



# Innovations in the First-Year Seminar: Additional Evidence

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# Learning Outcomes of this Session

- Provide current evidence on organization, content, and administration of first-year seminars across American colleges and universities.
- Showcase first-year seminar content and how other campuses utilize empirically vetted content within seminar instruction and pedagogy.
- Recognize successful first-year seminar experiences and incorporate them into your institution's first-year seminar.
- Identify national trends and comparisons on first-year seminars in an effort to evaluate specific practices/assessment methods related to the your first-year seminar.
- Extend the national discussion on the assessment of first-year seminars and the implications for best practices.



# Presentation Outline

- First-year seminar overview
- Methodology/participants
- Seminar characteristics
- Instruction
- Content and pedagogy
- Seminar assessment

# 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).

# Tendency Toward “Engaging Pedagogy”

- A variety of teaching methods
- Meaningful discussion and homework
- Challenging assignments
- Productive use of class time
- Encouragement for students to speak in class and work together

(Swing, 2002)

# 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

(Tobolowsky and Associates, 2008)

# 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Methodology for 2009 administration
  - Administration: Oct. 30 – Dec. 15, 2009
  - Invitation sent to 3,225 institutions in 3 waves
  - Access population v. survey population
  - Incentive program
  - 1,019 responses (32% response rate)
- 87.3% of 2009 respondents (n = 890) reported having a first-year seminar

# 2009 Survey Participants

| <b>Institutional Chara.</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Two-year                    | 235           | 26.4              |
| Four-year                   | 655           | 73.6              |
| Public                      | 464           | 52.1              |
| Private                     | 426           | 47.9              |



# 2009 Survey Participants

| <b>Size of First-Year Class</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Less than 500                   | 305           | 34.3              |
| 501 – 1,000                     | 210           | 23.6              |
| 1,001 – 2,000                   | 177           | 19.9              |
| 2,001 – 3,000                   | 74            | 8.3               |
| 3,001 – 4,000                   | 54            | 6.1               |
| 4,001+                          | 70            | 7.9               |



|                           | Percent of responding institutions with<br>first-year seminars | National percentage |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Institutional type        |  |                     |
| Two-year                  | 26.4   | 38.3                |
| Four-year                 | 73.6   | 61.7                |
| Institutional affiliation |  |                     |
| Private                   | 47.9   | 62.0                |
| Public                    | 52.1   | 38.0                |
| First-year class size     |  |                     |
| 500 or less               | 34.3   | 49.1                |
| 501 - 1,000               | 23.6   | 22.4                |
| 1,001 - 2,000             | 19.9   | 12.9                |
| 2,001 -3,000              | 8.3  | 6.0                 |
| 3,001 - 4,000             | 6.1  | 3.0                 |
| 4,001+                    | 7.9  | 3.1                 |

# 2009 Survey Participants

| <b>Discrete Seminar-Types</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Extended Orientation          | 549           | 61.7              |
| Academic Seminar - Uniform    | 230           | 25.8              |
| Academic Seminar - Various    | 208           | 23.4              |
| Pre-Professional/Discipline   | 128           | 14.4              |
| Basic Study Skills            | 199           | 22.4              |
| Hybrid                        | 199           | 22.4              |
| Other                         | 22            | 2.5               |

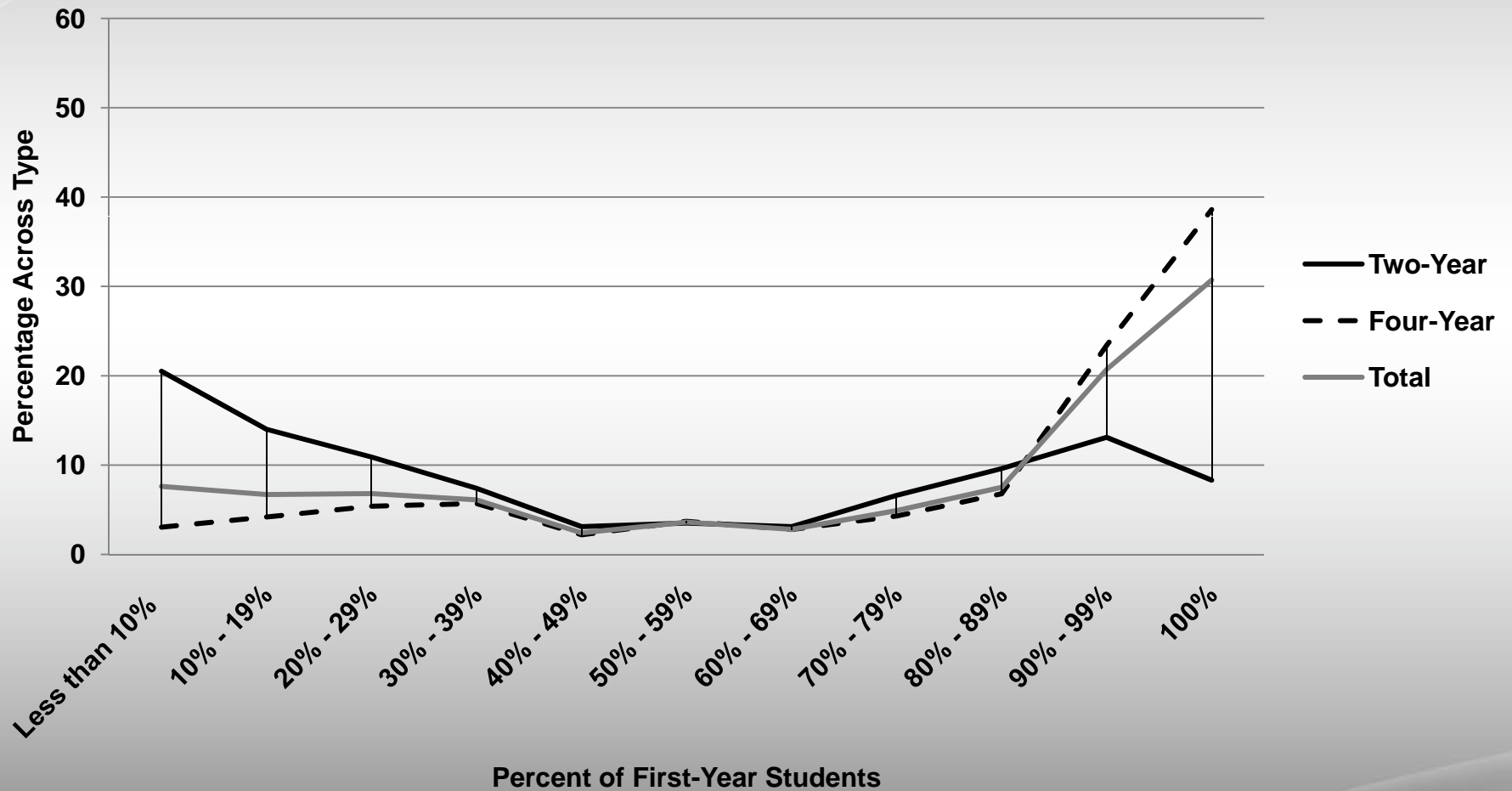
# 2009 Survey Participants

| <b>Primary Seminar-Type</b> | <b>Number</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Extended Orientation        | 354           | 41.1              |
| Academic Seminar - Uniform  | 139           | 16.1              |
| Academic Seminar - Various  | 133           | 15.4              |
| Pre-Professional/Discipline | 32            | 3.7               |
| Basic Study Skills          | 42            | 4.9               |
| Hybrid                      | 132           | 15.3              |
| Other                       | 30            | 3.5               |

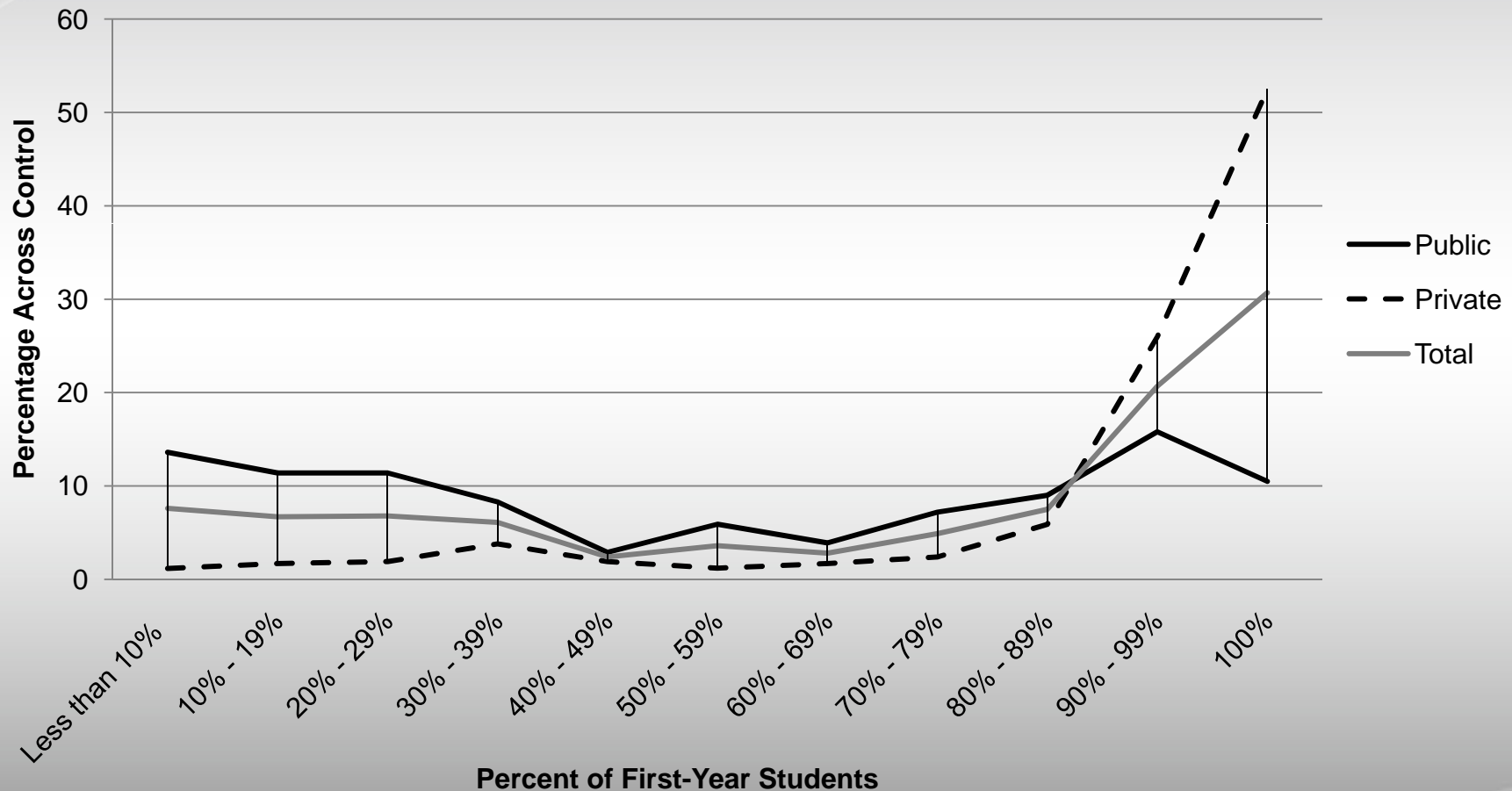


# SEMINAR CHARACTERISTICS

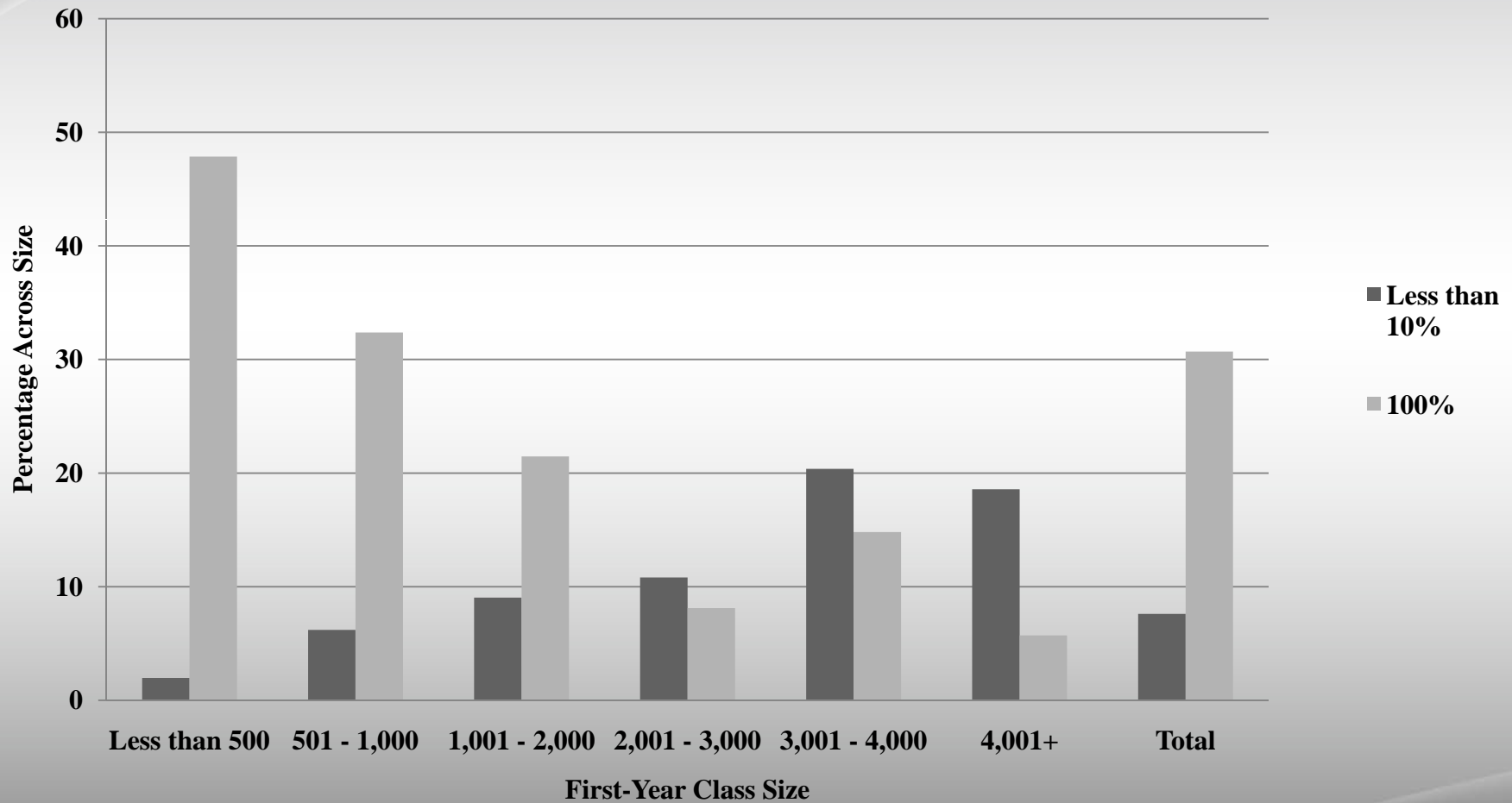
## Students who Take a First-Year Seminar Course by Institutional Type (n = 879)



## Students who Take a First-Year Seminar Course by Institutional Control (n = 879)



# Students who Take a First-Year Seminar Course by First-Year Class Size (n = 879)



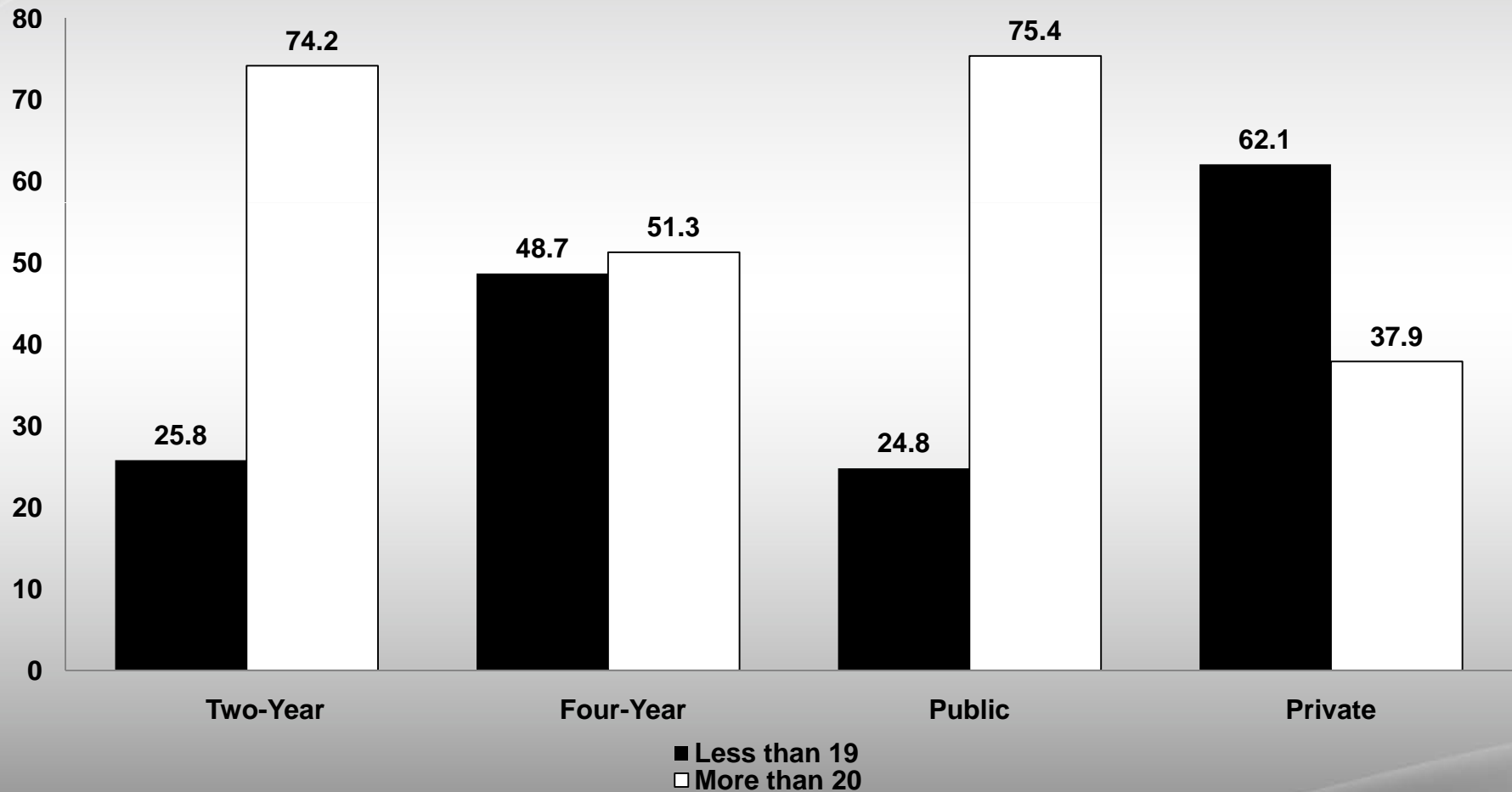


## First-Year Students *Required* to Take the Primary First-Year Seminar

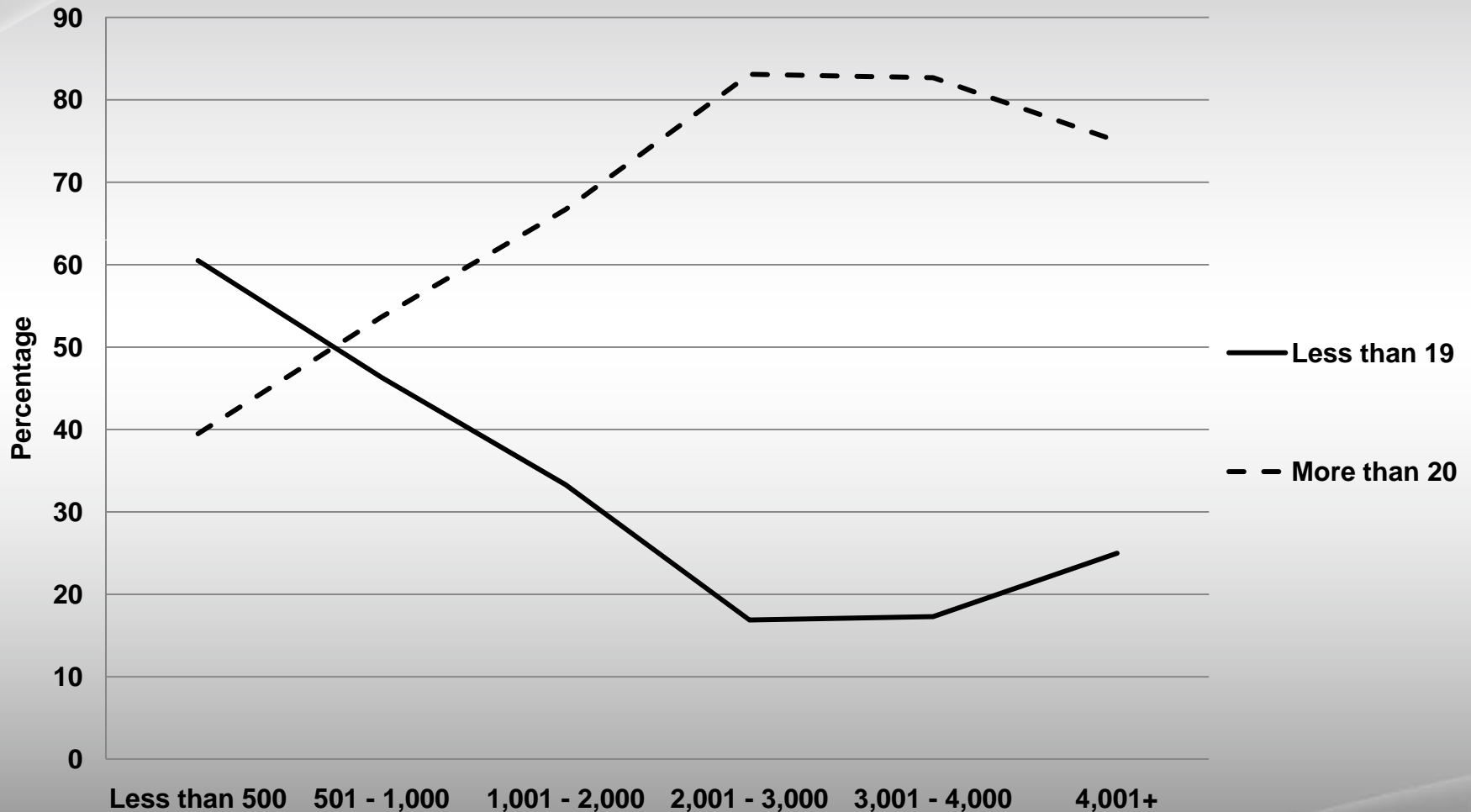
|      | Two-Year | Four-Year | Public | Private | < 500 | 501 - 1,000 | 1,001 - 2,000 | 2,001 - 3,000 | 3,001 - 4,000 | 4,001+ |
|------|----------|-----------|--------|---------|-------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------|
| None | 33.0     | 15.0      | 29.3   | 9.4     | 7.8   | 21.2        | 22.2          | 26.8          | 48.1          | 31.3   |
| -    | -        | -         | -      | -       | -     | -           | -             | -             | -             | -      |
| 100% | 19.5     | 46.7      | 20.9   | 59.7    | 55.4  | 46.8        | 28.7          | 22.5          | 19.2          | 9.4    |



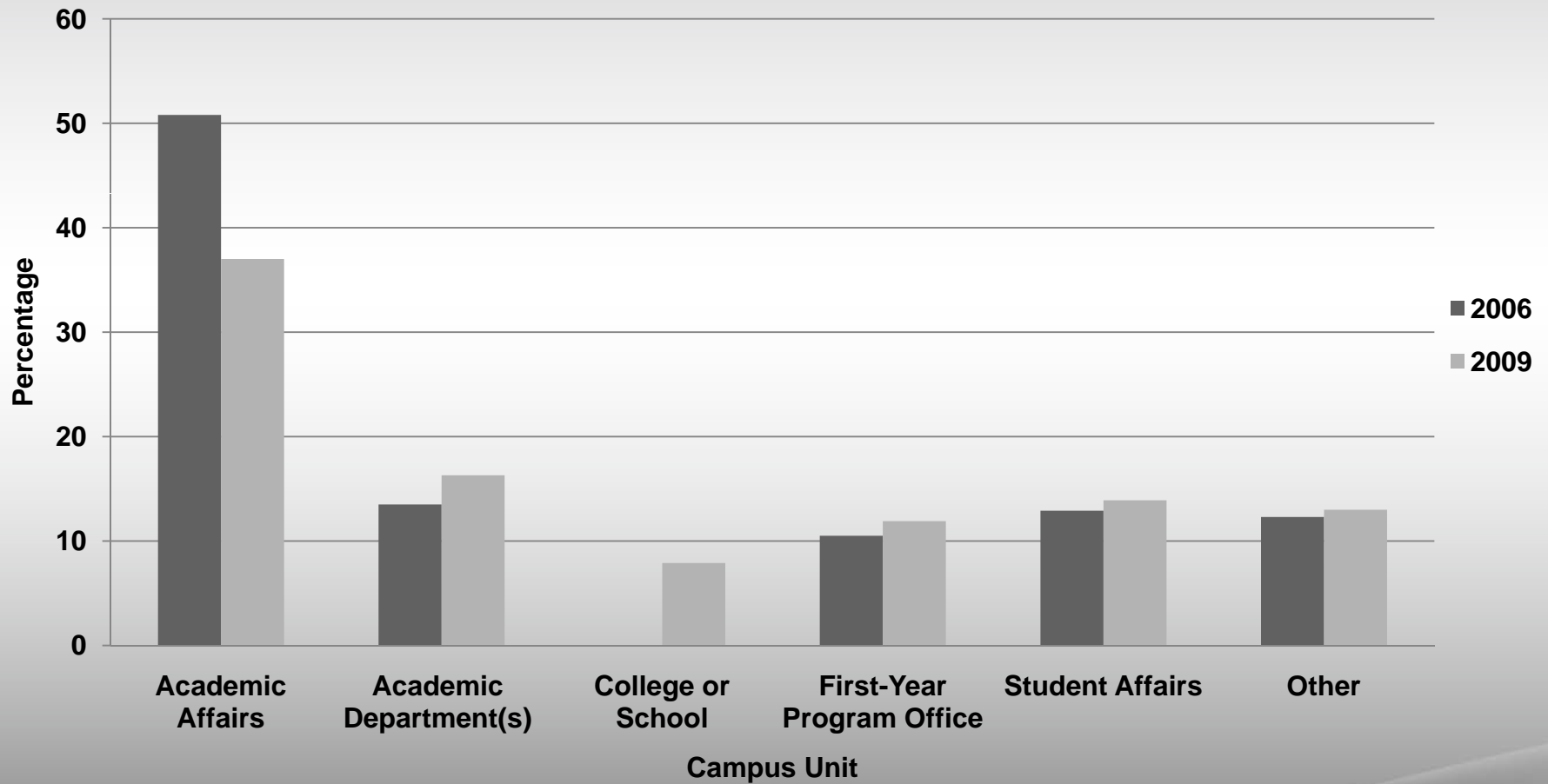
## Percentage of Seminar Class Size by Institutional Type and Control



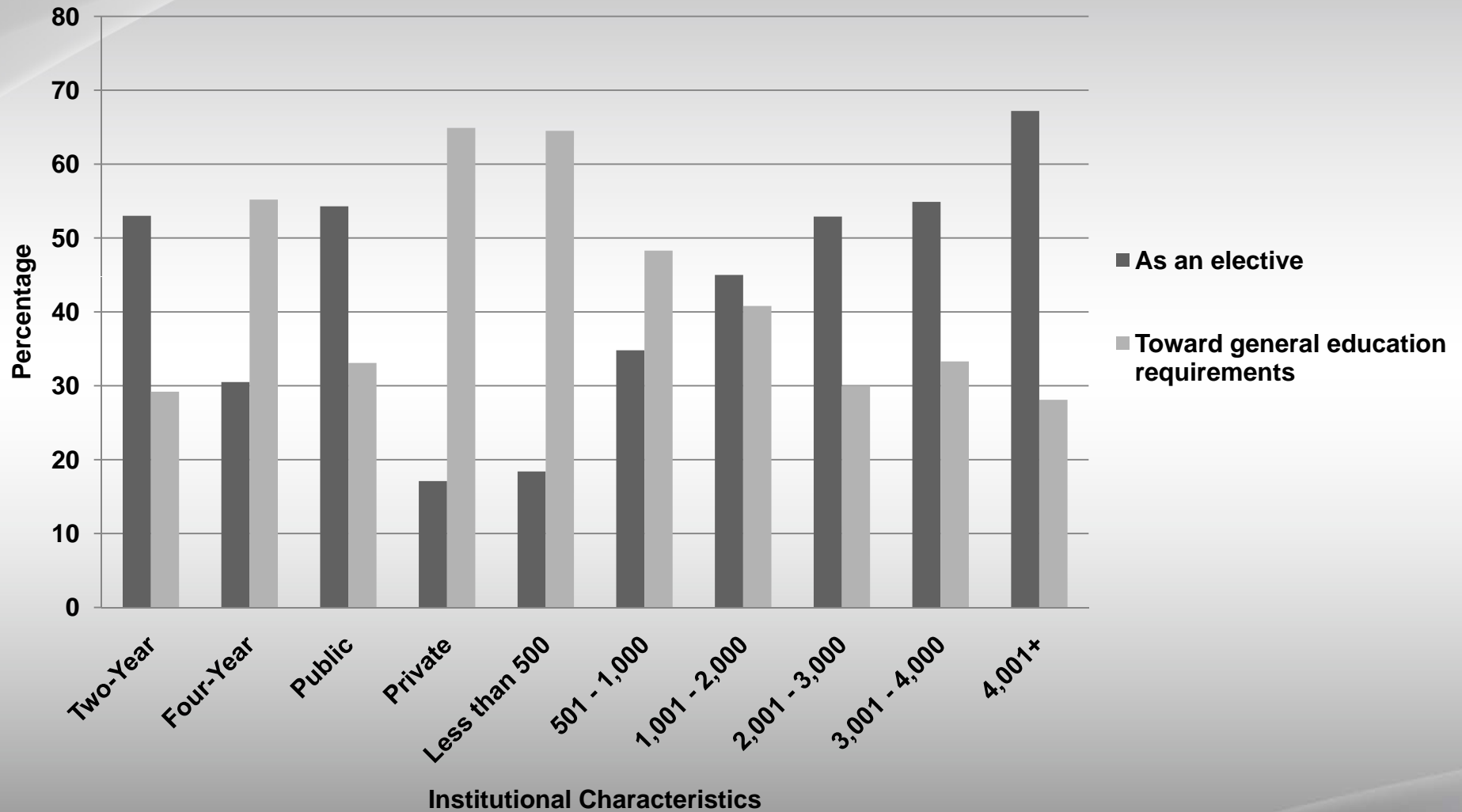
# Seminar Class Size by First-Year Class Size



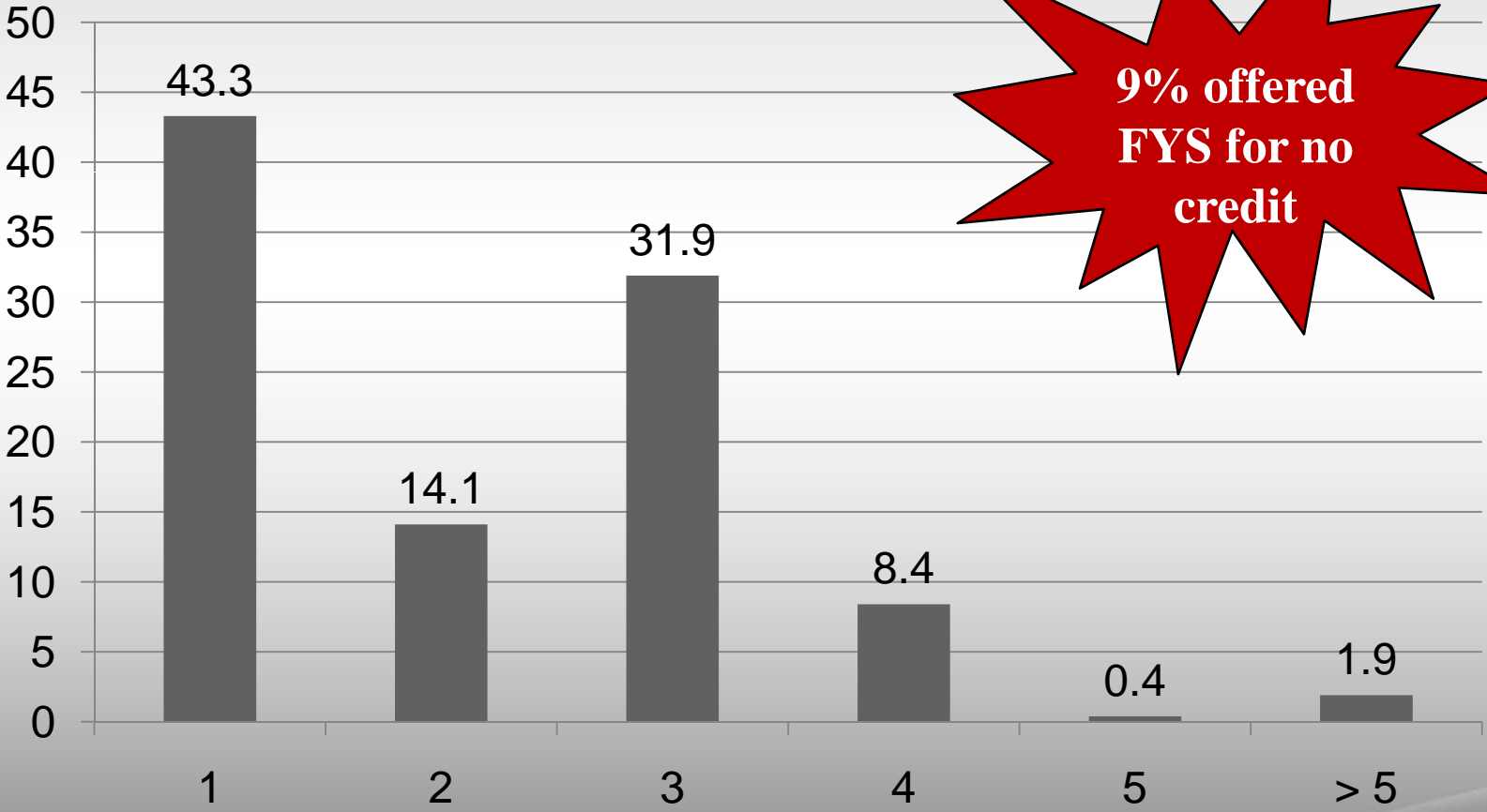
# Campus Unit Responsible for Administering the Seminar (n = 847)



# Distribution of Seminar Credit Applied



# Credit Hours



**9% offered  
FYS for no  
credit**

# Credit, Grading, and Length

- 91.3% of survey respondents report that the first-year seminar carries academic credit
- Most seminars (80.5%) are letter graded
- 67.8% of all participating institutions reported the first-year seminar was one semester in length.
  - The length of the seminar at the remaining institutions varied from half a semester (12.6%), one quarter (5.9%), and one year (3.8%).



# INSTRUCTION





# Who Teaches the Seminar?

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## Instructors

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Tenure-track faculty 61.4%

PT non-tenure track faculty 54.4%

Adjunct faculty 46.0%

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Student affairs professionals 48.2%

Other campus professionals 29.9%

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Graduate students 5.6%

Undergraduate students 5.1%

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# Who Teaches the Seminar?

- 43.6% 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

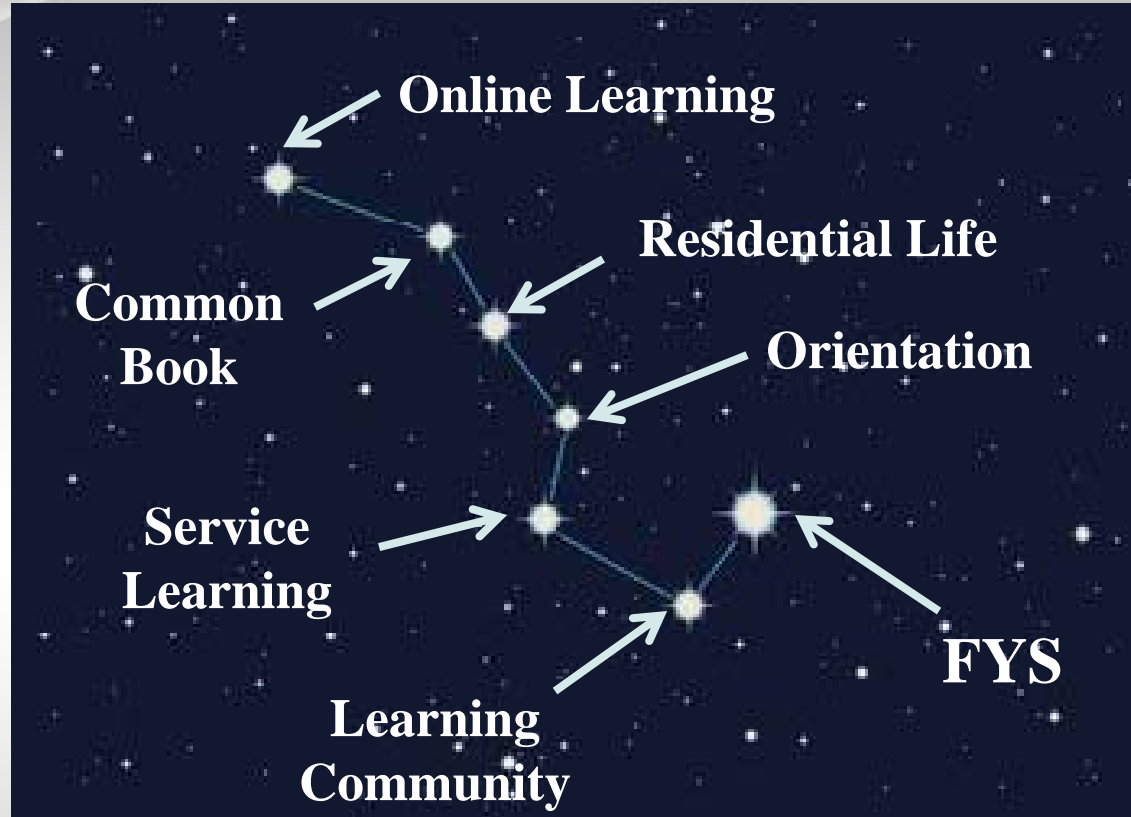


# How Are Instructors Compensated?

- 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

# Instructor Training

- 76.1% of respondents offer training for first-year seminar instructors
- Half of respondents required training for first-year seminar instructors
- 58.4% of respondents indicate that instructor training is  $\leq 1$  day long
- “Other” responses indicate ongoing training and support



# CONTENT & PEDAGOGY

# Course Practices

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## Practice

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|                          |       |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Online component         | 52.9% |
| Service-learning         | 40.3% |
| Linked to other courses  | 35.7% |
| Common reading component | 31.0% |

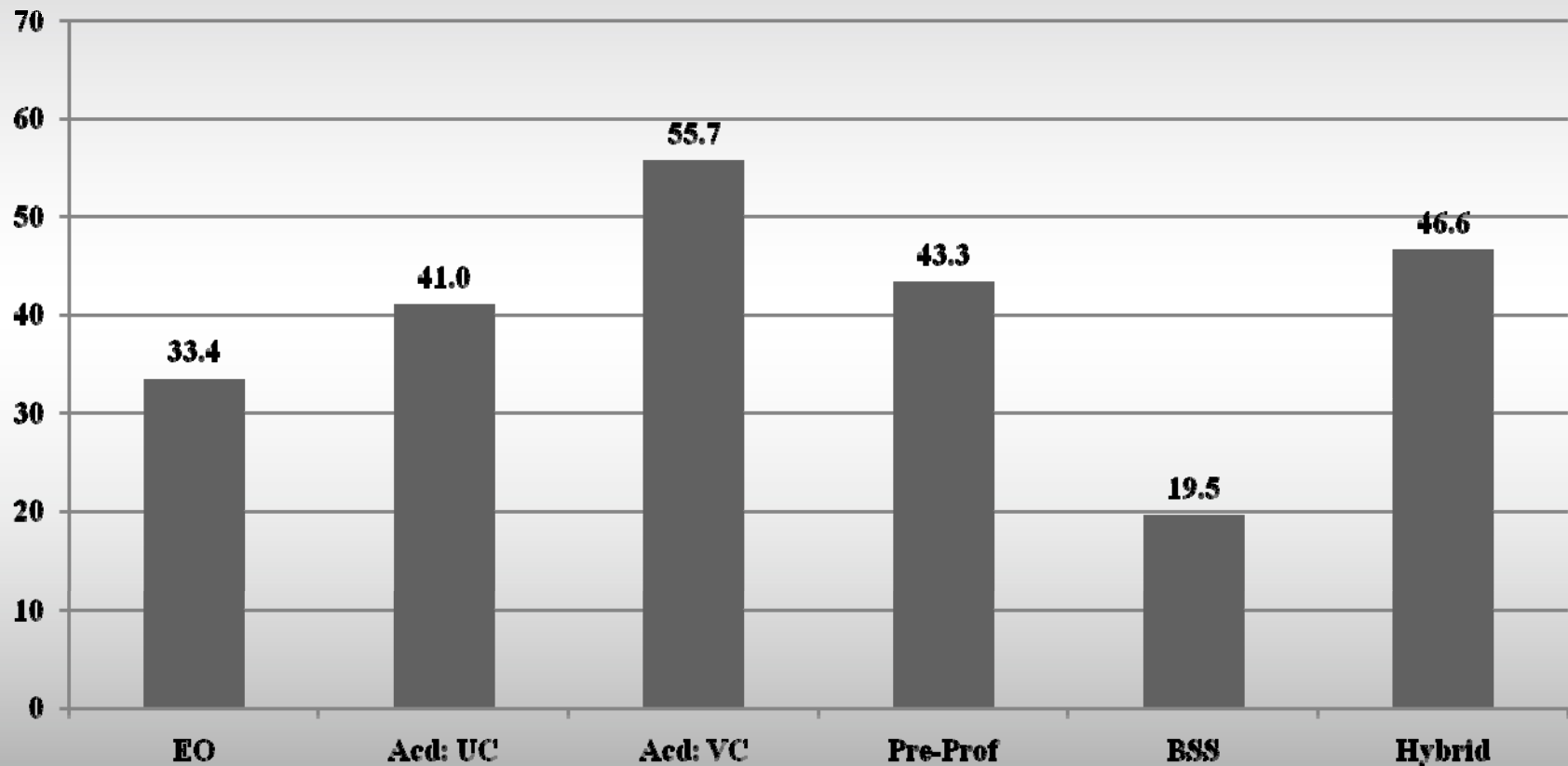
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# Online Components

(n = 280 responses to open-ended question)

- Nearly half mention the use of a course or learning management system
- Most common online components:
  - Repository for course documents
  - Discussion boards
  - Assignment submission
  - Intro to online research/information literacy
  - Quizzes, tests, & other assessments
- 15% indicate that their institutions offer sections entirely online

## Seminar Included Service-Learning Component by Seminar Type (n = 848)



40.3% of seminars include a service-learning component.



# Service-Learning

(n = 208 responses to open-ended question)

- Service experience varies widely by section and is often tied to specific course theme
- Service is typically of short duration
- Hunger/homelessness and at-risk youth most common focal points for service
- Reflection includes written papers, class discussions, and presentations

# Linked Courses

(n = 189 responses to open-ended question)

- Most commonly mentioned as interventions for a specific major or at-risk students
- FYS frequently linked to developmental course work in English, reading, and math
- Seminars most commonly linked to first-year composition in general education

# Linked Courses

(n = 189 responses to open-ended question)

- Linked courses structures range from block scheduling with little to no course integration to highly integrated thematic course links
- Linked courses frequently incorporate a residential component

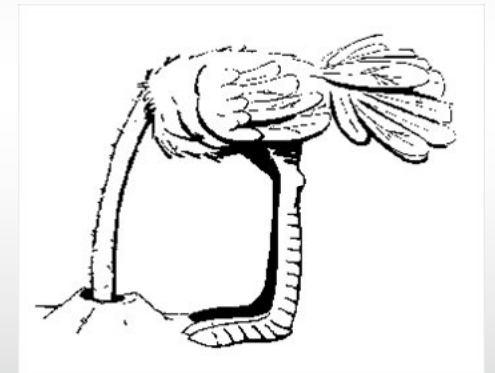
Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2006?



9.8% don't know



5.5 % didn't answer



# SEMINAR ASSESSMENT

# Quantitative Assessment Strategies

| <b>Assessment</b>         | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Student course evaluation | 94.9%          |
| Institutional data        | 75.3%          |
| Survey instrument         | 75.3%          |
| <i>Locally developed</i>  | 84.0%          |
| <i>National survey</i>    | 52.4%          |

# Qualitative Assessment Strategies

| <b>Assessment</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Focus Groups      |                |
| Instructors       | 51.3%          |
| Students          | 42.6%          |
| Interviews        |                |
| Instructors       | 45.6%          |
| Students          | 30.2%          |

# TV Timeout



## Most Important Course *Objectives*

| <b>Objective</b>                                     | <b>Percent</b> |
|--|----------------|
| Develop academic skills                              | 54.6           |
| Develop a connection with the institution            | 50.2           |
| Provide orientation to campus resources and services | 47.6           |
| Self-exploration/personal development                | 28.5           |
| Create common first-year experience                  | 23.3           |
| Develop support network/friendships                  | 17.4           |
| Increase student/faculty interaction                 | 16.9           |
| Improve sophomore return rates                       | 15.5           |
| Develop writing skills                               | 11.9           |
| Introduce a discipline                               | 7.0            |
| Develop financial literacy                           | 1.1            |
| Encourage arts participation                         | 0.6            |
| Other (please specify)                               | 8.1            |



Most Important  
*Topics* that  
Compose the  
Content of the  
Seminar

| Topic                           | Percent |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Campus resources                | 42.4    |
| Study skills                    | 39.8    |
| Academic planning/advising      | 35.7    |
| Critical thinking               | 34.8    |
| Time management                 | 27.6    |
| Writing skills                  | 17.3    |
| Career exploration/preparation  | 15.5    |
| College policies and procedures | 15.1    |
| Specific disciplinary topic     | 14.0    |
| Relationship issues             | 9.2     |
| Diversity issues                | 6.9     |
| Health and wellness             | 3.7     |
| Financial literacy              | 1.0     |
| Other                           | 14.8    |

# Review

- Objectives:
  - Develop academic skills
  - Develop a connection with the institution
  - Provide orientation to campus resources and services
- Topics:
  - Campus resources
  - Study skills
  - Academic planning/advising

## Outcomes Measured

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

# Implications / Final Thoughts

- Be sure there is alignment between course outcomes and assessment
- Be sure to regularly assess FYS practices and student outcomes
- Assessment should include multiple methods and sources

# Implications / Final Thoughts

- There is no one “right” type of seminar; pick and choose what is best for you
  - Connect to learning/program outcomes
- Invest in initial instructor training and ongoing support
- Connect FYS to other educational initiatives and practices (constellation)
  - Continue integrating good practices



# References

- Hunter, M. S., & Linder, C. (2005). First-year seminars. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, & B. O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 275-291), San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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- Tobolowsky, B.F., & Associates (2008). *2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum* (Monograph No. 51). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

# Questions? Comments?

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**Executive summary: <http://sc.edu/fye/research/reports/index.html>**