# NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

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# Surveying the National Landscape of First-Year Seminars, a High-Impact Practice

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Research, Grants, and Assessment

National Resource Center for
The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

# Background on FYS

- The first-year seminar (FYS) is “a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students” (Barefoot, 1992, p. 49).
- These courses contribute to outcomes including:
  - Persistence to the second year
  - Grade point average
  - Satisfaction with faculty, peers, and the institution
  - Use of campus services
  - Interaction with faculty
  - Development of academic, interpersonal, and communication skills

  (As summarized in Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013)

# Overview of National Survey of First-Year Seminars

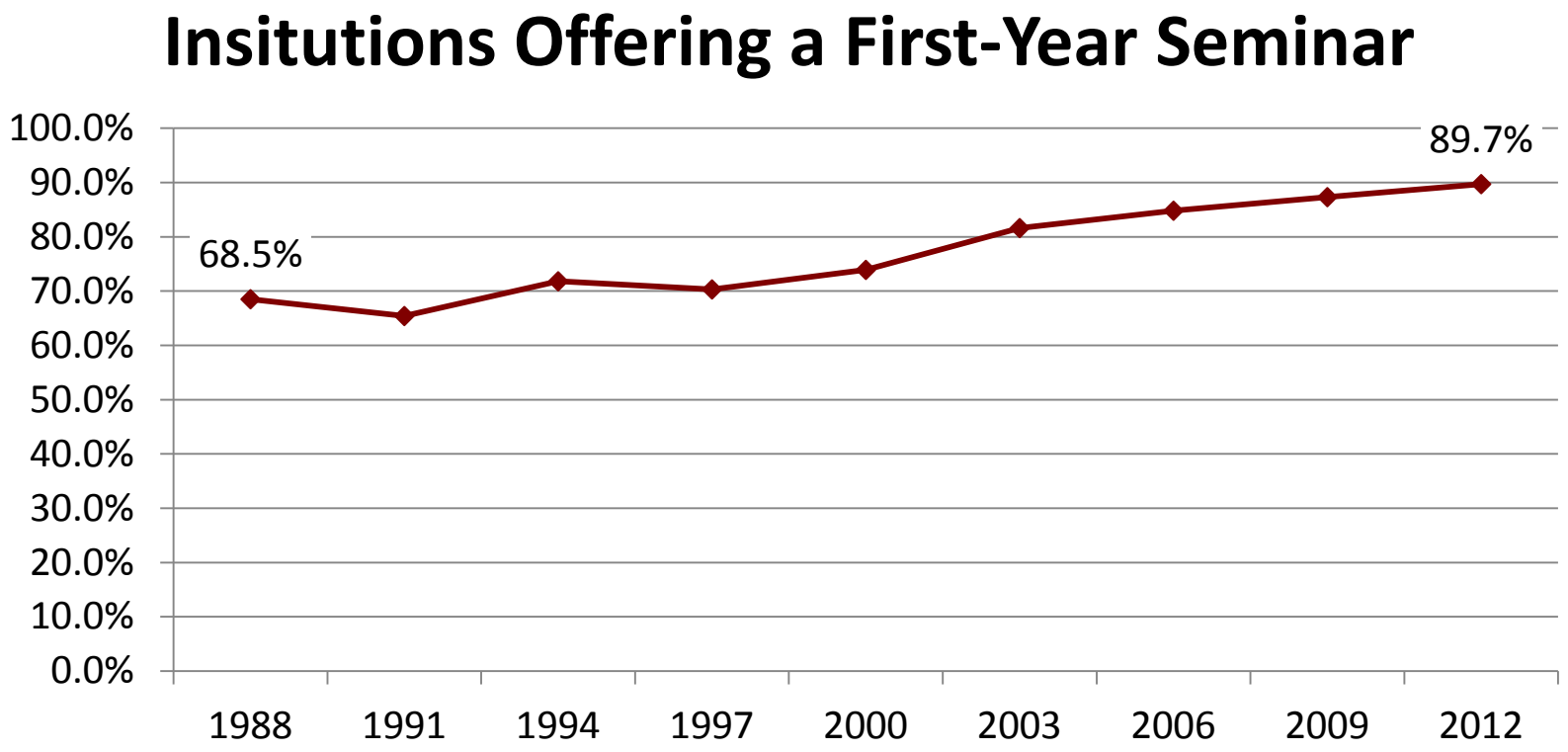
- Since 1988, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has triennially conducted a national survey of the features of first-year seminars
- Has provided the most comprehensive national picture of the practice related to curricular interventions to support students in the first college year

# Why Continue to Study FYS?

"While promising, they are not a panacea. Only when they are implemented well and continually evaluated…will we realize their considerable potential."

- Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010

# Why Continue to Study the FYS?



# 2012-13 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Ninth triennial administration of the NSFYS since 1988
- Online instrument
  - FYS Types
  - Distribution
  - Teaching
  - Administration
  - Objectives
  - Assessment
  - HIPs

# NSFYS 2012-13 Methodology

- 3,753 institutions were invited to participate
  - 4 waves: CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 NSFYS participants
  - Administered from Nov. 2012-Jan. 2013
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- 804 (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS

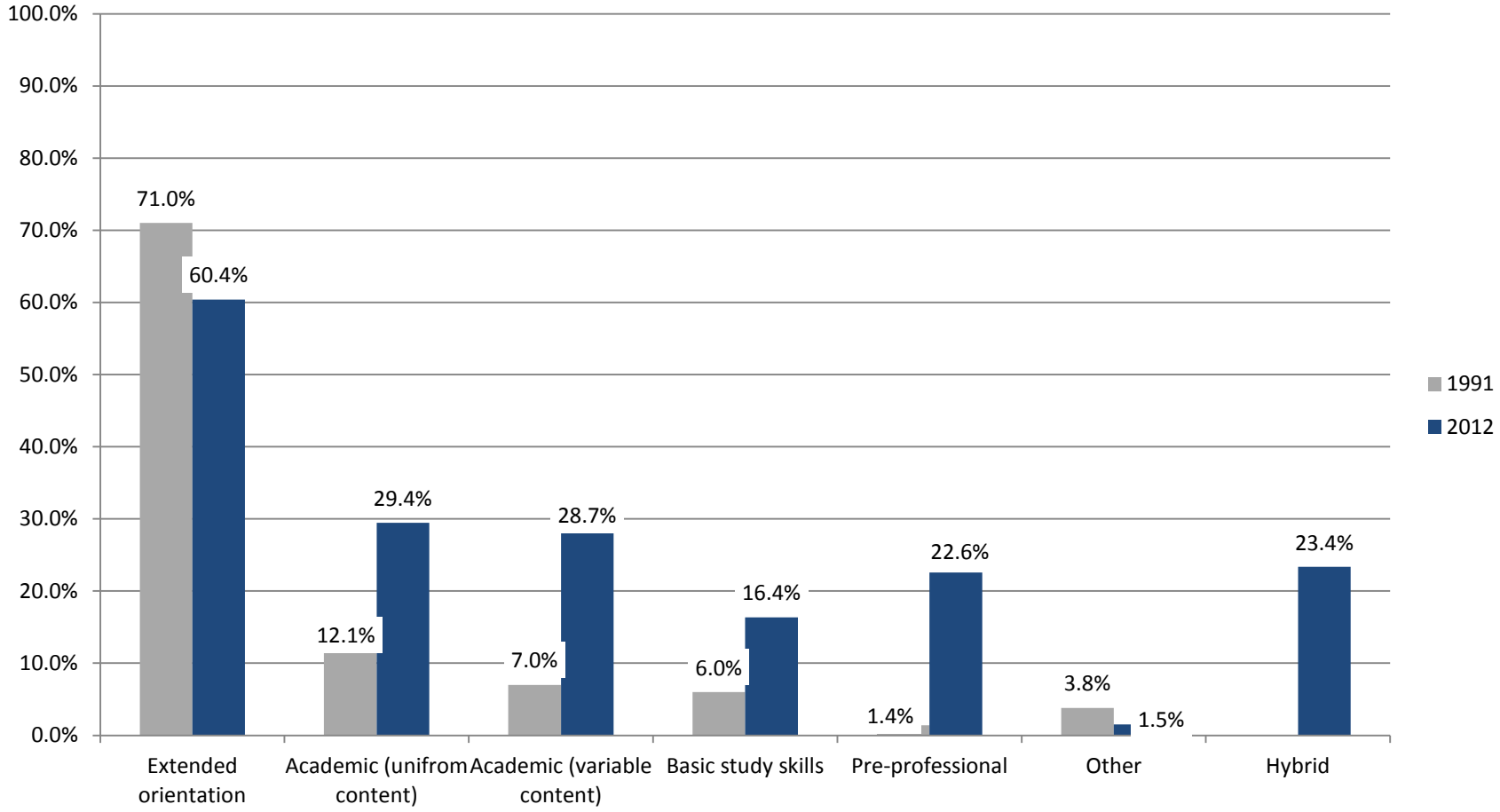
2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# TYPES OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

# First-Year Seminar Types

- Extended orientation seminars
- Academic seminars with generally uniform content
- Academic seminars on various topics
- Preprofessional seminars or discipline-linked seminar
- Basic study skills seminars
- Hybrid seminars
- Other

# Seminar Distribution

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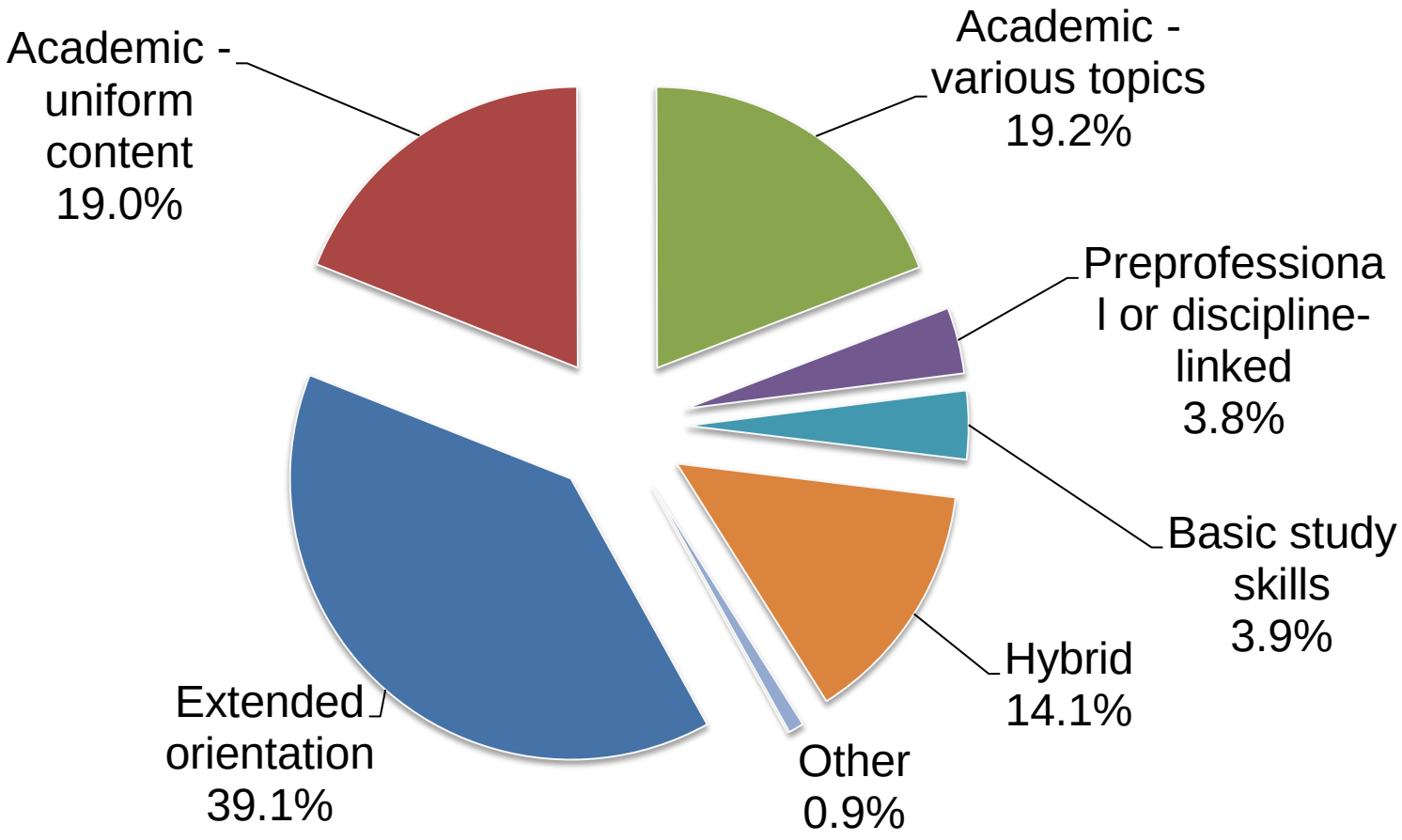
# Primary FYS


Academic - uniform content 19.0%
Academic - various topics 19.2%
Preprofessional or discipline-linked 3.8%
Basic study skills 3.9%
Hybrid 14.1%
Other 0.9%
Extended orientation 39.1%

National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTION

# First-Year Seminar Administration

*What campus unit directly administers the first-year seminar?*

| Campus Unit | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Academic affairs central office | 25.9 |
| Academic departments | 20.0 |
| First-year programs office | 16.3 |
| College or school | 9.3 |
| Student affairs central office | 7.6 |

**Across all campus units administering the experience, 80.2% had a dean, director, or coordinator.**

**However, 56.2% served in the role *part time*.**

# First-Year Seminar Administration

- Median size of FYS program is 21-30 sections
- 55.6% report a class size of >20 students
- Three-quarters of FYS are one term in duration
- 43.5% of FYS carry one credit hour
- 85.2% of FYS are letter graded
- FYS credit most often applies toward general education requirements (58.6%), as an elective (37.9%), or the major (8.5%)

**42.5% of responding institutions require all students to take a FYS**

# First-Year Seminar Instruction

| Instructor | % |
|---|---|
| Tenure-track faculty | 71.1 |
| FT non-tenure-track faculty | 60.7 |
| Student affairs professionals | 52.0 |
| Adjunct faculty | 51.9 |
| Other campus professionals | 31.8 |
| Graduate students | 4.7 |
| Undergraduate students | 4.1 |

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| **Undergraduate students** | **4.1** |

46.3% institutions report that undergraduates play a role in the first-year seminar.

2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# SEMINAR OBJECTIVES

# Most Important Objectives

| Objective | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Develop a connection with the institution | 44.9 |
| Provide orientation to campus resources & services | 37.8 |
| Develop academic skills | 36.3 |
| Develop critical thinking skills | 23.3 |
| Create common first-year experience | 21.6 |
| Develop study skills | 20.0 |
| Self-exploration or personal development | 17.0 |
| Develop support network or friendships | 14.5 |
| Improve second-year return rates | 14.5 |
| Increase student-faculty interaction | 12.4 |
| Develop writing skills | 11.6 |

# Objectives by Primary FYS

| | Primary Seminar Type | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Course Objectives** | **EO** | **A-UC** | **A-VT** | **PP-D** | **BSS** | **HY** |
| Create common first-year experience | | 35.8% | | | | |
| Develop a connection with the institution | 56.3% | 36.5% | | 41.4% | | 49.5% |
| Develop academic skills | 34.6% | 37.8% | 32.0% | | 46.4% | 45.8% |
| Develop critical thinking skills | | | 50.3% | | | |
| Develop study skills | | | | | 67.9% | |
| Develop writing skills | | | 38.8% | | | |
| Introduce a discipline | | | | 48.3% | | |
| Provide orientation to campus resources and services | 58.3% | | | | 50.0% | 34.6% |
| Provide preprofessional preparation | | | | 41.4% | | |

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# 21st Century Learning Outcomes

| Objective | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Develop a connection with the institution | 44.9 |
| Provide orientation to campus resources & services | 37.8 |
| **Develop academic skills** | **36.3** |
| **Develop critical thinking skills** | **23.3** |
| Create common first-year experience | 21.6 |
| Develop study skills | 20.0 |
| **Self-exploration or personal development** | **17.0** |
| Develop support network or friendships | 14.5 |
| Improve second-year return rates | 14.5 |
| Increase student-faculty interaction | 12.4 |
| Develop writing skills | 11.6 |

# Employability Outcomes

| Objective | Percentage |
|---|---|
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| Provide orientation to campus resources & services | 37.8 |
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# Objectives/Topics

| **Select the three most important course objectives for the first-year seminar: (n = 761)** | |
|---|---|
| Develop a connection with the institution | 44.9% |
| Provide orientation to campus resources and services | 37.8% |
| Develop academic skills | 36.3% |
| Develop critical thinking skills | 23.3% |
| Create common first-year experience | 21.6% |

| **Select the three most important topics that compose the content of this first-year seminar: (n = 761)** | |
|---|---|
| Campus resources | 35.7% |
| Academic planning or advising | 34.7% |
| Critical thinking | 32.6% |
| Study skills | 29.8% |
| Campus engagement | 27.7% |

2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# ASSESSMENT OF THE SEMINAR

# Assessment of the FYS

- Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since fall 2009?


**Yes**
59.4%

**No**
32.4%

**I don't know**
8.1%

# Assessment of the FYS – Institutional Characteristics: Type

| Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2009? (n = 749) | Two-year | Four-year | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 49.5% | 62.7% | ** |
| No | 39.3% | 30.2% | |
| I don't know | 11.3% | 7.1% | |

** p < .01

Difference between public and private institutions formally assessing the first-year seminar not statistically significant

# How was FYS Assessed?

| What type of assessment was conducted? (n = 444) | % |
|---|---|
| Student course evaluation | 86.9 |
| Analysis of institutional data | 71.2 |
| Survey instrument | 53.4 |
| Direct assessment of student learning outcomes | 52.9 |
| Focus groups with instructors | 35.4 |
| Program review | 33.3 |
| Focus groups with students | 30.6 |
| Individual interviews with instructors | 20.1 |
| Individual interviews with students | 12.4 |

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Quantitative Assessment
Qualitative Assessment
Program Evaluation

# Use of Survey Instrument to Conduct Assessment

| What type of survey instrument did your institution use to assess or evaluate the first-year seminar? (n = 237) | |
|---|---|
| A locally developed (i.e., home-grown) survey of instructors | 57.0% |
| A locally developed survey of students | 75.1% |
| A national survey (e.g., NSSE, CCSSE, CIRP, EBI) | 54.9% |
| I don't know | 0.4% |

*No significant difference in distributions when disaggregated by institutional characteristics*

# Use of Survey Instrument to Conduct Assessment

| Please identify the national survey(s) you used: (n = 128) | |
|---|---|
| National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) | 75.8% |
| CIRP Freshman Survey | 27.3% |
| Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) | 15.6% |
| Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) | 14.1% |
| Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) | 14.1% |
| Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) | 13.3% |
| First-Year Initiative (FYI) | 10.2% |
| Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) | 8.6% |
| CIRP Your First College Year (YFCY) | 7.8% |
| Individual Developmental and Educational Assessment (IDEA) | 4.7% |
| Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) | 1.6% |
| College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) | 0.0% |

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**94% of two-year institutions report using CCSSE. Remaining survey instruments between 0-11%.**

2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES IN FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

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# High-Impact Educational Practices

### First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

### Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

### Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

### Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

### Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

LEAP

### Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

### Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

### Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

### Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

### Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.

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# FYS as a High-Impact Practice

## First-Year Seminars and Experiences

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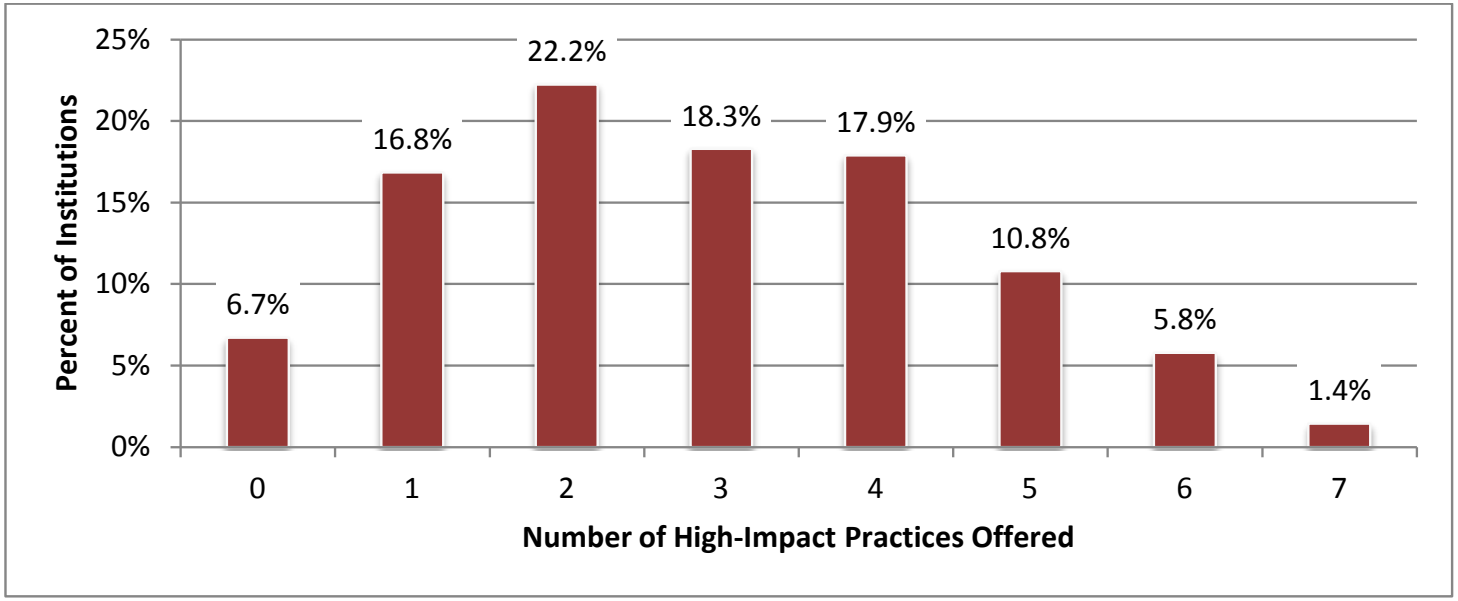
# HIPs Examined on 12-13 NSFYS

- Collaborative assignments and projects
- Diversity and global learning
- Writing intensive
- Service-learning
- Learning community
- Common reading experience
- Undergraduate research

# Specific HIPs in the FYS

| High-Impact Practice in the FYS | % |
|---|---|
| Collaborative assignments & projects | **67.2** |
| Diversity/Global learning | **58.8** |
| Writing-intensive | **42.5** |
| Common reading experience | **38.1** |
| Learning community | **36.8** |
| Service-learning | **31.8** |
| Undergraduate research | **12.8** |

# Number of HIPs Offered in the FYS




Distribution of total number of High-Impact Practices offered at institutions.

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Average number of HIPs connected to FYS: 2.87

# HIPs Examined on 12-13 NSFYS

- Collaborative assignments and projects
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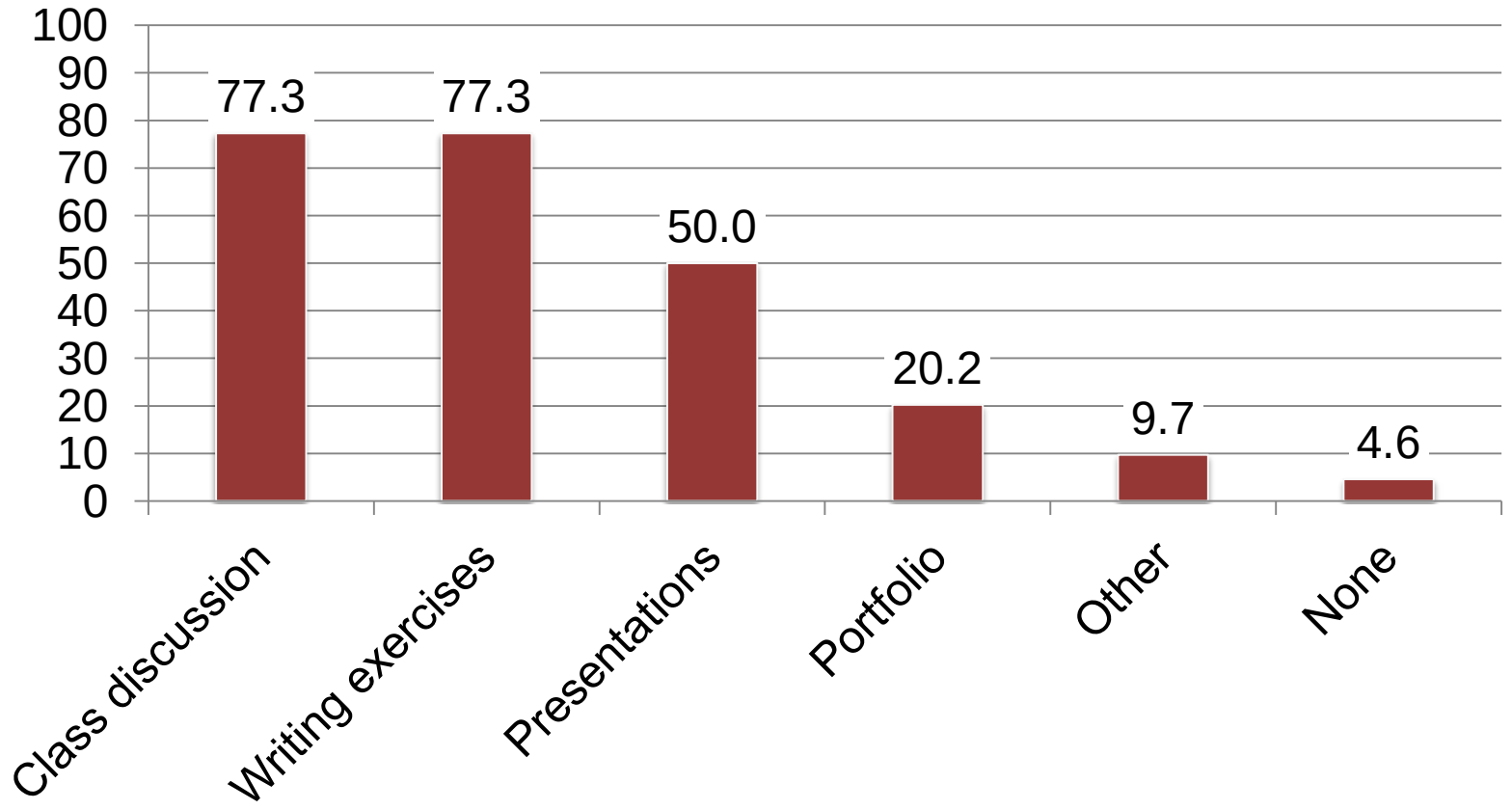
# Reflection Activities for Service-Learning in FYS



# Service-Learning in the FYS

- 42.4% of institutions do not indicate a specific number of service hours
- Service is often of a short duration
  - 26.5% of campuses require > five hours of service
  - 6.3% of campuses require > 10 hours of service
- Hunger/homelessness and at-risk youth are the most common focal points for service

# "Please describe how the FYS incorporates service-learning"

- Varies by instructor (40.9%)
- Service in the community (19.2%)
- Service in connection with the institution (14.0%)
  - Institution-based days of service
  - New student orientation activities
  - Institutionally-organized service project
- Service-based project was an assignment in FYS (13.6%)

# Learning Communities & the FYS

- Designed to serve a variety of student populations but most commonly mentioned as major-specific or at-risk student interventions
- FYS linked to a variety of general ed courses but most commonly to first-year composition
- Range from co-enrollment the thematically integrated

# Learning Communities & the FYS

| LC Characteristics in FYS | % |
|---|---|
| Co-enrollment, not all courses | 73.8 |
| Coordinated course content | 34.5 |
| Common set of theme-based experiences outside of the course | 33.5 |
| Living-learning community | 30.5 |
| Course content connected by common intellectual theme | 25.8 |
| Co-enrollment, all other courses | 9.1 |
| Other | 8.0 |

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| **Course content connected by common intellectual theme** | **25.8** |
| Co-enrollment, all other courses | 9.1 |
| Other | 8.0 |

# "What role does the FYS play in the learning community?"

- Linked with common courses (24.6%)
- Contribute to students' sense of belonging
  - Connecting to peers (17.6%)
  - Connecting to an academic discipline or theme (16.2%)
  - Connecting to the campus and it resources (12.5%)
- FYS was the central feature of the LC (10.3%)
- FYS and LC worked together to support students in developmental education (5.1%)

# Common Reading in the FYS

| Means of incorporating common reading in FYS | % |
|---|---|
| Basis for class discussion | 32.6 |
| Required text or reading | 15.8 |
| Orientation or other campus activity | 15.4 |
| Varies by instructor/section | 15.4 |
| Basis for paper or presentation | 10.9 |
| Theme of seminar | 4.9 |
| Links FYS with other courses | 1.1 |

# Common Reading in the FYS

| Means of incorporating common reading in FYS | % |
|---|---|
| **Basis for class discussion** | **32.6** |
| Required text or reading | 15.8 |
| Orientation or other campus activity | 15.4 |
| Varies by instructor/section | 15.4 |
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# Conclusions

- Extended Orientation Seminar still the most prevalent type of FYS
  - Academic Seminars are on the rise and are nearly as prevalent
- Other seminar types are also diffuse
- Variety of seminar types have been developed and implemented to meet unique institutional needs

# Conclusions

- Seminar continues to be housed in some sub-unit of academic affairs
- Course is most frequently taught by faculty on campuses
- Large numbers of “contingent instructors” also teaching the course:
  - Non-tenure track faculty
  - Student affairs and other campus staff
- Nearly 4 in 10 campuses use undergraduate peer leaders in course

# Conclusions

- The top 3 most important objectives identify strong with the goals of an extended orientation seminar course:
  - Connection with the institution
  - Orientation to campus resources and services
  - Develop academic skills
- Largely aligned with course topics
- Evidence of connection with 21st Century Learning Outcomes
- Development of “soft skills” employers are looking for does not have a strong presence in the objectives or course topics

# Conclusions

- First-year seminars are being regularly assessed by nearly 60% of institutions
- Assessment strategies are mostly quantitative in nature
  - Most use readily available data such as course evaluations and institutional data
  - While this is a good place to start, it provides only broad-level information about student outcomes around the course
- Direct assessment of student outcomes encouraging
  - Only reported by half of institutions
- Survey instrument as a tool encouraging, as most who use surveys report locally developed surveys of students.
  - However, only half of institutions report using locally developed surveys
- Overall, institutions are making improved efforts to assess FYS, have room for improvement

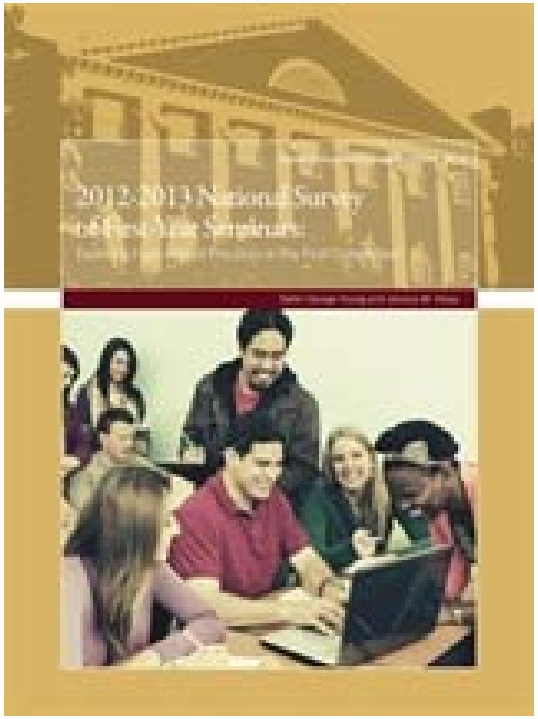
# Conclusions

- High-Impact Practices:
  - FYS is a place where a number of HIPs are delivered to first-year students
  - The average institution offers the opportunity for students to engage in 4 HIPs if they enroll in FYS
  - However, the evidence provided by institutions about several HIPs calls into question the quality of the delivery of these practices in FYS.

- Institutions would be better to focus more on quality than quantity.
  - Rather than trying to do 4 simultaneously with varying degrees of quality across all sections - think about intentionally doing 2 or 3 well.

# Thank You

Questions/Comments?




## More information available

**2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Exploring High-Impact Practices in the First College Year**

**Dallin George Young and Jessica M. Hopp**

**Available March 2014**

**www.nrcpubs.com**

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