



## NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

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

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# Leveraging Programmatic Decision Points for First-Year Seminar Success

2013 ACPA Convention  
Las Vegas, NV

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# Session participants will....

- gain a greater understanding of what first-year seminars are, how they are organized, and the purpose they serve in the collegiate curriculum
- better understand the impact of specific seminar characteristics on student outcomes
- be able to discuss institutional challenges and best practices with respect to first-year seminars and new student success strategies

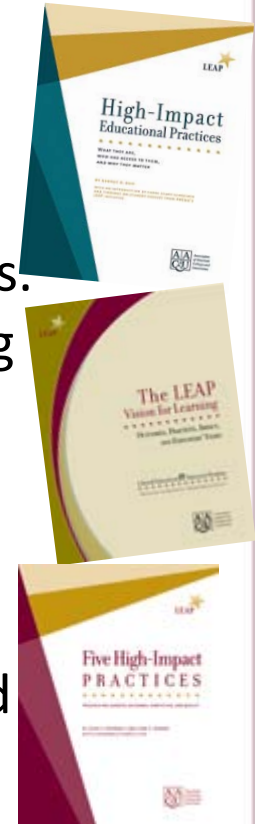
# What Is a First-Year Seminar?

A course designed to “assist students in their academic and social development and in their transition to college. A seminar, by definition, is a small discussion-based course in which students and their instructors exchange ideas and information. In most cases, there is a strong emphasis on creating community in the classroom.” (Hunter & Linder, 2005, pp. 275-276).

# FYS as High-Impact Practice

## 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.”



**What percent of colleges and universities across the United States offer a first-year seminar?**

1. 45-55%

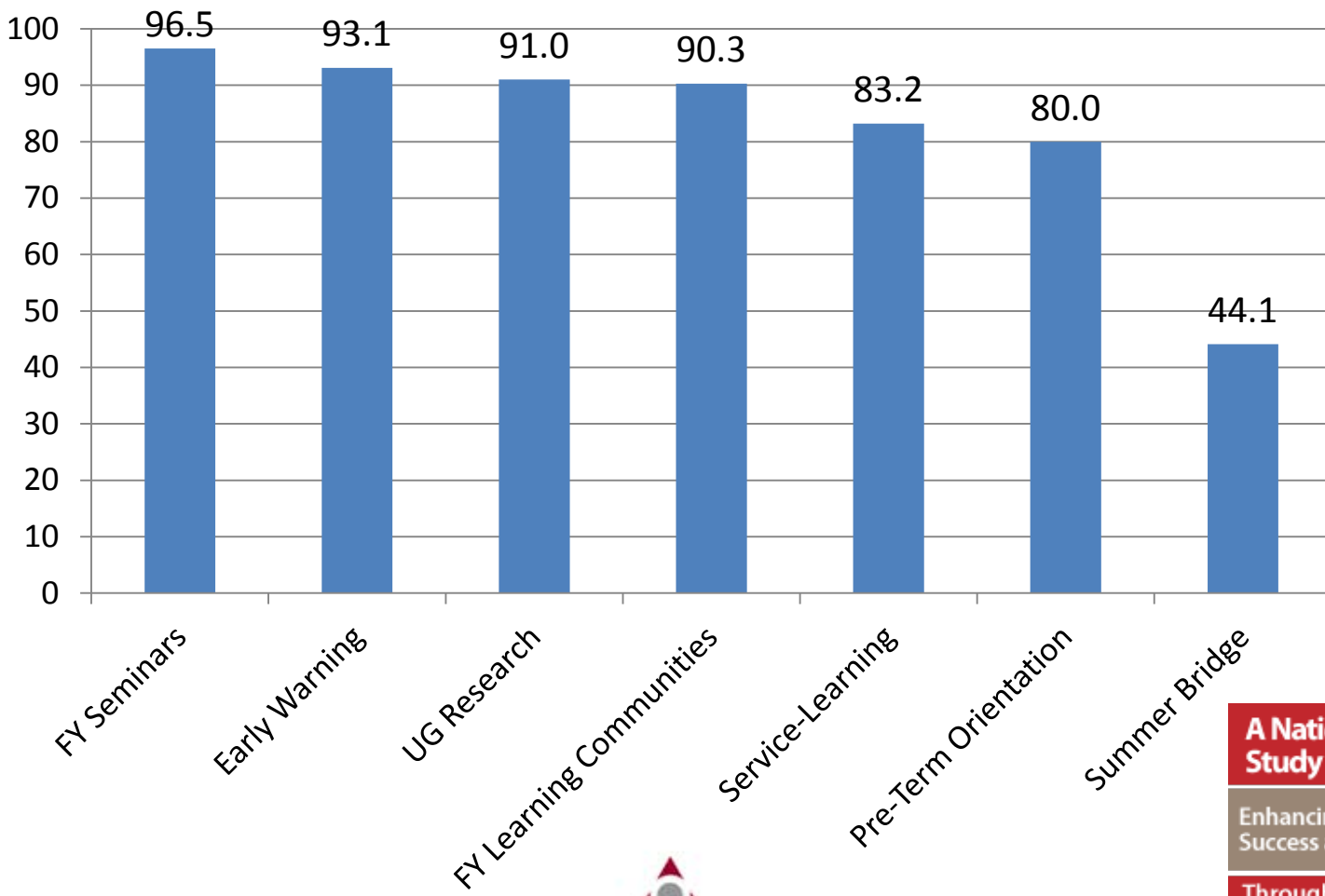
2. 56-65%

3. 66-75%

4. 76-85%



5. More than 85%




**A National Study** ★  
Enhancing Student Success and Retention  
Throughout Undergraduate Education ★

**“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, p. 403)*



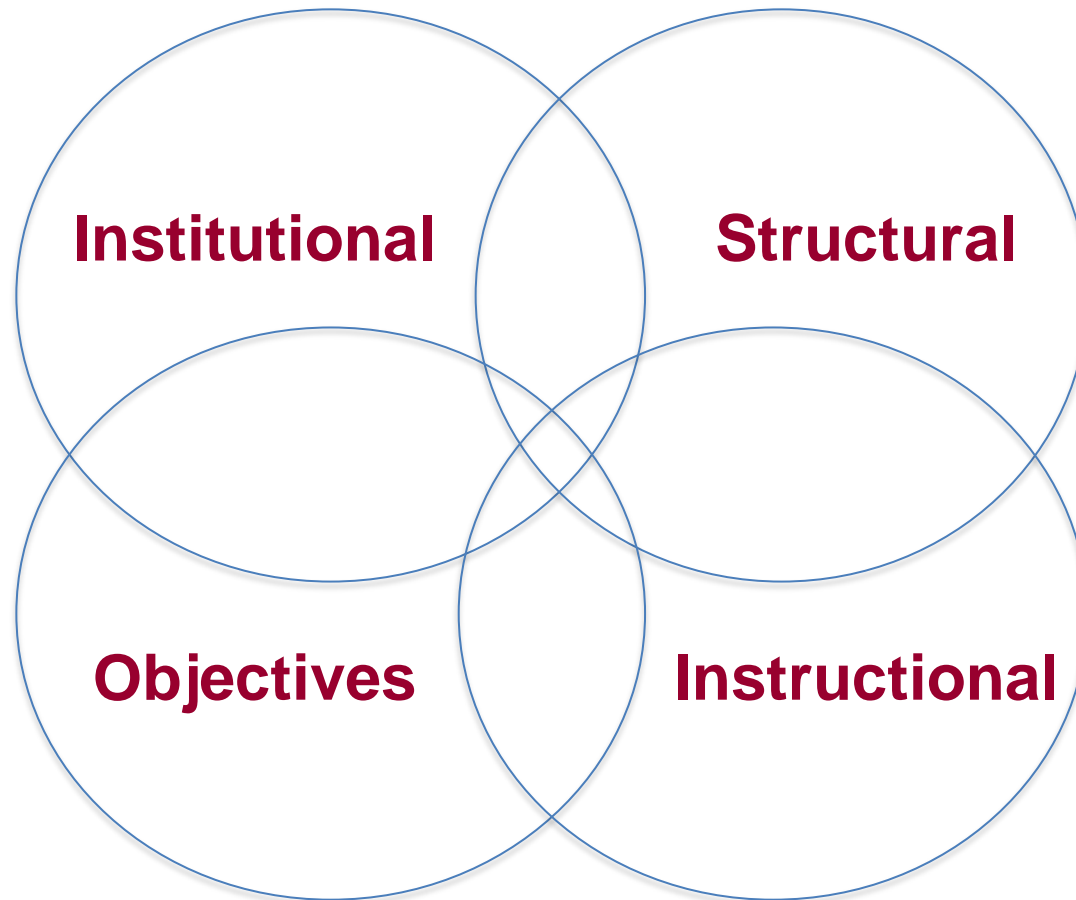




**But not all seminars are  
created equal. How do you  
go about making decisions  
to support FYS success?**

# Caveats

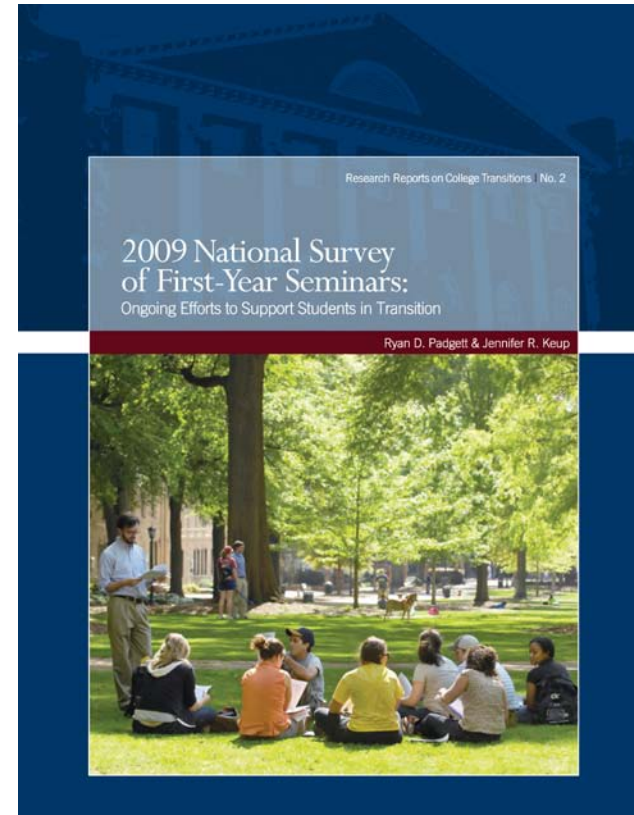
- There is no one “right” answer
- Institutional setting always “trumps” national data
  - Culture
  - Student needs
- Doing something is better than doing nothing



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# NATIONAL SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS



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# 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Administration: Oct. 30 – Dec. 18, 2010
- Invitation sent to 3,225 institutions in 3 waves:
  - Chief Academic Officer
  - Chief Executive Officer
  - Chief Student Affairs Officer
- Incentive program
- 1,028 usable responses
  - 32% response rate
  - 890 with FYS



# 2010-2011 Follow-Up Survey

- Funded by a grant from the Spencer Foundation
- Primary purpose was to gather information on student outcomes
  - Students in FYS in 2009-2010 academic year
  - General population of first-year students
- Survey sent to 890 respondents with FYS from the 2009 survey in Spring 2011
- Incentive program
- 185 usable responses

# Methods

- Descriptive statistics
- Correlations
- Series of OLS regressions on GPA and persistence
  - Institutional characteristics
  - Structural seminar characteristics
  - Instructional seminar characteristics
  - Course objectives

# Other Sources

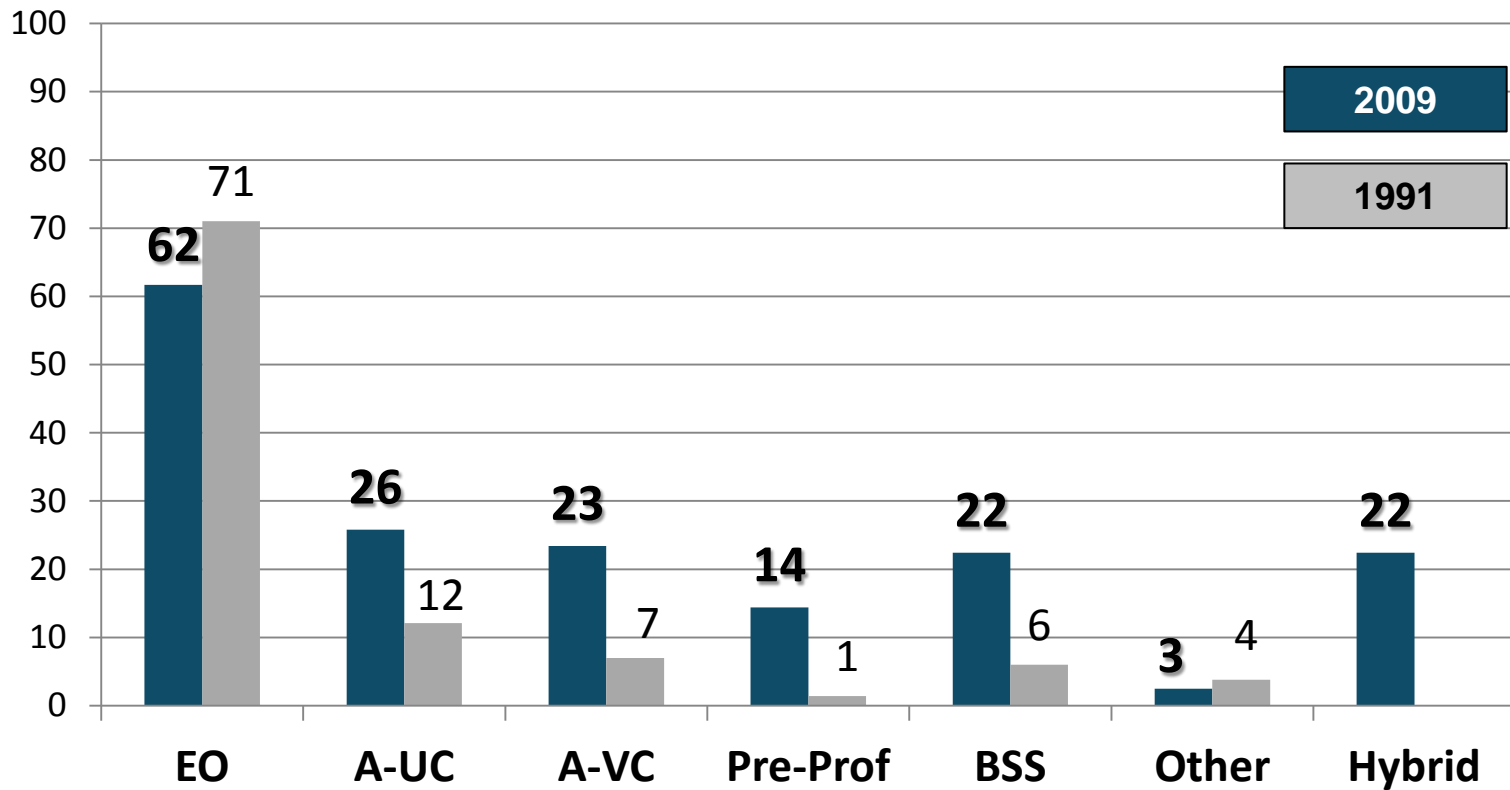
- JNGI 's Enhancing Student Success and Retention throughout Undergraduate Education: A National Survey
- Articles from *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*
- Essay series by Randy Swing on FYI
- WNSLAE findings

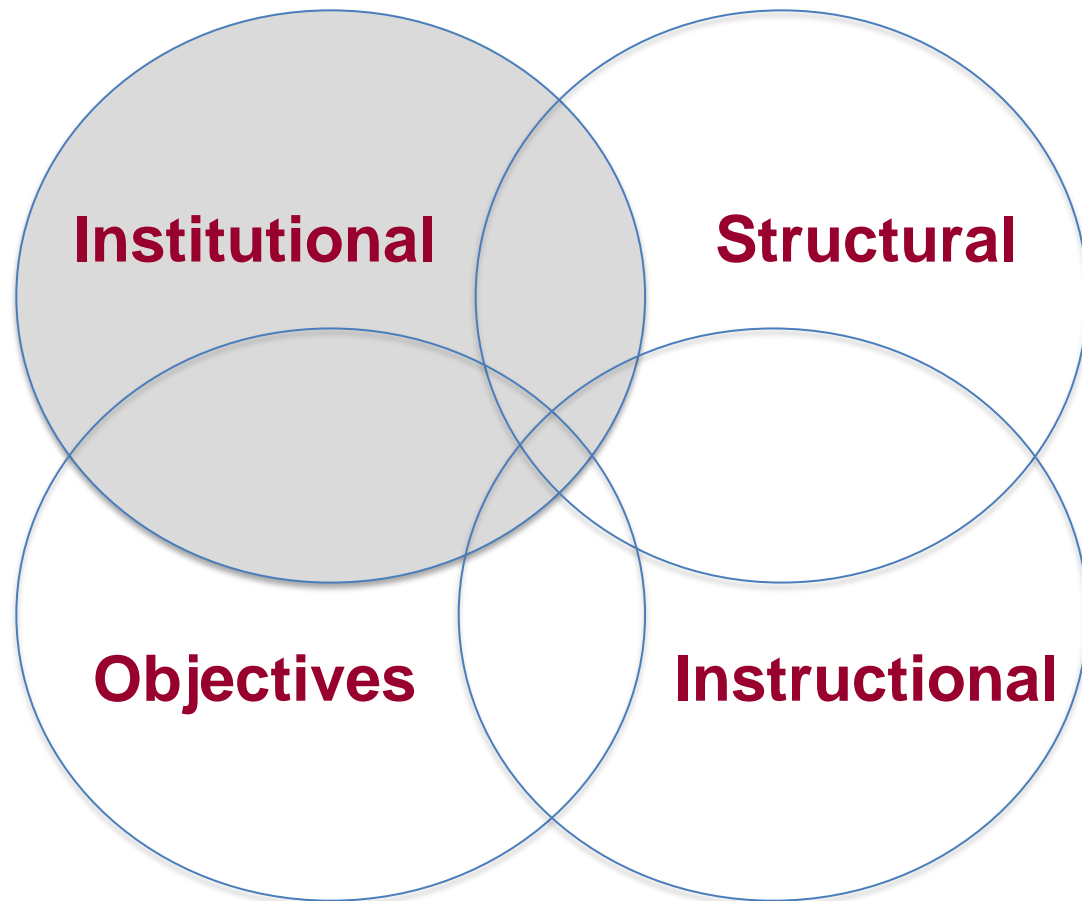


# Types of First-Year Seminars

- Extended orientation seminars
- Academic seminars with generally uniform content
- Academic seminars on various topics
- Professional or discipline-based seminars
- Basic study skills seminars
- Hybrid seminars

# All Types of FYS Offered





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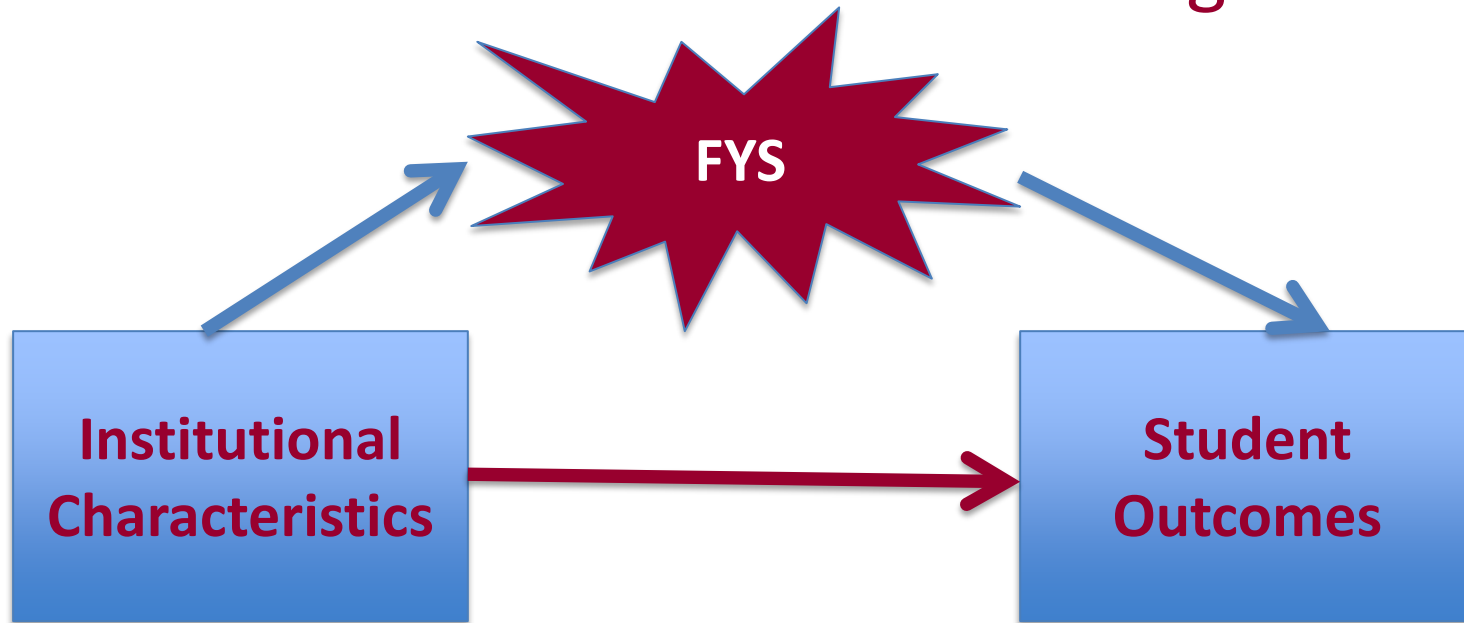
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# Institutional Characteristics & FYS

- Greater representation of FYS at 4-year campuses but growing at 2-year schools
- FYS is slightly more prominent at private institutions than public
- Tend to have FYS more frequently at larger institutions but require it less

# Institutional Characteristics & FYS

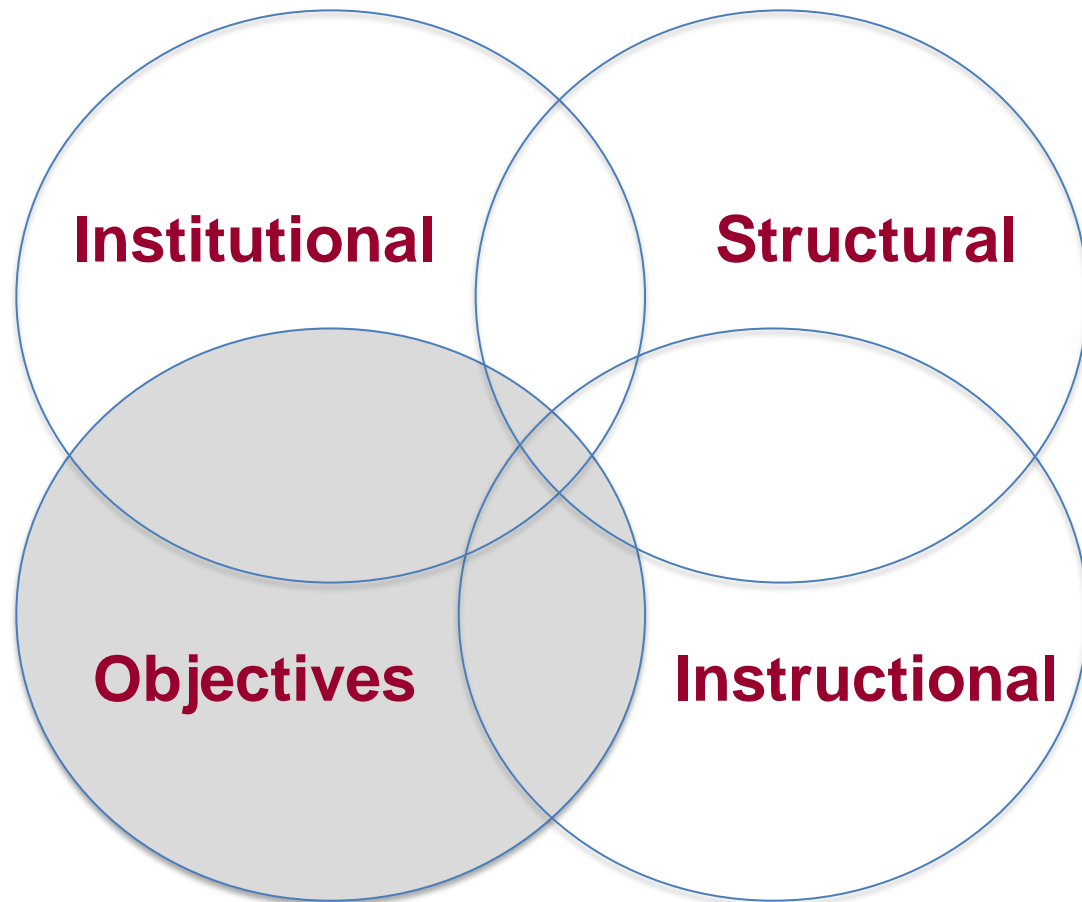
Most often FYS are a mediating force



**What institutional  
characteristics or  
limitations do you hope  
FYS will address?**



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| <b>FYS Objective</b>  | <b>%</b>    |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Develop academic skills</b>                                | <b>54.6</b> |
| <b>Develop connection w/the institution</b>                   | <b>50.2</b> |
| <b>Provide orientation to campus resources &amp; services</b> | <b>47.6</b> |
| Self-exploration/personal development                         | 28.5        |
| Create common first-year experience                           | 28.5        |
| Develop support network/friendships                           | 17.4        |
| Increase student-faculty interaction                          | 16.9        |
| Improve sophomore return rates                                | 15.5        |



| <b>FYS Assessment Outcome</b>             | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|
| Persistence to sophomore year             | 73.7     |
| Satisfaction with faculty                 | 70.9     |
| Satisfaction with institution             | 65.3     |
| Grade-point average                       | 58.0     |
| Use of campus services                    | 51.0     |
| Connections with peers                    | 49.3     |
| Participation in campus activities        | 49.0     |
| Out-of-class student/faculty interactions | 47.1     |
| Academic abilities                        | 42.0     |
| Persistence to graduation                 | 38.4     |

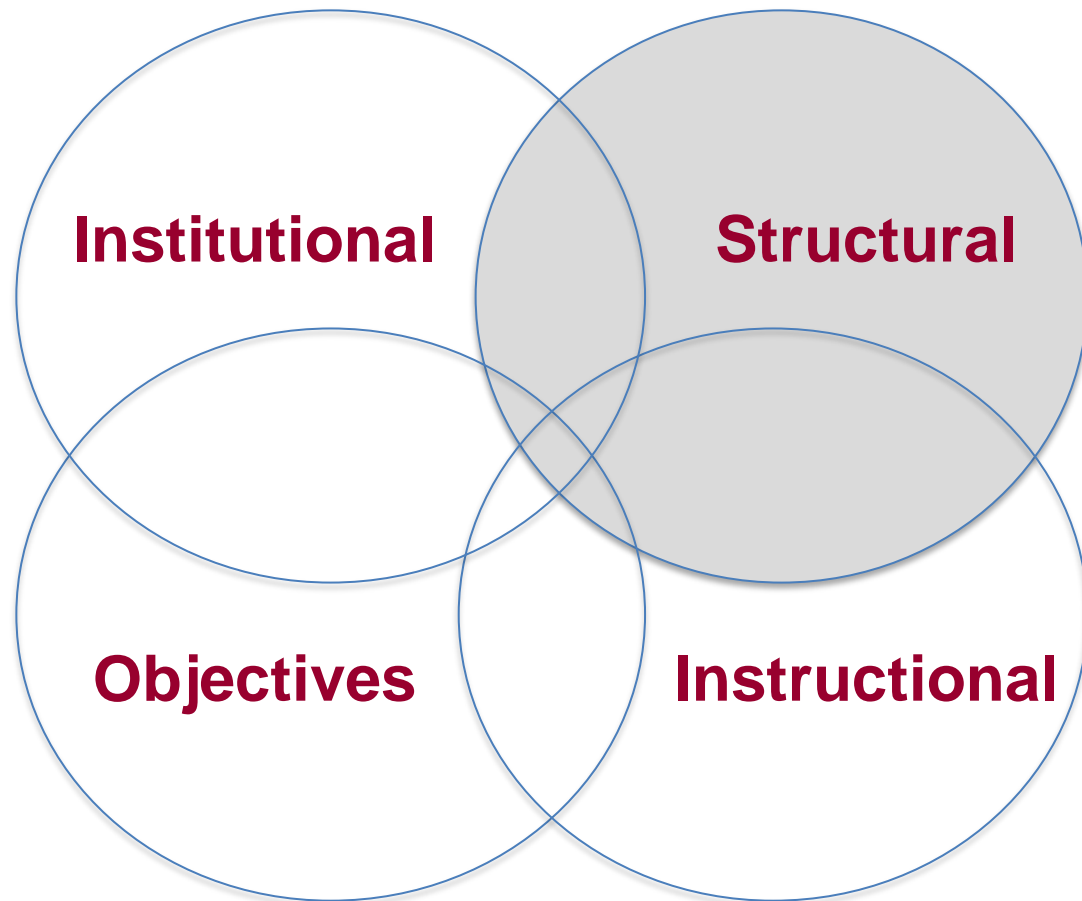
# Misalignment

“Too often program objectives represent articulation of broad learning objectives but the assessment strategy relies upon transactional measures that do not adequately capture progress and achievement of student learning and program goals.”

*Keup & Kilgo, forthcoming*

# FYS Objectives and Outcomes

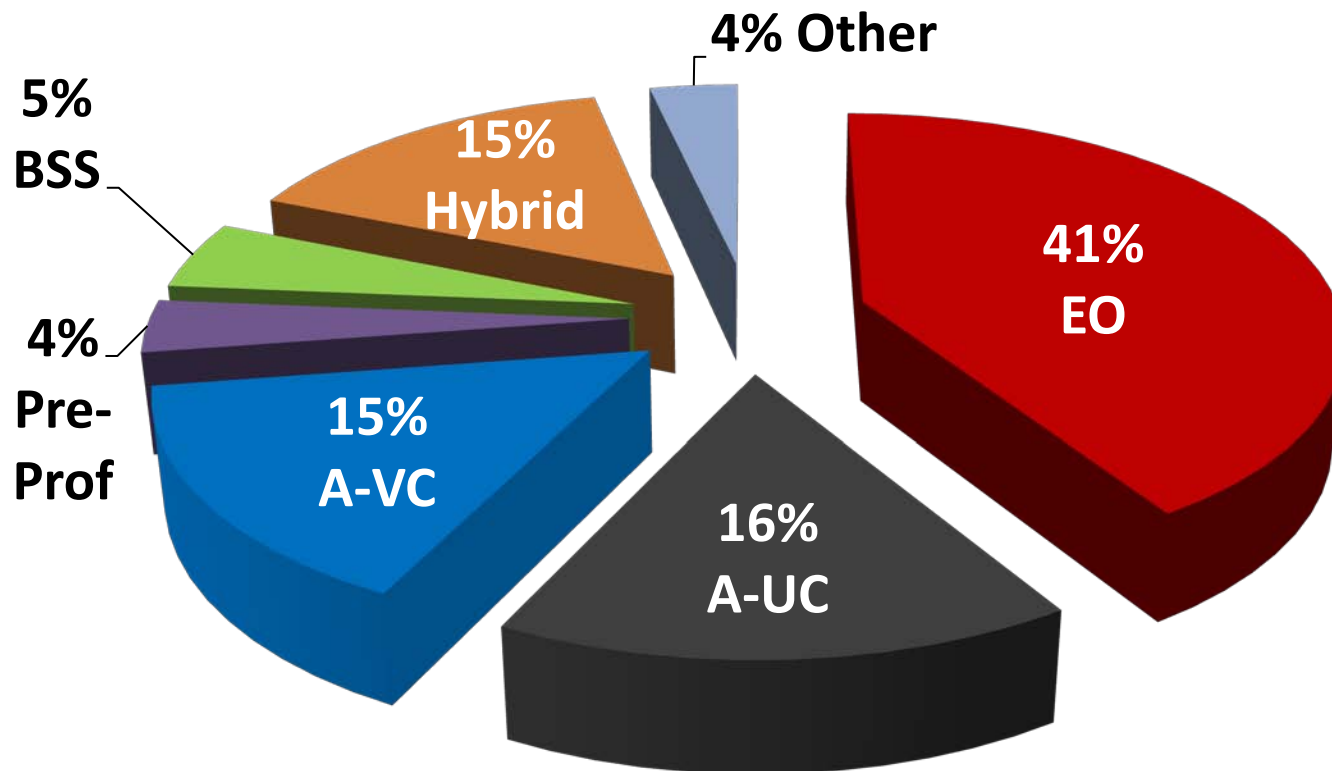
- First-to-second year retention
  - **Develop writing skills (+)**
  - **Self exploration/personal development (+)**
- Average first-year grades
  - **Improve sophomore return rates (-)**
  - Provide orientation to resources/services (-)
  - Develop writing skills (+)



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# Primary Types of FYS Offered



# Administrative Home of FYS

| Unit                      | %    |
|---------------------------|------|
| Academic affairs          | 37.0 |
| Academic department       | 16.3 |
| Student affairs           | 13.9 |
| First-year program office | 11.9 |
| College or school         | 7.9  |

75.1 % of courses have a seminar director

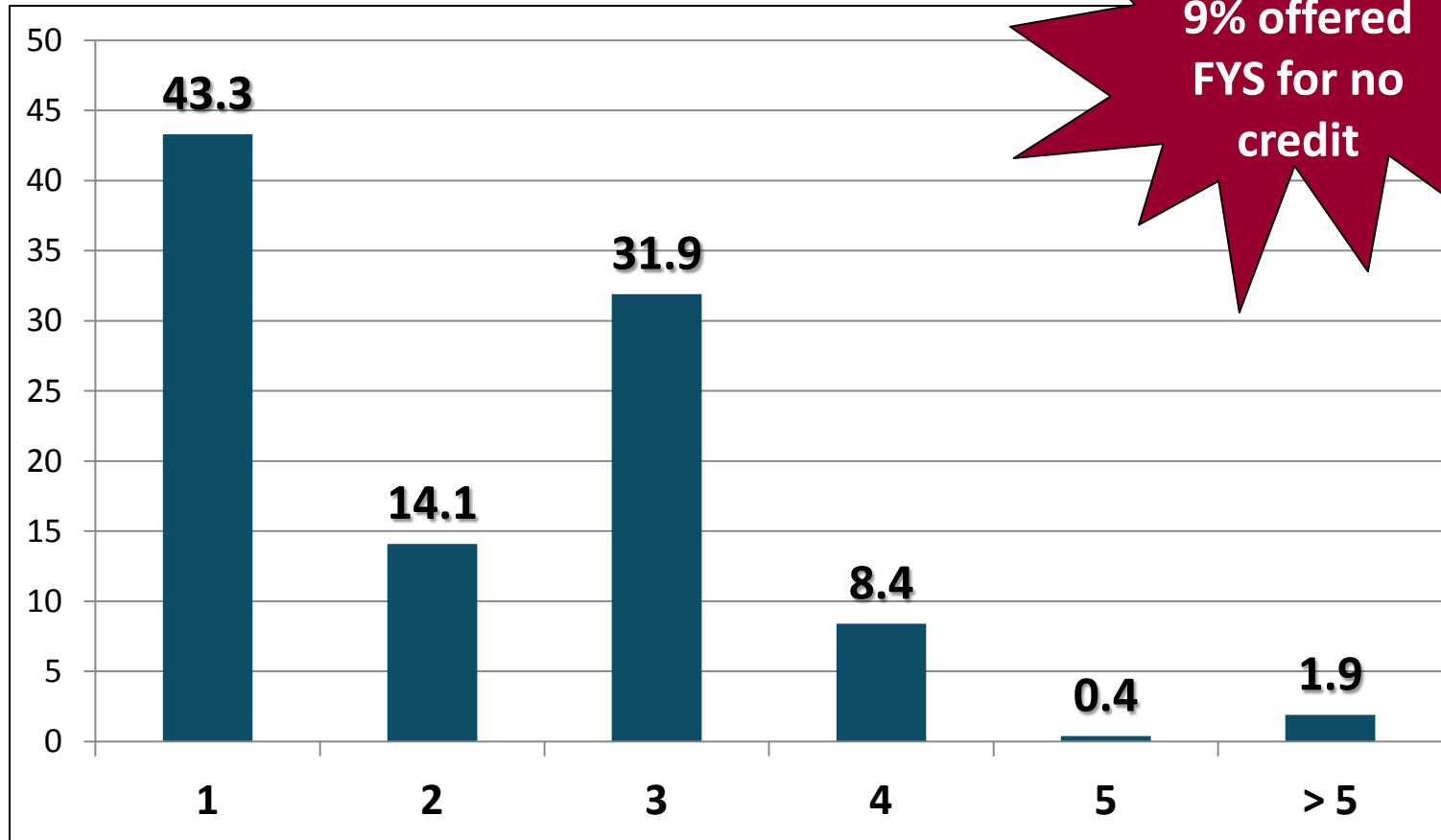
37.9% of courses directors are full time



# Administration of Seminars

- Average size of seminar program is around 30-32 sections
- A majority of seminars (58.3%) have classes enrolling 16 to 25 students
- Over one-third (39.6%) of institutions require all first-year students to take the seminar

# Credit Hours



**9% offered  
FYS for no  
credit**

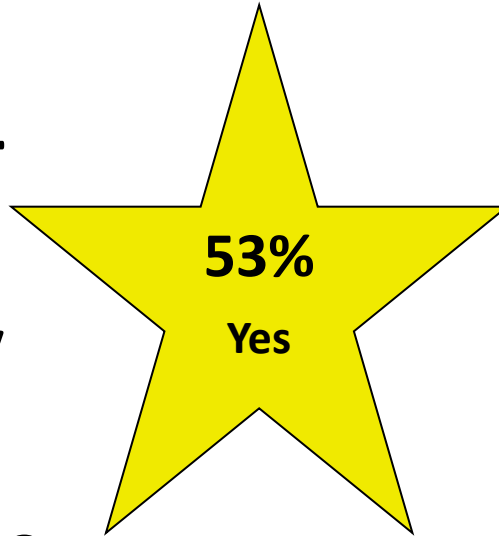


# Grading and Credit

- Most seminars (80.5%) are letter graded
- Seminar credit applies toward graduation in most cases
  - General education—53.1%
  - As an elective—39.8%
  - To the major—9.7%

# Assessment

**Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated in the past three years?**



9% don't know



# Assessment Methods

| <b>Assessment</b>                | <b>%</b>    |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Student course evaluation</b> | <b>94.9</b> |
| <b>Survey instrument</b>         | <b>75.3</b> |
| <b>Institutional data</b>        | <b>75.3</b> |
| <b>Focus groups: instructors</b> | <b>51.3</b> |
| <b>Interviews: instructors</b>   | <b>45.6</b> |
| <b>Focus groups: students</b>    | <b>42.6</b> |
| <b>Interviews: students</b>      | <b>30.2</b> |

# Seminar Type and Outcomes

- Discipline-Based/Pre-Professional Seminars
  - Knowledge of campus policies/procedures (+)
  - General effectiveness on learning outcomes (-)
- Academic Seminars
  - Cognitive/academic skills (+)
  - Critical thinking skills (+)

*(Swing, 2002)*

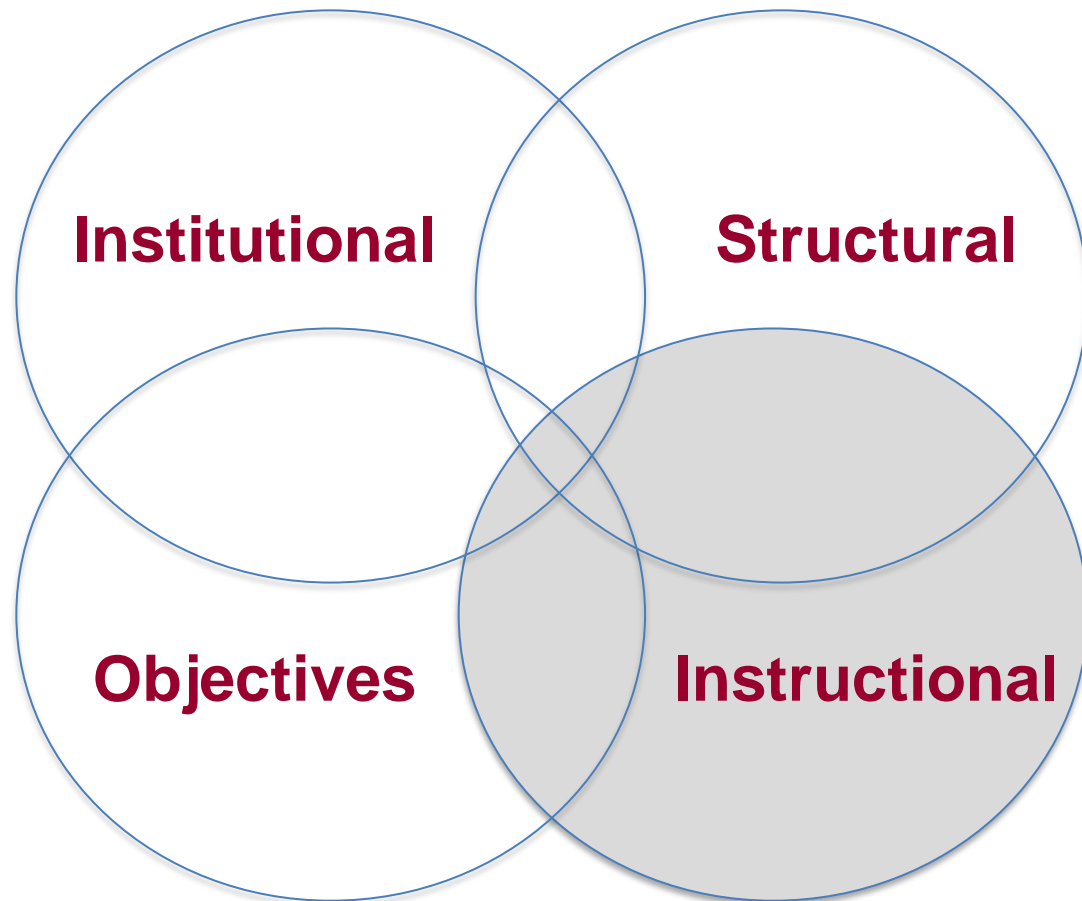
# Seminar Type and Outcomes

- Extended Orientation Seminars
  - Out-of-class engagement (+)
  - Study strategies (+)
  - Knowledge of academic services (+)
  - Knowledge of wellness issues (+)

*(Swing, 2002)*

# FYS Structures and Outcomes

- First-to-second year retention
  - Number of credits (+)
  - Administered by Student Affairs (-)
- Average first-year grades
  - **Number of credits (+)**
  - **Seminar class size (-)**
  - **Seminar has been assessed (-)**



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# Who Teaches the Seminar?

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| <b>Instructor</b>             | <b>%</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Tenure-track faculty          | 61.4     |
| FT non-tenure-track faculty   | 54.4     |
| Student affairs professionals | 48.2     |
| Adjunct faculty               | 46.0     |
| Other campus professionals    | 29.9     |
| Graduate students             | 5.6      |
| Undergraduate students        | 5.1      |

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# Who Teaches the Seminar?

- 43.7% of institutions have some team taught sections of the seminar
- 8.6% team teach all sections
- 31.2% of institutions have some sections of the seminar taught by the students' academic advisors

# FYS Instructor Training

- 76.1% of institutions offer instructor training
- 50.1% of institutions require instructor training
- 58.4% offer training that is one day or less
- Many of the responses in the “other” category of training duration indicated longer and ongoing training models

# Top 5 Course Topics

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| <b>Most Important Course Topics</b> | <b>%</b>    |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Campus resources                    | <b>42.4</b> |
| Study skills                        | <b>39.8</b> |
| Academic planning/advising          | <b>35.7</b> |
| Critical thinking                   | <b>34.8</b> |
| Time management                     | <b>27.6</b> |

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# Course Practices

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| <b>Practice</b>          | <b>%</b>    |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Online component         | <b>52.9</b> |
| Service-learning         | <b>40.3</b> |
| Learning-community       | <b>35.7</b> |
| Common reading component | <b>31.0</b> |

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# FYS Instruction and Outcomes

- First-to-second year retention
  - **Course topic: Critical thinking (+)**
  - Course topic: Writing skills (+)
  - Course topic: study skills (-)
- Average first-year grades
  - **Adjunct faculty (-)**
  - **Course topic: Health and wellness (+)**
  - **Online components (-)**
  - **Course topic: College policies and procedures (-)**

# Takeaway Thoughts

- Important to classify and clarify the different types of influences and decision points for FYS implementation and success
- How do these different areas interact with each other
- FYS may have a mediating or indirect effect on the outcomes of interest

# Takeaway Thoughts

- Specific structural, instructional, and course objective/content areas do yield significant results on outcomes.
- Aligning first-year seminars with the academic mission and activities of the institution yields positive outcomes.
- Different degrees and range of impact based upon outcome (e.g., retention and GPA)

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# Questions?



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