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## Plan fosters first-years

The Bridge to Academic Excellence will welcome its first group this summer.

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A University initiative designed to prepare incoming freshmen for the collegiate experience is taking shape.

The Bridge to Academic Excellence program will welcome its first group of 80 students this June, offering recent high school graduates a taste of social and academic life at the University.

Rickey Hall, assistant vice president in the Office for Equity and Diversity, said ideas for a program like this were floating around a few offices on campus.

Earlier this year, a task force recommended a bridge program to help student-athletes improve first semester classroom performance to ultimately bolster graduation rates. A similar program was already in the works through University academic offices.

“It just made sense since the institution was developing a program to incorporate them,” he said.

Hall said the University would not admit students it did not believe could succeed.

“I don’t want anybody to view this from a deficit model,” he said. “This is a way to introduce students to the academic rigor of college and also to introduce them to campus resources in a time where it is less hectic.”

Interim director of the Bridge to Academic Excellence program Steve Cisneros said 20 student-athletes will participate in the program, and the remaining spots will be filled by applicants through the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence.

Cisneros said a task force designed the program to reach students who could use a boost, like first-generation college students, those from a low-income background and those who come from a rural area and might find it difficult to adjust to the University’s urban setting.

“What we’re looking for are students who have an interest in the program and those who could use a jump into the first year,” he said.

Cisneros said students will live together in a residence hall under the supervision of peer mentors and take six credits: a four-credit science course and a two-credit writing course.

Accepted students won’t pay anything for the credits or housing. In fact, to offset the potential loss of money from a summer job during the six-week program, the University is paying students a weekly income.

“The program is completely free,” Cisneros said. “We’ll pay for their credits and their room and board, and students will receive a \$50 weekly stipend.”

According to Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education Craig Swan, the program will cost roughly \$400,000. Expenses will be divided between University administration and the athletics department.

Swan said the program will be challenging.

“Some people have referred to this as academic boot camp,” he said. “These are meant to be rigorous and demanding courses.”

Sophomore Rebekah Garcia said she could have benefited from a program like this in her first year.

“I would have loved to have come from high school where they set you up with things like this,” she said.

Garcia, a first-generation college student from central Minnesota, said she is excited to work as one of eight peer mentors for the program, living with students and leading them in academic and extracurricular events.

“College is not a joke,” Garcia said. “I feel like this is the best thing (the University) can do for incoming freshman.”