**FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE) AT MSU**

**OVERVIEW**

Goal 3 of MSU’s Strategic Plan focuses on “Creating a Destination Residential University”. One tactic for achieving this goal is delivering a “signature first-year experience.” The First-year Task Force (FYTF), comprised of members representing students, faculty, staff, and administrators, proposes a FYE model that emphasizes MSU’s liberal arts mission and undergraduate research initiative. Additionally, the FYTF recognizes the importance of using resources already available on campus, making reasonable demands on faculty, and creating a dynamic learning experience within existing degree requirements.

**KEY TERMS**

**First-year Experience (FYE):** deliberate and strategic programming that ties academic work with student activities and support resources in order to help first-year students acclimate to college.

**Learning Community (LC):** According to research, a Learning Community seeks to create an “integrative learning experience” and build connections between faculty, staff and students (Schmidt and Graziano, eds. *Building Synergy for High-Impact Educational Initiatives* xvi). For MSU, a Learning Community refers to a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort between two faculty who link their core courses and develop three assignments that integrate content from the two courses.

**Academic Seminar (AS):** Generally, an Academic Seminar teaches first-year students “how to do college”; additionally, courses designated as Academic Seminars often share a “common intellectual theme” (Schmidt and Graziano, eds. *Building Synergy for High-Impact Educational Initiatives* 7, 21). For MSU, a diverse and changing slate of core courses will be designated each spring as Academic Seminars; these courses will emphasize research and/or creative activities through various assignments. Students will be required to attend 1) a guest lecture emphasizing interdisciplinary research or creative work early in the semester, and 2) a research or creative presentation (such as Celebration of Scholarship) later in the semester.

**Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS):** MSU-specific statement in progress, Liberal Arts Task Force.

**Peer Mentors (PM):** Returning undergraduate students who are assigned to work with specific LC or AS faculty in order to provide study and life skills for students.

**Peer Leader (PL):** Returning undergraduate students who are embedded in a section of MWSU 1233 to provide intensive support for students and instructors.
**PROPOSED MODEL**

**Working mission statement:** Foster academic success and student engagement in a dynamic learning community where the liberal arts and sciences are explored, valued, and applied.

**Orientation:** Introduction to a COPLAC institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall: Learning Community</th>
<th>Spring: Academic Seminar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Liberal Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Introduction to Research and Creative Activities</td>
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**Learning Community of two lower-level courses OR one lower-level course & MWSU 1233**

- Taught by faculty/full-time instructor
- Driven by topic/theme
- Integrates assignments
- Embeds FYE objectives in core and course objectives:
  - Critical Thinking (core objective)
  - LAS awareness (course objective)
  - Engagement/community (Teamwork/Social Responsibility core objective)
- Meets FYE objectives through additional programming:
  - Led by Peer Mentor/Leader
  - LAS mission
  - Study Skills
  - Life Skills

**Sections of core courses drawn from all component areas and specifically designated as AS**

- Taught by faculty
- Driven by topic/theme
- Emphasizes a research or creative activity component
- Embeds FYE objectives in core and course objectives:
  - Critical Thinking (core objective)
  - LAS awareness (course objective)
  - Engagement/community (Teamwork/Social Responsibility core objective)
- Meets FYE objectives through additional programming:
  - Led by Peer Mentor
  - Undergraduate Research
  - Study Skills
  - Life Skills

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1 MWSU 1233: College Connections is required for all conditionally admitted students; they may take it in an LC or as a stand-alone course.

2 For LCs including MWSU 1233.

3 Research component is defined as any assignment that introduces students to a basic skill in collecting information in order to answer a question or solve a problem.
### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

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<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Fall: Learning Community</th>
<th>Spring: Academic Seminar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>Offering 15 LCs</td>
<td>Design PM program</td>
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<td>Piloting training for faculty</td>
<td>Recruit faculty for LCs and AS pilot</td>
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<td>2017-18</td>
<td>Offer 25 LCs</td>
<td>Offer 10 AS</td>
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<td>Pair 10 LCs with PMs to pilot PM program</td>
<td>Evaluate/adjust PM pilot</td>
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<td>Recruit faculty for AS</td>
<td>Recruit PMs</td>
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<td>2018-19</td>
<td>Offer 35-40 LCs (serve full FY enrollment)</td>
<td>Offer 15 AS</td>
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<td>Pair each LC with a PM</td>
<td>Pair 10 AS with a PM to pilot program</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluate/Revise Orientation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>Offer 35-40 LCs (serve full FY enrollment)</td>
<td>Offer 25 AS</td>
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<td>Pair each LC with a PM</td>
<td>Pair each AS with a PM</td>
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<td><strong>Implement new Orientation summer 2020</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2020-21</td>
<td>Offer 35-40 LCs (serve full FY enrollment)</td>
<td>Offer 35-40 AS (serve full FY enrollment)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pair each LC with a PM</td>
<td>Pair each AS with a PM</td>
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### TASKS AND SUBTASKS

#### Curricular
- Define liberal arts education for MSU students (work with Liberal Arts Task Force)
- Identify how each course contributes to liberal arts education (work with Liberal Arts Task Force)
- Develop/revise MWSU 1233 to emphasize LAS
- Develop curriculum for Academic Seminar courses

#### Professional Development/Training
- Recruit and train faculty to teach learning communities and academic seminars
- Recruit and train peer mentors to help students acclimate to college

#### Assessment
- Convene the First-Year Council as recommended in the Foundations of Excellence report (2006) to coordinate and assess the FYE
- Develop Student Learning Outcomes for FYE
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the first-year experience
  - Increase 1st to 2nd year persistence to 80%
  - Increase 4-year graduation rate to 40%
  - Increase students' attendance at events and activities
  - Increase faculty satisfaction regarding student learning and classroom performance