

Foundations of Excellence® Faculty Dimension Report

University of Colorado Boulder

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Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty.

These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year that is realized through high-quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems.

Section 1: Process Summary

The Faculty Dimension committee used multiple sources of evidence to assess the degree to which a culture of faculty responsibility for first-year students is nurtured by senior academic leaders, deans, and department chairs, and supported by CU-Boulder's reward systems. The committee assumed the FoE Faculty/Staff survey provided the perspective of individual faculty and staff. We also conducted a survey of Department Chairs (42 of 49 responded) to gauge the role of unit policies in the encouragement and recognition of teaching first-year students. That survey asked questions about teaching assignments, annual evaluations of teaching, and assessment of teaching during the tenure review process. Data on how teaching has been judged for tenure decisions (AYs 2011/12 through 2016/17) was provided by the Office of Faculty Affairs. Lastly, information on recruitment, incentives, and training of instructors in RAP and FYSM programs, which represent specific types of first-year teaching, was solicited. Each committee member independently analyzed all of this data relative to the performance indicators for this FoE dimension. Those individual analyses were compiled, discussed, and merged into the following summary of our findings and recommendations.

Section 2: Faculty dimension committee

Name	Title	Committee Role
David Budd	Professor, Geological Sciences	Committee Chair
Lecia Barker	Associate Professor, Information Science, CMCI	Committee Member
Michaele Ferguson	Associate Professor, Political Science	Committee Member
Sam Flaxman	Associate Professor, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology	Committee Member
Mark Gammon	Learning Development & Design Manager, OIT	Committee Member
Cindy Justice	Assistant Dean, Arts & Sciences Advising Center	Committee Member
David Paradis	Instructor, History	Committee Member
Chase Raymond	Assistant Professor, Linguistics; Spanish & Portuguese	Committee Member
Steven Rock	Associate Professor, Accounting	Committee Member

Section 3: Narrative on General Situation and Findings of the Dimension Committee

PI 4.1. Importance of the First Year. To what degree does the institution make the first year a priority for faculty teaching assignments, for resource allocation to support first-year instruction, and by rewarding high quality instruction of first-year students?¹

Teaching assignments are decided at the Departmental level. The chair survey indicates that 75% of departments take into account the distinct needs of introductory courses in making teaching assignments. Unclear to the committee was whether this consideration is a response to the specific needs of first-year students or to the more general attributes of high-enrollment gateway courses, which may or may not be dominated by first-year students. Departments often allow faculty to self-select into teaching, with about a third of chairs (32%) reporting that faculty can choose to teach first-year courses and nearly half allowing faculty (47%) to choose to

¹ *The degree to which faculty are rewarded for excellence in advising first-year students is considered not applicable as faculty at CU-Boulder are not charged with advising first-year students, and only 4.8% of faculty and instructor respondents to the Faculty/Staff survey stated that they were "official academic advisors."*

teach gateway courses. Fewer than half of chairs or associate chairs are “always involved” in assigning instructors to such courses. Whether self-selecting or assigned, the committee had no data on whether the faculty most suited to teach first-years are in fact doing so.

Faculty, administrators, and staff all judged the amount of resources available to support first-year courses as moderate. Open-ended responses on the faculty/staff survey to institution-specific questions suggest that more resources could be employed, including better instructor pay; reduced teaching loads for instructors to engage in more intense first-year classes; better classroom environments for large classes; smaller classes vis-à-vis gateway courses; more TAs; more assistance with course development; and more professional development focused on the unique aspects of teaching first-years.

Despite a growing emphasis on the first-year experience, most faculty perceive only modest institutional support for their engagement in it. The modal response to how much first-year teaching is rewarded by institutional leaders is “not at all,” and the mean/median is “slightly.” The survey of chairs also suggests that most departments do not incentivize faculty to develop targeted first-year instruction or to engage in substantial extracurricular activities with first-year students. For example, teaching of first-year students is not considered in 62% of departments’ annual merit evaluations, and 88% of departments do not consider teaching first-year students in their annual evaluation of “excellence” in teaching. A sizable majority of departments (79%) also do not weigh first-year student teaching/engagement in promotion and tenure decisions. Recently developed guidelines for non-tenure track faculty to be promoted to Teaching Professor also do not reference first-year teaching engagement. These data indicate that there are departments that do motivate faculty to embrace first-year teaching and that do reward faculty who strive for excellence in doing so, yet a substantial majority does not.

The committee suspects one potential reason for lack of incentivisation is that standards for teaching excellence are not well established at CU Boulder. As best we can tell, excellence is not systematically evaluated, but generally based on performing research on effective teaching rather than practicing best teaching practices and achieving high levels of student learning. This impression is supported by the fact that FCQ scores are reported as the most commonly used metric in evaluating teaching for annual merit evaluation and the second most common metric for tenure and promotion. Survey data and open responses also signal that tenure-track faculty are encouraged to pursue tenure and promotion exclusively through research excellence. Tenure data show that, in the 6-year period from 2011 to 2017, only 8.3% of 230 tenure cases included excellence in teaching at the VCAC level (Departments were more generous, recommending teaching excellence in 18.3% of all cases).

PI 4.2. Campus-Level Encouragement. To what degree do senior academic leaders encourage faculty to use pedagogies of engagement in first-year courses, understand campus-wide learning goals for the first year, understand the characteristics of first-year students at this campus, and understand broad trends and issues in the first year.

Faculty and instructors, on average, rate institutional leadership support for faculty involvement with first-year students as moderate. It is the committee’s judgment that this rating reflects a mixed bag of intentions, actions, and inactions. On a positive note, there are relevant programs that enjoy the continued support of academic leaders. These include instructional programs like Resident Academic Programs (RAPs), First-Year Seminars (FYSMs), and first-year curricula in some colleges (e.g., Leeds, some Engineering units). The new FYSM is a specific example of strong senior leadership. It encourages broad faculty involvement through an open call for seminar proposals and offers multiple ways for faculty to engage (buyouts to departments, overload contracts, normal teaching load duties). Similarly, there are professional development programs that introduce pedagogies of engagement to faculty (e.g., FTEP) and support teaching with technology (e.g., ATDT/ASSETT). However, the *Faculty Engagement Questionnaire for RAP and FYSM Programs* indicates participation in these first-year teaching opportunities is mostly the result of intrinsic motivation on the part of individual faculty rather than encouragement provided by senior academic leadership. Further, very few faculty or instructors actually report participation in any professional development for teaching, which suggests self-motivation is the primary reason for acquiring training.

We find little evidence that campus-level leadership has provided a consistent, campus-wide message about the other aspects of this performance indicator. There are no campus-wide learning goals for the first year and 80% of faculty and staff report a moderate or poorer understanding of the institution’s education goals for first-year students. There is also no evidence of encouragement by senior administrators for all faculty to utilize pedagogies of engagement, nor is there any evidence of encouragement by senior administrators for departments to substantially value and reward faculty for use of such pedagogies. Finally, the faculty/staff survey reveals that data on the characteristics of first-year students and trends and issues related to first-year students is not

considered or utilized by the vast majority of faculty, which in turn would suggest encouragement to do so at any administrative level is lacking.

PI 4.3. Unit-level Encouragement. To what degree do unit-level academic administrators encourage faculty to use pedagogies of engagement in first-year courses, understand unit-level learning goals for entry-level courses, and understand the discipline-specific trends and issues related to entry-level courses?

The faculty/staff survey and the Department Chair survey did not directly ask whether unit-level administrators encouraged use of engagement pedagogies or encourage an understanding of trends and issues related to entry-level courses. However, the overall low scores on the more generalized faculty/staff survey questions related to these issues (reviewed above for PI 4.2) suggest that if there is unit-level encouragement for these specifics, it is not common. In open-ended responses, some Chairs stated that investment in teaching innovations and course development were important, but active learning was notably absent. In addition, only a third of faculty/staff survey respondents agreed that a unit-level philosophy had been communicated to them. Collectively, the data suggest that widespread unit-level encouragement for faculty to seek excellence in their engagement with first-year students is unlikely; rather, there appears to be large variation at the unit level.

Unit-level administrators are perceived by faculty and instructors as reasonably supportive of faculty engagement with first-year students. This is the reason the committee graded unit-level encouragement a C. Fifty-four percent of faculty and graduate teaching assistants rated as “high” or “very high” the degree to which unit leaders value involvement with first-year students. Far fewer faculty and teaching assistants believe that unit leaders consider such involvement to be completely unimportant or only slightly important (22% and 33%, respectively). The high marks for valuing involvement, however, do not translate to similarly high levels of acknowledgement, recognition, or reward by units. Only 37% of faculty and 18% of graduate teaching assistants stated that units reward excellent teaching of first-year students.

PI 4.4. Expectations. To what degree are expectations for involvement with first-year students clearly communicated to newly hired and continuing full- and part-time faculty and instructors whose responsibilities include teaching first-year students?

The faculty/staff survey suggests that expectations for teaching first-year students are poorly communicated, if at all, to new faculty and instructors. Approximately two-thirds of faculty respondents and 86% of senior administrators stated that working with first-year students was mentioned either “not at all” or “slightly” during the hiring process—be it in job ads or in interviews. This result is not surprising to the committee; hiring is overwhelmingly based on research accomplishment and potential. Of greater concern is that nearly three-quarters of recent hires reported that active and focused engagement with first-year students routinely goes without mention at New Faculty Orientation.

The faculty/staff survey does indicate that there are some units or programs where first-year teaching is explicitly topicalized in the interview process. Open-ended responses suggest that many faculty hired specifically to work with first-year students (e.g., RAPs, first-year programs in the College of Engineering, gateway courses) have expectations communicated to them early and clearly.

The level to which expectations for involvement with first years is communicated to continuing faculty and instructors is less clear. The question presumes involvement is a policy goal, yet there is no clearly articulated and communicated campus-wide philosophy about the first-year experience. The survey of Department Chairs conveys a general sentiment that teaching introductory courses taken by first-year students is “important” and considered in teaching assignments. However, the survey did not specifically address whether Department Chairs communicate expectations to faculty regarding involvement with first years, and so we are limited in our ability to draw inferences.

Section 4: Assessment & Rationale

Rationale: Although intentions of administrators are rated as moderate, consistency across campus is lacking at the unit level in details and implementation. Significant leadership at all levels and across the entire campus is needed to remedy shortcomings. This includes convincing a broader range of faculty of the importance of the first year; better training of faculty to succeed in teaching first year students, and improved recognition and rewards structures associated with first-year teaching at the unit level.

Section 5: Recommendations for Action

From the highest levels of campus administration down to unit heads, leadership must send consistent, strong, and recurring statements that working with first-year students is critical to the University's future, and as significant as any other activity undertaken by faculty. Chairs should be held accountable by deans, and deans by senior administrators, for ensuring that successful teaching practices and reward structures are implemented for first-year and gateway courses.

Provide Meaningful Incentives and Rewards for Faculty to Teach and Mentor First-Year Students

1. HIGH PRIORITY - **Reward substantial engagement in first-year teaching and mentoring** in the annual merit review process, and in promotion and tenure. Teaching and mentoring first-year students should be given differential weight for non-tenure track faculty in promotion to senior instructor and teaching professor, and for tenure track faculty in establishing "excellence" in teaching for promotion and tenure.
2. HIGH PRIORITY - **Grant course releases and/or reduced teaching loads** so that faculty have adequate time to develop high quality first-year/gateway courses, or to significantly redesign existing first-year/gateway courses using pedagogies of engagement.

Provide Pedagogical Training & Support for Faculty who Teach and Mentor First-Year Students

3. HIGH PRIORITY - **Develop and make available to all faculty professional development seminars that articulate the distinct needs of first-year students, and that disseminate pedagogies effective for first-year/gateway courses.** Faculty should be given meaningful incentives to participate in these seminars.
4. HIGH PRIORITY - **Allocate significant funding for faculty professional development directed towards the teaching and mentoring of first-year students:** including conference travel, hosting conferences and speakers on campus, pedagogical training, research on teaching first-year students, and purchasing technology and other materials for first-year/gateway courses.
5. HIGH PRIORITY - **Encourage faculty to innovate with teaching first-year/gateway courses by providing insulation in the short-term from the potential negative consequences of innovation** (e.g. lower FCQ scores).

Section 6: Sources of Evidence

Doc #	Title	Author	URL
33	Faculty/Staff FoE Survey Additional Questions	Improvement Committee, Institutional Research, Fran Costa	https://foe.jngi.org/d/02539-7649/additionalquestionsfacstafffinal.docx
55	Faculty Engagement - RAP n FYSM.pdf	David Budd	https://foe.jngi.org/d/20d1e-7726/faculty-engagement--rap-n-fysm.pdf
76	Tenure data_AY2011-12 to AY2016-17.pdf	David Budd	https://foe.jngi.org/d/5f573-7814/tenure-dataay201112-to-ay201617.pdf
81	Fall 2017 Faculty/Staff Survey Results (questions 64-65, 68-70, 79, 80, 82, 20-22, 33, 60-63, 94-99)	FoE and Committees	https://foe.jngi.org/d/a5b97-7825/facultystaffsurveyresults2017.pdf
87	DeptChairs_Survey_Teaching_Evaluations.pdf	Office of Data Analytics	https://foe.jngi.org/d/76a5c-7837/deptchairssurveyteachingevaluations.pdf
104	BFA Teaching Professor Policy 041516-1.pdf	BFA	https://foe.jngi.org/d/c0d02-7987/bfa-teaching-professor-policy-0415161.pdf