

## **Student Success Initiative – Foundational Courses Task Group Executive Summary**

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### **Background/Structure**

The Foundational Courses Task Force received its charge on September 27<sup>th</sup> and began biweekly meetings on Friday October 25<sup>th</sup>. Membership was the following:

Annie Abbott, Spanish and Portuguese; Rob Baird, CITL; Teri Farr, DGS; Ivan Favila, Grainger Engineering; Rhonda Kirts, Student Affairs; Kristi McDuffie, Rhetoric; Kristin McMurray, FMS; Jennifer McNelly, Mathematics; Melissa Michael, MCB; Brian Siemann, DRES; Shelly Schmidt, FSHN; Diana Steele, Testing/CITL; Nicole Turner, FAA; Matthew West, Mechanical Engineering; Nancy Walsh, Admissions/Financial Aid; and Craig Zilles, Computer Science.

The meetings during the fall semester focused on background research investigating Student Success Initiatives at other Universities including U. Illinois Chicago, Michigan State, Indiana University, the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, Georgia State University and the University of Minnesota, as well as a theoretical framework for looking at student success published by Prof. Cuseo in 2007 that was referenced by some of the other studies. These resources are all available in the committee's box folder:

<https://uofi.app.box.com/folder/87020404286>

Three major themes (Pedagogy/Best Practices, DFW and Gatekeeper courses, and Scheduling and Facilities), emerged from these discussions, and the task force self-divided into subcommittees based on each member's interests/expertise during the spring semester. The subcommittees met independently, with the biweekly meeting being used to report on progress and get feedback. Each subcommittee made significant progress in identifying goals and a plan to accomplish those goals. Unfortunately, in March both co-chairs and a large fraction of the task force found themselves with significant new responsibilities to ensure a successful transition to online instruction in response to Covid-19. Thus, our meetings became less regular, with only 2-3 meeting held thereafter, on Zoom, between March 15 and August 1, 2020.

### **Pedagogy and Best Practices**

Shelly Schmidt accepted chair responsibilities for the Pedagogy and Best Practices subcommittee. Two goals were identified 1) identify potential obstacles that hinder students from succeeding in foundational courses and 2) recommend practices, initiatives, and/or actions (within and beyond the classroom) that can provide every student with the opportunity to succeed in their foundational courses and continue that success throughout their college career. The attached subcommittee report includes their initial findings for both goals as well as 6 specific action items ranging from convening meetings foundational course instructor (and students) to establishing a Student Success Center at Illinois.

## **Scheduling and Facilities**

Kristin McMurray accepted chair responsibilities for the Scheduling and Facilities subcommittee. This group focused on an issue of students having access to the courses they need to take in order to graduate in four years. Barriers include classes being full, or having two required courses with conflicting schedules (e.g. it isn't possible to take both courses simultaneously). A related issue is what happens if a student gets "off-sequence", since many of the foundational courses are prerequisites for required courses, missing one course can have a domino effect significantly increasing the time to graduation. This is a penalty our most vulnerable students cannot afford. In order to better assess the extent to which these issues impact students at Illinois, the subcommittee created a "Course Access Survey" and a list of groups to whom it should be given. That document is attached to this summary.

## **DFW and Gatekeeper courses**

Unfortunately we were not able to collect recommendations from this sub-group, but will submit any findings we might receive in the coming weeks.

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Overall, our committee acknowledges that with COVID-19, many of the recommendations we might have made will be invariably affected by present conditions. But we also acknowledge that many of our concerns about at-risk students, inclusive and engaged pedagogies, and success in large critical courses will be magnified in an online/distance education setting, which includes a further separation between students and necessary campus resources, in many cases.