
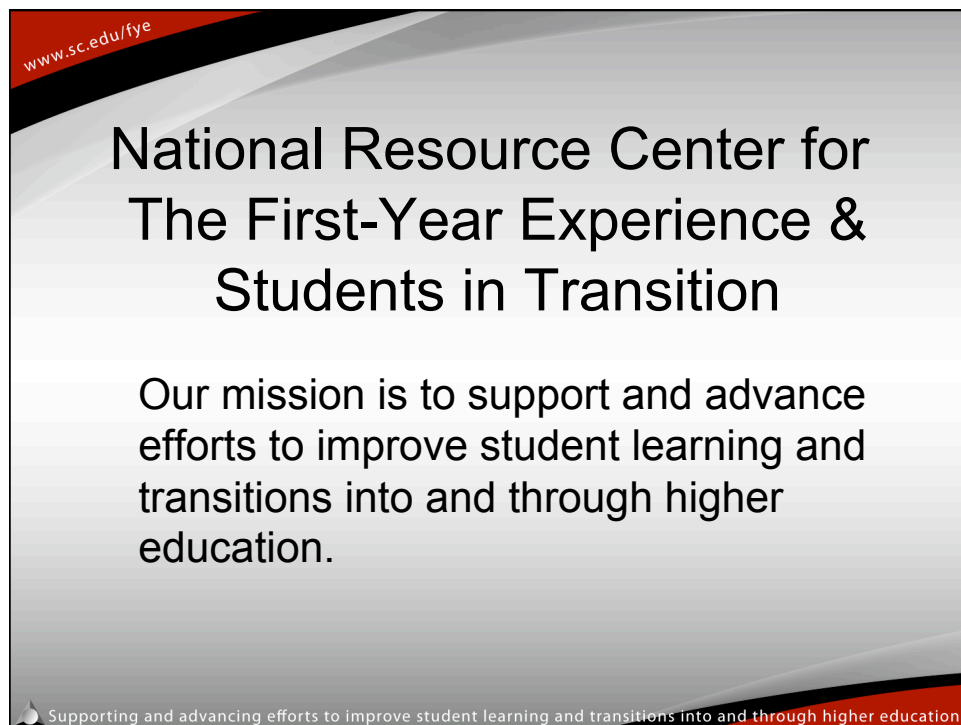


A National Overview of Writing  
in First-Year Seminars

Tracy L. Skipper  
CCCC  
March 19, 2010  
Louisville, KY


 **National Resource Center for  
The First-Year Experience®  
& Students in Transition**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



[www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye)

National Resource Center for  
The First-Year Experience &  
Students in Transition

Our mission is to support and advance  
efforts to improve student learning and  
transitions into and through higher  
education.

 Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

[www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye)

## National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition

- Conferences and professional development events
- Publications
- Research
- Online resources ([www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye))

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

[www.sc.edu/fye](http://www.sc.edu/fye)

## Defining First-Year Seminars

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).

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Defining First-Year Seminars

- Extended Orientation
- Academic, Common Content
- Academic, Variable Content
- Basic Study Skills
- Pre-Professional, Discipline-Linked

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Inquiry-Based First-Year Seminar

The focal point of the first year should be a small seminar taught by experienced faculty. The seminar should deal with topics that stimulate and open intellectual horizons and allow opportunities for learning by inquiry in a collaborative environment. . . .it should enable a professor to imbue new students with a sense of the excitement of discovery and the opportunities for intellectual growth inherent in the university experience. (Boyer Commission, 1998, qtd. in Brent, 2005, pp. 256-257.)

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Replacing Introductory Writing with the First-Year Seminar

### Possibilities

- Avoids perception of remediation
- Changes faculty & student views about writing and education in general
- “excellent vehicle for introducing students to academic discourse in a research-intensive context” (Brent, 2005, p. 263)

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Replacing Introductory Writing with the First-Year Seminar

### Possibilities

- Method for accomplishing WAC goals “in a WAC-resistant environment” (Brent, p. 264)
- Enhance faculty development opportunities

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Replacing Introductory Writing with the First-Year Seminar

### Problems

- More expensive
- Better suited to “private baccalaureate liberal arts schools” and “more selective private schools” (Moon, 2003, p. 107)
- Writing taught by those not trained to teach writing

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Replacing Introductory Writing with the First-Year Seminar

### Problems

- Emphasis on content rather than rhetorical competence or skill development may put some students at a disadvantage
- Territorial issues and support for graduate education

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Overview of Respondents

National Survey of First-Year Seminars				
	2006 (N = 821)		2009 (N = 892)	
	All Types	Primary Type	All Types	Primary Type
EO	57.9%	40.9%	61.6%	41.1%
AUC	28.1%	17.4%	25.9%	16.1%
AVC	25.7%	17.9%	23.4%	15.4%
Basic	21.6%	5.8%	22.4%	4.9%
Prof	14.9%	1.6%	14.4%	3.7%
Hybrid	20.3%	16.2%	22.5%	15.3%
Other	4.4%	0.3%	2.5%	3.5%

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Seminar Goals

Important Course Goals, All Institutions		
Goals	2006	2009*
Develop academic skills	64.2%	54.6%
Develop a connection with the institution	NA	50.2%
Orient to campus resources	52.9%	47.8%
Encourage self-exploration/development	36.9%	28.5%
Create common first-year experience	36.0%	23.3%
Develop support network	32.3%	17.5%

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as a Seminar Goal

**Writing as an Important Course Goal by Institution Type (N = 107)**

	Number	Percentage
Two-Year (n = 237)	15	6.3%
Four-Year (n = 655)	92	14%
Public (n = 465)	27	5.8%
Private (n = 369)	75	20.3%
For-Profit (n = 58)	5	8.6%

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as a Seminar Goal

**Writing as an Important Course Goal by Seminar Type (N = 107)**

	Number	Percentage
Extended Orientation	11	3.1%
Academic (Uniform)	27	19.4%
Academic (Variable)	51	37.8%
Basic Study Skills	6	14.3%
Pre-Professional	1	3.1%
Hybrid	9	13.3%

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as a Seminar Goal

### Academic w/ Variable Content

- “Seminars introduce students to the critical thinking and writing skills required in college and include a particular emphasis on intercultural understanding in keeping with the international focus of the college.” (Kalamazoo College, p. 75)
- “Seminars are intended to help students find and develop a voice through writing, speaking, analytical reading, discussion, and critical thinking. They integrate collaborative and group work, peer review, and effective discussions.” (Kalamazoo College, p. 76)

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as a Seminar Goal

### Extended Orientation/Linked Course

English faculty’s goal for program:

- Ability to write effective thesis statement
- Ability to write convincing argument with acceptable grammar, punctuation, and mechanics
- Develop skills in critical reading (p. 128, Rocky Mountain College)

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education



www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as a Seminar Goal

### Extended Orientation

Most instructors stress a set of 7 common goals, including “incorporate a variety of skills essential to academic and personal success (i.e., written communication, oral communication, self-reflection, organization, critical thinking, and the ability to synthesize ideas and information)” (p. 176, University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Skills as Course Topic

	2003 (N = 621)	2006 (N = 821)	2009 (N = 892)
<b>All Seminars</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>
Extended Orientation	12.9%	5.1%	5.4%
Academic (Uniform)	45.0%	37.3%	28.8%
Academic (Variable)	73.5%	56.5%	51.8%
Basic Study Skills	32.4%	8.9%	9.5%
Pre-Professional	17.6%	8.3%	3.1%
Hybrid*	---	16.0%	12.9%

\*Hybrid category introduced on 2006 survey.

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Connection to Innovative Course Practice

	Writing Skills as Goal/Topic	Writing Skills Not Identified
Extended Orientation (n = 21)	3	18
Academic (Uniform) (n = 23)	12	11
Academic (Variable) (n = 23)	19	4
All Other Types (n = 16)	5	11

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Writing Assignments/Activities

Assignment	EO (n = 14)	AUC (n = 34)	AVC (n = 59)
Research Papers	2	7	18
Formal Essays	0	9	20
Process Approach	1	5	21
Journals	2	5	11
Reaction/ Reflection Papers	7	4	7
Personal Writing	3	10	4
Informal Writing	2	5	8
Peer Review	0	2	10

Note. 131 respondents provided descriptions of writing assignments in the seminar.

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Links to Writing-Intensive Courses


	English	Developmental English	Composition
EO ( <i>n</i> = 129)	13	8	15
AUC ( <i>n</i> = 43)	4	3	6
AVC ( <i>n</i> = 40)	4	3	4
All Other Types ( <i>n</i> = 64)	6	5	8
Total	27	19	33

*Note.* 284 respondents provided descriptions of learning community structures.

Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

www.sc.edu/fye

## Is Writing Improved?



Supporting and advancing efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education

## Questions?

Tracy L. Skipper, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director for Publications

[tlskippe@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:tlskippe@mailbox.sc.edu)

(803) 777-6226



A National Overview of Writing in First-Year Seminars  
Tracy L. Skipper, Ph.D.  
Conference on College Composition and Communication  
March 19, 2010

- Bamberg, B. (1997). Alternative models of first-year composition: Possibilities and problems. *Writing Program Administrator*, 21(1), 7-18.
- Brent, D. (2005). Reinventing WAC (again): The first-year seminar and academic literacy. *CCC*, 57(2), 253-276.
- Daniell, B. (1998). F-Y comp, F-Y seminars, and WAC: A response. *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 2(3), 69-74.
- Hunter, M. S., & Linder, C. W. (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: Jossey-Bass.
- Moltz, D. (2009, November 11). Choose your own freshman comp. *Inside Higher Ed*.
- Moon, G. F. (2003). First-year writing in first-year seminars. Writing across the curriculum from the start. *Writing Program Administrator*, 26 (3), 105-118.
- Runciman, L. (1998). Ending composition as we knew it. *Language and Learning Across the Disciplines*, 2(3), 44-53.
- Tobolowsky, B. F. & Associates. (2008). *2006 national survey of first-year seminars: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum* Monograph No. 51). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.
- Tobolowsky, B. F., Cox, B. E., & Wagner, M. T. (Eds.). (2005). *Exploring the evidence, Vol. III: Reporting research on first-year seminars* (Monograph No. 42). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.
- Tobolowsky, B. F., Mamrick, M., & Cox, B. E. (2005). *2003 national survey of first-year seminars: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum* Monograph No. 41). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition.