


TO: Fred Servello
Dean, College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, & Agriculture

FROM: Jeff Hecker 
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs & Provost

RE: First Year Student Success

DATE: November 2, 2018

Student success is central to our mission, values, reputation and fiscal health. As we discussed at the Deans Retreat and subsequent Deans Council meetings, first-year student success is a major focus for Academic Affairs in 2018-2019 and will continue to be a top priority in the ensuing years. On September 27, we launched the public phase of this initiative at a faculty forum (<https://umaine.edu/provost/first-year-academic-success/>). The response to the call for volunteers has been very positive and we are moving forward to form working groups that will address various aspects of the challenge. At the same time as these working groups are carrying out their charges, I would like the faculties associated with each of our undergraduate majors to engage in thoughtful reviews of the first-year curricula associated with each major. I am asking you to work within the structures of your college to manage this work for the majors in your college.

The *goal* of this initiative is to improve first year student success as defined by first year retention. Improved student success contributes to the fulfillment of our mission and will allow for strategic investments of resources. The *strategy* is faculty review of the curricula that they require and/or recommend for first year students to examine the following questions: 1) Do the curricula serve the intended purposes and produce the intended outcomes? 2) Are there unintended consequences of the curricula that negatively impact student success? As the faculty engage in this work, I ask that they be guided by the same principles that will guide the larger initiative: 1) Consider what they can do (i.e., focus on areas that can be directly affected by faculty action); 2) Take a multi-pronged approach (i.e., consider multiple strategies to address concerns and improve student success); 3) Learn from others (i.e., consider what colleagues at other universities do to support student progress and retention); and 4) Be data informed (i.e., test assumptions against available data). Regarding the last guiding principle, I am asking you to support faculty in using the information available through the Academic Performance Solutions (APS) tool in the service of this work. Jeff St. John can provide log-in information for the tool and Deb Allen (Office of Institutional Research) can assist faculty who have questions about how it works. OIR can provide information not available through APS.

In completing this work, I ask that the faculty respond to the following questions as they review the first-year curricula for their majors.

1. What is the **required** first-year curriculum?
 - a. Courses in the discipline
 - b. General Education courses that meet major requirements
 - c. Other courses that meet major requirements

2. What is the **recommended** first-year curriculum?
 - a. Courses in major
 - b. General Education
 - c. Other recommended courses
3. Why is this the required/recommended first-year curriculum?
 - a. What are expected student-learning outcomes?
 - b. How successful is this curriculum at producing expected outcomes?
4. What are the risks associated with this curriculum (e.g., multiple high DFW rate courses in the same semester; excessive options for fulfilling General Education requirements without guidance)?
5. In light of risk assessment, what are the alternative first-year curricula?
6. What practices, resources, and/or tactics are in place to mitigate risks?
7. What additional steps can be taken to mitigate risk?

Deliverables

- I. **Deans Summary** (Limit 4 pages <COEHD,ENG, MBS> 6 pages <CLAS, NSFA>
 - Summary of key findings for majors within your college
 - College-based initiatives to improve first year student success
- II. **Major Reports**

For each undergraduate major within your college, please produce a report that provides the following information. Related majors in the same department /school may be presented together in a single report if appropriate.

 - 1) Executive Summary (Limit 2 pages)
 - Key findings
 - Key components of plan to improve student success and timeline for implementation
 - 2) Detailed Report and Supportive Materials (no page limit)
 - Responses to the seven guiding questions
 - Supplemental materials

Timeline: Reports are due by the close of business on **Friday, April 12, 2019.**