Want to Mix It Up? Try Blended Learning!

Higher education is in the midst of monumental change. One impetus for this change is ever-emerging technology that is increasingly available—mobile, ubiquitous, and interactive (Dew, 2010). According to Dede (2007), new technology impacts not only the culture as a whole but also the ways that students and faculty think about the work of learning:

> The implications for institutions of higher education go well beyond the surface conclusion that students are using interactive media, so we had better use them too. To the extent that powerful engagement and learning, thinking styles, and new literacies are emerging from students' usage, the academy should rethink how we view the creation, sharing, and mastery of knowledge. (p.20)

Thomas and Brown (2011) conceptualize this change as a "new culture of learning" (p. 17), where learning happens everywhere, not just in the classroom. In this new culture, higher education will move from a stable infrastructure (i.e., learning as the acquisition of a defined collection of knowledge) to a fluid infrastructure in which teachers and learners interact with knowledge and use technology for the purpose of creating new applications for existing bodies of knowledge. For many faculty, however, the prospect of a dramatically changed instructional landscape that is actively driven by the use of technology is a frightening prospect. Some of this fear can come from a general lack of preparedness to effectively integrate technology into the instructional process. One way of systematically moving toward the use of technology that may be helpful to both faculty and students, and ameliorate fears, is the use of a blended course format (i.e., an instructional model that combines face-to-face classroom instruction with the use of online learning tools).

> "It is the framework which changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame."
>
> —Marshall McLuhan, philosopher and communication theorist

Getting Started with Blended Courses

Poirer (2010) cites a meta-analysis completed by the U.S. Department of Education (2009) indicating that blended (or hybrid) courses are the fastest growing learning model in higher education. Further, this report revealed that students enrolled in blended courses performed, on average, better than students taking courses in a face-to-face classroom setting. The process for creating a blended course option for your students that enhances the quality of learning includes the following steps:

1. Begin by examining the learning outcomes that you have established for the course and asking yourself, Are there ways in which students could better learn, process, and interact with this instructional content through the use of online resources?

2. Consider and research the wide range of available online technology. Blended classes come in a variety of flavors with varied combinations of technological tools (specific suggestions are offered in the next section).

3. Remember that the online portion of a blended class is intended to extend and diversify student learning (e.g., processing and discussing information, exchanging opinions and ideas, gaining access to a rich collection of electronic resources) (Lo, Johnson, & Tenorio, 2011).

4. Start small, at a level that is both manageable and comfortable, and begin to build and enhance your courses with the addition of technological bells and whistles.

Online Tools to Consider in Blended Learning Formats

There are a variety of technological tools that can be easily and quickly integrated into course-based learning.

- Examine the resources available through the content management system (CMS) being used on your campus (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle). These platforms contain several online tools that will automatically make connections between your course content and your students. Additionally, most campuses have onsite information technology (IT) experts who can assist you in making these CMS-based course adaptations.

- Use online video resources like YouTube (www.YouTube.com) and Technology Entertainment and Design (www.TED.com). These websites offer a vast storehouse of videos on an amazing array of topics. Some videos are available for download or can be accessed by providing students with the designated URL. Students, for example, could be required to view a video on one of these sites and then provide a written response or critique through an online blog or discussion forum.

- Incorporate online discussion forums and blogs as a means for students to share their thoughts and feelings on course-related topics with the additional feature of critiquing and responding to one another's work. This places student work in a restricted, yet still public, venue and invites interesting exchanges of opinions and perspectives. Poirer (2010) also suggests that an added dimension of online discussions is the possibility of giving students the responsibility of serving as moderators for these conversations.

- Consider using a wiki; through a rather simple process (www.wikispaces.com), individuals and groups of students can create an open source document that can be edited by every member of the participating group. This allows students to work asynchronously on a group project from remote locations outside the classroom(e.g., home, residence hall, student center).

- Make use of online journals (often available through CMSs) to allow students to share their thoughts and feelings on course content in a protected format that is only available to the student and designated faculty members.

- Take advantage of the online quiz feature common in many CMSs. Students access the quizzes outside of class and respond to questions about assigned readings and content presented in the classroom setting.

Ride the wave of change, embrace this new culture of learning, and face your fears while becoming more techo-savvy by mixing it up with blended learning!

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Visit www.facebook.com/fyesit to be directed to our Facebook page. Like us and receive access to a network of educators committed to student college success.

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What's Happening at the National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers 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/forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 25 participants. For more information, visit www.sc.edu/fye/oc.

Conferences and Institutes

31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 17-21, 2012

Early Registration Deadline: January 24, 2012

San Antonio, Texas

This annual conference is designed to provide educators from nearly every corner of higher education a comfortable, welcoming environment to share innovative ideas, programs, tools, and research critical to the first-year experience. Registration information is available at www.sc.edu/fye/annual. The Twitter hash tag #fye2012 is in use for the 31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience.

Save the Dates

Institute on First-Year Seminar Leadership

April 15-17, 2012

Columbia, South Carolina (University of South Carolina)

25th International Conference on The First-Year Experience

July 16-19, 2012

*Proposal Deadline: March 16, 2012*

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

19th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 13-15, 2012

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

31st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience®

Conference Highlights

» Colleague clusters at luncheon

» **Featured Speakers:**
Dewayne Matthews, Vice President for Policy and Strategy of the Lumina Foundation for Education
Charles Blaich, Director of the Center of Inquiry at Wabash College

» Commercial and nonprofit exhibits

» Focused dialogues to facilitate networking

www.sc.edu/fye/annual

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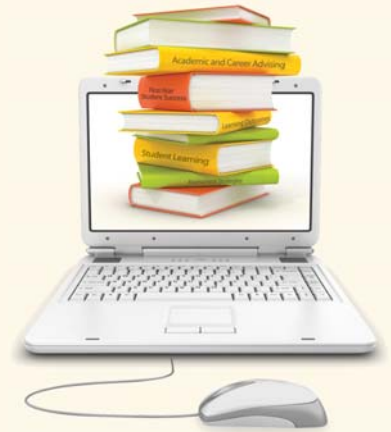
Course Dates

April 2 – May 4, 2012

Instructor Training and Development: Critical Foundations for First-Year Seminar Programs

Facilitated by: Mary Stuart Hunter, Associate Vice President for the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and U101 Programs at the University of South Carolina.

May 14 – June 15, 2012

Transfer Student Success: Meeting the Needs of a Unique Population on College Campuses

Facilitated by: Mark Allen Poisel, Associate Provost for Student Success at Pace University.

July 9 – August 10, 2012

Developing and Constructing Valid Survey Instruments

Facilitated by: Ryan D. Padgett, Assistant Director of Research, Grants, and Assessment for the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina.

Courses are limited to the first 25 registrants.

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

Publications

New Online Shopping Site Is Now Active

Earlier this month, the National Resource Center launched a new online catalog and e-commerce gateway. Visit www.nrcpubs.com to check out recent releases on the first-year seminar, the first-year experience in community colleges, researching college transition issues, and much more.

New Releases

The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success
Volume II: Instructor Training and Development
James Groccia and Mary Stuart Hunter

The second volume in this new series from the National Resource Center offers strategies for designing and presenting a comprehensive faculty development program in support of the first-year seminar. Guided by an understanding of adult learning and development, chapters focus on the organization of one-shot and ongoing development efforts, content for training programs, evaluation as a development activity, and strategies for recruiting and maintaining a dedicated instructor team. While focused on the first-year seminar, the volume offers useful insight for anyone charged with designing faculty development initiatives for first-year instructors. To learn more or order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.
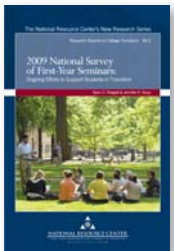
Research Report on College Transitions No. 2
2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Ongoing Efforts to Support Students in Transition
Ryan D. Padgett and Jennifer R. Keup

The findings from the ninth triennial administration of the National Survey of First-Year Seminars comprise the most comprehensive data set of institutional information on first-year seminars to date and provide a national portrait of current practices and structural characteristics for these courses. The analyses also suggest emerging trends and future directions for first-year seminars. Drawn from a broad sample of colleges and universities from every institutional type, control, and size, the survey addresses topics including seminar characteristics and administration; student demographics; instructional roles, development, and compensation; and assessment. To learn more or order a copy, visit www.sc.edu/fye/publications.

NRC Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center plan to be actively involved in the 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.

National Research and Trends on High-Impact Educational Practices and the Transition to College. Concurrent session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), in Washington, DC, January 26, 3:30-4:00 p.m.

Demonstrating the Impact of First-Year Seminars on Student Outcomes. Concurrent session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 ACPA Annual Convention, in Louisville, Kentucky.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and High-Impact Practices: The Role of First-Year Seminars. Concurrent session by Taryn Ozuna and Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, at the 2012 ACPA Annual Convention, in Louisville, Kentucky.

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

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