

# Examining First-Year Seminars as a High-Impact Practice

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# Why Examine First-Year Seminars?



**“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*

The collage includes book covers such as:
 

- Journal of Higher Education*
- The First-Year Experience in American Higher Education*
- How College Affects Students*
- Building and Sustaining Learning Communities*
- Student Departure Puzzle*
- Developing and Sustaining Successful First-Year Programs: A Guide for Practitioners*
- What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*
- NSSE National Survey of Student Engagement*
- Journal of College Student Development*
- Impact of First-Year Experiences*

*Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005*



# High-Impact Educational Practices



## 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.

## Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

## Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

## Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

## Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

## Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

## Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

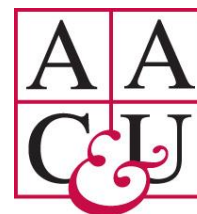
In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

## Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

## Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.



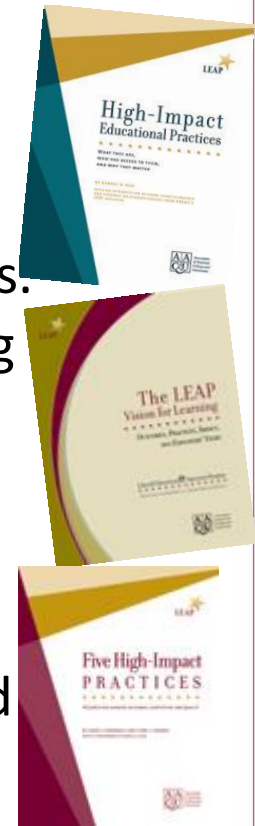
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# FYS as High-Impact Practice

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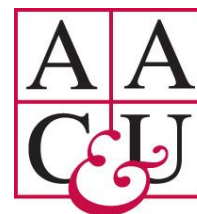
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**“While promising, they are not a panacea. Only when they are implemented well and continually evaluated...will we realize their considerable potential.”**

*Kuh in Brownell & Swaner, 2010*



# What does it mean to be HIP?

## The EVOLUTION of the HIPSTER 2010 – 2015

Photos by Maddy Booth

Models: Jess Smith & Ryan Vogel

Produced by Sarah Lawrence and Brittany Joyce



**The Cruelty-Free Vegan**  
**SOLO**  
The vegan's cruelty-free canvas bag is always toting around organic veggies and his world's only thing that runs at just how hungry he really is.



**The Colorful Crafter**  
**SOLO**  
Self-aware enough to understand what it means to have Portlandia steaming in the background while she crafts, her world revolves around browsing Etsy and getting lots of glitter.



**The Chic Traveler**  
**SOLO**  
She travels to Instagram and Instagram to travel. A 5/5 Airbnb review if the room is cool enough to post, and, while her road trip may only last a few days, this girl knows how to make it look like a month-long vacation. At least to her followers.



**The Festival Flower Girl**  
**SOLO**  
Forever dressed in her hair and maybe a metallic tattoo or two to match, she goes for festivals - specifically dressing for them. Her closet is just about all tribal print and boho.



**The Lumbersexual**  
**SOLO**  
With a beard that says he lives in the wild and a body that says he may or may not get seaweed when his culture's pretty boy. Just think of all the infernal accomplishments in that Stopp 40.



**The Coffee Shop Sophisticate**  
**SOLO**  
Spearheading the meow-savvy movement in his standout frames and other sock collection, he enjoys reading, as well as watching people watch him read O'Jays.

Paste



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

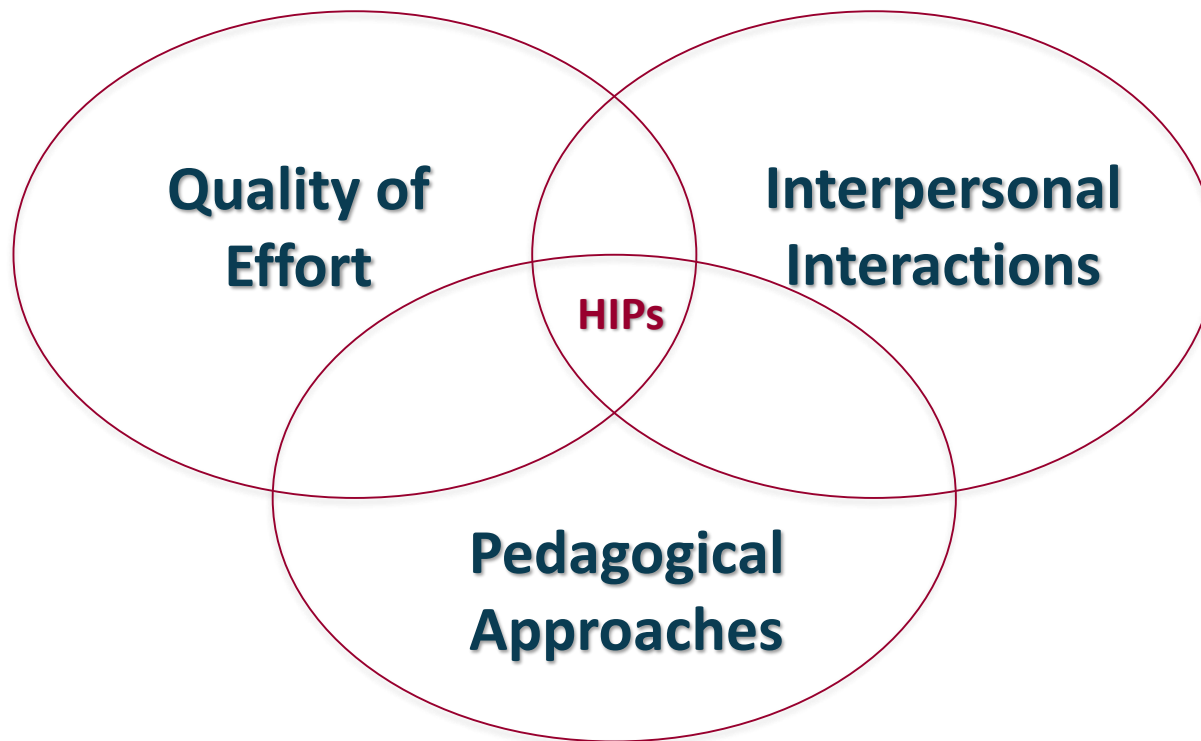


# Characteristics of HIPs

- Creates an investment of time and energy
- Includes interaction with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Demands reflection and integrated learning
- Real-world applications
- High expectations
- Includes frequent feedback
- Exposure to diverse perspectives
- Accountability



# Criteria for FYS as HIP



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# Quality of Effort

- **Creates an investment of time and energy**
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- **High expectations**
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# Interpersonal Interactions

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# Pedagogical Approaches

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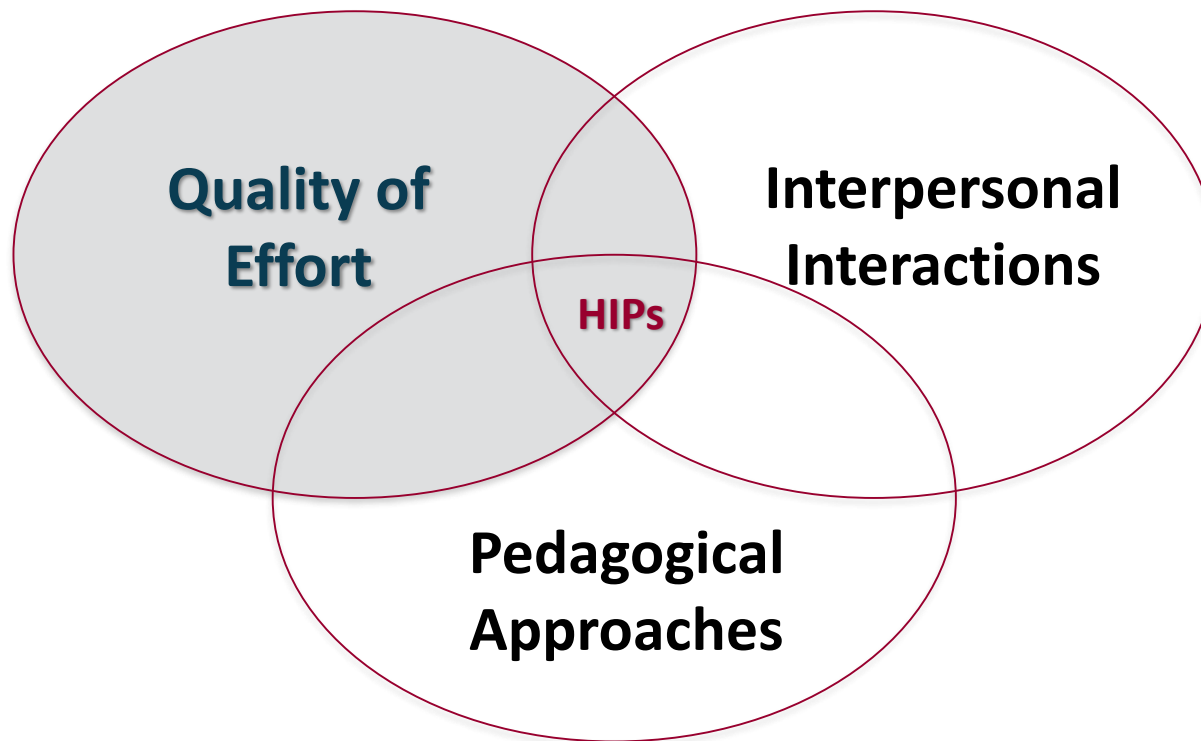


# 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

- 3,753 **institutions** were invited to participate
  - 4 waves: CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 participants
  - Administered from Nov., 2012-Jan., 2013
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- **804** (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS
- **Limitation**: Not the most recent data set



# Criteria for FYS as HIP



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# Investment of Time & Effort



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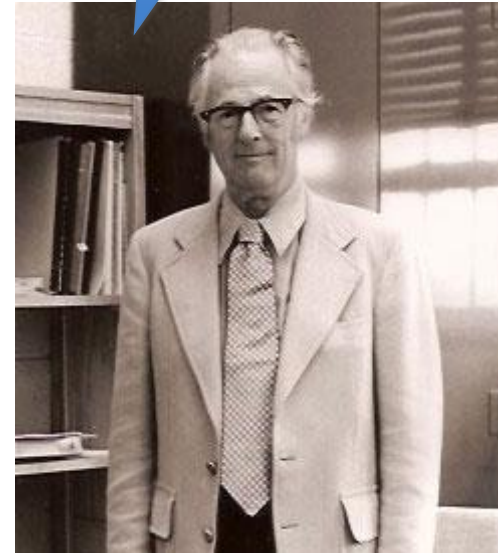
Engagement



Quality of  
Effort



Involvement

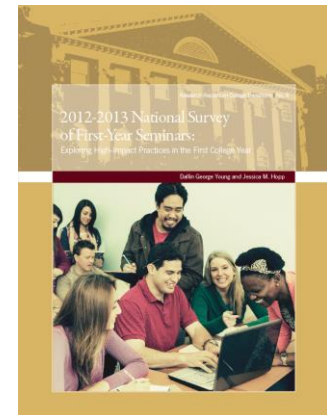




# Investment of Time and Effort

## STRUCTURE (Quantity)

- Three-quarters of FYS are one term in duration
- Credit hours
  - 45% of FYS carry three credit hours
  - 44% of FYS carry one credit hour
- 48% report 3+ classroom contact hours a week



# Investment of Time and Effort

## ENGAGING PEDAGOGY (Quality)

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



# Performance Expectations Set at Appropriately High Levels



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# Course Cues for High Expectations

- Are duration, credit, & contact hours for FYS the same as other first-year courses? Not always.
- Application of credit hours
  - GE: 59%
  - Elective: 38%
  - Major requirements: 9%
  - No credit: 6%
- Grading
  - Letter grade: 84%
  - Pass/fail: 12%

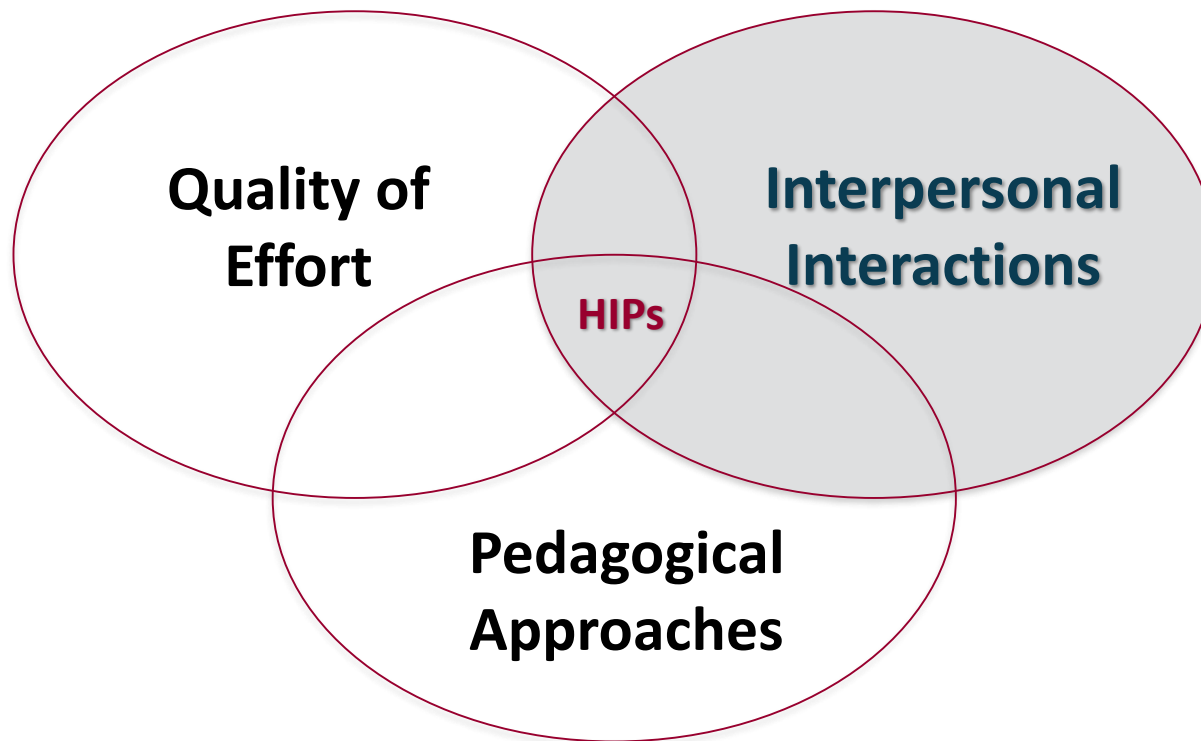


**Academic  
Seminars with  
Various Topics**



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# Criteria for FYS as HIP



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# Interactions with Faculty



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# Interactions with Faculty

Two foundational conditions are necessary for FYS to even have the possibility of fulfilling this tenet of HIP:

1. Faculty are, in fact, serving as instructors.
2. Course enrollment is small enough to afford the ratio of students to faculty that is optimal for substantive interaction.

# First-Year Seminar Instruction

Instructor	%
Tenure-track faculty	71.1
FT non-tenure-track faculty	60.7
Student affairs professionals	52.0
Adjunct faculty	51.9
Other campus professionals	31.8
Graduate students	4.7
Undergraduate students	4.1



# First-Year Seminar Instruction

Institution

Tenure

Student

Other campus

Graduate student

Undergraduate students

0

1.1

1.9

1.8

7

4.1

**Over 60% of institutions intentionally place at least some first-year students in sections taught by their academic advisors.**

*(Young & Hopp, 2014)*



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# Interactions with Faculty

- 44% of FYS limit enrollment to < 20 students
- Seminars with < 20 students tend to be:
  - At private colleges and universities
  - At four-year campuses
  - At smaller institutions
  - Academic seminars & especially w/variable content
- Seminars with > 20 students tend to be:
  - Extended orientation
  - Pre-professional/discipline linked
  - Basic study skills

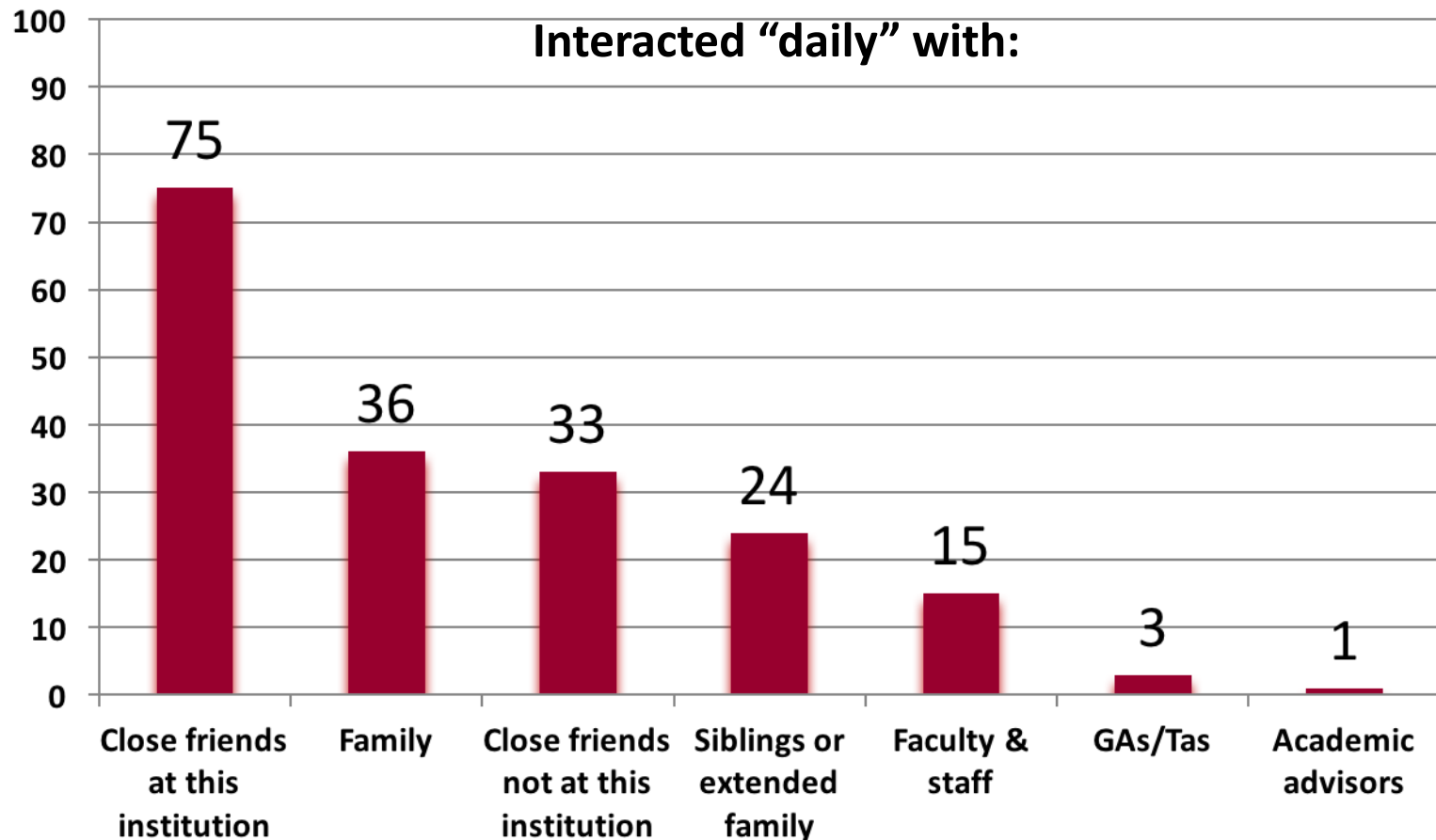
# Interactions with Peers



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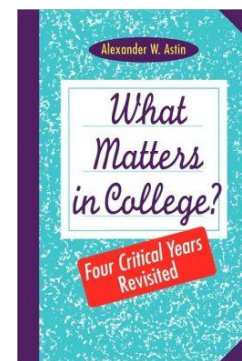
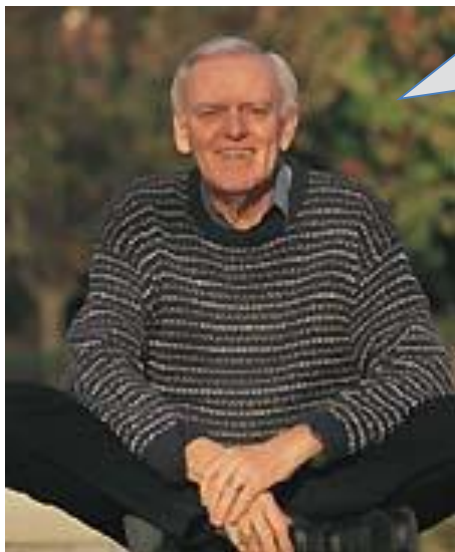
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# Interaction with Peers



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“The student’s peer group is the **single most potent source of influence** on growth and development during the undergraduate years”  
(Astin, 1993, p. 398)





# Interaction with Peers

- Structure matters (AGAIN!)
  - “The length and frequency of the class, the student-centered nature of the course, & a sense of shared exploration and empowerment among the participants” were catalysts for the development of meaningful academic and social relationships. (*Enke, 2011, p. 9*)
- Students are more likely to study together and appreciate group activities more in FYS than other FYE courses

# Interaction with Peers

- Experiential learning (e.g., wilderness) seminars increases and enhances connections with peers
- Relationships in FYS extend far beyond course, year, and even undergraduate experience (*Enku, 201; Foote, 2010*)
- Peer leaders in the seminar
  - FYS instructors of record in 5-10% of institutions
  - Play a role in FYS at 46% of institutions

# Experiences with Diversity



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OF BENETTON.



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# 4 Elements of Diversity and Campus Culture

- Historical
- Structural
- Behavioral
- Psychological



*(Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998)*

# Experiences with Diversity

## STRUCTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

- National data on identity areas of students enrolled in FYS does not exist
- FYS and GE courses expose students to various majors and diversity of disciplinary perspectives
- Restricted enrollment types of seminars versus open enrollment
- > 60% of institutions report they offer special FYS sections for student subpopulations

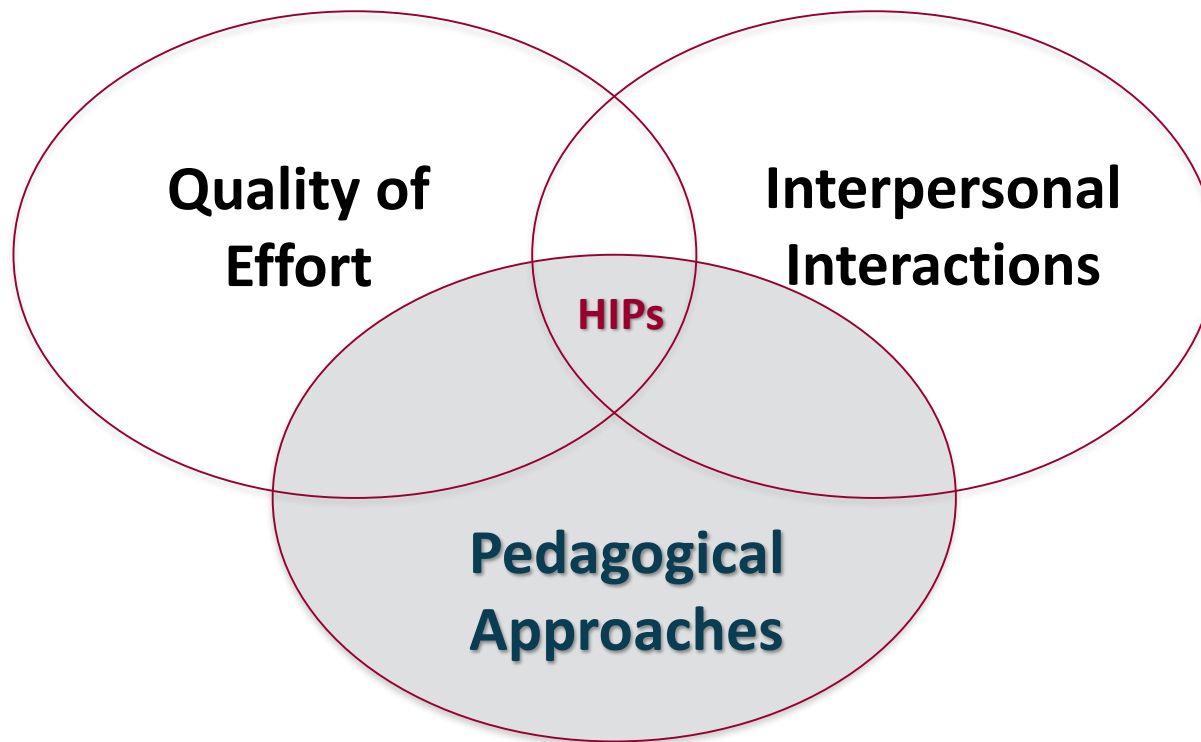


# Experiences with Diversity

## TOPICS COVERED IN THE CLASSROOM

- 59% of institutions report that their FYS incorporates diversity/global learning
- FYS yield bigger gains in multicultural awareness, commitment to social justice, attributional complexity than other FY courses  
*(Engberg & Mayhew, 2007)*
- Class-level structural diversity + engaging pedagogy = behavioral diversity

# Criteria for FYS as HIP



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# Opportunities to Discover Relevance Through Real-World Applications



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# Most Important Objectives

Objective	Percentage
Develop a connection with the institution	44.9
Provide orientation to campus resources & services	37.8
Develop academic skills	36.3
Develop critical thinking skills	23.3
Create common first-year experience	21.6
Develop study skills	20.0
Self-exploration or personal development	17.0
Develop support network or friendships	14.5
Improve second-year return rates	14.5
Increase student-faculty interaction	12.4
Develop writing skills	11.6

# Relevance & Real World Application

- 16% of institutions offer pre-professional/ discipline-linked FYS; 4% as primary FYS
- 61% of campuses offer special sections of FYS
  - Academic preparation (honors and developmental)
  - Identify areas
  - Enrollment patterns
  - Campus experiences
- Other HIPs: 37% of FYS have LCs, 32% include SL, and 13% have UGR





# Opportunities to Reflect; Demonstration of Competence

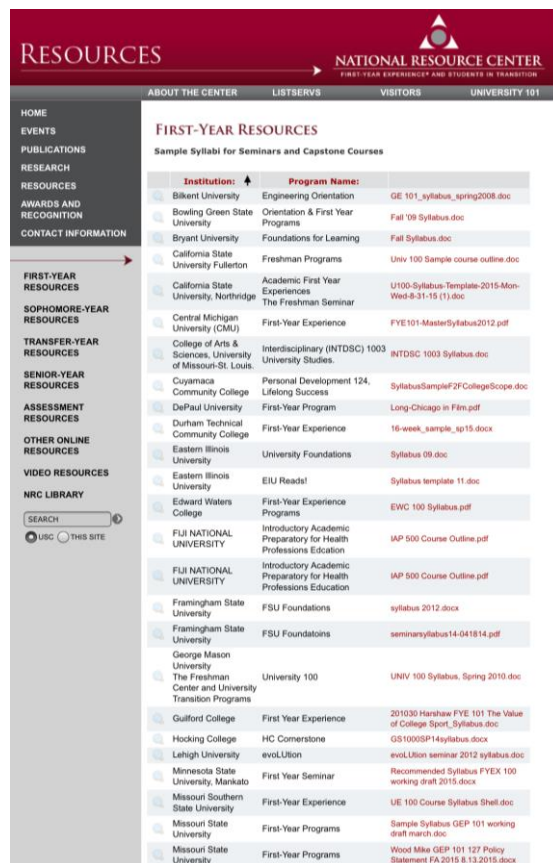
Learning  
equals Experience  
Reflection  
plus



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# Reflection & Competence



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**FIRST-YEAR RESOURCES**  
Sample Syllabi for Seminars and Capstone Courses

Institution:	Program Name:	Link
Bilkent University	Engineering Orientation	GE 101_syllabus_spring2008.doc
Bowling Green State University	Orientation & First Year Programs	Fall '09 Syllabus.doc
Bryant University	Foundations for Learning	Fall Syllabus.doc
California State University Fullerton	Freshman Programs	Univ 100 Sample course outline.doc
California State University, Northridge	Academic First Year Experiences The Freshman Seminar	U100-Syllabus-Template-2015-Mon- Wed-8-31-10 (1).doc
Central Michigan University (CMU)	First-Year Experience	FYE101-MasterSyllabus2012.pdf
College of Arts & Sciences, University of Missouri-St. Louis	Interdisciplinary (INTDSC) 1003 University Studies	INTDSC 1003 Syllabus.doc
Cuyamaca Community College	Personal Development 124, Lifelong Success	SyllabusSample27CollegeScope.doc
DePaul University	First-Year Program	Long-Chicago in Film.pdf
Durham Technical Community College	First-Year Experience	16-week_sample_sp15.docx
Eastern Illinois University	University Foundations	Syllabus 09.doc
Eastern Illinois University	EIU Reads!	Syllabus template 11.doc
Edward Waters College	First-Year Experience Programs	EWC 100 Syllabus.pdf
FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	Introductory Academic Preparatory for Health Professions Education	IAP 500 Course Outline.pdf
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Framingham State University	FSU Foundations	syllabus 2012.docx
Framingham State University	FSU Foundations	seminarsyllabus14-041814.pdf
George Mason University	University 100	UNIV 100 Syllabus, Spring 2010.doc
The Freshman Center and University Transition Programs		
Gulford College	First Year Experience	201030 Hershaw FYE 101 The Value of College Sport_Syllabus.doc
Hocking College	HC Cornerstone	GS1000SP14syllabus.docx
Lehigh University	evolution	evolution seminar 2012 syllabus.doc
Minnesota State University, Mankato	First Year Seminar	Recommended Syllabus FYEX 100 working draft 2015.docx
Missouri Southern State University	First-Year Experience	UE 100 Course Syllabus Shell.doc
Missouri State University	First-Year Programs	Sample Syllabus GEP 101 working draft march.doc
Missouri State University	First-Year Programs	Wood Mike GEP 101 127 Policy Statement FA 2015 8.13.2015.docx

- Collection of FYS syllabi on the National Resource Center resources database
- 46 syllabi from 39 institutions
- Represents 2- and 4-year campuses in U.S. and internationally
- Not systematic data collection for the purposes of research

# Reflection & Competence

- Measures of competence: assignments
  - Most often include traditional metrics (papers, quizzes, exams, presentations, homework)
  - Some innovative and engaging assignments (journals, reflection papers, personal/academic plans, scavenger hunts, campus/diversity activities)
  - Most FYS include multiple means of evaluating student performance and competence
- Public displays of competence were in the form of presentations, group work, & faculty interviews

# Reflection & Competence

- Opportunities for reflection: assignments
  - Most FYS syllabi included structured opportunities for reflection (journals, reflections, opinion essays, thought pieces) for course completion and grading
  - Self-assessments and typologies are also popular
  - Assignments related to cultural events, global citizenship, diversity, and service (nearly) always had a reflection component
- FYS is often a faculty learning lab for teaching & pedagogy (*Cuseo, 2009*)

# Frequent, Timely, & Constructive Feedback



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# Frequent Feedback

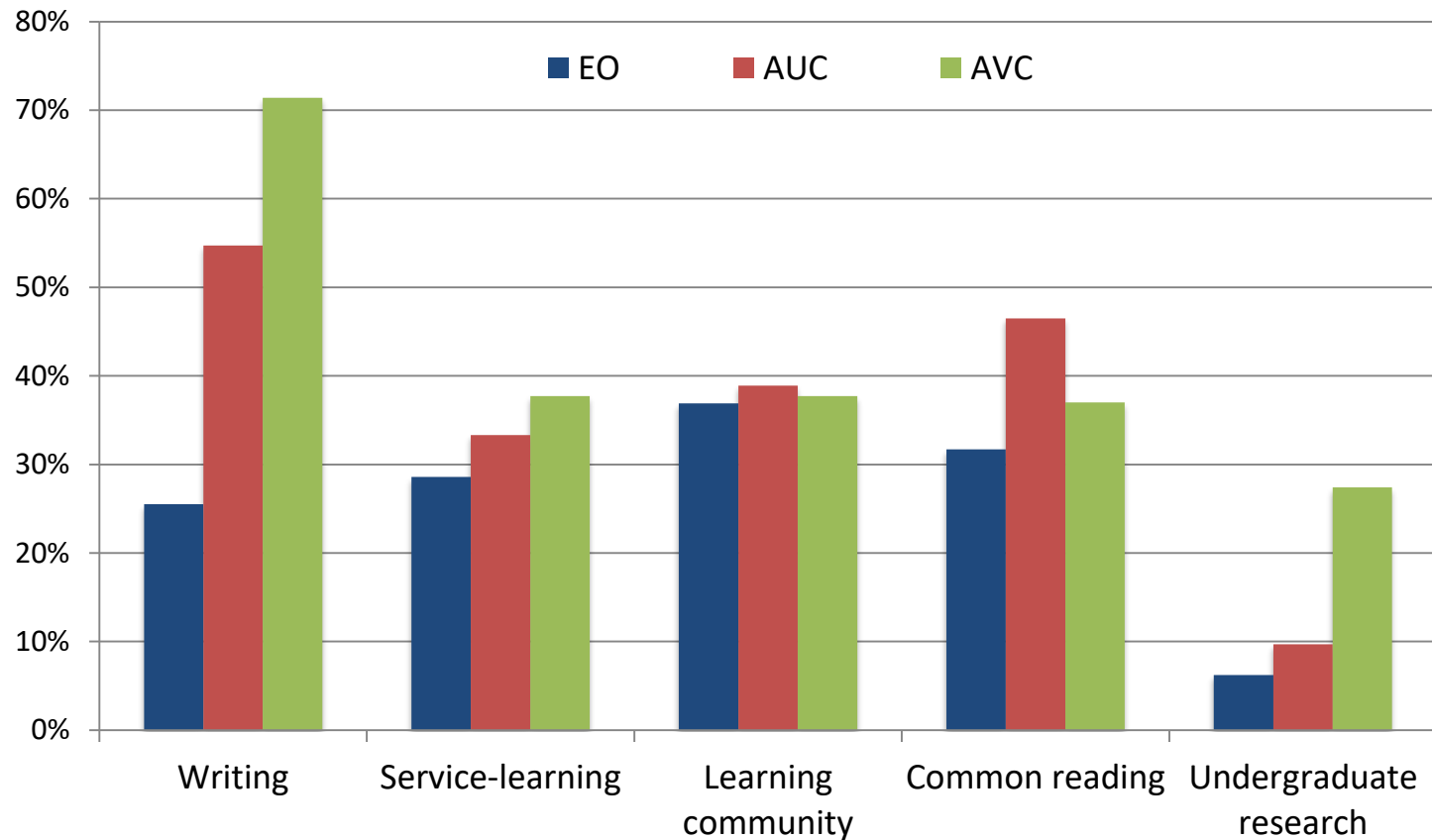
“Few studies offer specific evidence about the implementation and impact of this tenet of high-impact practices in first-year seminars. One notable exception is a small literature base on writing assignments in the first year and in first-year seminars. Writing assignments, especially those that required multiple drafts, are a common and effective vehicle for frequent, timely, and constructive feedback in first-year seminars (Foote, 2010; Skipper, 2014).” *(Keup & Young, forthcoming)*



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# HIPs by Seminar Type



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# Emphasis on Writing

- In academic seminars of both types ( $p < .05$ )
  - Less likely in extended orientation and pre-professional seminars ( $p < .05$ )
- When section size is less than 19 ( $p < .001$ )
- When tenure-track faculty serve as course instructors ( $p < .001$ )
  - Less likely when student affairs professionals are instructors ( $p < .001$ )

# Evidence of Meaning-Making Assignments

	EO ( <i>n</i> = 75)	AUC ( <i>n</i> = 81)	AVC ( <i>n</i> = 105)	Hybrid ( <i>n</i> = 45)
Research paper	4	18	31	11
Expository writing	9	17	11	7
Article review, critique, analysis	4	19	13	11
Argument	0	2	7	1
Discipline-specific writing assignments	0	0	0	1

# Other Writing Assignments

	EO ( <i>n</i> = 75)	AUC ( <i>n</i> = 81)	AVC ( <i>n</i> = 105)	Hybrid ( <i>n</i> = 45)
Journal	21	18	6	12
Career exploration/academic planning	16	10	1	3
Personal exploration/reflection	22	20	6	13
Electronic writing	5	6	3	2
Response papers	22	14	19	11
Analysis of inventories	4	2	0	0
Career-related documents	3	3	1	0
Business writing	2	1	0	0



**Thought is action in rehearsal.**  
Sigmund Freud

# QUESTIONS, CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & TAKEAWAYS



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# Concluding Thoughts & Takeaways

- Engaging pedagogy is critical to FYS success as HIPs
- Structure matters
- Academic FYS are models of emerging best practice
- Data are often clear what we should be doing in FYS to uphold principles of HIPs, but less clear about what we are actually doing
- We need to study classroom practices
- **FYS does appear to be a HIP via these 8 criteria**



# Questions? Comments?



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