Interdisciplinary Collaboration & the First-Year Seminar:
Developing & Assessing
A Learning Frameworks Course

I. Rationale for developing a Learning Frameworks Course for first-time-in-college students entering UH-Downtown.
   a. The Learners’ Community as an FYE program which fosters innovation on behalf of first-year students.
      i. A revised first-year seminar designed and taught by faculty.
   b. Characteristics of UH-Downtown students which prompt the need for a course introducing at-risk first-time-in-college students to higher education culture.
      i. At-Risk Students:
         1. First-generation college students: 40%
         2. Low-income students: 40% reported
         3. First-time-in-college students: ca. 900-1,000 each fall
         4. Academically underprepared students: 85%
      ii. Retention of FTIC students:
         1. FY02—63.18% up from 54.7% in FY98
      iii. FTICs earning a degree within 6 years
         1. FY02—14.26% up from 8.78% in FY98
   c. History of the First-Year Seminar at UHD
      i. The debate about the usefulness of the existing College Success Program course, the target student population, who should teach it—faculty or staff, where should it be housed—University College or Social Sciences, etc.
      ii. The right moment for adding a first-year seminar to general education core
         1. Revising the general education core curriculum
         2. THECB call for frameworks courses as a statewide retention strategy…
   d. State of Texas funding for Learning Frameworks courses as the context for additional institutional incentive to develop such a course.
      i. Not a study skills course!
      ii. A Learning to Learn course—A Learning Framework course uses as the basis of its curriculum 1) research and theory in the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation, 2) factors that impact learning, and 3) application of learning strategies. Theoretical models of strategic learning, cognition, and motivation serve as the conceptual basis for the introduction of college-level student academic strategies. Students are ultimately expected to integrate and apply the learning skills discussed across their own academic programs and become effective learners. (THECB course description)
II. Planning and Implementation of a Learning Frameworks Course

**CSP 1301 (Effective Learning Models)** is currently a part of UH-Downtown’s course inventory as a Learning Framework course. It is a three-hour, credit-bearing course that has been approved as a pilot by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and is funded by the state of Texas.

a. **Goals of the course**
   i. Help students set realistic goals regarding their college experience by socializing them to the university environment.
   ii. Engage students in a self-discovery process to identify what type of learner they are, and based on this information and their newly acquired knowledge of psychological models of learning and achievement, to prompt them to design a cognitive-behavioral learning framework for themselves.
   iii. Help students understand how the various disciplines are alike in their pursuit of ‘truth’ yet different in their focus and methodology.

b. Engaging faculty in the planning process
   i. LC and CSP Task Forces

c. Engaging the support of **university administrators** (department chairs, deans, provost, president)

d. **Logistics** of offering a pilot course
   i. Getting the course approved and listed in class schedule
   ii. Student recruitment, advising, and registration processes
   iii. Securing departmental approvals for academic faculty teaching the course

III. Learning Frameworks: The Course Design

a. **Theory Driven Course Design**
   i. Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)—what is it?
   ii. Five Facilitating Variables
      1. Self-Awareness
      2. Positive Affect (Emotion)
      3. Metacognitive Development
      4. Academic Self-Efficacy
      5. Intention to Achieve

b. Architecture of the course
   i. **Weeks 1-3**: Psychology professors, serving as instructors of record for each course section, introduce students to: 1) self-assessment strategies and 2) psychological theories of learning from each of the major psychological perspectives (evolutionary, behavioral, cognitive).
   ii. **Using Elliot Aronson’s Jigsaw Method** in Weeks 1-3
   iii. **Weeks 4-14**: Five academic experts rotate through the course—a sociologist, a poet, a mathematician, a psychologist, and a biologist. Students are introduced to how each major discipline within the university understands the world, how they as students might apply that methodology to their college reading, what discipline they might choose to major in, and what career opportunities are associated with that field of study. Each rotating faculty has three class meetings to share their discipline with students. The fourth class
meeting of the two-week rotation is team-taught by the instructor of record and the discipline expert to tie elements of the discipline back to the theories of learning introduced in the first three weeks of class.

iv. Utilizing Supplemental Instruction (SI) Leaders as peer mentors

v. Evaluating student progress:
1. Mini-course syllabi in five disciplines
2. Assignments and exams

IV. Funding Makes Innovation Possible…
a. Funding through F.I.P.S.E.—Summary description of the FIPSE grant
   i. The Learning Frameworks Course Pilot: Revised UHD first-year seminar
   ii. The Bridge Program: Partnership with a local independent school district
      1. UHD-Galena Park Independent School District Partnership: UHD partners with two largely Hispanic local high schools in a Bridge Program to serve as: 1) the cite of future recruitment of first-time-in-college students into the UHD frameworks course, and 2) an opportunity for UHD students completing the frameworks course to participate in the development and delivery of an early college awareness curriculum on their former high school campus.
      2. Early College Awareness Curriculum for High School Students: Successful UHD frameworks course students will, upon completion of their first college semester, work with the Bridge Program coordinator to develop a sequence of presentations that they would deliver to second-semester high school juniors regarding preparation for college and the application process. An early college awareness curriculum would include a discussion of such components as the recommended high school curriculum, SAT and ACT preparation, exploration of specific universities and their degree programs, financial aid application (including the online FAFSA), the Texas Academic Skills Program Test, developmental education, the Texas common core curriculum, and the college admission/advising/registration process.
   iii. Benefits to SI Program of The Learners’ Community (UHD’s FYE program): In addition, 10-15 UHD frameworks course students would be recruited each semester beginning in Spring 2003 for three years to serve in the Learners Community Supplemental Instruction (SI) Program, boosting the number of SI leaders offering tutorial sessions for high risk gatekeeper courses in UHD’s core curriculum.

V. Program Evaluation Design Issues
a. Theory Driven Evaluation
   i. Evaluation of the Learning Frameworks course will be addressed in the context of an experimental design. Achievement levels of students from two sections of the course containing a total of 24 students in Fall 2002 and two sections containing a total of 50 students in Fall 2003 will be compared with two control groups: 1) a matched, no program-dosage control group, and 2) a
matched group of students selected from the ongoing Learners Community program. Latent variables depicted in Figure 1 (other relevant correlates & control variables) will be measured via self-report survey and tabulation of exam and course grades. Sample size permitting, hypotheses represented in Figure 1 will be tested statistically with a combination of structural equation and multilevel (hierarchical linear) modeling.

b. Assessment of Effect Mechanism for Multivariate Models
   i. Figure 1 below depicts a heuristic model predictive of academic retention and achievement. The UHD Learning Frameworks course is designed to enhance achievement by impacting four facilitating variables that operate both directly and indirectly. They are: the strength of intention to achieve, metacognitive development, self-awareness, and academic self-efficacy. Additionally, besides mediating the relation between the Learning Frameworks course experience and academic achievement, academic self-efficacy is hypothesized to moderate the relation between academic achievement and strength of intention to achieve. Although this model is basically cognitive, our approach will be innovative in that we shall explicitly assess the emotional correlates of these variables.

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**Figure 1. Learning Frameworks Intervention Heuristic Model: Academic Achievement as a Function of Academic Achievement Intention, Self-Awareness, Positive Affect, Metacognitive Development, and Academic Achievement Self-Efficacy**

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c. Effects Take Time
   i. What is appropriate time lag for effect measurement?
   ii. Minimal utility of pre-test/post-test design
   iii. Repeated measures, latent growth design

VI. Learning Frameworks Courses: A Working Bibliography


