

Killer Courses: Understanding and Overcoming Roadblocks to First-Year Academic Success and Retention

Betsy O. Barefoot

Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education

Session Overview

- **Definitions of Killer Courses**
- **Data from institutions that participated in Foundations of Excellence® Self-Study**
 - **Brief description of the Foundations of Excellence®**
 - **Data from 2- and 4-year institutions**
- **Actions to address Killer Courses**
 - **Audience suggestions**
 - **Recommendations from FoE institutions**

Killer Courses

- **Courses with high rates of unsuccessful outcomes (D, F, and Withdrawals)**
 - Courses with DFW rates of 30% or higher are often considered killers
 - These courses “kill” a student’s GPA, motivation, academic progress, scholarship eligibility and interest in remaining in college.
- **What is your institution’s definition?**

Why Addressing Killer Courses Matters

- Its About Teaching
- Its About Learning
- Its About Student Performance
 - Cliff Adelman's Inside the Toolbox and Toolbox Revisited
- Its About Institutional Performance (& Funding)
 - Performance-Based Funding
- Why Does It Matter to Your Institution?

FoE Institutional Participants

- **FoE began in 2003 with the 4-year sector**
 - **219 Pilot and 24 “Founding Institutions”**
- **Extended in 2005 to 2-year institutions**
 - **88 Pilot and 10 “Founding Institutions”**
- **To date 256 institutions, both four-year and two-year, have participated in Foundations of Excellence**

High Enrollment Courses and DFWI Rates

- **FoE institutions identified the 5 courses with the highest enrollment of new students**
- **For each course institutions calculate the number of new students enrolled, the number who receive a D, F, Withdrawal (W) or Incomplete (I), and a DFWI rate.**

Average DFWI Rates for Five Highest Enrollment First-Year

Two-Year Institutions			
Academic Year	Institutions	Number of Courses	DFWI Average Rate
2004-2005	10	50	36%
2005-2006	13	65	36%
2006-2007	13	65	38%
2007-2008	10	50	35%
2008-2009	7	35	33%
2009-2010	19	91	38%
2010-2011	15	74	31%
2011-2012	4	19	35%
Overall	91	449	35%
Four-Year Institutions			
Academic Year	Institutions	Number of Courses	DFWI Average Rate
2004-2005	20	100	25%
2005-2006	18	90	25%
2006-2007	10	50	28%
2007-2008	17	85	22%
2008-2009	9	45	31%
2009-2010	11	55	21%
2010-2011	6	30	23%
2011-2012	9	45	22%
Overall	100	500	25%

High Enrollment Courses by DFWI Rates for 2-Year Institutions

Field	Number of Courses	DFWI Rate
Math developmental	99	44
Math college level	16	44
English developmental	27	43
Sociology	14	37
History	15	36
Computer	34	35
English college level	104	33
Biology	9	33
Political science	7	32
Psychology	56	31
FYS/ Success	26	28
PE / Health	6	26
Other	13	26
Speech	23	24

High Enrollment Courses by DFWI Rates for 4-Year Institutions

Field	Number of Courses	DFWI Rate
Economics	6	40
Math developmental	25	39
Math college level	55	38
Accounting/Finance	4	37
English developmental	3	34
Biology	20	29
History	23	29
Chemistry	9	26
Psychology	64	26
Political Science	9	25
Philosophy	7	24
Sociology	23	23
Computer	8	20
English college level	124	20
Fine Arts	6	20
Health/PE	13	19
Speech	31	17
FYS/ success	34	16

Percentage of High Enrollment Courses that Are High Risk

Percent of Courses with DFWI rate of 30% or More		
Academic Year	2-Year Institutions	4-Year Institutions
2004-2005	70%	32%
2005-2006	69%	30%
2006-2007	80%	36%
2007-2008	62%	25%
2008-2009	63%	51%
2009-2010	71%	27%
2010-2011	57%	37%
2011-2012	68%	22%
Overall	68%	31%

Anecdotal Reasons for High DFWI Rates

- **Students lack of academic preparation (especially in mathematics)**
- **Inadequate or nonexistent placement procedures**
- **Class size**
- **Late enrollment; missed classes**
- **Faculty grading pattern; lack of early feedback**
- **Other???**

What does your campus do to

- **Identify high DFWI courses, especially those that are “gateways” to the major?**
- **Investigate causes?**
- **Address the problems?**

Actions to Address Killer Courses

- **Inform departments of DFWI rates**
- **Require departments to develop action plans to enhance success in high DFWI courses.**
- **Examine the reasons of high DFWI rates.**
- **Develop increased curricular support services for courses with high DFWI rates.**

Actions to Address Killer Courses

- **Provide Supplemental Instruction for courses with high DFWI rates.**
- **Discuss creating more engaging pedagogies as one way to reduce DFWI rates.**
- **Use Early Warning and/or Early Intervention (Analytics) Tools**

Contact Information

- **Betsy Barefoot**
 - Vice President and Senior Scholar
 - Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education
 - barefoot@jngi.org
 - 828-475-6018

- <http://www.jngi.org>

- <http://www.jngi.org/gateway/>