

# RESOURCE

for College Transitions

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

April 2004, Vol. 1, No. 5

## National Resource Center and Houghton Mifflin Recognize Outstanding Advocates for First-Year Students



*Top Row (Award Recipients): Dorothy Ward, Rosemary King Carr, Robert Smith, Earl Bagley, Janice Odom, Jason Finkelstein, Eric Newhall, Jeffrey Hale. Not in Picture: Kathleen Evans, Patricia Maestro. Bottom Row (Staff Members): Carrie Linder, John Gardner, Stuart Hunter. Not in Picture: Mary Finch (Houghton Mifflin Publishing)*

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2004 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award.

The award, now in its 15th year, honors college faculty, administrators, staff, and students for their outstanding work on behalf of first-year college students and for the impact their efforts have on the students and culture of their institutions.

In August 2003, presidents of post-secondary institutions were invited to nominate one educator on their campus by preparing and submitting a narrative description of

the nominee's activities to enhance the first year at his/her institution. A panel of past award recipients and other distinguished educators reviewed 235 nomination portfolios and selected 10 individuals as this year's Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates. Two award recipients were chosen in each of the following institutional categories: two-year colleges; four-year colleges/universities with 2,000 or fewer students; four-year colleges/universities with 2,001 to 7,000 students; four-year colleges/ universities with 7,001 to 15,000 students; and four-year universities with more than 15,000 students. The 2004 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates are:

Earl G. Bagley  
Vice President for Student Affairs  
Associate Professor  
Columbus State University

Rosemary King Carr  
Director, Student Success Programs  
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Kathleen S. Evans  
Associate Dean of Students  
Director of the Student Advisement Center  
State University of New York College at Oswego

Jason A. Finkelstein  
Director, Coordinated Freshman Programs  
City University of New York, Bronx Community College

Jeffrey L. Hale  
Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs, Enrollment  
Management and Marketing  
Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Patricia Maestro  
Faculty Coordinator for Student Success, Bridge Program  
Mt. San Antonio Community College

Eric L. Newhall  
Associate Dean of the College & Director of the Core  
Program  
Professor of English and Comparative Literary Studies  
Occidental College

Janice E. Odom  
Director, The Caldwell Programs  
North Carolina State University

Robert M. Smith  
Interim President  
Slippery Rock University

Dorothy P. Ward  
Assistant Professor of English  
Director, Entering Student Program & Chair, University  
Studies  
The University of Texas at El Paso

This year's Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates share the common goal of improving the educational experience for first-year students, yet their methods for doing so are uniquely responsive to the particular institutional settings of which they are a part. For more information about the 2004 Advocate award recipients, please visit the National Resource Center's web site.

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## The Minute Paper Classroom Assessment Technique Revisited

*Tracy Skipper, Editorial Projects Coordinator  
National Resource Center for The First-Year  
Experience & Students in Transition*

The concept of the minute-paper, where instructors ask students to write down the "muddiest point" at the end of the class period is a well-known classroom assessment technique (Cross & Angelo, 1988). I use a number of variations of this concept in my teaching. The examples here are drawn from my fall 2003 English 102 course in composition and literature, but this strategy can be adopted for any course to meet a wide range of goals.

Assessment of Student Learning. The most basic purpose of the minute paper is to give instructors a quick and easy way of assessing students' understanding of basic course concepts. Thus, you might ask students to tell you "where they are" as you complete a unit, approach a test, or after the presentation of a key concept in the course. The first essay assignment in English 102 asked students to use reader-response criticism to generate a theory about a text and develop an essay in support of that theory. I wanted students to give me some feedback on what they needed to know to approach the assignment with greater confidence. To that end, I asked them to jot down answers to the following questions: (a) What questions do you have about reader-response criticism? What are the muddiest points for you? (b) What questions do you have about completing the first essay? and (c) What questions or concerns do you have about anything we've done in the course so far? While students did have some basic questions about the critical approach they were required to use, by far most of their questions dealt with how to develop a thesis statement and how to organize an essay. After offering the students several strategies for organizing essays and suggesting how these might be used in their writing, I divided them into small groups to identify a thesis and use one of the strategies we reviewed to outline an essay. Thus, this type of assessment allowed me to make some mid-course corrections, focusing in on some specific student issues.

Assessment of Teaching and Course Design. Minute papers can also be used to get feedback on what is work-



*Tracy Skipper*

ing well in terms of pedagogy or assignment design. My students did not do well on their second essays, which asked them to use a biographical or historical context as a jumping off point for interpreting a text. While their feedback would have no impact on the assignment they had just completed, I still wanted to know why it had given them such trouble. Again, I asked them to respond to three questions: (a) What was the most difficult part of the biographical/historical essay in your opinion? (b) What specific activities or assignments did we do during this unit that helped you write the essay or understand this critical approach? and (c) What did you need to know or be able to do in order to approach this essay with greater confidence? Their feedback confirmed for me that our classroom activities had helped them understand the critical perspective, but it also suggested that we had not spent enough time talking about doing research, selecting secondary sources, incorporating source material, and documenting that material. While students read two sample essays—one taking a biographical approach and one a new historical approach—many felt like they needed to see more examples of this type of writing in order to do it well. Like the assessment discussed above, this feedback can be used to make mid-course corrections, adjusting similar assignments later in the semester in response to these issues. Such assessment also provides helpful information for restructuring the unit or assignment for future classes.

*Assessment for Student Engagement.* The final way I used the minute paper in my course was to engage students in the

learning process and give them ownership over the course. For example, students were asked at the beginning of a class session to write down one question or point they would raise about the day's reading. These "questions" formed the basis of that day's lesson, as we addressed each one in turn. At the end of the semester, students were asked to develop a question for the final exam. While not "assessment" in a traditional sense, the questions students generate can offer valuable insights into what they believe are the most important points in the course curriculum.

These quick and dirty assessments do not take a lot of preparation, yet they are powerful tools for letting students know that their learning and progress is important to you and for engaging them as learners.

Using minute papers is not without risks, however. You have to have a certain degree of flexibility. I cannot ask my students what they need from me if I am not willing to discard my beautifully designed lesson plan and develop something new that responds to a pressing need. Giving students control of the direction of a particular class session also means that you have to leave the comfort and safety of your lecture notes behind. They might take you out on a limb, a place you were not prepared to go, but that limb can be a rewarding educational experience for you and your students. And if you find you really are not prepared to go there, there is no shame in saying—"you know, that's a really terrific question. Let me do some research on that so that we can discuss it at our next class meeting." Better yet, invite the students to do the research, as well.

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## Women May Enter College With Fewer Computer Skills Than Male Peers

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In the mid-1990s, the U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration popularized the term “digital divide” to describe the societal split between those with and those without access to computers and the Internet (Warschauer, 2003). Although the higher education community needs to be aware of ongoing disparities in access, it is the potential for gaps in information literacy and technology skills of incoming first-year students that are of critical concern. The assumption of technological determinism (Warschauer), which suggests that the presence of technological tools will lead to its appropriate use, overlooks the main problem that many first-year students have—minimal experience employing these tools in pedagogically complex ways. Access to the tools, plus constructive use of those tools is a necessary ingredient in narrowing the digital divide (Resnick, 2001) and becoming a successful first-year student.

Augmenting the complexity of these concerns is research that suggests that information literacy and information technology skill gaps among men and women may plague incoming first-year students (Wilbon, 2003). This may be a leading contribution to the shortage of women entering computing majors. For example, although women now represent approximately 60% of all enrolled students in higher education (Koemer, 1999), a mere 23% enter the Information Sciences and Technology (IST) major at Penn State, Capitol College.

A longitudinal study confirms the existence of a gender gap in the perceived technology skills of incoming first-year students. Data were obtained over a three-year period from a technology survey administered to all students attending a first-year testing, counseling, and advising program at a local campus of a large university. Students were asked if they wanted to participate in a study that measured both access as well as technology skills of first-year students and were reminded that participation was completely voluntary. Those who agreed to participate completed an online sur-

vey while they were in the computer lab registering for fall courses (Goodfellow, 2002).

The results from a one-way analysis of variance test showed significant differences between male and female students' skill level in using a word processor ( $p < .01$ ), searching the Internet ( $p < .01$ ), developing enhanced presentations ( $p < .01$ ), and game playing ( $p < .01$ ). The men rated themselves substantially higher than the women in all of these skills, even though there were more women ( $n = 542$ ) than men ( $n = 343$ ) participating in the survey. The men also indicated that they spent significantly more time using these skills (except for using a word processor, where there was no difference). Thus, women appear to have less confidence in their skills and reported spending less time using technology than their male counterparts.

Based on initial results, technology workshops were implemented for the 2003 academic year, covering basic library search strategies, databases available to students, standard software packages, creation of slide presentations, and Internet searching. However, these workshops are for the general population at Penn State Schuylkill and do not target women specifically. Plans are currently being made to implement special forums for the female student population to encourage and mentor them in the use of technology for academic performance and future career success.

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## What's Happening at the Center?

### Conferences

The National Resource Center invites you to join us in Maui, Hawaii for the 17th International Conference on The First-Year Experience, June 14 – 17, 2004. Featured speakers for the conference are Graham Henderson, Vice Chancellor of the University of Teeside, United Kingdom and Laura Rendón, Veffie Milstead Jones Endowed Chair at California State University—Long Beach, United States. For complete conference information or to register, Click [here](#).

The Center continues its focus on assessment strategies for the first college year with the 2004 Summer Institute on First-Year Assessment in Asheville, North Carolina, July 18-20, 2004. Gloria M. Rogers, Vice President of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology will keynote the event.

### Teleconferences

In April, the National Resource Center will broadcast an interactive teleconference focusing on the role of campus activities in student learning.

#### *Campus Activities: Creating Intentional Connections for Student Learning*

Thursday, April 29, 2004 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST  
featuring Jan L. Armino, Gregory S. Blimling, and Walter M. Kimbrough

This panel of national experts discuss the importance of campus activities in student engagement and learning, the crucial role co-curricular and extra-curricular activities play in student success, and proven strategies that make a difference in students' college experience.

To register for this teleconference, click [here](#).

## Rose State College Empowers Students for Success

*Monique Bruner, Academic Advisor  
Rose State College*

Rose State College is a small community college located just outside Oklahoma City. The student body comprises a large number of at-risk and returning adult students who are making changes in their careers. Our goal is to empower students with the skills necessary for success in college and life in general. Many students come to college without knowing how to study or how to go about devel-

oping a plan that will work for them. The Strategies That Empower People for Success (STEPS) program is designed to help students of all ages and backgrounds develop important study skills, become well-rounded, and persist until graduation. This is accomplished with these strategies:

**1. Reach students early.** We use the front-line contacts (e.g., academic advisors and admission officers) to refer students to the program.

**2. Provide timely, entertaining, and useful workshops,** and students will come. The STEPS program offers one- to three-hour workshops, covering six academic areas and four life management areas. Students receive a certificate of attendance for completing each workshop. Students who attend and complete all 10 workshops will receive special STEPS Forward recognition including an award reception given in their honor, a certificate, eligibility to list the STEPS program on their student activities transcript, and a press release sent to their hometown newspaper.

The academic areas are:

- Goal setting
- Time management
- Study skills
- Test-taking tips
- Memory and concentration
- Active reading and note-taking

The life management areas are:

- Wellness as a way of life
- Money management
- Making the most out of your relationships
- Leadership is a game show

**3. Constantly motivate, encourage, and care for students** and they will return. At Rose State,

- Students who attend the workshops are asked to provide an e-mail address so that weekly study tips can be sent. The e-mail also includes important upcoming dates and enrollment information and serves as a reminder of any upcoming STEPS workshops.
- Easy-to-read handouts are given at each workshop.
- Workshops are full of description and stories of other student successes. Once students realize that others in their same predicament have completed the program, they are encouraged as well.
- Students who regularly attend the session often become friends and bond with each other.
- Students are given no wait cards for express enrollment. This encourages them to plan ahead and enroll early.
- The STEPS Bulletin board provides current information and strategies on how to be a successful student.

- Many Rose State College faculty give extra credit for workshop attendance. This is the initial reason that many students attend the workshops. However, after they attend one workshop, more times than not they will attend several others.
- We provide a resource library so that students can come by and check out reference material from the workshops.

With the current push on colleges to increase graduation and retention rates, the big question is, “What can we do?” Rose State College has successfully met both the needs of the students and the college by implementing the STEPS program. The STEPS program addresses retention, because students completing all 10 workshops graduate at higher levels than the general student population. Additionally, the STEPS program is cost effective because personnel already employed by the college can implement it. Resources and materials are inexpensive. The students benefit from the personal touch of the program as it helps them feel as if they are more than just a number and that someone really cares.

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## Student Voices Tell Story of First Year at College of Charleston

*W. J. Bruce Fleming, Faculty  
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College of Charleston’s (SC) Freshman Seminar 101 introduces students to the values and applications of a liberal arts education while focusing on the benefits of active membership within academic communities. It helps first-year students understand their roles as students; establish realistic career and life goals; obtain information about academic programs including course, major, and graduation requirements; understand the occupational implications of their educational choices; improve student success skills; and become familiar with the college’s procedures, resources, and services. Major course topics include “Navigating the College,” “Work and Values,” “Liberal Arts Education,” and “Life Skills.”

The success of first-year seminars is commonly measured in terms of discrete variables like retention rates and GPAs. Student learning and adjustment to college are equally important outcomes, but they are more difficult to measure. Nine students in four 2003 Freshman Seminars describe the impact of the seminar on their transition from high school to college. Major themes include learning styles, co-curricular experiences, academics, socialization, self-analysis, and transitions.

### *Learning Styles*

Michael Pesta – Oxford, PA

[The Freshman Seminar] helped me gain a truer sense of myself, easing my insecurities. It increased my confidence by showing me the outside environment of college and by enabling me to look inward, which really helped during the first semester. It afforded me the time to do the necessary self-exploration to discover my personality traits. I would not have done this on my own. The seminar helped me see how my learning style is related to my personality and discover characteristics that increased my confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, it strengthened my organization and time-management skills, by helping me coordinate them with my personal learning style.

### *Co-Curricular Experiences*

Emily Franklin – Alexandria, VA

The Freshman Seminar helped me realize that a student’s experience during college encompasses more than classes. While studies remain central, involvement in campus activities is also important. The number of activities available is overwhelming; I had a hard time selecting from the many students organizations, intramural teams, and cultural events. Deciding whether to go Greek was another difficult choice. I soon realized being involved in everything was impossible, and I chose only activities important to me. My Freshman Seminar class enabled me to determine my personality traits and, in turn, I chose activities that supported these personal characteristics. I learned to balance my academic and social activities, helping my college experience begin successfully.

### *Academics*

Colleen Murrin – Chattanooga, TN

My academic transition was fairly average. In high school, I was on the honor roll. I worked to earn strong grades, but it wasn’t very difficult. I figured college would be similar – I was wrong! I studied like I did in high school

for my first quiz . . . which I promptly failed. This came as a shock because I never fail; it just doesn't happen. And I know I am not the only student struggling in classes that were a breeze in high school, but it just doesn't have the same impact as when it happens to you. Freshman Seminar helped me realize that success in college means studying longer and harder than before. Also, Freshman Seminar's "Career Component" showed me that my future does not rest solely on my major choice and grades.

Ted Wojtkowiak – Haddonfield, NJ

Freshman Seminar helped me learn about being a student. Before arriving on campus, I prepared mentally for the increased workload; after the first few weeks I felt in control of my grades. I was confident going into exams and achieved high marks in every subject, except physics. Strangely, I failed the first test. (I had been in accelerated physics in high school.) I used Supplementary Instruction after my Freshman Seminar instructor said: "Struggling students are not the ones who go to the student center; successful students are the ones who go." Learning about various college resources such as SI in Freshman Seminar aided my academic success.

### **Socialization**

David Tudor – Nashville, TN; Jenny Gilson – Haddonfield, NJ

One major difference we discovered between high school and college is that we had to work diligently to meet people. Without this effort, we might have been lonely and missing our close-knit group of friends from home. The peer-to-peer atmosphere of Freshman Seminar helped encourage new friendships. Also, Freshman Seminar introduced various campus organizations throughout the semester, which made getting involved on campus and shedding the freshman shell easier.

### **Self-Analysis**

Randy Pease – Duxbury, MA

The process of self-analysis was an essential tool during my Freshman Seminar experience. Properly identifying, understanding, and critiquing myself provided a strong base for my educational career. Freshman Seminar introduced

me to surveys and tests, helping me discover my learning habits. After completing these, I had a stronger grasp of myself as a student and was able to maximize my college experience. The first year of college is challenging, but learning about who you are makes it more enjoyable.

### **Transitions**

Meghan Blankenship – Louisville, KY; Lindsay Holman – Pebble Beach, CA

In moving from high school to college, we experienced some expected and some unexpected changes. We had taken some "college-level" classes in high school, which prepared us for the expected work ethic and integrity of college. Larger changes occurred in our lives outside of class: We no longer lived at home with our parents, enjoying quiet family meals. Rather, we ate our meals in a cafeteria and lived in a building with 700 other women. We experienced much more freedom than before, in that we had more free time between classes and no one was monitoring our attendance. By helping us anticipate and negotiate some of these changes, the Freshman Seminar made the transition to college a less stressful one.

Academic and social struggles, physical and geographical changes, and myriad other transition issues can affect students' success. Previous environments often cannot prepare students for these adjustments. Lindsay Holman, a student from Pebble Beach, California, said it best: "I was prepared for college – especially after graduating from an academically challenging college prep school. Preparation eased the transition, but no amount of preparation is comparable to first-hand experience." First-year seminars are an equally important structure for easing the transition for students like Lindsay—and for those students who enter college feeling less prepared and less confident than she did.

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## Alcohol 101 Plus Review

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The Alcohol 101 Plus program is a well-integrated effort to provide college students with information about the choices they will face regarding alcohol use and the potential consequences of their decisions. The program is designed to promote discussion of these issues and includes a Facilitator's Guide, a CD-Rom of activities, and a web site with corresponding resources.

The Facilitator's Guide is an excellent resource for educators leading this program. The guide features sections on legal issues and campus regulations and on specific target audiences including first-year students, athletes, Greeks, and students facing judicial sanctions. The guide also provides a breakdown of each of the activities and areas included on the CD-Rom with specific suggestions for the facilitator, including how to encourage discussion and act as a good listener and moderator. A planning grid provides session descriptions and identifies topics applicable to different audiences. Handouts for students, discussion topics for each activity, and the intended learning outcome of each session are also included.

The CD-Rom activities allow participants to follow virtual college students through typical college scenes relating to alcohol. The "virtual campus" setting in each segment takes students through the challenges they will face and allows them to make choices for the characters and identify the consequences of each choice. The activities range from hosting parties and facing peer pressure to challenges that specific groups of students may face. The interactive situations allow students to take an active part in learning about the dangers and outcomes of alcohol-related incidences.

The web site, [www.alcohol101plus.org](http://www.alcohol101plus.org), contains sections for students, parents, and educators with basic information about the program. Resources are also provided on alcohol and its effects, creative ways to say no, and safety and health tips. Several resources are available in both English and Spanish.

The Alcohol 101 Plus program breaks down information into easy to handle segments and provides the resources students and facilitators need to fully understand these topics. The program works best in small groups of students with a facilitator leading the discussion. The combination of the facilitator's guide, interactive CD-Rom, and web site references provide a good foundation for implementing this

program in a first-year seminar or campus orientation program.

Alcohol 101 Plus has also recently been recognized with a FREDDIE Award in the category of Health and Wellness, at the 29th Annual International Health and Medical Awards ceremony. This international competition recognizes feature-length films, documentaries, series, videos, web sites and CD-Roms which portray excellence in exploring health-related issues. In addition to this prestigious award, Alcohol 101 Plus was also a finalist in the categories of Community Health and Behavioral Diseases.

Alcohol 101 Plus is produced by the Century Council, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to fighting drunk driving and underage drinking. The program can be ordered through the web site free of charge.

## Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year

This is the fifth installment in the Center's ongoing series of brief institutional profiles, describing key initiatives designed to improve the learning and success of first-year students. In this issue we feature two institutions that recognize the importance of all aspects of the first-year experience in student success.

**Appalachian State University**  
Boone, North Carolina  
Established 1899

Since its founding in 1899, Appalachian State University has focused on student academic success and the develop-

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ment of social and leadership skills. Its approach to the first year is intentional, comprehensive, and seamless and begins with the admissions process. The Admissions Office coordinates communication, connecting students with services such as Residence Life, Financial Aid, and the Registrar's Office as well as appropriate academic programs.

All students attend an academically focused orientation program during the summer where they receive their first college assignment—they are to read a specially chosen book before they return in the fall. In the fall, students participate in a second orientation introducing them to clubs, organizations, and leadership opportunities. During this program, small groups of students discuss the summer reading assignment with a faculty member.

All first-year students are assigned an academic advisor to assist them with negotiating the academic environment. A wide range of learning community options allow first-year students to take classes together. These include the Watauga College Freshman Program, an interdisciplinary, residentially based program and Student Support Services, a federally funded effort to support low-income and first-generation college students. In addition, more than 200 co-curricular activities offer students an opportunity to be involved in areas that complement their academic experience.

All first-year students have the opportunity to receive academic assistance through the tutoring program, Supplemental Instruction, and learning skills program. At-risk students are involved in special services geared to their individual academic needs. Early warning processes for all first-year students assure that academic progress is monitored, and problems are identified and dealt with in a timely manner. The Freshman Seminar, a three-hour, graded graduation credit course focusing on issues of academic and personal transition, serves over 50% of the first-year class.

Examples of evidence of success and institutionalization of effort include:

- A retention rate of 83.2% for the 2000 first-year class, the third highest in the UNC system.
- Five- and six-year graduation rates for Freshman Seminar students typically exceed other cohorts' graduation rates.
- Regularly scheduled, paid training opportunities are held for faculty and academic affairs and student development administrators who teach in Freshman Seminar and Freshman Learning Communities.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

Established 1899 (became a university in 1965)

A residential public institution of 15,609 undergraduates, Ball State University strives to provide a strong liberal arts education committed to personal learning and excellence in undergraduate teaching. At the heart of this commitment is the first-year program, which includes the University Core Curriculum, Freshman Connections Program, University College, and first-year seminar courses.

**The University Core Curriculum (UCC).** The UCC program is required of all students and consists of courses in English, mathematics, science, social science, fine arts, and global studies, constituting nearly a third of a Ball State baccalaureate degree. The core curriculum stresses written and verbal communication skills and mathematics and reflects our new global reality by requiring every student to take a course in international/global studies. This program has been recognized by AAC&U in its Strong Foundations category as one of the exemplary programs in the country.

**Freshman Connections Program.** Freshman Connections, initiated in 1997, is a residential learning communities program for first-year, non-Honors College students. The program places students in linked courses, which are part of the University's Core Curriculum. A critical component of Freshman Connections is the Teaching and Learning Team (TLT). Comprised of faculty teaching linked courses, residence hall directors, academic advisors, and peer mentors, each TLT meets regularly to discuss the progress of students enrolled in the team's courses. The Freshman Connections Program has resulted in improved first-year student performance, including lower rates of academic probation and disqualification, improved GPAs, and sophomore-year retention.

**University College (UC).** Established in 1985, UC is a multi-faceted support college that provides free peer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction (SI), academic workshops, and comprehensive advising for first-year students.

**First-year Seminar Courses.** Ball State's first-year seminars are targeted to specific populations. ID 101: The Freshman Seminar for Undecided Students is a seven-week course on academic major selection. Through assessment, instruction in decision making, and exposure to university and community resources, undecided students prepare a major exploration portfolio with the goal of deciding on a major by the end of the first semester. In addition, three of the seven academic colleges offer first-year seminar courses specific to the majors in their departments.