



## NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

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

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# Examining the National Picture of Assessment of First-Year Seminars, a High-Impact Educational Practice

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# Objectives

To present:

- Recent evidence that describes assessment practices nationally related to the first-year seminar.
- How institutional approaches to assessment of the first-year seminar might be influenced by institutional characteristics.
- How institutional approaches to assessment of the first-year seminar might be influenced by the seminar's connection to other High-Impact Educational Practices.

# Outline

- Background of First-Year Seminars
- Background of National Survey of First-Year Seminars
- Overview of the 2012-13 Administration of the National Survey of First-Year Seminars
- Characteristics of the Sample of Responding Institutions
- Assessment of First-Year Seminar
- High-Impact Practices in the First-Year Seminar
- Connecting High-Impact Practices to Assessment of First-Year Seminar
- Conclusion



# Background on FYS

- The first-year seminar (FYS) is “a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students” (Barefoot, 1992, p. 49).
- These courses contribute to outcomes including:
  - Persistence to the second year
  - Grade point average
  - Satisfaction with faculty, peers, and the institution
  - Use of campus services
  - Interaction with faculty
  - Academic skills
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Communication skills(As summarized in Greenfield, Keup, & Gardner, 2013)

# Overview of National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Since 1988, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has triennially conducted a national survey of the features of first-year seminars
- Has provided the most comprehensive national picture of the practice related to curricular interventions to support students in the first college year

# Overview of 2012-13 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- Ninth triennial administration of the NSFYS
- Asks institutions to provide information about first-year seminar
  - Sections include: general institutional characteristics, types of first-year seminars offered, information about the seminar, student characteristics, instructor characteristics, and administration of the seminar
  - The survey also includes a section on practices related to assessment of the seminar
  - New to 2012-13 administration is a section focusing on High-Impact Practices in the FYS
    - (More about this in a minute)

# Methodology - 2012-13 NSFYS

- 3,753 institutions were invited to participate in the survey.
  - 4 waves (CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 participants)
  - Administered from 11/2012 – 1/2013
- 896 campuses participated, a response rate of 23.9%.
- 804 (89.7%) indicated that they offered one or more first-year seminars.

# Characteristics of Sample

Institution Characteristic	National Percentages	Percent of all Campuses Responding to NSFYS (n = 896)	Percent of NSFYS Sample with First-Year Seminars (n = 804)
Control			
Public	36.8%	54.1%	54.5%
Private, not for profit	37.0%	42.9%	42.8%
Private, for profit	26.2%	3.0%	2.7%
Type			
Two-year	48.6%	26.7%	25.6%
Four-year	51.4%	73.3%	74.4%
Number of first-year students			
Less than 500 students	57.5%	29.8%	29.5%
501 - 1,000 students	20.6%	22.8%	22.6%
1,001 - 1,500 students	8.9%	11.8%	11.9%
1,501 - 2,000 students	4.4%	7.6%	7.5%
2,001 - 2,500 students	2.6%	6.6%	6.8%
2,501 - 3,000 students	1.7%	2.9%	2.9%
3,001 - 3,500 students	1.1%	4.1%	4.5%
3,501 - 4,000 students	1.0%	2.5%	2.2%
4,001 - 5,000 students	1.1%	3.6%	3.7%
More than 5,000 students	1.1%	8.4%	8.3%

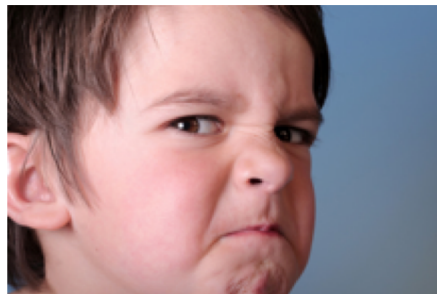
National percentages based on data from Carnegie Foundation (Control and Type) and IPEDS (Number of first-year students)

# Assessment of the FYS

- Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since fall 2009?



Yes  
59.4%



No  
32.4%



I don't know  
8.1%

# Assessment of the FYS – Institutional Characteristics: Type

<b>Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2009? (n = 749)</b>	<b>Two-year</b>	<b>Four-year</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
Yes	49.5%	62.7%	**
No	39.3%	30.2%	
I don't know	11.3%	7.1%	

\*\*  $p < .01$

# Assessment of the FYS – Institutional Characteristics: Control

<b>Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2009? (n = 749)</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
Yes	56.2%	63.2%	n.s.
No	34.4%	30.1%	
I don't know	9.4%	6.7%	



# How was FYS Assessed?

<b>What type of assessment was conducted? (n = 444)</b>	<b>%</b>
Student course evaluation	86.9
Analysis of institutional data	71.2
Survey instrument	53.4
Direct assessment of student learning outcomes	52.9
Focus groups with instructors	35.4
Program review	33.3
Focus groups with students	30.6
Individual interviews with instructors	20.1
Individual interviews with students	12.4

# How was FYS Assessed?

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Student course evaluation	86.9
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Individual interviews with instructors	20.1
Individual interviews with students	12.4
Quantitative Assessment	
Qualitative Assessment	
Program Evaluation	

# How was FYS Assessed? - Differences by Characteristics

**What type of assessment was  
conducted? (n = 444)**

	Institutional Characteristic		<i>p</i>
	<i>Two-year</i>	<i>Four-year</i>	
Survey instrument	36.3%	57.8%	***
Analysis of institutional data	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>	
	77.5%	64.2%	**
Focus groups with instructors	29.5%	41.3%	*

Positive relationship between size of incoming first-year class and proportion of campuses reporting the use of institutional data as assessment technique ( $p < .01$ ).

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# Use of Survey Instrument to Conduct Assessment

**What type of survey instrument did your institution use to assess or evaluate the first-year seminar? (n = 237)**

A locally developed (i.e., home-grown) survey of instructors	57.0%
A locally developed survey of students	75.1%
A national survey (e.g., NSSE, CCSSE, CIRP, EBI)	54.9%
I don't know	0.4%

*No significant difference in distributions when disaggregated by institutional characteristics*

# Use of Survey Instrument to Conduct Assessment

**Please identify the national survey(s) you used: (n = 128)**

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	75.8%
CIRP Freshman Survey	27.3%
Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)	15.6%
Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE)	14.1%
Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI)	14.1%
Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)	13.3%
First-Year Initiative (FYI)	10.2%
Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)	8.6%
CIRP Your First College Year (YFCY)	7.8%
Individual Developmental and Educational Assessment (IDEA)	4.7%
Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE)	1.6%
College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ)	0.0%

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94% of two-year institutions report using CCSSE. Remaining survey instruments between 0-11%.

# Objectives/Topics

## Select the three most important course objectives for the first-year seminar: (n = 761)

Develop a connection with the institution	44.9%
Provide orientation to campus resources and services	37.8%
Develop academic skills	36.3%
Develop critical thinking skills	23.3%
Create common first-year experience	21.6%

## Select the three most important topics that compose the content of this first-year seminar: (n = 761)

Campus resources	35.7%
Academic planning or advising	34.7%
Critical thinking	32.6%
Study skills	29.8%
Campus engagement	27.7%

# Outcomes Assessed

**Please indicate each student outcome that was measured: (n = 440)**

Satisfaction with the seminar	75.9%	Student self-reports of improvement	31.6%
Achievement of learning or course outcomes	68.9%	Use of campus services	31.6%
Persistence to second year	58.4%	Persistence to graduation	25.9%
Satisfaction with faculty	52.7%	Satisfaction with advising	25.9%
Student self-reports of course impact	49.3%	Out-of-class student-faculty interaction	25.0%
Grade point average	39.5%	Information literacy	23.6%
Critical thinking	36.6%	Writing ability	23.0%
Connections with peers	36.1%	Understanding of institutional identity and culture	17.0%
Participation in campus activities	34.8%	Civic engagement	12.3%
Satisfaction with the institution	32.7%	Involvement in service	12.3%



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# And Now for Something Completely Different...



# High-Impact Practices

- “High-Impact Educational Practices” are a collection of 10 educationally effective practices identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) – specifically selected because of the significant impact of these practices associated with student outcomes (see Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008).

# High-Impact Practices

- First-year seminars/experiences
- Common intellectual experiences
- Learning communities
- Writing-intensive courses
- Collaborative assignments/projects
- Diversity/global learning
- Internships
- Undergraduate research
- Service/community-based learning
- Capstone courses/projects

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# High-Impact Practices in FYS

- Several HIPs have had historical connection to FYS:
  - Common Reading Programs
  - Learning Communities
  - Service Learning
- Anecdotal evidence that FYS is a “hub” for other HIPs in the first college year



# High-Impact Practices in FYS

- 2012-13 NSFYS asked institutions about the connection of other HIPs to the FYS:
  - Writing-Intensive
  - Collaborative Assignments and Projects
  - Diversity and Global Learning
  - Service-Learning
  - Learning Community
  - Common Reading Experience
  - Undergraduate Research

# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

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

– Kuh, 2010



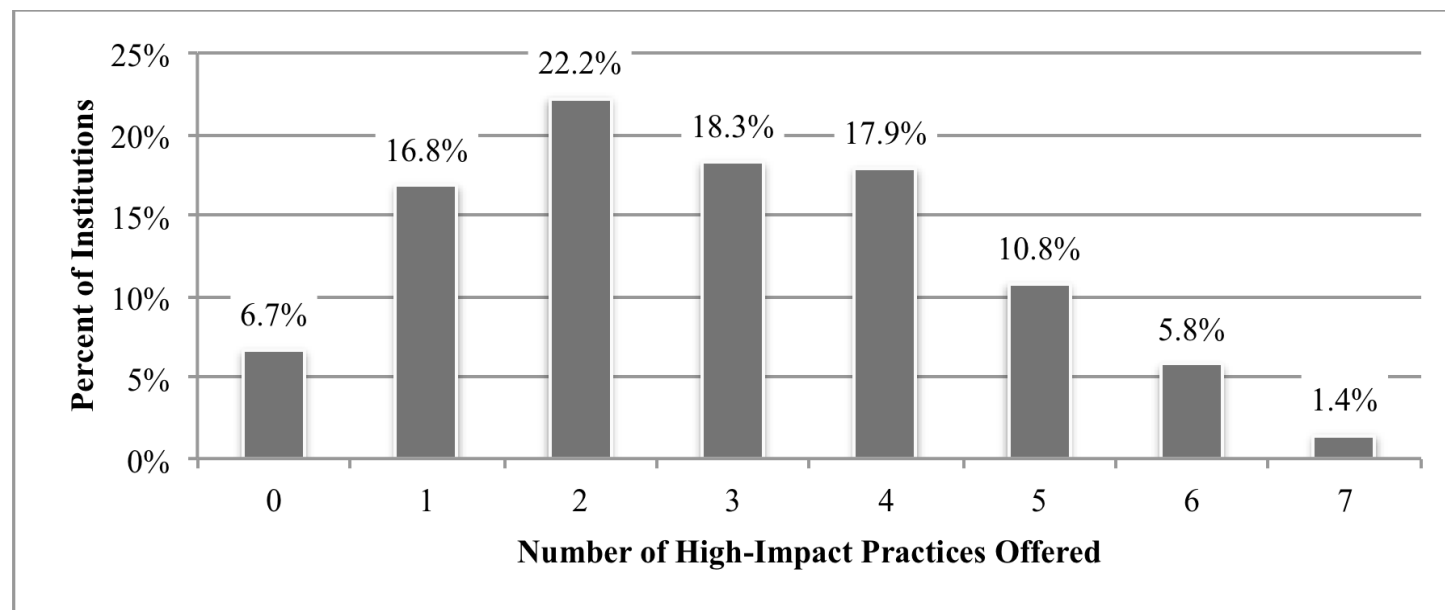
# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

- Following the statement of the importance of evaluation of HIPs by Kuh -
- I wanted to test the idea that institutions that have more HIPs in connection with the FYS are somehow different in their assessment activities

# Connection of HIPs to FYS

- 93% of institutions report offering at least one and 76% report offering two other HIPs in connection with the first-year seminar.
- Number of High-Impact Practices situated in the first-year seminar:
  - Mean: 2.87, SD 1.69
  - Median: 3

# Connection of HIPs to FYS



*Figure 1.* Distribution of total number of High-Impact Practices offered at institutions.

# Connection of HIPs to FYS

- Sorted institutions into two groups, above and below the median number of HIPs in the FYS ( $n = 751$ ):
  - 2 or fewer HIPs in FYS: 45.7%
  - 3 or more HIPs in FYS: 54.3%

# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

Has your first-year seminar been formally assessed or evaluated since Fall 2009? (n = 749)	2 HIPs or Fewer	3 HIPs or More	<i>p</i>
Yes	52.2%	65.5%	***
No	36.4%	29.1%	
I don't know *** $p < .001$	11.4%	5.4%	

# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

What type of assessment was conducted? (n = 444)	2 HIPs or Fewer	3 or More HIPs	<i>p</i>
Analysis of institutional data	65.9%	74.7%	*
Direct assessment of student learning outcomes	45.3%	58.1%	**
Focus groups with instructors	29.1%	39.6%	*
Focus groups with students	24.6%	34.7%	*
Individual interviews with instructors	13.4%	24.5%	**
Individual interviews with students	8.4%	15.1%	*
Program review	31.3%	34.7%	
Student course evaluation	84.4%	88.7%	
Survey instrument	40.8%	61.9%	***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

What type of survey instrument did your institution use to assess or evaluate the first-year seminar? (n = 237)	2 HIPs or Fewer	3 or More HIPs	<i>p</i>
A locally developed (i.e., home-grown) survey of instructors	52.1%	59.1%	
A locally developed survey of students	74.0%	75.6%	
A national survey (e.g., NSSE, CCSSE, CIRP, EBI)	42.5%	60.4%	*
I don't know	0.0%	0.6%	

\*  $p < .05$

Please indicate each student outcome that was measured: (n = 440)	2 HIPs or Fewer	3 or More HIPs	<i>p</i>
Satisfaction with the seminar	67.0%	81.8% ***	
Achievement of learning or course outcomes	62.5%	73.1% *	
Persistence to second year	52.8%	62.1%	
Satisfaction with faculty	42.6%	59.5% ***	
Student self-reports of course impact	35.8%	58.3% ***	
Participation in campus activities	23.9%	42.0% ***	
Critical thinking	29.0%	41.7% **	
Grade point average	38.1%	40.5%	
Student self-reports of improvement	18.8%	40.2% ***	
Connections with peers	31.3%	39.4%	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Please indicate each student outcome that was measured: (n = 440)	2 HIPs or Fewer	3 or More HIPs	<i>p</i>
Satisfaction with the institution	24.4%	38.3% **	
Use of campus services	22.2%	37.9% ***	
Out-of-class student-faculty interaction	13.6%	32.6% ***	
Writing ability	11.9%	30.3% ***	
Persistence to graduation	19.9%	29.9% *	
Information literacy	16.5%	28.4% **	
Satisfaction with advising	22.2%	28.4%	
Understanding of institutional identity and culture	6.8%	23.9% ***	
Involvement in service	5.1%	17.0% ***	
Civic engagement	6.3%	16.3% **	
Other (please specify)	8.0%	5.7%	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# Assessment of the First-Year Seminar

- 60% of institutions conducted a formal assessment the seminar
  - While this only includes a three-year window (2009-2012), the number is too low.
  - Significantly higher at four-year (62.7%) than two-year colleges (49.5%)

# Assessment of the First-Year Seminar

- Focus on quantitative methods to assess FYS
  - Especially student course evaluations and available institutional data
    - Low-hanging fruit, easy to gather.
    - Less flexible and precise than other methods
    - These data sources and methods do not require extra capacity, especially important in austere times, but we can do better than using course evaluations and institutional data to assess effectiveness of first-year seminars
  - Qualitative methods are important to describe the impact of the course on student outcomes in a deeper way
    - While cost-intensive compared to some quantitative methods, these methods are effective direct measures of student outcomes

# Assessment of the First-Year Seminar

- Mixed results regarding the connection of objectives, topics, and measured outcomes.
  - Evidence that objectives and topics of the course are aligned
  - Measured outcomes not necessarily aligned with objectives for course
  - Best practices: Assessment efforts should align objectives, efforts, and measured outcomes
    - Possible disconnect between people who outline objectives (administrators), topics (instructors), and outcomes (IR, administrators, or instructors)
    - Disconnect potentially hinders the effectiveness of the seminar

# Assessment of the First-Year Seminar

- Large proportion assessing satisfaction with seminar (75.9%)
  - 86.9% of institutions assessing FYS use student course evaluations
- Large proportion assessing achievement of course outcomes (68.9%)
  - Both important parts of a robust assessment effort
  - Assessment of course outcomes should be occurring in more than 70% of programs that conduct assessment

# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

- Results show a significant association of the presence of HIPs connected to the FYS and the assessment of the seminar
  - More HIPs associated with a higher proportion of institutions:
    - Conducting assessment of FYS
    - Using most assessment techniques (surveys, focus groups, analysis of institutional data)
    - Assessing a wide range of objectives



# Connection of HIPs to Assessment of FYS

- Seems there is something there with assessment and HIEP.
- What is driving this?
  - If the institutions value outcomes, they are likely to implement programs that influence them
  - If the institutions value outcomes, they are likely to assess and evaluate programs that influence them
- Safe to say that assessment practices in the FYS co-vary with the inclusion of HIEP in the FYS
- More research is warranted to better understand this connection

# Conclusion

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

– Kuh, 2010

# Thank You

## Questions/Comments?

