



## Five Little Things That Contribute to Classroom Success

There are countless aphorisms that encourage individuals to plan ahead while touting the value and results that will undoubtedly accrue. For example,

*"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."* (Alexander Graham Bell)

*"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."* (Benjamin Franklin)

*"Plan ahead or find trouble on the doorstep."* (Confucius)

While it is easy to agree with these words of wisdom, putting them into practice is often another matter. In teaching, as each semester begins, there is often a blur of activity that does not relent until the last of the final semester grades are posted. Faculty can find themselves caught up in a series of deadlines, committee meetings, advising sessions, research projects, curricular and program planning initiatives, and accreditation visits, along with the normal challenge of assuring that students receive the best possible learning experiences in their courses. This can lead to little available time to plan for an engaging and stimulating classroom environment. However, the quick, basic, and easy planning strategies listed below can enhance the levels of classroom success.

1. Creating a detailed, organized, and accurate syllabus
2. Administering effective assessment strategies
3. Personalizing the classroom environment
4. Using technology to keep in touch with students
5. Ensuring that Plan A always includes having a Plan B



### The Syllabus

Time spent on planning and preparing the course syllabus before classes begin is an investment that pays great benefits throughout the entire semester. The more detailed and organized the syllabus (e.g., order in which topics and learning experiences will be shared, dates and times, assigned readings, due dates for scheduled assessment activities), the less time needs to be spent catching up on content; cramming in information; creating poor-quality, last-minute materials; or dealing with students' frustrations due to course requirement

... the best educators thought of teaching as anything they might do to help and encourage students to learn. Teaching is engaging students, engineering an environment in which they learn. Equally important, they thought of the creation of that successful learning environment as an important and serious intellectual (or artistic) act, perhaps even as a kind of scholarship, that required the attention of the best minds in academia.

(Bain, 2004, p. 49)

confusion. As Erickson, Peters, and Strommer (2006) note, the syllabus also sets the “tacit agenda” for the course, helping

determine what the professor is like, how the class is run, and what climate will prevail. This agenda is an experiential one; students form impressions and learn the rules for class behavior more from what we do in the first class than from what we say. (p. 67)

## Assessment Strategies

The first step in providing exemplary teaching in any course or discipline is having a strong grasp of identified student learning outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The second step is systematically designing effective assessment strategies that document the level at which students are actually learning. Finally, faculty must inform their students, in detail, as to the exact methods that will be used to assess their learning (e.g., the number and format of quizzes/examinations, written products, presentations). Yet, Lang (2006) notes

This ... is far more than grading policy (what percentage will it take to make an A), but the beginning of a conversation that should last throughout the term that will help students understand what it means to become an A thinker in a particular course or discipline, and what constitutes evidence that the student has achieved that kind of thinking. (p. 114)



## The Personalized Classroom

Most people respond positively when they are addressed by name or their name is remembered after an initial meeting (students included). Calling someone by name acknowledges the caller’s interest in that person and can potentially raise the communication exchange to a deeper level. Personalizing the classroom by using students’ names when asking or answering questions can help create an atmosphere that encourages more open and frequent dialogue, especially from the “silent majority.”

Quite often, instructors only become familiar with the names of students who are performing below expectations and those who are the stars of the

classroom. This policy frequently eliminates a significant portion of the students in the class. While memorizing students’ names in a large lecture may not be feasible, committing to this strategy in small- and medium-sized classes can be well worth the effort and send a powerful message to students that they matter. Many electronic classroom management systems (e.g., Blackboard, CNet) provide tools for creating class rosters including student pictures. Even simple index cards that students fill out on the first day of class with personal information can be useful memory aids.

## In-Touch Technology

Emerging technology provides a vast array of tools to stay connected with others. These tools can provide an efficient means of communicating with students. Consider, for

# Online Courses

on The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition



## Course Dates

**March 7-April 8, 2011**

**Teaching That Informs and Transforms: Strategies and Techniques for Engaging and Challenging Today’s Learners**

*Instructor:* Brad Garner  
Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning  
Indiana Wesleyan University

**April 4-May 6, 2011**

**Models and Methods of Student Advising: Promoting Career and Academic Success and Transition**

*Instructor:* Paul A. Gore  
Associate Professor of Educational Psychology and Student Success  
Special Projects Coordinator  
University of Utah

**May 9-June 10, 2011**

**Proving and Improving: The Pillars of First-Year Assessment**

*Instructor:* Jennifer R. Keup  
Director of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition  
University of South Carolina

[www.sc.edu/fye/oc](http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc)

example, the power of the following techniques that can be planned in advance and routinely carried out during the semester:



- Creating a Facebook group page for each class
- Providing students with the opportunity to Twitter responses to exit questions that summarize what they have learned during a particular class
- Creating a schedule to send e-mails to individual students on a weekly basis
- Asking students to share what they are learning and how the course is

connecting with the rest of their lives by sending an e-mail (i.e., on a scheduled basis designed, for example, around their last names and letters of the alphabet). A quick response to these e-mails can help deepen student engagement.

## Plan A: Always Have a Plan B

As has been described, planning is a powerful tool that can enhance opportunities for success in teaching. Good planners know, however, that the best intentions can be sidetracked by events and circumstances that cannot be predicted. Therefore, great instructors are flexible and prepared to make alterations in the presentation of materials and learning experiences when unexpected changes in the classroom situation happen (e.g., the technology in the classroom does not work, a surprise campus event is scheduled, an unforeseen illness prevents attending class). Strategies that can help prepare for a switch to Plan B include:

- Routinely checking the established schedule to determine what lies ahead
- Periodically sending an e-mail to students outlining the activities and assignments for the week ahead
- Strategizing about the common “what ifs” and preemptively developing alternative courses of action (e.g., teaching presentation to use when the PowerPoint fails, reorganizing the class to facilitate conversation and feedback when students fail to respond)
- Maintaining an awareness of upcoming campus events that may impact classes

## Summary

Making these activities part of a regular routine (i.e., things to do automatically each semester in every class) can free up time and energy to focus on the tasks of teaching during the semester. Give them a try: Planning does pay great benefits!

### References

- Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Erickson, B. L., Peters, C. B., & Strommer, D. W. (2006). *Teaching first-year college students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lang, J. (2006, September 1). The promising syllabus. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. 114.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Prentice-Hall.

## COMING SOON

**National Resource Center**  
for The First-Year Experience® & Students in Transition  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Available January 2011



Monograph No. 54

### Transfer Students in Higher Education: Building Foundations for Policies, Programs, and Services That Foster Student Success

Mark Allen Poisel and Sonya Joseph, Editors

ISBN 978-1-889-27171-2. \$35.00

Available January 2011



Research Report No. 1

### 2008 National Survey of Sophomore-Year Initiatives: Curricular and Cocurricular Structures Supporting the Success of Second-Year College Students

Jennifer R. Keup, Jimmie Gahagan,  
and Ryan N. Goodwin

ISBN 978-1-889-27172-9. \$20.00

# WHAT'S HAPPENING

## at The National Resource Center

### Conferences and Continuing Education

#### Online Courses

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is embarking on additional professional development opportunities for educators at colleges and universities by offering online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses are designed to provide participants with the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and with the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses will use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions/forums, listservs, and blogs. Courses are limited to 25 participants. For more information, visit [www.sc.edu/fye/oc](http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc)

#### Online Courses Offerings:

##### March 7-April 8, 2011

Teaching That Informs and Transforms: Strategies and Techniques for Engaging and Challenging Today's Learners

##### April 4-May 6, 2011

Models and Methods of Student Advising: Promoting Career and Academic Success and Transition

##### May 9-June 10, 2011

Proving and Improving: The Pillars of First-Year Assessment

### 30th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 4-8, 2011

Atlanta, GA

*Register by January 14, 2011 to receive the conference registration discount!*

The First-Year Experience conferences are meetings where educators from two- and four-year institutions come together to openly share ideas, concepts, resources, assessment tools, programmatic interventions, and research results focused on the first college year. Registration and proposal information is available at [www.sc.edu/fye/annual](http://www.sc.edu/fye/annual)

### 14th Outdoor Orientation Program Symposium (OOPS)

*Held in conjunction with the 30th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience*

February 5, 2011 (9:00 am - 4:30 pm)

Atlanta, GA

The Outdoor Orientation Program Symposium (OOPS) is a conference within a conference. Leading experts and practitioners involved in adventure-based, outdoor, wilderness, and extended orientation programs meet annually to share information in a one-day mini-conference with nine workshops and two keynote addresses. Presentations will include information on best practices, new program techniques, and nuts and bolts information that

**30<sup>th</sup>**  
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- **George R. Boggs**, president and chief executive officer of the American Association of Community Colleges

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 Center, it's conferences  
 and publications, visit

[www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye)



will help established and aspiring programs. A consistent focus at OOPS is a current update on research and assessment. Registration information for the symposium is available on the Annual First-Year Experience Conference registration form in the workshop section at [www.sc.edu/fye/annual/Annual\\_Registration\\_2011.pdf](http://www.sc.edu/fye/annual/Annual_Registration_2011.pdf)

## Save the Date

### Institute on Transfer Student Success

April 17-19, 2011  
Costa Mesa, CA

### 24th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

June 21-24, 2011  
Manchester, England

### 18th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 8-10, 2011  
St. Louis, MO

### Institute on First-Year Success in the Community College

November 6-8, 2011  
Cincinnati, OH

## Publications

The National Resource Center with its partners is pleased to announce the release of two new monographs focused on strategies for improving the transition into college.



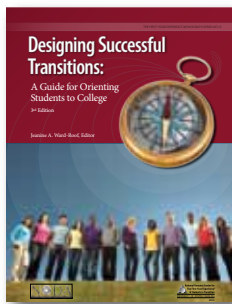
Monograph No. 53

### Organizing for Student Success: The University College Model

Scott E. Evenbeck, Barbara Jackson, Maggy Smith,  
Dorothy Ward, & Associates

Produced in conjunction with the Association of Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies, this new monograph draws on data from more than 50 institutions to provide insight into how university colleges are organized,

the initiatives they house, and the practices in place to ensure their effectiveness. Twenty case studies from 15 different campuses offer an in-depth understanding of institutional practice. Ultimately, university colleges are not only a structure for organizing educational experiences but also a catalyst for creating institutional change. To learn more or order a copy, visit [www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms053.html](http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms053.html)



**Newly Revised:** Monograph No. 13

### Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College (3rd edition)

Jeanine A. Ward-Roof, Editor

For more than 15 years, *Designing Successful Transitions* has been an essential resource for orientation professionals and for other educators charged with ensuring that new students make a successful transition to college. Produced in conjunction with the National Orientation Directors Association, this new



A biannual publication from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition

*E-Source for College Transitions* is a complimentary biannual electronic newsletter published by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Its primary purpose is to provide practical strategies for supporting student learning and success. Articles on a variety of topics related to student transitions are welcome, including those focusing on:

- > Strategies for addressing the first-year, sophomore, senior, and transfer transitions at different types of institutions
- > Innovative teaching strategies and programs addressing the needs of special student populations
- > Strategies for assessing student learning experiences, programs, or courses
- > Descriptions of institutional initiatives with demonstrated results
- > Descriptions of new and relevant print and online resources



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edition draws on current research and practice to outline the basic organizational structures of orientation and their theoretical underpinnings while also discussing special considerations for diverse student populations, transfer students, nontraditional students, and parents and family members. The role of technology and assessment in orientation and orientation in the two-year institution are also addressed. New to this volume are chapters that focus on changing the campus culture and institutionalizing orientation; anticipating and managing crises; and extending the benefits of orientation through first-year seminars, service-learning, outdoor programs, and common reading programs. To learn more or order a copy, visit [www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms013.html](http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms013.html)

## NRC Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition plan to be actively involved in the fall conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and to meet NRC staff members.

***Recent Findings and New Directions for Research on High-Impact Educational Practices in the Transition to College.*** Roundtable presentation by Jennifer R. Keup, NRC Director, and Ryan D. Padgett, NRC Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the 2010 ASHE Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 18, 2010, 1:45-2:30 p.m., Indianapolis Marriott Downtown, Marriott 5a room.

***The Impact of First-Year Seminars on College Students' Need for Cognition.*** Research paper presentation by Ryan D. Padgett, NRC Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, and Jennifer R. Keup, NRC Director, at the 2010 ASHE Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 20, 2010, 4:45-6:15 p.m., Indianapolis Marriott Downtown, Lincoln room.

## Research

### 2010-2011 Paul P. Fidler Research Grant Recipient



The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is pleased to announce its 2010-2011 Paul P. Fidler Research Grant recipient Paul McLoughlin. A doctoral candidate at Boston College, McLoughlin has been selected for his study, "High-Achieving Low-Income Students: How Low-Income Students on Full Financial Aid Are Navigating an Elite College Environment." This hermeneutic phenomenological study will seek to describe the lived experience of low-income students who are recipients of full need-based aid attending an elite college, how they navigate an elite college environment, and their transition from first-year students to seniors.

McLoughlin will be awarded the Fidler grant at the 17th National Conference on Students in Transition, November 13-15, 2010, in Houston, Texas.

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### The Toolbox

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*The Toolbox* is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

The online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit [www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox](http://www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox)

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