"Innovation does not equal transformation, and multiple innovations do not add up to fundamental change... The willingness for higher education to allow innovations on the margins is a way of containing it, preventing it from contaminating 'core functions.' Innovation on the margins relieves pressure on the institution to create more essential change."--Kay McClenney

**Characteristics of Institutional Excellence for the First-Year Experience**

1. Institutions accept responsibility for first-year student achievement. Place high priority among competing institutional priorities.
2. Leadership, operating on multiple levels, is essential to the achievement of excellence.
3. Excellence flourishes in a culture that encourages idea generation, pilot projects, and experimentation.
4. Excellence in the first-year is achieved through efforts designed for all or for a critical mass of first-years students.
5. Assessment is an essential component of moving forward and sustaining excellence.
6. Of the campuses that achieve first-year excellence, a common characteristic is clarity of institutional identity and mission and a concomitant respect for students.
7. Excellence in the first-year relies on the direct involvement of an institutions faculty.
8. Excellence in the first year requires attention to pedagogy in the first-year courses.
9. First-year excellence necessitates both creative acquisition and judicious use of financial resources.
10. There is a steady outward gaze—the willingness to learn from and share with others.
11. Excellence rests on an intentional first-year curriculum and on supportive curricular structures.
12. Excellence thrives in an environment where division walls are down.