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2006 National Survey on First-Year Seminars

In November 2006, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition undertook its seventh national survey of first-year seminar programming in American higher education. The purpose of the study was to gather information about first-year seminars in American higher education.

Chief Academic Officers, Chief Executive Officers, or Chief Student Affairs Officers at regionally accredited colleges and universities with undergraduate and lower divisions were e-mailed a link to the web-based survey. A total of 2,646 institutions received invitations to participate in the survey. A total of 968 responded to the survey.

- » 2,646 survey invitations distributed
- » 968 surveys completed (36.6% response rate)
- » 821 institutions reported that they offer first-year seminars

Respondents Offering Each Type of Seminar Across All Institutions (n=821)

Seminar Type	Frequency	Percentage
Extended orientation	475	57.9
Academic (uniform content)	231	28.1
Academic (variable content)	211	25.7
Basic study skills	177	21.6
Pre-professional or discipline-linked	122	14.9
Hybrid	167	20.3
Other	36	4.4

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

Course Objectives and Topics

“Survey respondents were asked to select the three most important seminar objectives. The two most frequently selected objectives were to develop academic skills (64.2%) and to orient students to campus resources and services (52.9%)” (Griffin and Tobolowsky, 2008, p.83).

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* = 335, 40.8%)
2. Critical Thinking (*n* = 333, 40.6%)
3. Campus resources (*n* = 313, 38.1%)
4. Academic Planning/Advising (*n* = 301, 36.7%)
5. Time management (*n* = 235, 28.6%)

Academic Credit and Grading Practices

Most of the respondents (92.2%, *n* = 742) indicated that their first-year seminars are offered for academic credit. Of those 742, 42.5% (*n* = 313) listed one credit hour, 32.7% (*n* = 241) listed three credit hours, and 12.6% (*n* = 93) listed their courses carrying two credit hours.

More than half (50.4%, *n* = 414) of institutions allow the first-year seminar to apply towards general education requirements, while 40.3% (*n* = 331) of institutions allow the first-year

seminar to apply as an elective. Only 9.3% 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.

Grade type	Frequency	Percentage
Letter grade	664	82.0
Pass/fail	126	15.6
No grade	20	2.5

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

Almost half (46.0%, $n = 370$) of responding institutions require their first-year seminars for all first-year students, while 34.6% of institutions ($n = 278$) indicate that the seminar is required for some but not all students, and 19.4% of institutions ($n = 156$) do not require the seminar for any of its first-year students.

While 38.1% ($n = 313$) reported that they do not offer any special sections for unique populations, a number were offered with the highest percentages offering special sections for honors students (22.4%, $n = 184$), academically underprepared students (19.9%, 163), and learning community participants (18.4%, $n = 151$). *Note. Percentages do not add up to 100%. Respondents could make more than one selection.

Class size	Frequency	Percentage
Under 10	6	0.7
10-15	147	18.2
16-20	298	36.9
21-25	241	29.8
26-30	61	7.6
Over 30	55	6.8

Administrative Unit, Learning Communities, and Service-Learning Component

“Most participating institutions indicated that the division of academic affairs was the administrative home of their seminar (50.8%), with only 10.5% stating that the seminar was administered by first-year program offices” (Griffin, Romm, and Tobolowsky, 2008, p. 53).

“Almost 80% of respondents indicated that the seminar had a dean/director/coordinator, and more than 60% reported that this position was less than full-time. Across all institutions, almost 50% of the deans/directors/coordinators held other positions were members of the faculty” (Griffin, Romm, and Tobolowsky, 2008, p.56).

With regard to learning communities, 35.3% ($n = 280$) reported linked courses with seminars to create learning communities. 40.2% ($n = 322$) of institutions reported having a service-learning component in first-year seminars.

Seminar Is Part of Learning Community by Institutional Affiliation (n = 644)

	Private (n = 339)	Public (n = 305)
Frequency	94	141
Percentage	27.7	46.2

Seminar Includes Service-Learning by Institutional Affiliation (n = 650)

	Private (n = 342)	Public (n = 308)
Frequency	176	97
Percentage	51.5	31.5

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

Teaching Responsibility by Institutional Affiliation (n = 667)

Instructor for seminar	Private (n = 351)	Public (n = 316)
Faculty*	93.2%	87.7%
Student affairs professionals**	40.5%	54.1%
Other campus professionals	26.8%	28.5%
Graduate students**	3.1%	8.2%
Undergraduate students	10.3%	6.0%

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

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

“While almost half (43.7%) of responding institutions had some sections that were team-taught, very few institutions employed team-teaching in all their seminar sections (only 11.4%) (Tobolowsky and Griffin, 2008, p.65).

With regard to instructor training, 76.8% ($n = 612$) of responding institutions offer training for their first-year seminar instructors, while 52.3% ($n = 416$) require training for their first-year seminar instructors. “Most training sessions were one day or less, with 35.4% lasting half a day or less and 24.3% lasting one day. At both two-year and four-year institutions, training was most often offered for half a day or less (51.8% at two-year schools vs. 31.4% at four-year schools)” (Tobolowsky and Griffin, 2008, p.77).

Institutions with Sections Taught by Academic Advisor by Institutional Affiliation (n = 651)

	Private (n = 343)	Public (n = 308)
Frequency	138	72
Percentage	40.2	23.4

“Most of the respondents (92.2%, $n = 742$) indicated that their first-year seminars are offered for academic credit.”

Age of Seminars

Almost half of institutions participating in the survey (47.8%, $n = 387$) report having first-year seminars that have been offered for more than ten years, 42.5% ($n = 344$) report having first-year seminars for three to ten years, and only 9.8% ($n = 79$) 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 (60.2%, $n = 488$) indicate that they have conducted a formal program evaluation since fall 2003. The three most frequently selected types of evaluation were course evaluations (97.2%, $n = 457$), survey instruments (82.4%, $n = 342$), and institutional data (79.2%, $n = 300$).

<i>Results Attributed to First-Year Seminars by Institutional Affiliation (n = 404)</i>		
Seminar improved or increased	Private (n = 231)	Public (n = 173)
Persistence to sophomore year*	34.2%	53.8%
Student connection with peers	37.7%	45.7%
Student use of campus services	33.3%	36.4%
Out-of-class student/faculty interaction	36.8%	30.1%
Level of student participation in campus activities	31.2%	34.1%
Student satisfaction with the institution	36.8%	39.3%
Student satisfaction with the faculty	32.5%	24.3%
Academic abilities	27.3%	28.9%
Persistence to graduation	11.7%	21.4%
Grade point average*	6.5%	28.9%
Other	17.3%	19.7%

Note. Percentages do not equal 100%. Respondents were able to make more than one selection.

More information on this survey can be found in **The First-Year Experience Monograph Series #51**.