

E-SOURCE

for College Transitions

August 2003, Vol. 1, No. 1

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I introduce *E-Source for College Transitions*, the new electronic newsletter from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. As an evolution of the 16-year-old FYE NEWSLETTER, *E-Source* boasts a new format and mode of delivery. It was expressly designed to meet the needs of higher educators and others interested in the college student experience by providing timely, useful, and vital information. A new issue will be posted to the web every two months with feature articles, news briefs, and other items of interest. Subscribers will receive an e-mail notification containing highlights and links to articles when a new issue is available. Our new electronic format will also offer subscribers easy access to past issues of *E-Source*.

While our look has changed, we will continue to feature articles on curricular and co-curricular initiatives designed to enhance student learning and success in the first college year and beyond. *E-Source for College Transitions* will help you and your institution stay on the cutting edge of trends and issues related to the college student experience. Each issue will provide fresh ideas for your use and will report on proven approaches for enhancing college student transitions.

We at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition are confident that you will find *E-Source for College Transitions* to be an important resource for the work on your campus. As always, we welcome your comments and your contributions. Guidelines for submitting articles and information for future issues of *E-Source for College Transitions* are available online in the Center's publications area.



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Collaborative Activities Increase Learning in Large Classes

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Many institutions turn to large lecture classes as a way of “doing more with fewer resources.” Instructors in these courses are most comfortable teaching the way they were taught—the lecture method. Yet, a variety of research studies have indicated that this may be one of the least effective approaches to student learning, especially as students increasingly challenge us to entertain them—to move them from passive learning roles to active ones. Thus, faculty must grapple with stepping out of their comfort zone to create high-quality learning experiences for their students—no easy task in the large lecture hall.

Instructors may have little control over the physical classroom environment, but some questions they might entertain as they design a course syllabus and individual class meetings, include:

- How large is the classroom?
- What type of equipment will be used? Can the students who sit at the back of the room see the screen, the chalkboard?
- Can the students who sit at the back of the room hear the instructor? Does the instructor need a microphone?
- Does the setup of the room allow the instructor to move about the room and engage inter actively with the students?

They may also make a large lecture class more dynamic by breaking class meetings into various stages, where lecture is interspersed with collaborative and active learning activities. This article presents one model of this approach, based on a course that meets once a week for four hours. These strategies can also be adapted to classes meeting for shorter periods of time at more frequent intervals.

For example, I divide the four-hour class meeting into three 80-minute segments. Each segment follows the same basic outline:

- Mini lecture—30 minutes
- Question-and-answer session—10 minutes
- Group quiz (15-20 multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions completed by teams of four students)—15 minutes
- Feedback session on the quiz answers submitted by the group—5 minutes

Tips for Engaging Students in Learning

- Restate the main points by using a new example, asking for the main points, and showing where the class is now
- Ask a student to summarize the lecture’s key ideas
- Restate what students are expected to have gained from the lectures
- Create working teams in class
- Create a non-threatening environment
- Be accessible
- Use a variety of activities to reach different learning styles
- Use technology effectively
- Assign creative projects
- Place “help” boxes in the back of the classroom
- Pair students to help both learn better
- Develop a course homepage on the web

Group activity, with teams of four students, on the concepts covered during the lecture—10 minutes

The same process is repeated in the second and third segments. As you can see, during each 80-minute segment an enormous amount of learning, reinforcement, and feedback takes place. The question-and-answer session gives me an opportunity to engage each student at some point during the semester. Using the class roster, I call on individual students to answer questions, and I try to call on every student once during the quarter. Group activities are designed to raise students’ level of understanding of the concepts presented during the mini lectures. Sometimes, a short film or a brief impromptu presentation by a group of students takes the place of the group activity. The last 10 minutes of each class is devoted to a “wrap up” session and a discussion of the next class session and class assignments.

Students often skip large lecture classes, because they don’t feel they will be missed. I haven’t found this to be a problem in my courses. One reason is that their peers hold them accountable for attending class. The students know that the points earned for completing the collaborative exercises and group quizzes help their grade and better equip them with knowledge to further their education in their field. The benefits of quizzes and group activities may be greatest for struggling students who are also at greatest risk of dropping out.

Students also enjoy the course because they are more engaged. For example, one student commented: “I thought

this class was going to be hard and boring but this was such a fun class and I learned so much.” Some additional benefits to students are:

- Interaction with other students in a large class
- Immediate feedback provided on the quizzes
- Feelings of success and increased confidence
- A student-centered large lecture class can also be more rewarding for faculty, because they experience the change in student motivation that far exceeds the boundaries of a single course.

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Recent Grant Funding for First-Year Programs

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As educators continue to wrestle with tight budgets and shrinking resources, foundations are an increasingly important source of funding for first-year programs and initiatives. The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is committed to providing information concerning foundations that support the first-year experience. The following list details several foundations that have recently funded first-year initiatives.

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
 140 East 62nd Street
 New York, New York 10021
 (212) 838-8400
<http://www.mellon.org>

Synopsis: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports work in higher education, museums, art conservation, performing arts, conservation and the environment, and public affairs. The Foundation seeks to strengthen institutions and their capacities rather than encourage them to take on ancillary activities and to strengthen programs long enough to achieve meaningful results.

Funded Projects: \$250,000 to Hampshire College (Amherst, Massachusetts) to implement a comprehensive new program for first-year students

The William Bingham Foundation
 20325 Center Ridge Road
 Suite 629
 Rocky River, OH 44116
 Ph: (440) 331-6350
<http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/ingham/index.html>

Synopsis: As a family foundation, The William Bingham Foundation furthers the charitable purposes of its founder, Elizabeth Bingham Blossom, in the fields of education, health and human services, science, and the arts. Grants are made only to public charities and range in size depending on program budget and goals.

Funded Projects: \$100,000 to Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.) toward construction of a student residence hall and related facilities and a \$40,000 challenge grant to the University of Florida (Gainesville, Florida) for Greening UF, an environmental sustainability project involving students, faculty, and staff

The Pew Charitable Trusts
 2005 Market Street, Suite 1700
 Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077
 Ph: 215.575.9050
 Fx: 215.575.4939
<http://www.pewtrusts.com>

Synopsis: The Pew Charitable Trusts support non-profit activities in the areas of culture, education, the environment, health and human services, public policy, and religion. Based in Philadelphia, the Trusts make strategic investments that encourage and support citizen participation in addressing critical issues and affecting social change. The education program is supporting a few current grantees who are working to highlight higher education performance at the state and national levels in the critical areas of access, affordability, completion, cost-effectiveness, and student learning

Funded Projects: Breaking new ground in smoothing the transition between high school and college, the Standards for Success (S4S) project is providing high school students with knowledge and skill standards they will need to succeed at America's research universities. The Pew Trusts awarded a \$1.2 million dollar matching grant to the Association of American Universities (AAU) for the program.

The “funded projects” information was obtained from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and foundation web sites. The synopses of funding organizations were developed from organizational web sites and grant search engines online. Please note that the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition does not endorse these organizations. Those interested should contact the foundation directly for application instructions and funding requirements.

What's Happening at the Center?

Updates on Conferences, Research, and Publications

Conferences. A variety of professional development opportunities await you this fall and winter. The Center invites academic deans and department chairs to our Fall Institute, October 12-14, 2003 in Columbia, South Carolina. We are currently accepting proposals for the 10th National Conference on Students in Transition to be held in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, November 16-18, 2003. The deadline for proposals is September 2, 2003. Visit our web site for proposal and registration forms and more information about the conference.

Research. In 1994, John N. Gardner noted that “Educators are spending enormous amounts of energy in developing their freshman seminar courses [and] want to know how their efforts fit into the larger national and historical context of this unique curriculum reform.” This is still true 10 years later as the National Resource Center plans to administer the revised National Survey of First-Year Seminars. This is the first major overhaul of the triennial survey since its first administration in 1988.

This new survey continues to focus on capturing data regarding the administration of the seminars as well as gaining a better understanding of what is happening in the classroom. The survey has been retitled, dropping the word “Programs,” to state clearly that our interest is in the seminar rather than other first-year initiatives. Additionally, we are attempting to explore aspects of the first-year seminar that have not been fully captured before. For example, this instrument features more questions on the use of peer leaders, team teaching, and on-line course elements than past surveys.

Perhaps the most significant change is that the survey will now be administered online. Our hope is that we have made the instrument clearer, easier to answer, and easier to return. Therefore, when the survey pops up in your e-mail this fall, please take the time to respond and return it to us.

For more information about the survey, please contact Barbara Tobolowsky or Carrie Linder.

Publications. The National Resource Center recently released the second edition of *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College*, edited by Jeanine Ward-Roof of Clemson University and Cathie Hatch of Bemidji State University. The revised monograph is a product of the Center’s ongoing collaboration with the National Orientation Directors Association.

A new instructional video will be available from the Center this fall. Produced in collaboration with the SC Sustainable Universities Initiative, *The Power of One: College Students and Sustainability* challenges students to adopt strategies that will allow them to live in harmony with the natural world and to do so in such a way that community AND commerce can thrive. A guide for instructors accompanies the video.

Students Have Greater Access to E-Service, But Shrinking Technology Budgets May Impact Learning

The Campus Computing Project’s annual survey reveals that institutions of higher education are making gains in e-commerce and other e-services for students. In the last five years, the number of campuses processing credit card payments over the web has risen from a little over 5% to just over 40%. More than two thirds (70.9%) of institutions responding to the fall 2002 survey offer online course registration. Despite these gains, Kenneth C. Greene, founding director of the Campus Computing Project, notes that institutions still lag about two years behind the corporate sector in providing the types of e-commerce/e-services routinely available to students elsewhere. One reason for this is that e-commerce is usually low on the list of priorities for campuses, falling behind network and telecommunication services, user support services, online instructional resources, network security, and IT training for students and faculty.

The budget crisis for higher education is also affecting academic computing. One third (32.6%) of respondents to the fall 2002 survey reported a decline in their academic computing budget for this academic year, with public universities being the hardest hit (more than half reported declining budgets). Mid-year budget cuts at many institutions exacerbate the situation. While most respondents to the survey are cautiously optimistic about the impact of budget cuts on technology initiatives, nearly one third

(31.9%) “agree/strongly agree” that budget cuts will have a detrimental effect on efforts to enhance eLearning at their institutions. As many states continue to struggle with budget deficits, the picture may not be much brighter for fall 2003.

A complete copy of the 2002 Campus Computing Report can be ordered from Kenneth Green c/o Campus Computing, P.O. Box 261242, Encino, CA 91426-1242.

Best Practices for Building Strong Faculty-Peer Partnerships

Jill Steinberg, Director, Peer Mentor Program
Wendy Sue Peng, Peer Mentor

Working with a peer mentor can be a privilege, an incredible learning experience, and a real challenge. The strategies listed below are adapted from those used in San Jose State University’s MUSE Program. They are designed to facilitate good working relationships between peers and faculty and ensure that the peer is an asset to the instructor and the first-year seminar class.

- Include the name and e-mail address of the peer mentor (PM) on the syllabus, which indicates he or she is a resource for students in the course.
- Meet with PM before the semester begins to discuss strategies for including the PM in the seminar.
- Meet with PM throughout semester to find out how the course is going for the PM and for the students. Ask about how the relationship between you and the PM is going. Discuss issues identified by students, PM, and yourself and brainstorm how the two of you might respond.
- Offer the PM time (e.g., 15 minutes) with the class – sometimes with you there and sometimes alone – to talk to students about their adjustment to campus, new relationships and changing relationships with friends and family, and assignments for this and other courses.
- Offer the PM the opportunity to present in class on a topic related to college success, such as study skills or selecting classes.
- Provide student e-mails to the PM so that he or she can maintain contact with them.

Setting clear expectations for peer mentors is also important. Some common expectations include:

- Attending every class meeting
- Meeting with students in or outside of class for study sessions
- Assisting instructors with field trips

- Asking questions in class that other students might be afraid to ask— for example, to stimulate discussion, model being a “good student/scholar,” model not knowing something and being able to ask a question in class
- Participating in responding to student work or assigning course grades, in accordance with institutional policies

“Pitfalls”

- PM comes and just sits in the class and is given no time to interact with students in class.
- If PM meets with the instructor, the professor doesn’t ask for feedback or responds in a way that makes the PM reticent or even afraid to offer feedback in the future.

Of course, there are many other strategies for building successful peer-instructor relationships. Consult colleagues on your own and other campuses to see what practices have worked well for them and their peer leaders.

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Higher Education Loses Pioneer in First-Year Seminar Assessment

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Dr. Paul P. Fidler, Professor Emeritus of Higher Education at the University of South Carolina, died on June 22 in Boston after losing his struggle with a long illness. Fidler is remembered both at USC and in the larger national higher education community for a number of very important accomplishments.

Fidler first came to the University of South Carolina in 1961. He received his undergraduate education at Duke University, his master’s degree from the University of South Carolina, and his doctorate from Florida State University.

Fidler held a variety of senior administrative posts over nearly four decades in the University’s Division of Student Affairs. His many accomplishments include founding the



Dr. Paul P. Fidler

University's annual Awards Day to celebrate and commemorate the accomplishments of students for excelling inside and outside the classroom, the design of a special experimental unit to serve "undeclared" students, and the establishment of the Career Center and the Academic Planning Office (a precursor to the University's current Office of Institutional Planning and Assessment). In addition to his appointments in the Division of Student Affairs, Fidler was a faculty member in the college student personnel services offered through USC's College of Education.

Fidler was a pioneer in the now widespread "assessment and accountability" movement, whereby colleges attempt to study, document, and report on the learning outcomes of their students. His work in this area, more than 25 years before it became fashionable in higher education to demonstrate such accountability, focused on measuring the impact of innovations introduced on campuses around the country to improve the first college year. In particular, Fidler demonstrated through convincing statistical terms the value of USC's University 101 program to student persistence, campus engagement, and academic achievement, making the course a model for those around the country. Likewise, his involvement in the first three national surveys of first-year seminar programs helped define seminars for first-year students on a national level. Fidler's pioneering research on the college student experience also had special areas of focus on the transfer student phenomena, the impact of on-campus residential living on student achievement, and components of the college experience that contribute to satisfaction levels in college graduates.

Fidler is survived by his wife of 44 years, Dr. Dorothy Fidler who is a scholar of note on the topic of the American first-year experience and is the founding editor of the Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. They both shared a career at the University, retiring simultaneously in June of 1999. Dr. Fidler also leaves behind two children, Paul Perry Fidler, Jr., of San Diego, and Cheryl Lynne Fidler Williams of Memphis. In addition, he is survived by his brother, William Kemp Fidler, of Asheville.

Institutions Excel in Providing First-Year Programs

In 2002, The Policy Center on the First Year of College completed a national study to identify and describe through in-depth case studies a variety of "Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year." Early in 2002, colleges and universities across the United States were invited to participate in the selection process by submitting short narrative descriptions of their first-year initiatives. From the 130 nominations received, 55 institutions in six institutional categories were chosen as semi-finalists.

These institutions were invited to submit additional materials for review. Thirteen campuses representing all sectors of American higher education were chosen from this group of semi-finalists as Institutions of Excellence that exemplify best practice in the first year. The criteria for this selection process were as follows:

- Evidence of an intentional, comprehensive approach to the first year that is appropriate to the institution's type
- Evidence of assessment of the various initiatives that constitute this approach
- Evidence of broad impact on significant numbers of first-year students, including, but not limited to, special student sub-populations
- Strong administrative support for first-year initiatives, evidence of institutionalization, and durability over time
- Involvement of a wide range of faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, and other constituent groups

In this issue, we present the first of a series of brief institutional profiles, describing a few of the key initiatives improving the learning and success of first-year students on these campuses. A complete narrative is available on the

Policy Center's web site. Click on the institution name to access the narrative.

Community College of Denver
Denver, Colorado

Five-campus system has 10,793 students

CCD Integrated Advising. CCD has a three-tiered integrated advising model that addresses student advising needs from the first point of contact through graduation and/or transfer. This model includes basic skills assessment, general core advising, referral to support services, and policies on declaration of major and program-major advising. All CCD students are assigned an advisor on admission. The college has a 70% persistence rate from fall to spring semester for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students. Overall, CCD's year-to-year retention rate for this same population averages 45%.

First-Generation Student Success Program. The First-Generation Student Success (FGSS) program enrolls students in first-year experience classes, learning-community initiatives, tutoring and peer mentor programs, service-learning opportunities and community service activities. CCD first-generation students also have access to computerized classrooms and drop-in labs for supplemental support and enrichment. The FGSS program has an annual retention rate of 80%.

North Lincoln Campus of Learners. The North Lincoln Campus of Learners is a joint-partnership between CCD and the Denver Housing Authority. The project provides access to education, training and related services to adults who reside in the North Lincoln Park Homes. The FGSS program works collaboratively with the North Lincoln Campus of Learners to transition residents into the college and help them attain their educational and career goals. Forty-two of the 48 North Lincoln students have been retained at the college—an 88% retention rate after year one, with 23 students named to the Vice President's and Dean's Honors lists.

LaGuardia Community College

Western Queens, New York

Part of the City University of New York (CUNY), serving more than 11,000 students

LaGuardia hosts an extremely diverse student population, approximately 70% of whom were born outside the U.S. All of the College's first-year programs concentrate on two major goals: (a) fostering academic success among developmental and ESL students and (b) creating a sense of community and connectedness to the College among a highly diverse group of commuting students.

Learning Communities. LaGuardia's learning communities typically link developmental courses with credit-bearing courses in the disciplines; for example, approximately 50% of ESL courses are now offered in this mode (34% of the incoming students are placed in ESL). The "New Student House" model serves students who need skills work in more than one area by linking two developmental courses with a discipline-area course. The new student seminar is also incorporated into first-year learning communities, including New Student House. Courses offered in the learning community model have higher pass rates than the same courses offered in a stand-alone model.

Opening Sessions for New Students. In 2001, the College instituted an "Opening Sessions" day for incoming students, with a plenary session and concurrent workshops/presentations led by LaGuardia faculty and students on topics such as leadership, women's issues, communication, student clubs, student success stories, community activism, and diversity. The sessions were well-received by students; 84% of participants rated the day's activities as good to excellent.

Common Reading. In an effort to create a shared intellectual experience for first-year students, a first-year theme (e.g., "Personal Narrative and Memoir") and common reading (e.g., "Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First Hundred Years") were established. More than 30 faculty members volunteered to lead discussions of the book built into Opening Sessions for new students. Faculty developed a web site for both student and faculty use with lesson plans and background materials for the text.

For more information on the Institutions of Excellence, look for the forthcoming book from Jossey-Bass, *Meeting Challenges and Building Success: Creating Campus Climates for First-Year Student Success*.

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