Developing and Implementing a Continuum Model for the First Year Experience

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AVP Academic Learning Initiatives
York University, Toronto, Canada
• Founded in 1959, in north-west quadrant of Toronto
• Undergraduate and Graduate
• Third largest in Canada
• 10 Faculties
• >50,000 students
• 1400 FT faculty members
• 1000 PT faculty/TA
2009: new Vice-President Academic and Provost

2010 White Paper: “Building a More Engaged University”

2010 First Year Experience Business Case developed, introducing the **Continuum** Model
The Continuum Model offers maximum flexibility to the 9 undergraduate Faculties and 8 Colleges regarding possible first-year experiences, ranging from the potential for 100% inclusion via virtual communities to the creation of small, highly focused living/learning communities.
CONTINUUM MODEL

SMALL COHORTS

Living Learning Communities

PAN UNIVERSITY

Virtual Communities
December 2010

Provost releases the call for a $2.5M Academic Innovation Fund (AIF)

Proposals are invited in any of the 4 areas identified for implementation from the 2010 Provostial White Paper:

- Experiential Education
- E-learning
- Community Engagement
- Student Experience
March 2011
Several proposals directly related to the advancement of the Continuum Model receive AIF funding in the Student Experience category, including:

- College Themes Cluster (small cohorts)
- Peer Mentors Cluster (mid-sized cohorts)
- Transition Cluster (pan-university)
CONTINUUM MODEL

SMALL COHORTS → PAN UNIVERSITY

College Communities  Peer Mentors  Coordinated Transition Program
LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Bethune Life Sciences House
Current Topics in Psychology

THEMED FLOORS IN RESIDENCES
Maison Bilingue
Health and Wellness
Green House
Music and Sound
Law, Politics and Public Policy
Bethune Life Sciences House

- Home to approximately 40 students in Biology, Biochemistry, Biomedical Science, Biophysics, Chemistry, and Kinesiology & Health Science, all interested in living and learning together
- All are enrolled in the same Life Sciences core courses and labs
- All have access to organised study groups and Supplemental Instruction
Current Topics in Psychology

- All themed floor residents enrolled in the same section of Psychology 1010
- Students take part in study groups, exam preparation sessions, learning skills workshops, field trips and other activities

Themed Floors in Residence

- Not tied to specific courses
- Residence Dons, Alumni speakers, Movie Nights, activities, etc. all related to the overarching theme
MID-SIZED COHORTS
(PEER MENTORS)

PEER MENTORING

COURSE CLUSTERS

RENEWED GENERAL EDUCATION/
FOUNDATION/CORE COURSES
In 2010/11 the Peer Mentor Subcommittee of the Retention Council:

- **Prepared** an inventory of mentor training in place at York
- **Reviewed** student leadership training best practices
- **Developed** a template of key mentor training program components
- **Presented** 4 Peer Mentor Core Training Modules:
  - Peer Mentoring 101: Standing on the Shoulders of Everyday People
  - Understanding Diversity
  - The Helping Conversation and Crisis Intervention
  - Resilience: A (very short) Course on Managing Hardship
HealthAid Peer Mentorship Program

- Ran a pilot in 2010/11; expanding through AIF
- Designed to support first year transition in core 1000 level Faculty of Health courses (many are large lecture courses)
- 1400 students in 2010/11; goal of 2120 in 2011/12
- 24 academically strong senior students received the four Peer Mentor Core Training Modules
- 48 Class reps will receive orientation and training
- This model can be replicated in other Faculties and service units
Incoming Student Transition Initiatives begin when a student accepts their offer of admission, and ends at the conclusion of Fall Co-curricular Week (second week of October)

COORDINATED TRANSITION PROGRAM

FALL CO-CURRICULAR WEEK
York University admits approximately 9,000 new students each year

GOAL: to build a framework that supports and coordinates activities designed for incoming students

AIF supported initiatives:

- New Student Portlets (prior to Orientation)
- RED Zone enhancements (prior to Orientation)
- JumpStart (Glendon College, prior to Orientation)
- Student Services play (during Orientation)
New Student Portlets

• Announcements and News
• Calendar Feature: personalized important dates
• Podcast Series and Chat Forum

Future

• Peer Mentor Online Community
RED Zone

• College Council Presidents and Orientation Chairs working with RED Zone Ambassadors throughout the summer

• RED Zone Presentations
  • Including a prof e.g., “Expectations in the classroom” and a student panel

• YU Connect Onboarding (a path of intentional learning and participation in co-curricular activities)

Future

• RED Zone math and writing tutorials
JumpStart
A 2 week summer program designed to:

• Foster academic success
  • Time management; note taking skills; exam preparation

• Foster personal growth
  • Accept personal responsibility; set goals; connect to university life

• Promote a balanced, healthy lifestyle
  • Stress management; eating well; alcohol and other drug issues
Student Services Play

An original production, to be presented during Orientation, designed to provide incoming students with information that will be more easily recalled (replacing a series of “talking heads”).

Topics will include common issues such as homesickness, academic challenges, and finances within a context of the range of campus support services available to students.
Fall Co-Curricular Week
October 2008

York Senate approves the creation of a Fall Co-curricular Week (FCW) immediately following Canadian Thanksgiving (2\textsuperscript{nd} Monday in October)

October 2009

Inaugural Fall Co-curricular Week is held
FCW THEME: Early Help for Greater Success

PRIMARY FOCUS: Transition and 1st year students

4 FCW Engagement Categories are identified:

• Academic skills-related (41 and 35 sessions offered)
• Advising-related (12 and 4 sessions offered)
• Career-related (8 and 18 sessions offered)
• Social and Community Events (25 and 33 activities offered)
Participation in FCW sessions doubled from 2009 to 2010, but debate over FCW occurred at Senate in fall 2010.

The timing of FCW will remain the same in 2011, but a change is anticipated for 2012.

The debate has shifted from whether FCW is a good idea, to when it will prove to be most effective for students at all levels of study.
RECAP

SMALL COHORTS  \rightarrow  PAN UNIVERSITY

College Communities  Peer Mentors  Coordinated Transition Program
Questions?

THANK YOU!

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