

YOUR FIRST COLLEGE YEAR (YFCY) AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF EXCELLENCE PROJECT

Funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and Lumina Foundation for Education the Policy Center on the First Year of College, “Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year” currently has in development and piloting a set of standards for excellence in the first year. The primary goal of this project is to develop both an aspirational model for the first year and a set of measurement tools and processes to enable campuses to measure their performance vis a vis these “dimensions” of excellence. While not specifically developed for this purpose, the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey includes questions that address student experiences related to many of the elements of our “Foundational Dimensions” for first college year excellence. For your convenience, staff members from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and the Policy Center on the First Year of College have prepared the following description of this interface between these dimensions and YFCY.

Below you will find a full descriptions of many Foundational Dimensions in bold followed by a list of items from the Your First College Year (YFCY) that address each of these dimension statements. For more information on the Foundations of Excellence project, we invite you to visit the web site for the Policy Center on the First Year of College at <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/>. Similarly, details about the mission, administration, and national findings from the YFCY survey are available online at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/yfcy/>.

EDUCATED PERSON: Begin a process by which students gain an understanding of what it means to be an educated person according to institutional mission and values. Central to this understanding is the intellectual experience of the students’ first year. Thus, institutions establish clear academic goals and chart progress towards those goals.

The following items from the 2004 YFCY measure first-year students’ cognitive development, intellectual skills, and academic success:

#8 Since entering this college, how successful (*Completely successful, Successful, Unsuccessful*) have you felt at:

- Understanding what your professors expect of you academically
- Developing effective study skills
- Adjusting to the academic demands of college

#9 Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age (*Highest 10%, Above average, Average, Below average, Lowest 10%*). We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself.

Academic ability
Mathematical ability
Self-confidence (intellectual)
Writing ability

#20 Compare to when you entered this college, how would you now describe your (*Much stronger, Stronger, No change, Weaker, Much weaker*):

General knowledge
Analytical and problem-solving skills
Knowledge of a particular field or discipline
Critical thinking skills
Library/research skills

#23 What is your current grade average (as of your most recently completed academic term)?

A (3.75 - 4.00)
A-, B+ (3.25 - 3.74)
B (2.75 - 3.24)
B-, C+ (2.25 - 2.74)
C (1.75 - 2.24)
C- or less (below 1.75)
I do not receive grades in my courses

TRANSITIONS: Facilitate appropriate recruitment, admissions, and student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission. Institutions improve the academic and social readiness of students to make the transition to higher education environments by communicating clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and providing appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain linkages and curricular alignments between faculty and secondary school teachers, and they communicate with guidance counselors, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

The following questions from the 2004 YFCY represent measures of students' experiences with aspects of institutional support for educational success:

#5 Please rate your satisfaction (*Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied, No experience/Not available*) with each of the following campus service and facilities at this institution:

Classroom facilities
Computer facilities
Library facilities and services
Academic advising
Tutoring or other academic assistance
Registrar's office
Student housing facilities/services
Financial aid services
Career center/services
Student health center/services
Psychological counseling services
Recreational facilities
Orientation for new students

#16 Since entering college have you:

Enrolled in honors course
Enrolled in remedial/developmental course
Enrolled in a formal program where a group of students takes two or more courses together (e.g., FIG, learning cluster, learning community, linked courses)

#17 Have you taken a college course or seminar specifically designed to enhance the academic skills and/or social development of first-year college students (e.g., first-year seminar, student success seminar, basic student skills course, University 101)?

Yes, as a required component of the first-year curriculum
Yes, as an optional course
No, I did not take a first-year development/transition course or seminar

#18 Please select the type of course or seminar specifically designed to enhance the academic skills and/or social development of first-year students that best describes the section/seminar that you took.

Extended orientation seminar (e.g., college survival, college transition, or student success course)
Academic seminar where the primary focus on a general academic theme or discipline
Pre-professional or discipline-linked seminar that is designed to prepare students for the demands of a specific major, discipline, and/or profession
Basic study skills seminar that focuses on the acquisition of fundamental academic skills (e.g., college writing, note-taking, reading texts, etc.)
Other
I did not take a first-year development/transition course or seminar

FACULTY: Elevate the first college year to a high priority for the faculty. Chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs articulate expectations for substantial faculty interaction with first-year students, both inside and outside the classroom. The institutions' system of rewards supports these expectations.

The following items from the 2004 YFCY survey evaluate students' quantity and quality of interaction with faculty during the first year of college:

#4 Since entering college, how often have you interacted with the following people (e.g., by phone, e-mail, Instant Messenger, or in person) (*Daily, 2 or more times per week, Once a week, 1 or 2 times per month, 1 or 2 times per term, Never*):

Faculty during office hours
Faculty outside of class or office hours

#8 Since entering this college, how successful (*Completely successful, Successful, Unsuccessful*) have you felt at:

Understanding what your professors expect of you academically
Getting to know faculty

#13 Since entering this college, how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, or Not at all*) have you felt:

Intimidated by your professors

#19 Since entering college, indicate how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, or Not at all*) have you:

Worked with a professor on a research project
Received negative feedback about your academic work
Received advice and guidance about your educational program from a professor
Received emotional support and encouragement from a professor

#24 Please rate your satisfaction (*Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied*) with this institution on each of the aspects of campus life listed below:

Amount of contact with faculty

ENGAGEMENT: Engage students, both in and out of the classroom, in order to develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission. An explicit goal of first-year instruction across the curriculum,

engagement promotes intellectual curiosity and excitement. Engagement is also the basis for out-of-class learning and development. Whether in or out of the classroom, engagement promotes critical thinking, lifelong learning, moral and spiritual development, and civic responsibility.

The following items from the 2004 YFCY survey measure aspects of students' curricular and co-curricular involvement as well as their time allocation:

#10 Since entering this college, how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, or Not at all*) have you:

- Attended a religious service
- Felt bored in class
- Participated in organized demonstrations
- Studied with other students
- Performed volunteer work
- Come late to class

#13 Since entering this college, how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, or Not at all*) have you felt:

- That your courses inspired you to think in new ways

#16 Since entering this college have you:

- Decided to pursue a different major
- Declared your major
- Joined social fraternity or sorority
- Played varsity/intercollegiate athletics

#19 Since entering this college, indicate how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, or Not at all*) you:

- Turned in course assignment(s) late
- Spoke up in class
- Discussed course content with students outside of class
- Skipped class
- Turned in course assignments that did not reflect your best work
- Participated in intramural sports

#22 Since entering this college, how much time have you spent during a typical week (*None, Less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-5 hours, 6-10 hours, 11-15 hours, 16-20 hours, 21-30 hours, Over 30 hours*) doing the following activities?

- Attending classes/labs

Studying/homework
Socializing with friends
Exercising or sports
Partying
Working (for pay) on campus
Working (for pay) off campus
Volunteer work
Participating in student clubs/groups
Watching TV
Household/childcare duties
Reading for pleasure
Commuting
Playing video/computer games
Prayer/meditation
Surfing the Internet
Communicating via e-mail, instant messenger, etc.

DIVERSITY: Ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people different from themselves, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

The following items from the 2004 YFCY survey assess first-year students' worldview as well as their experiences with, and attitudes toward, issues of diversity and multiculturalism:

#9 Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age (*Highest 10%, Above average, Average, Below average, Lowest 10%*). We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself.

Understanding of others

#10 Since entering this college, how often (*Frequently, Occasionally, or Not at all*) have you:

Socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group

#12 Indicate the importance to you personally (*Essential, Very important, Somewhat important, Not important*) of each of the following:

Helping to promote racial understanding

Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures

#20 Compare to when you entered this college, how would you now describe your (*Much stronger, Stronger, No change, Weaker, Much weaker*):

Knowledge of people from different races/cultures

Ability to get along with others

Understanding of the problems facing your community

Understanding of national issues

Understanding of global issues

ROLES AND PURPOSES: Promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and for society, and support the development of relevant personal goals. First-year students are provided opportunities to examine their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college/university. They are exposed to the value of general education as well as to the value of more focused, in-depth study of a field or fields of knowledge (i.e., the major). In general, institutions help students realize a variety of balance points: for example, learning for personal enrichment; learning to prepare for future employment; learning to prepare for citizenship, and learning to serve the public good.

The following items from the 2003 CIRP Freshman Survey address many of the roles and purposes of higher education in general and students' institution in particular. Since the YFCY survey was designed as a follow-up to the CIRP Freshman Survey, these measures will be useful to those institutions that merge these two data sources to create a longitudinal data set:

#29 In deciding to go to college, how important (*Very important, Somewhat important, Not important*) was each of the following reasons?

My parents wanted me to go

I could not find a job

Wanted to get away from home

To be able to get a better job

To gain a general education and appreciate of ideas

To improve my reading and study skills

There was nothing better to do

To make me a more cultured person

To be able to make more money

To learn more about things that interest me

To prepare myself for graduate or professional school

A mentor/role model encouraged me to go

To get training for a specific career

#36 Below are some reasons that might have influenced your decision to attend this particular college. How important (*Very important, Somewhat important, Not important*) was each reason in your decision to come here?

My relatives wanted me to come here
My teacher advised me
This college has a very good academic reputation
This college has a good reputation for its social activities
I was offered financial assistance
This college offers special educational programs
This college has low tuition
High school counselor advised me
Private college counselor advised me
I wanted to live near home
Not offered aid by first choice
I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of the college
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college
Rankings in national magazines
Information from a website
I was admitted through an Early Action or Early Decision program
A visit to the campus
This college's graduates get good jobs

The following items on the 2004 YFCY represent an opportunity to assess first-year students' personal values and goals:

#12 Indicate the importance to you personally (*Essential, Very important, Somewhat important, Not important*) of each of the following:

Becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts (acting, dancing, etc.)
Becoming an authority in my field
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field
Influencing the political structure
Influencing social values
Raising a family
Having administrative responsibility for the work of others
Being very well off financially
Helping others who are in difficulty
Making a theoretical contribution to science
Writing original works (poems, novels, short stories, etc.)
Creating artistic work (painting, sculpture, decorating, etc.)
Becoming successful in a business of my own
Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life

Participating in a community action program
Helping to promote racial understanding
Keeping up to date with political affairs
Becoming a community leader
Integrating spirituality into my life
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures