

To: Educational Policies Committee
From: Sascha von Meier, Coordinator, First-Year Experience Pilot
Re: Progress Report and Recommendation for FYE Pilot

March 23, 2006

As coordinator of the FYE Pilot planning team, I am pleased to report that we are prepared to proceed with the implementation of the 2006-07 Pilot as encouraged by EPC in April, 2005. We propose the year-long experimental course UNIV 150 A&B, "Identity and Global Change," as described in the attached syllabus.

Our development work commenced in Fall '05, when the FYE faculty team¹ was assembled by the Provost at the recommendation of the GE Subcommittee and we began to exchange and negotiate our diverse interpretations of how such an integrated, multi-disciplinary first-year course would be executed in practice, based on the outlines provided under the FYE plan developed through the GE Initiative. Representing different disciplines and teaching styles, our group converged on a set of specific student learning outcomes to inform the selection of course content and pedagogy as well as the assessment efforts, and on a syllabus that we believe is both realistic to carry out and true to the design intent of the course. While both the syllabus and list of learning competencies are working documents and thus necessarily subject to ongoing revisions, we are confident that they represent a solid foundation for embarking on this course in the Fall 2006. We are excited about the opportunity to share this work with our students and colleagues and look forward to further preparation before the fall, including faculty development activities and coordination with Student Services Professionals (SSPs) and student Peer Mentors slated to participate in the Pilot.

Considering that the process of undertaking this Pilot is in fact a heuristic device for determining the viability of such an approach to Freshman education at SSU, we recognize the importance of assessing as objectively as possible the strengths and weaknesses of our model, allowing it to be improved, adapted, or, in the face of insurmountable problems, rejected. Our assessment team (comprised of two FYE instructors and four members not associated with FYE) is preparing a strategy for evaluating both the extent to which FYE students achieve the intended results (internal assessment) and for comparing the results to students not enrolled in FYE (external assessment). More detail is provided in the attached memo to the GE Subcommittee about the Assessment Plan.

In view of the time required for gathering and interpreting assessment data, combined with the time constraints for academic scheduling, the FYE team recommends a decision to conduct a two-year Pilot, spanning both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 academic years. Under no circumstances should we expect a hasty assessment of the first semester of the 2006-07 Pilot to inform the decision (due in early 2007) about whether to continue the Pilot into 2007-08. Considering the many questions that would need to be answered before a hypothetical scale-up of an FYE program — including faculty satisfaction and the ease of faculty team integration with rotating members — and considering also that our experience of the first year is likely to indicate many opportunities for improvement, a two-year Pilot seems eminently sensible. For similar reasons, we would recommend that no final strategic decisions, such as a scale-up of

FYE to encompass the entire Freshman class, be made until a longitudinal study of FYE students has assessed the longer term effects such as retention rates, major declaration, and graduation. Ultimately, the goal of reforming the first-year GE program is to enhance our students' subsequent experience of college, and we cannot know whether this has been accomplished until the first cohort graduates. With a two-year Pilot, the earliest feasible time for a final scale-up decision would then be in 2011.

On behalf of the FYE faculty, I would like to thank EPC for your confidence in our work, and we look forward to a continuing productive collaboration.

cc: Provost Ochoa
Paul Draper, GE Subcommittee Chair

1. The FYE planning team, a subset of whom are scheduled to teach in the 2006-07 pilot, includes: Sarah Baker (English and Music), Melinda Barnard (Communication Studies), Jim Behuniak (Philosophy), Michael Ezra (AMCS), Peter Hoffman-Kipp (Education), Nelson "Buzz" Kellogg (Hutchins), Tom Shaw (Hutchins), John Sullins (Philosophy), Tori Truss (Theater Arts), Greta Vollmer (English), Alexandra "Sascha" von Meier (ENSP), Tim Wandling (English), John Wingard (Anthopology).