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“Stars in the Constellation: National Research on the First-Year Experience as a Collection of High-Impact Curricular and Cocurricular Initiatives”

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Session Abstract: The First-Year Experience has been a philosophy for improving first-year student transitions for nearly four decades. High quality FYEs are comprehensive, integrated, inclusive, and advance student engagement and learning outcomes. This session featured evidence from the 2017 National Survey of The First-Year Experience to describe the most common initiatives used in the first year, identify their structural features and educational characteristics, and examine the connections between these initiatives to create a system of FYE interventions.

Session Learning Objectives

As a result of attending this session, participants will:

- » Enhance their knowledge of what first-year experiences are, how they are organized, the purpose they serve in the undergraduate experience, and outcomes associated with them.
- » Gain a greater understanding of how high-impact practices are integrated in the first-year experience to create a system of effective FYE interventions.
- » Have the opportunity to compare the pedagogies and practices used in their first-year experiences to a national profile and to consider innovations or refinements to their institutional efforts.

What are the “Stars” in Your FYE Constellation?

Does your institution offer any of the following first-year student success programs, initiatives, or courses specifically or intentionally geared toward first-year students? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Common reading
- ☐ Convocation
- ☐ Developmental or remedial education
- ☐ Early alert systems (i.e., systems that monitor student academic performance and may include direct outreach to students in academic or other types of difficulty)
- ☐ Experiential learning or learning beyond the classroom
- ☐ First-year academic advising
- ☐ First-year gateway courses
- ☐ First-year seminars
- ☐ General education
- ☐ Leadership programs
- ☐ Learning communities (i.e., curricular structures in which small cohorts of students are co-enrolled in two or more courses)
- ☐ Mentoring by campus professionals
- ☐ Peer education (e.g., Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, peer-led team learning, peer mentoring)
- ☐ Placement testing
- ☐ Pre-term orientation (including extended orientation and welcome programming)
- ☐ Residential programs or initiatives
- ☐ Service-learning
- ☐ Student success center
- ☐ Study abroad
- ☐ Summer bridge
- ☐ Undergraduate research
- ☐ Writing-intensive coursework
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

Which of these programs, initiatives, or courses are the primary efforts by which the first-year objectives are met? (Please select up to 5 and document them below).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What Does Your Constellation Look Like?

Using the model used in the presentation, please draw the constellation of first-year programs, initiatives, or courses at your institution.

Examine the connections between the stars in the constellation and determine the characteristics of those connections on the following spectrums:

1. Existent ← → Nonexistent

[**Remember: not all stars will be connected. Some are on their own in the “universe.”**]

2. Formal ← → Informal

3. Strong ← → Weak

4. Strategic ← → Operational

5. Recent ← → Longstanding

Vision: The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition serves as the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.

Mission: To support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. We achieve this mission by providing opportunities for the exchange of practical and scholarly information as well as the discussion of trends and issues in our field through the convening of conferences and other professional development events such as institutes, workshops, and online learning opportunities; publication of scholarly practice books, research reports, a peer-reviewed journal, electronic newsletters, and guides; generating, supporting, and disseminating research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and maintaining several online channels for resource sharing and communication, including a dynamic website, listservs, and social media outlets.