Using Assessment to Improve Programs, Accentuate Strengths, Dispel Myths, and Engage Critics

Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience
Session #232

Alan Whitcomb, Coordinator
First-Year Seminar
Impetus for Assessment

Without data, you are just another person with an opinion.
- Andreas Schleicher-

Food for Thought - CSC ('83)

Without [evidence], you are just another person with an [unsubstantiated] opinion.
Purpose for Today's Presentation

Illustrate the Utility of FYS Assessment:

- Investigating Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the First-Year Program
- Improving the Seminar (Program)
- Guiding Seminar Pedagogy
- Selecting and Training Faculty
- Engaging Friends and Foe Via an Informational Campaign Based on Evidence
The First-Year Seminar at Mount Ida College

- Learning Strategies ➔ Leadership ➔ Critical Thinking

- Learning Outcomes:
  - Critical Thinking
  - Writing
  - Speaking
  - Information Literacy and Technology
Who Teaches the First-Year Seminar in the Fall?

- **Full-Time Faculty (1-3 Sections)**
- **Adjuncts (15-20 Sections)**
  - College Staff
  - Others
- **Selection and Summer Training**
- **3 Credit Academic Course - Graded/GPA, Required for Graduation**
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

- Students Don’t Like The FYS
- It’s Not Working (FYS)
- Students see it as just another writing course.
- In other words, students' experiences in the seminar are homogeneous.

What did students think?
Compared to your other courses, how interesting was CC101?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign. Less Interesting</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Interesting</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Interesting</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Interesting</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign. More Interesting</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to your other courses, how **Enjoyable** was CC101?

- **Sign. Less Enjoyable**: 13.9%
- **Less Enjoyable**: 23.5%
- **As Enjoyable**: 11.3%
- **More Enjoyable**: 32.6%
- **Sign. More Enjoyable**: 18.7%
Compared to your other courses, how **Valuable** was CC101?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign. Less Valuable</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Valuable</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As Valuable</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Valuable</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign. More Valuable</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

- “Why is the FYS more difficult than my other courses?” (Students’ Sentiments)
- “All that students have to do is just show up to get an ‘A’.” (Faculty Member on Appeals Committee)
Compared to your other courses, how difficult was CC101?

- Sign. Less Difficult: 8.7%
- Less Difficult: 37.7%
- As Difficult: 21.3%
- More Difficult: 27.4%
- Sign. More Difficult: 4.8%
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

• “All that students have to do is just show up to get an 'A'.“ (Faculty Member on Appeals Committee)
  • Dental Hygiene Program
  • DH Program Students: “We didn’t know how much free time we had!”
  • Doctors, Nurses, Lawyers, Pilots, etc.
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

- Students report they’ll study more in college than they did in high school.

But do they?
Time Spent Per Week Preparing for Classes in High School (BCSSE)

Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or More</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Time Spent Per Week Preparing for Classes in High School and College (Anticipated - BCSSE)

47.8%  28.5%  29.0%  22.4%  15.0%  1.2%  1.2%  1.9%  4.0%  0.7%  3.3%
Weekly Hours of Study for All Courses

HS-7.5  MIC Pred.-15.3  MIC Act.-10.5

Study Hours

Percentage of Students

- 0 - 3.5: 18.6%
- 4 - 7.5: 33.1%
- 8 - 11.5: 21.6%
- 12 - 15.5: 8.8%
- 16 - 19.5: 2.0%
- 20 - 23.5: 7.1%
- 24 - +: 8.8%
Weekly Hours of Study for CC101

Percentage of Students

Study Hours

- 0 - 1.5: 45.2%
- 2 - 3.5: 37.4%
- 4 - 5.5: 13.1%
- 6 - 7.5: 1.6%
- 8 - 9.5: 0.3%
- 10 - 11.5: 1.6%
- 12 -+: 0.7%
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

• Our students need to work (employment).
Weekly Hours of Employment
(Note: 60.4% of All Students Reported Working 0 Hours/Week)
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

- Conclusion: A student’s experience in the First-Year Seminar is largely idiosyncratic to the instructor of their section of the seminar.

- Conclusion: Students’ experiences in a multiple-section course or seminar such as the FYS is NOT homogeneous (for better or worse).
Unsubstantiated Opinions Related to the Seminar

• Conclusion: While students are studying more on average than they did in high school, it is considerably less than they anticipated.

• Conclusion: Most of our students (60%) are NOT employed while enrolled as full-time students;
  
  71% < 10 hours; 86% < 15 hours
Sources of Assessment Information

- Seminar Evaluations by Students
  - 8. Based on your performance in CC101 to this point in the semester, what grade do you expect to receive in CC101?
    
    A     A-     B+     B     B-     etc.
  
- 6. In a typical week, how much time did you spend outside of class preparing for CC101 Only? (Last Two Weeks of Semester)
Assessment Findings

• In sections of the FYS where students expected to earn higher grades, did they report studying (fewer or more) hours, on average, than those sections with students who expected to earn lower grades.

• Students expecting higher grades reported studying fewer hours. (r=-.51)

Interpretations?
Assessment Findings

• “Based on your performance in the FYS to this point in the semester, what grade do you expect to receive in the FYS? A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, etc.

• How difficult was FYS compared to your other courses?"

• Sections of students with expected higher grades rated the FYS as less difficult than students in sections with expected lower grades (-.54)
Assessment Findings

• “Based on your performance in the FYS to this point in the semester, what grade do you expect to receive in the FYS? A A- B+ B B- C+ etc.

• “How [interesting, enjoyable, valuable] was FYS compared to your other courses?”

• Students in sections with expected higher grades rated the FYS as more interesting, enjoyable, and valuable than...
  (+.71, +.78, +.65)
Assessment Findings

• “Based on your performance in the FYS to this point in the semester, what grade do you expect to receive in the FYS?
  
  A  A-  B+  B  B-  C+  etc."

• “The instructor stimulates my interest in the subject...”

• Sections of students with expected higher grades rated their instructors higher in stimulating their interest in the subject than... (.64)
Assessment Findings

- “Based on your performance in the FYS to this point in the semester, what grade do you expect to receive in the FYS? A  A-  B+  B  B-  C+  etc.
- “Overall, the instructor is…”
- Sections of students with expected higher grades rated their instructors higher overall than students in sections with expected lower grades. (+.58)
Assessment Findings

- **Summary:** Sections of students with expected higher grades rated:
  - their instructors more favorably overall;
  - their instructors as stimulating greater interest in the subject;
  - the course as more interesting, enjoyable, and valuable, but less difficult;
  - however, students with expected higher grades spent less time studying.
CC101 - FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR: FALL 2008

CC101 Instructor Selection, Training, and Feedback
Instructor1
Instructor2
Instructor4
Instructor6
Instructor7
All

CC101 Instructor

CC101 GPA, MIC CUM GPA, HS GPA

GPA

3.52
3.26
2.74
1.72
1.02
2.49
2.33
2.70
2.64
2.11
2.46
2.44
2.25
2.58
2.63
2.55
2.54
0.00
0.50
1.00
1.50
2.00
2.50
3.00
3.50
4.00

0.00
0.25
0.50
0.75
1.00
1.25
1.50
1.75
2.00
2.25
2.50
2.75
3.00
3.25
3.50
3.75
4.00
Faculty Selection and Evaluation

- FYS Instructor Expectations (A Priori)
- Possible Components of a Teaching-Learning Effectiveness Index
  - Quality (Student Ratings)
    - Overall and Intellectual Stimulation Ratings
    - Interesting, Valuable, and Enjoyable Ratings
  - Student Commitment (Student Ratings)
    - Effort, Challenge, Difficulty
    - Hours of Study
  - Learning Outcomes (Direct Measures)
## Faculty Selection and Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Another</th>
<th>Effort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MA201</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC101 A</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Study Hours; Grades Students Earned; Feedback to Students

MA201, CJ101, HI101, MA115, BA101, EN101, SM100, MA098, PE100, MA090, PS101, EN099, SO101, MA121, CC101, AC110
Faculty Training

• Among Other Things:
  • Students’ Intellectual, Professional, and Personal Growth and Development
  • Quality of Teaching (e.g., Value, Interest, Enjoyment)
  • Student Commitment (e.g., Study Hours)
  • Impact of Grading/Assessment on Students’ Study Time
    • High by Attainable Expectations
    • Timely Feedback Is Important!
  • Learning Outcomes (Efficiency)
Faculty Training and Feedback

- Students’ Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)
- Instructors’ Individualized Teaching Plans (ITPs)
OVERALL CC101 RATING

2.87

3.32

All Instructors

Instructor 1
### CC101 Seminar Evaluation: Item Ranks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL STUDY HOURS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORK HOURS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERESTING</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIFFICULT</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENJOYABLE</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>VALUABLE</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>CURRENT ISSUES</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRITICAL THINKING</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITION PAPERS</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC SKILLS COURSE</td>
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<td>LIBRARY INFORMATION</td>
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<td>MATERIAL INTERESTING</td>
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<td>ACADEMIC SKILLS CAREER</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMFORT</td>
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<td>CLASS DISCUSS</td>
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<td>RESEARCH PAPERS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORAL PRESENT2 SKILLS</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANGEL ON-LINE</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVERALL CC101 RATING</td>
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