

## Appendix A: Survey Methodology

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### Population

The access population for the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars were chief academic officers, chief executive officers, and/or chief student affairs officers at regionally accredited, not-for-profit, undergraduate-serving institutions of higher education. This population was drawn from the electronic edition of the *2010 Higher Education Directory*. Though the chief academic officers, chief executive officers, and/or chief student affairs officers are likely well informed about their institution's first-year seminar, these contacts were instructed to forward the e-mail *if it would be more appropriate for another person on your campus to complete this survey*. As such, our population of interest were the individuals who were the most knowledgeable about the first-year seminar at each institution.

### Survey Administration

The survey content was created and constructed by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC). The dissemination and administration of the survey instrument was conducted by StudentVoice, an online assessment program that, among other specialized assessment platforms, collects data using web-based technology. StudentVoice oversaw the survey administration and general data management, as well as housed the survey link.

On October 30, 2009, an invitation to participate in the Survey was sent to the chief academic officer—or the chief executive officer if there was no listing for the chief academic officer in the *2010 Higher Education Directory*. If neither the chief academic officer nor the chief executive officer were listed within the *Higher Education Directory*, the institution was omitted from the study. Further, nonverified or undeliverable e-mail accounts were also omitted from the study. The invitation served three primary purposes: (a) notifying participants that the NRC was conducting the eighth administration of the Survey; (b) providing detailed information about when they could anticipate receiving a link to the survey instrument; and (c) confirming that the participant was the appropriate contact or representative who could accurately provide information about the first-year seminar, and if not, request the correct campus contact information.

The Survey was launched on November 4, 2009, and a total of 2,519 verified participants were e-mailed the survey link and the deadline to participate (December 11, 2009). Following the launch date, four follow-up reminders were sent to nonrespondents. The first reminder e-mail was sent on November 10 to the chief academic officer; the second reminder e-mail was sent on November 17 to the chief executive officer, with a subsequent reminder e-mail sent on November 23; the third reminder e-mail was sent December 1 to the chief student affairs officer; the final reminder was sent December 8 to all three institutional contacts (i.e., chief academic officer, chief executive officer, and the chief student affairs officer). The survey administration ended on December 11, 2009 at 5:00 p.m., and the survey link was officially disabled on December 15, 2009.

Incentives were provided to promote and encourage survey responses. Survey participants were informed in the invitation to participate and follow-up letters that completion of the Survey would enter their institution into a random drawing for one of three registration waivers to the 29th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience or one of 10 institutional subscriptions to *E-Source for College Transitions*, an online professional newsletter published by NRC. Further, survey respondents were informed that their survey responses would remain confidential unless they self-selected to publicly share their responses through a confirmation question that concluded the Survey.

A total of 1,019 institutions participated in the 2009 survey administration, indicating a 40.5% response rate—a reasonable response rate for a web-based survey. The response rate is a slight increase from the 2006 administration (36.6%) and a significant increase to the 2003 administration (23.7%). Of the 1,019 total respondents, 890 institutions (87.3%) indicated their institution offered a first-year seminar, while 129 institutions (12.7%) indicated they did not offer a seminar or did not know if they offered a seminar.

## Analyses

The original measure for first-year class size had a response set of 10 continuous iterations of class size (ranging from *less than 500*, *501–1,000*, and increasing in intervals of 1,000 up to *more than 5,000*). First-year class size was recoded into a six interval response set because of the low number of institutions in some of the higher response sets. Collapsing some of the response sets with lower responses increases the statistical power of each response set for comparative analyses. Furthermore, *other* was a viable response option for respondents selecting a discrete type of first-year seminar on their campus. Only 22 respondents identified their seminar as *other*. Given the low frequency and weak statistical power of this category and the ambiguity of *other* as a seminar option, *other* was dropped from comparative analyses involving seminar type.

The analyses of the sample data were primarily conducted at the descriptive level. Appendix D provides a comprehensive frequency distribution and sample percentages for each item. Further, the frequencies were tabulated for the sample in the aggregate (total) and across institutional type, control, size, and seminar type. To test for significance across group type, chi-square analyses were conducted across institution type (two-year, four-year), control (public, private), first-year class size (less than 500, 501-1,000, 1,001-2,000, 2,001-3,000, 3,001-4,000, and 4,001+), and seminar type (extended orientation, academic with uniform content, academic on various topics, preprofessional or discipline-linked, basic study skills, and hybrid). Note that significant effects are not represented within Appendix D but are reported throughout the research brief.

Table 1  
*Characteristics of Responding Institutions With First-Year Seminars (n = 890)*

	Percent of responding institutions with first- year seminars	National percent
<i>Institutional type</i>		
Two-year	26.4	38.3
Four-year	73.6	61.7
<i>Institutional affiliation</i>		
Private	47.9	62.0
Public	52.1	38.0
<i>First-year class size</i>		
500 or less	34.3	49.1
501 - 1,000	23.6	22.4
1,001 - 2,000	19.9	12.9
2,001 - 3,000	8.3	6.0
3,001 - 4,000	6.1	3.0
4,001+	7.9	3.1
<i>Institutional selectivity</i>		
Two-year college	26.6	39.7
Special focus institution	5.2	18.5
Inclusive	13.5	18.8
Selective	32.4	15.7
More selective	15.1	7.3

*Note.* Figures for the national percentages are from *The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* at <http://nces.ed.gov/IPEDS> and *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* at <http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/>.

The organization of this volume is intended to provide data in a manner that is accessible and informative for higher education researchers and practitioners with varying levels of methodological sophistication and comfort with statistics. The research brief is organized into thematically focused sections, which may be read individually or as a complete volume. In addition, responses to each survey item are analyzed by institutional type (two-year or four-year institution), institutional control (public vs. private), first-year class size (comparable to past analyses of seminar data that used institutional size), and primary type of first-year seminar (as measured by the seminar type with the highest student enrollment). The volume and detail of the overall and disaggregated data