



Working Group B: First-Year Experiences

Context

CU Denver has an obligation to ensure our students have the support they need to persist and, ultimately, to graduate. Our aim is to increase student retention rates. We will do this through a swift and coordinated response to recommendations from a National Institute for Student Success (NISS) report to enhance student retention and success. NISS identified institutional barriers that stand in the way of our students' success and provided guidance for our next steps. Four Student Success Transformation working groups will address areas of greatest opportunity and will leverage CU Denver data and community collaboration to guide action steps that will hold us accountable for improving student retention.

Charge

Students at CU Denver graduate with an average of 14.5 more credit hours than they need, and too many never find their way to graduation. Twenty-five percent of CU Denver students change their major at some point in their college career, and 85% of them do so after their first year. Many students need to explore their interests before committing to a major and eventual career pathway. However, late major changes can lead to excess credit accumulation and extended time to graduation. To address this challenge, the First-Year Experiences (FYE) working group is charged with designing a comprehensive, sustainable, and scalable first-year framework that helps CU Denver students find their right-fit majors early and build a strong foundation for college success.

The group will examine and integrate existing elements—such as Major & Career Pathways (Meta Majors), FYE courses, and Summer Bridge programs—into a coordinated model that ensures all first-year students receive opportunities for major exploration and career discovery. The group also will ensure that first-year students continue to develop a sense of belonging, an academic mindset, and other skills critical to college success. Special attention will be given to ensuring that the unique needs of all students are met, including those of traditional first-year students right out of high school, students who arrive with a significant number of previously earned credits, and adult learners. This first-year framework will also support students at the greatest academic risk.

The working group will use the [NISS Diagnostic & Playbook](#) as the basis for their recommendations, with particular attention to report portions that address FYE data and areas for improvement (pages 6, 15, 21, 24, 27, 37-39).



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Summer 2025 Deliverables

By August 15, 2025, the working group will document the following and share a summary of their efforts with Chancellor Christensen and Provost Marrongelle:

- Catalog current FYE organization/structure and success rates
- Review current Major and Career Pathways (meta majors) with initial recommendations for changes (if necessary)
- Assess the feasibility of learning-community course combinations in support of meta majors
- Identify recommendations for FYE course option(s) to anchor a new FYE structure
- Draft a proposal for a revised First-Year Experience, including a plan for universal implementation

In addition, the working group will:

- Identify how it will expand perspectives beyond the initial group membership to include, in particular, faculty and students
- Share a work plan for completion of Spring 2026 deliverables outlined below

Fall 2025 Deliverable

By December 15, 2025, the working group will document the following and share a progress update on their efforts to-date with Chancellor Christensen and Provost Marrongelle.

Spring 2026 Deliverables

By May 15, 2026, the working group will share comprehensive documentation of their efforts with Chancellor Christensen and Provost Marrongelle, including:

- Models for all first-year Learning Community course combinations with block scheduling
- A proposal for redesigned FYE course(s), incorporating embedded career-preparatory content and new learning outcomes
- Identified mechanisms that would allow faculty to participate in FYE courses within their existing contractual instructional obligations
- A review of current Summer Bridge Program organization/structure/outcomes and success rates
- Data identifying which students need Summer Bridge support most
- A proposal for a redesigned Summer Bridge program, incorporating provision for requiring participation for students at highest academic risk
- A matrix for evaluating programs for future refinement

In addition, the working group will share:

- An overview of how campus constituent voices were engaged throughout the process and what collaborations are still necessary for implementation



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- A work plan for implementing the working group's recommendations, incorporating goals, tactics, accountable individuals or teams, and measures of success