

First Year Program

As the Academic Affairs Committee of the Student Government Association, our discussions continually revolve around what students attending Youngstown State University need pertaining to academics. We have identified some challenges that not only involve the academic needs of the students but also their personal development and social needs. Though these challenges affect students throughout their college career, they are most salient during students' first year at the university. Attempting to address all of these issues is ambitious; however, our research has led us to believe that it may be possible through the development of a comprehensive First Year Program.

The following challenges have been identified:

- Students lack knowledge of campus resources/events
- Commuters have trouble becoming involved on campus
- There is little sense of a university-wide community on campus
- Students lack pride in the university.
- Students need to develop certain skills earlier in their college career, i.e. responsibility, analytical skills, values, etc.

A First Year Program would be more effective than first year services SGA has previously discussed, such as a seminar, because of it can be tailored to the specific needs of our students. The components of a First Year Program at YSU may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Cohorts that would serve as social networks
- Introductory social and informational weekend for new students, which would elaborate on the SOAR program and other orientation services
- Integration of the First Year Program initiatives into the General Education Curriculum
- Encourage students' participation in extracurricular seminars, programs, and activities
- Support a common reading program

These components were compiled by the Academic Affairs Committee after reviewing models of First Year Programs of other universities. Attached are details of the programs of the three universities that were the focus of discussions.

After discussing this program in more depth with your council, we would appreciate your input concerning the program and suggestions for future action and research.

Recent Graduate Examinations

In order to better assess the programs offered at YSU, we propose administering comprehensive examinations to recent graduates. Such examinations would be used for assessment purposes only, and not to negatively affect students (e.g., students would not be delayed in their graduation for poor performance). The content of the examinations would be agreed upon by each department for their various programs/majors, and should aim to represent the basic knowledge of the discipline.

Student Research Funding Committee

The Student Government Association has been debating the appropriateness of awarding monies from its student organizations budget to fund student research/projects and trips to conferences to present such research. We want our funds to positively impact as many students as possible, and funding research generally benefits only those few who participate. We recognize, however, the value of undergraduate research and want to ensure that students have the opportunity to request financial support for their projects.

To provide financial resources for supporting student research, we are investigating the creation of a university fund specifically reserved for such purposes. We would like to discuss the appropriateness of such a fund as well as some aspects of its administration.

Revised USA Today Readership Program

During our former meeting, there was a general consensus that the USA Today Readership Program, as it was, did not warrant renewal, and this was reaffirmed at a subsequent SGA meeting. In accordance with some suggestions made at our past meeting, we propose a modified program that encourages student readership while also encouraging critical thinking about the news content and more appropriately allocating program costs.

The modified program would provide newspapers to students in our larger General Education courses, such as Writing I/II or Communications 1545. The content of the papers could then be used as material for essays or speeches so that students are thinking critically about it. As nearly every student takes these courses during their tenure at YSU, habits of readership would be promoted more generally than to only those 300 who received papers on a given day. Another benefit of this approach is that the costs of the papers can be assessed directly to the students who are incurring them.

In our meetings with USA Today representatives, we have been assured that the logistics of such a program can be accommodated. We would have the flexibility to, for instance, have papers delivered only once or twice a week, so that students do not pay for papers they would have to receive a day or two late. The papers can also be bundled and labeled for each professor and course section before they are delivered.