Attached is an educational planning (success planning) assignment that may be useful to you, if not in whole, perhaps in part. It includes course planning templates as well as guidelines for planning on-campus cocurricular and off-campus experiential learning, which should be integral elements of a comprehensive student-success plan (as opposed to a narrower "academic" plan that's strictly limited to course work).

The attached plan was modified recently as a result by research I stumbled across a couple of years ago on goal-setting. This research suggested that effective goal setters and goal attainers don't only plan for (and visualize) their success, they anticipate potential obstacles or impediments that could interfere with the execution and completion of their plans. To that end, you'll see the following reflection questions included in the attached future-planning assignment:

1. What challenges or obstacles do you think might interfere with your ability to complete your educational plan (finances, family responsibilities, etc.?)

2. What campus resources might help you deal with these challenges or obstacles?

3. What people (on or off campus) could you network with to help you successfully complete your plan?

4. As you pursue your educational plan, who might be a mentor for you, or serve as a personal source of inspiration and motivation?

Students completed this plan as a heavily-weighed assignment in their first-year seminar, which required all first-term students to meet with their academic advisor during a non-rushed period of the term (late September/early October). Since this was a common assignment in all sections of the course, it helped forge additional consistency across course sections; in addition, it generated a buzz of collective energy and synergy among first-term students who were not only discussing their plans with their advisors but with other students as well (akin to what a common reading is intended to do).

Students were explicitly instructed to maintain a copy of their educational plan and bring it with them when meeting with academic advisors and career development specialists, and to come to those meetings prepared to discuss their progress on the plan, as well as any changes to it. The students' academic advisors also had their own copies of students' educational plans; they often used the plans as touchstones or focal points during meetings with students that took place beyond the first term. Advisors reported that students were coming to appointments better prepared to discuss next-term registration, and they had a much better sense of their overall educational direction and progress. Thus, the educational plan not only functioned as an ongoing motivational compass for students; it also served to enrich the quality of our academic advising program.

As I mentioned before when this topic emerged on the FYE List, I believe that the educational plan or student success plan may be the most important assignment to include in an FYE course. It has the potential to extend the reach/impact of the course well beyond the first term because students leave the course with a course product that they can refer to and use throughout their remaining years in college.

In a sense, this assignment and the product it generates, converts the FYE from a stand-alone course designed to facilitate students' transition to college and transforms it into a curricular vehicle that promotes their transition through college to degree completion.

Best,
- Joe

P.S. Institutional research conducted at Valencia Community College (FL) indicates that when at-risk students who complete an educational plan in their first-year seminar, their retention rates become comparable to "non-risk" students. At Florida State University, it's been found that at-risk (underprepared
and first-generation) students who develop degree plans have higher graduation rates than at-risk students without such a plan; also, students in general who complete a degree plan are more likely to graduate on time and are less likely to accumulate excess units beyond the number required for a baccalaureate degree.