



Value-Added Discussion Enhancers

For some faculty members, the process of engaging students in classroom discussion can be a fearful proposition—with unpredictable dialogue leading into unplanned topics. Michalec and Burg (1995) describe the anxiety that faculty can sometimes experience as they approach the prospect of a classroom discussion:

The professor enters the room and begins organizing his materials for the day's lesson. He has enjoyed teaching this class but feels slightly nervous as he anticipates the uncertainty of what is about to transpire. Today he is planning an activity that involves discussion; his gut tightens ever so slightly.... As he scans his class, he wonders what pedagogical stumbling blocks lay hidden in the dance of ideas that often accompany a good discussion. (p. 312)

Despite the potential risks, effective face-to-face discussions can help students personalize and gain new perspectives on course content. However, the facilitation of successful discussions in a college classroom requires skill and technique—both of which can be learned through practice and persistence. Garmston and Wellman (1999) have suggested, for example, that faculty should consider adhering to the Rule of Ten and Two that calls for two minutes of intentional processing and conversation for every 10 minutes of lecture or video presentations. This factor may have added relevance for today's digital learners who often equate communication and discussion with texting, Facebook entries, Twitter, and e-mail (Roehling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry, & Vandlen, 2010). Below is a list of additional techniques that can give faculty added confidence and reassurance as they embark on classroom discussions.

- **Brad's fourth law of motion.** An extension of Newton's three laws of motion and appearing for the first time in publication, Brad's fourth law of motion states, "If students are encouraged to talk at the beginning of a class, they will be more likely to continue talking as the class proceeds." Start each class with a brief interactive activity to begin the conversation-ball rolling.
- **What was the question?** Great discussions begin with high-quality topics, questions, and prompts. In the classroom, dialogue can be stimulated with a question, video clip, scenario, or provocative position on the topic of concern. To aid in the process, and to eliminate the common student, what-was-the-question refrain, post discussion questions or prompts on a PowerPoint slide.
- **The deafening silence.** Remember that any time a discussion topic or question is posed, there will automatically be a period of silence. This pause only indicates that the students are processing and considering the question and their possible responses. Expect it and accept it.



“As a leader... I have always endeavored to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion. I always remember the axiom: A leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.”

— Nelson Mandela

- **Small to large.** Consider having students begin their discussion by talking with a neighbor or those around them in the classroom. Then, reconvene the group and harvest the ideas and concepts generated in the initial conversations.
- **Music to my ears.** Play a subtle musical background during those times when your class is working in small groups. By playing music as students talk, an incredible level of energy can be infused into the room. Using the Three Slide Technique, outlined below, can effectively and seamlessly introduce music.
 - Display the discussion prompt or question to the students on slide one.
 - As students begin their discussions, advance to slide two, which is a duplicate of slide one (i.e., displays prompt or question) but has an inserted audio file (i.e., mp3 for Windows operating systems, MPEG-4 for Apple) set to start automatically and play continuously.
 - When you are ready for the small groups to reconvene into a large group, move on to slide three, which is, again, the same slide (to keep the prompt or question displayed for large-group discussion) but stops the music.
- **Time is a variable.** Announcing the time that is available for a small-group discussion provides structure and a sense of accountability. To enhance this variable, download a timer that can be projected on the screen for all to see.
- **Here is what I heard.** Even though the room may be filled with the buzz of conversation while students talk in small groups, when the group is reconvened, students are often reluctant to share their thoughts with the entire class. One way of circumventing this situation is to ask students to divulge something of interest that they heard from one of their small-group partners.
- **Practice leads to improvement.** The process of becoming a skilled discussion facilitator simply takes time and practice. It is a very unique skill set, but one that you, as a faculty member or instructor, can master.

The next time you go into a classroom, say this: "Let's have a discussion about that topic!"

References

- Garmston, R. J., & Wellman, B. M. (1999). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Michalec, P., & Burg, H. (1995). Transforming discussion from collegiate to collegial. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 9, 311-326.
- Roehling, P. V., Kooi, T. L. V., Dykema, S., Quisenberry, B., & Vandlen, C. (2010). Engaging the millennial generation in class discussions. *College Teaching*, 59(1), 1-6.

31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience®

Conference Highlights

- » Colleague clusters at luncheon
- » **Featured Speakers:**
Dewayne Matthews, Vice President for Policy and Strategy of the Lumina Foundation for Education
Charles Blaich, Director of the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College
- » Commercial and nonprofit exhibits
- » Focused dialogues to facilitate networking

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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.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers 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 use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions/forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 25 participants. For more information, visit www.sc.edu/fye/oc.

Conferences and Institutes

31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 17-21, 2012

San Antonio, Texas

This annual conference is designed to provide educators from nearly every corner of higher education a comfortable, welcoming environment to share innovative ideas, programs, tools, and research critical to the first-year experience. Registration and proposal information is available at www.sc.edu/fye/annual.

Save the Dates

Institute on First-Year Seminar Leadership

April 15-17, 2012

Columbia, South Carolina (University of South Carolina)

25th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

July 16-19, 2012

Proposal Deadline: March 16, 2012

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

19th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 13-15, 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

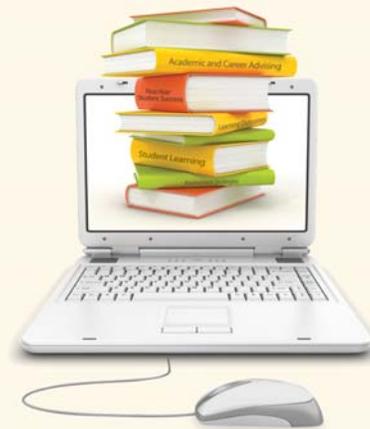
Publications

We Are Making Changes to Serve You Better

In January 2012, the National Resource Center will launch a new online catalog and e-commerce gateway that will allow customers to search for and purchase our resources online. We will continue to accept institutional purchase orders and checks via fax or mail in January, so watch for the launch announcement for more information.

Online Courses

on The First-Year Experience®
and Students in Transition



Course Dates

April 2 – May 4, 2012

Instructor Training and Development: Critical Foundations for First-Year Seminar Programs

Facilitated by: Mary Stuart Hunter, Associate Vice President for the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and U101 Programs at the University of South Carolina.

May 14 – June 15, 2012

Transfer Student Success: Meeting the Needs of a Unique Population on College Campuses

Facilitated by: Mark Allen Poisel, Associate Provost for Student Success at Pace University.

July 9 – August 10, 2012

Developing and Constructing Valid Survey Instruments

Facilitated by: Ryan D. Padgett, Assistant Director of Research, Grants, and Assessment for National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.

Courses are limited to the first 25 registrants.

Register online at
www.sc.edu/fye/oc

In order to make the transition to the new system, we will temporarily suspend publication sales beginning December 1, 2011. We will resume sales on January 2, 2012 with the launch of our new system. If there are resources you need before the end of the calendar year, please place your order prior to December 1. Visit us online at www.sc.edu/fye/publications/cart to complete your order form and then fax it to (803) 777-4699.

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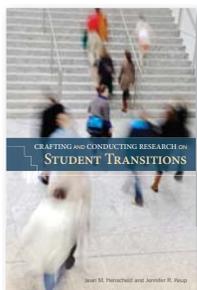


The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success, Volume I: Designing and Administering the Course

Jennifer R. Keup and Joni Webb Petschauer

Volume I in a new five-volume series defines common seminar configurations, goals, and course topics, drawing on national studies and institutional research reports. It offers guidance in selecting a seminar model, addresses strategies for launching and administering

the seminar, and describes successfully managing change within the course. To learn more or order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.



Crafting and Conducting Research on Student Transitions

Jean M. Henscheid and Jennifer R. Keup

Designed for students and educational professionals researching students' movement into and through higher education, *Crafting and Conducting Research on Student Transitions* is a concise resource, describing both qualitative and quantitative methods. The authors walk readers through the process of selecting a topic, designing a study, and disseminating the research results on explorations of the

college student experience from the first college year to beyond graduation. To learn more or order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.

NRC Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center 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 meet NRC staff members.

National Research and Trends on High-Impact Educational Practices and the Transition to College. Concurrent session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), in Washington, DC, January 26, 3:30-4:00 pm.

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition exhibit at the 10th Annual Conference of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) in Fort Worth, Texas, January 25-27, 2012.



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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