



First Year Reading Partnerships for Success

James Madison University's First Year Reading program (FYR) celebrated its 10th birthday and the University Centennial in 2008 with Madison's *Federalist 10*. Personnel from Student Affairs (Orientation) and Academic Affairs (General Education, Libraries & Educational Technologies) partnered to engage our newest class with a challenging text and facilitate critical thinking work prior to and after students' arrival in the classroom. Participants in this session will discuss critical thinking initiatives and student engagement activities in relation to FYR texts and programming.

The Players

Office of Orientation	General Education	Libraries & Educational Technologies
Access to First Year students as a class	Access to Faculty facilitators to lead read discussion groups	Supplementary materials from library collection to support the read
Funding and leadership for the creation of promotional materials to support the read	Access to faculty who assisted in the de-construction of the read (for a student and faculty non-specialist audiences)	Creation of Blackboard organization to host materials for faculty
Placement of faculty facilitators with FY discussion groups	"Buzz" creation among GE faculty to use text in FY coursework	Compilation of FY reading program research
"Buzz" creation among incoming FY students (via Facebook group)	Faculty and upper division students for Drawbridge scenario	Assistance in faculty training and moral support for non-specialist faculty
FY Convocation logistics	Faculty support for FY convocation moderators and host	Clicker technology at FY Convocation

The Read

Fed 10 themes of unity vs. faction and representative democracy were highlighted for students and made obvious in the printed version of the text distributed to students. Our first year students arrive on the Wednesday prior to the first week of classes. Students are organized into 45-60 member groups and introduced to a JMU faculty or staff member who then leads them in a discussion of *Fed 10* that transpires before they attend their first university class at JMU.

We consider FY Reading to be a "threshold" event in that we demonstrate to our incoming students what is expected of them in a classroom prior to their stepping foot into one. Small group discussions for this text took many forms. Political Science and History have particular attachments to *Fed10* and Madison, but what about the Writing Program, or Communication Studies or anyone from Science and the Social Sciences? Faculty support meetings were offered by our partnership team to encourage spooked faculty to put their own

interpretation to a document foundational to the form of American government. The facilitated discussions subsequently took many turns; how do you deconstruct a difficult text (Library faculty), what does it mean to be a citizen in a republic (Debate & Communication Studies), discussions of voice (Women's Studies and Sociology), group membership and affinity (Psychology), faction creation and unity (Orientation). Interpretations were numerous and meaningful to us, but did our newest students understand the application of the principles discussed in *Fed10*? Without James Madison to explain it to them, how could we?

Bringing Fed10 to Life

Our team developed a convocation program around a faction-creating scenario, The Drawbridge. First Year Convocation is the closing orientation event and signals the beginning of university life. Students heard the story of the Drawbridge characters in their student-led orientation groups prior to convocation and were asked to come to a consensus vote deciding which character was responsible for a horrible crime. At Convocation, a faculty moderator introduced and led the 3900 students in a "discussion" of that first group vote and introduced characters who brought the scenario to life written and performed by JMU Theater students. Here the first year students were given faces and back story to the scenario. Orientation groups reconvened to reconsider the new information and recast their group's vote via delegates using remote control CPA classroom clickers. Faculty-panelists and the moderator brought text themes back using the scenario as a channel to view how issues of unity and faction can play out in classrooms, campuses and life. Group delegates were then asked to vote again – this time without group consultation - by representative vote and again employing the classroom clickers. With this exercise we tried to *represent* the concepts in *Fed10* using a present day situation and invited the students to practice meaning-making, critical thinking skills and exercise of judgment.

Supporting Pieces:

- Federalist 10 Piece distributed to JMU first year students and faculty facilitators
- Faculty facilitators' guide
- Drawbridge Scenario
- Drawbridge cast members script

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