



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
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Demonstrating the Impact of First-Year Seminars on Student Outcomes

2012 ACPA Convention
Louisville, KY

Jennifer Keup, Director



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
- have the opportunity to compare their seminars to a national profile and to consider innovations and refinements based on that profile
- better understand the impact of specific seminar characteristics on student outcomes
- discuss institutional challenges and best practices for first-year seminars

**How far back
in higher education
history do we need
to go to find
evidence of the
earliest first-year
seminars?**

1. Classical Greece
2. 1790s
3. 1880s
4. 1930s
5. 1970s



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).

History of First-Year Seminars

- Courses were used as an extended orientation to fulfill in loco parentis
- Use of these courses waxed and waned over the 20th century until they all but died out by the 1960s
 - End of in loco parentis
 - Faculty became disenchanted with teaching the “life skills” content
 - “Sink or swim” attitude toward student success

History of First-Year Seminars

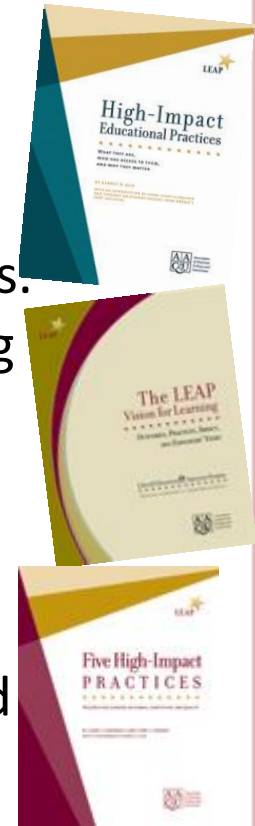
- Resurgence of interest in first-year seminars
 - Post- World War II Baby Boom generation
 - Increased access historically underserved population
 - Underprepared students were struggling to be successful in higher education
- University 101 Programs at the University of South Carolina was an early leader
- Currently, as many as 94% of U.S. campuses offer a seminar

(Barefoot & Koch, 2011)

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.”



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

NATIONAL SURVEYS OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS



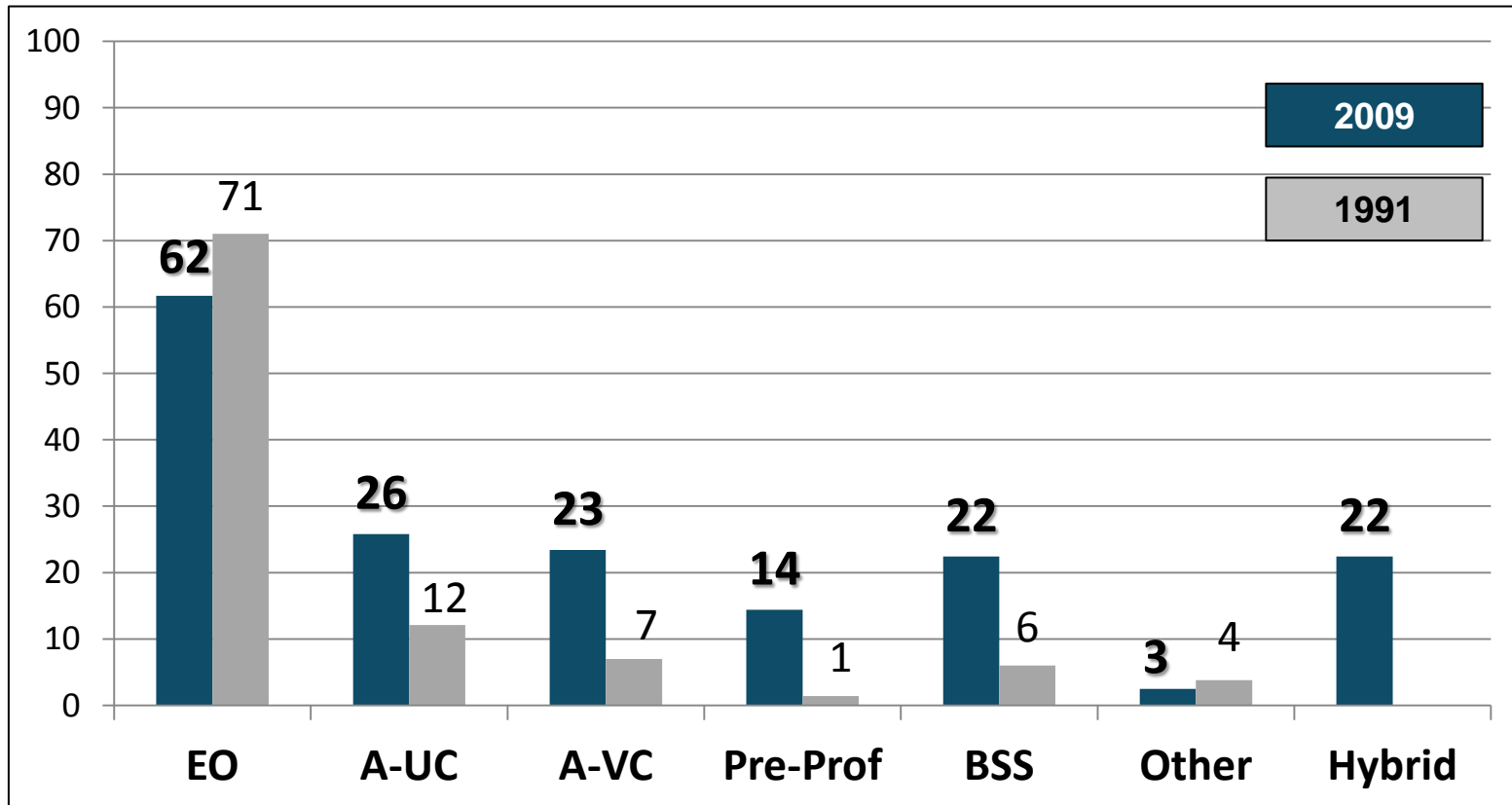
87% OF THE 56% WHO COMPLETED MORE THAN 23% OF THE SURVEY THOUGHT IT WAS A WASTE OF TIME

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

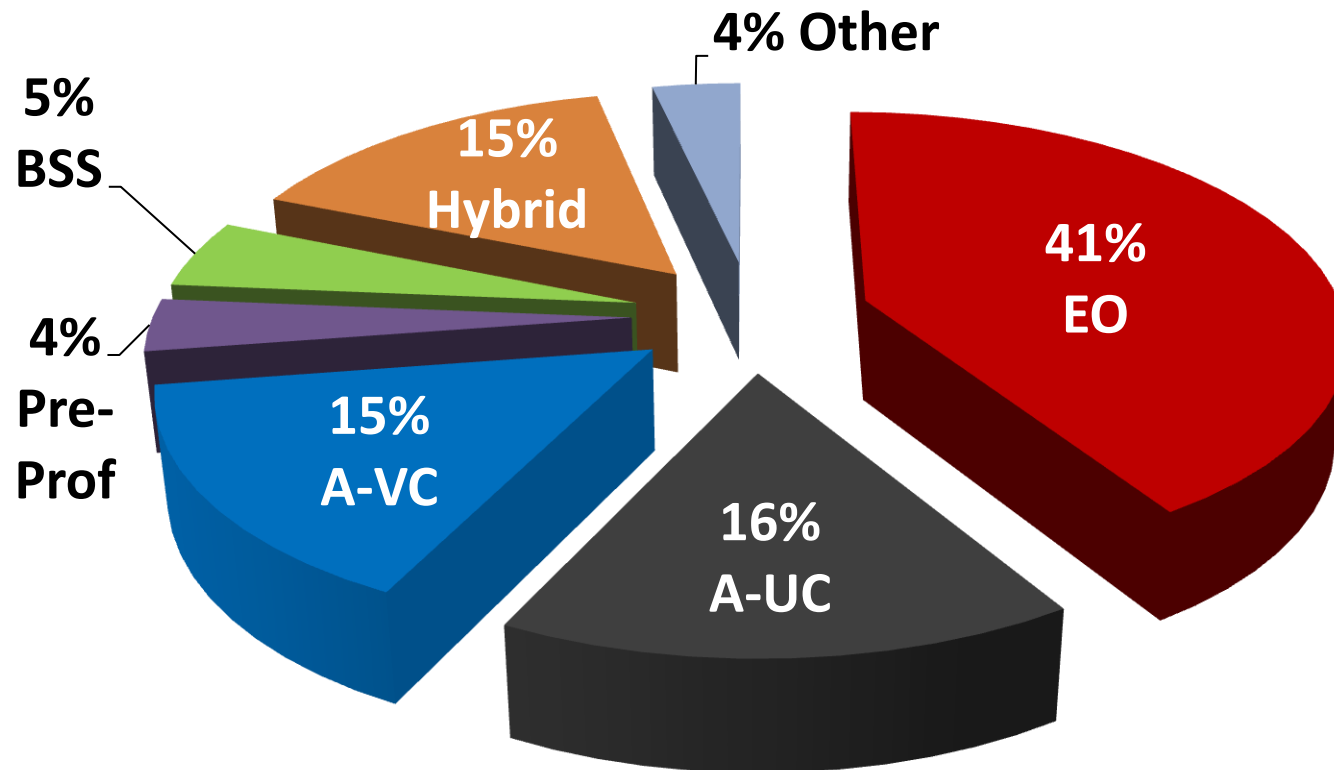


All Types of FYS Offered



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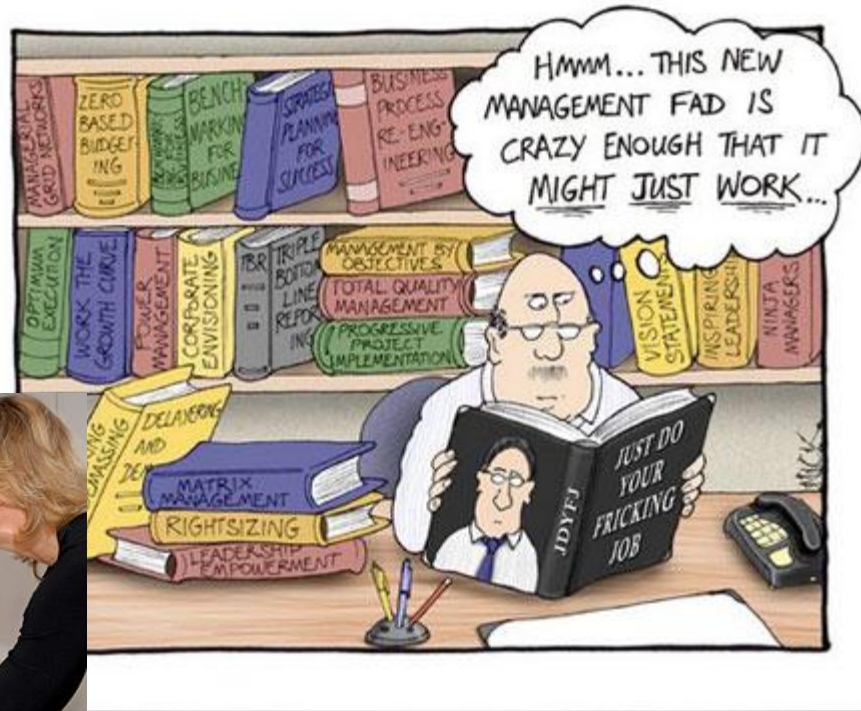
Primary Types of FYS Offered



Top 5 Seminar Goals

Most Important Course Goals	2009
Develop academic skills	54.6%
Develop a connection w/institution	50.2%
Orient to campus resources	47.6%
Encouraged self-exploration/personal development	28.5%
Create common FY experience	23.3%

COURSE ADMINISTRATION



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Administrative Home of FYS

Unit	2009
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

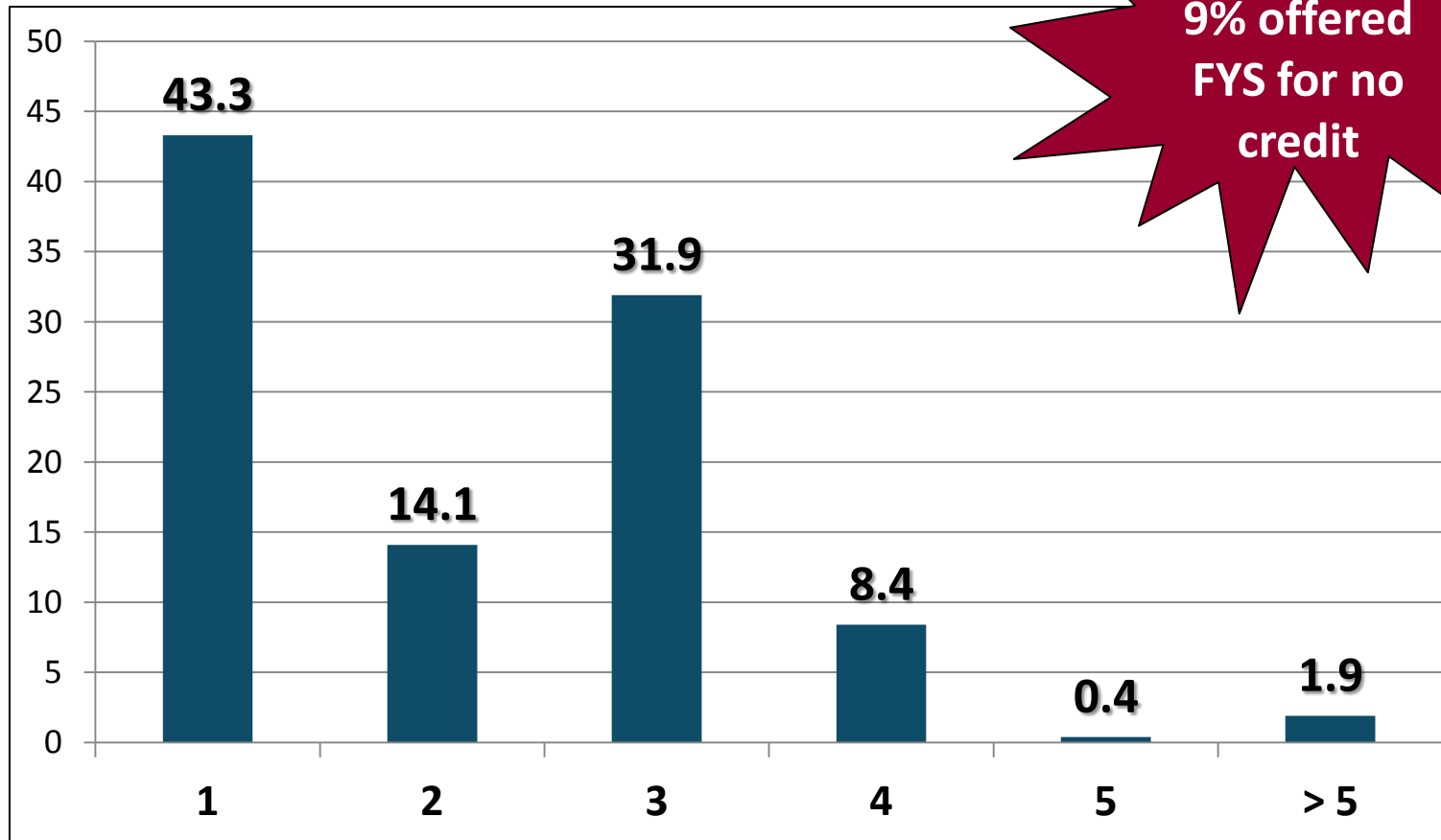


37.9% of courses directors are full time

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%

INSTRUCTION

“Ditch Your Laptop, Dump Your Boyfriend”

Op-Ed in the September 25, 2010 edition of the New York Times



*Advice for freshmen
from the people who
actually grade their
papers and lead their
class discussions.*

Who Teaches the Seminar?

Instructor	%
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

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

How Are Instructors Compensated?

- Most frequent compensation is a stipend
- The second most frequent responses were “None” and “Part of overload”
- Other forms of compensation
 - Graduate student support
 - Release time
 - Unrestricted professional development funds

How Much Are Instructors Compensated?

1: \$500 or less	4: \$1501-\$2000	7: \$3001-\$3500	10: \$4501-\$5000
2: \$501-\$1000	5: \$2001-\$2500	8: \$3501-\$4000	11: >\$5000
3: \$1001-\$1500	6: \$2501-\$3000	9: \$4001-\$4500	

	Mean Stipend
Adjunct faculty	3.82
Other professional	3.41
Tenure track faculty	3.40
Student affairs professionals	3.06
Graduate student	2.70

Top 5 Course Topics

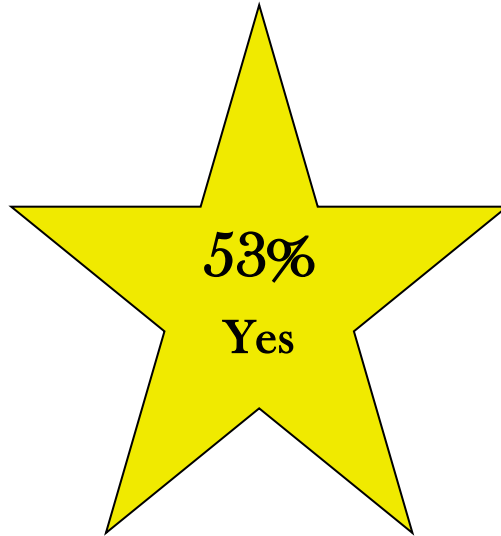
Most Important Course Topics	2009
Campus resources	42.4%
Study skills	39.8%
Academic planning/advising	35.7%
Critical thinking	34.8%
Time management	27.6%

Course Practices

Practice	2009
Online component	52.9%
Service-learning	40.3%
Learning-community	35.7%
Common reading component	31.0%

ASSESSMENT & OUTCOMES

Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2006?



Assessment is Critical!

“High-impact practices...combine and concentrate other empirically validated pedagogic approaches into a single multidimensional activity [but] **only when they are implemented well and continually evaluated**...will we realize their considerable potential.”

Quantitative Assessment

Assessment	2009
Student course evaluation	94.9%
Survey instrument	75.3%
Locally developed	84.0%
National survey	52.4%
Institutional data	75.3%

Qualitative Assessment

Assessment	2009
Focus Groups	
Instructors	51.3%
Students	42.6%
Interviews	
Instructors	45.6%
Students	30.2%

Outcomes Measured

Outcome	Percentage
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
Other	18.5

2010 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

Outcomes of Interest

- Persistence to the second year
- First-year GPA
- Satisfaction with first-year experience
- NSSE/CSSE Benchmarks
 - Level of academic challenge
 - Active and collaborative learning
 - Student-faculty interaction
 - Supportive campus environment

Methods

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

Finding #1

There is a misalignment between FYS objectives and assessment outcomes

“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

Finding #2

Characteristics of first-year seminars have a greater impact and wider range of effect on first-year grade point average than they do on persistence to the second year

Finding #3

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.

+ Assigning course

credit

- Adjust teaching staff

- Create modules

+ Higher percentage of

FY students

participate

**OTHER POSITIVE:
assessing the seminar,
content on health and
wellness, objective of
personal development**

creative

+ Emphasize

skills and critical

thinking

campus

+ Academic seminar

with variable content

- Basic study skills

seminars



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Finding #4

Academic seminars with variable content tend to represent the convergence of characteristics that yield positive outcomes on persistence and grades.

Conversely basic study skills seminars are limited by lower-impact characteristics and an at-risk student population.

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Questions?



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References

Padgett, R.D. & Keup, J.R. (2011). *2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Ongoing Efforts to Support Students in Transition*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.