First Year Experience Student Survey and Faculty and Staff Survey Results

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Background

The Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year (FOE) is a project of the Policy Center on the First Year of College. The FOE began in 2003 and was funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education and The Atlantic Philanthropies. The purpose of the Foundations of Excellence is to encourage institutions of higher education to engage in a comprehensive process of self assessment and improvement planning related to the new student experience. The FOE uses an aspirational model comprised of nine components referred to as Dimensions, and measurement principles which serve as the framework for the self-study and improvement planning process. Each year a small group of colleges and universities are selected to participate in the FOE project and receive assistance from the Policy Center and access to their various assessment tools and resources. In the summer of 2006 Skyline College was selected to participate in the Foundations of Excellence national cohort for 2006/07.

The self-study began in the summer 2006 with training by the Policy Center of group of Skyline College faculty, staff and administrators who formed the Skyline College FYE Steering Committee. In order to accurately evaluate the programs, services, activities and interventions related to the first year experience, the FYE Steering Committee created an operation definition of a freshman at Skyline:

> The First-year cohorts at Skyline College consist of students who: were transfer, degree and/or certificate-seeking or whose education goal was undecided and were continuing, transfer, first-time or returning, and had not completed an associate degree or higher, and who completed 24 or fewer units at Skyline College.

As part of the self-study process Skyline College engaged in two different surveys: Faculty and Staff Survey and Student Survey. Both were administered in the Fall 2006 via an on-line survey. All faculty and staff were sent e-mail invitations to participate with several automated reminder notifications to complete the survey. Similarly, all students were sent an e-mail invitation, reminder notifications and a link to the survey was placed on the college's website. Students were also provided an incentive to participate through the possibility of receiving an iPod Nano. At the completion of the survey, five students were randomly selected to receive an iPod Nano.

A total of 401 students responded to the survey. Of the students who responded 31% were freshman and more than half of the respondents (70%) had been at Skyline for 1-3 semesters. The majority of students who responded to the survey were part-time (63%) and female (63%). Of those students who responded to the 41% were Asian, 16% were Hispanic, 28% were White and 1% were Black, closely reflecting the student population at Skyline College. About one third (35%) of the student respondents were between the ages of 18-21 and most were employed off campus (70%).

A total of 149 faculty and staff responded to the faculty and staff survey. Of those who responded 58% were faculty, 19% were staff, 14% were professional staff and 9% were administrators. The majority of respondents (89%) had worked at Skyline for at least one year and 83% responded that they had direct working relationships with new students and/or had knowledge of institutional practices regarding the first year of college.

Highlight of the Findings

- Faculty and staff who took the survey believed that the college had not established a common philosophy on working with new students for their first year experience. However, there was agreement among faculty and staff that the college is highly committed to new student success.

- Students who took the survey believed that they know where to go to get help with non-academic matters and believed that faculty and staff was able to refer them to the right office when they had questions.

- Students who responded to the survey believed that there was not enough information about out-of-class activities nor did they know where to go to get involved with college-sponsored organizations or events or feel that the importance of these activities was conveyed.

- Both faculty/staff and students who took the survey believed that the college communicated fairly well the expected standards of behavior (i.e., academic honesty and ethical conduct).

- Students opinion about academic advising differed somewhat from that of faculty and staff. Students who took the survey believed that they were receiving a moderate amount of assistance from faculty and staff in future enrollment plans, selecting courses and explanation of requirements. Faculty and staff believed students were receiving a high amount of assistance.

- Faculty and staff who responded to the survey believed that the college was meeting the needs of sub-populations of students (i.e., Honors students, students with learning and physical disabilities and racial/ethnic minority students) fairly well.

- Students who responded to the survey felt that their academic needs were being met and felt respected and that they were being treated fairly.

- The faculty and staff who took the survey believed that there was a fairly high degree of diversity awareness infused into the curriculum and out-of-class activities, but the students believed there was only a moderate amount.

- The faculty and staff who responded to the survey believed that assessment and assessment information (including research) was slightly used to influence their work with new students and that assessment was used only moderately for improvement planning.

- Faculty and staff who took the survey believed that Skyline College was providing a moderately high quality experience for new students and that the delivery of the first year experience at the college enhanced student learning.

- Students who took the survey responded that they were highly satisfied with their decision to attend Skyline College, believed the college was committed to new student success, and would recommend the college to friends.

Philosophy Dimension

The Philosophy Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.4. This was the third lowest of the nine overall dimension ratings. This dimension asked questions about the degree to which the institutional philosophy for working with new students was institutionalized and communicated to the college and the degree to which individual departments operated from a common philosophy on working with new students. These questions received the lowest ratings within this dimension with a range from 1.3-3.3 mean scores. In addition, a question was asked about the degree to which the college was committed to the success of new students received one of the highest ratings of 4.0 mean score.

There were no questions on the student survey that were linked to the Philosophy Dimension.

Organization Dimension

The Organization Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.5. This was the sixth highest of the nine overall dimension ratings. This dimension asked questions about the degree to which faculty and staff could accurately refer students to various organizational structures including: Administrative questions, academic rules, help with coursework, personal issues, and institution-sponsored events. The ratings for this cluster of questions were from 4.3 mean score on the high end (help with coursework) to 3.7 mean score on the low end (help with personal issues). Questions were also asked about structures and resources including the degree to which the institution effectively organized itself to develop an integrated first college year that supported the following: Routine communications among units, collaborations between academic and student services, and adequate resources for academic support services, entry-level course, and extracurricular activities. All of these received mean scores ranging from 2.93-3.46. Two additional questions were asked regarding whether student services and faculty partnerships were encouraged by institutional leadership (3.4) and whether faculty/staff had a voice in decisions about new student issues (2.96).

A similar set of questions were asked of students. This dimension received a 3.5 overall mean score rating (fourth highest rating out of seven) with the highest rating of 3.9 found under the degree to which the student understood how the college was organized so that the student could get help with non-academic matters/personal issues. The lowest rating (2.9) was found under the question which asked about the student's understanding of where to go to get involved with college-sponsored organizations or events. An additional question was asked as to the degree to which faculty and staff referred the student to the right office when they had questions. This question received a relatively high rating of 3.8.

Transitions Dimension

The Transitions Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.5, and was the fifth highest rating of the nine overall dimension ratings. This dimension asked faculty and staff about the degree to which the institution communicated to new students the importance of standards of behavior, academic honesty, acknowledging the source of ideas not their own, ethical conduct and assuring academic support outside of the classroom. The responses to this cluster of questions ranged from 3.3-3.6. Faculty and staff

were also asked questions around academic advising. This included a question on overall effectiveness of academic advising (3.5 mean score) , as well as the degree to which faculty and staff helped new students select courses, discussed with students what it takes for them to be academically successful, and future enrollment plans. In addition a question about the degree to which faculty and staff received training to effectively address new student needs was asked. This cluster of questions rated relatively high, ranging in mean scores from 4.6-4.7.

The same set of questions was asked of the students with the addition of several other clusters of questions. This dimension received a 3.1 overall mean score rating making it the second lowest rating out of seven dimension ratings. When asked about the degree to which the college communicated standards of behavior including academic honesty, acknowledging the source of ideas not their own and ethical conduct, the student responses ranged from 3.5-3.9. When asked about academic advising and the degree to which faculty and staff explained program requirements, discussed future enrollment plans and helped students to select courses, the student responses ranged from 3.2-3.5. Students were then asked about making connections and the degree to which the college helped them connect with other new students and continuing students, as well as with faculty members and academic support services and making their family feel part of the college experience. The student responses ranged from a high of 3.2 (connecting with academic support services) to a low of 2.4 (helping family to feel part of the college experience). Students were also asked two questions about out-of-class activities and the degree to which the college communicates the importance of these activities and the opportunities for involvement that the college provided. Both questions rated relatively low (2.7). Finally, the survey asked questions about pre-enrollment information and activities and the degree to which the college communicated academic expectations to students as well as information about programs and majors, tuition and financial aid. This cluster of questions rated relatively high with a range of 3.3-3.6.

Campus Culture Dimension

The Campus Culture Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.6, and was rated the fourth highest of the nine overall dimension ratings. This dimension asked faculty and staff about the degree to which faculty involvement with new students was considered important to institutional leaders, department leaders, and colleagues. All three questions rated relatively high with mean scores ranging from 3.9-4.0. Faculty and staff were then asked about the degree to which excellence in teaching new students was acknowledged and/or rewarded by faculty colleagues and department leaders. Both questions received mean scores of 2.9. When asked about the hiring process (responsibilities to new students described in job description, candidate interviews and during the new faculty orientation), faculty and staff responses ranged from 2.6-2.8.

The students were asked one question related to the Campus Culture Dimension. This question asked students the degree to which the instructor made him/herself available outside of class. The mean score rating for this question was relatively high at 4.0.

All Students Dimension

The All Students Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.9, and was rated the highest of the nine overall dimension ratings. The questions in this

dimension asked faculty and staff about the degree to which the institution addressed the needs of the following subpopulations of students: Honors students, students with academic deficiencies, students with learning disabilities, students with physical disabilities, student athletes and racial/ethnic minority students. The responses ranged from 4.2 (Honors students) to 3.7 (students with academic deficiencies). The other questions rated 3.8 and 3.9.

The students were asked a similar set of questions along with a few additional questions about campus environment and quality of courses. This dimension received a 3.9 overall mean score rating making it the second highest rating out of the seven overall dimension ratings. The first question asked the degree to which the student felt safe on campus. This question rated 4.0 mean score. The remaining questions asked the student the degree to which they felt respected (3.9), felt they could express their beliefs without concern about how others will react (3.8), felt their academic needs were met (3.8), felt their social needs were met (3.4) and felt they belonged (3.6). A final question asked the student to what degree the instructor treated all students fairly regardless of gender, race or ethnicity. This question rated the highest with the dimension at 4.5 and among the highest on the survey overall.

Learning Dimension

The Learning Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.7, and was rated the third highest of the nine overall dimension ratings. The questions in this dimension asked faculty and staff about the degree to which the institution assured all new students individualized attention from faculty and staff as well as out-of-class learning opportunities. These questions rated 3.6 and 3.3 respectively. The survey then asked faculty and staff the degree to which they understood the institutions intended education goals for new students. This question rated among the lowest in this dimension at 3.3. Faculty and staff were asked to rate the degree to which they, as faculty, communicated academic expectations to new students, encouraged students to ask questions in class, effectively managed student behavior in classes, initiated communication early in the term with students who are performing badly, encouraged students to participate in course-related out-of-class events, made themselves available to students outside of class, developed and documented specific learning goals for a course. For this cluster of questions the mean scores ranged from 3.9 (documented specific learning goals) to 4.7 (encouraged students to ask questions in class).

The Learning Dimension rated third highest overall of the nine dimensions at 3.8 mean score. This section of the student survey asked several questions about the degree to which a student-identified course was appropriate to the student's academic preparation with regard to writing (3.2), reading (3.3), library research skills (3.3), mathematical skills (3.2) and computing skills (3.4). This section of the survey also asked the student the degree to which the course material was valuable (4.0). Students were then asked several questions regarding instructors including the degree to which the instructor: helped the student learn course material (4.1), provided individual attention (3.8), provided prompt feedback (3.9), encouraged the student to ask questions in class (4.3), effectively organized course material (4.1), communicated concepts clearly (4.0), used effective teaching methods (4.1), communicated academic expectations to the student (4.1) and encouraged the student to participate in course-related out-of-class events (3.6).

Diversity Dimension

The Diversity Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.8, and was rated the second highest of the nine overall dimension ratings. The questions in this dimension asked faculty and staff the degree to which the curriculum and out-of class activities experienced by new students included appropriate attention to diverse ideas and world views. The responses to these two questions were 3.7 and 3.9 respectively. The survey then asked about the degree to which the institution provided opportunities for the following groups to interact with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures: other students (4.0), faculty and staff (3.8), people outside the institution (3.2). The last question in this section of the survey asked faculty and staff about the degree to which the institution communicated to new students the importance of respecting others with differing opinions. The response was 3.8 mean score.

The students were asked a similar set of questions along with a few additional questions about interactions and standards of behavior. This dimension rated 3.2 mean score overall and was the lowest rated dimension of the seven on the student survey. The first set of questions asked about the degree to which the college exposed the student to different world cultures, world religions, political perspectives, and issues related to social and economic status. The results for this cluster of questions ranged from 2.7-3.3. The next cluster of questions in the Diversity Dimension section of the survey were the same as those asked in the faculty and staff survey. These questions included the degree to which the institution provided opportunities for the following groups to interact with individuals from differing backgrounds and cultures: other students (3.5), faculty and staff (3.3), people outside the institution (2.7) and the degree to which the institution communicated the importance of respecting others with differing opinions (3.6).

Roles and Purposes Dimension

The Roles and Purposes Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 3.4, and was rated the second lowest of the nine overall dimension ratings. The questions in this dimension asked about the degree to which the institution helped new students explore their motivation for getting a college education in terms of their: knowledge for personal growth (3.4), preparation for future employment (3.7), active engagement in the community (3.0), contributions to the betterment of society (3.0), and achievement of life goals (3.5).

The student survey asked a similar set of questions as those found in the Roles and Purposes section of the faculty and staff survey. The overall rating for this dimension of the student survey was 3.4 mean score, making it the third lowest rating of the seven overall dimension ratings. Students were asked about the degree to which the faculty and staff advisors discussed how college helped them to achieve their goals (3.2), and to examine their personal reasons for getting a college education (3.0). In addition, the survey asked the student the degree to which the college helped the student understand how attending college increased knowledge for personal growth (3.7), prepared them for involvement in the community (3.4), and to contribute to the betterment of society (3.4).

Improvement Dimension

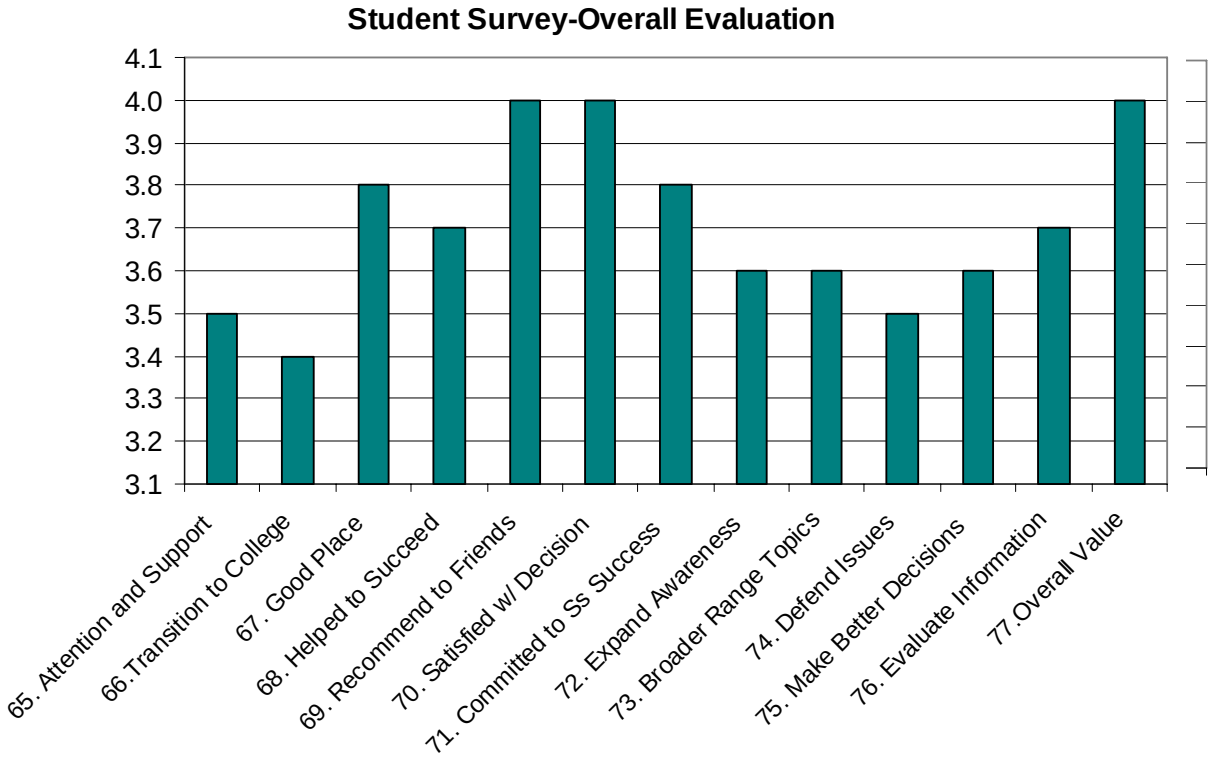
The Improvement Dimension received an overall mean score rating from the faculty and staff of 2.7 and was rated the lowest of the nine overall dimension ratings. The questions in this dimension focused on professional development and the use of assessment. The first set of questions asked about the degree to which the faculty and staff were engaged in various professional activities that focused on the first year experience including: Attending conferences and workshops (2.8), attending national or regional conferences and workshops (2.4), reading professional materials (3.0), and presenting at conferences or contributing to publications (2.0). The second set of questions asked the faculty and staff about the degree to which specified information had influenced their work with new students including: Demographic information from the college's database (2.7), measures of pre-enrollment academic skills (2.7), academic skills measured after one semester or more (2.8), measures of student time spent studying (2.6), measures of student alcohol consumption (1.8), current practices at other institutions (2.4), and professional/published research (2.8). There were three additional questions which asked faculty and staff to provide overall ratings on assessment capabilities including: Assessing what is relevant (3.3), disseminating results in a timely manner (3.3), and using results for improvement (3.2).

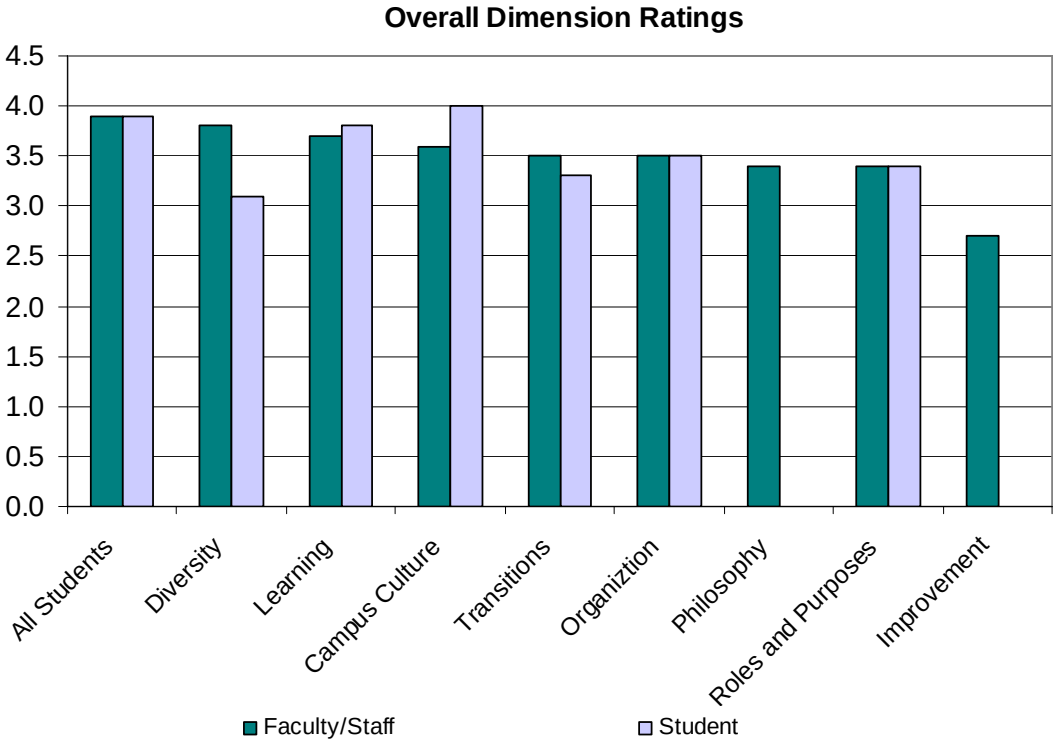
There were no questions in the student survey related to the Improvement Dimension.

Overall Evaluation of Institution

The faculty and staff survey asked respondents to provide an overall evaluation of the institution's delivery of the first year in the following areas: Demonstrating that the success of new students is an important goal (3.5), enhancing students' personal development (3.4), enhancing student learning (3.7), improving the probability that students will re-enroll at this institution (3.6), and providing a high quality experience for students (3.7).

The student survey also asked respondents to provide an overall evaluation as follows: The degree to which the college provided the student the right amount of attention and support (3.5), helped the student make the transition to college (3.4), had been a good place for college students (3.8), helped the student succeed as a student (3.7), satisfied with the decision to attend this college (4.0), the college was committed to the success of new students (3.8), the value of the college experience (4.0), expanded awareness of issues (3.6), ability to discuss a broader range of topics (3.6), ability to better defend position on issues (3.5), ability to make better decisions (3.6), ability to objectively evaluate information (3.7) and would recommend the college to friends (4.0).


Student Survey-Overall Evaluation
4.1
4.0
3.9
3.8
3.7
3.6
3.5
3.4
3.3
3.2
3.1
65. Attention and Support
66.Transition to College
67. Good Place
68. Helped to Succeed
69. Recommend to Friends
70. Satisfied w/ Decision
71. Committed to Ss Success
72. Expand Awareness
73. Broader Range Topics
74. Defend Issues
75. Make Better Decisions
76. Evaluate Information
77.Overall Value


Overall Dimension Ratings
4.5
4.0
3.5
3.0
2.5
2.0
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
All Students
Diversity
Learning
Campus Culture
Transitions
Organiztion
Philosophy
Roles and Purposes
Improvement
Faculty/Staff
Student