



The Undergraduate Education Office and First-Year Offerings

Custom Research Brief

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

A member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

Organizational Structures

- *What organizational structures do contact institutions use for offices of undergraduate education? What is the faculty's affiliation with the offices?*

Coordinating Lower Division Offerings

- *How do contact institutions coordinate lower division offerings? How does the core curriculum coordinate with prerequisites for majors, and how is the curriculum structured to meet student demand? At what administrative level are offerings coordinated? Do contact institutions offer year-long freshman academic programs, and if so, are they administered through the office of undergraduate education?*

Assessment and Evaluation

- *Do institutions conduct regular evaluations of lower division offerings? What metrics determine the effectiveness of the offerings?*

Sources:

- Education Advisory Board's internal research library <http://www.educationadvisoryboard.com>
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- Profiled institutions' websites

Research Parameters:

The Council contacted vice provosts and deans for undergraduate studies at public research institutions.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (CONT.)

A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief				
Institution	Location	Campus Setting	Carnegie Classification	Approximate Total Enrollment (Fall 2009)
University A	Pacific West	City: Large	Research Universities (high research activity)	28,000
University B	Pacific West	City: Large	Research Universities (very high research activity)	19,000
University C	Mid-Atlantic	Suburb: Large	Research Universities (high research activity)	13,000
University D	South	Suburb: Large	Research Universities (very high research activity)	29,000
University E	Pacific West	City: Midsize	Research Universities (very high research activity)	22,000

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

II. EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Key Observations:

- **Offices of undergraduate education across contact institutions typically oversee academic counseling, honors programs, select scholarships, and assist with the coordination of undergraduate curricula.** The offices are typically responsible for student success across the entire institution.
- **Although offices of undergraduate education are partially involved with coordinating lower division curricula for entire institutions, college deans and department leaders are ultimately responsible for implementing significant changes.** If disagreements arise, then mandates for change are typically determined by the vice president for academic affairs or provost.
- **Core curriculum requirements are typically determined with an emphasis on shared governance across all colleges and academic units.** Although offices of undergraduate education are involved in the process for developing learning outcomes, core curriculum committees are typically created by faculty senates to determine learning outcomes.
- **Faculty assignments for lower division offerings are coordinated at either the college or departmental level.** Contacts report that offices of undergraduate education are not responsible for selecting faculty members to teach specific lower division courses.
- **Contact institutions conduct regular evaluations of undergraduate education offerings, but offices of undergraduate education do not always oversee the evaluation processes.** In many cases, offices of undergraduate education supplement the evaluation processes; at University A, the office is responsible for communicating and coordinating curricula changes across the University after individual academic departments and colleges have conducted evaluations.

III. OFFICE STRUCTURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Overview of Undergraduate Education Offices

Administrators within the Office of Undergraduate Education	
University E	<p><i>The following individuals report to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies • Director of Academic Advising • Senior Director of Disability Services • Director of Teaching & Learning Center • Director of First-Year Programs • Director of Student Orientation Programs • Executive Assistant to the Vice Provost
University B	<p><i>The following individuals report to the Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Undergraduate Education • Director, Institutional Research • Director, University Writing Program • Assistant Vice Provost and Executive Director, Academic of Learning through Partnerships for Higher Achievement (ALPHA) Center • Director, Academic Resource Center • Assistant Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education (Student Success & Undergraduate Research) • Assistant Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education (Summer and Honors Programs) • Special Assistant to the Vice Provost
University D	<p><i>The following individuals report to the Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director of Robertson Scholars Program • Associate Dean and Director of the Academic Advising Program • Retention Director • Associate Dean for Honors Program and Director of Center for Undergraduate Excellence • Director for Distinguished Scholarships • Director for Undergraduate Research • Associate Dean for First-Year Seminars and Academic Experiences • Associate Dean for Undergraduate Curricula • Associate Dean and Director of the Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling
University C	<p><i>The following individuals report to the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education • Academic Standards and Policy Specialist • Director, Learning Resources Center • Director, Meyerhoff Scholars Program • Director, Women's Center • Director, Honors College

III. OFFICE STRUCTURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Coordinating Academic Success Initiatives

At most contact institutions, the mission of the office for undergraduate education includes coordinating and promoting educational opportunities for students across the university. Most commonly, the office's mission includes overseeing first-year and transfer programs, assisting in the development and assessment of curricula and academic policies, and providing students with the necessary resources for promoting academic success.

Offices of Undergraduate Education: Select Areas of Involvement

University A

- General education (University Studies)
- Honors program
- Pre-PhD program for undergraduates
- Faculty development programs
- Academic support services
- National Guard commissioning program
- Assessment and accreditation
- Grants, scholarships, and undergraduate leadership awards
- Curricular development

University B

- Involvement in K-12 education
- Study abroad programs
- Faculty development programs
- Academic support services
- First-year programs
- Institutional and undergraduate research
- Summer sessions
- Writing program
- Honors program
- Assessment and accreditation

University C

- General education
- First-year seminars
- Honors program
- Academic advising
- Academic support services
- Peer mentoring
- Scholarship programs
- Undergraduate research
- Experiential education
- Undergraduate retention

University D

- Summer bridge program
- Living-learning communities
- First-year seminars
- Introduction to an honors university seminar
- General education
- Academic policy administration
- Writing intensive program
- Undergraduate research

University E

- Student orientation
- First-year programs
- Academic advising
- General education
- Academic support services
- Faculty development
- Disability services
- Affiliated honors programs

IV. COORDINATING LOWER DIVISION OFFERINGS

Committee and Departmental Authority

At most contact institutions, the authority for decisions regarding lower division offerings rests with the appropriate faculty or university committees rather than with the office of undergraduate education. The vice provost or dean for undergraduate education is typically responsible for determining whether or not an institution's overall educational offerings meet established learning outcomes and prerequisites for majors. This role allows for a broad perspective of undergraduate offerings and encourages collaboration among academic units.

Promoting Prerequisite Review at *University A*

Recent changes to the math placement process at **University A** have spurred discussions regarding prerequisite requirements at the institution. According to contacts, the previous process placed students in courses that were too advanced, and as a result, students had difficulty succeeding in the courses. Although the revised testing and placement process is expected to better place students in the future, contacts expect that demand for lower division math courses will rise and students will need to complete more math courses in order to meet existing major prerequisites. In response, the vice provost in the division of University Studies is assembling the deans and facilitating discussions on any changes that are required regarding course prerequisites across the entire institution. Although the vice provost is leading the discussion, the deans are ultimately responsible for implementing changes. Contacts report that although the provost may provide directives to the deans, the three faculty unions maintain a significant level of authority with regard to changes to prerequisites.

Summer Sessions and Writing Programs at *University B*

Although most curricular decisions are managed by individual academic departments at **University B**, administrative oversight for summer sessions and the writing falls under the purview of the Office of Undergraduate Education. Contacts indicate that this structure is a natural extension of the Office's mission: assisting and supporting students' academic success across all colleges within the institution.

Approving General Education Courses

Although committees at several contact institutions are responsible for overseeing and approving general education curriculum, the development of individual courses is typically conducted at the departmental level. In most cases, general education approval consists of two steps:

- Instructors must seek approval from their department chair or dean before submitting a course for approval within the general education curriculum.
- Instructors must identify and explain to the general education committee why their course meets the specific requirements associated with the general education program.

General education committees or undergraduate education offices maintain a predetermined list of learning outcomes or requirements for use in the general education approval process. At **University C**, for example, the Office of Undergraduate Education does not have the authority to create or modify specific requirements. The Office is responsible, however, for developing the form used by the faculty senate's general education committee. A copy of the institution's general education requirements is included with this report as an appendix.

IV. COORDINATING LOWER DIVISION OFFERINGS (CONT.)

Select Institutional Profiles

First-Year Course Sequence at *University A*

As part of the University Studies general education program at **University A**, the Freshman Inquiry program, or FRINQ, is designed to organize students' first-year studies into themes which fulfill four goals: inquiry and critical thinking, communication, the diversity of human experience, and ethics and social responsibility. For the 2011-2012 academic year, students may choose from nine different themes:

FRINQ Themes for 2011-2012		
Design & Society	Globalization	Human/Nature
Life Unlimited?	Institution City	Race and Social Justice
Sustainability	Ways of Knowing	The Work of Art

All entering first-year students, with the exception of honors and Liberal Studies students, are required to enroll in a FRINQ course theme. Each course group, which consists of no more than 36 students, meets four times per week; two sessions are led by a member of the faculty team assigned to the theme, and two sessions are led by a student peer mentor.



What are the responsibilities of peer mentors?

Peer mentors at **University A** are full-time upper-division undergraduate or graduate students that lead 12-student sessions and work closely with faculty to implement goals outlined for each course theme. The institution employs more than 100 mentors, who must undergo a rigorous selection and evaluation process. All mentors must complete a four-credit training course in the spring prior to working as mentors with a grade of "B+" or higher, complete a two-week training course in the fall, and are required to maintain at least a 3.25 GPA. Additionally, peer mentors must participate in seven hours of training throughout the quarter. The institution estimates that peer mentors work approximately 10-20 hours per week, but the institutions pays for up to 12 credits of tuition (9 credits for graduate students) and a monthly stipend.

FRINQ Course Assessment

In order to assess the effectiveness of each FRINQ course, students are required to complete at least four separate questionnaires: one before the FRINQ course to measure prior learning, and one after each of the three FRINQ terms throughout the year. Sample copies of each questionnaire are included with this report as appendices.

IV. COORDINATING LOWER DIVISION OFFERINGS (CONT.)

FRINQ Student Portfolio Assessment

Student portfolios are randomly evaluated as part of the assessment process for the FRINQ program. In 2010, approximately 230 student portfolios (out of 494 students who consented to their review) at **University A** were evaluated based on the four goals of the FRINQ program. Each goal is assigned a score between one and six based on separate rubrics (a score of six being the highest). Ideally, a student completing the FRINQ program should be able to demonstrate the following aptitudes:

High-Scoring FRINQ Assessments	
Inquiry and Critical Thinking	<p><i>Consistently does all or almost all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc • Identifies the salient arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con • Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view • Generates alternative explanations of phenomena or event • Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons • Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead • Makes ethical judgments
Communication (Includes Writing and Quantitative Literacy)	<p><i>Consistently does all or almost all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the ability to communicate clearly for a variety of purposes and diverse audiences • Shows the mark of the writer's own labor, critical judgment, and rhetorical shaping • Marked by lucid and orderly thinking, substantial depth, fullness and complexity of thought • Articulates metacognition on the writer's part: analysis of learning strategies, revision techniques and improvement in writing skills • Evidences control of diction, syntactic variety, and usage • Demonstrates evidence of ability to conduct independent research and to integrate the results with other methodologies in original work • Comprehensively displays meaning of statistical significance, calculus, a comprehensive understanding of causality and correlation, applications of normal curves and outliers to physical and social phenomena and an integrated comprehension of linear regression
The Diversity of Human Experience	<p><i>Consistently does all or almost all of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creatively and comprehensively demonstrates an understanding of personal, institutional and ideological issues surrounding diversity in a scholarly fashion, using concrete examples • Work reflects an ability to view issues from multiple perspectives, to question what is being taught, and to construct independent meaning and interpretations • Demonstrates broad awareness of how the self appears from the greater perspective of human experience, questions own views in light of this awareness, and contemplates its implications for life choices in the personal and public spheres
Ethics and Social Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio creatively and comprehensively articulates approaches to ethical issues and social responsibility, in a scholarly manner, citing specific evidence. Demonstrates an ability to view multiple sides of these issues, to question what is being taught, and to construct independent meaning and interpretations. • Portfolio presents well-developed ideas on the role of ethical issues and social responsibility in both private and public life. Demonstrates a deep awareness of how a conceptual understanding of ethical issues and social responsibility manifests concretely in one's own personal choices, including decisions on when and how to act.

IV. COORDINATING LOWER DIVISION OFFERINGS (CONT.)

Avoiding Oversimplification of General Education Requirements at *University E*

Although institutional efforts to create general education requirements that are easy to understand can benefit students and the faculty, contacts at **University E** report that oversimplification can create a program that is unsustainable. For approximately four years, the institution's general education model, known as Pathways, consisted of six different themes (e.g., Human Nature Pathway, Exploring Culture Pathway, Law, Science Culture Pathway). Students were expected to take specific courses outlined in each theme for their first two years at the institution. Although the program was initially popular with students and faculty due to its straightforwardness, the program ultimately proved to be too restrictive; students who wanted to take a wide variety of courses or participate in the study abroad program were often stymied due to the course requirements associated with their Pathways theme. The institution attempted to remedy this issue by shortening the Pathways requirement to one year, but contacts express that the one-year requirement was also too restrictive. Ultimately, the Pathways program was dissolved and the funding was used to expand the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program.



What is the Freshman Interest Group Program?

Approximately twenty to twenty-five first-year students enrolling in two general education courses and a first-year seminar comprise each FIG at University E. The one-credit seminars, which are typically led by an instructor from one of the two general education courses, consists of assignments, projects, and discussions related to an overall FIG theme. Students may choose to participate in residential or nonresidential FIGs; students in residential FIGs are housed in residence halls close to each other and members of similar FIGs, while students in nonresidential FIGs are not assigned to specific halls.

Professional Services Note

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