

Interview With Patrick Terenzini and Robert Reason

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On March 13, 2006, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition interviewed Patrick Terenzini, Senior Scientist at Penn State's Center for the Study of Higher Education and Distinguished Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Education Policy Studies, and Robert Reason, Research Associate at Penn State's Center for the Study of Higher Education, Assistant Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Education Policy Studies, and Professor-in-Charge of the College Student Affairs Program. Terenzini and Reason were awarded a grant by The Spencer Foundation to conduct a three-year comprehensive study they call *Parsing the First College Year*.

As Terenzini explained, "I am a former English teacher and I have also enjoyed playing with metaphors in the titles of articles and papers. What Bob and I are trying to do with this particular project, taking a comprehensive look at the first year of college, seems to me a lot like parsing a sentence (i.e., breaking it down into component parts of speech with an analysis of the form, function, and syntactical relationship of each part). We chose the first year be-

cause that is a critical point in students' academic career. The research suggests that, on any typical four-year college campus, if you were to track a cohort of students over a five-year period, half or more than half of the students will leave the institution at the end of the first year. It is also an important time for the students academically because two thirds of the general cognitive skills develop in the first two years."

Terenzini further indicated that the researchers were approaching this study with the intent to discover how college affects students on a broader scale than just in the classroom or residence hall. Reason explained, "One of the things this project stands to do is inform the way we think about institutional characteristics that directly affect outcomes and move us further away from looking at just public/private [and] research/liberal arts." Terenzini elaborated, "Research on how college affects students has been rather narrowly focused. Rarely has there been a study that takes a comprehensive look at all the forces. We tend to concentrate on what happens in the classroom, residence halls, extracurricular activities, or financial aid. But each is just one piece of the puzzle. We are trying

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to take a much broader perspective. We have about 35 years of research that indicate that the traditional descriptors of institutions (i.e., size, control, curricular admission) are not particularly good predictors of how much students learn after you take into account the characteristics of the students who attend an institution. I think the key word is that we are looking at *internal* institutional operations, structures, policies, and practices. In this study, we think what institutions *do* is more important to student learning than what they *are*. We think that by approaching this as we are, institutions that participate in this study, we hope, will begin to think differently about the first year."

The proposed framework incorporates, in four sets of constructs, the

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wide array of influences on student learning and change indicated in the research literature. The four sets of constructs in the researchers' proposal are student precollege characteristics and experiences; the organizational context; the peer environment; and individual student experiences. As Terenzini said, "We are interested not only in the kinds of individual experiences that students have and how those are related to outcomes, but also in the peer environment, the faculty culture, and an institution's internal characteristics (e.g., their structure, the way they allocate resources to the first year, staffing in the first year, how much coordination there is between academic and student affairs, whether what faculty members do with the first year is reflected in promotion and tenure policies). We are interested in how all those things work together to shape the kinds of experiences students have, which in turn are the most powerful influences on how much and what they learn. We hope, by the end of this project, to have a fairly detailed map of how the forces or influences shaping student learning in that first year relate to one another."

This study will be a longitudinal panel study. The researchers will follow the same students from the time they arrive on their campuses through the first year. They will use data from ACT assessment to learn about these students' previous preparation and their involvement in different kinds of activ-

ities in high school, which will be used to control for precollege differences as they try to analyze what happens after the students enroll.

What is unique to Terenzini and Reason's study is their inclusion of faculty and administrators. They plan to ask faculty about their behaviors, values, and attitudes as well as their perception about what their institution is doing for the first year. The researchers will also send a questionnaire to the chief academic and student affairs officers on each campus to inquire about institutional policies, practices, and structures within those two divisions.

Reason added, "What is important, getting a little bit away from design, is that we are not in this alone. We have assembled what I think is a very impressive advisory board: John Gardner, M. Stuart Hunter, Laura Rendón, George Kuh, and Vincent Tinto. They have been wonderful in assisting us thinking through the design issues and the data issues as they come up. We are also working closely with NSSE and ACT and folks at Penn State's Survey Research Center. It is a big project and we have a lot of help doing it." Terenzini agreed, "I just want to mention that, in a study of this magnitude, there is no way we can do it alone. We have some very helpful partners. It is a fascinating project to us. We are very excited about it and we are very appreciative of the Center's, The Spencer Foundation's, ACT's, and NSSE's support."

When asked what they hope to accomplish, Terenzini said, "We think the

study has great potential payoffs for institutions and public policy makers. One of the things we think this will do for participating institutions is to generate a checklist of things to think about in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of their first year."

Terenzini and Reason hope to involve 40 four-year institutions, 6,000 to 8,000 students, faculty, and two senior officers from student and academic affairs per campus. For those interested in participating in *Parsing the First Year of College*, please go to <http://www.ed.psu.edu/cshe/parsing/home.html>



E-Source for College Transitions (ISSN 1545-5742) is published bi-monthly by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. Telephone (803) 777-6029. A one-year subscription is \$40.

The Center, a nonprofit organization, will use proceeds from the newsletter to defray publication costs, support research, and disseminate information.

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Faculty Mentoring At-Risk First-Year Students

Robert J. Stonebraker

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Winthrop University launched a voluntary mentoring program in 2003 that has shown solid results at minimal cost. The program, primarily aimed at first-year students whose grade point average is below the requisite 2.00, pairs faculty mentors and students in order to foster a supportive relationship for students. The faculty mentor serves as a resource, advocate, and friend to a single student—often providing the encouragement and motivation he or she needs to succeed. The specific goals of a mentoring relationship include:

- Developing a supportive relationship with the student
- Discussing the causes of academic difficulties with the student
- Working with the student to develop a plan to address these difficulties
- Meeting regularly with the student to monitor the progress of the plan

To assist faculty in achieving these goals, all mentors receive a *Mentoring Toolkit* (<http://www.winthrop.edu/retention/pdf/mentortoolkit.pdf>) that explains the responsibilities of a mentor, suggests a model for mentoring the student, and lists available university resources. Mentors also are referred to Winthrop's online *Student Guide to Success* (<http://www.winthrop.edu/retention/students.htm>) that walks students through possible “obstacles to

success” and helps identify potential strategies for each. It lists specific approaches for dealing with a wide variety of academic and personal problems ranging from poor time management and test-taking skills to loneliness and stress. Some mentors have students complete a self-analysis of their performance in specific courses (<http://www.winthrop.edu/retention/analysis.htm>) to identify areas of needed improvement. Others use the guide as a source of ideas. For example, mentors unsure of how to help students with reading retention issues can find material on the SQ3R study system (<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/sq3r.html>).

Faculty are recruited each fall, via e-mail, to volunteer as mentors. Eligible students are identified after first-semester grades are available. Letters are mailed to those first-year students with GPAs below 2.00 inviting them to join the program. As program director, I match participants with a mentor and encourage them to contact their mentors as soon as possible. Because mentoring can be most successful when there is an existing connection, students may request a specific person from the list of volunteers. If that mentor already has been assigned to someone else, I choose a mentor whom I think might be a similarly good match for the student.

During the semester, I stay in touch with participants and provide opportunities for mentors to meet and discuss experiences and troubleshoot any problems that might arise. At the end of the semester, I solicit feedback from participants with electronic surveys and follow up with those who do not respond. Also, I run statistical analyses comparing the academic performance of students who are being mentored to that of eligible students who chose not to join the program.

Multivariate regressions indicate that students who meet their mentors throughout the semester show a statistically significant improvement in their cumulative GPA of about 0.3 points relative to eligible students who did not participate. The majority of student survey respondents credit their mentors with being a major factor in their academic improvement. (For more detailed results, see <http://faculty.winthrop.edu/stonebraker/research/Letstalk.doc>).

In their written survey comments, students often note the importance of having a knowledgeable person who was neither a parent nor someone who would be assigning a grade, with whom they could discuss academic issues. Others say that their mentors are valuable in helping them identify why they performed poorly in the past and in instilling the self-confidence needed to change. We have found those who meet most frequently with their mentors report the most satisfaction and the best results. Mentors write that they enjoy

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the opportunity to work with students on such a personal basis. Some comment on the importance of retention to the university, but most emphasize the individual satisfaction gained from being able to make a real difference in a student's life.

One important asset of the program is that it requires almost no monetary outlay. Other than minimal mailing expenses and a handful of secretarial hours, the only prerequisite is finding a faculty or staff volunteer willing to coordinate the program. The program does involve significant time commitments from the mentors, but most report that they look forward to the hours they spend mentoring. Even with no reward other than a "thank you" to offer, I have been able to attract enough volunteer mentors to serve all interested students.

Although the results are encouraging, several challenges remain. One of these challenges is convincing students to participate. This year, 165 first-year students were invited to join the program, but only 28 accepted. Moreover, not all participants who accept commit fully. In the program's first year, only 13 of the 33 participants still were meeting with their mentors by mid-semester. Many did not meet even once with their mentors. A few signed on due to parental pressure and never intended to follow through, but in personal conversations, most blamed procrastination for failing to meet with the mentor. Even when invited, setting foot in a professor's office can be scary for first-

year students. Many find excuses to put it off. To combat this, I have become more proactive with e-mails and phone calls to recalcitrant students. I explain that their mentor is looking forward to working with them and list specific times when they might be able to meet. One student who had ignored repeated phone messages suddenly appeared at his mentor's door after I enlisted one of his instructors to speak with him. Probably because of these efforts, three fourths of students who signed up this year are meeting regularly with their mentors.

Even with better student participation, there still will be inherent limits on the number of faculty volunteers. Mentoring never will impact large numbers of students. Nonetheless, the program is inexpensive, makes a positive impact on academic performance, and has received enthusiastic support from both faculty and student participants.

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Invitation to Submit Your Story

The editor welcomes short articles and news items with illustrations. Guidelines follow for those who would like to submit articles for consideration related to the first-year experience and other significant student transitions.

Audience: *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

Style: A limited number of feature-length stories will be interspersed with shorter research briefs or news items. Limited references can be printed. Tables, figures, and artwork will be included on a space available basis. Annotations should include the following: complete title of the publication, author(s) or editor(s), publisher, publication date, and complete URL if source is available online. *E-Source* does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent to Inge Kutt Lewis, Editor, at lewisik@gwm.sc.edu as a Microsoft Word attachment. Article, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA style.

Length: Feature-length articles should be 500–1,000 words. Brief articles should be 250–500 words. Annotations of recent publications should be no more than 50–100 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length.

Copyright: Articles shall not have been registered for copyright or published elsewhere prior to publication in *E-Source*.

Contact Information: Contact information will be included with each article selected for publication in *E-Source*. Please include the following information with your submission: name, position title, department, institution, city, state, phone number, and e-mail address.



The University of Cincinnati's FYE Best Practices Series:

A Forum for Generating Communication and Collaboration Across the Institution

Pamela Person

Director, First-Year Experience & Learning Communities, University of Cincinnati

Until recently, the growth of first-year experience (FYE) programs has been a sleeper movement at the University of Cincinnati (UC). UC is an urban, public, research university with more than 5,000 first-year students enrolled in 11 undergraduate colleges. Because UC's undergraduate students are accepted into specific colleges, each with its own course offerings and requirements, it is easy for knowledge about curricular innovations to remain decentralized. First-year seminars, learning communities, and other first-year curricular initiatives have been created and expanded over the past six years throughout the university in a somewhat autonomous fashion with limited sharing of goals, structure, outcomes, or experiences across organizational boundaries.

The Center for First-Year Experience and Learning Communities, a unit within the Office of the Provost for Baccalaureate and Graduate Education charged with leading the University's various units to implement FYE initiatives, decided it was time to showcase the university's best practices for supporting first-year students. The Center hosted a series of presentations given by UC's experts to celebrate and broadcast how we support first-year student

learning while also discovering the commonalities, differences, and potential for adaptation and collaboration that exist in the current programs.

The inaugural series was held in winter quarter 2005 and consisted of five, two-hour, biweekly sessions. The first four sessions each featured FYE programs in two colleges or units. The Center invited speakers from programs we had identified as innovative, comprehensive, or well-integrated with other aspects of the undergraduate experience that were also varied in their approach to supporting first-year students.

First, we developed a list of faculty and staff whose support and influence could help advance attention to FYE across the institution and sent personalized e-mail invitations to attend the series followed by phone calls. The personalized approach worked well. Our attendance exceeded our expectations with more than 40 people attending each session and more than 150 individuals participating over the course of the series. Second, we videotaped and posted the presentations along with supporting materials on our web site (www.uc.edu/learningcommunities), for those who could not attend the ses-

sions. This additional outreach was a welcome surprise to those who asked for more information and reinforced the Center's positive rapport with the campus community. The final wrap-up session was a guided discussion to synthesize what participants learned from the series and to generate ideas about how to promote the value of first-year experience programs on campus.

For the 2006 FYE Best Practices series, the theme shifted from showcasing unit-specific programs to sharing experiences with engaging pedagogies. The series included student and faculty presenters on effective strategies for teaching and mentoring first-year students, using electronic portfolios to achieve integrative learning, promoting scholarly inquiry and critical thinking around social issues, and transferring intellectual and practical skills across contexts. These topics correlate with a current proposal for FYE at UC that will help align unit-specific efforts with one another by using a shared philosophical approach as well as consistent principles, themes, and components. Participation in the 2006 series was standing room only.

Each year, participants have expressed gratitude for the series. In particular, they appreciated "opportunities for dialogue between various department members" (2005), "hearing feedback from fellow professors" (2006), and "having resource people to contact" (2006). They also offered topics for future series presentations or other regularly scheduled professional

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development events. For example, participants repeatedly mentioned wanting more information on how to conduct assessment, use technology, incorporate reflection, and tap into the diverse composition and experiences of students to enhance learning.

Our UC FYE Best Practice Series has provided a communication forum that will help achieve our ultimate goal, which is to create an identifiable and active network of faculty and staff who share with one another their knowledge about the first college year at the University of Cincinnati.

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A Proven Possibility:

Faculty-Student Interaction Outside the Classroom

Bradley E. Cox

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The American university offers two clear and distinct opportunities for student learning. The most obvious, and the one most often associated with university operations, occurs in the traditional college classroom when a student attends a formal lecture or presentation by an expert in some particular discipline. The second opportunity occurs outside of the classroom. The late night philosophical discussions over a cup of coffee in the student union, the afternoon flag football games in the quad, and the community service trips taken as a part of an honor society all have an impact on student learning. While the classroom presents a ready-made context for meaningful interaction between students and faculty members, the environment outside the classroom is only beginning to be recognized as an equally important site for student learning. Faculty can also play a valuable role there.

However, recent reports from national studies of student engagement paint a less-than-ideal picture of faculty interaction with students outside of the classroom. According to 2002 CSEQ (College Student Experience Questionnaire) results, over 70% of the nation's college students had not worked with a faculty member on research that year, over 50% did not so-

cialize with faculty members, and 25% did not discuss their career plans with a faculty member. The 2003 report of NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) indicated that only 22% of first-year students and only 36% of seniors had discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty either often or very often. Even as seniors, less than one third of responding students often or very often worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework. These recent findings support the earlier conclusion of Wilson and Gaff (1975) that "even by their senior year, then, most students have had only a modest amount of contact with their teachers outside of the classroom" (p. 154).

Despite the institutional barriers that protect the current dichotomous student learning experience, some progressive universities are seeking to synergistically integrate the in- and out-of-class experience for its students. Specifically, by fostering faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom, some universities are redefining the role of the faculty and expanding the opportunities for the student learning in higher education.

While the national norms indicate that faculty-student interaction outside the classroom happens relatively

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infrequently, some institutions have sought to break through the barriers that separate faculty and students once they leave the classroom. As Wilson and Gaff (1975) stated, even “large institutions can at least overcome the barriers of size through the creation of differentiated internal structures designed to bring faculty and students together” (p. 155). Across the country, and in all types of institutions, colleges and universities have initiated policies and practices to foster faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. The following examples represent just a few of the many possible ways an institution can facilitate faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom.

Undergraduate Research at University of Michigan, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of North Carolina, and University of California - Berkeley

Particularly popular at top-rated research universities, undergraduate research programs introduce students to the rigors of professional-level research. Students in these programs volunteer to join a faculty member in a study related to their shared interest or disciplines. Working as a junior colleague, the students devote up to twenty hours a week to their research and receive some level of course credit. Findings from these studies are often published in journals or presented at conferences, allowing students to gain scholarly recognition while still undergraduates.

Mentoring Programs in the California State University system

Formal mentoring programs are often used as tools to assist under-prepared or underrepresented students. Students who meet certain criteria as being “at-risk” enter the program and are either selected by or are assigned a faculty mentor who has agreed to mentor as many as twenty students. The student meets with his/her mentor on a regular basis to discuss academic and personal matters that may affect the success of the student. To promote participation in these formal mentoring programs, some campuses are offering academic credit to participating students and/or course-load reductions for participating faculty.

Faculty-in-Residence at the University of South Carolina and Harvard University

Residential colleges bring faculty and students together in their homes. In these programs, a faculty member lives in a residence hall with students. The professor acts as a guide or mentor to the students in the hall. The live-in professor may be students’ formal advisor, though it is more likely that the professor will engage students more informally.

Faculty-Student Meals at University of Pennsylvania, University of South Carolina, University of North Carolina - Greensboro, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Though more often used to facilitate collegiality between faculty members and their graduate students, faculty-student meal programs are being used on some campuses to encourage faculty members and undergraduates

to interact in an informal setting. Institutions provide free meals (for the student or the faculty member, or both) when the meal takes place in a campus dining hall. In addition to facilitating these ad-hoc connections, some institutions have initiated permanent, recurring opportunities for faculty and students to share a meal. Residential colleges at the University of South Carolina and the University of North Carolina - Greensboro hold regularly scheduled lunches, dinners, and teas for their students and associated faculty.

Required Office Hours at St. Petersburg College, Santa Fe Community College, Blinn College, Pellissippi State Technical Community College

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While office hours are expected at most colleges, some institutions—particularly two-year schools—are articulating specific requirements for faculty office hours. Recognizing that faculty can have physical contact with students only when they are in physical proximity to students, some universities use required office hours as a way to bring faculty and students together. For example, the department of Science, Engineering, and Wellness at St. Petersburg College requires that teaching faculty members are physically on-campus four days each week with a minimum of 12 office hours scheduled each week. Manatee Community College even requires 5 weekly office hours from its extended adjunct faculty. By ensuring faculty availability, these schools are increasing the opportunities for students to seek faculty interaction outside the classroom.

Summer Reading Programs at institutions across the country

Previously exclusive to elementary and secondary schools, summer reading programs have now made their way into American higher education. More than 40 institutions now require some (if not all) of their incoming first-year students to participate in small seminar discussions with faculty about an assigned reading. Several schools incorporate summer reading materials into

the fall semester courses, providing opportunities to build on the connections established before classes have even begun. By introducing small groups of students to individual faculty, institutions hope that new students will become acclimated to a culture that encourages personal interaction between faculty and students.

These institutional and programmatic successes indicate that frequent and meaningful faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom can occur on all types of college campuses. Though there are a number of factors that interfere with such interaction, there are no excuses. With careful attention, each obstacle can be overcome, and each student (and faculty member) can recognize faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom as an integral part of the college learning experience.

Reference

Wilson, R. C., Gaff, J. G., & Associates (1975). *College professors and their impact on students*. New York: John Wiley.

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Developing an Instructor Retreat

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The coordinators of the University of Wisconsin Colleges (UWC) (13 two-year institutions in the UW system) first-year experience program realized that our instructors needed a day to focus exclusively on designing and teaching these first-year courses. In June 2005, we offered our first First-Year Seminar Instructor Retreat.

A grant from the UW System's Office of Professional and Instructional Development helped facilitate the planning, which was done by veteran seminar instructors from across the state. We used the results from various assessment processes, including EBI's (Educational Benchmarking, Inc.) First-Year Initiative Survey, student focus groups, and comments on our instructor evaluation forms, to help us brainstorm possible goals. We narrowed and prioritized this list, settling on three goals for the retreat: (a) to develop a sense of community among instructors with a common idea of what the course is, (b) to allow instructors to share successful teaching strategies with their colleagues, and (c) to showcase best practices from teachers who were doing especially good work in their classes.

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We thought carefully about what activities and topics we wanted to include in this day-long program (see side bar); settling on topics that could be covered in breakout sessions (e.g., specific ideas for teaching and innovative course formats that instructors might like to try) and ways to build in opportunities for campus-specific conversations, discussions of general information, and reflection. To keep some variety throughout the day, we decided to have general opening and closing sessions, concurrent sessions that would allow people to make choices based on their own interests and needs, and a “lightning round” of 5- to 10-minute presentations on teaching techniques. The lightning round presentations would allow presenters to share their work without having to fill a full-length presentation, and we would be able to include a lot of great ideas within a short period of time. We intentionally planned lunch to be informal, with no speakers or activities, so that participants could talk and reflect on what they were learning.

We sent out a general call for proposals to all seminar instructors and campus first-year experience (FYE) coordinators. Instructors responded to the call with session proposals on such things as teaching the scientific method, linking first-year seminar to other courses, teaching teamwork, and helping students make connections on campus. As FYE coordinators, we also wanted to include sessions showcasing practices

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First-Year Seminar Instructor Retreat Schedule

9:00-9:30	Refreshments and Collegiality
9:30-11:00	General Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • “First-Year Seminar Goals and Curriculum,” • “Who Are Our Students?”
11:15-11:45	GIFTS* I “Learning Clusters” “Advising”
11:55-12:25	GIFTS II “Success Book” “Teaching the Scientific Method in the First-Year Seminar”
12:30-1:15	Lunch Entry ticket: What was the most worthwhile idea you learned from the general session? What questions remain?
1:20-1:50	GIFTS III—Lightning Round These five-minute presentations are designed to provide a quick introduction to a variety of teaching ideas. 1:20-1:25 “Teaching Students about Remembering” 1:25-1:30 “One of Us” 1:30-1:35 “Passport Assignment - Meeting Pertinent People on Campus” 1:35-1:40 “Approaching Aesthetics: Framework for a Simple Project in Freshman Seminar” 1:40-1:45 “Adult 101”
2:00-2:30	GIFTS IV “Helping First-Year Students to Connect” “Brainstorming Session on Teamwork”
2:40-4:00	Closing Session Entry ticket: One-minute paper (What was the most worthwhile idea you learned during the GIFTS sessions? What questions remain?) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raffle • Campus debriefing/report out • Prize drawing

*GIFTS=Great Ideas For Teaching Students



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that we knew from our course assessment were important. For instance, from the First-Year Initiative Survey, we knew that useful course reading and engaging pedagogy were important to student satisfaction with the courses. We specifically invited instructors on the campuses where these factors had been ranked highly to share their work with their colleagues. Once our program was in place, we invited (but did not require) all first-year seminar instructors to attend the conference at the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County campus. More than 70 instructors came.

We began the day with a general session that invited people to discuss our course guide and the challenges and opportunities involved in accomplishing our four major course goals for the first-year seminar. The conversation was facilitated by our provost and our institutional FYE coordinator. As retreat participants critiqued and shared, the facilitators took notes that later guided a revision of the course guide. This session helped to develop a mutual understanding. During the closing session, in which people were able to spend time with their campus colleagues and begin planning for the next semester, we kept things lively with prize drawings for fun office supplies and a raffle for certificates at their campus bookstores.

To evaluate the success of the retreat, we did two things. First, during the day, we asked participants to write one-minute responses to the questions,

“What was the most worthwhile idea you learned from the sessions? What questions still remain?” Their responses served as tickets for lunch and our afternoon refreshments. The following day, we also distributed an e-mail evaluation that participants could either e-mail back or print and return through inter-campus mail. Participants’ responses indicated that the day was a very positive experience, contributing to a better understanding of the course, ideas for effective ways to approach it, and an appreciation for our common experiences and problems with the course. The most positive responses were about the lightning round session. Here, people appreciated the great concrete teaching strategies to use in class.

The process we used to plan our retreat suggests four recommendations for planning similar events:

- (a) Bring successful instructors together to help plan the event. With multiple perspectives, you will have greater success at identifying and meeting the needs of your participants, and anticipation of the event will begin to grow immediately.
- (b) Think first of your goals for the event and let those guide the decisions you make. While identifying the goals took time, it helped us develop a shared sense of the real value of the retreat. Having the goals in place (and on the board in front of us) helped us stay focused as we planned the specific details.
- (c) Vary the activities to keep your participants engaged.

- (d) Build in time for people to talk with their peers (by campus, department, or institutional role) and build in time for people to talk with those who can offer a new perspective. This interaction builds both support and challenge for your participants.

We learned a lot from this event and are already planning our next retreat. With the increased number of first-year seminars, a one-day retreat with both new and veteran instructors is a good way to provide a stimulating, informative, and community-building experience for all seminar instructors.

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Assessing Volunteerism in First-Year Seminars

Sally Vestal

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Instructors in the first-year seminars assist students in answering the question: How can I be successful at this institution and in my life? Connecting students with volunteer opportunities is one way to help them find the answer. By volunteering in the community, students may begin to feel more comfortable in their new environment. Volunteerism also creates more diverse learning experiences for students and gives students the opportunity to integrate and apply their knowledge. Ultimately, such experiences make learning more meaningful because what the student knows becomes a part of who the student is.

Students who perform volunteer work while attending college are more likely to attend graduate school, donate to their alma mater, volunteer in their community after college, and socialize with individuals from different backgrounds (Campus Cares, n.d.). In the short term, volunteering while in college has a positive influence on the student's academic development, including time spent on academics, problem-solving skills, and grades earned (Campus Cares). Volunteering also has a positive effect on the student's social development by increasing life skills like leadership, self-confidence, and the ability to resolve conflicts (Campus

Cares). Given the benefits of volunteering, what efforts are being made as part of first-year seminars to increase student volunteerism?

The EBI First-Year Initiative Assessment was developed in cooperation with the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Seventy perception questions on the survey use a seven-point Likert scale where one represents "not at all" and seven represents "significantly." One of the perception questions asks students the extent to which the course/experience increased the time they spent volunteering for worthwhile causes. The assessment includes specific learning outcomes that help define the effectiveness of the first-year seminar.

In 2005, 56 colleges and universities participated in the EBI First-Year Initiative Assessment. When all the responses were compiled, the mean response to the questions pertaining to volunteerism was 3.83 on a seven-point scale. Thus, it would appear first-year seminars have little effect on students' overall volunteer efforts.

However, volunteerism has positive effects for some students. For example, students who felt that the course increased their level of volunteerism had a higher level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the course. Students

who responded that the course did not increase their level of volunteerism perceived the course to be less effective than those who indicated that the course had some influence on the amount of time spent in volunteer efforts. Conversely, students who indicated that the course had a significant effect on the degree of their volunteer efforts perceived the course as much more effective.

Institutional commitment also appears to play a role in the course's impact on volunteerism. Students with no plans to transfer to another college or university tended to feel that the course increased the degree to which they volunteered their time more than those who planned to transfer. The difference between the means of the two groups of students is statistically significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Students who experience an increase in the level of their volunteer efforts also perceive that the FYI course is more effective. In response to the apparent long and short-term benefits that volunteer work has on college students, institutions may wish to increase the level of emphasis the course places on volunteerism. Course instructors may be able to strengthen the course by enlisting assistance from other university groups that commonly spearhead volunteer efforts.

For more information on this assessment or how your institution can become involved, please visit our web site or contact Dave Butler, FYI Project Director at Dave@webebi.com

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What's Happening at the Center?

Reference

Campus Cares. (n.d.). *Why volunteer? The positive outcomes associated with volunteering in college*. Retrieved March 8, 2006, from <http://www.campuscares.org/resources/outcomes.html>

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Teleconference

Shattering Barriers: *Transforming the College Experience for Students of Color*

April 20, 2006

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm EDST

Panelists:

Evette Castillo

Director of Multicultural Affairs at
Tulane University

Wynetta Lee

Associate vice President for Academic
Planning, Research and graduate studies at
California State University-Monterey Bay

Laura Rendón

Professor and Chair of the Department of
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at
Iowa State University

Whatever you call it—first-year reading experience, summer reading program, or common reading experience—initiatives that bring new students together with their peers, faculty, and college staff to discuss a text at the beginning of the academic year have become fixtures on many campuses. While sometimes controversial, reading programs help first-year students make a successful academic and social transition to college. As these programs have gained in popularity, informal conversations via listservs and presentations at national meetings have explored strategies for designing, implementing, and assessing common reading experiences. However, discussion of these programs in the higher education literature has remained sparse. The National Resource Center is now pleased to be able to fill this gap. Monograph No. 44, *Common Reading Programs: Going Beyond the Book*, written and edited by Jodi Levine Laufgraben, provides a practical guide to launching and sustaining first-year reading programs. The monograph includes brief descriptions of successful programs from across the country, planning timelines, sample budgets, lists of selected readings, and much more. To learn more about this and other publications from the National Resource Center, please visit our web site (www.sc.edu/fye/publications/index.html).

In addition to the new monograph, the Center maintains a national database of common reading programs. The database includes the recent book selections from more than 80 colleges and universities. It is now time to update the database with the books now being selected for the 2006 summer/common reading programs. Therefore, if your institution has finalized its selection for the summer/fall 2006 common reading program, please take one minute to complete the update form (http://nrc.fye.sc.edu/resources/summer_info/index.php).

Your contribution to the database allows other institutions to explore the wide range of potential reading selections. It may also facilitate the sharing of resources between institutions that are using the same selection.

Upcoming Conferences

2006 Summer Institute on First-Year Assessment

June 25-27, 2006
Asheville, North Carolina

19th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

July 24-27, 2006
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

13th National Conference on Students in Transition

November 3-5, 2006
St. Louis, Missouri

