"The First-Year Experience's First 25 Years—the Jury is In, But Out on the Next: You Can Determine the Verdict"

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25th Anniversary First-Year Experience Conference and Gala Celebration
Atlanta, Georgia, February 28, 2006.

I want to thank my successors who lead the National Resource Center for inviting me to deliver this address. It is an opportunity for poignant reflection and I hope inspiration. They have graciously welcomed my counsel, both solicited and unsolicited, for the past six and a half years since I took early "retirement" from the University of South Carolina. The Center that I left behind in a literal sense is stronger than ever, thanks to the leadership especially of Stuart Hunter, a most thoughtful, competent and unselfish woman, who always has the big picture about what's best for the first-year experience movement squarely in mind, and whose organizational genius made the continuation of our first to second conferences and beyond a reality in the first place.

I want to thank all of you for coming to the conference and for staying until Tuesday. You haven't had enough and there is still more to get; and you honor our presenters this morning to follow. I thank you for all of that.

There is a concept in conference planning that is sort of like the design of shopping malls—the use of "anchors" in the selection of major speakers, designed to get people to the beginning and hold them to the ending. The former works I believe, but I have always doubted the latter. So I thank you doubly for coming this morning, particularly at this ghastly hour.

This event is clearly a marker for me professionally and personally, as I am one of the few people in the room who was present at the conception and is still at it, thanks largely to most of you who have shared some version of the original vision and then done all the work that we now gather to talk about in these conferences.

But to prepare a speech like this is to face and overcome some of its major challenges:

1) I have been talking about the first-year experience for these 25 years, and actually long before. What could I possibly have to say that hasn't already been said, by me and others?
2) How in the world can I make this a speech that strikes an appropriate balance between modesty, accuracy, information, inspiration, and a call for further needed action?
3) How can I honestly present a thoughtful, critical self examination without over doing self congratulations about those things we really have done well?

So what am I going to do? Well, I am going to reflect on, as the conference description says, "some forks taken and not taken" and offer some "admittedly personal commentary" on where I think we must go "if the first year work is to be sustained, strengthened and really amount to a lasting 'revolution' in American higher education"

How about an outline John, as you were taught to do in Speech 101 in 1961 when your final course grade was a D (one of your better grades that term)?

1. Audience analysis: why are you here? Why are you still coming? What explains the enduring popularity of this movement and why 98,726 higher educators have attended FYE gatherings prior to this conference? And who are you?
2. Some reflection on our beginnings: the conference series and the first-year movement.
3. The 800 pound gorilla in the room: Retention—or from aspirational ideals to a business model. Does this really motivate you?
4. What have we accomplished?
5. What's missing?
6. Victims of our own success
7. Some questions that need to be asked
8. It all comes down to philosophy—some models
9. Looking towards our next 25 years
10. And now, the time is right for resolutions

In this talk this morning I am going to use a series of "reflections". I have learned from a man whom I admire tremendously for his contributions to the service learning components of the first-year experience, Edward Zlotkowski, of the importance of reflective thinking as the highest order of thinking that we need to start to move our new students towards: the kind of thinking whereby we ask ourselves now what have we learned of value? What does it mean to us? How are we going to use it? How might it empower us? How does it connect to our other important learnings?

In that speech 101 course which I almost failed, one of the other things I learned was the importance of "audience analysis". And in that vein I would like to reflect on why are people still coming, and in record numbers, 25 annual conferences later? What might explain the enduring popularity of this movement? It is obviously not explained by the fact that I run the NRC because I no longer do. So to the extent that any aspect of this attendance was ever associated with anything I did, this is no longer the case and this phenomenon is clearly institutionalized.

<u>Why are people coming to the FYE conferences?</u>

I think people are still coming because they recognize that the work of strengthening the first year is not done; that there is still more.

There is the search for the "what's next"? I think you will find that. There have been plenty of examples at this conference and I intend to give a few myself.

People come because they realize that looking at the demographics of American higher education, the risks being taken by our new students and their families, the debt incurred, the sacrifices made, the levels of high school preparation, the unequal distribution of wealth and advantage that becomes ever more skewed in the favor of the privileged, the tremendous courage shown by our new students, their high, and some would say unrealistic, aspirations—that all this means new students need us more than ever. I would concur.

People come because they yearn to be a part of something that is bigger than themselves and their own institution, a community that genuinely cares for others, the less fortunate, the underrepresented, those that have fewer advocates and who are being increasing ignored in what Maureen Dowd calls "Bushworld".

People come because they want to be around others who have the big picture interests of their institutions at heart, not just the petty, parochial interests of one's own vested areas. Don't get me wrong here. I am not naïve. Of course we come with personal vested interests. But I think there is something about this conference series and the related work back home that encourages us to rise above a more narrow view of what's good for our particular slice of the academy. This fye focus encourages us to aim our sights higher, more broadly, more idealistically.

People come because they love being at something that is student focused as opposed to discipline or profession oriented (although for some the care and feeding of first-year students has definitely become a profession).

People come because they genuinely crave and enjoy being part of a larger more holistic enterprise characterized by a partnership of faculty, academic administrators, student affairs administrators, students, and more recently IR and assessment experts—and perhaps here as well, part of something to which the for-profit world of shameless commerce has obviously attached itself to in the name of serving first-year students.

People come because this is NOT an organization, an association. There is no business meeting. There are no organizational politics. Nobody running for office. No in, no out, group. Every one is in. This is really powerfully inclusive.

People come because this is a culture that gives license to taking risk and innovation on behalf of student success. So forgive us if some of us get overexcited and make claims to innovation that may not be entirely justified. We mean well. We certainly are enthusiastic and want to help students.

People do come here as first timers, in fact 820 of the 1400 pre-registered for this conference, as new members to the larger network devoted to improving success of new students, looking for new ideas and strategies.

People come here because even though it has become unfashionable to admit to liberal ideas, most of you still believe in an old liberal maxim that people really can and will

improve themselves if given the opportunities by institutional interventions (i.e. government support and intervention) to do so.

People come here to genuinely share, usually without hope for commercial or personal gain, to learn from others, to obtain constructive feedback in a collegial non career threatening context.

People come here in search of inspiration, of hope, of meeting new people who share a common value system built around the importance of improving the "foundation" of the undergraduate experience. And they come to see now old or long time friends who share those values.

People come here because there is no student bashing in this conference culture.

And people come here still searching for that magic bullet, that holy grail of retention, which they will NOT find, because there isn't any.

And people come here because they have found that what they have learned here and taken back in previous years can and does make a difference; it leads to educational improvements and more student success.

And some of you may be here because you have been "sent"; or because you have just been appointed to a new position and have been charged by your superior(s) to start or refine or fix this or that program, or boost retention, or who knows what? And I hope you have found some answers, models, and inspiration.

I am sure there are other reasons too. I am inspired by all your reasons and your continuing presence.

And now that I have reflected on why I think you are here, let me find out who you are (more audience analysis):

1. How many of you are full time faculty?
2. How many of you are academic administrators?
3. How many of you are student affairs administrators?
4. Other types of higher educators, IR/Assessment experts, researchers, whatever?
5. Students?
6. How many of you are guests from countries outside the US? Welcome.
7. How many of you work in for-profit institutions?
8. How many of you work in two-year colleges?
9. Private liberal arts colleges?
10. Regional, comprehensive state colleges and universities?
11. Research universities?
12. Other types of special purpose PSE's, military service academies, whatever?
13. First timers?
14. How many of you have heard me talk before?

Thank you. That's very helpful for me to know more about my audience, and I hope for you too.

Some reflections on how all this got started and what can we learn from that.

Well, for openers, I can say that I am really glad we aren't trying to start this conference series, or the University 101 first-year program at the University of South Carolina of which this conference is an outgrowth in 2006. I am glad we are not trying to start a national movement today on behalf of improving support for an underclass. It wouldn't happen. Now we are trying to sustain this movement that started long ago in another political era entirely.

The first-year experience movement, an effort to transform the beginning college experience, to humanize it, to adapt it to its new students for whom it had never been designed, was started during the Vietnam War, and eight years after the Civil Rights Act, and seven years after the Voting Rights Act; and the Higher Education Act. This was a time when there was significant public and Congressional support for expanding the rights and opportunities of neglected, disadvantaged, less fortunate Americans, including beginning college students. If the aftermath of Katrina tells me anything, it is that kind of support and compassion does not currently exist in a sufficiently critical mass. Instead our priorities are for redistributing wealth, cutting taxes and government services, "starving the beast", and enhancing opportunities for private gain. This suggests to me that many of the dominant values of the first-year experience are now counter culture—and that in turn may explain in part the popularity of this conference series. Let's look more specifically at the origin of this conference series (and I will do this more succinctly than I did in the Primer session for those of you that attended that).

How and why did this conference series begin?

The first conference, held in February of 1982, was entitled not "The Freshman Year Experience" but instead, "A National Conference on the Freshman Seminar Course Concept" It is amazing that anyone came at all to such an event! That conference was an outgrowth of a course, University 101, at the University of South Carolina. And that course was an outgrowth of a student riot that had occurred on that campus in May of 1970. A group of disaffected students had gathered to protest both the invasion of Cambodia and a number of local USC issues. The Governor called out the South Carolina National Guard who tear gassed the students who were peacefully but noisily assembling and then a riot ensued in which they stormed the administration building. The president, who was then barricaded in his office for 24 hours, resolved to prevent such events in the future and set out, with the assistance of a faculty committee, which he formed to study the causes of the student riot, to humanize the University. How to do it? Not with a conference series, that's for sure. But instead with a new course called University 101, that was designed to:

- teach the new students to love the University and not to riot and trash it;

- to teach the roles and purposes of higher education and our institution in particular;
- to form new and functional human relationships;
- to create a support group;
- to learn and use student support services;
- to encourage the joining of co-curricular organizations;
- to increase out of class faculty-student contact;
- to provide an extraordinary degree of academic freedom to teach the course you'd always wanted to teach but never had the opportunity before;
- to provide an antidote to the large, unengaging, archetypal lecture courses in the first year which so successfully bore students and faculty alike;
- to change a large university culture to make it more student-centered, more humane
- to accomplish this through mandatory faculty staff development as a precondition for teaching the course
- to bring together faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs officers in a new partnership for the greater common good.

Note what is missing here: absolutely no reference to student retention! This was never mentioned as a goal or possible outcome. It was only three years after the course was launched in 1972 that in 1975 during the course of our first effort to "assess" the course outcomes (long before "assessment" became fashionable) that we discovered that the elective student participants, who elected to participate in the University 101 course, even though they were less well qualified in terms of PGPA than the non participants and hence we would have thought less likely to be retained, were actually retained at a higher rate, year after year after year (and many years at statistically significant levels). And then some years later, in the course of a PhD dissertation by my friend Dr. Mark Shanley, current CSPO at Northern Kentucky University, it was found that this retention rate held up over time and University 101 students were significantly more likely to actually graduate. And the rest is history. The first-year seminar had been discovered as a panacea to the retention problem—with such findings replicated now at hundreds of other institutions.

I was appointed by the founding president, Thomas F. Jones, my first USC mentor, as the first faculty director of the University 101 course and faculty development program in 1974, his third choice, in the era before affirmative action after the first two white guys turned him down. Big differences: they were tenured and I wasn't; they were not risk takers and I was.

After directing the course for seven years and right after being promoted to full professor in the Spring of 1981, I had to decide what I was going to do for the rest of my life now that I had lifetime job security and could do, within reason, whatever I wanted. I decided that if I were going to continue as faculty director of the first year seminar, I needed to take steps to make this role more intellectually stimulating for me, to combine it somehow with professional development, for myself and others; and to somehow make this more of a scholarly endeavor.

Now at that time, as a country, in 1981, we had just reached our peak year for number of high school graduates and the numbers were expected to decline and then rise again gradually but not return to pre 1981 levels until the mid 1990's. And that set off, in part, a rising concern about student retention. And we knew we had one of the strategies to address student retention. So I decided to organize a conference. My goal was to get 50 people together to talk about strategies to improve first-year seminars. And I thought I could get 50 to come if we held the conference in Columbia, S.C. in the dead of the winter when maybe 50 "Yankees" would want to come south to see if we wore shoes in the winter. And low and behold 173 came, not 50. And at the concluding session, like we will hold later this morning 25 annual conferences later, we were told to do another conference, but to do one on a broader theme of the entirety of the beginning college experience, not just first-year seminars. And we listened to the customer in the 80's spirit of TQM. Or did we? Well, we offered a new conference, what became a series, called "The Freshman-Year Experience" in which we attempted to look beyond the first-year seminar to the rest of the first-year experience. But what people primarily still came for, and what people thought we were primarily doing was still extolling the virtues of the first-year seminar. And try as hard as I might, to move us beyond that initial focus, (organizations and movements develop their traditions, their cultures, early and they are hard to change, both internally and the ways they are perceived externally) I only had limited success. The first-year seminar had become the bread and butter, the original Coke formula, and it was hard to move too far away. And in some ways that's where we are still at 25 years later; still revolving around the first-year seminar, but trying to reach out beyond, myself included (although this year on the conference program agenda there was essentially a dead heat between the number of sessions on first-year seminars and those on learning communities—a development I was delighted to see). I will return to this theme, this conundrum. But first, what about this emphasis on retention?

Retention: the 800 Pound Gorilla in the Room

There is no doubt about it. This is the 800 pound gorilla. This is what gets attention. This is what motivates many to invest in "FYE programs". And I am not happy about it. I have "retention fatigue". But I know that the pursuit of it is what brings many to this conference. And that implies some obligation incumbent on me to deliver on that.

On a very fundamental, personal level, this interest in improving student persistence is something I have devoted my whole professional life to. I was almost not retained myself. My first year at Marietta College is/was a case study in how not to structure intentionally a first year of college; and many of my experiences were precisely those today on many campuses that explain unacceptable rates of attrition. So I am indeed motivated to do something about retention based on my own experience. I am resolved to do everything in my power to create cultures of opportunity on campuses where students will have a first-year experience more intentionally leveraged for success than was mine 45 years ago. Believe me, those memories are alive, powerful, formative, painful, yet inspiring and directing. I could build this whole speech around them but you don't want

or need that. But these tapes replay in my head every single working day for me, which is every day.

And, from the opposite spectrum, that of our nation, improving retention is a commendable national public policy goal. And we are under a lot more pressure to do so: from legislatures, Congress, the US Department of Education, and indirectly, from the regional accreditors who are demanding, and getting in some cases, more evidences of practices leading to educational improvements, and thus retention.

But I think we have been loosing sight of the ends vs means perspective. Retention is not really the end(s), the goals of higher education. There is nothing fundamentally, intrinsically academic about retention. Retention is a measurement, a benchmark, of educational attainment. And I would argue, often a minimum one at that. Retention is a C minus and a pulse, the ability to fog a mirror. This is not sufficiently aspirational.

And that is why still, 25 years later, many of my faculty colleagues want to have nothing to do with this retention business. To them, retention is code for lowering standards, coddling students. They don't teach courses in retention, offer majors or degrees in retention. Retention is someone else's job or concern, not theirs. And yet they have an enormous influence on retention. How to bridge this gap, particularly when they find most of the standard conversations about retention so lacking in intellectual substance?

I would argue that another problem with the "retention" conversation is that it is using a business model and metaphor. It is a productivity measure. It suggests the need for "customer service" which is anathema to many faculty. This implies that students are customers who not only have rights (most all of us are willing to grant that they have rights) but this model assumes that students both know best, what's good for them, what they want, and that we must give it to them—even when we know that what many of them think they want may not be good for them at all.

I am also concerned about this focus on retention as I see it as a focus that puts us first, and not the students. It is institutionally self serving, when in some cases it may be patently clear that it is not in the student's best interests to be retained, either at this time or at this place. I am disturbed by the inherently self serving and selfish tone of this retention conversation. It is not about putting students first when we are really honest about what drives this conversation. At its basest level it is all about money, the supreme American value—and hence a business and not a higher education model.

I am lamenting then what I see as a diminished sense of purpose for the first-year experience movement. I am concerned that those whose participation in under the tent we most need (the faculty), is least likely to happen as long as we phrase the first-year conversation around the theme of retention.

I am concerned that "retention" does not specifically enough suggest what should be the outcomes of the beginning college experience, particularly in a manner that is aspirational enough. This whole focus on retention then I argue is not a form of raising

standards at all, rather it is a conversation about minimal or no standards. And what I want to see us do is to raise the bar and pursue standards of excellence, what I have come to call in my own current work "Foundational Dimensions of Excellence ® in the First College Year" (see www.fyfoundations.org) In conclusion regarding this theme, I invite you, I implore you, to move this conversation beyond retention. We cannot take this work on the first year to a new level, to a "what's next?", unless we do. Retention restrains us, it limits our vision and our capacity for creativity and excellence.

So what have we accomplished in 25 years? And where do we need to go next?

Well, we have had many successes:
*The first year is taken much more seriously today than it was 25 years ago.
*The notions of the "first-year experience" are well established in the lexicon of higher education
*Now it is not only or even primarily chief student affairs officers who are pushing the agenda for an improved focus on the first year, but the chief academic officers.
*Hundreds, actually, thousands, of campuses now have the archetypal first-year signature interventions such as the first-year seminar, learning communities, service learning, Supplemental Instruction, and campus-wide initiatives known as "the first-year experience
*A focus on the needs of first-year students has led to the creation of a quasi first-year profession such that professional positions are advertised in higher ed trade publications
*Disciplinary, and professional associations focus on first-year courses and improvement strategies
*The press covers campuses' efforts to improve the first-year experience
*The original language, "the freshman-year experience" has become more inclusive and accurate in its reconstitution as "the first-year experience"
*And many campuses have stopped referring to their predominantly female, and overwhelmingly not "fresh" new students as "freshmen".
*The original conference organization and then higher education center that promoted this increased level of attention to the first year, has flourished and moved to successively greater levels of impact
*And other higher education centers beyond USC have also taken up this banner
*Graduate courses on the study of the first-year experience movement are beginning to find their way into the curricula of schools of education
*A legitimate new field of scholarly research and publishing, thanks largely to USC (and Jossey-Bass) has developed around this larger effort to improve the first year of college
*Foundations and government agencies award grants to improve the first year
*A huge for-profit industry, or industries, have developed to cultivate, support, sell products and services to this burgeoning field of activity
*The focus on the first year has led to an expanded application of lessons learned to other critical transitions during the undergraduate years; in particular, what is called "the sophomore year experience" and "the senior year experience"
*Thanks to The Pew Charitable Trusts and George Kuh and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Education a powerful national conversation and action steps have occurred focusing on the concept of "engagement" behaviors and practices of both

students and institutions (as in the use of the NSSE and CCSSE in four-year and two-year institutions, respectively).
*The first year improvement efforts are gradually being folded into the work of regional accreditors, most notably now, the Higher Learning Commission, thanks to the leadership of its Executive Director, Steve Crow, whereby any of their 1000 institutions may now accomplish reaffirmation of accreditation by doing either a special emphasis self study (the PEAQ option) or a special improvement project (the AQIP option) focusing on the first year (INSERT HLC WEB SITE ADDRESS). In the SACS region a focus on the first year is increasingly being integrated into Quality Enhancement Plans.
*A set of standards for excellence in the first college year, for purposes of both measurement of institutional performance and aspirational design, have been developed by over 300 participating two and four-year colleges and universities (see www.fyfoundations.org).
*And what began as, at best, a national set of activities has greatly expanded to a true international set of partnerships, scholarly works, convenings, and movement.

<u>So what's missing? What has yet to be done? Where are we? What are some of the challenges we face?</u>

Well, in spite of all this energy, action, positive outcomes, and all this that has been written and said:
*there is abundant evidence that students are not as engaged as we would like
*there is also evidence that students are not as engaged during the first year of college as they thought they would be!
*levels of performance in high DWFI rate courses should be a cause for embarrassment and action, especially in mathematics
*there is still too much unacceptable attrition
*there is much instability in the viability and leadership of first-year "programs"
*the response of the academy to the challenges of the first year has been primarily to design "programs" rather than a more comprehensive institutional response (I shall return to this)
*and on some campuses these "programs" are, at best, still eating crumbs on or under the table
*the mantra that surrounds the first year as the basis for reform is not academic and not sufficiently motivational (i.e. retention) to take us to the next level)
*we are competing for ever scarcer resources in a larger society that does not currently share our values
*and we are competing for students' most precious of resources: their time, energies, attention, priorities, discretionary monies—our first college year endeavors vis a vis their jobs, families, pursuits of pleasures, busy demanding lives.

<u>We are the victims of our own success!</u>

In retrospect, I like to say now that I didn't set out to redesign the first year by encouraging the creation of a set of "programs". But, it appears that that is what I did. While in the days of the early conferences, people might have heard me extolling the

loftier values and purposes of more attention to the first year, developing a philosophy and set of values to underpin what they would do to improve the experience of new students—this is indeed what I said---but what I did was another story. What I did was to lead a first-year seminar "program"; help campuses start "programs"; organize conferences that featured "programs", etc. And it is no wonder then that synonymous with the first year then became the notion of "programs". And this is also understandable because the good people who were actually going to do this work had to work at the unit level, where they had influence and a sphere of control. These people by and large did not run the institutions. This was, in effect, largely a people's movement—although it has now it has become one increasingly of senior people, policy makers. And as such, what started out as a "reform" or even a "revolutionary" movement, not trying to overthrow anything, but to offer an alternative, an antidote, has increasingly taken on many of the forms of orthodoxy and legitimacy. It has had to, to survive, let alone flourish. And so is it revolutionary any more? Probably not, if it ever was. But certainly it can be said to have joined the establishment—and that's probably a good thing because it bodes for greater probability of institutionalization. But the first year "it" has largely been at the "program" or "unit" level, and not at the macro level of institution wide, big picture thinking and grand design. It is to that level of bigger picture, institution wide, grand design level of thinking that my work is now devoted. That is where I want to move us, or go with you! In conclusion, I am saying that we are the victims of our own success in that we have been so successful in getting campuses to reflexively think "programs" when they finally do get interested in ramping up the first year, that it is now a great challenge to get them to think more comprehensively and philosophically beyond "programs".

To do so, consider these questions (instead of "how do we increase retention?")

1.How, if you wanted to, could you look at the entirety of the first year, as a unit of analysis per se (i.e. beyond the program level)?

2. Does your campus have a grand design, a plan, for the entirety of the first year?

3. Does your campus have a philosophy, an explicit statement of core values, assumptions, aspirations for what the first year should be all about (I will show you what I mean in a moment)?

4. How is this philosophy emergent from, connected to the institutional mission?

5. What about your organizational structure? Is anyone, any office, in charge?

6. How coherent, integrated, coordinated are your institution wide efforts? What coordinating mechanisms, bodies to you have?

7. What "transitions" are your new students going through and how is your campus organized to address these transitions?

8. What are your goals for student learning in the first year? What do you know about how well you are accomplishing those goals?

9. What do you believe is so important that you want to be the first-year experience for ALL students? Beyond what all students experience, how well do you meet the needs of unique sub populations?

10. To what extent are your faculty invested in and owning of these first-year initiatives and what are you doing about this? How can you make the first year a higher priority for faculty?

11. How do you ensure that all new students have intellectual and personal experiences that engage them with diverse ideas and people in structured learning experiences, inside and outside the classroom?

12. How can you promote new student understanding of the roles and purposes of higher education and of the potential of your institution to help them attain these broader societal and personal goals?

13. What are your strategies for assessment and institutional improvement of the beginning college experience? What do you know about your effectiveness? And what are you doing with what you know?

I note I have stopped here one short of 14, remembering as I do what happened to another visionary leader who had his 14 points and a vision for world peace, that kept us out of the League of Nations and helped insure World War II.

Ah, so many questions, and so little time. But you have all kinds of time, years, a whole career, to pursue these questions or those that motivate you, when you get back home. Let me be transparent: these questions above are exactly the kinds of things I think a campus needs to be working on for improvement of its first year.

Philosophy, the Purposes of the First Year are the root of all improvement efforts:

I want to move here, just for a few minutes, to illustrate what I mean in terms of possible answers to one of the questions above, namely, about having a philosophy for the entirety of the first year. Slowly but surely a number of campuses are developing such philosophy statements, which in turn drive everything else they want to do for first-year students and by which they could be measured. It is such standards for measurement that I believe are ultimately more fair to institutions with widely differing missions and cultures and especially student bodies. Instead of being held to the one size fits all metrics of "retention" I would rather see us held accountable to such outcomes as these:

Philosophy Statement
Columbia College

The first year of enrollment at Columbia College provides a foundational experience in which women can grow and develop academically, socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Programs, activities, and initiatives are designed to help shape the student's view of the college experience and develop appropriate expectations so that she can be successful at Columbia College and can build a foundation for personal and professional success following graduation from college. Through living and learning in a diverse community, experiencing leadership opportunities, balancing responsibility and freedom, being accountable to one's self and to others in the community, and reflecting intentionally upon her experiences, the student develops her identity as a woman and leader.

Philosophy Statement
Illinois State University

We at Illinois State University believe that the first year of college is a critical time in students' lives. We work as a diverse community of learners to provide a supportive environment for our first-year students during their transition to higher education.

We promote courses, programs and services that engage students with the intellectual, social and cultural dimensions of learning while challenging them to develop the skills and the sense of responsibility needed to be successful at the University and as citizens.

Philosophy Statement
Maryville College

The First-Year Experience at MC provides students a foundation for college success by helping them to connect with the mission of the College, establish roots in the College community, develop new ways of thinking, and live as responsible citizens.

Philosophy Statement
Nazareth College of Rochester

At Nazareth College, we celebrate the uniqueness of first year students by providing a foundational experience that addresses the needs of all students. Our faculty and staff engage students in the pursuit of knowledge and exploration of diverse perspectives and cultures. We encourage and support first year students in taking responsibility for their learning in and out of the classroom. Student learning and development are promoted through programs and services that facilitate a successful transition to college.

Our first year curriculum enables students to understand the connection between liberal studies and professions while fostering an appreciation for the value of lifelong learning. Our co-curricular programs recognize the abilities and talents of each individual and support the growth of the student as a whole person. Because service is an integral part of our tradition, we value and promote participation in our local and global communities. In serving others, first year students gain social and self-awareness, learn about civic responsibility and develop leadership skills.

We are committed to the success of our students and to the continuous evaluation and improvement of the first year experience.

Philosophy Statement
Pellissippi State Technical Community College

The faculty and staff at Pellissippi State Technical Community College believe that the first-year experience is critically important as it provides the foundation for college success and lifelong learning. To best serve the unique needs of first year students, we commit ourselves to the following:

- facilitating new student transition to the college campus
- providing high-quality instruction during the first year
- establishing positive mentoring and advising relationships with beginning students
- supporting a vibrant college culture where students experience and express diverse world-views
- offering a comprehensive range of activities and opportunities to enhance learning and personal growth
- evaluating the results of our efforts addressing first-year student needs.

In providing first-year students exceptional opportunities for growth and involvement, we believe they will connect more deeply with the college community, achieve their academic goals, and gain a clearer, fuller vision of their lifetime direction.

Philosophy Statement
Plymouth State University

Plymouth State University makes a special effort to encourage students with the very best it has to offer. We especially recognize the critical nature of each student's first-year campus experiences, and we strive to realize student success by

- Instilling a love of learning
- Fostering experiential learning pedagogies
- Encouraging skeptical inquiry
- Developing communication and quantitative reasoning skills
- Providing educational and emotional resources and support
- Modeling appropriate ethical values

To achieve these ends, Plymouth espouses four particular first-year goals:

- To foster a strong sense of community
- To encourage an understanding of Plymouth's mission
- To nurture academic and social success by instilling confidence and competence
- To encourage faculty and staff to make personal connections with students

Ultimately, we strive to awaken in each student his or her own potential to become an educated, active contributor to society. We recognize the serious responsibility of each member of our campus community to act as a responsible guide toward this awakening.

Philosophy Statement
SUNY, Brockport

Vision Statement for the First Year of College

The vision for the first year of college is that all students successfully complete their first college year establishing a foundation for understanding their own lives in the context of a diverse world and for completing their degree.

Mission Statement for the First Year of College

The State University at Brockport is committed to providing and assessing a comprehensive educational experience that promotes both the academic and co-curricular success and engagement of all students in their first year of college.

Philosophy Statement
University of Charleston

The mission of the University of Charleston is to educate each student for a life of productive work, enlightened living, and community involvement and this mission is the backbone for all activities sponsored by the institutional community. A student must achieve competence in the three focus areas of the mission to be considered a truly educated person and receive the institution's highest honor: a diploma. To that end it is the responsibility of all members of the university community who work with a first year baccalaureate-degree seeking student, be they trustee, administration, faculty, staff, student, alumni, or volunteer, to lay the necessary groundwork for achieving a smooth transition to student success. Although this is a shared responsibility, the future graduate is ultimately accountable for his/her education.

As a community we believe that each student who is accepted and registered for classes by the University of Charleston has the potential to achieve the goal of becoming an educated person and receiving a diploma. For this reason we take very seriously the admission requirements set forth by the institution and administered by the Department of Admissions. In an effort to further clarify the hallmarks of an educated person the faculty

has defined a set of Liberal Learning Outcomes that each student regardless of major or degree must demonstrate prior to graduating. In addition, the faculty of each discipline has defined a set of program outcomes that each student enrolled in the given major must achieve prior graduation. These two sets of outcomes are of equal importance, and although clearly and necessarily interrelated, must not be subject to one another. While these outcomes cannot be simplified or expanded, except by vote of the faculty, the method by which a student demonstrates achievement of the outcomes is variable.

Research has demonstrated that there is more than one way to learn. We believe that the student must have the opportunity to achieve competence in a variety of ways, but it is the responsibility of the respective governing bodies of the institution to certify the achievement of the outcomes.

The foundation for both sets of outcomes is laid in the student's first year. The University of Charleston has designed intentional experiences that are comprehensive, integrated and coordinated to enable students to lay a solid foundation. The faculty view engaging students in curricular and co-curricular experiences as a high priority. Students will reflect on their personal values and beliefs, explore the values and heritage of the institution, and discover their place in a pluralistic society.

The University of Charleston understands that education is a process and we are committed to self-assessment and benchmarking of the first year experience and beyond.

Philosophy Statement
University of Wisconsin Colleges
Engaging Students in the First Year

Mission:

The University of Wisconsin Colleges' first year of college experience will focus on first year students as they make the transition from their high school or post high school experiences to the college experience. This intentional, comprehensive curricular and co-curricular initiative will promote an understanding and appreciation of liberal education, and will assist students with developing strategies and attitudes that will maximize academic success. It will familiarize students with campus resources and how to use them, foster the development of positive relationships between and among students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and prepare students to become life-long learners, responsible citizens and leaders.

Goals and Strategies:

Goal 1. Promote an Understanding and Appreciation of Liberal Education.

- ***Sub-goals:***

a. Fostering an aesthetic appreciation of the liberal arts
b. Fostering an understanding of the liberal arts tradition
c. Providing a liberal education
d. Promoting the appreciation for the importance of the college experience

e. Fostering a joy and respect for learning

Goal 2. Engage Students in Academic Pursuits.

- ***Strategies that could be used by UW Colleges' faculty and staff to achieve this goal:***

a. Promoting active learning (students need to be actively engaged in the learning process)
b. Offering First-Year Seminars
c. Offering Learning Communities
d. Offering interdisciplinary studies opportunities
e. Promoting student involvement and responsibility in the learning process
f. Defining institution-wide expectations for first year students
g. Providing study abroad opportunities
h. Providing students with opportunities to share what they are learning
i. Providing students with opportunities to actively apply knowledge to life experience
j. Investigating individual learning styles
k. Assisting students with learning how to learn

Goal 3. Engage Students on the Campus.

- ***Strategies that could be used by UW Colleges' faculty and staff to achieve this goal:***

a. Encouraging involvement in athletics and intramural sports
b. Encouraging involvement in campus committees, clubs, and societies
c. Encouraging involvement in the Student Government Association
d. Providing an organized, structured Mentoring Program that promotes faculty-student interaction
e. Encouraging participation in study groups
f. Providing Convocation activities
g. Providing orientation activities
h. Developing and implementing opportunities for collective student experiences (i.e., with a work of art, theatre production, musical production, film, or common reading)

Goal 4. Engage Students in the Community.

- ***Strategies that could be used by UW Colleges' faculty and staff to achieve this goal:***

a. Providing opportunities for service learning
b. Providing opportunities for volunteerism
c. Providing opportunities for field trips
d. Providing internship opportunities
e. Involving students in campus-community projects and partnerships
f. Participating in government-related activities

Goal 5. Provide Students with the Skills Necessary for Academic and Life Success.

- ***Strategies that could be used by UW Colleges' faculty and staff to achieve this goal through teaching:***

Academic Success Skills*:*

a. Reading skills
b. Writing skills
c. Listening skills
d. Speaking skills
e. Library skills (i.e., information literacy, online search techniques and tools, and the ability to critically evaluate information resources)
f. Researching skills
g. Note-taking skills
h. Test taking skills
i. Problem-solving skills
j. Goal setting skills
k. Organization skills
l. Setting priorities skills
m. Small group skills
n. Reading and following directions skills
o. Time management skills
p. Critical thinking skills
q. Technology skills

Life Management Skills:

a. Enhancing students self-understanding
b. Providing assistance for life planning
c. Promoting open-mindedness
d. Assisting with value clarification
e. Assisting students in developing personal values
f. Providing opportunities for leadership training
g. Instilling a commitment to health and wellness
h. Providing guidance for managing a budget
i. Providing opportunities for financial planning

Tools Necessary for Navigating University Culture:

a. Providing financial aid information
b. Providing opportunities for career and major exploration
c. Advising students as to how to register for classes
d. Understanding university policies and procedures
e. Providing student learning support centers

<u>Looking towards our next 25 years.</u>

As I look at my own work, where I have come and where I want to go, 25 years back, 25 ahead, I have three big bets. This is where I want to go. Where do you want to go in your work over the next quarter century?

1. I want to continue to invest my creative and intellectual energies in working with my colleagues at USC's National Resource Center to help them further direct the efforts for first-year reform in American higher education by helping them set that agenda.
2. I want to get campuses to the level of taking the first year so seriously they will actually do what academics do best, they will STUDY it, as a unit of analysis per se. That's right, do a self study of the entirety of the first year. I am astounded that most organizations full of such bright people as us, and faced with such staggering problems of high failure rates in the core business (the core curriculum) and attrition, that have never really seriously studied what they are doing in the first year. And then after they do such a study, I want them to take the findings and produce a plan for a grand design. I am urging and inviting campuses to treat the first year as seriously as it would a "self study" in the more conventional sense of that phrase. And hence my second big bet seems a natural concomitant, namely…….
3. I want to integrate this work of self study and action/improvement planning, with established practices for reaffirmation of accreditation. In terms of promoting change today, it's the regional accreditors who are driving much of the action. Quite simply this means I would like to see more campuses devoting their reaccreditation self study energies to improving the first year. Now that could be real power, real traction for the first-year movement. We will see. This is the combining of something you don't have to care about/pay more attention to (the first year and its students) with something you do have to attend to: your reaccreditation.

<u>In the next 25 years there are some other things I would like to see:</u>

1. Reducing our tolerance for high levels of failure in the first year
2. And as an illustration, especially math failure, that key gatekeeper for entry into all the pre wealth majors! Note, at this conference, of the 203 sessions we had 26 dealing with first-year seminars, and only three dealing with improving success in math courses—and one could argue that for many students it was those math courses that was the determinant of subsequent college enrollment (or disenrollment as the cases often were) and not the first-year seminar!
3. And thus accepting more institutional and individual responsibility for student learning and success (and yes, retention too).
4. Paying far more attention to the introductory college courses, their learning goals, pedagogies, faculty assignment patterns, evaluation, DWFI patterns, faculty development support.
5. And hence developing concerted action plans to attack the failure rates in the highest failure rate courses—one of American higher education's dirtiest little secrets—the 30%+ DWFI rates where there is enormous variability of student success or failure as a function of whose section the student may or may not be registered in—in effect a right to fail! It would be my hope that my own First-Year Experience Conferences would pay more attention to this matter of course redesign. It is in such courses where the rubber truly meets the road in the FYE

and not in first-year seminar courses much as I love them and believe in them. The action has to move beyond the first-year seminar, to the heart of the real academic experience, what my wife Betsy Barefoot, often refers to as the "assessment free zones"!

6. I would like to see us get real, get honest, get realistic and admit that the search for "better students" may not be the most viable strategy for educational improvement or a boost in the rankings. There just aren't enough of those "better" students around. And everyone else wants them too. Instead, we have to realistically concentrate on the students we actually have, not the ones we'd rather have, or think we used to have, or that we think we used to be like. In terms of Alexander Astin's IEO model, this means focusing on the things in the first year, that we control, the "E", the environment, as opposed to the "I", the input variables, which are much harder to control.
7. I would like to see us, and I am not yet clear on who the "us" is, but I will become clear on this, become more proactive in developing the next generation of leaders and scholars in the first-year movement. We are going to see a passing of the generational torch of the main sources of intellectual capital, most of them now in their sixties. And some of the next generation of leaders are right here at this conference series and even in this room. I invite you to self identify yourself and own your power for shaping the verdict of what the next 25 years is going to amount to.
8. And finally, I want to see those of us in this "FYE" movement get our own house in order, and tackle something that none of the leaders have yet taken on squarely, except for my colleague, Dr. Randy Swing, the Co-Director and Senior Scholar at the Policy Center on the First Year of College. I am referring to his landmark work in developing the "FYI", the First-Year Initiative, a now six year old survey instrument designed to measure and benchmark institutional performance in terms of student reported learning gains from participating in first-year seminar courses. I am distressed that the most common form of first-year seminar is a one credit course. I am distressed by the lack of academic rigor and quality I see espoused in many of the seminar course descriptions and in many of the text materials designed to support these courses. We are now a mature movement. The first-year seminar dates to 1882, that's 1882, not 1982, and is so well established that surely it can stand more scrutiny, more rigor, more restructuring to look more like real college courses, and without loosing their missionary zeal to humanize the first year and support student transitions. Surely some of you will rise to this challenge. We must pay more attention to the quality of these courses.

And, finally, a time for resolutions:

Well, I leave you now with those thoughts and challenges, those perspectives on our accomplishments and our unfinished agendas. I would like to conclude with resolutions, yours and mine. It is my hope that as you leave the conference you will leave resolved to do something that you wouldn't have done had you not come to the course. I hope you

have resolved to take some creative, new, active steps to improve your first-year experience. And I invite a few of you now to share yours and I will share mine.

ASK FOR AUDIENCE RESOLUTIONS

And now for my resolution: well mine is really pretty simple: it is to attack my two big bets (described a few minutes ago in this talk), and to resolve to come back here twenty five years hence, in 2031, when I will be 87 years old—surely not to deliver the closing plenary address! I will gladly settle instead to listen to one of you! It would appear then, that I aspire and resolve to be retained, and to persist!

But it is you, more than I, who will bring in the verdict on the next 25 years. And on that I wish you the very best.