



Foundations of Excellence[®]

In the First College Year

PROJECT DETAILS – www.fyfoundations.org

Note: This printable document is a condensed version of material available on the above Website. For more detailed information about all aspects of the Foundations of Excellence process, go to the Website or contact the Policy Center directly at 828-966-5401, info@fyfoundations.org.

What is Foundations of Excellence?

Now more than ever in challenging economic times, your campus needs a strategic action plan for the critical beginning college experience. Foundations of Excellence[®] will yield a new vision for enhanced learning and retention of first-year and transfer students as well as priorities for resource allocation. Foundations of Excellence is a comprehensive, externally guided self-study and improvement process for the first year. **New for 2009 is the expanded capacity of the self-study process to include a focus on transfer students.** The centerpiece of Foundations of Excellence is a model for first-year excellence comprised of a set of principles that are termed Foundational Dimensions[®]. These Dimensions, developed by the Policy Center on the First Year of College and vetted by over 300 institutions, guide measurement of institutional efforts and provide an aspirational model for the entirety of the beginning college experience. (initial contact with students through admissions, orientation, and all first-year curricular and co-curricular experiences.) These Dimensions also provide an intellectual foundation for the entirety of the undergraduate experience.

Highlights

Foundations of Excellence is a process that . . .

- revitalizes a campus's approach to the first year
- moves the retention conversation to a more intentional focus on educational quality
- is the "what's next" for many campuses who have already made significant efforts to improve the beginning college experience
- moves away from a piecemeal approach to the first year toward an intentional comprehensive approach
- focuses on institutional behavior rather than student behavior
- is grounded in more than three decades of reform and research conducted by its principals
- engages faculty, in addition to other constituent groups, in first-year reform efforts
- links academic and student affairs in a collegial process
- involves institutional research / assessment professionals
- extends beyond unit-level assessment to institution-wide assessment
- utilizes qualitative assessment supported by quantitative data and external support
- can be integrated with accreditation-related assessment measurements

Participation in Foundations of Excellence is open to any regionally accredited four- or two-year postsecondary institution in the United States and comparable educational institutions in other countries.

The process is designed to be completed in approximately one calendar year; however, should it require additional time, participating campuses have two-year electronic access to all Foundations materials.

The engine of The Foundations of Excellence® process is a campus-based task force – a group with broad representation from across the campus. The work of the task force begins with a campus audit of the first year (the “Current Practices Inventory”) and continues with a nine- to twelve-month process of evaluation using the Foundational Dimensions® and related performance indicators (P.I.’s), and culminates in the development of a strategic action plan for campus improvement.

The Foundations of Excellence process is the signature work of the Policy Center on the First Year of College. The center, founded in October 1999, has enjoyed the support of the following philanthropies for the development of its work: The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Lumina Foundation for Education, USA Funds and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. The Policy Center collaborates with Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI) to provide the supporting technology infrastructure and surveys of faculty/staff and students in support of the self-study process.

What Foundations of Excellence Participants Receive: A Comprehensive Package of Services and Products

Twelve months of intensive consulting support by a team of highly experienced professionals led by John N. Gardner of the Policy Center. This consulting team consists of core staff members in addition to knowledgeable experts drawn from former Foundations of Excellence (FoE) participating institutions. These consulting services are tailored to the unique needs of each campus and include

- support from a primary Policy Center Advisor, a senior Policy Center team member who will provide both solicited and unsolicited assistance throughout the project.
- regular telephone and e-mail communication from the Policy Center Advisor and others on the Policy Center team.
- comprehensive written feedback on eleven distinct steps in the self study process.
- technical support for the FoE technology platform, FoEtec®.
- assistance with FoE surveys: administering, understanding their applications, and interpreting data.
- periodic national cohort conference calls/webinars that will enable your team to interact with Policy Center staff members and colleagues at other FoE participating campuses.

Foundational Dimensions. The Foundational Dimensions are nine principles underpinning first-year excellence designed as both aspirational and measurement standards for the first year. These nine Dimensions, in both four-year and two-year versions, are the central intellectual assumptions of this work.

Performance Indicators. Each Foundational Dimension is accompanied by a set of performance indicators that break down the broad constructs into measurable components.

Current Practices Inventory. This inventory is both a process and template for conducting a comprehensive, institution-wide inventory of all policies, practices, and programs, both curricular and extracurricular, affecting first-year students. Information collected on the Current Practices Inventory serves as a factual knowledge basis for the ensuing assessment activities.

Final Report and Implementation Plan for first-year improvement. Foundations of Excellence[®] includes a process and template for producing the ultimate outcome of the process, the Final Report and Implementation Plan for first-year improvement.

FoEtec[®] - an advanced technology platform. FoEtec is available to all participants and serves as a sophisticated, but user-friendly, electronic platform for recording of data, internal and external communication, as well as reporting of findings. Participating campuses will have a two-year license to use the FoEtec electronic platform.

Foundations of Excellence Faculty/Staff and Student Surveys. As part of participation in the Foundations of Excellence process, campuses will participate in surveys of both faculty/staff and first-year students. The faculty/staff survey is administered electronically; the student survey is available in both web and paper formats. The surveys, owned and administered by Educational Benchmarking, Inc., (EBI) are employed early in the self-study process. EBI's interactive on-line analysis tools allow groups to analyze and discuss survey results as team. Final results are an important source of evidence for the campus to make judgments about its level of performance in the first year.

Foundations of Excellence Launch Meeting. The Policy Center sponsors a required two-day summer meeting to prepare each campus to derive maximum benefit from the Foundations of Excellence process. Three complimentary registrations include most meals and all materials. In addition to the three representatives, additional participants may attend for a fee of \$325. The 2009 launch meetings will be held in Asheville, NC at the Asheville Renaissance Hotel on the following dates: Four-year institution meeting on July 30th & July 31st; Two-year institution meeting on August 3rd & August 4th.

Foundations of Excellence Winter Meeting. The Policy Center sponsors a one-day optional Winter Meeting of all participating campuses. Participants may attend the Winter Meeting for a modest cost recovery registration fee. The Winter Meeting will enable current and past participants to meet and share challenges, opportunities, and outcomes of the project. Detailed registration information will be provided several months prior to the meeting.

Feedback from Policy Center staff on all reporting items. As part of the Foundations of Excellence® process, participating campuses submit, to the Policy Center, the Current Practices Inventory and reports on the nine Foundational Dimensions®. In turn, the campus will receive written feedback from Policy Center Advisors on each of these reports.

National recognition. While recognizing individual campuses' privacy with respect to specific findings, participating campuses will receive national publicity for their involvement in Foundations of Excellence.

Special opportunity for Higher Learning Commission institutions. Institutions that are regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) may use the Foundations of Excellence process as the first step in an officially sanctioned "customized self-study process" for the purposes of reaffirmation of accreditation. For more information on this option contact either John Gardner at the Policy Center or your HLC campus staff liaison.

Fee for Foundations of Excellence Participation

The fee for Foundations of Excellence participation for 2009-2010 is \$36,500. This fee covers all of the products and services noted above.

The comprehensive fee includes costs for specific project components such as: Foundations of Excellence Surveys with a retail value of \$5,200 and the cost of the Launch Meeting at \$975 per institutional team.

Additional costs include travel and accommodations costs for three institutional representatives to attend the Launch Meeting in Asheville, NC (required participation) as well as a modest registration fee, travel and accommodation costs for institutional representatives to attend the Winter Meeting (optional participation).

Discounts may be available for:

- Multiple campuses from the same community college district
- Multiple campuses from the same university system
- Two- and four-year institutions working in the same service area, which collaborate on their respective FoE self studies

Optional Foundations of Excellence Process Enhancements and Support (additional fees)

Note: The Foundations of Excellence process has been designed to be successful and influential without the additional services described below. But Policy Center staff recognize that some campuses may wish to select from a menu of additional forms of support and service, and these are offered in that spirit and recognition.

Campus visit(s). Members of the Policy Center consulting team are available to make site visits to participating FoE campuses. During site visits a number of services may be provided based on the unique needs of the campus. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Direct work with campus leaders, FoE task force members, and students.
- Presentations to the campus community during the self-study process (e.g., campus launch, mid-point, or at the conclusion of the study).
- Consulting on various first-year initiatives.
- Interaction with media representatives.

Campus visits may be made by:

- The campus's primary Policy Center Advisor
- Any of the other Policy Center consulting team members

A Second Perspective. A member of the Policy Center consulting team may be requested to serve as a “critical friend” to the campus task force. This consultant provides additional, independent written feedback on the key components of the self study. The principal advantage of this feature is that the campus secures the added perspective and support of someone who has successfully led and completed the FoE process. This consultant provides extensive feedback in addition to the feedback provided by the campus's primary advisor. This option may also be enhanced by incorporating a campus visit.

Advisory support for former Foundations of Excellence participating institutions. As the Policy Center launches its fifth national cohort group of Foundations of Excellence participants, we will have worked previously with 147 US colleges and universities, public and private, four and two-year, that have participated in a Foundations of Excellence Self Study and Strategic Action Plan for campus improvement. Recognizing that the hardest work for many of them may be the implementation of that Strategic Action Plan, we understand that some institutions may want or need external assistance on such implementation and we would be pleased to offer such support.

Additional participant attendance at Launch Meeting. Launch Meeting additional participant costs (above the three complimentary representatives) include a registration fee of \$325 per person and costs for travel and accommodations.

Optional participant attendance at Winter Meeting. Winter Meeting participant costs include a modest cost recovery registration fee per person and costs for travel and accommodations.

Why Should Your Campus Consider Participating in Foundations of Excellence®?

Over the past 25 years, the importance of the first year of college has been acknowledged to some degree by a wide range of American colleges and universities. Yet the result has often been the creation of an array of program-level initiatives, many of which operate on the margins of the first year and have only limited impact on students. Such efforts, although well intentioned and staffed by dedicated professionals, have existed in the absence of a structured model of excellence that goes beyond a single program to a broader vision of a campus's comprehensive approach to the first year. By conducting a systematic first-year self study under the guidance of the Policy Center on the First Year of College, your campus will take a candid look at its strengths and weaknesses and, based upon its findings, develop a strategic action plan that can lead to enhanced student learning and persistence. Although such a self study is, in itself, no panacea, it can be an invigorating, institution-wide experience that brings together multiple constituent viewpoints about improving your campus's first year and can lead to substantive institutional change and improved student outcomes.

Benefits of participation in Foundations of Excellence include...

- undertaking a broad assessment of *all* components of your campus's approach to the first year.
- working directly with leading experts in the field of student success and retention.
- creating powerful synergies across unit lines for first-year improvement.
- experiencing the benefits of "task force-based assessment," which uses a variety of data sources including professional judgment of task force members.
- building a comprehensive improvement and strategic action plan for the first year that acknowledges both institutional strengths and weaknesses and provides a grand design for the beginning college experience.
- having the opportunity for networking with other participating campuses.
- a year-long period of extensive, external consulting support.

What the Foundations of Excellence Process Adds to Existing Models of First-Year Assessment

The campus environment—how an institution structures the new student experience—plays an important role in determining how students spend their time, how they engage in learning, and whether they decide to return for the second year or even the next term. Yet campus assessment often focuses primarily on student characteristics rather than the institution's policies, practices, and procedures. The Foundations of Excellence process adds an essential component to a careful analysis of the first year by enabling institutions to conduct a thorough examination of their environments and to connect findings to student-level input and outcomes data. By focusing on what they control, institutions can take immediate steps to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses. As a comprehensive process, Foundations of Excellence goes beyond limited analysis of discrete components of the first year; instead it acknowledges the interconnected nature

of the many components of the student experience. Most fundamentally, the Foundations of Excellence® process is assessment of *institutional* behaviors, policies, and practices.

Does Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year Link with Student Learning Outcomes?

Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year is a self study that leads institutions to be more accountable for student learning through a) the identification of common learning goals for the first year, and (b) the auditing of learning outcomes across first-year courses. The process is not prescriptive. It does not provide specific goals for learning or measure specific learning outcomes. The core philosophy of the self study is that setting and monitoring learning goals is an important indicator of institutional excellence, and that there are many ways to accomplish this end.

Rather than directly testing students' knowledge and skills, the Foundations of Excellence surveys and processes present an aspirational vision of learning that requires a campus to evaluate its success in a) establishing desired learning outcomes, b) communicating these to students, families, and other stake holders, c) documenting student learning with multiple sources of evidence that may include quantitative and qualitative measures, and d) using results to confirm effective practices or make adjustments. A critical step in achieving an institution's larger goals for its graduates is developing benchmarks for student learning in the first year that guide institutional decisions and actions. The self study assures that institutions consider learning outcomes in a broader context of institutional improvement rather than narrowly focusing on the selection of a single test of academic knowledge.

Foundations of Excellence Participants

Over 300 institutions have participated in the Foundations of Excellence process since its inception in 2003. During phase I, 322 Institutions assisted in the development of the Foundations of Excellence process. Since then, 147 Institutions have participated in the comprehensive Foundations of Excellence process.

Founding Institutions

The following institutions provided national leadership by pilot testing the Foundations of Excellence® process. Their advice led to the final version of the Foundational Dimensions® and performance indicators. In gratitude for their assistance, the Policy Center has named these campuses "Founding Institutions."

Four-Year Founding Institutions (Pilot 2003 - 2004) *

Each of the following four-year institutions was a member of either the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) or the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), partner organizations in the Foundations of Excellence pilot project in 2003-2004.

Institution	State
Augsburg College (CIC)	Minnesota
Aurora University (CIC)	Illinois
Chadron State College (AASCU)	Nebraska
City University of New York, Brooklyn College (AASCU)	New York
City University of New York, Medgar Evers College (AASCU)	New York
Columbia College (CIC)	South Carolina
Endicott College (CIC)	Massachusetts
Franklin Pierce College (CIC)	New Hampshire
Georgia Southwestern State University (AASCU)	Georgia
Illinois State University (AASCU)	Illinois
Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis (AASCU)	Indiana
Indiana Wesleyan University (CIC)	Indiana
Kennesaw State University (AASCU)	Georgia
Madonna University (CIC)	Michigan
Maryville College (CIC)	Tennessee
Marywood University (CIC)	Pennsylvania
Missouri Western State University (AASCU)	Missouri
Nazareth College of Rochester (CIC)	New York
Plymouth State University (AASCU)	New Hampshire
St. Edward's University (CIC)	Texas
State University of New York College at Brockport (AASCU)	New York
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (AASCU)	Texas
University of Charleston (CIC)	West Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Parkside (AASCU)	Wisconsin

* Funded by grants from the Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education.

Two-Year Founding Institutions (Pilot 2005-2006)

Institution	State
Kennebec Valley Community College	Maine
Longview Community College	Missouri
Middlesex Community College	Connecticut
Montgomery County Community College	Pennsylvania

Oakton Community College	Illinois
Pellissippi State Technical Community College	Tennessee
San Jacinto College South	Texas
Spokane Falls Community College	Washington
University of Wisconsin Colleges	Wisconsin
Virginia Highlands Community College	Virginia

Results of Foundations of Excellence[®] Participation: What Campuses Are Reporting

Project leaders from former participating universities and colleges are reporting results like these:

- Outcomes
 - Enrollment gains
 - Retention gains
 - New data to enhance assessment efforts
 - Increased campus-wide awareness of the importance of the first year
 - Improved academic affairs/faculty/student affairs collaboration
 - More faculty buy-in to first-year efforts
 - Linkage to strategic planning, general education revision, integration with other multi-institution projects, interests of boards of trustees
 - Connection with institutional reaffirmation of accreditation
 - Creation of philosophy and mission statements for the first year
 - At last, a strategic plan for improving and executing the first year
 - Increased capacity and experience in understanding institution-wide assessment, and in using assessment results to actually make decisions

- Creation of new first-year structures
 - University/first-year colleges
 - Offices for the first year
 - Realignment of academic affairs to include assessment and student success
 - A new position for Director of the Sophomore Year
 - Creation of permanent task forces, advisory councils, committees for oversight of the first year

- Creation of new or improved first-year programs and activities
 - Improved student-to-student mentoring
 - Improved student referral processes for uses of campus resources
 - Required orientation programs
 - A new Center for Student Leadership
 - A new Center for Engaged Learning
 - A new Transfer Student Experience program
 - First-year student convocations

Based on the above experiences and outcomes, the Policy Center maintains that similar outcomes can be achieved by any two- or four-year institution that is willing to devote the personnel, time, energy, commitment, and resources to fully experience and engage with the Foundations for Excellence® process. Towards that end, we invite your inquiries and application. **Applications will be reviewed upon receipt.** Applications are reviewed and spaces awarded on a rolling basis during this period until capacity is reached. Applications must be received no later than May 29, 2009. **The Policy Center's goal is to work with a small number of two- and four-year institutions each year to ensure they receive the maximum amount of individual attention from our staff. In this current year we are supporting 30 institutions engaged in the Foundations of Excellence process. To apply, go to www.fyfoundations.org and complete the concise application form. This form requests contact information and brief responses to four questions about the institution and its current approach to the first year.**

Terms and Conditions for General Use of the Foundational Dimensions® and Foundations of Excellence Self Study

The Foundational Dimensions were originally developed by the Policy Center in collaboration with its research partners and over 300 public and private four- and two-year institutions. The Dimensions are the trademarked intellectual property of the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Together the Dimensions constitute an aspirational and measurement model for the first year. We hope that institutions will find them useful as they consider the design of an educationally purposeful experience for first-year students. To that end, campuses are encouraged to copy the Dimensions for internal use. This copyright permission does not extend to other kinds of copying, such as for general distribution, advertising or promotional purposes, creating new publications, or resale.

Please note that a public claim to conducting a Foundations of Excellence self-study can only be made by campuses that have obtained a license to use the templates, reporting documents, and processes designed to facilitate use of the Foundational Dimensions as an aspirational and measurement model.

If you have questions about these terms and conditions, contact the Policy Center at info@fyfoundations.org or 828-966-5401.

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