

General Announcement

Dear FYA-L and FYE-L subscribers,

The First-Year Initiative (FYI) benchmarking study, was launched in fall 2001 to assess and benchmark the learning outcomes of first-year seminars. This message contains an overview of the study, announces a series of essays on study results, and briefly reports key findings.

FYI Overview

With funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Policy Center on the First Year of College in partnership with Educational Benchmarking, Inc. developed The First-Year Initiative (FYI) benchmarking survey. Over 31,000 students from 62 institutions completed the survey in the last weeks of a first-year seminar. While the intent of FYI is to provide participating campuses with information to guide improvement at the local campus level, the project also created a large cross-institutional database on the learning outcomes from first-year seminars. Also, the study provided a rich opportunity for national research on the effects of first-year seminars across institutional types.

FYI investigated 14 factors – 10 learning outcomes, 2 assessments of the classroom experience, and 2 assessments of satisfaction with the college/university experience. The learning outcomes include: Academic skills development, out of class engagement, critical thinking, time/priorities management, faculty/student connections, student/student connections, knowledge of academic services, understanding campus policies, study skills, and wellness issues.

Reporting FYI Results

In the coming months the results of the 2001 FYI study will be shared with the higher education community through conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles, but the importance of these findings calls for a more expeditious dissemination such as that provided by the FYE-L (first-year experience listserv) and the FYA-L (first-year assessment listserv). To speed the process, this message contains brief descriptions of key findings from the research; however, because research on complex phenomena produce complex findings, it is impossible to adequately relay the finer points in this single communication. So, over the next several weeks each of the key findings will be explained in greater detail in a short essay that will be posted to FYA-List, FYE-List, and archived on the Policy Center's Website.

Overview of key findings (Each of the following findings will be explored in greater depth in an essay that will be posted on this listserv in the coming weeks.)

Contact and credit hours: One, two, and three contact/credit hour courses were investigated. Each format produced significant learning outcomes. Overall, more contact hours produced greater learning outcomes than fewer contact hours.

Seminar theme format: Seminars focused on transition to college issues and interdisciplinary-theme seminars produced similar learning outcomes. Discipline-based seminars were far less effective than transition-theme and interdisciplinary-theme seminars.

Required/Elective: Elective courses produced greater learning outcomes, even when statistical controls were applied for student demographics and course characteristics.

Curricular Links: Seminars linked to another course produced greater learning outcomes than “stand alone” seminars.

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants: Seminars using undergraduate teaching assistants produced great learning outcomes except in the areas of critical thinking and academic skills (writing, speaking, etc.).

The delivery of the course, a concept we have named “Engaging Pedagogy,” best explains the learning outcomes generated by first-year seminars.

I hope that members of the listserv will find these essays useful and invite your feedback and comments about the FYI instrument and research.

Watch your e-mail tomorrow for the first essay in this series.