

## Narrative Statement

### Kennesaw State University First-Year Experience Program

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***Program Overview/Executive Summary.*** The First-Year Experience (FYE) program at Kennesaw State University (KSU) includes numerous curricular and extracurricular initiatives designed to enhance first-year students' entry to the university, enhance student learning, promote increased retention to the second year, and support the myriad of campus-wide programs that increase student success and graduation rates. These initiatives include first-year seminar courses, theme-based learning communities (LC), the Early Start Bridge Academy, advising teams that integrate peer mentoring, first-semester alert/intervention, and a new 1-credit-hour course designed for first-year students who are on academic probation following their first semester. The foundation for these first-year initiatives are strong learning outcomes for both the seminar courses and the LC program, innovative curricular and pedagogical strategies that utilize faculty scholarship on the first-year student population, and a dedicated faculty who are leaders in the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning while also producing primary research in their disciplines. While each aspect of KSU's FYE is distinct, they combine to form a powerful illustration of KSU's mission as a student-centered institution that fulfills the Board of Regents' strategic goal of meeting "students' 21<sup>st</sup> century educational needs" with a nationally recognized FYE program.

KSU is proud to be the only University System of Georgia institution honored by *U.S. News & World Report* for its FYE. In 2009 KSU's program was listed as one of 30 exemplary "Academic Programs to Look For" for the sixth year in a row. The program was also recognized nationally in 2003 when the Policy Center for the First Year of College chose KSU as one of the benchmarking institutions for the "Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year" project. The program continues to serve as a role model for institutions across the country embarking on the one-year "Foundations" project.

In addition to national honors, the FYE program is an integral part of the KSU campus. The initiatives are housed within University College and its Department of First-Year Programs, which collaborate with the Division of Student Success & Enrollment Services. Breaking from the national norm of treating first-year programs as "add ons" to either student success divisions or discipline-based academic units, KSU has shown its commitment to these programs by launching University College in 2004 and later, in 2007, by designating a specific academic department with tenured and tenure-track faculty wholly dedicated to teaching first-year students.

The flagship of the FYE program is KSU 1101, a seminar course that has been a part of the undergraduate curriculum for more than two decades. Originally designed as an extended orientation course, it is now a 3-credit-hour academically rigorous course that incorporates vital transition issues such as study skills and time management with ethical decision-making, diversity and multiculturalism, global citizenship, civic engagement, and communication skills. It promotes self-awareness while also challenging students to understand their places within an ever-complex and interconnected global society. At the same time, it provides students with a sense of place at the university, ensures they receive guidance from an advising team (KSU 1101 professor, an academic advisor from Student Success Services, and a peer advisor from the Center for Student Leadership), and encourages selection of a major and career exploration.

All sections of KSU 1101 – and its new globally focused version (KSU 2290) – meet four specific learning outcomes: 1) Life Skills, 2) Strategies for Academic Success, 3) Campus and Community Connections, and 4) Foundations of Global Learning. These learning outcomes drive all content, readings, assignments, and assessments. All KSU 1101 sections utilize *Foundations of Academic Inquiry*, the custom-published textbook written and edited by University College faculty and supported by a custom website hosted by Pearson Custom Publishing. Writing the textbook allows KSU 1101 faculty to incorporate both university-specific resources as well as their expertise, allowing students to learn from numerous first-year

faculty even though they are only in a single section of the course. For example, a former librarian authored the chapter on college-level research and an Assistant Professor of Communication wrote the public speaking chapter. The textbook, and its accompanying electronic resources, reflect the scholarly approach that First-Year Programs faculty take in regards to their teaching.

All sections of KSU 1101 and KSU 2290 also integrate a common reader as well as out-of-class activities that promote connections with the campus and greater community. For example, the 2008-09 common reader selection was *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time* by Greg Mortenson. After reading the book and hearing Mr. Mortenson speak on campus, first-year students raised \$16,000 for his organization to build a school in rural Pakistan in honor of KSU. Since inception of the common reader program in 2004, other selections have focused on the Holocaust, overcoming life-threatening challenges, achieving academic success against the odds, engaging in the modern-day abolitionist movement to fight global slavery, and pursuing a life of active citizenship.

In addition to the traditional KSU 1101 seminar, the FYE offers hybrid and online versions, specially themed versions, and the globally focused version based on the Center for Strategic & International Studies' "7Revolutions" project. Currently treated as a special topics version of the seminar (KSU 2290), this course will be proposed as a permanent part of the curriculum next year. Finally, KSU 0090 was just added to the seminar offerings. It is a 1-credit-hour version of the traditional seminar that focuses on study skills, time management, academic planning, and major exploration for students on academic probation.

KSU expanded its FYE beyond individual courses in 2000 when it introduced LCs, clusters of General Education courses designed around interesting themes as well as disciplines and majors. Each community is populated by a group of 20-25 students enrolled in the same sections of 2-4 courses, forming a cohort, or community, of learners. LCs also have a common set of learning outcomes. They are: 1) Students will demonstrate skills in interacting appropriately with other students, faculty, and staff; 2) Students will demonstrate cross-disciplinary connections; 3) Students will reflect upon the value of global learning for engaged citizenship; and 4) Students will use critical thinking skills and problem solving skills.

The first-year seminars and LCs served 2,517 students in fall 2008. In any given year first-year seminars reach approximately 72% of incoming first-time, full-time students in the fall; while 10-12% are served by LCs that do not contain a seminar section. The remaining 16-18% are generally served in spring semester. Data from the last five fall semesters provide a snapshot of the growth in students served by these initiatives (see Table 1). It should be noted that the numbers in Table 1 do not reflect the percentages above because the numbers listed for seminars in the table are for students in a KSU 1101 section that is not part of a LC, whereas the numbers for LCs include those with and without a KSU 1101 section.

**TABLE 1: Total Number of First-Year Students Served by Seminars & Communities**

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
Seminars	220	352	925	1065	1653
LCs	845	1430	1212	1246	864*
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>1065</i>	<i>1782</i>	<i>2137</i>	<i>2311</i>	<i>2517</i>

\* The reduction in LCs was a program development decision.

In addition to these expansive programs, the FYE includes initiatives that target specific populations. For example, in 2008 the Early Start Bridge Academy (ESBA) was piloted. This version of a LC, which spans part of summer and fall semesters, links Math 0099 with KSU 1101 and is designed to promote academic success among students who are admitted with college-level mathematics deficiencies. Results from the pilot were so positive that the academy will be expanded this summer. Finally, the FYE includes an early alert/early intervention initiative to track students' progress in the first half of the semester with the goal of providing assistance to reduce the percentage of DWF occurrences in the first semester. Each of these initiatives will be detailed in the pages that follow.

While KSU's FYE program is varied and wide-ranging, it is predicated on a commitment to student success. That commitment was made more than 25 years ago when KC 101 was added to the undergraduate

offerings, and it thrives today as new courses like KSU 2290 and KSU 0090 are developed. Furthermore, that same commitment drives the enhancements of new programs like ESBA, and it promotes continuous innovation from faculty who are working to develop new initiatives to strengthen KSU's FYE program.

**Program History:** Modeled after the University of South Carolina's nationally regarded University 101 course, Kennesaw College (now KSU) implemented a Freshman Seminar (now the First-Year Seminar) in 1983 with the goal of improving student success and retention. Dr. John Gardner, a leading scholar in the field of students in transition and founder of USC's National Resource Center for the FYE and Students in Transition, helped shape the seminar at its inception. Since that time the course has been refined to address the specific needs of KSU's ever-changing student body.

In the early years of the program, the seminar course was taught by faculty from the various disciplines as part of their course load. As KSU's enrollment grew, this approach was no longer feasible. Primary responsibility for KSU 1101 was then given to the Department of Learning Support (later, the Department of University Studies). This was the beginning of KSU's signature approach of having dedicated tenure-track faculty teach first-year seminars. In 2000, the first LCs were organized. Then, in 2003-2004 KSU was selected to participate as a founding institution in the Foundations of Excellence Project, managed by Dr. John Gardner, who by then had established the Policy Center for the First Year of College. A project-directed self-study concluded that KSU offered significant programs fostering student success and made the following suggestions: (1) Increase collaboration between the academic programs and the programs/services offered by the Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services and (2) Establish a college-level affiliation for the Department of University Studies, which had been reporting to a Dean of Undergraduate Education but was not affiliated with a specific academic college. In response, a University College was established in the 2004-2005 academic year with the Department of University Studies as its only department.

In fall 2005 KSU instituted a First-Year Curriculum Requirement for first-time, full-time students entering the university with fewer than 15 semester credit transfer hours (usually in AP, IB, or joint-enrollment transfer credit). Though it was originally proposed that all students take KSU 1101, some students with high credit-hour programs would have had great difficulty fulfilling this requirement. Therefore, students can fulfill the requirement by (1) completing a first-year seminar or (2) enrolling in a LC that combines two or more General Education courses. (Most, but not all, LCs contain a KSU 1101 section). The curriculum requirement passed all levels of review, including the Undergraduate Policies & Curriculum Committee, with strong support across campus. KSU is one of the few schools in the state with a first-year curriculum requirement, one that both ensures first-year students receive the transitional support they need while providing them with flexibility in choosing how to fulfill the requirement.

In July 2006, a new Dean of University College was hired; subsequently, a college-level Director of First-Year Retention Initiatives was appointed to develop new programs/services intended to increase student success and retention. University College was then restructured into two departments. Faculty with primary responsibility to KSU 1101 and/or the LCs program were moved into a new Department of First-Year Programs (FYP). Currently, the FYP Department consists of a Department Chair, a Course Coordinator for first-year seminars, a Learning Communities Coordinator, and 11 full-time faculty, 6 of whom have terminal degrees. Two faculty have joint appointments with the College of the Arts, but their home department is FYP. The department has no degree programs. Therefore, its sole focus is on the success of first-year students and helping them transition to an academic major. Emphasis is placed on collaborative programs and services, especially with the Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services. Though University College and the Department of First-Year Programs are recent additions to campus, this structural focus on the needs of incoming students testifies to KSU's commitment, as mentioned in the strategic plan, to becoming one of the "best learning-centered institutions" in the country.

***Departmental Philosophies and Goals:*** The philosophy and goals of the Department of First-Year Programs are probably best stated through its mission statement and its core values. The mission statement states: “The Department of First-Year Programs at Kennesaw State University provides first-year students a foundation in academic and life skills to be further developed as these students progress toward graduation. In collaboration with other academic units and student success units, the Department of First-Year Programs assists students in the transition to college life by reinforcing the value of general education, by exposing students to the concept of global citizenship, by expecting students to engage in critical thinking, and by promoting personal growth through academic and social opportunity.”

The core values are the following:

- **A Student-Centered Approach.** Students are the primary consideration in the decisions we make in our teaching, our service, and our scholarship. We are committed to and intentional about student success.
- **Collaborative Teaching and Learning.** Teaching and learning are enhanced by working in partnership with students, other faculty, staff, and the larger community. We do not just *accept* opportunities to team our efforts; we *invite* such collaboration. We value a collaborative learning environment inside and outside the classroom.
- **Interconnectedness of Learning.** We seek to convey to students our vision that the university experience is not a collection of discrete courses and majors but rather an integrated multidisciplinary preparation for life in a complex world. We create connections among academic disciplines and KSU entities that contribute to student success.
- **Internationalization and Global Learning.** We emphasize teaching and learning about different groups of people and different parts of the world so that students will be able to participate fully and responsibly in our increasingly diverse and global society. Taking a global perspective, we look for ways to internationalize our curriculum, programs, and services. We strive to create an inviting atmosphere for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Diversity and Multiculturalism.** We embrace diversity and value the unique cultures, lifestyles, qualities, backgrounds, and experiences of all people. We seek opportunities to support and promote this value and strive to create a climate of inclusiveness that honors and celebrates the unique contributions of all individuals.
- **Scholarship and Lifelong Learning.** We value research, scholarship, creative activity, and lifelong learning, and we encourage and support these pursuits among members of our department and our students.
- **Civic Engagement.** We intentionally and systematically incorporate service learning, volunteerism, and community-based learning in our curriculum and programs. We promote civic engagement, political participation, and social responsibility that lead to an active citizenry who have a positive impact on their communities at the local, national, and global levels.
- **Leadership.** We place a strong emphasis on leadership; therefore, we value leadership that is ethical, innovative, and student-oriented. We consistently model what it means to make good, moral leadership decisions that are in the best interests of our students, faculty, and staff. We strive to be innovative leaders in developing international models to enhance student success.
- **A Culture of Optimism.** We see possibility in our students, our department, our institution, our profession, the world, and each other. We believe in the continuous improvement of our classes, our college, and the university.

### Kennesaw State University First-Year Experience Program Fact Sheet

<p>I. Individual and collective faculty efforts to improve teaching and student learning.</p>	<p>A. KSU 1101 Course Mandates          B. SoTL Presentations &amp; Publications          C. Experiential Education/Civic Engagement/Readership Program          D. Themed Seminars          E. Custom Textbook/Website</p>
<p>II. Methods of assessment of student learning and achievement that go beyond student evaluations, and the use of the assessment results to inform teaching practices and curriculum development and revision.</p>	<p>A. Research Led to the Curriculum Requirement          B. Common Reader Data Promotes Engagement</p>
<p>III. Active support to enable faculty to use innovative and effective forms of pedagogy and technology, e.g. critical thinking, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, learning communities, etc.</p>	<p>A. Internal Grant Opportunities          B. Themed Learning Communities          C. Professional Development          D. Summer Orientations for Faculty          E. Online Certification/Training</p>
<p>IV. Strong links between good teaching and various rewards, e. g., compensation, promotion, tenure, grants, leaves, travel, departmental/program-based awards, etc.</p>	<p>A. Awards          B. Recognition</p>
<p>V. Departmental/unit policies that encourage collaborative faculty efforts, including team teaching, teaching discussion groups, common assessments, interdisciplinary courses, learning communities, mentoring, etc.</p>	<p>A. Integration within Communities          B. Emerging Scholars Study Abroad Community          C. Joint Appointments</p>
<p>VI. An on-going data-driven process for reviewing and reshaping curricula so that achieving academic excellence and serving the needs of all students remain as top priorities.</p>	<p>A. Retention Data          B. Early Start Bridge Academy          C. Early Alert/Intervention          D. KSU 0090          E. Future Assessments</p>
<p>VII. Exemplary programs for advising, mentoring, recruiting, and retaining students, co-curricular work with students; out-of-class learning.</p>	<p>A. Advising/Advising Teams          B. Peer Leaders/Peer Advisors          C. AAMI          D. Guest Lecturers          E. Out-of-Class Engagement</p>
<p>VIII. Successes of the department's or program's students, e.g., graduation, job placement, acceptance in graduate schools, etc.</p>	<p>A. Student's National Conference Presentation          B. Student Honored in ONE Campus Challenge</p>
<p>IX. Clear articulation of how quality is defined, promoted and assessed by the department of program.</p>	<p>A. Course Rigor          B. Course GPA</p>

## Documentation of Initiatives & Success in Advancing Student Learning

### *I. Individual and collective faculty efforts to improve teaching and student learning.*

A. KSU 1101 Course Mandates. Due to the large number of sections offered each fall, the FYP Department relies on part-time faculty and professional staff members from the Division of Student Success & Enrollment Services to teach first-year seminars. To ensure students receive a consistent knowledge base, skills, and out-of-class experiences, the department's Curriculum Committee devised a list of course components that are mandatory for each section of KSU 1101. While honoring academic freedom and allowing faculty to determine how these components are integrated into individual sections, the faculty voted unanimously to approve the mandates in order to promote academic rigor and ensure a similar learning experience for those enrolled in KSU 1101. These mandates include the integration of a mid-term and final exam, an individual research project, a group project, the common reader, limits on the use of attendance and participation in the course grade, and protection of test materials for faculty who utilize the textbook's test-bank questions. Faculty teaching the globally focused KSU 2290 course and those working to develop KSU 0090 also developed mandates to ensure consistency in courses with multiple sections.

B. Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Presentations & Publications. The FYP Department's faculty are committed to engaging in and presenting primary research on first-year initiatives. Their presentations are consistently accepted at both the national and international FYE conferences, the National Learning Communities Conference, NACADA's annual conference, and the American Democracy Project annual conference. Faculty have also presented at the International Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conference, AASCU's national conference, and the Institute for Higher Education Policy Meeting.

Additionally, faculty have also published SoTL research projects in the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, the *Journal of Learning Communities Research*, the National Resource Center's *Exploring the Evidence* monograph series, and in several book chapters. Faculty have numerous publications within their disciplines. A few representative, recent publications and presentations are listed below:

Hoerrner, K. & Goldfine, R. (in press). "Kennesaw State University's learning communities program: A focus on faculty development." In *Creating a Portal for Student Success*, S. Evenson, B. Jackson, M. Smith & D. Ward (eds). National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition: Columbia, S.C.

Braden, S., Hoerrner, K., Davis, J., Usher, C. & Hill, K. (2009). *Enhancing and assessing a seminar course: Ensuring continuous program development*. Presented at the National Conference on the First-Year Experience, Orlando, FL.

Hoerrner, K., Goldfine, R., Prochaska, N., Buddie, A., Collins, C., Holler, E., Wooten, B. (2007). *Beginning with the end in mind: Achieving learning outcomes through thoughtful assignment development in multi-discipline learning communities*. Paper presentation at the Association of American Colleges & Universities, Savannah, GA.

Price, Christy T., Lynn M. Boettler, and Laura R. Davis. (2009) "A Seat at the Table for Everyone: Exercises in Valuing Diversity." In *Getting Culture: Incorporating Diversity Across the Curriculum*. Reagan A., R. Gurung and Loreto R. Prieto (eds). Stylus Publishing LLC

Smith, Deborah N., Ruth Goldfine, and Melissa Windham (in press) Using Learning Outcomes to Compare Students in an Independent Section of a First-Year Seminar Course and Students in a First-Year Seminar Course Embedded in a Learning Community, *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*

C. Experiential Education/Civic Engagement/Readership Program. Experiential education is rapidly becoming a significant part of a students' education and is widely recognized as reinforcing learning

behaviors among students. The FYP Department offers innovative and experiential education through some of its KSU 1101 courses and within a LC titled “Learning the Ropes.” The purpose is to engage students in a hands-on experience either through KSU’s Challenge Corner ropes course or experiential classroom activities, thereby allowing students to work as a team, enhance verbal and nonverbal communication skills, relate to others, create an obstacle/leadership course involving life and decision making, and learn about important wellness topics. A pilot study assessed the effectiveness of the experiential approach with a cohort of 120 students by comparing three teaching approaches (traditional, mixed-method, & experiential) using a mixed method set of qualitative and quantitative assessments. The study revealed statistically significance improvement in students’ sense of self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and communication skills. Because of the small sample size there was not statistical significance within the GPA comparisons, but it was noted that students within the experiential approach classes were earning a higher class GPA and had higher overall GPAs. A larger study is in progress to verify and expand upon these findings.

The FYP Department actively encourages faculty to incorporate civic engagement projects into their curriculum. Many faculty work with Volunteer Kennesaw State University to promote primarily out-of-class projects. These projects range from raising money for agencies such as the Humane Society to nursing home visits to various other volunteer activities. Other faculty have students devise their own civic engagement projects. Still others design civic engagement projects utilizing the theme of the common reader. FYP values not only the learning these students achieve in participating in projects but also the intrinsic value of the projects themselves as service to the KSU community and beyond.

Many faculty teaching KSU 1101 or in LCs take advantage of the *New York Times/ Atlanta Journal-Constitution* readership program that provides a limited number of free copies to students. Faculty either assign or allow students to select articles from these news sources for class discussion or written reflection on topics related to the theme or focus of the course.

D. Themed Sections of First-Year Seminar. In an intentional effort to meet both the interests and the needs of a diverse first-year student body while also giving faculty an opportunity to utilize their discipline backgrounds, experiences, and expertise, themed sections of the first-year seminar are offered each fall. Examples include “Insight into Creativity,” “Elections 2008,” and “NASCAR.” These themed sections are taught independently, providing students who are not in a theme-based LC with the experience of learning the 1101 concepts within a different context.

The globally focused version of the seminar (KSU 2290) was also launched in fall 2008 to provide students with a distinct context for fulfilling seminar course learning outcomes. Five members of the University College faculty developed a course based on the Center for Strategic and International Studies’ (CSIS.org) initiative called the Coming Seven Revolutions ([www.7revs.org](http://www.7revs.org)), which forecasts what the world will look like in 2025 and beyond as a result of seven driving forces changing the world<sup>1</sup>. Those faculty, working with *The New York Times*, developed an interactive website on Epsilon.com that allowed the 167 students in all seven sections to dialogue with one another about the readings, guest lecturers, course content, and transitioning to college life. Student evaluations, both quantitative scores and qualitative comments, were particularly strong for KSU 2290, outpacing the aggregate scores for KSU 1101 sections.

F. Custom Textbook and Companion Website. The Course Coordinator and the Department Chair for FYP are co-editors of a custom textbook for KSU 1101 published by Pearson Custom Publishing. A unique feature of *Foundations for Academy Inquiry* is that it is written almost exclusively by FYP faculty. The textbook is designed and geared to meet the needs of first-year students while focusing on the course’s four learning outcomes. A companion website is hosted by Pearson and has many online assessments and support for each textbook chapter. Faculty authors also developed a test bank and Powerpoint presentations for their chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> These seven driving forces, according to CSIS researchers, are population, resource management, technology, information/knowledge, economic integration, conflict, and governance.

## ***II. Methods of assessment of student learning and achievement that go beyond student evaluations, and the use of the assessment results to inform teaching practices, and curriculum development and revision.***

While there are multiple assessments for the FYE initiatives, only two examples will be provided below. Assessment of the advising teams, Early Start Bridge Academy, and other aspects of the seminar courses and LCs are detailed elsewhere in this document.

A. Research that Led to the First-Year Curriculum Requirement. While there was no longitudinal assessment program developed when KC 101 was added to the curriculum in 1983, sporadic studies showed the effectiveness of the course, especially on target populations. For example, Dr. Bowman Davis studied the retention rate of “academically high-risk students,” comparing those who took the first-year seminar with those who did not in 1984-1986. Results showed significant improvements in both retention rates and cumulative first-year GPAs among the KC 101 students studied. When LCs were piloted in 2000, the GPAs of the 180 students enrolled were compared to random samples of KSU 1101 students and a control group. Results showed a statistically significant difference in the LC students; their first-semester GPAs were 2.52, compared with 2.32 for KSU 1101 students and 2.24 for the control group. A case study of students in MATH 1113 in fall 2004 revealed that students who were taking the course within a LC persisted to a greater degree than those who were taking it independently, and the LC students had slightly higher grades. These and other qualitative and quantitative studies – as well as retention data that consistently showed KSU 1101 students (and then LC students who had the seminar course as part of their community) were retained at higher rates than those not in the course – led the University College Advisory Council to propose the first-year curriculum requirement.

B. Common Reader Data Promotes Engagement. An annual assessment of the common reader program was launched in 2007, the year first-year students read *Not For Sale*. Quantitative and qualitative data from close to 700 KSU 1101 students was presented at the International Conference on the First-Year Experience<sup>2</sup> and has been submitted for publication<sup>3</sup>. The data revealed that the common reader program promoted greater appreciation for reading; encouraged social and academic connections among students, faculty, and the book’s author; and enhanced students’ global understanding while promoting global engagement. Results showed that incoming traditional-age students can not only tackle a complex issue like human trafficking but can also find avenues to engage in eradicating this global problem. They read, discussed with others, participated in opportunities to learn more, and developed ways to take what they learned beyond the specific first-year seminar course. The assessment of the 2007-2008 common reader informed the faculty choice for 2008-2009 and helped to generate the idea to engage students in raising the needed funds to build a school in rural Pakistan.

## ***III. Active support to enable faculty to use innovative and effective forms of pedagogy and technology, e.g. critical thinking, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, learning communities, etc.***

A. Internal Grant/Funding Opportunities: Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), University College Incentive Grants, Travel Support from the Dean’s office, QEP, Online Course Development. Numerous faculty have received \$500 to \$750 internal grants for innovative program development. For example, five faculty in fall 2008 and spring 2009 received a grant to develop an

<sup>2</sup> Hoerner, K., Goldfine, R., Mixson-Brookshire, D., Schnur, L. & Morrissey, J. (2008). *Getting students engaged: Effective common reader strategies*. Paper presentation at the International Conference on the First-Year Experience, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> Goldfine, R., K. Hoerner, D. Mixson Brookshire and J. Morrissey (submitted) *Getting first-year students globally engaged: Using the common reader to promote reading, connections and engagement*. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*.

Experiential Education module to enable them to present a workshop at CETL in fall 2009. FYE faculty have been particularly successful in securing CETL's Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Grants, Faculty Learning Community grants, and an Undergraduate Research Travel grant.

On an annual basis the Dean of University College offers incentive grants to faculty to develop new courses including new themed versions of KSU 1101, new LCs, and new pedagogical approaches that foster student learning. Grants are also awarded to support travel to regional, national, and international conferences to present findings from assessment studies and other research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and to participate in workshops designed to improve the teaching of first-year students. Grants have also been awarded to create resource libraries for LCs and first-year seminar courses. In FY 09 more than \$28,000 was awarded to FYP faculty for stipends, travel, and resource material acquisition through a competitive internal grant process. The Dean's office provided an additional \$17,000 in support of travel for University College faculty to national and international conferences for presentations related to programming for first-year students and to members of the Dean's staff to explore opportunities for external funding of first-year programming.

A special allocation of an additional \$20,000 was made available to University College in support of KSU's QEP, "*Global Education for Engaged Citizenship*," for FY 08 and 09. Each year about half that allocation has supported projects or travel related to the teaching of first-year students.

In FY 09 an additional allocation of \$17,500 has been made to University College to develop and implement online versions of some of its courses. Approximately half of those funds will be used for developing and implementing an online version of KSU 1101.

B. Themed Learning Communities. FYP promotes, organizes, and facilitates faculty-driven learning communities to promote student learning and retention and to enable like-minded faculty to work together in linked courses driven by a common theme. Some of these communities are major-specific such as "Fit to Teach" for education majors, and many are related to KSU's QEP such as "Beyond 'The Big Chicken': The Year of Turkey." There are also general interest communities such as "Class of 2012" and "Leadership for Social Change." These LCs are comprised of a combination of two, three or four General Education, elective, and/or lower-division major courses and may or may not contain a first-year seminar. Students learn the value of foundation courses through student-centered active learning experiences that connect concepts across disciplines. These cohorts of 20-25 students connect with each other, connect to campus, and connect to faculty from multiple disciplines in their first year of college.

C. Learning Community Professional Development Opportunities. Since 2004, FYP's Learning Communities Coordinator has conducted a workshop that brings together faculty linked by LC to discuss the best methods to serve the students via the LC method. According to a research paper by two faculty members in the Department of First-Year Programs, from 2004-2007, a two-to-four day workshop in May "included a keynote speaker, whose presentation focused on helping faculty to understand the motivations, needs, and attitudes of incoming students and how to challenge and support them. Other featured speakers addressed the demographic picture of the incoming first-year class and the scholarship of teaching and learning within LCs. Both faculty and student panels were also [featured]." In spring 2008, the workshop model was modified to focus on providing protected time for LC faculty to develop their approaches to their themes for the following fall. Emphasis is placed on satisfying the four learning outcomes for LCs.

In Fall 2008, a Brown Bag series of six events was initiated to encourage faculty to learn and share expertise about specific topics, such as how to conduct research related to LCs. Four discussion leaders from campus were featured, and two open sessions with the Coordinator of Learning Communities sessions were scheduled.

LC faculty also are encouraged to participate in the annual National Learning Communities Conference and to publish their work in the *Journal of Learning Communities Research*.

D. Summer Orientation for Part-time and Adjunct Faculty. Each summer the Course Coordinator, in conjunction with the Dean of University College and the Chair of the FYP Department, presents a daylong orientation session for faculty teaching the seminar. The orientation is directed primarily toward part-time faculty and professional staff members. The orientation covers course structure, requirements, the custom website and WebCT/Vista, teaching strategies, ancillary materials and more. Responses have been overwhelmingly positive, and new adjunct faculty members are particularly appreciative of the opportunity to learn from their full-time colleagues.

F. Online Certification/Training. Three members of the FYP faculty have completed the KSU's online teaching certification, allowing them to develop and teach online courses. One of them was named the department's Online Course Development Coordinator and will pilot a fall 2009 online section of KSU 1101. The online section is designed to support students in the new BBA program that is completely online; further, it is being developed to support one of President Papp's strategic initiatives to increase access to students who might not be able to attend traditional classes.

The certified faculty also have an opportunity to teach hybrid versions of the seminar, and they receive additional support and training from CETL. Developing and teaching either hybrid or online courses promotes faculty development while also helping the department serve a niche of students who need the seminar in a different delivery mode.

***IV. Strong links between good teaching and various rewards, e. g., compensation, promotion, tenure, grants, leaves, travel, departmental or program-based awards, etc.***

As stated previously, the FYP Department is unique in its structure. It is an interdisciplinary academic department with two tenured and 9 tenure-track members of the faculty. There are also three Lecturers who can seek promotion to Senior Lecturer. Evidence of excellence in teaching is a primary component in the department's tenure and promotion guidelines.

A. Awards

1. National Awards: Each year the National Resource Center for FYE and Students in Transition, with the support and co-sponsorship of Cengage Learning, recognizes individuals on the nation's campuses who are Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates. Presidents are invited to nominate one educator on their campus, and a national panel of distinguished educators reviews the nomination portfolios and selects 10 individuals as the nation's Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates. Two award recipients are chosen in each of five categories based on institution type and size.

In 1999 Dr. Nancy King, then Vice President for Student Success and Enrollment Services at KSU, received this award. In 2009, Dr. Ralph J. Rascati, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of University College, became the second individual from KSU to win the prestigious award.

2. College Awards: Each year University College recognizes faculty performance with awards for Distinguished Professional Service, Distinguished Scholarship, and Distinguished Teaching. In the past two years, since the establishment of the Department of First-Year Programs, departmental faculty have won three of the six awards given, one in each of the three categories. These awards were given in recognition for their activities promoting the success of first-year students.

B. Recognition

1. Selection to Lead Pre-Conference Workshop at National FYE Conference: The National Resource Center for FYE and Students in Transition has invited two Department of First-Year Programs faculty members to lead a Pre-Conference Workshop at the National Conference on the First-Year Experience in February 2010. The workshop, "Experiential learning for first-year students, as easy as falling off a log," is designed to focus on the concept of knowledge through the transformation of experience. This is quite an honor, and it illustrates KSU's standing as a leader in innovative pedagogy for first-year students.

2. **Recognition of Expertise in the Field of LC Research:** KSU plays a leading national role in both the National Learning Communities Conference (NLCC) and the *Journal of Learning Communities Research (JLCR)*. KSU is a member of a six-school consortium responsible for the annual National Learning Communities Conference. In November 2009, KSU will host the conference. The *Journal of Learning Communities Research (JLCR)*, the only academic journal dedicated to advancing research and best practice of LCs, is a collaborative effort between KSU and IUPUI. One of the journal's co-editors, the managing editor, the book review editor and the subscription manager are all FYP Department faculty or staff.

3. **Collaborating Outside of the University:** University College's Associate Dean and an FYP faculty member are working collaboratively with four HBCUs (Fort Valley State University, Tennessee State University, Alcorn State University and Alabama State University) to pilot modified versions of KSU's first-year seminar at those institutions. The five university consortium is preparing a grant proposal that will be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to support this effort.

4. **Site Visits:** As a benchmarking institution for the Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year program and because the university is one of six institutions in the national Learning Communities Consortium, delegations from other institutions visit the Department of First-Year Programs to learn about KSU's FYE program. In the past several years, delegations from Columbus State University, Auburn University, University of Tennessee - Chattanooga, Austin-Peay State University and Utah Valley State College have all visited. The department averages two site visits each academic year.

5. **SACS Evaluator for QEP:** Dr. Keisha Hoerrner, now FYP Department Chair, was chosen in 2006 to serve as the QEP Lead Evaluator for Tri-County Technical College's SACS reaffirmation team. The institution's QEP was improving first-year student success through the development of a first-year seminar course and LCs.

***V. Departmental/unit policies that encourage collaborative faculty efforts, including team teaching, teaching discussion groups, common assessments, interdisciplinary courses, learning communities, mentoring, etc.***

By its very nature as an interdisciplinary department, housing faculty whose discipline backgrounds range from business to English, FYP policies encourage and honor collaboration, integration, and shared governance.

A. **Integration within LCs:** The LCs program at KSU is the embodiment of collaborative, interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Although the program is housed in the Department of First-Year Programs, LCs are a campus-wide effort. For example, in Fall 2008, nearly 800 students enrolled in 34 LCs that involved 61 instructors from 16 academic departments and five administrative departments. Every academic college was involved. At this time, there are no financial incentives for faculty to participate in LCs. Those who volunteer to teach in LCs are among those most dedicated to student-centered learning at KSU.

B. **Presidential Emerging Scholars Study Abroad LC – Fall 2009:** This four-course LC, "Ethical leadership in an age of global engagement," is among the first in the nation to integrate the study of global issues, leadership development, and a study abroad trip to create a uniquely meaningful experience for high-achieving first-year students. Students will study and then experience the challenges facing citizens of Salvador, Brazil. Particular interest will be directed toward educational, governmental, cultural, business, and economic matters. Students also will be introduced to LINK, the personal development program offered by KSU's Center for Student Leadership.

C. **Joint-Appointments:** University College has a number of faculty with joint appointments to either another academic unit or a unit within the Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services. Two

faculty members in FYP have joint appointments with the College of the Arts, one in Visual Arts and one in Theatre and Performance Studies. These faculty provide FYP with unique opportunities to develop LCs targeted toward students majoring in those disciplines. Another faculty member has a joint appointment in the Department of University Studies and as the Director of the Center for Student Leadership. He has been heavily involved in the globally focused KSU 2290 and in LCs focused on leadership.

***VI. An on-going and data-driven process for reviewing and reshaping curricula so that achieving academic excellence and serving the needs of all students remain as top priorities.***

A. Retention Data: One measure of student success is the ability of an institution to retain its students in good academic standing and to have them graduate from the institution. The success of any FYE program is probably best measured by the first-to-second year retention rate. Graduation rates are probably most affected by a student's performance in courses mandated by the student's chosen major field of study and are less attributable to their first-year experience. The data in the table below show retention rates attributable to KSU's FYE program. Data are presented in Table 2 for the three cohorts immediately preceding the implementation of the first-year curriculum requirement (fall 2002, fall 2003, and fall 2004) and in Table 3 for the 3 cohorts since implementation of the first-year curriculum requirement (fall 2005, fall 2006, and fall 2007).

**TABLE 2: Retention by Cohort Year before Curriculum Requirement <sup>4</sup>**

Category	2002			2003			2004		
	N	% Ret	% Inc	N	% Ret	% Inc	N	% Ret	% Inc
Not in FYE <sup>a</sup>	1053	74.0	--	1264	73.4	--	711	71.4	--
In FYE <sup>b</sup>	769	78.9	4.9	788	80.1	6.7	937	76.5	5.1

<sup>a</sup> Students not enrolled in KSU 1101 or an LC

<sup>b</sup> Students enrolled in KSU 1101 (alone or in an LC) + Students enrolled in an LC without a KSU 1101 section

**TABLE 3: Retention by Cohort Year after Curriculum Requirement**

Category	2005			2006			2007		
	N	% Ret	% Inc	N	% Ret	% Inc	N	% Ret	% Inc
Not in FYE <sup>a</sup>	322	60.6	--	378	68.3	--	213	74.2	--
In FYE <sup>b</sup>	1705	75.1	14.5	1975	77.6	9.3	2136	76.4	2.2

<sup>a</sup> Students not enrolled in KSU 1101 or an LC

<sup>b</sup> Students enrolled in KSU 1101 (alone or in an LC) + Students enrolled in an LC without a KSU 1101 section

It can be seen from the data that there is a measureable positive effect of the FYE program. In the years since the implementation of the first-year curriculum requirement that effect appears to be more variable. However, that can probably be attributed to the small number of students in the base (students not enrolled in either a first-year seminar and/or a LC). With numbers that small, a difference in retention of 2 or 3 students changes the retention rate by 1%. For example in fall 2007 a difference of 21 students retained would change the % retained by 10% for those not in the FYE, whereas those same 21 students would only change the % retained by 1% for those students in the FYE. Therefore, instead of looking at each year independently, it may be more instructive to calculate the mean retention over the entire 6-year period. The baseline retention (those not in FYE) would be 71.7%. Retention for those in the FYE would be 77.0%. This is a 5.3% increase due to the FYE program. This translates to an additional 440 students retained over

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the number of students in FYE for 2004-2007 are lower in Tables 2 and 3 than for the comparable years in Table 1. This is because Table 1 contains all students served by the program whereas Tables 2 and 3 only contain first-time, full-time, first-year students.

the 6-year period analyzed and, if one considers the current (fall 2008) size of the class of incoming first-year students, means an additional 130-135 students retained per year – more as enrollment grows.

B. Early Start Bridge Academy (ESBA): Some students are admitted to KSU with the need to take Learning Support Mathematics, MATH 0099, before they can enroll in their first college-credit-bearing math course. The DFW rate for MATH 0099 is typically 20-30%. Therefore, an initiative was developed in summer 2008 to address this problem: the Early Start Bridge Academy (ESBA). A group of 29 incoming, self-selecting first-year students requiring learning support math were given the opportunity to enroll in a two-course LC consisting of MATH 0099 and KSU 1101. The students had additional time to master the material because the courses started in the summer (4 weeks) and continued into fall semester (15 weeks). Therefore, the students had 19 weeks to master the mathematics material rather than the traditional 15 weeks. The KSU 1101 course focused on time management skills and strategies for academic success during the four-week summer timeframe. This early start resulted in improved grades in that section of MATH 0099 (DFW rate = 7%; Pass rate = 93%)<sup>5</sup>. In addition, post-test responses on the Mathematics Self-Efficacy Test, students' journal entries, WebCT/ Vista discussion forums, and focus group discussions indicated improved study skills and demonstrated a positive attitude regarding their ability to be successful in college in general and mathematics in particular<sup>6</sup>. These encouraging numbers have resulted in an expansion of ESBA planned for summer/fall 2009.

C. Early Alert: In fall 2007 the Director of First-Year Retention Initiatives piloted an Early Alert/Early Intervention program in KSU 1101 classes to identify first-semester students who were experiencing poor academic performance and to direct them to appropriate resources or interventions that could help them succeed. KSU's implementation of the Early Alert/Early Intervention Program is an important element in the campus RPG initiative and the university's strategic plan. In the fall 2007 implementation, Early Alert referrals were received from 92% of KSU 1101 faculty. Of the 198 students who were contacted by Early Alert, 125 (75%) completed the semester in good academic standing. In fall 2008 138 students were referred for Early Alert. Of these, 88 (64%) students completed the semester in good academic standing. The current manual implementation of the program will continue in KSU 1101. However, because the manual implementation is labor intensive, expansion to other courses will be dependent on the acquisition of software with a point-and-click interface for identification and intervention referral to automate the process for faculty.

D. KSU 0090 Course for Students on Academic Probation: In spring 2009 the department developed a 10-week, 1-credit-hour, pass/fail course (KSU 0090) to help students who are on academic probation after their first semester regain good academic standing. The course, which will be required of these students beginning Spring 2010, focuses on time management, learning styles, and strategies for academic success as well as strategic choice of a major. Individual Development Plans will be created with each student, and follow-up appointments will be required after the 10-week session.

E. Future Assessments with New Dedicated Assessment Coordinator: In fall 2008 a successful national search filled a new Assessment Coordinator position. This person will begin in summer 2009 and will have 50% responsibility to teach KSU 1101 and 50% responsibility as the Assessment Coordinator for University College. This summer the individual will begin developing and implementing a comprehensive longitudinal

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<sup>5</sup> Matthews, K., Myles, N. & Naidu, P. (2009). *Kennesaw State University's Early Start Bridge Academy: Connecting Mathematics Self-Efficacy with Academic Success and Retention*. Presented at the National Conference on the First-Year Experience, Orlando, FL.

<sup>6</sup> P. Naidu, R.J. Rascati, K. Matthews, R. Birrell, T. Jones and R. Casey. (2008) *Kennesaw State University's Early Start Bridge Academy: Connecting Mathematics Self-Efficacy with Academic Success and Retention*. Presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Research in Access and Developmental Education, Sept 24-27, San Juan, PR.

assessment strategy for all programs in University College with the highest priority being assigned to those programs that serve first-year students.

## **VII. Exemplary programs for advising, mentoring, recruiting, and retaining students; co-curricular work with students; out-of-class learning.**

A. Advising/Advising Teams: In fall 2008 a new First Year Advising Center (FYAC) was opened to better serve the needs of first-year students. This advising center is jointly operated by Student Success Services (SSS)<sup>7</sup> and University College. It is staffed by professional academic advisors from SSS, an FYP faculty member with 50% responsibility to the FYAC, and the college's Director of First-Year Retention Initiatives.

FYP faculty have taken an active role in student advising, functioning as academic advisors and mentors, especially to exploratory students who have not yet declared a major. In fall 2006 a pilot study was done in which advising teams were formed for 10 sections of KSU 1101. Teams consisted of the instructor of the section, a professional advisor supplied by SSS, and a student Peer Advisor supplied by the Center for Student Leadership. Retention and GPA were compared to a matched set of students in sections that did not have advising teams assigned. Retention results were encouraging, but not statistically significant. GPA results showed a significant increase for students with advising teams assigned when the students followed up with those teams. In fall 2007 the program was expanded to 50 sections. Preliminary results from these studies were presented at the 2008 NACADA meeting<sup>8</sup>, and the complete results from the two-year study were presented at the Foundations of Excellence meeting in 2009<sup>9</sup> and are summarized below. Statistically significant increases in both GPA and retention were observed for those students in the 50 sections with advising teams who followed up with their team members:

<u>Retention</u> :	81.7% for those assigned advising teams who followed up with team members
	74.2% for those assigned advising teams who did not follow up with team members
	72.6% for those without advising teams.
<u>GPA</u> :	2.99 for those assigned advising teams who followed up with team members
	2.67 for those assigned advising teams who did not follow up with team members
	2.68 for those without advising teams.

Based on these results, all fall 2008 sections of the First-Year Seminar were assigned advising teams. This has now become a permanent feature of the program, and efforts are now directed at getting more students to make follow-up appointments.

B. Peer Leaders/Peer Advisors: In collaboration with the Center for Student Leadership (CSL), two related programs have been developed. The Peer Leader Program uses students affiliated with the CSL who have previously completed KSU 1101 as student assistants for faculty currently teaching KSU 1101. They attend every class session for the section to which they are assigned and perform a variety of functions at the request of the instructor, such as facilitating class discussions, organizing co-curricular activities associated with the class, helping students in the class prepare for advising sessions, or helping connect students to campus resources and activities.

The Peer Advisor program was developed concurrently with the pilot of the Advising Team program. Peer Advisors meet with the class to which they are assigned a few times during the semester to discuss academic advising and other campus connections. Many maintain contact with their assigned classes through Facebook accounts and are available by this mechanism or by email to answer questions from students. In FY 09 a more structured training program was developed for the Peer Advisors. Student

<sup>7</sup> SSS is a unit within the Division of Student Success and Enrollment Services.

<sup>8</sup> Rascati, R.J., B.Glankler and J.G. Craven. 2008. A Team Approach to Advising Exploratory First-Year Students: Using Faculty, Professional & Peer Advisors. Presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference on Academic Advising (NACADA), Oct 1-4, Chicago, IL.

<sup>9</sup> Rascati, R.J. and K.L. Hoerrner. 2009. Structural Reorganization, Increased Collaboration, and Curricular Reform at Kennesaw State University, Presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Foundations of Excellence Winter Meeting, Feb 6, Orlando, FL.

feedback indicates that both Peer Leaders and Peer Advisors have been well received by the KSU 1101 faculty and by the KSU 1101 students.

C. AAMI Learning Community: KSU is participating in the African-American Male Initiative (AAMI). One of KSU's efforts for AAMI was the development of a LC for first-year students (2006-2008). AAMI students met with representatives from Student Success Services and Study Abroad programs to learn about course options and degree plans. AAMI students also met several times to discuss grades with advisors in the office of Multicultural Student Retention Services. AAMI students met with community leaders, including city council members, state senators, university presidents and provosts, and also attended workshops on leadership. AAMI students were involved in out-of-class learning. Each AAMI participant volunteered through Volunteer KSU a minimum of six hours. In addition, they helped organize and attended a day-long set of activities at Grady High School in Atlanta led by congressmen, civic leaders, community activists and state representatives to increase political and civic engagement. The students helped organize and attended a similar event titled "Are You Engaged?" on the KSU Campus.

D. Department-Sponsored Guest Lecturers: The FYP Department strives to provide students with stimulating out-of-class learning opportunities. One way this is accomplished is through guest lectures by the author of the annual common reader. In the past four years, the department has sponsored visits by Dr. Eugen Schoenfeld, Da Chen, Dr. David Batstone, and Greg Mortenson. The department also works closely with the Dean of University College and the American Democracy Project/Political Engagement Project committee to sponsor noted lecturers including Dr. Erik Peterson who serves as the Senior Vice President, the William A. Schreyer Chair in Global Analysis, and the Director of the Global Strategy Institute in the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. FYP faculty are also active in inviting KSU alumni, community members, and other experts into their classrooms while encouraging students to take advantage of campus and community events that introduce them to a variety of speakers and topics.

E. Out-of-Class Engagement: Noted researchers Dr. Joe Cuseo and Dr. Vincent Tinto point to a lack of connection as one of the primary reasons first-year students are not retained. To address this concern, the KSU 1101 seminar seeks to promote student-campus connections, as indicated in its learning outcomes. To that end, KSU 1101 sections have worked together on Habitat for Humanity builds, visited Dixie Motor Speedway in their NASCAR-themed section, and worked with Moe's Southwest Grill as part of their KSU 2290 course to conduct a fundraiser for Greg Mortenson's work. They've also attended lectures, performances, and sporting events on campus. The department also sponsors an annual out-of-class event for all incoming students in August: the First-Year Convocation. This special ceremony officially welcomes the students into KSU's community of learners and promotes commencement as the "book-end" ceremony they will complete in four years.

***VIII. Successes of the department's or program's students, e. g., graduation, job placement, acceptance in graduate schools, etc.***

The FYE program defines its success by the number of first-year students who return to KSU for a second year in good academic standing with an eye toward major selection and the motivation to graduate.

Graduation success, job placement, and graduate school acceptances are the purview of degree programs and the departments that house them. However, some student success stories can be directly attributed to their first-year experience. Two examples are presented below:

A. First-Year Seminar Student Presents at National Conference: In fall 2007 a student, Landon Waters, in a NASCAR-themed first-year seminar wrote a research paper titled: "NASCAR's *Car of Tomorrow*: The Little Stock Car that Could." With the encouragement of his professor he submitted and later presented the paper to the Sports Division, Popular Culture Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco in March 2008.

B. First-Year Student Honored in ONE Campus Challenge: The ONE Campaign, a national grassroots organization dedicated to ending global poverty and promoting the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, sponsored the ONE Campus Challenge this fall, and more than 1,000 colleges and universities participated. Audrey Ruark, a first-year student in KSU 2290, was inspired by the ONE Campaign's goals and volunteered to lead KSU's efforts in the Challenge. She recruited students to the cause, developed events on campus to raise awareness about the MDGs, engaged Greek organizations to support ONE, and presented President Papp with a proclamation that he signed designating KSU as a ONE Campus. Miss Ruark's efforts placed KSU in the top 15 schools, the only institution in Georgia to receive such an honor. Miss Ruark was invited to the ONE Power Summit, an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., where she interacted with members of Congress, leading activists fighting global poverty, UN representatives, and celebrities. Miss Ruark's accomplishments illustrate KSU's QEP in action.

***IX. Clear articulation of how quality is defined, promoted and assessed by the department or program.***

A. Course Rigor: In 2006, a committee was created to ensure all students in the seminar have a common pedagogical experience and to ensure academic rigor in the course. The committee did not propose a common syllabus so as to allow faculty to teach to their individual strengths, styles, and interests; rather, the committee created 11 course mandates, which range from a common textbook and common reader, to mid-term and final exams, to research projects and a group project. To assist with the RPG initiative and with the Early Alert/Early Intervention program, a policy was set in place in 2007 that at least one major assignment be completed, graded, and returned to students no later than the fourth week of class.

B. GPA: One measure of the academic rigor of the multi-section KSU 1101 course is its aggregate GPA, which was 3.37 in fall 2004. [This was higher than the average of all undergraduate courses at KSU, and most likely represented a form of grade inflation resulting from an inconsistent application of academically rigorous assignments and standards.] In fall 2006 after a renewed focus on academic rigor, the aggregate GPA was reduced to 3.26. In a continuing effort to address this issue, the course mandates discussed earlier were enacted in fall 2007. That fall, and again in fall 2008, the aggregate GPA was further reduced to 3.15. The FYP Department faculty are pleased with the progress being made. However, they will continue to monitor the aggregate GPA and compare it to the undergraduate average to ensure that this course meets the academic rigor to which KSU aspires.

***Conclusion: External Endorsement of KSU's FYE Program***

Clear evidence of the quality of KSU's FYE program and its various facets can be gleaned from comments made by individuals outside of KSU who are well versed in the area of FYE programs and whose reputations in the field have been long established. Some of these are cited below and in the attached letter from Dr. John H. Gardner.

A. LCs, The National Learning Communities Conference (NLCC) and the *Journal of Learning Communities Research (JLCR)*

Scott Evenbeck, Dean of University College at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) wrote the following:

“The NLCC Consortium, fostered by the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education, was launched as a Midwestern Consortium, first of Delta College with Harper College, both community colleges, and then including IUPUI as a four-year institution, and then including Kansas City Community Colleges, as the regional conference became a national conference and a “signature” element of the learning community movement in the nation. The partners invited Kennesaw as a partner in recognition of Kennesaw's national leadership with innovative curricula, particularly with learning communities. With the addition of a second four-year institution and one from the south, the consortium became truly national. Kennesaw has been an outstanding partner, and IUPUI has

been proud to co-sponsor the *Journal of Learning Communities Research*, a collaboration coming directly from our collaboration in the consortium.

Frank Ross, Ph.D., Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Life and Learning at IUPUI, and current co-editor of the *Journal of Learning Communities Research* says:

“The National Learning Communities Conference is an annual opportunity for professional development attracting faculty and higher education professionals from across the country.... Kennesaw State University, as the host institution for the 2009 NLCC is responsible for coordinating all logistics related to the conference, as well as ensuring an outstanding program of conference sessions and workshops for attendees. Without the leadership of the team from Kennesaw, the 2009 NLCC would not be possible.”

Barbara Jackson, Ph.D., of IUPUI, former co-editor of *JLCR*, says:

“Kennesaw State was the prime mover in the establishment of the *Journal of Learning Communities Research*... Kennesaw State sought to establish a peer-reviewed journal which would serve the goals of facilitating communication among learning communities researchers and practitioners as well as provide credibility and visibility within the academy for a new undergraduate pedagogy.”

B. KSU's FYE Program – Finally, two letters of support were received. These are best appreciated by reading them in their entirety. Therefore, they are attached to this narrative and constitute the final two pages of this nomination document. The first is from Dr. Mary Stuart Hunter, Executive Director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. The second is from Dr. John N. Gardner, Senior Fellow of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and Executive Director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College.



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BUILDING A BETTER FOUNDATION FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Dr. Ralph J. Rascati  
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA 30144

April 22, 2009

Subject: Support for University System of Georgia Regents' Excellence Award

Dear Colleagues of the Review Process:

I provide this letter in my capacity as the University of South Carolina's Senior Fellow in the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and as Executive Director of a non-profit organization, the Policy Center on the First Year of College. I evaluate Kennesaw's efforts in the context of having visited eighteen of the USG campuses and over 500 other US campuses engaged in work to improve the beginning college experience.

The University of Georgia as a System has a long and distinguished history as both a system and individual campuses in pursuit of improved performance of first-year students. I know of no USG institution that has made a greater, more consistent and more distinguished effort in this regard than Kennesaw State University. The University's efforts are most notable because:

1. Unlike many first-year experience efforts they are highly institutionalized.
2. They are not the administrative fad du jour, having enjoyed strong support from faculty and two presidential and multiple provostial tenures, over more than 25 years.
3. They have been based on continuing experimentation, never coasting on institutional laurels, which has in turn been based on continuing assessment.
4. The results of these efforts and assessments have been widely disseminated in the academy through publishing and conference presentations.
5. These efforts do not constitute a boutique program serving only a small constituency. Instead they are broad based and constitute a widely shared common experience.
6. These efforts have inspired replication elsewhere.
7. These original first-year improvement efforts have spawned other now institutionalized innovations for the sophomore and senior year experiences.
8. These efforts involve multiple, coordinated, integrated approaches such as a comprehensive first-year seminar; learning communities; academic support with Supplemental Instruction; a common reading experience and reader; utilization of peer leaders; an early alert intervention; a summer bridge program; a unique version of the University College concept with a specially dedicated, appointed, tenured, faculty rewarded for its teaching excellence; an intentional set of core values which underlie all program components; and very, very impressive retention outcomes.
9. Kennesaw's past record of distinction led to its selection in 2003 as one of twelve "Founding Institutions" for the national Foundations of Excellence recognition project out of an applicant pool of 124 peer institutions.

I am well satisfied that Kennesaw deserves the highest level of recognition for its commitment to improving first-year student learning, success and retention.

Sincerely,

John N. Gardner, Executive Director



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Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
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Sincerely,

John N. Gardner, Executive Director



UNIVERSITY 101  
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR  
THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND  
STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

April 24, 2009

Ralph J. Rascati  
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Kennesaw State University  
1000 Chastain Road, Mailstop #2401  
Kennesaw, GA 30144

Dear Dr. Rascati,

I write this letter in support of your award application to the University System of Georgia, Regents Excellence Award for First-Year Programming. I write in my capacity as Executive Director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.

By way of background for the grant review committee, the Center has as its purpose the support and advancement of efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. We do this important work through the collection and dissemination of information about the first-college year and other significant student transitions. This information is used to assist educators and to enhance the learning, success, satisfaction, retention, and graduation of college students in transition. To that end, the Center organizes and hosts a highly influential series of national conferences and institutes, engages in research, publishes a scholarly journal, a newsletter, a monograph series, and other publications, maintains a website and several internet listservs, serves as a site for hosting sabbaticals and visits from scholars and educators, and houses a library collection, provides telephone support and assistance for thousands of educators annually.

I have been aware of the excellent work in the first-year at Kennesaw for many years. The faculty and staff engaged in a wide variety of efforts there have developed excellent institutional programs for first-year students and have also provided leadership on national and international levels through their scholarship, presentations at conferences, and consultation with other campuses. Kennesaw is one of the few, if not the only, institution to support first-year efforts in such a significant way by creating a dedicated, tenure-track faculty for the first-year program. Their approach is the envy of many campuses across the country. Their data-driven decision making and their significant resource allocation to the first year is to be commended. Additional support and recognition for this program from the University System of Georgia Board of Regents will allow Kennesaw to solidify its good work at the very highest levels of national leadership in first year programs.

Sincerely,

Mary Stuart Hunter  
Executive Director