

Hallmarks of Excellence in the First Year of College

(Version 1.0)

An AACSCU Hallmarks institution . . .

1. Approaches the first year in ways that are intentional, explicit, and based on a clear philosophy/rationale for students' first year. The overall institutional philosophy, as it relates to first-year students, is explicit, consistent with the broader institutional mission, clear and easily understood, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. Moreover, this philosophy is consistent with institutional policies and practices.
2. Establishes the necessary organizational structure(s) and policies to achieve a comprehensive, coordinated approach to the first year. These structures and policies provide the following: a) oversight and coordination of all first-year efforts, b) human and financial resources specifically budgeted to the first year, c) institutional policies that reflect a concern and support for the first year (e.g., tenure, promotion, and other reward policies and procedures; targeted faculty development efforts), d) clarity about admissions policies and institutional expectations of students, e) structured support services as needed, and f) partnerships among academic, student affairs, and other administrative units in a coordinated and collaborative effort on behalf of first-year students.
3. Serves all first-year students, including various sub-populations, relative to their needs. First-year efforts involve all admitted students at all academic levels and meet the particular needs of students in various sub-groups (e.g., adults, commuters, students with disabilities, minority students, etc.).
4. Seeks to engage students in the collegiate experience both in and out of class. Student engagement represents the extent to which students take part in educationally productive activities that are linked to desired outcomes of college. Student engagement is not only a means to student learning and success, it is also a worthy end in itself in that it promotes intellectual curiosity and excitement, as well as acquisition of various habits of mind that are the foundation for critical thinking, lifelong learning, and civic involvement. On Hallmarks campuses, student engagement is a clear goal for both first-year instruction across the disciplines and for out-of-class learning opportunities.
5. Ensures that all first-year students encounter diverse ideas, viewpoints, and people. Whatever the institution's demographic composition, first-year students have the opportunity to interact with those different from themselves, confront opinions and values different from those they currently hold, and explore a variety of world views and human experiences in a challenging and supportive environment.

6. Uses a variety of assessment designs and methods (quantitative and qualitative) to examine all aspects of students' first-year experience and to evaluate and understand the impact of institutional policies, strategies, and interventions on first-year students. Assessment tools include national or regional instruments that provide comparative data in addition to those developed within the institution. Assessment results are used for institutional decision-making, resource allocation, and continuous improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. Assessment is not limited to measures of student persistence and/or satisfaction but also investigates student learning according to defined and articulated goals for the first year.

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