These Things We Know for Sure: Key Components and Strategies for a Successful FYE Experience

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Millersville University of Pennsylvania

National Conference on the First-Year Experience, San Diego, CA
February 15, 2014
I. Introductions

II. First Year Seminars
   A. Types
   B. Benefits & Challenges

III. FYE Components
   A. Living Learning Communities
   B. Service Learning

IV. Assessment
   A. Focus Groups
   B. Institutional Surveys
   C. National Surveys and Standardized Tests

V. Long-Term Success and Sustainability
   A. Faculty Development
   B. Academic-Student Affair Partnerships
   C. Administrative Support

VI. Moving Forward
What do you hope to gain from this workshop?
Millersville University Profile

- Undergrad Enrollment – 7,644
  - 89% Full time
  - 18% Minority
  - 96% In state (Pennsylvania)
- Mean SATs = 1540 (M+W 1024)
- First Generation Students – 60%
- Top Majors:
  - Undecided (846)
  - Business Administration (823)
  - Biology (730)
  - Psychology (511)
  - Elementary Education (486)
  - Applied Engineering Safety & Technology (434)
Our Roots – The Charge

- Began FYE Development in Fall 2001
- Develop potential models for a holistic first-year program
  - Intellectual Engagement
  - Civic Engagement
  - Social Engagement
- Structural Elements
  - First Year Seminar
  - Enhanced Advisement
  - Living-Learning Community
## Evolution of FYE Program
### Strategic Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2001 to Fall 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2005 to Fall 2007</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
<th>Fall 2013</th>
<th>Fall 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNIV 101 (one credit)</strong></td>
<td><strong>UNIV 179 (three credits)</strong></td>
<td><strong>UNIV 103 (three credits)</strong></td>
<td><strong>UNIV 103</strong></td>
<td><strong>UNIV 103</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focused on University transition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Experimental Course w/ Academic Focus</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Education Credit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Major Based Sections Added – GE Credit</strong></td>
<td><strong>All Incoming First-Year Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started w/ 6 Sections</td>
<td>8-10 Sections</td>
<td>12 Sections</td>
<td>34 Sections (20 Major Based)</td>
<td>~55 Sections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seminar Models

UNIV 101

- 1 Credit Extended Orientation
- Learning Community
  - English Composition
  - Intro to Speech
- Socratic Format
- Problem-Based Learning
- Co- and Extra-Curricular Assignments
- Transition Elements
- Service Learning
- Faculty as Advisor

UNIV 103

- 3 Credit Content Rich: Undecided or Major Based
- Learning Community
  - English Composition
  - Intro to Speech
  - Others
- General Education Credit
- Co- and Extra-Curricular Assignments
- Transition Elements
- Service Learning
- Faculty may or may not serve as Advisor
Common Transitional Elements

- Advising and Registration
- Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
- Building a Community
- Career Services
- Choosing a Major
- Cultural Events & Co-Curricular Activities
- Living Away from Home – College Life
- Stress Management
- Study Skills (e.g. Note Taking, Exam Prep)
- Time Management
- Tutoring
- Understanding a Syllabus

OTHERS?
Common Learning Objectives

1) Communicating Orally and in Writing
2) Obtaining and Evaluating Information
3) Engaging in Critical Inquiry
4) Appreciating the Importance of Civic Engagement
5) Understanding the Importance of a Liberal Arts Education
6) Making a Successful Transition into University Life both Academically and Socially
Alternative Teaching Approaches – Linda & Carol
  Problem Based Learning
  Technology...

Instilling High Academic Expectations – Lynn
  Setting the Stage – Explicit Expectations
  Structuring Assignments...

Supporting Successful Transition to University Life – Dan
  Time Management
  Alcohol...
Selected Seminar Topics

**EXPLORATORY SECTIONS**
- Convergence Culture
- Culture, Science and Mathematics in the Pre-Columbian Americas
- Force for Social Change
- Homes and Homelessness
- How to Change the World
- Intro to Human Rights
- Inside Out: Detective Fiction, Jazz, and Philosophy
- Justice for All: The Promise of Education
- Leadership through Sport
- Learning by Doing
- Scientific Revolutions
- Telling Your Story
- Who Am I?

**MAJOR BASED SECTIONS**
- Art Outspoken – ART
- Chemists Have Solutions
- Earth Systems - ESCI
- English Majors Seminar
- Cultural Understandings and Misunderstandings – FORL
- From pi to i through e – MATH
- Music Majors Seminar
- Physics Majors Seminar
- Representing America – HIST
- Teen Angst – ERCH
- What Color is My Parachute – BUAD
- What and Who are Computer Scientists
Positive Relationships
Living-Learning Communities
Service Learning

Successful Components of FYE Programming
Fostering Positive Relationships

- **Cultivating and Supporting Faculty Involvement**
  - Informal contact - crucial
  - Welcome letter
  - Brown bag lunches and Faculty Discussions
  - Blog

- **Developing Peer Mentor Relationships**
  - Faculty-Peer Mentor introductions in spring
  - Handbook to outline expectations - on both sides
  - Participation in Faculty Development Workshop
  - Peer mentor training
  - Nomination of successful students to continue tradition

- **Building Community with Students**
  - Faculty serve as advisor
  - Living-Learning Community
  - Seminar format
  - Service Learning – Day of Caring
Living-Learning Communities

- Living-Learning Community
  - Co-enrolled in UNIV 103 and Composition or Speech Class
    - Common assignments encouraged but not required
    - Still positive outcomes even if no commonality
  - Housed in residence halls together
  - Programs held in residence halls (TOTs)

- Peer Mentors
  - Live in residence halls with students
  - Assigned to a UNIV 103 section
  - Resource for information on campus activities and resources

- Attentive Advising
  - Seminar Instructor may act as advisor
  - Supported by Peer Mentors
Living-Learning Communities
Living Component

- Students make friends!
- Students study together!
- Students go to events together!
- Students party together 😞
Philanthropic: helping those less fortunate

Civic: students act as agents of change empowering others

Communitarian: through service students become responsible members of communities
Form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development (Jacoby, 1996)

Joins two complex concepts: community action, the ‘service,’ and efforts to learn from the action and connect what is learned to existing knowledge, the ‘learning.’ (Stanton, Giles, Cruz 1999)
Service Learning
Making the Connection

SERVICE

- Serving Meals at Homeless Shelters
- Book Group with Women’s Shelter
- Pen Pals with Local Elementary School Students
- Writing Workshop at Homeless Shelter

LEARNING

- Journal Writing
- Class Discussion – Providing students the opportunities to make connections
- Integrated w/ Course Readings
- Capstone Project
Break Out Session

Developing Positive First-Year Relationships – Linda
- Students
- Peer Mentors
- Faculty

Implementing Learning and Living-Learning Communities – Lynn & Carol
- Partnership with Student Affairs
- Structure
- Benefits

Positive Service Learning Experiences – Dan
- Types of Service Learning Experiences
- Role of Reflection
- Assessment
Developing an Assessment Plan

Have a plan from Day 1!
Add from there!
Writing Prompts

- Tied to the Goals of the University or FYE program
  - Civic Responsibility: What is civic responsibility?
  - Liberal Arts: What is a liberal arts education?

- Requires Buy-In by Faculty
  - Writing samples across seminars
  - Control – need help from faculty outside of UNIV 103

- Exceptionally Labor Intensive

- Rubrics
  - Multiple Iterations required to develop effective rubric
  - Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) Values Rubrics
    - Inquiry and Analysis
    - Critical Thinking
    - Written Communication
    - Oral Communication
    - Creative Thinking
    - Quantitative Literacy
    - Information Literacy
    - Teamwork
    - Problem Solving
    - Civic Engagement
    - Ethical Reasoning
    - Integrative Learning
    - Reading
## Writing Prompts

**Sample Rubric: What is a liberal arts education?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Off Target (1)</th>
<th>Partial/Developing (2)</th>
<th>On Target (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>The response indicates a misconception, lack of understanding, or may be incorrect regarding liberal arts education.</td>
<td>The response indicates a more limited understanding of a liberal arts education. Responses may focus on skills or dispositions but may be limited to one’s professional study, rather than across different disciplines.</td>
<td>The response indicates a well developed conceptualization and understanding of liberal arts education. Responses focus on the purpose of liberal arts to foster skills and dispositions about ways of knowing across different disciplines (e.g., problem solving, critical reflection, communication, computation). Responses are stated with context of multiple disciplines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Examples of responses** | • Required for graduation  
 • Related to arts, music, performance  
 • Related to politics or political ideology  
 • Major course/vocation courses  
 • I don’t know  
 • Incorrect answers | • Study of different cultures  
 • Exposure to different perspectives (e.g., not formal disciplines or subjects).  
 • General education (basic education)  
 • Reading, writing, thinking, science, math.  
 • Individual attributes (e.g., being smart, studious, etc.)  
 • Well rounded person | • Exposure to different disciplines, courses, or subject areas  
 • Ways of knowing about things from many different perspectives.  
 • Designed to develop understanding, knowledge, and appreciation outside of one’s area of expertise.  
 • Well rounded education |
| **Percentages**      | 49.0% (74)                                                                 | 41.7% (63)                                                                            | 9.3% (14)                                                                            |
## Writing Prompts

### Pre-Test / Post-Test Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pre-Test</th>
<th>Post-Test</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts Content</td>
<td>1.64 (.66)</td>
<td>1.99 (.80)</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts Level of Elaboration</td>
<td>1.90 (.62)</td>
<td>1.82 (.58)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Responsibility Content</td>
<td>1.78 (.83)</td>
<td>2.32 (.71)</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Responsibility Level of Elaboration</td>
<td>2.01 (.70)</td>
<td>1.98 (.61)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 122 for Liberal Arts coding; N = 114 for Civic Responsibility coding; standard deviations in parentheses.

Range: All scales based on 1 = off target/shallow to 3 = on target/deep
Focus Groups

Students

- Student Invitation
  - Random Selection – Difficult
  - Faculty Invitation – Easier but may not be as valid
  - Incentives

- Six (or Seven) Basic Questions
  1) What did you enjoy most?
  2) What did you like least?
  3) Did you like living in the first year residence hall?
  4) What did you think of the peer mentor experience?
  5) What would you change about FYE?
  6) Do you have anything to tell us?
  7) If you changed your major do you still think the class would have been valuable?

- Share Results
I’m friends with people I would never have been friends with before.
I kind of feel like an outsider in other classes, but I feel like family in UNIV 103.
We learned responsibility. Every person had to do their work and all of the work was out of class.
I hate my night class. I wanted to play ultimate but couldn’t because of my class. It’s hard to get engaged in clubs because they meet at night.
I never realized how much faculty wanted us to come see them during office hours.
Nice to have a teacher you can ask questions. Kind of like a second advisor.
It was an easy class. I didn’t have to pay much attention to it. All we had to do was read and discuss it in class. A GPA booster.
Our peer mentor was really cool and really helpful. She totally explained registration. She told us we could come by at 6 a.m.
Not all students take advantage of the experience. Some students participate but many do not.
Focus Groups
Faculty

- Invitation
- Four Questions
  1) What did you do that went really well and was beneficial?
  2) What do you think is really important but you need help with?
  3) What was your peer mentor experience like?
  4) What was your biggest frustration?
- Share Assessment
- Immediate Follow-Up
Focus Groups
Faculty – Sample Statements

- Energizing – got me out of a teaching rut.
- Students didn’t get the seminar concept. At the beginning of the semester they were frustrated I wasn’t lecturing. I need to better prepare them for what a seminar is.
- Being both teacher and advisor made me better at both.
- There is a student perception that the class is a blow off and they are often very frustrated that it isn’t.
- I could convey to students that college involves a high level of intellectual rigor...students rose to my high expectations.
- It would have been better if my peer mentor had taken the class.
- I really like that the commuter students bond with the students living on campus.
- The service learning was great, but it was a lot of work!
- The ideal topic “has clear impact on students’ personal lives...and can be treated with academic integrity.”
- I felt schizophrenic trying to teach both the course content as well as the transition issues.
Peer Mentor Discussion

- Part of Winter Break Training

- Six Questions
  1) What were your successes that you would like to share?
  2) What were the difficulties/frustrations you had to overcome?
  3) With whom did you connect: hallway or class?
  4) How were you best able to communicate with your mentees?
  5) What do we need to change?
  6) Did you feel unprepared for anything?

- Follow Up – Use to Guide Fall Training
Students in a freshman living/learning dormitory rated several factors higher than students in general.

*Living in the residence halls has been a positive experience for me.*

General Student Population 4.18  
First-Year Living Learning Hall 4.26

*There’s a lot of community spirit in my hall*

General Student Population 3.50  
First-Year Living Learning Dormitory 3.91

Ranges: All scales based on 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Institutional Survey
UNIV 103 Experiences - Students

- Development
  - Questions
    - Based on Common Learning Objectives
    - Transitional Elements
    - Other Institutional Priorities
  - Where possible match with national assessments

- Implementation
  - Launched during finals week – all UNIV 103 students
  - Incentive: Random selection for $25 gift cards

- Results
  - 31% Response Rate
Institutional Surveys
UNIV 103 Student Survey Results

Compare your UNIV 103 experiences to other courses this semester. Please indicate How much you agree or disagree with the following statements. In my UNIV 103 course,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time writing</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>30.95</td>
<td>26.79</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time in class discussion.</td>
<td>38.69</td>
<td>29.76</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time considering different points of view.</td>
<td>30.36</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spent more time considering how knowledge from different disciplines helps inform opinion.</td>
<td>27.54</td>
<td>29.34</td>
<td>30.54</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a great sense of community with my classmates.</td>
<td>38.69</td>
<td>34.52</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt my instructor was there to help me.</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>27.98</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institutional Surveys
University 103 Experiences - Faculty

- Question Development
  - Mirrored Student Survey (perception vs. reality)
  - Based on Common Learning Objectives
  - Transitional Elements
  - Other Priorities/Initiatives
    - Rank importance of academic/social/discipline topics
    - Information Literacy
    - Collection of Best Practices
    - Faculty Development Opportunities

- Implementation
  - Launched during finals week – all UNIV 103 faculty
  - Two surveys one for major based and one for exploratory
  - Used Survey Monkey
### Institutional Surveys
#### UNIV 103 Faculty Survey Responses

Please rate how often these social transition topics were emphasized/discussed in your UNIV 103 course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>More than one class period</th>
<th>One class period</th>
<th>Less than one class period</th>
<th>Did not discuss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol and other drug use/abuse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Center</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular Activites</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Planning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=15
National Surveys & Assessments

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE):
  - To assess the extent to which students engage in education practices associated with high levels of learning and development
  - Allows you to add your own questions as well

- Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA):
  - To gauge summative performance authentically, the CLA presents realistic problems that require students to analyze complex materials and determine the relevance to the task and credibility. Students' written responses to the tasks are evaluated to assess their abilities to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems, and communicate clearly and cogently.

- Pre-Test and Post-Test Surveys
  - Higher Education Values Inventory (HEVI)
  - Quick Discrimination Index (QDI)
National Assessments
NSSE: National Survey of Student Engagement

Sample Measures: Seminar vs. No Seminar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students who were involved in a freshman seminar . . .</th>
<th>Means (all differences ( p &lt; .05 )) [Based on scale of 1 (Never) to 4 (Very Often)]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Had more serious conversations with students who were very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar. | Seminar = 2.28  
No Seminar= 2.02 |
| Worked more with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar. | Seminar = 2.59  
No Seminar= 2.32 |
| Worked more on a paper or project that required researching ideas or information from various sources than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar. | Seminar = 2.71  
No Seminar= 2.40 |
| Asked more questions in class and contributed to class discussions than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar. | Seminar = 2.87  
No Seminar= 2.63 |
| Came to class without completing readings or assignments less than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar. | Seminar = 1.61  
No Seminar= 1.83 |
## National Assessments

**NSSE**

### Sample Measures: One Credit vs. Three Credit Major Based vs. Undecided

| Students in the one-credit seminar met with faculty members outside of class for advising or to discuss assignments or grades more than students in the three-credit seminar. | One-Credit = 2.00  
Three-Credit= 1.65  
\[ p <.05 \]  
[Based on scale of 1 (Never) to 4 (Very Often)] |
|---|
| Students in the one-credit seminar evaluate their entire educational experience received at Millersville higher than students in the three-credit seminar. | One-Credit = 3.93  
Three-Credit= 3.59  
\[ p <.10 \]  
[Based on scale of 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent)] |
Lessons Learned About Assessment

- Assessment needed to sell and maintain FYE programming.
- Need a mix of both quantitative and qualitative assessment.
- Seek efficiency through use of existing processes.
  - Talk to institutional research
    - Is your campus already using NSSE?
    - Can you run queries that answer your questions?
  - Embed assessment into courses and programs
    - More consistent
    - Higher participation rates
- Avoid over-testing and survey burnout.
- Stay flexible.
  - Assess your assessment!
    - Questions will need to be tweaked
    - Rubrics will need to be refined
    - Fill the gaps
  - Adjust assessments to the changing goals and demands of the program
- Think about longitudinal assessments.
LONG TERM SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMMING
Benefits for Faculty

- **Opportunities**
  - Learn culture of today’s students
  - Synergy between teaching and service
  - Meeting people outside the silo
  - Leadership roles
  - Scholarship with new and fun people!

- **Promotion and Tenure Implication**
Faculty Development

- Supporting Faculty Development
  - Periodic Semester Meetings
    - Sharing Best Practices & Assessment Results
      - Resume: Before and After
      - Syllabus Review
    - Developing New Teaching Skills
      - Reflective Writing
      - Seminar / Discussion
    - Collaboration with Student Affairs
      - Learning Opportunities in the Residence Halls
      - Room Tour
  - Periodic Electronic Updates: E-mails and Blog
  - End of Semester Faculty Workshop
    - Major Theme for Workshop: Who is the typical student?
    - Concurrent Sessions
      - Pedagogy Theme
      - Transition Theme
    - 6 Commonly Asked Questions about an FYI Seminar
    - Peer Mentor Introduction
- Focus Groups – Drive Faculty Development
Academic and Student Affairs Partnership

- Challenge due to institutional structure
  - Student and Academic Affairs do not talk much
  - Committee of the Willing

- Partnership
  - Peer Mentors
    - Nomination and Selection
    - Training
    - Director acts as Liaison
  - Living Learning Community
    - Housing Assignments
    - Residence Hall Programs
  - Community Service / Service Learning
  - Presentations in UNIV 103 Courses
    - Peer Health Educators
    - Counseling Center
    - Career Services

- Critical to overall success and building community
Administrative Advocacy and Support

- Depends on the culture of the campus
  - Retention Initiative
  - Building community
  - Attracting students

- Support of Highest Academic and Student Affairs Administration
  - Academic Affairs
    - Pays for coordinator
    - Encourages (Twists Arms) faculty to offer seminars
    - Faculty development
    - Special activities
    - Collaboration incentives
    - Service learning coordination
  - Student Affairs
    - Housing for living-learning communities
    - Peer Mentor housing and training
    - Transitional elements

- Faculty must understand and value the first-year experience
  - “Not my job to get a student ready for college.”
  - Encourage Critical Thinking vs. “Tell me the right answer.”
  - College 2020
Lessons Learned

Connections with people make the most difference!

Sustainability requires personal investment among students, faculty, student affairs professionals, and administration!
Resource Documents

Available here: 2013 FYE National Conference - These Things We Know for Sure
Millersville Gen Ed Website
http://www.millersville.edu/gened/index.php

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