

**Strategic Planning Proposal**  
**Partnerships in Excellence – Developing Multiple Entry Points into the Curriculum**  
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**OVERVIEW:**

To ensure all Smith students develop tools and strategies for success, an appropriate curriculum for entering students must be developed further. Under such a model, all students would take at least two small courses during their first year, with the specific aim of developing basic skills including public speaking, writing, and quantitative skills. To achieve this goal will require a rethinking of first year courses across the curriculum to ensure that an adequate number of such courses can be offered. Moreover, the specific aims of such courses must be clearly articulated to ensure their success (something like the writing intensive model).

Under the proposed model, first year small courses would involve a partnership of faculty, staff (e.g. Jacobson Center), and perhaps also a well-supported peer mentoring system. This team will work together to ensure that students develop basic skills in these areas, and then begin to refine these skills as they move forward in the curriculum. Such a model will enable us to take deploy our existing resources (e.g. faculty/student ratios) while also developing further appropriate partnerships across campus. The model must be flexible to match the increasingly diverse backgrounds of our entering students such that all students are able to make substantial progress on skill acquisition in their first year.

**BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION**

One of the strengths of Smith is the ability of students to interact in small group settings with faculty and peers. Yet, as structured, many of our students must wait until the upper, more specialized courses to find themselves in small classes. At the same time, we recognize the importance of basic skill acquisition /refinement for all entering students. Such skills include speaking, writing, critical thinking, and quantitative skills. Developing a solid basis is essential to all of our students, and is particularly critical given the diversity of backgrounds of our entering students. Such skills are essential for achieving academic excellence.

**THE PROGRAM**

I propose that we rethink our curriculum for first year students with the specific aim of developing a series of courses across the curriculum that ensure that students master basic skills early in their time at Smith. One model is to require all first year students to take at least two limited enrollments. Some elements of this proposal include:

- Developing a series of limited enrollment (12-16 students?) courses for which first year students have priority. Obviously, increasing the number of such courses will require us to rethink offerings at other levels and to rebalance coverage of introductory material with other pedagogical concerns. In other words, the model of large, survey introductory courses (offered in some areas) will have to be reworked to ensure limited enrollment, more focuses courses are also offered.
- Develop courses as a true partnership between faculty, staff (e.g. professionals at Jacobson, library staff, etc.) and perhaps also, a well-organized and supported peer

mentoring system. Assignments within these small courses will be developed to ensure that all students develop basic skills. For example, writing assignments could include reviews within the course, by faculty and by staff at Jacobson. Upperclass students could be mobilized to provide support in basics, and might run 'review' or 'problem solving' sessions for certain of our entry level offerings.

To ensure success in creating multiple entries into the curriculum will require considerable discussion and refinement of ideas. Clearly, there are many ways to succeed at providing appropriate entry-level experiences. Rather than deciding *a priori* what the elements of such courses must have, departments and programs could be given the challenge to create an appropriate number of such early experiences in their particular areas. At the same time, the strategic plan should include specifics on increasing the 'toolset' available to faculty through development of faculty training, and center(s) for partnership with staff on campus to ensure success in training early students.