THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE: WHAT WORKS AND WHY
Conference Sponsored by CHERE (Center for Higher Education Retention Excellence)

The First Year is the foundation for:
- the undergraduate curriculum
- choosing a major
- establishing a good GPA
- learning good study habits,
- developing positive attitudes towards faculty, the learning process and the university,
- developing long-term relationships that last through and beyond college,
- decisions to stay, leave, or transfer.

First-Year Seminars produce better student outcomes if they are:
- elective,
- graded,
- use peer leaders,
- carry sufficient credit hours to achieve objectives, and
- are linked into a learning community.

Lessons from the work of the Gardner Institute (on student retention):
1. Retention does not belong to a single individual, campus office or small group of individuals.
2. Go beyond the “r” word to focus on excellence
3. Raise everyone’s consciousness about the importance of the first year and first-year students
4. Pay attention to the core business of the first year – instruction across the disciplines
5. Don’t (by policy or lack of policy) allow students to sabotage their own success (through failure to require orientation, advising (more than once!), class attendance, registering on time, entering the institution on time, and following a set education path).
6. Employ standards of measurement (e.g., Foundational Dimensions, program outcomes that can be easily counted such as retention and GPA)
7. Do understand the first year experience form various perspectives (faculty, staff, students, etc.)
8. A FINAL CRITICAL INGREDIENT is your university’s capacity for change (are you willing to ask tough questions, be candid, use data? Is there clarity of mission and vision? Sufficient resources? Consistency of leadership? Trust?)