



A First-Year Seminar for Diverse Students: Lasting Effects or Soon Forgotten?

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The Context

- @ private, religiously-affiliated, 4-year undergraduate
- @ 2,400 students
- @ educational commitment to diversity
- @ diversity - 50% international/ESL
- @ short-term study in U.S.; return home
- @ 70 countries - Asia, South Pacific
- @ admitted with a minimum TOEFL score of 500
- @ tested for enrollment in credit-bearing ESL courses

Quick Facts - International Students in the U.S.

- @ 564,766 in 2005-2006
- @ 3.9% of the total enrollment; 12% graduate student enrollment
- @ top four sending countries: India, China, Korea, Japan
- @ declining/flat enrollments 3 consecutive years
- @ largest numbers: California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Florida
- @ top fields of study: business & management, engineering
- @ physical & life sciences, social sciences
- @ 1-year retention rates 78.4%
- @ 6-year graduation rates 57.2%

The Seminar

- ⓐ purpose is to address student transition needs (not necessarily retention)
- ⓐ required semester-long 2-credit course
- ⓐ course objectives
 - policies & procedures of the ESL program
 - policies & procedures of the University
 - campus resources, time management, computer & study skills
 - American university classroom culture
 - American culture; appreciation for diversity
 - knowledge of regional (Hawaii) history & culture

The Study

Purpose

- ⓐ long term effects
- ⓐ go beyond retention statistics / GPA data
- ⓐ measure students' self-reported level of adjustment (academic, social, cultural)
- ⓐ role of the seminar in adjustment beyond the first semester / year

Survey

- ⓐ questions based on course objectives, previous assessment data, academic/social adjustment
- ⓐ rating scale 1 – 6 & open-ended
- ⓐ 29% response rate
- ⓐ generally representative of gender & ethnicity at the university
- ⓐ self-reported GPA = 80% 2.7-3.69

Findings

Understanding/Knowledge—University Policies

ESL Program (*minor, credit, grading, advancement, curriculum*) 4.51-5.16 “agree”

University (consider self knowledgeable, *graduation, registration, website/catalog, nonacademic services, get help, GE, learning centers, honor code*) 4.56-5.24 “agree”

Role of Seminar 4.76-5.33 “agree”

Academic Adjustment and Behaviors

Consider self successful, time management, active learner, professors' expectations, classroom behavior, assignments on time, regular attendance

Response Range = 4.62-5.22 “agree”

Role of Seminar 4.56-5.04 “agree”

Understanding/Degree of Comfort— Culture

Interact Americans, made & learned from mistakes, interact variety of peers, appropriate social/classroom behavior, recognize & accept cultural differences, comfortable campus culture, points of view

Response Range = 4.70-5.23 “agree”

Role of Seminar 5.07 “agree”

Knowledge/Familiarity—Regional Culture/Community

Getting around, historical & tourist sites, history & culture

Response Range = 4.16-4.45 “somewhat agree”

Role of Seminar = 4.52 “somewhat agree-agree”

Development of English Language Skills

Sufficient for social interaction, course work

Response Range = 4.91-4.93 “agree”

Role of Seminar = 4.30 “somewhat agree”

Timing of Information

Most helpful

Ⓢ during the semester enrolled = 4.39 “somewhat agree”

Ⓢ after course completion = 4.41 “somewhat agree”

Ⓢ continues to be helpful = 4.68 “somewhat agree - agree”

Role of Seminar (*could have learned without*) = 4.05 “somewhat agree”

Academic and Social Involvement

Talking to professors, well-adjusted to culture/university, participation or involvement social/academic/religion activities, part of campus life, involved with peers

Response Range = 4.64-4.89 “somewhat agree-agree”

Role of Seminar = 4.80 “agree”

Level of Familiarity/Level of Comfort

Least familiarity/comfort first semester, after first semester, current.

Statistically significant increases among all three points in time for the most part; some exceptions between “after first semester” and ‘currently.’”

Impact of Seminar on Familiarity/Comfort

Ⓢ Level of Familiarity (*regional culture, ESL program, university policies, GE, American university system, classroom culture, professors’ expectations*) = 4.25-4.75 “good-very good”

Ⓢ Level of Comfort (*participating in class, social life, active learner, interacting with professors, interacting other cultures, effective use of time, where/how to get help, finding way around*) = 4.53-4.78 “good-very good”

Usefulness of Seminar Topics/Activities

Topics: Region/community, time management, university classroom culture, ESL, university policies, American culture, campus resources, intercultural

Response Range = 3.65-4.08 “very useful”

Activities: Reports campus/region, guests, field trips, group presentations, learning journals, tours campus, pair & group work, reports services, individual presentations, vocabulary

Response Range = 3.56-3.88 “useful-very useful”

Discussion

- Ⓜ Areas of immediate interest or need tended to be rated higher (EIL curriculum & advancement, services, cultural interaction, GE)
- Ⓜ Some areas not as meaningful in first semester (graduation requirements, EIL minor)
- Ⓜ Some areas difficult to effect change – time management
- Ⓜ Findings correspond with emphasis of most teachers
 - more on EIL/university policies, student behavior
 - less on regional culture/community, English skills, time management
- Ⓜ Topics & activities viewed very positively

Areas to Address

- Ⓜ Prearrival information
 - low levels of knowledge about EIL, GE, policies, classroom culture, expectations
- Ⓜ Interaction with Americans
 - expressed less comfort interacting with Americans & professors & also with class participation
- Ⓜ Time management
- Ⓜ English skills focus—liked vocabulary learning

Conclusions

- Ⓜ seminar is successful in aiding transition
- Ⓜ meets its purpose
- Ⓜ appropriate response to unique international student needs & unique campus needs
- Ⓜ positive involvement behaviors identified
- Ⓜ perhaps both adjustment & persistence positively affected
- Ⓜ retention rates need further investigation 68% vs. 98%