HISTORY

The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies (FYTS), established originally as the Department of First-Year Programs in the fall 2007, is housed in University College. The department is known for its nationally recognized first-year programs, which promote the development of first-year students and students in transition. Although the department does not currently offer any degree programs, it houses key programs and curricula central to the mission and strategic plan of KSU that contribute markedly to the success of KSU students.

Descriptions of Specific Programs and Curricula:

FYTS has various academic and co-curricular programs for meeting the needs of our diverse student population. These programs are central to our mission, and that of University College, in promoting learning and development of first-year students and students in transition as well as addressing recruitment, retention, progression, and graduation (RRPG).

Learning Communities

The Learning Communities program is a curriculum initiative that promotes the integration of General Education and other lower-division courses during a student’s first semester. A typical learning community is a theme-based cluster of courses that allows a student cohort to take 2-4 courses together while also taking advantage of faculty collaboration, out-of-class learning opportunities, and service learning. There are general interest communities and discipline-based communities that link major courses with General Education offerings. Enrollment in a Learning Community or a First-Year Seminar (KSU 1101) is required of all first-time, full-time students with fewer than 15 credit hours.

First-Year Curriculum

The first-year curriculum is an integral part of KSU’s efforts to promote student retention, progression, and graduation and aims to introduce first-year students to the culture of the university, foster their academic and personal success, develop their decision-making capabilities, and enhance their critical thinking and communication skills. Central to this curriculum is the three-hour, academically oriented seminar course that promotes the close interaction of instructor and students. This interaction is facilitated by the intentionally small size of 25 students in each seminar. The faculty who teach this course guide students in assignments both inside and outside the classroom that promote global learning, ethical decision-making, academic success skills, self-discovery, and career exploration. The curriculum also integrates the Common Reader program to engage first-year students in a common experience in discourse and discovery.
The first-year curriculum is available to students through four different versions of the seminar course, which are often featured as the anchor course in Learning Communities. First-time, full-time students with fewer than 15 credit hours are required to enroll in one of the four versions of the first-year seminar (FYS) as an independent course or in a Learning Community. The four versions of the First-Year Seminars currently available to students are:

**KSU 1101 First-Year Seminar (Traditional)**
KSU 1101 is the original version of the three-credit hour FYS that directly addresses academic success and life skills such as time management, study strategies, goal-setting, and careers. While a form of the seminar course has existed at KSU since 1983, the current three-credit hour version of the course became part of a university-wide requirement beginning with the fall 2005 semester.

**KSU 1111 Tomorrow’s World Today**
Based upon a program at the Center for Strategic International Studies, a Washington D.C. think tank, KSU 1111 was initially titled “The Coming Seven Revolutions.” Available as a special topics seminar spring 2008-spring 2010, the course became a permanent offering in fall 2010 and was renamed “Tomorrow’s World Today.” Students in the course analyze the impact of seven global challenges: population, resource management, technology, economic integration, information/knowledge, conflict, and governance on their own lives, while applying academic success strategies and becoming acclimated to college life.

**KSU 1121 Be the Change**
In fall 2010, a special topics version of the First-Year Seminar entitled “Be the Change” was taught. In spring of 2011, the course became a permanent offering as KSU 1121. In this version of the FYS, students work to make a difference in the world through research- and action-oriented community-based learning projects. They investigate a problem, find supporting evidence of the problem’s scope, and offer solutions that culminate in a final project where academic and life skills relevant to multiple disciplines and careers are applied.

**KSU 1200 First-Year Seminar: Leadership**
KSU 1200, First-Year Seminar: Leadership is a version of the FYS designed to enhance first-year students’ leadership skills and cultivates their knowledge of leadership theory and application. Through experiential learning projects, students practice leadership on campus and in the community while developing life skills, their connections with the university, academic success strategies, and global perspectives. KSU 1200 was first offered fall 2010 to a select population of first-year students as part of the THRIVE program, an intervention program to assist with student retention.
**IT2101 Computers and Your World**

IT 2101, a course designed to promote digital literacy, was adopted into the department in 2011 as yet another avenue of promoting student success. The course explores how computers and the Internet have revolutionized society and aids students in becoming well-rounded and informed users of computing technologies. This course consists of three modules: (1) hardware and operating systems; (2) spreadsheet, presentation, and database software; and (3) networks, the Internet, and information literacy. Other topics include security, privacy, globalization, Web 2.0, diversity and ethics. Currently a requirement for communication majors, IT 2101 is under consideration for inclusion in Area D of the general education requirements.

**First-Year Convocation**

First-Year Convocation is an annual tradition and signature event coordinated by the department. This collaborative effort involves a large number of campus units and serves as the first-year students’ official induction into the University. Similar to a commencement ceremony, the event includes a processional of faculty dressed in academic regalia along with the University’s top administrators who welcome first-year students as members of the KSU community and witness their induction into the KSU community of scholars.

**Thrive**

The Thrive Program is a transition and retention initiative developed collaboratively by the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies and the Center for Student Leadership. A gated program, Thrive targets students on state merit aid who meet the specified GPA and ACT/SAT requirements and who are eligible for Georgia’s HOPE scholarship. The program combines multiple interventions, such as enrollment in KSU 1200, leadership-themed learning communities, graduation coaching, academic workshops, peer mentoring, and themed residential living. Thrive helps students develop the academic habits and skills required to maintain the HOPE scholarship, integrate academically and socially to university culture, progress toward graduation, and develop leadership skills.

**Accomplishments**

When established in fall 2007, the primary focus of the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies (formerly the Department of First-Year Programs) was to maintain the excellence of its existing programs while establishing itself as a unit separate from University Studies, the department from which it was derived. A national search for a permanent chair was successfully conducted, governing documents and policies were developed, and necessary committees were formed during the founding years of the department. Since that time (2008-2012), the accomplishments and achievements of the department have been abundant; some highlights include:
• The work of the department contributed greatly to KSU’s 11 consecutive years of recognition by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the top schools in the area of first-year experience.

• Three departmental faculty – Carlton Usher (Diversity Faculty Fellow), Lynn Boettler (Community Engagement Faculty Fellow), and Stephen Braden (Fellow for Adjunct Faculty) – were awarded faculty fellowships in KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

• The department faculty authored a custom textbook for use in the first-year seminars; this publication is updated regularly. Several chapters of the textbook, *Foundations of Academic Inquiry*, were adopted by other colleges for their own custom FYE textbook.

• The first-year curriculum was significantly expanded to include three new versions of the seminar course (KSU 1111, 1121, and 1200) in order to provide students with greater options for completing the first-year curriculum requirement.

• Online and hybrid versions of the seminar were developed and have become regular offerings since 2009.

• In its capacity as a member of the National Learning Communities Consortium, the department hosted the National Learning Communities Conference (2009).

• Dr. Keisha Hoerrner, Department Chair (2007-2012), received KSU’s Philip C. Preston Award for Distinguished Community Service (2009).

• The department received the Georgia Board of Regents Program Excellence Award, the highest honor for excellence among departments and programs system wide. The program was recognized for enhancing the success of first-year students and improving retention (2010).

• Dr. Keisha Hoerrner was named one of 10 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2012).

• IT 2101 was successfully integrated into the department with an average of 28 sections offered each academic year.

• Faculty who teach KSU 1111 hosted the inaugural Global Challenges Panel (2012), which consisted of experts addressing each of the seven global challenges. KSU 1111 students showcased their research to the campus community through the annual Global Village Poster Presentation event.

• The Learning Communities Program instituted an Advisory Board, realigned its student learning outcomes, and developed a new approach to programmatic assessment that is appealing to faculty and students.
A video teleconferencing initiative involving KSU first-year students in Ken Hill’s KSU 1111 (Global Issues) class and students from the University of Kashan in the Islamic Republic of Iran was launched (2009).

The Soliya project, a 3-credit hour special topics course focused on intercultural dialogue and peace building, was successfully launched in 2012. It was the college’s first virtual study abroad course.

Helen Bisesi was awarded KSU’s Shining Star Customer Service Award (2012).

Cathy Bradford received the Staff Employee of the Year award (2012).

While this list provides only a representative reporting of the many achievements of the department, it serves to demonstrate the expertise and high caliber of work typical of the department’s talented faculty and staff.

SUMMARY OF SWOT ANALYSIS

During spring of 2012, a SWOT Analysis of the department was performed in order to determine FYTS faculty and staff perceptions of the department at that time and to help in the development of this strategic plan. First-Year and Transition Studies’ faculty were asked to complete the analysis; a summary of that SWOT analysis is incorporated into this plan. All the themes that emerged are summarized below. Thus, the SWOT summary does not reflect a consensus opinion but rather a compilation of individual perceptions. It is also a snapshot in time of those perceptions taken during the spring of 2012.

Strengths:

Strong Student Focus. The dedication of the FYTS faculty and staff to helping first-year students is reflected in the 2011 NSSE results, where, in the overall rating, KSU was “more likely to outperform amongst first year students” than its peers. Faculty and staff alike are “user-friendly,” student-centered, and responsive to student needs. The entire department expresses a sincere interest in student success and strives to provide a caring, learner-centered environment designed to nurture new students in preparation for academic rigors.

Faculty. Full-time faculty, in conjunction with a strong group of enthusiastic support faculty, bring years of teaching experience along with a wealth of diversity in the number of disciplines they represent. The department as a whole is engaged both in and out of the classroom, actively participating in professional development opportunities and contributing to conferences at all levels. Their dedication makes the many programs offered by the department (learning communities, Thrive, community service and engagement, promotion of campus involvement and awareness) possible and successful.

National Reputation. Kennesaw State University’s first-year experience program is among the best in the country, according to the U.S. News & World Report 2012 “Best Colleges” issue – and this has been the case for ten years.
Leadership. Under the administrative umbrella of University College, FYTS thrives under leadership that is both strong and well respected. Both the Dean of the college under which the department falls and the Associate Dean, formerly the department chair, have gained national recognition by receiving the Outstanding First-Year Advocate Award sponsored by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and Cengage Learning.

Weaknesses:

Identity and Perception. Although inroads have been made across campus in recognition of both the department and its programs, the department still seeks to create a clear identity within the academic community. As faculty and staff integrate with university-level committees and achieve national recognition through their work and service, FYTS’s reputation is gaining a solid foothold. The makeover of UC’s entire website, including FYTS’s, has accomplished a major step in marketing the department, both internally and externally, but efforts must be continued in order to ensure the entire campus understands the mission and accomplishments of the department.

Resources. The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies has not found itself immune to the state of the economy and, like other departments, is stretched to its limits in financial and human resources. Many tenured faculty are required to split their time and efforts due to joint-appointments. In addition, the shift of many full-time faculty to administrative roles has created the potential for gaps in fulfilling the needs in other departmental service areas. With human resources spread thin, it is not surprising that research and grant funding, along with external funding, is minimal. The extensive use of part-time faculty to handle heavy fall semester enrollments often results in a minimum of training and oversight to insure quality of service.

Technology. Keeping up with the rapid progress of technology is a daunting task even for well-funded departments. While FYTS has obtained additional resources (e.g., a mobile laptop “classroom” and an amply equipped computer lab to house the IT2101 course) and has updated the department’s classrooms to include basic technology (i.e., instructor workstations and overhead projectors), classroom furnishings are old and cannot accommodate students attempting to use their own digital devices. The building housing the department remains one of the oldest on campus and, as such, reflects issues common to older facilities, particularly with the HVAC. The only remedy for this is to patiently await new facilities to house the college in the future.

Opportunities:

Community Engagement: Engage KSU, a community engagement initiative undertaken by the University as a whole, is viewed as an opportunity by many in the department. FYTS programs and curriculum can be enhanced and expanded to incorporate community and civic engagement opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. In addition, the department may consider expanding definitions of scholarship to include community-engaged scholarship and provide faculty development resources that support community-engaged teaching. Combining
community-engagement and study abroad to form international community-engagement experiences also presents an opportunity along with a broadening of the common experience concept for first-year students beyond the common reader program to include community-engagement experiences.

Global Learning: Exploring ways of expanding global learning options, particularly study abroad experiences for our students, is seen as an opportunity. In addition, continuing to organize and host summits around global issues and connecting with the greater global community through technology offers the potential for virtual global learning. Some examples might be forming learning communities with students from other colleges and universities around the world via Facebook, or creating a video “pen pals” program that links our students with college students in other countries.

Emerging Technologies: Enhancing and expanding the use of new and emerging technologies, not only in teaching and learning endeavors but also in marketing and branding the department, presents many opportunities. These opportunities are vast and might include more frequent use of Twitter to promote and inform students of programs and activities, video conferencing, mobile instructional modules, departmental blogs, a multi-media textbook, electronic and open source publishing of student and faculty work, and others.

Collaboration: Collaboration with a number of entities, particularly those outside of University College, could build greater understanding about our department and facilitate the improvement and development of programs and curriculum. Partnering with other departments in developing interdisciplinary courses, reaching new faculty through invitations to participate in Learning Communities, encouraging departmental faculty to serve on college-wide committees, or hosting open houses may activate new collaborations.

Complete College Georgia: The Complete College Georgia initiative aligns with much of the work the department is already doing. Enhancing existing programs, such as Graduation Coaching, and expanding curriculum and services that target students with historically low college completion rates will provide opportunities for the department to demonstrate its support of the initiative and highlight the strength of existing programs and accomplishments.

Threats:

Funding and Budget: Given the state of the current economy, the possibility of a reduction to an already limited budget continues to remain a threat. Departmental programs, curriculum, and initiatives should consistently be evaluated for their cost effectiveness.

Departmental Climate: Doing more with less continues to be a byproduct of the state of the economy, and this has taken a toll on departmental faculty and staff. Faculty and staff are being asked to serve on more committees and support more initiatives – and to do this without compensation in time or money. As a result, morale, motivation, and positivity are gradually moving toward the lower end of the spectrum. Without implementing measures to combat this decline, productivity and the overall health of the department may be threatened.
Campus Identity: Despite concerted efforts to inform the KSU campus about the nature of the department and our activities, it is believed that many across campus are still unaware of the department’s accomplishments, areas of expertise, and contributions to the University and the field. This lack of awareness can jeopardize the department with regard to expansion and support of programs and initiatives.
VISION AND MISSION

Vision Statement:
The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies (FYTS) shall provide students participating in our award-winning, multi-faceted, student-oriented programs with an exceptional experience during their transitions to or at KSU that promotes their success in college and beyond. The department shall distinguish itself as a leading contributor to scholarship in the emerging discipline of first-year and transition studies.

Mission Statement:
In collaboration with other academic and student success units, the department provides students with the knowledge, resources, and innovative services necessary to promote personal growth as engaged citizens and emerging scholars.

CORE VALUES

As an integral unit of University College, the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies shares a deep commitment to the values of the College. Recruitment, retention, progression, and graduation of first-year students and students in transition at Kennesaw State University are of prime consideration, which results in department values that reflect strong synchronicity with those of the College.

We, the members of the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies at Kennesaw State University, place the following values at the center of our teaching, service, and scholarship:

A Student-Centered Approach
Students are the primary consideration in the decisions we make in our teaching, our service, and our scholarship. We are committed to and intentional about student success. We strive to do everything in our power to ensure that students feel welcome in our department and our classes, that they have ready access to college resources and personnel, and that they know we are student advocates across the KSU campus and in the larger community.

Collaborative Teaching and Learning
Teaching and learning are enhanced by working in partnership with students, other faculty, staff, and the larger community; therefore, we actively seek such collaboration. We value a collaborative learning environment inside and outside the classroom, one in which students learn from diverse others in both peer learning and peer teaching activities and one in which we (faculty and staff) actively support each other in our mutual goal of ensuring student success.
Interconnectedness of Learning
We see the university experience not as a collection of discrete courses and majors but as an integrated multidisciplinary preparation for life in a complex world, and we seek to convey this vision to our students. We create connections among academic disciplines and KSU entities that contribute to student success, and we play a unique role in bringing together academic resources to provide seamless support to students.

Internationalization and Global Learning
We emphasize teaching and learning about different groups of people and different parts of the world so that our students will be able to participate fully and responsibly in our increasingly diverse and global society. We approach what we do with a global perspective, looking for ways to internationalize our curriculum, our programs, and our services. We strive to create an inviting atmosphere for students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Diversity and Multiculturalism
We embrace diversity and value the unique cultures, lifestyles, qualities, backgrounds, and experiences of all people. We seek opportunities to support and promote this value and strive to create a climate of inclusiveness that honors and celebrates the unique contributions of all individuals.

Scholarship and Lifelong Learning
We value research, scholarship, creative activity, and lifelong learning, and we encourage and support these pursuits among members of our department and our students. Through these endeavors, we seek not only to enrich our learning and that of our students but also to contribute to our fields of study and, ultimately, to the betterment of society.

Civic and Community Engagement
Our department intentionally and systematically incorporates service learning, volunteerism, and community-based learning in its curriculum and programs. We promote civic engagement, political participation, and social responsibility that lead to an active citizenry who have a positive impact on their communities at the local, national, and global levels.

Leadership
We place a strong emphasis on leadership. Members of the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies value leadership that is ethical, innovative, and student-oriented. We consistently model what it means to make good, moral leadership decisions that are in the best interests of our students, our faculty, and our staff. We support each other in leadership endeavors designed to help us learn and grow, and we are concerned about helping others develop their leadership potential. We hold firm to the conviction that leadership occurs at all levels, not just in a top-down fashion, within our department, college, university, and the larger community.

A Culture of Optimism
We see potential and possibility in our students, our department, our institution, our profession, the world, and each other. We believe in the continuous improvement of our classes, our department, and the university as a whole.
STRATEGIC GOALS AND ACTION STEPS

The Department of First-Year and Transition Studies, acting in conjunction with University College, is committed to putting into practice the core values outlined above. The following strategic goals and action steps are rooted in the shared mission of the College and the department, and reflect our fundamental dedication to student success.

**Goal 1:**
**Broaden and strengthen academic programs and courses that promote student retention, progression, and graduation through innovative coursework and support systems while maintaining high academic and professional quality.**

**Action Steps**

1. Present a proposal to the Board of Regents for a graduate degree program in First-Year Studies; if approved, launch the program within 5 years.

2. Increase learning community offerings to accommodate and serve 50 percent of entering first-year full-time students by 2017.

3. Develop courses in a variety of delivery formats that include condensed semesters, online and hybrid offerings and expanded scheduling opportunities.

4. Seek or reallocate funding for initiatives (such as graduation coaching) to academically assist and support at-risk student populations.

5. Pursue acceptance of IT2101 into the general education requirements for the purpose of promoting digital literacy to assist students in achieving academic success.

6. Engage in collaborative efforts to develop greater opportunities for students to participate in undergraduate research.
Goal 2:
Increase communication efforts to promote and publicize the work of the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies and the successes of our students, faculty, and staff to both internal and external communities.

Action Steps

1. Expand the communication systems including social and new media that promote FYTS to external communities such as local high schools.

2. Maintain a current and active departmental website including faculty, curriculum, program information, and departmental accomplishments.

3. Prioritize the hiring/allocating of staff to coordinate strategies and processes for maintaining current and active internal and external departmental communications.

4. Develop and circulate an online newsletter featuring the work of Learning Communities students and faculty.
Goal 3:
Cultivate a culture of respect, understanding, and support of diverse perspectives and people.

Action Steps

1. Increase the number of FYTS faculty who are either Global Learning Specialists or Global Learning Contributors by 50%.

2. Seek and promote learning opportunities that enable FYTS faculty to assist students in engaging with individuals in other cultures, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

3. Promote opportunities for faculty/staff development with a focus on exposure to, and interaction with, diverse perspectives and issues surrounding diversity and inclusion.
**Goal 4:**
Expand and promote opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to become locally, nationally, and globally engaged in their communities.

**Action Steps**
1. Support Engage KSU efforts by increasing the number of scholarly products produced by FYTS faculty/staff that have a community-engaged component.

2. Revise tenure and promotion guidelines to support community-engaged pedagogy, scholarship, and service.

3. Balance offerings of first-year seminars to approximately 25% for each of the versions.

4. Examine the feasibility of a community and/or global engagement activity as a common experience alternative to the common reader program.

5. Collaborate with other units on campus to provide an annual opportunity to engage departmental faculty, staff, and their families in a community-engagement activity or event.
**Goal 5:**
Secure the resources necessary to support and sustain current and envisioned programs within the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies.

**Action Steps**
1. Increase the number of grant proposals submitted over the five-year period covered by this strategic plan.
2. Seek external funding to support domestic and international educational opportunities for a greater number of students and faculty.
3. Pursue funding and resources that support services and programs for advancing Complete College Georgia goals.
4. Expand opportunities for hosting interns and undergraduate/graduate assistants.
5. Encourage staff to participate in professional development opportunities designed to increase skills and enhance work performance.