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The First-Year Seminar (FYS):

Considerations in FYS Development for Student Affairs Instructors

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The First-Year Seminar (FYS):

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by

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The First-Year Seminar (FYS):

Considerations in FYS Development for Student Affairs Instructors

by

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With the increase of first-year initiatives throughout postsecondary education around the world, student affairs personnel are becoming more involved with the programs and strategies of the First-Year Experience. This report focuses on the First-Year Seminar (FYS), one of various strategies that could be used as a part of an institution's First-Year Experience. Student affairs personnel are increasingly being asked to instruct and take part of an FYS course. In this endeavor, these individuals sometimes lack the background and knowledge to begin the process for planning, developing, and teaching such a course. This report provides theoretical foundations, case studies, and descriptions of general considerations for future development of a FYS course by student affairs personnel.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important issue for the future of any society as the education of youth is paramount to a successful society. The educational goals of society's youth begin from elementary and primary school and continue through postsecondary education. One of the most important issues in postsecondary education is college retention (Davig & Spain, 2003; Schnell & Doetkott 2002). Currently, less than two-thirds of students who enter a program of postsecondary education continue to their second-year (ACT Educational Services, 2009). This low rate combined with the 57% national postsecondary graduation rate is not conducive of a national high performance postsecondary education program (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). These rates are significantly lower than the estimated 80% of high school graduates who will need some form of postsecondary education in order for the United States to remain competitive economically (Kuh, 2007a). This makes college adjustment and student retention very important for our future.

The issue of college adjustment has lead to the development of a number of approaches designed to increase retention among new incoming first-year students. These approaches include first-year student learning communities, orientation programs, and small group interventions (Folger, Carter, Chase, 2004; Jaffee, 2007; Wasley, 2006). This review will focus on the first-year experience course approach for increasing student retention. This approach has many of its roots in the University of South Carolina's "University 101" first-year survival seminar, which was first implemented in 1972

(Roach, 1998). This approach to addressing an incoming student's adjustment to a higher education setting has since been implemented at numerous other postsecondary institutions. College adjustment has become an important topic in higher education due to increasing academic costs and the importance of retaining postsecondary students to certification or graduation (Sidle & McReynolds, 1999).

Many postsecondary institutions have incorporated counselors, academic advisers, and peer mentors in their attempts to help address college adjustment issues surrounding their incoming first-year students (Wasley, 2006). Academic advisers and counselors are often given the duty of instructing transition and success courses for their respective departments and colleges (e.g., University of Texas at Arlington, 2006). This strategy can also lead to better relationships between students and staff, possibly giving the students more confidence and fostering more willingness to meet with their adviser regularly. College counselors and academic advisers need to be aware of the issues surrounding college adjustment and what to address if given the assignment of instructing an FYS course.

The FYS course has been developed over the last 30 plus years across the country and it is important to understand the background of how this type of course was developed (Roach, 1998). This paper will overview the primary theoretical foundations for the creation of the FYS course. Several theories will be presented, including Chickering's Vectors of Development (Chickering, 1993), Alexander Astin's Theory of Involvement (Astin, 1996), and Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (Tinto,

1993). This review will also examine how FYS courses have been implemented and their relative success rate at addressing issues such as student retention and graduation.

After the examination of the different strategies available and their rates of success, this review will conclude with a discussion of considerations that may be helpful in the development or implementation of a single semester FYS course. While many postsecondary institutions and programs develop and implement college adjustment strategies, many faculty and staff are unsure how to take the next step and develop a syllabus for such a course. Sometimes these courses are geared towards a specific group of students or a certain department and major (Roach, 1998). It is the differences between the various departments, colleges and universities implementing FYS that may make it easier or more difficult to create the course and to plan a syllabus. However, there should be a certain set of core subjects that should be considered when developing an FYS course. This core set of subjects needs to include how to better utilize campus resources and how to improve student academic engagement (Kuh, 2007b).

Completing at least two years of postsecondary education is becoming the new standard requirement of education necessary for obtaining employment (Kuh, 2007a). Institutions of higher education must address the issues of retention and college adjustment if the youth of today's society will continue competing at the global level. Counselors, advisers, and administrators should gain an idea of the background and theory related to these issues as well as how to address them. Currently, there are many strategies being utilized by postsecondary institutions to help new incoming first-year students adjust to their college lifestyle, framework and academic demands. No single

strategy has become the ‘silver bullet’ in achieving higher rates in student retention. However, the FYS course, with its multidimensional approach to college readiness and success, is rapidly becoming a frequent choice for institutions looking to increase their own first-year student retention. Several studies will be examined in this review highlighting both the success and challenges of FYS courses. Finally, with more and more faculty and staff being asked to instruct first-year seminars, first-year experiences, and college adjustment courses, this paper will outline a number of considerations to be examined for the future development of FYS courses.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR (FYS) COURSE

At the turn of the 20th century, the first-year college experience started becoming an issue for institutions of higher education because of the need to help new students in their development and acclimation to the college environment. This change in focus resulted in the development of courses and seminars designed to help address these issue at higher education institutions across the country (Upcraft, Garner, et al., 1989). However, by the 1970s, few higher education institutions maintained first-year seminars (FYS) (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002).

The 1970s however, brought a revision and reimplementation of FYS courses, starting at the University of South Carolina. In 1972, the University of South Carolina introduced 'University 101' as its prototype adjustment course to aid in the transition and retention for new incoming first-year college students (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002). 'University 101' was initially implemented with 264 students in 1972. Over the next 25 years, the course grew to serve about ten times that amount, with courses being taught in classes of approximately 20-25 students (Roach, 1998). John Gardner (1986) states that FYS courses are highly important, and that they set the tone for the remainder of the student's higher education experience. Dr. Gardner took control of University 101 at the University of South Carolina in 1974, believing that the concept and knowledge in developing this course was in its infancy (Roach, 1998).

'University 101' has spawned growth around the United States in FYSs. In the mid-1990s, hundreds of schools are reported to have offered, in some way, an FYS

course for incoming students (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002). As a result of this continuing growth and increasing research base, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, based at the University of South Carolina, was created. The center aids other higher education institutions by hosting conferences, conducting research and disseminating resources and information about best practices and college adjustment (Roach, 1998).

Theoretical Foundations

The emergence and use of the FYS course for the promotion of college success is grounded in various theoretical foundations. Much of the theoretical background for FYS courses addresses student persistence and retention. Retention is often considered the best method for evaluating FYS courses since their primary goal is to help students thrive in college so that they can successfully reach certification or graduation (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002). However, other theories examine other academic performance indicators, such as student stability and academic adjustment. Arthur Chickering (1993) described one of the earliest and well known theories of college student development. His identity-formation theoretical framework is integrated into the larger system that is postsecondary education.

Chickering's Vectors of Development

In 1963, Chickering originally proposed seven vectors in which identity development occurs in college students. These vectors begin with developing competence by becoming autonomous. In becoming autonomous, students need to become independent of all those around them. This is, however, in conjunction with the pursuit of

becoming interdependent and still pursuing assistance when needed. Chickering's vectors continue to managing emotions, establishing identity, and freeing interpersonal relationships. In freeing interpersonal relationships, Chickering further proposes that students must become more tolerant of others and continue the work towards interdependence. Chickering's final vectors are clarifying purposes and developing integrity (Chickering, 1993).

Developing an individual identity as a student in higher education plays a role in many theories, however most can draw their roots from Chickering's Seven Vectors. Others have developed theories around different perspectives. The Theory of Involvement by Alexander Astin tries to focus on involving students in higher education processes (Astin, 1996).

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Astin (1996) theorizes that involvement for higher education students focuses on three separate areas: academic, faculty, and student organizations. The academic area focuses on getting students involved with their coursework and academic performance. In tying involvement with the academic, these ideas encompass the Socratic method of teaching, as well as a discussion-based lecture, driven by the students and the ideas presented. Academic involvement forms much of the background for the development of FYS course strategies.

The next area of involvement discusses is that of the faculty (Astin, 1996). College faculty members are often asked to instruct FYS courses in addition to their other responsibilities. Among these responsibilities is research in the areas in which they

specialize and teaching in their areas of expertise. These research and other areas of responsibilities give faculty opportunities to become involved with first-year students. Students may begin to network with faculty who share their interests as well as begin to envision the different types of academic areas and forms of research available. Involving the faculty with the students' development allows for greater growth among first-year students and increases their own involvement (Astin, 1996).

The last area of involvement discussed by Astin (1996) is that of the role of student organizations and groups. Many institutions of higher education host hundreds of student groups and organizations. These organizations usually are created around a central purpose or interest. First-year students can learn to become involved with groups that share common interests and goals. As students become more involved with these groups, they begin to network and socialize with peers. This process of involvement can be helpful to the development of first-year students, as they begin to seek and find groups with commonalities with themselves and get more involved.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1996) suggests the need to focus on the first-year of higher education because of the importance of a student being involved during their time in higher education. Involvement early in a student's higher education career can lead to greater academic and personal success (Upcraft, Garner, et.al, 1989). However, Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Departure examines a student's individual characteristics and how their growth and development continues throughout their higher education career (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002).

Tinto's Theory of Student Departure

Tinto (1993) focused his theory on three principles of commitment. The first is community. Tinto (1993) discusses community as having students transition and ultimately integrate from their pre-college communities to the various communities on the campuses of their respective colleges and universities. The sense of community an institution tries to provide for students is an important factor in the development of students' commitment to the institution. This sense of community is developed both within the lecture halls and classrooms, as well as outside the academic arena. Academically, students connect with faculty and peers towards the common goal of succeeding in college. Outside the academic arena, the sense of community may come from varsity athletics, student governance organizations, community events, or other institutional extracurricular activities. These activities, academic and extracurricular, are very important towards developing the sense of community within an institution's campus and student population.

Tinto's (1993) second principle is commitment to students. The institution's commitment can come in the form of an effective retention program that will focus on the needs and services of the student population. The institution itself will also focus on creating an environment where their priorities are the needs of the students. Services and employees will echo this commitment as much as the institution makes it important. The institutional commitment to its students and their needs is very influential to the development of college students and also ties into the first commitment of community.

Lastly, Tinto (1993) suggests the final principle is the institutional commitment to education. “Education, not retention, is the primary principle of effective retention (Tinto, 1993). Any institution of higher education has its priorities rooted in the value of educating the students it serves (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002). In this area of commitment, Schnell and Doetkott (2002) suggest that faculty play a large role in their modeling of educational endeavors and commitment. The academic roles of faculty and staff play a large and similar role in a student’s commitment as they do in Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement.

These theories focus on similar items that have aided in the development of various college adjustment strategies, including FYS courses, mentoring programs, and residential living programs, among others (Upcraft, Garner, et. al., 1989). Chickering’s Seven Vector’s Identity Development theory focuses on the student’s identity in the higher education setting as it ties into the policies, initiatives, and goals of the individual institutions. Alexander Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement focuses on the importance of getting first-year students involved with various aspects of the higher education experience. Vincent Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure looks at the commitment of the students and institution across a student’s higher education experience and how these commitments create the ultimate commitment needed between the student’s and institution’s goals. These theories lead to the creation of various models for college adjustment for first-year students.

CHAPTER THREE

MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

First-year seminar (FYS) courses have been developed as a strategy to confront the issue of student retention and college adjustment at institutions of higher education across the country. These institutions are creating FYS courses primarily on the theoretical foundations of Astin and Tinto (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002). However, various models have been developed to aid in this process. Many of the models discussed in this report are in place at institutions across the country. The first models discussed are based on small groups.

Small Groups

Picklesimer et al. (1999) discusses how collaboration between academic administrators and college faculty can lead to greater levels of community and the acquisition of new skills and information, such as advanced intellectual stimulation and decision-making. This type of collaboration has led to the development of intentionally structured groups (ISGs) for personal development courses at institutions of higher education. These ISGs usually included between six and eight students. These students would meet for an additional class period each week after the eighth week of class during the regular semester term. These ISGs were used to supplement the personal development traditional core curriculum taught in the regular course. In this supplemental period group leaders implemented more life skill and personal development instruction and discussion for the students in a small group setting.

Picklesimer et al. (1999) reports that student reactions were positive and that upon further development of the course, student satisfaction would increase. Students also reported that the formation of friendships inside and outside the course was frequent. These findings came as a result of informal student feedback. Also, implementing this model appears to have had many positive benefits for the students, however, there were many limitations that still remain in question concerning this model. One of those limits is the lack of quantitative data to support the results of student satisfaction for the ISG model. Picklesimer et al. (1999) reported no systematic feedback was collected, thus further study should be conducted for this model. Another challenge for this model is the effect of the ISGs on student retention. The study conducted by Picklesimer et al. (1999) did not present quantitative results on student satisfaction, achievement or retention. Although informal results were gathered and showed positive remarks by many of the students in terms of satisfaction, evaluative measures should be integrated into studies such as these to measure the quantitative and qualitative effects of implementing this model, including comparisons to control conditions.

Although the Picklesimer study had serious problems in the research design and data collection, limiting its conclusions and usefulness, Folger, Carter, & Chase (2004) conducted a study at another institution of higher education focused around a first-year program targeting first-generation college students. The study was designed to evaluate grade-point-average (GPA) and second-year retention rates for students who participated in the program and also participated in a small group intervention, similar to that discussed in Picklesimer's study. The small groups included six to ten students and

focused around academic discussion topics, such as college resources and relationships. The groups met for about 6 weeks of the beginning of the fall semester? and met for 90 minutes in extra sessions.

The primary differences between these two very similar studies is that Folger, Carter, and Chase (2004) presented quantitative data about their groups of students in terms of GPA and retention. Their results indicated that for the students who participated in the small group intervention, their retention rate to the second year was approximately two times that of the students in the control group (79% as compared to 39%). In addition, the students in the program achieved approximately one grade point higher in cumulative GPA than the control group students, who did not have any extra or additional services since they did not participate in the program. Although the limitations are significant in that these small studies examine small sample sizes and controls, the intervention of such a strategy shows potential. The studies suggest that small groups created about halfway thru an FYS course can possibly increase student retention, satisfaction, and academic performance.

Supplemental and Course Clustered Instruction

Another model suggested by research about FYS courses revolves around coordinating another academic course with the FYS course. Crissman (2001) studied clustering students taking an FYS course who were also in another academic course. This study examined a group of first-year students who were clustered in the two courses and a group of first-year students who were not clustered in a second course outside of the FYS course. This study was conducted at a small liberal arts college and was designed to

help determine whether the clustering of students aided in academic success and retention. However, no quantitative data was presented in the study and only select interview responses were presented. Crissman (2001) states that there was substantially more positive feedback from the clustered students in regard to their belief that they were performing better academically. These students also provided feedback that they were more academically involved and committed to their peers. Non-clustered students reported similar feelings, however, they also reported negative feelings, such as lack of purpose for the course. Although this qualitative data may yield positive insights into student satisfaction, this data is not a viable source for measuring student retention and academic success.

These results present a number of limitations for the study. First, the data seems to present a weak link between positive remarks and the non-clustered students. Crissman (2001) acknowledges that many non-clustered students reported positive feelings about their FYS course and their academic performance. However, without quantitative data to support her assertions that the clustered students had more positive experiences than the non-clustered students, the validity of this assertion cannot be verified. Secondly, there was no standardization among the different sections of clustered and non-clustered students. Instructors used varied materials and texts for their courses and reported student satisfaction may have been confounded with differing teaching styles and formats. Lastly, the samples of students used were not representative of a diverse institution or equal in sample size numbers. Although students cannot be forced to participate in a study, this study had a non-clustered sample size of about three times the size of the clustered group

and included predominately Caucasian females. The limitations presented by the data collection and analysis raise questions about the validity of the success of clustering courses together.

A second study conducted by Yockey and George (1998) examined the pairing of an FYS course with another course. Their study used an optional FYS course paired with a core course, such as introductory sociology, where the academic portion of the FYS course is based on the core course material. This type of supplemental instruction model is similar to the clustering model presented by Crissman, in that students are grouped together in two separate courses and they both focus on academic success and retention. Yockey and George (1998) did present quantitative data to support their conclusions.

Based on the results of their study, they concluded that the students who took part in the supplemental instruction model achieved grades that were more than a half point higher in the core course than the control group. The supplemental instruction students also achieved about a third of a grade point higher in semester cumulative grade point average than the control group students. These results however were not duplicated the following year. Although the results of this study show positive and quantitative data to support their conclusions, many limitations are still present in this study.

One of the limits is that the FYS course enrollment was predominantly at-risk students. Although many of the students who take FYS courses around the country are categorized as ‘at-risk,’ this is a limit that the researchers recognized. Another limitation is the inconsistent results for the following year. Although this may seem to suggest that

more data needs to be collected, the researchers used this data to modify the course pairing parameters and modified the course selection to better aid the students.

These pairing and clustering models provide an approach towards academically engaging students to foster not only their college adjustment, but also their academic commitments. The positive results from these studies show potential for the pairing and clustering models; however, more research should be conducted in order to examine the benefits for all first-year students.

Persistence

The final model that will be reviewed is based on an examination of different ideas, topics, and activities utilized in the FYS course at the researcher's institution. This model, presented by Davig and Spain (2003), relates specifically to retention and student persistence in higher education.

Davig and Spain (2003) conducted a study of the topics and activities integrated into the FYS course on their campus for first-year students. Their institution utilizes an FYS course strategy that requires students to complete an FYS course as part of their graduation requirements. The course is managed by the individual colleges within a large research university in the Southwestern United States. Undeclared students take a general FYS course not geared towards a specific academic area. Although Davig & Spain (2003) note that primary course content for declared major students in individual colleges and undeclared students taking the general course are different, however, they also note the basic concepts are similar. Participants in the study were categorized into three groups, separating the first-year students into business majors, non-business majors, and

undeclared. The data collected included a quantitative and qualitative component. The students would rate the usefulness of the topics presented in the course as well as provide feedback for what topics should have been included in the FYS course and the reasons pertaining to leaving school if they did not re-enroll. GPA and retention data were also collected.

The data collected by Davig and Spain (2003) suggest that five key areas were highly related to student persistence. These topics included: a campus tour, group activities outside of class, curriculum planning (as directly related to the issuance of a semester degree audit to the students), advising information, and study skills. Another activity that was rated as helpful by the students was getting acquainted in class. The study also found some topics that were rated not helpful by students. These topics included ROTC information, family adjustment information, computer skills, and critical thinking information.

The interview feedback from the students focused primarily on getting more information about making decisions about majors. Also, the students who did not re-enroll gave a wide range of issues for not re-enrolling, including car problems, child care arrangements, and university location.

The study by Davig and Spain (2003) utilized student satisfaction and perceived usefulness to determine the most helpful topics and activities for first-year students taking the FYS course. Although the purpose of the study was to identify these topics, one major limitation of the study was that it did not tie retention rates to the students who rated

these topics. Further research utilizing retention rates for the samples studied would greatly improve this study.

The models reviewed presented give more insight into the growth and development of the FYS course. Many institutions utilize different models, including many listed above, to create and modify their FYS course/s. The theories presented in Chapter Two created the foundation for the various models in use today. These models will continue to build on the FYS course foundation towards practical uses of the course.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDIES

The first-year seminar (FYS) course has been utilized at many institutions of higher education (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002) and hundreds more have utilized other college adjustment strategies (Folger, Carter, Chase, 2004; Jaffee, 2007; Wasley, 2006). Many of these institutions that have implemented the FYS course have conducted research examining their creation and effectiveness. Much of this research is positive, however, there are also negative results from the research and this review will examine both types of studies to provide a practical view of this movement. This section will be broken up into five sections, based on the five types of FYS courses available, as determined by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina (Tobolowsky, Cox, & Wagner, 2005).

Extended Orientation

The first type of FYS course to be reviewed is extended orientation. This type of FYS seminar is also the most widely utilized across all types of institutions of higher education (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). In the 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, about 40.9% of all institutions selected ‘extended orientation’ as the primary type of first-year seminar being utilized by their institution. The survey also found that about 57.9% of all institutions offer an ‘extended orientation’ FYS seminar (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). Extended orientation FYS courses are basically self-explanatory as an ‘extension’ of the first-year orientation experience, usually

including content about campus resources, learning strategies, time management, and other topics (Saunders & Romm, 2008).

An extended orientation FYS seminar is utilized at Eastern Connecticut State University, a public four-year university with approximately 5,000 students. Their FYS course is part of a wider First-Year Program (FYP), which requires enrollment in the FYS course; however the program itself is optional. The seminar enrolls about one third of all first-time, first-year students in various sections of the course, not to exceed 25 students per section. As part of FYP, students are 'clustered' together, similar to the course clustering instruction model discussed in Chapter Three. The 'cluster' encompasses three classes, two general requirement classes and the FYS course. FYS course topics include improving academic skills, utilizing library resources, time and stress management, among others. In evaluating the FYP, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students in the FYP than those who did not participate in the FYP (81% to 72% for Class of 2003 cohort) (Lashley, 2005). One of the limitations of the evaluation was the fact that students were not required to participate in the FYP, only a small portion of the first-year class participated in the FYS course and the results could be confounded by student motivation. Another limitation is that the evaluation examined the FYP rather than the FYS course.

Another utilization of extended orientation FYS courses is at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). IUPUI is a public four-year university with approximately 30,000 students. Their FYS course utilizes common pedagogies and learning outcomes, such as beginning the process of understanding critical thinking,

establishing a network of staff, faculty, and other students, among others. At IUPUI, the individual degree-granting colleges and schools have mostly developed their own FYS course. The FYS courses are also linked to another first-year course, usually first-year mathematics, English, or other introductory courses. IUPUI refers to this as the development of their learning communities, but it can also be referred to as 'clustering' as mentioned in Chapter Three and in the Eastern Connecticut State case study. Currently, about 73% of all first-time, first-year students are enrolled in a FYS course. In evaluating the FYS course, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students who took a FYS course than those who did not participate in a FYS course (69% to 60% for the Class of 2002 cohort) (Jackson, Williams, & Hansen, 2005). One of the limitations of this case study is that the courses were primarily managed by the individual colleges/schools, which can lead to various methods and topics within the larger learning outcome framework that are covered. Also, IUPUI is developing themed learning communities or clusters, which will center around a central theme within each of the course clusters, which will also expand to a minimum of three first-year courses (Jackson, Williams, & Hansen 2005). This new themed cluster development suggests that the 'extended orientation' model may be shifting at IUPUI and it may be more similar another type of FYS course.

Academic with Uniform Academic Content across Sections

The next type of FYS course to be reviewed is the Academic seminar with generally uniform academic content across sections. This type of FYS seminar is not as widely used or offered as the 'extended orientation' type, however, over a quarter of

institutions offer such a course. (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). In the 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, about 28.1% of all institutions offered an 'academic seminar with uniform content' FYS seminar (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). Academic seminars with uniform content FYS courses can be theme-oriented or interdisciplinary and focus on an academic theme/focus with integrated academic skills, such as writing and critical thinking (Saunders & Romm, 2008).

One of the schools that utilize academic seminars with uniform content across FYS seminars is Southeastern Louisiana University, a public four-year university with approximately 15,000 students. Their FYS course is a three-hour elective course optional to first-year students. The seminar enrolls about a quarter of all first-time, first-year students in various sections of the course, not to exceed 25 students per section. The FYS course is based upon the theories of Tinto and Astin. They try to achieve several goals surrounding academic and social integration, which include orienting students to campus and developing academic-based skills. In evaluating their FYS, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students in the FYS than those who did not participate in the FYS (71.5%% to 63.1% for Class of 2002 cohort) (Wood, Autin, & Hall, 2005). The major limitation in this study was the fact that this was an optional course selection for first-year students and that students wanting to participate in a FYS course may significantly influence the results.

Another utilization of an academic seminar with uniform content FYS courses is at the University of Nevada at Reno. The University of Nevada at Reno is a public four-year university with approximately 17,000 students (Savidge, 2009). Cavote & Kopera-

Frye (2004) conducted a study on their campus, examining the effectiveness of a subject-based FYS course for first-year students. This specific FYS course combined high school-to-college transition information with the subject-based content of an introductory college course. In evaluating the FYS, they concluded that there was no relation between academic success indicators (i.e., grade point average and retention rates) and participation and completion of the subject-based FYS course (80% to 83% for Class of 1999 cohort). Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2004) also concluded that the subject-based FYS courses was only offered at about a quarter of the academic departments on their campus and thus could have limited the scope of their study.

Academic With Variable Academic Content Across Sections

The next type of FYS course to be reviewed is the academic seminar with various academic content across sections. This type of FYS seminar is not as widely used or offered as the 'extended orientation' or 'academic with uniform content' courses, however, just over a quarter of institutions offer such a course (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). In the 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, about 25.7% of all institutions offer an 'academic seminar with variable content' FYS seminar (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008).

One of the institutions that utilize academic seminars with variable content across FYS seminars is the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), a public four-year university with approximately 18,000 students. The FYS courses are related to the instructor's expertise, as the instructors are primarily university professors. Topics of these courses include but are not limited to, "Fictional Women Detectives," and "Nuclear

Enviroethics." The class is not required, however about 70% of all full-time first-year students enroll in the course. Some of the courses are also linked to learning communities and utilize course-clustering. While the content various across sections, the primary goals of the course are uniform, and they include encouraging students' self-assessment and goal clarification, enhancing students' essential academic skills, among other topics. In evaluating the FYS course, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students who took a FYS course than those who did not participate in a FYS course (72% to 52.5% for Class of 2002 cohort) (Ward et. al., 2005). One of the limitations related to this type of evaluation and seminar is that though goals and objectives may be uniform across sections, the various contents taught and the methodology used to achieve those goals can be difficult to identify and duplicate.

Another utilization of the academic seminar with variable content across sections FYS seminar is at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is a public four-year university with approximately 7,500 students. The FYS courses are created and developed by cross-college faculty teams, who focus the course on a central theme but examine the theme from different disciplinary perspectives throughout the course. The goals of the program are generated from those of the students, the faculty, and the university into the course itself. In evaluating the FYS course, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students who took an FYS course than those who did not participate in an FYS course (70.3% to 58.9% for Class of 1998 cohort) (Staley, 2005). The primary limitation to this case study focuses on

non-uniform goals across sections, which creates a difficult situation to identify individual factors that may be positively affecting retention in those FYS courses.

Basic Study Skills

The next type of FYS course to be reviewed is the basic study skills seminar. This type of FYS seminar is one of the least offered and utilized types of FYS courses, with it being offered at just over a fifth of institutions (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). In the 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, about 21.8% of all institutions offer a basic study skills FYS seminar. In addition, only 5.8% use the basic study skills FYS course as their primary type of seminar (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008).

One of the institutions that utilize basic study skills FYS seminars is at California State University, San Marcos, a public four-year university with approximately 8,000 students. The FYS course has a class size of 25 to 35 students and covers various topics, such as time management, presentation skills, health and wellness, among others. The FYS course sections have eight uniform goals, such as Well-being, Diversity, and Interpersonal relations. Although the class is not required, over 50% of first-year students take the course. In evaluating the FYS course, it was found that retention to the second year was higher for students who took an FYS course than those who did not participate in a FYS course (88.5% to 66.7% for Fall 1995 to Spring 2000) (Sparks, 2005). The limitations to this case study include the lack of an individual yearly breakdown of first-year to second-year retention rates, as well as larger class sizes from the previous FYS types. Although larger class sizes may be more appropriate for this individual institution,

it provides a different variable to compare this type of FYS to the other types, which are usually capped at 25 students.

Another institution that utilizes basic study skills FYS seminars is North Dakota State University, Fargo (NDSU). NDSU has approximately 14,000 students and is a public, four-year university (North Dakota State University, 2009). Schnell and Doetkott (2002) conducted a study of NDSU's retention rates to help determine if an FYS course was instrumental for retention. Students are not required to enroll in an FYS course so they voluntarily enrolled in an academic skills seminar. Although details of this specific course are not outlined, his results concluded that their was a significant difference in retention rates of those students who took the seminar and a matched comparison group who did not (96.22% for first-year retention for the students who took the course as opposed to 91.15% for the matched comparison group who did not take the course). The primary limitation of this study is the lack of information about the FYS course itself, such as goals, objectives, and structure.

The FYS course is not limited to these four types of seminars; however, the four reviewed are the most popular and the most utilized. Other types of FYS courses include hybrid versions, pre-professional and discipline-related versions, and other non-specific versions. Hybrid types of FYS courses are combinations of two other types of FYS courses, such as combining basic study skills and extended orientation (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). Hybrid types of seminars are offered at about 20.3% of institutions, but only primarily utilized at 16.2% of institutions (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). Pre-professional and discipline-related versions are FYS courses

designed specifically for students of specific disciplines and are usually taught and structured from the individual schools, such as pharmacy, education, or business (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). These types of FYS courses are the least utilized of the specific individual types of FYS courses, being offered at 14.9% of all institutions, but only being primarily used at about 1.6% of institutions (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008). Finally, there are other non-specific types of FYS courses being utilized, with these being courses that do not fit into any of the other discussed categories. These types of FYS courses are rarely utilized, only being offered at about 4.4% of institutions and only being primarily utilized at less than one percent of all institutions (Griffin, Romm, & Tobolowsky, 2008).

While these four types of FYS courses are the most utilized, individual institutions select and choose a type of FYS that best fits their goals, purpose and objectives. Many times, retention and overall first-year experience are the highest priority; however many times institutions will choose to follow a theoretical framework to their first-year seminar course, which embodies what they are looking for in their first-year student experience and their first-year seminar. The different institutions of the United States provide a unique overview of different examples and studies. Most research focuses on results, while others focus on different course aspects, such as community engagement. The general results from this overview of studies and examples show that there are positive effects for FYS courses but they require more examination and research. Despite the flaws, this research does provide the opportunity to construct a list

of considerations for the future development of first-year seminar courses across the country.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Many discussions and ideas are considered before a first-year seminar (FYS) course is created and implemented at an institution of higher education. Many institutions require faculty and staff to be the instructors for these courses. Although many instructors are capable of constructing the curriculum for their particular section of the FYS course, many others, including some staff, are not. Based on the theory and research presented in this review, an outline of suggestions of concepts and activities should be considered when developing the curriculum for a FYS course will be presented. Although this overview of suggestions may not be comprehensive and extensive, these items are important to consider for first-year students in a FYS course.

Engagement

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement outlines areas where students need to be involved in order to help them persist in higher education (Hyers & Joslin, 1998). These areas are important for student engagement in the academic and non-academic arenas. First-year students expect do be more actively engaged more than what is currently provided for them (Kuh, 2007b). Engaging the first-year students in academic activities and academic discussions are key concepts of many of the subject-based FYS courses discussed. This sort of involvement and engagement of students in academics may empower the students towards academic achievement. FYS courses in development should consider integrating a large involvement concept in the course. Uses of the

Socratic method and active discussion sessions are some ideas utilized by other courses across the country.

Development Seminars

Many students are overwhelmed by the differences in learning requirements and course formats when transitioning from high school to higher education. These students should be taught the newest models of basic study skills during their time in an FYS course. Throughout the different types of FYS courses, many of the main objectives support instruction on skills necessary for the success of students in postsecondary education. The adjustment towards concentrating on four or five classes is not difficult for most students; however, the depth of information discussed in college courses is where many students are taken aback. In addition, they have to adjust to instructors' teaching styles and formats. Ample time in FYS courses should be allocated towards basic study skills and its associated topics, including time management, study skills, note-taking, health and wellness, among others (Schnell & Doetkott, 2002; Lashley, 2005; Sparks, 2005; Ward et. al., 2005).

Course Size

The average size of a high school classroom is about 20 to 30 students and this format is familiar to the first-year higher education student, having spent at least four years experiencing these size classes. The general consensus among FYS course literature is for the course to range from 18 to 25 students, usually about 20 students per section. This allows for more personal interaction between the instructor and the students, as well as providing familiarity to the students who may be in other college courses with

hundreds of students. This course size also facilitates student engagement and involvement, where more interactive activities can take place instead of just using a lecture-based format. Although course size is dependent on the resources available at the institution, consideration should be given towards limiting the course section size to the preferred range.

Campus Resource Availability

Institutions of higher education are usually in possession of various programs and resources available for its student population. Libraries, counseling and advising centers, learning centers, and computer labs are just some of the resources available to students at many institutions. These resources need to be presented to the first-year students, preferably by staff working for these programs and centers. For example, higher education libraries are home to extensive collections of literary works, computer resources, periodical archives, and research journals. Coordinating with the library staff for a librarian to come speak about the resources available at the campus library will present the students with valuable information about what services are available for them in terms of research, study areas, and meeting places (Barefoot, 2006). Most institutions have integrated fees for students that pay for these services. The FYS course is an excellent opportunity to ensure that these resources are known and not under-utilized by the students.

Advising

As many FYS courses are becoming required for incoming first-year students, academic advising becomes an important topic for students (Davig & Spain, 2003). FYS

courses present an opportunity for institutions to educate and inform students about the advising services available. These services are very important for students, as they pertain to graduation requirements, financial aid, registration for courses, and degree plan planning. FYS courses should develop an advising component where an academic adviser may present information in regards to the how-to's for student advising services available at that institution. Educated and informed students also help in lowering the workload for academic advisers and counselors during peak times (i.e., registration periods for classes, pre-advising).

Evaluation

Lastly, when the creation and implementation of an FYS course is considered, the most important item is to have an evaluation plan built into the course. This evaluation should include tracking students for persistence, achievement, and retention, as well as obtaining feedback on process issues, information provided and other helpful topics. This expands upon the common idea that the FYS course must be geared towards the population of students the institution serves and every institution is different. These evaluative methods help the constant development and growth of the FYS course and the literature available for other institutions that are developing their own FYS courses.

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