Introducing the Freshman Program (FP) Steering Committee

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The Freshman Program Steering Committee is a group of dedicated individuals and varied stakeholders who share a commitment to helping undergraduate students at AUC make the transition to the university level coursework and co-curricular activities successfully. The Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies (ODUS), the Dean of Students, the SSE Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and the Provost’s Office; faculty from each school, as well as from the departments of Rhetoric and Composition (RHET) and English Language Instruction (ELI), the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT), the Library, Scientific Thinking, and Philosophic Thinking; staff from the Freshman Year Experience (FYE), the Academic Advising Center, the Office of Student Services (OSS), and Career Advising and Placement Services (CAPS); and students. This broad range of stakeholders serves as an advisory body to the deans and the AUC administration, and this helps to ensure a unified approach to enhancing the freshman experience through regular communication.

This advisory committee grew out of a Task Force created by the late Provost Medhat Haroun in 2011 with a mandate to create a plan to enhance the critical thinking and communication skills of first year students to better prepare them for work in their majors. The Task Force defined the freshman program as a new student’s first three to four semesters with a full course load, during which students take foundational core courses; created a Mission Statement; and identified core values, strategic goals, and learning outcomes for students. Several curricular changes were proposed by the Task Force and accepted by the Senate in spring 2013, including redesigned tandem freshman seminar and freshman writing theme-based courses, which were designed spring and summer 2013 and implemented in fall 2013. In addition, the former Science and Humanities/Social Sciences course options were re-branded as Pathways 1 (Scientific Encounters) and Pathways 2 (Cultural Explorations) courses to make them more meaningful for students. In addition, new Pathways 1 and Pathways 2 course development for the Freshman Program that incorporated the new learning outcomes was encouraged. These achievements of the Task Force became the nucleus of the new Freshman Program, and the outcomes are presented on the Freshman Program web page. When the task force ended its work, the FP Steering Committee was formed to oversee the development of the new academic program and the development of other co-curricular activities that had been suggested but not yet developed or implemented.

The large steering committee carries out its tasks through seven subcommittees which are led by steering committee members and also include other stakeholders, principally faculty and students who are involved in each area but not on the FP steering committee. These subcommittees and their chairs include the following:

- a. New Course Design and Faculty Orientation (Hoda Mostafa, CLT)
- b. Common Reader Program (Doris Jones, RHET)
- c. Assessment (Juleen Keevy, RHET)
- d. Student Life (Hoda Grant, ODUS and Alexandria Gazis, OSS)
- e. Students with Disabilities (Ali Mohktar, OSS)
- f. Undergraduate Research (Alessandro Topas, PHIL)
- g. Social Responsibility (Pandeli Glavanis, ODUS)
Previous editions of the *ODUS Newsletter* have included news about important new FP co-curricular initiatives that have been implemented this academic year: the new Common Reader Program led by Dr. Doris Jones and the Peer Advisory Leaders (PAL) led by student Sherihan Megahed with the support of Dr. Hoda Grant. These programs are continuing to grow and develop in their second semester this spring, and reflection and discussion have led to new iterations for next year being planned.

In this short article introducing the FP Steering Committee I would like to highlight the recent work of another subcommittee, for New Course Development and Faculty Orientation. The focus of recent meetings has been how to best support faculty developing and piloting new freshman-level courses. This subcommittee will review new Pathways 1 and Pathways 2 courses for the Core Curriculum and provide feedback to new course developers.

To help to guide faculty in developing their new courses, a new Google site with guidelines for developing new courses has been created by migrating and updating a wiki-site created by a Task Force subcommittee. This site now contains a checklist for new course developers, with a general timeline and advice about communication with the Academic Advising Center to promote new courses. The Google site is available to everyone in the AUC community and is entitled [A Guide to Designing Freshman Program Courses.](#)

In addition, there will be two faculty orientation sessions offered to new course developers, one at the ALA Symposium on April 21 and one on Thursday, April 23 from 1-2 pm in Room # 1021 on the first floor of the Library. Specific details about the presentations and the presenters will be announced in mid-April.

More accomplishments of the Freshman Program Steering Committee will be featured in upcoming ODUS newsletters. AUC is indeed fortunate to have such a passionate and dedicated group of individuals so thoroughly committed to enhancing the Freshman Program.