

INTRODUCTION

A task force was assembled to review the status, depth, and breadth of first year student activities and asked to recommend a highly innovative co-curriculum program for Lehigh University. The First-Year Experience Task Force began its work in January of 2005 after receiving their charge from Provost El-Aasser. A synopsis of the task force's activities for the period of January – May 2005 is provided (see Appendix A). The purpose of the following report is to highlight the task force's activities and ultimately provide recommendations to the Provost on how to proceed in enhancing the first-year experience *and beyond* for Lehigh University students.

*Nothing in this world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.*¹

TASK FORCE REPORT

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Lehigh's First-Year *and Beyond* Experience is to define creative and innovative learning opportunities that will complement and enhance classroom experiences and provide students with a fully integrated education throughout their career at Lehigh. The goal is to instill within the student, the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and to excel in their chosen profession and to become a citizen-of-the-world. Lehigh has made the commitment to life-long learning and to motivate students to continually develop as a member of their family, their community, and the society-at-large.

*The signature of the Lehigh experience is that the inside of our students' heads becomes a more interesting place to live for the rest of their life.*²

STEP ONE: WHAT IS THE FIRST-YEAR AND BEYOND EXPERIENCE

Before recommendations could be formulated in how to enrich the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience, a necessary step was to ensure that all members of the task force agreed upon a common definition of what a first -year experience encompasses.

It's the first step of a holistic, life experience process that inspires an interest in life-long learning within the student. It assists the students in making the transition from high school to college life and puts them on the path to a successful college experience and beyond. It integrates the "traditional" division between academic and the informal activities associated with the full undergraduate experience. It formally, and informally, guides the student's development in areas such as personal competence, self identity, goals, and collegiality. It will provide students a vehicle to enhance their mastery of the academic world. The experience should be adaptive and intentional but not intrusive or prescriptive. It involves all the stakeholders, including parents, students, faculty, administration, staff, alumni, prospective employers, and the community-at-large.

STEP TWO: WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING – AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The task force members engaged in a limited environmental scan to see what other institutions are doing and to determine if there were industry-wide best practices currently in place. A short synopsis of the schools that were identified through web searches is available in Appendix B.

The schools that were reviewed are: ASU, Babson College, Bates, Brown, Ithaca College, Lebanon Valley College, MIT, Rochester Institute of Technology, St. Lawrence, University of Minnesota, University of Pittsburgh, University of South Carolina, University of Washington, and West Virginia University.

The task force identified the following as “best practices”:

1. Consistent and frequent communication with students via newsletters, Websites and other online resources (see LVC) ensures the messages are getting out to the students.
2. More expansive array of activities aimed at facilitating the transition to college such as Brown’s First Year Seminar program, MIT’s Concourse program, and Babson College’s First Year Curriculum.
3. Coordinated service learning experiences at Bates College.

The task force initially determined that many other universities were already providing an array of activities for first year students both prior to coming to the campus and within the first few months of arriving on campus.

One important find was that a systematic interdisciplinary/universal approach, namely the integration of academic and student life over a four-year period, was rarely identified. In most institutions, the activities for students within the colleges and academic affairs were not linked to those occurring in student life.

The task force believes that it has found a niche for Lehigh that will enable the institution to not only create a signature program but could become a model for other universities to follow when developing their Integrated the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience.

It should be noted that through the environmental scan it was noted that conferences are held annually on this topic. Although the Student Affairs Office routinely attends these conferences, it is rare that faculty attends. It was decided that two members of the task force would attend one conference during the 2005 summer.

STEP THREE: LEHIGH – AN INTERNAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN AND ASPIRATIONS

In Appendix C a summation of the first-year experiences that are currently being offered by the four colleges and Student Affairs is available. (Please note: As with all inventories it is possible that there are some programs being offered at Lehigh that are not listed on one of these reports.) By performing a campus-wide inventory, the task force was able to obtain a deeper understanding of the scope of the programs that are currently being offered.

In addition, many of the current programs had common goals. The four most frequent goals were:

1. To assist students in making in the transition to college life;
2. To assist students in connecting on both a social and academic level;
3. To assist students in establishing the proper set of expectations about college life, and
4. To develop life skills to prepare the students for their next transition after graduation.

Based on what the task force member’s had identified from their external and internal analysis of existing programs, it became clear that Lehigh needed to move beyond the four common

goals and that an integrated approach was best. In addition, if Lehigh created a program that went beyond the first-year it would provide students with an opportunity for systemic intellectual growth. However, before proceeding with its recommendations the task force decided to complete a Gap analysis followed by focus groups using current Lehigh students.

STEP FOUR: GAP ANALYSIS OF LEHIGH STUDENTS

Table A is a summary of the Gap Analysis that was completed by the members of the task force and was expanded to reflect the information that was received from the two rounds of focus groups. This analysis became the cornerstone of the task force’s recommendations. A review of this table establishes what the task force believes are the current students’ strengths and weakness across three domains essential for lifelong learning and a productive college career namely, Cognitive (intellectual capacity, prior learning), Conative (motivation), and Affective (emotion and social) areas. After completing the left side of the chart describing the current state of the student’s abilities in these three domains, the task force then went on to identify what characteristics were needed for our students to be successful in a career and life.

Table A.

Input --	Output --
<p>Cognitive Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They take tests well. • They are verbally articulate. • Very able to multi-task. <p>Cognitive Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t intellectually challenge themselves. • Lack intellectual curiosity. • Tend to be declarative rather than interrogative. • Don’t get what they don’t know (meta-cognition). • Tend to think in absolutes (no grays). • Behave as though all ideas/opinions are equally good or equally valid. • Not interdisciplinary thinkers • Lack of appreciation and understanding for healthy, well-being. • Tend not to be creative thinkers. • Unaware of intellectual gap between HS and college. • Don’t see connections among courses. 	<p>Cognitive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are intellectually curious. • Creative thinkers. • Interdisciplinary thinkers. • Effective communicators through various means of expression. • Have learned how to test the quality of ideas. • Seek cognitive dissonance. • Practice balanced, healthy lifestyle behaviors.
<p>Conative Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly motivated to succeed. • Highly motivated to understand how to cope with time management issues. • <p>Conative Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their definition of success is grades based. • Motivated to avoid failure when in conflict with their definition of success. • Don’t make the “growth choice.” • Not willing to learn from mistakes/failures. 	<p>Conative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are active participants in their intellectual pursuits. • Take measured risks and accept challenges especially in areas of intellectual discomfort. • Have accepted the responsibility of being a public citizen and educated person. • Have a personalized, broadened definition of success. • Make the “growth choice.” • Accept and rejoice in who they are and have become. •
<p>Affective Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very social (may not be so much F2F) • Happy • Well-adjusted 	<p>Affective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept responsibility and accountability for others as well as self. • No longer risk averse.

Input --	Output --
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enthusiastic and excited <p>Affective Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious/stress-filled • Afraid • Doubting (insecure intellectually) • Risk averse and afraid to take lead/responsibility • Fear of failure • Come from sheltered environments • Naive about diversity and all that it encompasses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared to accept a leadership role (could be as follower). • Have a broadened life experience (global view, multi-culturally sensitive). • Collaborative, cooperative, collegial (empathetic)

STEP FIVE: WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS SAY - FOCUS GROUPS

To test those statements of the Gap Analysis several different focus groups were held with Lehigh students.

Two series of focus groups were organized to ensure that the statements in the Gap Analysis were appropriate. Two different standard set of questions (which were created by Student Affairs and validated by the Associate Deans) were used for the two series of focus groups. Appendix D will provide the reader with a transcript of all the focus groups, as well as the results of the questionnaire that was given to the second focus groups.

The focus groups provided the task force with two very important pieces of information:

- The original Gap Analysis completed by the task force members was predominately correct. There were only minor changes that had to be made to the original chart.
- It is imperative that more in-depth focus groups must be held concurrently as the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience is expanded. The task force felt quite strongly that the university has only scratched the surface of the problems, concerns, and outstanding issues facing our students. The task force stated unequivocally that the students must become active participants in creating this program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After completing the above steps the following recommendations surfaced as to how to proceed to create a first-class model of an integrated First-Year *and Beyond* Experience for Lehigh students. These recommendations however should not be considered complete, but rather the first step of an evolving process. To create a meaningful and well defined First-Year *and Beyond* Experience many more steps and testing of various components are required.

1. As a starting point the task force's definition of the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience should initially be adopted with the understanding the definition is a living breathing entity that will change as the landscape of the program develops.
2. The Provost should establish a second task force which will include members from the first task force and individuals from Ed Pol and will have the responsibility for the next phase of the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience. This task force's goal will be to ensure that the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience initiative moves forward and develops a clear

list of deliverables. This second task force would be responsible for initiating the four elements listed in #3.

The ultimate goal is for the second task force to be replaced by an ongoing Standing Committee, which would report directly to the President/Provost. However, since a Standing Committee requires R&P action the task force felt it was too premature to start with this step, but recommend that this be a future goal.

3. The task force believes that there are four essential elements of the program that must be more fully developed and coordinated to ensure that the *First-Year and Beyond Experience* becomes a signature program. It should be noted that these elements are not listed in hierarchal order of importance. They are:

Element One: To become a signature program at Lehigh, the *First-Year and Beyond Experience* must have the support and endorsement of the President and Provost and involvement of the appropriate faculty and staff. The pilot (comprehensive and integrated) programs, (see Element Three), needs to be lead by a team consisting of both faculty and student representatives, as well as representatives from Academic and Student Affairs. The key to making this program unique and successful is the removal of all boundaries between the academic and non-academic wings of the university. This translates into a significant culture change throughout the university. The program must truly reflect a cohesive and interdisciplinary approach with one voice for the campus. The program must reflect an “our” mentality not a “mine” and “yours”.

Element Two: An area that is lacking and will need more focused attention in the new *First-Year and Beyond Experience* is to better educate the parents as to the changes their son/daughter will go through as they make the transition from high school to college life. The parent program should shift from the current general program that is in place and migrate to a more in-depth series of discussions. The Parents Committee Report dated September 2002 should be reviewed as a starting point (see Appendix C). However, the key for a successful parent program is to include parents in the process of developing both the student program as well as the parent’s program.

In order for Lehigh to be successful in this area it must work closely with the parents, who often times have a very different agenda than their student and the institution. The university must be bring them along to understand the challenges that are placed on both the students and the university (i.e. FERPA).The task force recommends that the Parent’s Committee Chair provide two names of parents willing to serve on the *First-Year and Beyond Experience*.

Element Three: The task force recognized the importance of having the *First-Year Experience* go beyond the end of the first year and continue in a well-coordinated and integrated model; hence *and Beyond*. In fact, as a student continues through their four years in college s/he is faced with continual development across the Cognitive, Conative, and Affective domains. A well-designed plan would take into consideration the transitional phases of the student’s college career and provide opportunities to learn and grow so that the overall mission of the program can be achieved. Specifically, “*The goal is to instill within the student, the knowledge and skills*

necessary to lead and to excel in their chosen profession and to become a citizen-of-the-world.”

Element Four: A critical component to the success of the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience is the support and education of the faculty in student issues. The task force believes that the faculty needs to be encouraged and rewarded for their commitment to this initiative. One of the key elements to the program’s signature is that faculty take a mentoring role with the undergraduate students and reward the students for exhibiting intellectual curiosity and putting themselves in an uncomfortable educational setting (making the “growth choice”). A group should be established to design a faculty development program for First-Year *and Beyond* Experience. By having such a program it will ensure that the faculty’s time is used effectively. Greg Reihman the Director for Faculty Development should be a member of this group in order to integrate this activity with his on-going initiatives. The changing of a culture will not happen in a year however, the first step is to have a consistent message to the faculty that this activity and their participation is highly valued.

4. The task force recommends that a pilot program for entering students (encompassing multiple educational modules) be developed with curricular and co-curricular themes that cut across the four colleges and ties into the existing programs available on campus. The curricular and co-curricular themes would be modular in format with clear learning objectives so that the university could assess the student’s progress in the form of outcomes assessment. It is also recommended that each year a new educational theme be designed to provide transfer and continuing students, as well as first year students with new learning opportunities. Possible themes that would cut across all four colleges are: Diversity and Multiculturalism; Critical Thinking; Ethics, Honor & Integrity; Information Literacy; Creativity; Entrepreneurship; and How to Work at the Intersection of Interdisciplinary Knowledge.
 - a. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of how the educational theme modular program may work. The next series of bullets describe the process overall:

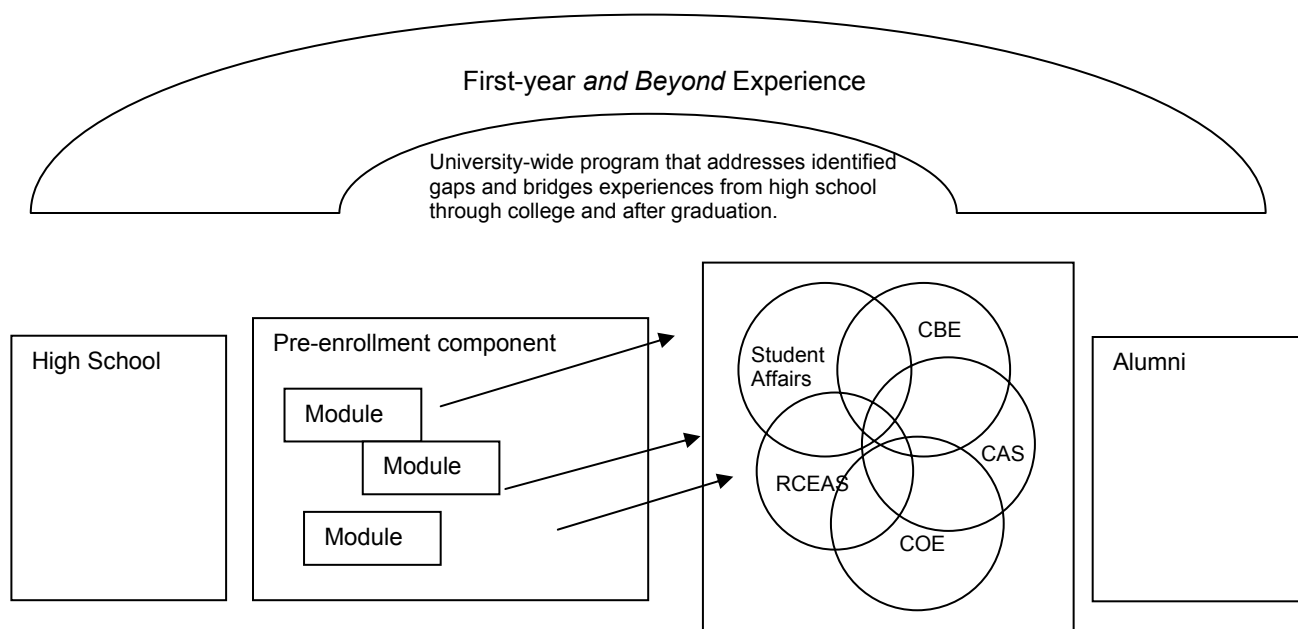


Figure 1.

- i. High school students who had been admitted into Lehigh and paid their deposit would choose to participate in one of three different educational theme modules offered in the *First-Year and Beyond Experience*. The method of participation would be patterned after the CLIPPER Project where the students would be working in Virtual Learning Communities. Based upon the data collected from CLIPPER I and II many of the CLIPPER students believe that a key element to their success at Lehigh was developing a social network prior to coming to campus. In addition, participating in a college course before entering their first semester allowed them to determine where their intellectual challenges would be once they began taking multiple college courses.
- ii. During the summer or week prior to classes beginning all the first year students would come to campus and participate in a common orientation program that would build on the educational theme modules. Several of the key intellectual threads from the modules would be expanded to enhance the student's curiosity. The *First-Year and Beyond Experience* Orientation program would be lead by staff and faculty who themselves had been through an extensive training program. The key to the orientation program is to establish a baseline of knowledge and skills common to all entering first year students and to facilitate their transition to college.
- iii. The students would then begin taking classes as first year students and be advised to participate in more curricular and co-curricular theme modules. The educational theme modules would be taught by trained faculty from all four colleges so that degree programs may chose which modules they believe are most relevant for their students. The integrity of the mission of

the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience would not be compromised however, as all four college faculty teaching the modules would be expected to incorporate Cognitive, Conative, and Affective domain elements. In addition, the faculty would be encouraged to take a mentoring role with the undergraduate students and promote intellectual curiosity and challenge the students to be in uncomfortable educational settings.

- iv. As the students move through their four years at Lehigh the educational theme modules would continue to be a part of their academic course of study. In addition, as students progress throughout their academic careers the modules would address different issues and hence take a developmental and life-cycle approach to intellectual development.
- b. The key component for the proposed First-Year *and Beyond* Experience is that the student must understand the importance and overarching educational mission of the program.
- i. The task force discussed at length the idea of student's receiving grades for the various theme modules. It was determined that grading was not the appropriate way to proceed with these types of educational activities; instead students would be required to complete so many modules as part of Lehigh's graduation requirement.
 - ii. Another recommendation of the task force is that a portion of the week, for example, hypothetically every Wednesday from 3-5pm would be set aside for the students' to participate in one of the curricular or co-curricular modules. During that time period, nothing else would be scheduled on campus, except activities relating to the modules. The task force is aware that this is an extreme idea and one that would not be unanimously endorsed by the campus-at-large. The Task Force does believe that only with this type of radical action would a culture shift begin to take place and the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience program would be embraced.
5. Using the information obtained from the small student focus groups as a starting point (and perhaps other information the Student Affairs has obtained), it is recommended that continual assessment of needs and outcomes is completed on a regular basis. It is understood that student needs are evolutionary and should be closely monitored and change with the student body. Some of the information that should be maintained and questions that should be asked on a regular basis are:
- a. demographic information (gender, culture, and race),
 - b. family educational history (1st generation college),
 - c. interests outside the classroom (clubs, extra curricular activities).
 - d. what are the intellectual mismatches between expectations and reality that may translate into poor educational performance,
 - e. how and when should information be communicated to students and their families, and finally
 - f. what can Lehigh do to help those students who are performing poorly and not happy with college life.

6. Establish a budget line that will support both faculty and staff traveling to conferences relating to this topic. This would ensure a flow of up-to-date information being received on the best practices that are being developed throughout the higher education community and serve as a mechanism to tell about Lehigh's achievements.
7. Building on the successful peer mentoring program within the College of Business and Economics each college is to be charged to design its own program to reflect the unique culture of its college. This program should be viewed as a "life-cycle" with incoming students initially needing the mentoring and eventually morphing into students who become the peer mentors of the next generation of incoming students.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE

May 2005 – Task force submits their recommendations to the Provost.

Summer 2005 –

1. A second task force is established with faculty representation from the four colleges, Ed Pol, and staff from Academic and Student Affairs. The second task force identifies team leaders to direct each of the following teams (*see prior section for a description of all these areas*):
 - i. Virtual Learning Communities,
 - ii. Pilot Educational Theme Modules Program,
 - iii. Training Program for Parents,
 - iv. Training Program for Faculty, and
 - v. Common Student Orientation Program.
2. Team Leaders will use the 2005 summer to confer with appropriate faculty/staff to create a roadmap which will include
 - i. a detailed timeline for 2005-06 and 2006-2007 relating to coordinating current activities and the implementation of new activities/programs (a clear list of deliverables),
 - ii. how can existing programs, which are administered by the four colleges and Student Affairs, be integrated with each other, and
 - iii. the development of a coordinated list of future programs to be implemented in 2006-20067.

Fall 2005 – Planning begins with the second task force overseeing the activities listed below.

1. Ideas are solicited and educational theme modules for the Pilot Curricular and Co-curricular Theme Modules Program and for the Virtual Learning Communities Program are selected. The individual groups for each module will be charged to provide a clear roadmap of how their module will interface with the university-at-large and the cost for implementation.
2. The team leaders continue to work on their plans for each of the components of the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience Program.
3. Ongoing assessment of current programming and reviews of what additional assessment will be needed for the new programs is completed by the second task force.

4. Pilot Training Program for Faculty is designed, in coordination with the Director of Faculty Development, with the goal of rolling out the first pilot program in the spring 2006.

Spring 2006 –

1. The second task force designs comprehensive and integrated roadmaps, to be rolled out in the fall 2006, for all on-campus experiences which will provide current students with a clear understanding of the opportunities available today and how to integrate these activities into their four years at Lehigh.
 - a. Design a specific publication that will be both informative for current students and can be used in incoming students informing them of the First-Year *and Beyond* Experience.
2. A budget for each of the new module is developed and submitted to the second task force for review and approved by the Provost.
3. Pilot Training Program for Faculty is rolled out.
4. Proposal is submitted to various foundations for funding.
5. Apply for Clipper III funding for piloting in the summer of 2007.

Fall 2006/Spring 2007 –

1. Launch new pilot on-campus integrated experiences for current students.
2. Develop Clipper III modules for the next entering class of students.
3. Faculty Training Program is expanded beyond the level of pilot.

Summer 2007 –

1. On campus piloted modules aimed at new students and their parents starts with the entering class of 2007 (students and parents)

BUDGET PROJECTIONS

It is anticipated that the following resources be budgeted to fund the following items:

1. Faculty summer support for 2005, 2006, and 2007.
2. Faculty course release time to plan and implement for current students during 2005-2006 and implementation for new students in 2006-2007.
3. Funds for travel to conferences and to visit other institutions.
4. A modest budget for miscellaneous supplies, i.e. copying, telephone, etc.

IN CONCLUSION

The task force member's started this report with a quote about the power of an idea whose time has come. We will now leave with this one last thought,

The way to do things is to begin. ³

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¹ Victor Hugo

² Joan De Salvatore, 2005

³ Horace Greeley