

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
FIRST-YEAR STUDY GROUP**

CONTEXT

The University of South Carolina has a nationally lauded reputation for the first-year experience and does a good job of helping students transition from high school to college. Through a variety of established programs the university diligently works to ensure first-year students are successful academically and personally. But a rapidly changing external environment; changes to the size and profile of the Columbia student body; new major institutional initiatives, priorities, and student needs; and the proliferation of new programs and services for first-year students require us to ensure that the expectations our students have for their first year of college (as well as those expectations we attempt to influence for them) are aligned with the actual experiences the first-year students have once they arrive on campus. In order to enhance our first-year programs, we must ensure we integrate existing programs, eliminate duplication of effort, and introduce new programs to fill any gaps in our service delivery for our students in transition. Important to these efforts will be the consistent messages provided by every unit of the university—an exploration of current themes with future improvements that are more accurate and purposeful will be a necessary element of this review. Additionally, the use of all media, especially the adoption of social media channels, must be an outcome of this study.

CHARGE

The committee will focus on educational and cultural reform at the University of South Carolina to support student success by adapting and using the notion of induction of new students from a series of disparate events and classes to an integrated and intentionally sequenced process that involves pre-enrollment communications from all units, summer orientation, welcome week, and University 101.

This focus will include all relevant resources, communications, and programs from the time a student submits a deposit to the end of the student's first year of college.

The committee will provide recommendations for ways to enhance the integration of these components to a seamless process, clearly articulate the intended outcomes for the whole process as well as for each major program. Additionally, the committee will recommend a plan to assess these outcomes and to strengthen internal and external communications regarding the first-year experience. Also, the committee will develop a list of salient questions and problems that are surfaced during this review.

SUGGESTED STARTING POINTS

If the committee needs to do a site visit to a model institution, or bring in an external expert, funds may be provided.

What are the learning outcomes for the first-year experience? How will we accomplish the stated outcomes for the first year? How will we assess the outcomes for the first-year student experience?

What information, resources, and support do first-year students need; when do they need them; when are they ready to receive them; and who is best suited to deliver the designed experiences? Please include digital and online aspects of service delivery.

The committee should address the calendar issue: should the university change the opening calendar so residence halls open Friday through Sunday and classes start immediately on Monday? Rather than a welcome week to ease students toward academic work, would engaging first-year students and students in transition immediately in academic classes better serve the induction?

What online services and processes should be included to create expectations, align expectations and experiences, and prepare first-year students for the virtues and vices of college?

What systems and processes must be initiated to accommodate late transfer applicants who are enrolled at another institution in the summer, so they can have their transcripts evaluated, advisement can take place, and the student can enroll at Carolina?

What early intervention programs (primarily from the Student Success Center but from other units as well) will enhance first-year students' chances to academically and personally succeed in the first six weeks of the first semester? Additionally, what interventions, challenges, or support systems are needed in the spring semester to assist students who do not make academic progress in the fall or who are in danger of academic failure and/or the loss of their scholarships?

Who are our first-year students? What are their needs?

What are our university's priorities for first-year students and students in transition? What current services and programs are in place, and what do we know about the role they play in our first-year students' success?

How do existing services and programs compare with best educational practices? Conduct an inventory of "touches." Are there gaps in the services and programs provided to meet our first-year students' needs?

Map out current efforts, and match current efforts with student/institutional needs—that is, conduct a gap analysis identifying the challenges and opportunities that exist for each current effort.

What are the barriers to student success and acclimation? What are the committee's recommendations for future research and for future studies/reviews? What is the time frame for changes in the students' first-year experiences recommended by the committee?

What recommendations does the committee have regarding the existing Student Government Pillars for Carolina program?

What other advice and consultation does the committee have for the institution?