Establishing the Roots for a Solid Foundation:
New Student Experience Institutional Task Force
College of Environmental Science and Forestry
2018–19

ESF is a STEM-focused, Carnegie doctoral institution with a national reputation for rigorous training in basic and applied natural sciences, engineering, social sciences and landscape architecture. For most undergraduate majors, the first year of ESF coursework consists of a challenging full slate of foundational courses (biology, chemistry, calculus, and writing). This challenge is compounded by the diverse backgrounds and levels of preparation of incoming students who may not have adequate/necessary relevant coursework in high school. To promote better student outcomes and retention, many leading institutions implement a variety of first-year programs and support initiatives. Among the most successful are ‘learning communities’ and variations on that concept, e.g., first year interest groups (FIGs) at UW-Madison and the STEM Collaboratives on eight campuses of the California State University system. The latter programs at CSU, which encompass a variety of models, yielded significant gains in retention and satisfaction for CSU’s first-generation college students in STEM majors. As a science-focused institution, we are well-placed to build initiatives based on the abundant scholarly research on teaching, student learning, student experiences, mentorship & advising, retention and other related topic, and to evaluate the efficacy of new initiative through collecting data on student outcomes and experiences and make modifications through an adaptive management process.

The President, in consultation with ESF Academic Governance, has established a task force focused on enhancing the new student experience. The membership includes:

Co-Chairs
- Neal Abrams, Associate Professor (FCH) and Chair, Student Life Committee
- Amelia Hoffman, Academic Success Coordinator, Office of Student Affairs

Task Force Members
- Nasri Abdul-Aziz, Instructor and Placement Coordinator, APM, Gen Ed Division
- Eileen Baldasarre, CSTEP Coordinator, Office of Student Affairs
- Malika Carter, Chief Diversity Officer
- Erin Craig, Associate Provost of Enrollment and Marketing
- Jeanine DeBaise, Instructor, Environmental Writing Program
- Melissa Fierke, 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 and Curriculum Committee
- John Turbeville, Office of Student Affairs
- USA representative James Quinn
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
  o ‘Learning Communities’ at ESF: design, implementation, support
  o Optimal lecture and lab sizes
  o Use of placement exams
  o Developmental / remedial courses
  o Use of student metrics and data analytics
  o Instructional support
  o Early warning systems
  o Facilities needs
- Degree requirements and financial aid considerations
  o Integrating developmental / remedial courses in curriculum
  o Increasing curriculum flexibility where possible
- Transfer students
  o Issues with SUNY ‘seamless’ and Gen Ed transfer requirements
  o 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
  o Academic advising
  o Student health and counseling
  o Tutoring (peer and professional)
  o Disability services
  o Diversity and inclusion
  o Centennial Hall activities
  o First-year orientation
  o Transfer student orientation

**Timeline and Deliverables**

A working draft plan, including *specific, prioritized, and actionable recommendations* is needed by June 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.