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2000 National Survey on First-Year Seminars

In April 2000, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition undertook its fifth national survey of first-year seminar programming in American higher education. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about the first-year seminars in American higher education.

Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs at regionally accredited colleges and universities with a student population of 150 or more were mailed survey instrument with invitation to participate in the survey. A total of 2,597 institutions received invitations to participate in the survey. A total of 1,013 responded to the survey.

- » 2,537 survey invitations distributed
- » 1,013 surveys completed (39.9% response rate)
- » 749 institutions responded that they offer first-year seminars

Description of Seminar Respondents by Seminar Type (n = 749)

	Frequency	Percentage
Extended orientation	465	62.1
Academic (common content)	125	16.7
Academic (variable content)	96	12.8
Basic study skills	27	3.6
Professional	20	2.7
Other*	16	2.1

Note. *Not included in data analysis due to small numbers.

Course Objectives and Topics

Respondents were asked to identify three primary course objectives of their first-year seminar. The three most frequently reported objectives were to develop essential academic skills (72.6%, $n = 506$), to ease the transition and adjustment of students to the college environment (47.9%, $n = 334$), and to provide an orientation to campus resources and facilities (21.9%, $n = 153$). **Note.* Percentages do not add up to 100%.

Respondents were asked to identify the five most important topics that comprise the content of the first-year seminars. The five most frequently reported topics were:

1. Academic skills (86.9%, $n = 436$)
2. Time management (39.8%, $n = 200$)
3. Personal development/self-awareness (33.1%, $n = 166$)
4. Transition to college (25.1%, $n = 126$)
5. Career exploration (22.7%, $n = 114$)

Academic Credit and Grading Practices

Most of the respondents (90%, $n = 668$) indicated that their first-year seminars are offered for academic credit. Of those 668, 46.8% ($n = 314$) listed one credit hour, 29.0% ($n = 194$) listed three credit hours, and 16.2% ($n = 108$) listed their courses carrying two credit hours.

Almost half (42.8%, $n = 287$) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards elective credit, while 34.7% ($n = 232$) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards general education requirements, and 22.0% ($n = 147$) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply toward core requirements. Only 4.8% ($n = 32$) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards major requirements.

*Note. Percentages add up to more than 100%, because some schools offer varying levels of application of credit for their seminars.

Type of Seminar	Pass/Fail	Letter Grade
Extended orientation	25.2%	74.8%
Academic (common content)	6.5%	93.5%
Academic (variable content)	9.4%	90.6%
Professional	15.8%	84.2%
Basic study skills	20.0%	80.0%

Seminar as Required Course, Special Sections, and Course Enrollment Levels

Almost half (49.9%, $n = 371$) of responding institutions require their first-year seminars for all first-year students, while 30.4% of institutions ($n = 226$) indicate that the seminar is required for some but not all students, and 19.7% of institutions ($n = 147$) do not require the seminar for any of its first-year students.

Most of the respondents reported offering special sections for unique populations on their campus. The top three student sub-populations reported for having a special first-year seminar section were students within a specific major (16.8%, $n = 126$), academically underprepared students (15.0%, $n = 112$), and honors students (14.0%, $n = 105$).

10.7% of responding institutions provide a special section of the seminar for transfer students new to their campus. Extended orientation was the most common type of seminar for transfer students.

Type of Seminar	Transfer Section Offered	No Transfer Section Offered
Extended orientation	13.4%	86.6%
Academic (common content)	8.9%	91.1%
Academic (variable content)	3.2%	96.8%
Professional	5.0%	95.0%
Basic study skills	0.0%	100.0%

Maximum Section Enrollment	Frequency	Percentage
Fewer than 10	6	0.9
11 – 20	316	46.6
21 – 30	281	41.4
More than 30	75	11.1

Administrative Unit, Learning Communities, and Level of Campus Support

“Nearly a quarter of first-year seminars are housed in an academic college or division, while an additional 19% are housed under general academic affairs” (Skipper, 2002, p.58).

With regard to learning communities 25.1% ($n = 186$) reported linked courses with seminars to create learning communities.

Type of Institution ($n = 740$)	Seminar Linked	Seminar Not Linked
Two-year	23.4%	76.6%
Four-year	25.7%	74.3%
Institutional Affiliation ($n = 738$)		
Private	15.3%	84.7%
Public	34.0%	66.0%

Over half (53.8%, $n = 397$) of all responding institutions listed a medium level campus support, while 40.0% ($n = 295$) reported a high level of campus support. Only 6.3% ($n = 46$) of institutions reported campus support as low.

Teaching Responsibility, Team Teaching, Instructor Training, Connection to Advisor

Teaching Responsibility	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty	666	88.9
Student affairs professionals	404	53.9
Other campus professionals	279	37.3
Undergraduate students	75	10.0
Graduate students	27	4.9
Other	25	3.3

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

“Approximately one-third of institutions responding to the survey use teams to teach the first-year seminar. Teaching teams can take any number of forms. Common examples of teaching teams reported include: two faculty members from different disciplines, two faculty members from the same department, faculty member paired with a student affairs or academic affairs administrator, and faculty member or professional staff member teamed with an undergraduate teaching assistant or peer leader” (Skipper, 2002, p. 45).

With regard to instructor training, 77.2% ($n = 571$) of responding institutions offer training for their first-year seminar instructors, while 49.4% ($n = 357$) require training for their first-year seminar instructors. “Instructor training programs tend to be brief, with nearly one third of institutions reporting that training takes place in half a day or less. A little more than 20% of institutions offer two-day training sessions, and slightly less than 20% offer two-day training opportunities” (Skipper, 2002, p. 54).

“Only 4.8% ($n = 32$) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards major requirements.”

Role of Instructor as Academic Advisor by Seminar Type (n = 740)

Type of seminar	Advises Seminar Students	Does Not Advise Seminar Students
Extended orientation	15.5%	84.5%
Academic (common content)	30.6%	69.4%
Academic (variable content)	30.8%	69.2%
Professional	30.0%	70.0%
Basic study skills	3.7%	96.3%

Age of Seminars

Nearly forty percent (37.7%, $n = 268$) of institutions participating in the survey report having first-year seminars that have been offered for less than five years, 29.7% ($n = 211$) report having first-year seminars for six to ten years, and 17.6% ($n = 125$) report having first-year seminars for eleven to fifteen.

Seminar Evaluation and Results Attributed to Seminars

Regarding formal evaluation of course outcomes, 57.1% of institutions report student satisfaction with the course and instructor, 33.0% report increased persistence to sophomore year, 32.3% report student satisfaction with the institution, 29.8% report increased content knowledge/improved academic abilities, and 25.2% report increased use of campus services.

**Note.* Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

More information on this survey can be found in *The First-Year Experience Monograph Series #35*.