Foundational Studies Program

Annual Report 2012-2013 Academic Year
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2012-2013 Highlights

2012-2013 was a remarkable year accented by numerous accomplishments and many challenges. The faculty and staff associated with FSP demonstrated responsiveness and agility in the development and revision of courses (including mid-year changes) and advising related questions. We developed processes and systems to accommodate the new program. We formed robust working relationships with departments and offices involved in the program and its associated efforts. In short, it has been a very successful year.

Foundational Studies Receives a ID21 Award

In October 2012, The Foundational Studies Program was one of three award winning programs recognized by the JK Albertson Foundation as an ID21 Award Recipient. Along with the media attention, the program received a $50,000 grant to support our work. The grant funding has enabled the program to provide supplies and support for faculty and staff to build components of our University Learning Outcome Assessment plan, funded travel to learn more about ePortfolios, and supported collaborative work by faculty conducting assessment of learning outcomes. More information about the assessment efforts this year is included on page 16 of this document. Additionally, the grant provided funding for FSP to contract with a professional producer to create a video that would introduce incoming first year students to the program and highlight what to expect in Intellectual Foundations (UF 100).

Intellectual Foundations (UF 100), Civic and Ethical Foundations (UF 200), and Transitional Foundations (UF 300) Courses are Launched

The Foundational Studies Program developed and delivered courses at the 100, 200, and 300 levels reaching 7035 total enrolled for the year (includes 81 in summer classes). Faculty used feedback from midterm assessments, student comments, and course evaluations to refine and even redesign the courses between fall and spring and again during the summer.

The UF courses provide models of student-centered learning: clickers are used in UF 100 plenaries to support students’ interaction, Discussion Groups in UF 100 engage students in team
based projects, ePortfolios are featured in UF 300 to promote integrative learning, and in UF 200 we are building experiential learning to take students outside of the classroom and extend their learning. The Foundational Studies Program collaborated with the library faculty to establish an intentional information literacy curriculum that scaffolds learning from the first year through the capstone. See the Albertsons Library website for a white paper about the collaboration.

http://libraries.boisestate.edu/foundations/index.html

Contained within is a detailed report about the courses, enrollment, assessment, and anticipated changes for 2013-14 in the UF courses.

**Developing a Clear Message: Foundational Studies is...**

Because Boise State has dramatically redefined undergraduate education with the development of a Foundational Studies Program that spans the college experience from cornerstone to capstone, re-educating the many communities the program touches is an essential function for the office. The FSP has worked collaboratively with departments across campus to help these many constituents understand the features and goals of the program. Those activities included writing newsletter articles to be included in the New Student and Family Programs electronic newsletter, revising the FSP website (with the help of our University Web Manager and her staff), teaming up with Assessment Facilitators to have conversations with departments about the University Learning Outcomes and their course goals, providing a lunch session at the Great Ideas Symposium, and an open house in our new FSP office in the spring. Helping students understand and appreciate the UF courses and the new FSP curriculum is perhaps more challenging and arguably more essential. FSP has worked in collaboration with the Advising Coordinators to support a new Bronco Venture orientation program that helps attendees build understanding through multiple messages and experiential learning. Finally, we created a new video with contemporary graphics and styling which explains the program’s features and benefits in a language that students can understand. The new video has been embedded into Bronco Venture and additional materials that we have used to build a clear and consistent message are included in the appendix of this document.

**Achieving our University Learning Outcomes**

Much of our energy this year has been dedicated to developing systems that will support our faculty in assessing and understanding students’ learning related to the eleven outcomes that guide our undergraduate programs. Assessment, done well, fosters conversations about learning. It is not a single number or measure, but a process with a steady eye on the desired achievements of our students and a keen awareness that their performance has much to do with our planning and delivery of course content and skills through effective pedagogical strategies. One of Boise State’s strategic plan projects focused specifically on this goal and, after months of planning, we
have begun taking the concrete steps toward building an [ePortfolio platform](#) that will capture our students’ learning toward multiple ends. Not only will the ePortfolio serve our needs for measuring learning outcomes, it provides an excellent mechanism for students to trumpet their own accomplishments across the curriculum and co-curriculum to share as meaningful evidence with prospective employers and graduate schools. Our ePortfolio effort will begin in 2013-14 with a phased facilitated implementation including 1000 to 1500 students in classes throughout the curriculum.

Contained within this report are details about Boise State’s plan to build an integrative ePortfolio program and our work to support faculty as they are developing qualitative and quantitative approaches to measuring student learning.
Foundational Studies Program Goals

In the review of the Goals for 2012-13 we have highlighted our accomplishments in this report.

**Goal 1:** Successful implementation of the Foundational Studies Program including UF 100, 200 & 300 courses, advising and student success information, and support for faculty teaching in the program.

*Accomplished.* See report for details regarding UF 100, 200, and 300. See also discussion of outreach to advising and other student success units as well as faculty teaching in the program.

**Goal 2:** Develop clear and consistent communication with all program constituents (advising and students success, students, faculty, staff in co-curricular programs)

*Accomplished.* This goal is clearly a dynamic target and will require ongoing attention and activities for support. See for example the “Campus Walk About,” “Great Ideas Symposium,” web redevelopment, and video projects as examples of supporting this goal.

**Goal 3:** Build faculty/staff engagement in the Foundational Studies Program.

*Ongoing.* With the relocation of our office to 116 Business and the introduction of our UF courses, familiarity of the program is growing. We successfully recruited new full time faculty or staff to teach in the program for the coming year. The department chairs are highly supportive of the program and see it as an integral component of our university’s undergraduate curriculum (comments from one on one meetings with Chairs and Deans, Summer 2013). This effort will be continuous, thus the goal cannot be neatly checked off as “accomplished.”

**Goal 4:** Design and implement and evaluate the first phase of an assessment plan for the University Learning Outcomes

*Accomplished.* The first phase included gathering information from faculty through assessment facilitators about the courses and assessment questions to guide us as we move forward. There is a clear need for methods that are integrated into the work that we do as faculty rather than additive. The ePortfolio has been widely accepted as a model that will help us do that. See an expanded discussion of this goal in the Assessment of University Learning Outcomes section of this document.

**Goal 5:** Support initiatives that integrate high impact practices into the undergraduate experience.

*Accomplished.* Foundational Studies has supported the CALIPER grant, The Campus Read (UF 100 and 300 courses boosted attendance at Sharon Matola’s talk to capacity and Bruce Barcott’s close to that). Additional support includes sponsorship of the Mechanical and Biomedical Engineering Department’s Program Transformation Grant.
The Foundational Studies Program Inaugural Year

Boise State launched its new undergraduate curriculum in the fall of 2012, introducing many new and redesigned courses. Among them were three courses developed specifically for this new integrated curriculum and focused on establishing and developing the University Learning Outcomes for our undergraduate students. The full description of intention and philosophy behind the Foundational Studies curriculum is described in the program proposal, which is available online.

The program garnered tremendous positive attention even as it was being launched when the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation awarded an ID21 Award to Boise State for its innovative approach to transforming undergraduate education. The award recognition speaks as much about the courage of the faculty and staff who designed the new program as it does for the program itself.

In the pages that follow, courses and initiatives involved in actualizing the Foundational Studies Program (FSP) are discussed. The FSP encompasses:

- The three interdisciplinary courses with the UF designation (100, 200, and 300)
- The liberal arts curriculum of the university (formerly identified as the “Core”)
- The body of courses that include the FSP designation which includes Disciplinary Lens, Communication in the Disciplines, and Finishing Foundations
- It shares the responsibility of establishing and assessing the University Learning Outcomes with all of the curricular and co-curricular programs serving our undergraduate students.

These multiple identities can cause confusion at times, thus it continues to be the work of the Foundational Studies office to offer clarification as needed. Our work involved with each of the above will be discussed in this report.

While not directly related to the launch of the Foundational Studies, another major undergraduate curriculum innovation corresponded to the introduction of the program. Boise State had lowered its minimum credit hours required for graduation from 128 to 120, in step with many universities throughout the country. Consequently, most of the university’s majors and programs revised their degree requirements in 2011 and introduced those degrees in the 2012 catalog. The unintended consequence was a flood of existing Boise State students who opted to change catalogs and subsequently added UF courses to their degree requirements. This onslaught of students changed the tenor and composition
of UF 100 and 300 courses in the fall and made course enrollment management a very uncertain venture. There was no way to plan for students who might opt to change their catalog. Further, if nothing changed, this situation would continue for at least 6 years. Finally, despite the voluntary nature of their change from an older catalog to the 2012 catalog, some existing students resented being required to take the UF courses.

After consultation with the advising coordinators, academic departments, and university leadership, the Office of the Provost announced that students enrolled at Boise State under a catalog prior to 2012 would have their UF course requirements waived. This waiver was announced at the beginning of April and affected summer and fall registration. As a result we will be better positioned to manage the enrollment for the UF courses. Coordinating this waiver effort required tremendous work and collaboration between the Vice Provost’s office, Advising and Academic Enhancement and the college advising coordinators, The Office of the Registrar and the Foundational Studies Program.

The waiver experience also generated another unexpected response: some departments were not pleased about the decision to move students through the course requirements and did not want to their students to have that option. Others were not clear about the change and how it would impact them. In an effort to overcome the buzz of confusion the Vice Provost’s office, Advising and Academic Enhancement, and Foundational Studies instituted a “walk about” campus during which we hand delivered a one page information sheet about the waiver and a separate one page sheet with Foundational Studies Facts (see Appendix ). This initiative had a positive effect and stemmed the confusion.

The following sections detail accomplishments and highlighted challenges experienced in the curriculum this year beginning first with the UF courses and then discussing issues pertaining to other areas of the undergraduate curriculum. This section does not discuss assessment efforts, see page 16 for a discussion of the assessment developments.

**The University Foundations (UF) Courses**

The launch of the UF courses and the commitment to continuing, dynamic course development along with a coordinated effort to evaluate (at midterm and at the semester’s end) student responses to the courses can be considered a tremendous accomplishment for the many people involved.

*Intellectual Foundations UF 100.*

As described in the program proposal, UF 100 is an interdisciplinary course taught in a large plenary (~225-250 students) by two Lead Faculty. Students are co-enrolled in 24 student discussion groups as well in an arrangement that may be likened to a closely coordinated science lecture and lab. The courses are all thematic in nature and are designed to engage students in questions for which there is no clear answer, but that hold rich opportunities for students to engage in inquiry. The course themes are described on our Foundational Studies website. The courses are intended to be taught through a learner-centered approach using active learning strategies.
Seven instructional teams collaborated to deliver a total of 14 face to face plenaries each with 8-11 associated discussion groups and 6 online courses (includes summer) to 3211 students. All of the courses engaged in redesign between the fall and spring semesters in response to data collected during the fall semester. Five of the seven plenaries were significantly redesigned with changes made to content and pedagogical approaches. All of the plenary teams refined their approaches to intentional discussion of the way the course connects to the University’s Learning Outcomes. All of the UF sections participated in the Midterm Assessment Process, conducted by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Data from these reports indicated a much higher level of student satisfaction in the spring (relative to the fall). Students reported that plenaries and discussion groups were contributing to their learning, although differentially across sections. In each semester we have used midterm and end of semester evaluations to guide course adjustments and revision. The UF 100 Lead Faculty have used the summer of 2013 to continue to develop and revise the courses to insure that it is delivering our learning outcomes and that we have reliable data to measure those outcomes (read more about the outcomes for UF 100 and our first year assessment process).

Throughout the year, the Foundational Studies leadership and faculty worked to address the need to better describe the nature and purposes of the course for students. The above referenced course redesign efforts were largely targeted toward clarification of the purpose and goals of UF 100 as well as making the expected student learning outcomes more apparent. For example, faculty referenced the University Learning Outcomes for the course (critical inquiry, oral communication, and teamwork & innovation) more regularly and made these criteria transparent on graded assignments.

Above, we discussed the detrimental effect of having students enrolled in the course who were changing catalogs. Neither the continuing students nor the students who were new to the university were clear about the course and its purpose. UF 100 is, in many ways, creates a degree of cognitive dissonance for students because it differs from the typical courses students experience in higher education. It is not tied to a particular discipline, the course titles can be interpreted in many ways, and there is not one, but many instructors involved in its delivery. Students were not prepared to deal with this counter-cultural experience.

To address this cognitive and experiential dissonance, Foundational Studies created a new video that explains the University Learning Outcomes, places them in the context of more “traditional” college courses (our Disciplinary Lens courses), and then explains the UF 100 course. Designed primarily for traditionally aged-first year students, this video has been used during the summer 2013 Bronco Venture orientation sessions to introduce students to these central features of their first college year. Additionally, New Student and Family Services has collaborated with Advising and Academic Enhancement and the college Advising Coordinators to develop a new introduction to Boise State academics including the video and other learner-centered activities designed to engage them in the kind of learning they will experience and to provide them in the information they need to be better informed when the time comes for course selection and academic planning. Finally, Vice
Provost Sharon McGuire has taken a leadership role in crafting an academic welcome message for students and their parents/guests during orientation that reinforces the introduction students get on the first day of orientation and, most importantly, engages parents in the discussion of “what to expect” academically in a student’s first college year.

**Classroom Spaces to Facilitate Learning in UF 100**

The UF 100 program is space intensive and designing a schedule to meet demands for student scheduling and doing so given campus space constraints is a challenge for FSP and the Office of the Registrar. FSP, working in conjunction with Vice Provost Jim Munger, designed a “flat schedule” maximizing classroom availability, ensuring suitable classroom spaces for UF 100 Discussion Groups, and to providing greater scheduling ease for students. UF 100 courses will be offered each day of the week and discussion groups will be held all day Monday – Friday (until noon on Friday) in three classrooms with the exception of only a few discussion sections. An additional benefit of this arrangement is that FSP materials can be kept in the three classrooms and, in the case of two plenaries, all of the discussion sections will be taught in the newly renovated and technologically advance classroom, ILC 213.

**Civic and Ethical Foundations UF 200.**

The Foundational Studies Program legislation describes UF 200 as sophomore level course providing direct support for our writing, ethics, and diversity & internationalization ULOs taught in medium sized classes (~40 students). The proposal discusses the required experiential component as follows:

Documentation of an experiential learning activity related to ULO’s 5 and 6 [ethics and diversity and internationalization] is required of every student. For example, instructors will be encouraged to utilize service-learning as a pedagogical strategy required of all students in his/her section. Other experiential learning activities might include community service, student leadership, and facilitation of student-group discussion in UF100 sections. (Foundational Studies Proposal, p. 5)

UF 200 launched in the spring of 2013 with eight face to face sections and one online section. During the spring the faculty teaching the course met every other week to adjust and refine their plans as they were learning about the ways the students were responding to the content. This continual loop of formative assessment was crucial as we concluded the spring semester with new understandings about changes we would need to implement in order to support an increase from nine sections of the course to 34 sections.

After the spring semester, the faculty confirmed that directly supporting the writing ULO in UF 200 would be nearly impossible (or create counterproductive faculty burnout) with class
enrollments of 40. Even using a writing to learn model, faculty cannot respond thoughtfully to writing in such large classes. Writing intensive classes at Boise State are typically capped at 20-25 students. The faculty and the Vice Provost agreed to adjust the class maximum to 30 students so that the faculty could focus on supporting this signature learning outcome.

Course Leadership and staffing. Like UF 100, UF 200 was initially designed to have “Lead Faculty” who are responsible for developing master syllabi for the course. The Lead faculty, in addition to a few other faculty and professional staff taught the first semester offerings. The experiences in the spring helped us better chart out a strategy to provide course leadership for UF 200 as we move forward.

- This spring our Course Coordinator (Riley Caldwell-O’Keefe) began supporting the course. Riley helps develop and support campus and community connections with the UF 200 faculty, plans and develops faculty development for them, and serves as primary recruiter for the course.
- The Lead Faculty members will serve as instructional leaders to facilitate collaboration and the sharing of practices and content across a small group (~5-6) of Foundational Studies Fellows teaching UF 200. In addition to the small group meetings, the Lead Faculty will meet periodically to discuss and make needed to the overall curriculum, design, or other variables impacting the teaching and learning experience within the course.
- In an effort to acknowledge the commitment that all teaching faculty have to the UF 200 course and to honor the contributions they make to our undergraduate curriculum through this signature course, we developed the title, “Foundational Studies Faculty Fellows” to designate the faculty teaching our UF 200 courses. These talented individuals are carefully selected from Boise State’s full and contingent faculty and our professional staff whose credentials and experience that prepare them to help students achieve the University Learning Outcomes. This group of faculty members is diverse and come to us from many departments and areas of the University community.

The Experiential Component in UF 200. During the planning stages of UF 200, the notion of providing a full service learning experience for the 2800 students per year in the course was quickly dismissed. At the same time, the Foundational Studies legislative language made it clear the intent was to include “experiential” learning in the course. The faculty arrived at two solutions for our inaugural semester: (1) experiencing the Tunnel of Oppression (an on campus, student led initiative); and (2) visiting the Idaho Human Rights Educational Center (HREC). Both of these experiences were selected on the basis of their contribution to our Diversity and Ethics ULOs. Our experience provided important formative feedback about
both of these experiences and has given us direction in terms of structuring experiences for the coming year.

- The Tunnel of Oppression is experiential in that it is an experience outside the classroom, however the UF 200 students are largely passive learners during the experience. While we find it valuable (see students’ reflections in appendix), we want to make sure there are additional experiential activities associated with the class. Secondly, the Tunnel cannot be a required event because of its nature and because of its timing. The faculty, therefore, developed four alternative civic engagement and interactive experiences designed to meet the Diversity ULO in the course.

- All of our campus based UF 200 classes visited the HREC and participated in a specially developed docent led tour. The focus of our students’ interaction with the HREC exhibits is to support reflection and to provide a springboard for civic engagement. Students in our classes had widely varying levels of prior knowledge about the subjects in the HREC (particularly the Ann Frank story and the historical framework for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In future semesters, faculty will assign an introductory reading to their students prior to visiting the HREC.

- Additional experiential components have been built into the course and Foundational Fellows are developing more. For example, many sections are integrating this year’s Campus Read, _Half the Sky_, into their courses. The book invites action in response to the plight of women and children who are subjected to human trafficking and abuse in the US and around the globe. While the content of the book reinforces the learning outcomes for the course, reading the book will also prepare students to engage more actively in the campus activities connected to our book selection. Another experiential project involving a group of faculty will include a focus on local food production, particularly tomatoes, and will include collaboration with Boise’s _Tomato Independence Project_. Students will read the book _Tomatoland_ by Barry Estabrook and participate in local garden projects with their UF 200 community. Other Foundational Fellows are focusing on civic engagement by engaging in the democratic process and helping students understand how they can advocate for issues (of their own choosing) and engage in the legislative process. Boise State’s location, at the heart of city, county, and state government provides ample opportunity to build these engagement skills.

Transitional Foundations UF 300.

UF 300 is designed for transfer students entering Boise State having completed their core courses and/or an Associate’s Degree at another regionally accredited university. The course is based in adult learning theory that assumes students coming to the university with the requisite academic experiences also have considerable life experiences. The intention of the faculty is to facilitate
students’ processes of identifying their skills, building on their developmental base and preparing for upper division work as well as for work/graduate school. We use a 21st century skills theme to provide unity to the course. Students work in teams on problems that mirror real-life challenges and they hone communication and information literacy skills that will help them succeed in their major courses. Finally, students begin constructing their ePortfolio — a collection of the student’s work that illustrates the connection between their educational outcomes and the skills employers and graduate programs are seeking. When students master these 11 Learning Outcomes, they will be able to demonstrate the ways their undergraduate learning has prepared them for the challenges and opportunities that await them “Beyond the Blue.”

In 2012-13 Foundational Studies offered an array of UF 300 course options for students:

<table>
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<th>Summer</th>
<th>Course format (special population)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Face to face main campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Hybrid (one on main campus, one on Meridian campus)</td>
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</table>

Table 1. UF 300 Enrollment 2012-2013

As discussed on page 7, enrollment planning for UF 300 was a significant challenge in 2012-13 because of students changing catalogs. It is understood that transfer populations are always harder to track and anticipate, but the internal variable created pressure on the program. Existing students were taking seats needed by transfer students. The waiver offer should alleviate this pressure. Still, we know we need additional seats in UF 300 and we are challenged to identify faculty who are qualified and available to teach the course.

**Course Leadership and staffing.** During the inaugural year, UF 300 had a pair of Lead Faculty responsible for providing curricular leadership to the team of faculty teaching the course. As the faculty met throughout the year, the clear need for this type of leadership came into question. Because of the variety of course types, we found that natural teaching teams emerged: main campus face to face sections were clustered together as were the hybrid and online sections for the regular university population. The online sections for the self-support sections tended to meet separately and joined us for end of semester reviews. This clustering provided **communities of practice** and we determined a designated Lead Faculty was not required for the course. Instead, the Foundational Studies course coordinator will serve to foster collaboration and communication amongst the UF 300 faculty.

**Formative feedback for UF 300.** Based on student feedback in the fall and spring semesters, UF 300 faculty made substantive changes to the course. Students confirmed that several of the learning experiences in UF 300 are valuable to them:
- Class discussions
• Learning to work in teams
• Gaining confidence to integrate technology in learning
• Critical and creative thinking
• Creating an ePortfolio

Since Fall 2012, students in UF 300 have been using an ePortfolio to synthesize and reflect on their learning prior to and during their matriculation at Boise State. Feedback on this course requirement has been strongly positive and students see it as one of the primary benefits of the course. Because there was no platform option that facilitated the use of these ePortfolios for a systematic assessment of student learning, the faculty has not yet taken that step. In the coming year, however, UF 300 will be among the courses involved in the new Digication ePortfolio platform launch.

Two element of the course came up repeatedly as a barrier to learning. First, for the online students, working in teams was a challenge that some of them were not able to overcome. The online faculty have been working to revise the expectations for online team work and we anticipate these changes will alleviate some of the tension around that element of the course. Still, online teamwork is a real 21st century skill and we affirm its value in the course. Secondly, adult students were unhappy with the textbook which seemed to contribute to their sense that the course was not appropriately geared for the 300 level.

During the summer of 2013 a new textbook was selected: Sherfield and Moody’s Cornerstones for Professionalism text reinforces the 21st Century readiness theme and is written explicitly for adult learners who are returning to the classroom. All of the UF 300 main campus, online, and hybrid sections will be using this text in the fall.

During our UF 300 end of year assessment meeting, the faculty had a frank conversation about the tension between adhering to a common syllabus and to finding their own inspiration to bring to the class. With the invitation to “teach to your strengths,” one of our faculty members signed up for the Center for Teaching and Learning Course Design Workshop. The revised course emphasized creativity as a 21st century skill. While still focusing on all of the ULOs for the course, the faculty member was able to bring focus and enthusiasm to the course. Student responses to the revised syllabus are clear in their answers to the question, “List the two most valuable things you learned in this course” is telling:

• Digital fluency! Im [sic] a nerd now! Critical Thinking for the win!
• By far the most valuable thing that I learned in this class was empathy. The second most important thing that I learned was learning how to learn.
• I thought all of the class was valuable. I really enjoyed the team work and the technology learning.
• I learned the importance of creativity in the world and how it is a much suppressed trait. I also learned how to create a website.
• Introduction to new ideas and concepts. Learning to set up a web site was my favorite. I had never thought that I could do it. Granted it didn't look the best. But it's a new skill that will get better with more practice.

We anticipate that other sections will also be redesigned thematically to build on faculty strengths and to appeal to student interests.
Communication in the Disciplines (CID) and Finishing Foundations (FF) Courses

Another distinctive feature of Boise State’s undergraduate curriculum is the inclusion of a course that is focused on developing written and oral communication skills as they are practiced in the student’s major. Similarly, every major has a capstone or Finishing Foundations course that serves to polish written and/or oral communication skills, as well as critical inquiry, and teamwork & innovation. These courses are intended to link students’ academic learning with real world issues or challenges. Departments are encouraged to add experiential components to the courses as well. While some of the departments offered their CID and FF courses in 2012-2013, many more of these courses will be offered for the first time this year.

These CID and FF courses are distributed across campus, with the responsibility for their design and delivery resting in the academic departments. We do, however, offer central support for faculty teaching these courses. Through collaboration with the Writing Center Director, Clyde Moneyhun, this year two support systems were put in place.

- The Virtual Coffee House. This blog provides helpful tips and resources for those who teach CID and FF courses.
- In Spring 2013 Clyde Moneyhun began offering drop in “Coffee Houses” for those who wanted to stop by the Writing Center, have a cup of coffee and a snack and talk about their writing pedagogy or assignment questions.

We anticipate that the addition of the ePortfolio will be a useful tool in both the CID and the FF courses to support and document students’ learning in these signature learning outcome areas.
Assessment of the University Learning Outcomes

The following section seeks to summarize assessment plan development actions taken to date. It then presents a vision for how assessment activities may be conducted as we move forward. The assessment plan is emerging through a developmental evaluation process (Patton, 2011) in which questions are posed, “data” is collected and evaluated, and those evaluations lead us in the next steps. At this point the data is not student learning artifacts, but faculty and staff insights, course design tables, survey data, qualitative gleanings from meetings, and more.

Establishing a foundation for assessment

Spring 2011

The assessment process began with the creation of rubrics for our 11 University Learning Outcomes (ULOs) and proposing courses to align with those rubrics. The rubrics are available online at http://academics.boisestate.edu/fsp/university-learning-outcomes/.

Summer 2011

Syllabus statements and course design tables for all of the courses proposed for Foundational Studies (includes UF, Disciplinary Lens, Communication in the Disciplines, and Finishing Foundations) were created by faculty in all departments. The original design documents are archived online at http://tinyurl.com/almjwlu (a Google site limited to Boise State Faculty and Staff created for the curriculum design process).

Fall and winter 2011-2012

An Assessment Team with representatives from the undergraduate colleges and student affairs met to consider multiple models for assessment plans. An external consultant, Dr. Douglas Eder, was brought to campus in February of 2012 to lead a conversation about modes of authentic assessment and building a culture of assessment on our campus. Dr. Eder’s visit was followed by three “Assessment Think Tanks” in February and March of 2012 to gather faculty and staff responses to assessment strategy ideas.

**Evaluation:** (1) assessment of general education learning outcomes has to be connected to program assessment in the academic and student affairs departments and that faculty using authentic (formal and informal) modes of assessment that are built into their classes will be the most meaningful and sustainable. (2) A system that is transparent and does not add extra work or layers of bureaucracy is important. (3) Encouraging faculty and staff to focus conversations about what has been planned and what is actually happening in classes is an worthwhile starting point. Many people on campus have not been engaged in the FSP course creation process and we need to disseminate knowledge about the courses and intention (goals) of the program.

Based on the evaluation emerging from the 2012 process, the course design documents and rubrics that would guide the implementation of the new courses were the focus of Phase one. Additionally, based on evaluation (3) it was determined that getting more faculty involved in
conversations about curriculum and assessment would help us create more consistency and work toward the goal of creating a culture of assessment on campus.

August 2012- May 2013

Ten assessment facilitators (a blend of faculty and graduate students) were recruited and trained to guide (facilitate) faculty conversations. The conversations were intended to guide faculty in a review of the course design plans and the rubrics and to consider the “fit” between the planned course and the delivered course. The Assessment Facilitators conducted face to face meetings with faculty from 26 DL courses during the fall and 16 in spring 2013. The original plan, to meet with 60 courses during the 2012-2013 academic year, was modified when an NSF Wider Grant (CALIPER) was awarded to study DLN courses through the use of a guided observation protocol (RTOP) and the evaluation of assessment documents. The CALIPER Grant generated feedback from approximately 40 faculty teaching FSP courses.

Fall 2012

In order to facilitate the dynamic nature of course design tables, over 300 course design table documents were entered into a data base. Although work continues to remove errors and to “clean up” these files, DL course design tables are now available at http://academics.boisestate.edu/fsp/dl-course-design-documents/. CID and FF files will be added to the site. The intent is that course design tables should be “living” documents to reflect the activities that faculty are including in their FSP courses. Activities and outcomes that will not be conducted should be removed from the planning documents. The work on this element of the project is on temporary hold until FSP can hire a student to continue developing the tables.

December 2012

A faculty survey was created and distributed to the faculty teaching DL courses. The intent of the survey is twofold: (1) to help build awareness of the course design documents and connection the course has to achieving the University Learning Outcomes; (2) to collect information from faculty about their assessment activities and the “fit” they have with the course design documents.

The survey was sent to 411 unique addresses and 166 surveys were returned (a 40% response). Some faculty sent email responses that they were not clear where to look for the course design tables referenced and others were not sure how to answer the questions. Additional clarification of the survey questions is needed and a revised survey will be sent in Fall 2013.

Fall and Spring start of the semester

All faculty teaching any FSP course (DL, CID, FF) receives an email message reminding them that they are teaching a course that is designated as a Foundational Studies course and asks them to verify that they are using the correct syllabus statement and university learning outcomes as well as integrating the teaching and assessment activities.
Work began in UF 100 and 300 at suggested modifications to the first 6 ULOs (our Signature Outcomes) to operationalize these ULOs for our courses. Interdisciplinary teams met to suggest wording that would be more closely aligned with the courses and to target levels of proficiency for students. UF 100 has defined a set of criteria and a target level of proficiency and has linked these learning outcomes to signature assignments\(^1\) in the course. See Table 2 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>4 Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>3 Meets Expectations</th>
<th>2 Below expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Critical Inquiry</td>
<td>A review of documents will be conducted in December 2013 to describe Exceeds and Below Expectations.</td>
<td>Clearly identifies and describes the problem; evidences general understanding of how it fits within the course’s focus.</td>
<td>A review of documents will be conducted in December 2013 to describe Exceeds and Below Expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating the Problem/Question/Issue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adheres to and clearly follows research practices with respect to thoroughness and accuracy of data collection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Critical Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluates the value of the source for its accuracy and reliability and identifies the bias of the source.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting &amp; Organizing Evidence/Data/Reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focuses on a central message that is clearly and consistently stated and supported.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[academic research]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses an organizational pattern that is clearly and consistently observable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Critical Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Makes appropriate language choices for the audience and occasion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses delivery techniques that make the presentation interesting, understandable, and display the speaker’s preparation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Oral Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>Responds in a way that conveys comprehension of orally communicated ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Oral Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Presentation/Delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Communicate effectively as a listener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Signature assignments have some commonality across sections of a course, but are not standardized measures. They are not typically tests or quizzes, but are integrated into the regular work of the course.
**Phase Two**

**Surveys and Communication**

Some of the phase one assessment activities will continue into phase two. Namely, we will continue to develop and refine the online database of course design tables and will add to that the syllabus statements for approved courses. Further, we will continue to survey the faculty to gather data on assessment activities, faculty opinions regarding students’ learning and to determine “pain points” in the process. This survey process also provides a communication mechanism to reach contingent faculty who may not be as closely affiliated with their academic departments. Similarly, the email messages will continue each semester as a means of outreach to faculty.

**ePortfolios**

General ePortfolio information

The major work of Phase Two includes the development and implementation of an ePortfolio system of assessment. For those who are unfamiliar with ePortfolios, a useful primer is available on California's ePortfolio site: [http://eportfolioca.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=115](http://eportfolioca.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=115). The focus of our ePortfolio is to provide a collection of a student’s work and to provide structures and opportunities for students to develop greater “integrative knowledge” through reflective processes. Integrative knowledge is at the heart of our undergraduate curriculum – it is the understanding that the University Learning Outcomes are developed and honed throughout the many academic and co-curricular experiences they have at Boise State. A ULO is not experienced once and then “checked off” but encountered multiple times to provide opportunities to develop greater and greater levels of proficiency in the criteria it encompasses.

Spring 2013

The Strategic Plan Charter team for Achieving the ULOs conducted an extensive review of ePortfolio platforms. In the search we sought a platform that supported the ideas of authentic expressions of learning, integration into the courses and co-curriculum, ease of use and flexibility, integration into our current systems at Boise State, as well as a robust system for assessment and reporting. [Digication](http://digication.com) emerged as the best platform on all of these criteria.
Summer 2013

A half time coordinator was hired to craft the infrastructure required for integrating the platform into the university. Templates and rubrics that are specific to Boise State were created to create a unique brand for this online learning environment. Training with OIT staff and faculty who will be using the platform in their fall classes is scheduled for August 2013. There will be approximately 1000 new student users creating Digication ePortfolios in 2013-2014.

For Digication, the subscription cost for the fully functional ePortfolio platform will be $11,000 ($11.00 per student) in the first year. The cost per student will decrease as additional accounts are added. Faculty and staff portfolios are free and alumni portfolios are free for as long as Boise State maintains a contract with the vendor. The Foundational Studies Program will seek a course fee to cover the costs of the ePortfolio and related support structures.
Strategic Challenges and Opportunities

Use of learner-centered strategies in UF courses.

Our faculty members are building strategies and approaches to increase the learner-centeredness of their courses. For some faculty members, this shift in practice is more natural than others. The recent research on learning in higher education continues to demonstrate that these approaches to learning are aligned with the brain’s ability to assimilate new information. The Foundational Studies Program has worked to encourage and support the development of active learning across the curriculum. Two important changes were made in UF courses to support active learning this year:

1. UF 100 Plenary maxima. In the fall and spring FSP increased class max from the original 225 to 250, meeting room capacity, for most of the plenaries. The result, packed plenaries, challenged even the most committed active learning practitioners and created an atmosphere that was not consistent with our learning goals. Although we have no data to confirm it, anecdotally, the sheer size and nature of the class reinforced the anonymity students may feel in a large class and undermined class attendance and engagement. Using clickers for quizzes and attendance, for example, lost effectiveness as in such a large crowd, students could easily hide a second clicker, entering responses for a missing peer.

   In response to our challenge in UF 100, the class maximum was reduced to 216 (matching the number of seats in 9 discussion groups) for any plenary that committed to reducing lecture time and increasing active learning in the plenary. Six of the eight plenaries have made this commitment. The remaining two are focusing on enhancing lectures with clicker interaction throughout the plenary.

2. UF 200 maxima. The UF 200 faculty teaching in our inaugural semester reported that a class maximum of 40 (as was initially set in the FSP Proposal) was inconsistent with guidelines for a writing intensive class. While writing classes in the English department are limited to 23 students, we arrived at a limit of 30 students and an emphasis on the “writing to learn” approach to incorporating the writing learning outcome in the class. Further the faculty agreed that all classes would generate 6 pages of polished text per semester in addition to reflective writing, draft writing, and other in class exercises. This change created the need for an additional 23 sections of UF 200 per year.

   Original Planning: 40 seats x 70sections = 2800
   Reduced Maximum: 30 seats x 93sections = 2790

Course Design Fidelity

While the University Learning Outcomes provide the skeletal framework for the courses in the Foundational Studies Program (including Disciplinary Lens, Communication in the Disciplines, Finishing Foundations, and University Foundations courses) there needs to be a level of fidelity so that individual sections of a course are still resemble one another.

In the UF courses fidelity is achieved by:
• Bi-weekly or tri-weekly Faculty meetings
• Shared Blackboard sites for the development of shared assignments
• Signature assignments (in UF 100 and UF 300)
• Annual assessment meetings to examine student learning artifacts, assess represented criteria and establish a focus for the coming year.

Currently the only vehicle for course fidelity in other areas of the FSP curriculum is the course design table for each course. These design tables are now available online and an end of semester survey will help focus faculty attention on the agreed upon outcomes, assessment strategies and pedagogies for each course. Additional measures for course design fidelity will be addressed in the assessment plan.

**Staffing in the UF courses**

In the 2013-2013 budget the Foundational Studies Program was given the authority to hire two full time FSP lecturers. These lecturers will help us work toward a balance of full-time and temporary faculty, particularly in UF 200 and 300, which will help support quality and consistency in the program. It should be noted that while there is no current target percentage highlighted by accreditors or others regarding full-time to part-time faculty, accreditors do attend to the quality of the conditions under which part-time faculty work (AAUP report, n.d.). The Foundational Studies program is committed to supporting full and part time faculty with productive growth-enhancing evaluation, opportunities for development, and membership in our communities of practice.

**Designing a sustainable structure for FSP and its related initiatives**

The Foundational Studies Program, as it ramps up to the full capacity of its course offerings and rolls out the assessment plan, is challenged to keep moving forward to achieve our goals and to do so with the utmost quality. Faculty and staff have been added in the past year to support these efforts. As we move into the next phase of development, identifying collaborative partnerships to leverage our work will be crucial.
Goals for 2013-2014

The Goals established in 2012-13 served the program well. Yet, we did not establish any metrics by which we would measure their clear accomplishment. The Goals for 2013-14, therefore, have been revised to include measurable outcomes.

1. Launch ULO assessment including ePortfolio and end-of-semester survey.

   *Evidence of Success:*
   - Digication site will be created with Boise State specific content including templates and rubrics.
   - 1000 student ePortfolios will have been created including students in UF 300, selected ENGL 101, Spanish Education Majors, and Mechanical Engineering majors. Additional ePortfolios supported by Service Learning and Career Services will be uploaded.
   - Workshops and training sessions will be held to support students and faculty involved in the initiative.
   - Student survey regarding ePortfolio usefulness.
   - Develop and lead assessment teams to guide DL assessment effort
   - Revise and deliver faculty assessment survey at the end of the fall and spring semesters
   - Course Design Documents will be updated and online so that they are fully accessible to faculty.
   - Collaborate with IR to develop mapping between NSSE data, senior survey and investigate the use of class based NSSE questions on course evaluations.

2. Continue creating and refining clear and consistent communication with all program constituents (advising and student success, students, faculty, staff in co-curricular programs).

   *Evidence of Success:*
   - FSP website will be reviewed by external audience (students, faculty, and staff) to provide feedback about accessibility of information.
   - FSP will contribute 4 articles to the NSFP newsletter for parents
   - FSP will contribute to AAE newsletters

3. Develop and maintain supports, structures, and assurances of highly effective teaching practices in UF 100, 200, and 300 with the explicit intention of fostering a consistently high level of course quality.

   *Evidence of Success:*
   - Establish a faculty development series for UF 100, 200, and 300 faculty and discussion group leaders regarding active learning for fall and spring. Collect
data on the use of active learning and learning outcomes in UF 100, 200, and 300 classes.

- Collaborate with Service Learning to provide faculty development for integrating experiential learning into UF 200. Target 5 hours of out of class experiential learning for 75% of the UF 200 classes.
- Document integrated co-curricular experiences with curriculum (e.g. Campus Read, Diversity and International opportunities).
- Based on fall 2013 courses, define target number of pages of reading and writing for UF 100, 200, and 300
- Based on fall 2013 student learning data, finalize UF 100 course rubric for ULOs 1, 3, 4
- Based on fall 2013 UF 200 and 300 identify key criteria for the ULOs that we will target for assessment and draft course level rubrics that can be more readily applied to UF 200 and 300 assignments.
- Define signature assignments for UF 200 by the end of the Spring 2014 semester.

4. Develop a sustainable structure that serves to increase the ability of the FSP program to deliver on the University’s strategic plan.

Evidence of Success:
- Establish multi-year targets for full time faculty and staff teaching UF courses and measure annual success based on that target.
- Collect data on advising referrals to target information to areas that demonstrate less clarity
- Create an organizational chart to support primary mission of FSP and related initiatives
- Demonstrate sustainable enrollment management and budgeting practices

5. Take steps in building a national reputation as a leader in reformed general education and the undergraduate experience.

Evidence of Success:
- Participate in Idaho’s LEAP State efforts
- Present about FSP at national General Education conferences (AGLS, AACU) and Higher Education conferences
- Collaboration on grant supported projects regarding assessment and higher education practices
- Seek/support FSP faculty and staff to publish articles in national higher education media outlets
- Seek/support FSP faculty and staff to publish in higher education journals
Appendix

Example of a response from one student about experiential learning in UF 200 (participating in the Tunnel of Oppression):

[Names removed for privacy. Shared with permission.]

Tunnel of Oppression Essay

1How can this experience inform conversations about racism, sexism, and all the –isms we grapple with in class and beyond?

This experience was very eye-opening and spurred me to have conversations outside school about it and even at my place of work. Although up until this point we had been talking and reading about topics regarding racism, sexism, and any other –isms we didn’t have anything to physically associate those terms with their meaning (besides outside experiences, some of which I hadn’t experienced). In essence after we were walked through the Tunnel of Oppression, we were given a face to match the name. They were no longer words on a page or words spoken, but physical representations of the term themselves. That in and of itself I think helped, me at least, become informed on certain aspects of discrimination or stereotyping I hadn’t known very much about previous to visiting the Tunnel of Oppression. Because not everyone is part of an ethical foundations class such as my peers and I, it also presented an opportunity for those not involved to become aware of the issues that plagues those being discriminated against. This experience also informs conversations as it gives us a look into how racism, sexism, etc. are created and formed. For instance I didn’t know that a large majority of homeless people were L/G/B/T until after having visiting the Tunnel of Oppression and so it gave me even more information that I hadn’t learned in class.

The Tunnel of Oppression I personally believe is a great way of informing and conveying how those who are oppressed feel. It puts you in the shoes of that person, another dynamic that isn’t possible in the class room or from reading excerpts from books, magazines, or any other published work. Until you feel how that person feels, you can’t completely understand discrimination, and I can safely say that while I was walking through the Tunnel of Oppression I felt what they were feeling.

It’s easy to be ignorant of something until you are put into that situation. This is why I think that the Tunnel of Oppression was a necessary thing for me to experience and I believe it could be beneficial for everyone to experience.

2How do these values compare and contrast with your values or ethics?
UF 300 Student Comments (responses to the most important things they learned in the class):

- Library research would be my next choice. I learned so much from this activity because it has made it easier for me to do research in other classes as well. I have used the Albertson Library online before, but it was really useful to learn how to whittle down what information to select. I also thought it was a great refresher since returning to college. I had forgotten a lot of the preferred pieces of research that each profession prefers like journals and peer review articles. I also liked how we could look up the references based on an article for more in depth research and also to see how recent the information they used and to do it all with one click of the mouse!

- I have also learned to think critically. Not everyone tells the truth, and it's up to me to decide who's being truthful and who's not. After all, "Answers are critical to education" and I can determine some of these answers by asking different types of questions (MacArthur Foundation, Cornerstones 285). But I must remember that not everything can be solved, and I must therefore learn to "tolerate uncertainty" (Cornerstones, 284). In addition, it is also crucial to "distinguish fact from opinion," and the way to do that is to look for anything that can be factually proven (Cornerstones, 292).

- The three things that I have taken away from this semester are leadership, communication, and resumes. I always knew what leadership meant and looked like, but I never realized exactly how many different types and styles there are. Also the qualities that come with leadership are something that I have taken away from the quizzes that we have taken and learning exactly what improvements I can make to become the type of leader I want to be. The second is the different ways in which we communicate in today's world. It is no longer in person meetings or telephone conversations, but rather through written text of emails and text messaging. This is a necessary skill that we have learned about in how to become successful in the 21st century. Communication has become such a unique technology that we must keep up with it in order to stay in touch with the world. It is a lot more individualized in the sense that we are only communicating through undeletable text that we must always be aware of what we are saying. The third is resumes and their evolution into the 21st century. I came into this class that it always comes in printed word on paper that is covered in a nice binder or at the very least a well organized document that could be sent via email. What the e-portfolio project taught me with resumes is the new creative ways to be noticed. The technologies of computers has allowed for businesses to look at resumes differently in how we present them as they are no longer just a piece of paper with experiences and skills. They are now a more individualized personal representation of us that must be created in a way to make us more noticeable to the businesses we apply.

- I really enjoyed exploring different technological aspects as well. I want to learn more about technology but doing it on my own but I didn't know where to start or how to learn about these programs. I really enjoyed learning how to make an e resume. I was worried about my resume looking dull since I didn't understand the programs but this section made it easy and fun to learn.
By Mike Journee

In the Western Tradition, the University
Exploration of All the Truths That Are Known

Yet, as modern universities like Boise State focus on economic development, the creation of a specialized, professional workforce for an increasingly technical economy and society, students run the risk of missing out on a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the world in which they will work and live.

This fall, Boise State students will begin a new curriculum regimen that provides a broad view of the undergraduate experience. The Foundational Studies Program is designed to instill students with lifelong learning skills and perspectives to help them thrive and grow as world citizens and as leaders far beyond the specifics of their chosen degree programs.

"The idea is that your college education is really a springboard. When you leave with a degree in hand, you're not really done," says Dr. Tony Black, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and a key administrator who has led the collaborative, wide-ranging process to create the program. "The idea is that you're going to go on and pursue your passion, and we hope that our students will be able to do that." Dr. Black is overseeing the implementation of the program with Dr. Amy Moir, interim dean of the College of Engineering, and Dr. Sharon Huen, vice provost for academic affairs.

The Foundational Studies Program curriculum is designed to provide a strong foundation for all students. The program is divided into several parts, including general education courses and specific major requirements. It is designed to foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations.

Additionally, students take one to three hours per week to meet with a faculty advisor in a small group setting. This allows for more personalized attention and support as students navigate their academic journey.

Key Features of the Program:

- Connected courses in a multi-disciplinary senior year
- A design for learning that builds on important concepts
- New and redrewnded courses that inspire critical and innovative thinking
- Linked experiences outside of the classroom
- Learning outcomes developed in partnership
- Critical thinking and problem-solving with a built-in process for robust, rich, and meaningful experiences
Foundational Studies Facts

FSP Courses as Building Blocks

- UF 100 and 200 are building blocks for the undergraduate curriculum. They introduce habits of mind and skills that students can build on in their majors, minors, and electives throughout their undergraduate years.

UF 100 – a BIG experience and a small experience

- All UF 100 courses have themes and they are all slightly different in terms of the structure of the class (some are more lecture, some are more active). Students can learn more about each class by visiting the FSP website (see the link to STUDENTS and click on UF 100)
- It is an ACADEMIC class, so students need to count on spending 6 hours per week outside of class on UF 100 (projects, activities, reading, preparation)
- Students should take UF 100 in their first year at Boise State
- All UF 100 sections require college level reading readiness.

UF 200 – an Active Learning course focusing on Ethics & Diversity.

- UF 200 courses are structured more like a “traditional” class. They have 30 students and one professor.
- All UF 200 courses include some sort of “experiential” learning that takes place outside of the classroom.
- There are variations across course sections, but all sections cover the same learning outcomes and students should be prepared for writing and reading requirements as appropriate for a 200 level course.

UF 300 for Transfer Students

- Students who have earned any Associate’s Degree or whose Academic Advisement Report (AAR) indicates they are “Core Certified” take UF 300.
- UF 300 is a graduation requirement for these students
- The “58 hour rule” expired at the end of the 2012-13 academic year.
- A key activity in UF 300 is building an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) that presents their learning and skills from life and educational experiences prior to coming to Boise State.
- Additional learning focusing on Ethics, Diversity, and Critical Inquiry is central to the UF 300 course.

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1 For example, the most recent edition of Journal on Excellence in College Teaching is devoted to the discussion of cognitive research and learning in higher education. The methods that we know are most effective for k-12 learners are most effective for all learners. Learner and learning-centered methods include “practical strategies based on principles derived from brain related sciences” (Jensen, 2011; qtd. In Freeman & Wash, 2013).