

## Faculty Perspectives on Decisions to Teach in First-Year Experience Programs

**K-STATE FIRST**

33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference  
on The First-Year Experience  
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“They are happy men whose natures sort with their vocations.”

-Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

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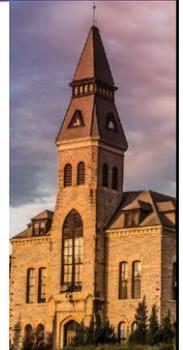
## First-Year Experience Programs

- Retention benefits
- Student success, student learning, degree attainment
- First-Year Seminars (of various kinds)
- But also now common reading programs, learning communities, engaged advising, peer mentoring, early alert programs, and more

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## Kansas State University

- Over 24,300 students from all 50 states and more than 100 countries
- University Profile
  - Public Land Grant
  - Research University with high research activity
- Long-term strategic plan goal: become **“one of the nation’s top 50 public research universities”**



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## K-STATE FIRST History

- 2008-09 Initial Pilot Study of FYS Program
- 2010 Launch of K-State First, Creation of KSBN and CAT Communities
- 2011-13 Development, Changes, Success, Growth

## K-STATE FIRST Programs

[www.k-state.edu/first](http://www.k-state.edu/first)

CAT Communities

First Year Seminars



A great college experience starts with a GREAT first year.



K-State Book Network

Guide to Personal Success

## K-STATE FIRST Notable Features

- Growth in numbers of classes, communities, and students served
- Solid gains in retention, degree attainment, and student satisfaction
- Student participation is not required (though all first-year students receive the common book)
- **Faculty involvement is also voluntary**, though some are asked by their Department Heads

## Overarching Research Question

**What factors contribute to faculty “buy-in” for FYE programs?**

## Competing Commitments:

### *Teaching in FYE Programs at Research Schools*

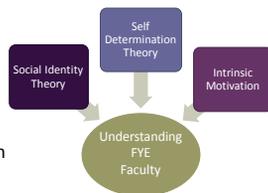
- Institutional priorities
  - Conflict with institutional priorities
  - Implicit or explicit institutional messages about primary responsibilities (e.g., Backes-Gellner & Schlinghoff, 2010; Hardre & Kollman, 2012; Leisyte, Enders, & de Boer, 2009; Serwo, 2000)
- Zero-sum game (e.g., Eimers, 1997)
- **Examining faculty experiences in this area may enable the development of more successful first-year programs.**

## Prior Research on FYE Faculty

- Personal, professional, political effects of participation on instructors (Wanca-Thibault, Shepherd & Staley, 2002)
- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors associated with continuing to teach in first year programs (Soldner, Lee & Duby, 2004)
- How teachers of first year seminars transfer their own learning (e.g., teaching approaches) to other courses (McClure, Atkinson, & Wills, 2008; Fidler, Neururer-Rotholz, & Richardson, 1999)
- **While prior research reveals interesting themes, we further examined faculty buy-in within the context of additional relevant psychological theories.**

## Theoretical Framework

- Psychological theories on **motivation and identity** may help us understand:
  - How faculty handle the balance between teaching and research
  - What leads to participation in first-year programs



## Social Identity Theory

- *Social identity* refers to the way individuals define themselves in terms of group membership
  - Defining oneself on the basis of vocation is quite common (Deaux, 2001)
- *Social identity theory* (Tajfel, 1978; 2010) suggests that social identities are a crucial part of self-image, and a valuable source of positive feelings
- Social identity may affect how faculty decide to balance teaching and research responsibilities
- **We predict that faculty in K-State First will strongly identify as teachers, despite their position at a research institution.**

## Self-Determination Theory

- *Self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2009) asserts that all humans have basic needs
- Feeling competent, and experiencing autonomy and relatedness in professional activities will increase intrinsic motivation
- **K-State First faculty will demonstrate active decisions to engage in first-year programs as a way to meet their personal and professional needs.**

## Intrinsic Motivation

- Associated with high personal standards of achievement and an emphasis on personal effort (e.g., Blumenfeld, Kempler, & Krajcik, 2006)
- Leads individuals to engage in behaviors because they enjoy them
- **We predict that faculty who continue in the K-State First program will provide responses that demonstrate high intrinsic motivation.**

## The Current Study

- We predict that faculty in K-State First who continue to teach in the program will demonstrate
  - Strong identification as teachers
  - Decision to continue in the program
  - High intrinsic motivation
- We examined these questions using both quantitative and qualitative measures of faculty experience.

## Survey Procedures

- We sent electronic invitations to the 105 individuals who have taught in the K-State First program
- Participants completed the online survey voluntarily
- We sent reminder emails periodically
- 77 individuals (73%) participated in the study

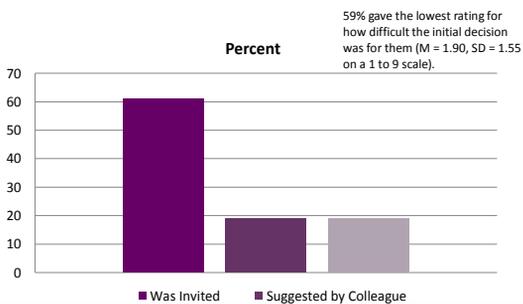
## Domains Assessed

- Factors Related to Faculty Motivations, Identities, and Self-Concepts:
  - Teaching Background
  - Decisions to Teach in the KSF program
  - Experiences and Perceptions of Teaching in the KSF program
  - Self-Concepts as Teachers

## Teaching Background

- The sample consisted largely of experienced teachers
- The majority were tenured faculty members
- Number of years they had been teaching:
  - Me = 14, M = 16.58, SD = 12.58 (years overall)
    - Me = 9, M = 11.90, SD = 10.83 (years at Kansas State)
  - 86% had 5 or more years of teaching experience overall
    - 74% had 5 or more years of teaching experience at Kansas State

## Decisions to Teach in KSF



## Why They Decided to Teach in KSF

- Most common reasons (from free responses):
  - The opportunity to teach first-year students
  - The class structure (e.g., size, type)
  - The reputation and philosophy of KSF

### Why They Decided to Teach in KSF

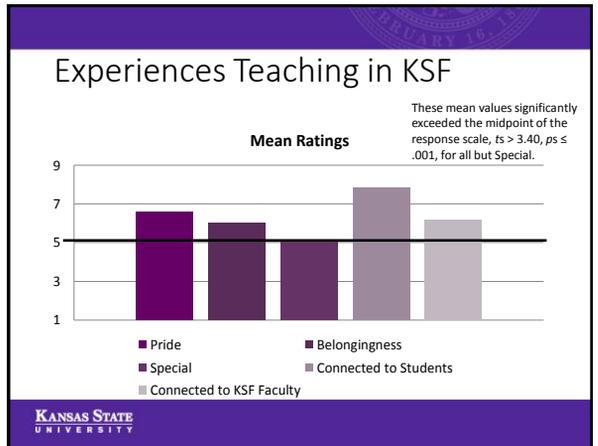
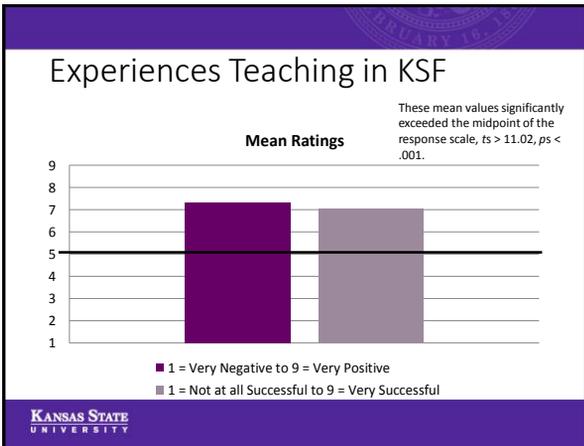
- “I thought the **program was intriguing**. It has a great mission to **engage first year students**, and the learning community idea was exciting.”
- “Opportunity to **reach first-year students** in a different environment, focus on learning in unique ways, have a smaller classroom.”
- “The opportunity to .... **work with other faculty** across campus to **learn more about best practices** in teaching and learning.”

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### Continuing to Teach in KSF

- Overall, three times as many participants continued to teach in KSF
- 54 participants made the decision to continue to teach in KSF
  - 56% gave the lowest rating for how difficult the decision was for them
  - M = 2.28, SD = 2.01 (on a 1 to 9 scale)
- 18 participants made the decision not to continue to teach in KSF
  - They reported this decision was more difficult for them
  - M = 3.28, SD = 1.00 (on a 1 to 9 scale)
  - 9 of them indicated they did not continue because they left K-State

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## Why They Continued to Teach in KSF

- Most common reasons (from free responses):
  - Enjoyed teaching first-year students
  - Liked the course
  - Recognized the value of KSF

## Why They Continued to Teach in KSF

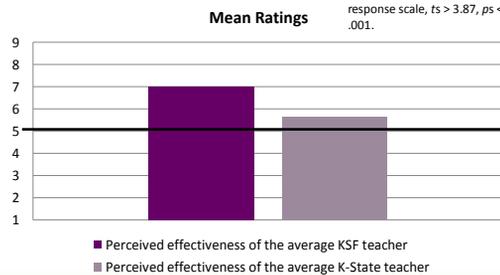
- “I **loved teaching** classes in this way! I **loved the connection** with students, and I had **better results** from the students.”
- “I was **inspired by the program’s mission** and **liked the contact with other enthusiastic teachers.**”

## How to Attract Faculty to KSF

- Most common suggestions (from free responses):
  - Focused recruiting (e.g., invitations)
  - Improve campus presence (e.g., disseminate information)
  - Provide (and emphasize) benefits (e.g., money)

## Perceptions of KSF

These mean values were significantly different,  $t = 8.39, p < .001$ . Both ratings teachers exceeded the midpoint of the response scale,  $t_s > 3.87, p_s < .001$ .



## Perceptions of the Costs of Teaching in KSF

- Greatest costs (among those anticipated, on a 1 to 9 response scale):
  - Attending additional meetings (5.51)
  - Attending additional workshops (5.40)
  - Course preparation time (5.14)

## Perceptions of the Costs of Teaching in KSF

- Greatest costs (from free responses):
  - Time investment
    - Far and away the greatest cost, noted by the majority of participants
  - Emotional investment

## Perceptions of the Costs of Teaching in KSF

- Trivial costs (among those anticipated, on a 1 to 9 response scale):
  - Looking unfavorable to colleagues (1.80)
  - Looking like you are too focused on teaching (2.31)
  - Lack of freedom (2.83)

## Perceptions of the Benefits of Teaching in KSF

- Greatest benefits (among those anticipated, on a 1 to 9 response scale):
  - Making a difference (8.33)
  - Connecting with students (8.30)
  - Having an enjoyable experience (7.69)
  - Supporting the program's goals (7.51)
  - Gaining new teaching ideas (7.26)
  - Having the chance to teach what you want to teach (6.61)
  - Gaining experience teaching in interdisciplinary ways (6.13)
  - Professional development (6.00)

## Perceptions of the Benefits of Teaching in KSF

- Greatest benefits (from free responses):
  - Improved relationships and community building
  - Better teaching and learning
    - Each of these was noted by the majority of participants

## Perceptions of the Benefits of Teaching in KSF

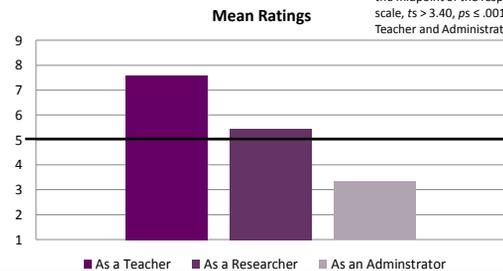
- Trivial benefits (among those anticipated, on a 1 to 9 response scale):
  - Improving your ability to obtain tenure (2.36)
  - Improving your ability to receive a promotion (2.74)
  - Making you more competitive for teaching awards (3.13)
  - Improving your merit evaluations (3.21)
  - Looking favorable to your colleagues (3.23)
  - Providing your with potential undergraduate research assistants (3.44)
  - Increasing your own campus visibility (3.82)

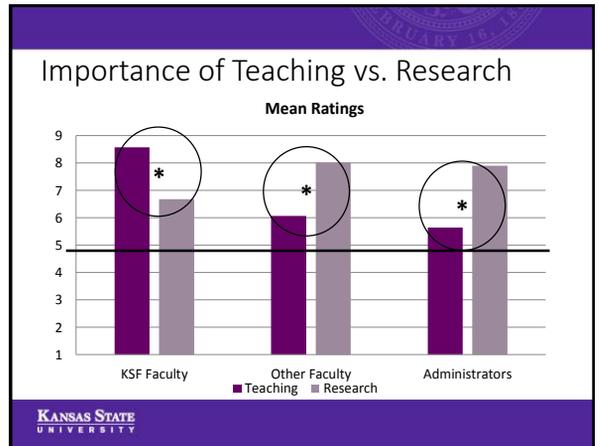
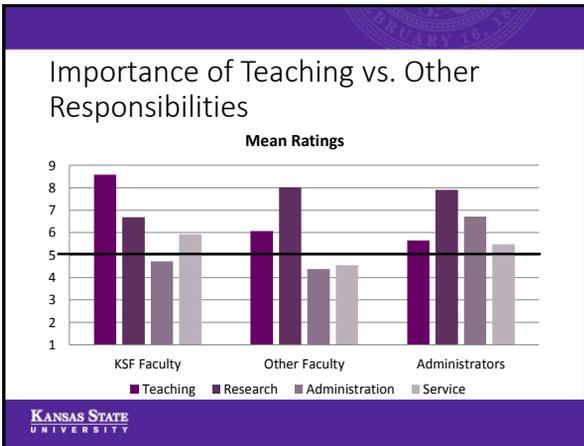
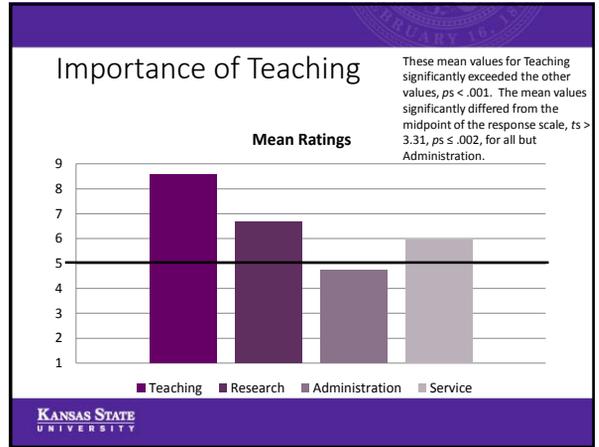
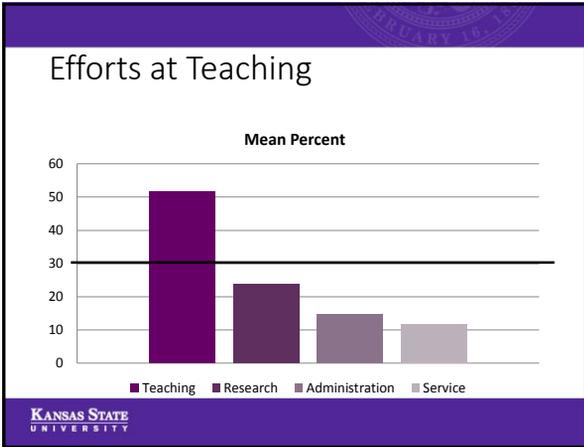
## How to Improve Faculty Experiences in KSF

- Most common suggestions (from free responses):
  - Provide more money, support, and resources
  - Provide more KSF-sponsored activities
  - Provide more professional development

## Self-Concepts as Teachers

These mean values were significantly different from each other,  $ps < .001$ . The mean values significantly differed from the midpoint of the response scale,  $ts > 3.40$ ,  $ps \leq .001$ , for Teacher and Administrator.







## Key Findings

- **Self Determination/Intrinsic Motivation:**
  - *Faculty who have remained in the K-State First program do demonstrate responses that are high in intrinsic motivation*
    - They started teaching because of the type of class, student, and philosophy of KSF
    - They continue teaching because it was a positive, successful experience; they enjoyed the students and the course
    - They valued the connection to students and found a sense of belonging as part of this community of colleagues
    - They recognized the value and importance of the program
    - They want to make a difference; they believe that they do

## Recommendations for Recruiting and Retaining Faculty to FYE Programs

- **Ask your best teachers to participate**
  - Ask faculty who have reputation for teaching, who “buy-in” to the mission
  - Involve Deans/Department Heads to help make the ask
- **Incentives are not the MAIN thing, but they help**
  - Emphasize intrinsic benefits
    - Format of class leads to connections and deep learning
    - Professional development opportunities
  - Offer extrinsic benefits
    - Stipend or funds
    - Create opportunities for recognition
    - Concerns about tenure/promotion

## Recommendations for Recruiting and Retaining Faculty to FYE Programs

- **Invite faculty to participate in research on the scholarship of teaching and learning**
  - Action research projects on teaching methods
  - Assessment of student learning outcomes
- **Apply rich theoretical frameworks to better understand the experience of faculty in first-year program**

## Questions for Discussion

- How do we identify and recruit top teachers for the program?
- How do we create institutional systems that allow FYE courses to “count”? (i.e., that reward participation extrinsically)
- How do we create faculty community without creating faculty burn-out?

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