

DRAFT 2
BACKGROUND AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR A NEW
FIRST-YEAR COURSE—A QEP INITIATIVE
Foundations for Learning (3-credit-hours)
Serving as the Gateway to Critical and Creative Thinking
and Student Success at ECU

Background/Introduction

The focus of ECU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), approved by SACS in late 2007, is to "develop critical and creative thinkers who can communicate effectively." One of the stated campus-wide program initiatives is to *develop an effective first-year course that will aid in the transition to college.....provide foundation knowledge and skills in critical and creative thinking.... and integrate the development of problem-solving skills into both the student's academic and social life.* It is essential that this QEP initiative begin in Fall 2008 in order to have time to assess its effectiveness toward meeting the objectives of the QEP over the next four years. It is proposed that the course be implemented in Fall 2008 as a pilot project with up to 20 sections for first-year, first-time students who are entering ECU with 30 or less academic credits. The future implementation beyond 2008/09 year will be dependent on the outcomes of the pilot.

Foundations for Learning is being developed based on heavily researched national best practices. According to the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition 85% of institutions surveyed in 2006 offer a First-Year Seminar (FYS) course (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings/surveys/survey06.html>). It is one of the most heavily and routinely researched and evaluated courses in the nation over the last 20-plus years.

Foundations for Learning is being designed to facilitate first-year students' adjustment to the college environment and to promote successful skills for college and life through a combination of curricular and co-curricular learning activities. It is intended to develop learners holistically through activities that promote personal, intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and vocational development and enhance critical and creative thinking skills that promote life-long learning.

The new *Foundations for Learning* course is designed to serve as a gateway to higher level learning and aligns with the ECU General Education program, promoting "learning that is central to the intellectual pursuits associated with our educational programs....(enabling) students to make informed choices about matters of public and personal significance in a diverse, democratic society and global community." The intended outcome is that students will be better prepared for all college coursework after completing the course successfully. It is expected that the learner will become more fully engaged in the ECU community and the learning process through this course, a specific goal for improved retention.

Secondary Function of the Course—To Improve ECU First-to-Second Year Retention Rates

The new multi-purpose *Foundations for Learning* course will promote student learning and success while addressing low first-to-second-year retention rates. ECU is focused on improving retention and graduation rates. It is well-documented that a carefully designed and implemented first-year course will improve student retention. According to Cuseo (2007), who has synthesized numerous collections of research on student success and retention, there is probably "more compelling and empirical evidence gathered for the first-year seminar than any other course in the history of higher education." Numerous studies using various research methods (e.g., Barefoot, 1993; Fidler, 1994; Gardner, 1998; Tobolwski, 2005; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999), have demonstrated the effectiveness of the first-year seminar on improved student success on many levels, including increased college persistence and graduation rates. The preliminary results of the 2006 survey by the National Research Center for the First-Year Experience

and Students in Transition (2007) indicated that 43% of the schools surveyed reported an increased persistence rate to the sophomore year. Additional positive outcomes were reported for improved peer connections, increased student satisfaction with institution, among other things.

EKU First-Year Student Needs

The following overviews ECU’s first-year students’ needs based on information provided by the ECU Counseling Center, ECU Institutional Research Office, and other related data.

Per the Mental Health Needs Survey conducted by the ECU Counseling Center in 2004, the following are the top concerns reported. See Attachment A for the complete survey.

ITEMS		Extent to Which It Concerns you	Extent to Which it Affects Grades
		(Much, very much or all of the time)	
Study Habits or Time Management.	1	80.9%	79.5%
Procrastination/Getting Motivated	2	78.8%	75.1%
Academic Pressures	3	77.9%	70.8%
Stress	4	73.2%	64.6%
Test Anxiety	5	70.8%	69.8%
Decision Making	6	67.3%	53.9%
Job market info for various majors.	7	65.9%	37.4%
Identifying interests/abilities/skills/work values	8	64.9%	51.3%
Problems Concentrating	9	63.0%	62.3%
Worrying Too Much	10	61.3%	54.0%
General Occupational Information	11	60.0%	36.6%
Choosing/Changing a Major	12	56.6%	42.4%
Financial Difficulties	13	53.9%	39.0%
Perfectionism	14	52.9%	46.3%
Anxiety or Tension	15	52.6%	54.0%
Math Anxiety	16	50.8%	48.9%
Sleep Problems	17	50.7%	48.0%

Attachment B demonstrates the many challenges confronted by ECU first-year students, as collected from national surveys such as the NSSE and CIRP tools. Please see the attachment for the types of issues ECU first-year students report. Attachment C highlights some ECU student needs extrapolated from the 2006/07 ECU Fact Book and ECU Institutional Research Office, including current ACT, Pre-College Curriculum, and developmental placements of ECU first-year students.

Common Core Curriculum

The purpose of *Foundations for Learning* is to serve as a gateway course for first-year students to build skills, competencies, and values for becoming an educated person through a common core curriculum in

which all students have a common learning experience. In his review of the literature on first-year courses, Cuseo (in press) states “30.4% of colleges and universities offering a holistic first-year seminar report that one of their most important course objectives is to “create a common first-year experience.”

At this time, the existing ECU Academic Orientation course lacks a consistently implemented core curriculum. Students’ experiences in their Academic Orientation courses vary greatly. To promote the goals of the ECU QEP, we need a well-structured, comprehensive and common course to introduce students to critical and creative thinking. Also, a common core curriculum will assist retention efforts. Cuseo (2000) emphasizes “When students have a common classroom experience that is focused on and concurrent with a commonly experienced life transition, the personal meaning and significance of the classroom experience is augmented. The classroom becomes a supportive sanctuary for student reflection and dialogue about this common life experience,serving to promote the feeling of being a member of the same community and the feeling that “we’re all in this together.” Such commonality has the potential to create a collective energy and synergy that can multiply the course’s positive effects.” Since building community is a cornerstone of increasing retention, the common core curriculum can help accomplish that goal.

The pilot *Foundations for Learning* course is being developed with 80-85% common core elements (topics), allowing for academic freedom—personal choice and autonomy for course instructors with up to 20% of the course. This will allow for individuality and creativity with respect to how instructors demonstrate the content, what instructional methods they use, and how they assess or evaluate student learning of the content within certain parameters specifically related to the ECU QEP.

Three-Credit-Hours

Foundations for Learning is designed as a three-credit-hour course to ensure sufficient class contact time, breadth of coverage, and comparability with other courses in the college curriculum. For Fall 2008, the course will fulfill the university-required one-credit-hour Academic Orientation course in addition to providing two hours of elective credit. FYS research shows that there is a strong positive correlation between FYS credit hours and positive outcomes (Cuseo, 2000). There are several conceptual arguments in favor of FYS carrying three credit hours including greater breadth and depth of content and skill development; development of social-emotional ties between students, peers and instructors; less need to rely on lecture format; and giving the course more credibility by aligning the credit hours and contribution to GPA with other 3-credit college courses.

Specific Course Goals and Learning Objectives:

Four broad, student-centered course goals have been identified along with nine encompassing student learning objectives to meet the needs of ECU first-year students and to ensure a common learning experience. These course goals and student learning outcomes are congruent with national models for FYS courses. The National Resource Center survey (2007) found that the top five most frequently reported topics for the course include: study skills, critical thinking, campus resources academic planning/advising, and time management.

ECU Foundations for Learning Course Goals

GOAL 1: Provide a foundation for understanding a liberal education* and preparing for college level work.

GOAL 2: Provide foundational knowledge and skills in critical and creative thinking.

GOAL 3: Promote transition to college and life-long learning.

* Liberal education definition from Association of American Colleges and Universities

(http://www.aacu.org/press_room/media_kit/what_is_liberal_education.cfm): “A philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility. Characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific course or field of study, liberal education can be achieved at all types of colleges and universities. “General Education” and an expectation of in-depth study in at least one field normally comprise liberal education.

GOAL 4: Promote an understanding of personal and social responsibilities related to global and local communities.

Student Learning Objectives

As a result of the course, students will be able to:

- SLO 1: Articulate how EKU's General Education Program contributes to being a liberally-educated person.
- SLO 2: Articulate what it means to be a critical and creative thinker.
- SLO 3: Construct good arguments and recognize and evaluate arguments related to a class topic.
- SLO 4: Demonstrate the ability to find, evaluate & use information, utilizing technology and library resources.
- SLO 5: Identify academic resources and support services important for academic success.
- SLO 6: Identify and articulate individual learning style and abilities.
- SLO 7: Engage in activities that promote connection to the university.
- SLO 8: Develop and articulate academic and life goals.
- SLO 9: Articulate the value of diverse perspectives.

Administrative Structure

The new *Foundations for Learning* course will be administered from Academic Affairs, under the Dean of University Programs, aligned with the General Education Program. Two oversight groups are being established to provide oversight and counsel for the development of the course:

- 1) the *Foundations for Learning Advisory Committee* to serve as a curriculum advisory group with membership from faculty, staff, and students representing all five colleges, academic affairs, library, and student affairs professionals, and
- 2) the *Foundations for Learning Steering Committee* to serve as an oversight and accountability group for logistics and implementation with membership from faculty, staff and students with equal diversity as the Advisory Committee.

Additionally, the Instructor Learning Community (ILC) (made up of instructors who will teach the course) will work as a team to develop core content for the course. Members of that group, along with members of the Advisory Committee and the QEP Assessment Coordinator will make up the Foundations for Learning Assessment Team, who will develop the course assessment elements and evaluate the course outcomes to see if objectives are being met, making recommendations to the ILC for changes to the course.

Fall 2008 Pilot Implementation

As of January 17, the course has been approved by the ECU Council on Academic Affairs for pilot implementation in Fall 2008. Up to 20 sections (500 students) of the course will be offered, depending on the number of instructors recruited. Each section will be capped at 25 seats to promote active involvement, class bonding, and delivery of frequent, personalized feedback to students. Over the next five years, it is anticipated that the course will be fully implemented.

Who Will Take the Course?

Students who are undeclared in major and entering ECU as first-time freshmen will be offered the course during Spring/Summer ECU Orientation/Registration. Students will be informed that two of the three credit hours will count as elective credit on their transcript (one of the three credit hours will fulfill the existing Academic Orientation University Requirement).

Who Will Teach the Course?

Congruent with national models, a diverse group of instructors will be sought by recruiting both academic and student affairs professionals who are qualified to teach and who are enthusiastic about teaching first-year students. It is anticipated that a minimum of 50% of the instructors will be tenure-track faculty, with the remainder being professional staff with at least a master's degree and teaching experience and no more than 10% adjunct faculty. Potential benefits for instructors include:

- Engaging at the grass-roots level in helping to create a new, intentionally-designed first-year foundational curriculum to improve student learning, better prepare students for college and life, and improve student retention.
- Gaining a better understanding of EKU's first-year students.
- Helping new students transition to the EKU college environment and experiencing the joy of developing special and enduring relationships with students.
- Enhancing, improving, and invigorating the teaching experience through innovative pedagogy and instructional strategies that can impact all courses.
- Building professional partnerships and camaraderie across different disciplines and divisions—enhancing a stronger sense of community.
- Earning a stipend for professional development and overload or reassigned pay for teaching the course.

Each instructor will either receive compensation as overload pay or the academic department will be reimbursed for release time, commensurate with EKU policy and procedures. Course credit will be credited to the academic department in which the instructor is affiliated. Credit for students (or student count will be credited to) will be assigned to the instructor's academic department.

Instructor Professional Development & Course Development

Identified instructors will form the *Foundations for Learning Instructor Learning Community*. This learning community will convene regularly for professional development activities, to share instructional methods and resources, to develop common assessment items that address the core learning objectives, and to continually evaluate and critique the course outcomes. The identified *Instructor Learning Community* will participate in a five-day training in early May, just after spring semester ends. All instructors will be required to participate and will receive a stipend for their participation. The *Instructor Learning Community* will develop their courses and assessment plans over the summer, meeting regularly to share their plans.

Assessment

Course-level Assessment

The pilot course will be continually assessed and evaluated, utilizing multiple types of assessment to ensure it is meeting specific programmatic goals and to provide information for fine-tuning the course and for determining its overall value-added impact. Annual assessment results will be used to determine how to improve/strengthen the course.

An assessment team, a group made up of instructors who teach the course, members of the Co-Curricular Advisory Group, and the QEP Assessment Coordinator will review and score a representative sample of student work produced in the course. Every effort will be made to ensure that course content, process and emphasis is appropriately rigorous and challenging to students. Student learning focused assessment methods will fit seamlessly into the proposed curriculum. In fact, teaching/learning activities created for the course will be used not only to assign grades to students but to also generate assessment information that speaks to the achievement of the course learning objectives. Individual faculty will use the student work products to fine-tune their teaching as the semester progresses, while the assessment team will use the aggregated assessment information to ascertain the effectiveness of the course as a whole. A variety of assessment tools will be used to measure student learning, including: quizzes, tests, journals, reaction papers, essays, term papers, oral/visual presentations, reflective writing assignments and a final portfolio.

Updated 2/15/2008

Assessing for Critical and Creative Thinking

Like all projects/programs participating in the QEP, *Foundations for Learning* will use the University Critical and Creative Thinking Rubric to assess student skills. An end of course assignment will be designed and scored with the University Critical & Creative Thinking Rubric with the following performance targets:

- At least 60% of students will achieve a developing rating for the *Comprehension and Identification of Evidence* criteria.
- At least 60% of students will achieve a developing rating for the *Recognition of Perspectives and the Application and Analysis* criteria.
- At least 60% of students will achieve a developing rating for the *Interpretation and Evaluation* criterion.
- At least 60% of students will achieve a developing rating for the *Synthesis* criterion criteria.

With the expectation that the course will improve first-to-second year retention rates, comparisons of retention rates between participants and non-participants will be conducted. It is anticipated that *Foundations for Learning* students will persist to the second year at higher rates than will non-participants.

QEP Program Level Assessment

Foundations for Learning is the critical first piece of the overall QEP program level assessment plan. Using the CAT (Critical Thinking Assessment Test developed at Tennessee Technological University) baseline data will be collected at the beginning of the semester from a sample of students enrolled in *Foundations for Learning* for the purpose of comparing entry-level performance with the performance of EKU seniors. Evaluation of results will be conducted on both a pre-test/post-test basis and a cohort comparison basis.

**ATTACHMENT A
EKU FIRST YEAR STUDENT NEEDS**

At A Glance: EKU First-Year Students

EKU Office of Institutional Research

[CIRP 2006]

- The majority of first-year students are white, female, age 18-19.
- EKU is the first college choice for 77% of first-time students.
- The top two majors expected for first-time women: Nursing and Elementary Education.
- The top two majors expected for first-time men: Law Enforcement and Business Management.
- Forty-six percent of first-time students report a *Very Good* chance of making a B average.
- Women choose EKU because of its size; men choose EKU because of its cost.
- Eighty percent of first-time students report *To Get Training for a Specific Career as Very Important* in deciding to go to college.
- Thirty-nine percent of first-year students have an estimated parental income less than \$50,000.
- Sixty-seven percent of first-time students indicate *Some or Major* concerns in financing college.
- Forty-four percent of first-time students report a *Very Good* chance of getting a job to help pay for college.
- FYS have a lower sense of self-efficacy than other students, consistently rating themselves below their peers in academic ability, math ability, writing ability, and intellectual self-confidence.
- Forty-six percent of first-time students permanently reside within 50 miles of campus.
- One-third of FYS are first-generation (neither parent has attended college).
- Nearly one-half of first-time students have fathers with no college experience; forty percent have mothers with no college experience.
- First-time women and men differ the most on these opinions: 1) Federal government should do more to control the sale of handguns (W: 76.6%; M: 59.8%); 2) It is important to have laws prohibiting homosexual relationships (W: 29.0%; M: 47.2%).

[NSSE 2007 – statistically significant items relative to KY Peers, Carnegie Peers, and Public Carnegie Peers]

- EKU Freshmen, more than their peers, ask questions in class or contributed to class discussions.
- EKU Freshmen, more than their peers, worked with other students on projects during class.
- EKU Freshmen had a larger number of assigned texts in courses than their peers.
- EKU Freshmen had more papers of fewer than 5 pages than their peers.
- EKU Freshmen had more problems sets taking less than one hour to complete than their peers.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to participate in community service or volunteer work, whether inside or outside a course.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to feel the institutional environment provides the support needed to succeed academically.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to feel the institution helps them cope with their non-academic responsibilities.
- EKU Freshmen are more likely than their peers to use computers in academic work.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to feel they learn effectively on their own.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to feel they understand people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- EKU Freshmen are less likely than their peers to contribute to the welfare of their community.
- EKU Freshmen rate the quality of academic advising they have received poorer than their peers.

[Other]

Updated 2/15/2008

- Our service region has a significantly higher poverty rate than the Kentucky or National averages.
- Our service region has significantly lower household incomes than state or national averages.
- Our service region has a significantly higher percentage than the statewide population of those who are Medicaid-eligible.
- Our service region has a greater unemployment rate than the national average and is the highest in the state.
- For high school students in our service region, the first decision is not where to go to college, but if to go to college – 39% of high school graduates continue to college.
- Our students incur more loan debt at the time of graduation than the national average; students from the service region incur more loan debt than students outside the service region.
- Half of our FYS enter ECU under-prepared in at least one basic skill area.
- Our service region has a significantly higher percentage of high school graduates entering colleges under-prepared for college-level work.
- Last year, 350 FYS had not met all the KY Pre-college Curriculum requirements.
- ECU students spend more time commuting and working than their peers.
- ECU students spend more time than peers caring for dependents.
- ECU students face many of the same challenges to remain in college, regardless of academic ability. The influence of family, friends, and work to leave college is of equal significance. Students indicate a complete willingness to set aside academic endeavors in order to assume the responsibility of care giver, spouse, parent, or financial provider (Miller, 2005).

ATTACHMENT B
EKU Counseling Center Mental Health Needs Survey: 2004

Percent of students who answered much, very much or all the time

For Level of Concern and Impact on Grades

ITEMS		Extent to Which It Concerns you	Extent to Which it Affects Grades
		(Much, very much or all of the time)	
Study Habits or Time Management.	1	80.9%	79.5%
Procrastination/Getting Motivated	2	78.8%	75.1%
Academic Pressures	3	77.9%	70.8%
Stress	4	73.2%	64.6%
Test Anxiety	5	70.8%	69.8%
Decision Making	6	67.3%	53.9%
Job market info for various majors.	7	65.9%	37.4%
Identifying interests/abilities/skills/work values	8	64.9%	51.3%
Problems Concentrating	9	63.0%	62.3%
Worrying Too Much	10	61.3%	54.0%
General Occupational Information	11	60.0%	36.6%
Choosing/Changing a Major	12	56.6%	42.4%
Financial Difficulties	13	53.9%	39.0%
Perfectionism	14	52.9%	46.3%
Anxiety or Tension	15	52.6%	54.0%
Math Anxiety	16	50.8%	48.9%
Sleep Problems	17	50.7%	48.0%
Managing Your Money	18	50.2%	31.3%
Speech Anxiety	19	47.9%	39.8%
Relationship With Parents/Family	20	47.7%	33.8%
Tendency to be Critical/Sarcastic	21	46.6%	31.0%
Lack of Career Plans	22	45.0%	32.2%
Relationship With Partner/Spouse	23	43.8%	35.1%
Physical Appearance	24	43.2%	22.1%
Relationship With Friends/Roommates/Peers	25	42.9%	29.5%
Death of a Friend or Loved One	26	40.6%	35.5%
Communication Skills	27	40.0%	32.0%

Updated 2/15/2008

Dealing With Anger	28	34.4%	26.2%
Shyness/Being Ill At Ease With People	29	33.4%	22.6%
Depression	30	32.0%	32.4%
Weight Problems	31	30.7%	16.9%
Breakup/Loss of a Relationship	32	30.3%	28.1%
Adjustment to the University	33	29.2%	24.7%
Dieting	34	29.1%	16.0%
Feeling Unworthy or Inferior	35	27.1%	22.1%
Loneliness/Feeling Isolated	36	26.5%	22.2%
Dating Concerns	37	26.4%	17.2%
Overeating	38	25.5%	16.6%
Sexuality/Intimate Relationships	39	21.0%	13.1%
Afraid of a Close Relationship	40	20.7%	14.4%
Unhappy Much of the Time	41	20.7%	21.3%
Alcohol	42	19.9%	17.6%
Items		Percent Endorsed (Much, very much or all the time)	
Conflict With Parents About Choice of Major	43	19.8%	17.4%
Smoking	44	19.6%	11.9%
Homesickness	45	18.5%	17.0%
Other	46	16.7%	14.7%
Binging	47	13.1%	11.3%
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	48	10.7%	7.4%
Drugs	49	10.5%	12.1%
Pregnancy (yours or hers)	50	10.0%	10.3%
Emotional Abuse	51	9.6%	10.6%
Discrimination Based on Race, Gender, Orientation, etc.	52	9.6%	8.3%
Arrest or Legal Problems	53	8.7%	9.5%
Thoughts of Suicide	54	8.6%	10.1%

Updated 2/15/2008

Physical Handicap or Disability	55	8.0%	8.3%
Thoughts of Harming Others	56	7.6%	8.5%
Intentionally Vomiting After Eating	57	7.5%	8.3%
Bulimia	58	7.2%	6.8%
Childhood Physical Abuse	59	6.8%	7.3%
Childhood Sexual Abuse	60	6.8%	7.5%
Sexual Orientation	61	6.5%	6.5%
Anorexia	62	6.2%	7.2%
Rape/Sexual Assault (other than date rape)	63	5.4%	7.2%
Deliberate Self-Inflicted Injuries	64	5.3%	7.3%
Physical Assault	65	5.2%	7.2%
Date Rape	66	5.1%	7.7%
Physical Abuse After Childhood	67	4.8%	6.3%
Sexual Abuse After Childhood	68	4.2%	6.5%
Current Physical Abuse	69	4.1%	6.8%
Current Sexual Abuse	70	3.8%	5.8%

ATTACHMENT C

According to the *2006/07 EKU Fact Book* (<http://www.ir.eku.edu/web/Factbook/pdf/06-07/2006-2007%20Factbook-web.pdf>) and the EKU Institutional Research Office:

- 51.6% of EKU students are first-generation college students
- 39% of Fall 2007 entering first year EKU students are developmental in one or more areas (reading, English, mathematics)
- In 2006, 350 first-year students entered EKU with a KY Pre-college Curriculum deficiency.
- Even though EKU ACT scores have improved in the last few years, they are still below the national averages in most cases.

Fall 2006	EKU	Kentucky	National
ACT Composite Average Score	20.8	20.6	21.1
ACT English Average Score	20.7	20.6	20.6
ACT Mathematics Average Score	19.9	19.9	20.8

- The most recently reported one-year retention rate at EKU is 65.1%. System-wide retention (meaning students who were retained at EKU or another public Kentucky institution) was 73.5% at EKU compared to 78.5% average for Kentucky public institutions (http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/1FE4E17E-2D8F-4E86-93BC-A7E2AE72EDC0/0/One_yr_ret_0506_20070320.pdf)
- The six-year graduation rate at EKU (2000 entering cohort) was 35.4%, compared to 46.7% average for Kentucky public institutions (http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/445CB071-FC0A-419F-A6FB-630D6590A61F/0/GRS_2000_20070410.pdf)
- About half (49.8%--1024 out of 2058) of 2006 EKU Freshmen were from the EKU 22-county service region, where some of the poorest and lowest levels of educational attainment in the nation are located.

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