

First-Year Redesign

Foundational Principles (Foundational Dimensions®)

(Two-Year College Version)

► Foundational Principles | Two-Year Institutions: First Year

Foundational Principles statements constitute a model that provides two-year colleges with a means to evaluate and improve the new student experience. This model recognizes the multiple roles and functions of two-year institutions as well as their service to student populations that have widely varying educational backgrounds and goals. As an evaluation tool, the model enables two-year institutions both to confirm their strengths and to recognize the need for improvement. As an aspirational model, the Principles provide general guidelines for an intentional design of the new student experience. The Principles rest on four assumptions:

- The academic mission of an institution is preeminent.
- The experience of new students is central to the achievement of an institution's mission because it lays the foundation that enables students to achieve their educational goals.
- Collectively, the Principles constitute an ideal for improving not only the new student experience, but also the entire college experience.

Foundational Institutions intentionally cultivate learning environments for new students that emerge from a philosophy of two-year colleges as gateways to higher education.

The philosophy is explicit and easily understood. It is consistent with the institutional mission, reflects a consensus of internal and external constituencies, and is widely disseminated. The philosophy is also the basis for student success including: organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, and resource allocation to support the new student experience. **(Philosophy)**

Foundational Institutions provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and flexible approach to the new student experience through effective organizational structures and policies.

These structures and policies guide and align all aspects of the new student experience. Through effective partnerships, critical stakeholders such as instructional, administrative, and student services units provide a coherent experience for new students that is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements. Institutions regularly assess their policies and processes to assure they are meeting the needs of new students. **(Organization)**

Foundational Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage new students to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institutional mission, students' academic and career goals, and workplace expectations. Both in and out of the classroom, these learning experiences promote critical thinking, ethical decision making, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Student learning is regularly monitored, and results are used for improvement. **(Learning)**

Foundational Institutions make new students a high priority for faculty and staff. A culture of responsibility for the experiences of new students characterizes these institutions. This culture is realized through high-quality instruction, services, and support as well as substantial interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom. Institution leaders nurture this culture and support it by institutional recognition and rewards. **(Institution Culture)**

Foundational Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions beginning with outreach and recruitment and continuing throughout the period of enrollment. They communicate clear curricular/co-curricular expectations and possibilities, and they provide appropriate preparation and support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. These institutions create and maintain communication with secondary and postsecondary institutions, families, employers, community agencies, and other sources of support for students. **(Transitions)**

Foundational Institutions serve all new students according to their varied needs. These institutions anticipate, identify, and address the needs of all students in response to their individual abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences. These efforts are subject to assessment and adjustment as needed. Institutions also ensure campus environments that are safe for all students. **(All Students)**

Foundational Institutions ensure that new students experience ongoing exploration of a variety of ideas as a means of enhancing their learning and participation in global communities. Institutions cultivate an open and civil community in which students interact with people from varied backgrounds. These institutions guide students to reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold and become self-aware and empathetic to others' lived experiences. **(Global Awareness)**

Foundational Institutions promote student understanding of the purposes of higher education and those unique to two-year institutions, for the individual and society. These purposes include learning for personal growth, career enhancement, workplace preparation and retraining, and transfer for additional education. Institutions encourage new students to examine their motivation and goals with regard to higher education. Students are exposed to the value of both a general education and focused study in an academic or career field. **(Educational Purposes)**

Foundational Institutions review student data, conduct assessments, and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations to effect improvement. Institutions regularly develop and distribute data on student enrollment and academic success patterns. Assessment provides feedback to new students to guide their learning, to faculty to guide their teaching, and to the institution to guide planning, resource allocation, decision making, and improvement of programs and policies. To facilitate improvement, these institutions are knowledgeable about current practices at other institutions as well as relevant research and scholarship. **(Improvement)**

The Foundational Principles were developed by John N. Gardner, Betsy O. Barefoot, and Randy L. Swing of the Policy Center on the First Year of College in collaboration with 87 two-year colleges. The following ten campuses provided national leadership in the inaugural use of the Principles: Kennebec Valley Community College, Longview Community College, Middlesex Community College, Montgomery County Community College, Oakton Community College, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, San Jacinto College South, Spokane Falls Community College, University of Wisconsin Colleges, and Virginia Highlands Community College. The Foundational Principles were revised in 2024 by Betsy Q. Griffin, Sara Stein Koch, Jill Robinson Kramer, and Robert Rodier of the Gardner Institute.

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