



Starting and Finishing Well: Openers and Closers

There is often a tendency for faculty to begin and end classroom sessions in rather unceremonious ways (e.g., “Let’s move on to chapter 7,” “Today we are going to talk about . . .,” or “We’ll pick this up on Monday. . .”). Although these types of introductions (openers) and conclusions (closers) do serve a functional purpose and send a message to students as to the status of the classroom experience, engaging and purposeful openers and closers can also be powerful learning opportunities. A thoughtful opener invites the students to preview and engage with the topics, questions, and controversies that will form the focus of the session’s learning experiences. A well-planned closer helps students summarize and synthesize the most important take-aways and talking points.

Engaging and purposeful openers and closers can also be powerful learning opportunities

Setting the Stage

In teaching, it is important to communicate that you have planned and are prepared for the learning experience that lies ahead. Consider these three ways of setting the stage for the learning experiences that will be offered during class:

- Walking into a room where music is playing can create a certain mood and level of energy. In addition, the choice of music (e.g., period of a piece, lyrics, melody and rhythm, style) can highlight a time in history; emphasize social commentary; reference customs, traditions or cultures; or simply serve as a way of setting a desired tone for learning (e.g., quiet and reflective, high energy). Consider making a musical playlist (using your computer, an mp3 player, or even a CD), complementing your syllabus topics or designed to set the tone for the day’s class, and have music playing when your students arrive. As a twist on this idea, ask your students to volunteer for the task of creating a playlist for classes throughout the semester.
- As a means of fully capitalizing on class time, post an engaging and challenging question on a PowerPoint slide at the beginning of each class. Create an expectation that students are to discuss or respond to the presented question or topic, either through conversation or in writing, within minutes of arriving. Solicit these responses, or refer back to these questions, during class discussions.
- Quite often, students and faculty hurry into and out of the classroom. As a way of building an additional connection with your students, be at the door and greet them as they arrive. Better yet, call them by name as they enter.



“Most models [of learning] assume that the purpose of learning is to incorporate new information or skills into the learner’s existing knowledge structure and to make that knowledge accessible Learning begins with the need for some motivation, an intention to learn. The learner must then concentrate attention on the important aspects of what is to be learned and differentiate them from noise in the environment The deeper the processing of the information in terms of its underlying organization, the better the learning and later retrieval of that information.”
—Svinicki, Hagen, & Meyer (1996, p. 273)

Openers

A well-crafted opener to a classroom learning session can serve several purposes: (a) create a frame of reference for discussions and explorations, (b) help learners to organize and interpret new information, and (c) link new information to previously gained knowledge (Blakey & Spence, 1990; Dirkes, 1985).

Ausubel (1960), in his studies on verbal learning, coined the term *advance organizers* to describe intentionally designed learning prompts that help students understand what is ahead in the instructional process and to frame this information in relation to what they already know and understand. Additionally, advance organizers provide a means to motivate students and elevate their anticipation about the process of learning. Examples of openers, or advance organizers, include

- A news clip that relates to the topic of conversation for the day
- Surprising statistics from research studies
- Quotes from people who are significant in the discipline (and/or the culture of students)
- A provocative scenario that involves ethical decision making
- A current song with lyrics that relate to the learning topic
- A montage of graphic images embedded in PowerPoint
- A visual guide (i.e., graphic organizer) to the topics that will be discussed and explored in the form of an outline, key talking points, flow chart, list of procedures or activities, or abbreviated versions of PowerPoint presentations.

Closers

As the time comes to close a class, you would like your students to take their new learning beyond the bounds of the classroom. An effective closer can encourage this by providing students with a concrete way of summarizing and synthesizing what they have learned. The following list of closers offer specific prompts and guides that help students tie together the concepts, principles, and facts that have been presented:

- Have students write a 60-second paragraph (i.e., a brief written response) to a question about the topic of the day
- Ask students to work in pairs and interview one another on what they have learned
- Provide students with an intentional summary of the day's main talking points
- Invite students to submit a journal entry on their responses to each day's learning activities
- Have students process, in small groups or pairs, an applied scenario related to the topic

Start strong and finish well!

References

- Ausubel, D. P. (1960). The use of advance organizers in the learning and retention of meaningful verbal material. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 51, 267-272.
- Blakey, E., & Spence, S. (1990). *Developing metacognition*. Syracuse, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources.
- Dirkes, M. A. (1985). Metacognition: Students in charge of their thinking. *Roeper Review*, 8(2), 96-100.
- Svinicki, M. D., Hagen, A. S., & Meyer D. K. (1996). How research on learning strengthens instruction. In R. Menges & M. Weimer (Eds.), *Teaching on solid ground* (pp. 257-296). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Online Courses

on The First-Year Experience®
and Students in Transition



Course Dates

May 9-June 10, 2011

**Proving and Improving:
The Pillars of First-Year
Assessment**

Instructor: Jennifer R. Keup
Director of the National Resource Center
for The First-Year Experience and Students
in Transition University of South Carolina

**Course is limited to the first
25 registrants**

**Back by Popular Demand!
July 6 - August 3, 2011**

**Fostering First-Year Student
Success**

Instructor: Stephanie Foote
Director, Academic Success Center and
First-Year Experience
University of South Carolina Aiken

**Course is limited to the first
40 registrants**

Course cost: \$425

**Register online at
www.sc.edu/fye/oc**

WHAT'S HAPPENING

at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Online Courses

The National Resource Center is offering online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses are designed to provide participants with the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and with the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions and forums, listservs, and blogs. For more information, visit

www.sc.edu/fye/oc.

Online Courses Offerings:

May 9 - June 10, 2011

Proving and Improving: The Pillars of First-Year Assessment – Instructor: Jennifer R. Keup

July 6 - August 3, 2011

Fostering First-Year Student Success – Instructor: Stephanie Foote

Conferences and Institutes

24th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

June 21-24, 2011

Manchester, England

Register by May 18, 2011, to receive an early registration discount

The 24th International Conference on The First-Year Experience provides a setting for sharing ideas, concepts, resources, assessment tools, programmatic interventions, and research results focused on the first year of college or university. Join with educators from countries around the world as we explore approaches for enhancing the first-year student experience and provide opportunities for intensive learning and relaxed interactions. For more information, visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/ifye>.

Save the Dates

18th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 8-10, 2011 – St. Louis, MO

Proposal Deadline: June 3, 2011

Institute on First-Year Success in the Community College

November 6-8, 2011 – Cincinnati, OH

31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 17-21, 2012 – San Antonio, TX

25th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

July 16-19, 2012 – Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

24th International Conference on The First-Year Experience®

Manchester, England

June 21-24, 2011

*Held in conjunction with the European Conference on the First Year Experience
June 20, 2011*



Cohosted by:

Tamagawa University, Japan

Teesside University, United Kingdom

University College Dublin, Ireland

University of Manchester, United Kingdom

York University, Canada

Register before May 18, 2011 to receive the conference discount.

**For more information visit:
www.sc.edu/fye/ifye**



**National Resource Center for
The First-Year Experience®
& Students in Transition**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

18th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 8-10, 2011
St. Louis, Missouri

Proposal Deadline:
June 3, 2011



Publications

The National Resource Center is pleased to announce the release of two new publications:



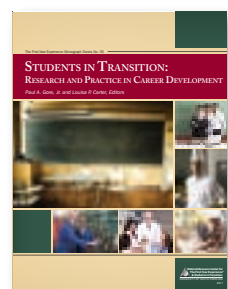
Monograph No. 54

Transfer Students in Higher Education: Building Foundations for Policies, Programs, and Services That Foster Student Success

Mark Allen Poisel and Sonja Joseph, Editors

This new monograph presents what we know about transfer students, addresses assumptions and myths about the transfer experience, and explores the changing demographics of this student group. Adopting a student-centered approach, the volume offers strategies to begin (and continue) the work of serving

students and creating transfer-friendly campus environments. Transfer issues are explored from the perspective of both sending and receiving institutions, and research, case studies, and best practices are provided to help institutions meet the challenges of enrollment, orientation, advisement, coordination of services, retention, and graduation of transfer students. To learn more or to order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications/monograph/monographs/ms054.html.



Monograph No. 55

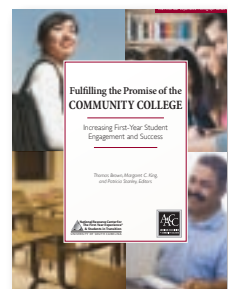
Students in Transition: Research and Practice in Career Development

Paul A. Gore, Jr. and Louisa P. Carter, Editors

Offering a primer on action research methodologies and examples of practice, *Students in Transition: Research and Practice in Career Development* responds to a dual challenge facing career development educators—designing cutting-edge

career development interventions and demonstrating their effectiveness. Overviews of quantitative and qualitative measures and career development instruments are presented to assist educators in documenting the outcomes of their programs and initiatives. The case studies in the final sections of the volume describe the delivery and evaluation of a wide range of career initiatives offered in diverse settings and spanning the transition from high school to college through the senior year. To learn more or to order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.

Coming in May 2011



Monograph No. 56

Fulfilling the Promise of the Community College: Increasing First-Year Student Engagement and Success

Thomas Brown, Margaret C. King, and Patricia Stanley, Editors

A joint publication with the American Association of Community Colleges

Fulfilling the Promise of the Community College is one of the first volumes to take a comprehensive look at the first-year experience

in the community college, examining the unique characteristics of these institutions and the students they serve, barriers to success, and strategies for ensuring that students achieve their higher education goals. Authors describe successful adaptations of faculty development initiatives, first-year seminars, common reading programs, academic and career advising, learning communities, and STEM initiatives in the community college setting.



A biannual publication from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition

E-Source for College Transitions is a complimentary biannual electronic newsletter published by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Its primary purpose is to provide practical strategies for supporting student learning and success. Articles on a variety of topics related to student transitions are welcome, including those focusing on:

- > Strategies for addressing the first-year, sophomore, senior, and transfer transitions at different types of institutions
- > Innovative teaching strategies and programs addressing the needs of special student populations
- > Strategies for assessing student learning experiences, programs, or courses
- > Descriptions of institutional initiatives with demonstrated results
- > Descriptions of new and relevant print and online resources



Visit www.sc.edu/fye/esource to sign up for content alerts or view archived issues.



Call for Manuscripts – Special *Journal* Issue on Peer Educators

The Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition seeks manuscripts reporting empirical research on peer education experiences with a particular interest in the study of programs and practices from various countries. Studies might examine a range of social, academic, and developmental outcomes and processes associated with participation in peer educator experiences both for the students served and for the students who provide peer

education. The submission deadline is May 15, 2011. For more information and guidelines, visit www.sc.edu/fye/journal/PDF/CFS_Peers.pdf.

Research

2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

An executive summary of the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars can be viewed now on the NRC website at www.sc.edu/fye/research/reports. A research report containing detailed analyses is scheduled for release in December 2011.

Paul P. Fidler Research Grant

The Paul P. Fidler Research Grant is designed to encourage the development and dissemination of knowledge that has the potential to improve the experiences of college students in transition. The grant is named in memory of Paul P. Fidler, a faculty member at the University of South Carolina, whose pioneering research on student learning and success had a vital impact on work being done to promote the success of all students in transition. The grant award includes a cash stipend, travel to two national conferences, a presentation at a national conference, and priority consideration for publication. Completed applications must be received by the National Resource Center by midnight EST, July 1, 2011. To learn about the grant, visit www.sc.edu/fye/research/grant.

NRC Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center plan to be actively involved in the spring conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and to meet NRC staff members.

Using Longitudinal Assessment for Institutional Improvement. Panel session including Ryan D. Padgett, NRC assistant director for research, grants and assessment; at the 2011 Association of Institutional Research (AIR) Forum in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; May 23, 2011; 8:30-9:30 am.

New Evidence on the First-Year Seminar: Assessing and Evaluating Seminar Objectives, Topics, Innovations, and Learning Outcomes. Roundtable presentation by Ryan D. Padgett, NRC assistant director for research, grants and assessment; at the 2011 Association of Institutional Research (AIR) Forum in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; May 23, 2011; 11:55 am-12:35 pm.

Join NRC on

facebook

The National Resource Center is on Facebook. Visit our homepage at www.sc.edu/fye and click on the Facebook link in the left column to be directed to our Facebook page. Become a fan and receive unique access to a network of educators committed to college student success.

We're now
on Twitter!

Follow [@NRCFYESIT](https://twitter.com/NRCFYESIT) to become even more connected with the ongoing work of the National Resource Center.

The Toolbox

Author: Brad Garner
Telephone: 765.677.2452
E-mail: brad.garner@indwes.edu
Address: Indiana Wesleyan University
4201 South Washington Street
Marion, IN 46953

The Toolbox is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.

The online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox

Publication Staff

Editor: Toni Vakos
Graphic Designer: Melody Taylor