

Foundations of Excellence in the First Year of College

Final Report of the Task Force

Middle Tennessee State University

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Who (by title) was on the task force?

Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost, Enrollment Management, Chair
Assistant to the Provost and Director, First-year seminar
Professor, Biology
Professor, Educational Leadership
Professor, Learning Strategies, Developmental Studies
Associate Professor, Math, Developmental Studies
Assistant Professor, English
Associate Vice President, Academic Support Services
Associate Dean of Student Life and Director, Student Affairs Research
Director, Academic Support Center
Director, Housing and Residential Life
Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Research
Director of Student Development/Orientation
Academic Advisor, Academic Support Center

How often did you meet?

The Task Force got a very late start, as the project was put on hold until the arrival of our new Executive Vice President and Provost, who joined MTSU in March. Therefore, meetings of the task force began on April 25, and were held weekly until the final meeting on June 11.

How did you organize your work (e.g., committee of the whole, subcommittees)?

The Task Force functioned as a committee of the whole. John Gardner joined the group via conference call in the first meeting, to provide an outline of the Hallmarks Project and to answer questions of the group. As that meeting concluded, a sub-group of members volunteered to coordinate, by the next meeting, an initial list of first-year related projects and services available at MTSU. Though not required as a part of the Hallmark Project, the group felt that it would be helpful to provide the list to remind all task force members of existing efforts already in place on campus.

In the remaining meetings, the task force tackled each of the Hallmarks, one at a time. Discussions began with a review of the Hallmark itself, with members offering thoughts and suggestions regarding pieces of the statement that were unclear, confusing, or that could be worded more clearly. “Suggested areas of review” and “sources and forms of evidence were then considered.” The two members charged with drafting the final report took notes. Following each meeting, a draft of the Hallmark under discussion was forwarded to task force members for further review and comment.

Two particular areas generated a great deal of debate. In terms of the specific Hallmarks, the “suggested areas for review” for Hallmark 2 were the most controversial. As you know, Hallmark 2 focuses on the importance of student engagement in educationally productive activities both in and outside of the classroom college. Yet the “suggested areas for review” focused solely on participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement. This was problematic for our group from two perspectives. There was vigorous discussion as to whether or not the NSSE was the only appropriate assessment tool to measure student engagement, and whether we supported a requirement that each Hallmark campus participate in the NSSE. Once

the task force had arrived at general agreement that a nationally normed study of engagement would provide valuable information for Hallmark campuses, we worried that the single focus on the NSSE would overlook other important areas for review for the campus. Therefore, our revisions of this Hallmark focused on identifying campus programs, services, and activities that would contribute to the outcome of student engagement. Many of these were derived from the article “Triumph or Tragedy: Comparing student engagement levels of member of greek-letter organizations and other students.”¹ From there, it seemed to make sense that the assessment of our success in promoting actual student engagement would become one of the several assessments outlined as a part of Hallmark 6.

The second area of great debate was an operational issue rather than a point connected to the actual Hallmarks. Our group had great difficulty in responding to requested items while not making responses specific to our own campus. In particular, we struggled in providing “sources and forms of evidence.” We were unclear as to what were to be considered “sources and forms,” and our own interpretation seemed to contradict the clear instruction that we were not to offer input that was specific to our own campus. We contacted our liaison twice for clarification, and were told that while “Suggested areas for review” could be considered a question of “where,” “Sources and forms of evidence were to be considered as the “what” we might find when we looked at the various suggested areas for review. Our debate centered on whether we were being asked to provide a list of reports, statements, documents, etc., that might be found in the suggested review area, or whether we were to provide statements about programs and services of that review area that seem to illustrate the goals of the Hallmark.

Interestingly, the final two Hallmarks generated the least discussion among task force members. When this was brought to the attention of the group, the response was that these two Hallmarks were most difficult to comment on because they are the least developed areas on our own campus. While they are goals for MTSU, neither a comprehensive administrative structure nor a coordinated assessment approach for the first year is currently in place. However, there was consensus among task force members that the goal of having a comprehensive administrative structure in place should be closely related to the goals of having a clear philosophy to guide the first-year experience. Hence, our group recommended moving the former Hallmark 5 to the position of Hallmark 2.

As we concluded the work of the task force, the prevailing feeling among members seemed to be that our findings clearly illustrated the need for MTSU to create a single administrative unit charged with coordinating first-year services and programs. While a number of very effective programs were identified on our campus, it was clear that funding, administration, and assessment were scattered among multiple departments and divisions. A coherent plan for coordination of services is needed; it is already apparent that support for such an arrangement will come from the President. The next step will be to identify the essential components of such a structure and to articulate a plan for reorganization.

¹ Hayek, J.C., Carini, R.M., O’Day, P.T., & Kuh, G. D. (2002). Triumph or tragedy: Comparing student engagement levels of members of greek-letter organizations and other students. Journal of College Student Development, 43(5), 643-663.

A brief summary (~ two pages) describing whether and how this project benefited your campus's understanding of the first year and how it might influence further work on your campus.

The chance to participate in the Hallmarks Project came at a particularly appropriate time for the MTSU campus, following a full year of discussion regarding how we might improve our academic support services for undergraduate students. At the direction of President Sidney McPhee, and under the guidance of the interim Executive Vice President and Provost, a series of meetings involving academic deans, academic advisors, directors of support programs and other staff had been undertaken during the 2002-03 academic year. The initial result of those discussions was the creation of a short-term plan for improving academic advisement, with a longer-term strategic goal of establishing a new unit to coordinate services for all entering students.

Our participation in the Hallmarks Project coincided with the arrival of our new Executive Vice President and Provost, providing us with an avenue to effectively review and recap issues related to the President's vision for creating a strategic direction for coordinated academic support services for new students. The establishment of the Hallmarks Task Force brought together many of the faculty and staff most likely both to develop and to be impacted by the university's transition to this new way of providing services. The process of reviewing the Hallmarks and creating feedback regarding areas of review and forms of evidence provided task force members with an opportunity for on-going dialogue. In particular, task force members were able to engage in more intense discussions about the priorities of our specific institution; our strengths, opportunities and deficits; and potential future directions for strategic improvement.

By using the Hallmarks as the foundation, the task force was able to frame discussions much more broadly than we might have without such guidelines. In addition to reviewing existing and needed programs and services, we were encouraged to look at issues of institutional philosophy and mission, at funding and the implications of the budgeting process, and at existing and potential structures for better coordinating services. Our discussions regarding assessment were particularly fruitful for our campus, providing many members of the task force their first glimpses into both the strengths and weaknesses of our current assessment processes. The group also felt as though the process helped provide additional support for the movement toward creation of a common coordinating structure for the first year. The absence of such a structure and the resulting lack of coordination of campus efforts became glaringly obvious through the work of the task force.

Overall, participation in the Hallmarks Project has served both to continue the existing campus dialogue and to provide impetus for additional forward movement. The rest of the group echoed this comment from a faculty member serving on the task force:

I particularly like having the opportunity to think about how our organization works to meet the needs of first year students, to see how and where activities and programs interconnect (or don't), and to learn about activities and programs of which I was unaware. While I am appreciative of being included in this project and have gained from

the experience, I'm sorry that more faculty aren't aware of all the services, activities, and programs this institution has to offer.

The report of the Hallmarks Task Force and the revised Foundations of Excellence produced by the Policy Center will be shared with the Executive Vice President and Provost and with the President. The revised Hallmarks will serve both as a blueprint for development and as a report card for achievement as we strive for excellence in all aspects of the first-year experience at MTSU. We anticipate that this aspirational model of excellence will shape the final strategic plan for academic advising and for establishing an enrollment unit for first-year students that will be submitted to the President during the 2003-04 academic year.

Ultimately, it is the hope of this task force that participation in this project will result in demonstrable, measurable improvement in the learning, success, and retention of first-year students at Middle Tennessee State University.

Hallmark 1

Basic Hallmark: *Approaches the first year in ways that are intentional, explicit, and based on a clear philosophy/rationale for student's first year. The overall institutional philosophy, as it relates to first-year students, is explicit, consistent with the broader institutional mission, clear and easily understood, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies.*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: Approaches the first-year in ways that are intentional, explicit, and consistent with the broader institutional mission. First-year programs, expectations and policies are based on a clear philosophy/rationale that is easily understood and reflects an appropriate consensus of campus constituencies.
2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:
 - a. Institutional mission and visions statements; *planning documents, self-study, and reaccreditation documents*
 - b. *Evidence of budgetary support for first-year programs*
 - c. Curriculum (structures; interdisciplinary connections; articulated first-year curricular plan; *general education requirements*)
 - d. Clear specification of the institution's expectations – both academic and otherwise – for its students. *Clear plan for communicating those expectations to students*
 - e. Comprehensive orientation program with significant involvement of academic affairs
 - f. *Admissions policies, requirements, and procedures, communication with prospective and newly accepted students*
 - g. Informational materials, (e.g., viewbooks, websites, ads, *student handbook*)
 - h. Recruiting strategies
 - i. Course staffing assignments (e.g., who teaches first-year students? *Who teaches first-year seminar courses?*)
 - j. Class size policies (e.g., any limits on class size, or on how many *high enrollment* courses first-year students may take, *efforts to minimize potential alienation and isolation in high enrollment classes through learning communities or supplemental instruction*)
 - k. Residence hall policies (e.g., first-year student hall; require living on-campus in first year)
 - l. *Clear coordination of first-year programs, services, budget and staff*
 - m. *Advising policies and processes (e.g., mandatory advising for first-year students; early assignment of advisor)*
 - n. *Retention statistics regularly monitored and assessed; campus demographics used to shape appropriate retention and performance goals for first-year students*
3. Sources and forms of evidence:
 - a. A specific statement of philosophy and goals for the first-year has been widely distributed and well supported by all areas of campus. University catalogue, website, promotional materials, academic or other master plans, reaccreditation documents and Institutional Effectiveness plans contain clear and coherent messages regarding expectations and goals of the first-year experience.

- b. Departmental budgets for orientation, Welcome Week, academic advising, first-year seminar and other first-year programs and services are adequately funded with permanent dollars.
- c. Board of Regents General Education requirements contain a clear plan for first-year courses; developmental/remedial studies structure, policies and curriculum logically connect to overall first-year requirements; course clustering/learning community programs provide interdisciplinary connections for first year students; first-year requirements for specific majors logically connect to the overall first-year philosophy.
- d. Expectations for becoming a part of the university academic community are explicitly communicated to students through such matriculation programs as new student convocation programs, summer reading programs for first-year students, welcome week activities that focus on both academic and social needs. New students receive e-mail addresses prior to arrival on campus and are encouraged to begin using the university computing system.
- e. Orientation and/or pre-matriculation advising policies and requirements are clear and designed to support university expectations for first-year students. Deans and faculty are active throughout the orientation program. First-year seminar courses are required for all first-year students or for specific populations.
- f. Admissions deadlines, admission requirements, and special admission procedures reflect the articulated philosophy and goals of the first-year experience.
- g. Information materials sent by Admissions and by Orientation highlight university expectations and the programs and services available to support first-year students.
- h. Special recruitment plans and processes are consistent with the first-year philosophy of the institution (e.g., recruitment of National Merit Scholars, honors recruitment, impact of state lottery scholarships.)
- i. First-year students have access to classes taught by full professors during their initial semesters. New faculty training programs within each college provide information about effective academic advising and teaching during the first-year. A comprehensive and continuing training program prepares faculty to teach the first-year seminar course.
- j. Class sizes are limited for first-year seminars, Developmental Studies, and Honors courses. Linked course programs limit course size and promote development of learning communities. Curriculum review committees review first-year course proposals for appropriate size limits. Science laboratory courses are restricted in size.
- k. Freshmen are encouraged/required to live in FYE Halls and/or other specific living-learning communities for first-year students.
- l. Centralized academic support services coordinate essential first-year services, including the first-year seminar, academic advising, career advising, living-learning programs, learning community programs, orientation and transition services and parents programs.
- m. Academic advising is required prior to course registration. Students are introduced to their permanent advisors during summer orientation programs. Student handbooks and advising material are provided to all first-year students.

- n. Retention goals are articulated in university planning documents, performance funding documents, and institutional effectiveness plans. Annual retention and performance reports are conducted and regularly reported for use in strategic planning, goal setting processes, and for improvement of first-year programs.

Hallmark 2 (formerly Hallmark 5)

Basic Hallmark: *Has organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, coordinated approach to the first year. These structures and policies provide oversight and coordination of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized through partnerships among academic, student affairs, and other administrative units.*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: **Has organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, coordinated approach to the first year.** These structures and policies provide oversight and coordination of all first-year efforts. A coherent first-year experience is realized through partnerships among academic, student affairs, and other administrative units.

2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:

- a. Specific organizational and budgetary unit(s) devoted to the first-year
- b. Staffing assignments specific to first year (e.g., leadership and related; specific, first-year related job descriptions; focused recruiting and preparation for working with diverse students)
- c. Budget (e.g., specific allocation to first year; hard money (vs. soft or one-time) support)
- d. Faculty and staff reward systems cognizant of first-year activities
- e. Faculty development programs
- f. Formal interconnections among units within and across vice-presidential areas
- g. Communications systems (both w/in and outside, e.g., w/families)
- h. Governance mechanisms (e.g., faculty senate oversight committee on first year)
- i. Planning processes and structures (first year *is considered integral to* program planning and development)
- j. Annual faculty and staff performance reviews take specific account of first-year related activities

3. Sources and forms of evidence:

- a. Centralized academic support services coordinate essential first-year services, including the first-year seminar, academic advising, career advising, living-learning programs, learning community programs, orientation and transition services and parents programs. An adequate budget funded with permanent dollars supports the coordinating unit.
- b. A comprehensive training program prepares faculty to teach the first-year seminar course. Staffs working with first-year students (e.g., residence hall staff) receive specific training. First-year programs are staffed with the needs of that population in mind (e.g., addition of tutors and academic advisors in first-year residence halls).
- c. Departmental budgets for orientation, Welcome Week, academic advising, First-year seminar program and other first-year programs and services are adequately funded with permanent dollars.
- d. Teaching, academic advising, and/or working with first-year students are considered favorably in promotion, tenure, and merit increase processes.

- e. Comprehensive faculty training programs are in place to promote quality instruction and academic advising by faculty.
- f. Appropriate staff attends planning and other departmental meetings, regardless of formal reporting lines (e.g., the director of the first-year unit attends staff meetings of both the Provost and the Vice President for Student Affairs). Training programs include faculty and staff from across various reporting units.
- g. University catalogue, website, and other promotional materials contain clear and coherent messages regarding expectations and goals of the first-year experience. Parents Association and/or other family involvement groups disseminate information about first-year transitions and important university milestones.
- h. Annual reports to governing boards include information regarding first-year success rates, programs, and services. Faculty Senate and other committee structures include involvement in development and oversight of first-year issues.
- i. First-year coordinating staff is included in appropriate strategic planning and development committees. Student success in the first-year is a regularly reported item for annual reports, institutional effectiveness plans, etc.
- j. Performance review process and forms include appropriate reference to involvement in programs and services for first-year students.

Hallmark 3 (formerly Hallmark 2)

Basic Hallmark: *Seeks to engage students in the collegiate experience both in and out of class. Student engagement represents the extent to which students take part in educationally productive activities that are linked to desired outcomes of college. Student engagement is not only a means to student learning and success, it is also a worthy end in itself in that it promotes intellectual curiosity and excitement, as well as acquisition of various habits of mind that are the foundation for critical thinking, lifelong learning, and civic involvement. On Hallmarks campuses, student engagement is a clear and explicit goal both for first-year instruction across the disciplines and for the nature and content of out-of-class learning opportunities.*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: Seeks to engage students in the collegiate experience meaningfully both in and out of class. Engagement represents the extent to which students take part in educationally productive activities that are linked to desired outcomes of the college experience. Student engagement is a means to student learning and success, promotes intellectual curiosity and excitement, and encourages habits of mind that are the foundation for critical thinking, lifelong learning, and civic involvement. On Hallmark campuses, meaningful student engagement is a clear and explicit goal both for first-year instruction across the disciplines and for the nature and content of out-of-class learning opportunities. Level of student engagement is regularly assessed, data is shared with appropriate campus constituencies, and a clear plan for making use of the data is regularly implemented.
2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:
 - a. First-year curriculum (e.g., number of assigned texts, written papers, out-of-class assignments, and projects)
 - b. Emphasis on active and collaborative learning in coursework and in out-of-class activities (e.g., service learning projects, group project assignments, out-of-class discussions about academic topics)
 - c. Meaningful faculty/student interaction
 - d. Use of academic and other support services (e.g., academic advisors, tutoring, career advising, counseling)
 - e. Co-curricular activities
 - f. Proportion of first-year students residing on campus, working on-campus jobs, taking full-time versus part-time course loads, participating in co-curricular activities
3. Sources and forms of evidence:
 - a. First-year courses receive careful review by curriculum committees to insure that they require an appropriate number of assigned texts, written papers, out-of-class assignments, and projects.
 - b. First-year courses expose new students to active learning options including service-learning projects, group project assignments, and class presentations. Co-curricular activities encourage discussions about academic topics through lecture series, symposia, and other out-of-class opportunities. First-year seminar curriculum includes involvement in appropriate out-of-class activities.

- c. Faculty serve as advisors for student organizations and activities involving first year students, including Phi Eta Sigma national first-year honorary, debate teams, Model UN programs, etc. Faculty, staff, and administrators regularly attend campus events. Faculty maintain regular office hours and encourage students to make out-of-class contact. Living-learning centers encourage faculty participation in residence hall life.
- d. First-year students regularly access appropriate academic and other support services. Developmental advising strategies include intrusive outreach efforts by academic advisors. Library, computer lab, and other support services maintain hours that meet the needs of first-year students. First-year seminar classes introduce students to support offices.
- e. First-year students are engaged in meaningful co-curricular activities, including service projects, student government, academically related activities, student organizations, and campus traditions.
- f. When appropriate, campus policies and expectations encourage first-year students to become fully engaged in their university experience by supporting living on-campus, working on-campus jobs, assuming full-time course loads. Policy exceptions permit and encourage other forms of engagement for those students with special circumstances and needs. Specific programs support engagement of such special populations as distance learners, adult learners, students with disabilities, and students with children.

Hallmark 4 (formerly Hallmark 3)

Basic Hallmark: ***Ensures that all first-year students encounter diverse ideas, viewpoints and people.*** *Whatever the institution's demographic composition, first-year students have opportunities and are encouraged to interact with people different from themselves, to confront opinions and values different from those they currently hold, and to explore a variety of world views and human experiences.*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: Encourages all first-year students to encounter diverse ideas, viewpoints and people, through opportunities to interact with people different from themselves, to confront opinions and values different from those they currently hold, and to explore a variety of world views and human experiences. Whatever the institution's demographic composition, institutional mission and learning goals promote the development of an appreciation for diversity among all first-year students.
2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:
 - a. Curriculum, course content (e.g. general education requirements, but also across disciplines), *and policies at the level of the governing board that support diversity within the curriculum*
 - b. Faculty, staff, and student profiles *used as benchmarks to direct hiring, promotion, and recruitment/admissions policies and strategies that promote a diverse campus community; statistical changes in campus demographics are regularly reviewed; data used to drive changes to policy and practice; faculty and staff training to support creation and celebration of a diverse campus environment*
 - c. Academic opportunities *that promote encounters with diverse ideas, viewpoints, and people available to first-year students* (e.g., first-year seminars, community service, internships, undergraduate research projects, study abroad, student and faculty exchanges, *service learning courses*)
 - d. Residence hall policies, programming and special halls (e.g., living-learning centers, *roommate assignment policies, policies requiring or giving preference to first-year student in on-campus housing*)
 - e. Academic and student affairs programming (e.g., speakers, festivals, symposia)
 - f. *Appreciation for diversity reflected in the staffing and programming of orientation activities*
3. Sources and forms of evidence:
 - a. General studies requirements, department-specific first-year course requirements, Board of Regents Learning Outcomes, and first-year seminar support diversity within the curriculum.
 - b. Diversity is well represented within the campus faculty and staff, and appropriate policies to support diversity are represented by all institutional plans and policies. Minority student enrollment exceeds demographic composition of the state.

- Scholarships to promote minority enrollment are funded with permanent dollars. Summer enrichment programs promote minority student enrollment and success.
- c. First-year seminar courses are required for all first-year students and for specific populations. New student convocation programs, summer reading programs for first-year students, and welcome week activities promote encounters with diverse ideas. Learning communities/clustered courses promote close student contact.
 - d. Freshmen are encouraged/required to live in FYE Halls and/or other specific living-learning communities for first-year students.
 - e. First-year seminar curriculum includes involvement in appropriate out-of-class activities. Permanent budgets support campus appearances by nationally known speakers. African American History Month, Women's History Month, and other celebrations are annual campus events and receive permanent funding. Special programming is provided that supports diverse points of view (e.g., USA Today Readership program, Residence Life Cinema series.) Mentoring programs are available for women students, students of color, and non-traditional students.
 - f. Orientation staff reflects the diversity of the student population. Appreciation for diversity is specifically addresses in orientation activities, and is reflected in the promotional materials and structure of the orientation program. Specific orientation activities are available for international students, non-traditional students, distance learners, and other special populations.

Hallmark 5 (formerly Hallmark 4)

Basic Hallmark: *Serves all first-year students, including various segments of the first-year student population, according to their needs. First-year efforts involve all students admitted to the institution and meet the particular needs of students in various constituents of the new student population (e.g., first-generation students, adults, commuters, students with disabilities, students of color.)*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: Serves *all* first year students according to and regardless of their needs. First-year efforts involve all students in identifying their diverse interests and goals and create opportunities for students to meet those needs. First-year program design and resource allocation considers and addresses commonalities as well as differences represented by first-generation students, adults, commuters, students with disabilities, students of color, and distance learners.
2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:
 - a. Co-curricular activities *available and first-year student participation encouraged*
 - b. *Philosophy, delivery and oversight of academic, career, and personal advising/counseling*
 - c. Testing and placement *services*
 - d. Mix of academic and student support services clearly targeted *to segments of student population with unique needs* (e.g., under-prepared students, honors students, adults, different religions, students with special needs, *distance learners*)
 - e. *Faculty and staff training*
 - f. Libraries
 - g. Computing support (both hard- and software)
 - h. Financial aid award policies based on needs and abilities
 - i. Auxiliary Services (e.g., bookstore, food services)
 - j. *Registration policies for students with unique needs*
 - k. *Policies for making reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities*
 - l. *Hours of operation for critical support services including the library, business office, book store, records office, academic advising*
3. Sources and forms of evidence:
 - a. Information regarding campus clubs and organizations is centralized and easily accessible to students. Centers for special populations (e.g., Women's Center, Adult Student Center) provide gathering places and programs for students and student groups. A variety of co-curricular programs are offered through the academic departments, schools, and colleges. Campus publications and websites highlight co-curricular opportunities. First-year seminars and other courses encourage appropriate out-of-class involvement.
 - b. Academic advising services are designed to meet the developmental needs of first-year students, and advising services transition with students as their academic careers progress. Developmental academic advising services are offered through a centralized unit for all undeclared students and students considering a change of major. Students with declared majors are assigned a faculty advisor and

may also seek the services of the professional advisor for their College. Career advising services are offered in conjunction with the academic advising services, as well as through a specific Career and Employment Center. Career specialists are assigned to each academic college. Personal advising/counseling is available and accessible. All of these areas are represented during freshman orientation and parent orientation programs.

- c. Determination of course placement is consistent with first-year philosophy and mission. Developmental/remedial studies structure, policies, and curriculum connect logically to overall first-year requirements. Centrally coordinated on-campus testing services are available to assist students in advanced placement.
- d. Centers for women, minority students, international students, and other special student populations are available on campus and are actively involved in outreach to first-year students. Designated offices serve underprepared students, students with disabilities, non-traditional students, student-athletes, and distance learners. An Honors College or department provides in- and out-of-class services to high ability students. Living-learning centers support the creation of learning communities for students.
- e. Orientation and development programs are in place for faculty, staff, and for management staff. Technology training is available to all levels of faculty and staff. A comprehensive academic advisor-training program serves both faculty and professional advisors.
- f. First-year students, including distance learners, have access to special collection libraries, including the curriculum library. Adaptive technologies center assists students with disabilities in making full use of the library facilities. The library sponsors laptop checkouts for students and the Research Coach program.
- g. Computing support is available through an adaptive technologies lab, instructional labs, and the help desk. All residence hall rooms are wired for Internet access and are supported by a staff of network technicians. Open computing labs are available 24-hours throughout campus and in the residence halls. Laptops are available for checkout in the library.
- h. Permanent funding supports scholarships for students from target groups. Financial Aid information is broadly shared through publications, web pages, and in orientation programs. An emergency fund is administered through Financial Aid to assist students in financial crisis. A large percentage of first-year students are employed in on-campus jobs.
- i. New students may order textbooks from the bookstore during orientation; books are pre-packaged for student pick-up at the beginning of the fall semester. Freshman meal plan requirements are consistent with articulated first-year philosophy and goals. Hours of operation serve the needs of first-year students.
- j. To accommodate unique scheduling needs, student-athletes and students with disabilities are permitted to pre-register ahead of the general student population.
- k. A comprehensive array of services is available through a centralized office serving students with disabilities, including advising, tutoring, note taking, and testing. Students with disabilities may meet with a counselor from DSS prior to registration to make arrangements for appropriate accommodations. Construction projects to make the campus more accessible are undertaken annually.

Hallmark 6

Basic Hallmark: *Uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative assessment designs and methods to examine all aspects of students' first-year experience and to evaluate and understand the impact of institutional policies, strategies, and interventions on first-year students. While first-year assessment may from time-to-time focus on discrete activities or organizational components, these assessments are undertaken within an overall, systemic view of the first year as a distinct time period and set of experiences in student" lives. Thus, first-year assessment considers the interrelationships between and among programs, policies, and structures. Assessment tools include national or regional instruments that provide comparative data in addition to those developed for local use. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional decision-making, resource allocation, planning, and continuous improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. Assessment is not limited to measures of student persistence an/or satisfaction but also investigates student learning and change in areas and goals articulated or implied in the institution's mission statement and related documents.*

1. Basic Hallmark, revised: **Uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative assessment designs and methods to examine all aspects of students' first-year experience and to evaluate and understand the impact of institutional policies, strategies, and interventions on first-year students.** While first-year assessment may focus from time-to-time on discrete activities or organizational components, these assessments are undertaken within an overall, systemic view of the first year as a distinct time period and set of experiences in students' lives. Thus, first-year assessment considers the interrelationships between and among programs, policies, and structures. Assessment tools include national or regional instruments that provide comparative data in addition to those developed for local use. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional decision-making, resource allocation, planning, and continuous improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. Assessment is not limited to measures of student persistence and/or satisfaction. Efforts also investigate student learning and growth as articulated or implied in the institution's mission statement and related documents.

2. Suggested Areas for Review, revised:

- a. *Coordination of assessment efforts as a specific assignment of a specific office or individual*
- b. *Data systems (integrated and relational)*
- c. *Appropriate budgetary and staffing support for assessment effort.*
- d. *Data collection plans and schedules regarding first-year topics (e.g., characteristics, outcomes, climate, program/service evaluations, course ratings, alumni surveys); all first-year programs "fair game" for assessment.*
- e. *Implementation of the "The College Student Report" of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a national instrument that solicits students' reports of their level of involvement in various aspects of their first year of college*
- f. *Clear plan for disseminating and reviewing the data, insuring that all appropriate campus areas receive feedback; mechanisms in place to promote collaboration in responding to the data in improving first-year programs, policies, and services*

3. Sources and forms of evidence:

- a. First-year assessment is coordinated through a centralized unit for first-year services. That unit coordinates first-year assessment with overall university assessment goals and programs with a centralized university research office.
- b. Data systems related to students are integrated and relational (e.g., Pipeline, Banner, Data Warehouse, degree audit systems.)
- c. First-year assessments efforts are appropriately staffed and supported with permanent budget dollars. A specific liaison with the university research office coordinates overall assessment efforts.
- d. A coherent plan for first-year assessment is articulated and supported by the campus. Annual assessments of student participation in various first-year programs are undertaken regularly, including assessments of academic advising, first-year seminar programs, and academic support services. First-year students are involved in faculty and course review processes. The ACUHO-I resident satisfaction survey is implemented annually. Appropriate data is collected from first-year parents.
- e. The “The College Student Report” of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is implemented.
- f. A clear plan for disseminating and reviewing the data is implemented, insuring that all appropriate campus areas receive feedback. Mechanisms are in place to promote collaboration in responding to the data in improving first-year programs, policies, and services. Review of data regarding the first-year experience is included in executive staff planning retreats, is reviewed by Faculty Senate, and is included in faculty development and faculty orientation programs.