from academic leadership and material support for pedagogical innovations and course redesigns. The establishment of an in-house journal or newsletter on teaching and learning for dissemination of research and pedagogical innovations should be investigated.

As noted previously, the task force is mindful of the need to establish a strong alignment of reward structures with institutional goals. If the university seeks to increase the commitment of faculty to the teaching and mentoring of freshmen, this focus must be reflected in the formal and informal reward structure.

Accomplishments / Progress

Progress is already being made in relation to some facets of this set of recommendations. The Faculty Development Program has enriched programming for faculty related to pedagogy, student learning, and assessment. The program has sponsored programs that promote learner-centered education and pedagogies of engagement. During the 2005-2006 academic year, a grant-funded program focusing on freshmen and teaching freshmen was launched. Transforming the Freshmen Year is supporting twenty faculty members in an extended period of study that is focused on promoting changes in practice with promise to increase the engagement and success of freshman students. Innovation in instructional design has also been supported through the E-Learning annual grant program. Large enrollment freshman-level courses, especially those with historically high rates of attrition and failure, have been priorities for the E-Learning grant program for two years. While there has been considerable faculty development and support for instructional innovation as recommended, further investment in the infrastructure for faculty development and specific programming that will aid faculty in teaching and mentoring freshmen is needed.

¹⁰ Braxton, J.M., Bray, N.J., and Berger, J.B. (2000) Faculty Teaching Skills and Their Influence on the College Student Departure Process *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 215-226. Braxton, J.M., Milem, J.F., and Sullivan, A. S. (2000) The Influence of Active Learning on the College Student Departure Process. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71, 569-590.

Cultivating Student Connections with the Institution

Recommendation: Research and expand upon promising programs that increase student engagement with the university and facilitate establishment of personal connections for the student.

“Complimentary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program.”¹¹ “Students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically, and who are the happiest, organize their time to include interpersonal activities with faculty members, or with fellow students, built around substantive academic work.”¹² “Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.”¹³ “Student learning is strongly influenced by a variety of interconnected out-of-classroom factors, most notably student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions”¹⁴. (Residential) Living-Learning Communities are illustrative of one type of institutionally-sponsored programs intended to enhance and increase student engagement with the university.

Accomplishments / Progress

With the support of a President’s Recruitment and Retention Grant, six new Living Learning Communities (residential) were established during the 2004-05 academic year.

Business LLC	Hotel Restaurant Management LLC
Forestry “Tree House” LLC	Outdoor Recreation LLC
Education House	Eco House

Living-Learning Communities (LLCs) bring together in a residence hall students who share a common academic major or area of interest. The value of a Living-Learning Community is its ability to provide a strong bridge between faculty and students. Activities and events related to majors and/or special interests are planned for Living-Learning Community members, including interaction and involvement with faculty in the residence hall setting. Initial assessment measures of student involvement with the LLC, satisfaction, retention, and engagement shows promising results. Expansion of the number of LLCs and closer collaboration with academic programs and colleges is under consideration.

Benchmarking and Modeling

After the Task Force on the Freshman Year hosted the Summit on the Freshman Year in the spring of 2004, a subcommittee on modeling and benchmarking retention was formed with four key objectives:

- Develop benchmarks for measuring retention in relation to peer institutions
- Propose institutional goals for retention
- Identify gaps in the data and conduct further research
- Develop a model for expected retention based on the characteristics of incoming students.

Progress on each of these objectives is noted below and organized within recommendations that still need to be addressed.

Recommendation: Adopt and strive to achieve the one-year retention and four- and six-year graduation rate goals for both the five-year and ten-year time periods.

In accordance with their charge, the subcommittee developed benchmarks for measuring retention in relation to peer institutions. In order to benchmark the university’s performance on three common outcome measures of success, one-year retention and four-year and six-year graduation, data were

¹¹ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2005). Annual Report, Center for Postsecondary Research. Indiana University, . Bloomington, IN. p 48.

¹² Light, R.J. (1992) Explorations with Students and Faculty about Teaching, Learning, and Student Life. The Harvard Assessment Seminars: Second Report. Graduate School of Education., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. p 6.

¹³ NSSE (2005). p. 50.

¹⁴ Astin, A. W. (1993) What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

collected and reported for three separate peer institution lists (see Appendix C). The first list of peers is the Arizona Board of Regents approved list of peers and is arguably an aspirational list. The second list has been referred to as the "President's List" and has a focus on institutions that are similar to Northern Arizona University due to their institutional profile. The third list is from the Education Trust. The selection criteria for inclusion in this third peer list are: Doctoral/Research-Intensive, 25-35% Pell Grant-eligible undergraduate population, public institution, half to one and a half Northern Arizona University's size, and half to one and a half Northern Arizona University's expenditures per student. Based on the three peer lists, the Task Force on the Freshman Year proposes the institution adopt the five-year goals below.

The ten-year goals that follow are from Northern Arizona University's response to ABOR's redesign of the structure of the state universities. Already adopted by the institution, the task force also proposes that these ten-year goals be adopted by freshman programs and used as benchmarks for evaluating success.

	Average for the three peer lists	NAU	Five- year goal	Ten- year goal
One-year retention	76%	67%	76%	80%
Four-year graduation	25%	27%	30%	N/A
Six-year graduation	51%	51%	55%	60%

Recommendation: Fill gaps in institutional data related to high school credentials and track program participation to allow for further research.

There are three gaps in the university's data that have been identified and are currently being addressed in order to further research efforts focused on modeling retention.

First, the university has not historically required final high school transcripts for students who sent in transcripts prior to completing their last semester of high school. Not surprisingly, a significant number of these students did not provide them. By way of illustration, 34% of the fall 2004 cohort did not provide final transcripts. The end result is that cumulative high school GPAs are not available for retention modeling. High school GPA is a significant piece of data in retention modeling and thus necessary to include in the institution's work with ACT, Inc. and in local efforts to analyze retention. The task force has thus recommended that final high school transcripts from the 2005 cohort and forward be required. The Office of Undergraduate Admissions has implemented this change.

Second, in addition to collecting the final transcript for cumulative GPA data, the task force also recommended that the Office of Undergraduate Admissions enter all appropriate high school course (e.g., core coursework) data into the university's student record system to aid in official data reporting and retention modeling. The final transcript is imperative for accurately identifying course deficiencies, which in turn is needed to best understand who at the institution is most at risk of being academically unsuccessful and/or leaving the institution. Current understanding of the proportion of students with deficiencies is incomplete due to the lack of final transcripts, and, thus, we do not yet have a full understanding of how deficiencies relate to retention.

Third, the task force recommends that university programming targeting freshmen be required to track participation in PeopleSoft so that data are available on participation/engagement. Without knowing which specific students participated in which programs, it is difficult to assess a program's impact on retention. Therefore, the task force recommends that programs systematically populate designated fields established in PeopleSoft to track student participation in programs and student use of services, so that PeopleSoft data can be used for analysis.

Where fields do not currently exist in PeopleSoft, it is recommended that program staff pursue the inclusion of key fields and load data at the time those fields are established. In these cases, programs

should continue to collect data locally and make them available upon request for analysis until available in PeopleSoft.

Recommendation: Develop a model for expected retention based on characteristics of incoming students.

The university has provided student record data to ACT, Inc. in order to assist in the calculation of individual retention prediction scores. These scores have been returned to the university for all first-time students who completed the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) at Orientation. As noted previously, the Gateway Student Success Center has taken the lead in using these retention scores to conduct outreach and interventions with students, while FYE 101 and EPS 101 have been structured to utilize results from the Student Readiness Inventory to more generally address student needs.

Retention analysis that will yield a prediction of overall retention rate for the institution will not be available until retention data are available for those students who have taken the SRI. In the spring of 2006 and then again in the fall of 2006, ACT, Inc. will work with the university to compile the needed retention data for these students in order to further the retention research.

As institutional data become more reliable and available, the task force recommends that the Office of Planning, Budget, and Institutional Research, the Assessment Coordinator in Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, the Gateway Student Success Center, and the Assistant Director of Enrollment Services continue on-going work with ACT, Inc. to determine the value of utilizing the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI) and other ACT, Inc. and institutional data for predicting retention.

Issues for Further Research and Consideration

Recommendation: Conduct further research.

The Task Force on the Freshman Year has identified the following areas that will need additional consideration or research before specific interventions or programs are implemented.

- Re-implementation of a freshman seminar
- Web-based courses for the freshman year
- Instructional design and pedagogy in lower division courses
- Effective strategies for reducing DFW rates
- Articulation of high school and college courses

Re-Implementation of a Freshman Seminar

The discontinuation of the freshman seminar (UC 101) at Northern Arizona University altered the character of the first-year academic experience. The University Colloquium was intended to be an anchor for the first year that provided for extended development of key academic and learning skills, as well as an introduction to the university's general education program. This program was not successful for a number of reasons. However, studies on freshman year experience courses suggest that students who participate in these courses tend to complete more credits, earn higher grade point averages, and are more likely to be retained than students who do not.¹⁵ These data suggest that a well-designed and well-implemented freshman seminar can enhance student achievement and retention. Given the potentials of

¹⁵ Davis, B. O., Jr. (1992). Freshman Seminar: A Broad Spectrum of Effectiveness. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 4(1), 79-94.; Sidle, M. W. & McReynolds, J. (1999). The Freshman Year Experience: Student Retention And Student Success. *NASPA Journal*, 36(4), 288-300.; Strumpf, G. & Hunt, P. (1993). The Effects of an Orientation Course on the Retention and Academic Standing of Entering Freshman. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience*, 5 (1), 7-14.

such courses, consideration should be given to establishment of a worthwhile freshman seminar that contributes to student academic integration and efficacy. The design of a freshman seminar program should be aligned with clearly formulated goals and informed by what is known about the impacts of different types of freshman seminars.

Research could include the following:

- Features of freshmen seminars that are linked to positive impacts on retention and student success
- Discussions with other similar universities about their successful seminars
- Institutional strategies for successful implementation of freshman seminar programs
- Whether there is support among the faculty for re-instituting a freshman seminar program

Web-Based Courses for the Freshman Year

Given the increasing interest in web-based course offerings, it seems important to assess the effects of these courses on freshman retention. It is unknown whether freshman participation in these courses has no effect, a positive effect, or a negative effect on retention efforts. The following questions are examples of data that would be useful to have available in assessing the effects of web-based courses on retention.

- Are the DFW rates for freshman students enrolled in web-based courses different from the DFW rates for freshman students in the same courses offered in the face-to-face format?
- Does enrollment in multiple web-based courses have an impact on students' involvement and connection to the university and its faculty?
- Do web-based courses create the need for additional academic support services beyond what is already available to students?

Instructional Design and Pedagogy in Lower Level Courses

A key component of any retention effort is the quality of students' learning experiences in their classes. The task force identified a number of issues that affect the quality of those learning experiences and that need further research and consideration.

- What are the patterns of instructional design and practice utilized in lower division courses at Northern Arizona University?
- How does the university tangibly communicate the value it places on the teaching of freshman classes?
- How does the university ensure that on-going professional development is provided for instructors of freshman courses?
- How can the effectiveness of instructional design and delivery be best evaluated in these courses?
- What types of student data are available to instructors that could improve their instruction, and how best can those data be provided to instructors?

Effective Strategies for Reducing DFW Rates

According to page eighteen of the *Report on the Freshman Year*, the task force drew the following conclusions regarding the role of courses with high DFW rates on freshman retention.

...while the evidence is clear that academic performance is related to successful retention into the sophomore year, there is no evidence that taking high DFW courses is the reason a student has a lower grade point average and subsequently leaves the institution.

The intent of this statement is to caution the reader against targeting these courses as the sole or even main reason why freshman do not persist. These courses are probably best thought of as one component

of students' academic success that should be targeted for improvement. In this vein, the task force has identified the following areas for consideration.

- As the factors that contribute to high DFW rates potentially can vary across courses, it makes sense to research carefully the reasons for a high DFW rate in specific courses.
- Multiple approaches for reducing DFW rates should be examined, in the very likely situation that a single approach (e.g. Supplemental Instruction) may not be appropriate in all cases.
- Faculty involvement seems very relevant here so that rigor is not adversely affected by attempts to reduce DFW rates.

Articulation of High School and College Courses

An important input variable for students' college success is the quality of experiences and background knowledge they acquired during their K-12 education. Some additional consideration should be given to how the university can effectively communicate with high schools about their students' preparation for college. These considerations could include the following.

- To what extent can students be aggregated by the high schools they attended for data analysis purposes?
- What types of interactions between academic departments at the university and similar academic units at the high school level would be most beneficial?

Moving Forward

The recommendations presented in this report were developed over a period of two years, during which institutional action has been underway along many fronts. As the university moves forward to further strengthen the freshman year and improve retention, it should consider actions that have the greatest potential to impact institutional success in light of what is already in place or in progress. And, all members of the university community should consider how they can contribute to student success.

Efforts Underway

Northern Arizona University has begun implementation of recommendations to expand class-linked academic support, sharpen the focus of advising and orientation in the first year, increase advising support for freshman students with the greatest needs, expand faculty development related to teaching and mentoring freshmen, further develop programs that increase student engagement with the university, adopt goals for retention and graduation rates, and enhance institutional data and modeling of retention.

In FY06, resources were reallocated within Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs to support these initiatives. The university also invested \$250,000 of new funds to support the expansion of Supplemental Instruction and other forms of class-linked academic support, and to increase advising support for freshman students. The task force is mindful of these positive developments and is recommending continued or increased efforts in these areas.

Priorities

The first priority for the university should be to build an institutional culture that is focused on student learning and success. The recommendations for institutional leadership and culture do not require resources as much as commitment and actions that will cultivate the organizational context in which programmatic efforts will be most likely to succeed. This requires the attention of leadership at all levels across university divisions.

Among the recommendations that will require resource investments, the task force priorities are as follows:

- Expand class-linked academic support
- Strengthen advising for freshmen, especially for students at risk or in transition
- Focus faculty development on teaching and mentoring freshmen
- Expand Student Support Services.

The long term strategy should be to enrich the learning experiences of freshmen in order to increase the likelihood of academic success and forge stronger connections with faculty, staff, and peers, while developing effective advising and academic support programs to assist students with educational and navigational challenges.

A University Community Focused on Student Success

A key characteristic of colleges and universities that outperform predictions for student retention and graduation rates is the shared commitment of the entire community of faculty and staff to students and their success. While the focus of this report is on broad institutional actions and programmatic efforts that have potential to increase student retention, it is equally important that each member of the university community consider how to engage positively with our students and help guide them to achieving their potential.

No matter what our role, each of us has opportunities to engage with students and support their learning and development. University employees can contribute to student retention in myriad ways. The task force offers the following suggestions:

- Take advantage of opportunities to become acquainted and develop personal relationships with students.
- Consider your accessibility to students when determining hours of work and other practices.
- If you become aware of a student who is having difficulty, be proactive and direct that student to support resources.
- Consider the impact of institutional/business practices on students; avoid practices that create unnecessary obstacles or otherwise interfere with student progress.
- Respond as quickly as possible to student communications and inquiries.
- Convey to students that you care about their well-being and success.
- Encourage students to make connections between what they learn in the classroom to their activities outside the classroom.
- Initiate conversations with colleagues within and outside of your area about what you are doing to promote student success.
- Attend student-oriented functions.
- Dine once per week in the University Union or duBois Center.
- Invite a student to lunch or coffee.
- Ask each student with whom you interact about how they are doing.
- Give prompt and frequent feedback to students about their performance and progress.
- Try new teaching strategies that actively engage students with problem solving and with each other.
- If you do not know the answer to a student's question, take responsibility for finding it.

Efforts to increase student achievement and persistence to degree must address three critical components of the first year of college: development of academic efficacy, academic engagement, and social integration, all of which contribute to institutional commitment. Northern Arizona University should pursue improvements in the first-year experience that strengthen outcomes in all three areas. At the same time, institutional strategy should be adapted to institutional context, student characteristics, and what is learned about the effectiveness of policies, practices, and programs.

Theoretical models of student departure or retention are contextualized by institutional characteristics. This suggests that institutions should consider context carefully as they attempt to design the first-year experience in an effort to reduce student attrition. Ryan and Glenn suggest that more selective institutions may find that a focus on social integration is more cost-effective, while less selective institutions would be wise to concentrate efforts on improving academic efficacy and integration.¹⁶ Their empirical investigations of a range of practices and programs at a less selective university suggest that the promotion of student academic competency is the best strategy for increasing academic motivation and persistence. Northern Arizona University should, similarly, determine what arenas for development and investment to achieve goals for student achievement are most important. On-going assessment and institutional research are key infrastructures that will enable the institution to develop strategic plans for enhancing the freshman year.

Whatever strategy the university pursues, it is most important that we have a clear sense of purpose that integrates all of the components.¹⁷ An exclusive focus on programming will not create a coherent first-year experience. A collective commitment of the university community to goals for student achievement and development should guide the development of programs and practices.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 299.

¹⁷ Barefoot, B.O. "Creating a More Effective First Year: Lessons from the Field." October 28, 2005, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ.

Appendix A: History and Background of the Task Force on the Freshman Year

Charge to the Task Force

In September 2003, President John Haeger established a Task Force on the Freshman Year with a two-year charge to review, assess and recommend changes to the academic and support services provided to freshmen at Northern Arizona University, with the intent to assure a high-quality first-year academic and college life experience, and to improve the retention rates of first-time, full-time (FTFT) freshmen on the Flagstaff Campus. Outcomes of the task force were to include:

- A Freshman Year Summit (held on March 23, 2004) that assessed the state of the freshman year at Northern Arizona University
- An interim report (published in May 2004) that recommended actions to improve the academic success of freshmen and a set of metrics to assess the freshman year
- A final report at the end of the two-year work of the task force recommending a set of institutional actions to improve the retention of first-time, full-time freshmen.

Task force membership during the two year study included the following:

Task Force on the Freshman Year Committee Membership			
2003-04 Membership		2004-05 Membership	
Cindy Anderson*	Residence Life	Cindy Anderson*	Residence Life
Christy Arazan	PAIR	Christy Arazan	PAIR
David Bousquet, Co-Chair*	EMSA	David Bousquet, Co-Chair*	EMSA
Charles Connell	History, Faculty Senate	Rick Brandel* (in Margot's absence)	Dean of Students
Pam Eibeck, Co- Chair*	Undergraduate Studies	Charles Connell	Faculty Senate, History
Ryan Ewing	ASNAU	Tom Fetsco*	Educational Psychology
Tom Fetsco*	Educational Psychology	Erin Grisham*	Educational Support Programs
Erin Grisham	Educational Support Programs	Pat Haeuser	PAIR
Pat Haeuser	PAIR	Laura Huenneke	College of Engineering and Natural Sciences
Laura Huenneke	College of Arts and Sciences	Margot Saltonstall*	EMSA
Hannah Ledbury	ASNAU	Kooros Mahmoudi	Sociology and Social Work
Kooros Mahmoudi	Sociology and Social Work	Karen Pugliesi, Co-Chair*	Undergraduate Studies
Margot Saltonstall*	EMSA	Roy St. Laurent	Mathematics and Statistics
Kiisa Nishikawa	Biological Sciences	Travis Shumake	ASNAU
Roy St. Laurent*	Mathematics and Statistics	Ryan Rodriguez	ASNAU
Kapri Saunders	ASNAU	James Casebeer	Enrollment Services

Cindy Payne	Office of New Student Programs	Joanne Hood	Undergraduate Admissions
*Designates Executive Committee Member			

Summary of the First Year Efforts of the Task Force

During the first year of the task force, committee members sought to gather and analyze data which described current and enduring patterns in the demographic, academic preparedness and experience, attitudes, and persistence patterns of FTFT students. Representatives from freshman support programs described their targeted populations, program activities, dedicated budget and sources, program evaluation efforts and assessment of outcomes. Previous institutional studies related to student retention and enrollment efforts were reviewed for patterns and nature of recommendations for institutional improvement including:

- Retention at Northern Arizona University: Programs and Results, Scannell & Kurz, Inc. March 30, 2003
- Northern Arizona University Review of Financial Aid Strategies, Scannell & Kurz, Inc., March 25, 2003
- Admissions, Retention, and Enrollment Management Challenges at Northern Arizona University, Scott Healy & Associates, June 13, 2002
- Report of the Northern Arizona University Retention Advisory Council, Academic Year 2000-01.
- Report on Retention for Northern Arizona University, Margaret E. Faulkner, Ed.D., November 26, 2000
- Study Group of Enrollment Management, September 10, 1997
- Preliminary findings from the task force were shared with the campus community at a Summit on the Freshman Year held on March 23, 2005. An outline of the Summit agenda is presented in Appendix B.

May 2004 Report on the Freshman Year

Key results from the first year of the task force included the following:

- Freshmen are predominantly full-time, residential, traditionally-aged college students attending classes at the Flagstaff campus. Most are in-state, Caucasian, and have at least one parent with a college degree. Approximately 30% of our freshmen fail to meet requirements for regular admission (i.e., GPA, SAT/ACT, class rank, or high school coursework). Attitudinally, male freshmen are more confident in math and science than the national norm yet have a lower desire to complete their college degree than the norm.
- First-time, full-time freshmen experience relatively small classes and educational experiences that are equal to or better than that of our peers, as rated by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Many of these positive educational practices are characteristic of University Colloquium (UC101), a course taken by 73% of FTFT freshmen in the 2002-2003 academic year. The elimination of UC101 as a requirement may alter the quality of the first year educational practices our freshman experience. After fall and spring terms, 76% of the FTFT freshmen were in good standing both terms, 14% had academic difficulty one or both terms, and 10% of freshmen left after fall term (6% in good standing, 4% on probation.) Most FTFT freshmen who leave after their first year were less academically successful than the returning students, most with GPA's below 2.5.
- Seventy-nine percent of Northern Arizona University freshmen ranked Northern Arizona University as their first choice for college attendance. Approximately 37% of our FTFT freshmen are first generation college students. In contrast to their peers nationally, 89% of freshmen arrive in Flagstaff from homes 101 or more miles from campus (28% is the national average) and 90% of non-Flagstaff FTFT freshmen choose to live on campus. In AY03-04, the majority of freshmen (70%) expressed

concerns about financing college, and over 90% of FTFT Flagstaff freshmen were awarded some form of financial aid. Northern Arizona University freshmen tend to be very independent, socially autonomous and academically confident, but less likely than their peers nationally to seek assistance. Northern Arizona University FTFT freshmen face many of the same adjustment and transition issues typical to new college students, including the development of essential self-management skills and personal/academic evaluation of their choice to attend Northern Arizona University. Freshmen are involved in a variety of out of class activities. Students reported exercising two to three days per week and over 50% of the students reported being involved in a dating or committed relationship. An increasing segment of our FTFT class (33%) classifies themselves as abstainers or non-drinkers of alcoholic beverages.

- A large number of freshmen support programs are offered through Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Programming tends to be targeted without significant overlap but without much coordination between or among programs. Most programs have some form of assessment, focusing on measures such as GPA, but they generally do not assess learning outcomes. Supplemental Instruction, offered through a partnership between academic units and Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, is an example of an effective program for improving student academic success.
- Retention rates of FTFT freshmen over the past eight years have remained relatively steady around 67%. Entering students most likely to be retained are traditionally-aged, white females. Retention rates are related to high school academic success whether measured by high school GPA, test scores or high school rank. Once here, college academic performance predicts retention with an average retention rate of 79% for FTFT freshmen with a college GPA > 2.5. Intensive freshman programming such as that offered by Honors, Athletics and STAR, has a positive effect on the retention of their participants.
- Of the 2002 FTFT freshman cohort, 31% did not return for the fall 2003. Fifty-three percent of these freshmen were in good academic standing (not on probation or suspended). The students who were in good academic standing, but still left the university report generally positive experiences at Northern Arizona University but express dissatisfaction with location-related issues (e.g., weather, town). Most students in good standing leave to attend another college in their home state, with 44% transferring to Arizona State University and 12% to the University of Arizona.
- Assessment measures were identified that look at the inputs, experiences and outcomes of our freshmen. Inputs include demographics, high school academic performance and attitudinal indicators. Experiences include pre-term experiences, coursework, and freshman programming. Outcomes include academic performance measures, student learning outcomes and student-development outcomes. This task force recommends regular coordinated collection of data, which should result in annual or bi-annual assessment reports on the freshman year experience.

In its initial report the Task Force on the Freshman Year identified actions that the institution should take in order to improve the quality of the freshman year experience for our entering students and to improve retention (Appendix B). Some of these actions are currently underway, while others are elaborated in this report.

Summary of the Second Year Efforts of the Task Force

During the 2004-05 year the President's Task Force on the Freshman Year continued to address factors affecting academic success of freshmen; consider other factors related to retention; and to further refine recommendations aimed at enhancing the freshman year experience. An organizational structure for continued review and monitoring of the freshman year emerged as a key strategy for institutionalizing and coordinating efforts to create a high quality residential student experience for first time full time freshmen. Utilizing the work of the first year of the task force as a foundation, over-arching goals for the second year of the task force emerged:

- Assess/measure retention in a more sophisticated way.
- Enhance the academic experience and success of freshmen.

- Establish formal retention program assessment, planning, and prioritization.
- Continue development of recommendations for the final report as suggested by the work of the task force this year. Refine and further specify recommended future actions from the May 2004 report.
- Develop recommendations for on-going assessment of the freshman year.

Subcommittees

In 2005, the task force was divided into three working subcommittees to coordinate and concentrate efforts into related or thematic areas. The subcommittees and assigned tasks were as follows:

- Improving Academic Success of Freshmen
 1. Survey extant research on freshman learning.
 2. Identify most effective pedagogical practices.
 3. Assess alignment of educational experience at Northern Arizona University with what is known about what promotes student success.
 4. Identify most important enhancements of courses and programs to promote academic success in the freshman year.
 5. Identify faculty development needs.
 6. Consult with Liberal Studies Review Committee about the freshman year.
 7. Cultivate communication and collaboration between faculty and student affairs.
 8. Assessment of Freshman Year-Update through 2004: nature of educational experience in freshman year post UC 101
- Assessment of Retention Programming
 1. Institution-wide assessment of retention programs (using a broad framework that encompasses all retention efforts)
 - a. Inventory of services
 - b. Populations served
 - c. Evidence of effectiveness
 - d. Identify redundancies
 - e. Identify gaps in services
 2. Develop an institutional plan for retention programming.
- Modeling/Benchmarking Retention of the Freshman Year
 1. Develop benchmarks for measuring retention in relation to peer institutions.
 2. Develop a model for expected retention based on characteristics of incoming students.
 3. Propose institutional goals for retention.
 4. Identify gaps in data and conduct further research—transfer students, multivariate analysis of retention.

Appendix B: Institutional Efforts Addressing Freshman Year

- Advising:
 1. Advising Task Force
 2. Changes to the Gateway Student Success Center (GSSC), effective 2004-05:
 - a. Move of Career Services to GSSC
 - b. Increase in Advising Staffing FY 05
 - c. Move of the Office of Biomedical Professions to GSSC
 - d. Provost's request for further Investment in GSSC to Support Intrusive Advising for At-Risk Students
 - i. Adopt RAP
 - ii. Utilize CSI and Admissions Data for Identification and Advisement of At-Risk Freshman
 - iii. Strengthen Early Career Exploration and Planning
- Curriculum and Courses:
 1. Liberal Studies Program
 - a. Liberal Studies Committee (Standing Senate Committee)
 - i. Oversight of current program
 - ii. Assessment of student learning
 - iii. Program changes (incremental)
 - iv. Summer Reading Program
 - v. Senate Liberal Studies Review Committee
 - Comprehensive review of Liberal Studies Program and University Requirements
 - Development of proposal for replacement for UC 101
 - Development of proposal for revision or substantial alteration of Liberal Studies Program and/or University Requirements (Diversity)
 2. Honors Program Review
 - a. Review and assessment of Honors Program
 - b. Planning for future
 3. University Requirement- Diversity
 - a. University Curriculum Committee
 - i. Implementation for fall 05
 4. Course Capacity Management and Scheduling
 - a. Course Scheduling Infrastructure Committee
 - i. Analysis of factors creating capacity shortfalls and other obstacles to student enrollment in courses needed for progression to degree
 - Demand projections for lower division courses
 - Data infrastructure to support monitoring of enrollment
 - Guidelines for course schedule planning/practices
 - Development for department chairs related to course scheduling and curriculum design
 - Demand projections for upper division courses
 - Demand projections for distance programs
 5. Freshman Course Design and Enhancement
 - a. E-Learning Grant Program F04 and F05- Focus on projects using technology to enhance student learning and success in large enrollment freshman courses
 - i. Supplemental Instruction
 - NIH supported program in CENS- serving BIO, CHEM and PHY
 - SBS Pilot (Collaboration between LAC and SBS)- serving SOC and PSY
 - ii. Provost's request to expand and other appropriate forms of focused academic support to high enrollment high DFW freshman courses

6. Faculty Development
 - a. Spring 2005 Faculty Development Series-"Pedagogies of Engagement" (Faculty Development Program)
 - i. Transforming the Freshman Year (grant funded program) - year long program (05-06) of intensive faculty cohort activities and university-wide programs focused on freshman learners and course design (Office of Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies/Faculty Development Program)
7. Other
 - a. AASCU Graduation Rate Outcome Study - Northern Arizona University is a participant in national study of factors that lead to higher graduation rates
 - b. Celebration of Academic Achievement linked to Family Weekend
 - c. New Student Orientation - Planning for F06 Cohort (in progress)
 - d. Review of lower division web-based courses (in progress)
 - e. Assessment of implementation of new criteria for enrollment in EPS 101 (in progress)
 - f. Study of Probation/Suspension patterns F05 (in progress)

Appendix C: Peer Institutions for Retention and Graduation Benchmarking

	One-year retention rates	Four-year graduation rates	Six-year graduation rates
ABOR Approved Peers			
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY	67%	27%	51%
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA	70%	20%	45%
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA - LAS VEGAS	72%	12%	38%
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY	74%	10%	44%
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA - DULUTH	74%	na	na
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY	76%	33%	61%
CAL STATE UNIVERSITY - FRESNO	76%	na	42%
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA	76%	17%	50%
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING	76%	25%	57%
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY	77%	17%	42%
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA - RENO	77%	15%	48%
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY	78%	22%	49%
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY	79%	23%	49%
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA	80%	28%	54%
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT	83%	53%	70%
OHIO UNIVERSITY	84%	43%	70%
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE	89%	57%	74%
MIAMI UNIVERSITY (OH)	90%	64%	80%
average	78%	29%	54%
Potential Peers			
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY	67%	27%	51%
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO	69%	26%	47%
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-ARLINGTON	69%	13%	37%
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA	70%	20%	45%
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI	72%	20%	46%
INDIANA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA	74%	24%	49%
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY	74%	10%	44%
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA-GREENSBORO	75%	na	na
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY	76%	33%	61%
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA	76%	17%	50%
EAST CAROLINA	77%	25%	54%
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY	77%	17%	72%
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY	77%	18%	56%
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY	78%	22%	49%
CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY	78%	18%	52%
ILLINOIS STATE	81%	31%	59%
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA-TUSCALOOSA	83%	33%	62%
OHIO UNIVERSITY	84%	43%	70%
MIAMI UNIVERSITY (OH)	90%	64%	80%
SUNY BINGHAMTON	91%	70%	80%
average	77%	28%	56%

Trust List			
Portland State University	66%	8%	31%
University of Akron Main Campus	66%	na	37%
Northern Arizona University	67%	27%	51%
Florida Atlantic University- Boca Raton	68%	14%	35%
University of South Alabama	69%	12%	31%
Wichita State University	69%	12%	34%
Wright State University	70%	18%	44%
Indiana State University	70%	19%	39%
Montana State University - Bozeman	71%	14%	44%
University of Louisiana at Lafayette	73%	6%	29%
South Dakota State University	75%	23%	54%
North Dakota State University	75%	16%	50%
University of North Carolina at Greensboro	75%	na	na
University of North Dakota - Main Campus	76%	17%	50%
East Carolina University	77%	25%	54%
average	71%	17%	42%

Data from 2003