

INTERIM REPORT 2020-2021 First Year Seminar (FYS) Project

Background

The UVU First-Year Seminar (FYS) project was initiated after approval from the Re-envisioning the Undergraduate Experience Committee (RUEC), led by Drs. Elena Garcia and Joe Jensen. The FYS was chosen as one major high-impact practice (HIP) to implement. If successful, this initiative would better connect beginning UVU students with resources, concepts, mentors, and strategies to improve student success, retention, and completion. Existing or dormant General Education courses such as HUM 1010 were selected in cooperation with faculty and department chairs to be re-developed from the ground up to embed specific curriculum content on academic student success strategies, metacognition, and campus resources. FYS students experienced measurable positive outcomes and growth despite the restrictions of the pandemic.

Faculty and Course Offerings

Faculty were recruited in Fall 2019 to begin offering FYS courses in Fall 2020. Faculty participated in an intensive six-week professional development course through RUEC partnering with the Office of Teaching and Learning in summer 2020. Fourteen faculty from 13 different departments offered 20 hybrid-delivery FYS course sections in Fall 2020.

Shared Processes

All FYS Project faculty re-developed their courses as a FYS, adapting and integrating curriculum on student success strategies and skills including active learning, critical thinking and reading, note taking, time and self-management, and test taking. Faculty also taught metacognitive strategies for students to become more successful learners. These focal points were integrated with the discipline-specific content of the 3-credit GE courses.

Faculty incorporated common assignments for students, which includes a 55-question pre-and post-assessment emphasizing general education, one shared reading (“What It Means to be a Well-Educated Person in the 21st Century,” Cuseo, Joseph, 2017), and a survey on college Preparation Self Evaluation. This assessment also included resources to help students prepare for the college experience.

Initial Outcomes: What is an Educated Person? Assessment (quantitative and qualitative)

For the quantitative section, this Qualtrics survey asked students to rate their level of agreement with 56 items mapped to expected learning outcomes from the First-Year Seminar. For the column “Percent Increase,” we combined initial survey data from Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. “Final” represents data taken from the Fall 2020 end-of-semester survey.

Eight of these items tied directly to the FYS Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). These FYS ELOs were developed by the FYS Project Faculty Curriculum Development team based on some of the USHE First Year Experience (FYE) Tuning Group’s ELOs for a first-year student’s first-year experience in general education courses.

Pre- and post- assessments indicated a variety of ways the FYS courses impact students. Data reveals positive gains in how students rated their quantitative literacy and their ability to problem solve, write, use research, learn deeply, lead effectively, manage time, think creatively or critically, and work collaboratively. Data also indicates that the initial FYS courses increased students understanding of General Education and how a liberal education inspires lifelong learning. Note: The data also indicates that students did *not* become more aware of campus resources or feel part of a community at UVU. These outcomes were most likely due to COVID and the inability of students to be on campus. See the following data summary.

| AS A RESULT OF MY UVU COURSES I . . . (this table shows the percent perceived increase in skill level) | Percent Increase (initial to final) |
|---|--|
| ... collaborate better with a team. | 12.9 |
| ... approach solving problems differently. | 10.4 |
| ... know how to be a better leader. | 10.2 |
| ... feel like I have become a more effective presenter/speaker. | 7.2 |
| ... feel like I am thinking about issues at a higher-level. | 7.1 |
| ... feel better able to stay on top of the latest technology. | 5.4 |
| ... feel like I have become a most creative thinker. | 5.2 |
| ... am able to think more critically about problems and issues. | 5.1 |

Two of these items focused directly on increased appreciation for general education.

| | |
|--|------|
| General education courses will help me continue to learn throughout my life. | 12.1 |
| I understand what is meant by a "liberal education". | 7.8 |

The other items were indicative of positive change in the student's behavior and attitudes.

| | |
|--|-----|
| There is at least one faculty member at UVU I feel like I can turn to as a friend and/or mentor. | 9.8 |
| I enjoy working with a team in my classes. | 6.2 |
| I focus my time on the most important things first. | 5.4 |

| WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN EDUCATED PERSON? (this table shows the most common themes identified by FYS students) | Themes Mentioned (# out of 160 responses) |
|---|--|
| ... Possesses a broad range of knowledge, skills and abilities | 46 |
| ... Continual learner; lifelong learner | 43 |
| ... Effectively applies knowledge, skills and abilities | 40 |
| ... Has had formal education/training | 38 |
| ... Is a critical thinker | 25 |
| ... Broad life experiences; learns from life experience | 18 |
| ... Open to new ideas | 17 |

Following is a sampling of representative quotes from FYS course students in response to the question *What does it mean to be an educated person?*

- An educated person is somebody that has a great knowledge and the wisdom to properly use that knowledge.
- In my opinion an educated person is someone who has the ability to live a responsible life. There are different types of education so just saying "someone who went to school" is not entirely accurate. An educated person is able to analyze a situation based on previous experiences and make a decision that is in line with moral values.
- A person who is educated seeks to understand every aspect of a topic they are engaged in. They eventually are able to apply the things they know in both a written way and verbally. They seek to enlighten others when appropriate and seek to help others succeed as well as they have.
- I argue that to be an educated person means to be enlightened in morality and using what one has learned to bring changes to society. Being educated is more about practice, education means that you can see beyond the basics of life, think critically, and evaluate situations to come up with solutions that help everyone for the best.

Key Feedback: Academic Success Skills

| KEY FEEDBACK: How has this FYS course helped you improve on basic college and study skills? (this table shows the most common themes identified by FYS students) | Themes Mentioned (# out of 160 responses) |
|---|--|
| ... Study Skills/Tools | 66 |
| ... Metacognitive Skills | 60 |
| ... Better Understanding of College | 35 |
| ... Time Management | 32 |
| ... Collaboration | 21 |
| ... Negative feedback (primarily from non-first-year students in FYS by mistake) | 27 |

On the final College Preparation Self Evaluation assessment, students were asked how the FYS course improved their basic academic success skills. Here is a sample of the hundreds of responses received:

- It gave me back the confidence I lost in doing schoolwork. I now have new tools that have helped in in and out of school.
- I think this course was able to help me develop the skill of critical thinking and coming up with my own thoughts and not believing everything I hear.
- This course has taught me that it isn't all about passing a final at the end of the semester. We come to school to learn and improve ourselves, passing the test at the end is just the result.
- I have learned that other classmates are good study tools. Being able to talk and chat with them makes the material easier to understand and helps me remember more material.
- Rather than always stressing over the exams and what may be on them, I took homework assignments seriously and focused on doing those as correct [sic] as possible along with projects.

Summary

As high impact practice (HIPS) initiative, the purpose of FYS courses was to introduce students to the academic life of the university and prepare them for success in the context of an academic GE course. The primary objective was for students to form meaningful relationships with professors and fellow students in a course that is academically engaging and exciting because *learning* is fundamentally the purpose of the First Year Experience (FYE).

Data from the first semester show gains and improvements in first year student academic success. In addition, students in FYS courses also provided positive feedback on FYS faculty and courses.

It is expected that the continuation and future expansion of the FYS Project will positively impact first-year student success. This positive trend should translate to a lift in first-to-second year retention, and ultimately completion.

The FYS Project is currently in its second semester and the project is funded for 2021-2022.