

6.6 CONTENTS

01 Succeeding in Student Success: Tracing Lasell College's Retention Increase

A comprehensive strategic plan based on extensive data collection and collaborative planning increases Lasell's retention rates by 9%

04 The Big Picture

A column by Joe Cuseo The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar: Course Impact on Student Retention and Academic Achievement

Joe Cuseo synthesizes the evidence for a cogent case for a first-year seminar based on the impacts on retention/persistence and academic performance/achievement.

06 West Virginia University's Mid-Semester Help Center Keeps Students Enrolled

Reporting midterm grades as an early alert system followed up with a centralized, temporary help center proves to be a successful, low-cost retention strategy.

08 University of Florida Updates First-Year Seminar for Honors Students

A floundering initiative transforms into a robust course through creative programming changes based on assessment results..

11 Wofford's Novel Experience: Taking a Common Reading Program to Dinner

Wofford's common reading program combines innovation, fun, and rigor with discussions over dinner, an essay competition, and a formal convocation featuring the book author.

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

Second in a series, this article describes the 16-member NRC advisory board, providing a brief description of the composition and responsibilities of the board and introducing the four members whose terms end in 2010.

15 What's Happening at the National Resource Center?

Succeeding in Student Success: Tracing Lasell College's Retention Increase

From single-sex to coeducational, two-year to four-year, undergraduate-only to undergraduate and graduate students, Lasell College, a comprehensive institution with approximately 1,300 students, has undergone many changes over the past several decades. One aspect of the College that has remained constant, however, is its continued dedication to student success. It was this campus-wide dedication—a sentiment shared among faculty, administrators, and staff—that led to a major student success initiative started in 2006 that continues to flourish today.

Several years before fully implementing this initiative, Lasell formed a 10-member Retention Committee responsible for gathering data about enrolled and exiting students. What started as a trial-and-error approach to data collection grew into a sophisticated system that incorporated a variety of standardized surveys, National Student Clearinghouse data, and student profiling techniques. Once adequate data had been collected by the Committee, the College used that opportunity to re-examine their policies and practices within a student-centered context, launching the 2006 student success initiative.

Lasell wanted to maximize the resources it had available to assess the institution's strengths and areas for improvement and develop a targeted student success plan. So, in 2006, Lasell sought the expertise of a private educational consulting and research firm to provide structure, ensure accountability, and lend expertise and guidance in advancing the student success initiative.

At a two-day planning retreat facilitated by the firm, the Retention Committee—renamed the Student Success Committee (SCC) to better reflect its mission—ascertained the College's most pressing needs (e.g., implementing a first-year seminar, hiring more faculty and staff, and improving student health services) and divided into teams tasked with developing goals and timelines associated with the identified needs. The SCC was in a prime position to spearhead these efforts due to (a) its composition (members included faculty, staff, and administrators from many levels—though no senior staff were on the SCC; also, all members had reputations for being particularly student-centered); (b) dedicated support from the institution's outgoing and incoming presidents (there was a leadership change during this period); and (c) the vast amount of data that had been collected, which allowed the SCC to depend upon verified facts rather than anecdotal information.

Kathleen M. O'Connor
Vice President for Enrollment Management

Dianne Polizzi
*Registrar
Lasell College
Newton, MA*

Jennifer O. Farnum
*Vice President of Marketing & Research
Teresa Farnum & Associates
New Boston, NH*

See STUDENT SUCCESS, p. 2

Between 2006 and 2008, SCC teams, with the authority of the administration, made significant headway in carrying out both large- and small-scale changes across the College. Changes were chiefly aimed at increasing first-time, full-time (FTFT) retention, as FTFT students were identified during the planning retreat as being the student subpopulation most in need of attention. To aid in completing identified tasks, the teams recruited more than 40 members of the Lasell community who had been identified by SCC affiliates as being important change agents within the institution and well-suited for the respective tasks. The president extended invitations to identified members, being sure to stress the importance of the tasks and his appreciation for their participation.

Working together, the SCC made significant headway toward achieving major goals including:

Academic

- Initiating a three-credit, theme-based, required first-year seminar
- Increasing spring courses offerings
- Adding full-time faculty positions
- Sponsoring professional development workshops for faculty
- Developing a common reading program
- Starting an early intervention program geared toward identifying underprepared students and designing appropriate curricula

Student Health and Wellness

- Forming an alcohol awareness committee
- Adding new fitness classes
- Adding staff and services in the Health Center, the Athletics department, and the Business Office (e.g., providing outreach services and extending office hours)
- Expanding dining services hours of operations, menu variety, and seating capacity

Student Engagement

- Increasing stipends for student residential assistants (RA)
- Improving RA training sessions
- Providing assistance from athletes on move-in day
- Recruiting alumni to help on move-in day
- Implementing programs to strengthen class identity, including initiating a class “colors” program (specific colors associated with graduation dates), providing students with T-shirts and memorabilia; designing inter-class competitions; and initiating student government-sponsored social events
- Increasing the number and variety of activities in the campus center, (e.g., increased indoor recreational facilities, moving all student group headquarters into the building, and lengthening food service hours)
- Extending library, computer lab, and shuttle hours

General Campus

- Adding housekeeping resources
- Purchasing software for reporting and resolving maintenance issues

See STUDENT SUCCESS, p. 3



Determining which of these changes have the largest impact is a difficult task, but Lasell's retention rate suggests that the cumulative effect of these changes is substantial: Prior to 2006, FTFT fall-to-fall retention averaged in the mid-60% range, with a 2006 rate of 61.4%. Since the implementation of SSC tasks, that rate jumped to 70.4% in 2008, representing a 9% gain. Similarly, fall-to-spring retention was traditionally located in the 86-88% range; statistics for the fall 2008 cohort revealed a rate of 92.6%.

Not surprisingly, Lasell faced challenges in implementing these plans. For instance, funding, changes in administration, and differing opinions about top priorities were all potential obstacles that arose during the process. However, these challenges were overcome via the SCC's infrastructure (e.g., delineating set SCC team roles, responsibilities, and timelines) and members' ongoing commitment. For example, concerns about initiative funding were circumvented by setting up a system that diffused fiscal responsibility and encouraged collaboration. Specifically, SCC task funding was accomplished by matching SCC tasks to appropriate departments. Departments were then mandated to include those tasks, which were earmarked as "SCC initiated," in budget proposals to senior staff, who made budget allocation decisions accordingly. By adopting this system, funding was dispersed across the College, no single person was able to determine tasks' financial fates, and success-related tasks were afforded special attention.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all template for developing and implementing student success initiatives, institutions aiming to increase retention rates or engaging in other student success endeavors may be interested in the following recommendations:

1. Gather and centralize pre-existing institutional data. Clean, easy-to-access data are needed to guide decision-making processes.
2. Determine which faculty, staff, and administrators would be most influential in a student success initiative and invite them to a hosted student success planning retreat, preferably in an off-campus location.
3. Use the retreat as an opportunity to discuss the institution's strengths and challenges and to thoroughly examine the data.
4. Using the data, decide which student subpopulations are most in need of aid or intervention.
5. Form committees tasked with addressing these populations, creating clear and tangible goals with associated timelines.
6. Monitor progress toward the goals, making sure to focus on successes and encourage continued efforts.

Currently, Lasell is supervising programs already set in place and keeping track of progress toward goals. For instance, the first-year seminar migrated from an elective course to a one- or three-credit required course. The goal is to offer only the required course at the three-credit level by the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year. Similarly, the SCC has identified additional student subpopulations that have been added to their priority list: second-to-third-year students, high-achieving students, and undeclared students. At present, the SCC is consulting their cache of collected student data to determine which interventions are optimal for these student subpopulations.

Contact

Kathleen M. O'Connor, Ed.D.
KOConnor@Lasell.edu

Related articles in E-Source

- Pirwitz, S. (2005). Conducting exit surveys to increase retention. *2(5)*, 5.
- Abel, M. (2006). Increasing retention rates through academic early intervention programs. *4(1)*, 11.
- Young, J. (2006). CHEER program positively impacts retention and degree completion. *4(2)*, 1.
- Hall, R. (2006). Peer-mentoring program eases transition to university and increases retention. *4(2)*, 7.
- Harper, M. S., & Allegretti, C. L., (2009). Transition to university: An adjustment and retention program for first-year students. *6(4)*, 10.



The Big Picture

Joe Cuseo

*Associate Professor, Psychology; Director, Freshman Seminar
Marymount College, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA*

The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar: Course Impact on Student Retention and Academic Achievement

As John Gardner, pioneer of the first-year experience movement has observed, “Starting a freshman seminar is not easy. Because academic credit is frequently involved, freshman seminars must clear the gauntlet of faculty curriculum-review bodies.” (1989, pp. 238-239). This article provides a synthesis of the best empirical evidence for the first-year seminar (FYS), which readers may use to attain and sustain support for the course. The focus is on the two most frequently assessed outcomes associated with the first-year seminar: (a) student retention (persistence) and (b) academic performance (achievement).

The positive impact of first-year seminars on student retention is well documented. Its association with improvement in student persistence has been replicated across a wide variety of institutional settings and student populations. Based on their original review and synthesis of more than 2,600 postsecondary studies relating to how college programs and experience affect student development, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reached the following conclusion about first-year seminars: “The weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar is positively linked with both freshman-year persistence and degree completion. This positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account” (pp. 419-420).

Research supporting the seminar’s positive impact on students’ academic achievement (e.g., GPA) is not as widespread as it is for retention, but it is still substantial. Numerous campus-specific studies indicate that participation in the FYS increases students’ first-year GPA and decreases their risk of being placed on academic probation (Barefoot et al., 1998; House, 2005; Jackson, 2005; Porter & Swing, 2006; Soldner, 1998; Wahlstrom, 1993). Improved academic performance of FYS students who experience the seminar may be due to the fact that they are more likely than nonparticipants to (a) attend class regularly, (b) speak up in class, and (c) engage in greater interaction with faculty than students with similar college-entry characteristics who do not participate in the seminar (Keup & Barefoot, 2005).

Large-scale support for first-year seminars is provided by the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005), which included responses from more than 80,000

See CUSEO, p. 5

first-year students. Relative to students who did not participate in a first-year seminar, course participants reported that they

- Were more challenged academically
- Were more likely to engage in active and collaborative learning activities
- Interacted more frequently with faculty
- Perceived the campus environment as being more supportive
- Gained more from their first year of college
- Were more satisfied with the college experience

In addition, relative to students who participated in orientation but not a first-year seminar, FYE participants reported greater engagement, satisfaction, and developmental gains in the following areas:

- Academic advising or planning
- Career advising or planning
- Financial aid advising
- Academic assistance
- Academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005).

Based on a review of research published in the *Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition* and in three volumes of studies published by the National Resource Center at the University of South Carolina (Barefoot, 1993; Barefoot et al., 1998; Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005), Hunter and Linder (2005) concluded that, "The overwhelming majority of first-year seminar research has shown that these courses positively affect retention, grade point average, number of credit hours attempted and completed, graduation rates, student involvement in campus activities, and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education" (p. 288).

Consistent with Hunter and Linder's review, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) critically reviewed three decades of research on the FYS and reached the conclusion that with rare exceptions, first-year seminars produce uniformly consistent evidence of positive and statistically significant advantages to students who take the courses. In short, the weight of evidence indicated that first-year seminar participation had statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion (p. 403).

Positive outcomes of first-year seminars have been documented through the use of virtually all major types of research methods (e.g., quantitative and qualitative, experimental and correlational), with all types of students (at-risk and well-prepared, minority and majority, residential and commuter, male and female) at all institutional types (two- and four-year, public and private), sizes (small, mid-sized, large), and locations (urban, suburban, rural). As Barefoot and Gardner (1998) note,

References

References cited in this article may be obtained by contacting Joe Cuseo at jcuseo@earthlink.net

Additional references on the first-year seminar available in:

Koch, A. K., Foote, S. M., Hinkle, S. E., Keup, J., & Pistilli, M. D. (Eds.). (2007). *The first-year experience in American higher education: An annotated bibliography (4th ed.)*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

See CUSEO, p. 7

West Virginia University's Mid-Semester Help Center Keeps Students Enrolled

In spring 2007, West Virginia University (WVU) launched a new retention initiative, the Mid-Semester Help Center—a one-stop shop resource center for first-year and upper-class students. WVU uses reporting midterm grades as an early alert system to identify students who are not doing well academically, and the Help Center provides an intervention strategy in response to the midterm grades. As Cuseo (2008) notes, "Reporting only a grade at midterm, by itself, does not specify the *source (cause)* of the poor performance and fails to suggest the specific *intervention* strategy needed to rectify the problem." The Center was also created to respond to feedback from a 2006 Student Satisfaction Inventory indicating student dissatisfaction with the "campus run-around" when seeking information and to the many questions from parents regarding services available when their son or daughter receives a disappointing midterm grade.

The halfway point of the college semester provides students with an opportunity to review academic performance and make adjustments in study habits and class schedules. At WVU, professors only submit a grade at the midterm point for students who have a grade of *D* or *F* during the eighth week of classes. All WVU students who receive a midterm grade are sent an e-mail inviting them to seek assistance at the Mid-Semester Help Center. The Center is also advertised throughout the residence halls, University 101 classes, and e-mails sent to WVU parents.

The Help Center is a temporary, one-stop shop that is setup at convenient campus locations in the student union and campus recreation center for one day during the ninth week of classes. The Center is designed to provide outreach to academically deficient students, but it also serves other at-risk populations, including first-year, commuter, and general studies students. This collaborative retention initiative between units in student and academic affairs includes advising, admissions, financial aid, the counseling center, student health, tutoring resources, retention office, parent advocate, civic engagement opportunities, and disability services. Within the Center, students have the opportunity to meet with academic advisors, access key academic information, identify support services, and add or drop classes.

The keys to WVU's Help Center are bringing essential offices and support services to one location and offering classes that begin at midsemester. After speaking with representatives at the Help Center, students have the option to remain in a class they are struggling with or drop the class and pick up a course that begins at midsemester. Students are encouraged to stay in classes in which they may be able to improve their grade and are provided with information on free tutoring services and counseling assistance to develop better time management skills. For students who opt to drop a class, midsemester classes allow them to remain at full-time status, maintain financial assistance, or salvage their GPA. A variety of courses are offered ranging from physical education or civic engagement classes to courses focusing on learning strategies or exploring career options. The majority of classes

See WVU MID-SEMESTER, p. 7

Regan Bruni

Assistant Dean for Retention and Research

Katie Utterback

*Parent Advocate
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV*

WVU MID-SEMESTER Cont. from p. 6

are one-credit with a few three-credit options. Several classes are also offered online.

The Help Center has been offered each semester since its inception and has assisted more than 1,300 students. WVU has collected data on 1,114 of these students comprised of 650 first-year, 267 sophomore, 122 junior, 70 senior, and 5 graduate students. Seventy-nine percent of the students using the Center had a midterm grade of *D* or *F* during the semester they received assistance. More than 89% of the students who have used these services agreed that the Mid-Semester Help Center was beneficial to their continued enrollment at WVU, and 83% agreed that after visiting the Mid-Semester Help Center they felt better about their academic situation. First-year students who visited the Help Center ($N = 101$) during the spring 2007 semester had a 89.1% retention rate to the fall 2007 semester in comparison to 82.4% of first-year students who did not attend.

By centralizing resources and campus-wide collaboration, the Mid-Semester Help Center provides a unique service to West Virginia University students and prepares them to make a better informed decision about their current academic situation. The result has been a major impact on student success and retention at very little cost.

HOME

CUSEO Cont. from p. 5

“First-year/student success seminars are remarkably creative courses that are adaptable to a great variety of institutional settings, structures, and students” (p. xiv).

While the FYS has the potential to promote the success of all students, it is likely to have its most dramatic impact on students who are at high risk for attrition, such as low-income and first-generation college students. The potential of the FYS to promote early success and reduce attrition of at-risk students is evidenced by a 16-year series of studies of first-year students enrolled at the University of South Carolina. In 14 of the 16 years studied, students who took University 101 (first-year seminar) were more likely to persist to the sophomore year than entering students who did not take the course—and this result held true for at-risk students—as measured by standardized admissions-test scores (Fidler, 1991). As such, the FYS is an educational intervention that represents a particularly powerful vehicle for promoting the persistence and success of low-income and first-generation college students.

As Natalicio and Smith (2005) point out: “Supporting students as they enter their first year of college and investing in their future is simply the right thing to do” (p. 175). The FYS may be the most well-researched and well-documented strategy for providing this support.

HOME

References

Cuseo, J. (2008, December). Early-alert (warning) systems. Paper presented at the Academic Impressions' Conference, Early Warning Interventions for At-Risk Students, San Diego, CA.

Contact:

Regan Bruni
Regan.Bruni@mail.wvu.edu

Katie Utterback
Katie.Utterback@mail.wvu.edu

University of Florida Updates First-Year Seminar for Honors Students

In the spring of 2005, the University of Florida (UF) Honors Program struggled with the content of its elective, one-credit first-year seminar. The course was intended to (a) help students become more familiar with opportunities for campus involvement; (b) develop written, oral, teamwork, and self-reflection skills; and (c) develop positive mentoring and working relationships with an honors advisor and student leader. The seminar was first offered during fall 2004, with approximately 10% of first-year honors students enrolled in five sections. Honors students did not respond favorably on end-of-course evaluations to the traditional extended orientation topics offered, such as time and financial management, study skills, general campus involvement, personal health, and campus resources.

Many honors students, already high achievers, felt they had mastered the basic concepts of keeping a schedule, learning how to study, maintaining healthy lifestyles, and finding clubs and organizations through their high school experiences. These students desired more advanced skills and activities in a first-year seminar.

Responding to this feedback, in the fall of 2006, the first-year seminar content was updated focusing on academic opportunities, scholarship and award applications, and campus engagement. The number of sections was also expanded to six fall classes and one spring class. Sections are limited to 25 students and are cotaught by an honors advisor and an undergraduate peer leader who is active in the Honors Program.

Course highlights include faculty and student peer panels on undergraduate research, study abroad, and internships. Upper-class honors students who have taken part in these opportunities are invited to share their experiences with first-year students. Three class workshops on résumé writing, effective interviewing, and academic advising skills (e.g., working with faculty and understanding academic documents such as degree audits) offer students the opportunity to apply course knowledge while developing writing, oral presentation, and teamwork skills.

For a more hands-on approach to discovering campus resources and increasing campus engagement, the following events were added to the seminar curriculum:

Melissa L. Johnson

*Assistant Director
University Honors Program
Doctoral Student
College of Education*

Michael Flegiel

*Undergraduate
Honors Student, Undergraduate
Researcher
University Scholars Program
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL*



Service plunge: Honors students participate in the campus-wide service day (Photo courtesy of the author).

See HONORS STUDENTS, p. 9

- **Gator Adventure Project.** To encourage community engagement, each week student pairs review and photograph an off-campus location (e.g., local restaurant, park, or museum) and share the information with classmates.
- **Community Service Plunge.** A campus-wide service day is dedicated to small projects in the local community (e.g., neighborhood clean-ups, blood drives, helping at a hospice thrift store, assisting with bingo at a retirement community).
- **Annual Philanthropy Competition.** Students in each seminar section compete to collect the most items on a local agency's wish list, culminating in a field day celebration outside the honors residence halls.
- **Weekly E-posts.** Students participate in weekly online discussions on a variety of topics (e.g., follow-up questions to class discussions, posts by course peer leaders, current event opinions, getting-to-know-you questions).

To build positive mentoring and faculty working relationships, students meet individually with both their instructor and peer leader. Most students tend to meet formally with their instructor via an academic advising appointment and informally (e.g., at a coffee shop, at the student union, or on the campus lawn) with their peer leader to discuss college life or extracurricular involvement.

Course enrollment has increased significantly since the program changes have been implemented (i.e., approximately 18% of the 2008-09 honors cohort participated). The reason for this increase has not been formally assessed; however, many of the student orientation leaders have now taken the seminar and actively promote it through word-of-mouth recommendation at the first-year orientation. In spring 2009, UF began a pilot assessment of the seminar changes using an online survey consisting of 12 open-ended questions covering the ease of college transition, campus involvement, campus resources used, and experiences with the seminar (if taken). Participants were selected from all students ($N = 394$) who took part in the honors program between fall 2005 and spring 2008. Twenty-two students who had taken the course and 14 students who had not taken it responded to the survey. Responses were coded and grouped based on themes that emerged from the data.

Student narratives indicated that the class was a great way to network with advisors and student leaders within the Honors Program. Students who took the seminar were more likely to report feeling closely connected with the Honors Program compared to students who did not take the class. In addition, nearly all of the seminar students reported they felt they had developed strong résumés as a direct result of the skill-building tasks offered during the course while this theme emerged for only a few of the nonseminar students who felt they had developed strong résumés.

Furthermore, students found activities like the Gator Adventure Project and the group community service projects to be a fun opportunity to bond with fellow classmates and expand their local knowledge. When asked what helped with their college transition, two thirds of seminar students responded that the



Tug-of-war: Preparing for the women's tug-of-war match during the annual philanthropy competition field day (Photo courtesy of the author).

See HONORS STUDENTS, p. 10

relationships they formed and communities they became a part of were the most important. Less than half of the nonseminar students responded likewise. For some students, the seminar itself was an important community, while for others their involvement outside the classroom was essential for a successful transition.

Based on anecdotal evidence (i.e., obtained through advising appointments and informal discussions), many students reported they did not fully realize the benefits of the course until after their initial semester, when they began seeking and applying for opportunities. For example, several students mentioned feeling more prepared for interviews in later semesters because they participated in a mock interview workshop in the seminar. Other students reported feeling more comfortable interpreting their online degree audits in subsequent semesters, or helped classmates read their audits, because of the academic advising overview provided in class.

Approximately one third of the students felt there was “too much work for a one credit course.” While there are no immediate plans to change the work requirements of the seminar, content will continue to be evaluated and revised as needed to match course requirements to learning outcomes with a greater focus on helping students see the value of each assignment. UF is committed to ensuring the seminar remains practical, while also challenging students to seek advanced opportunities and to reflect on their motivations for involvement. Pedagogically, the use of student panels in the seminar has been hugely successful and will continue to be emphasized. Many students commented that they were unaware of the many possibilities for study abroad or undergraduate research until they heard the experiences shared by their peers.

Assessment results and student comments indicate that the changes UF has incorporated into its honors first-year seminar are successful and have turned a floundering initiative into a robust course. By tailoring service-learning opportunities to the surrounding community, using student peer panels to present information on curricular and cocurricular opportunities, and including practical skill-building workshops, many components of the University of Florida’s honors first-year seminar are adaptable to other institutions.

Contact

Melissa L. Johnson
mjohnson@honors.ufl.edu

HOME

Wofford's Novel Experience: Taking a Common Reading Program to Dinner

Wofford College, located in Spartanburg, South Carolina, established its Novel Experience common reading program in 2002 with the goal of helping incoming students see that intellectual interactions can occur outside of the classroom and realize the importance of discussing ideas with faculty and fellow students. Wofford faculty state, "Our goal is for them to share a common intellectual experience and to see right away that the emphasis of a liberal arts education is learning through reading, thinking, and discussing" (Baker, Farr, Norman, & Trakas, 2006, p. 1).

As part of the orientation process, first-year students are notified what novel has been selected the summer before their first semester. Students are expected to write a short essay on the reading during the first week of their Humanities 101 class, which is a required course for all entering students. The essay topic is announced on the first day of class, and essays must be submitted by the end of first week.

Mid-week, prior to turning in their essays, students, faculty, and orientation peer leaders meet for the Novel Experience dinner. As Laufgraben (2006) notes, "bringing students together over lunch or dinner to discuss a book offers a casual setting for students to get know each other while maintaining an academic focus" (p. 4). The night of the dinner, first-year students gather in the campus auditorium, and each Humanities 101 class, together with its instructor, is randomly assigned a restaurant destination. Wofford picks up the dinner tab for the approximately 500 student and faculty participants. Originally funded by the College, since 2007 the program has been financed by an anonymous benefactor.

Faculty members are provided a list of possible book discussion questions, though each professor decides how to individually structure the conversation over dinner. Some professors hand out note cards with questions about the novel and divide the class into smaller groups for discussion. Others have a more informal discussion around the dinner table during dessert.

To complete the Novel Experience, professors select three essays from their class that they deem to be the most compelling, and a faculty committee selects the best eight from all of the essays submitted. The eight essays are printed in a program distributed to students at the Novel Experience convocation held approximately two weeks after the dinner, which all first-year students are required to attend. The author of the common reading novel is invited to the convocation and responds to the eight essays during his or her lecture.

Meg Beacham
 Graduate Assistant
 University of South Carolina
 Columbia, SC

Past Novel Experience Books

Middle Passage

by Charles Johnson

Ender's Game

by Orson Scott Card

Waiting by Ha Jin Year of Wonders

by Geraldine Brooks

Paco's Story

by Larry Heinemann

Rich in Love

by Josephine Humphreys

A Gracious Plenty

by Sheri Reynolds

See WOFFORD, p. 12

The Novel Experience Benefits and Outcomes

Students are asked to evaluate and provide feedback on all the different activities they experience during their official orientation, and the Novel Experience is a consistent highlight. Every year since its inception, more than half of students rank the dinner as one of the top three favorite orientation events.

Examples of positive student feedback include comments such as,

I was scared to death of what my college classes were going to be like, but getting to go out to dinner with my professor and classmates made everything not seem so intimidating.

I realized my professor was actually a pretty cool guy. It was neat to see him outside of the classroom environment. We did talk about the novel and school stuff at dinner, but more importantly, we ended up just getting to know more about him, and him about us.

The benefits of the Novel Experience are many. The dinner at a local Spartanburg restaurant introduces students to the Spartanburg community and allows students to interact with their professors in a more relaxed setting outside the classroom. This early informal interaction with a faculty member is also intended to encourage students to develop relationships with faculty throughout their undergraduate careers. The program format serves as an incentive for students to read the book by engaging them in multiple venues interacting with their peers and professors (i.e., essay competition, dinner, and convocation) and linking their participation directly to the success of the experience. Academic rigor is promoted through the dinner by involving students in intellectual discussions and the essay competition by recognizing the academic accomplishments of the essay finalists before their peers. Finally, the Novel Experience serves to immediately engage new students in the Wofford campus community in an entertaining, fun, and academically challenging way, helping to ease their transition to college life.

Conclusion

Combining a common reading program with a planned off-campus activity (e.g., dinner discussions, film series, lecture series, or service opportunities) that engages and invests both students and faculty in the success of the program can have multiple positive outcomes. With creative and innovative thinking, a common reading program can play a vital role in helping new students acclimate to college. Wofford has found a way to make its common reading program a productive introduction not only to Wofford's academic expectations, but also to the culture of the campus and the local community.

HOME

References

- Baker, A., Farr, I., Norman, E., & Trakas, D. (2006). A novel idea. *College English Association Forum*, 35(2). Retrieved March 3, 2009, from <http://www2.widener.edu/%7Ecea/352baker.htm>
- Laufgraben, J. L. (2006). *Common reading programs: Going beyond the book*. (Monograph No.44). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Contact

Meg Beacham
meg.beacham@gmail.com

Related Articles in E-Source

- Liggett, S. (2005). *Mountains Beyond Mountains: Campus and community apply summer reading to Katrina aftermath*. 3(2), 1.
- Corbin, L. (2005). The novel experience: An uncommon summer reading program. 3(3), 5.
- Bukics, R. M., & Clemence, K. (2007). Lafayette's first-year students analyze a film for their common reading. 4(4), 8.
- Fister, B. (2007). One book, one campus: Exploring common reading programs. 5(1), 1.
- Lowery-Hart, R., & Campbell, K. (2008). Connecting common reading and study abroad. 5(5), 6.

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

Introduction

In the May issue we introduced the 2009 class of the National Resource Center's advisory board. In this issue, we are pleased to announce the 2010 class. Board members serve in a consultative role for the Center giving advice and contributing suggestions for publications, marketing and funding strategies, research topics, and conference speakers, as well as authoring articles for NRC publications. Members include leaders and experts in higher education, representing a variety of institutional types, professional associations, and research centers. The 16 advisors serve terms staggered over a four-year period. The contributions of these individuals have been and continue to be vital to our work in improving the lives of students.

Phyllis Curtis-Tweed

Medgar Evers College, The City University of New York

Phyllis Curtis-Tweed is the associate provost at Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York. A graduate of the University of Maryland College Park, Curtis-Tweed earned her PhD in Educational Leadership from Emory University and went on to pursue her postdoctoral training in psychology at Harvard University. While at Harvard, she received a minority investigator's award from the National Institutes of Health and served on the faculty of Harvard Medical School and Harvard Graduate School. She also served on the faculty of Simmons College and at numerous Harvard-affiliated hospitals before joining the faculty at Medgar Evers College in 2001. Her service at Medgar Evers College began through her position as an associate professor and director of the Freshman Year Program. In this position, she contributed to the development of the Foundations of Excellence Project, which ensures student success through programming in the first college year. In addition to her position as an associate professor, Curtis-Tweed now serves as the interim associate provost for Assessment, Research and Student Success. Her research interests include psychology and education, specifically the first-year experience, and she has published and presented numerous times on these topics. Her service to the profession also includes her work for the *Journal of Moral Education* and her membership on the Executive Board of the Association for Moral Education.

Laurie Schreiner

Azusa Pacific University

Laurie Schreiner is the chair of the Department of Doctoral Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California, where she is also a professor. A graduate of Milligan College, Schreiner earned her PhD in Community Psychology at the University of Tennessee. She has served the field of education in her roles as a faculty member, associate academic dean, and research fellow for 25 years. Her scholarly interests include student satisfaction and retention; strengths-based education; Christian higher education; campus climate; and programming in the first and second college years. Her service to the profession includes her work co-authoring the Student Satisfaction Inventory, an assessment instrument that is now used by more than 1,600 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. In addition, Schreiner



Phyllis Curtis-Tweed



Laurie Schreiner



Donna Younger



Patrick Terenzini

See ADVISORY, p. 14

has completed the national validity study of *StrengthsFinder* and co-authored the book *StrengthsQuest: Discover and Develop Your Strength in Academics, Career, and Beyond*. She was a project director for a grant focused on programming for first-year students and one focused on the development of a campus-wide strengths education program, both of which were funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. She also serves as a senior research associate for the Gallup Organization and is a senior fellow at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Donna Younger

Oakton Community College

Donna Younger is the director of the Learning Center at Oakton Community College in Chicago. After earning her MAT in English Education and her EdD in Higher Education Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Memphis, she joined the faculty of the School for New Learning at DePaul University and continues to teach several courses there. For the past 20 years, Younger has served as a consultant for the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning on prior learning assessment and use of behavioral interviewing to assess the abilities of job candidates and college applicants. She joined Oakton Community College in 2002, where she became involved in the first-year experience through her work as the chair of the College Studies Department and as an instructor for the first-year seminar. She also serves as the liaison for the college's participation in the Foundations of Excellence project and as a consulting team member for the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Her scholarly interests include the academic success of community college students, the relationship of academic policies to student success, and the assessment of student development.

Patrick Terenzini

Center for the Study of Higher Education, Penn State

Patrick Terenzini is a distinguished professor of education in the Educational Policy Studies Program and a senior scientist at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Terenzini earned his MAT in English Education from Harvard University and PhD in Higher Education from Syracuse University. He has served the field of higher education in his roles as a teacher, researcher, and administrator for the past 35 years, including his work at Dean College in Massachusetts, Syracuse University, the State University of New York at Albany, and the University of Georgia. His areas of scholarly interest include the effects of college on student learning and development, the college experiences of low-income and first-generation students, and teaching and learning in undergraduate engineering. He has published more than 120 refereed journal articles and is a frequent speaker in his field of interest. His service to the profession includes his work as editor-in-chief of *New Directions for Institutional Research*, as associate editor of *The Review of Higher Education*, and serving on the editorial board of *Research in Higher Education*. In addition, Terenzini served as president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education and has received several research and service awards from the Association of Institutional Research, the American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Related articles in E-Source

(2009, May) The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition Advisory Board. 6(5), 13.

E-Source Submission Guidelines

For complete guidelines and issue dates, see www.nrc.fye.sc.edu/esource/submission.

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

Style: Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style. *E-Source* does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

Length: Original feature-length articles should be 750-1200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

Please address all questions and submissions to:

Toni Vagos, Editor
National Resource Center for The
First-Year Experience & Students in
Transition
University of South Carolina
1728 College Street
Columbia, SC 29208
E-mail: vakost@mailbox.sc.edu
Phone: (803) 777-1924
Fax: (803) 777-9358

What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Publications

New Resource and Call for Contributions – Peer Educator Programs

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has launched a new resource on our web site with a collection of research-based descriptions of peer educator programs. Five cases are presented from a range of different educational institutions using peer educators in a variety of different settings—first-year seminars, diversity education, orientation, support programs for at-risk students, and Supplemental Instruction.

We also invite you to help us expand the available resources on peer educators by including a description of your initiative in this online collection. If your institution has an assessed peer educator program that has a history of two years or more, we encourage you to submit a description of your program for consideration. We are interested in the objectives and structure of the program, how it has been assessed, what was learned, and how the assessment results have been used to improve the service provided to new students. The peer educator program collection and guidelines for those who would like to submit an initiative for publication can be found at www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/peers.html

Conferences

22nd International Conference on The First-Year Experience®

July 20-23, 2009
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Join educators from around the world as we explore approaches for enhancing the first-year experience for students.

For more information on the conference, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/events/international.



2nd Midwest Drive-In Conference on Strengthening the First Year of College: Embracing Collaborative Partnerships

September 25, 2009
Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois

This regional one-day drive-in conference provides a forum for academic and student affairs professionals to share ideas, resources, and engaging pedagogy to enhance their instruction of first-year students. Keynote speaker will be John N. Gardner, Executive Director of the Policy Center on the First College Year, and Betsy O. Barefoot, co-director of the Policy Center, will be the plenary speaker. The deadline for proposals for educational sessions is July 31, 2009. For more information on the conference, please visit www.fyconference.niu.edu

PUBLICATIONS STAFF

Toni Vakos
Editor

Dottie Weigel
Editorial Assistant

Angie Mellor
Graphic Designer

Tracy L. Skipper
Editorial Projects Coordinator

Barbara Tobolowsky
Associate Director

Jennifer Keup
Director

Mary Stuart Hunter
Executive Director

eSOURCE FOR
COLLEGE
TRANSITIONS

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. The National Resource Center has as its mission to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. The Center, a nonprofit organization, will use proceeds from the newsletter to defray publication costs, support research, and disseminate information.

The First-Year Experience® is a service mark of the University of South Carolina. A license may be granted upon written request to use the term The First-Year Experience. This license is not transferable without the written approval of the University of South Carolina.

The University of South Carolina is an equal opportunity institution.

Subscriptions: A single-year subscription is \$40. A multiple-year subscription is \$35 per year. An institutional subscription is \$100 per year or \$95 per year for a multi-year subscription. Orders may be placed online at www.sc.edu/fye/esource/ or by calling (803) 777-6229.

See HAPPENING, p. 15

Institute on First-Year Assessment

October 10-12, 2009 • Charlotte, North Carolina

This Institute has been developed for faculty, first-year program directors, student affairs professionals, institutional researchers, and assessment practitioners who are new to the field of first-year assessment and have recently become charged with the responsibility of assessing first-year programs and initiatives. For more information on the Institute, please visit <http://sc.edu/fye/events/assessment/>



Fellowships Co-Sponsored by AIR for the Institute on First-Year Assessment

The National Resource Center, in collaboration with the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), is offering up to five fellowships that will cover the registration fee for the Institute on First-Year Assessment. To learn more or to apply for this fellowship, visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/AIRfellowships.htm> or call (803)777-8158. The deadline for application is September 1, 2009.

16th National Conference on Students in Transition

November 6-8, 2009 • Salt Lake City, Utah

Share with and learn from each other the latest trends, initiatives, best practices, ideas, research, and assessment strategies focused on supporting student success through the full spectrum of college transitions. Concurrent session, roundtable discussion, poster session and exhibitor presentation proposals are invited on topics addressing student transitions. The proposal deadline is July 13, 2009. For more information on the conference, please visit <http://sc.edu/fye/events/sit/>



7th Ohio First-Year Summit

October 16, 2009 • Cincinnati, Ohio

Hosted by the University of Cincinnati and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, this one-day symposium will feature thought-provoking discussion and interaction about why attending the first-year matters, exemplar approaches, and what lies ahead as we embrace the 21st century. Proposals for traditional presentations, panel discussions, experiential activities, or poster sessions will be accepted online until July 15, 2009. For more information, visit www.uc.edu/conferencing/events/ohfye

Save the Date

29th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience®

February 12-16, 2010 • Denver, Colorado

The First-Year Experience conferences are meetings where educators from two- and four-year institutions come together to openly share ideas, concepts, resources, assessment tools, programmatic interventions, and research results focused on the first college year. Online proposal information available July 13, 2009 at <http://sc.edu/fye/events/annual/proposal.html>



Research

Sophomore-Year Initiative

The National Resource Center has completed data collection for the 2008 National Survey on Sophomore-Year Initiatives. A summary of the findings can be found at <http://sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings/pdf/Soph08.executivesummary.final609.pdf>

HOME

Join NRC on Facebook

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is on Facebook. Visit our homepage at www.sc.edu/fye and click on the Facebook link in the left column to be directed to our Facebook page. Becoming a fan gives you unique access to a network of educators committed to student college success.