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Foundations of Excellence - Final Report

McHenry County College

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The Foundations of Excellence® Report Card

This report card represents the final step in the Foundations of Excellence process. It is the culmination of a nine- to twelve-month effort of analysis and planning focused on the first year. This report card is based on an aspirational model of the first year produced in 2003 by the Policy Center on the First Year of College and its research partners in collaboration with 219 four-year colleges and universities. That model, consisting of nine Foundational Dimensions,® identifies characteristics of excellence in the first year. Because the Dimensions focus on institutional structures, policies, and processes (the decisions institutions make about organizing and delivering the first college year), the model is useful in confirming effective practice and/or providing direction for improvement efforts.

The core work of the project was conducted by your institution's Foundations of Excellence Task Force with assistance from the Policy Center on the First Year of College and Educational Benchmarking, Inc. By using a series of performance indicators and a variety of data sources, the Task Force carefully reviewed the campus efforts that align with each Dimension. These reviews resulted in a collective judgment about your institution's level of achievement on each of the performance indicators.

The final step in the process was to produce single-grade indicators of the institution's achievement of each Dimension. Because these grades are based on judgments made by your campus task force, they are not intended to be used in comparison to any other institution or in a ranking system. The Foundations Report Card can be used most effectively as an indicator of relative grades within your institution. The grades reflect the best collective judgment of the task force and are supported by the evidence collected during the project. Grades will not be made public by the Policy Center in any manner that identifies individual institutions.

Foundational Dimensions	Grade
Foundations Institutions intentionally cultivate learning environments for new students that emerge from a philosophy of two-year colleges as gateways to higher education. The philosophy is explicit and easily understood. It is consistent with the institutional mission, reflects a consensus of internal and external constituencies, and is widely disseminated. The philosophy is also the basis for organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, and resource allocation to support the new student experience. (Philosophy)	D-
Foundations Institutions provide a comprehensive, coordinated, and flexible approach to the new student experience through effective organizational structures and policies. These structures and policies guide and align all aspects of the new student experience. Through effective partnerships, critical stakeholders such as instructional, administrative, and student services units provide a coherent experience for new students that is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements. (Organization)	B-
Foundations Institutions deliver curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage new students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the institutional mission, students' academic and career goals, and workplace expectations. Both in and out of the classroom, these learning experiences promote critical thinking, ethical decision making, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge. (Learning)	C+
Foundations Institutions make new students a high priority for faculty and staff. A culture of responsibility for the experiences of new students characterizes these institutions. This culture is realized through high-quality instruction, services, and support as well as substantial interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom. Campus leaders nurture this culture and support it by appropriate institutional recognition and rewards. (Campus Culture)	C-
Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions beginning with outreach and recruitment and continuing throughout the period of enrollment. They communicate clear curricular/co-curricular expectations and possibilities, and they provide appropriate preparation and support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. These institutions create and maintain communication with	C

secondary and other postsecondary institutions, families, employers, community agencies, and other sources of support for students. (Transitions)

Foundations Institutions serve all new students according to their varied needs. These institutions anticipate, identify, and address the needs of traditional and non-traditional students in response to their individual abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences. These efforts are subject to assessment and adjustment as needed. Institutions also ensure campus environments that are inclusive and safe for all students. (All Students)

B-

Foundations Institutions ensure that new students experience ongoing exploration of diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and participation in pluralistic communities. Institutions cultivate an open and civil community in which students interact with people from varied backgrounds and cultures. These institutions guide students to reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others. (Diversity)

B-

Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education and those unique to two-year institutions, both for the individual and society. These roles and purposes include learning for personal growth, career enhancement, workplace preparation and retraining, transfer for additional education, engaged citizenship, and serving the public good. Institutions encourage new students to examine their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college. Students are exposed to the value of both a general education and focused study in an academic or career field. (Roles and Purposes)

C+

Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to effect improvement. Assessment provides feedback to new students to guide their learning, to faculty to guide their teaching, and to the institution to guide planning, resource allocation, decision making, and improvement of programs and policies. As a way to facilitate improvement, these institutions are knowledgeable about current practices at other institutions as well as relevant research and scholarship. (Improvement)

C-

Recommended Action Items:

- Philosophy Statement (*High priority*)

In the absence of a campus-wide philosophy statement, it is the recommendation of this task force that a general philosophy statement be developed for use by all programs and services that impact the new student population at McHenry County College.

- Early Warning Alert/System (*High priority*)

Based on the findings of several dimension committees, it is the recommendation of this Task Force that MCC implement an Early Warning Alert System (academic performance, attendance, personal matters, etc.) to provide our new students with the opportunities and available resources at the earliest indication of their need for the student. If it is our mission to serve our students, then this is a high priority item. MCC should investigate what other institutions are doing for an "Early Warning Alert System", study the effectiveness of these initiatives, and then provide appropriate recommendations.

- Hiring Process (*High priority*)

A standard question addressing "New Students" should be included in the hiring process of new instructors.

- Academic Progress Policy (*High priority*)

Our current Academic Progress Policy of 24 credit hours, as stated in the college catalog is: "If you have less than a 2.0 cumulative grade point average after 24 credit hours completed, you'll be required to meet with a counselor." This policy should be re-evaluated. 24 credit hours indicates that most students have already completed two semesters.

- Diversity & Curriculum Integration (*High priority*)

Provide opportunities for a dialogue among faculty to exchange ideas for including diversity in course curriculum.

- Review of General Education Goals (*High priority*)

Narrow the list of General Education goals to encourage curriculum mapping across campus.

- Central Location for All Data (*High priority*)

Data relevant to first year students (MCC 101 data etc.) should be in a location where everyone dealing with first year students can easily access it (such as the inside mcc website).

- Time Management (*High priority*)

Encourage faculty to include suggested study time requirements in syllabi and on schedules. Ideally, out-of-class time requirements for each class would be in a database, and the total time out of class would end up on the class schedule mailed to student. This could help students balance work and school schedules.

- Attendance (*High priority*)

Explore the college's current attendance record keeping policies, and possibilities to expand record keeping.

- Student Feedback (*High priority*)

Review data-driven instruments that gauge student perceptions regarding how MCC identifies and addresses their academic, social/personal, safety needs. This could be the basis for systematically identifying needs, which currently seems fractured and reactive (TrakDat, CCSSE, Exit Survey, Faculty Evaluation, and Program Review).

- Physical Environment (*High priority*)

Create welcoming physical environments throughout campus. Evaluate where students study and congregate and provide comfortable seating outside of classrooms and other areas across campus.

- Alternative Communication Tools (*High priority*)

Findings indicate that students will not use e-mail and prefer other tools such as an MCC - My Space.

- Emphasis on engaging assignments through faculty driven meetings (*High priority*)
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 - o Continued emphasis is needed for faculty to design assignments that engage students (e.g. the NEA Higher Education Advocate suggests requiring a "product" as the result of reading assignment).
 - o Successful instructional methods used to increase student engagement should continue to be shared by faculty members during fall and spring workshops and/or in sessions offered by Professional Development.
 - o In order to increase student engagement, faculty members need to be encouraged to continuously reinforce the relevancy of courses. Sessions should be held to share strategies to emphasize the link between courses and real life.

