Increasing Academic Rigor in First-Year Seminar Courses

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www.scholarlyteaching.org
Agenda

- Student Academic Expectations and Experiences
- Current Practices: Rigor in First-Year Courses?
- First-Year Seminar Courses: Raising the Bar and Raising the Support
STUDENT ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES
Most students walk into college expecting it to be challenging. What percentage of first year students report that their experience matched their expectation?

a. 5%
b. 17%
c. 48%
d. 79%
Almost everyone expected college to be a lot of work.
Student Expectations Drop After Starting College
(Meyer, Spencer, & French 2009)

First Year Students

Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less Rigorous than Expected</th>
<th>Matched Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

Percent
How Much Should Students Study?
The Orientation Message....

Plan to study 2-3 hours outside of class for every hour you are in class.

http://www.collegeparents.org/members/resources/articles/your-college-student-investing-enough-time-studying
So How Much Do Students Study?

First-Year Student

Average of 13-14 hours per week
(at 4 year universities)

Average Student

Average of 17 hours per week


http://college.usatoday.com/2014/08/18/how-much-do-you-study-apparently-17-hours-a-week-is-the-norm/
What We Say and What We Do…
Two Different Stories

2-3 hours per class hour!

Not really!

(Schilling & Schilling, 1999)
Another Example
Wyatt, Saunders, & Zelmer (2005)

Interestingly…. Student expectations were related to grade!

So…. Faculty are not requiring students to engage in effort they expect
CURRENT PRACTICES: RIGOR IN FIRST-YEAR COURSES?
An Unfortunate Relationship

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Less likely it is used by faculty

More likely an activity facilitates critical thinking

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Lawrence, Serdikoff, Zinn & Baker (2008)
Only 45% of college students report being asked to engage in significant reading and writing.
Any Good News?
Roska & Anum 2011

Students with professors who DO EXPECT significant reading and writing DO SPEND more time studying.
Students Generally Do What is Expected


Expect Students to:
- Write
- Read
- Think Critically

And they will!
The First Semester Really Matters!

“What is required of students in their first semester appears to play a strong role in shaping the time investments made in academic work by students in their last semester of their senior year.”

(Schilling & Schilling, 2006, 8)
Why Aren’t We Challenging Students?

- Fear of negative evaluations or student complaints
- Discouraged by prior attempts not resulting in desired
- Increased workload
- Lack of support by administration

(Stewart & Schlegel, 2009; Lei et al., 2010; Lawrence, Serdikoff, Zinn & Baker, 2008)
CURRENT PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Types of First-Year Seminar Courses

- Extended Orientation
- Academic- Uniform Content
- Academic- Variable Content
- Basic Study Skills

http://www.sc.edu/fye/
A Brief Look at the History of the Freshman Seminar Course

Extended Orientation Format

Source: http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/survey_cycle/index.html
Note: The samples are different so caution must be used when looking at longitudinal trends
The Growth of Academic Seminars

Extended Orientation: 1991 - 71, 2012 - 60.4
Academic-Uniform Content: 1991 - 12.1, 2012 - 29.4
Study Skills: 1991 - 6, 2012 - 16.4

Young & Keup (2014)
http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/research_presentations/files/2014/ACPA%202014%20DGY_JKeup.pdf
The Current State of the Freshman Seminar Course

- Orientation: Approximately 40%
- Academic- General: Approximately 40%
- Academic- Discipline Specific: Approximately 40%
- Study Skills

http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveys/survey_instruments/pdf/Executive_Summaries_2013_National_Survey_FirstYearSeminars.pdf
First-Year Courses are NOT all Equal

(Ryan & Glenn 2004)

First Semester Students

Socialization Focused, Theme-based (66)

Learning Strategy-based (77)

No Course (1354)

MORE LIKELY TO BE IN SCHOOL ONE YEAR LATER
Helpful for ALL Students...

**Good Academic Standing**

Retention from First-Second Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Seminar</th>
<th>Socialization</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>84</td>
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**Academic Probation**

Retention from First-Second Year

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<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>57</td>
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Ryan & Glenn (2004)
What FYE Course Factors Matter?

Porter & Swing, 2006

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<th>FYE Course Factors:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Study Skills and Academic Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Campus Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer Connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Health Education</td>
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Survey Participants: 45 Institutions, 20,031 Students
Results....

FYE FACTORS

- Study Skills and Academic Engagement
- Health Education

SUCCESS

- Higher intent to persist (even after accounting for institution and student characteristics)

Porter & Swing, 2006
The Future of First-Year Seminar

Increased Academic Rigor

- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
Call for Challenge is Not New

Chickering and Gamson 1987

7 Principles for Undergraduate Education

“Expect more and you will get more. High expectations are important for everyone -- for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated.”
Raise the Bar, Raise the Support
Setting Challenging Goals: The ABC’S Goal Setting Framework

ABCS

- Aim High
- Believe in Yourself
- Care and Commit
- Specify and Self-Reflect

Harrington (2016) Student Success in College: Doing What Works!
Depression: Is there a Downside to Challenging Goals?
Reynolds & Baird (2010)

- 1979: Ages 14-22, 12,686 participants
- 1992: 9,016 participants
- Highest Degree: 4,892 participants
Goal Attainment?
Reynolds & Baird (2010)
Results…
Go Ahead Challenge Your Students

- No evidence of “emotional cost” (depression) for unrealized goals
- Higher expectations were associated with lower levels of depression
Learning Outcomes

Critical Thinking

Information Literacy
Completing isolated “critical thinking” exercises doesn’t work

Cotter and Tarry (2009)
More Involved Research Assignments Work!

PsychBuster Project
Pre-test-not significantly different

No project
Post-test-significantly different at p < .0005

Blessing and Blessing (2010)
Challenging Activities that Promote Productive, Critical Thinking...

- Summaries and critiques of articles, websites, or other readings
- Debates
- Case studies
- Research papers or presentations
- On-line or in-person discussions

Edmund (2008)
Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

Need to be explicitly taught- must carefully craft our assignments and not leave it to chance

(Hayes-Bohanan & Spievak, 2008)
Skills Needed

“it is evident that students can find information, but have great difficulty interacting with and understanding what they are reading.”

Using Research to Increase Academic Rigor in First-Year Seminar Courses

Active Reading, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy

Active Reading

Information Literacy

Critical Thinking
Increase Rigor, Increase Support

Exploring the Research with the Author: Chapter 2

Want help understanding the article? Explore the research with the author.

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Assessment Data: Good News- GPA

Middlesex County College NJ

Cumulative GPA  Term GPA

2007/2008 Not Using Research Approach
2010/2011 Using Research Approach
2013/2014 Using Consistent Resource with Research Approach
The Population—It’s Working Despite More Students in Lowest Developmental Courses

Middlesex County College NJ

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<tr>
<td>RDG 009</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 009</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 2007/2008: 1931 Students, 19% RDG 009
- 2010/2011: 2996 Students, 29% RDG 009
Scores went up on every item with exception of staying the same on one item.
Assessment Data

Middlesex County College NJ

Scores went up on every item with exception of staying the same on 1 item.

2011 Using Research Approach
2012 Using Consistent Resource with Research Approach
Thank You!

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