

1-22-2015

Freshman Year Experience: A Comprehensive Review

Portland State University. University Studies Council

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/unst_assessment_research



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Citation Details

Portland State University. University Studies Council, "Freshman Year Experience: A Comprehensive Review" (2015). *University Studies Assessment Research*. 11.

https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/unst_assessment_research/11

This Report is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Studies Assessment Research by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.



Portland State University

Freshman Year Experience: A Comprehensive Review

January 22, 2015

Prepared by the University Studies Council
2012-2013 and 2013-2014

Tom Seppalainen, Chair
Ben Anderson-Nathe
Katherine Barich
Daneen Bergland
Becky Boesch
Rowanna Carpenter
Annabelle Dolidon
Martha Dyson
J. R. "Jones" Estes
Meredith Farkas
Pedro Ferbel
Dan Fortmiller
Jeff Gerwing
Rolf Hardesty
Tyson Jones
Yves Labissiere
Tom Lockett
Randy Miller
Jim Morris
Betsy Natter
Joe Poracsky
Susan Reese
Amy Spring
Jack Straton
Rachel Webb
Nora Wendl

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Background	3
Curricular Experience	9
Faculty Experience	19
Student Resources	26
Conclusion	31
Bibliography	53

Illustrations

Figures

1. Oregon state production of high school graduates	6
2. FRINQ and PSU Hispanic and Latino student enrollment	7
3. Oregon state annual household income by race/ethnicity	7
4. Oregon state composite math and reading scores by race/ethnicity	8
5. FRINQ and PSU international student enrollment	8
6. Number of freshmen credits earned per term	10
7. Mean grade point average by program	11
8. Freshmen course grades by program for completed courses	11
9. Average non-complete grades awarded to freshmen by department	12
10. Average freshmen class size by program	12
11. Freshmen student overall satisfaction with educational experience at PSU	13
12. Student-rated faculty effectiveness	14
13. Student-rated curricular effectiveness	14
14. Student satisfaction with FRINQ course	14
15. Student-rated mentor effectiveness	15
16. Student-reported helpfulness of ePortfolio in making connections among topics	17
17. Student-reported helpfulness of ePortfolio in understanding self as a learner	17
18. Annual percentage by faculty type teaching freshmen	20
19. Annual percentage by program of faculty type teaching freshmen	21
20. Annual percentage by program by term of faculty type teaching freshmen	21
21. Chair perception of clear goals and objectives for students' freshman year	32
22. Chair-reported value of institutional mission for freshman year	32

Tables

1. Activities FRINQ students plan to participate in	4
2. Activities FRINQ students reported needing significant help with	4
3. FRINQ Student financial responses	5

Executive Summary

In fall term of 2012, the Provost charged the University Studies Council with evaluating Portland State University's preparedness to meet the needs of future freshmen. Specifically, the charge asks the Council to "conceptualize the challenges faced by future freshmen, and recommend strategies, alignments, and any changes needed for developing a unique first-year experience that address these challenges." The Council spent 20 months researching, compiling, and analyzing campus-wide data to prepare this report and use that data to examine the freshman experience at PSU in order to understand where our institutional and programmatic strengths and weaknesses lie. In addition, the report includes national, state, and local demographic information on the freshmen we can expect to see in our courses in the coming years.

The Council gathered data, best practices, and initiatives and plans focused on the freshman student experience from campus units that have responsibility or provide services for first-year students (Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, the Freshman Retention Project, the First-Year-Experience Housing Program, the Honors College, and the University Studies program) to inform this report. Further, the Council sent a comprehensive survey to Deans, Department Chairs, and unit leaders on campus regarding their experience with freshmen, freshmen curricula in general, and Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) in particular. In addition, the Council conducted a FRINQ faculty survey focusing on faculty experience with the curriculum, support for their research and instructional roles, and overall assessment of their FRINQ experience.

The data show that the year-long FRINQ curriculum is working well for the significant majority of students, with 75.7% of students satisfied to very satisfied with their FRINQ course (figure 14). Similarly, of the faculty who teach in the program, 74% enjoy the experience of teaching in FRINQ and describe it as "rewarding," "stimulating," "meaningful," "transformative," "wonderful," and "invigorating." A high number (88%) of faculty report that they "feel confident teaching the interdisciplinary curriculum" and 83% of faculty agree to strongly agree that they "enjoy getting to know my students personally."

The data also reveal some hard realities and areas where PSU can improve its practices to support our current and future students better. At \$13,378 PSU currently has the highest level of unmet financial need in the Oregon University System. With such a significant financial shortfall, our students face challenges outside of academic preparedness and 24% of freshmen report worrying that they will not have enough money to finish school. Moreover, the report finds that a lack of policy coordination among the administrative offices that impact the student bottom-line (e.g., Student Accounts, Registrar, and Financial Aid) imposes additional hardship on students struggling to pay for school.

For the freshmen that persist through these financial challenges, the university does not have a comprehensive, campus-wide assessment to understand the freshman curricular experience outside of general education courses. Because the general education requirement of University

Studies or Honors comprises less than half of a full-time freshman's first-year credit load (15 credits out of a minimum 36 credits), this is a significant data gap in how freshmen are engaging with their first year in the departments.

The report provides recommendations of actionable items for integration into the strategic plans of the relevant units. The individual recommendations vary yet all require communication, collaboration, and commitment across levels of the university hierarchy. A culture of competition for resources (e.g., student credit hours, departmental turf, and tenure lines) and other processes that discourage communication, collaboration, and sustained commitment is our greatest institutional challenge for serving the needs of future freshmen.

To foster a culture of collaboration for the common good of our freshmen, in addition to the individual recommendations, the Council recommends developing a mission statement focused on freshmen to inform the prioritization and coordination of campus resources so that these can be matched most effectively with student needs.

As figure 21 illustrates, only 9 of the 35 Chairs responded that they strongly agree that "my department or unit has clear goals and objectives for students during their freshman year," while almost all somewhat or strongly agree that "a clearly articulated institutional mission for the freshman year of college would be valuable to PSU" (figure 22). This is an opportunity for the PSU campus community to work together to articulate that mission.

A mission statement and the collaborative work it requires promises benefits to PSU. First, freshmen currently comprise only a small (approximately 10%) proportion of our undergraduate population. This is a potential area of great growth. Second, PSU's general education programs offer a small liberal arts college environment to undergraduates within Oregon's largest and only urban University. This is an asset for not only formulating a genuine mission statement but also an opportunity for its effective and strategic use in purposes ranging from recruiting to retention. Third, campus-wide reflection and collaboration on a freshman mission promises to broaden the immediate stakeholder group beyond student services and the general education programs. Like any other university, PSU can only benefit from a more uniform culture of "ownership" of freshmen students. It is well known that students major-hop during their first two years during a time when they are also most likely to transfer out; a culture of uniform care and attention to the needs of freshmen even before they declare a major and/or settle in to one can only advance student success. Fourth, and in a more self-reflexive mode, we fear that without an inclusive mission statement for freshmen and the work that goes into developing one, programs and efforts dedicated to the success of future freshmen will remain marginalized and their potential educational impact unrealized.

The Council predicts that the collective articulation of a Freshman Mission Statement for Portland State, together with the coordination across levels of our institution required to accomplish that mission, will result in a campus that more effectively matches campus resources with student needs and contribute to a campus where teaching and advising of freshmen and non-

majors is not seen as a distraction from “real” work (i.e., majors, graduate students, and grants) but a fulfilling and invigorating professional experience. We also surmise that this collective work will help create a more flexible if not nimble institution, one that can adapt to the evolving needs of its future students, both as freshmen and beyond.

Introduction

In fall term of 2012, the Provost charged the University Studies Council with evaluating Portland State University's preparedness to meet the needs of future freshmen. Specifically, the charge states:

Conceptualize the challenges faced by future freshmen, and recommend strategies, alignments, and any changes needed for developing a unique first-year experience that address these challenges.

In addition, any recommendations should acknowledge changing demographics; unique learning needs of international students and those with varying abilities; improve connection between curricular (Freshman Inquiry) and other elements of first year experience like orientation, placement, advising, residence and student life, and academic support activities; integrate student's general education experience with the student's college/major experience; address needs of "undeclared" students; reflect the increasing need for undergraduate research and engagement activities; improve student satisfaction; improve faculty's professional experience in delivering the learning; acknowledge the impact of changes in faculty mix; and feasible within current and anticipated University resources.

Per the Faculty Governance Guide (2012-2013, page 6) the University Studies Council, a committee of the Faculty Senate, is charged with oversight of all aspect of University Studies.

University Studies Council shall therefore steer the review of Freshman Inquiry. We request that the council establish a workgroup that includes members of University Studies Council, a representative of Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, two students, and two members appointed by Vice President, Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, with expertise in student life issues (advising, residence and student life, and academic support activities).

In accomplishing its charge, University Studies Council will make a concerted effort to seek public input, hold public forums and colloquia, and to gather information from many sources.

The Council spent 20 months researching, compiling, and analyzing campus-wide data to prepare this report. Its goal is to use data to examine the freshman experience at PSU in order to understand where our institutional and programmatic strengths and weaknesses lie. In addition, the report includes national, state, and local demographic information on the freshmen we can expect to see in our courses in the coming years. Furthermore, the report offers recommendations to guide future work involving freshmen. Finally, the Council underscores the importance of developing a mission statement for the freshman year at Portland State to facilitate coordination among the relevant campus units in hopes of effectively matching freshman student needs with resources.

Methodology

Initial Planning

University Studies Council invited Dr. Jean Henscheid, a nationally known expert on evaluating Freshman and first-year experience, to serve as a consultant to the committee. Dr. Henscheid has guided dozens of institutions on program development and assessment concerning first-year students. In working with the Council, she provided a multifaceted outline of dimensions and factors that have been found important for first-year students' experience and success. She also provided models of high impact practices at model institutions. The Council reviewed over 100 dimensions of suggested areas of study and pursued a subset of those most applicable to freshmen at PSU, and proceeded as follows.

Data Collection

The Council invited representatives from campus units that have responsibility or provide services for first-year students—Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, the Freshman Retention Project, the First-Year-Experience Housing Program, the Honors College, and the University Studies program—to its meetings. These groups shared data, best practices, lessons learned, initiatives, and plans focused on the freshman student experience to inform this report. The data, unless specified otherwise, are from the 2012-13 academic year.

Further, the Council developed and sent a comprehensive questionnaire to Deans, Department Chairs, and unit leaders on campus regarding their experience with freshmen, freshmen curricula in general, and Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) in particular. It also requested specific information on what kinds of supports are in place for the freshman students in their programs. In addition, the Council conducted a survey of faculty who taught FRINQ. The survey focused on faculty experience with the curriculum, support for their research and instructional roles, and overall assessment of their FRINQ experience.

The Council identified a need for more information on the courses that freshmen take outside of FRINQ. This general education requirement comprises less than half of a full-time freshman's first-year credit load (15 credits out of a minimum 36 credits) and is parallel to Honors College students' courses. While the UNST End-of-Year Survey asks a few general questions about the student's experience at PSU, it is not designed to measure a student's curricular experience outside of FRINQ. In lieu of a comprehensive, campus-wide assessment of freshmen, the Council asked the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) to provide the data it collects on freshman courses from the 2012-13 academic year. The purpose of this was to understand the freshman curricular experience outside of the FRINQ general education courses. Insights from this provide a broader campus context for understanding the overall curricular experience for freshman students in that the OIRP data provide information on faculty mix, class size, achievements (in terms of grades, GPA), and challenges (rates of D grades, Withdrawals, Incompletes, Failing grades).

Analysis

To analyze the data collected and used for the report, the Council formed three subcommittees, the domains of responsibility of which also structure the report:

1. Curriculum:

Features of the Freshman curriculum and student, faculty, and institutional perspectives on the curricular experience in general education and departmental courses.

2. Faculty Experience:

Features and experiences of the faculty teaching freshmen.¹

3. Student Resources:

Support services for first-year students and the faculty/staff working with them.

Each of these three major sections of the report have the following organization: first, a discussion of the *Context* for the section in question; second, an analysis of *What is Working*, followed by the third, *Current Challenges in Implementing Best Practices to Serve Future Students*, ending with, fourth, *Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges*. Before these major areas of study though, the report offers background, trends and demographics on our current and future freshmen.

Background

The Portland State Freshman: Trends and Demographics

From OIRP data we know that, as an entering freshman, a student is slightly more likely to be female with a high school GPA of 3.39 (compared to males at 3.31). Over the year, 16.1% of freshmen will stop attending. Reflecting recent regional demographic changes, only slightly half (52%) of freshmen students identify as White. The remainder reflects a growing diversity: Latino, 12.6%, International, 11.1%, Asian, 9.7%, and Black and Native American/Pacific Islanders, 3.6% and 2.0%, respectively (OIRP Dataset 2012-13)².

From the Prior Learning Assessment conducted each fall term in FRINQ courses, we know that in 2013-14, 73% of FRINQ students are Oregon residents. In terms of age, 85.8% of students are 19 years or younger, 12.2% are between 20 and 25, and 2% are older than 25. Similarly, 81.6% of FRINQ students were attending high school the year before enrolling at PSU. An analysis of high school GPA shows that 21.2% of FRINQ students entered PSU with a high school GPA lower than 3.0; while 46.7% had a high school GPA between 3.0 and 3.49, and 32.2% had a high school GPA of 3.5 or higher.

PSU continues to attract a significant percentage of first-generation students with 51.7% of FRINQ students reporting that neither parent earned a 4-year degree. And 88.3% of FRINQ students planned to earn a bachelor's degree from PSU, and 31.5% intend to not pursue

¹The Council did not have the resources to qualitatively survey all PSU faculty working with freshmen on campus; the Council utilized OIRP data to look at the student experience in these classes.

²“Statistical Portrait: 2012-2013,” *Office of Institutional Research and Planning*, last modified July 17, 2013, <http://www.oirp.pdx.edu/source/port1213.htm>.

advanced degrees.

Almost half (43.3%) of FRINQ students now live in the Residence Halls and many plan to be involved on campus and in the community. Students reported where they would participate in table 1.

Table 1. Activities FRINQ students plan to participate in

Activity	Students planning to participate (%)
Student clubs or organizations	56.9
Volunteering in community	40.9
Intramural sports	16.3
Outdoor program	15.9
Student government	4.1
Greek life	4.1

Most FRINQ students will work in addition to attending school, with 50.1% planning to work between 1 and 20 hours per week and 19% planning to work more than 20 hours per week. About a third (30.9%) do not plan to work during the school year.

Other significant characteristics of freshmen include 35.3% reporting speaking a language other than English at home and 8.6% reporting having at least part-time responsibility for dependents.

It is noteworthy that 75.6% of students reported having attended orientation prior to fall term. When asked what they need the most help with during their freshman year, students report the following:

Table 2. Activities FRINQ students reported needing significant help with

Activity	Students needing a lot of help (%)
Math	31.6
Finances	26.1
Writing	22.1
Finding a job	20.9
Reading and understanding academic texts	15.6
Study skills	14.3
Finding a social group	10.6
Tutoring in other areas	10.2
Adjusting to college	7.4
Using the library	5.5

Note: Ratings were made on a scale of 1 = I don't need any help to 3 = I need a lot of help.

When asked to list their concerns in the third week of fall term, 36.9% listed financial issues as their top concern. Alarming, 24% worry that they may not have enough money to finish school. When asked in more detail, students expressed agreement with the following statements:

Table 3. Student financial responses

Statement	Agree or strongly agree (%)
I understand how to use credit cards responsibly	73.6
I understand where to go to ask questions about financial aid issues	64.6
I understand the various financial aid options available to me	60.6
I understand where to go to ask questions about my bill at PSU	59.2
I understand how student loans work	57.3
I understand how to find a job to help pay for college	57.1
My personal financial situation makes me feel stressed	55.1
I understand how to make a plan for addressing my financial needs	52.7
I feel prepared financially to meet an emergency (car repairs, medical bills, etc.)	31.3

The profile of students enrolled in FRINQ courses for fall 2013 reveals that while they represent the characteristics of traditional college students in many ways (e.g., age, transition directly from high school), they are also an increasingly diverse group. The Hispanic and Latina/Latino population has grown more than 9% over the last 5 years. First-generation students continue to make up just over half of the students enrolled in FRINQ courses and about 35% of FRINQ students report speaking a language other than English at home.

Regarding course enrollment patterns, Arts and Letters and the Natural and Physical Sciences enroll the most students across all terms (~25% and 20%, respectively). When beginning in the fall, the top subjects (excluding general education) that students enroll in include three from Natural and Physical Sciences (Chemistry, Math, Biology), four from Arts and Letters (Applied Linguistics [Intensive English Language Program], Music, Spanish, Writing), one from Social Sciences (Psychology), one from Business Administration (Introduction to Business and World Affairs), and Physical Education courses. As the year progresses, a shift occurs in the Arts and Social Sciences – in winter term, Writing and Spanish drop off the top ten to be replaced by Computer Science and Sociology; in spring term, Biology and Sociology drop off the top ten, replaced by Art and the return of Spanish. Linguistics, Chemistry, Math, Psychology, and Music remain in the top ten throughout the year (OIRP Dataset 2012-13).

In terms of faculty mix, when entering a classroom in the fall, freshmen find their courses taught mainly by tenure-track (31%) or full-time fixed-term faculty (31%). As the year progresses, freshmen classes taught by tenure-track faculty declines to 24% by spring.

Regarding retention, about 10% of freshman students who are admitted in fall do not transition to winter term and between 15-20% of the students who complete their freshmen year do not return

the following fall. In addition, students who have major concerns about financing their education, and students who are not sure about their plans (as identified in FRINQ Prior Learning Survey), leave at a higher rate. Similarly, students with high school GPAs below 3.0 and conditionally admitted students tend to leave at a higher rate. Finally, about 80% of the students who indicate (in the FRINQ End-of-Year Survey) that they are not planning to return the following fall do not come back (Freshman Retention Report).

Students who are retained by PSU completed their first year with a higher overall first year GPA (83.5% of the retained students have a GPA of 2.5 or higher with 33.7% of them attaining a GPA of 3.5 or higher) than those not retained (57.8% have a GPA of 2.5 or higher and 19.1% of them have a GPA of 3.5 or above). In sum, about three quarters of the students who do not come back leave in good academic standing (OIRP Dataset 2012-13).

Future Freshmen

High School Demographics

Figure 1 illustrates high school graduation trends in the state of Oregon. The forecast shows a fairly stable trend for the next 10 years.

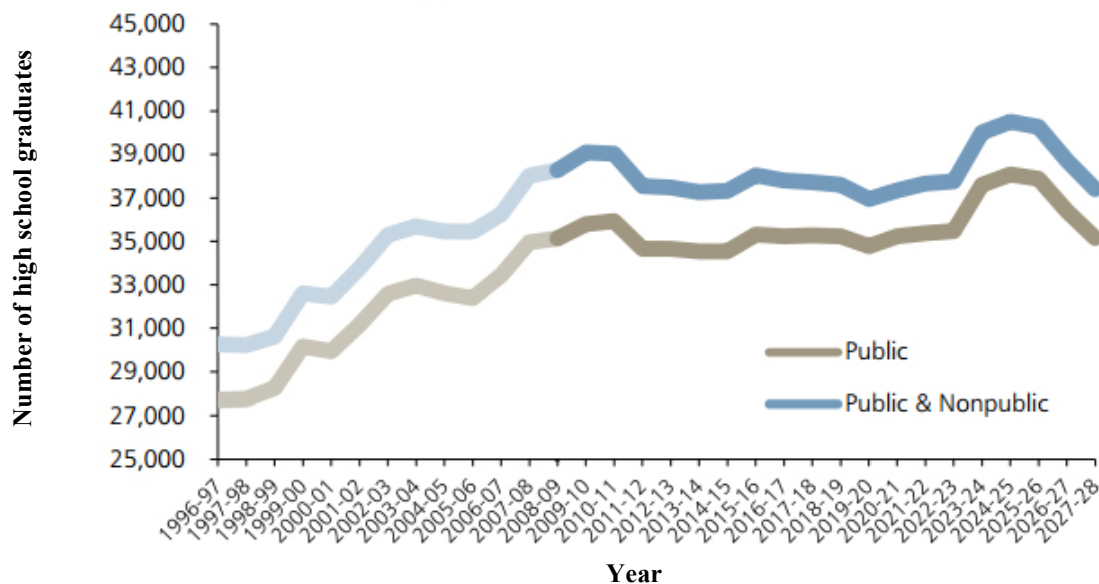


Figure 1. Oregon state production of high school graduates. Source: “Knocking at the College Door,” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*, <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profiles/or.pdf> (accessed Dec 3, 2013).

However, high school enrollment patterns indicate dramatic changes in the demographic mix of students. For example, Hispanic and Latino students show a three-fold increase.³ Our own enrollment reports from the OIRP⁴ affirm this pattern: from fall of 2008 through fall of 2012,

³“Knocking at the College Door,” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*, last modified January 11, 2013, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profiles/or.pdf>.

⁴“Stats and Facts,” *Portland State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning*, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.oirp.pdx.edu/StatsNFacts.html>.

Hispanic and Latino students increased by 77%. Hispanic and Latinos now represent more than 8.3% of our entire undergraduate student body up from 5.3% in 2008. Within University Studies, FRINQ enrollment patterns also show an increase in the Hispanic and Latino population, by 45% over the same time span. Between fall of 2008 and fall of 2013 this increase was 82%.

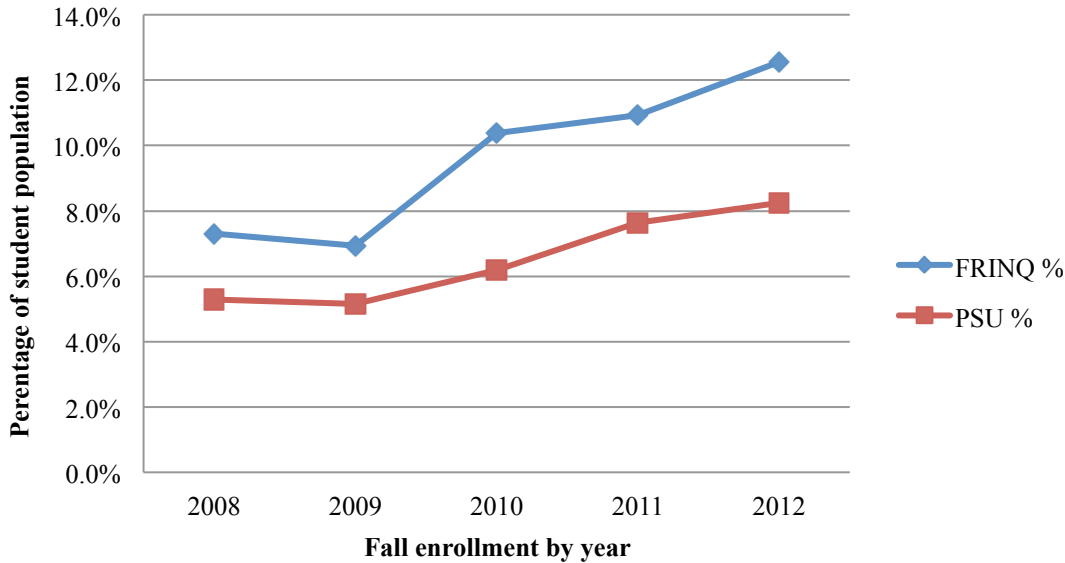


Figure 2. FRINQ and PSU Hispanic and Latino student enrollment.

When we look at the financial and academic performance data (shown in figures 3 and 4) this group as a whole has fewer financial resources and lower academic achievement levels. As our local outreach efforts pay off and more students from this group matriculate to PSU, we will need to bolster our resources for supporting students who have increased financial concerns and may be less academically prepared for college.

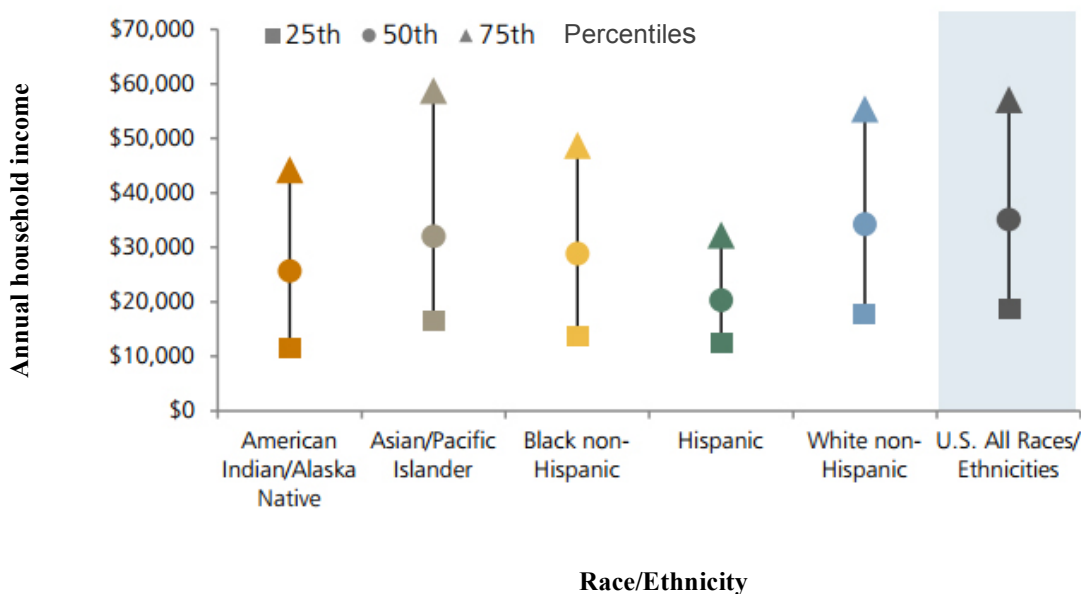


Figure 3. Oregon state annual household income by race/ethnicity. Source: “Knocking at the College Door,” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*, last modified January 11, 2013, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profiles/or.pdf>.

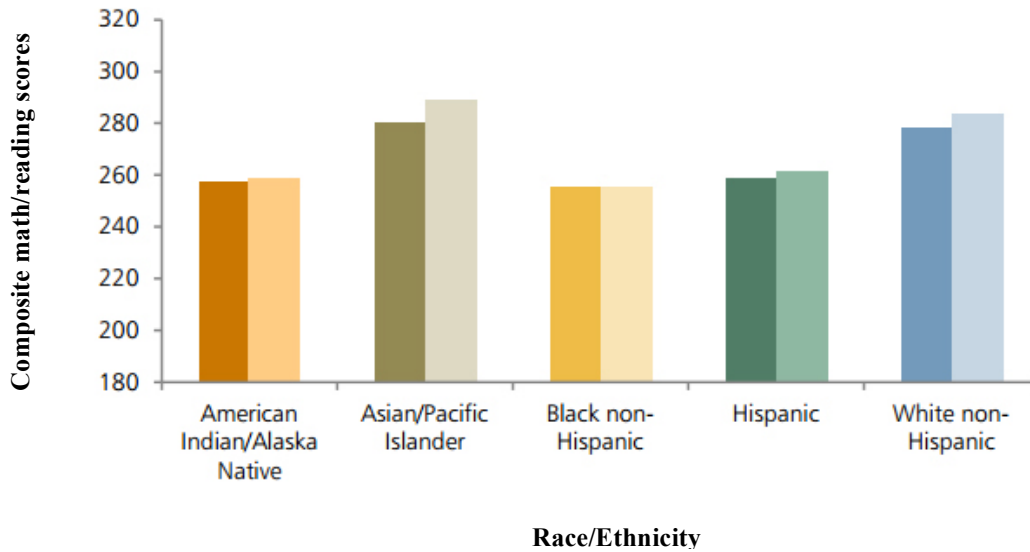


Figure 4. Oregon composite math and reading scores by race/ethnicity. Note: Oregon in darker shades; U.S. in lighter shades. Source: “Knocking at the College Door,” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*, last modified January 11, 2013, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profiles/or.pdf>.

PSU Enrollment Initiatives Affecting Freshmen

Recent initiatives intended to diversify our student body have focused on the recruitment of out-of-state and international students. These initiatives have led to modest increases in overall enrollment. However between 2008 and 2012, the number of international undergraduate students almost doubled. Furthermore, international students enrolled in FRINQ increased 62%. International students continued to grow (2.1%) while non-resident students also showed a slight increase (0.7%).

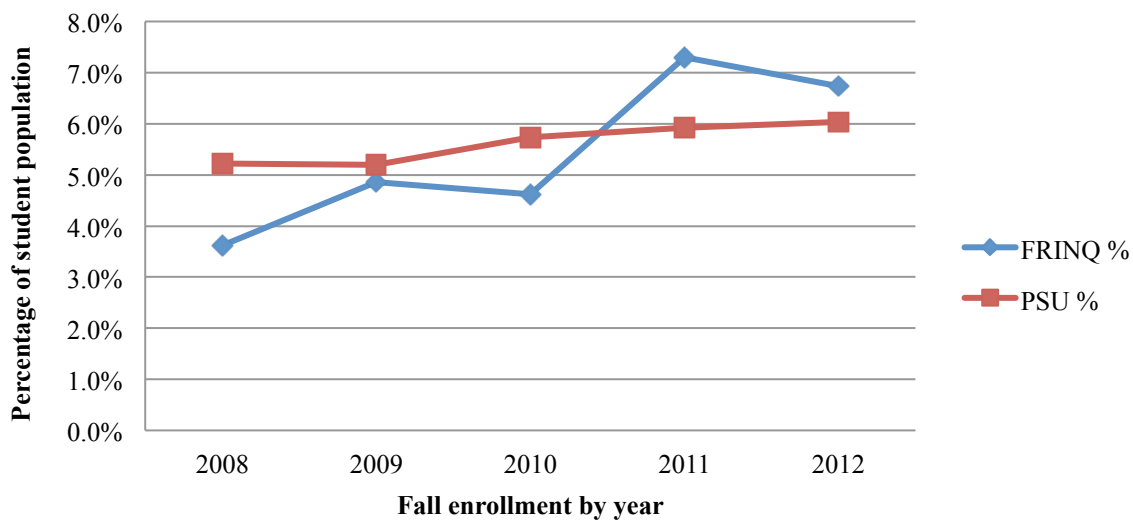


Figure 5. FRINQ and PSU International student enrollment.

4-Year Degree Completion

Starting fall term 2014, PSU promises that full-time freshmen who qualify and sign the Four-Year Degree Guarantee Agreement will get the support and courses necessary to graduate in four years, otherwise PSU will not charge them tuition for remaining required courses (<http://www.pdx.edu/four-year-degree-guarantee>). Students selecting this option will be guaranteed available classes starting fall of 2014. To support this initiative, departments will need to provide courses in a consistent if not “on-demand” manner.

State of Oregon 40-40-20 Initiative

The goal of 40-40-20 is that by 2025 all Oregonians will have a high school diploma, 40% will have an Associate’s or post-secondary certificate, and 40% will have a Bachelor’s or graduate degree.⁵ George Pernsteiner, former Oregon University System (OUS) Chancellor notes of the initiative:

The 40% of the attainment goal “owned” by four-year colleges and universities is more nuanced than a raw number. Embedded within is inclusion of underserved students – low income, rural, students of color – whom the educational systems have not served well in the past and whose college-going and completion rates generally fall below the average. Ethically and numerically we cannot meet the 40% goal with just the students who typically enter the college pipeline today, many of whom have better pre-college preparation, are from families with greater economic means, and do not need as much retention support in college as do underserved students.⁶

Considering the above mentioned changes in student demographics, together with institutional novelties and governmental education goals also referenced above, the assessment of PSU freshmen needs initiated by the Council and documented in this report appears very timely. The following three sections offer insights on our specific strengths and challenges and articulate strategies for supporting future freshmen students that we hope will come to inform processes and practices on campus.

Curricular Experience

Context

Credits Attempted and Earned

Over the year, freshmen at PSU take 15 credits either in a FRINQ or the Honors College Foundations course sequence. Both FRINQ and Foundations courses are interdisciplinary and focused on building the practice of critical inquiry within the context of an intellectual theme.

⁵“40-40-20 Resources and Initiatives,” *University of Oregon System*, last modified June 26, 2012, <http://www.ous.edu/partner/404020> (site discontinued).

⁶“Oregon’s 40-40-20: From Goal to Action,” *State Higher Education Executive Officers Association*, accessed May 18, 2014, <http://www.shceo.org/resources/state-policy-leadership/oregon%E2%80%99s-40-40-20-goal-action>.

All UNST courses, including FRINQ, draw upon the four program goals to inspire relevant learning objectives:

1. Inquiry and Critical Thinking
2. Communication
3. The Diversity of Human Experience
4. Ethics and Social Responsibility

Within the Foundations course sequence, “students are expected to:

1. Understand and analyze how scholarly articles are structured in different disciplines;
2. Explain how research questions are developed;
3. Explain how scholarly arguments are historically and textually framed.”⁷

On average, freshmen complete just over 12 credits per term (fall: 12.53, winter: 12.73, spring: 12.59). As illustrated in figure 6, the vast majority of PSU freshmen are completing 14 or fewer credits each term.

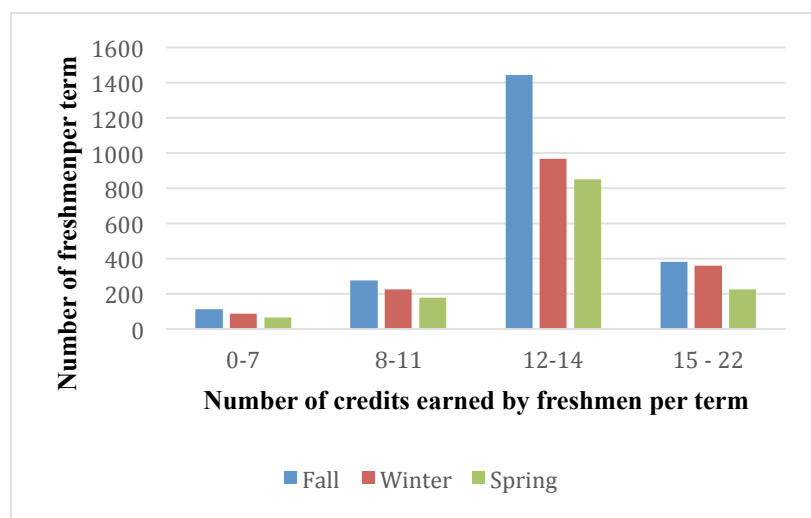


Figure 6. Number of freshmen credits earned per term (OIRP 2012 -2013).

As reviewed previously, in the Background section, Arts and Letters and the Natural and Physical Sciences enroll the most students across all terms (~ 25% and 20%, respectively). When beginning in fall, the top subjects (excluding general education) that students enroll in include three from Natural and Physical Sciences (Chemistry, Math, Biology), four from Arts and Letters (Applied Linguistics [Intensive English Language Program], Music, Spanish, Writing), one from Social Sciences (Psychology), one from Business Administration (Introduction to Business and World Affairs), and Physical Education courses. As the year progresses, a shift occurs in the Arts and Social Sciences – in winter term, Writing and Spanish drop off the top ten to be replaced by Computer Science and Sociology; in spring term, Biology and Sociology drop off the top ten, replaced by Art and the return of Spanish. Linguistics, Chemistry, Math, Psychology, and Music remain in the top ten throughout the year (OIRP Dataset 2012-13).

⁷Memo, Honors College.

Performance

Overall, as measured by an analysis of mean GPA, over the past three years, the majority of freshmen at PSU earn a GPA above 2.50 (figure 7).

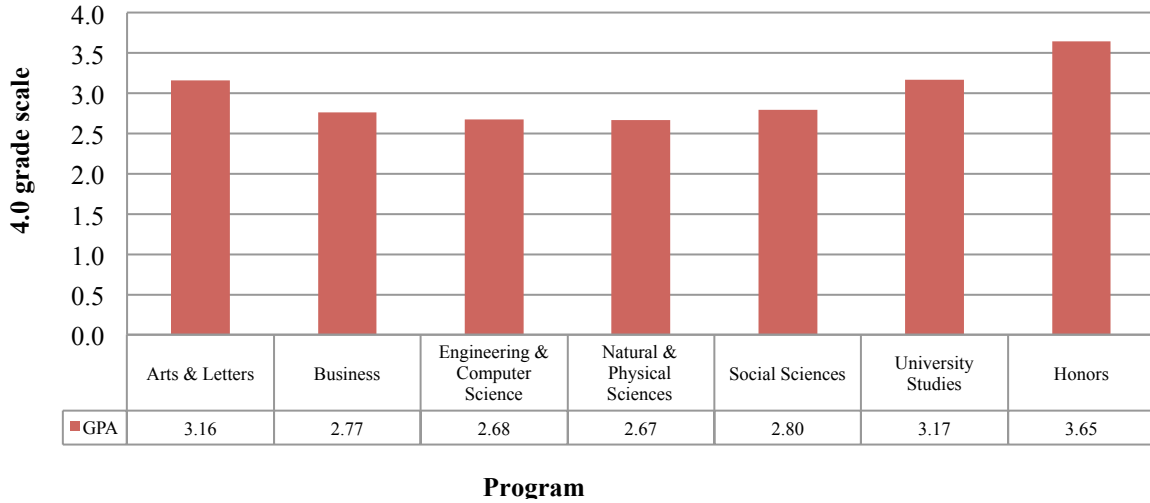


Figure 7. Mean grade point average by program (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

Specifically, figures 7 and 8 illustrate that freshmen students do best in the courses taken in Arts & Letters (Mean GPA: 3.16) and in their general education courses (FRINQ Mean GPA: 3.17 and Honors Foundations Mean GPA: 3.65). Mean GPA in other programs hovers in the B- range. When we observe the grade distribution across programs, we see the highest achievements (A and A-) occurring in FRINQ and Honors Foundations.

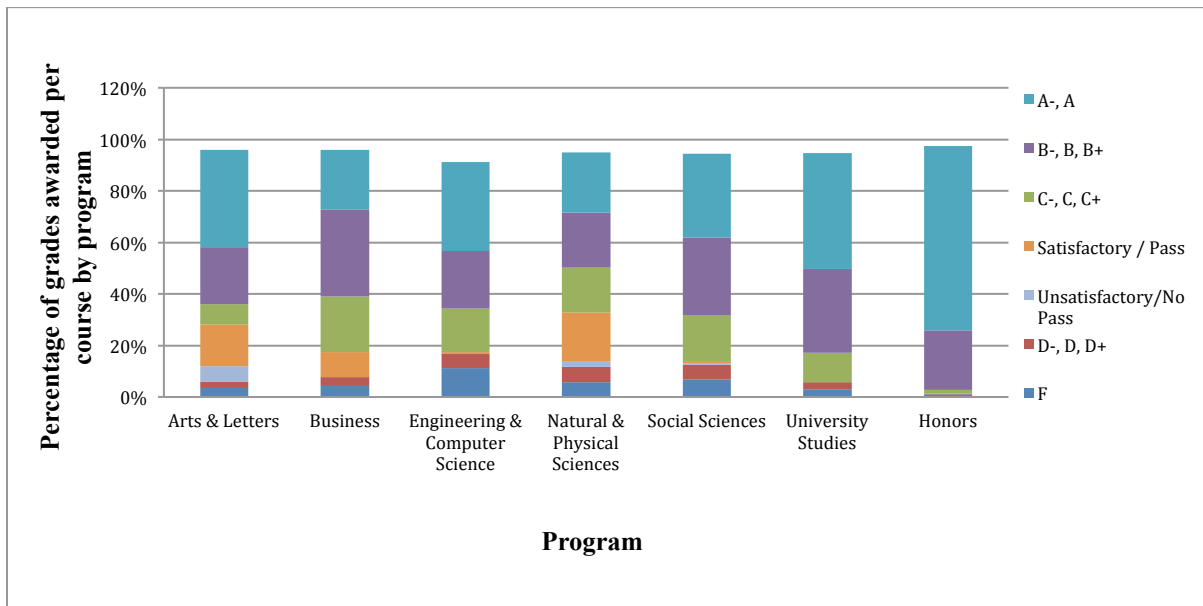


Figure 8. Freshman course grades by program for completed courses (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

Where Freshmen Struggle

In order to understand where freshmen experience the most academic struggles, we looked at the DWF and I rates (D grade, Withdrawal from course, Fail grade, and Incomplete, respectively) across the colleges for freshmen over the past three years. These data reveal that Engineering and Computer Science followed by Natural and Physical Sciences and Business have more freshmen withdraw from a course than the other programs. Figure 9 illustrates that the same pattern is roughly true for overall “non-completion” with Engineering & Computer Science and the Natural & Physical Sciences experiencing the highest levels.

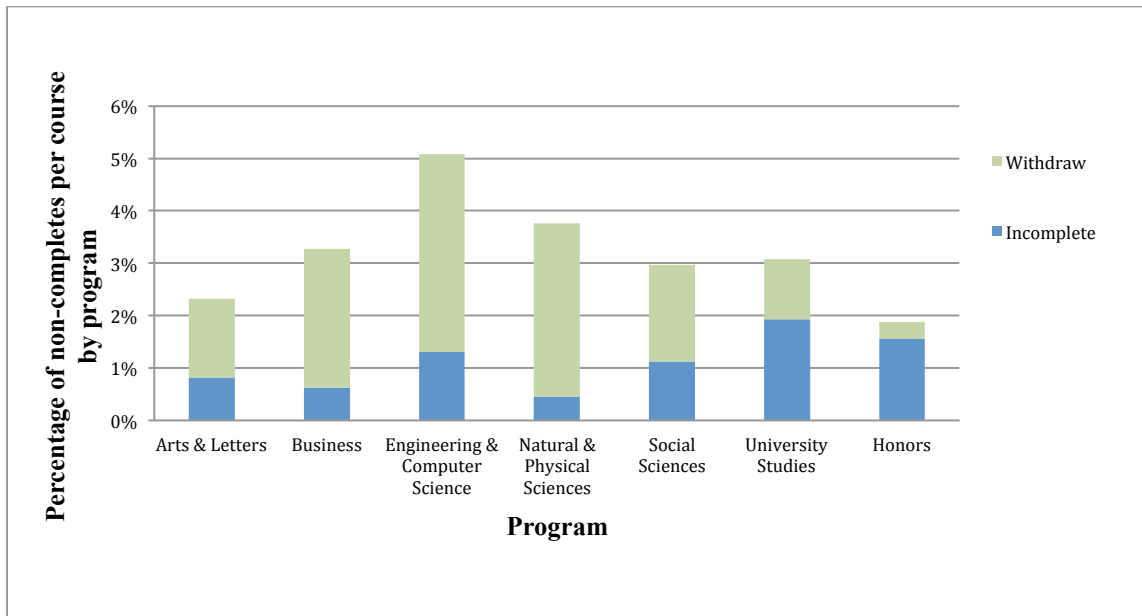


Figure 9. Average non-complete grades awarded to freshmen by program (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

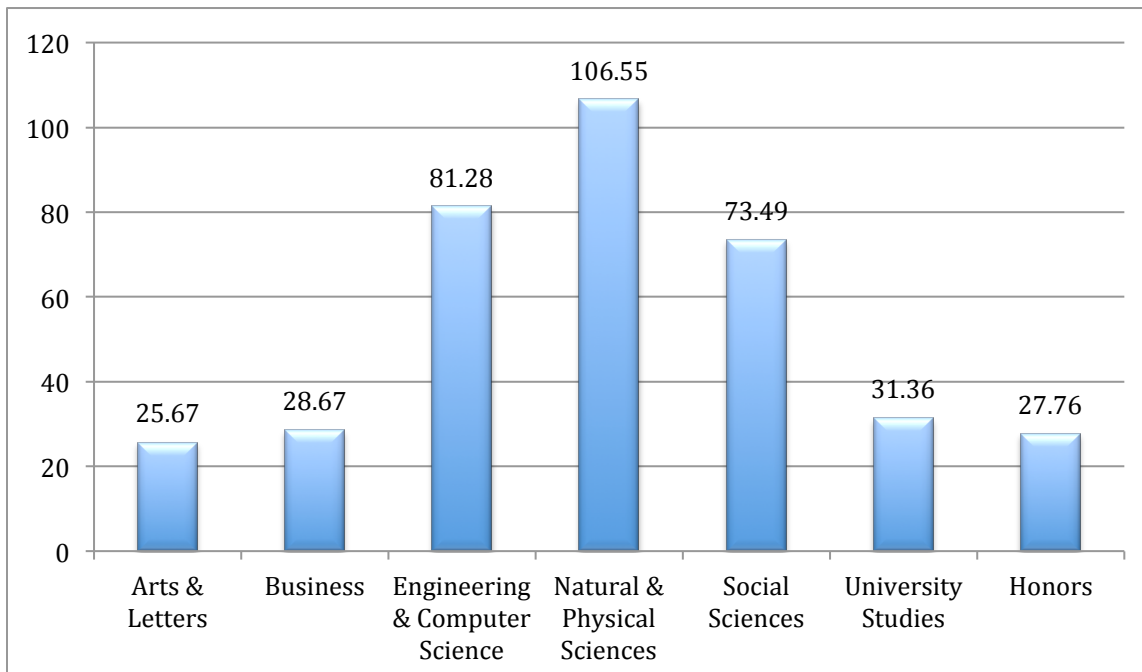


Figure 10. Average class size of freshmen courses by program (OIRP 2012-13).

Figure 10 illustrates that the Natural and Physical Sciences and Engineering and Computer Science have the largest freshmen class sizes, while Business class size is much smaller and the Social Sciences (which has the fourth greatest number of non-completes) class size is closer to that of Engineering and Computer Science.

As measured by the FRINQ End-of-Year Survey, overall (figure 11), at the end of their Freshman year, the majority of students are satisfied to very satisfied with their educational experience at PSU.

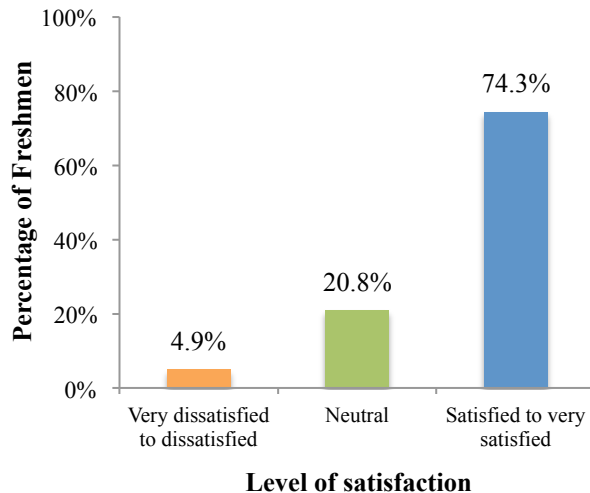


Figure 11. Freshman student overall satisfaction with educational experience at PSU.

What's Working

The features and practices of the University Studies Freshman Inquiry (and Honors College Foundations) are based upon national standards for high impact practices in higher education (AAC&U, Carnegie LEAP Report) and include small-cohort, first-year seminars focused on “big questions” within an interdisciplinary theme of inquiry. UNST also has an established and robust assessment practice that regularly gathers data and seeks input from students, faculty, and administrators. For students, these practices include an initial Prior Learning Survey in the first three weeks of fall term and an End-of-Year Survey in the last week of spring term. Recognizing that this level of data is not uniformly collected across the institution, the Council chose to analyze FRINQ data—even though it only accounts for one-third of a Freshman’s overall curricular experience in the first year.⁸

The UNST End-of-Year Survey is composed of three sections of 11 questions, for a total of 33 questions. For analysis here, each of the three sections is collapsed into a distinct variable: faculty effectiveness, mentor effectiveness, and curricular effectiveness. Each was calculated by taking the average of all relevant questions to create a single variable. Students reported high levels of agreement with each statement regarding faculty, mentor, and curricular effectiveness using a Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). High internal consistency was found for each scale (.94, .94, and .89, respectively), which strongly correlates

⁸ According to its Director, Honors Program also administers quarterly course evaluations but no findings were provided to the Council by Honors.

to their satisfaction with PSU ($r(772) = .41, p < .001$), illustrated in figure 12, with faculty effectiveness ($r(784) = .55, p < .001$), and with curricular effectiveness ($r(784) = .53, p < .001$) illustrated in figure 13.

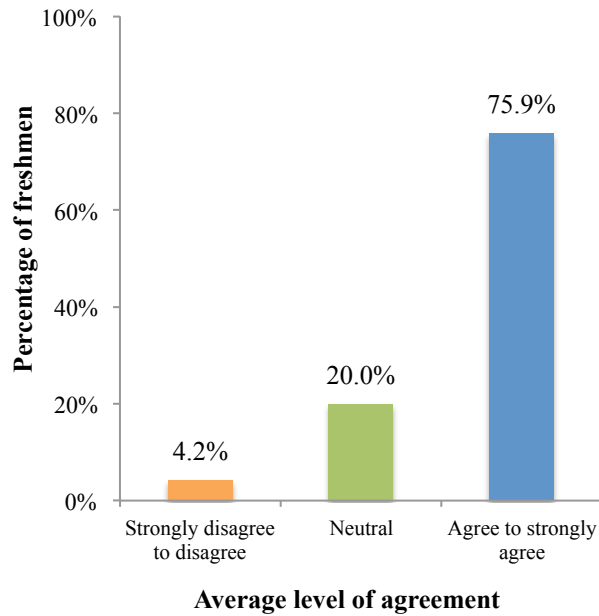


Figure 12. Student-rated faculty effectiveness.

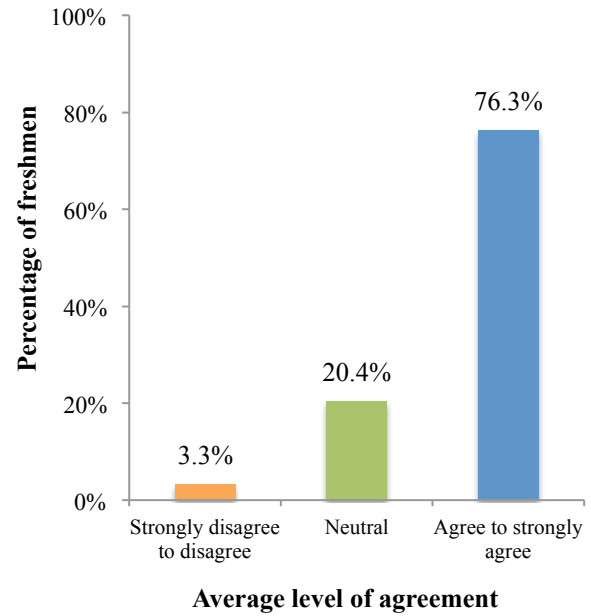


Figure 13. Student-rated curricular effectiveness.

As figure 14 illustrates, the great majority of students are satisfied to very satisfied with their FRINQ.

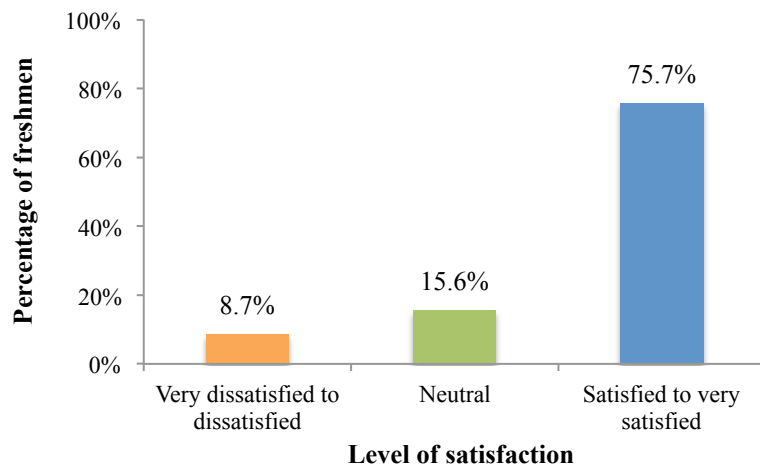


Figure 14. Student satisfaction with FRINQ course.

When looking more closely at the student evaluations, the Council found no differences among FRINQ themes on satisfaction with the FRINQ course ($F(8, 777) = 1.33, p = .23$) and there were no differences found among FRINQ themes on overall satisfaction with student experience at PSU ($F(8, 766) = .89, p = .53$). One theme had a significant difference of student ratings of faculty effectiveness ($F(8, 778) = 3.05, p = .002$) as compared to the two highest-rated themes. The rest of the themes did not significantly differ from one another on student-rated faculty effectiveness.

Freshman Inquiry students have the benefit of experienced instructors: nearly 70 percent of FRINQ faculty surveyed taught at PSU for nine or more years. A majority of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to bring their disciplinary background to their teaching of FRINQ. Both faculty and students believe that inquiry and critical thinking are well-covered in the curriculum. However, students reported that instructors did not always “make clear how each topic covered fit into the course” (FRINQ End-of-Year Survey).

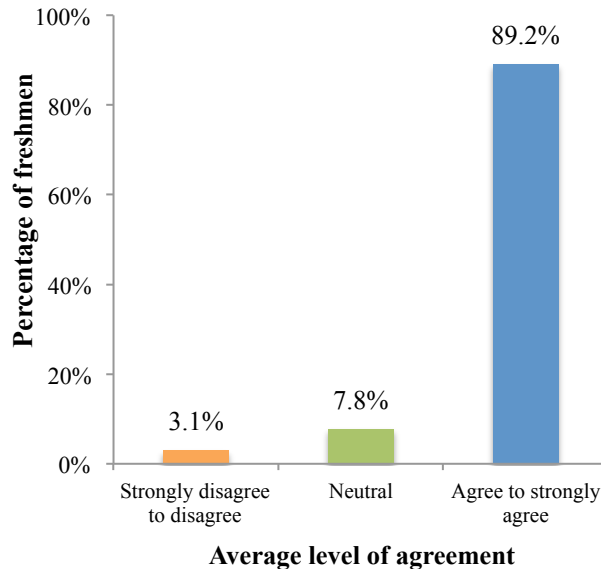


Figure 15. Student-rated mentor effectiveness.

Twice a week, FRINQ peer mentors lead 50-minute sections of 12 students from the class. Under the supervision of the faculty member, they serve as colleagues and guides, helping students learn about academic culture. Peer mentors also bridge faculty and students and help build positive learning communities among students. As figure 15 illustrates, when examining the role of the FRINQ peer mentor to serve as a support for students as they transition into higher education, students rate their PSU peer mentors as highly effective. Students rate peer mentors above 80% in all categories except one (77.6% of students agree/strongly agree that “The mentor sessions connected well with the main class”).

In examining the efficacy of peer mentors in the FRINQ curriculum, the Council found FRINQ course satisfaction and student-rated mentor effectiveness were moderately correlated ($r(784) = .36, p < .001$) and overall satisfaction with PSU and student-rated mentor effectiveness were weakly correlated ($r(772) = .21, p < .001$). However, student-rated faculty effectiveness and student-rated mentor effectiveness were strongly correlated ($r(785) = .52, p < .001$) as was student-rated mentor effectiveness and student-rated curricular effectiveness ($r(785) = .56, p < .001$).

Our Current Challenges in Implementing Best Practices to Serve Future Students

1. Supporting the Range of Student Skills and Needs

While students are passing with a C or better in their FRINQ or Honors College Foundations courses, as illustrated in figures 7 and 8, OIRP data illustrates that many freshmen fall short of passing their Engineering/Computer Science and Natural/Physical Sciences courses. Although faculty were almost unanimous in their confidence that they addressed the UNST goal and practice of writing, in their open-ended responses, they expressed concerns about the writing abilities of students both entering and finishing FRINQ.

2. First-Year Curriculum in Departments

The University does not systematically collect departmental data on freshmen at the level it does for the general education programs and only 46% of Department Chairs who completed the survey agreed or strongly agreed that their department or unit “has clear goals and objectives for students during their freshman year.” Together, these illustrate a significant weakness in PSU’s understanding of how its freshmen experience first-year departmental curricula. Anecdotally, Council members know of a few departments reexamining their first-year curriculum. Similarly, the majority of departments on campus do not see students as truly relevant to their curriculum until they declare theirs as a major.

3. Connecting Freshmen to Majors

We do not have data on how FRINQ or Honors Foundations relate course content to majors so the Council presumes collecting such data is an area for institutional improvement. This is particularly important for the Honors College whose first-year curricular goals emphasize a connection between the major and the Honors College thesis. Furthermore, because FRINQ courses are scheduled “off grid,”⁹ to take departmental courses that overlap with their FRINQ, students either leave their FRINQ cohort or skip registering for those courses. Neither option is optimal for the student.

4. Communication of Learning Goals

Based on the Chair and Faculty Survey responses, the UNST goals are not specific enough to ensure that their meaning and rationale is understood by students, academic professionals, and faculty. Similarly, the recent progression of the Urban Honors Program into a College needs to be communicated and supported across campus.

More specifically, the same number of FRINQ faculty reported covering quantitative literacy well or extensively as reported that it “could use more development” in their class. The same results emerged regarding community-based learning, with an equal number reporting that it is well covered as reporting it could use more development. This pattern indicates an opportunity for collaboration among FRINQ faculty teaching in UNST.

⁹The majority of courses on campus are 4 credits courses and fit within the same scheduling windows (aka “on grid”). Because FRINQ is 5 credits, with two mentor sessions, it has unique scheduling windows.

5. ePortfolios

Fifty-six percent of students said that the process of creating an ePortfolio helped them “understand the University Studies goals.” Furthermore, as figures 16 and 17 illustrate, for a substantial percentage of students, the culminating programmatic assignment for the first year falls short of some of its chief objectives.

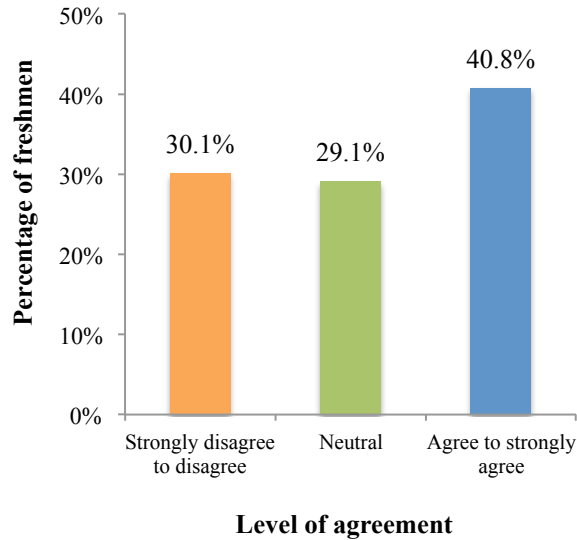


Figure 16. Student agreement with the statement, “The process of creating my ePortfolio helped me understand connections among topics in the course.”

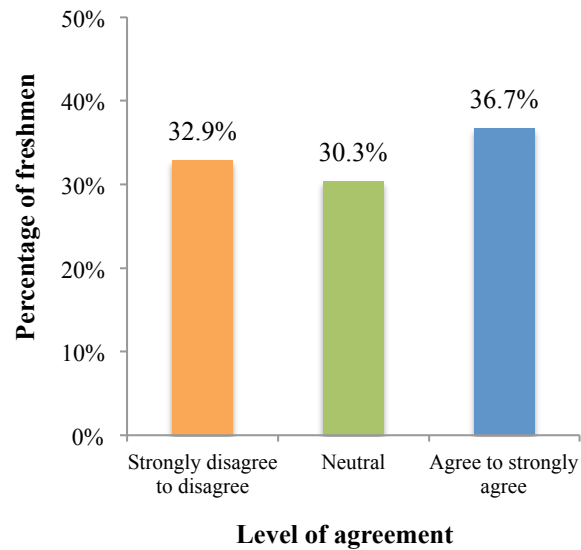


Figure 17. Student agreement with the statement, “The process of creating my ePortfolio helped me understand myself as a learner.”

These findings are not surprising to UNST. The program was awarded a Provost’s ReThink Challenge grant to revise the ePortfolio process.

6. Peer Mentors

As illustrated above in figure 13, from the student perspective, the peer mentor component of FRINQ is a highly effective curricular component of the course. Similarly, in the Faculty Survey, 72% of faculty agree-strongly agree that they are “satisfied with the role my mentor has played in my FRINQ course” and that “in general, mentors receive adequate preparation and training for their assignments.” In the open-ended faculty response section, approximately 18% of faculty wondered whether the current schedule of requiring two mentor sessions per week for the entire academic year made the best use of student and faculty time.

Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges

1. Supporting the Range of Student Skills and Needs

In addition to the recommendations detailed in the Student Resources Section of this report, the Council recommends outlining a set of “baseline” skills for success for entering freshmen and then determine existing and needed courses, resources, online modules that would help students (along with advisers, faculty, and mentors) identify and backfill gaps in skills, experience, or competencies. It is likely that some students will need to receive instruction in not only math but essential competencies such as time management, understanding of academic culture, and Internet and information literacy.

2. First-Year Curriculum in Departments

Acquiring data on departmental experiences with, and supports for, freshmen is critical. Even without such data in hand, the Council recommends continuing to support departments with undergraduate degrees to develop predictable curricular pathways. Departments should also collaborate with UNST and Honors College to ensure that there are no scheduling conflicts among key departmental and general education courses. Furthermore, when developing first-year courses and sequences, departments should acquire and assess data on whether first-year students are taking those courses (a preliminary analysis suggests that in some 100-level sequences less than 30% of the enrolled students are freshmen) and their success rates.

3. Connecting Freshmen to Majors

Developing and articulating the links in curricular content between FRINQ and disciplinary departments could have a positive impact on connecting freshmen to majors. For example, the UNST website could be used to illustrate how particular FRINQ themes connect with particular majors. Regarding the challenge of scheduling, in addition to the collaboration listed above, UNST should consider ways to overcome the scheduling challenge a quarterly 5-credit FRINQ creates for students. To begin with, UNST could pilot a FRINQ that is “on-grid” with other PSU classes.

4. Communication of Learning Objectives

The lack of communication among departments and programs working with freshmen can be overcome by creating opportunities for the sharing of information. For FRINQ, re-articulating its programmatic learning outcomes in each of the four goal areas utilizing the AAC&U VALUE Rubric (<http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/>) would create a shared vocabulary for faculty and students. This effort should be followed by engagement and development opportunities for PSU faculty and academic professionals such as an annual symposium for sharing information about best practices for serving freshman students. Similarly, to emphasize the institutional importance of these efforts, PSU needs to encourage and support Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and also credit faculty on such research for promotion & tenure purposes.

5. ePortfolios

Currently electronic portfolios are being used by FRINQ student both as a learning platform and an assessment tool. From the End-of-Year Student Assessments (figures 16 and 17), it is clear that the current implementation of the ePortfolio assignment requires considerable revision. It is equally clear that currently the ePortfolio assignment is not taken full advantage of as a tool for teaching and learning. Inspired by the data outlined in this report and student focus group data collected for the ReThink project on ePortfolios, UNST has plans to (re)energize professional development activities surrounding the ePortfolio platform.

6. Peer Mentors

While the peer mentor program has a positive curricular impact on FRINQ students, UNST should consider ways to facilitate best practices among all faculty and work more closely with faculty to develop methods for effectively and efficiently incorporating mentor sessions into the courses. In this vein, UNST should facilitate dialogue among FRINQ faculty regarding their utilization of the peer mentor and the mentor session.

Faculty Experience

Context

Understanding faculty's experience of teaching first year students is an important element that informs our understanding of the freshman experience at Portland State University. The Council found that there is limited data on faculty experience of teaching first-year students outside the FRINQ program. The Council recognizes this as a limitation and recommends that methods of assessment be created that allow for a more robust understanding of faculty experiences teaching first-year students in freshman-serving courses campus-wide. For this report, to understand faculty experience, the Council accessed data from the following sources:

- 1) Chairs Survey: this survey was sent to 75 departmental chairs; 36 responded.
- 2) Faculty Survey: this survey was sent to 75 faculty teaching FRINQ (over the last 5 years); 41 responded.

- 3) Faculty Interviews: the FRINQ Coordinator interviewed 21 shared-line/departmentally affiliated FRINQ faculty and six non-tenure track faculty teaching FRINQ (spring 2013).
- 4) OIRP Data: class size and faculty rank data for freshman serving courses offered within departments during the 2012-13 academic year.

The survey and interview data provide information almost exclusively about faculty experiences in FRINQ.¹⁰ OIRP data, in turn, offers background on all freshmen serving courses. For purposes of context, we start with the latter data concerning faculty mix and enrollment, describe briefly FRINQ faculty, and finish this subsection with a general description of the major challenge faced by faculty teaching freshmen. The subsequent major subsections all concern FRINQ faculty experiences.

Figure 18 illustrates that PSU freshmen are taught by a roughly even mix of tenure, fixed term, and adjunct faculty. When examining faculty mix by program, figure 19 shows that UNST and Honors Foundations have the greatest number of tenure-related faculty teaching freshmen while Business has no tenure-related faculty teaching freshmen but the greatest number of adjuncts.

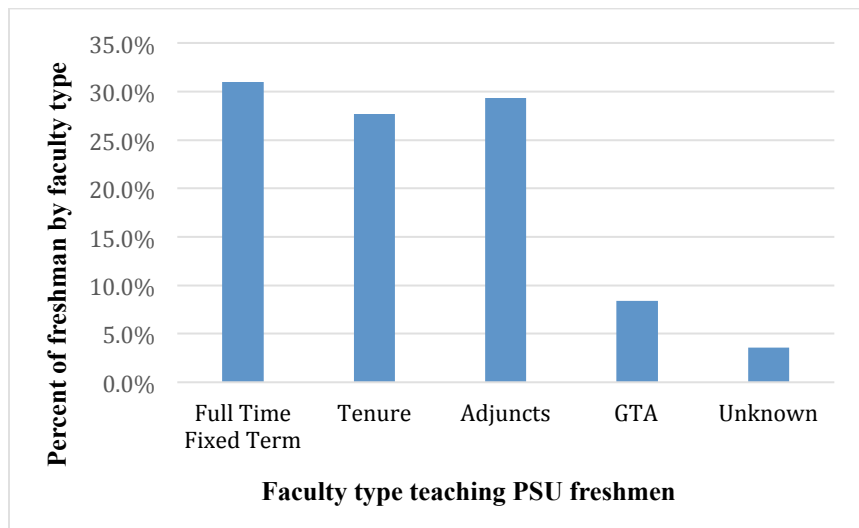


Figure 18. Annual percentage of faculty type teaching freshmen (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

¹⁰Very few responses to the Department Chair Survey addressed faculty experience teaching freshmen. For example, there are no responses to the question “Based on your experience in your department or unit, what are the major challenges students face during their Freshman year at PSU.”

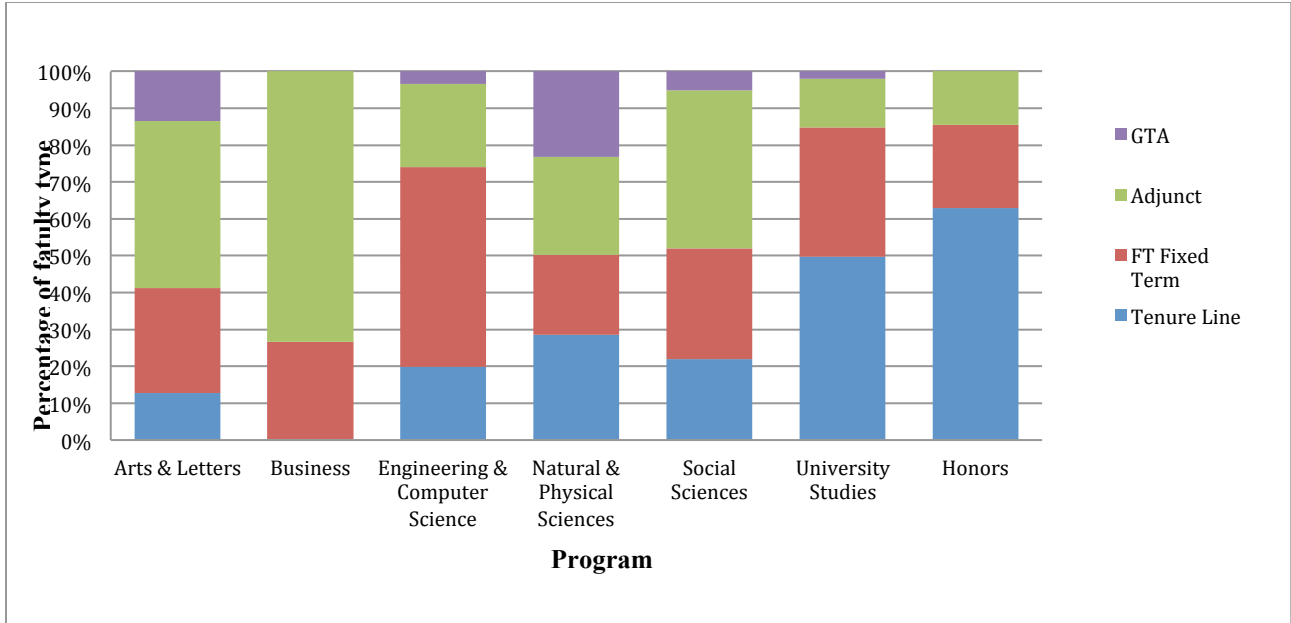


Figure 19. Annual percentage by program of faculty type teaching freshmen (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

Figure 20 illustrates how the faculty mix for freshmen changes over the course of the whole year. Summer courses are overwhelmingly taught by adjuncts with little to no courses taught by tenure-related or fixed term faculty. The graph also displays the drop off over the academic year of tenure-related faculty teaching freshmen and how an increasing number of their courses become adjunct taught.

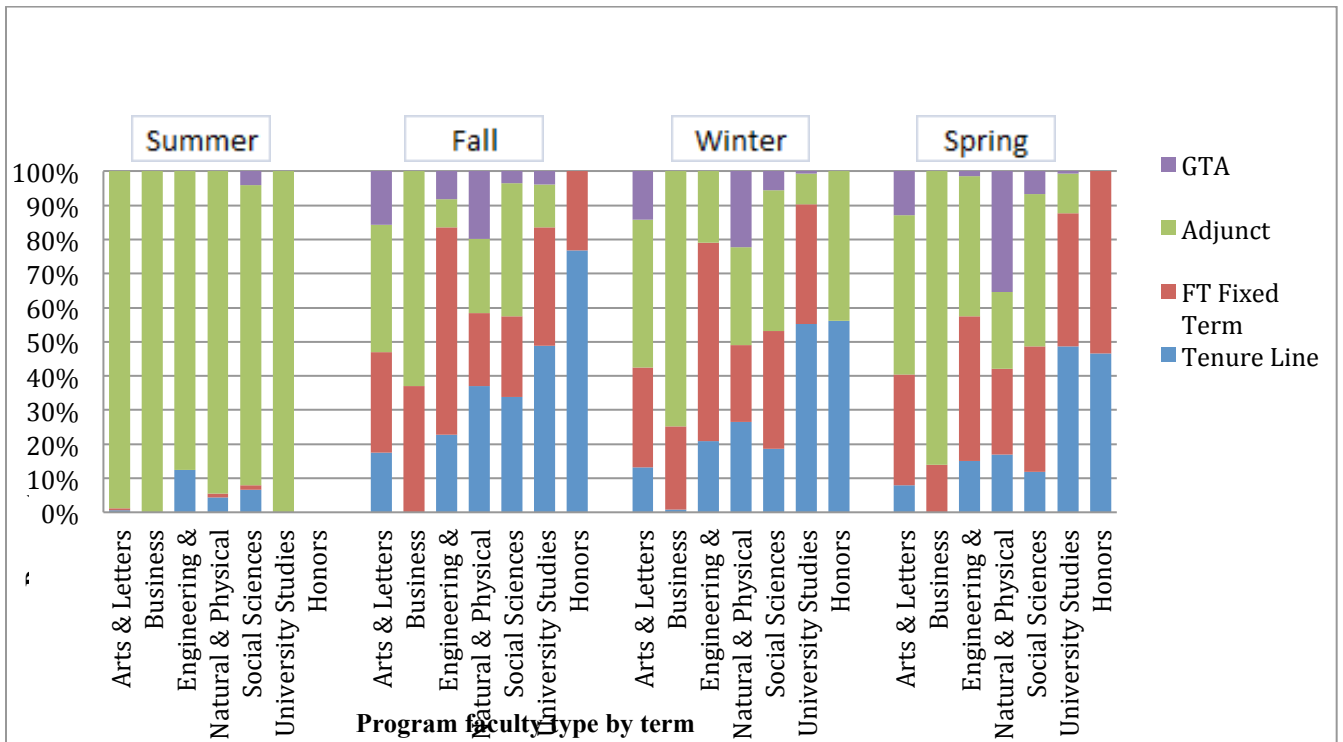


Figure 20. Annual percentage by program, each term, of faculty type teaching freshmen (freshmen cohort 2012-13).

The faculty involved in freshmen education through FRINQ deserve a brief contextualization. In 2007, in an effort to increase tenure-related faculty participation and engagement of academic departments in UNST, Provost Roy Koch and UNST Director Sukhwant Jhaj implemented a staffing initiative that was intended to create 25 tenure-related faculty positions that are shared between UNST and disciplinary, academic “home departments.” Financial limitations allowed hiring for 18 of such positions. These faculty have primary teaching responsibility in UNST while also serving as faculty in their respective home departments. In addition to shared-line faculty, FRINQ is taught by a mix of fixed-term and tenured faculty whose departments have participated in the program since its inception in exchange for a tenure line.

Overall, the data the Council reviewed shows that faculty’s major challenge is the variability in college readiness among our freshmen. As noted in the student data earlier in this report, students in FRINQ classes report needing help with academic skills: more than 30% of students report (Table 2) needing support with Math, 22% need assistance with writing, and 16% report struggling with reading and understanding academic texts. Faculty also report that much of student-identified need is for remedial instruction that they are not equipped to provide: instead of delivering course content they are assisting students in developing a gamut of skills necessary for success in college at large. The forecast projects an increase in enrollment among non-traditional students with varied educational needs and experiences, a development which will only exacerbate the above state of affairs. Student support and connecting faculty to resources available for student support will become even more important in the near future.

What’s Working

Of the faculty responding to the open-ended Faculty Survey questions, 74% reported enjoying the experience of teaching FRINQ and described their experience using words such as “rewarding,” “stimulating,” “meaningful,” “transformative,” “wonderful,” and “invigorating.”

The FRINQ themes bring together faculty from a variety of disciplines to co-create and teach interdisciplinary courses. In the Faculty Survey, 88% of faculty agree to strongly agree that they “feel confident teaching the interdisciplinary curriculum in FRINQ.” Similarly, in the open-ended section of the Faculty Survey, faculty mentioned enjoying the opportunity to teach interdisciplinary content. This was reported to be intellectually challenging and meaningful. Faculty appreciated the personal growth of learning across various disciplines and improving their own interdisciplinary competence. They also reported enjoying learning through the collaboration with colleagues from different disciplines for their FRINQ courses. Similarly, many of the faculty responding to the open-ended questions on the Faculty Survey reported enjoying the challenge and opportunity to expand and improve their teaching abilities. Faculty reported that FRINQ provided them with an opportunity to facilitate student learning, approach their teaching creatively, experiment with different teaching methods, and improve their teaching by learning from their collaboration.

Faculty reported enjoying the opportunity to work with and impact freshman students. They mentioned having limited opportunity to interact with freshmen outside of FRINQ and enjoying the ability to do so in their FRINQ courses. Eighty-three percent of faculty in the Faculty Survey

agree to strongly agree that they “enjoy getting to know my students personally” and, in the open-ended portion of the survey, express an appreciation for getting to know and work with Freshman students more closely than they might have otherwise been able to, particularly the opportunity to see them grow and develop over the course of the year-long FRINQ course sequence. They reported appreciating the seminar style, including the class size, which enables them to interact more closely with students, to know students individually, and to form relationships with students. FRINQ faculty expressed enjoying the opportunity to impact freshmen, shape freshman experience, and to introduce their disciplinary fields of study to freshmen during their first year in college. Faculty also mentioned benefitting from developing a better understanding of freshman student needs and challenges—both related and unrelated to academics—and being able to connect students with needed student success resources.

Current Challenges in Implementing Best Practices to Serve Future Students

1. A Unique Commitment

Designing a developmentally appropriate, engaging, year-long curriculum is a significant undertaking as is keeping it vibrant. Consequently, when describing their experiences in FRINQ, faculty in all categories reported a primary challenge of balancing their time and energy with the demands of teaching freshmen. Specifically, faculty commented on the challenge of devoting adequate time and energy to providing timely feedback to improve student learning.

2. Recognition

Faculty members describe a lack of respect and adequate recognition for contributing to the freshmen curriculum outside of their department. Faculty from across the categories repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with how FRINQ participation factors into promotion and/or tenure reviews, feeling that work invested into meeting the demands of FRINQ is not adequately recognized and rewarded. As they go up for promotion and tenure, shared-line faculty are particularly concerned by this lack of recognition and understanding among their departmental colleagues and campus leadership.

3. Collaboration and Service

In the Faculty Interviews, FRINQ faculty reported feeling isolated from their colleagues. They reported being isolated from other FRINQ faculty (due in part to being dispersed across campus rather than housed centrally) and departmental/disciplinary colleagues who are not involved in the FRINQ program. However, in the FRINQ Survey, 89% of faculty agree to strongly agree that they “have the opportunity to develop relationships with faculty in my department” and 64% agree to strongly agree that “collaboration within my FRINQ theme has enriched my curriculum.”

Because collaborative activities often are categorized in the context of professional evaluations as service activities, it is important to note that, in interviews, faculty describe a lack of adequate formal support for encouraging and rewarding optimal levels of collaborative service activities (e.g., that grants and publications are valued by their unit/PSU over teaching freshmen in a collaborative model). It is safe to conclude, even without systematic data on individual

experiences, that for shared-line faculty whose appointments span two units, service activities in one unit tend to occur at the expense of executing such duties in the other.

4. *Information, Policies, and Procedures*

Implementing the shared-line staffing imitative resulted in variability in how FRINQ staffing is accomplished. Each department negotiated their own Memo of Understanding (MOU). For some faculty, the MOU connects the individual to UNST, while for others the connection is tied to the department or college. Consequently, there is significant irregularity within departments and UNST regarding how FRINQ staffing choices are determined. For example, one respondent in the Chair Survey stated that their departmental faculty teach FRINQ for only one year while, in Faculty Interviews, a few respondents reported being the only person in their department to teach FRINQ. However, most faculty, across categories, express a desire for a break from FRINQ teaching responsibilities. Moreover, in the Chairs Survey, 42% found the year-long staffing commitment a challenge for their unit. Based on information from Faculty Interviews, there also exists variation in overall teaching loads while teaching FRINQ. Some faculty receive a two course release from their home department while others receive one and some faculty receive no reduction in overall teaching load. Staffing and work-load are a challenge for individual faculty—from at least a comparative perspective—and these are also challenging for units in terms of choice of faculty rotation into FRINQ.

The Council sees that these challenges rest in part on communication of practices and policies. In the Faculty Survey, 62% disagree to strongly disagree that UNST “does a good job of communicating with my department on general education issues relevant to my professional development and evaluation” and from the amount of inaccurate information contained within the open-ended survey responses of both faculty and Chairs, it is evident that the UNST program and participating departments need to create effective communication practices. For example, 70% of faculty disagreed/strongly disagreed that they “have the flexibility needed (a term or a year) off from FRINQ to pursue research or other projects” even though UNST and departments regularly have cooperated to create a “FRINQ sabbatical” and faculty are also able to buy out their FRINQ commitment.

Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges

1. *A Unique Commitment*

Suggestions for improving the FRINQ faculty teaching experience center on clarifying and standardizing the policies and procedures for FRINQ-specific faculty teaching loads and/or opportunities. These include reducing the overall faculty credit load while teaching FRINQ and faculty options for rotating off and on FRINQ (both during the year and over the years)¹¹.

¹¹ See also above, 4: again and in summary, there exists significant variation in how faculty teaching in FRINQ are supported in their departments - some faculty receive a two course release, others a single course, and some receive no course release - and half of shared-line faculty are aware of the possibility to rotate off of FRINQ for a year after three years of service while the other half is not.

Most faculty also expressed the desire for more support in helping non-traditional and international freshmen develop and manage first-year challenges.

2. Recognition

Although faculty repeatedly expressed a desire for increased recognition for their contributions to FRINQ, no specific suggestions for reaching this goal were offered except what the Council sees as an obvious point of equity: that successful teaching of FRINQ be recognized as a strength in promotion and tenure reviews across all levels of evaluation and in proportion to the high and unique professional investments it requires.

In order to improve the recognition of FRINQ and its teachers, the Council has various suggestions including creating an annual Freshman Teaching Award and hosting an annual symposium on freshman education to both advance the Scholarships of Engagement and of Teaching and Learning and to provide opportunities for FRINQ-related faculty to advance their scholarly agendas on freshman pedagogical topics. These suggestions are, however, offered as possible means to an end. It should be a truism that true recognition can only follow acknowledged success in collectively articulated goals. The Council believes PSU could do much better on this score and recommends a campus-wide effort to articulate a mission statement on the central dimensions of PSU's commitment to its freshmen. Only when this is accomplished can the pedagogical and curricular contributions of FRINQ, and its faculty, to the University's mission and reputation become clear and based in evidence.

3. Collaboration and Service

Faculty suggestions focused on ensuring that collaboration and service in UNST carry equal weight to their departmental analogues in promotion and tenure evaluations and improving communication about collaborative opportunities in UNST.

The Council also recommends the creation of professional development and support programs to help FRINQ faculty balance teaching and research expectations such as cross-disciplinary research and writing groups where faculty can share and advance their research. The Council also makes note of the fact that relatively few new FRINQ themes have been proposed in recent years. Faculty stipends to develop new themes should be a consistent budget priority in UNST. Only this way can Portland State continue offering a FRINQ curriculum that serves both our freshmen and the faculty scholars in charge of its delivery.

4. Policies and Procedures

Much of the negative faculty experience stems from variations in departmental/unit policies around FRINQ staffing and overall workload. It is time for all FRINQ participating home-units and UNST to collaborate on creating a sustainable solution in terms of the dimensions discussed in *A Unique Commitment* above, one that takes cognizance of the unique nature of teaching an interdisciplinary FRINQ curriculum. The solution must minimally establish equal opportunities for FRINQ faculty for sabbatical time from FRINQ.

Faculty experience of challenges is also premised on confusion about policies/practices including outright misinformation. This state of affairs must be urgently addressed through increased transparency and improved communication between UNST and home-units. Success in this will require at least a shift in how Chairs/Directors and UNST communicate. Currently, communication about programs and staffing are done informally on an individual basis. Given the regular turnover in leadership across all the relevant levels of decision-making on campus, without inclusive, formal communication channels, misunderstanding will persist.

Student Resources

Context

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE; both 2009 and 2011), first-year students at Portland State reported lower general satisfaction with their educational experience than students at Carnegie peer institutions. Fewer Freshman students at PSU reported that, if they could start over again, they would choose their current institution than those at our Carnegie peers (the 2009 mean result was 2.94 out of a high score of 4, versus 3.20 for peer institutions). Their overall satisfaction with their educational experience is also lower (2.77/4 versus 3.17/4 for peer institutions).

In spite of reporting that they engage in many valuable academic and intellectual experiences and in some cases more frequently than at Carnegie peer institutions, freshmen at PSU were less likely than students at Carnegie peer institutions to feel that their education was leading to personal growth. In fact, they scored lower than their Carnegie peers on every NSSE measure of educational and personal growth, which include writing, speaking, critical thinking, using technology, and learning independently. They are also less likely than Carnegie peers to feel they are acquiring job or work-related skills through their education (2.40/4 vs. 3.23/4).

Portland State is a large institution that can be overwhelming for freshman students. Many in the FRINQ faculty and mentor focus group found that “for some students, often first-generation students, the experience at PSU was overwhelming. They did not understand how college works or the kinds of work they would be expected to do.” Building a sense of connection to the university is critical to student success and retention. Given the large commuter population at Portland State, it is not surprising that, according to the NSSE results, first-year students at Portland State report spending less time attending campus events and participating in other co-curricular activities than their peers (1.90/7 vs. 2.23/7). When compared to our Carnegie peers, fewer students report that the institution provides them with the support they need to thrive socially and succeed academically. Freshmen score lower than those at Carnegie peer institutions on the quality of their relationships with other students (4.97/7 vs. 5.42/7), with faculty members (4.99/7 vs. 5.16/7), and with administrative personnel and offices (4.28/7 vs. 4.67).

While the 2012-13 FRINQ End-of-Year Survey (figures 11-15) illustrates that the majority of students are connecting to PSU through the FRINQ curriculum, only 46% of students in FRINQ

agreed that they have developed strong relationships with faculty members at PSU and 42% reported being neutral or disagreeing with the statement “I feel a sense of belonging at PSU.” Although the FRINQ End-of-Year and NSSE Surveys are very different instruments,¹² together they indicate that a significant number of PSU freshmen are not finding the support they need to be successful in class or forming a connection to the university.

The Council finds that the “disconnect” of Freshman students at PSU is intensified by a lack of coordination regarding advising and student services. The vision of holistic advising/student services remains unrealized on our campus. Moreover, the impact of the many services designed to support freshmen at PSU offered by EMSA, The Division of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, is frequently undermined if not marginalized by seemingly unrelated policy changes. The removal of the tuition plateau and the instatement of the pay-per-credit system is a case in point. For many of our students, going above 12 credits has financial aid ramifications they are unable to reconcile. The pay-per-credit system discourages the students who most need the support of a Learning Center class from registering for it because of the added expense. While the policy change appears to generate revenue for the university, it undermines program efforts on campus that serve our most vulnerable students, creating unaccounted costs to our budget and our purpose. Moreover, as is evident in many parts of this report, PSU will be seeing more freshmen in need of supplemental coursework and the success of those students should be paramount when considering institutional policy changes.

The primary data source for this section is an “in-house” report by EMSA across its many service alignments each of which responded to survey questions developed by the University Studies Council (UNST).¹³ Despite this singular data-source, the Council notes that many of the responses from both the FRINQ Faculty and Chair Surveys cohere with the views on challenges and recommendations articulated in the EMSA study. A review of the relevant literature also coheres with these recommendations.^{14 15 16}

¹² They also have radically different average response rates, 90% and 33%, respectively.

¹³EMSAs alignments include: Academic and Career Services consisting of Advising & Career Services, Disability Resource Center, and the Learning Center; Campus Recreation; Dean of Student Life consisting of Student Activities & Leadership Programs, Campus Conduct, Student Legal Services, Services for Students with Children, Queer Resource Center, and Women’s Resource Center; Diversity and Multicultural Student Services consisting of African American, Latino/a, Native American Students Services, Cultural Centers, Diversity Scholarship Program, and TRiO Student Support Services; Enrollment Management consisting of Admissions, Registration & Records, Financial Aid, and New Student Orientation; Housing & Residence Life; and the Student Health & Counseling Center.

¹⁴Robert M. Hendrickson, et al. *Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013), 341-373.

¹⁵Noel-Levitz, *2013 National Freshman Attitudes Report* (Coralville, IA: Noel-Levitz, 2013).

¹⁶Noel-Levitz. *2014 National Freshman Attitudes Report* (Coralville, IA: Noel-Levitz, 2014).

Current Best Practices

According to the 2012-13 FRINQ End-of-Year Survey, 74% of responding first-year students reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their overall educational experience at PSU and only 5% report being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their overall educational experience. Most students (64%) also agreed or strongly agreed that they made the right decision in attending PSU.

The majority of students see FRINQ as a positive educational experience. Most students (76%) report being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience in FRINQ, with only 9% reporting being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Seventy-nine percent of students agree or strongly agree that their FRINQ faculty made an effort to get to know them and even more (85%) reported that their mentor made an effort to get to know them. As discussed in the Curriculum section of this report, the UNST Peer Mentor program is a high impact practice for freshmen at PSU. As figure 15 illustrates, the peer mentors excel at helping freshmen acculturate to college.

According to the 2011 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), freshmen at PSU reported at a greater frequency certain academic and intellectual experiences than did students at Carnegie peer institutions. These include: making a class presentation, including diverse perspectives in discussions and assignments, working with other students on projects, examining the strengths and weaknesses of one's own views on a topic or issue, trying to better understand someone else's views, learning something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept, and analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory. Freshmen also report more rigor in their education, doing more reading (both assigned and unassigned) and writing assignments, and more problem sets that take more than an hour to complete than Carnegie peers.

The student resources provided for freshmen by EMSA aligned programs center around three areas: new student events, communication programs, and orientation and advising. New student events include programs such as orientation sessions, convocation, and Party on the Plaza. Communications include targeted email campaigns, the Student Handbook, and the "Turntable Advising" show on KPSU. Orientation and advising services include drop-in advising hours, the summer "ROADS" bridge class, and the academic coaching program.¹⁷

In recent years, advisors have made a special effort to reach out to freshmen. According to the 2011-12 FRINQ End-of-Year survey, 91% of freshmen accessed some type of academic advising service. Those who did were more likely to feel they belonged at PSU, knew the requirements of their major, understood graduation requirements, and thought they made the right decision to attend PSU. Students who received advising also reported a greater likelihood of continuing their studies at PSU in the following year. Also, these students were more likely to utilize other PSU support services at higher rates than those who did not access advising services.

¹⁷ See EMSA Report for a complete list of the opportunities and programs offered for freshmen.

Current Challenges in Implementing Best Practices to Serve Future Students

1. Financial Insecurity

With the highest level of unmet financial need in the OUS (\$13,378), many students at PSU struggle financially, which impacts their ability to devote time to and continue their education. In 2012, 36% of incoming FRINQ students listed finances as their top college concern. While income status is not the single determinant of retention, concern about finances is a strong predictor of whether or not a student will remain at PSU. Students who report no concern about paying for college are 69% more likely to be retained than those who are concerned.

PSU freshmen report spending more time than Carnegie peers working for pay on campus (1.7/4 vs. 1.54/4 at peer institutions) and off-campus (2.76/4 vs. 2.31/4). Students who do not work are 56% more likely to be retained at PSU than those who work 20 or more hours per week. In the FRINQ Prior Learning Assessment given to incoming students, when asked what can PSU do to help you continue in your studies, the largest number reported needing financial assistance (56%). In the same survey, 62% of students reported wanting education about finances and financial aid.

According to the EMSA Report, understanding PSU and Federal financial aid policies, connections between financial aid and course registration, and the true costs of college (e.g., housing, student fees, books) are common challenges among freshmen.

2. Academic Struggles

The theme of student preparedness is prevalent in all the data surveyed. The challenge of having college-level skills is most pronounced in the areas of reading, writing, and math but also in the less obvious areas of making appropriate course selections, study and time management skills, and balancing competing priorities. For international students including those who passed TOEFL, English proficiency is an ongoing struggle as well as acculturation to the meaning and importance of class participation.

Academic preparedness is also a major concern with regards to retaining freshmen. Students with below a 3.0 high school GPA (27% of incoming FRINQ students) are least likely to be retained. Students with under a 3.0 high school GPA had a 64% fall retention rate in comparison to 69% for students with a GPA between 3.0-3.5 and 78% for those with a GPA over 3.5.

3. Advisor Shortfall

Advising services at Portland State have long been recognized as an area in need of investment. Currently, the student to advisor ratio is approximately 600/1. This ratio is double what is recommended for basic effectiveness. The EMSA Report also notes a problem with consistent and accurate advising within majors/departments – presumably with respect to non-major related areas of advising – as well as faculty availability.

According to NSSE, students were less likely to be satisfied with the quality of advising than at Carnegie peer institutions. Freshmen are much less likely than at Carnegie peer institutions to discuss career plans with an instructor or advisor (1.79/4 vs. 2.21/4). They are also less satisfied with advising overall (2.54/4 vs. 3.03/4). Whether this speaks to the quality or availability of advising, or both, is unclear. In the FRINQ End-of-Year Survey, 63% of students were neutral or disagreed that they have developed a strong relationship with an academic advisor.

4. Navigating PSU

Based upon the NSSE and EMSA Reports, navigating the institution of PSU is a significant challenge for freshmen. In particular, understanding PSU policies, procedures, and how to access institutional information and what resources are available are all difficult tasks for students.

5. Uncoordinated PSU Policies

As discussed in the Context section, some PSU policies unintentionally hinder the success of freshmen. Examples include the lack of admission application deadline, punitive Financial Aid and Business office policies, and an understandable and timely tuition and fees structure (because PSU tuition for academic year is not finalized until August, student, and especially international student, planning is hindered).

Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges

1. Financial Security

Alleviating the high level of financial insecurity is one of the most effective solutions to improving the success and retention of future freshmen. Suggestions to this aim include rewriting the Financial Aid and Business Office policies to prioritize retaining the student; financial aid packages that cover the actual full and realistic cost of attendance (“zero shortfall” policy that is not dependent upon PLUS Loans); a 12-month plus payment plan without accruing interest; student completion of a financial literacy tool; and information on FAFSA completion offered in languages other than English.

The data also illustrates that work impacts student success. Switching to a M/W & T/TH & F scheduling grid would offer students more flexibility to schedule courses around work.

2. Academic Support

Recommendations for improving academic support focus on fostering student understanding of college and PSU expectations. We can help students be better prepared before they arrive on campus (e.g., expanded bridge programs, collaborative activities with feeder schools). Freshmen should also undergo writing and reading placement with availability of “Fundamental” (remedial) courses as necessary (similar to math offerings). Moreover, these credits should count toward graduation similar to the Colorado system (<http://higher.ed.colorado.gov/Academics/remedial>). We should also help students understand their learning style and connect freshmen who are not living in residence halls with support programs (e.g., U.Success, Career Services).

PSU should also develop programming within majors/departments that encourages freshmen to explore and form connections to students' potential departments (for example, offering one-term exploratory departmental courses rather than the 101/201, 102/202, 103/203 survey model). And freshman mentoring activities within each undergraduate program should be widely available.

In addition, increasing monitoring and mentoring of low GPA/conditionally admitted students, conducting early-warning risk analysis (e.g., flag on mid-term grades), and identifying drop-out prone students (e.g., using EAB predictive modeling tool) would help student services reach vulnerable freshmen more effectively. Expanding the successful Retention Project in UNST campus wide through OAI would further improve our supports for future freshmen.

3. Advisors

PSU should increase the number of professional advisers to a level appropriate for its advising model (our ratio is over 600:1, best practice is 300:1). We should also simplify advising technology. Advisors currently manage 12 platforms when, for efficacy, it should be 3. Housing professional advisers in one place might also improve the current state of affairs at least in communication and accuracy. PSU should also expand the breadth and depth of International Orientation including its on-line accessibility. And finally, given our objective of holistic advising, ongoing and mandatory training for faculty/departmental advisers is critical.

4. Navigating PSU

To enhance freshmen's navigation of PSU we must improve communication. Means for achieving this might include regular community fair opportunities (for, e.g., exposure to departments and units via tabling and sharing opportunities and resources), packaging advertisement of programs/opportunities together, improving campus signage, and PSU website revision (e.g., a first-year student portal with complete student experience resources).

5. Complete Campus Coordination of PSU Policy Changes

In order for PSU policies to support the success of future freshmen whom we can expect to be more at-risk for non-completion, we need to develop a system for vetting policy changes on the basis of accurate predictions including unintended consequences for students. For policies and mandates already in place, a similar system should be used to evaluate impact and efficacy.

Conclusion

The individual recommendations for overcoming current challenges in the three focus areas of this review, curricular experience, faculty experience, and student resources, offer actionable items for integration into the strategic plans of the relevant units. The individual recommendations vary with respect to the most effective and/or important source and level of intervention yet all require communication, collaboration, and commitment across levels of the university hierarchy. A culture of competition for resources (e.g., student credit hours, departmental turf, and tenure lines) and other processes that discourage communication, collaboration, and sustained commitment is our greatest institutional challenge for serving

future freshmen. To foster a culture of collaboration for the common good of our freshmen, in addition to the individual recommendations, the Council recommends developing a mission statement focused on freshmen to inform the prioritization and coordination of campus resources so that these can be matched most effectively with student needs.

Mission

As figure 21 illustrates, only 9 of the 35 Chairs responded that they strongly agree that “my department or unit has clear goals and objectives for students during their freshman year,” while almost all somewhat or strongly agree that “a clearly articulated institutional mission for the freshman year of college would be valuable to PSU” (figure 22). This is an opportunity for the PSU campus community to work together to articulate that mission.

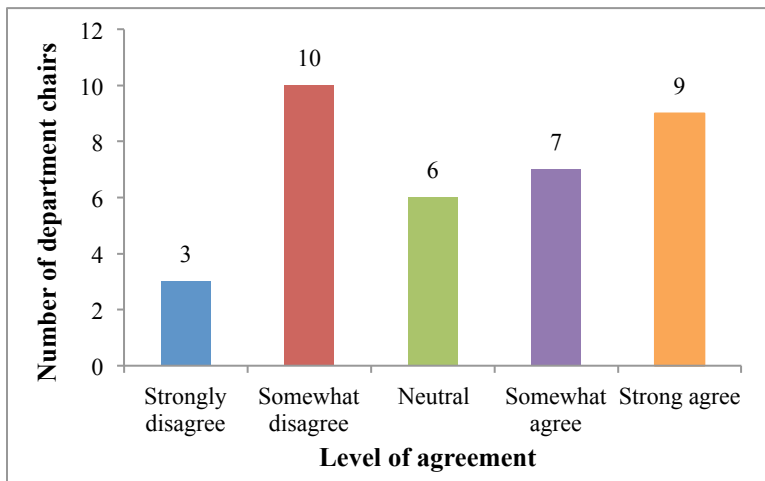


Figure 21. Chair-reported levels of agreement with the statement, “My department or unit has clear goals and objectives for students during their freshman year.”

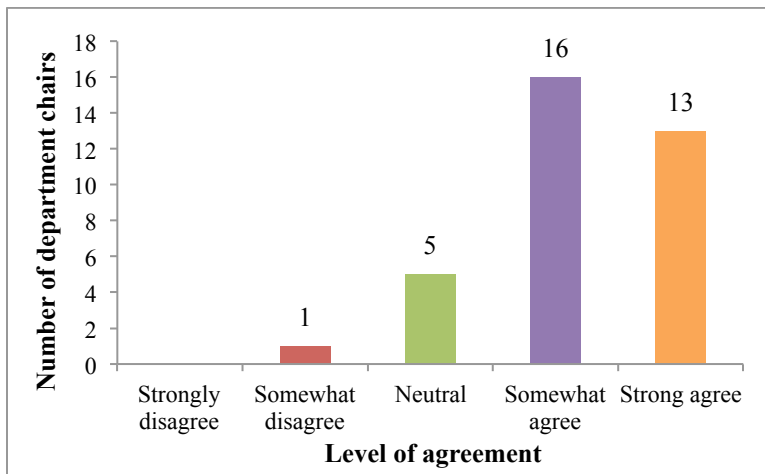


Figure 22. Chair-reported levels of agreement with the statement, “A clearly articulated institutional mission for the freshman year of college would be valuable at PSU.”

A comprehensive mission statement specific to freshman year is not idiosyncratic in the landscape of higher education. Many universities and colleges have already formulated one (e.g., Duke University, Miami University, Sewanee: The University of the South, Wheaton College). This is not surprising. Universities naturally consider students who enter as freshmen “their own” and invest in their success. Students who choose PSU for their freshman year with an intention of making it their four-year college deserve no less.

A mission statement and the collaborative work it requires promises benefits to PSU. First, freshmen comprise only a small, approximately 10% proportion, of our undergraduate population. A mission statement rooted in campus realities and inspired by our aspirations and ambitions is feasible. Second, PSU’s general education programs offer a small liberal arts college environment to freshmen yet within Oregon’s largest University. This is an asset for not only formulating a genuine mission statement but also an opportunity for its effective and strategic use in purposes ranging from recruiting to retention. Third, campus-wide reflection and collaboration on a Freshman mission promises to broaden the immediate stakeholder group beyond the relevant student services and general education programs. Like any other large public university, PSU can only benefit from a more uniform culture of “ownership” of freshmen students. It is well known that students major-hop during their first two years during a time when they are also most likely to transfer out; a culture of uniform care and attention to the needs of freshmen even before they declare a major and/or settle in to one can only advance student success. Fourth, and in a more self-reflexive mode, we fear that without an inclusive mission statement for freshmen and the work that goes into developing one, programs and efforts dedicated to the success of future freshmen will be marginalized and their potential educational impact unrealized.

Coordination

In our present institutional context in which educational outcomes are expected to be delivered with fewer resources, coordination of institutional, departmental, and programmatic efforts is crucial for future freshmen. Genuine coordination requires a meaningful ongoing process with representation and participation of all the various campus stakeholders. For successful coordination, the institution needs to also prioritize its goals and support work that allows achieving these goals.

There are many illustrations of effective coordination and the kinds of benefits that can ensue from it. For example, when departments and UNST coordinate FRINQ themes with faculty expertise and interests, scholars can better align teaching with research. For students, the benefit is an opportunity to develop deeper connections among general education and departmental and major courses while for faculty, teaching complements, if not contributes to, their research. To maximize the success of future PSU freshmen, coordination efforts must also incorporate the many campus student services. FRINQ offers an example also of how to bring student services closer to the curriculum. For example, representatives from Career and Advising Services frequently work with faculty to develop skill-building activities used in FRINQ courses. This helps achieve PSU’s vision of holistic advising. The illustration also shows how coordination can contribute to a campus where teaching and advising of freshmen and non-majors is not seen as a

distraction from “real” work (e.g., majors, graduate students and/or research grants) but a fulfilling and invigorating professional experience. The result of effective coordination is an education that supports student learning, timely matriculation, and life goals.

There are many areas in urgent need of better coordination. For example, the policies in the Business and Financial Aid offices need to align with our retention and graduation strategies. We also need collaboration to achieve curricular flexibility. For example, students who are unable to complete the FRINQ curriculum as intended, in a 3-term sequence beginning fall term of the freshman year, need alternatives to completing the requirement and in a manner relevant to their intellectual development.

The Council predicts that the collective articulation of a Freshman mission statement for Portland State together with the coordination across levels of our institution required to accomplish that mission will result in a campus that more effectively matches campus resources with student needs. We also surmise that this collective work will help create a more flexible if not nimble institution, one that can adapt to the evolving needs of its future students, both as freshmen and beyond.

Bibliography

- 2011-2012 Freshman End-of-Year Survey Advising Report*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- 2013 FRINQ End of Year Survey*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- “40-40-20 Resources and Initiatives.” *University of Oregon System*. Last modified June 26, 2012. <http://www.ous.edu/partner/404020> (site discontinued).
- Bliss, Carolyn, Jeff Web, and Mark St. Andre. “The Impact of the University of Utah’s LEAP Program on Student Performance.” *The Journal of General Education* 61, no. 1 (2012): 39-58.
- Carpenter, Rowanna. *FRINQ Student Profile by Areas of Focus: Freshmen Enrolled in Freshman Inquiry Fall 2007, 2008, 2009*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2010.
- Enrollment Management and Student Affairs: The First-Year Student Experience Survey Results*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- Flower, Michael, Rowanna Carpenter, and Mirela Blekic. *Barriers to Success in Fall Term FRINQ: Faculty and Mentor Stories about Their Students*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- Freshman Inquiry Assessment*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- Freshmen Retention Project: 2012-13 Report*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2013.
- Hendrickson, Robert M., Jason E. Lane, James T. Harris, and Richard H. Dorman. *Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.
- Hooker, Beth, and Rowanna Carpenter. *A Profile of FRINQ Students Whose Home Language is Not English*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2011.
- Jhaj, Sukhwant, and Rowanna Carpenter. *Freshman Inquiry Retention: Updated Findings*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2011.
- Jhaj, Sukhwant, and Rowanna Carpenter. *Freshman Retention: Impact of Financial Concerns*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2011.
- “Knocking at the College Door.” *Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*. Last modified January 11, 2013, accessed December 3, 2013. <http://www.wiche.edu/info/knocking-8th/profiles/or.pdf>.

- “National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).” *Portland State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning*. Accessed June 17, 2014. <http://www.oirp.pdx.edu/Surveys/index.htm>
- Noel-Levitz. *2013 National Freshman Attitudes Report*. Coralville, IA: Noel-Levitz, 2013.
- Noel-Levitz. *2014 National Freshman Attitudes Report*. Coralville, IA: Noel-Levitz, 2014.
- “Oregon’s 40-40-20: From Goal to Action.” *State Higher Education Executive Officers Association*. Accessed May 18, 2014. <http://www.sheeo.org/resources/state-policy-leadership/oregon%E2%80%99s-40-40-20-goal-action>.
- “Statistical Portrait: 2012-2013.” *Portland State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning*. Last modified July 17, 2013. <http://www.oirp.pdx.edu/source/port1213.htm>.
- “Stats and Facts.” *Portland State University Office of Institutional Research and Planning*. Accessed December 3, 2013. <http://www.oirp.pdx.edu/StatsNFacts.html>.
- University Studies Enrollment Projection Report: 2014-2015 Academic Year*. Portland, OR: Portland State University.
- Wise, Vicki. *National Survey of Student Engagement: Brief Findings*. Portland, OR: Portland State University, 2012.