Telling vs. Showing: The Evolution from a Welcome-to-College to a Thematic University Seminar

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Background & Context
• Maryville University
  • 20 minutes from downtown St. Louis, Missouri
  • Private, four-year institution integrating liberal learning with professional learning
  • Traditional-age and adult students
  • College of Arts & Sciences and Schools of Business, Education, Health Professions
• 3,500 students; 320 first-year students

• University Seminar
  • 3-cr hr required of all traditional first-years
Background & Context

• Pre-2007
  • Changing Vice President for Academic Affairs
  • The Great Divide: Course goals; Amount of work expected; Faculty vs. Staff taught
  • Students placed in sections based on demographics

• 2007
  • Need for change
  • Task force of faculty/staff discussions
  • Critical review of the course, objectives
  • Laundry list of ‘Why do we have this course?’
Evolution of Needs

• Faculty Needs
  • Clear expectations of course goals
  • Autonomy – academic freedom
  • Community of support among/between INTD101 faculty/staff

• Student Needs
  • Clear expectations of course goals
  • Student Life components to ensure resources are shared and known
  • Community within the classroom and beyond
Springboard to Comprehensive First-Year Experience

- FYE Summit
- FYE Excursions
- Civic Engagement Project
- First-Year Experience at Maryville
- Spring FYE Courses
- Summer Connection
- New Student Orientation
- Living-Learning Communities
- University Seminar

START
Goals of the Course

**CRITICAL THINKING**
Students become independent, creative, and analytical thinkers.

**COMMUNITY**
Students are integrated into the university community of scholars.

**COMMUNICATION**
Students articulate and defend ideas through research, writing, and speaking.
Faculty, Staff, Peer Mentors

• Who teaches and how do we recruit to teach?
  • Vice President for Academic Affairs sends Call for Proposals
  • FYE Advisory Board reviews/edits/approves
  • Approximately ½ faculty and ½ staff taught
  • Included in faculty load (4/4)
  • Staff paid adjunct salary (~$2,650)

• Peer Mentor Program
  • Enroll in EDUC302: Practicum in Peer Mentoring
Current University Seminar Course

• Shared Goals – Different Themes
  • Community, Communication, Critical Thinking

• Theme Examples
  • Family Matters: Yes, It Does!
  • Fantasy Novels and Their Fans
  • That’s What Dreams Are Made Of
  • Coaching TLC: Teamwork, Leadership, Communication

• Students rank themes of interest
  • Students are excited about the class!
  • 90% get first choice; remaining get 2nd
Our Instructor Community
• March, May, October
• Support for ideas, films, texts

Student Life/Academic Partnership
• Past 2 years – 2 weeks mid-semester
• 2010 – Saturday requirement

Term Projects
• Flip Video Presentations
• Group Power Point Presentations
• Term Papers

End of Year Showcase – FYE Summit
Assessment

• In Class Evaluations – specific to course

• On-Line Evaluations – used for all courses

• Faculty Reflection Statements

• Peer Mentor Review of Class and Experience

• Retention Numbers
Positives from Student Evaluations

“This course was centered on class interactions rather than the usual note taking and boredom. It was engaging and that made a better learning environment.”

“I liked learning how there is no ‘right answer’.”

“I feel very close to this class and made some very good friends.”

“It was an awesome class.”
Improvement from Student Evaluations

“Make it a year-long class.”

“Less books, reading, assignments.”

“Meet more often than twice each week.”

“More short essays and less long papers.”
“Because students selected our theme, it was obvious they wanted to be there to learn. It usually didn’t matter how much work they had to do.”

“Student enjoyed this class and thus, I thoroughly enjoyed teaching it!”

“It is refreshing to teach a course that can go in the direction that the students want and need it to go rather than rushing to the next chapter in the text in order to cover all of the material.”
Contact Information

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