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2003 National Survey on First-Year Seminars

In October 2003, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted its sixth national survey of first-year seminar programming in American higher education. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about first-year seminars in American higher education.

Chief Academic Officers or Chief Executive Officers at regionally accredited colleges and universities with undergraduate and lower divisions were e-mailed a link to the web-based survey. Institutions without working e-mail addresses (511 schools) were sent paper letters directing them to the survey website. A total of 3,258 institutions received invitations to participate in the survey. A total of 771 institutions responded to the survey.

- » 3,258 survey invitations distributed
- » 771 surveys completed (23.7% response rate)
- » 629 institutions responded that they offer first-year seminars

**Note. All data below reflects only those schools that are non-proprietary and offer a first-year seminar.*

	Frequency	Percentage
Extended orientation (EO)	405	65.2
Academic (uniform content) (AUC)	170	27.4
Academic (variable content) (AVC)	151	24.3
Basic study skills (BSS)	124	20.0
Pre-professional (PRE)	88	14.2
Other	51	8.2

Note. Percentage does not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Course Objectives and Topics

“Survey respondents were asked to select the three most important objectives of their seminars. The two most frequently selected objectives were to develop academic skills (63.4%) and to orient students to campus resources and services (59.6%). Retention to the sophomore year was selected by 26.7%” (Cox, 2005, p.81).

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. Study skills (*n* = 390, 62.8%)
2. Campus resources (*n* = 382, 61.5%)
3. Time management (*n* = 371, 59.7%)
4. Academic Planning/Advising (*n* = 361, 58.1%)
5. Critical Thinking (*n* = 325, 52.3%)

Academic Credit and Grading Practices

Most of the respondents (89.9%, *n* = 522) indicated that their first-year seminars are offered for academic credit. Of those 522, 49.5% (*n* = 273) listed one credit hour, 31.2% (*n* = 172) listed three credit hours, and 13.2% (*n* = 73) listed their courses carrying two credit hours.

More than half (57.3%, *n* = 316) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards general education requirements, while 42% (*n* = 232) of institutions allow the first-year

seminar to apply as an elective. Only 6% ($n = 33$) 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.

Method of Grading Across All Institutions (n = 620)

Assessment Method	Frequency	Percentage
Letter grade	489	78.9
Pass / fail	115	18.5
No grade	16	2.6

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

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

Almost half (46.8%, $n = 288$) of responding institutions require their first-year seminars for all first-year students, while 33.3% of institutions ($n = 205$) indicate that the seminar is required for some but not all students, and 19.8% of institutions ($n = 122$) do not require the seminar for any of its first-year students.

While 44.8% ($n = 278$) reported that they do not offer any special sections for unique populations, a number were offered with the highest percentages offering special sections for academically underprepared (20.6%, $n = 128$), honors students (18.2%, $n = 113$), and learning community participants (15.3%, $n = 95$). *Note. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Percentage of Respondents Reporting Approximate Class Size Across All Institutions (n = 618)

	Frequency	Percentage
Under 10	7	1.1
10-15	106	17.2
16-20	223	36.1
21-25	208	33.7
Other	74	12.0

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Administrative Unit, Learning Communities, and Service-Learning Component

“The unit most frequently cited as directly administering the seminars was academic affairs (46.2%). Seminars were administered by first-year program offices at only 10.5% of the responding institutions. While more than three fourths (77.3%) of respondents indicated that the seminar had a director / coordinator, this position was frequently less than full time (66.0%). Most of the directors / coordinators with other positions were members of the faculty (51.1%). The administrative home of the seminar and the existence and status of a coordinator/ director varied by seminar type, institutional affiliation, and enrollment” (Cox, 2005, p.77).

With regard to learning communities, 24.8% ($n = 152$) reported linked courses with seminars to create learning communities. 23.7% ($n = 145$) of institutions reported having a service-learning component in their first-year seminars.

<i>Seminar is Part of Learning Community by Institutional Affiliation (n = 612)</i>		
	Private (n = 310)	Public (n = 302)
Frequency	47	105
Percentage	15.2	34.8

<i>Seminar Includes Service-Learning Component by Institutional Affiliation (n = 611)</i>		
	Private (n = 309)	Public (n = 302)
Frequency	99	46
Percentage	32.0	15.2

Teaching Responsibility, Team Teaching, Instructor Training, Connection to Academic Advising

<i>Teaching Responsibility by Institutional Affiliation (n = 620)</i>		
	Private (n = 314)	Public (n = 306)
Faculty	90.8%	88.9%
Student affairs professionals**	38.2%	52.6%
Other campus professionals	28.3%	33.7%
Graduate students**	1.6%	7.2%
Undergraduate students**	9.2%	3.3%

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.
** $p < 0.01$

“Respondents were asked two questions regarding the use of team teaching in their seminars. First, they were asked if any seminar sections were team taught. They were then asked what percent of the sections were team taught. While 39.9% of the schools reported offering some sections employing team teaching, while most schools (56.4%) used team teaching in less than 25% of their sections. Private schools were more likely than public schools to team teach all of their sections (35.0% and 18.6%, respectively)” (Cox, 2005, p.61).

With regard to instructor training, 72.4% ($n = 443$) of responding institutions offer training for their first-year seminar instructors, while 68.8% ($n = 302$) require training for their first-year seminar instructors. “Most training sessions were short, with 36.1% lasting half a day or less, 22.8% lasting one day, and 17.8% lasting two days. Only half (50.0%) of the highly selective responding institutions required instructors to attend training; 70.6% of the other institutions required the training” (Cox, 2005, p.67).

<i>Institutions with Sections Taught by Academic Advisor by Institutional Affiliation (n=617)</i>		
	Private (n = 313)	Public (n = 304)
Frequency	113	758
Percentage	36.1	24.7

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.
** $p < 0.01$

“The unit most frequently cited as directly administering the seminars was academic affairs (46.2%).”

Age of Seminars

Over half of institutions participating in the survey (50.2%, $n = 358$) report having first-year seminars that have been offered for three to ten years, 41.1% ($n = 250$) institutions report having first-year seminars that have been offered for more than ten years, and only 8.7% ($n = 53$) report having first-year seminars that have been offered for two years or less.

Seminar Evaluation and Results Attributed to Seminars

Over half of all respondents (52.4%, $n = 322$) indicate that they have conducted a formal program evaluation since fall 2000.

<i>Results Attributed to First-Year Seminars by Institutional Affiliation (n = 322)</i>		
Improved or Increased	Private (n = 180)	Public (n = 142)
Persistence to sophomore year**	48.3%	71.8%
Student connection with peers	60.6%	55.6%
Student use of campus services	48.3%	54.9%
Student satisfaction with the institution	18.3%	53.5%
Out-of-class student/faculty interaction	17.8%	41.6%
Level of student participation in campus activities	42.8%	40.1%
Academic abilities*	31.1%	42.3%
Student satisfaction with faculty	30.6%	31.7%
Grade point average**	16.1%	40.1%
Persistence to graduation**	12.2%	26.1%
Other	11.7%	8.5%

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

More information on this survey can be found in **The First-Year Experience Monograph Series #41**.