

## UC Great Beginnings

### PURPOSE

University of Cincinnati's first-year experience is part of the very fabric of the university. Woven into the General Education Core as a key touchpoint, it promotes the achievement of academic excellence and is student-centered. UC Great Beginnings is the first-year experience guiding document which supports the goal of extending higher learning beyond the walls of the university classroom to incorporate the greater community and workplace while concurrently providing students with a sense of belonging and connectedness to the university, its mission, and the Next Lives Here vision for the future.

While success can look different for each first-year student who attends the University of Cincinnati, this document defines student success as *a positive transition to the culture of college with an awareness of campus resources, understanding of the level of academic rigor of college courses, and a sense of purpose and belonging at UC.*

As part of their General Education, all students are required to enroll in at least one first year experience (FYE). FYEs can be facilitated through various credit-bearing or non-credit structures and be delivered in a variety of ways including in person, online, or hybrid. Courses identified as first-year experiences will be denoted with an *FY* attribute which will be declared by their offering departments. Academic units may define which courses or experiences meet the UC Great Beginnings General Education requirement for an FYE.

Commonly used structures include:

- **First-year seminar/course:** A small enrollment credit-bearing course taught by a professional staff or faculty member designed to introduce collegiate level expectations and resources to support student learning.
- **Learning community:** A small enrollment 0-credit course led by an upper-level undergraduate student designed to introduce collegiate level expectations and resources to support student learning.
- **Introductory-level disciplinary course:** A major introductory course taught by a faculty member that is expanded to include and integrate with other aspects of the first-year experience and curriculum.

This guiding document lays out FYE target learning areas, program assessment metrics, guidance on evaluation and optional tools, and encourages practices of implementation based on the latest research in the field.

### TARGET LEARNING AREAS

The UC first-year experiences target five learning areas to create Bearcats that are...

1. **Life-Long Learners:** Developing academically strong students who are successful at the university and beyond as lifelong learners. UC FYE programs seek to empower students to:
  - a. *Identify and assess* their natural styles, previously acquired skills and knowledge, and current academic practices of learning (writing, oral communication, analysis, reading, information literacy, note-taking, studying, and test-taking strategies)

- b. *Build* metacognitive strategies (self-assessment and reflection, goal setting, decision-making, time-management, project management) to develop deeper, sustained learning
  - c. *Practice* research-based academic habits and metacognitive strategies to support course work, involvement on campus, and personal development
  - d. *Aspire* to continue to learn in and out of the classroom throughout their adult life
2. **Connected and Engaged:** Giving students information, opportunities, and skills to empower them to be involved on campus and engaged with peers, faculty and staff, and cultural life of this large, urban, research university. UC FYE programs seek to empower students to:
- a. *Identify* their own needs and benefits of building a sense of belonging and connection to campus
  - b. *Build* relationships with peers through active-listening, interpersonal interaction, conflict management, collaboration, and teamwork
  - c. *Practice* learning with and from people from a variety of backgrounds to foster innovation, deepen relationships, and increase perspective building
  - d. *Practice* self-directed action to connect to campus resources (staff, faculty, offices, organizations, and peers)
  - e. *Aspire* to become a leader and impact the greater community
3. **Critical and Reflective:** Providing space and opportunity for students to reflect on and build their own views of the world through growth in critical thinking. UC FYE programs seek to empower students to:
- a. *Identify and critically reflect* on personal identities and values
  - b. *Identify* University of Cincinnati's expectations for academic integrity, ethical behavior, and personal accountability including those outlined in the Bearcat Bond, Just Community Principles, and Student Code of Conduct
  - c. *Identify and build* skills to encourage developing a growth (vs. fixed) mindset
  - d. Describe identity as multifaceted and constituting multiple categories of difference such as race, color, language, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, and intersectionality as operating by individual and group. \*
  - e. Describe how cultures (including their own) are shaped by the intersections of a variety of factors such as race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, ethnicity, nationality, and/or other socially constructed categories of difference. \*
  - f. *Build* problem-solving skills and develop strategies for autonomous solutions
  - g. *Practice* skills that lead to engaged, respectful, and meaningful conversation and conflict resolution
  - h. *Aspire* to make change through critical thinking, reflection, and problem solving

4. **Professional and Career-Ready:** Prompting students to start to think about their professional path after graduation. UC FYE programs seek to empower students to:
  - a. *Explore and identify* potential academic and professional paths that are consistent with personal values, interests, talents, and goals\*
  - b. *Identify* the role of a research university and opportunities afforded to students who study there, including understanding how knowledge is created, evaluated, utilized, and shared
  - c. *Practice* educational planning by setting educational and career goals and pursuing opportunities that align with them\*
  - d. *Aspire* to serve society and address problems, big and small, to help improve the world

\*Adapted from [UC's Career Education Learning Outcomes Touchpoint 1: First Year](#)

5. **Mentally and Emotionally Well:** Developing students who are mentally and emotionally healthy and able to successfully navigate college life as a developing adult. UC FYE programs seek to empower students to:
  - a. *Identify* strategies and campus resources to successfully manage, change, and adapt to new situations
  - b. *Build* energy-giving strategies that support a balanced lifestyle
  - c. *Practice* behaviors and utilize campus programming and offices that contribute to physical and mental health and well-being
  - d. *Aspire* to have a balanced life

UC FYE programs should be relevant, engaging, and action-orientated and should execute the target learning areas through experiences that allow students to reflect, explore new information and resources, interact with and build community with peers, and find mentorship with staff and faculty.

#### FYE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT METRICS

FYE programs seek to positively impact first year students experience at UC in meaningful ways. To measure program effectiveness and identify areas of improvement, assessment is needed. Given that all students at the university are required to be in a first-year experience and recognizing that these programs are not the only support service students receive in the first year, there is difficulty in analyzing the program's impact.

Given this, two metrics are suggested in helping to evaluate FYE programs:

- Student satisfaction surveys to better understand the student experience
- Measuring and comparing retention data (GPA, enrollment in future semester classes, academic standing, etc.) between programs with varying FYE models, while keeping initial student populations in mind (regional colleges vs. Clifton colleges, on-the-ground programs vs. fully-online programs, etc.)

### FYE PROGRAM EVALUATION AND OPTIONAL TOOLS

UC Great Beginnings is intended to be a dynamic and responsive tool for programs to meet student and university needs. Each unit will evaluate its own FYE program(s) using the UC Great Beginnings content and structures as part of their regular program review processes. As the central support for FYE programming on campus, the Learning Commons has developed a university-wide FYE Assessment. This university-wide assessment includes an analysis of aggregate data reflecting such issues as student achievement, retention, and graduation, student engagement (which can also be measured by instruments like the National Survey for Student Engagement), and other comprehensive measures of outcomes including contributions toward achievement of UC strategic goals. Colleges, departments, and units are encouraged to participate in the FYE Assessment.

### ENCOURAGED FYE PROGRAM PRACTICES

UC Great Beginnings is the cornerstone upon which each student's university learning experience is built. Therefore, students' experiences throughout their first year should reflect UC's dynamic environment for learning and introduce students to what they are expected to accomplish for graduation. Below are encouraged practices based on the latest research in the field:

- Using peer mentors or near peers for delivering instruction or guidance
- Training instructors (professional staff, faculty and student leaders) on the pedagogy, history, and impact of FYEs
- Incorporating activity-based learning or community-engaged pedagogy into program or course
- Including activities that foster out-of-class interaction between students, their faculty, and other university mentors
- Creating and maintaining programs that foster student participation and leadership in university life to contribute to the comprehensive, cohesive, and well-integrated foundation for higher education
- Maintaining academic rigor to protect the integrity of degree programs
- Connecting with other university-wide initiatives including but not limited to [Next Lives Here](#)

### UC GREAT BEGINNING REVIEW PROCESS

Multiple and varied assessments to improve UC Great Beginnings and to confirm its effectiveness for eliciting desired processes and outcomes must be a core and regular part of its design and implementation, which follows an on-going continuous improvement model. Every three years a campus-wide collective will review and update this document as a means of keeping it updated with latest research, student needs, and university initiatives.