

First-Year Redesign (Foundations of Excellence®)

Foundational Principles (Foundational Dimensions®)

Four-Year College Version

Foundational Principles statements constitute a model that provides institutions with a means to evaluate and improve the first year of college. As an evaluation tool, the model enables institutions both to confirm their strengths and to recognize the need for improvement to address gaps in services and changes in society and student needs. As an aspirational model, the Principles provide general guidelines for an intentional design of the first year. The Principles rest on four assumptions:

- The academic mission of an institution is preeminent;
- The first college year is central to the achievement of an institution's mission and lays the foundation on which undergraduate education is built;
- Collectively, the Principles constitute an ideal approach for improving not only the first college year, but also the entire undergraduate experience.

Foundational Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices. The philosophy/rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of institution constituencies. The philosophy/rationale is also the basis for first-year organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation. **(Philosophy)**

Foundational Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year. These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements. Institutions have clear metrics to assess their policies and structures to assure they are meeting the needs of all first-year students. **(Organization)**

Foundational Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institution's philosophy and mission. Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Student learning is regularly monitored, and results are used for improvement. **(Learning)**

Foundational Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty and staff. These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty and staff responsibility for the first year that is realized through high-quality instruction, services, and substantial interaction with first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic and student services officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems. **(Institution Culture)**

Foundational Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with the institutional mission. Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year, institutions communicate clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate. **(Transitions)**

Foundational Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs. The process of anticipating and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to assessment and adjustment throughout the first year. Institutions provide services with respect for the students' abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences so that all students can succeed. Institutions also ensure an institution environment that is safe for all students. **(All Students)**

Foundational Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience a variety of ideas as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of global communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from various backgrounds, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and become self-aware and empathetic to other's lived experiences. **(Global Awareness)**

Foundational Institutions promote student understanding of the purposes of higher education for the individual and society. These purposes include knowledge acquisition for personal growth, learning to prepare for future employment, learning to become engaged citizens, and learning to serve the public good. Institutions encourage first-year students to examine their motivation and goals regarding higher education in general and to their own college/university. Students are exposed to the value of general education as well as to the value of more focused, in-depth study of a field or fields of knowledge (i.e., the major). **(Educational Purposes)**

Foundational Institutions review student data, conduct assessments, and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations to achieve ongoing first-year improvement. Institutions regularly develop and distribute data specifically on first-year student enrollment and academic success patterns. They assess the impact of academic and co-curricular experiences provided to first-year students. These assessments are linked to the institutions' overall assessment. Assessment results are an

integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and ongoing improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. As part of the enhancement process and as a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on the first college year. **(Improvement)**

The Foundational Principles were originally developed in 2005 by John N. Gardner, Betsy O. Barefoot, Stephen W. Schwartz, Michael J. Siegel, and Randy L. Swing of the Gardner Institute in collaboration with Robert R. Reason, Patrick T. Terenzini, Edward Zlotkowski, and 235 colleges and universities. The following institutions provided national leadership in the inaugural use of the Principles: Augsburg College, Aurora University, CUNY – Brooklyn College, CUNY – Medgar Evers College, Chadron State College, Columbia College, Endicott College, Franklin Pierce College, Georgia Southwestern State University, Illinois State University, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indiana Wesleyan University, Kennesaw State University, Madonna University, Maryville College, Marywood University, Missouri Western State University, Nazareth College of Rochester, Plymouth State University, Saint Edward's University, SUNY – Brockport, Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, University of Charleston, and University of Wisconsin-Parkside. The Foundational Principles were revised in 2024 by Betsy Q. Griffin, Sara Stein Koch, Jill Robinson Kramer, and Robert Rodier.

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