Destroying a First-Year Seminar Program and Rebuilding From the Ground Up

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The history of freshman seminar at CTX …
From Bad to Worse:
History of Freshman Seminar at CTX

• Mid 80s – 2000 – The Master Student
• Fall 2000 to Fall 2004 – ORI 1101 Freshman Seminar
• Fall 2005 – The Disaster Year

• Fall 2006 – No requirement for all students
  – Developing Scholars Seminar for provisional students
• Fall 2007 – Life and Leadership
Student opinions …

- From Fall 2005 course assessments
  - “I did not find this course to be useful.”
  - “They (large groups) are a waste of time.”
  - “Freshman Seminar shouldn’t meet so often.”
  - “If you want students [to be] successful, make the class something students want to go to instead of something they dread.”
  - “Get rid of Freshman Seminar.” “Do away with it.”
Why we failed

- No ownership/champion
  - Or the wrong one
- Struggle between academics and student services
- Trying to “be all things to all people”
Why we failed

• No goals/direction
  – Cohorting by majors
  – Separating provisional students
  – Service learning
  – Academic or social?
• No collaboration
• Model that wasn’t workable
R.I.P.
Developing a new course

- Receiving approval from faculty
- Organizing an exploratory committee
- Creating the syllabus
  - Major purpose
  - Outcomes
  - Course setup
  - Expectations/Logistics
Developing a new course

• Vetted syllabus through committee
• Looked at other schools/best practices
• Issues to tackle
  – Who could teach/who would teach?
  – What to include/What not to include?
  – Too much/Too little?
  – Academic content/Student services content?
  – Common course calendar & activities?
IT PASSED!

• First week of October – faculty says “go ahead” (*skepticism reigns*)
• First week of November – first stab at developing syllabus (*confusion reigns*)
• First week of December – syllabus finalized (*uneasiness reigns*)
• Second week of January – faculty approves Life & Leadership syllabus (*rejoicing reigns*)
Why We Succeeded

• We were willing to “kill” it
• We found a champion
• We waited for the right time
• We developed a good model
• We involved the right people
• We didn’t involve the wrong people
• We ignored/navigated roadblocks
Selecting *(the right)* Instructors

- Committed to students
- Can work in a team setting
- Willing to be trained/developed
- Can spend time spring and summer
- Hand-picked
- Developed written job description
- 2-credits of pay for a 1-credit class
- Handed out agreement to be signed
Instructor Input

- Weekly meetings through April
- Developing learning outcomes/course purposes
- The BIG THREE (from 50+)
- 10 specific learning outcomes
• “Best practices” readings
  – My Freshman Year
• Group dialogues
• Practicing team building
• Vetted each other’s course handouts
• Individuals developed activities and assessments for each outcome
• Trained in Campus Tool Kit
Launching Life & Leadership

• Met as classes twice during Week of Welcome
• Paired instructors (2 in each time slot)
• Kept meeting as instructors throughout fall semester
• Partnered with Service Learning
Launching Life & Leadership

- Two Special Events:
  - All student chapel
  - Speaker from Growing Leaders
- Developed Pre-Test/Post-Test for learning outcomes
- Use of Instructor Assessments of course
- Provided regular updates to full faculty
- Provided funds for outings/donuts/etc
Ongoing Improvements

• **Year 2**
  - Minimal changes
    • Added optional extra seminars
  - Ongoing development
    • *Millenials Go to College*
  - Addressed things directly observed through assessment
    • Added Lutheran Ethos piece to Week of Welcome
    • Provided “life success seminars” as options
    • Chose not to bring in *Growing Leaders* speaker
    • Met more frequently during Week of Welcome
Ongoing Improvements

• Year 3
  – Went to 2 days a week
    • Monday – large group seminars
    • Wednesday – small group discussions
  – Dropped Campus Tool Kit
  – Added Strengths Quest
  – Added a Common Book/Reading
  – Deepened the First Year Experience
    • Servant Event during Week of Welcome
    • Added Teaching Freshmen Workshops
What’s Next? - Building a true FYE

• Mid-semester service project
• 2nd Semester class/connections
• Learning Communities
• Use of student mentors
• Enhancing the Monday Seminar
• Strengths Quest training and deeper implementation
• Mid-semester grade checks
Life & Leadership – A Wrap-Up

• What we saw…
• What we did…
• What we learned…
• What we changed…
• What we want to do…
Want more info?

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