ESTABLISHING ROOTS FOR A SOLID FOUNDATION:
New Student Experience Institutional Task Force
College of Environmental Science and Forestry
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First-Year Experience Task Force: Executive Summary

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The First-Year Experience (FYE) task force was initiated by President Amberg and developed in consultation with Academic Governance. The group started its work in January 2019 and was comprised of campus members including students, staff, faculty, and administration. The Task Force was charged with reviewing the present first-year experience at ESF and coming up with an action plan to improve student retention, satisfaction, and success.

Our charge was to research and identify issues and stress points for first-year students as well as develop an implementation plan for actualization as soon as the fall 2019 semester. Many factors influence the first-year experience, beginning prior to matriculation through graduation. Our Task Force was tasked with only the first-year experience; our boundary conditions were students’ matriculation to ESF through the conclusion of the first year. In many cases, transfer students are considered first-year students, but our Task Force concentrated on factors and experiences of students in the direct transition from high school to the first year of college. Although transfer students encounter different challenges, we believe our recommendations will improve the transition to ESF for all incoming populations. We also highlighted the needs of underrepresented students and students with the highest risk of leaving the institution. We do recognize that improvements and recommendations for this traditional group of students will likely benefit all ESF students moving forward.
MEMBERSHIP

The membership includes:

Co-Chairs

• Neal Abrams, Associate Professor (FCH) and Chair, Student Life Committee

• Amelia Hoffman, Academic Success Coordinator, Division of Student Affairs

Task Force Members

• Nasri Abdul-Aziz, Instructor and Placement Coordinator, APM, Gen Ed Division

• Eileen Baldassarre, CSTEP Coordinator, Division of Student Affairs

• Malika Carter, Chief Diversity Officer

• Erin Craig, Associate Provost of Enrollment Management and Marketing

• Janine DeBaise, Instructor, Writing Program

• Melissa Fierke, Department Chair & Associate Professor (EFB)

• Sophie Gublo-Jantzen, Office of the Provost and IQAS Committee

• Scott Shannon, Associate Provost for Instruction

• Mark Teece, Associate Professor (FCH) and Chair of Curriculum Committee

• John Turbeville, Division of Student Affairs

• USA representatives- James Quinn & Jourdyn Evonne Lee
PROCESS

Using a constructivist case study design, we implemented focus groups for first-year students, and individual faculty interviews to inform our work. The Task Force began its work by identifying stakeholders as well as preliminary pinch points for first-year students using institutional data.

Throughout this process, students had an opportunity to be heard and share their thoughts and feelings resulting in a deeper understanding of the complexity of their experience. This process of data collection was coupled with discussions regarding institutional retention data.

Our focus groups were co-facilitated by at least two members of the Task Force, and the focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic content. This developed into a three-stage plan for completing the Task Force’s charge: obtaining data, analyzing data, and making recommendations. The literature review conducted prior to beginning our research included best practices from highly respected institutions with well-developed first-year programs, focus groups with current first-year students, individual interviews with faculty commonly associated with first-year courses, an open campus forum, and the experiences and interests of the individual Task Force members contributed to our findings within our case study analysis. The findings of each of these data sources will be discussed later in this document.

Institutions that undergo in-depth self-studies or case study design, can tailor their interventions more successfully to the needs of their specific populations (Sheperis, et al., 2017 p. 39), hence our desire to look inward at our own first-year students. We asked them what challenges and barriers they faced, along with what aspects and current interventions at ESF assisted in their transition to the College. Every institution has different barriers for students to overcome, but listening and being sensitive to their needs and experiences will help any intervention be more successful. In this summary we will outline the process of the Task Force throughout the spring, research conducted, as well as recommendations based on the feedback received.

PROCESS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Information Gathering
- Strategic Development
- Review and Endorsement
- Implementation
In addition to the scope of our own investigation and research, ESF comes with its own set of parameters that need to be considered as part of addressing the first-year experience.

We see three major areas that impact the first-year experience:

1. The faculty’s ownership and responsibility to design the coursework, review the program curriculum, instruct courses, and advise students;

2. The relationship with Syracuse University which imposes limits on food service, academic accommodations, and coursework; and

3. Centennial Hall, which is a residence hall that is neither owned nor operated by the College and creates boundaries in the living/learning partnership.

All of these reflect back to the College’s size, staffing, and overall financial challenges which impose limits on a framework built on good pedagogy and first-year student support. Above all of the external pressures and costs, there is one single underlying theme that is simultaneously free, but comes with a cost; simple, yet incredibly complex; unsaid, but spoken about incessantly. That theme is fellowship.

Nearly 60% of our recommendations come at little-to-no financial cost. However, siloed ideologies have prevented the implementation of many of these same recommendations made by previous College-wide committees and Task Forces. While there should be no harm in trying something new, many times the barrier to change seems to be change itself. We present our findings in several formats and classifications, providing the stakeholders with several ways to reflect on the recommendations.
Through our process, it became evident that some recommendations would have a greater impact for the Fall 2019 semester. Listed below are a few top priority items for implementation, however we do not want other recommendations to get lost because they shed light on specific populations in need of additional resources, support, and policy changes to help ease their academic and social transition to ESF.

**Curricular review of first-year courses:** This became a priority due to many students experiencing academic issues within their first semester. The Task Force has proposed conducting a programmatic curricular review to identify opportunities for students to have more flexibility in their academic plans to not simultaneously take General Biology I, General Chemistry I, as well as math in order to help ease the academic transition.

**Professional academic advising & faculty mentors:** Students and faculty voiced their concerns regarding adequate first-year advising, and stated that many of the relationships were build with advisors later on in a student’s academic career and the first-year does not have many opportunities or time for intentional mentoring. Therefore, students would benefit from having an assigned professional academic advisor for the first two years of study, and simultaneously have an assigned faculty mentor to have more meaningful conversations with regarding their career aspirations and opportunities for involvement in research. Whereas, professional advisors would help students navigate course plan sheets, transfer credits, financial aid considerations, administrative paperwork, and registration.

**Support for historically underrepresented students:** Within the focus groups, students described their experiences during their academic and social transition to the college. Students noted a visible lack of diversity and representation on campus, and felt as though this was a significant barrier to their educational experience. We propose not only hiring direct diversity and inclusion support services, increasing faculty diversity and knowledge about micro-aggressions, but investing in adequate support resources to help students who have limited access to preparatory education before coming to ESF.
## FINDINGS

### Table 1. Emergent themes, examples, and recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme ID</th>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Examples from the data</th>
<th>Proposed Recommendation (see timeline and cost estimate below)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1        | First-year courses (Big Three; Biology, Chemistry, and Math) | • Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of work in their core classes.  
  • Students felt underprepared to meet the demands of the classes, and faculty also reported that some students are playing catch-up within the first 3-5 weeks and often fall behind very quickly. | • Ask AG (IQAS and CoC) to help facilitate a review of all departmental curricular requirements for first-year students and the format of plan sheets to determine if there is any flexibility in sequencing or course options. (Consider modifications to current sequencing, additional electives, or other solutions to assist with overload during the first semester.)  
  • Implementation of “trailer courses” for Bio I/II and Chem I/II similar to Math to enable first-year students and transfer students to complete required courses in a more timely fashion if they are unsuccessful the first time in the course, or need to withdraw. (Do this in conjunction with curricular review by the individual departments that require those courses.) ----cost of the additional professoriate.  
  • Coordinate first-year course exam dates so they do not conflict with one another, and assist with adequate student preparation. |
<table>
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| 2        | Teaching Style & Pedagogy             | • Limited training and/or professional development opportunities for faculty  
• Faculty teaching first-year students have varied styles towards working with first-years, ranging from “tough love” through excessively supportive | • Provide access to professional development for faculty through external sources or an on-campus Teaching and Learning Center.  
• Set out expectations for faculty teaching first-year courses, including pedagogy and soft skills.  
• Encourage good teaching practices from faculty through incentives and campus recognition programs. |
| 3        | Academic Advising                     | • Advisors have limited expectations or need for student interactions in the first semester  
• There is a lack of appropriate guidance on coursework  | • Implement professional academic advising in the 1st and 2nd year at minimum to facilitate guidance on coursework.  
• Implement purposeful, timely, and regular check-ins with advisees. Rather than waiting for the students to initiate contact.  
• Continue the use of faculty mentors for advising on content and research and follow a shared advising model. |
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| 4       | Learning Environment (Class Size) | • High value on instructor-student connection  
• Class sizes larger than expected  
• Students struggled to predict their grades in courses and are unable to make timely decisions about dropping courses, which, in turn, impacted their financial aid eligibility | • Class size congruent to disciplinary norms, campus master plan, Admissions publications, and utilization study (cap at 180).  
• Mandate midterm grade reporting (online through the ESF portal) in collaboration with a resolution from IQAS for all first-year students, regardless of course. Include advisors in the process.  
• Maximize individual and small group interactions through recitations, posted office hours, and informal meetings. |
| 5       | “Diversity Barrier” | • Students do not see others who look like them  
• Limited community activities  
• Students experience bias and microaggressions | • Encourage all faculty and staff to learn about microaggressions and bias.  
• Hire a Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion for underrepresented people to assist with programming, outreach, affinity formation.  
• Increase cultural diversity within the faculty through intentional recruitment (PRODIG) |
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ESF 132</td>
<td>● Range of different experiences in current 132 course constructs</td>
<td>● Developing a common rubric for the 132 experience that would not require faculty to fundamentally change the course, but ensure that the objectives are met to make certain there is consistency and fairness across majors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Bring back the passion-Use 132 courses as a framework for developing purpose, transition to ESF, and deepen their commitment to their respective field of study at ESF</td>
<td>● Four suggested themes are:  ○ Connection  ○ Curriculum  ○ Careers  ○ Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>● Students reported that they were displeased with Sadler dining facility, and preferred Trailhead.</td>
<td>● Future committee work can address this finding in consultation with USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Academic readiness</td>
<td>● The Math placement scores were sent late to advisors this past fall and some students were placed into courses that were beyond their ability level</td>
<td>● Provide students access to take the appropriate math course based upon their math placement score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Courses at the appropriate level are not always offered (e.g. APM 101)</td>
<td>● Move math placement score interpretation from Recommended to Required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● There are no preparatory courses for students who are at-risk or underprepared from high school</td>
<td>● Develop preparatory courses for chemistry and biology and/or delay normal course sequencing for at-risk students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme ID</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 9        | Student interest and motivation within an academic program | • Participants did not feel what they were learning within the first semester applied to their major of interest  
• Desire for more program-focused hands-on learning experiences from the start of semester | • Proposed curricular changes* will allow for more engagement with social transition supports. Engage with mentors and engage with research earlier in their academic career.  
• *Curricular changes include trailer courses, professional advisors, and consistent outcomes within ESF 132 courses. |
| 10       | Mental Health | • Students reported high levels of psychological and academic stress including anxiety and depression  
• Stressors extended to experiencing bias and discrimination | • Assuage academic anxiety by providing students with access to accurate grades at mid-semester.  
• Work with Academic Governance to develop a resolution on grade reporting and clarity on grading practices.  
• Require microaggression and bias training for instructors. |
| 11       | Student support and engagement, make equal opportunity a priority | • Students at-risk do not have resources to promote success | • Implement a summer bridge program for underrepresented and at-risk students.  
• Increase campus support and financial funding for summer bridge and EOP programming. |
<p>| 12       | Affordability &amp; Aid | • Affordability is a key factor for students who choose to come to ESF | • Increasing first-year credit completion will help with students’ retaining aid eligibility under federal rules and enable students to increase their grades at a faster pace with trailer courses (cumulative GPA in the first year and additional scholarships with GPA requirements). |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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</table>
| 13      | **Grading, Feedback & Early Alert** | • Participants indicated that they received very little grading feedback until late in the semester, and often their grades were too low to recover from  
• Predicted grades are often lower than the actual final grade, causing students to withdraw when they may have passed a course | • Continue and expand the use of academic alerts and require all first-year faculty to participate in submitting mandatory midterm grades to the ESF Portal.  
• Encourage faculty to be clear and transparent about grade calculations and the impact of a curve (within the syllabus). |
| 14      | **Faculty Interactions**         | • Students reported feeling mostly positive towards their faculty and found that their interactions outside the classroom helped them develop a closer relationship and level of comfort  
• Some faculty do not post office hours and were not very responsive to email which made interactions like advising more difficult  
• Students feel that some faculty set them up for failure and expected students to fail | • Require faculty to post all course syllabi and office hours on public platforms (e.g. faculty webpages or centralized College website) to assist with advising & transparency.  
• Fix and use student photos & preferred pronouns for attendance to assist faculty in getting to know their students.  
• Provide stakeholder access to student course schedules.  
• Engage faculty (not just those who students are likely to meet in the first year) during Orientation to get students to recognize and feel more comfortable with their faculty & prospective curriculum. |
SURPRISES

Centennial Hall. Students were engaged in three different venues as part of the Task Force’s data gathering: focus groups, an open campus forum, and USA representation on the Task Force itself. Throughout all of the discussions, there was no mention of the residential living experience as part of the ESF student experience. In this sense, we want to point out the importance of what was not discussed in these venues. The first-year experience is a formative time for college students, much of that time being spent outside the classroom. The majority of ESF students live in Centennial Hall, which means there should be a major living-learning connection. While students did not report a negative experience, they also did not mention the residential component as supportive to them or as a positive experience. This ambivalence is surprising and concerning since strong residential experiences are imperative to building community. As such, we recommend exploring the community and residential experience further with Student Affairs and Centennial Hall staff.

CONSIDERATIONS

Course instructors¹. In addition to the residential living experience, students’ courses and course instructors are the other formative piece of the first-year. There are proportionately very few instructors who teach first-year students, so a single instructor can be responsible for teaching 6–8 credits of a student’s first-year courses. As such, a single instructor can greatly affect a students’ perception of a course, a program, a department, and the College. This “instructor effect” is exacerbated at ESF because of the common set of courses for first-year students; chemistry, math, biology, and writing. The lack of course diversity in the first-year curriculum presents a limited view of ESF’s offerings and values.

¹ The term Instructor is used to indicate an individual teaching a course. It does not suggest rank or formal ESF/SUNY title.
Table 2. Strategic recommendations based on group and stakeholder input.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention focus</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Theme IDs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student Experience & Satisfaction | • Coordinate first-year course exam dates  
• Encourage & acknowledge good teaching practices from faculty  
• Implement course size restrictions based on space and disciplinary norms  
• Training on microaggressions and bias in and out of the classroom  
• Increase cultural diversity among faculty  
• Engage first-year students in meaningful program-focused experiences  
• Engage faculty beyond first-year instructors in Orientation | 2, 4, 5, 9, 14 |
## Intervention focus

- **Curriculum, Instruction, & Advising**

### Recommendation

- Curricular program review to determine and implement flexibility in sequencing or course options
- Implementation of “trailer courses” for Bio I/II and Chem I/II
- Set out expectations for faculty teaching first-year courses, including pedagogy and soft skills
- Implement professional academic advising in the 1st and 2nd years
- Purposeful and proactive advising
- Mandate midterm grade reporting
- Develop a common/shared set of outcomes for ESF 132
- Develop preparatory courses and/or modify course sequencing for students at-risk
- Prioritize first-year credit completion
- Post course syllabi on College websites

### Theme IDs

- 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 14

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### How do students rate their interactions with academic advisors?

**33%** of first-year students gave the quality of their interactions with academic advisors a "high" rating.

*NSSE Pocket Guide, 2017*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention focus</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Theme IDs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Accessibility & Support | • Implement professional academic advising in the 1st and 2nd year students  
• Maximize individual and small group interactions through recitations, posted office hours, and informal meetings  
• Hire a Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion for underrepresented people  
• Enroll students in recommended math course  
• Provide accurate, transparent, and accessible course grade information and grade prediction  
• Implement a Summer Bridge Program for underrepresented and at-risk students  
• Increase funding and access to direct academic support resources  
• Implement a midterm academic early alert system  
• Fix student photos and preferred pronouns in Student Information System  
• Provide stakeholder access to student schedules (faculty, advisor, Student Affairs Staff) | • 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14 |
COST VS. IMPACT

The major concern for the Task Force was balancing impact for student success with cost of implementation. Our group struggled with this throughout the process and ended up categorizing recommendations based upon both cost and impact. Specifically, our recommendations rely heavily on the areas of low-cost high-impact, and high-cost high-impact. It is also important to note that recommendations that have a high-cost often also require time to develop and implement, which defrays costs from a chronological perspective. With that said, we have also developed a large set of low-cost high impact recommendations ready for implementation as soon as fall 2019.

The last categorization scheme will indicate chronology for implementation.
1. Coordinate first-year course exam dates
2. Post specific office hours for all advisors and instructors
3. Post course syllabi on College websites
4. Enroll students in recommended math course
5. Engage faculty beyond first-year instructors in Orientation
6. Provide accurate, transparent, and accessible course grade information and grade prediction
7. Set expectations for faculty teaching first-year courses, including pedagogy and soft skills
8. Maximize individual and small group interactions through recitations, posted office hours, and informal meetings
9. Implement course size restrictions based on space and disciplinary norms
10. Engage first-year students in meaningful program-focused experiences
11. Develop a common rubric for ESF 132
12. Mandate midterm grade reporting
13. Encourage and acknowledge good teaching from faculty
14. Require training on microaggressions and bias in and out of the classroom
15. Review curriculum to determine and implement flexibility in sequencing or course options
16. Provide stakeholder access to student schedules (faculty, advisor, Student Affairs Staff)
17. Fix student photos and preferred pronouns in Student Info System
18. Implement a midterm academic early alert system
19. Encourage purposeful and proactive advising
20. Prioritize first-year credit completion
21. Implement “trailer courses” for Bio I/II and Chem I/II
22. Develop preparatory courses and/or modify course sequencing for students at-risk
23. Increase funding and access to direct academic support resources
24. Hire a Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion for underrepresented people
25. Implement a Summer Bridge Program for underrepresented and at-risk students
26. Create a Center for Teaching & Learning
27. Professional academic advising in the 1st and 2nd years
28. Increase cultural diversity among faculty
## Recommendations Ranked: Impact & Cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rec #</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Percent impacted</th>
<th>Rank of effort/cost</th>
<th>Time to implement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coordinate first-year course exam dates</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Post specific office hours for all advisors and instructors</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Post course syllabi on College websites</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enroll students in recommended math course</td>
<td>Math-adverse</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Engage faculty beyond first-year instructors in Orientation</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Provide accurate, transparent, and accessible course grade information and prediction</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Set out expectations for faculty teaching first-year courses, including pedagogy and soft skills</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Maximize individual and small group interactions through recitations, posted office hours, and informal meetings</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Implement course size restrictions based on space and disciplinary norms</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Engage first-year students in meaningful program-focused experiences</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Develop a common rubric for ESF 132</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mandate midterm grade reporting</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4mo-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rec #</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
<td>Target population</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Encourage &amp; acknowledge good teaching practices from faculty</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 - 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Training on microaggressions and bias in and out of the classroom</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Curricular program review to determine and implement flexibility in sequencing or course options</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Provide stakeholder access to student schedules (faculty, advisor, Student Affairs Staff)</td>
<td>At risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Fix student photos and preferred pronouns in Student Info System</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Immediate-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Implement a midterm academic early alert system</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Immediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Purposeful and proactive advising</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Prioritize first-year credit completion</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Implementation of “trailer courses” for Bio I/II and Chem I/II</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Immediate-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Develop preparatory courses and/or modify course sequencing for at-risk students</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Immediate-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Increase funding and access of direct academic support resources</td>
<td>At-risk</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Immediate-1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hire a Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion for underrepresented people</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Implement a Summer Bridge Program for underrepresented and at-risk students</td>
<td>Underrepresented</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Create a Center for Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Professional academic advising in the 1st and 2nd years</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Increase cultural diversity among faculty</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
60% of the Task Force recommendations are considered low effort/cost

Our goal was to assess current barriers that exist within the first-year experience and find ways to address any unmet needs. Our process of inquiry was data driven, and incorporated perspectives from the entire campus community. The philosophical underpinning of our Task Force was simple. ESF has the tools, knowledge, and resources necessary to address these issues internally, and we wanted to be sensitive to the financial barriers that currently exist. Some of the recommendations include higher cost projects, however, most of those items will have a dramatic return on investment, or are necessary to ensure success of targeted student populations in need of support.

A majority of our recommendations are low cost, but will necessitate a campus commitment and policy changes in order to fulfill these needs. It is our objective to move swiftly to enact low or no cost items by the fall 2019. However, in order for these recommendations to be actualized it will require vetting and approval by IQAS and Academic Governance. We believe that these strategic interventions will address issues of both retention and student satisfaction within the first-year, as well as support the faculty experience. As recommendations are implemented, the First-Year Experience Committee will review retention data and reassess progress or emerging areas of need.

How did we assess and address the first-year experience?

- Student Retention Data Review
- Comprehensive Literature Review
- Faculty & Student Focus Groups
- Coding and Theme Development
- Campus Feedback Forum
- Feasibility & Reporting
- Commitment & Action
INITIAL STEPS

The Task Force suggests the following steps for getting started in order to make the highest impact in the shortest amount of time:

✓ All recommendations that come at low cost will be implemented immediately by stakeholders working together collegially, keeping the focus on student success.

✓ The Provost or Dean of Instruction will ask all department chairs to complete a curricular review of their first-year student schedules and subsequent course sequences that lead to bottlenecks, completion issues, and most importantly, flexibility in the first semester to avoid taking biology, chemistry, and calculus within the first semester where possible.

✓ The Task Force will ask IQAS and USA to review the proposed curricular and policy changes and submit a joint resolution to Academic Governance by mid-fall.

✓ Initiate a “Success at ESF” campaign focused on different stakeholders: students, faculty/staff, and administration.

✓ Subsequent accepted recommendations will be considered as part of ESF’s 5-year strategic plan.
Original Task Force Charge

The Task Force is charged with looking at the present first year experience at ESF and coming up with an action plan to improve student retention, satisfaction, and success. Issues to be addressed may include, but certainly are not limited to, the following:

- Improving student performance in foundational courses with large enrollments
  - ‘Learning Communities’ at ESF: design, implementation, support
  - Optimal lecture and lab sizes
  - Use of placement exams
  - Developmental / remedial courses
  - Use of student metrics and data analytics
  - Instructional support
  - Early warning systems
  - Facilities needs
- Degree requirements and financial aid considerations
- Integrating developmental / remedial courses in curriculum
- Increasing curriculum flexibility where possible
  - Transfer students
  - Issues with SUNY ‘seamless’ and Gen Ed transfer requirements
- Preparation for comparative rigor of ESF coursework
- Online tools and resources (aside from Blackboard)
- Inclusive classrooms and community learning spaces
- Changes to course evaluation approaches and tools
- Graduate teaching assistant (GA) selection, training, and evaluation
- Impacts of potential enrollment growth
- Out-of-classroom support
  - Academic advising
  - Student health and counseling
  - Tutoring (peer and professional)
  - Disability services
  - Diversity and inclusion
  - Centennial Hall activities
  - First-year orientation
  - Transfer student orientation

Timeline and Deliverables

A working draft plan, including specific, prioritized, and actionable recommendations is needed by xxx 2019 in order to begin implementation for the 2019-2020 AY. Recommendations should consider approximate timelines and appropriate stakeholders/venues for vetting and implementation of proposed actions, which may involve individual faculty, degree coordinators, unit heads, department chairs, AG Committees, Student Affairs, ESF administrative offices, SUNY system, etc. This information will provide a ‘road map’ for implementing priority and near-term recommendations - and is a critical deliverable of this effort. Given the urgency and complexity of the underlying challenges, the draft plan and roadmap will be a ‘living’ document to be reexamined and adapted as learning occurs and circumstances evolve.
Mock up of ESF Success Campaign Advertising & Outcomes:

Success at ESF

ESF students are an amazing group of humans from across the globe, all focused on one thing - improving their world. While it can sound daunting, there are some simple steps to success.

- **Visit office hours**
  Office hours are a great way to know your instructor and help them help you! Look on the course webpage or syllabus for office hour information.

- **Take time**
  Physical and emotional health are connected. Take time to exercise and eat well. Bonus - you'll learn better too!

- **Sleep**
  Sleeping helps you learn! Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep every night. Your brain remembers more when you sleep more!

- **Just Ask**
  Don't know what is due? Just need someone to talk to? Want to vent? Find the right place and just ask!
Special thank you to the students, Task Force members, faculty, administration, and staff who actively participated in the data collection, consultation, feedback, forum, and analysis process.
Works Cited


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