

The First-Year Gateway Experience: A Groundbreaking Model

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Abstract - Based on calls for a paradigm shift in higher education, which have appeared in the literature for years (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Tagg, 2003, Bryant University transformed its first-year experience into an innovative model, The First-Year Gateway). Informed by research from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education*, the Association of American Colleges & Universities' *Liberal Education for America's Promise*, and the Wabash National Study, a group identified five learning outcomes: effective communication, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, diversity awareness, and information literacy. Key to this undertaking was faculty development, and utilizing assessment data to improve curricular design and learning outcomes. The result is an interdisciplinary 13 credit first-year program developed to foster a successful transition into Bryant University. Launched in fall 2012, assessment data was gathered to determine whether common learning outcomes were achieved. Faculty embedded student success goals into their courses, which are designed to foster purposeful adjustment to higher education. Preliminary assessment indicates institutional gains in retention, academic standing, and student and faculty engagement during the implementation year. The new model, based on Wenger's community of practice (COP), created opportunities to discuss pedagogy. Most importantly, the model fostered faculty's deeper understanding of first-year transitions.

Introduction

Higher education is in need of a paradigm shift. The rhetoric about being student-centered has, for too long, served to justify traditional practices that have failed to deliver on the core mission of institutions - to promote student learning. Calls for a learning-centered paradigm have appeared in the teaching and learning literature for more than 15 years (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Tagg 2003). While these calls have not gone completely unheard, innovation has largely occurred at the margins – the margins of higher education and the margins of institutional practice. The shift in paradigm to becoming learning-centered requires educators to act as agents of change, demonstrate a laser focus on student learning, commit to their teaching and learning mission, and plan for effectively utilizing learning outcomes assessment data. Further, administrative agents of change must demonstrate a commitment to support, foster and reward classroom innovation, document their approaches and results, and make public their efforts in the form of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Bryant University has taken seriously the challenge to assume its role as an agent of change. The basis to foster this paradigmatic shift is built into the institutional mission of the University, and the vision for the future has been laid out in the strategic plan, *Vision 2020: Expanding the World of Opportunity*. At Bryant, numerous initiatives now underway endorse a plan of action to support academic excellence by assisting faculty in the creation and delivery of challenging academic programs. No program better exemplifies a commitment to becoming a learning-centered institution than the First-Year Gateway Program initiative.

As part of this initiative, the institution has intentionally utilized learning outcomes assessment data to inspire and inform its teaching and to develop a curriculum that cultivates professional skills and critical thinking as part of students' educational experience. Key to this undertaking is the institution's focus on faculty development initiatives, and utilization of assessment data to improve curricular design

and student-learning outcomes. The result is an informed and responsive interdisciplinary thirteen credit first-year program designed to cultivate leadership and critical thinking, while fostering a successful transition into Bryant's scholarly community.

To kick-start this curricular transformation, informed and inspired by research from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education* (Colby et al., 2011), the Association of American Colleges & Universities' *Liberal Education for America's Promise* (LEAP, 2011), and the Wabash National Study (Blaich & Pascarella, 2013), a work group was charged with identifying learning outcomes for each of the potential First-Year Gateway courses, keeping high-impact educational practices in mind (Kuh & Schneider, 2008). Re-occurring themes around these outcomes led to conversations about creating a new comprehensive first-year experience, utilizing data to refine teaching and documenting student success.

In championing this important campus-wide initiative, the Vice President of Academic Affairs appointed representative stakeholders consisting of faculty from the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Business, staff from the Academic Center for Excellence, Center for Teaching and Learning, Office of Undergraduate Advising, the Library, and Student Affairs. The work group began meeting regularly in January of 2012 to determine core learning outcomes. Simultaneously, faculty committees were already meeting to explore the redesign of the Bryant's general education program, which created an opportunity for the faculty to develop new first-year courses built around core learning outcomes.

The following represents the *required*, comprehensive thirteen credit first-year experience program with common learning outcomes across the curriculum:

Program Design & Learning Outcomes

Launched in the fall of 2012, the Gateway Program welcomes Bryant's newest members to the community, sets a foundation for academic and personal success, and cultivates the qualities of character vital for leadership and for the health of a democratic society. The Gateway curriculum is built around fundamental questions about the role of the individual in a fast-paced, ever-changing world. Faculty and staff work with students in the Gateway to foster the development of the habits and skills essential for success at Bryant and beyond. They do this by encouraging students to:

- Draw meaningful connections between learning that takes place inside and outside of the classroom,
- Apply knowledge and skills from multiple perspectives,
- Communicate ideas effectively, and
- Reflect on learning experiences.

The Gateway Curriculum is comprised of five major courses, each designed to cultivate key learning outcomes. These include:

- *Global Foundations of Character and Leadership (GFCL-3 credits)*: The aim of this course is to pose fundamental questions about the place of the individual in society in the context of a swiftly changing global environment. To be effective citizens in the 21st century requires creative thinkers capable of examining complex contemporary problems in historical perspective with an understanding of diverse world-views and cultures. Students are asked to reexamine values and assumptions, and to develop the character and leadership skills required to make complex ethical decisions.
- *Global Foundations of Organizations and Business (GFOB-3 credits)*: This course poses fundamental questions about the creation and ethical deployment of intellectual capital within the context of global enterprise. The transformation of the world economy has created the need for individuals with sophisticated skills, global perspective, expertise in multiple areas, and the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills needed to meet the challenges of continuously changing business conditions. Successful organizations rely on collaborative efforts to solve problems and implement initiatives. Such processes require individuals with a

multi-disciplinary perspective and demonstrated skills in leadership, negotiation, communication, and time management.

- *Writing Workshop (WRT 106-3 credits)*: This course engages students with peers and their instructor as a collaborative of writers. Focusing on the practice of writing as a process, students become familiar with the conventions of specific rhetorical situations. Students develop transferable strategies for effectively accessing, interpreting, evaluating, and presenting information with an awareness of purpose and content. Along with fostering writing competencies and a capacity for inquiry and analysis, students reflect upon experiences as writers and participants in various learning communities. Students come to recognize writing as a value-laden ethical enterprise, a means of self-exploration, self-definition, and self-expression.
- *Introduction to Literary Studies (LCS 121-3 credits)*: Through intensive reading and writing about imaginative literature, students develop the skills necessary for literary analysis and effective writing. The aim of the course is to aid students in becoming discerning readers, critical thinkers, and thoughtful writers.
- *The Bryant Innovation and Design Experience for All (IDEA) (1 credit)*: This intensive, experiential learning component of the Gateway curriculum provides students with a unique opportunity to apply the five learning outcomes, integrate perspectives, and foster team and leadership skills. For 72 hours at the start of the spring semester, students work in teams of five on a design challenge. The IDEA challenges students to demonstrate their learning about the innovation process. Specifically, the IDEA deepens students' understanding of design thinking and teamwork.

Academic Outcomes

All of the Gateway curricular elements and learning experiences are designed to promote student growth and development on a set of core learning outcomes essential for success at Bryant and beyond. These learning outcomes include:

- *Effective written communication*: The development and expression of ideas in writing.
- *Effective oral communication*: Designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors.
- *Critical thinking*: The habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
- *Ethical reasoning*: The ability to assess one's own values and social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions.
- *Diversity awareness*: Possessing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interactions in a variety of cultural contexts.
- *Information literacy*: The ability to know when there is a need for information, and to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and both effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand.

These outcomes represent a subset of those advocated by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). The outcomes also reflect the expressed desires of employers for the skill sets and habits of mind they find most important in college graduates. An AAC&U survey on employer priorities suggests that nearly all those surveyed say that "a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate's] undergraduate major." More than 9 in 10 of those surveyed say it is important that those they hire demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity; intercultural skills; and the capacity for continued new learning. In addition, more than 75% of employers say they want more emphasis on five key areas including: critical thinking,

complex problem-solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings (Hart & Associates, 2013).

Student Success Outcomes

Bryant University's student success program has existed for nearly twenty years, beginning with a non-credit extended orientation program and developing into a one-credit seminar course entitled Foundations for Learning (FFL 101), which was mandatory for all first-year students. In the spring of 2012, Foundations for Learning (FFL 101) was eliminated as a result of institutional curriculum revisions and the development of the new model, the First-Year Gateway Experience. Consequently, in the fall of 2012, student success outcomes were revised to align with the Gateway curricular goals.

Student success programming in the First-Year Gateway Experience is designed to transition students into a scholarly community by fostering their intellectual, academic, social, and emotional adjustment. Integrated success instruction and programming enables students to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the self in the scholarly community.
- Engagement in scholarly activities such as group discussion, conducting research, and synthesizing materials, thereby illustrating a growing awareness of the importance of active involvement in the educational process.
- The ability to plan and prioritize academic and student life activities to promote success inside and outside of the classroom.
- Development of cognitive and metacognitive abilities, including those skills involved in the self-regulation of learning and developing a fuller understanding of a range of learning and study strategies.

In an effort to maintain key components of *Foundations for Learning* (FFL 101), particularly those support systems that are highly correlated with student success and retention, after an initial Gateway Retreat in the spring of 2012, the decision was made to integrate the major components of the FFL 101 course and program into the *Global Foundations of Business* (GFOB 100) and *Global Foundations of Character and Leadership* (GFCL 100) courses. Faculty teaching the WRIT 106 and LCS 121 agreed to deliver some of the other features of the former model. The student success textbook, *Foundations for Learning: Claiming Your Education* (3rd ed.), was adopted as the core student success text to be utilized throughout the curriculum. The focus of the book is on intellectual adjustment with personal development issues integrated into the academic themes of "claiming an education" and taking responsibility for one's own education (Hazard, L. & Nadeau, J. 2012)

In addition to the common text, some components of the former model that were retained are strong partnerships with the academic support units including the Academic Center for Excellence (the University's learning assistance programs and services), The Writing Center, Undergraduate Advising, and Student Affairs, comprising departments such as the Center for Campus Engagement and the Women's Center. Stakeholders from both Academic and Student Affairs partnered to design integrated success instruction and programming. For example, each section of the First-Year Gateway classes was assigned an Academic Advisor and a Student Affairs representative responsible for partnering with faculty to intentionally monitor the academic and social transition of first-years. Advisors conducted class visits at key developmental timeframes in the semester to inform the students about campus policies such as academic honesty rules, the grading system, academic standing regulations, and registration procedures.

Student Affairs representatives visited classrooms to emphasize the importance of student engagement in co-curricular programming such as participating in workshops offered by the Amica Center for Career Education or attending a workshop on sexuality offered by the Women's Center. Faculty required students to participate in study skills instruction and programming offered by The Academic Center for Excellence and The Writing Center to augment classroom instruction. Finally, in addition to co-curricular workshops, a series of Gateway Sessions were created to formally align with the Gateway goals. For example, during the 2013-2014 academic year, students participated in Gateway Sessions aimed at developing self-regulatory behaviors to meet student success goals; a session on the

process of reflective learning to meet the critical thinking goal; and an ethics event designed to advance the ethical reasoning goal.

ePortfolio& Reflection

Consistent with best practices (Chen, H.L. and Light, T.P., 2010), the Gateway team developed an ePortfolio template with placeholders for students to upload artifacts and reflections for each of the key Gateway learning outcomes. Faculty development sessions were held in the summer and fall of 2012 to familiarize them with the ePortfolio template, as well as to provide strategies they might use to foster student reflection. The ePortfolio template was presented to the students early in the fall in their Gateway courses. A set of short instructional videos about the ePortfolio were produced and made available to faculty for uploading into their Blackboard sites. In addition, classroom visits for portfolio assistance were made available upon request. Finally, the Writing Center hosted several sessions on promoting student reflection to help students prepare portfolio content.

Assessment Data

From its inception, the Gateway Program has relied on assessment data to guide curriculum design and pedagogical choices. Professional development workshops in the summer and fall of 2012 relied heavily on reams of institutional data providing valuable insights into today's college students in general and Bryant students in particular. A "data sampler" featuring empirical evidence from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Cooperative Institution Research Program (CIRP), the Wabash National Study, the Bryant Orientation Survey, and Bryant demographic and student success data was provided. Workshop participants were assigned subsets of the data sampler and asked to identify patterns in an effort to reflect on the implications for teaching and learning. This exercise proved valuable in orienting Gateway faculty and staff, and served as the basis for follow up workshops on such topics as cognitive development, learning theory, scaffolding curriculum, and student transition, to name just a few. The data sampler exercise had the added benefit of socializing the Gateway team to the need for ongoing program assessment to inform professional development. Such assessment activities have been built into the program's design for both academic and student success outcomes.

Academic Outcomes Assessment

All of the Gateway courses have adopted the same broad program learning outcomes. Faculty have worked to identify course assignments that are aligned with one or more outcomes. All faculty have also been made aware of and utilize the AAC&U VALUE rubrics for the relevant outcomes. Bryant employs an assessment module within the Blackboard learning management system installation, enabling faculty to quickly align course assignments with appropriate outcomes. Once aligned, all submitted student work for these assignments is collected in a pool and is available for assessment purposes. The Gateway leadership team randomly selects a sample of relevant student work for each outcome and assigns these to an assessment team through Blackboard. Assessment teams evaluate the work samples using the common rubrics, and Blackboard then compiles a report of the results.

AAC&U VALUE rubrics are designed to review a portfolio of student work over the course of their undergraduate experience (Rhodes, T.L., 2010; Rhodes, T.L. & Finley, A.P., 2013). As such, it would not be expected for first-year students to score in the 3-4 range on the rubric. More realistic goals for the Gateway Program would be for average scores in excess of 2.5 on a 4-point scale. In the summer of 2013, assessment teams reviewed samples of student work for *effective written communication* and *information literacy*, as well as the quality of student reflections in the ePortfolios. Results are described in the tables below.

Table 1: *Written Communication Assessment Results*

Written Communication Rubric	Scores Based on Four-Point Scale
Context and Purpose for Writing	2.49
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions	2.33
Sources and Evidence	2.23
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	2.58

Table 2: *Information Literacy Assessment Results*

Information Literacy Rubric	Scores Based on Four-Point Scale
Determine Extent of Information Needed	2.40
Access Needed Information	2.21
Evaluate Information and Sources Critically	1.99
Use Information Effectively for Specific Purpose	2.36
Access and Use Information Ethically and Legally	2.32

Table 3: *Reflection Assessment Results*

Reflection Rubric	Scores Based on Four-Point Scale
Clarity	2.62
Relevance	2.17
Analysis	2.15
Interconnections	2.25
Self-Criticism	2.17

In addition to providing baseline data for future program assessment, these results indicate written communication performance at or approaching program goals. However, the performance on information literacy suggests significant attention should be paid to accessing and evaluating information. Similarly, helping students to deepen their reflections, particularly with regard to analysis and self-criticism should be an area of emphasis. These results are shared with communities of practice, and faculty are encouraged to share assignments and assessments aimed at improving student performance on such indicators.

Student Success Outcomes Assessment

While the approach to integrate student success components across the curriculum is, indeed, innovative, there were concerns that the shift from the former model to the Gateway would create challenges, not only for the first-years and their transition, but also for the academic support units and the faculty.

Since the fall of 2004, Bryant has participated in Educational Benchmarking's First-Year Initiative Assessment (FYI). The FYI is a self-report, diagnostic tool designed to understand student perceptions of their first-year experience. The instrument analyzes 15 factors (categorized by predictor status and factor performance). Scores are based on a seven-point Likert scale.

Over the years, longitudinal data from the FYI has been utilized to support continuous improvement efforts; thus, data gathered from the FYI in the fall of 2012 and 2013 allowed for some initial assessment related to the effects of the Gateway implementation on student success outcomes. Results indicated some gains in student success variables and some areas of concern compared to the results from the fall of 2011, prior to the Gateway implementation. For example, one area of concern was *Knowledge of Academic Services*. Students were asked to what extent did the course improve their knowledge of the role of the academic advisor, how to obtain a tutor, how to obtain academic assistance, and avail themselves of library resources. Compared to 2011, scores on this factor of 5.56 decreased by -.32 in 2012, and then decreased again by -.10 in 2013. The difference in the score between the fall of 2011 and 2013 may be connected to the varying patterns of student participation in the available Academic Center for Excellence and Writing Center Workshops. In the former model, there was a more uniform integration of the workshops into the curriculum. With the Gateway initiative, there are still pockets of faculty resistance to requiring and/or delivering some of the student success offerings.

Another area of concern was the decrease in *Knowledge of Campus Policies* from 4.87 to 4.14 between 2011 and 2013 (-.73). This factor ascertains information about students' knowledge of academic honesty rules, the grading system, academic probation policies, and registration procedures. Most of this information was previously addressed in advising class visits and during required Registration Workshops. Again, the decrease in this category may be attributed to faculty resistance to these types of class visits and not uniformly requiring the Advising Registration Workshops.

The largest decrease between 2011 and 2012 was in *Knowledge of Wellness* from 4.26 to 3.71, a decrease of-.55. This factor asks students questions about dealing with stress and sexual issues, exercising regularly, and the impact of drug and alcohol consumption. While there were efforts to include class visits from Student Affairs personnel to address a variety of social adjustment issues, during the Gateway implementation year, these class visits were also met with some faculty resistance. On the other hand, during the second year of the Gateway initiative, faculty became more keenly aware of the importance of the social transition to college. Partnerships between faculty and Student Affairs personnel were strengthened in the second year. As a result, in the fall of 2013, this factor increased by +.31.

Finally, one area of on-going concern in both the former student success model and the Gateway are the scores related to establishing effective self-regulatory behaviors (White & Kitchen, 1991; Hazard, 1997; Steel, 2007, Huie, et al., 2008). The research in this domain is clear: self-regulatory behaviors are at the heart of college success. These behaviors are measured in *Managing Time and Priorities*. In this factor, students were asked to report on their habits related to establishing personal goals, organizing time to meet responsibilities, setting priorities to accomplish what is most important, establishing an effective study schedule and preparing for tests well in advance. While this is one of the most challenging spheres for creating cognitive and behavioral change, and scores are moving in the positive direction, work still needs to be done in this area. Minor gains were made on this factor: +.16 in 2012 and then again in 2013: +.31, representing an increase from 4.83 to 5.30. Improvements in this factor may be attributed to faculty encouraging students to attend a Psychology of Procrastination Gateway Session, and time management and goal-setting workshops.

In other student success domains, there were notable gains related to the Gateway implementation from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2013.

Table 4: Student Success Factor Gains from 2011 to 2013

Factor	2011	2013	Gains
Connections with Faculty	4.93	5.18	+.25
Engaging Pedagogy	4.73	5.41	+.77
Study Strategies	4.55	5.08	+.53
Connections With Peers	4.55	5.24	+.68
Out of Class Engagement	4.24	4.82	+.62
Academic and Cognitive Skills	4.07	4.94	+.87

Of particular note were the gains made in *Academic and Cognitive Skills* (+.87) and *Engaging Pedagogy* (+.77). *Academic and Cognitive Skills* asked students questions related to their decision-making skills, reading, writing, and oral presentation skills, as well as their computer skills. A variety of changes related to the Gateway may be attributed to improvements in this area: the addition of WRIT 106 into the curriculum, the implementation of the ePortfolio, and the emphasis on reflective learning across the curriculum. In terms of the gains in *Engaging Pedagogy*, there is a clear connection between the intentional faculty development initiatives and improved teaching practices. Faculty report positive experiences with faculty development programming and attribute the opportunity to participate in these activities as transformational to their teaching.

While the Educational Benchmarking First-Year Initiative Study provides comparative data on the Gateway implementation from year to year, other factors related to student success can be considered, such as first to second year retention, Dean's List (3.2 G.P.A.) and President's List (4.0) achievements, and academic standing data (probation, warning, and dismissal descriptive statistics). Preliminary assessments in these areas pointed to institutional gains in student success indicators during the initial Gateway implementation year. For example, first to second year retention improved by 2.3% during the implementation year.

Table 5: Retention Rates Pre and Post Gateway Implementation

First to Second Year		First to Second Semester	
2011-2012	87.6%	Fall 2011-Spring 2012	96.2%
2012-2013	89.9%	Fall 2012-Spring 2013	97.0%
		Fall 2013 to Spring 2014	95.3%

The percentage of students who achieved Dean's List after their first semester also increased; Dean's List achievements improved by 8% from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2013.

Table 6: First-Year (FY) Dean's List and President's List

Term	1st Year Dean's List	% of FY	1 st Year President's List	% of FY
Fall 2011	318	39%	11	1.3%
Fall 2012	316	41%	19	6.0%
Fall 2013	399	47%	15	1.8%

When comparing year-to-year data, there are mixed results when at-risk indicators such as warning, probation, and dismissal are examined. Overall, however, pre and post Gateway implementation movement remains in the positive direction. Compared to the fall of 2011, the percentage of students on probation decreased by 1.1 % in the fall of 2013. Similarly, when making spring to spring comparisons, the percentage of students on probation decreased (-1.8%), and those on warning decreased (-1.5%).

Table 7: *First-Year (FY) Probation and Dismissal Rates*

Fall	Probation	FY %	Spring	Probation	FY %	Warning	FY %	Dismissal	FY %
2011	51	6.2%	2012	31	3.8%	24	2.9 %	12	1.4%
2012	37	4.7%	2013	12	1.5%	20	2.5 %	8	1.0%
2013	47	5.3%	2014	17	2.0%	12	1.4%	14	1.6%

Overall student success indicators remain in the positive direction; still, there is an awareness that some momentum was lost between the first and the second year of the Gateway implementation related to the student success indicators. For instance, probation rates increased slightly (+.6%) between fall 2012 and 2013, and again from spring 2013 to 2014 (+.5%). While various factors may have contributed to these increases such as a significantly larger first-year class size in the 2013 compared to 2012 (from 772 to 890 students), there is an emerging recognition that continuous faculty development efforts in general is a necessity, but particularly in the area of student success. Much work needs to be done in the area of developing a retention-minded faculty.

Faculty Development

The generous support of the Davis Education Foundation has enabled the Gateway Program to remain focused on professional development and ongoing assessment. Built into the structure of the program are the means of “closing the loop” by faculty participation in “communities of practice” and using learning outcomes assessment data to inform professional development activities.

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

– Etienne Wenger (2004)

Five Communities of Practice (COPs) were formed and now meet throughout the year. These COPs include groups for each of the four, three-credit Gateway courses (Global Foundations of Character and Leadership, Global Foundations of Organizations and Business, Writing Workshop, and Introduction to Literature), as well as a macro level group consisting of the course coordinators, the Assistant Vice President for Teaching and Learning, the Director of Student Success Programming, and the Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Each COP meets regularly to coordinate Gateway initiatives and reflect on practice.

Gateway Retreats & Professional Development Workshops

Beginning with a two-day retreat for Gateway faculty and staff first held in June, 2012, the Gateway leadership team offers a myriad of faculty development workshops throughout the year. Workshop topics have included: using an ePortfolio, promoting student reflection, understanding today’s students, working with students with disabilities, connecting curricular and co-curricular programming, diversity awareness, to name just a few. In addition, more targeted faculty and staff development activities have taken place within the communities of practice. For example, the Character and Leadership team has worked with Dr. Kathleen Reardon of the Marshall School at the University of Southern California on common definitions of character and leadership, as well as classroom strategies and common resources related to the course title. Further, the Writing Workshop team hosted workshops with the author of their textbook, Dr. Michael Palmquist. Most recently, more than 50 faculty and staff

participated in the second annual Gateway retreat. This two-day event reinforced a number of important student success principles on which the program is built, as well as providing opportunities for coordinating activities across the communities of practice, including better integration of co-curricular programming.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Through this groundbreaking model, Bryant's First-Year Gateway initiative has steadfastly moved the institution toward providing students with a solid foundation for success by fostering the knowledge, leadership skills and quality of character necessary "to engage responsibly with the life of their time" (Carnegie Foundation, 2011). While there remains a keen awareness that this initiative has ambitious goals aligned with the current climate in higher education, it continues to be approached with confidence that it yields great benefits for both faculty and students. At the same time, however, stakeholders recognize the on-going challenges of the paradigm shift. For instance, integrating student success components across the curriculum is innovative and exciting, yet there are still lingering concerns that shifting to this new model poses some difficulties for the support units and faculty. On the other hand, preliminary assessment data produced during the first two years provides reassurance that Bryant University is clearly moving in the right direction.

There is still much work to be done, but the Gateway model has produced clear benefits for students and faculty. Perhaps of paramount importance is that the model has fostered faculty's deeper understanding of first-year transitions and student success, and the COP paradigm has created opportunities for faculty to discuss their pedagogy. Indeed, the model has fostered a deep understanding that faculty development is critical to changing institutional climate and culture. Providing faculty and staff with diverse professional development opportunities has contributed to both the motivation and energy to stay focused on continuous improvement efforts. For instance, the development of a Small Private Online Class (SPOC) to frontload some of the student success goals is nearly complete. First-years will be expected to complete the SPOC prior to entering in September, 2014. Further, there is widespread openness to continuing with additional faculty and staff development opportunities such as:

- Working to improve communication and collaboration among stakeholders
- On-going Blackboard and ePortfolio training
- Creating experiences for faculty and staff to reflect on practice
- Re-designing adjunct and new faculty orientation
- Augmenting faculty understanding of student success and development
- Updating pedagogical practices
- Helping faculty to further understand the importance of assessment and making data driven decisions

Perhaps what is most exciting is that the First-Year Gateway has sparked discussions regarding the development of experiential and integrative learning opportunities, and the will to design an Upper-Level Gateway experience for all Bryant University students.

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