



**John N. Gardner Institute  
Foundations of Excellence: Transfer Focus**

**Purpose**

This initiative is designed to study all aspects of the transfer student experience and to produce a plan for institutional improvement leading to higher levels of transfer student learning, satisfaction, and graduation.

**Roles**

1. Task Force is comprised of faculty, administrators, staff, and students from across campus who will meet 2-3 times during the year. The Task Force includes everyone who is working on any aspect of the project.
2. Two Liaisons (Maria Hesse, Kathy Yeager) organize and monitor the self-study process and serve as the primary conduit of information to and from the Institute. They play a leading role in determining how the self-study will be structured and scheduled, and they work with others to determine task force membership and to divide the task force into Dimension Committees. They will collaborate with others within the university to select Dimension Committee chairs. They convene occasional meetings of the entire Task Force and more frequent meetings of the Steering Committee.
3. The Steering Committee is composed of leaders of each of the Dimension Committees, as well as others such as representatives from institutional research and the senior administration. The primary roles of the Steering Committee are to assist the liaisons in project management, to read and react to all Dimension Reports as they are completed by Dimension Committees, to make final decisions about the content of the action plan, and to serve as chief advocates and public relations representatives for the project.
  - a. ASU will also have an Executive Committee of the Steering Committee with representatives from the Provost's office and the three colleges/academic units who are funding the project (Fred Corey, Duane Roen, Todd Sandrin, Paul LePore, and Maria Hesse).
4. Institute Advisor (John Gardner) will guide the task force through this process and will provide written feedback on all reports. July 31, 2016, is the end date of the assistance.
5. The Survey Administrator for the Web-Enabled Survey System (WESS) manages the technical aspects of the FoE Faculty/Staff and Student Surveys (Shelly Potts with assistance from Gerald Blackson).
6. Institutional Research staff members or data analysts will be involved in compiling data to be uploaded in the Current Practices Inventory (Melinda Gebel with assistance from Mary Carrillo).
7. Dimension Committees are charged with conducting an analysis of institutional achievement of each Dimension. By responding to performance indicators, committee members will develop a greater understanding of the current situation on campus, acknowledge both strengths and challenges, and discover opportunities for improvement.

Finally, the committee will develop a Dimension report to summarize its findings and provide recommendations for the future.

- a. In the early fall, once committee membership has been established, committees should have an initial meeting to introduce the process, discuss the assigned Dimension and the performance indicators, and respond to questions.
- b. They may need to meet often (perhaps bi-weekly) until dimension reports are ready.

## **Model**

The model is comprised of nine aspirational principles of excellence, termed Foundational Dimensions<sup>®</sup>. Each Dimension Committee will:

- Gather and interpret evidence and use it to reach a conclusion about the institution’s current achievement of each dimension.
  - Performance Indicators (PIs) should engage the committee in discussion and encourage the use of multiple perspectives and forms of evidence.
- Discuss the implications of the conclusions.
- Develop specific recommendations to improve the experience of transfer students.

Recommendations from all Dimension Committees will be combined to create a comprehensive institutional “blueprint” for improvement.

Surveys ask questions about respondents’ perceptions of institutional performance on each Dimension.

- The first is a survey of students, administered electronically in the month of November.
- The survey of faculty and staff is usually administered in late September or early October.
- Survey results are available in the FoEtec system and can be analyzed by a variety of demographic and employment variables.

Current Practices Inventory (CPI) – an inventory of current practices including programs, services, policies, and data about transfer students. New items may be added to the CPI at any time during the self-study.

Sources of Evidence – Other potential sources of evidence can be used to inform Dimension Committee work including but not limited to committee members’ knowledge; existing assessment data; existing documents and campus reports; and interviews, focus groups, focused surveys, and observations. Each committee should answer the following questions:

- What are the strengths and limitations of the available sources of evidence?
- What additional evidence would have been useful?
- How balanced is the evidence (qualitative/quantitative, current/longitudinal, etc.)?
- Is the evidence easily available for future use by the institution?

FoEtec<sup>®</sup> system is an electronic platform that allows for recording and sharing committee findings, survey data, the Current Practices Inventory, and other forms of evidence. All members of the Task Force will have “view access” to the FoEtec system. The project Liaisons can add individuals to the system.

Final Report, Report Card, and Action Plan – The self-study portion of the FoE process culminates with the development of a final narrative report, a “report card” to be used to grade institutional performance on each Dimension, and a strategic action plan. The implementation will detail specific action items and will provide an estimated timeline, allocation of responsibility, and projected cost for each action item.

The Dimension Committee writes a summary report (no set length, but it may be best to limit these to 5-10 pages) of its deliberations, analyses, findings, and conclusions. This report should include a review of the evidence the committee used in reaching its decisions (e.g., FoE survey results, findings of other institutional assessments, existence of actual programs and policies, observations). The primary purpose of the Dimension report is to summarize the discussions of the committee and serve as a basis for recommended action items. In essence, the Dimension report builds the case for change or for maintaining current efforts.

The Dimension Committee will develop recommended action items for improvement. Action steps may include the continuation of existing practice, changes in existing practice, or development of new practices. Each recommendation should be supported by the committee’s findings and linked to corroborating evidence. The committee might “test” its recommendations by asking the following questions:

- Is there a “current situation” that the action item is designed to address?
- Is there evidence that action is needed?
- Is it clear why the committee is recommending this specific action?
- Is it clear what outcomes the action is intended to produce?

Based upon the findings, the Dimension Committee will recommend an overall grade for the Dimension. The Gardner Institute does not provide a rubric for determining the grade. Each committee will consider all its discussions to develop a summative grade that reflects the degree to which the institution is achieving the highest aspirational level of the Dimension. In general, high grades will be accompanied by few high priority action items, and low grades will reflect an urgency to implement recommended action items.

When feedback from the Institute Advisor has been considered and appropriate additions or changes have been made, each Dimension Committee report should be read by all members of the Steering Committee, who may request additional analysis or evidence from the Dimension Committee or may accept the report as submitted.

The Steering Committee will use all nine Dimension Committee reports to develop the comprehensive Final Report, inclusive of an institutional action plan. Institutions who were high implementers of the plan saw significant retention increases.

### **Definition of Transfer Students**

Transfer students are defined as degree-seeking students at an institution with credit from another higher education institution. This includes two-year to four-year transfers and four-year to four-year transfers. This definition means that transfers may be full-time or part-time; classified as first-year, sophomore, junior, or senior students; and enrolled in day, evening,

weekend, or distance-education courses. This definition excludes high school students who are taking college courses (dual enrollment students) and transient students (those who are seeking a degree at another institution and are taking courses – such as a summer course – at a second institution).

## **Foundational Dimensions**

### Philosophy Dimension

Foundations Institutions develop intentional policies and practices related to the transfer student experience based on a clear philosophy/rationale. The philosophy/rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. The philosophy/rationale is also the basis for transfer policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation. This philosophy recognizes both similarities and differences in first-year and transfer transitions.

In deliberations about this Dimension, task force participants will determine whether the institution as a whole and/or one or more unit(s)/department(s) have either an explicit (written) or implicit philosophy, purpose, or rationale for the transfer experience (i.e., first-year of transfer). Participants will further determine whether such philosophy(ies) are disseminated or have demonstrable influence on the nature of the transfer experience. In the absence of a philosophy, task forces can use extant policies, practices, and programs to deduce the institution's philosophy for the transfer experience. The task force may also find that fragments of an institutional philosophy exist in many institutional or unit-level documents.

### Organization Dimension

Foundations Institutions create organizational structures that provide oversight and coordination of the transfer experience. A coherent transfer experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced through appropriate budgetary allocations. Foundations Institutions also assure communication and collaboration with sending institutions at multiple levels including senior administration, academic departments, academic advising, and other administrative units.

Performance Indicators for this Dimension ask committee members to determine how the institution is organized to support transfers, and how it coordinates with sending institutions in various functional areas. Committees also investigate the level of specific services to transfers as well as funding and evaluation issues.

### Learning Dimension

Foundations Institutions assure the continued development of transfer students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission. They coordinate with partner institutions (sending and receiving) to determine common course goals and learning outcomes and encourage the participation of transfer students in engaging learning experiences both in and out of the classroom.

Performance Indicators for this Dimension ask committee members to determine the level of collaboration between academic counterparts in sending and receiving units in determining common course goals and outcomes. Committees also investigate whether the institution compares the academic performance of native versus transfer students and provides special academic opportunities for transfer students in order to increase their level of engagement.

### Faculty Dimension

Foundations institutions create a culture of faculty responsibility for transfer student success by encouraging awareness of and responsiveness to the unique needs of transfer students. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems.

The Performance Indicators for this Dimension focus on the degree to which the institution and its academic units encourage a culture of faculty responsibility for transfers. Committees are also asked to evaluate the degree to which expectations for involvement are set and rewards provided for service to transfers.

### Transitions Dimension

Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate transfer student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission. Beginning with transfer student recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year of transfer, institutions and academic departments communicate clear curricular and co-curricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments and administrative linkages with sending institutions to assure a seamless transition process.

Committee members will judge the effectiveness of the institution's communication to transfers about important topics using a variety of methods. They will then determine how well transfer students connect with others on campus, the quality of various transfer-specific procedures, policies, and academic advising for transfers.

### All Students Dimension

Foundations Institutions serve all transfer students according to their varied needs. The process of anticipating, diagnosing, and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to continuous assessment and adjustment. Institutions provide services with respect for the students' abilities, prior academic experiences, current needs and interests. Institutions also ensure a campus environment in which transfer students are accepted and valued.

Performance Indicators require an analysis of the institution's effectiveness in identifying transfer students with particular needs and addressing those needs. Committees are also asked to evaluate the degree to which the campus environment is welcoming and respectful towards transfers and assures them equitable treatment in all matters of policy and practice.

### Diversity Dimension

Foundations Institutions ensure that all students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions introduce transfer students to the standards of behavior expected in a diverse, open, and civil community.

Performance Indicators for the Diversity Dimension ask committee members to determine the institution's intentionality in including transfer students in its diversity programming and in courses that meet a diversity requirement. Committee members also evaluate the degree to which the campus conveys standards of behavior related to interaction about human and intellectual differences.

### Roles and Purposes Dimension

Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society. These roles and purposes include knowledge acquisition for personal growth, learning to prepare for future employment, learning to become engaged citizens, and learning to serve the public good. Institutions encourage transfer students to deepen and strengthen their understanding of the value of general education and to reexamine their motivation and monitor their progression toward personal educational goals.

Dimension Committees are asked to investigate the degree to which academic departments help transfer students prepare for life beyond college, provide them an opportunity for examining their own motivation for college, and help them understand the rationale for major and graduation requirements.

### Improvement Dimension

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing improvement in the transfer experience. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and ongoing improvement of programs and policies that affect transfer students. As a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on transfer students and the transfer process.

Committee members are asked to investigate the level of systematic assessment of initiatives designed for transfer students and the use of that assessment. Performance Indicators also ask whether ongoing assessment has yielded better understanding of important student behaviors and characteristics and how assessment information is being disseminated. The final Performance Indicator asks whether faculty and staff are in touch with external and internal sources of information and expertise about the transfer experience.

*NOTE: Much of the information above was provided by the John N. Gardner Institute (JNGI) or paraphrased from their materials.*