



Report of the Cap Year Experience Committee

June 15th, 2015

Submitted to Richard Gale, VP Academic and Provost

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a structural plan for a proposed Cap Year Experience (CYE) to be piloted for the 2017 academic year at Capilano University. The report will also be used as a consultation piece in the development of the pilot.

Over the past three months, an ad hoc committee convened to advise the VP Academic and Provost on the creation and operation of a CYE. Committee members include the Dean of Health and Education, a representative from each of the five faculties, and a student.

The committee members utilized the vast research in the area of post-secondary first-year programs, particularly from the US; consultation with Capilano University's Institutional Research Department; and their own expertise and experience in their faculty roles to develop a plan to be used for consultation.

Drawing on the Academic and Strategic Plans, the report found five key elements for a CYE at Capilano University:

- a supportive and dynamic cohort environment that fosters student success,
- opportunities for personal and academic growth through experiential and exploratory learning,
- accessible, progressive, uniquely 'Capilano' programming,
- engaging, interdisciplinary 'theme- based' curriculum, and
- consistent and individualized student support through faculty-to-student and peer mentor-student advising teams.

This report will be presented to the campus community so that students, staff, and faculty can provide consultation and feedback to the committee. It will also be presented to the larger community, including high school teachers and counsellors. Faculty members will then be invited to submit proposals for curriculum design and development for the 2017 pilot year.

Introduction

The scope of this proposal is to provide a rationale and framework for what a first-year experience at Capilano University might look like – the Cap Year Experience (CYE).

“This would be a year-one curriculum that serves three purposes: provide interested students with a shared first year including a common curriculum and extra-curricular support; showcase what makes Capilano University distinctive in terms of program offerings and educational experiences; and, offer an attractive, purposeful alternative to the “gap year” many students seek before embarking on their chosen academic trajectory. The Cap Year might focus on social action and community engagement, global affairs or study abroad, or be a foundation year of preparatory studies to increase the likelihood of success. There could even be a Cap Year designed to help students transition into Canadian advanced education. It would not be required, would not take the place of general education, but the Cap Year could provide a venue for much of the programming Capilano values.” (Academic Plan, p. 30)

Krause (2006) suggests that “we have now reached the stage where universities must recognize the need for institution-wide approaches to enhancing the first-year experience” (8.8.6). Furthermore, all stakeholders in first-year initiatives should work together to create a more sustainable, institution-wide approach that “transcends academic, administrative, and support areas’ silos” (Kift, 2008, p. 2).

Frameworks | First Year Experiences

External research on first-year experience frameworks describes a wide spectrum of first-year experiences for students, each with its own combination of high-impact practices.

The Gap Year practice is one that is travel and/or community based and is often an experience that is managed by companies separate from the institution.

In an integrated First-Year Experience (FYE), elements such as orientation, common first-year seminars, peer mentoring, common/shared experiences, living-learning environments, and a variety of other options are intended to support new students, both personally and academically, as they transition to university life. The FYE options are integrated into the first year of study or designed to be program specific.

At other institutions, distinct FYE programs offer a separate year of study which includes many of the elements of an integrated FYE, such as orientation, seminars, and mentoring. In addition, students enroll in unique constellations of courses which are designed around a common theme and which allow them to explore their interests and participate in field trips/travel in a supported academic framework.

Kalamazoo College in Michigan, for example, offers a unique FYE program.

Their FYE aims to help students to

- achieve academic success,
- identify and pursue their passions,
- connect with Kalamazoo College and the greater Kalamazoo communities,
- construct complex intercultural understandings, and
- develop a purpose-filled and balanced life.

Their FYE includes the following elements:

- summer common reading,
- wilderness experience,
- orientation,
- first-Year seminars,
- first-Year forums,
- academic advising, and
- peer leaders.

Oregon State University provides the following as part of their FYE for new students:

- welcome week and orientation (START program includes orientation, advising and registration),
- on-campus living and living-learning communities provide better connections to the campus, community and residences have live-in Academic Advisors,
- academic advising, and
- U-Engage courses and course playlists organized by themes.

Faced with issues of declining domestic enrolment, weak retention numbers, questions about financial sustainability, and the need to bolster their reputation as a destination of choice, the York University FYE Working Group has established goals and objectives to guide and advance the creation of the first year experience framework.

New students at York will develop personal and academic competence, and a sense of purpose.

York University can achieve this by

- ensuring students are clear about what will be expected of them academically;
- investing in teaching resources for full- and part-time faculty, and teaching assistants;
- investing in accessible learning resources/services;
- providing career and academic advising that encourages reflection and builds a sense of purpose; and
- offering programs that foster practical competence and physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

New students at York will make meaningful connections with peers, faculty, staff, and York University.

York University can achieve this by

- delivering effective, well-coordinated orientation programming;
- expanding the recruitment, training, and deployment of peer mentors;

- encouraging awareness and involvement in co-curricular experiences; and
- facilitating strategies for faculty, academic advisors, other staff, and peers to connect with students in and outside the classroom.

Our Cap Year Experience (CYE) could combine elements of both the FYE and the Gap Year and offer an academically rigorous, exploratory and supportive first year.

Benefits | First Year Experiences

First-year experiences differ in design across institutions but all programs include a variety of high-impact practices: “curricular and co-curricular structures that tend to draw upon high-quality pedagogies and practices in pursuit of 21st century learning outcomes; they are teaching and learning practices that have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students..,[toward] increase rates of retention and student engagement” (Kuh, 2008). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) describes several of these, including first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing intensive courses, collaborative writing and assignments, undergraduate research, service and community-based learning, and capstone projects (AAC&U). (<http://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>)

Many schools offer first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies (AAC&U). The seminar provides a forum for new students to examine their entry to college, and the implications it has for their identity, their time, and their intellectual growth, can be offered in various formats and are taught by varying combinations of faculty, staff and administrators (Bers and Younger, 2014).

The 2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars is reported on by Tobolowsky (2008). Of the 968 institutions that responded, 821 reported offering a FYE seminar and 196 (24%) were community colleges. There are some differences between seminars at colleges and larger 4-year institutions. For example, community colleges tend to develop the seminar to fill skill and knowledge gaps, while four-year institutions are somewhat more likely to focus on students’ entry into the academic community (Bers and Younger, 2014). In addition, four-year institutions are more likely to require the seminar for all first year students (46%) compared to two-year institutions (21.5%). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that “participation in first-year seminars has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on students’ successful transition to college, and the likelihood of persistence into the second year and as well as on overall academic performance in college on an array of other college experiences known to be related directly or indirectly to bachelor’s degree completion” (p. 403).

Common intellectual experiences generally develop by way of a core curriculum. This can take a variety of forms, such as a set of required common courses or general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. The core curriculum is often organized around broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and co-curricular options for students (AAC&U).

Learning communities integrate learning across courses and expose students to broader issues and big questions. Often students take courses that are linked and work closely together and with their instructors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines (AAC&U).

In service- and community-based learning opportunities, students gain experience by working with community partners to complete a project or fulfill an academic goal. Students apply what they are learning in their classes to working in real-world settings and giving back to the community.

Capstone courses and/or projects are culminating experiences that require students to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork (AAC&U).

First-Year Students at Capilano University

It is important that we align these possible benefits with the unique student body that we have at Capilano University. Institutional Research at Capilano characterized the following trends in our first-year students:

- From 2009/2010 to 2014/2015, both direct and delayed entry enrolments from high school have been declining.
- The majority of our students are direct from high school, and an increasing proportion are first-generation students (first in the family).
- The attrition rates overall for bachelor programs are about 30%, certificate programs about 50%, and diploma programs about 30%.
- Over the past 5 years, about 15.87% of the first-year students who continued to the next year changed their programs.

Rationale for CYE

Based on these findings, the CYE has the potential to

- attract more students directly from high school who would be interested in a dynamic, academically rigorous year in which they could explore their interests;
- attract more students directly from high school who would benefit from the personal and academic support provided by a CYE;
- increase the success and retention of students within programs and at Capilano University overall;
- support and encourage students in exploring multiple academic interests in their first year;

- open up opportunities for students and allow them to discover their interests and possible career paths; and
- attract students who wouldn't otherwise consider Capilano University as a destination University.

Elements of the CYE

The Cap Year has the potential to provide students with

- a purposeful and engaging full-time learning experience over two semesters;
- opportunities for personal and academic growth through experiential and exploratory learning
- progressive, uniquely 'Capilano' programming;
- accessible, interdisciplinary theme-based curriculum taught by dynamic teams of instructors;
- a supportive and cohesive cohort environment that facilitates student success;
- consistent and individualized student support through faculty-to-student and peer mentor-student advising teams;
- opportunities to develop the critical thinking, writing, and reading skills essential for post-secondary success;
- transferable university credits (six to twelve) for further post-secondary studies; and
- opportunities for campus and community connection and engagement.

CYE Program Objectives

The CYE program objectives are aligned with the institution's strategic and operational plans published in 2014:

Exposure to interdisciplinary curriculum (pg. 12 of Strategic Plan; pg. 16 of Academic Plan relating to commitment to integrative and trans-disciplinary experience.)

1. **Introduction to foundational capabilities and transferable skills** (pg. 4 of Strategic Plan.)
Supported by cross faculty resources as well as the library, writing and math centres, advising, counselling and learning specialist services.
 - Self-directed learning, awareness, and responsibility; up-to-date information gathering and research skills; communication skills; quantitative reasoning ability; group and social interaction skills; creative, critical and analytical reasoning skills; community/global consciousness and responsiveness.

2. **Participation in experiential learning** (pg. 12 of Strategic Plan) including service and community projects (pg. 16 of Strategic Plan and pg. 21 of Academic Plan). Resources within each faculty could be leveraged to facilitate this learning e.g. links to industry and government partners, local Chambers of Commerce, and not-for-profit entities.

3. **Development of personal and social responsibility** (pg. 9 of Academic Plan in regard to Whole-Person education). Student use of the writing and math centres, advisory, counseling and learning specialist services would be encouraged.
 - Civic knowledge and engagement at local and global levels; ethical reasoning and action; foundations and skills for lifelong learning.

4. **Exploration and demonstration of intercultural understandings** (*Aboriginal* pg. 12 Strategic Plan and 27 of Academic Plan, *international* pg. 29 of Academic Plan, *socio-economic* etc.). Incorporating the Centre for International Experience, Study Abroad, and the Kexwusm-ayakn Student First Nations Centre.

5. **Exploration and demonstration of intercultural understandings** (Aboriginal pg. 12 Strategic Plan and 27 of Academic Plan, international pg. 29 of Academic Plan, socio-economic etc.). Incorporating the Centre for International Experience, Study Abroad, and the Kexwusm-ayakn Student First Nations Centre

6. **Development of stewardship/sustainability** (refer to Academic Plan pgs. 10-11)
The integration of the institution's own sustainability initiatives as well as EarthWorks will support this outcome.

In addition to the program objectives listed above, it is intended that the students also experience the following **tangible personal outcomes**:

- the ability to access a clear educational pathway and career goals by identifying, cultivating, and pursuing passions;
- a possession of greater preparatory skills to more effectively transition into a university setting and achieve academic success;
- a connection to our campus and its multiple faculties as well as extended stakeholder groups and communities; and
- the development of curiosity, engagement, and self-motivation to support the ongoing pursuit of a purpose-filled and balanced life.

CYE Student Learning Outcomes

Successful students will be able to

- identify their own values, passions and abilities;
- develop the awareness and skills necessary for personal, academic, and future career success;
- recognize and apply the elements of effective and clear communication;
- develop and apply critical thinking, critical reading, and critical writing skills;
- collaborate, consult, and interact confidently and effectively with others;
- explore diverse perspectives to develop or modify their points of view;
- gain a deeper appreciation for both cultural and environmental interconnectedness of the world;
- increase their understanding of their relationship, both as consumers and citizens, to a number of local and global issues; and
- apply interdisciplinary concepts, theories, and practices as well as critical thinking, imagination, and judgment to an individual portfolio and/or group Capstone project based on the CYE designated theme.

CYE Framework

Required Components	Description/ideas	Program Objectives
Theme * See next section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each cohort will have an educational theme which is woven throughout the entire curriculum. 	1,2,3,4,5,6
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a week of intensive faculty, staff, peer leaders, and new student involvement • Success oriented • Gives students sense of place • Build relationships • Instills the feeling of “I made the right decision” • Allows for an outdoor experience and community service project • Connects students to First Nations Community • Delivered in the final week of August 	1,3,5,6

Seminars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intended to help students find and develop a voice through writing, speaking, analytical reading, critical thinking, and discussion ● 1st year university writing credit ● Academic success skills ● Explorations of an idea, topic or event ● Curriculum based ● Linked to theme ● Credit based 	1,2,4
Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Two types: interdisciplinary speakers and advising and success strategies ● Student participation in university lecture series with internal and external experts who lecture on key topics ● Alumni presenting on their program experience ● Non- credit based but assignments in courses will be linked to forum content 	1,4, 5
Advising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Support Success Teams comprised of academic advisors, faculty, peer mentors ● International student “buddies” ● Current students serving as field trip co-leaders ● Possible full time 1st year advisor support 	2,4
Core courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transferable across institutions 	1,2
Theme Based Directed Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interdisciplinary ● Community Service Learning 	1,2,3,6
Capstone project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Portfolio creation ● Capstone Project 	1,2,3,4,5

CYE Academic Year Sketch

THEME

ORIENTATION

Week long experiential learning
Building a sense of place and integration of the cohort

SEMINARS

#1 #2 #3

9 credits

Theme based

-writing intensive, reading skills, and critical thinking

e.g.: ENG 100, USSD110, BADM106, WRTG 100, USSD 100, LBST 100

FORUMS

#1 INTERDISCIPLINARY SPEAKERS

- immersion into campus life
- exposure to ideas and events on campus
- attend classes in various faculties

#2 ADVISING SUCCESS STRATEGIES

- in-class instruction and individual consultation

COURSES

9 credits

Student's choice of playlist based on theme related courses offered throughout the campus (existing courses)

THEME BASED DIRECTED STUDY

#1 INTERDISCIPLINARY / SERVICE LEARNING

3 credits

- experiential learning includes community outreach and theme based excursions

#2 CAPSTONE

3 credits

- portfolio creation and a class Capstone project

Possible CYE Program Themes

- Transformation
- Rise of Asia
- Democracy
- Democracy and Diversity
- Outside/Immigrant Societies
- Migration and Displacement
- Creativity and Culture
- Sustainability
- Food
- Catastrophe and Renewal
- People, Technology, and Society
- Passion
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Heart versus Head
- Ideas and Innovation
- Beauty and Diversity
- Social Progress
- Bias
- Innovation and Awesomeness

CYE Next Steps & Implementation

August 2015

- Consult with campus and external community for feedback
- Deliver presentation forums during August PD

Fall 2015

- Begin program proposal approval process. The CYE committee could put out a call for proposals with the mandatory components and criteria for assessment.
- Proposals due by November 15th, 2015
- Decision on pilot by December 15th, 2015

Spring 2016

- Development of pilot

Fall 2016

- Program and course approvals completed

Spring 2017

- Marketing of the first CYE pilot for fall 2017
- Admissions open

Fall 2017

- Cohort begins academic year with an Orientation at the end of August with faculty and advising team.
- The program continues with two semesters paralleling the Academic Year calendar.
- Pilot evaluation committee implemented.

Challenges

- Where does this program live?
- As the courses may be cross-faculty, how will the approval process work from a departmental level upwards?
- Marketing and advertising - do we have the resources to do this effectively as a “for profit” program?

References

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