Increasing Academic Rigor in First-Year Seminar Courses

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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

Prediction Time

Most students walk into college expecting it to be challenging. What percentage of first year students report that that their experience matched their expectation?

a. 5%
b. 17%
c. 48%
d. 79%

Student Expectations Drop After Starting College

(Meyer, Spencer, & French 2009)

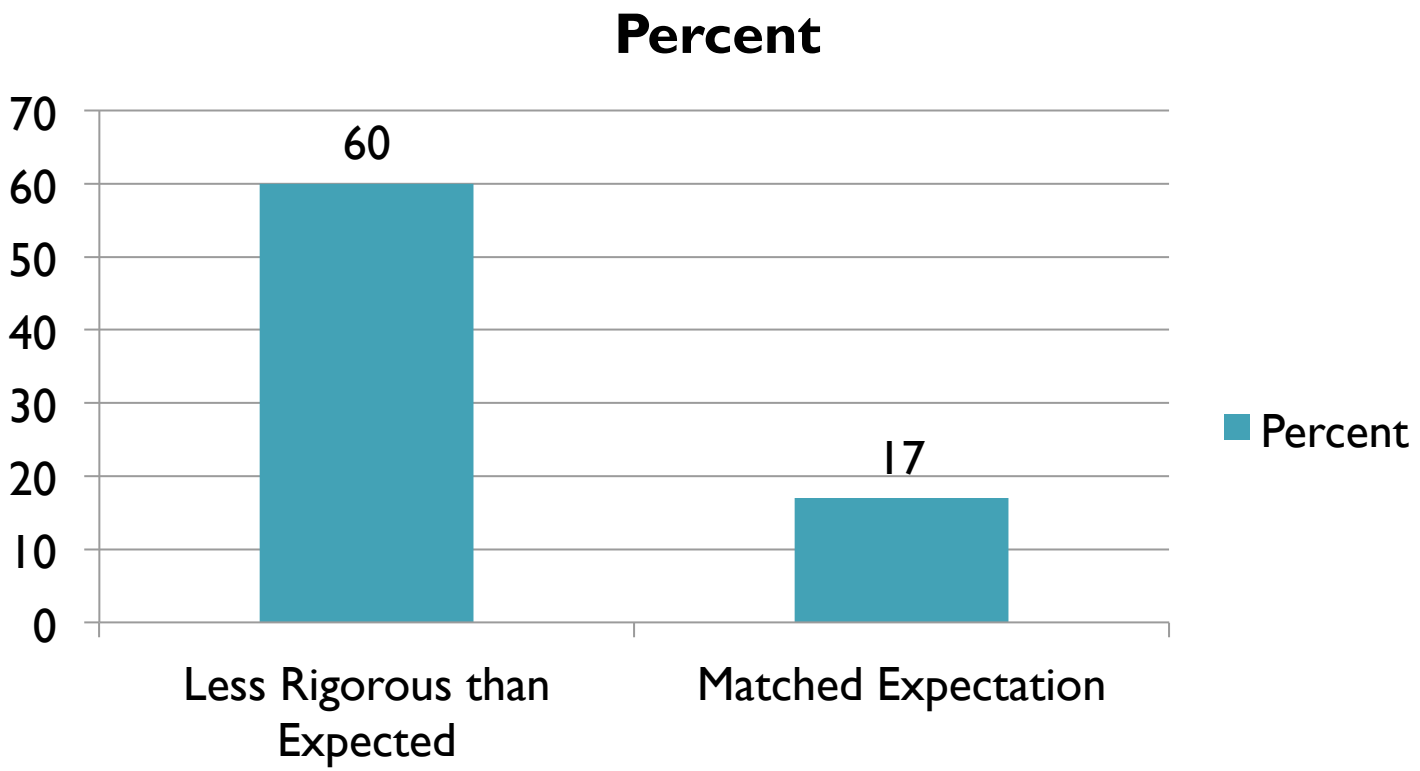
Before Starting College….

Almost everyone expected college to be a lot of work

Student Expectations Drop After Starting College

(Meyer, Spencer, & French 2009)

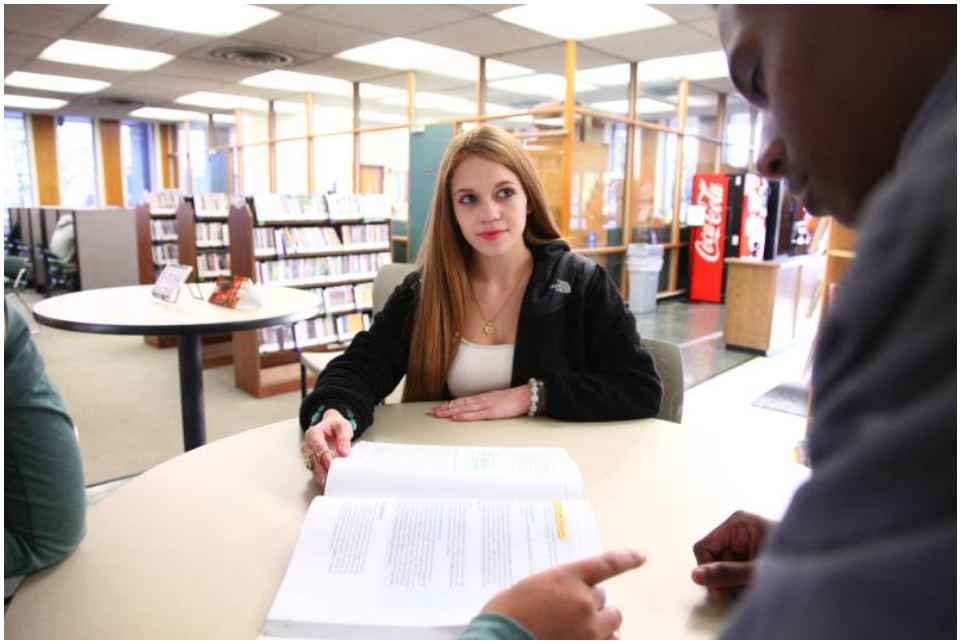
First Year Students



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)

https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/what-student-engagement-data-tell-us-about-college-readiness

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

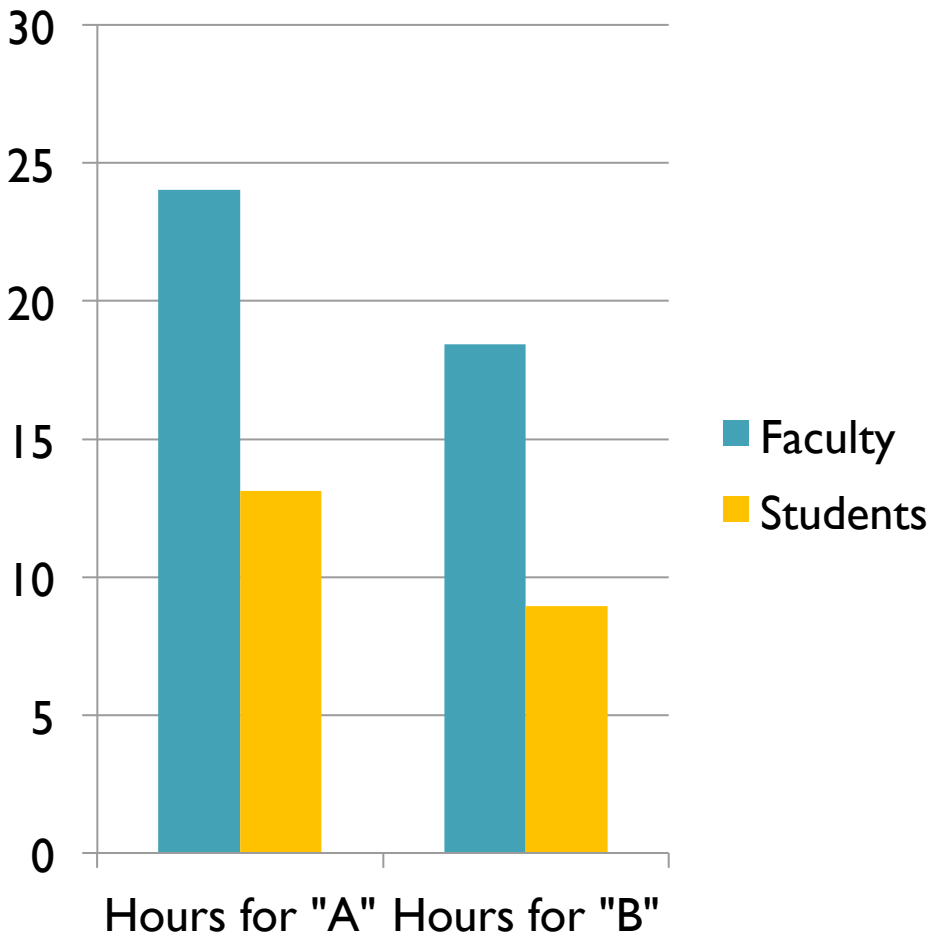
2-3 hours per class hour!

Not really!

(Schilling & Schilling, 1999)

Another Example

Wyatt, Saunders, & Zelmer (2005)



Interestingly….

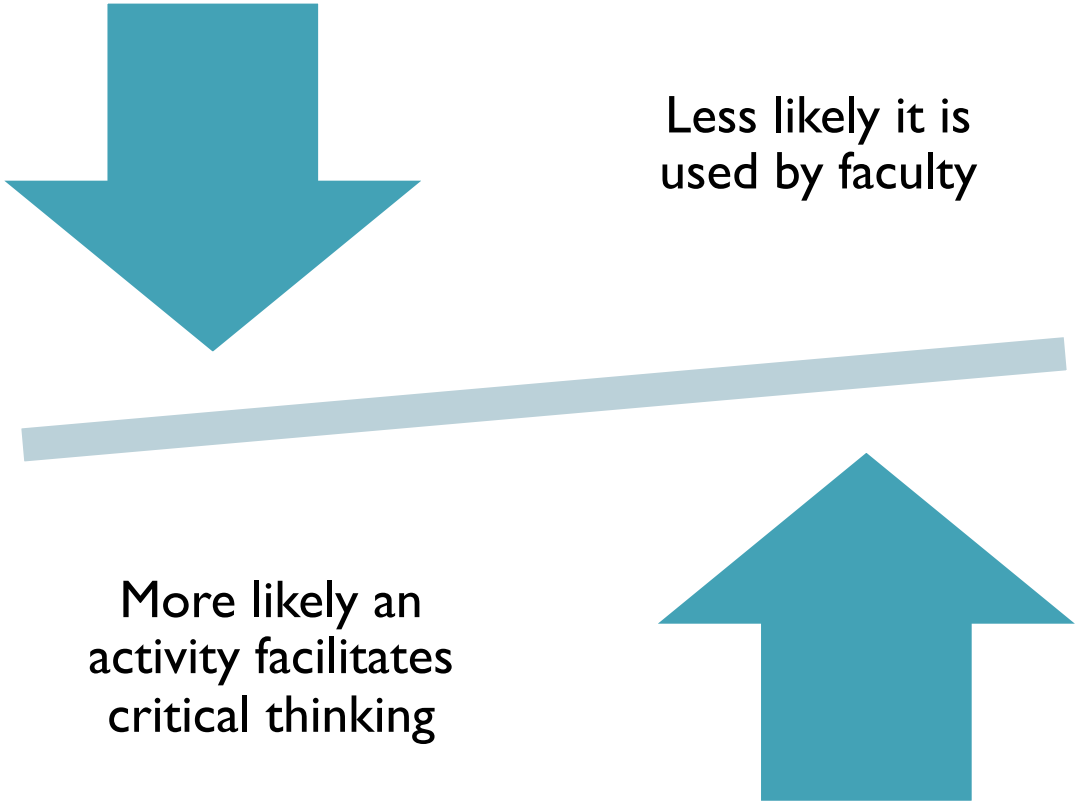
Student expectations were related to grade!

So….

Faculty are not requiring students to engage in effort they expect

CURRENT PRACTICES: RIGOR IN FIRST-YEAR COURSES?

An Unfortunate Relationship

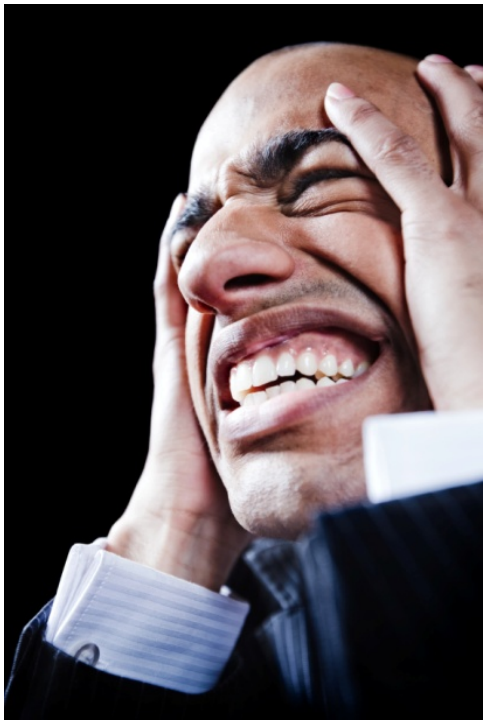


Lawrence, Serdikoff, Zinn & Baker (2008)

A Lack of Learning at College?

Roska & Anum 2011

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

Kuh, Laird, & Umbach (2004)

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)

First-Year Seminar Courses

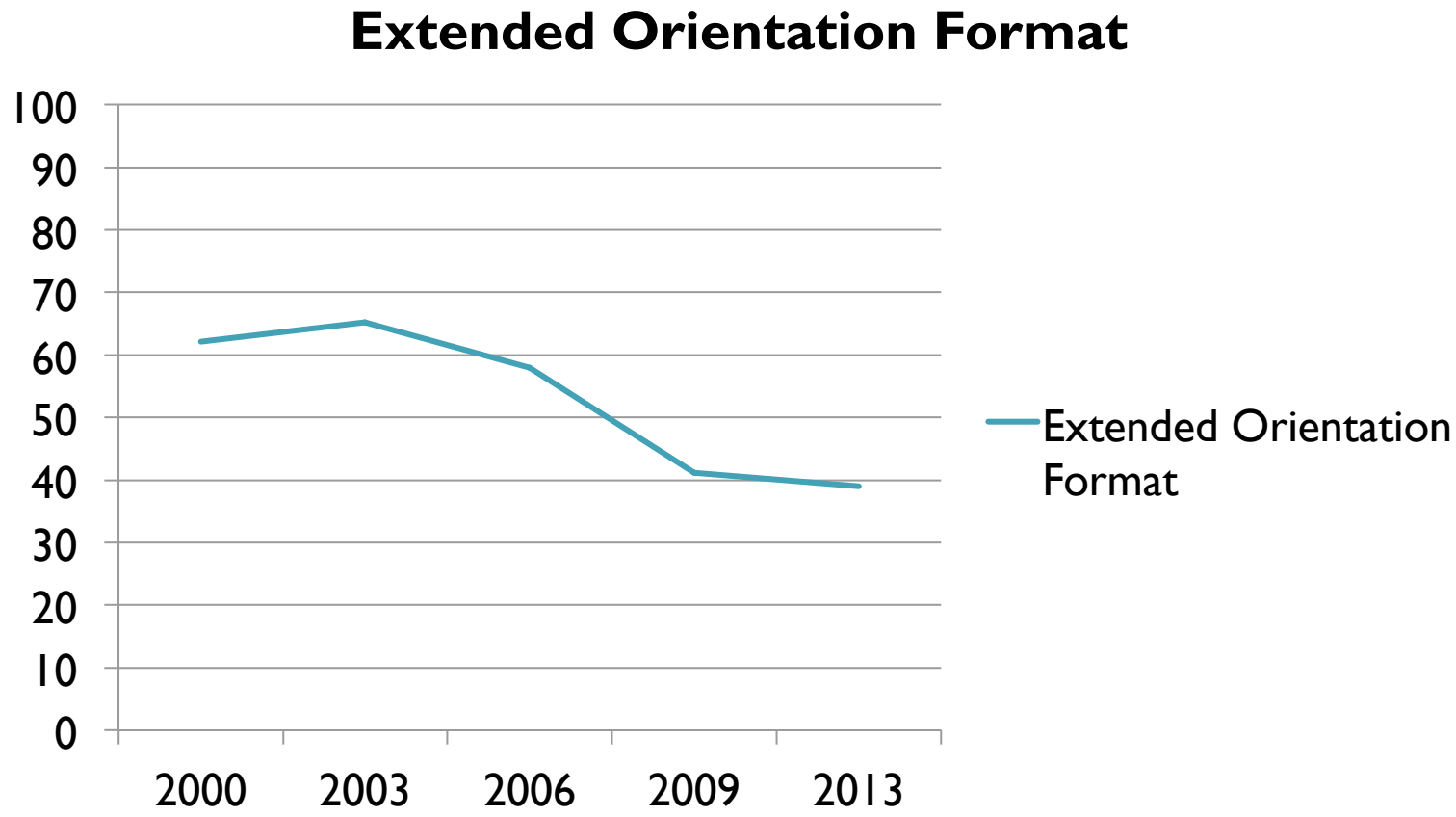
CURRENT PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Types of First-Year Seminar Courses

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

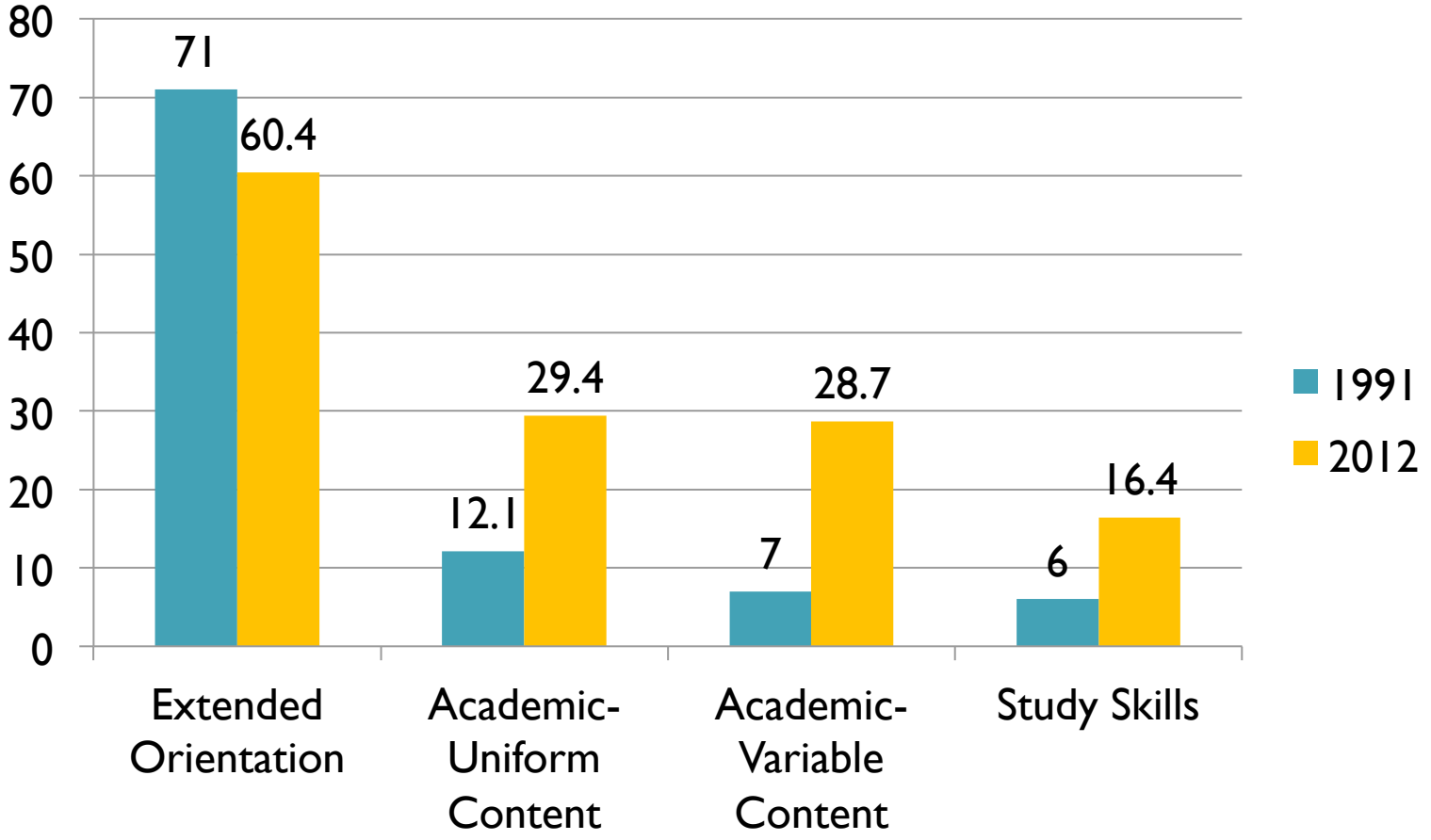
http://www.sc.edu/fye/

A Brief Look at the History of the Freshman Seminar Course



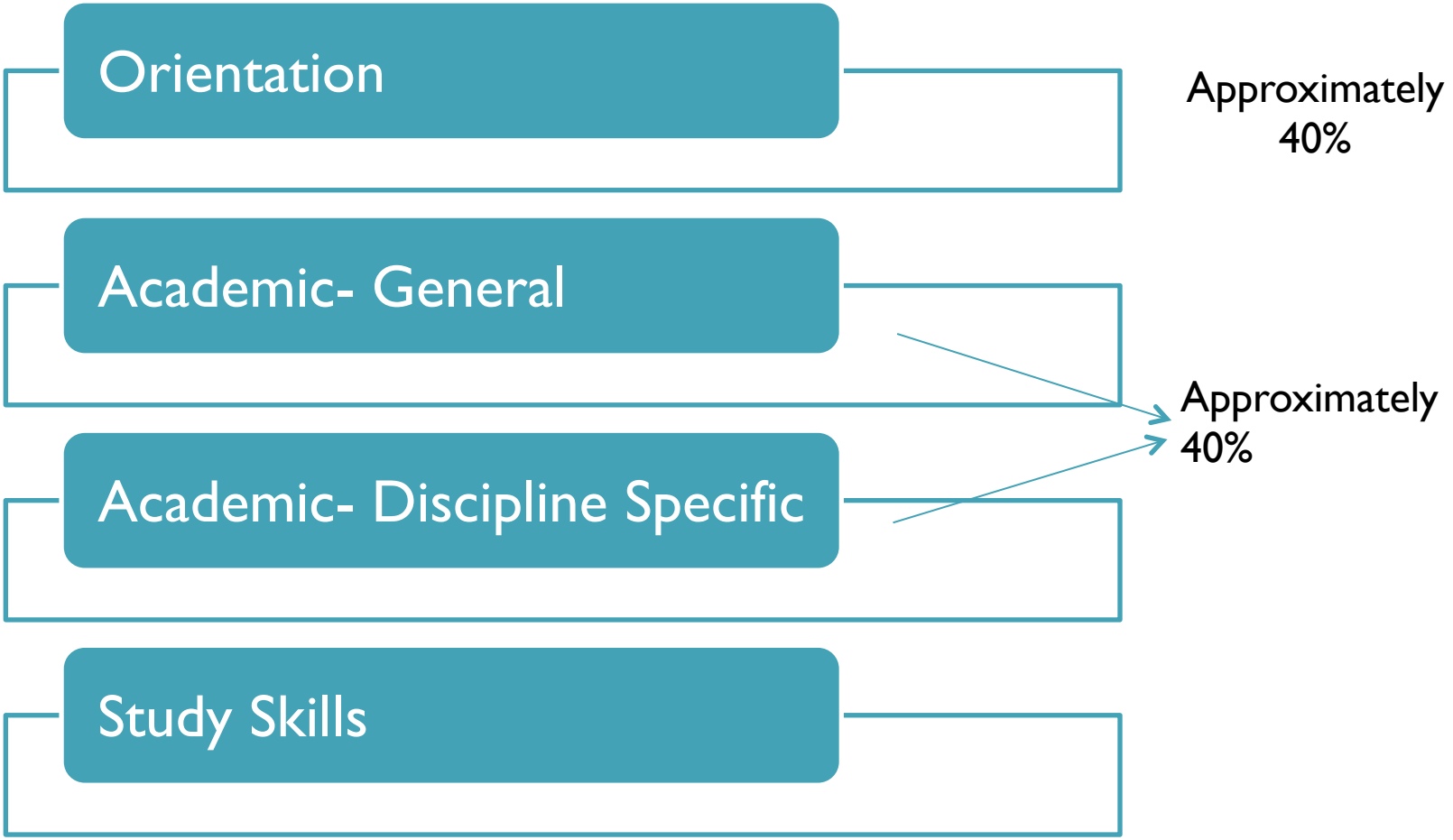
Source: http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/survey_cycle/index.html
Note: The samples are different so caution must be used when looking at longitudinal trends

The Growth of Academic Seminars



Young & Keup (2014)
http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/research_presentations/files/2014/ACPA%202014%20DGY_JKeup.pdf

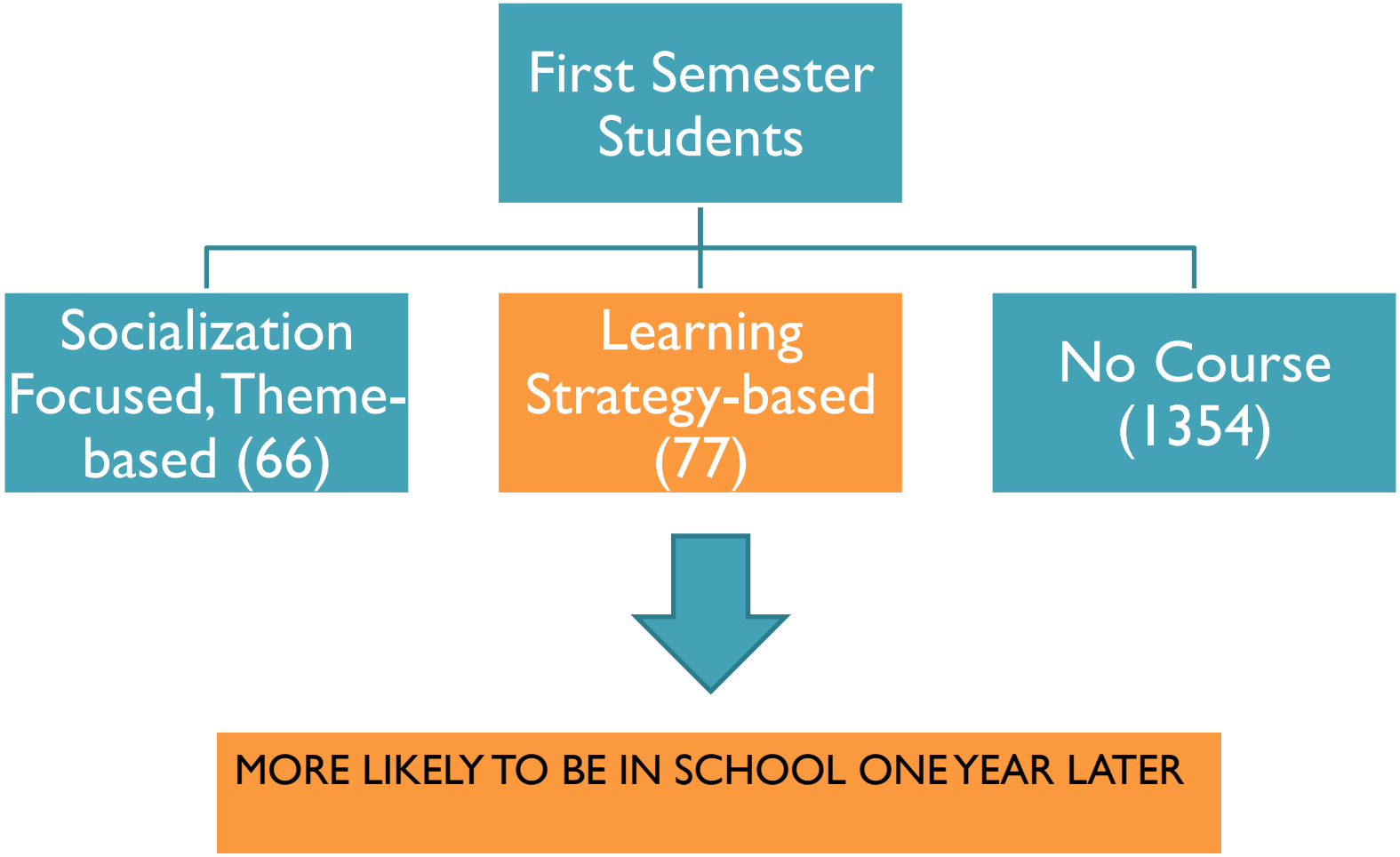
The Current State of the Freshman Seminar Course



http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveys/survey_instruments/pdf/Executive_Summaries_2013_National_Survey_FirstYearSeminars.pdf

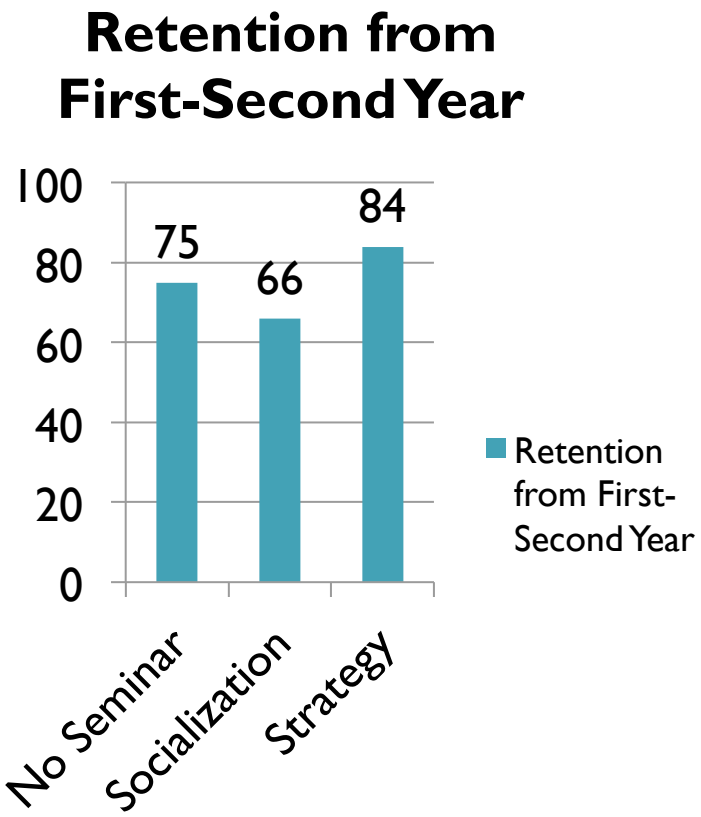
First-Year Courses are NOT all Equal

(Ryan & Glenn 2004)

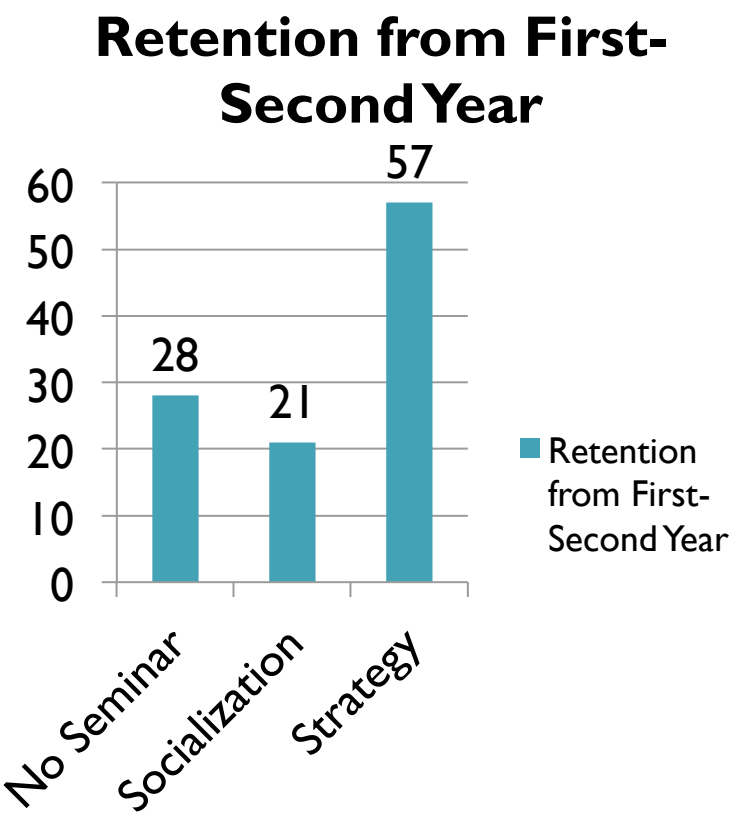


Helpful for ALL Students…

Good Academic Standing



Academic Probation



Ryan & Glenn (2004)

What FYE Course Factors Matter?

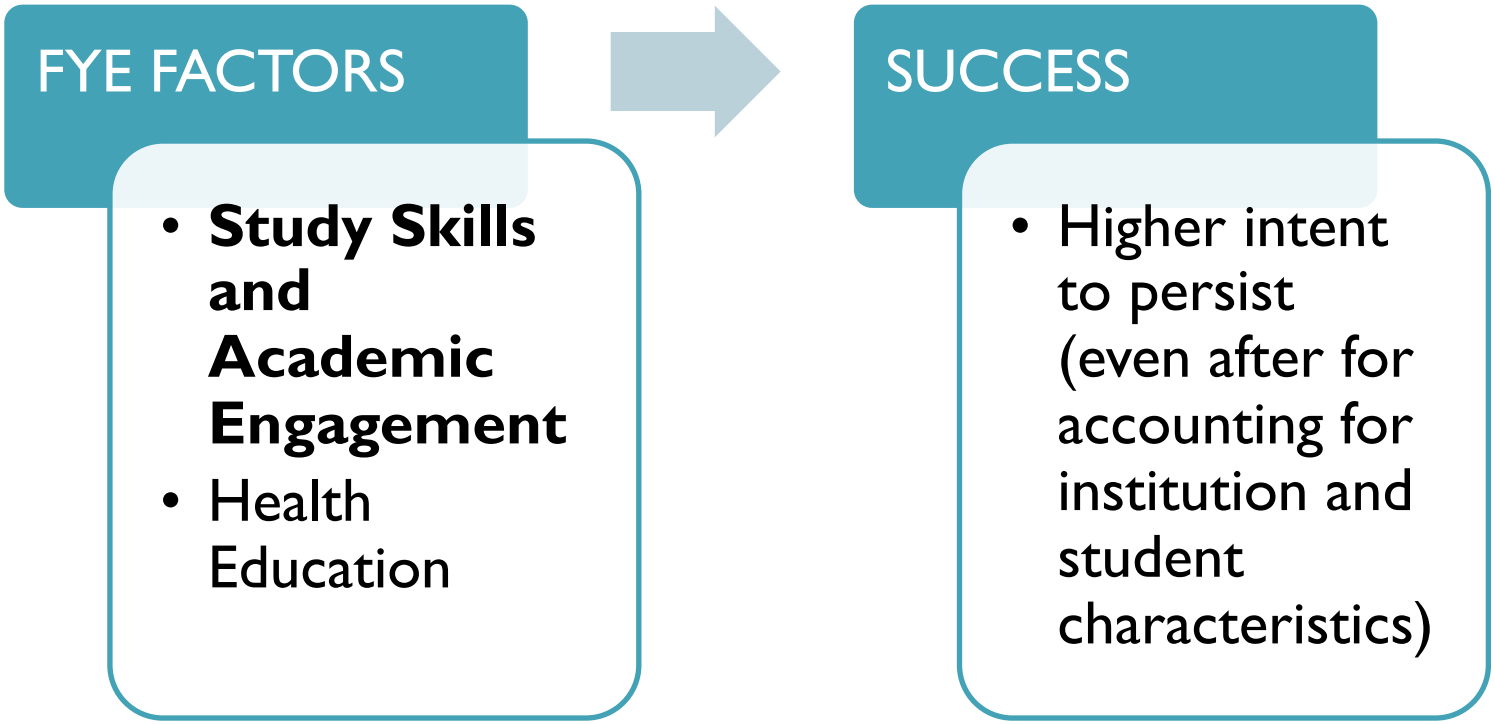
Porter & Swing, 2006

FYE Course Factors:

- Study Skills and Academic Engagement
- Campus Policies
- Campus Engagement
- Peer Connections
- Health Education

Survey Participants: 45 Institutions, 20,031 Students

Results….



Porter & Swing, 2006

The Future of First-Year Seminar

Increased Academic Rigor

- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy

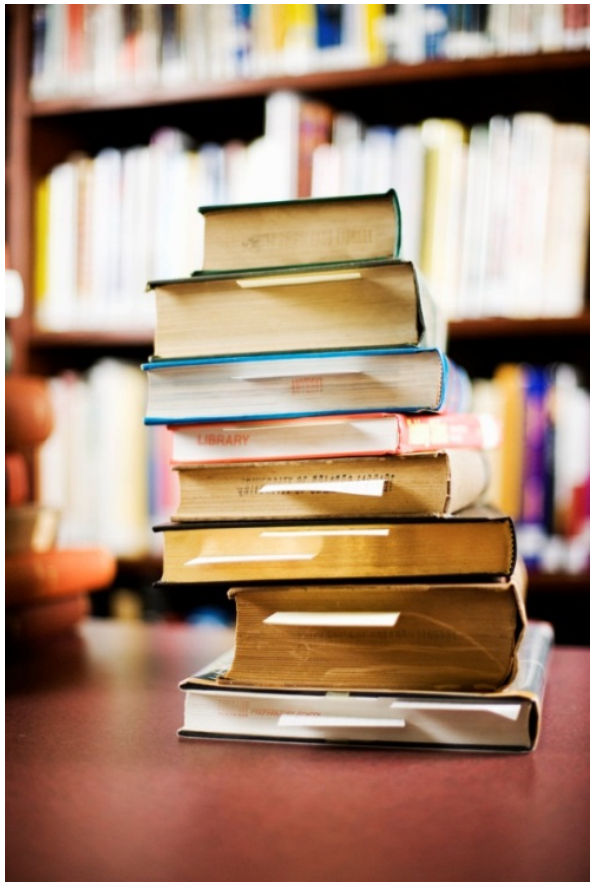
Call for Challenge is Not New

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)

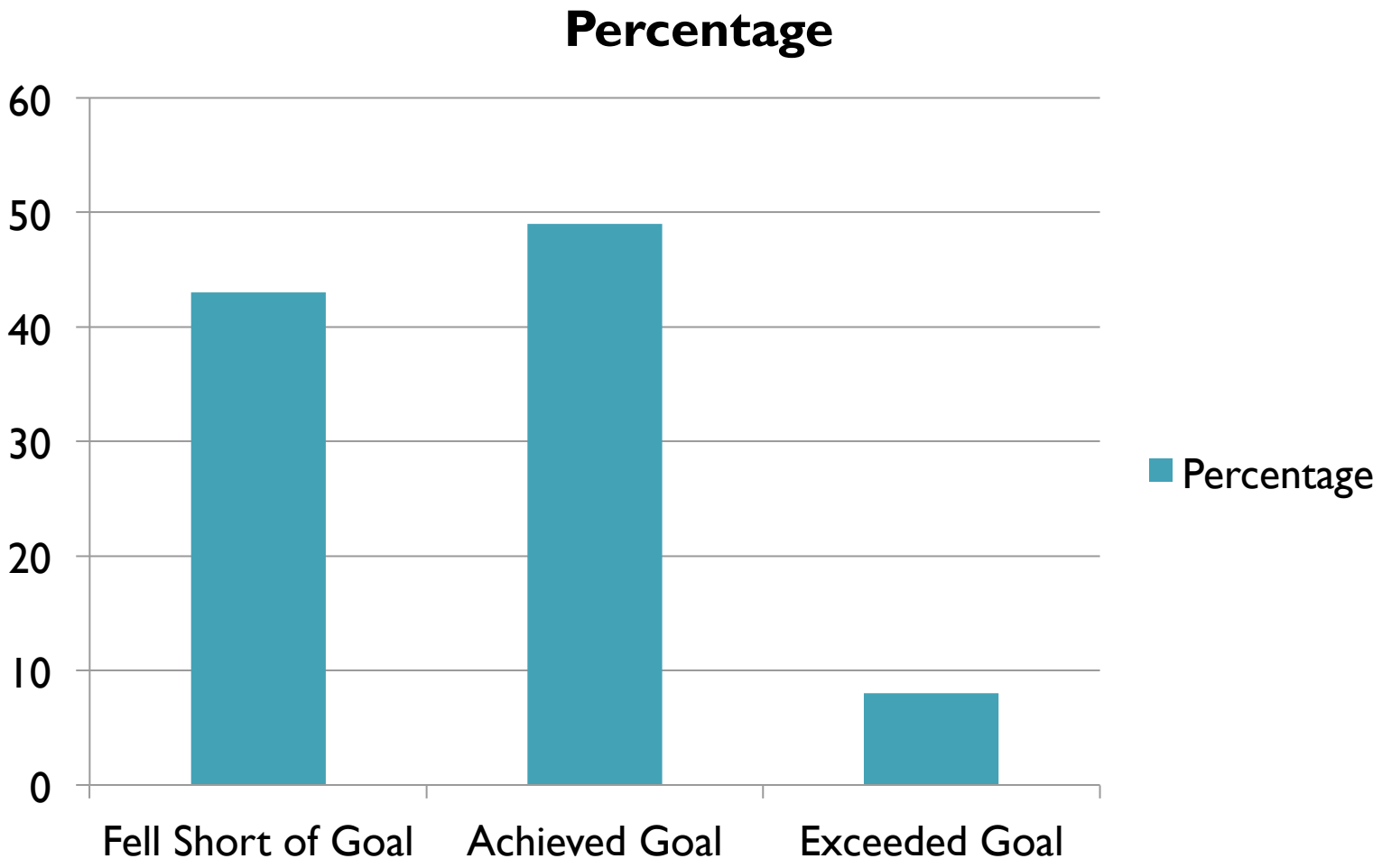
1979
- Ages 14-22
- 12,686 participants

1992
- 9,016 participants

Highest Degree
- 4,892 participants

Goal Attainment?

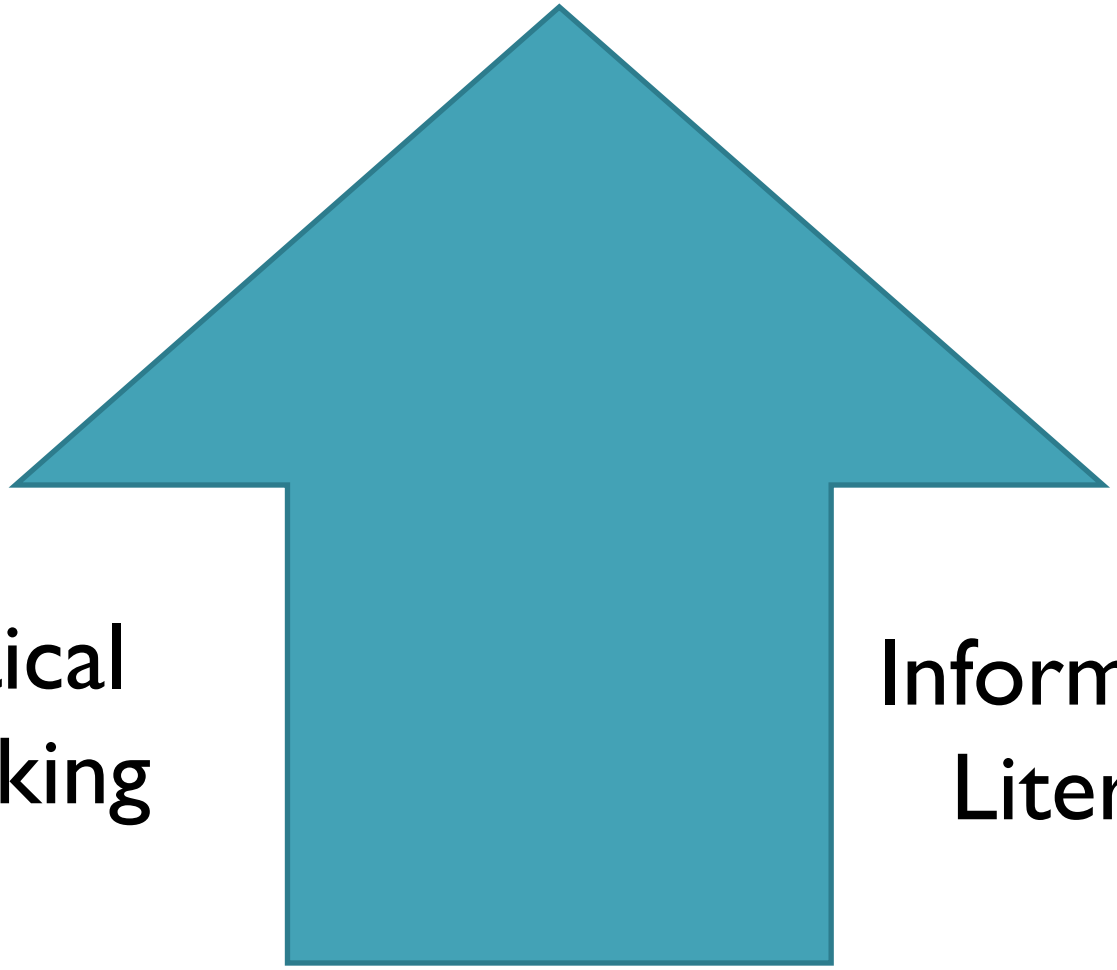
Reynolds & Baird (2010)



Results…
Go Ahead Challenge Your Students

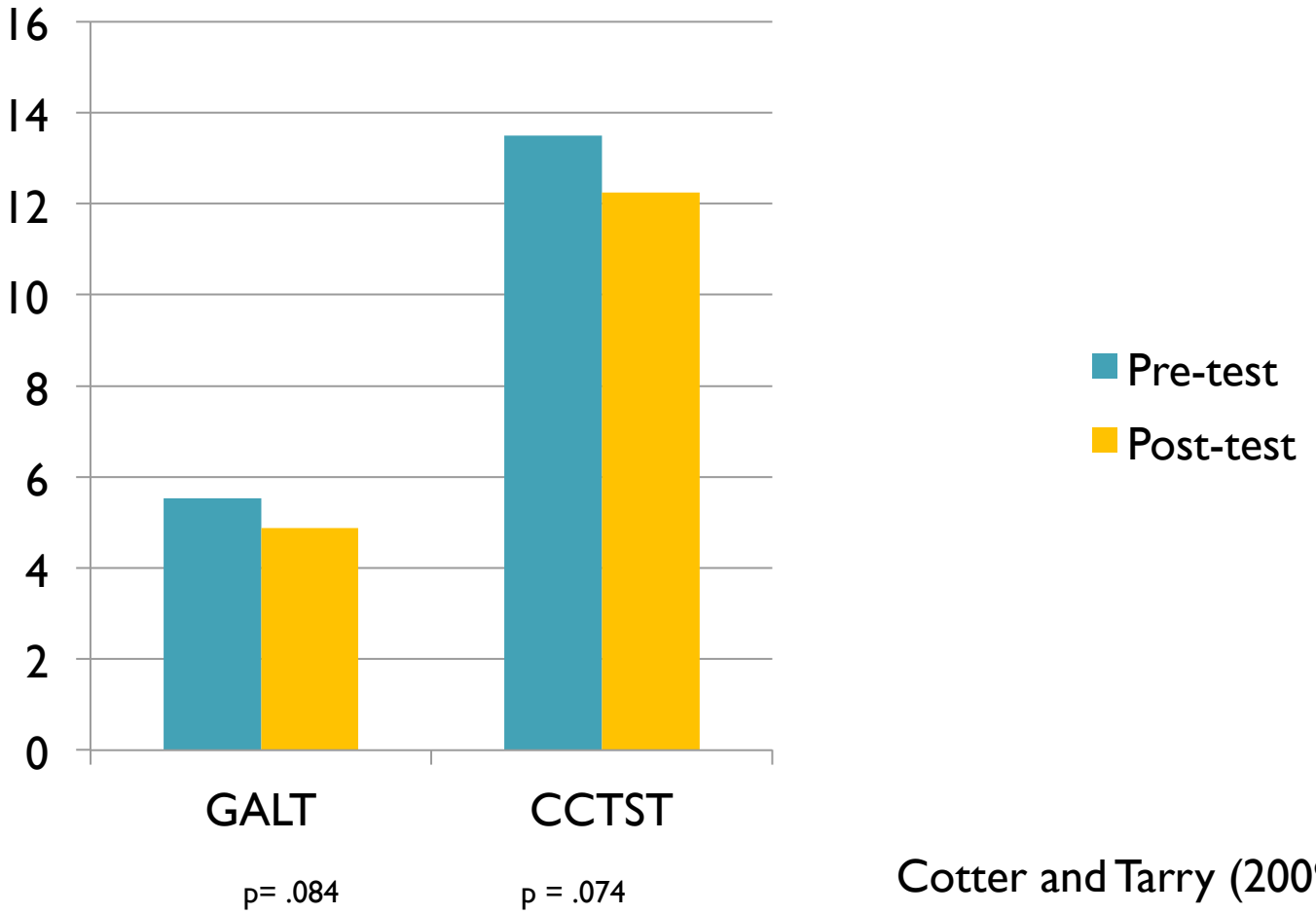
- No evidence of "emotional cost" (depression) for unrealized goals
- Higher expectations were associated with lower levels of depression

Learning Outcomes



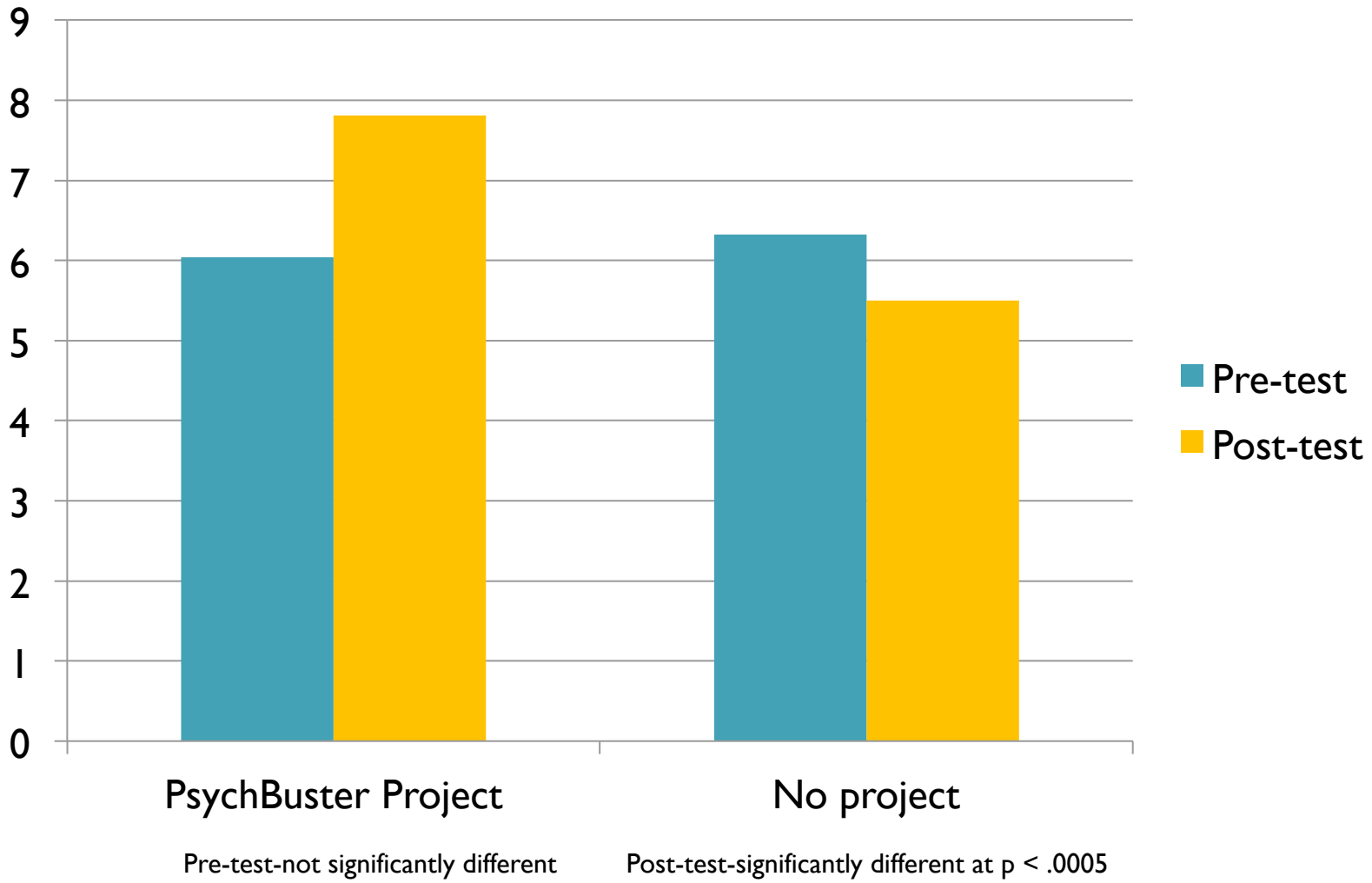
Do Critical Thinking Exercises Work?

Completing isolated "critical thinking" exercises doesn't work



Cotter and Tarry (2009)

More Involved Research Assignments Work!



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

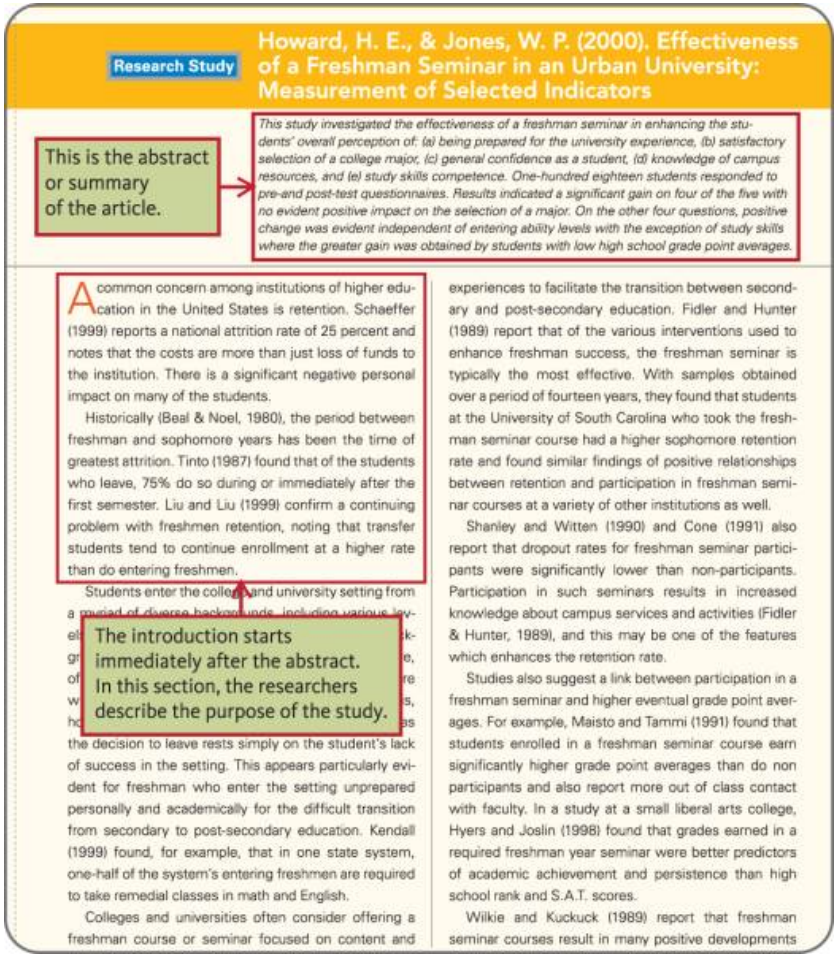
(Hayes-Bohanan & Spievak, 2008)

Skills Needed

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

Ludovico & Wittig (2015), p. 37

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



Research Study

Howard, H. E., & Jones, W. P. (2000). Effectiveness of a Freshman Seminar in an Urban University: Measurement of Selected Indicators

This is the abstract or summary of the article.

This study investigated the effectiveness of a freshman seminar in enhancing the students' overall perception of: (a) being prepared for the university experience, (b) satisfactory selection of a college major, (c) general confidence as a student, (d) knowledge of campus resources, and (e) study skills competence. One-hundred eighteen students responded to pre-and post-test questionnaires. Results indicated a significant gain on four of the five with no evident positive impact on the selection of a major. On the other four questions, positive change was evident independent of entering ability levels with the exception of study skills where the greater gain was obtained by students with low high school grade point averages.

A common concern among institutions of higher education in the United States is retention. Schaeffer (1999) reports a national attrition rate of 25 percent and notes that the costs are more than just loss of funds to the institution. There is a significant negative personal impact on many of the students.

Historically (Beal & Noel, 1980), the period between freshman and sophomore years has been the time of greatest attrition. Tinto (1987) found that of the students who leave, 75% do so during or immediately after the first semester. Liu and Liu (1999) confirm a continuing problem with freshmen retention, noting that transfer students tend to continue enrollment at a higher rate than do entering freshmen.

The introduction starts immediately after the abstract. In this section, the researchers describe the purpose of the study.

Students enter the college and university setting from a myriad of diverse backgrounds, including various lev-

the decision to leave rests simply on the student's lack of success in the setting. This appears particularly evident for freshman who enter the setting unprepared personally and academically for the difficult transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Kendall (1999) found, for example, that in one state system, one-half of the system's entering freshmen are required to take remedial classes in math and English.

Colleges and universities often consider offering a freshman course or seminar focused on content and experiences to facilitate the transition between secondary and post-secondary education. Fidler and Hunter (1989) report that of the various interventions used to enhance freshman success, the freshman seminar is typically the most effective. With samples obtained over a period of fourteen years, they found that students at the University of South Carolina who took the freshman seminar course had a higher sophomore retention rate and found similar findings of positive relationships between retention and participation in freshman seminar courses at a variety of other institutions as well.

Shanley and Witten (1990) and Cone (1991) also report that dropout rates for freshman seminar participants were significantly lower than non-participants. Participation in such seminars results in increased knowledge about campus services and activities (Fidler & Hunter, 1989), and this may be one of the features which enhances the retention rate.

Studies also suggest a link between participation in a freshman seminar and higher eventual grade point averages. For example, Maisto and Tammi (1991) found that students enrolled in a freshman seminar course earn significantly higher grade point averages than do non participants and also report more out of class contact with faculty. In a study at a small liberal arts college, Hyers and Joslin (1998) found that grades earned in a required freshman year seminar were better predictors of academic achievement and persistence than high school rank and S.A.T. scores.

Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) report that freshman seminar courses result in many positive developments

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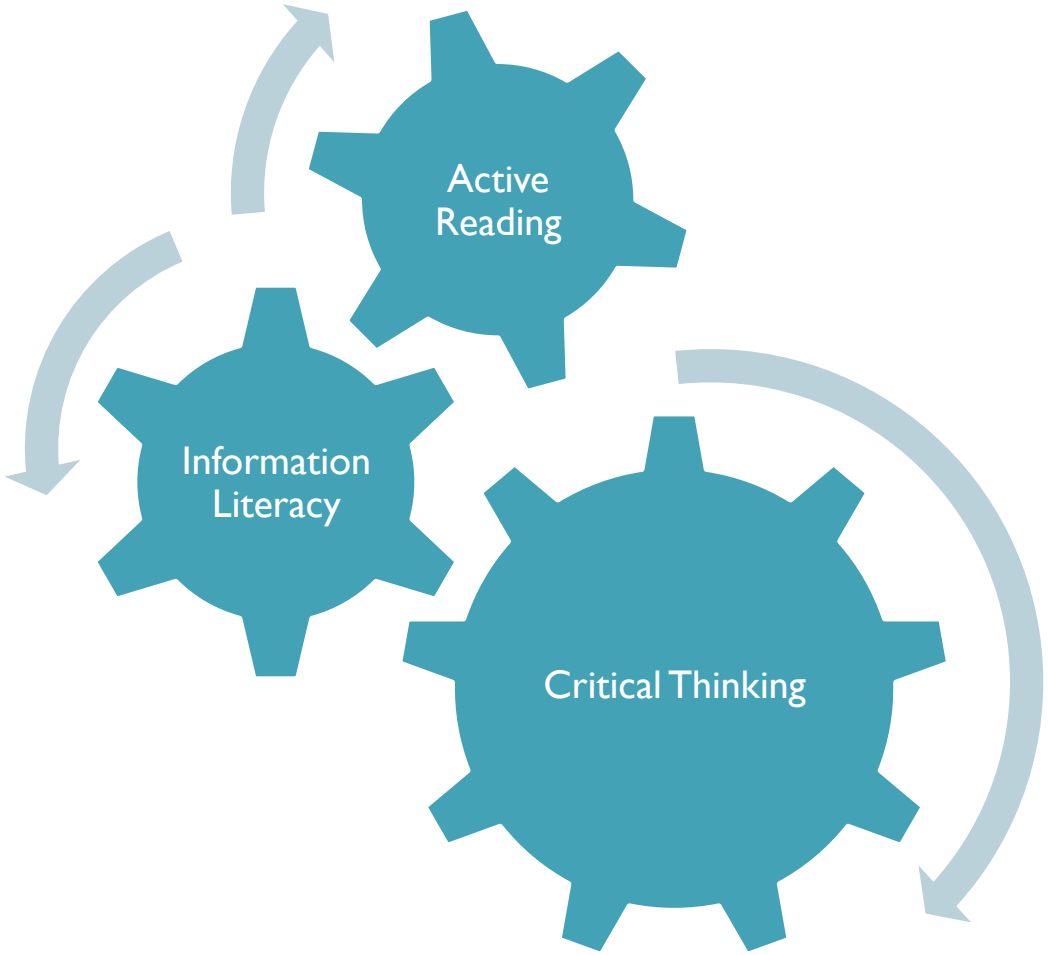
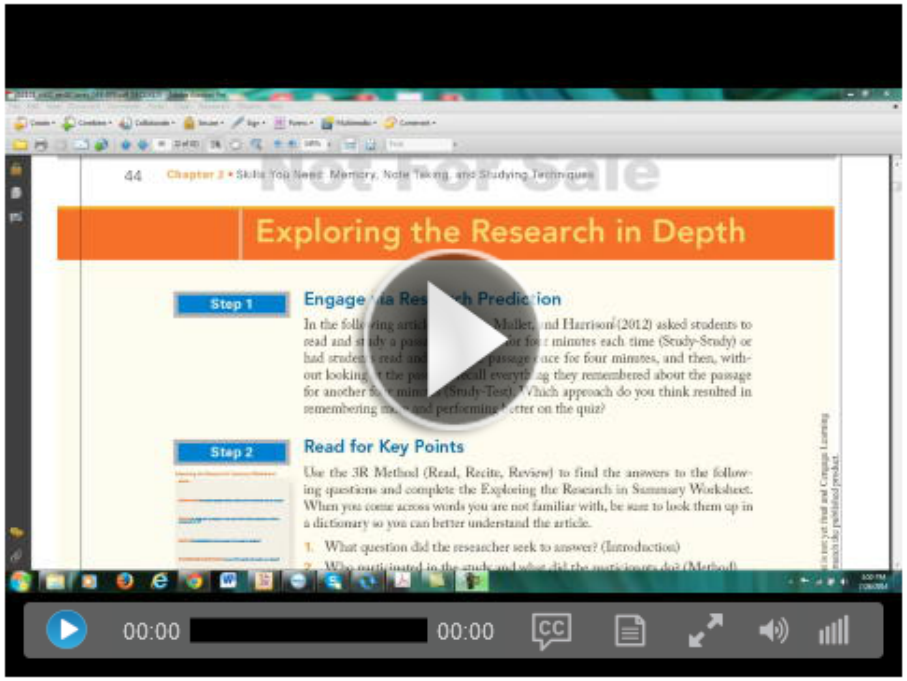
Active Reading, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy



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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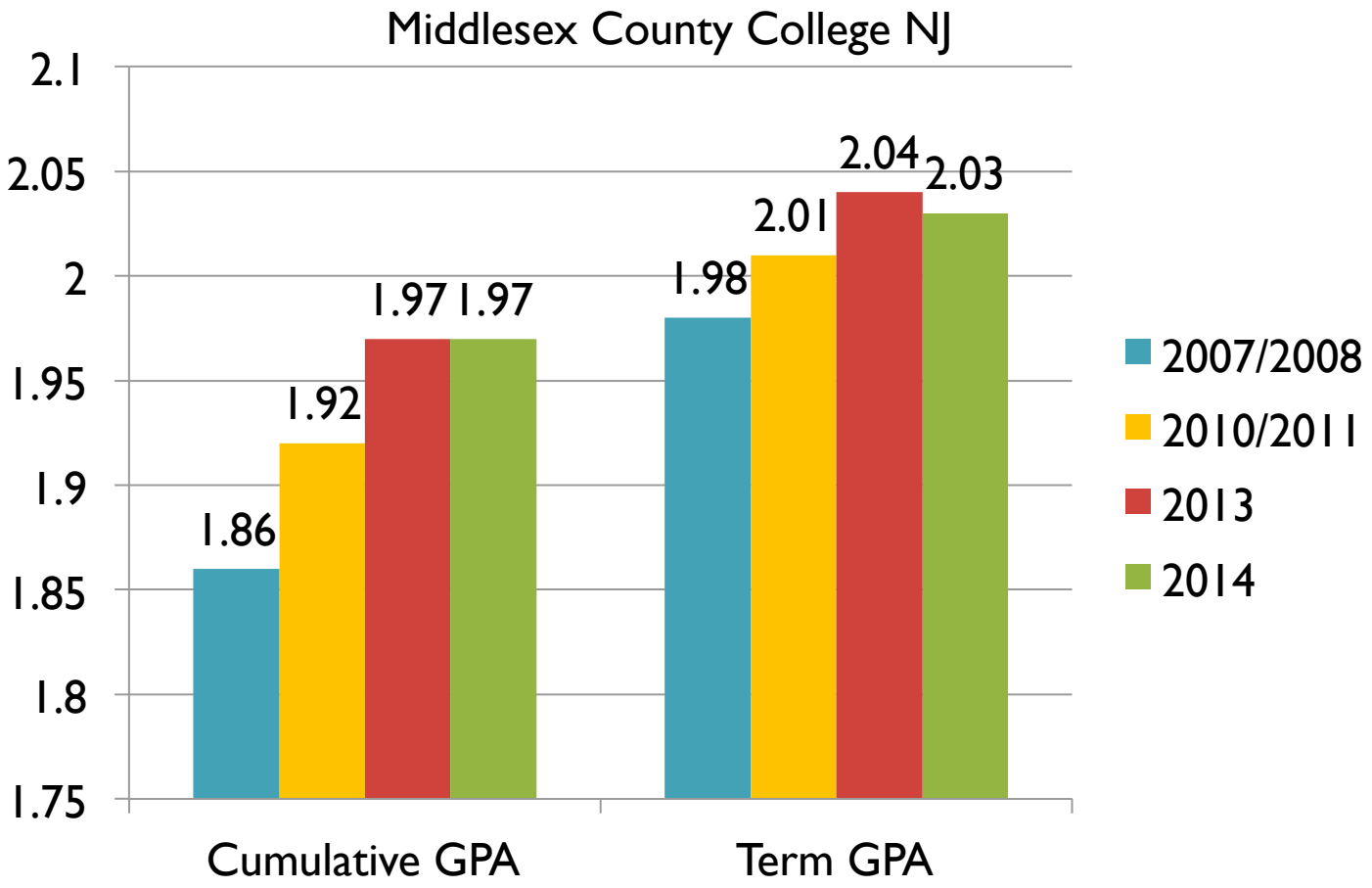
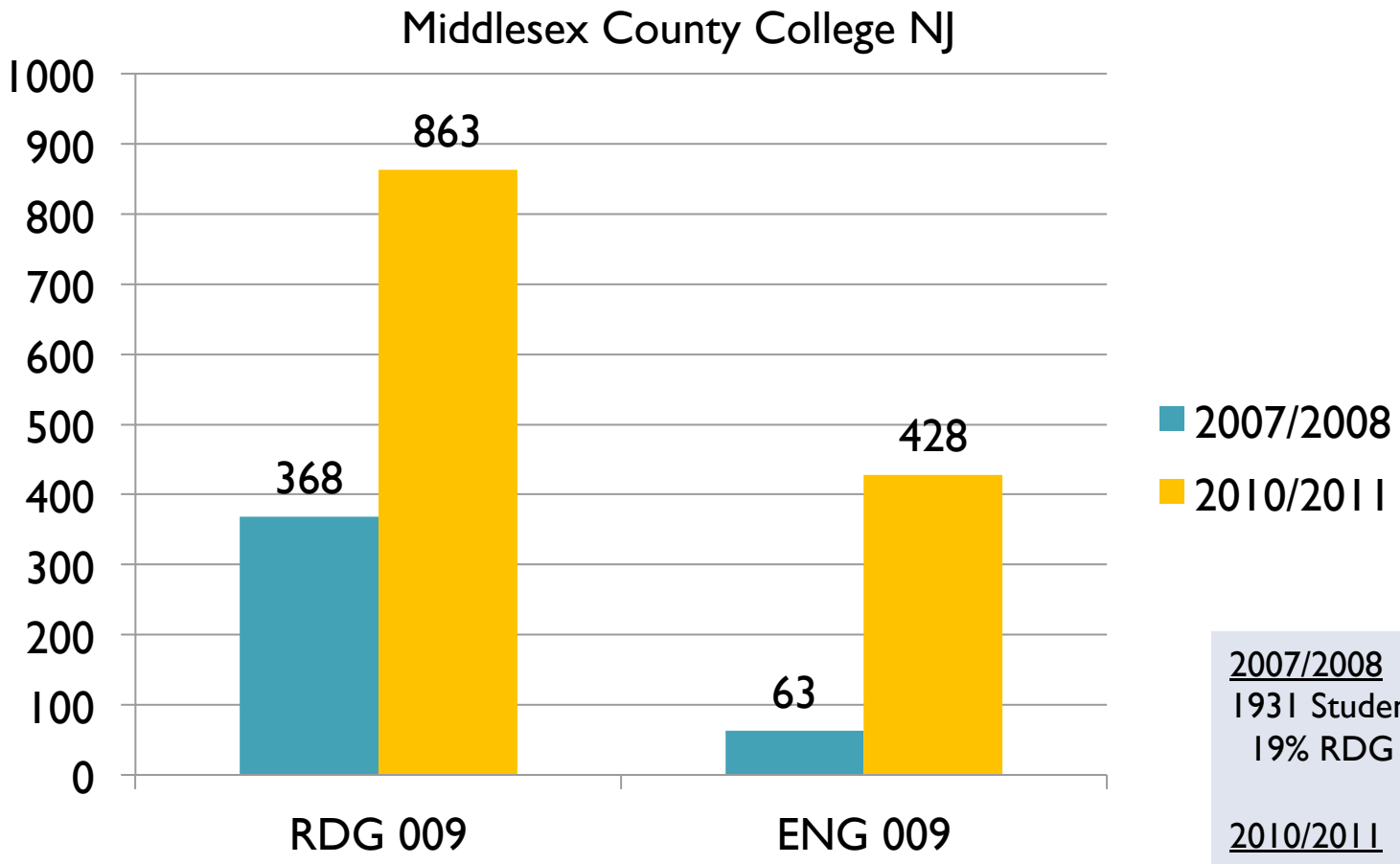
Assessment Data: Good News- GPA



2007/2008 Not Using Research Approach
2010/2011 Using Research Approach
2013/2014 Using Consistent Resource with Research Approach

The Population-

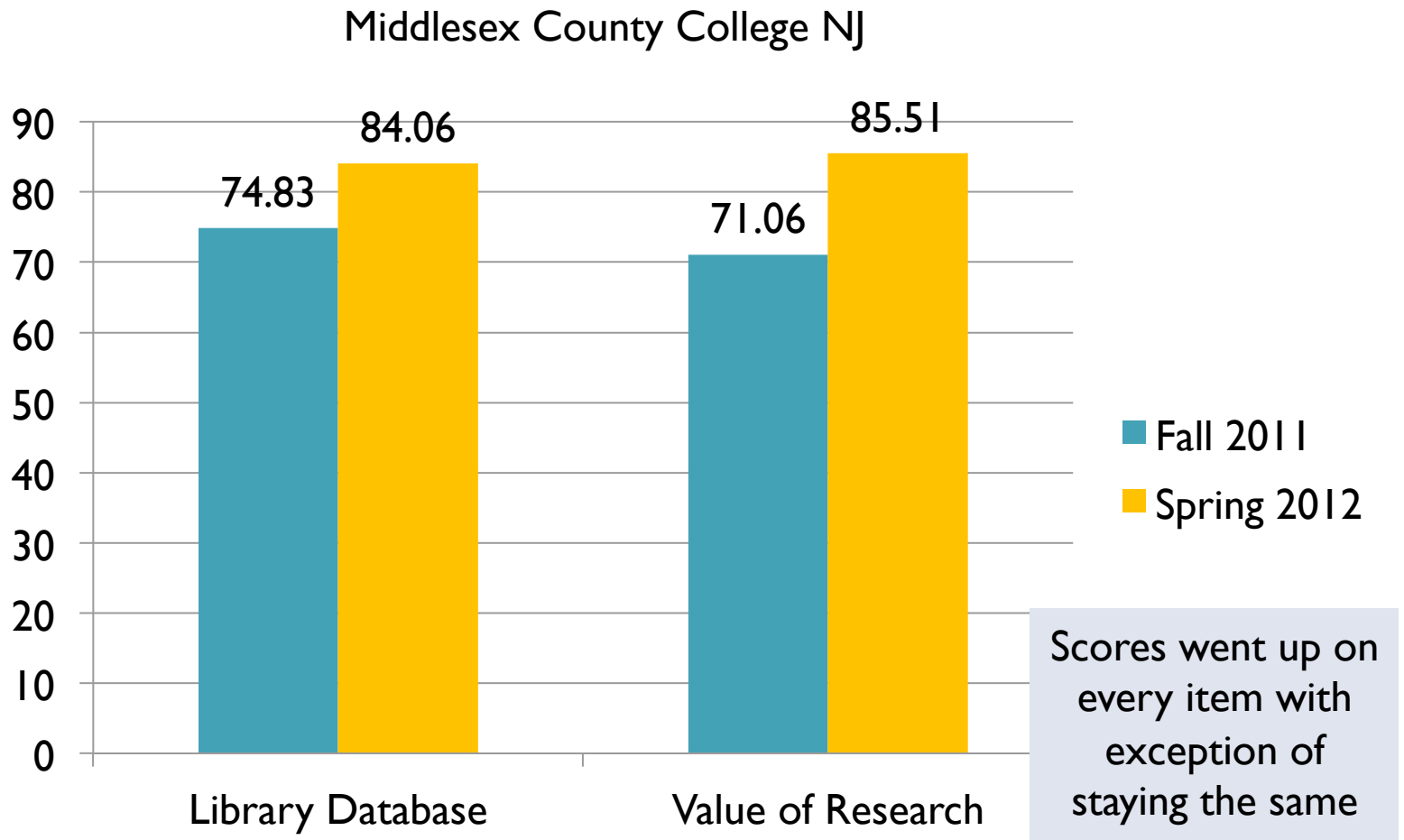
It's Working Despite More Students in Lowest Developmental Courses



2007/2008
1931 Students
19% RDG 009

2010/2011
2996 Students
29% RDG 009

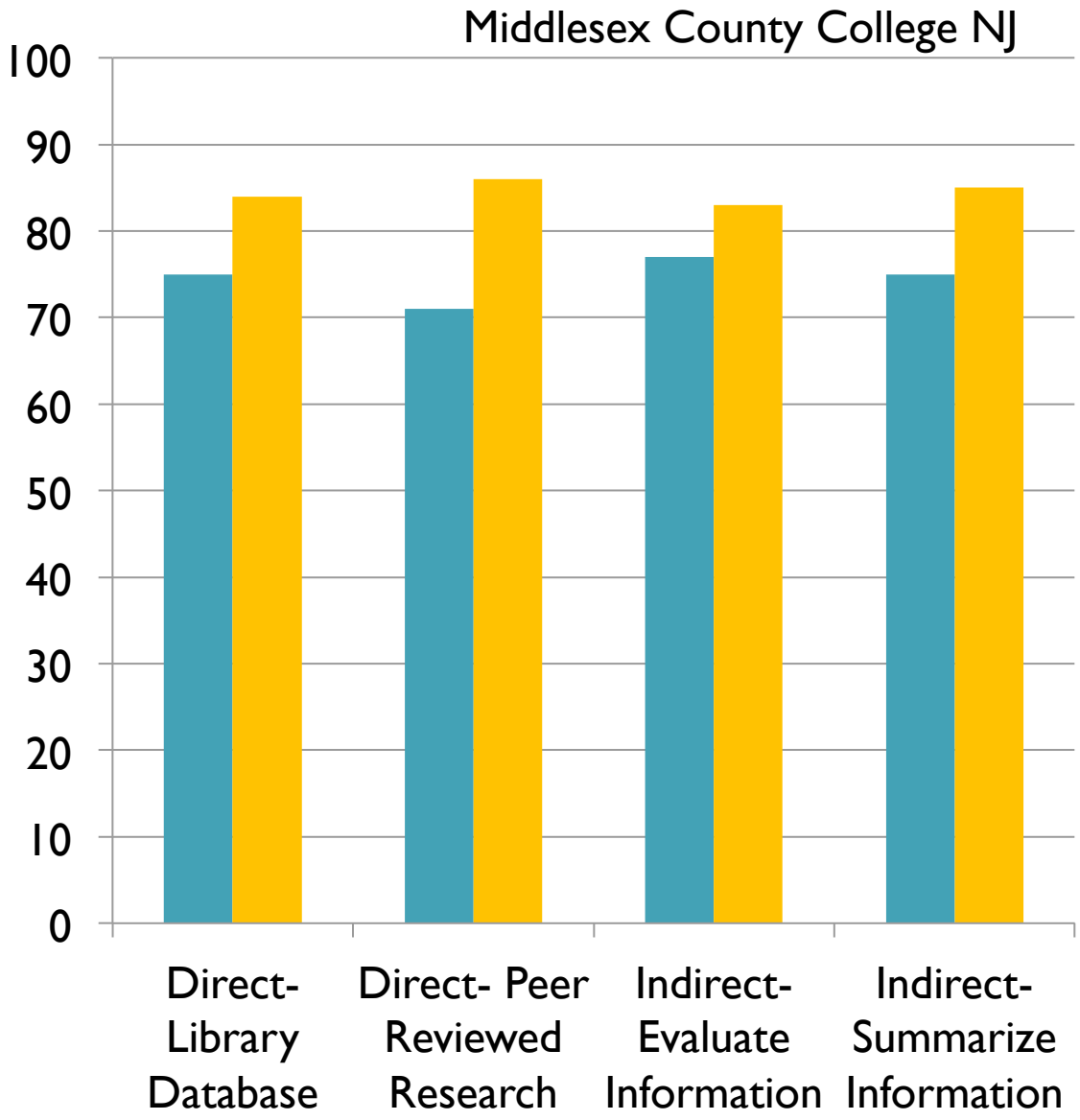
Direct Measure- Multiple Choice Test Questions



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

2011 Using Research Approach
2012 Using Consistent Resource with Research Approach

Assessment Data



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2011 Using Research Approach
2012 Using Consistent Resource with Research Approach

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