

Campus-wide review of the FIG Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In reviewing the FIG program, it seems only right to begin by documenting the impact of the FIG program on the following goals in MU Strategic Plan: Excellence in Student Success

Goal 5: Increase first-year (FTC) undergraduate student retention to 93% by 2023.

Overall, students participating in FIGs between FS2007 and FS2016, had an average 87.8% first year retention compared to non-FIG participants averaging 84.4% or an overall average increase of 3.6 +/- 1.5% increase.

The impact of the FIG program on first year retention of Pell Grant-eligible (6.2% ± 2.4 more than non-FIG participants in same cohort) and First Generation students (6.9% ± 1.8 improvement) was even more significant. For students who were both First Gen + Group 4, the increase was 9.6% ± 3.2.

Goal 6: Enhance the experience of every first-year MU student to create an individualized path to personal and academic success

The FIG program is designed to deliver the information and resources required to ensure student success as outlined by the Strategic Plan. The FIG seminar classes typically cover topics like time management, 4-year plans, and campus academic and wellness resources. First year students are given access to a faculty mentor in an informal setting that promotes interaction. The co-housed peer mentor serves as a role model and guide to life as an engaged college student.

Goal 7: Increase student thriving, engagement, and sense of belonging through accessible support community, and mentorship.

The FIG program builds a sense of community by co-housing and co-enrolling students with similar career or academic interests. The design ensures they are put in contact with a faculty mentor who can provide them with the academic roadmap needed to succeed at a large state university.

The impact of the FIG program on first-year students makes it easy to overlook the benefits that more than a thousand students have gained by serving as peer learning assistants. The FIG program gives these students the opportunity for an authentic leadership experience under the guidance and mentorship of the co-Fac partner.

Goal 9. Improve four-year undergraduate student graduation rates by 20% by 2023.

The four-year graduation rate for students who participated in FIGs during FS2007 to FS2013 averaged 51.9% compared to only 43.3% for non-FIG participants.

The four-year graduation rate for Black/African American students who participated in FIGs during FS2007 to FS2013 averaged 40.3% compared to only 28.0% for non-FIG participants. For Hispanic/Latino students in the same time period, FIG participants graduated at a rate of 48.3% compared to non-FIG participants at 40.9%

First Gen students who participated in a FIG during FS2007 to FS2013 had a four-year graduation rate of 42% compared to 33.6% rate for the same group who had not been a part of the FIG program.

It is arguable that no other campus wide program is contributing more than the FIG program to our current successes in moving towards these Student Success goals articulated in the Strategic Plan. This makes it all the more shocking to note the complete absence of any mention or recognition of the FIG program in MU's Strategic Plan. The recent departures of the founders and long-time campus leaders of the FIG program underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive plan for the continued success and renewal of this signature program.

Demographics based on SIS data for 2007-2016

- 26% of student with Pell Grants participated in FIGs
- 26% of students that are first-generation participated in FIGs
- 30% of non-first-generation students participate in FIGs
- 36% of advising group 1 students participate in FIGs
- 30% of advising group 2 students participate in FIGs
- 26% of advising group 3 students participate in FIGs
- 24% of advising group 4 students participate in FIGs

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishment of a Program Academic Director and Oversight Committee

1. The committee recommends an experienced co-Facilitator (co-Fac) be named as the FIG program Academic Director who would have ultimate oversight of all non-Residential Life aspects of the program. Residential Life would continue to staff a FIG coordinator to manage the logistical side of the program. The Academic Director and FIG coordinator would be co-directors and share the overall supervision of the FIG program. To recognize the campus-wide nature of this program, our recommendation is the FIG Academic Director report directly to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies. The Academic Director would presumably be a part-time commitment in which the FIG responsibilities would be integrated into a faculty or staff member's existing position.

The committee strongly felt the academic component of the FIG program and evaluation of co-Facs should be separate from the Residential Life component.

The Academic Director should be charged with working with appropriate academic Deans to sequester classes for FIG enrollment. The heavy reliance on A&S general education classes requires close cooperation between the college and the FIG program. Traditionally the college has "bundled" the seats being saved for the FIG program with additional seats to ensure some key courses still had openings during Summer Welcome. The seats unused by the FIG program were then slowly released (e.g., 10/day) during Summer Welcome. The shift of the FIG program oversight to outside A&S Dean's office means it is imperative a new plan for sequestering seats and determining who can release unused seats during Summer Welcome needs to be developed. Furthermore, the anticipated move to a Resource Allocation budget model will inevitably trigger pressure from departments offering service courses to maximize enrollment and discourage participation in sequestering seats. New policies will need to be developed prior to budget changes to minimize the impact on the FIG program.

The Academic Director's responsibilities and authority should be explicitly outlined before his or her appointment.

The Academic Director will engage with national organizations involving FIGs and related Learning Communities and serve to both represent MU and to gather best practices to bring back for local discussion.

2. The committee further recommends an oversight committee of 5-7 members be established to provide advice and consent for any significant changes to the FIG program. The oversight committee would be made of active co-Facs that would represent different interest groups in the FIG program. We recommend the initial members have 1-3 year appointments with subsequent appointments being 3 years to ensure a continued influx of fresh ideas and viewpoints. Approval of the oversight committee would be needed for any substantive change that affect multiple FIGs (e.g., new mandated requirements for course content).

The committee felt an oversight committee, appointed by the VPUGS, would help bring new ideas into the FIG program and give stakeholders a better line of communication. The Academic Director and Residential Life FIG Coordinator would have authority for routine decision making but it would be expected that program modifications which would have more global impact on multiple FIGS would need oversight committee approval.

The oversight committee should include ex officio representatives from the Registrar's Office, Enrollment Management and an individual who is active in the Advising Council or executive group of the Advisors Forum.

3. The committee recommends each FIG should have an academic unit or department that serves as the sponsor.

The sponsoring unit would provide expertise in identifying appropriate co-Facs, marketing the FIG, consulting on co-enrolled coursework, recommending PLAs, and essential syllabus content. The sponsoring department would not have a formal financial obligation but might, in some circumstances, be a source of supplemental funds for cultural events or other activities.

Co-Facs

4. The “co-Fac” title was originally chosen to identify the “co-facilitation” role that the faculty/staff leader of the FIG played. Prospective students and their parents find the term confusing. To eliminate this confusion and signal the proposed changes in expectations for the faculty/staff leader, we propose switching to a title of “Faculty mentor”. Similarly, the current peer learning assistant (PLA) title would become “RA and FIG peer mentor” to reflect both their traditional RA responsibilities in the residence halls and their role in the FIG.
5. A set of expectations for co-Facs should be articulated. At a bare minimum, we would suggest:
 - Weekly meeting or check-in with PLA
 - Attend at least a majority of FIG seminar classes
 - Responsibility for approval of syllabus
 - Responsibility for topics to be covered in the class
 - Responsibility for final approval of weekly lesson plans

The expectations for co-Facs has evolved over the years of the program. At one time, co-Facs who provided guidance and general oversight of the PLAs but not an active role in the seminar was an acceptable role. The responsibilities of the co-Fac in regards to syllabus and lesson plan design was further confused by encouraging PLAs to design the syllabus and lesson plans prior to discussions with the co-Fac and by giving Student Coordinators what looked like final approval. The committee felt there should be an articulation of expectations for co-Facs to signal that a more active involvement with the seminar was now considered a best practice. Consistent with that more leadership role, the co-Fac should be given final authority over the design of the syllabus, lesson plans, and class schedule. The FIG program can assist in this process by maintaining a repository of syllabi and lesson plans to be used as templates.

6. Annual review of co-Facs

The committee felt there must be some mechanism in place to ensure co-Facs were meeting the minimal expectations. At the bare minimum, the Co-Directors should be surveying PLAs to determine the level of co-Fac involvement in providing guidance and participation in the seminar.

7. The 2018 AY policy offering co-Facs a salary supplement consistent with the practice used for SSC courses should be maintained. The stipend could be linked to a minimum enrollment of X students (number to be determined) and pro-rated for FIGs with lower enrollments.

The rationale behind this recommendation was that some staff co-Facs were not allowed access to the earlier stipends placed in E&E accounts based on departmental or unit policies. Others found the requirements to work through a program fiscal officer to get approval for expenditures burdensome. The need to spend the stipend within the academic year meant that co-Facs could not save up the funds to allow periodic replacement of a bigger ticket item such as a laptop. The committee welcomed the change in 2018 to a payment made directly to the co-Fac’s salary.

The committee recognizes the recommendations on co-Fac and PLA stipends (recommendations #16 and #17) have significant costs associated with them. A long-term funding plan for the FIG program that can survive the upcoming changes to budgetary allocations needs to be established by the University administration. One model would be the income from FIG seminar enrollment could be earmarked for this purpose. We note that at one time 80% of seminar tuition fees were transferred to the FIG program. Furthermore, there should be a financial contribution from the campus level to reflect the impact on retention and other campus goals. The committee views the alternative of developing a “FIG participation fee” as counterproductive.

We note the pool of ~3000 former PLAs and ~25,000 former FIG students, along with a potential “naming” opportunity for a signature program at MU, makes the FIG program well-situated for an advancement initiative aimed at creating an endowment to help support the program (e.g., extra cultural events, stipends or awards for PLAs). The committee recommends the FIG program partner the Advancement Office to aggressively pursue this path.

8. More training for new co-Facs needs to be in place.

The committee felt more guidance should be given to new co-Facs. The recommendations for a list of faculty expectations and a repository of syllabi and lesson plans, combined with an optional get together in April or May for new or interested faculty should suffice.

9. The FIG program should maintain a Syllabus & Lesson plan repository on a Canvas website.

The committee felt that the Program Director should curate a website of syllabi and lesson plans freely available to all co-Facs and PLAs and that the SSC and TRIG instructors should be invited to participate. Past syllabi would be a starting point for PLAs or new co-Facs.

10. The final responsibility for syllabus and lesson plan approval should rest with the co-Fac.

The committee saw the role of the SCs in syllabus and lesson plan approval as flawed. The PLA should work with the Student Coordinator and Program Director for cases when the co-Fac is not providing sufficient guidance.

11. The co-Facs and relevant departmental or unit heads should be given an opportunity annually to provide input on co-enrollment classes for each FIG.
12. The committee acknowledges the long-time, generous support that the Campus Dining Services has made to the success of the FIG program by providing meal passes that allow the co-Facs to dine in the Residence Halls with their students. Every effort should be made to continue this policy since it promotes informal interactions between co-Facs and students that have long lasting effects.

Peer Learning Assistants

13. The PLA/ RA application process will begin mid-fall semester. Co-Facs and academic/unit sponsors will provide feedback on PLA preferences prior to selection being made. Selection of PLAs will be made early in the spring semester.

To clarify, a Resident Adviser’s (RA) responsibilities include safety, security, community building, crisis response, and administrative tasks. A Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) has all the same responsibilities as an RA plus co-facilitation of the FIG. Residential Life supervisors may reduce up to 5 hours/week of the PLA’s RA responsibilities during the fall semester to compensate for their PLA duties.

PLA/RAs are compensated room and board for an average of 20 hours of work per week. Traditionally, the FIG responsibilities have been budgeted at 5 hours per week for only the fall semester. PLA candidates are evaluated on a range of skills to ensure they can meet all position expectations. ResLife is piloting a co-Fac review process for fall 2019 candidates, and are currently consulting with Human Resources regarding future developments in this area.

Co-facs and sponsoring units should be solicited to nominate students for PLA selection. Furthermore, co-Facs should be given an opportunity to view the applicant pool and highlight candidates who might be good fits with their FIGs.

14. A minimum 3.0 GPA should be a preferred qualification for PLAs. The Academic Director should monitor exceptions to this criterion. Sponsoring units or co-Facs can request stricter enforcement of the GPA minimum or additional qualifications for PLAs (e.g., Honors College-eligible). Applicants should be required to rank their preference for a PLA/ RA or either position. Preference should be given to applicants who select PLA only to discourage selection of applicants more interested in free room and housing than the experience of being a PLA.
15. The current design of the program means the co-Fac and PLA have no formal responsibilities to the FIG program in the spring semester. Further exploration of ways to keep both the co-Fac and PLA engaged with the FIG cohort during the spring semester is warranted.

As a starting point, the Academic Director could survey current co-Facs to develop a list of the best practices currently being used during the spring semester.

The Academic Director might work with be able to identify partnerships that would promote social interactions between the FIG leaders and students. For example, the athletic department may be willing to provide free or discounted tickets to events like volleyball, women's basketball, wrestling, or track. The theatre department may offer opportunities to view dress rehearsals. Guided tours of exhibits of the Museum of Art & Archeology, Museum of Anthropology or the Missouri Historical Society might be arranged.

In developing any new opportunities for the spring semester, it will be important to realize the PLAs are not compensated for FIG responsibilities in the spring and it would be unfair to require them to do unpaid work. The co-Facs would also be uncompensated during the spring semester but presumably many of them could justify the time commitment as part of their normal professional responsibilities.

16. All PLAs should receive a \$300 minimum stipend on top of room & board to recognize the increased workload compared to RAs.

One of the most common comments on the PLA survey was PLAs felt they were being compensated at the same rate as RAs despite having the additional responsibilities and duties of serving as a PLA for the FIG. It was felt that some of this resentment could be alleviated by Residential Life program better articulating the different responsibilities of the two positions. Regardless, the committee felt that a modest stipend would help recruit higher quality PLAs and more fairly compensate their contributions.

17. Effort should be made to retain PLAs for a second or third year by offering a bonus (\$300 on top of base \$300 stipend)

The committee felt there should be a stronger effort to retain junior/senior students with experience leading a FIG.

18. The committee felt there would be significant advantages to offering an optional 1 credit hour, Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, 8 week leadership course in second half of the spring semester prior to their responsibilities for the coming academic year.

Logistical problems (e.g., late hires or schedule conflicts) would make it impractical to require this training for new PLAs but incentives (e.g., reduced required meetings with Student Coordinators in the fall, credentialing of leadership training) could encourage PLA participation. It was assumed that co-Facs or campus experts could partner with Res Life staff in developing and delivering content. The committee felt that the ideal design would be one in which incoming PLAs were offered a “1 credit hour scholarship” so that there would be no cost to them. One or more assignments in this class could involve the incoming PLA meeting with their future co-Fac to discuss the syllabus and course goals. An alternative to “1 credit hour scholarships” would be to offer this training as a “0 credit hour” course but this would mean incoming PLAs were being required to do work before they were being paid.

The PLA surveys contained multiple comments about the excessive meetings with the Student Coordinators (SC). The respondents included PLAs from the last 3 years so may have not reflected recent changes in policy. Returning PLAs were no longer required to attend team meeting and their 1:1 meetings with the SC were bi-weekly this year. New PLAs started with weekly team and 1:1 meetings but switched to bi-weekly interactions after 8 weeks.

New FIGs

19. There should be an annual or biannual “Call for Nominations” in which departments or interest groups could suggest new FIG themes.

This recommendation would be consistent with Recommendation #3 in which each FIG would have a sponsoring unit. Any department or campus unit could submit a proposal with a draft syllabus, recommendation for co-Fac, marketing plans and other supportive material. The impact of adding a new FIG would need to be balanced with the demands on beds in the residence halls and seats required in co-enrolled classes. Addition of new FIGs needs to be done cautiously to ensure the pool of qualified PLAs and engaged co-Facs is not exceeded such that quality is sacrificed.

The criteria and deadline for determining whether a FIG were discussed and a tentative timeline which would allow input by all stakeholders (Residential Life, VPUGS, sponsoring unit, co-Fac) was developed:

- July: Continued support for current FIGs (taught the prior fall semester) must be confirmed for following academic year (e.g., in July 2018, Figs for fall 2019 will be proposed)
- July: New FIG proposals are due for review. Proposal contains: statement of support by sponsoring academic/unit, agreement to funding model, identified co-Fac or needed co-Fac background, draft syllabus, marketing plan, etc.
- July: FIG boot camp style programs proposed. Proposal contains: funding model, goals, academic/unit support.
- September 1st: FIG co-directors and board confirm support for current FIGs and approve/decline for proposed FIGs
- September 1st: FIG co-directors and board approve/decline support for proposed FIG boot camps.
- October 1st: Residential Life confirms RA hiring needs for next academic year
- October 15th: Residential Life identifies FIG space within halls
- December 1st: Housing Preference Form for the next academic year opens.
- December 1st – March 1st: Academic/Unit Sponsors market and promote their FIGs
- March 1st: Round one of housing assignments. Residential Life reviews all student preferences and begins making room assignments. FIG preference numbers will be shared with Academic/Unit Sponsors. FIGs at X or larger will be confirmed for the fall semester. If demand exceeds capacity,

discussions on whether to add an additional FIG section will commence. FIGs with enrollment between X – X will be placed on tentative status and the Academic/Unit Sponsor will be asked to aggressively promote their FIG to help it make. If these FIGs do not make X by May 1st, they will be cut. FIGs with X or less on March 1st will be cut. The “X” cutoff values will ultimately be determined by the proposed funding model but the goal should be to get a transparent process in place so that all stakeholders understand what it takes to proceed with a FIG. Res Life intends to pilot this communication in the spring semester 2019.

- May 1st: FIGs for next academic year confirmed. The co-directors and oversight committee have the ability to permit FIGs to proceed that did not make. These FIGs would be on a probationary status. Should they not make the following year, they will be cut.
- May 1st: Final date for ‘by invitation only’ FIGs to submit names for room assignment/FIG placement.
- Residential Life, in consultation with the VP for Undergraduate Studies will decide what FIGs are permitted to continue enrollment into Summer Welcome, or proceed continually with low enrollment. It is understood that a continuation of a low enrollment FIG would require financial contributions from the VPUGS, Res Life, and/or the sponsoring unit.

Recruitment & Targeting enrollment of student populations most likely to benefit

20. The co-Facs and sponsoring units for each FIG should be active in the recruitment of incoming students. Students should be provided with short synopsis for goals/activities of each FIG and an optional link for co-Facs to offer a more expansive description.
21. Strategies to promote participation by Pell Grant-eligible, advising group IV and first generation college students should be developed.

Because the Land Grant scholarship fully covers the tuition of Pell Grant-eligible students, the committee gave serious consideration to recommending that all Pell Grant-eligible students be required to enroll in either a FIG or SSC section. Unfortunately, capacity issues makes this impractical at the present time. One rough estimate was that requiring all Pell Grant-eligible students to be in a FIG would require a doubling of the current size of the FIG program. Other hurdles would be dealing with Pell Grant students who enrolled late, were local and lived at home, or couldn't get into a FIG of their choice.

The committee was in agreement that it would be a mistake to design FIGs that were restricted to Pell Grant-eligible, advising group IV and/or First Gen students. The consensus was that they should be fully integrated into the general FIG population.

22. A strategy should be developed by Academic Director and Residential Life to save a limited number of spaces (housing and co-enrolled classes) in appropriate FIGs so that advising group IV or First Gen students who enrolled late or failed to appreciate the advantages could be matched with a FIG to improve their retention and 4-year graduation rate. Furthermore, a program should be piloted in which one or two advising group IV or First Gen students are added to select FIGs during Summer Welcome even if it is not possible to co-house them with the rest of the FIG to test whether this improves retention rates.

Required elements

23. FIGs should be required to incorporate at least 3 elements from the list below but no co-Fac or PLA should be required to teach any particular element. To promote the incorporation of these topics, sample lesson plans will be made available on the Canvas website for co-Facs and PLAs.

- Diversity class
- Ethics class
- Time management
- MU Traditions
- Student Health/Mental well-being
- Financial responsibilities
- One Read Program
- Career/Major Exploration

To promote FIG seminars exposing students to “difficult dialogue” topics, the Academic Director should work with co-Facs and PLAs to encourage the involvement of classroom visits from trained individuals from existing campus resources such as:

- Diversity Peer Educators <https://multiculturalcenter.missouri.edu/dpe/>
- Active Minds Peer Educators <https://wellness.missouri.edu/get-involved/active-minds-peer-educators/>
- RSVP Peer Educators <https://rsvp.missouri.edu/get-involved/student-groups/rsvp-educators/>
- LBBTQ Outreach Panels or Safe Space training <https://lgbtq.missouri.edu/training-and-outreach/>

The Academic Director would also work to make co-Facs and PLAs aware of the presentations available from other MU units such as:

- Office of Undergraduate Research Ambassadors
<https://undergradresearch.missouri.edu/about/ambassadors/>
- Alumni Association Student Board Traditions
https://www.mizzou.com/s/1002/alumni/interior.aspx?sid=1002&gid=1001&pgid=2321&cid=3850&post_id=0
- International Center Study Abroad
<https://international.missouri.edu/study-outside-the-us/faculty-staff/index.php>
- Career Center (CliftonStrengths for Students, Resume/Cover Letter, Resume/Interviewing, Developing Your Online Image, Values Activity, CAREER Challenge)
<https://career.missouri.edu/services/faculty-staff/career-outreach/>
- Office of Service-Learning
<https://servicelearning.missouri.edu/faculty-staff/>

24. The Cultural Event should be revived as an optional event. The Academic Director should work to identify no cost (e.g., Tours of the Museum of Art & Archeology or Historical Society) or low cost options (e.g., sponsoring topical films or speakers at Jesse Wrench that could be attended by multiple FIGs). The Program Director should try to form partnerships with local arts venues (e.g., Theatre departments at MU and Stephens, RagTag Cinema, Citizen Jane Film Festival, MU Concert Series) to get discounted tickets.

The loss of the Cultural Event in 2018 was mourned by some and welcomed by others who felt the event sometimes failed to match the theme of the FIG or wasn't sufficiently culturally challenging. Others noted the difficulty in mandating required attendance when some students had jobs or other activities that conflicted.

25. The committee recommended the Academic Director requests co-Facs recommendations for 1 or 2 spring semester courses that might be made available to the FIG members for co-enrollment. The Academic Director would need to work with the Registrar and units offering those courses to reserve spaces.
26. The committee was generally supportive of the view that a FIG implies co-housing of its participants.

Every effort should be made to co-house FIG students on a single floor of the residence hall as opposed to splitting them to adjacent floors.

As noted earlier in recommendation #22, the committee recognized that some students who would most benefit from a FIG, including First Gen or advising group IV students, often don't become aware of the advantages of a FIG until Summer Welcome. Although the committee feels the best option would be to work to co-house and co-enroll these higher risk students in FIGs, it felt a pilot program that would allow a limited number of late enrollees into the FIGs when space in the co-enrolled classes remains even if co-housing space is no longer possible.

The committee briefly discussed the idea of "Spring semester FIGs" but recognized the co-housing principal made this impractical.

The committee briefly discussed the concept of Sophomore Interest Groups (SIGs). One barrier to such a program would be whether the University would reserve space in the residence halls for sophomores, possibly at the expense of freshman accessibility, once the student population rebounds. The SIG concept should be re-considered once a long-term campus policy on providing space to sophomore students is established.

27. The committee felt TRIGs should be encouraged and overseen by the Academic Director and be treated as equivalent to FIGs in regards to the recommendations made here.

The TRIGs represent a population of students who benefit from co-enrollment and a seminar class but who would be difficult to capture if co-housing in a residence hall was required.

28. Some committee members saw value in creation of a new program which would allow co-enrollment and/or a seminar class along some disciplinary theme but not requiring co-housing. The committee did not make a recommendation on the merit of this alternative design but felt that if such programs were developed, they should be given a name distinct from the FIG or Learning Communities branding used by Residential Life.
29. The committee recommends that the "bootcamp" programs associated with FIGs (e.g., BIOME, business and engineering school programs) should compile a list of best practices and outcomes that could be more widely shared on campus to promote their adoption by other units.
30. The committee feels the Academic Director should be charged with making an annual report on the impact of FIGs on retention, GPA, and 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates. A rotating subset of FIGs should be examined on their 3-year average performance to determine the impact of particular FIG themes on student success. The short and long-term impact on PLA performance should also be assessed.