



## NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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# Surveying the National Landscape of First-Year Seminars: a High-Impact Practice

Dallin George Young, Assistant  
Director for Research, Grants, and  
Assessment

Jennifer R. Keup, Director



April 1, 2014

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

# Background on FYS

- The first-year seminar (FYS) is “a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students” (Barefoot, 1992, p. 49).
- These courses contribute to outcomes including:
  - Persistence to the second year
  - Grade point average
  - Satisfaction with faculty, peers, and the institution
  - Use of campus services
  - Interaction with faculty
  - Development of academic, interpersonal, and communication skills(As summarized in Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013)

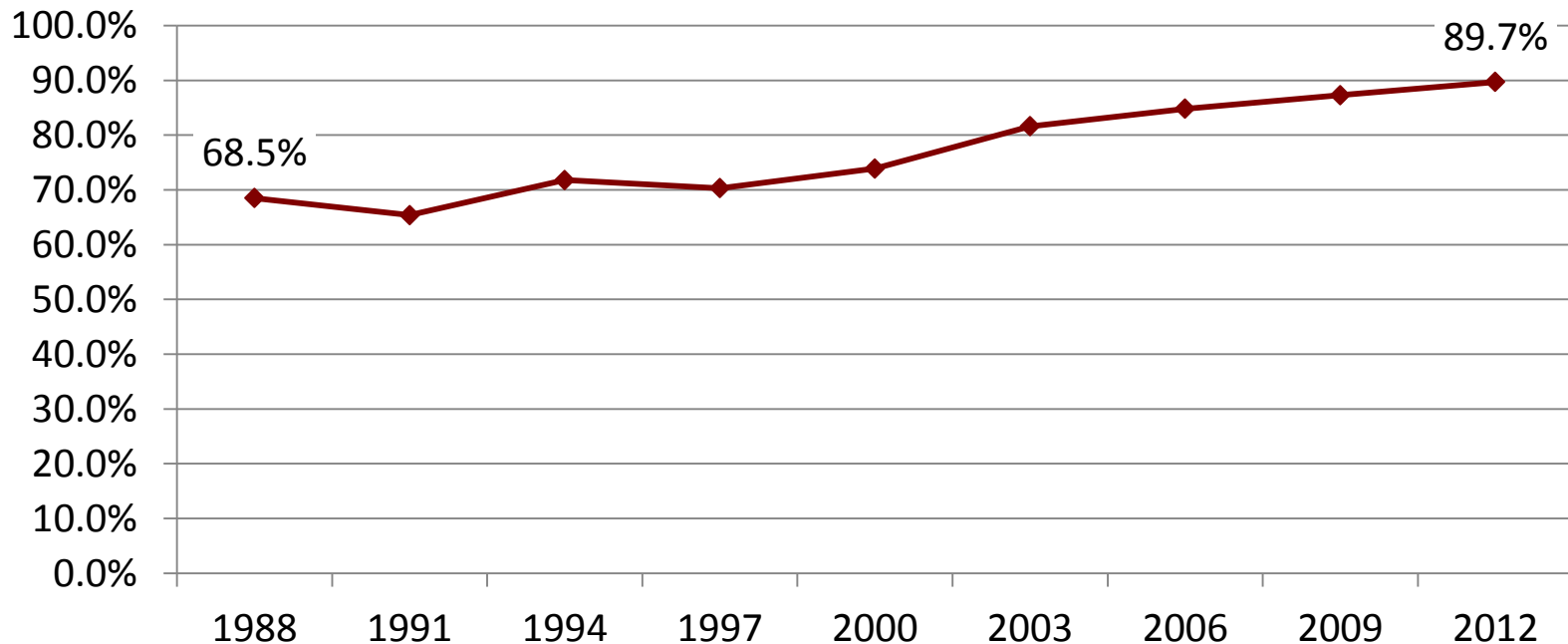
# Why Study First-Year Seminars?

“FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college.”

-Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005

# Why Study the FYS?

## Institutions Offering a First-Year Seminar



# High-Impact Educational Practices



## First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

## Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

## Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

## Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

## Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

## Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

## Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

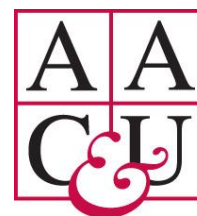
In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

## Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

## Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.



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# Why Continue to Study FYS?

“While promising, **they are not a panacea**. Only when they are **implemented well** and **continually evaluated**...will we realize their considerable potential.”

- Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010

Overview

# NATIONAL SURVEY OF FIRST- YEAR SEMINARS



# Overview of National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Since 1988, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has triennially conducted a national survey of the features of first-year seminars
- Has provided the most comprehensive national picture of the practice related to curricular interventions to support students in the first college year

# 2012-13 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Ninth triennial administration of the NSFYS since 1988
- Online instrument
  - Types of First-Year Seminars
  - Students
  - Teaching
  - Administration
  - Objectives
  - Assessment
  - HIPs

# NSFYS 2012-13 Methodology

- 3,753 institutions were invited to participate
  - 4 waves: CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 NSFYS participants
  - Administered from Nov. 2012-Jan. 2013
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- 804 (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS

2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# TYPES OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

# First-Year Seminar Types

- Extended orientation seminars
- Academic seminars with generally uniform content
- Academic seminars on various topics
- Preprofessional seminars or discipline-linked seminar
- Basic study skills seminars
- Hybrid seminars
- Other

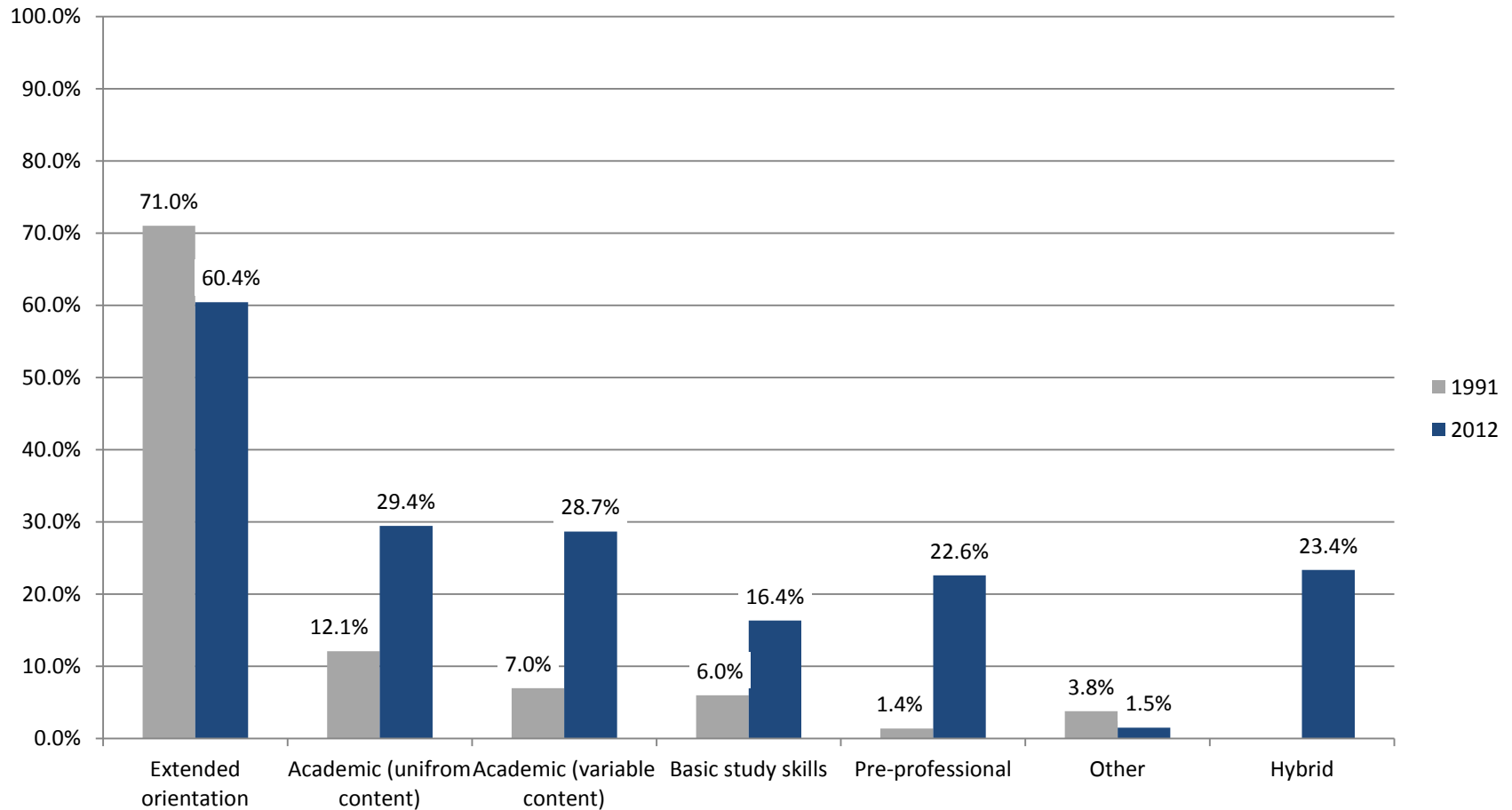
# Which is your Institution's Primary Seminar Type?



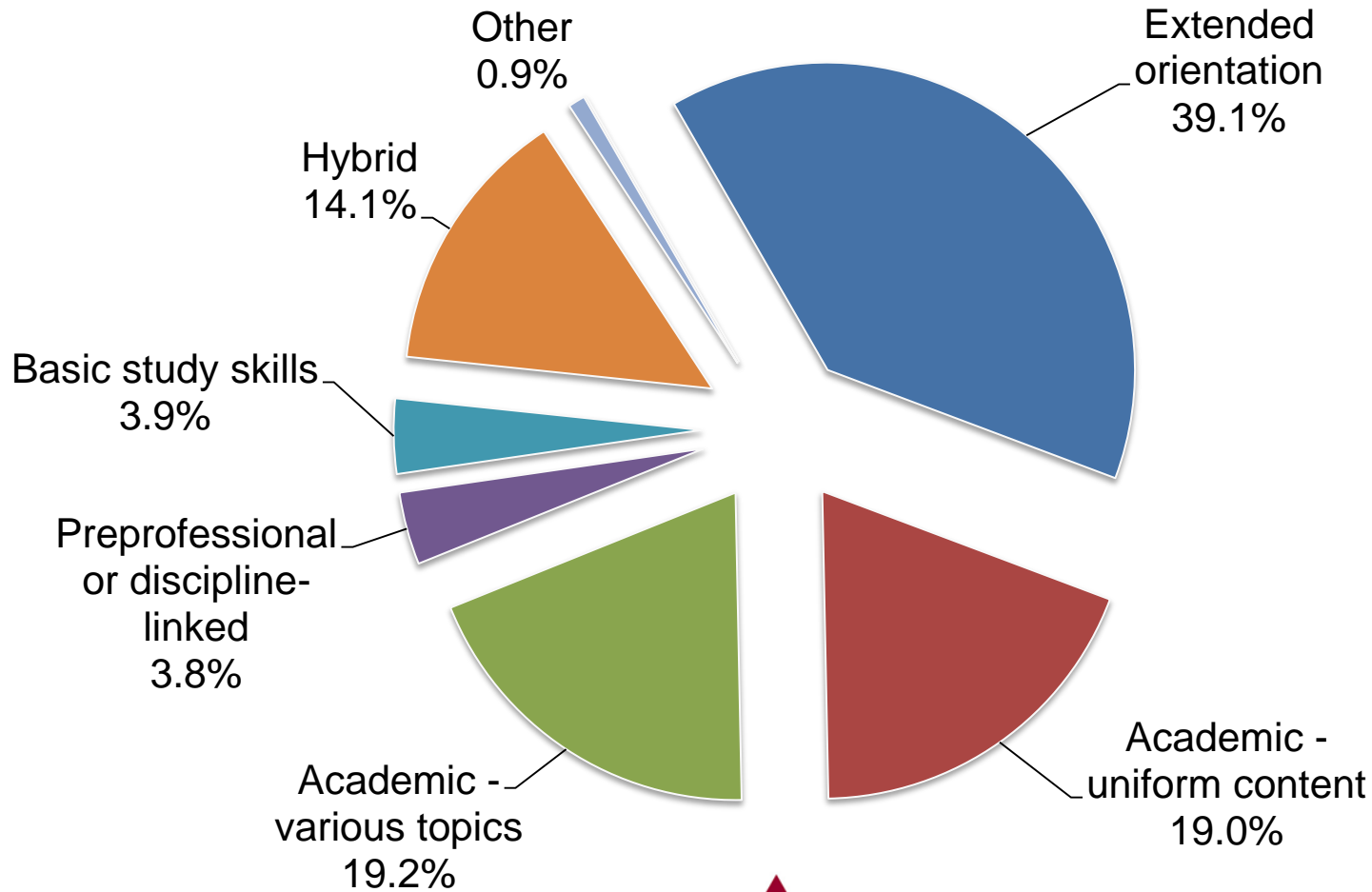
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# Distribution of All Seminar Types



# Primary Type of FYS





National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# **ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTION**

# First-Year Seminar Administration

*What campus unit directly administers the first-year seminar?*

Campus Unit	Percentage
Academic affairs central office	25.9
Academic departments	20.0
First-year programs office	16.3
College or school	9.3
Student affairs central office	7.6

**Across all campus units administering the experience, 80.2% had a dean, director, or coordinator.**

**However, 56.2% served in the role *part time*.**

# First-Year Seminar Administration

- Median size of FYS program is 21-30 sections
- 55.6% report a class size of >20 students
- Three-quarters of FYS are one term in duration
- 43.5% of FYS carry one credit hour
- 85.2% of FYS are letter graded
- FYS credit most often applies toward general education requirements (58.6%), as an elective (37.9%), or the major (8.5%)

**42.5% of responding institutions require *all* students to take a FYS**

# First-Year Seminar Instruction

Instructor	%
Tenure-track faculty	71.1
FT non-tenure-track faculty	60.7
Student affairs professionals	52.0
Adjunct faculty	51.9
Other campus professionals	31.8
Graduate students	4.7
Undergraduate students	4.1

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46.3% institutions report that undergraduates play a role in the first-year seminar.

2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# SEMINAR OBJECTIVES



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# Most Important Objectives

Objective	Percentage
Develop a connection with the institution	44.9
Provide orientation to campus resources & services	37.8
Develop academic skills	36.3
Develop critical thinking skills	23.3
Create common first-year experience	21.6
Develop study skills	20.0
Self-exploration or personal development	17.0
Develop support network or friendships	14.5
Improve second-year return rates	14.5
Increase student-faculty interaction	12.4
Develop writing skills	11.6

# Objectives by Primary FYS

Course Objectives	Primary Seminar Type					
	EO	A-UC	A-VT	PP-D	BSS	HY
Create common first-year experience		35.8%				
Develop a connection with the institution	56.3%	36.5%		41.4%		49.5%
Develop academic skills	34.6%	37.8%	32.0%		46.4%	45.8%
Develop critical thinking skills			50.3%			
Develop study skills					67.9%	
Develop writing skills			38.8%			
Introduce a discipline				48.3%		
Provide orientation to campus resources and services	58.3%				50.0%	34.6%
Provide preprofessional preparation				41.4%		



# Objectives/Topics

## **Select the three most important course objectives for the first-year seminar:**

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Develop a connection with the institution	44.9%
Provide orientation to campus resources and services	37.8%
Develop academic skills	36.3%
Develop critical thinking skills	23.3%
Create common first-year experience	21.6%

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## **Select the three most important topics of the first-year seminar:**

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Campus resources	35.7%
Academic planning or advising	34.7%
Critical thinking	32.6%
Study skills	29.8%
Campus engagement	27.7%

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2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

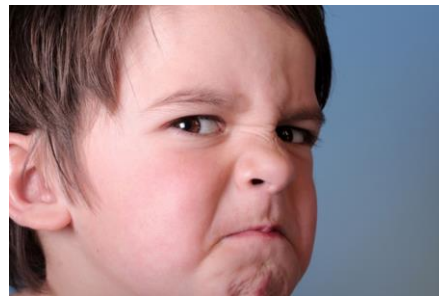
# ASSESSMENT OF THE SEMINAR

# Assessment of the FYS

- Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since fall 2009?



**Yes**  
59.4%



**No**  
32.4%



**I don't know**  
8.1%

# How was FYS Assessed?

<b>What type of assessment was conducted?</b>	<b>%</b>
Student course evaluation	86.9
Analysis of institutional data	71.2
Survey instrument	53.4
Direct assessment of student learning outcomes	52.9
Focus groups with instructors	35.4
Program review	33.3
Focus groups with students	30.6
Individual interviews with instructors	20.1
Individual interviews with students	12.4

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Quantitative Assessment

Qualitative Assessment

Program Evaluation



2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

# HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES IN FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS



# High-Impact Educational Practices



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## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

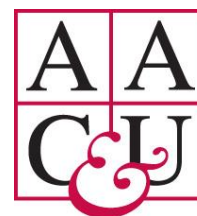
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# FYS as a High-Impact Practice

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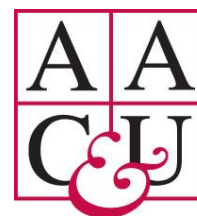
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# HIPs Examined on 12-13 NSFYS

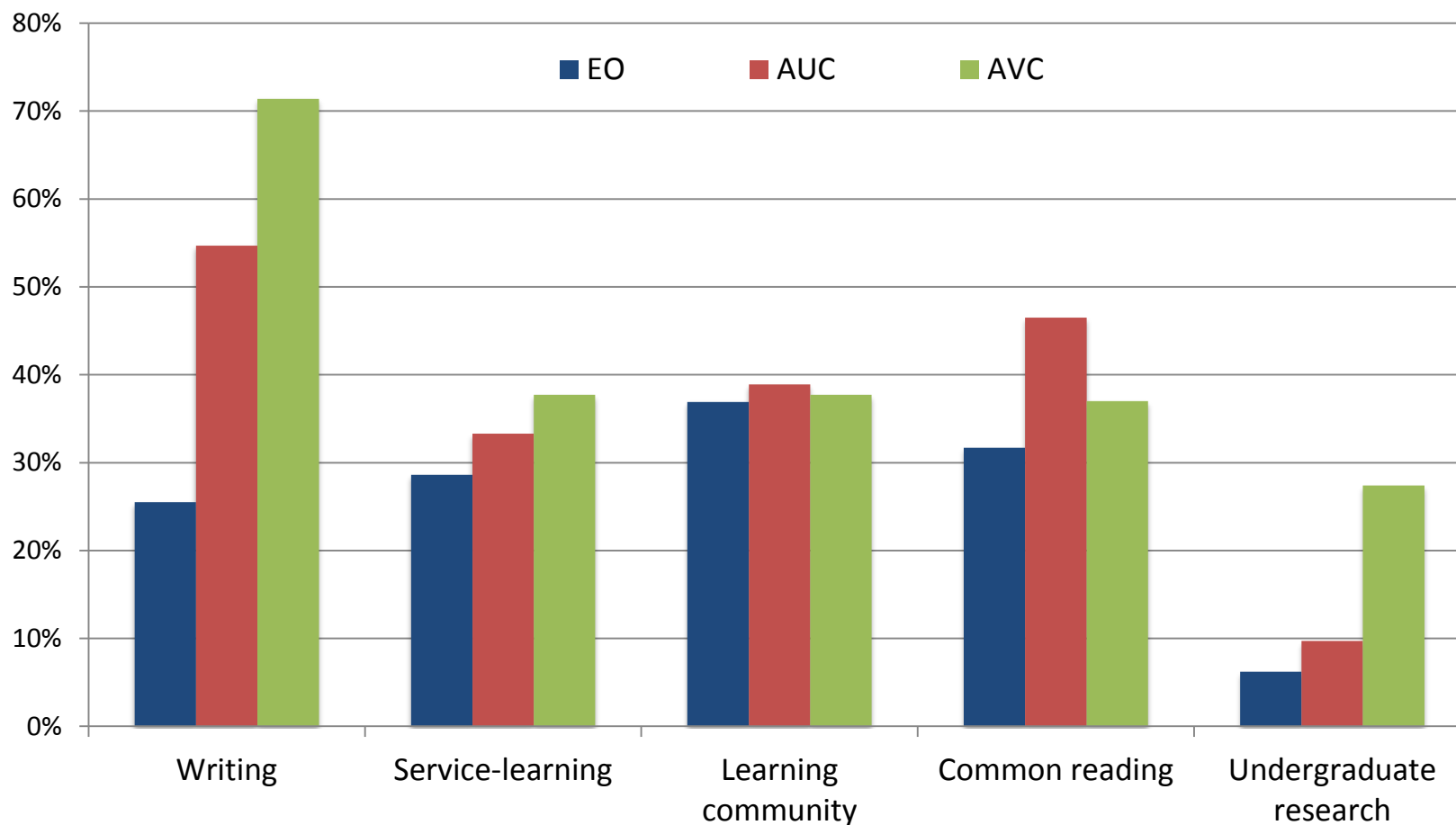
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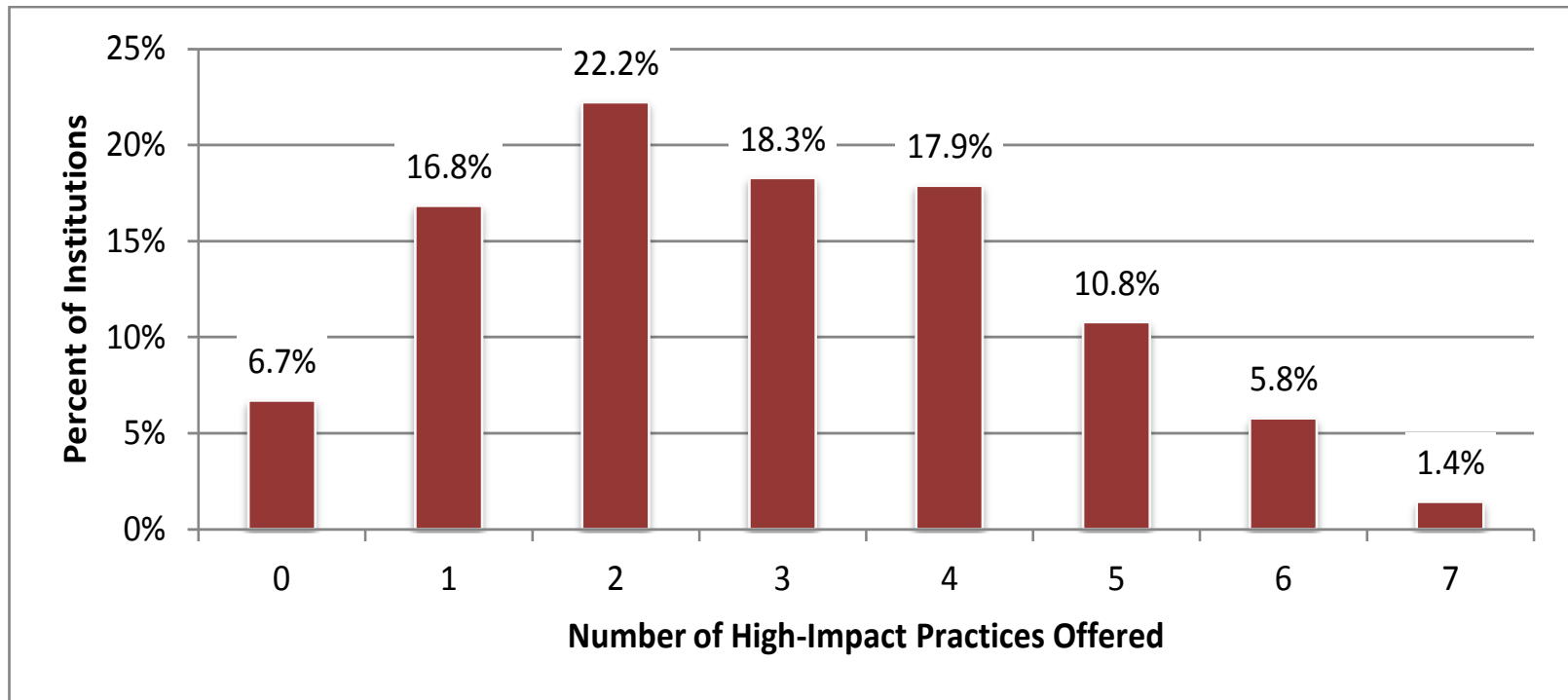
# Specific HIPs in the FYS

High-Impact Practice in the FYS	%
Collaborative assignments & projects	67.2
Diversity/Global learning	58.8
Writing-intensive	42.5
Common reading experience	38.1
Learning community	36.8
Service-learning	31.8
Undergraduate research	12.8

# HIPs by Seminar Type



# Number of HIPs Offered in the FYS



# HIPs Examined on 12-13 NSFYS

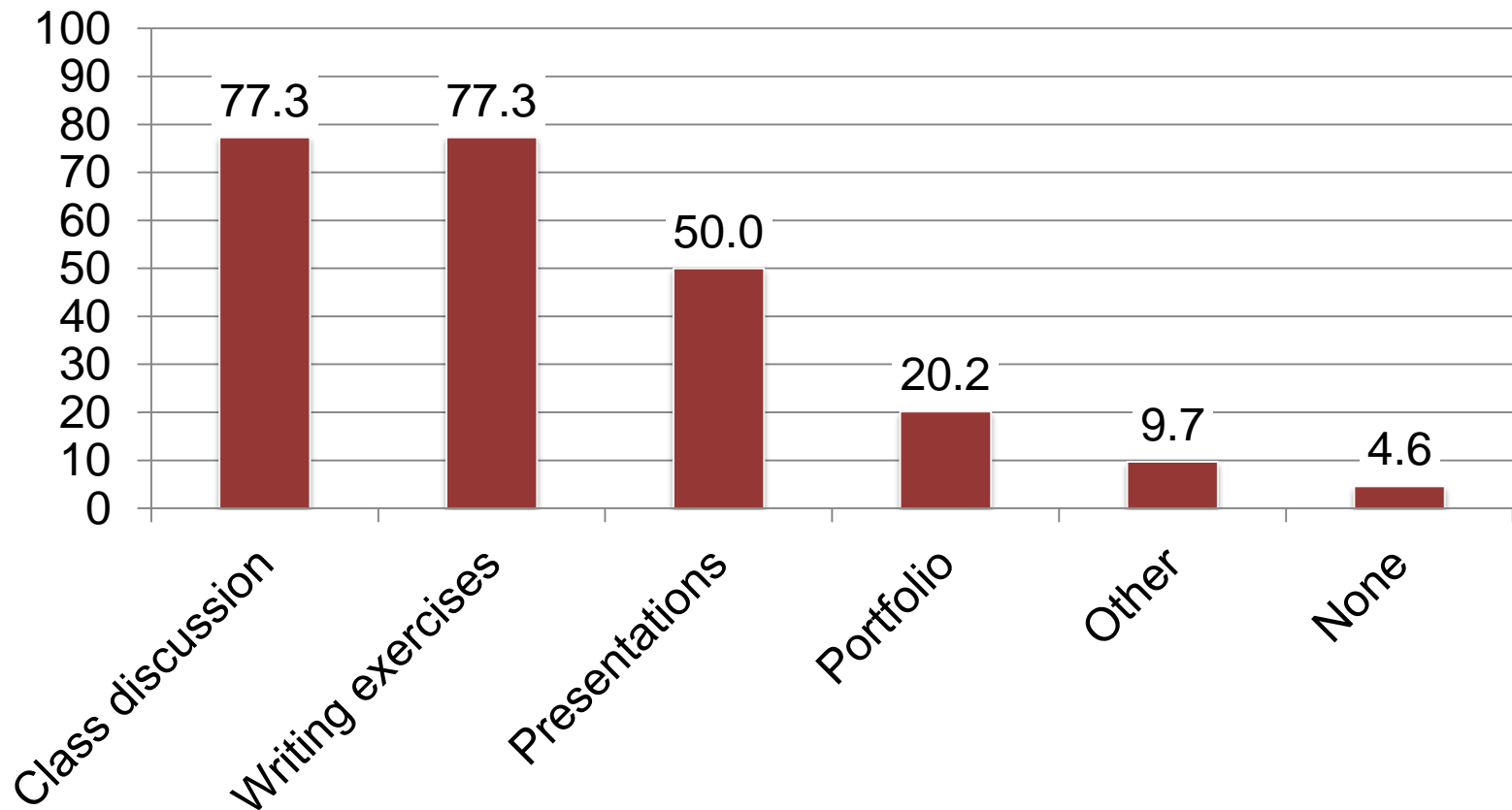
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- **Common reading experience**
- **Undergraduate research**

# Reflection Activities for Service-Learning



# Service-Learning in the FYS

- 42.4% of institutions do not indicate a specific number of service hours
- Service is often of a short duration
  - 26.5% of campuses require > five hours of service
  - 6.3% of campuses require > 10 hours of service
- Hunger/homelessness and at-risk youth are the most common focal points for service

# “Please describe how the FYS incorporates **service-learning**”

- Varies by instructor (40.9%)
- Service in the community (19.2%)
- Service in connection with the institution (14.0%)
  - Institution-based days of service
  - New student orientation activities
  - Institutionally-organized service project
- Service-based project was an assignment in FYS (13.6%)

# Learning Communities & the FYS

- Designed to serve a variety of student populations but most commonly mentioned as major-specific or at-risk student interventions
- FYS linked to a variety of general ed courses but most commonly to first-year composition
- Range from co-enrollment the thematically integrated

# Learning Communities & the FYS

<b>LC Characteristics in FYS</b>	<b>%</b>
Co-enrollment, not all courses	73.8
Coordinated course content	34.5
Common set of theme-based experiences outside of the course	33.5
Living-learning community	30.5
Course content connected by common intellectual theme	25.8
Co-enrollment, all other courses	9.1
Other	8.0

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# “What role does the FYS play in the **learning community**?”

- Linked with common courses (24.6%)
- Contribute to students' sense of belonging
  - Connecting to peers (17.6%)
  - Connecting to an academic discipline or theme (16.2%)
  - Connecting to the campus and its resources (12.5%)
- FYS was the central feature of the LC (10.3%)
- FYS and LC worked together to support students in developmental education (5.1%)

# Common Reading in the FYS

Means of incorporating common reading in FYS	%
Basis for class discussion	32.6
Required text or reading	15.8
Orientation or other campus activity	15.4
Varies by instructor/section	15.4
Basis for paper or presentation	10.9
Theme of seminar	4.9
Links FYS with other courses	1.1

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Varies by instructor/section	15.4
Basis for paper or presentation	10.9
Theme of seminar	4.9
<b>Links FYS with other courses</b>	<b>1.1</b>

# Undergraduate Research in the FYS

Means of incorporating UG research in FYS	%
Introduce research skills	17.7
Varies by instructor	17.7
Research project or paper	14.6
Presentation of research	13.5
Develop information literacy	11.5
Self-directed research	10.4
Discipline focused	8.3
Honors specific	3.1

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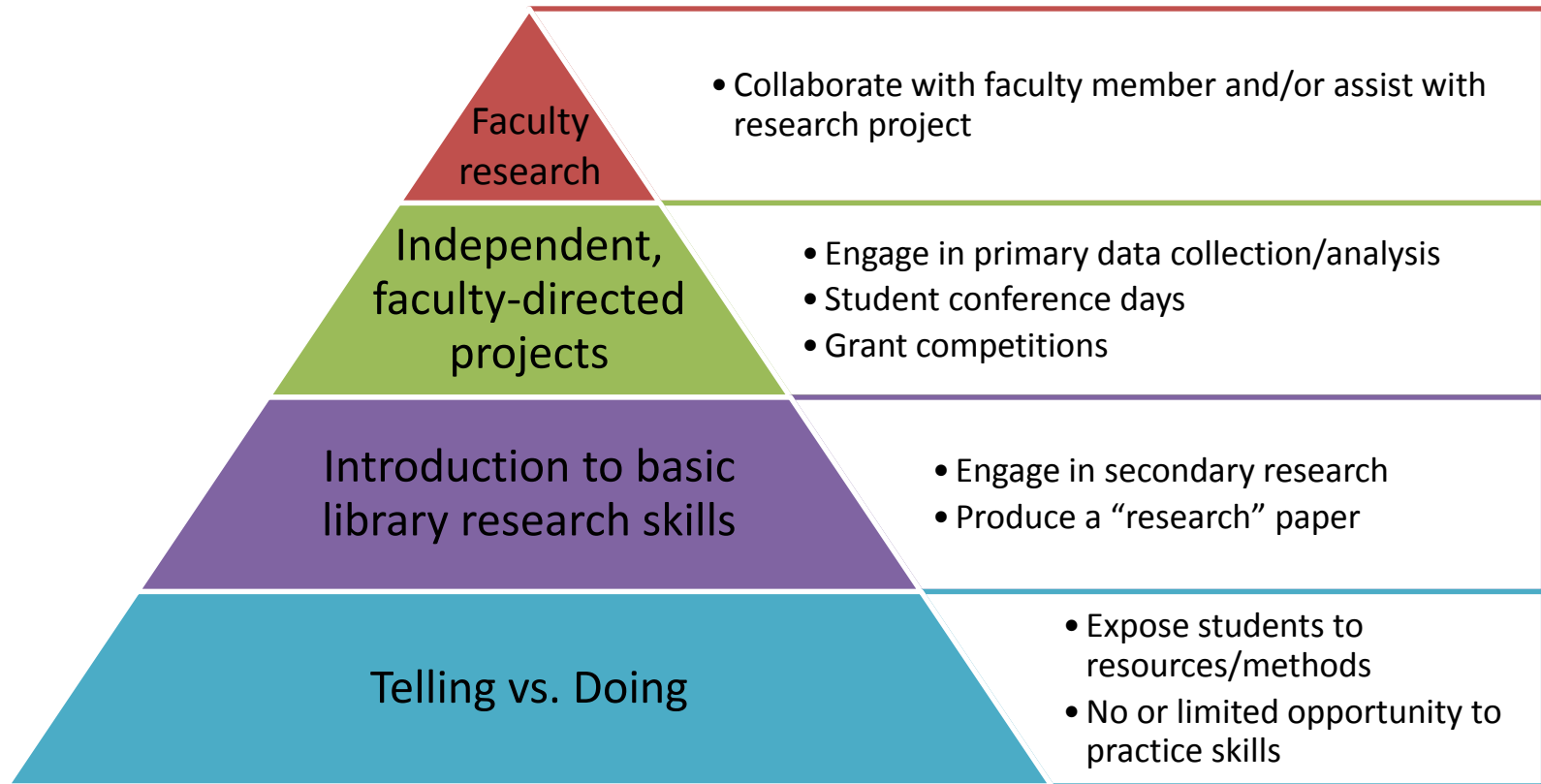
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# Undergraduate Research in the FYS



# Conclusions

- Extended Orientation Seminar still the most prevalent type of FYS
  - Academic Seminars are on the rise and are nearly as prevalent
- Course is most frequently taught by faculty on campuses
  - Large numbers of adjunct faculty and staff also teaching the course
- Nearly 4 in 10 campuses use undergraduate peer leaders in course

# Conclusions

- First-year seminars are being regularly assessed by nearly 60% of institutions
- Assessment strategies are mostly quantitative in nature
  - Most use readily available data such as course evaluations and institutional data
  - While this is a good place to start, it provides only broad-level information about student outcomes around the course
- Direct assessment of student outcomes encouraging
  - Only reported by half of institutions
- Overall, institutions are making improved efforts to assess FYS, yet still have room for improvement

# Conclusions

- High-Impact Practices:
  - FYS is a place where a number of HIPs are delivered to first-year students
  - The average institution offers the opportunity for students to engage in 4 HIPs if they enroll in FYS
  - Exceeds the recommendation by Kuh (2008) for undergraduates to participate in 2 HIPs
- Institutions would be better to focus more on quality than quantity.
  - Rather than trying to do 4 simultaneously with varying degrees of quality across all sections - think about intentionally doing 2 or 3 well.

# Thank You

## Questions/Comments?



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FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION  
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**More information available**

**2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Exploring High-Impact Practices  
in the First College Year**

**Dallin George Young and Jessica M. Hopp**

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