

UC | Great Beginnings

First-year Experience Statement

PURPOSE

UC | **Great Beginnings** is the integrated first-year experience curriculum at the University of Cincinnati. The first-year experience curriculum is part of the very fabric of the university; woven into the GenEd Core as a key touchpoint, it promotes the achievement of academic excellence and is student-centered. UC|Great Beginnings emphasizes that higher learning extends 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 its vision for the future.

The UC first-year experience curriculum's target learning areas aim (1) to help students acquire intellectual and self-management skills needed for success in the university, as well as in life-long learning; (2) to get students engaged with the cultural life and diversity of this large, urban, research university; (3) to focus students' attention on what their professional and civic responsibilities to the world might be as educated persons; and (4) to advance students' capacity to make connections between knowledge gained from multiple sources and to apply their increasingly comprehensive understanding to new questions and situations.

Opportunities for student learning embedded in UC | Great Beginnings are situated and reinforced through student' participation in multiple academic and co-curricular experiences that address its target learning areas. During students' first year at the university, defined as starting with students' confirmation to attend UC and ending with enrollment census day in fall semester of their second year, all matriculated students will experience a similar and comprehensive, cohesive, and well-integrated introduction to higher education at the University of Cincinnati.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased student engagement, learning, and achievement in the first year of college and beyond especially as it relates to General Education.
- Progress toward increased graduation rates as measured by increased retention from the first to second years of college, a preliminary indicator of success.
- Clearly articulated and structured first-year experience requirements across all degree programs.
- Clearly articulated and structured first-year experience co-curricular opportunities.
- Creation of an identifiable and active network of faculty and staff who share with one another their knowledge and practice surrounding the first college year including scholarly activity related to teaching and learning.

STRUCTURE

UC | Great Beginnings is intended to be the cornerstone upon which each student's university learning experience is built. Therefore, its components should be designed to reflect UC's dynamic environment for undergraduate learning and introduce first-year students to the types of learning activities, competencies, and level of accomplishment that graduating students are expected to demonstrate. For example, courses and experiences that use active, experiential, or community-based pedagogies—and, that incorporate purposeful and on-going reflection as an integral part of their design are desirable as these are signature features of UC's undergraduate experience. Likewise, academic rigor must be maintained to protect the integrity of degree programs.

Although all students will be assured of participation in a required first-year experience component, no particular structure for delivering UC|Great Beginnings is prescribed to divisions, colleges, departments, or units. Rather,

these bodies will develop programs that, while incorporating the UC|Great Beginnings aims and objectives, are tailored to the unique needs of their students.

Structures that have proven useful and may serve as models include: first-year seminars—small enrollment courses designed to introduce collegiate level expectations and resources to support student learning; learning communities—an intentionally designed package of courses and experiences in which students are co-enrolled and through which learning may be linked; introductory-level disciplinary courses that are expanded to include and integrate with other aspects of the first-year experience and curriculum; courses and activities that foster out-of-class interaction between students, their faculty, and other professional mentors; required, regularly-scheduled academic advising; the use of undergraduate teaching assistants or peer mentors; first-year student retreats and conferences, clubs and organizations, and other similar programs that foster student participation and leadership in university life.

EVALUATION

UC|Great Beginnings is intended to be dynamic and responsive to student and university needs with even its aims and objectives being changeable. 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.

Each unit will evaluate its own UC | Great Beginnings content and structures. Units will use their data in conjunction with university-wide data to make ongoing enhancements to improve performance.

University-wide assessments will include analysis of aggregate data reflecting such issues as student achievement, retention, and graduation; student engagement as measured by instruments such as the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE), and other comprehensive measures of outcomes including contributions toward achievement of UC strategic goals.

TARGETED STUDENT LEARNINGS

Sample areas of emphasis and learning objectives for each target learning area are listed below.

INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

To advance students' capacity to make connections between knowledge gained from multiple sources and experiences and to apply their increasingly comprehensive understanding to new questions and situations, students will:

- Learn how to recognize interrelationships of academic and professional disciplines.
- Gain some appreciation for how knowledge is created and shared.
- Begin learning how to utilize diverse and even contradictory points of view.
- Begin to apply previously acquired skills and knowledge to practice in new and various settings.
- Recognize how various courses and learning experiences contribute to mastery of the general education baccalaureate competencies and personal collegiate goals.

INTELLECTUAL & SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

To help students acquire intellectual and self-management skills needed for success in the university as well as in life-long learning, students will:

- Gain some proficiency in academic and task-management skills: critical thinking, ethical behavior, goal setting, information literacy, listening, note-taking, problem-solving, project management, reading, self-assessment, self-reflection, study, test-taking, time management, writing, and use of technology.
- Gain skills for setting academic and career development goals and plans for their achievement.
- Learn strategies to successfully manage change and adapt to new situations.
- Gain some understanding of and exhibit behaviors related to personal health and well-being.

- Acquire skills to effectively manage competing priorities like work, family life, and study by learning how to spend their time and energy in ways that support a balanced lifestyle.
- Learn how to form effective relationships, learning partnerships, and teams with faculty, staff, and other students to learn about and engage in educational opportunities and university life.

PROFESSIONAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

To focus students' attention on what their professional and civic responsibilities to the world might be as educated persons, students will:

- Gain some understanding regarding the consequences that actions have upon the community; incorporate learning from mistakes and building on successes to take responsibility for behaviors.
- Learn concepts of professional and civic responsibility to improve the world and the human condition.
- Learn personal accountability skills as well as assertiveness skills for voicing ethical concerns to others.
- Exhibit behaviors that indicate some understanding of cultural competence; welcome opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and communication.

UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT

To get students engaged with the cultural life and diversity of this large urban research university, students will:

- Know about university services and practices and how to reach service representatives for assistance.
- Stay abreast of current university policies and procedures and become familiar with campus facilities, academic and student service offices, governance structures, and other resources.
- Participate in university sponsored co-curricular activities outside of class requirements including lectures, workshops, plays, concerts, student organizations, etc.
- Have opportunities to participate in classroom and co-curricular activities with students from different nationalities, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.
- Extend to those they meet the same respect, cooperation, and caring they expect from others.
- Work to build a learning environment that offers everyone an equal opportunity to grow, flourish, and contribute.
- Have opportunities to take courses and participate in activities from colleges and academic departments outside of their primary program of study.