The First-Year Experience Committee met regularly throughout the year to review, coordinate, and set policy for the teaching and administration of FYE courses, including recruiting faculty and courses, assessing the program and its courses, offering pedagogical support for teaching faculty, and reviewing the program’s budget. The Committee also worked closely with the Office of Student Life to identify possible authors to invite to lead the New Student Orientation program keynote event. Finally, the Committee submitted an application to the Associated Colleges of the Midwest for a FaCE grant to support the development of an effective assessment program. After receiving a $15,000 grant, the Committee spent much of the spring planning events with the ACM and partners at Lake Forest College.

Summary. The 2009-2010 academic year was a productive one for the Committee. Among its achievements are:

- Supervising a curriculum for 2009-2010 that, for the first time, included almost no visitor blocks, and recruiting a curriculum for 2010-2011 that offers a robust array of courses, though with more reliance on visitor and emeritus faculty members than is ideal.
- Developing a program mission statement and a list of common elements in FYE courses, as well as defining a list of expected student learning outcomes for program courses and a plan for a pilot assessment of the program.
- Proposing a multi-campus ACM study assessing first-year courses, and developing the program outlined in the grant proposal.
- Staging a successful orientation session for faculty new to FYE, as well as a reception for all who taught fall FYE courses.
- Recommending NSO readings for 2010 and 2011.
- Developing means to track and justify budget expenditures, particularly field trip expenses.
- Making use of PROWL to collect and store FYE course materials and to allow program faculty to offer guidance to the Committee.

For the coming year, the Committee has committed to the following goals, which it hopes the 2010-2011 Committee will follow up on:

- Continuing the effort to ensure that the FYE curriculum relies on regular faculty members as much as possible.
- Meeting with program faculty members to complete work on the program’s mission statement, course elements list, learning outcomes list, and assessment
program; and, after completion of that work, bringing the documents to the College faculty meeting for approval.

- Implementing a pilot assessment program in the fall, and revising it in the spring, with the aim of developing a comprehensive program assessment in the fall of 2011.
- Working with the Writing Center to support the new student writing portfolio requirement.
- Carrying out the program outlined in the FaCE grant, which includes organizing two ACM conferences in 2010-2011 in Chicago, and writing a report to be distributed to all ACM colleges on best practices in first-year program assessment in the fall of 2011.
- Continuing to develop pedagogical support programs, including one bringing together new and experienced faculty and another with the whole FYE faculty concerning the implications of the assessment plan we develop for program courses.
- Reorganizing the PROWL FYE syllabi collection so that it is more accessible.
- Preparing a recommendation to Student Life for the 2012 NSO reading.
- Preparing a proposal for the FEC to incorporate in personnel files an optional FYE review of candidates for renewal, tenure, or promotion.
- Continuing to maintain effective student support programs, including the FYE mentor program and various academic support programs in the Learning Commons.
- Continuing to monitor the program budget, with the aim of maximizing efficiency.

Detailed discussions of the Committee’s work follow.

**Course Offerings and Staffing Issues.** One of the ongoing challenges facing the FYE program is assembling a broad, strong curriculum that also introduces in-coming students to regular faculty members. Last year’s Committee, working with the Dean’s Office and the Office of First-Year and Sophomore Studies, put together a broad curriculum of 35 fall and three spring courses, drawn from 21 departments and programs as well as from General Studies. The only departments not participating in the program in 2009-2010 were Art and Education. Although courses in Biology, Chemistry, Philosophy, and Psychology were also not offered, faculty members from those departments taught FYE courses under other rubrics; and Paul Kuerbis of Education was active in developing support programs for FYE. The Committee and the Dean’s Office succeeded in recruiting a sufficient number of courses for the incoming class, with minimal reliance on instructors who were not regular faculty members.

For the 2010-2011 academic year, FYE is currently scheduled to offer a curriculum as broad as that offered in past years: 34 fall and three spring courses, drawn from 21 departments and programs as well as from General Studies. The only larger department not participating is Art; however a faculty member from that department is teaching a General Studies course.
This schedule, which is subject to change if incoming enrollment rises beyond expectations, is not as successful as this past year’s schedule was at maximizing the employment of regular faculty members. This past year, 76 blocks were offered, with 66 taught by regular faculty members and ten taught or co-taught by visitors or emeritus faculty members. The 2010-11 schedule currently lists 74 blocks, with only 57 taught by regular faculty members and fully 17 taught by visitors or emeritus faculty members.

Mission Statement and Assessment Issues. When the Assessment Committee requested a plan for evaluating the first-year program, the FYE Committee realized that the program lacked a clearly defined mission statement and program description. Before developing an assessment plan, consequently, the Committee had to define the program, its character, and aims more clearly than had been done previously. Over the course of the year, the Committee systematically developed a mission statement, a program description, a list of common elements to be included in FYE courses, a list of student learning outcomes expected as a result of taking an FYE course, and a pilot assessment plan.

Given the broad character of the program, which includes faculty members and courses from almost every department, the development of these documents and plans was a complex matter. In constructing the documents and plans, the Committee had to consider how any descriptions or plans might appear from the perspective of the various divisions and departments. By block 7, the Committee completed a draft of all of the documents, except the assessment plan.

In order to assure that the Committee proceeds in ways that can gain the support of the faculty, the Committee shared drafts of these documents with all program faculty members on a PROWL site designed to allow individuals to evaluate and criticize the drafts. Feedback from the faculty has already resulted in the rewriting of several sections of these documents, and has highlighted areas of disagreement among the program faculty that will require continued discussion to settle. Based on that feedback, the Committee plans to authorize a pilot assessment of about 12-15 courses in the fall of 2010, focusing on learning outcomes that are not in dispute. The Committee plans to work with program faculty and the faculty as a whole – probably through a series of public meetings – to develop a consensus about the mission, character, and assessment of the program and its courses.

The direct measures in the planned pilot assessment are designed to focus narrowly on only one section of the learning outcomes list, that concerning writing and reading. These areas have proven to be less controversial than others and measuring these outcomes appears more manageable than in some cases. In addition, FYE reading and writing assessments are likely to coincide with and support work on the new writing portfolio requirement. We expect to recruit about 12-15 instructors in the program to take part in this pilot assessment.

In addition, the Committee, working closely with the Office of Institutional Research, has begun preparing a substantially revised and shortened FYE Survey, to be given to all
students in FYE courses at the end of block 2. The aim of this revision has been to turn much of the survey into an effective indirect measures instrument, thereby widening the pilot assessment beyond writing and reading.

**ACM FaCE Grant Project.** As part of its attempt to meet the assessment challenge, the Committee, partnering with colleagues at Lake Forest College, submitted a grant application to the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. Funded at the level of $15,000, the resulting program, “First-Year Learning Outcomes and Their Assessment,” invites several ACM colleges to participate in developing assessment programs and comparing notes on the progress of those programs. The Committee has been working with John Ottenhoff at the ACM and our Lake Forest College partners to recruit collaborators at three or four other ACM schools, with whom we will meet in November 2010 in Chicago. Over the spring, each collaborating partner will then revise their plans and present their results at an ACM-wide April 2011 conference.

A good deal of effort was put into developing the grant application, working with ACM to craft a call for collaborating partners once the application was approved, and devising a schedule for the coming year.

**Support for Teaching Faculty.** Based both on feedback from faculty and on worries about budgets, the program decided this year not to hold a large retreat. Instead, a smaller half-day meeting was held drawing together about six instructors new to the program along with a slightly larger group of experienced faculty members. At that meeting, new faculty members were introduced to the program and its requirements, with input from experienced faculty. Overall, feedback from participants suggested that the format proved to be an effective way to introduce new faculty to the program. It seems likely that a similar event will be scheduled next year.

On Monday, November 9th, the Committee also held a wine and cheese reception for faculty associated with the Program. The reception had several aims, including celebrating the successful end of the fall FYE courses and toasting the instructors. At the reception, the Committee began systematically surveying attendees, with the aim of gaining commitments to consider teaching in 2010-2011 or collecting suggestions concerning colleagues who might be recruited. In addition, the Committee previewed early drafts of the program’s mission statement and asked for feedback from participants. Finally, the reception also allowed faculty members to report back about their courses to Roberto Garcia, Director of Admissions, and several members of his staff. A representative from the Office of Financial Aid also participated. The ensuing frank discussions revealed that experiences in the program continue to be varied, with some faculty members very happy with the incoming student body and others expressing concern about some students’ limitations.

At the end of the fall, in addition, the Committee collected syllabi from instructors, using a PROWL site for the first time as the depository.
Finally, the Committee began discussions with the FEC about the possibility of developing a means for including in personnel files a systematic review, when requested by a candidate being considered for renewal, tenure, or promotion, of faculty members who have taught in the program for two terms or more. These discussions remain preliminary.

**Support for the NSO Program.** The Committee continued working to support the Office of Student Life in its search for stimulating summer reading to assign to incoming first-year students and for an effective keynote event for New Student Orientation Week. Following a decision taken in the previous year, the Committee decided to continue the rotation of types of readings among the divisions. Having devoted 2009 to a social scientific reading, the Committee pledged to seek a reading in the natural sciences for 2010 and one in the humanities for 2011. In order to identify the best reading possible, the Committee began by systematically polling members of the relevant divisions (natural sciences and humanities) for recommendations. After generating long lists of recommendations, the readings were farmed out to members of the Committee and students working in the Writing Center to review.

After gathering many reviews and considering many alternatives, the Committee gave its recommendations of readings in the natural sciences to Vice President Mike Edmonds in the fall. As a result, the fall 2010 reading was chosen: journalist Tracy Kidder’s account of the work of medical researcher Dr. Paul Farmer, *Mountains beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*. Tracy Kidder has also agreed to be the keynote speaker for New Student Orientation Week this coming fall.

The Committee is also happy to announce that Vice President Edmonds has agreed to take its recommendation of a literary work for the fall 2011 incoming class: our own David Mason’s *Ludlow: A Verse Novel*. The Committee will be working with Student Life and David to develop what we hope will be an intriguing NSO keystone event.

The Committee would like to announce to members of the social science division that in the fall it will begin seeking their recommendations for a work in the social sciences to be assigned in the summer and fall of 2012.

**Budgetary Concerns.** The Committee, recognizing the need to be fiscally responsible in the present challenging economic environment, continued to struggle to find the most cost-effective ways to manage the program. One concern has been the FYE field trip budget. Because of the wide array program participants, it was difficult in previous years for the program to plan for courses’ travel needs. Faculty members, at times, took students off to the BACA campus or beyond, without considering how those travel expenses would be accounted for. This year, Julie Tetley developed a process to begin giving the Committee a chance to budget for field trips. Working with Vehicle Services, she developed a new Vehicle Reservation Form to be submitted by instructors, ideally before the term begins. Although this year’s field trip expenditures still exceeded our budget, the development of a process for identifying, justifying, and accounting for course travel is a positive step.
The Committee asks that, if FYE instructors intend to travel with their courses and if their department budgets are not able to support that travel, they please contact Julie well ahead of time so that she can foresee and respond to budgetary problems. The Committee recognizes that travel can be an important part of College courses and commends faculty members for taking the initiative to introduce students to new experiences through travel. However, we ask your assistance in planning for any travel that you would like FYE to underwrite.

The Committee also continued discussions about the relatively “soft” financial support for some of its key elements, including the Student Mentor Program.

PROWL-Based Communications. Although the Committee recognizes that not all faculty members use or care to use PROWL, it has pursued the development of PROWL-based forms of communication with the FYE faculty, in the belief that even if participation is not comprehensive the platform can improve communication between the Committee and faculty. In the fall, the Committee shifted its syllabus collection to a PROWL site. The result was mixed, in part because assessment concerns continue to make it impossible to devote time to organizing the site so that it can be accessible to those who most need it, faculty new to the program.

The Committee also developed a PROWL site to seek feedback on the drafts of the new FYE mission statement, program description, course elements list, learning outcomes list, and assessment plans. The result, which is still ongoing, has been effective: a number of thoughtful questions and concerns have been raised, which will help guide the Committee’s assessment work in the short term and form the basis for face-to-face discussions about the program and its assessment next fall.

Other Events and Concerns. The FYE Committee was happy to support the President’s welcoming of the incoming class to a reception at Stewart House in early December.

The Committee also has been discussing some of the challenges of moving CC Bound to an electronic format. In particular, the continuing slow rollout of Banner makes the transition to an electronic format especially frustrating, as every single course choice by incoming students has to be entered by hand from a paper registration form, choice by choice, into c3po. The amount of labor involved, the Committee believes, is highly wasteful.