The NAU First Year Learning Initiative
September, 2013

The First Year Learning Initiative (FYLI) is a unique, locally developed and driven program for building academic success in the early college career. There are currently 58 “FYLI-certified” courses, including many of the highest-enrollment, highest-impact gateway courses at NAU. FYLI also has a uniquely successful undergraduate Peer TA program. Each section of each certified course is eligible to receive one undergraduate peer TA, who are selected and supervised by faculty. Currently, the overwhelming majority of eligible faculty have opted into the program, and the program now places over 150 undergraduate students per semester in these positions.

The FYLI philosophy is that students need – and want – high standards in first-year coursework, and need to have those standards clearly communicated from the first moments of engagement with a course. To meet these high standards, students need support, guidance, highly engaging pedagogy, and clear, frequent feedback. Through the FYLI development process, course coordinators reshape their courses in order to meet these needs, focusing on three critical areas: socializing students for success in college; best practices in course design and delivery; alignment between learning activities and assessment as well as coordination of multi-section courses.

FYLI’s rapid growth and widespread faculty participation has resulted in substantial impacts to the first-year student experience at NAU. 96% of the 2012-2013 first year cohort participated in at least one FYLI course. FYLI is also associated with significant and substantial impacts on course completion, with DFW rates in FYLI courses dropping an average of 23% to 17% after certification. FYLI has also produced important shifts toward best practices, including a 60.8% increase in GPS use, 43.5% increase in multi-section coordination and 30.4% increase in low-stakes assignments.

A survey of over 1,400 students in FYLI courses affirmed that, in general, FYLI practices were implemented: most reported that attendance was required (95.1%), rubrics were provided (79.2%), work was due in the first two weeks of the semester (96.5%), and class time included active learning (93.8%). Student survey respondents also rated FYLI “socialization” outcomes
highly, especially valuing hard work on academics (4.17 out of a possible 5.0), accepting responsibility for academic effort, and examining how choices lead to academic success (both 3.8 out of a possible 5.0).