



Separating Fact From Fiction in the Digital Information Age

The continued emergence of digital technology has resulted in the instantaneous and ever-growing availability of vast amounts of information. To put this in perspective, below are some mind-boggling statistics regarding information in digital contexts:

- Since its inception at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research) in 1989, the worldwide web has grown exponentially. By 2013, there were over one billion websites operating on the Internet (Internet World Stats, n.d.).
- The website Technorati regularly surveys the status of technology as it intersects with the culture. In 2011, it reported that there were more than 8 million active blogs online, with a new blog being created every 7.4 seconds.
- Wikipedia, the most prolific of the wiki sites, began operation in July 2001 and estimates the number of wikis included on its site will surpass 4.5 million in 2015.

As faculty and students increase their levels of engagement with digital information, it is critically important that they develop the skills necessary to discern the level of accuracy and significance found in online material. However, the need to separate fact from fiction existed long before the digital age. In a 1969 lecture to the National Council of Teachers of English, Neil Postman, American author, media theorist, and cultural critic, proposed that “the art of crap-detection” (p. 1)—a term coined by Ernest Hemingway (see Manning, 1965)—was vital to a reader’s ability to separate useful content from that which is worthless, inaccurate, or vacuous. Postman posited one of five qualities can alert a reader to possible areas of inaccuracy or exaggeration:

- *pomposity*—using fancy words and phrases to reduce readers’ awareness of a lack of content;
- *fanaticism*—failing to accept any data or positions counter to those of the writer;
- *inanity*—exaggerating explanations on topics that have little value or relevance;
- *superstition*—without any supporting data, authoritatively stating fantasies and false notions as if they are true; and
- *earthiness*—using off-color language to emphasize a point or position.



“**Technology is a bit of a double-edged sword. Used right, it’s a wonderful tool, but unfortunately, it makes it easier for a lot of mediocre people to get really crappy ideas out.**”

**— Martin Gore,
English singer,
songwriter, and
musician**

The fact that students have established themselves as voracious consumers of the information found on the Internet has been widely documented (e.g., Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, & Perez, 2009; Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). As such, faculty should not only facilitate student learning in relation to identified course content but also help students develop the skills necessary to be vigilant critics of the content they encounter in digital venues. The next sections offer several ways this can be accomplished in the classroom, and a list of additional online resources are presented in the sidebar.

Walk the Talk

First and foremost, faculty need to model the patterns of behavior they hope to pass on to their students. For example, during lectures and discussions, instructors should avoid trying to impress students with stilted, technical, and flowery language when plain, everyday terms would easily accomplish the same outcome. Paying attention to the manner and delivery of course content can help faculty steer clear of the five qualities Postman (1969) identified above and prevent students from “red flagging” or dismissing classroom material as not worth listening to. Further, the classroom environment should encourage an inquisitive and analytical mindset for students, where they feel comfortable discussing and sharing—as well as challenging—ideas from peers and the instructor. Creating this type of backdrop for learning, modeled and supported by faculty, helps students try out new ideas, propose different ways of looking at content, and build better understanding through dialogue.

Let Me Count the Ways

It is helpful to give students guided practice in identifying and naming the various forms of hype that writers often use to convince readers of their assertions. With this goal in mind, faculty could locate articles or websites that strongly espouse a position on particular topics related to their academic discipline. Then, as an assignment or a classroom learning experience, instructors would walk through the identified resource with students, pointing out how the authors may be working in deceptive ways to convince the reader of their thesis.

Different Points of View

In every academic discipline, any number of topics invite controversy and strong differences of opinion. One strategy for helping students confront these hot-button issues and assess the ways in which different positions are communicated is to assign students responsibility for finding two or more opposing viewpoints (e.g., websites, blogs, articles) on a topic of concern. They would then draw up a list of points and counterpoints made by each author and reach a conclusion as to which writer was the most truthful and forthright in presenting his or her position. Students may even find that the most convincing writer takes a position counter to their own perspective on the issue, which can lead to deeper and richer classroom discussion and learning. As F. Scott Fitzgerald (1936) observed, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function” (para. 2). Faculty can help students accomplish this task by developing the skills of analysis, discernment, and dialogue, as well as become wise and discriminating consumers of information.

Help your students learn and practice the art of crap detection!

References

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Additional Resources

The Baloney Detection Kit available at <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/03/baloney-detection-kit-carl-sagan/>

Crap Detection and Other Essential Network Skills available at <http://socialreporter.com/?p=2079>

Crap-Detection Mini-Course (check out the Crap Detection Resources tab) available at <http://rheingold.com/2013/crap-detection-mini-course/>

Critically Processing What You Read available at <http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/critically-processing-what-you-read.php>



November 6-8, 2015
University of South Carolina,
Columbia, SC



Institute on

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SUCCESS

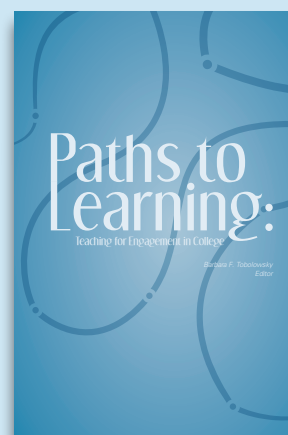
IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

With enrollments in community colleges on the rise, the quality of the first-year experience for students is critical to their success, whether they wish to obtain a certificate, an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution. The Institute on First-Year Student Success in the Community College will provide attendees the opportunity to discuss the current role of the community college in higher education and develop an action plan for creating or enhancing pathways for community college student success.

Register at:
WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/IFYSSCC

Price per individual: **\$645**
2 or more: **\$625**

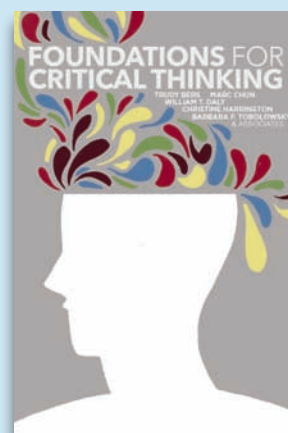
REGISTRATION DEADLINE OCTOBER 28, 2015



Paths to Learning

This book offers a succinct description of several pedagogical paths available to faculty that can actively engage all students. In addition to providing the most recent information on learning and assessment, individual chapters tackle different approaches, including critical pedagogy, contemplative pedagogy, strengths-based teaching, and cooperative/collaborative learning.

Barbara F. Tobolowsky, Editor
ISBN 978-1-889271-97-2
177 pages. **\$30.00**



Foundations For Critical Thinking

Foundations for Critical Thinking explores the landscape of critical-thinking skill development and pedagogy through foundational chapters and institutional case studies involving a range of students in diverse settings.

Trudy Bers, Marc Chun, William T. Daly, Christine Harrington, Barbara F. Tobolowsky & Associates
ISBN 978-1-889271-93-4
224 pages. **\$30.00**

www.nrcpubs.com

What's Happening at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Conferences and Institutes

Save the Dates

22nd National Conference on Students in Transition

October 17-19, 2015

Baltimore, Maryland

Registration Deadline: October 7, 2015

Institute on First-Year Student Success in the Community College

November 6-8, 2015

University of South Carolina

Registration Deadline: October 28, 2015

35th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 20-23, 2016

Orlando, Florida

Proposal Deadline: September 28, 2015

Early Registration Deadline: February 4, 2016

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 40 participants. Participants will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc> for more information.

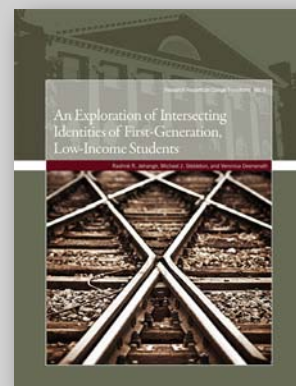
Online Course Offerings

Maximizing Digital Tool Use in the First-Year Seminar: Helping Students Become Digital Learners

October 5-30, 2015

Registration Deadline: September 25, 2015

Facilitated by Brad Garner, Director of Faculty Enrichment in the Center for Learning and Innovation, Indiana Wesleyan University



Research Reports on College Transitions No. 5

An Exploration of Intersecting Identities of First-Generation, Low-Income Students

Rashné R. Jehangir, Michael J. Stebleton, and Veronica Deenanath

ISBN 978-1-889271-97-2.

65 pages. \$20.00



Welcoming Blue-Collar Scholars Into the Ivory Tower

Developing Class-Conscious Strategies for Student Success

Krista M. Soria

ISBN 978-1-889271-96-5.

92 pages. \$25.00

www.nrcpubs.com

Publications—New Releases



Research Reports on College Transitions No. 5 *An Exploration of Intersecting Identities of First-Generation, Low-Income Students*

Rashné R. Jehanigir, Michael J. Stebleton, and Veronica Deenanath

This new research report captures the challenges low-income, first-generation students faced in their collegiate journey, examining the strategies they employed to persist. Organized thematically and using student narrative, the brief report explores the diversity of first-generation students, the intersections of their multiple identities, and their interactions with the institutional agents that affect college success. *An Exploration of Intersecting Identities of First-Generation, Low-Income Students* also offers practical suggestions for higher education professionals working with this diverse and growing population. ISBN 978-1-889271-97-2. 65 pages. \$20.00. To read an excerpt or place an order, visit www.nrcpubs.com.

National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet National Resource Center staff members.

First-Year Seminars in the Community College. Keynote presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; at the 2015 Two Year First Year Conference; September 25, 2015, 8:15-9:00 a.m.; Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel; Norfolk, Virginia.

Going Beyond the Book: Common Readings in The First-Year Experience. Presentation by Rico R. Reed, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Administration and Resource Development, and Denise L. Rode, National Resource Center Advisory Board Member; at the 2015 Midwest First-Year Experience Conference; September 25, 2015; Waubesa Community College, Sugar Grove, Illinois.

The Power of Peers: Exploring the Impact of Peer Leadership Experiences. Keynote address by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the Australasian PASS and Peer Learning Conference; September 29-30, 2015; Melbourne, Australia.

Judging the Book by Its Cover: Research on Common Reads. Concurrent session by Tracy L. Skipper, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Publications, at the 2015 NODA Annual Conference, October 24-27; Denver, Colorado.

Writing for Professional Advancement. Concurrent session by Stephanie Foote and Tracy L. Skipper, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Publications, at the 2015 NODA Annual Conference, October 24-27; Denver, Colorado.

An Evidence-Based Discussion of Aligning Objectives, Experiences, and Assessment in the First-Year Seminar to Carry the High Impact Into the Second Year and Beyond. Presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the 2015 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis; October 25-26, 2015; Indianapolis Marriott Downtown; Indianapolis, Indiana.

E-Source Submission Guidelines

For complete guidelines and issue dates, see tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/esource/web/submission.php.

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 750-1,200 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:

E-Source Editor

National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition
University of South Carolina
1728 College Street
Columbia, SC 29208

E-mail: esource@mailbox.sc.edu

Sign up for



Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the spring 2016 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new issues, please go to:

www.sc.edu/fye/esource

First-Year Seminar Characteristics Predicting Institutional Retention Rates. Research paper presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the 2015 ASHE Annual Conference; November 5, 2015, 2:30-3:45 p.m.; Mineral F, Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center; Denver, Colorado.

Telling the Story of Common Reading Programs in First-Year Seminars. Presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director; and Sara Frakes, National Resource Center Graduate Assistant for Research, Grants, and Assessment; at the 2015 ASHE Annual Conference; November 5, 2015, 4:00-5:15 p.m.; Capitol 6, Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center; Denver, Colorado.

A 360 View of the Policy, Practice, and Promise of College and Career Readiness and Success. Panel presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; David T. Conley, University of Oregon; Laura Jimenez, American Institutes of Research/College and Career Readiness Success Center; Julia Duncheon, University of Texas El Paso; and Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director; at the 2015 ASHE Annual Conference; November 7, 2015, 9:15-10:30 a.m.; CC 103, Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center; Denver, Colorado.

Journal Editors Panel. Panel presentation including Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, and other representatives of higher education scholarly journals at the 2015 ASHE Annual Conference; November 7, 2015, 1:45-3:00 p.m.; Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center; Denver, Colorado.

Partner Events

Two Year First Year Conference

September 24-25, 2015
Sheraton Norfolk Waterside
Norfolk, Virginia
<http://www.tyfy.info/Conference>

2015 Midwest First-Year Conference

September 25, 2015
Waubonsee Community College
Sugar Grove, Illinois
<http://mfyc.org/>

Center for Higher Education Retention Excellence

Can Non-Traditional Students Save Higher Education and Vice Versa
November 13-14, 2015
Central Connecticut State University
New Britain, Connecticut
<http://thechere.org/events/>

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The Toolbox

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The Toolbox is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative, learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

The online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox.

Publication Staff

Editor: Toni Vakos
Graphic Designer: Joey Hilton

22ND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND | OCTOBER 17 - 19, 2015

#SIT15

REGISTRATION DEADLINE
OCTOBER 7, 2015

AN INVITATION TO EDUCATORS COMMITTED TO STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS

The 22nd National Conference on Students in Transition, highlights the latest trends, initiatives, best practices, ideas, research, and assessment strategies focused on supporting student success in the first college year and beyond. Join us for this exciting learning experience!



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FEATURED SPEAKERS



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ONLINE COURSES

ON THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE
AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

**OCTOBER 5 -
OCTOBER 30, 2015**

**Maximizing Digital Tool Use
in the First-Year Seminar:
Helping Students to Become
Digital Learners**

Facilitated by: Brad Garner
Indiana Wesleyan University

Register by Sept. 25, 2015

www.sc.edu/fye/oc

- » Course Capacity - 25 Registrants
- » Fee - \$425

This course will focus on the ways in which the first-year seminar, through intentionally designed teaching and assessment strategies, can help first-year students acquire the competencies necessary to engage with digital technology and become more effective and active digital learners.



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ANNUAL FYE

ORLANDO | FEBRUARY 20-23, 2016



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PROPOSAL DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2015
WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/ANNUAL