

FIRST-YEAR ISLANDERS (FYI)
Executive Summary
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

The *First-Year Islanders* plan enhances and improves the academic experience of students attending their first year at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi. By implementing this plan, TAMUCC reinvests itself in its first-year experience and pursues its mission of excellence, engagement, expansion, and effectiveness, particularly in relation to undergraduate teaching and learning.

Vision Statement

The Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi *First-Year Islanders* (FYI) plan provides tailored academic challenge and centralized information and support for *First-Year Islanders*.

Mission Statement

Through its *First-Year Islanders* (FYI) plan, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi will transform the academic experience of its first-year students by supporting the underprepared to prepare, encouraging the prepared to advance, and inspiring the advanced to excel.

The *First-Year Islanders* plan will improve the learning experience of all first-year students by:

- Transitioning first-year students to higher education learning through the WAVE bridge experience;
- Providing faculty development focused on first-year students; and
- Invigorating the content and teaching methods of first-year courses.

The WAVE Bridge Experience

Several factors interfere with students' ability to start the semester on solid footing, thus hindering student learning. Faculty and staff have identified specific concerns: (1) financial aid, (2) work, (3) books, (4) technology, (5) housing, (6) appropriate classes, (7) expectations of college behavior, homework, readings, and attendance, (8) tutoring, SI, and mentoring, and (9) campus organizations, support services, and disability services. TAMUCC's WAVE Bridge Experience will address these concerns. It will be piloted with students who do not meet normal admission requirements; however, we hope over time to expand these events to include all first-year students.

At orientation, students who do not meet normal admission requirements and their families will meet with a retention specialist from CASA (the Center for Academic Student Achievement) to sign an ASAP (Academic Student Achievement Plan). The ASAP will mandate inclusion in the WAVE Bridge Experience and may also mandate participation in specific support programs, such as mentoring, tutoring, and SI. The WAVE Bridge Experience will be held Sun.-Tues. the week classes start and include: a welcome BBQ for families; a session with CASA; a faculty presentation regarding academic expectations; a technology "check up;" the Passport to the Island/Community Expo; a Healthy/Safe Living presentation; a peer-led discussion of personal responsibility, money management and work; several social/fun activities to build community (dive-in movie, crazy Olympics); and the FYI Convocation.

FYI Faculty Development

First-Year Islanders struggle in many of the required core and developmental education courses, but average first-term GPAs are particularly low in Biology 1406/1407, History 1301/1302, and Political Science 2305/2306, and in the Algebra sequence (Math 0398/0399/1314). At the same time, advanced students do not encounter sufficient challenge in their first-year courses. In response, faculty in the disciplines argued for the formation of collaborative faculty "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The goal of these communities is to improve the teaching and learning in these courses by making a member of each discipline responsible for researching current best practices in teaching first-

year students, sharing that research with members of his/her discipline, and finding ways to encourage discussion and incorporation of those practices into these barrier courses. A faculty member who teaches the courses being discussed will lead each community of practice. The FYI Director will facilitate assessment while the FYI Program Coordinator will assist with resource allocation. Changes to content and teaching methods will be gradually introduced and assessed.

In addition to the disciplinary “communities of practice,” the FYI Director will host several events a year focused on how first-year students learn. These will involve both on-campus expertise as well as off-campus expertise, and will be open to all faculty, but especially to those teaching first-year students.

Invigoration of Content & Teaching Methods

Supported and guided in part by the communities of practice and in part by other campus assessments, barrier courses and developmental courses in math will be revised to better meet the needs of all *First-Year Islanders*. Placement measures and diagnostics will be assessed and revised. New methods of delivery, newly “specialized” versions of courses, and other innovations will be piloted to *First-Year Islanders*. Further innovations will be determined as communities of practice work together. The FYI Director, the communities of practice leaders, and the CASA Director will facilitate these redesigns and assessment.

FYI Steering Committee

Susan Wolff Murphy (Chair)

College of Liberal Arts

Mark Hartlaub
Carlos Huerta
Peter Moore

College of Science & Technology

Blair Sterba-Boatwright
David Grise

Student Representatives

Courtney Lee
Sarah Lumpkins

College of Business

Kent Byus
Adolfo Benavides

College of Education

Frank Lucido

College of Nursing

Mary Bantell
Yolanda Keys

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Chris Shupala
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David Billeaux, AVPAA
Robert Nelsen, AVPAA
Ann Degaish, Dean of Students
Margaret Dechant, VP Enrollment Management
Jim Needham, Dean, Community Outreach
Gerardo Moreno, Director, CASA
Bridgette Hardin, Assoc. Dir., Office for Planning & Institutional Effectiveness