



# **FYI (First-Year Initiative) Benchmarking Study Findings**

A Benchmarking Survey  
of First-Year Seminars

# Five Types of First-Year Seminars: Choosing the Best Option for Your Institution

## 1. *Transition seminars (the majority)*

- focus on helping students learn strategies and skills for college survival

## 2. *Seminars with consistent academic content across sections*

- generally focus on a common academic theme

## 3. *Seminars focused on section-specific academic topics*

- generally focus on various themes; found at more selective institutions

# Five Types of First-Year Seminars

## ***4. Professional or discipline-linked seminars***

- Offered in departments or units; linked to specific majors

## ***5. Basic skills seminars***

- Remedial/developmental courses with a strong focus on study skills

***Also . . . Courses that are a combination of two or more types, and merged FYE general education courses.***

## **Results of a Cross-Campus Analysis of First-Year Seminars (“First-Year Initiative” Study); 41,000 students, 72 institutions**

- Developed collaboratively by John N. Gardner Institute and Educational Benchmarking, Inc.
- Piloted in 2001; data from 2002
- For more information, go to:

[http://www.webebi.com/\\_AsmtServices/FYI/default.aspx](http://www.webebi.com/_AsmtServices/FYI/default.aspx)

# Sample of Course Learning Outcomes (Students' Self-Perception)

## Factor Means

Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Services . . . . .	4.72
Course Improved Knowledge of Campus Policies. . . . .	4.58
Course Improved Connections with Peers. . . . .	4.54
Course Improved Connections with Faculty. . . . .	4.50
Course Improved Managing Time/Priorities. . . . .	4.50
Course Improved Critical Thinking. . . . .	4.40
Course Improved Study Strategies. . . . .	4.19
Course Improved Knowledge of Wellness Issues. . . . .	3.90
Course Improved Academic/Cognitive Skills. . . . .	3.74
Course Increased Out-of-Class Engagement. . . . .	3.63

***Important Note: 5.50 is 75% (above average) on a 7–point scale.***

# FYI Study Findings: Seminar Type

- Does the “type” of seminar matter?
  - Transition theme and special academic theme seminars were about equal on learning outcomes and student satisfaction measures.
  - Discipline theme seminars produced lower learning outcomes and student satisfaction.
  - Too few remedial courses were in the sample to draw valid comparisons.

# FYI Study Findings: Seminar Type

*Why the differences?* Student reported differences in levels of “engaging pedagogy”

Transition: 30.5% of respondents rated courses “high” in engaging pedagogy

Special academic: 36.5% rated courses “high”

Discipline-linked: 18.3% rated courses “high”

# What is “engaging pedagogy”?

- **The engaging pedagogy factor was derived from seven response items**
  1. A variety of teaching methods
  2. Meaningful class discussions
  3. Challenging assignments
  4. Productive use of classroom time
  5. Encouragement to speak in class
  6. Encouragement for students to work together
  7. Meaningful homework
- **This template can apply to any first-year course.**



# Does the Number of Contact Hours Matter?

## *% of students rating course “high”*

	<i>1 Hr</i>	<i>2 hrs</i>	<i>3 hrs</i>
Study Strategies	15.9	<b>20.6</b>	<b>19.4</b>
Academic Skills	10.9	12.7	<b>17.3</b>
Critical Thinking	23.1	26.1	<b>34.2</b>
Faculty Connections	24.9	<b>28.3</b>	<b>29.6</b>
Peer Connections	26.1	<b>35.5</b>	<b>37.3</b>
Out-of-Class Involvement	14.8	<b>18.5</b>	<b>18.6</b>
Policies/Procedures	<b>33.3</b>	<b>35.3</b>	30.4
Campus Services	35.9	<b>41.0</b>	35.4
Time/Priorities	24.6	<b>27.7</b>	25.2
Wellness/Spirituality	18.5	<b>24.0</b>	<b>23.0</b>
Belonging	55.3	<b>58.5</b>	<b>60.2</b>
Course Satisfaction	28.1	<b>34.9</b>	<b>35.4</b>
Engaging Pedagogy	24.1	30.1	<b>37.0</b>

# What are your desired outcomes?

Contact hours should align with your institution's desired seminar outcomes.

# Required/Not Required

(% of students rating course “high”)

	Required	Not required
Study Strategies	16.1	<b>19.5</b>
Academic Skills	12.7	14.0
Critical Thinking	27.8	28.1
Faculty Connections	24.8	<b>29.4</b>
Peer Connections	27.4	<b>38.0</b>
Out-of-Class Involvement	12.9	<b>17.8</b>
Policies/Procedures	25.9	<b>34.4</b>
Campus Services	27.7	<b>42.4</b>
Time/Priorities	22.6	<b>26.7</b>
Wellness/Spirituality	16.7	<b>24.0</b>
Belonging	56.0	58.2
Course Satisfaction	27.9	<b>37.7</b>
Engaging Pedagogy	29.0	31.9

# **What accounts for differences in student views of required vs. elective seminars?**

What can we do about insuring more quality control in required seminars?

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# Grading: Pass/Fail vs. Letter Grade

(Factor mean scores: 5.50 is 75% of scale)

	Graded	Pass/Fail
Study Strategies	4.25	4.33
Academic Skills	<b>3.63</b>	3.45
Critical Thinking	4.40	4.39
Faculty Connections	4.49	4.54
Peer Connections	<b>4.56</b>	4.45
Out-of-Class Involvement	<b>3.68</b>	3.44
Policies/Procedures	4.51	<b>4.79</b>
Campus Services	4.70	4.79
Time/Priorities	4.38	4.50
Wellness/Spirituality	<b>3.93</b>	3.81
Belonging	5.48	5.41
Course Satisfaction	4.56	4.62
Engaging Pedagogy	<b>4.58</b>	4.43

# Comparison of grading formats produces mixed results

Graded courses are associated with higher scores on “Engaging Pedagogy”



# Linked Courses (First-year seminar is one course in a learning community.)

	Linked	Stand-alone
Study Strategies	<b>4.46</b>	4.38
Academic Skills	<b>3.78</b>	3.64
Critical Thinking	<b>4.62</b>	4.50
Faculty Connections	4.60	4.65
Peer Connections	<b>5.02</b>	4.63
Out-of-Class Involvement	3.63	3.81
Policies/Procedures	4.55	4.70
Campus Services	4.75	4.91
Time/Priorities	<b>4.60</b>	4.57
Wellness/Spirituality	4.02	4.15
Belonging	<b>5.55</b>	5.50
Course Satisfaction	<b>4.89</b>	4.72
Engaging Pedagogy	<b>4.76</b>	4.66

# Linked courses appear to have an advantage over non-linked courses.

Higher outcomes in . . .

- Academic skills
- Study skills
- Critical Thinking
- Engaging Pedagogy



# Use of Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (i.e., Peer Leaders)

	UGTA	No UGTA
Study Strategies	4.28	4.31
Academic Skills	3.56	3.74
Critical Thinking	4.40	4.58
Faculty Connections	<b>4.54</b>	4.44
Peer Connections	<b>4.66</b>	4.42
Out-of-Class Involvement	<b>3.73</b>	3.23
Policies/Procedures	<b>4.52</b>	4.21
Campus Services	<b>4.83</b>	4.23
Time/Priorities	<b>4.47</b>	4.30
Wellness/Spirituality	<b>4.04</b>	3.49
Belonging	<b>5.48</b>	5.41
Course Satisfaction	4.57	4.51
Engaging Pedagogy	4.57	4.60

**Undergraduate TAs are associated with higher mean learning outcomes.**

A few exceptions to this general finding



# Summary

In this study, transition or academic seminars that

- Are elective
- Are graded
- Use peer leaders
- Carry sufficient credit hours to achieve objectives
- Are linked into a learning community
- And - - - that employ **engaging pedagogy**

Are correlated with better student outcomes!

# Contact Information

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