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Implementation of Second-Year Experience at WMU

Adrienne Fraaza

First-Year Experience, Western Michigan University
Academic Leadership Academy, 2014 - 2015

Abstract

Research indicates that second-year students need additional resources and attention to encourage their persistence at the university. After receiving copious guidance during the first year they are often left to navigate the following year on their own, where in reality, they need a great deal of support to help them continue to matriculate successfully.

As costs rise and more students turn to online education, it is imperative that WMU offers holistic and engaging support systems at all levels of a student's college career. Both national and institutional research shows that the needs of second-year students are not being met. This is a detriment to the university and a disservice to the student. When WMU offers a second-year experience program, we will not only align with the university's strategic plan, but will also demonstrate to the student that we are committed to their success beyond the first year. The development of SYE will take a great deal of teamwork and creative resources, but ultimately it will be a gem that draws students to us instead of our competition and will increase persistence and graduation rates.

The objective of the SYE program is to create high-impact practices for second-year students, fostering a sense of university belonging and improving persistence rates from year two to year three.

Who is involved

Second-Year Experience will be piloted out of the First-Year Experience Department and will eventually require a Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, and student interns. During the start-up stages, Adrienne Fraaza, Fall Welcome Coordinator, will oversee program implementation.

Target population:

- FTIAC students who completed their first year at WMU
- Transfer students beginning their first semester at WMU, spring or fall

Partners

- Academic colleges
- Residence Life – partner with their second-year living/learning communities
- Career and Student Employment Services
- Financial Aid



Student interns in the First-Year Experience Department

Goals of the SYE program

As a pilot program, the four main areas of focus will begin with:

1. Financial Aid/ funding college after the first year (promotes persistence)
2. Declaring a major and understanding what kind of job opportunities are available (promotes student success/retention)
3. Identifying and using campus resources students may not have used during their first year (promotes student success)
4. Increasing interest in study abroad, therefore increasing numbers who study abroad between sophomore and senior years (promotes strategic plan/retention/success)

Secondary foci include:

- Building a culture of traditions among second-year students
- Increase faculty-student relationships

Building traditions as a class



First-year students participating at Playfair, a traditional Fall Welcome event, building community and meeting new people

Proposed programming for SYE

- Celebration at the end of the first year
- Workshops available at the end of the first year to prepare students for second year
- Second year leadership conference
- Second year "bucket list"
- Second year class traditions
- Mailings for second year students
- E-newsletter for second year students
- Financial aid workshops
- Second-Year Experience seminar course, including a themed section on the city of Kalamazoo

Timeline

The proposed timeline of implementation:

- Spring 2016: social media and newsletter initiatives
- End of Spring 2016: summer postcard mailed to students/families
- Fall 2016: launch of Kalamazoo-themed seminar course for second-year students
- Spring 2017: evaluation of Kalamazoo-themed seminar course and plan to increase number of seminars offered for second-year students
- Fall 2017: second-year conference at beginning of academic year
- Fall 2017: creation of online "bucket list" in goWMU, including Signature Plan
- Spring 2017: workshops offered focusing on goals of SYE program, including major declaration, financial education, and study abroad
- Spring 2018 – Fall 2018: additional initiatives implemented including class-specific celebrations and launch of additional seminar courses
- Spring 2019 – 2020: SYE program is fully functioning, including seminar courses, Leadership Conference, workshops, social media connections, class celebrations and traditions



Funding

Funding will be obtained by the following:

- Request funds from the Associate Provost for Enrollment Management
- Collaborate with academic colleges
- Collaborate with Residence Life
- Seek grants related to student success

Proposed budget:

- Social media and e-newsletters: \$0
- Postcards mailed in summer: \$1500
- End-of-first-year celebration: \$10,000 - \$20,000
 - Miller Auditorium rental, giveaways, refreshments, keynote speaker
- Second-year class traditions: TBD
- Kalamazoo-themed and additional seminar courses: \$5,000 each
- Second-year Leadership Conference: TBD based on extent of programming
 - All or partially self-funded by registration fee
- Workshops: \$300 each
 - Refreshments, raffle prizes/incentives

Second-year experience and WMU's strategic plan

There are clear connections between developing second-year initiatives and WMU's strategic plan. Based on the WMU Strategic Plan, Year Two, Year-End Report on Progress and Outcomes (June 2014) these SYE goals/initiatives are closely linked to university strategic goals:

- Of the five University Goals, Strategic Goal #1 is to "ensure a distinctive learning experience and foster success of students" → clear support to aide second-year students
- "Planning should set big picture goals that direct current and future activities" → SYE is a new initiative that qualifies as a "big picture goal"
- "Reflect WMU's learner-centered vision" → improving persistence rates from year one to year two, and from year two to year three, indicates WMU's commitment to being learner-centered
- "Encourage cross-disciplinary partnerships to achieve multiple goals" → collaborating to support second-year students with Financial Aid, Academic Success Programs, Student Employment, and Advising
- Focus on number of seniors who participated in study abroad (currently from 11% to 12%) → globally engaged pillar
- Financial Aid/literacy can be tied to Academic Affairs Strategic Plan (AASP) Goal 2, Strategy 2.2: Retention activities addressed in Goal 2, Strategy 2.9
- AASP Goal 7, Strategy 7.1 – "promote cultural change...that leads to student success" → creating a support system that currently does not exist for second-year students

Next steps

- Present plan to academic colleges to garner support, both in programming and finances
- Present plan to Provost's Council to garner further support
- Seek and write grants that support student success
- Assemble planning committee to determine curriculum and funding of Kalamazoo-themed seminar course
- Begin writing e-newsletters targeted at second-year students
- Continue researching best practices from other universities for second-year experience programs
- Hold additional student focus groups

Contact information

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