

# E-SOURCE

FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS

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## Convocations: Welcome New Students to Campus

**Michelle Mouton**

Editorial Assistant, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, University of South Carolina



Each fall, many campuses across the nation offer convocations to introduce new students to the culture of the campus. These events are a powerful tool to integrate students into the traditions of a campus. Convocations provide an opportunity for campuses to express their unique culture by sharing ceremonies, stories, rituals, and traditions with new and returning students.

At many convocations, faculty and administrators wear full academic regalia to introduce students to the academic traditions of the campus. Typically, the new students are welcomed by the president, a dean, an outstanding faculty member, and/or student body leader to further emphasize the academic component of campus life.

For convocations to be a success, timing is important. Assistant dean for new student programs at Rutgers, Heath Boice-Pardee, notes, "Having this event on the first day of orientation, as the first major event is key... the students are new and will freely participate." This creates an opportunity for all first-year and returning students to attend.

Suzanne Trump, Director of Retention and Academic Advising at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (USIP), says that the goal of their event is to incorporate the new students into the community and to help students focus on the university in the context of the larger community. Therefore, students learn about Philadelphia as well as the school.

Convocations offer an excellent way for campuses to support the students' social integration as well. For instance, instead of students coming alone to the convocation, many institutions invite the students to attend as a group. For example, at Mount Olive College, students attend the welcome convocation with their first-year experience class. At Rutgers College, students come with their orientation groups, as residence hall floors, or in groups of commuter or transfer students.

Keeping the ceremony brief is important in holding students' interest. At Union College in Kentucky, where the opening convocation is kept under an hour, the majority of all first-year students attend. Holding the event at mid-day and including a picnic style lunch afterwards can also help to draw students to the event.

There are two other ingredients that help produce a successful event. Location is key. Typically, these convocations are held on central campus locations, such as an outdoor lawn or auditorium. Also, the college band and/or chorus performs the alma mater, fight song, and other campus anthems. The first helps orient the student to the campus itself and the second begins the process of connecting the student to the campus essence.

Convocations are not just about sitting and listening to speakers. In fact, some of the activities associated with convocation help connect the students socially. Rutgers holds spirit competitions

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among the groups, making it a positive experience for new students and ensuring high attendance.

These opening convocations create a sense of community on the college campus, a factor important in the out-of-class experiences of students (Kuh, 1991). Particularly on large campuses, creating this community can make the university feel smaller and more manageable for both students and faculty (Kuh). Convocations give faculty an added benefit by providing an opportunity to connect with students and their colleagues in a more comfortable atmosphere.

Although individual campuses differ, the themes of the opening convocation are much the same. By including specific campus traditions and messages, these welcome programs can be tailored to fit the campus community and institution mission. Regardless of the style of the program, opening convocations provide incoming students with an opportunity to learn about their institution and meet the people with whom they will be sharing their collegiate experience.

### Bibliography

Kuh, G. & Associates. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## Chief: The Students' Guardian

Inge Kutt Lewis

Editor, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, University of South Carolina

"I met an amazing person at Georgia Southwestern University," Randy Swing wrote in February 2004. "I asked students in several focus groups to tell me, 'Who knows your name on this campus?' 'Other students' was the most frequent answer, but when a specific individual was named, it was 'Chief.' They told me that 'Chief' is the 'Chief of Campus Police.' I thought it was a joke, that he knew their names from writing parking tickets, i.e. in a negative way. But that was not the case."

Director Oris W. Bryant, Jr. is chief of the Department of Public Safety. According to the Public Safety web site, "Chief Bryant ... is an active supporter of student organizations on the campus of GSW. He has received numerous individual student recognition awards and was voted 'GSW Staff of the Year' in 2000."

According to the Chief, it takes him about two months to get to know the first-year students by name, roughly 325-350 students. He starts on Student Preview Days, after he sets up the tables and various booths. He wanders around, finds the students and parents who look lost or confused, and talks to them. He sees the students again on Orientation Day, and then he helps carry things for them on Move-In Day. There are not many aspects of the campus in which the Chief is not involved, including the Greek community, student government, sports, church groups, residence halls, and first-year seminars. The Chief says, "I'm the one behind the barbecue grill. Students tend to remember the man who feeds them."

The Chief also takes students shopping in his personal car, then brings them home. He joins in sports events. He goes with them to the movies. He changes flat tires for evening students. He finds people who are parked illegally and reminds them to move their cars. He teaches them anger



management and talks to them about safety. He strolls around campus after hours to give students a chance to talk. The Chief says, "GSW is a rural campus and I come from a rural background. I know what it's like to feel lonely and out-of-place. I want the kids to know somebody is there for them."

He believes the campus is like a small town. "I know everybody, that means I can tell when something is wrong. I talk to them and listen. I'm a pretty good listener. Maybe it's something about their grades. I take them to the people who can help them. That's usually the first time they find out such services exist on campus."

Where does he find the time? "I didn't get married until two years ago. Now my wife does as much for the kids as I do, especially the women students." He still writes parking tickets, but the student who had \$300 worth of tickets, paid up and thanked the Chief. "The motto of GSW is 'a caring community of learning.' I'm just trying to show them that it's true." Now, what if every student thought of the police as someone who supports first-year students and connects with parents?

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## Student Development Theory: Missing Ingredient in Informed Teaching

**Debbie J. Williams**

Abilene Christian University

A seemingly well-kept secret among campus life staff is student development theory as a tool to inform decisions about designing programs for and teaching college students. While faculty are presented with a wide range of pedagogical options, I would posit that few, if any, of us discuss these pedagogies in light of student development theory. In this brief essay, I would like to illustrate the role that student development theory might play in faculty choices regarding appropriate pedagogies.

Citing studies as far back as the 1970s, Upcraft and Gardner (1989) argue that when students are taught by “power instructors” (i.e., the institution’s best and brightest), retention rates improve and the institution has “a larger base of satisfied alumni” (p.75). To ensure that teachers are or become “power instructors,” many university faculty development programs offer training sessions on new pedagogies as well as incentives for participating faculty.

For example, my university has offered training sessions in learning communities, learning teams, problem-based learning, active learning, and service-learning over the past seven years. This introduction is incredibly valuable to instructors seeking to change. Although many instructors may have new opportunities for innovation, some are left with the dilemma of selecting the appropriate pedagogical strategies for their classes. Are all these pedagogies appropriate for the first-year classroom? Are some better suited for certain disciplines, for example, problem-based learning for the sciences as opposed to the humanities? Can any of these pedagogies be used in combination with each other? If so, how does one choose? The challenge of maintaining currency in pedagogy and in one’s discipline is difficult to balance. Guidance in selecting among the available pedagogical strategies would be valuable for both instructors and students. For example, when learning teams training was offered at my

university, I quickly replaced the loosely structured groups I used in my upper-level writing courses with learning teams, which offered individual and team accountability strategies for mastering and applying principles in the course. I found my restructured learning team classes far more effective than the group structure I used previously.

When I was approached to participate in a first-year learning community, I was excited to have the opportunity to enhance my classroom approach with first-year students. However, I experienced unexpected discipline problems. I immediately remembered the success I achieved using learning teams with upper-level students, and I tried to address the discipline problem by adding learning teams to my learning community class. Learning teams facilitate intense team bonding; and, because the discipline problems were rooted in early group formation, I experienced even more classroom control problems. The learning teams literature I was familiar with said nothing about discipline problems with first-year students (and nothing about combined pedagogies). The learning communities literature only briefly addresses the problem of “disruptive behavior” (Temple University, 2000). However, when I came upon student development theory during my research, I found a potential answer to my dilemma.

Student development theory acquainted me with the co-curricular lives of first-year students in my learning community class. Chickering’s “vectors” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and Perry’s nine stages of world view development (Perry, 1968) offered insight into my students’ intellectual and emotional development. I gained insight into why learning teams did not work for these students. They needed guidance in moving towards autonomy, in moving from “groupthink” toward personal responsibility for their learning and actions. Without some basic competence in this area, the personal accountability demanded

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by learning teams was too challenging for them.

Student development theory is a set of descriptors, not prescriptions, and is not a panacea. As a body of theory, it has been criticized by faculty and campus life professionals for failing to address needs of special groups, such as minorities and women, though scholars are now pursuing these areas. Even so, I would argue that knowledge of student development theory is crucial for faculty as it offers us a general framework for better understanding the ways many of our students learn, and we, in turn, can make more informed decisions as to whether and how to implement and blend new pedagogical strategies in our first-year courses.

### Bibliography

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- Upcraft, M. L., & Gardner, J. (1989). *The freshman year experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Debbie J. Williams, PhD, Dir. of Composition  
Associate Prof. of English  
Abilene Christian University  
Box 28252, Abilene, TX 79699  
[wmsdeb@acu.edu](mailto:wmsdeb@acu.edu)



## Evaluating the Effectiveness of Technology in Our Schools\*

**Richard J. Noeth**

Director, Policy Research, ACT

**Boris B. Volkov**

ACT

The issues involved in evaluating the effectiveness of technology in education are complex. Yet technology as a primary educational tool and major school expenditure must be held accountable to its promise of enhancing teaching, learning, and student achievement. Available evidence indicates that technology has generally demonstrated positive, but limited, effect on improving the educational achievement of all students, but more rigorous and extensive evaluation is needed. Such evaluations can be achieved through comprehensive planning with key technology stakeholders and creating sound plans and practices. To this end, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2003) offers a series of questions when considering technology evaluation including: (a) how and when evaluation of technology's impact on teaching, learning, and achievement will be conducted and by whom; (b) what are key indicators of technology success; and (c) how technology will be used to evaluate teaching and learning.

We offer three recommendations that educational leaders and policy-makers can include as part of all technology planning and evaluation. Though not exhaustive, they can serve as reasonable benchmarks for those faced with the challenges of assessing the accountability of their institution's applications of technology.

1. *All relevant stakeholders should reach a consensus.* The use and impact of technology on campuses is far-reaching. Technology affects not only those most directly involved in teaching and learning (instructors and students), but also other stakeholders, including administrators and

staff members. As institutions consider and reconsider technology implementations, they should include representatives of all groups who might potentially be affected, both in the short and long term, by the technology application(s). The purpose and expected outcomes should be part of the discussions that conceptualize and create the technology implementation.

The net that considers potential outcomes should be cast widely—to include not only the individuals and groups but also the content and context areas that might be affected (subject matter learning, social interaction, collaborative learning, and tangential learning areas). All stakeholders should strive to reach a consensus on the purpose and intended outcomes of the technology. This consensus should be documented as specifically as possible, including the qualification and quantification of all anticipated outcomes.

2. *Every technology plan should include an evaluation component.* Institutions should have manageable technology plans that include a major focus on evaluation activities and outcomes—keeping the perspective that technological applications are one element within a complete instructional process. The discussion and design of the evaluation component should begin when technology programs are conceptualized and continue throughout (and beyond) program implementation. However, even if a program has begun without an evaluation component, it still may not be too late to institute an evaluation.

Considerations should include the issues of formative evaluation (conducted during the implementation, allowing for mid-program refinements) and summative evaluation (end of implementation to determine effectiveness) in terms of importance

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to stakeholders, resources required, timing, and expected information received. In addition, decisions on short-, medium-, and/or long-term evaluations, such as when they should be undertaken, how they would fit together, and what information might be gathered from each, should be made. The next level of consideration could include the types of evaluation (qualitative and quantitative) that might be conducted at each stage such as surveys, standardized assessments, locally developed measures, focus groups, and teacher proficiency indexes.

3. *Administrators and instructors should receive adequate, tailored, and continuing education.* Administrators and instructors are key technological interfaces on campuses; one is responsible for bringing technology into the institution, the other for bringing it into the classroom. They are also major technology stakeholders and successful technological implementations will depend largely upon their motivation, knowledge, and skill to enhance learning for all students. It is imperative that these educators be fully supported in this regard through adequate preparation, ongoing and state-of-the-art development activities, and links to other resources for additional support and learning. ▶

\*While this evaluation was based in K-12, recommendations are useful for higher education institutions.



In return, administrators and instructors must be held accountable for the effectiveness of their use of technology to support an enhanced learning environment for the educational community, as well as for subject matter learning for the range of students found in their classrooms. In other workplace environments, as new tools are incorporated into the work cycle, workers are evaluated on their proficiency in using them. Similarly, as educators are taught how to use technology to support teaching and learning, they should be held accountable for their ability to do so effectively.

### Bibliography

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (2003). *Evaluating the implementation of your technology plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncrtec.org/capacity/guidewww/eval.htm>

*If you are interested in the full report, it can be found at [www.act.org/research/policy/index.html](http://www.act.org/research/policy/index.html).*

Richard J. Noeth, Director, Policy Research  
ACT  
2255 North Dubuque Road  
Iowa City, Iowa 52243-0168  
[noethr@act.org](mailto:noethr@act.org)

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## FYI Benchmarking Assessment

(Part 2 of a 2-part series)

**Dave Butler**

FYI Project Manager, Educational Benchmarking

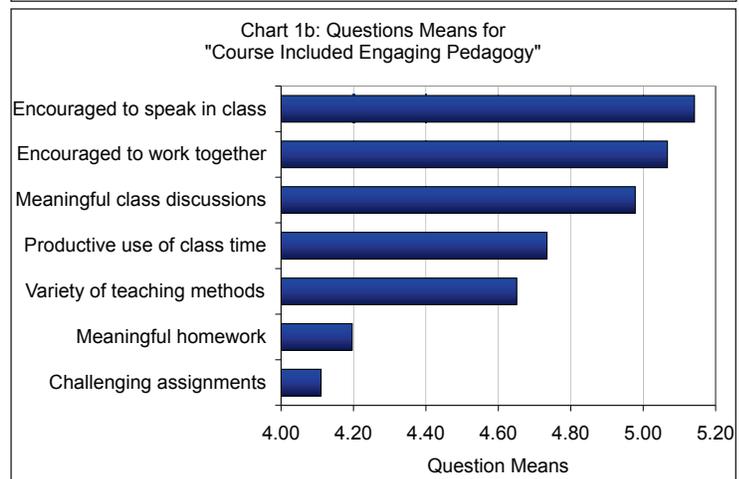
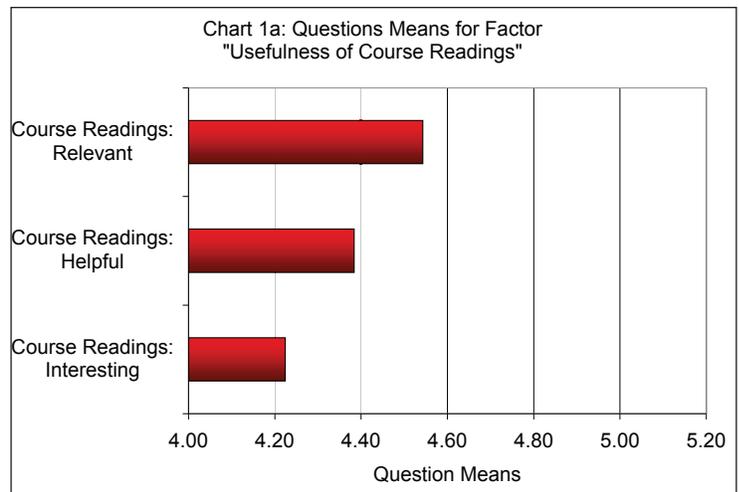
In the June issue of *E-Source*, we introduced EBI's First-Year Initiative Assessment and identified two factors related to overall course effectiveness for first-year seminars. The factors, "Engaging Pedagogy" and "Course Readings" are directly related to "Overall Course Effectiveness." Unfortunately, performance for these factors is lower than ideal. This article examines this relationship in greater detail.

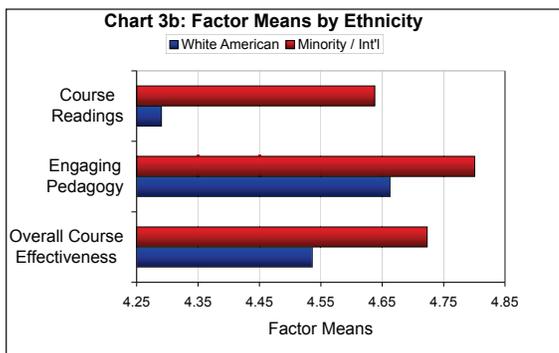
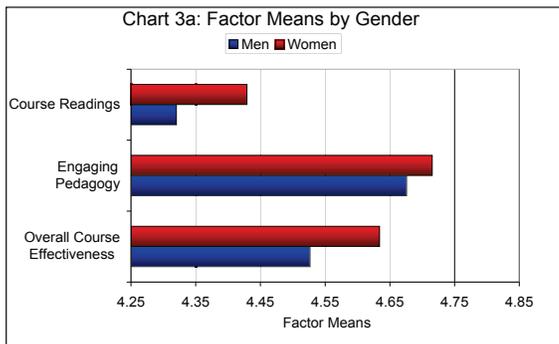
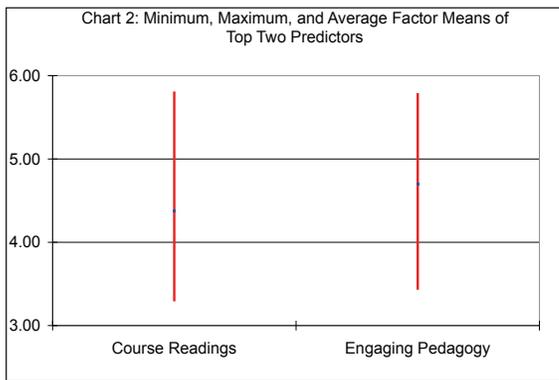
Chart 1a provides the individual question means that comprise the top predictor factors, "Usefulness of Course Readings." The lowest mean question in that factor asks to what degree the student finds the course readings interesting. The highest performing question asks the student if the course readings are relevant.

Chart 1b provides the individual question means that comprise the other top predictor factor, "Course Included Engaging Pedagogy." The highest mean question in that factor asks students whether they are encouraged to speak in class while the lowest performing question asks if the assignments were challenging.

Both Chart 1a and 1b are plotted on the same question mean scale (4.00 to 5.20 on a 7-point scale) to emphasize that the factor "Course Included Engaging Pedagogy" is higher performing than "Usefulness of Course Readings" on nearly every question.

Chart 2 shows the minimum institution mean and maximum institution mean (vertical bars) of the 51 participating institutions for the top two predictors of Overall Course Effectiveness. The marker represents the aggregate mean. One of the top predictors, "Course Included Engaging Pedagogy" is a higher ▶





scoring factor while “Usefulness of Course Readings” is a lower scoring factor. Please note the nearly 2.5 point difference (on a 7-point scale) between the highest and lowest mean institution on both factors.

**Gender:** There are differences in perception between men and women of the first-year experience course. Women scored the top two predictors, “Course Readings” and “Engaging Pedagogy,” statistically higher than men. In addition, women rated “Overall Course Effectiveness” higher than men. In general, women scored 14 of the 15 study factors higher than men. Men only rated one factor higher than women, “Course Improved Academic and Cognitive Skills”. Chart 3a is a graphical representation of the results of the t-test between these two populations.

Special thought should be given to how to improve the effectiveness of the first-year experience course for men, since they perceive the course to be a less valuable experience than women.

**Ethnicity:** In addition to differences in perceptions between men and women, we also find differences in perceptions between White American students and all other students (minority American and international students).

Minority and international students viewed the course impact more positively than White American students. On both top predictors and “Overall Course Effectiveness,” minority and international students rated these areas to have higher impact than White American students. Chart 3b provides a visual representation of these results.

Overall, minority and international students viewed the course impact more positively than White American students on 12 of the 15 study factors. White American students viewed a more positive experience on 2 of the 12 factors: “Sense of Belonging and Acceptance” and “Satisfaction with College/University”). The final factor (“Course Improved Connections with Peers”) was statistically equal between these groups.

Based on these results, we would encourage institutions to delve deeper into understanding why White American students perceive a lower impact from their first-year experience courses.

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For more information about FYI or how your institution can participate in other higher education studies, visit our web site <http://www.webebi.com> or contact Dave Butler, FYI Project Manager, at [Dave@webebi.com](mailto:Dave@webebi.com).

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## Recent Grant Funding for Higher Education Initiatives

**Alicia Phillip**

Editorial Assistant, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, University of South Carolina

As educational institutions continue to face the challenges of minimal resources and tight budgets, information regarding external sources of funding is invaluable. Below us a list of organizations that support higher education institutions:

### National Endowment for the Humanities

The National Endowment for the Humanities, a government agency, supports humanities education and scholarship at colleges and universities, and two of its grants are particularly noteworthy:

#### *Institutional Grants for Historically Black, Hispanic-Serving, and Tribal Colleges and Universities*

These grants are intended to enhance the humanities content of existing programs, develop new programs, or lay the foundation for more extensive endeavors in the future at historically black, Hispanic-serving, and tribal colleges and universities. Institutional grants of up to \$25,000 will be awarded for a period of up to three years.

#### *Grants for Teaching and Learning Resources and Curriculum Development*

Grants for Teaching and Learning Resources and Curriculum Development support projects that improve specific areas of humanities education and provide solutions to problems frequently encountered by instructors, through the development of new or revised curricula and instructional and learning materials. Maximum awards of \$200,000 for periods of up to three years will be offered. For more information contact:

Grants for Teaching and Learning Resources and Curriculum Development

Division of Education Programs  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
Room 302

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20506  
(202) 606-8380

[http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/faculty\\_research.html#howto](http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/faculty_research.html#howto)

### National Science Foundation *The Research Experiences (REU) for Undergraduates Program Grants*

The REU program supports active research participation by undergraduate students through site and supplement funding. It is especially targeted at underrepresented students such as minorities, women, and students with disabilities, thereby contributing to a diverse, internationally competitive, and globally engaged scientific and engineering work-force. Awards vary and have duration of up to five years. For more information contact:

The National Science Foundation  
4201 Wilson Boulevard  
Arlington, VA 22230  
(703) 292-5111

<http://www.nsf.gov/home/crssprgm/reu/contacts.htm>

### Department of Education FedGrants

*Strengthening Institutions (SIP), American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCU), Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNH) and Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HIS) Program Grants*

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This program provides funding to accredited institutions that meet certain eligibility requirements including enrollment of at least 25% full-time Hispanic students of which at least 50% are low-income individuals. Grants vary in amount and duration. For more information contact:

Ellen M. Sealey  
Institutional Development and Undergraduate Education Service  
U.S. Department of Education  
1990 K Street, Room 6049  
Request for Eligibility Designation  
Washington, DC 20202-8513  
(202) 502-7580

<http://www.fedgrants.gov/Applicants/ED/HRO/DCMGC/ED-GRANTS-120903-001/Grant.html>

This synopsis of funding organizations was developed from organization 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 organizations directly for application instructions and funding requirements.



## Giving Our Students "The Inside Scoop"

Colleen Sullivan

University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

Undoubtedly, the primary source of information for traditional-aged students is the Internet and it is our job as student affairs professionals to capitalize on this resource. Many university web pages are created by people who know their school inside and out, yet they are used by customers who often do not know what questions to ask or which department is involved. At the University of New Hampshire, we created *The Inside Scoop* web page [www.unh.edu/insidescoop](http://www.unh.edu/insidescoop) with the novice student and/or parent in mind.

The web page began in 1998 when many of the departments at UNH had very little information available on the web or did not have pages at all. Our web site was intended to be a vital link between university resources and the students. We have taken full advantage of the advancements in web resources to continually improve the web site.

*The Inside Scoop* web page is an important element in acclimating our entering students to our campus. This past year, we added a component called "The Freshmen," where five or six first-year students journal about their experience throughout the year.

During the month before school opens, we receive more than 2,000 hits per week, and during the last few days before students arrive, we topped out at more than 5,000 hits. Visitors to the site can access packing lists, dimensions of their new rooms, information on their new hall director, advice from upper-class students, as well as hundreds of links to different departments across campus. The general content of the web pages is adjusted throughout the year to reflect the various issues encountered by our first-year students.

Colleen Sullivan  
Durham, NH 03824  
[colleen.sullivan@unh.edu](mailto:colleen.sullivan@unh.edu)

## What's Happening at the Center?

### Upcoming Conferences

The National Resource Center invites you to plan to join us at the following upcoming conferences:

- [Fall Institute for Deans and Department Chairs](#), Charleston, South Carolina, October 17-19, 2004.
- [11th National Conference on Students in Transition](#), Nashville, Tennessee, November 7-9, 2004.

### 2003 National Survey on First-Year Seminars

The National Resource Center conducted the sixth administration of its triennial survey on first-year seminars in fall 2003. This survey continues the Center's commitment to researching and providing comprehensive information on the nature of first-year seminars.

A short summary of survey findings will be available on our web site, under the Research link, in fall 2004. A more detailed report will be published as a monograph and will be available for purchase in spring 2005.

### Learning Communities and First-Year Seminars

*Integrating the First-Year Experience: The Role of First-Year Seminars in Learning Communities* will be released in September 2004. This monograph, edited by Jean M. Henscheid, examines the effects of linking first-year seminars to learning communities and reviews successful programs at institutions nationwide. Strategies for linking courses and involving faculty, peer leaders, and other administrators are outlined. The collection of case studies provides a guide for establishing and enhancing such programs.

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### Survey

*As we celebrate the one-year anniversary of E-Source, the staff of the National Resource Center would like your feedback. This brief survey takes less than five minutes to complete. Thank you.*



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