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## **I. Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of the First-year Experience (hereinafter referred to as FYE) for students attending colleges and universities. *The National Institute for First-year Experiences* was founded to address the growing concerns and need for assessment relating to students' adjustment from parental oversight to becoming aware of their own adult responsibilities as a result of attending college. According to Challenging and Supporting the First-year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First-year of College, there is "overwhelming evidence that student success is largely determined by student experiences during the first-year" of college<sup>1</sup>. The result is "as a nation, we are focused more than ever before on the reform of adult education with a particular emphasis on the first-year of college."<sup>2</sup>

With a first year-to-sophomore retention rate of approximately 84%, Truman ranks at the top in the state, tying with the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Missouri-Rolla.<sup>3</sup> Although 84% represents a strong performance, Truman seeks to improve retention. This First-Year Experience Task Force was formed on January 25, 2005 by President Dixon, and was charged with "taking an expansive view of those activities that comprise the First-Year Experience and try to view these programs from the perspective of desired outcomes for students and students learning in the context of Truman's mission....The work of the Task Force should be informed by the insight that Truman must continue to improve if it is to realize its aspired goal for national recognition of its liberal arts mission."

Specifically the Task Force was charged with the following tasks:

- **Review and update** Truman's current learning objectives and goals for the First-year Experience to ensure that they are consistent with the goals for the Master Plan and Truman's present needs.
- **Assess** Truman's current First-year Experience programs to identify their strengths and weaknesses using Truman's existing assessment data to the fullest extent feasible. What are we doing well? Are there things we should improve or stop doing?
- **Research and Evaluate** First-year Experience programs of other liberal arts and sciences universities to determine how they introduce students to liberal learning and provide the necessary support structures for the transition to college as well as their possible appropriateness for Truman. What are liberal arts schools with better retention rates doing that we are not? Are there new initiatives that Truman should consider?
- **Recommend** specific changes for Truman's First-year Experience that would result in a better integrated, more effective living and learning environment for entering Truman students in conjunction with estimated cost projections.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Lee Upcraft, John Garner and Betsy O. Barefoot and Associates, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for improving the First-year of College*, Jossey-Bass, 2005, page 1..

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. page 2.

<sup>3</sup> From *U.S. News and World Report – Best Colleges*. The retention rates are averages of three years of reported data.

## Task Force Timetable and Process

The Task Force discussed in its initial meetings the timetable that was described in the charge letter. The timetable as presented in the charge letter states:

May 2005	Prepare a Report that describes efforts to “Review and update” and “assess” the First-year Experience.
November 2005	Prepare a report that identifies several alternatives for changes in the FYE. It is believed that this report would be shared with the University community to gather input.
March 2006	Present a final report that provides recommendations for the FYE.

The Task Force began meeting in March 2005, and immediately began work to gain an accurate understanding of the efforts already in place for the Truman FYE. **Appendix A** provides a list of the Task Force members. Prior to the formation of this Task Force, Truman had not developed comprehensive goals and objectives for the FYE, although outcomes for different elements of a student’s first college year had been discussed and adopted. **Appendix B** presents goals for one of these elements—what was once the Freshman Week Experience and has evolved into the Truman Week/Extended Week Experience. This set of goals and objectives were discussed and felt to be related but only applicable to a small part of the entire scope of the analysis.

As a starting point, the Task Force requested assessment data that had been gathered via the various national assessment tools administered at the University, as well as data from various individual research projects conducted by faculty and staff. To begin discussion, the Task Force used a tool, *Performance Indicators for Founding Institutions*, developed by the National Institute for First-Year Experiences, to evaluate the basic identification of resources, special training, or processes in place for first-year (hereinafter referred to as FY) programs. (**See Appendix C**) In addition, Task Force members met with constituents from the disciplines, divisions and departments across campus to gain a better perspective of the processes that were already in place to facilitate the FY transition. (**See Appendix D**) The Task Force examined the evolution and content of the current Truman Week model and the programs and services offered to FY students throughout the entire first year, which is the time frame considered by the committee to encompass the entire FY experience. This information was discussed within the Task Force in the context of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current FY experience.

Members of the Task Force subscribed to the belief that the FYE is much broader than the academic portion of a student’s college life. The FYE was reviewed as the student’s total experience—inside and outside of the classroom, their relationships, their academic endeavors, their out-of-classroom activities (whether academic or student affairs-driven), and their connections to campus (faculty, staff, or other students) and the community. Along these lines and drawing heavily on the University Master Plan and the input of various stakeholders, a sub-group of the Task Force drafted a document stating goals and objectives that should be accomplished by every Truman graduate, with a corresponding set of "First Steps" for FY students. These “First Steps” were derived from an examination of the University mission statement and an identification of reasonable skills and attributes that students should achieve during their FY. These skills and attributes would lead toward a successful educational

experience, completion of their degree at Truman State University and accomplishment of the University mission. **Appendix E** contains the First Steps, and the First Steps along with the Task Force's recommendations that are applicable to each Step. The Task Force recommends that the "First Steps" serve as the goals and objectives for the FYE.

The "First Steps" were used as a template for discussion of the strengths and areas of concern in the FYE that Truman currently provides to its students, and accordingly, were used to provide criteria for a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of Truman's FYE. The Task Force compared all the data received through assessment, our explorations of the initiatives across campus, and the current research literature available while evaluating each "step". This effort appears to be the University's first effort to organize, analyze, and report on the accomplishment of FY goals and objectives. The Task Force used existing data from assessment instruments which specifically examined the needs of FY students, and data from those instruments administered for other purposes but which contains questions pertinent to the analysis of needs of FY students. Although assessment of FY students' needs has not been examined on a consistent basis, some assessment projects have been conducted somewhat randomly by various members of the faculty and staff. At this time, no central point of collection for all data has been established. The Task Force recommends that any new initiatives developed as a result of this examination of the FYE must explicitly include evaluation and assessment components and a structure for change and improvement based those evaluations.

During the first phase of this Task Force's work, the "First Steps" were utilized to focus the Task Force research and discussions. Subsequently, the "First Steps" and related assessment data findings were communicated to various members of the University community through formal presentations as the "proposed goals and objectives" for the FYE. The Task Force recommends adoption of the "First Steps" as the widely known and accepted objectives for Truman's FYE.

During the second phase, the Task Force began researching other universities' and colleges' FY programs to determine what other models were used effectively. Task Force members examined **25** schools, all of which are listed in **Appendix F**. These schools were selected because they fit at least one of the following criteria:

- They are a member of COPLAC;
- They were compared to Truman during the last HLC self-study; or
- They were recommended by the President, the President's staff, or a member of the Task Force, due to their success with FYEs.

Presentations regarding the Task Force's progress were given to all major governance groups on campus: Faculty Senate, Undergraduate Council, Staff Council, and Student Senate. Formal presentations were also provided to the University community during the University Master Planning Day in July 2005 and the University Conference in February 2006.

Following this process, the Task Force embarked on the third phase of their work, and began processing all the information received through research and feedback from the University community and began developing its recommendations. The following sections represent the areas the Task Force identified as key focal points for improving Truman's FYE. These recommendations are identified with a rationale and an explanation of the needs that each would

address. These recommendations represent the vision of the Task Force, after carefully weighing information from assessment tools, the examination of other schools, a review of current literature, attendance at FYE conferences, and feedback from various University constituents.

## **II. Objectives of the First-Year Experience**

The Task Force was charged with the responsibility of examining the objectives of the FYE and ensuring that the objectives are consistent with the Master Plan and Truman's present needs. Early in the exploration of the current FYE, the Task Force learned that the University does not currently have explicit objectives for the FYE, nor widely accepted outcome objectives for our student's entire Truman experience.

The members of the Task Force believe that the lack of explicit goals and objectives for the entire FYE may contribute to the lack of consistency among students' experiences at the University. Explicit goals and objectives enable disciplines, divisions, and departments to align resources and actions with the University's mission, and further the linkage of the University's mission with day-to-day decisions that guide the actions of the faculty and staff.

The Task Force recognized that to focus on improving the FYE and thereby increasing satisfaction and retention, every aspect of the student's experience must be reviewed to determine areas for improvement. Any initiative to make improvements in the current culture must receive the support of the University administration and governance bodies. The existing scholarship on the FYE supports this assertion:

“The foundation of first-year student success is an institutional commitment by its leadership, faculty, staff, and governing boards to support the first-year of college. This means developing policies and practices, courses, programs and services, and resources necessary to fulfill this requirement. It also means that each institution must clearly state its objectives for first-year students and make a commitment to first-year student success that pervades all of its educational initiatives, both inside and outside the classroom, and involves all its faculty and staff.”<sup>4</sup>

### Recommendation #1

#### **Adopt the “First Steps” as the mission-based goals and objectives for all FY students.**

The Task Force developed mission-based goals and objectives by looking at the University's mission statement and master plan, the determining the essential skills and characteristics that students must have by the end of their first year to be on track for graduating. Similar steps were developed for each subsequent year of the student experience, but for the purpose of our task force, we focused exclusively on the first year. Therefore, the Task Force believes that the “First Steps” during the student's first year at Truman are:

1. Students need to have positive experiences with members of the Truman community and learn the skills necessary to be responsible citizen's within the Truman community.

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<sup>4</sup> *Challenging & Supporting the First-Year Student*, page 516.

2. Students need opportunities to interact meaningfully with those who are different and reflect upon these interactions.
3. Students need opportunities for self-exploration and role taking within a supportive and reflective environment.
4. Students need to develop confidence in their cognitive abilities and potential to succeed academically.
5. Students need information regarding principles of a healthy lifestyle and available university resources as well as support for making a successful transition to the college environment and independent living.
6. Students need to understand how a liberal arts and sciences education differs from other educational philosophies and recognize how their in-class and out-of-class activities may contribute to the achievement of the unique outcomes associated with a public liberal arts education.

The timely implementation of the **“First Steps”** as the goals and objectives for the FYE should serve as a focal point for the development and implementation of improvements to registration, orientation and support of first year students. Also, adoption of goals and objectives has as the potential to provide guidance for the processes of the Curriculum Review Committee, the Strategic Planning Action Committee, and others as change is discussed.

Although it is outside of its direct charge, members of the Task Force recommend the University immediately develop a set of goals and objectives for our students’ entire college experience. These and other goals and objectives at the University should be widely communicated to all faculty and staff. The lack of explicitly identified and articulated goals and objectives for the students’ entire college experience is of great concern to the Task Force. Campus controversies over topics such as the LSP, the number of modes, and computer literacy, reveal the problems associated with the absence of explicit and articulated goals and objectives. For the University to achieve meaningful improvements in the FY experience, student satisfaction, and the retention of students, a clearly defined set of goals and objectives for all levels must be identified and articulated. Goals and objectives identified for students at various levels should be clearly based on current research of developmental needs of students of that age and level of achievement and on internal assessment of student progress.

Members of the Task Force believe that the university community should be provided with an opportunity to learn about the “First Steps” and where appropriate, governance should formally approve the “First Steps” to gain the much needed “buy in” by members of the University community. Approval should be gained from governance bodies where appropriate. All members of the University community need to be familiar with the desired outcomes of our students’ entire experience as well as their FYE.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

**III. Recruitment and Admissions**

Often we think the FYE begins when students arrive on campus for Truman Week. The Task Force believes that the FYE starts with a student’s initial contact with Truman – via the internet,

campus visit, mailing, or phone call. The Task Force used this understanding of the FYE throughout its discussions.

Under the direction of the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, recruitment currently involves three groups: the Admissions Office; staff and faculty; and students. At present, the Admissions Office uses a multifaceted approach for recruiting students – through visiting high school campuses, regional college programs, direct mailings and phone calls to high school students, electronic newsletters and e-mail contact, scheduling individual campus visits as well as organizing visit days at Truman for large groups. Moreover, the Admissions Office revised its informational brochures and website in 2005 to be more user-friendly and visually interesting.

Staff and faculty assist in recruitment by meeting with prospective students and parents/guardians to discuss college curriculum, transfer of high school credits, and athletic involvement. In addition to arranging for students to attend courses in areas that interest them, staff and faculty write letters, interview students for competitive scholarships, and conduct auditions. Involvement also is seen through participation in the Admissions Office's personalized recruitment program by responding to reply postcards from prospective students about their interest in specific programs and divisions.

Truman students also play a part in recruitment through Admission's Student Ambassadors program and phone call program. Students interview candidates for some scholarships, have meals with prospective students, attend visit day events, and explain co-curricular offerings. Admissions staff works with residential students to host prospective students for overnight visits. In addition, Residence life enlists student volunteers to coordinate residence hall tours during visit days.

Although these comprise some of the programs that staff, faculty, and students are involved in, Truman's academic reputation and costs precede most of these efforts. In short, many prospective students have formed expectations and ideas about Truman *before* their initial contact with staff, faculty and students. While our reputation constitutes an invaluable asset, we may rely on it too heavily in recruitment – that is, staff, faculty and students assume that prospective students' interest in Truman will be maintained because we're good and they are lucky to be here. As such, many people outside of Admissions may be more passive in recruiting. Truman's academic reputation and costs might attract a high school student's attention, but the University needs a more encompassing, active, and coordinated effort to recruit prospective students and help them remain satisfied with their choice through their FYE.

#### Recommendation #2

**The Admissions Office should continue to investigate and develop a systematic, coordinated approach when recruiting new students that incorporates the entire University—students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The University, as a whole, should be encouraged to embrace recruitment processes, to support the Admissions Office in recruitment and retention of students at the University.**

Admissions reports that during the period of time September 2002-July 2003 only 66% of the 760 requests from prospective students seeking to speak with a faculty member were

accommodated<sup>5</sup>. With the inability to meet approximately one-third of the prospective students' needs, great concern is registered. At important recruitment times, there should be more effort University-wide to remind divisions and departments about their potential (and important) role in the recruitment process, and again, to be invited to participate in helping recruit students to campus. The leadership of the Divisions should develop support amongst faculty members for the Admissions Office.

To effectively recruit, the University needs to understand the reasons why students choose to not attend Truman or why they leave Truman after they are here. Comprehensive assessment to gather this information is not done on a systematic level. To learn this information, the institution must engage in ongoing assessment to determine these reasons and communicate the results to divisions/departments/staff/Student Senate, etc. In addition, the use of some Admissions' budget for promoting name recognition of the University through billboards, television commercials, advertising in periodicals, and other areas of high visibility could be used more frequently to remain visible in an increasingly competitive market.

Current recruitment practices have served Truman well. The Admissions Office, staff, faculty, and students attract quality prospective students to Truman in a very competitive market. Nevertheless, because the Committee maintains that the FYE begins with a student's *initial contact* with Truman, recruitment and admissions therefore assume even greater importance in the students' impressions and experiences. Initial contact with the University sets the tone and level of satisfaction, interest, and engagement that prospective students can expect from the Truman experience and the relationships they form when they are here as a student.

Currently, the Admissions Office has been working toward a deeper integration of their efforts with the rest of the campus community. For the University to be as effective as possible, the Task Force believes that the staff, faculty, students and alumni groups should have greater responsibility with the recruitment process. Some of these ways that the University as a whole can be more involved with recruitment include:

- Meeting with the Admissions Office to discuss specific ways for both groups to move students through recruitment, admissions and into specific communities, different divisions require different approaches with admitted FY students.
- Designating a group of specific hall resident or staff/faculty member(s) to act as liaisons with the Admissions Office to co-ordinate campus visits, class attendance, correspondence, etc.
- Being clear in expressing willingness to participate in recruiting prospective students.

Despite its good work, the Admissions Office could be more aggressive in recruiting faculty and staff members to provide assistance during the recruitment process. Currently, faculty can receive a *Faculty Handbook for Recruitment*, which represents a passive approach to faculty involvement. The Task Force, however, is unaware of similar materials available for staff or alumni involvement with recruiting. Overall, a more active approach to include staff and alumni in recruitment may benefit the University.

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<sup>5</sup> *Faculty Handbook for Recruitment*, from Truman State University, page 7.

Recently, however, Admissions has been working toward significant improvement in recruitment of underrepresented students through more focused marketing efforts in niche markets. In addition, collaborating with current students and Advancement to more consistently involve alumni in recruitment processes may prove to be positive in attracting more alumni's children. The current model requires staff, faculty, and students to take some of the initiative and contact the Admissions Office to volunteer, and it has a small but loyal core of volunteers. The University, however, could be more proactive in educating staff, faculty and students of the value of working with prospective students. *All* areas of Truman's campus should be actively invited to help build, join, and maintain communities of learners on campus with these new students.

*Recommendation #3*

**The Office of Admissions should continue to work with Information Technology Services (ITS) in expanding the reporting and tracking process so that the entire university can be more fully informed when working with prospective and admitted students.**

Recruitment information should be kept up to date so that *all* members of the University who interact with prospective students may refer to it. Interested individuals of the University community may seek information about the student's contact information, electronic or phone reminders about e-mailing or congratulating them upon admission, scholarship awards, payment of housing deposit, high school graduation, etc. This would enable a University person to follow-up on contacting a prospective student after a visit to campus without delay.

Using a more coordinated tracking system, contact with staff, faculty, students, and alumni can help provide cohesion between student recruitment and admission, and the payment of housing deposits and class registration. Often, these staff, faculty and current students cease to have contact with the prospective student after the recruitment phase. Moreover, the division-based model of recruitment (ITS reports and divisional-based letters to the prospective student) and its stress on divisional programs before a prospective student has even attended Truman may inadvertently communicate that we are a comprehensive university rather than a liberal arts university. In turn, this may affect the match between prospective students, their expectations for college, their understanding of the relation between the liberal arts and their major, and their satisfaction with Truman.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are anticipated with the acquisition or development of software to systematically track prospective students, unless a database system could be developed in-house. If so, the costs would be reflected in staff time devoted toward the development of this tool. In either respect, these costs are not anticipated to be prohibitive.

**IV. Course Registration**

The Task Force believes that registration of FY students needs to occur earlier to promote interaction and relationship building with the University's staff and faculty. Students need to be directly involved with the course registration process to be informed during their decision-making processes while feeling that they are in control of their class selections. To assist

students' understanding of the complexity of Truman's current curriculum, students need to collaborate with academic advisors during or prior to their registration.

*Recommendation #4*

**In consultation with an academic advisor, FY students should choose their own classes for their first-semester including sections and times. Students should be able to register as soon as they have made a commitment to Truman (i.e. paid a housing deposit or orientation fee) and completed placement exams. To allow students meaningful choices, the University has to carefully evaluate and pay close attention to seat availability within the LSP and major.**

Most institutions explored by the Task Force provide summer registration sessions where students have direct involvement with class selection. As identified in First Steps #1, "Students need to have positive experiences with members of the Truman community and learn the skills necessary to be responsible citizens within the Truman community." To help students begin accomplishing this goal, students need the option to register for classes earlier to feel connected to the institution and to begin relationship-building interactions with personnel. Allowing students to enroll in their own classes would foster independent thinking and promote informed decision-making towards their own academic experiences.

As identified in First Steps #3, "students need opportunities for self-exploration and role taking within a supportive and reflective environment." Since students are responsible for their own educations, Truman should encourage responsibility by allowing students to select specific courses with appropriate guidance from an academic advisor. At the same time, we need to ensure that students understand degree requirements as they make these choices.

*Recommendation #5*

**Evaluate, review, and amend current mathematics and foreign language placement policies to continually ensure that students are encouraged to take the appropriate math and foreign language classes for their level of academic preparation.**

Although the Task Force did not study this topic in depth, Academic Advisors raised questions about the placement processes citing several examples of students whom were placed into classes that did not seem appropriate. Apparently, the only evidence of assessment of the current placement model was conducted in 2003 by a math faculty member. He states, "No firm conclusion could be made about placement due to the confounding factors used in placing students into their first math class." The specific study can be found at: [http://assessment.truman.edu/grants/2003/mathematics\\_placement\\_and\\_its.htm#3.2%20Placement](http://assessment.truman.edu/grants/2003/mathematics_placement_and_its.htm#3.2%20Placement).

Currently, Truman officially requires all students to complete placement exams regardless of anticipated transfer credit. Given the amount of prodding required by Admissions to get students to complete the exams, some students find the process of completing exams odious. In many cases, math and foreign language placement can be done by just looking at the prerequisites the student has completed, yet these students are still required to take the exams.

We should also examine our rule that students cannot earn credit for Elementary I of a foreign language if they have had three years of the language in high school. Currently, the University has no mechanism in place to enforce the policy after the first semester. Consequently,

University officials are placed in the peculiar position of explaining the dissonance between official policy and practice. The University should consider alternatives to the policy that will not require more elementary seats but encourage students to take the appropriate course by awarding credit for the courses essentially completed prior to Truman.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

**V. Orientation**

*Recommendation #6*

**Develop and offer a summer orientation program for FY students and their families that will be in addition to, but much shorter in length, than the current Truman Week. The focus of summer orientation should be on ensuring a successful transition to campus and learning about campus resources by building relationships among FY students, academic advisors, faculty, and staff members.**

For at least the last 15 years, the traditional orientation program at Truman has occurred during Truman Week. Recognizing that research indicates an indirect positive effect between orientation and student persistence<sup>6</sup>, the Task Force believes the University should begin looking at offering additional orientation opportunities for FY students and families to begin acquainting them with the University. Summer orientation programs were prevalent among the 25 schools (**Appendix E**) that were examined by members of the Task Force, and the success of these programs was noted. Following this recommendation, summer orientation sessions should include:

- Registering for fall semester in consultation with a professional academic advisor.
- A tour of campus and living environment to help make new Truman students feel comfortable
- Introduction to Truman and campus resources that will be available while they are at Truman.
- Time to make sure that Student Accounts (i.e. financial aid, business transactions) are accurate and to take care of outstanding issues.
- Discussion of general living issues, such as student ID, parking sticker registration, seeing their assigned living space, and allow for student/family to take measurements of their room.
- Time for the new student to meet disciplinary faculty members.
- Parent/family orientation that covers specific issues that pertain to their questions and needs: transition issues and the process of student development; the empowerment of their student; and campus resources and processes.

Truman should connect admitted students with Truman prior to their official move to campus during Truman Week. An effective orientation program promotes the identity development process of being a “Truman student”, assists in the transition to the college campus, allows completion of all appropriate paperwork, and helps parents learn how to help their children identify appropriate University resources.

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<sup>6</sup> Upcraft, M.L., Gardner, J.N. et al. (1989). *The Freshman Year Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 406

Summer orientation also needs to focus on academic orientation, course advising and registration and the reduction of anxiety and uncertainty that the transition from home to college tends to cause. The orientation could begin earlier connections for students and families with the campus and provide information about the separation from home and family, and reassure parents and students that Truman was the best choice. We anticipate that orientation will reduce the “melt” numbers that we currently experience and create a greater sense of belongingness to Truman earlier than we have at the present time.

Orientation allows students to complete many of the administrative tasks of being a Truman student prior to their arrival in the fall. Currently, some students take care of these tasks on their own prior to moving to campus in August. Orientation, moreover is a means to “seal the deal”, and allow them to feel confident with their selection of a University. Since 2002, any student assigned to housing has been invited to tour their residence hall room by making an appointment in July through Residence Life. The original purpose of showing students’ their rooms has expanded to provide them with time to get their student ID, talk with the business office, and possibly meet with an academic advisor. Anecdotally, students who have visited reported that they feel more secure in their choice when they leave their summer visit. Residence Life accommodated approximately 235 visitors in 2005. This number has increased from about 125 in 2002, the first year the option was offered.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are anticipated as a result of adopting a summer orientation program. The specific details of the program have not been identified and accordingly specific calculations are not possible. Task Force members believed that the increased costs could partially be recovered through implementing a “New Student Fee” that would be earmarked for both summer orientation and Truman Week. More specific calculations cannot be made at this time.

**VI. Truman Week**

*Recommendation #7*

**Redesign the current Truman Week to connect with summer orientation and the proposed curricular changes for the FYE.**

The addition of summer orientation and the curricular proposals will have significant effects on the current model for Truman Week. With the change in the FY experience and the end of the Truman Week class, Truman Week could conceivably be shortened to four days from a Saturday through Wednesday and regular classes could begin on Thursday. During the revised Truman Week, students would have less direct face-to-face contact with a faculty member, although the Task Force does encourage a few hours of face-to-face contact with the instructor of the first year seminar. To work toward the attainment of the proposed First Steps, the revised Truman Week should include:

- Opportunities for connections with other students, faculty, and staff (in and out of the classroom).
- Acclimating students to academic life.
- A means for students to meet and interact with disciplinary faculty members.

- Promoting the appreciation of diversity, providing opportunities for students to explore and learn about differences.
- Helping students begin make connections to campus resources that may address their specific needs.
- Opportunities for students to become involved in a community service project to develop ties and interest in the living community.
- Beginning the defining and explanation of the liberal arts philosophy and Truman's core values to the students.
- Acclimating students to residence hall life. Students should have adequate time to feel settled before the official start of classes.
- Effective education on alcohol and sexual responsibility.
- Activities that foster Truman Pride and a sense of belonging, such as the Truman Challenge Cup Competition.

During focus groups of FY students (2005) and graduating seniors (2006) conducted by Student Affairs, a major theme emerged regarding Truman Week experiences. Students reported making significant connections with their peers, particularly those students living in their residence halls, as a result of activities associated with Truman Week. Seniors reported that these Truman Week activities were among their favorite memories of Truman and, after four or five years, many of their most enduring friendships were created during Truman Week. The current model of Truman Week has many active components that address various interests: music, art, trivia, sports, diversity, exploration, etc. Along with these out-of-class learning experiences, academics is also a strong component of this first week on campus. The activities should continue to be effective in nature, and that the ultimate goals of the Truman Week (i.e., transitioning to living on campus; meeting students, faculty, and staff; and introducing students to the academic classroom) should be recognized and addressed.

The College Cup Competition includes trivia, yard art, ridiculous relays, and lip sync competitions. Current Truman Week individual and group activities promote relationship-building with other students, staff, and faculty, introducing them to the classroom and campus resources, and acclimating them to campus life. Beginning fall 2005, alcohol-free late-night programming was introduced with incredible success. Several hundred students participated in these events, and enjoyed having an alcohol-free option available to them. According to Residence Life's student satisfaction surveys conducted annually from 2003 - 2006, approximately 50% of all students who live on campus consistently report that they completely abstain from alcohol. Approximately 55% of the students who live on campus are FY students. Therefore, focused and intentionally planned alcohol-free programming is essential to meet the needs of the students at Truman. As students needs' change, the various events should be evaluated to ensure they continue to meet the intended goals of the Truman Week activities.

Above all, some form of Truman Week must be maintained to support First Step #1: (Students need to have positive experiences with members of the Truman community...). The events within the current Truman Week model that focuses on relationship-building has demonstrated success by a decreased the number of students that have withdrawn from the university by the end of the first week. Counting students who moved into their residence hall room on campus, eighteen students withdrew at the end of Truman's Freshmen Week in 2000, versus an average of 2 – 3 students per year during the revised Truman Week between 2001—2005. Equally

important, the experiences that come from the relationships formed are the ones remembered years later as some of the most powerful and meaningful that the students have at Truman.

The Task Force learned that the CHOICES Program is well-received by students and is making meaningful and substantive contributions to the students. When surveyed, approximately 95% of the students reported either “very much” or “somewhat” liked the CHOICES presentation. When asked specifically about the coverage of topics, 93.5% of respondents said they either “very much” or “somewhat” felt that the CHOICES presentation made them think about common college issues (diversity, adjustment, academics, etc.) The Task Force envisions that programs such as the CHOICES Program will continue to have a role in the First Year Experience.<sup>7</sup>

To combat the perception that the FYE only encompasses the first week (or the extended week course), more emphasis should be done to review the current assessment data on a regular basis to look at the overall experience of the FY students, both in and out of the classroom. Those results should be widely communicated to validate the impact that the entire University can make on the students’ experiences throughout the entire FY, versus what happens only during the first week or just in class. The FYE Task Force believes a review of the information for the experiences of each class year (FY through graduation) should be done on a consistent basis to determine ways to better meet the needs of all students, regardless of what point they are at in the college career.

Currently, Division Day activities provide opportunities for FY students, faculty, and staff to interact within major areas, which has the potential to have positive benefits to students. The University should determine the benefit of holding Division Day activities during Truman Week (or at a later point in time), and develop a more effective way to include non-declared students to allow them the ability to explore the various disciplines. A model that was discussed would be a Wednesday toward the end of September that could be set aside without classes to host a day devoted to more Division Day activities and a Major/Minor Fair.

Students on the Task Force report feeling limited to choose to attend the activities of one discipline when they wished to explore other options. Since nearly half of all college students change their major during their first two years, and “Undeclared” is the largest incoming choice, many students may be better served if there are division-related activities for major-related activities, while also allowing for exploration. Incorporating the Division Day activities and the Major/Minor Fair into a dedicated day during the first month after classes could provide a positive way for students to participate in major-related activities, but offer some ability to attend

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<sup>7</sup> Survey performed by University Counseling Services. Interestingly other data reveals information about specific topics: Respondents indicated: “Because of the CHOICES presentation and follow-up discussion afterwards, I was more aware of the follow resources on campus”:

- 65.5% Multicultural Affairs (MAC)
- 70.2% Department of Public Safety (DPS)
- 78.9% Student Health Center (SHC)
- 88.7% University Counseling Services (UCS)
- 42.5% International Student Affairs
- 36.7% Women’s Resource Center
- 63.6% Residential College Program (RCP)
- 66.2% Career Center
- 50.5% Victim Support Services (in the community)

other events so they could ask questions about other disciplines. This schedule would also provide the opportunity for upperclassmen to become involved in mentoring and supporting new students. Often, disciplines that asked upperclassmen to participate had to count on using only the students that were back to town early, versus opening it up to others who may represent honorary societies or academic organizations. Special sessions for undeclared majors would also be provided so that these students feel that they have a home on campus as well.

Although this model has many perceived benefits, problems may involve a reduced number of faculty and FY students who are able or willing to participate in these events. A reduction of available time or not having the newness of just meeting faculty and other students once classes are in session may also reduce participation levels.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section. Cost savings may result because of the reduced use of faculty to teach Truman Week classes.

**VII. First-Year Advising**

Research tells us that a successful FYE is based on strong relationship-building and making connections. These connections can be with faculty, staff, FY peers, Student Advisors, and other students. FY advising is important in this process, and provides an opportunity for students to be connected with a professional staff person who is interested in their growth and development as an individual.

*Recommendation #8*

**Professional advisors with training in student development theory and a broad knowledge of all programs of the university with offices in close proximity to FY housing should continue to advise all FY students. Disciplines should enhance opportunities for interest-based advising by connecting co-advising to new major seminars.**

Advising plays an important role in connecting students to Truman and in helping them successfully transition to college. Advisors need to play an active role in helping students meet all of the First Steps. All professional and faculty co-advisors of FY students should:

- Help students learn about campus policies, regulations, and resources;
- Assist students in becoming active participants and contributors to their own educations;
- Encourage self-reliance and help students become better self-reflective, independent decision makers;
- Help students explore co-curricular activities that support the student's personal and professional goals.
- Help students set priorities and evaluate their progress so that they get the most out of their Truman experiences;
- Help students evaluate their long-term goals and choice of an academic major;
- Help students understand degree requirements and provide guidance in choosing appropriate classes; and
- Help students understand the liberal arts and the meaning of liberal education.

Given the fluidity of major patterns during the first year experience<sup>8</sup>, advisors of FY students need to be knowledgeable regarding all of Truman's programs in addition to the LSP. Student Senate in its vision statement, moreover, indicated that students also desire interest-based advising during the FY. While many students might find being compelled to see two different advisors during the FY cumbersome, new major seminars can provide students with access to faculty with expertise in the discipline.

In the renovation plans for our residence halls, already underway, the University has committed itself to providing advising offices in close proximity to FY students. By placing advising close to students, we maximize opportunities for casual contact between advisors and FY students and foster stronger relationships.

Truman FY students who are advised by professionals within the Residential College Program (RCP) continue to rate the quality of academic advising higher than senior students with faculty advisors. According to 2005 NSSE data, 31% of FY students rated advising excellent while only 25% of seniors rated it excellent. At the time of graduation according to the GSQ, however, students are more likely to be very dissatisfied with RCP advising. Recent advising surveys conducted under the auspices of the Advising Task Force found that RCP advisors are more likely to help students "to become self-reliant and self-reflective regarding decision making." Students also report that RCP advisors are more likely to help them gauge their progress towards a Truman degree as well as to develop good study habits.

*Recommendation #9*

**Provide faculty members with regular, high quality opportunities for professional development as academic advisors including workshops and a regular faculty/staff advising newsletter.**

These development opportunities should include:

- Conceptual elements—definition of advising and mentoring, role of advising, value of good advising, and student development theory.
- Informational elements—programs, liberal arts requirements, ideal sequencing of courses, policies, and referral resources; and
- Relational elements—interview skills, communication skills, listening skills, and rapport building.

While faculty currently only formally co-advise FY students, many faculty informally advise FY students. Hence, improving our advising skills will have positive benefits for FY students. Faculty members are provided with little to no training on how to effectively advise students in course selection or understand how to answer LSP questions. In 2004 and 2005, NSSE data shows that Truman students are less satisfied with advising than students at peer institutions. According to an advising survey commissioned by the Advising Task Force, moreover, over

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<sup>8</sup> Marty Eisenberg, "Change of Major Patterns by Truman Students, 2000-2004", April 2005.

50% of faculty responding reported that “advisors could benefit from a regular workshop in academic advising.”<sup>9</sup>

To assist faculty (especially new faculty), resources for training should be provided so the best curricular and career advice can be provided, no matter who the students seek to answer their questions. Student report that professional advisors are most effective with LSP questions, while faculty are best for discipline questions. When students have curricular choices that involve both LSP and discipline selections, they need to feel confident that both areas have the knowledge and training to assist them.

*Recommendation #10*

**Undertake a more comprehensive assessment of student satisfaction with FY advising.**

NSSE data over the past few years have shown that approximately one third of FY students rate advising excellent while a quarter rated it only poor or fair. The University can do better. We understand that the Vice President for Academic Affairs has appointed an Advising Task Force to make recommendations for improvements to the advising program. We urge consideration and potential implementation of the Task Force’s recommendations in this area.

*Recommendation #11*

**Require all faculty members to provide midterm grades for ALL classes in which FY students are enrolled. Institute an early warning system that allows faculty to inform academic advisors when students are not attending class or are doing poorly.**

Midterm grades continue to be valuable to students and advisors. Currently, midterm grades are only required for 100 and 200 level courses. With increasing amounts of transfer credit, many FY students, however, enroll in 300 level classes. The current requirement stems from the capabilities of our old administrative computing system. Our new system can handle midterm grades in any class.

Students who perform better academically are more likely to stay and graduate from Truman. An early academic warning system allows faculty to identify students in difficulty earlier in the semester. A warning system should provide systematic information on all new students at an earlier point in time as well as allow for faculty to report students in difficulty at any point in the semester. Faculty can indicate a lack of attendance, failure to turn in assignments, or poor work. The information provides the University with knowledge of academic problems earlier in a semester so that attempts can be made to help students adjust their behaviors and make referrals to appropriate resources on campus such as the Writing Center, Counseling Services, the newly proposed Learning Enhancement Center, etc.

*Recommendation #12*

**Develop a system of support to aid students who fail courses and to help them recover their esteem and achieve academic success without lowering standards for excellence. Revise the University’s repeat policy to allow a student to more easily recover from a low grade.**

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<sup>9</sup> Data provided by Advising Task Force.

Students should live with the consequences of their actions and low grades should appear on transcripts, but low grades during the first semester should not make graduating from Truman nearly impossible. An analysis of the 62 FY students with cumulative grade point averages below 2.0 at the end of fall 2004 revealed that to return to good standing after one semester of college, on average, they would need to earn 33.5 hours at 2.25, 11.2 hours at 2.75, or 4.2 hours at 4.00.<sup>10</sup>

Six-year graduation rates of students who earn less than a 2.0 during their first semester at Truman are exceedingly low. Of the 122 first year students entering in the fall of 2000 who earned less than a 2.0, only 28% graduated. Of the 36 with less than a 1.0, fewer than 6% graduated.<sup>11</sup> Hence, poor academic performance during the first semester is an obstacle to graduation. A more forgiving repeat policy would help these students to recover, learn the material by repeating a class, and possibly increase their graduation rates.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are anticipated to be minimal as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

**VIII. Learning Enhancement Center**

The fourth “first step” identified by the First-Year Experience Task Force states: “Students need to develop confidence in their cognitive abilities and potential to succeed academically.” To achieve this confidence, FY students often need support in making the academic transition from high school to college. Whether students are performing below average in their course work or below the expectations they set for themselves, Truman FY students will benefit from a service designed to help them improve their learning skills.

Truman State University has transformed itself from a regional suitcase institution to a state-wide, highly selective, public liberal arts institution. Although the mission has changed, Truman

<sup>10</sup> Calculations supplied by Marty Eisenberg. The data are summarized here:

	GPA	Hours needed to return to good standing at					
		2.25	2.50	2.75	3.00	3.50	4.00
Average	1.34	33.5	16.8	11.2	8.4	5.6	4.2
Minimum	1.95	2.0	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.33	0.25
Maximum	0.27	76.0	38.0	25.3	19.0	12.7	9.5

N = 62 from Fall 2004

<sup>11</sup> Data compiled by Kay Anderson and Marty Eisenberg. The data are summarized here:

First Term GPA	Number of Students	Number of Students Who Persisted to Graduation	Percent of Students Who Persisted to Graduation	Of Students Who Persisted to Graduation, Number Who Were Suspended, then Returned	Of Students Who Persisted to Graduation, Number Without Suspension History
Under 1.0	36	2	5.6%	1	1
1.0-1.49	24	5	20.8%	1	4
1.5-1.99	62	27	43.5%	3	24
Total	122	34	27.9%	5	29

Note: Data are for FY students who entered fall 2000 and graduated by August 2006.

continues to recognize its roots as a teachers' college and to embrace the science of teaching and learning. A center, established to facilitate skills of learning and enhance the quality of teaching is not only consistent with our culture and mission, but essential to our continued development and recognition for our teaching and learning excellence.

*Recommendation #13*

**Establish a Learning Enhancement Center (LEC) on campus, possibly as an addition to the existing Center for Teaching and Learning. The center would be a source of resources and support for students, faculty, and staff in enhancing the teaching-learning process. Appoint a separate Task Force to develop further the conceptualization of this center since the scope of developing the LEC is broader than our charge,**

According to CIRP Data over the past few years, nearly 20% of our incoming students indicate that they expect to need "special tutoring or remedial work" in mathematics and foreign language. Over 5% indicate that they expect to need help with English, science, and writing. Approximately, 3% indicate that they expect to need help with reading. Our students, moreover, are not doing as well in their first semester as they anticipate. According to CIRP data in the fall of 2004, 96% of new FY students expected to earn a first semester grade point average of 2.7 or higher while only 77% of FY actually fulfilled their expectations. A learning enhancement center would provide students an additional resource to help them meet their own expectations.

To meet the needs of all students and faculty, the LEC would offer all of the services traditionally found in student success programs including:

- Study skills support;
- Supplemental instruction;
- Tutoring programs;
- Individual consultation;
- Reference material; and
- Programs and information on a wide variety of student success topics.

In addition, the center would focus on improving the teaching-learning process providing opportunities for collaboration focusing on the science of teaching and learning. Faculty, staff, and tutors can explore the science of teaching and learning and practice that science in their collaboration with students seeking services at the center as well as in their classrooms.

Our designation as a highly selective institution defines for us a student body composed of some of the most academically talented young people society has to offer. We work hard to recruit a well qualified student population. Many of today's high school students are, however, often not prepared for the rigors of academic life. Success may have come too easily in the past for many of the academically talented students at Truman. We must recognize our obligation to not only challenge these students but to also provide the support they need to succeed. FY students in particular need the resources to help them refine and adapt their learning practices to produce success at the University level. Our freshman to sophomore retention rate and the number of students on probation (between 400 and 500 students) in any given semester reflect our failure to adequately support all of our students. If a student is willing to put forth the effort, we must embrace our responsibility to support them in any way necessary to help them succeed. We also

need to recognize that even the most talented “A” students can benefit from learning enhancement services.

Truman earned its reputation through a value-added approach demonstrating that our students experienced measurable gains in their learning. This value-added approach continues to be the hallmark of who we are. The enhanced quality of the students we admit achieving that “value-added,” however, is a continuous challenge. In order to succeed in this quest, we need faculty who are dedicated to continued growth and a “value added” approach to their pursuit of excellence in the teaching-learning process. We need to provide the resources necessary to discover and practice the science of teaching and learning to our continued growth as a learning-centered institution. Our faculty and staff need to consistently use the science of learning in their teaching practices. Truman faculty and staff must also work to contribute to the body of knowledge about the science of learning and use this new information to inform our decisions and enhance our culture as a learning community.

Specifically, a Task Force further developing the idea of the Learning Enhancement Center should:

- Identify a convenient and adequate physical space for this center. Ideally, the center will be located in close proximity to other student support services to allow for and encourage collaboration and consultation. Suggested locations could be the McKinney Center, Kirk Building or PML.
- Collaborate with the Writing Center, Center for Teaching and Learning, University Counseling Services, Residence Life, Residential College Program and academic advising, Multicultural Affairs, current tutoring initiatives, Career Center, and other existing programs to determine their relationships and coordination of efforts within the new center;
- Define personnel and other resources needed for the center to succeed. We recommend hiring a trained expert with credentials in the science of learning and the teaching/learning process to direct the center, as well as sufficient staff to operate the center and coordinate the efforts of the center and other existing support programs.
- Determine where the INDV 110 (study skills course) should be housed and taught.
- Design an implementation plan for the center.

**Comment on costs:**

The FYE Taskforce feels very strongly that a doctoral-level individual with expertise in learning psychology, learning styles, and learning assessment, as well as experience developing and managing student academic support services, should be hired to direct the Learning Enhancement Center. Two additional staff members, at the Masters level should be placed to assist the director. One of these staff members could coordinate tutoring and study skills support. The other staff member could direct efforts at supplemental instruction and learning assessment services. The Director would be a 12-month position at approximately \$75,000 for salary and benefits. The Master’s level coordinators would be 9-month positions at about \$45,000 each for salary and benefits. These types of services typically have large budgets to pay students who provide tutoring, supplemental instruction and other services. With Truman’s scholarship work requirement, we might be able to provide these services on a minimal annual operating budget of \$20,000 to \$30,000. It might be possible to share clerical support with another office. We are estimating approximately \$200,000 to \$210,000 annually to establish the Learning Enhancement Center.

## **IX. First-Year Experience Living & Learning Communities**

### *Recommendation #14*

**Maintain the current policy of requiring FY students to live on campus with an exception for students over 21 years of age, students who are parents or married, and students commuting from home or living with an immediate family member.<sup>12</sup>**

Research by Alexander Astin and Arthur Chickering indicates that students living on campus have significantly higher levels of involvement in activities outside of class and interactions with faculty and peers as well as greater institutional commitment.<sup>13</sup>

Living on campus helps students successfully transition to campus life. On Truman's campus, students have ready access to professional residence hall directors and academic advisors, as well as trained student staff members. All of these individuals help students have positive experiences with members of the Truman community, as defined in First Steps #1. This policy supports the transition process of students, helps them in their development of their own identity and adult responsibilities, and are positive toward helping students become much more integrated and connected to people and resources on campus, and become involved in activities on campus. Students also are more likely to attend classes, utilize the library and academic resources, and make positive connections with their faculty members. Because of this, the Task Force wants to note their continued support of the residency policy for FY students.

### *Recommendation #15*

**Create areas within some residence halls where FY students live together. Housing students enrolled in a section of the fall FY seminar in close proximity to each other would provide opportunities to create intentional learning communities within these FY housing areas. These students would then have opportunities to interact frequently and informally with each other both in and out of the formal classroom.**

For over 20 years, scholars have touted the value of intentional residential learning communities<sup>14</sup>. Learning communities take many forms throughout higher education. Some communities include a residential component and others do not. Some explicitly link two or more courses and some are centered on one course. Despite the variation in learning communities, a survey exploring the results of 63 studies of learning communities by Lindblad as summarized by Stassen<sup>15</sup> found that students in learning communities show greater institutional commitment; greater intellectual development and opportunities for synthesis and

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<sup>12</sup> The University, however, needs to clarify the definition of immediate family member. The waiver form produced by Residence Life defines immediate family member as parent, grandparent, or legal guardian. Information on the Admission website defines immediate family member as mother, father, brother, sister or grandparent (<http://admissions.truman.edu/apply/faq.asp>).

<sup>13</sup> See Alexander Astin, "Student Involvement: A Development theory for higher education," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 1977, 297-308 or Arthur Chickering, *Commuting Versus Resident Students*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1975;

<sup>14</sup> See Jodi Levine Laufgraben, "Learning Communities" in *Challenging and Supporting the First-year Student*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2005 and Charles C. Schroeder, "Developing Learning Communities," in *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Martha L. A. Stassen, "Student Outcomes: The Impact of Varying Living-Learning Community Models," *Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 44, No. 5, October 2003.

integration of knowledge; and greater tolerance for difference and appreciation for pluralism. They also demonstrated greater persistence and higher grade point averages.

In defining characteristics of a learning-centered institution, the American Association of Higher Education explicitly mentioned learning communities as an example of a program where “students routinely participate in active and collaborative learning experiences.<sup>16</sup>” In describing the Learning Paradigm, Robert Barr and John Tagg directly describe learning communities when they write “a college’s purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves, to make students members of communities of learners that make discoveries and solve problems.<sup>17</sup>”

By defining entire buildings or parts of residence halls as FY spaces, student staffing resources can be placed more strategically by having a higher ratio of student advisors to FY students than to upper class students living on campus. Student advisors’ roles explicitly address meeting the First Step goals of 1, 2, 3, and 5. Having upperclassmen in other areas within the residence halls would still offer opportunities for FY students to have positive role models and to seek advice of an older student. Placing FY students in designated areas allows us to enhance the learning experience of FY students by concentrating the approach to meet their needs.

By intentionally developing a community of peers, learning communities directly challenge the belief held by many students that learning is an individualistic activity by encouraging community learning. They facilitate intentional scheduling of related academic and co-curricular community activities. When effective, they help students to integrate their social and academic lives, and promote interaction between students and faculty.

These learning communities should follow the essential principles for learning communities as defined by Charles Schroeder including involvement, investment, influence, and identity<sup>18</sup>. They should also be the result of collaborative partnership between faculty, students, and residence hall staff. Learning communities can contribute to all of the First Steps in a meaningful way that complements the role of other contributors.

#### Recommendation #16

**Create a committee charged with annually assessing the effectiveness of these learning communities in promoting faculty-student and student-faculty intervention. The committee should include a least one member from the committee overseeing the FY seminar.**

To best meet the changing needs of the student body, annual assessment of the learning communities should be conducted to decide any improvements that can be made, and to encourage students and faculty to submit their feedback for making the experience better for those involved. To ensure this occurs, committee members should be appointed that are dedicated to goals and objectives of the FYE. The committee members should be familiar with

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<sup>16</sup> Kay M. McClenney, “The Learning-Centered Institution: Key Characteristics,” *AAHE Inquiry & Action*, Spring 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Robert B. Barr and John Tagg, “From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” *Change*, November/December 1995, page 15.

<sup>18</sup> Charles C. Schroeder, “Developing Learning Communities,” in *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1994.

the courses and other aspects of the experiences provided for the students. Longitudinal analysis, combined with retention rates and student satisfaction, can provide some important data for how the University can continue to meet students' needs.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

**X. Curriculum**

Currently, there is not a specific individual class that each FY student is expected to complete. The current core does not require such an experience. The Task Force strongly believes that a three-credit common course should be required that is of enough substance and quality for the students to achieve the goals. The course, however, needs to be considered in faculty loads and should not be taught as an overload.

*Recommendation #17*

**Disciplines with new major seminars or their own FY curricular experience should continue those experiences. These seminars should help students learn more about the major and help them determine if the major is appropriate for their career interests and goals. Disciplines currently without a one-hour new major seminar should consider adding such a seminar. New major seminars should be included in faculty teaching and advising loads.**

Evidence on change of major patterns of Truman Students suggests that major choice in the FY is relatively fluid. Specifically, an analysis of change of major patterns of Truman students found that<sup>19</sup>:

- After one year of college, one-third of students had changed a major while 70% had kept at least one of their majors.
- Approximately 20% of FY students will change a major from the fourth week of fall semester to the fifth week of spring semester.

By exploring career opportunities related to the major and the major curriculum, new major seminars allow students to explore whether the major is right for them. The seminars help students connect with discipline faculty. Seminars should contain elements of group advising on discipline topics. New major seminars directly contribute to meeting First Steps 1 and 3.

*Recommendation #18*

**FY students should continue to have the opportunity to take INDV 110 Skills for Academic Success<sup>20</sup> during their first semester for credit. They should also have the opportunity to take the course during a later semester as well if they decide that they could benefit from the course. In addition, the University should design and implement an assessment**

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<sup>19</sup> Marty Eisenberg, "Change of Major Patterns by Truman Students, 2000-2004", April 2005.

<sup>20</sup> The course was previously called Academic Planning and Development. On a small scale, Academic Advisors began teaching the course during the 2005-06 academic year. During 2006-07, all Academic Advisors will teach the course.

**program for evaluating the success of INDV 110, and evaluate the best home for the course as part of the planning and implementation of a Learning Enhancement Center.**

Currently, Academic Advisors in the Residential College Program teach the INDV 110 course. The two-credit, discussion-oriented course covers: reading and understanding textbooks; listening and concentration; note-taking strategies; understanding arguments and critical thinking; effectively managing time and avoiding procrastination; preparing for and taking exams; and, understanding and confronting obstacles to learning. INDV 110 directly contributes to helping student develop their cognitive capabilities, which is a part of First Step 4.

The study skills preparation of entering Truman students varies widely. Some students are surprised by the rigors of college courses and others come quite well-prepared. Overall, our students do quite well during the first semester. During the fall 2004, the median grade point average of FY student's was 3.25, while 6.5% of students ended the semester on academic probation. Twice as many students (13%), moreover, ended the fall with a perfect 4.0.<sup>21</sup> We risk disengaging a sizable proportion of our new students if we mandate a study skills course for all of them.

*Recommendation #19*

**Discontinue the teaching of LSP and major classes as extended Truman Week classes and eliminate the 1 hour course, INDV 101 Truman Week as a graduation requirement.**

Currently, extended Truman Week classes are offered within the LSP and within the major. Approximately, half of the FY class has an extended Truman Week class in the major and the other half has a class in the LSP. Each year around 8% of FY students drop the extended class. The majority of the drops occur when a student changes a major and the class is no longer relevant. Smaller disciplines (Nursing, Physics, Agricultural Science) desiring to offer extended courses in the major, moreover, have difficulty limiting the class to FY students. Similarly students in some majors (Psychology, Business, Accounting, and History) take a major-based extended week class while other students in the same major take an LSP-based extended week class. With these students and others, there is no consistent experience for their first introduction to the academic expectations on campus.

We also have little evidence showing that all of the classes meet the learning objectives for extended Truman Week Classes. Because of the inconsistency in students' experiences with Truman Week and Extended Week classes, we believe that the experience across these courses varies greatly. The learning objectives for the extended class have not been assessed to determine if they are being met. The variability in the kinds of courses turned into extended Truman Week classes from 1 hour to 4 hour courses, moreover, likely suggests variability in the experience.

*Recommendation #20*

**Create one-semester FY seminars as part of the current LSP. The seminars need to be incorporated into the LSP by either satisfying a mode or essential skill requirement. Specifically, the one-semester FY seminar would:**

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<sup>21</sup> Marty Eisenberg, "Fall Semester Grade Point Averages of First-year Students," March 2006.

- **Be a discussion oriented 3-hour experience for all FY students taught by faculty from across the disciplines assisted by an upper class peer leader;**
- **Be a discussion-oriented course with a uniform syllabus and common course reader with historical and contemporary material from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and avoid using textbooks;**
- **Stress active learning through critical questioning, speaking, listening, discussing, reading, and writing extensively about primary sources and original works;**
- **Develop students' critical thinking skills with special emphasis on the process of writing, presenting, and researching;**
- **Require students to complete a research or creative project that requires retrieval, evaluation, and proper documentation of sources and a public presentation of their findings;**
- **Provide students with instruction, guidance and support in the process of completing a substantial research or creative project; and**
- **Be taught as a seminar with a maximum class size of 22 students.**

The curricular centerpiece of the FYE should be a seminar experience with a shared intellectual component rooted in the LSP for all FY students regardless of major. The seminars aim to develop students' abilities to read, think, discuss, listen, speak, write, and to enlarge their understanding of the diverse ways in which thinkers and writers have sought and created meaning. The University should ensure that its best faculty teaches these seminars, while allowing faculty across the disciplines the opportunity to teach these classes. Upper class students should serve as peer leaders in the teaching of these classes.

The Task Force recognizes that coordinating between 65 and 69 sections of a common course might be a challenge for the University.<sup>22</sup> Hence, the Task Force saw merit in creating a limited number of seminars, 2 or 3, with common objectives but each using a different common syllabus and reader. Students would be able to choose between the seminars. The Task Force feels strongly that these seminars would include a portion of reading that is common to all FY students.

Members of the Task Force also see merit in a year-long FY curricular experience consisting of two seminars. A year-long curricular experience allows students to have a common seminar during the fall semester and to choose a topical seminar in the spring semester. Using this model, the first semester would:

- Be a shared intellectual 3-hour experience for all FY students taught by faculty from across the disciplines, assisted by an upper class peer leader;
- Be a discussion-oriented course with a uniform syllabus and common course reader with historical and contemporary material from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities<sup>23</sup>;

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<sup>22</sup> University of the Pacific offers a common course with a uniform syllabus and reader to an entering class of 880 students.

<sup>23</sup> The Task Force did not discuss a theme for the course, but other schools with similar kinds of courses have themes such as "What does it mean to be human?" or "What is a good society?"

- Stress active learning, through critical questioning, speaking, listening, discussing; reading and writing extensively about primary sources and original works;
- Develop students' critical thinking skills with special emphasis on the process of writing and speaking; and
- Be taught as a seminar with a maximum class size of 22.

The second semester would:

- Be a discussion-oriented 3-hour seminar designed by individual faculty members that examines in depth a theme or themes from the first seminar;
- Allow students to select a seminar from a range of topics;
- Further develop student's critical thinking skills with special emphasis on the process of writing, presenting, and researching;
- Require students to complete a research or creative project that requires retrieval, evaluation, and proper documentation of sources and a public presentation of their findings;
- Provide students with instruction, guidance, and support for completing a substantial research project; and
- Be taught as a seminar with a maximum class size of 22.

Recommendation #21

**To sustain the quality of the First Year Seminar, the University should:**

- **Create a committee with faculty and student representation to assess the effectiveness of the seminars in meeting learning objectives. Since the seminars emphasize class discussion, the assessment program should include a means to assess the quality and level of participation in class discussion.**
- **Offer a required annual Spring/Summer workshop for faculty and peer leaders to help them effectively develop their skills to teach a seminar with common readings drawn from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning, the workshop should also emphasize strategies for teaching writing, speaking, critical thinking, and discussion skills.**
- **Establish weekly meetings for faculty and peer leaders teaching the seminars to discuss teaching strategies, topics of mutual concern, and to share resources.**

As called for in First Step #1, small discussion-oriented seminars with peer leaders allows students to connect with at least one faculty member, an upper class student, and their peers during the first semester. By drawing upon material across the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences, the seminars explicitly introduce students to the liberal arts and the value of a liberal education. They also show students the interconnectedness of knowledge by asking them to explore significant questions. Hence, the seminars play a major role in students meeting First Step #6, as well.

The FY seminars, moreover, contribute to a community of learning by asking faculty to model liberal learning by teaching outside of their disciplines. The seminars ask faculty to be both teachers and learners. Using upper class student leaders provides a powerful pedagogy and allows students to see their peers as part of a community of learners.

A course with a common syllabus and common readings creates a base of common texts that faculty can use and refer to in other classes. Faculty can use these readings to help students make connections across classes. NSSE data support the need for a common collection of readings. Specifically, only 12% 'very often' put together ideas or concepts from different courses and only 10% 'often' or 'very often' talk about ideas with faculty out of class. The commonality provides a base for conversations.

A common syllabus also establishes community by providing a set of common issues for discussion across all FY students. With a degree of commonality from year to year, moreover, these texts also allow all Truman students over time to share in the common experience. It also provides community by asking everyone to participate in a shared experience.<sup>24</sup> According to our 2005 NSSE data, only 25% of our FY students 'very often' participate in class. Hence, discussion-oriented seminars directly develop and encourage students to be active participants in their own educations.

Based on 2004 NSSE data, in comparison to COPLAC schools, our FY students report doing more memorizing, less analyzing, less synthesizing, and making fewer 'judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods.' Hence, they report doing less critical thinking. The seminars make critical thinking a centerpiece of our FYE.

By including a public presentation and a substantial research or creative project, the seminar addresses needs identified in NSSE data. According to 2005 NSSE data, only 5% of our FY students made a class presentation 'very often'. Only 24% 'very often' 'worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources' and nearly 90% of our students report not writing a paper of 20 pages.

The University has also struggled with bringing information literacy into the curriculum. Information literacy requires students learn to retrieve, evaluate, and document sources. These are all explicit goals of the second seminar.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

**XI. Faculty and Staff Preparation**

"Students are at their most vulnerable during the freshman year. They need stimulating instructors who can motivate them to explore the outer reaches of their minds, who can challenge them as they have never been challenged before. And they need considerate instructors who, while offering them the challenge to excel, will also be sympathetic to the frustrations, anxieties, and adaptations so many freshmen must cope with."<sup>25</sup>

Since most faculty and staff at Truman work with FY students, whether they currently teach an extended Truman Week class or not, all of us need to be aware of the unique needs and challenges of working with FY students. Therefore, the University needs to provide opportunities

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<sup>24</sup> See Rebekah Nathan, *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* for an explanation of the difficulty of building community in a world of individual choice.

<sup>25</sup> Upcraft, M.L., Gardner, J.N. et al. (1989). *The Freshman Year Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 213

for professional development and resources to assist staff faculty in best meeting the needs of these students.

Recommendation #22

**The University should:**

- **Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help faculty and staff understand and help FY students overcome their unique curricular and co-curricular challenges.**
- **Provide a website of resources for faculty and staff who work with FY students**
- **Make faculty and staff aware of University resources (University Counseling Services, Student Health Center, Career Center, etc.) so that they can make appropriate referrals;**
- **Publicly recognize faculty and staff who excel in working with FY students.**

Faculty responding to a survey prepared by students in STATS 376 working with the FY Task Force found that “63% of faculty reported being less than satisfied with the direction given to them in working with first-year students.”<sup>26</sup>

Ideally, faculty would be selected to teach FY students based on excellent student course evaluations, and/or student or faculty nomination. Ideally, teaching a FY seminar will be considered a faculty honor and over time all members of the Truman faculty would have an opportunity to teach a FY seminar. In addition, the University might consider a team approach to teaching the FY seminar where a team consists of an appropriate staff member and a faculty member. Faculty members know how to teach, and students could also benefit from staff’s expertise and knowledge of the University resources and programs.

This recommendation has a direct relationship to the First Steps goal #1: Students need to have positive experiences with various members of the Truman community and learn the skills necessary to be responsible citizens within the Truman community.

**Brief comment on costs:**

Increased costs are not anticipated as a result of adopting the recommendations in this section.

## **XII. Administration of First-Year Programs**

Members of the Task Force believe that the time has arrived for a paradigm shift to occur at Truman State University. An intentional strategic shift of cultural values is required. The Task Force suggests that a greater emphasis should be placed upon meeting the needs of our students, and especially those of the first-year students.

Task Force members agreed that changes in the current organizational structure, as it affects the first-year student’s experience, are required. Members also agreed that the individuals currently involved in the Residential College Program (RCP) provide valuable services and programs to Truman students, especially FY students. However, the Task Force believes the time has come to re-examine the purpose and concept of the RCP, and transition this area to incorporate the

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<sup>26</sup> Christy Aranda, et. al., “The First-Year Experience: A Faculty Perspective,” unpublished, 2005, p. 3.

activities and programs that provide value to FY students. The change might involve shifting the RCP into an administrative area designated to oversee the new First-Year Experience.

*Recommendation #23*

**Administrative assignments and structures necessary to ensure success of the initiatives should be carefully studied before they are adopted and implemented.**

To assure that the necessary transition occurs, the Task Force envisioned a central administrative position be charged with the responsibility for coordinating and championing the activities for FY students. The Task Force anticipates that collaboration and coordination of resources and actions will be required, perhaps more than has ever been demonstrated, between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management/Admissions, and other offices on campus.

Once a plan to improve the experience of the FY student is identified, the University must demonstrate support of that plan at the highest level. The manner in which the First-Year programs are administered needs to have awareness and visibility on campus. The administration approach will be one of the primary determinants of the success of any initiatives in this area. The Task Force suggests that to successfully coordinate activities that directly impact Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs, the administrative position that oversees the FYE may need to report to both the Dean of Student Affairs and the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Intentional assessment and continuous improvement must be themes incorporated into the administration of the First-Year Experience. There should be no doubt about the assigned charge, duties, and authority of the individual selected to be administrator of these activities. The individual needs to have the authority and capability to craft, implement, and oversee a strategic plan that will enable Truman State to make the transition required. This person will need to articulate that change is needed and be able to work in collaboration with all areas of the University to coordinate necessary personnel and resources. This person will become the advocate of Truman's FYE, and accordingly must possess the vision of an improved first-year experience.

*Recommendation #24*

**Officially change University terminology from “freshmen” to “First-Year” student in circumstances where this term is more appropriate.**

During the deliberations of the Task Force, members reviewed a great number of literature pieces from a variety of sources. Without doubt, the use of the term “freshmen” has become outdated in some situations. Truman's General Catalog designates students' class levels as:

- Freshmen: 0 – 29 semester hours
- Sophomore: 30 – 59 semester hours
- Junior: 60 – 99 semester hours
- Senior: 90+ semester hours

In referencing our students' class levels defined by credit hours, the current common language in literature generally refers to these students as First-Year, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors. The

University should appropriately alter its practice of using the term “freshmen” when the term “first-year” student is more applicable. However, the committee did not agree on how to effectively use the new terminology to accurately reflect a student’s class level on campus. For example, new students to Truman could be both a first-year and a sophomore (or higher) if they just graduated from high school and moved to campus the following August, transferring in 30 or more hours of advanced placement/college credits. Those individuals would be considered first-year students for housing, athletics, and to the general campus, but would be sophomores (or higher) by credit hours and would register for classes earlier than students with 29 or less transferred credit hours.

A change toward this terminology would have no effect on the current residency policy. Specific areas of the University would need to determine whether the term “First-Year” is appropriate for their settings. However, for classifying students for credit-hour purposes and specifying particular courses for the students in their first year at Truman, this term could be appropriate.

### **XIII. Final Comments**

The Task Force met for more than 15 months and discussed all aspects of the student’s FYE. The recommendations that are offered here were developed after sifting through thousands of pages of material and having numerous discussions. A summarization of the recommendations would involve one basic theme: Placing more emphasis on the FY student. The recommendations that are presented are all grounded in the mission-centered First Steps that were proposed in this document. (See **Appendix E**)

The Task Force members believe that a shift in the cultural values of Truman is required. The change that is called for is subtle and evolutionary in nature. Although several of the recommendations appear to represent dramatic changes, such as the recommendation to form a Learning Enhancement Center and charge a specific individual with the administration of the FYE, deeper analysis reveals that many of the programs exist currently. The students that Truman attracts to attend are sought by virtually all of the universities in the Midwest and U.S. The Task Force advocates putting their interests first and foremost in our culture so we can not only meet their needs, but maintain competitiveness with other institutions.

The Task Force calls for the administrative and faculty leaders of the institution to exercise firm and strong leadership that entices individual staff and faculty members to “buy in,” which can only be accomplished through the development, public airing, and distribution, of mission-linked goals and objectives. There should be great encouragement of staff and faculty to renew their commitments to making the FY students’ experiences (as well as all other students) as meaningful and substantive as possible.

The Task Force members have confidence that the University will accept the challenge to reinvent itself around the principles and recommendations that are identified in this report. With the University’s reputation for creating and accepting intentional change, again new challenges lie before the institution. The Task Force recognizes that some of the changes proposed are substantial and will take time to implement. The University should not rush to implement changes, but be proactive to ensure that any changes implemented will positively affect all FY students.

# ADDENDUMS

**List of Task Force Members**

**Appendix A**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>
Andrea O'Brien, Co-Chair	Director, Residence Life
Jeff Romine, Co-Chair	Faculty, Business & Accountancy
Jason White	Head Academic Advisor, RCP
Melanee Crist	Assistant Director, Center for International Education—International Student Affairs
Brian Krylowicz	Director, University Counseling Services
Michael Seipel	Faculty, Science-Agriculture
Janice Young	Faculty, Health & Exercise Science
Cole Woodcox	Faculty, Language & Literature
Julianna Moore	Faculty, Fine Arts
Katie Monson	Student
Michael Pierson	Student
Brandon Large	Student
Grant Tower	Student
Matthew Siebert	Student
Lou Ann Gilchrist, Ex-Officio Member	Dean of Student Affairs
Garry Gordon, Ex-Officio Member	Vice President for Academic Affairs
Marty Eisenberg, Ex-Officio Member	Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs & Dean of the Residential College Program
John Fraire, Ex-Officio Member	Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management

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### **First-Year Program Learning Objectives**

**Each extended Truman Week class will begin with an intensive Truman Week Experience which provides a supportive environment for the student's academic and social transition to Truman.**

*By midterm of the first semester at Truman State University, each student will:*

- Understand the level of work expected of a Truman student. The student will have gained confidence and experience in how to achieve excellence in what one undertakes.
- Know campus procedures, campus facilities and services available to them (registration, advising, add/drop, portfolio, library, counseling, study skills, Writing Center, tutors, time management).
- Be encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities.
- Attend at least one cultural event.

*By the end of the first semester, each student should:*

- Know and practice study and time management skills necessary to succeed in classes at Truman.
  - Know a group of peers who can support each other through academic and social situations.
  - Develop a sense of belonging within the Truman community and will have established appropriate mentoring relationships with the faculty member such that the student is comfortable discussing career and educational topics beyond class-related material.
  - Have increased understanding and appreciation of the characteristics of a liberal arts and sciences education.
  - Have increased familiarity with why and how the university assesses student learning.
  - Have been given opportunities to develop their writing, speaking, and thinking skills.
-

**Performance Indicators for Founding Institutions**

**Appendix C**

This questionnaire instrument was utilized to both begin broadly assessing the institution, to identify key areas for later exploration, and to familiarize Task Force members to their responsibilities. The Performance Indicators are NOT open-ended questions. Rather, each topic is rated according to a scale, e.g., Yes or No; High, Moderate, Low, or No Influence; All, Most, Some, One, None, etc.

<b>Performance Indicators</b>	
<b>Philosophy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does your campus have a campus-wide written philosophy/rationale statement for the first year?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To what degree does the written philosophy/rationale statement influence current practices/policies for the first year?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Does any department or unit have a written philosophy/rationale statement for the first year?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To what degree do(es) the written departmental/unit philosophy/rationale statement(s) influence current practices/policies for the first year?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. If there is no written campus-wide statement, is there a single, guiding, implicit philosophy/rationale for the first year?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If yes, to what degree does the implicit philosophy/rationale influence current practices and policies for the first year?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. To what degree is either the written or implicit campus-wide philosophy/rationale for the first year disseminated to students, new faculty, or student life personnel?</li> </ol>
<b>Organization</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does your institution have a specific unit or administrative structure (e.g., office, dean or director of first year) with campus-wide multifunction responsibility for oversight of first-year students?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What has been the level of overall impact of this unit/structure on the experience of first-year students?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Does your institution have a campus-wide committee with a discrete focus on the first year?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What has been the level of positive impact of this committee on the overall quality of the first year on your campus?</li> <li>b. What is this committee's level of focus on each of the following issues? first-year curriculum, student life, and retention.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. If no campus-wide unit exists, to what degree is it common for committees charged with addressing first-year issues at the unit or department level to have cross-functional membership (e.g., faculty, student affairs professionals, administrators, students, others as appropriate)?</li> </ol>

*Report to President Dixon by the First Year Experience Task Force - May, 2006*

<b>Transitions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what degree do admissions materials (e.g., viewbook, brochures, web site) provide students an accurate picture of institutional mission, academic expectations, and student life?</li> <li>2. To what degree does your campus provide information designed to promote first-year student success (as appropriate) to families, K-12 classroom teachers, high school guidance counselors?</li> <li>3. How successful is your campus in assuring that first-year students establish connections with faculty- especially out-of-class; establish connections with upper-level students; know about and/or use campus services?</li> <li>4. To what degree does the institution assure that all students and their families have timely and accurate information about college costs and financial aid, including grants, loans, and scholarships, during recruitment and admissions, and during the first year in order to plan for subsequent years?</li> </ol>
<b>Faculty</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If, within the past two years, your campus has offered faculty development (i.e., workshops or other structured activities) that either focus on, or are inclusive of, teaching first-year students in the academic disciplines for any of the following groups, please indicate the degree of participation for each: (a) newly hired faculty (full- or part-time), (b) continuing full-time faculty, (c) continuing part-time/adjunct faculty, and (d) graduate teaching assistants?</li> <li>2. To what degree do the institution and academic units encourage out-of-class interaction between faculty and first-year students?</li> <li>3. Consider new faculty who were hired in the past academic year and whose responsibilities include teaching first-year students. To what degree were expectations for involvement with first-year students and with various components of the first year clearly communicated during the hiring process?</li> <li>4. To what degree does your institution reward high levels of faculty interaction with first-year students through special awards, annual performance reviews, decisions about tenure and promotion?</li> </ol>
<b>All Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what degree has your campus systemically examined the experiences and special needs of academically underprepared students, honors students, racial/ethnic minority students?</li> <li>2. To what degree are you providing services to meet the specific needs of first-year students who are academically underprepared, honors, racial/ethnic minority?</li> <li>3. To what degree have you evaluated the effectiveness of services intended to meet the special needs of academically underprepared students, honors students, racial/ethnic minority students?</li> <li>4. To what degree does your campus assure that “average” students experience individualized attention from faculty/staff, academic support, opportunities for campus involvement?</li> </ol>
<b>Engagement</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what degree do the following first-year, first-level courses include pedagogies of engagement (i.e., active learning strategies):             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. required, non-developmental writing;</li> <li>b. psychology;</li> <li>c. history;</li> <li>d. biology lecture portion.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. To what degree are the following out-of-class activities designed to achieve the institution’s learning objectives for first-year students:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. residence life</li> <li>b. intercollegiate athletics</li> <li>c. student union/student center activities</li> <li>d. campus cultural events</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. To what degree does your campus provide structured opportunities for students to practice the habits of civic engagement through the curriculum and co-curriculum?</li> </ol>

<b>Diversity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a. To what degree does the institution ensure that, in the first year, students experience diverse world-views through the curriculum and the co-curriculum?</li> <li style="padding-left: 2em;">b. To what degree does the institution ensure that, in the first year, students interact with diverse people through the curriculum and the co-curriculum?</li> <li>2. To what degree are first-year students' interactions with diversity followed by the opportunity to reflect on the implications/meanings of the interactions?</li> <li>3. To what degree are first-year students encouraged to explore their own culture in relation to other cultures?</li> </ol>
<b>Improvement</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what degree does your campus collect sufficient baseline data to place students in appropriate courses, meet students' needs for out-of-class academic support, and meet students' needs for out-of-class personal support?</li> <li>2. To what degree does your campus measure first-year outcomes in cognitive development and personal development?</li> <li>3. To what degree has the campus used assessment findings in order to confirm or improve first-year practice?</li> <li>4. Within the past three years, to what degree has your campus contributed to the national knowledge base on the first year through conference presentations, research, or publications?</li> </ol>

**Contributors:**

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**List of Constituents that Met with Task Force**

**Appendix D**

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**Departments and Divisions Solicited for FYE Initiatives and Efforts:**

- 1) Residential College Program (including Truman Week Program)
  - 2) Residence Life
  - 3) Athletics
  - 4) Financial Aid
  - 5) Student Affairs
  - 6) University Counseling Services
  - 7) Admissions
  - 8) Academic Disciplines
    - a) Math & Computer Science
    - b) Language & Literature
    - c) Social Science
    - d) Business & Accountancy
    - e) Science
    - f) Human Potential & Performance
    - g) Fine Arts
    - h) Education
    - i) Military Science
    - j) Undeclared Students (Represented by RCP)
-

## First Steps

1. Students need to have positive experiences with members of the Truman community and learn the skills necessary to be responsible citizen's within the Truman community.
2. Students need opportunities to interact meaningfully with those who are different and reflect upon these interactions.
3. Students need opportunities for self-exploration and role taking within a supportive and reflective environment.
4. Students need to develop confidence in their cognitive abilities and potential to succeed academically.
5. Students need information regarding principles of a healthy lifestyle and available university resources as well as support for making a successful transition to the college environment and independent living.
6. Students need to understand how a liberal arts and sciences education differs from other educational philosophies and recognize how their in-class and out-of-class activities may contribute to the achievement of the unique outcomes associated with a public liberal arts education.

### First Steps with Related Recommendations

The FYE Taskforce established the first steps as the most important priorities for a first year experience at Truman. The information below summarizes how our recommendations relate to the first steps.

These first set of recommendations are not specifically related to one of the six steps but instead relate to all of the six steps and our ability to implement other recommendations. Some of these recommendations may also help us continue our focus on achieving the first steps.

<i>Recommendations Compared to All First Steps</i>	
#	<i>Recommendation</i>
<b>1</b>	Adopt the "First Steps" as the mission-based goals and objectives for all FY students.
<b>16</b>	Create a committee charged with annually assessing the effectiveness of these learning communities in promoting faculty-student and student-faculty intervention. The committee should include a least one member from the committee overseeing the FY seminar.
<b>19</b>	Discontinue the teaching of LSP and major classes as extended Truman Week classes and eliminate the 1 hour course, INDV 101 Truman Week as a graduation requirement.
<b>23</b>	Administrative assignments and structures necessary to ensure success of the initiatives should be carefully studied before they are adopted and implemented.
<b>24</b>	Officially change University terminology from "freshmen" to "First-Year" student.

<b><i>Recommendations Compared to First Steps #1: Students need to have positive experiences with members of the Truman community and learn the skills necessary to be responsible citizens within the Truman community.</i></b>	
<b>#</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>2</b>	The Admissions Office should continue to investigate and develop a systematic, coordinated approach when recruiting new students that incorporates the entire University—students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The University, as a whole, should be encouraged to embrace recruitment processes, to support the Admissions Office in recruitment and retention of students at the University.
<b>3</b>	The Office of Admissions should continue to work with Institutional Technology Services (ITS) in expanding the reporting and tracking process so that the entire university can be more fully informed when working with prospective and admitted students.
<b>4</b>	In consultation with an academic advisor, FY students should choose their own classes for their first-semester including sections and times. Students should be able to register as soon as they have made a commitment to Truman (i.e. paid a housing deposit or orientation fee) and completed placement exams. To allow students meaningful choices, the University has to carefully evaluate and pay close attention to seat availability within the LSP and major.
<b>5</b>	Evaluate, review, and amend current mathematics and foreign language placement policies to continually ensure that students are encouraged to take the appropriate math and foreign language classes for their level of academic preparation.
<b>6</b>	Develop and offer a summer orientation program for FY students and their families that will be in addition to, but much shorter in length, than the current Truman Week. The focus of summer orientation should be on ensuring a successful transition to campus and learning about campus resources by building relationships among FY students, academic advisors, faculty, and staff members.
<b>7</b>	Redesign the current Truman Week to connect with summer orientation and the proposed curricular changes for the FYE.
<b>8</b>	Professional advisors with training in student development theory and a broad knowledge of all programs of the university with offices in close proximity to FY housing should continue to advise all FY students. Disciplines should enhance opportunities for interest-based advising by connecting co-advising to new major seminars.
<b>9</b>	Provide faculty members with regular, high quality opportunities for professional development as academic advisors including workshops and a regular faculty/staff advising newsletter.
<b>10</b>	Undertake a more comprehensive assessment of student satisfaction with FY advising.
<b>14</b>	Maintain the current policy of requiring FY students to live on campus with an exception for students over 21 years of age, students who are parents or married, and students commuting from home or living with an immediate family member.
<b>15</b>	Create zones within some residence halls where FY students live together. Housing students enrolled in a section of the fall FY seminar in close proximity to each other would provide opportunities to create intentional learning communities within the FY housing zones. These students would then have opportunities to interact frequently and informally with each other both in and out of the formal classroom.

21	<p>To sustain the quality of the First Year Seminar, the University should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a committee with faculty and student representation to assess the effectiveness of the seminars in meeting learning objectives. Since the seminars emphasize class discussion, the assessment program should include a means to assess the quality and level of participation in class discussion.</li> <li>• Offer a required annual Spring/Summer workshop for faculty and peer leaders to help them effectively develop their skills to teach a seminar with common readings drawn from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning, the workshop should also emphasize strategies for teaching writing, speaking, critical thinking, and discussion skills.</li> <li>• Establish weekly meetings for faculty and peer leaders teaching the seminars to discuss teaching strategies, topics of mutual concern, and to share resources.</li> </ul>
22	<p>The University should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help faculty and staff understand and help FY students overcome their unique curricular and co-curricular challenges.</li> <li>• Provide a website of resources for faculty and staff who work with FY students</li> <li>• Make faculty and staff aware of University resources (University Counseling Services, Student Health Center, Career Center, etc.) so that they can make appropriate referrals;</li> <li>• Publicly recognize faculty and staff who excel in working with FY students.</li> </ul>

***Recommendations Compared to First Steps #2: Students need opportunities to interact meaningfully with those who are different and reflect upon these interactions.***

#	<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>
7	Redesign the current Truman Week to connect with summer orientation and the proposed curricular changes for the FYE.
14	Maintain the current policy of requiring FY students to live on campus with an exception for students over 21 years of age, students who are parents or married, and students commuting from home or living with an immediate family member.
15	Create zones within some residence halls where FY students live together. Housing students enrolled in a section of the fall FY seminar in close proximity to each other would provide opportunities to create intentional learning communities within the FY housing zones. These students would then have opportunities to interact frequently and informally with each other both in and out of the formal classroom.

***Recommendations Compared to First Steps #3: Students need opportunities for self-exploration and role taking within a supportive and reflective environment.***

#	<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>
4	In consultation with an academic advisor, FY students should choose their own classes for their first-semester including sections and times. Students should be able to register as soon as they have made a commitment to Truman (i.e. paid a housing deposit or orientation fee) and completed placement exams. To allow students meaningful choices, the University has to carefully evaluate and pay close attention to seat availability within the LSP and major.
8	Professional advisors with training in student development theory and a broad knowledge of all programs of the university with offices in close proximity to FY

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	housing should continue to advise all FY students. Disciplines should enhance opportunities for interest-based advising by connecting co-advising to new major seminars.
<b>9</b>	Provide faculty members with regular, high quality opportunities for professional development as academic advisors including workshops and a regular faculty/staff advising newsletter.

<b><i>Recommendations Compared to First Steps #4: Students need to develop confidence in their cognitive abilities and potential to succeed academically.</i></b>	
<b>#</b>	<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>
<b>5</b>	Evaluate, review, and amend current mathematics and foreign language placement policies to continually ensure that students are encouraged to take the appropriate math and foreign language classes for their level of academic preparation.
<b>11</b>	Require all faculty members to provide midterm grades for <u>ALL</u> classes in which FY students are enrolled. Institute an early warning system that allows faculty to inform academic advisors when students are not attending class or are doing poorly.
<b>12</b>	Develop a system of support to aid students who fail courses and to help them recover their esteem and achieve academic success without lowering standards for excellence. Revise the University's repeat policy to allow a student to more easily recover from a low grade.
<b>13</b>	Establish a Learning Enhancement Center (LEC) on campus, possibly as an addition to the existing Center for Teaching and Learning. The center would be a source of resources and support for students, faculty, and staff in enhancing the teaching-learning process. Appoint a separate Task Force to develop further the conceptualization of this center since the scope of developing the LEC is broader than our charge.

<b><i>Recommendations Compared to First Steps #5: Students need information regarding principles of a healthy lifestyle and available university resources as well as support for making a successful transition to the college environment and independent living.</i></b>	
<b>#</b>	<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>
<b>7</b>	Redesign the current Truman Week to connect with summer orientation and the proposed curricular changes for the FYE.
<b>8</b>	Professional advisors with training in student development theory and a broad knowledge of all programs of the university with offices in close proximity to FY housing should continue to advise all FY students. Disciplines should enhance opportunities for interest-based advising by connecting co-advising to new major seminars.
<b>9</b>	Provide faculty members with regular, high quality opportunities for professional development as academic advisors including workshops and a regular faculty/staff advising newsletter.
<b>17</b>	Disciplines with new major seminars or their own FY curricular experience should continue those experiences. These seminars should help students learn more about the major and help them determine if the major is appropriate for their career interests and goals. Disciplines currently without a one-hour new major seminar should consider adding such a seminar. New major seminars should be included in faculty teaching and advising loads.
<b>18</b>	FY students should continue to have the opportunity to take INDV 110 Skills for

	Academic Success during their first semester for credit. They should also have the opportunity to take the course during a later semester as well if they decide that they could benefit from the course. In addition, the University should design and implement an assessment program for evaluating the success of INDV 110, and evaluate the best home for the course as part of the planning and implementation of a Learning Enhancement Center.
22	<p>The University should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help faculty and staff understand and help FY students overcome their unique curricular and co-curricular challenges.</li> <li>• Provide a website of resources for faculty and staff who work with FY students</li> <li>• Make faculty and staff aware of University resources (University Counseling Services, Student Health Center, Career Center, etc.) so that they can make appropriate referrals;</li> <li>• Publicly recognize faculty and staff who excel in working with FY students.</li> </ul>

***Recommendations Compared to First Steps #6: Students need to understand how a liberal arts and sciences education differs from other educational philosophies and recognize how their in-class and out-of-class activities may contribute to the achievement of the unique outcomes associated with a public liberal arts education.***

#	Recommendation
4	In consultation with an academic advisor, FY students should choose their own classes for their first-semester including sections and times. Students should be able to register as soon as they have made a commitment to Truman (i.e. paid a housing deposit or orientation fee) and completed placement exams. To allow students meaningful choices, the University has to carefully evaluate and pay close attention to seat availability within the LSP and major.
5	Evaluate, review, and amend current mathematics and foreign language placement policies to continually ensure that students are encouraged to take the appropriate math and foreign language classes for their level of academic preparation.
9	Provide faculty members with regular, high quality opportunities for professional development as academic advisors including workshops and a regular faculty/staff advising newsletter.
15	Create zones within some residence halls where FY students live together. Housing students enrolled in a section of the fall FY seminar in close proximity to each other would provide opportunities to create intentional learning communities within the FY housing zones. These students would then have opportunities to interact frequently and informally with each other both in and out of the formal classroom.
20	<p>Create one-semester FY seminars as part of the current LSP. The seminars need to be incorporated into the LSP by either satisfying a mode or essential skill requirement. Specifically, the one-semester FY seminar would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be a discussion oriented 3-hour experience for all FY students taught by faculty from across the disciplines assisted by an upper class peer leader;</li> <li>• Be a discussion-oriented course with a uniform syllabus and common course reader with historical and contemporary material from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and avoid using textbooks;</li> <li>• Stress active learning through critical questioning, speaking, listening, discussing,</li> </ul>

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	<p>reading, and writing extensively about primary sources and original works;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop students' critical thinking skills with special emphasis on the process of writing, presenting, and researching;</li> <li>• Require students to complete a research or creative project that requires retrieval, evaluation, and proper documentation of sources and a public presentation of their findings;</li> <li>• Provide students with instruction, guidance and support in the process of completing a substantial research or creative project; and</li> </ul> <p>Be taught as a seminar with a maximum class size of 22 students.</p>
<p><b>21</b></p>	<p>To sustain the quality of the First Year Seminar, the University should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a committee with faculty and student representation to assess the effectiveness of the seminars in meeting learning objectives. Since the seminars emphasize class discussion, the assessment program should include a means to assess the quality and level of participation in class discussion.</li> <li>• Offer a required annual Spring/Summer workshop for faculty and peer leaders to help them effectively develop their skills to teach a seminar with common readings drawn from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning, the workshop should also emphasize strategies for teaching writing, speaking, critical thinking, and discussion skills.</li> <li>• Establish weekly meetings for faculty and peer leaders teaching the seminars to discuss teaching strategies, topics of mutual concern, and to share resources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>22</b></p>	<p>The University should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to help faculty and staff understand and help FY students overcome their unique curricular and co-curricular challenges.</li> <li>• Provide a website of resources for faculty and staff who work with FY students</li> <li>• Make faculty and staff aware of University resources (University Counseling Services, Student Health Center, Career Center, etc.) so that they can make appropriate referrals;</li> <li>• Publicly recognize faculty and staff who excel in working with FY students.</li> </ul>

**List of Schools That Were Examined by Task Force**

**Appendix F**

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Ball State University  
Beloit College  
College of Charleston  
College of New Jersey  
College of William and Mary  
DePaul University  
DePauw University  
Drake University  
Drury University  
Evergreen State College  
Grinnell College  
Harvard University  
Ithaca College  
Macalester College  
Middlebury College  
University of Missouri Columbia  
New College of Florida  
Sonoma State University  
St. Olaf College  
State University of New York—Geneseo  
University of Minnesota – Morris  
University of South Carolina – Columbia  
Wheaton College  
William Jewel College  
Yale University

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