

**A Philosophy Statement and  
Learning Goals for First-year  
Students at Owens Community  
College**

**Fall Semester 2011**

## **Executive Summary**

Implementation of the Foundations of Excellence program at Owens in 2007 led to creation of committees studying different aspects, or dimensions, of first-year students' experiences. The committee studying the Philosophy Dimension learned that institutions with a strong focus on student success typically had developed philosophy statements addressing the unique needs of first year students. The committee found that Owens lacked a formal statement of philosophy and that Owens faculty and staff supported creation of such a statement.

The Philosophy Statement Quality Team researched first-year students philosophy statements of other colleges and universities and conducted a series of team brainstorming sessions to identify themes crucial to the success of our first-year students. Eleven themes were agreed upon for inclusion in the Owens Philosophy Statement for First Year Students. The themes were made tangible by the creation of learning outcomes. The Team recommends that Owens' Center for Teaching and Learning Success work with Owens' Marketing Department to promote and publicize the philosophy statement and related learning outcomes.

## **Project Statement**

To develop a comprehensive statement of philosophy and learning goals for Owens' first-year students.

## **The Team**

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Jacquelyn Jones, Program Manager, Bridge to Success Program  
Lauren Ferguson, Director, First Year Experience  
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## **Background**

The College participated in the Foundations of Excellence (FOE) Program in 2007 in an effort to improve the experiences of first-year students. FOE is a comprehensive, externally-guided self-study and improvement process that helps an institution realize its goals for first-year student learning, success, and persistence. This self-study program is comprised of a set of principles known as "dimensions." These dimensions guide measurement of institutional efforts and provide a model for the entire early college experience from initial contact through admissions, advising, orientation, and all other first-year curricular and co-curricular experiences.

The FOE self-study process works through committees with members from many different campus constituencies. Each team investigated one FOE dimension: Philosophy, Organization, Learning, Campus Culture, Transitions, All Students, Diversity, Roles and Purposes, or Improvement. Committees audited the College's existing processes and surveyed students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

The committee that studied the Philosophy Dimension learned that institutions with a strong focus on student success typically had developed a philosophy statement addressing the unique needs of students during their first academic year in college. The committee's audit revealed informal philosophy statements in many College departments that tended to be "scattered and inconsistent." [from FOE Executive Summary]. The fall 2007 Faculty & Staff Survey supported the findings of the audit:

- Overall, most faculty and staff do not feel that an institutional philosophy for working with new students has been communicated to them (37% negative response v. 29% positive response, 34% neutral)

- Faculty and staff are fairly split on whether or not they feel that the institution operates from a commonly held philosophy for working with new students (35% negative response v. 36% positive response, 29% neutral)

- Part-time faculty and staff (39%) feel that the institution operates from a commonly held philosophy for working with new students more so than full-time faculty and staff (26%)

- Faculty and staff overwhelmingly agree that a formal institutional philosophy for working with new students is valuable (75% positive response, 8% negative response, 17% neutral) [from FOE Survey Philosophy Dimensions Report, 2007]

Following analysis of the audit and survey, the Philosophy Dimension Committee recommended that the College create, publicize, and inculcate a philosophy statement specifically targeting students and programming for students in their first thirty credit hours, and that this statement be widely distributed and acted upon [FOE Executive Summary].

In addition to the FOE Executive Summary, the team studied the Student Success Plan that was created by Owens faculty and implemented during the 2002/2003 academic year. The Student Success Plan defined learning outcomes for students not just in terms of expertise in their programs of study, but also with respect to the attainment of a general education. The faculty committee determined that all degree-seeking students at Owens must complete core courses in writing, oral communication, mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, social responsibility, ethical reasoning and behavior, and respecting diversity. This plan was adopted by the School of Arts and Sciences. The Team used this plan as a platform from which to build a set of learning outcomes to encompass not just Arts and Sciences, but all Schools throughout the College.

### **Analysis of best practices at various FOE Institutions**

A philosophy statement offers the means for a college to determine its purposes and goals while defining “success” for its first-year students. This statement offers a vision of the future and is typically in line with the institution’s mission and vision statements.

The Philosophy Dimension Quality Team (the Team) investigated best practices by reviewing philosophy and vision statements of other institutions. The Team focused on five Foundation of Excellence institutions that developed and promoted first-year philosophy statements and that had First Year Initiative Programs/First-Year Experience Programs connected to the institutions via a class and/or co-curricular residential program.

-Montgomery County Community College, Pennsylvania (FOE 05/06): Philosophy statement emphasizes new student transition and student support learning both in the classroom and in the community. The statement is available on their website along with a link to FOE.

Philosophy statement:

Montgomery County Community College strives to address the unique needs and concerns of first year college students in order to facilitate a successful transition from their high school or post secondary experience. This intentional comprehensive curricular and co-curricular initiative will promote an understanding and appreciation of a college education and will assist students with developing strategies and attitudes that will maximize academic success and prepare students to become life-long learners and responsible citizens and leaders.

-SUNY Brockport, New York (FOE 03/04): Vision and mission statements for first-year students are available indirectly on the college’s website and in many College publications such as a first-year experience brochure, college catalog, and freshman resource material. SUNY Brockport offers residential learning communities, peer mentoring, and academic/personal resources for students. Vision and mission statements follow in lieu of a hypertext link:

Vision Statement:

The vision for the first year of college is that all students successfully complete their first college year establishing a foundation for understanding their own lives in the context of a diverse world and for completing their degree.

-Nazareth College, New York (FOE 02/03): Philosophy statement emphasizes faculty and student engagement and focuses on the whole student and on promotion of civic responsibility and global awareness and can be found in their first-year seminar program manual. The FOE link appears on Nazareth’s website. Nazareth offers a residential learning community focused on first-year experiences and students’ needs.

Vision Statement:

Nazareth College will be nationally and internationally recognized as a comprehensive educational institution, which provides its students with transformational experiences and integrates liberal arts, sciences, visual and performing arts, and professional education at the undergraduate and graduate levels and which places special value on student success, diversity, inclusion, civic engagement, and making a difference in local and global communities.

At the First Year Center, we are "Committed to the Success of First-Year Nazareth Students and All Students in Transition." We do so by:

- **Advocating** for new students
- **Listening** to and **problem-solving** with students
- **Educating** the college community on new student needs and concerns
- **Collaborating** with faculty and staff to create programs assisting new students
- **Training** student leaders on the needs of new students
- **Supporting** parents of new students
- **Providing** resources and ideas for programs supporting new students
- **Developing** campus initiatives to encourage student success and persistence

-Salisbury University, Maryland (FOE 05/06): Philosophy statement promotes first-year transition and improving retention rates. The first-year program focuses on new student seminars, opening week activities for new students, convocation, and family weekends. The philosophy statement is promoted on Salisbury's website.

Philosophy Statement:

The faculty and staff of Salisbury University are committed to building a community in which first-year students have ample opportunity to be embraced and developed as scholars and individuals in order that they may contribute as active citizens, attain gainful employment, and practice life-long learning in a democratic society and interdependent world. The first-year programs are guided by the University's core mission values: excellence, student-centeredness, learning, community, civic engagement and diversity.

Toward this end, Salisbury University espouses the following goals:

- Facilitate the transition of first-year students into the University community
- Prepare first-year students for academic success beginning with a strong foundation in the general education curriculum
- Integrate first-year students into the intellectual, cultural, and social environment of the institution and the surrounding community
- Assist first-year students in the examination of their personal motivation for pursuing higher education

Salisbury University is committed to creating, assessing, and constantly improving a first-year experience that assists all students during their critical first year.

-Metropolitan Community College-Longview, Missouri (FOE 05/06): Establishes initiatives and learning outcomes that promote student success, communication between faculty and student, and retention. One initiative that MCC offers to promote students' success and community is for the cohort to read a book in common. The FOE link is available on the website.

Philosophy Statement:

Metropolitan Community College-Longview recognizes that the first year of college is the foundation of successful learning.

- We commit to providing excellence in teaching and support services which ease the transition to college and promote learning and co-curricular engagement in the first year.
- We commit to challenge first-year students to accept responsibility and commitment to academic excellence, personal integrity, and civic responsibility.
- We commit to assisting students in their development of a constructive sense of self and in their awareness of the individual as a powerful innovator in the social, economic, and political communities.
- We commit to continuously assess and respond to the dynamic needs of first-year students.
- And, we hope first-year students will develop a sense of pride and involvement in MCC-Longview, an appreciation for cultural differences, and a philosophy that learning is a life-long process.

Based on research of the first-year philosophies and learning goals of these FOE colleges and universities and on a series of brainstorming discussion sessions by the Team, eleven themes were selected for inclusion in the Owens first-year philosophy statement and given practical life through learning outcomes.

## Philosophy Statement Themes

self-awareness	civic responsibility
commitment to students' needs	diversity
excellence in teaching	academic excellence
technology	student success
co-curricular engagement	success transition for new students
campus safety	

## The Team's Results

### The Owens First-Year Philosophy Statement

Owens Community College is committed to helping first-year students make a smooth and successful transition to the college environment. We believe in serving our students and our communities; your success is our mission. Owens will strive to:

\*Create an innovative educational experience, through in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, that supports students' efforts to become responsible citizens and engaged learners

\*Maintain a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus community where working and learning cooperatively, while respecting individual differences, is everyone's goal

\*Create an environment that is supportive yet challenging and that encourages the development of critical thinkers who are actively engaged in their own learning

\*Generate an atmosphere that reflects the vision and values of the College, including those of service, learning, innovation, collaboration, and excellence

### Learning Outcomes for First-Year Students

\*Students will make a successful transition to Owens Community College by learning about available College resources that support student success

\*Students will be given the tools for successful self-development to help them meet their goals related to personal growth, career enhancement, and community service

\*Students will identify, develop, and apply problem solving skills and critical thinking processes to make decisions that demonstrate competency in core College values

\*Students will acquire and enhance the communication and technical skills necessary to compete in a global economy

\*Students will be members of a pluralistic campus community supported by a welcoming, safe environment and defined by diversity and social engagement. Students will actively engage in learning about other peoples and other cultures

The following chart outlines the learning outcomes as presented by the team along with corresponding programs, courses and policies currently implemented by Owens that relate to the achievement of said outcomes.

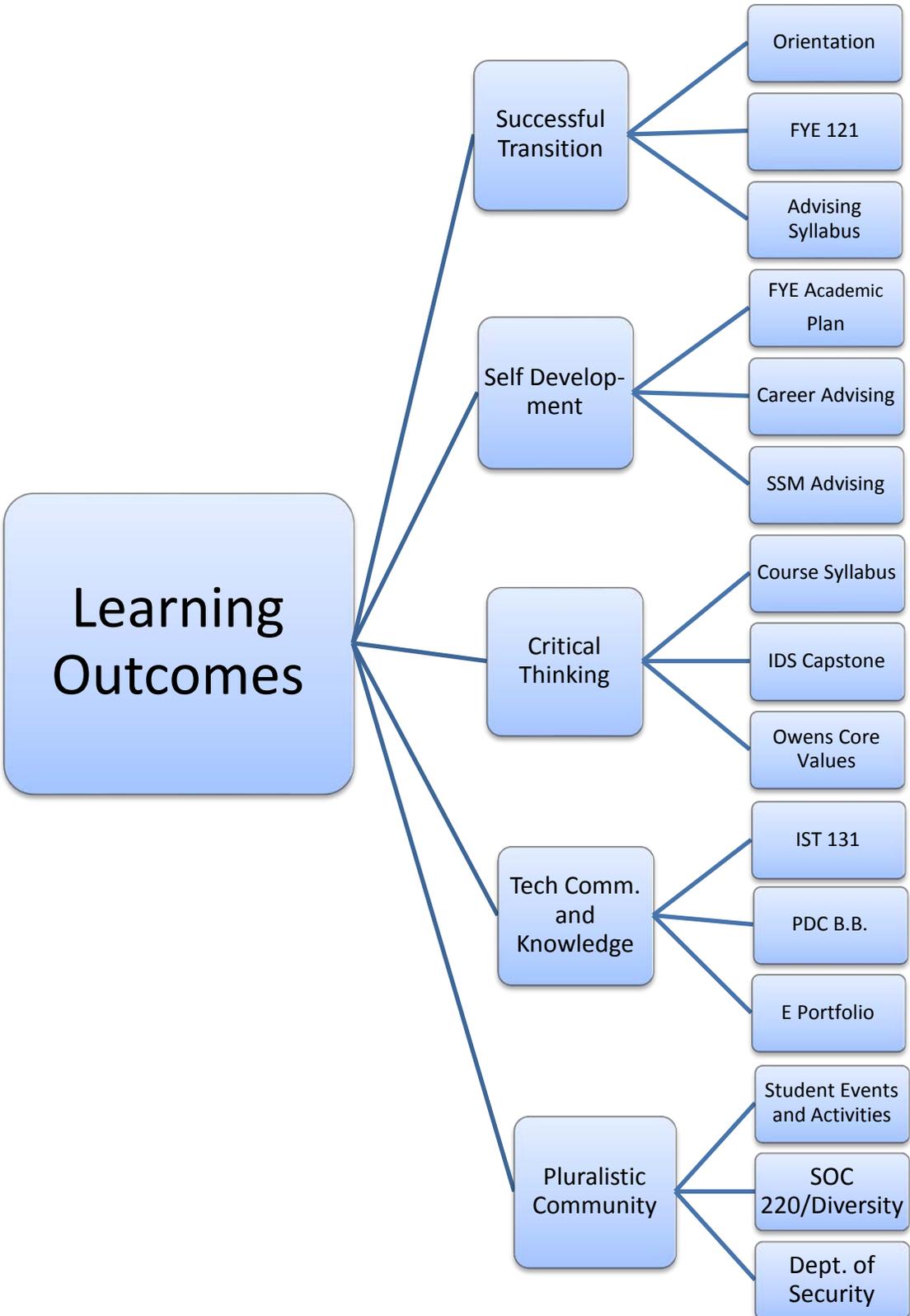
### **Alignment with AQIP Criteria**

Development of the First-Year Philosophy Statement and Learning Outcomes is aligned with AQIP Category One: Helping Students Learn. Category One “focuses on the design, deployment, and effectiveness of teaching-learning processes that underlie your organization’s credit and non-credit programs and courses, and on the processes required to support them.” Philosophy statement and learning outcomes are high level statements of what we, as an institution, hold most important. As such they are directly related to the design, deployment, and effectiveness of all programming directed to and consumed by first year students at Owens.

Effective publication of the philosophy statement and learning outcomes, similar to the program of publication of the College’s mission and vision statements, will successfully embed the First-Year Philosophy Statement and Learning Outcomes in the culture of the College. There they will form the base platform of the strong focus on student success championed by the Foundations of Excellence.

### **Work Already in Progress**

The team found that their proposed learning outcomes for first-year students are already exemplified in many existing programs and activities throughout the College, suggesting that the First-Year Philosophy Statement and Learning Outcomes are well-aligned with the College’s larger mission, vision, and goals. The chart that follows relates the team’s proposed learning outcomes with programs, courses, and policies currently implemented by Owens that exemplify those learning outcomes.



## Glossary of Terms/Operational Definitions

**Advising Syllabus:** An advising syllabus is a tool which allows individual advisors or offices to outline the advising relationship and experience for their advisees.

**Career Advising:** Career Advising is dedicated to helping students explore career possibilities, acquire tools needed to secure employment and connect with employers.

**Center for Teaching and Learning Success (CTLS):** The Center for Teaching & Learning Success was established in 2007 as part of the Office of Academic Services, reporting to the Provost's Office. The Center is representative of two critical center components: *student success and faculty excellence*. These two components encompass several departments under the Center's overarching structure.

**E Portfolio:** Electric Portfolio created by students in select Owens courses. This portfolio may include a variety of work completed by students within their coursework such as projects and papers as well as providing a place for students to create and store resumes.

**First-year Experience Course (FYE 121):** Mandatory for Arts and Science majors, this class is recommended for all new students during their first semester at the college. FYE 121 assists students make a successful transition to Owens. Students will develop an understanding of the language, culture, and resources of Owens Community College. Students will also begin to develop skills needed for college success, create an academic plan based on the required curriculum for their major, and examine their reasons and goals for attending college. Part of the title III grant.

**Intrusive Advising:** an action-oriented approach to advising that involves motivating students to seek help when needed. Intrusive advising has been effective in increasing the retention and overall academic performance of a variety of high-risk students.

**IDS Capstone:** This practicum course explores the connection between theory and practice by bringing together student service learning, academic readings and leadership experiences.

**IST 131 Computer Concepts and Applications:** a four credit hour class designed to provide a basic understanding of computer concepts and applications and their use in business settings. Covers word processing, spreadsheets, file organization and databases, presentation graphics, and Internet concepts. Includes essential concepts of computers, software, multimedia, computer files and storage, and computer architecture. Hands-on experience will be provided on networked computers in the Windows environment using the Microsoft Office Suite including Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint.

**Orientation:** A small group session designed for new students to Owens. This program offers an opportunity to learn how to get started and register for classes. The session is approximately 60 minutes and introduces students to the campus and gives a brief tour of important Student Services offices.

**OZONE:** The personal intranet account provided to all Owens students. This free account is used to register for classes, receive final course grades, find campus resources, and it is the campus wide E-mail system used to communicate with the entire Owens community. Students have their own personal user name and password to access this account.

**PDC B.B. Professional Development Committee Blackboard: XXX** To provide opportunities for continuous improvement through professional development that enhance the educational environment for the Owens community

**SOC 220 Multicultural Diversity in the United States:** This course introduces the student to many diverse populations within the United States-Native Americans, Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Euro-Americans. It primarily focuses on the social interaction of these ethnic and racial groups, the concepts of race and social class; and issues related to gender, ability and hate groups. (Social and Behavioral Sciences Elective).

**Source (The):** OCC Learning Center located inside The Source at 1301 Monroe Street in downtown Toledo. On-site academic offerings will provide convenient access to higher education, including opportunities for citizens to connect education and training to employment. It's only minutes from the main campus

**Student Learning assessment Committee (SLAC):** The Student Learning Assessment Committee (SLAC) at Owens Community College is committed to enhancing the integrity of the College's academic programs, student resources, and overall functioning through a comprehensive process for assessing student learning.

**Student Success Mentors (SSM):** Success Mentors are dedicated advisors whose focus is to help at-risk students navigate through college. Student Success Mentors help students identify and develop academic, professional and personal goals. Identify academic and career plans and identify and connect with on and off campus resources. Part of a Title III grant.

**Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders:** Supplemental Instruction provides regularly scheduled, out-of-class, peer-facilitated course review sessions in certain traditionally challenging classes. Led by students who have completed the class successfully, SI models effective study skills, uses group participation rather than lectures, and empowers students to take control of their own learning process. Part of the Title III grant.

### **Costs and Projected Return on Investment**

The cost of implementing the Owens First-Year Philosophy Statement and Learning Outcomes throughout the College is minimal. In fact, a great deal of what the team recommends has little or no cost, including the addition of this information to the College BlackBoard shell, FYE Syllabi, ONews, and New Student Orientation. Marketing implementation will require design and printing costs. Both Gary Corrigan, Director, Marketing & Communications – whose staff will create print and online materials – and Verne Walker, Director, Teaching & Learning Success – whose staff will disseminate the ideas throughout the College – have agreed to implement their portions of this project.

The Team expects that by increasing the focus of the College on first-year students through definition of an excellent first year program (the philosophy statement) and by defining what first year students will take away from their Owens experience (the learning outcomes) will make us better able to reach those goals. In the process of identifying goals and striving to reach them we hope to create better experiences for first-year students and to help them be to more successful. The Team expects that faculty and staff will internalize the First-Year Philosophy Statement and will bring new motivation and ideas to bear on how they work with first-year students. The Team hopes that first-year students will

have a new understanding of the College's expectations of them and for them; that students will be more satisfied with their first year Owens experience; that first year students will be more successful.

### **Measurability of Results**

Measuring the effectiveness of the Owens First-Year Philosophy Statement and Learning Outcomes will be difficult as there are numerous components involved. However, the Team is confident that implementation of such statements, if accepted and embraced by the entire College, will help unify all departments of Owens toward the goal of preparing students to be successful within their first year of college. We believe that students who are successful in their first year of studies will possess the motivation and skills necessary to persist until they reach their academic goals, be they earning a certificate or degree, matriculating to a university, or simply completing a series of courses for personal interest or to meet employment requirements. Related benefits to the College could include increased revenue due to increased first year retention as well as the possibility of increased state funding based upon student retention and graduation rates. In fact, what can be directly measured is the success with which the philosophy statement and learning outcomes are known and valued by faculty and staff members. The team will re-survey faculty and staff following project implementation to evaluate changed response rates from the 2007 Faculty & Staff Survey for these measures (paralleling questions from the 2007 survey):

- has an institutional philosophy for working with new students been communicated?
- does the institution operate from a commonly held philosophy for working with new students?
- do part-time faculty and staff respond differently from full-time faculty and staff on these measures?
- is a formal institutional philosophy for working with new students valuable?

If this survey finds that faculty and staff are both aware of and supportive of the First-Year Philosophy Statement and First Year Learning Outcomes, this team's project will have been successful.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Team recommends that the Owens First-Year Philosophy Statement be adopted and disseminated throughout the College
2. The Team recommends that the Owens Learning Outcomes for First-Year Students be adopted and disseminated throughout the College

- The Team recommends that the Owens Center for Teaching and Learning Success (CTLS) be charged with primary responsibility for implementing – through publication and programming - the First-Year Philosophy Statement and the Learning Outcomes for First-Year Students. The CTLS will collaborate with the Owens Marketing Department and the Student Learning Assessment Committee (SLAC) to communicate the Philosophy Statement and Learning Goals to all College constituencies. The team has already been in contact with Verne Walker from the CTLS and Gary Corrigan, Director of Marketing. Both individuals have pledged to support our recommendations.

PROJECT TIME LINE					
Introduction of Philosophy Statement and Learning Goals to the Owens Community					
	August	September	October	November	December
Center for teaching and learning success to plan campaign					
Marketing to design materials and plan campaign					
Marketing to inform college through various means					

Additional References

Boyer, Ernest L. *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York, Harper & Row, 1987) pp. 210-211.

Astin, Alexander W. "Involvement: The cornerstone of Excellence," *Change*, July/August 1985, pp. 35-39.

