



What's the Buzz? Connecting With Student Culture

America's professoriate is graying. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June, 2012) reports that more than one third of current faculty members on many campuses are 60 or older, and this percentage likely will increase as more instructors defer retirement to 70 or beyond. Having seasoned veterans in the classroom offers many inherent advantages (e.g., extensive knowledge, personal and professional experience, broad disciplinary perspective, a body of scholarly work), but as faculty grow older, the age gap between them and their students grows wider. This fissure creates the possibility of a disconnect that can leave faculty unaware of applicable, relevant, and timely cultural references that are part of their students' experience. To bridge this gap, faculty—at any age but especially the graying population—must consciously plug in to the cultural zeitgeist of their students through popular music, movies, celebrities, or politics and apply that knowledge in the classroom as part of the teaching and learning equation.

Acquiring the Connection

Having ongoing conversations with and listening to students is a good place for faculty to start learning about what is culturally relevant in their lives. These interactions might begin with explorations about how movies, music, television shows, or current social and political events that have captured students' attention relate to the class subject. Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook also offer insights into what subjects are trending on the current cultural map, and the Web provides opportunities for further research:

- The searchable website Lyrics.net (<http://www.lyrics.net/>) focuses on the themes and content of song lyrics.
- The topical website Movieclips.com (www.movieclips.com) provides a searchable database of movie clips to use in the classroom.
- YouTube (www.youtube.com) offers current entertainment, documentary, and news clips to supplement teaching.

Whether through personal conversations, online exploration, or other avenues, faculty must make a conscious decision to get to know what is happening in the world and what cultural phenomena are shaping their students' lives.

Using the Connection

Becoming aware of their students' cultural universe is the first step for faculty; the second is creating learning experiences that allow students to relate course content with



“I always think the everyday is more relevant than anything too grand because we all have to deal with it.”

—David Byrne,
Musician/Songwriter

the culture in which they live and learn. Some examples of how faculty from varied academic disciplines can link culture to course topics include

- connecting contemporary news stories that illustrate the ethical challenges faced by company leaders to the study of ethical dilemmas in the business world (business),
- examining past historical and political turmoil by discussing and showing its relation to current political issues in a country or region (history, political science),
- using stories from the news to illustrate similar dramatic and literary plots (literature),
- critiquing new scientific discoveries (e.g., medical decisions, research) reported in the news and their ethical and political implications (natural sciences, economics, philosophy), and
- re-envisioning the stories of classic literature in the context of current culture (literature).

In each case, faculty are responsible for making connections, but it is reasonable to ask students to explore and synthesize content to look for links with current culture and events. This process acknowledges the important role of current culture while also validating the students' ability to connect the dots.

Incorporating cultural connections into teaching and learning benefits faculty and students. For faculty, interjecting culturally relevant connections made through conversation or web research offers multiple avenues for creating energy and interest in a classroom or online learning experience and helps make course content fresh. For students, brain research indicates that connecting new learning with relevant parts of the learner's experience enhances the likelihood of retaining and processing that content (Byrnes, 2001).

Conclusion

Teaching and learning never occur in a vacuum. Instructors, students, learning environment, and the culture-at-large all come together in every classroom and online experience. Making a concerted effort to connect with the culture of students and assessing how that culture can be applied to course content strengthens the relevance of teaching and learning.

REFERENCES

Byrnes, J. P. (2011). *Minds, brains and learning: Understanding the psychological and educational relevance of neuroscientific research*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

June, A. W. (2012, March 18). Aging professors create a faculty bottleneck. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A1-A8.

Gaga Has a New Meaning, Baby

For students who entered college in fall 2013, chatting has seldom involved talking; a tablet is no longer something you take in the morning; and Gaga has never been just baby talk. For them, Eminem and LL Cool J could show up at parents' weekend, and pop culture icons Dean Martin, Mickey Mantle, and Jerry Garcia live on only in baby boomers' memories.

These references, taken from Beloit College's Mindset List for the Class of 2017 (<http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/>), represent a few of the cultural touchstones that shaped the lives of this academic year's first-year students. The list not only reminds faculty to eschew dated references but also provides insight into their students' cultural spheres, and connecting to that universe can make teaching and learning more relevant.

Reading the Mindset List should not make faculty feel old or out of touch, nor should they feel the need to pose as hipsters and toss out popular catchphrases to ensure excellent teaching evaluations. Rather, the list should illuminate that, while knowledge is absolutely necessary for great teaching, faculty of any age can enmesh themselves so deeply in their academic disciplines that they neglect the life and cultural experiences of the students sitting in their classrooms. The list also can be a call to action for faculty to increase their contemporary cultural awareness and commit to an ongoing assessment of how this awareness can enhance their teaching and their students' learning.

What's Happening at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Conferences and Institutes

Institute on First-Generation College Students

July 25-27, 2014

Renaissance Hotel, Asheville, North Carolina

Institute faculty will construct a framework for examining trends and practices connected to creating a comprehensive and intentional approach to ensure the success of first-generation students. Individual sessions will build on one another so that participants leave with a personalized action plan to use on their home campuses. Modeling the active pedagogies the National Resource Center advocates, Institute faculty will employ group work, problem solving, case studies, discussion, and other active strategies to engage participants in learning. Focused topics will include

- defining first-generation students and understanding their needs,
- discerning elements of a comprehensive institutional approach to first-generation success,
- identifying factors that contribute to student success,
- developing curricular and cocurricular strategies tailored for first-generation students,
- strategizing to gain institutional support for programs and initiatives,
- defining the role of faculty and staff in first-generation student success, and
- assessing programs and strategies for support.

Please go to <http://sc.edu/fye/FGCS> to register or for more information.

European First-Year Experience 2014 Conference

June 9-11, 2014

Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, England

The meeting, cohosted by the National Resource Center, will focus on two themes: (a) the student lifecycle and (b) building a first-year experience for international students. The deadline to register is May 30. For more information, please visit http://www.ntu.ac.uk/efye_2014/.

Save the Dates

21st National Conference on Students in Transition

October 18-20, 2014

Denver, Colorado

Institute on Peer Educators

November 7-9, 2014

University of South Carolina, Capstone Campus Room

34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 6-10, 2015

Dallas, Texas

November 7-9, 2014
University of South Carolina,
Columbia, SC

INSTITUTE ON

PEER EDUCATORS



Register at:
[WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/PE](http://www.sc.edu/fye/pe)

Sign up for



Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the fall 2014 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new issues, please go to www.sc.edu/fye/esource

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and 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 or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 40 participants. Participants will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc> for more information.

Online Course Offerings

Fostering First-Year Student Success

July 14-August 8, 2014

Facilitated by Stephanie Foote, associate professor of education in the Department of First-Year Programs at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia

This course is designed to engage participants in an exploration of many of the fundamental aspects of first-year student success. Drawing from multiple perspectives, the course will challenge participants to (a) move beyond generational characteristics to understand who first-year students are and what issues potentially impact their success; (b) apply the information generated through readings, reflective assignments, and discussion to innovate practices aimed at fostering first-year student success; and (c) develop a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods that can be used to measure first-year student success.

Proving and Improving: Foundations of First-Year Assessment

August 18-September 19, 2014

Facilitated by Dallin George Young, assistant director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

This course is an introduction to and overview of first-year assessment. It will provide participants with knowledge and tools needed to make sense of first-year assessment issues at their respective institutions. More specifically, this course will provide an overview of assessment models and methods; offer strategies for creating and implementing assessment plans, including the development of learning outcomes; and explore instruments used to assess students' learning, experiences, satisfaction, and development in their transition to college. Attention will be given to qualitative and quantitative assessment methods.

Common Readings: Creating Community Beyond the Book

October 20-November 14, 2014

Facilitated by Catherine F. Andersen, associate provost for Academic Affairs, University of Baltimore, and Fellow, John N. Gardner Institute on Excellence in Undergraduate Education

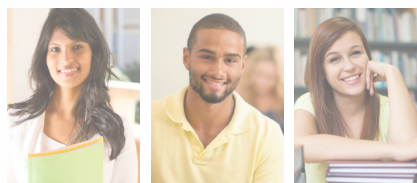
Common reading programs, defined for the purpose of this course, occur when groups of incoming first-year students read the same book(s) and participate in activities that create a common intellectual experience. These programs are becoming an important component of first-year experience initiatives and are most frequently designed to provide new students an introduction to the intellectual expectations of college in formal and informal gatherings. High-impact programs go beyond book discussion groups and include students, faculty, staff, and the larger community in an array of social, intellectual, and civic activities. Individuals in

July 25-27, 2014
Asheville, North Carolina

Institute on

FIRST-GENERATION

COLLEGE STUDENTS



The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition invites those interested in programs and initiatives for first-generation students to join us for the Institute on First-Generation College Students. Faculty will build a framework for examining trends and practices connected to building a comprehensive and intentional approach to ensure the success of first-generation students.

Individual sessions are designed to build on one another so that participants leave with a personalized action plan for use on their home campuses. Modeling the active pedagogies we advocate for our classrooms, the Institute faculty employ group work, problem solving, case studies, discussion, and other active strategies to engage participants in learning.

Register at:
WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/FGCS

this course will discuss the benefits and goals of a program; learn about the various types of programs; and explore how programs differ in scope, impact, and cost. Participants will design a comprehensive plan for their own campuses that includes goals and outcomes, an assessment plan, a budget, book selection criteria, and curricular and cocurricular programming.

New Releases



Navigating the First College Year: A Guide for Parents and Families

Richard Mullendore and Leslie Banahan

Parents and family members are critical to the success of new college students, but those who never attended college or who have been away for a while may lack critical information about the purpose, goals, and structure of higher education today. Recognizing this, NODA, the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education, and the National

Resource Center have collaborated for more than a decade to produce high-quality resources defining the role of parents and family members in first-year college student success. *Navigating the First College Year* is the latest effort in that partnership. This brief guide offers an overview of the college experience, especially in the first year; suggests strategies for helping students succeed academically and socially; and includes a glossary of key terms. Grounded in the student success research and practice literature, the guide is ideal for use in orientation programs, recruitment events, and family weekends. ISBN/ISSN 978-1-889271-91-0. 32 pages. \$3 (1-99 copies); \$2 (bulk-minimum quantity 100). To order *Navigating the First College Year*, please visit <http://www.nrcpubs.com/p/121/navigating-the-first-college-year-a-guide-for-parents-and-families>

National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the 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 National Resource Center staff members.

Leveraging High-Impact Practices in Our Work as Scholarly Practitioners. Keynote address presented by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director, at the 2014 Northeast Association of College and University Housing Offices (NEACUHO) Annual Conference; 8:30-10:30 a.m.; Thursday, May 29, 2014; Bridgewater State University-Large Ballroom; Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Transitions Beyond the First Year: Implications for Curriculum Design, Student Support, and Success. Preconference workshop presented by Matt Portas, University Teaching Fellow, Teesside University, and Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director, at the 2014 European First-Year Experience Conference; 9:15-11:15 a.m.; Monday, June 9, 2014; Nottingham Trent University; Nottingham, United Kingdom.

Research Reports on College Transitions No. 4 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Exploring High-Impact Practices in the First College Year

Dallin George Young and Jessica M. Hopp



For a quarter century, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has been examining the prevalence, structure, and administration of first-year seminars on American college campuses. The 2012-2013 administration of the National Survey of First-Year Seminars was expanded to explore the connection between the seminar and other high-impact practices in the first college year, including learning communities, service-learning, common reading programs, undergraduate research, and writing instruction. Findings are disaggregated by institutional characteristics and seminar type so that readers may easily identify the course features with the greatest relevance for their own context.

(2014). ISBN 978-1-889271-90-3. \$25.

www.nrcpubs.com

2014 European First-Year Experience Conference Keynote Address. Presented by M. Stuart Hunter, associate vice president and executive director of University 101 Programs and the National Resource Center; 10:15-11:15 a.m.; Wednesday, June 11, 2014; Nottingham Trent University; Nottingham, United Kingdom.

The Role of Peer Leaders in the First-Year Experience: Learning From Research Data.

Research paper presented by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director, at the 2014 European First-Year Experience Conference; 11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.; Wednesday, June 11, 2014; Nottingham Trent University; Nottingham, United Kingdom.

Research

Paul P. Fidler Research Grant

The Paul P. Fidler Research Grant encourages the development and dissemination of knowledge that has the potential to improve the experiences of college students in transition. The grant is named in memory of Paul P. Fidler, a faculty member at the University of South Carolina, whose pioneering research on student learning and success had a vital impact on work to promote the success of all students in transition. The award includes a cash stipend, travel to two national conferences, a presentation at a national conference, and priority consideration for publication. The application window for the 2014-2015 Paul P. Fidler Research Grant will close at 11:59 Eastern, July 1, 2014.

For more information, please visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant>.

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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, South Carolina.

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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