

Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher
Transitions to University Task Force Report: Three Years Later

Faculty and staff Task Force members reunited in December 2006 to review progress towards the TUTF recommendations and provide insight as to future directions. The Task Force members recommended that the progress to date be shared with the campus community.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to identify the progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the December 2003 Transitions to University Task Force (TUTF) report, ***Everyone a Learner, Everyone a Teacher***. As a result of senior administrative support and efforts by administrators, faculty and staff representing *all* segments of the university, measured progress has been made. In addition, the retention rates for first to second-year returning students have risen from 80.9% in 2001 to 84.4% in 2006. Four and five year graduation rates have also increased.

In fall 2003, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Richard Edwards charged a group of faculty, staff and students (Transitions to University Task Force) to... *review and assess the effectiveness of first-year undergraduate orientation programs and courses...to result in a proposed framework or plan for coordinating and supporting these separate programs* (p.2). The Transitions to University Task Force (TUTF) work was guided by a simple question: ***How do we better prepare our students to be intentional learners?*** Through gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by first-year students, the Task Force believed it could...*identify key resources and strategies to assist with transition, connect students with the energy of the university's intellectual environment and prepare them for their life's work* (p.14).

As preparation, the Task Force reviewed the following university documents: *First Year Learning Task Force Report* (1999); the *Future of Research and Graduate Education at UNL* (2020 Vision Report, 2000); *Intellectual Engagement and Achievement at UNL* (Blue Sky Committee Report, 2003); *UNL Institutional Indicators of Quality*; results from the *2002 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE)*; the *UNL Academy of Distinguished Teachers' "White Paper"*, and the 2001-02 *Noel-Levitz Consultation Recruitment and Retention Recommendations*. The 2002 AAC&U report, *Greater Expectations: A Nation Goes to College*, also guided the Task Force. Conversations regarding best practices were held with faculty responsible for teaching first year courses, faculty noted for their teaching expertise, student affairs personnel and administrators. Focus groups were held with groups of UNL students representing various academic constituencies and all levels of study.

Senior Administration has played an integral role towards addressing the Task Force's recommendations. In his 2004 State of the University Address, Chancellor Perlman announced establishment of funding ... *to support projects related to selective implementation of the recommendations of the Transitions to the University Task Force report or for such other activities relating to undergraduate education*. Administered by the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the *Initiative for Teaching and Learning Excellence (ITLE)* has provided an annual opportunity for faculty and staff to submit innovative proposals within a range of categories such as Advising for Success, Program Innovation, One Campus, Many Views, Teaching Fellowships and Continuous Improvement through Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes. Since 2004, close to

¹ all page number references are to ***Everyone A Learner, Everyone a Teacher***. Report from the Transition of University Task Force, December 2003.

\$900,000 has been competitively awarded to faculty and staff across the university to support innovation in undergraduate education. On March 29, 2007 the UNL campus will have an opportunity to learn about the projects funded under years 1 and 2 and the impact of those projects on undergraduate learning.

Task Force Recommendations: What has been accomplished?

- 1. First-year Core Courses.** The Task Force recommended that...*entering students participate in a substantive content-based, core course during their first year, offered by academic units that choose to identify existing courses that meet the core courses' learning outcomes. We encourage academic units to select from their existing stock of first- year courses, one course that would support the transition of first- year students to the academy* (p.7).

Follow-up: Several academic units have developed/ enhanced introductory courses to reflect the principles outlined in TUTFS report. Examples of courses are Engineering 010. Freshman Seminar in Engineering offered by the College of Engineering, and Agriculture 103. Introduction to Agricultural and Natural Resources Systems offered by the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

- 2. Comprehensive Education Program.** It was recommended that the current CEP program be reviewed as to its purpose and philosophy.

Follow-up: UNL is currently undergoing reform and revision of its CEP (General Education) program. The initiative is led by the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The General Education Planning Team (GEPT), chaired by Professor John Janovy, was formed to coordinate and implement the General Education review process across campus. The membership of GEPT and its advisory group, the General Education Advisory Committee (GEAC) is composed of faculty and staff representing units across campus. To increase their understanding of the reform and renewal process involved, members of the GEPT have attended two of the AAC&U Institutes on General Education. In addition, campus visits of national assessment consultants, Peggy Maki and Virginia Lee have increased understanding across the campus that assessment is a critical component in the new program. The goal is to complete the reform effort by AY 2007-08.

- 3. New Student Enrollment, Academic Orientation and Advising.**

A. New Student Enrollment. The Task Force learned through conversations with faculty and the student focus groups that the summer New Student Enrollment program provided a 'snapshot in time' of the university and should not be expected to function as the ultimate information source for new students and their parents. The Task Force suggested that NSE 1) place more focus on academics rather than social life and 2) spend less time on student skits in order to provide incoming students more time with academic advisors.

Follow-up: The Director of NSE in conjunction with the NSE Planning team, the Office of Admissions and the Office of Undergraduate Studies made several constructive changes to NSE. Examples of changes include:

- less time allocated for student skits and more time allocated with academic advisors
- a special session for parents on support for academic success at UNL
- follow-up to NSE by NSE Orientation Leaders with students assigned to them during NSE using email and Blackboard
- a formal assessment of student learning outcomes for student participation in NSE.

B. Mid semester Check-Point. Students who participated in the TUTF focus groups documented the need for entering students to participate in a timely review of academic responsibilities, as well as college and major requirements once these students were on campus.

Follow-up: Mid-Semester Check (MSC) was implemented in the fall 2004. During the fifth week of classes entering first-year and transfer students came to the Nebraska Union for an evening with faculty/staff and NSE Orientation leaders. Faculty and staff presenters at the event provided students the opportunity to review their progress to that point in the semester, offered tips for academic success in large classes and in specific disciplines, encouraged students to meet with their academic advisor for spring semester registration and prepared them for that important conversation. In 2006, MSC served close to 1500 students over a four night period. N-Cards were scanned to record attendance and that information was forwarded to academic units to help track students' progress toward graduation. Student evaluations of MSE indicated this is a useful activity and several students requested a shortened spring semester version of MSC.

C. Advising and Academic Support Services

i. **Academic advising** was a major issue that emerged from the student focus groups. Advising takes many forms at UNL and the Task Force questioned the efficiency and effectiveness of so many models.

Follow-up: To improve campus wide communication, the Admissions, Advising and Retention group was formed as a working sub-committee of the Enrollment Management Council. The group, chaired by the Dean of OUS, meets monthly to discuss admissions and advising issues. In 2005-06 the group emphasized sharing 'best practices' for advising. In addition, OUS publishes a monthly electronic newsletter available to all academic advisors and campus units. This contains information about upcoming campus-wide academic programs, events, and opportunities for student support.

The 2005 theme for the ITLE Grant submissions was **ADVISING**. Fifteen proposals representing all seven undergraduate colleges and student affairs were funded. Examples of proposals funded were: *An Academic and Student Affairs Initiative to Promote Student Transition to College Life*, a collaboration between the College of Business Administration and the Office of Admissions, *Transforming Academic Advising to Enhance Student Learning and Success* (Department of Psychology), *Advising for Architecture and Interior Design* (College of Architecture), and *The Power of Possibilities*, an interactive website designed by staff from Career Services and the Division of General Studies to help students explore academic majors related to their interests.

ii. **Academic Support.** The task force also recommended that additional resources be directed to provide academic support based on the Supplemental Instruction and Math EXCEL models to all sections of first-year courses, using advanced student peer mentors who regularly interact with the faculty member and facilitate small group work.

Follow-up: OUS has provided additional funds to expand the Math EXCEL program. Final grades for MATH EXCEL students have consistently ranged from 0.5 to 0.9 GPA points higher than the other non-MATH EXCEL students in the same lecture, taking the same exams. OUS has also directed POE funds to expand the highly successful program, Supplemental Instruction. The SI program has been in place since 1991. Since that time, over 13,000 students have benefited from SI. Performance levels of students participating in SI ranged from $\geq .5$ to ≥ 1.0 grade points higher than students in the same courses who did not participate in SI.

In 2003, OUS piloted a new initiative, the **Undergraduate Teaching Assistance Corps (UTAC)**. **UTAC** is a program that is patterned after the successful **UCARE** model, yet retains

the valuable SI component. **UTAC** students are sponsored by a faculty mentor. The student is trained in the Supplemental Instruction technique, serving as a peer mentor to students in a section of a first year course. The student also works with the faculty mentor on other aspects of teaching and learning. As of fall 2007, the combined **UTAC/SI** model will replace the SI model.

- iii. **Division of General Studies.** It was recommended that credit hour limitations be instituted for students in the Division of General Studies. These students would be required to complete the process for declaring a major by the time they have completed 60 credit hours of work at UNL

Follow-up: Further analysis is underway to determine the impact of this on the colleges.

4. *The Nebraska Colloquium.*

The task force recommended that the traditional "Summer Read" be dissolved and in its place, the campus considers instituting the **Nebraska Colloquium** <http://www.unl.edu/nc/>. The goal of the **Colloquium** is *to create an intellectual community that engages students, staff, faculty, and the larger community around a common theme, resulting in an exchange of ideas and reflections from which all will profit* (see Appendix C, p.20).

Follow-up: A proposal outlining the colloquium concept was presented in fall 2006 to the Dean's Council, Enrollment Management Council and other entities for consideration. It was recommended that the theme established for the EN Thompson Forum for AY07-08, the **Environment**, be adapted as the campus wide inaugural colloquium theme for AY 07-08. During spring 2007, Drs. Berger and Kean met with entities across campus to introduce the **Colloquium** and discuss how units might contribute to the 2007-08 Nebraska **Colloquium** theme. A post card and calendar will be sent to the university community in Fall 2007 and the website calendar will be continually updated with related events.

5. **Academic and Residence Life: Learning/ Scholars Communities and Staff Preparation**

A) It was recommended that a formal assessment of the Learning Communities be conducted with sponsoring academic units, housing staff and learning community students.

Follow-up: The newly appointed Learning Communities Coordinator, Annemarie Williams and OUS Dean met with each Learning Community Faculty Advisor during spring 2007 to discuss the current state of each of the Learning/Scholars Communities, as well as identify the unit's intended learning outcomes for their Learning Community participants. Over the past few years there has been an evolution in the underlying principles of the Learning Community, resulting in the establishment of Scholars Learning Communities, which are multi-disciplinary and intellectually driven. The EN Thompson Scholar and JS Morrill Scholars (CASNR) are examples of such communities.

B) It was apparent from the student focus groups that Resident Assistants often serve as the first connection between the entering student and the university. It was suggested that a more coordinated effort be made between the Offices of Undergraduate Studies and Residence Life to insure RA's have needed information and that it be delivered in a timely fashion.

Follow-up: Closer ties have been forged between OUS and Housing. OUS staff share information with the Resident Directors and Resident Assistants during the yearly training of Housing staff. The Director of Housing joins the OUS faculty and staff during their unit meeting at least once a semester to share information and discuss issues.

6. **Enrollment Management Practices.** The Task Force recommended that ...*Academic units need to give more serious attention for planning first- year courses and appropriate numbers of sections. We recommend the Enrollment Management Council take a serious look at course demand during NSE, and how entering students are accommodated* (p. 13).

Follow-up: In 2004 the Enrollment Management Council approved the request from the Dean of Admissions to establish an enrollment deposit fee date by which the enrollment deposit is accepted. This policy allowed us in spring 2006 to provide colleges with projected numbers of incoming students expected to enroll in high demand courses. The Chancellor and SVCAA supported the efforts of units to accommodate students and in fall 2006, most entering students were able to enroll in needed course. There were fewer expressions of student dissatisfaction with course schedules.

In 2006, the Director of Institutional Research and Planning chaired a committee representative of the academic community and developed an Enrollment Management Profile template for use by academic units in their reporting and decision-making activities.

7. **Faculty Recognition and Support.** The TUFT members believed that faculty responsible for teaching first year courses, many of whom are at the level of Senior Lecturer, should receive recognition and support for their efforts.

Follow-up: In 2004, the Chancellor instituted the ITLE Grants which provided funding opportunities for faculty/staff to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The Professor of Practice, a term that describes untenured, multi-year teaching track positions is a new designation approved by the NU Board of Regents in fall 2006.

The Task Force Report stimulated discussion across campus about the importance of student retention. Many units provided leadership for programs beyond the recommendations of this report. Examples are:

- Academic unit's shared best practices in student retention (see <http://www.retain.unl.edu>).
- The Office of Research and Graduate Studies, the Center for Science, Mathematics and Computer Education, and the Office of Undergraduate Studies provided 'seed' funding (AY 2003-05) to faculty for development and enhancement of innovative curriculum initiatives.
- The Department of Human Resources, Division of Business and Finance, partnered with Student Involvement (Student Affairs) to develop and deliver a series of workshops on how all units might contribute to student retention through improved service to students.

Future Directions

Task Force members continue to provide leadership and play key roles across campus working towards continuous improvement of the UNL undergraduate experience. The group recommended they serve as an informal advisory group to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, meeting once a semester to discuss topics of importance to the undergraduate student experience. There is still much to work to do as the campus community continues toward *the pursuit of excellence*, as identified in the *2020 Vision* report.

Task Force members thank members of the Senior Administration Team, the Deans and all the members of the campus community for their leadership and support in embracing and acting upon the recommendations in the TUTF report. We believe the next campus-wide initiative should focus on a review of the second-year student experience, as the yearly attrition rate of returning second to third year students increases by an average of 12%. The major question to be addressed is **how do we support the student experience beyond the first year so students may continue their intellectual and personal development, and successfully complete their undergraduate degree?**

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