



## Reflective Practice and Teaching

**A**nother semester ends. For many, it may have been a blur from beginning to end with classroom presentations to prepare and tweak, papers to grade, book chapters to revise or articles to finish, countless advising sessions to complete, innumerable e-mails to send, and an excessive dose of faculty and committee meetings to attend. But now it is done! While a brief respite and time for relaxation lie ahead, before the cycle begins again, one task remains: reflecting on the semester and considering ways to improve your teaching and the level of your students' learning.

Far too often, when the semester ends, instructors find themselves mentally exhausted, and engaging in personal reflection may seem an insurmountable task. Yet, there is an argument to be made that incorporating the process of reflective practice in teaching can be re-energizing. Below are some ways to accomplish that task and make reflective practice a regular part of a teaching regimen.

### Integrating Reflective Practice Into a Teaching Routine

Reflective practice in teaching is not a new idea (Dewey, 1933), and it has taken on a variety of forms (Gibbs, 1988; Kolb & Fry, 1975; Schön, 1984). The steps in the process vary slightly, but each one calls on us to think about the activities and experiences of our lives, followed by adjustments and recalibrations in the activities we choose and the decisions we make. In general, reflective practice in teaching involves

- **Making specific, concrete observations about events and circumstances that occur during the process of teaching** (e.g., the expected level of enthusiasm and response was not generated from classroom discussion),
- **Drawing conclusions about the experience and creating hypotheses** (e.g., unclear questions and prompts may have contributed to students not being prepared for a discussion),
- **Setting a new course of action** (e.g., considering an online learning experience during the next semester), and
- **Implementing an action plan** (e.g., leading an online discussion and observing students' responses).

Engaging in reflective practice is something that can be done after teaching a course or on a regular, ongoing basis. Practical and painless ways to accomplish this task include



“There are three principal means of acquiring knowledge ... observation of nature, reflection, and experimentation. Observation collects facts; reflection combines them; experimentation verifies the result of that combination.”

— Denis Diderot,  
French philosopher  
(1713-1784)

- **Becoming a participant and an observer in the class.** Instructors should strive to be mindful of how and what they are teaching and the manner in which students are responding and learning.
- **Creating notes to one's self.** It is helpful to have a manageable and convenient strategy (e.g., paper and pencil, smartphone or tablet app, computer Sticky Notes) to record one's thoughts and feelings about the teaching process and to document in the moment. Random flashes of insight can disappear as quickly as they appear.
- **Making adjustments in midair.** By maintaining a high level of awareness during the process of teaching, it is possible to make on-the-spot adjustments to the original plan (e.g., if students are not responding, instruction delivery can be stopped and students asked what they are feeling and thinking).
- **Finding a friend.** It is a wonderful gift to be able to share ideas about teaching with a trusted colleague. Sharing ideas and receiving feedback can help any faculty member grow as a teacher.

Teaching is a complex process. Part of that experience requires making innumerable decisions on a daily basis (e.g., content, presentation, and assessment choices; course management alternatives; classroom or student conflict resolutions). Engaging in reflective practice allows us to evaluate the level at which we are living and teaching in accordance with the things that we value and hold to be most important. More significantly, reflection opens the door for each of us to make corrections and adjustments and, hopefully, improve upon our own performance.

**Reflect. Make a plan. Put that plan into action. Continually grow in your teaching!**

## REFERENCES

- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process* (Revised ed.), Boston, MA: Heath.
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- Kolb, D., & Fry, R. (1975). Towards an applied theory of experiential learning. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Theories of group processes* (pp. 33-58). London, UK: Wiley.
- Schön, D. A. (1984). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

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**of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition**

A semiannual refereed journal providing current research and scholarship on significant student transitions. The primary purpose of the *Journal* is to disseminate empirical research findings on student transition issues, including

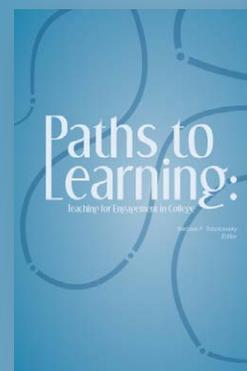
- Explorations into the academic, personal, and social experiences—such as outcomes related to success, learning, and development—of students at a range of transition points throughout the college years. These transitions consist of, but are not limited to, the first college year, the transfer transition, the sophomore year, the senior year and transition out of college, and the transition to graduate work;
- Transition issues unique to specific populations (e.g., nontraditional, traditional, historically underrepresented students, transfer students, commuters, part-time students); and
- Explorations of faculty development, curriculum, and pedagogical innovations connected to any of the transitions identified above.

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

# Paths to Learning:

Teaching for Engagement in College

Barbara F. Tobolowsky  
Editor



**Chapter 1: Paths to Learning: An Introduction**  
Barbara F. Tobolowsky

**Chapter 2: Research on Successful Learning Practices**  
Jillian Kinzie

**Chapter 3: Historical Overview of Learning Theories.**  
James E. Groccia, Stacey C. Nickson, Chenzi Wang, and Heather Hardin

**Chapter 4: Critical Pedagogy and the Struggle for Social Change**  
Nana Osei-Kofi

**Chapter 5: Embracing Contemplative Pedagogy in a Culturally Diverse Classroom**  
Laura I. Rendón and Vijay Kanagala

**Chapter 6: Strengths-Oriented Teaching: Pathways to Engaged Learning**  
Laurie A. Schreiner

**Chapter 7: Interactive Group Learning**  
James E. Groccia, Emad A. Ismail, and S. Raj Chaudhry

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**Chapter 9: Assessment of Classroom Learning**  
Wendy G. Troxel

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# What's Happening at The National Resource Center

## Conferences and Continuing Education

### Conferences and Institutes

#### 34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

February 7-10, 2015

Dallas, Texas

The Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience is designed to provide educators from every segment of higher education a comfortable, welcoming environment to share innovative ideas, programs, tools, and research critical to the learning, development, and success of first-year college students. The conference aims to promote a comprehensive and engaging community open to a diversity of ideas, in which all delegates are given the opportunity and resources to grow personally and professionally. The conference welcomes graduate and undergraduate students, encouraging them to deepen their knowledge of the academic communities of which they are a part.

#### Institute on Sophomore Student Success

April 17-19, 2015

University of South Carolina

Sophomore students have typically be the overlooked "middle-children" in higher education. With increasing awareness of second-year struggles, what resources and support can be provided to stabilize the sophomore year? The Institute on Sophomore Student Success will allow attendees the opportunity to examine trends and practices connected to building a comprehensive and intentional approach to ensure the success of sophomore students. Individual sessions are designed to build on one another so that participants leave with a personalized action plan for use on their home campuses. Institute faculty will employ group work, problem solving, case studies, discussion, and other active strategies to engage participants in learning.

### Save the Dates

#### Institute on Developing and Sustaining First-Year Seminars

July 24-26, 2015

Atlanta, Georgia

#### Institute on First-Year Success in the Community College

November 6-8, 2015

University of South Carolina

#### 22nd National Conference on Students in Transition

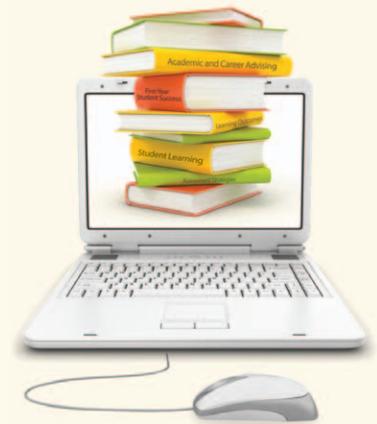
October 17-19, 2015

Baltimore, Maryland

#### 35th Annual Conference on The First Year-Experience

February 20-23, 2016

Orlando, Florida



## Online Courses

**April 6 – May 8, 2015**

### Made to Measure: Intermediate Principles of Assessment

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

**May 4 – 29, 2015**

### Transitions of the Collegiate Athlete

Facilitated by: Talea Drummer  
Athletic Director at Kent State University

Register today at:

[www.sc.edu/fye/oc](http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc)



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## Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and 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 or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 40 registrants. Participants will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Spring topics include assessing the first college year (intermediate level) and student athletes in transition. Visit <http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc> for more information.

### Online Course Offerings

#### Made to Measure: Intermediate Principles of Assessment

April 6 - May 8, 2015

Facilitated by Dallin George Young, Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina

#### Student Athletes

May 4-29, 2015

Facilitated by Taléa R. Drummer, Assistant Athletic Director at Kent State University.

## Publications of Interest



Volume 26.2 of the *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* is now available online. Highlights from each article are included below. Click on the article title to read the full abstract.

#### Meaning-Making Dynamics of Emancipated Foster Care Youth

**Transitioning Into Higher Education: A Constructivist-Grounded Theory** by Jacob O. Okumu. A qualitative study exploring the experience of emancipated foster care youth found that students undergo feelings of isolation and estrangement in transitioning to college but that such feelings were

tempered by a new-found sense of empowerment.

**Trailblazing: Exploring First-Generation College Students' Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Academic Adjustment** by Diane Cárdenas Elliott. While first-generation college students generally earned lower grades than their peers, modest increases in self-efficacy beliefs led to significant, positive increases in academic performance.

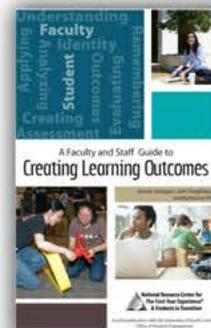
**First-Generation College Student Achievement and the First-Year Seminar: A Quasi-Experimental Design** by Angela Vaughan, Janessa Parra, and Trent Lalonde. Hierarchical propensity score matching to form quasi-control groups is proposed as a way to refine our understanding of the impact of first-year seminars.

**First-Year College Students' Strengths Awareness: Building a Foundation for Student Engagement and Academic Excellence** by Krista Soria and Robin Stubblefield. Students' awareness of their core strengths is positively related to academic self-efficacy and engagement, two factors closely related to success in higher education.

**Holistic Wellness and Its Impact on First-Semester Grades** by Sandy J. Cereola, Cathleen S. Snyder, Ronald J. Cereola, and Brett W. Horton. Overall wellness is important to student success in college, but physical and occupational wellness may be particularly important to academic success.

Not a subscriber? Visit <http://www.nrcpubs.com> to get access to this issue and archival content.

## RESOURCES ON ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING



### A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes

Jimmie Gahagan, John Dingfelder, and Katharine Pei

*Produced in association with the Office of Student Engagement, University of South Carolina*

ISBN 978-1-889271-67-5  
(2010). 30 pages. **\$3.00**



### The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success

Volume V: Assessing the First-Year Seminar

Daniel B. Friedman

ISBN 978-1-889271-81-3.  
(2012). 112 pages. **\$25.00**

[WWW.NRCPUBS.COM](http://WWW.NRCPUBS.COM)

## National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center is 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 meet National Resource Center staff members.

### Leveraging First- and Second-Year Transition Programs to Improve Transfer.

Concurrent session by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the 13th Annual Conference of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students, February 4-6, 2015; Grand Hyatt Buckhead, Atlanta, GA.

**Resilience: A Factor in First-Year Student Success.** Concurrent session by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center Executive Director, with Alex Thomas, at the 34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 7-10, 2015; Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, TX.

**Spirituality, Authenticity, Wholeness, and Self-Renewal in the Academy.** Concurrent discussion session by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center Executive Director, with John N. Gardner and Betsy Barefoot, at the 34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 7-10, 2015; Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, TX.

**Fostering Student Learning with Engaging and Meaningful Assignments.** Preconference workshop session by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center Executive Director, with Kevin Clarke and Catherine Sale Greene, at the 34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 7-10, 2015; Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, TX.

**A Look at the Book: Research Evidence on Common Reading.** Concurrent research session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director; Dallin George Young, Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment; and Catherine Andersen at the 34th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, 9:15-10:15 am; Monday, February 9, 2015; Dallas F in the Omni Dallas Hotel, Dallas, TX.

**An Evidence-Based Discussion of Integrating First-Year and Second-Year Transition Programs.** Concurrent session by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, and Jennifer R. Keup, Director, at the 2015 ACPA Annual Convention, March 5-8, 2015; Tampa, FL.

**Telling the "Story" of Common Reading Programs Using National Data.** Concurrent session by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director, and Dallin George Young, Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the 2015 ACPA Annual Convention, March 5-8, 2015; Tampa, FL.

**Helping Sophomores Navigate to Success: Theoretical Underpinnings, National Programmatic Trends, and Lessons Learned.** Concurrent session by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center Executive Director, with Molly Schaller, Barbara Tobolowsky, Jimmie Gahagan, and Kimberly Dressler, at the NASPA National Conference, New Orleans Convention Center, March 21-25, 2015; New Orleans, LA.



## Institute on SOPHOMORE STUDENT SUCCESS

April 17-19, 2015

**University of South Carolina,  
Columbia, SC**

Sophomore students have typically been the overlooked "middle-children" in higher education. With increasing awareness of second-year struggles, what resources and support can be provided to stabilize the sophomore year? The Institute on Sophomore Student Success will allow attendees the opportunity to examine trends and practices connected to building a comprehensive and intentional approach to ensure the success of sophomore students.

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## Awards and Recognition

### ACPA Diamond Honoree – Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center Director

Jennifer R. Keup has been selected by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Foundation as a member of their 2015 Class of Diamond Honorees. The Diamond Honoree Program, established by the ACPA Foundation in 1999, is both a recognition program and a fundraising activity. Those recognized as Diamond Honorees are selected by the Foundation Board of Trustees for their outstanding and sustained contributions to higher education and to student affairs. Keup will be honored during the Foundation's Diamond Honoree Ceremony and Reception at the ACPA International Convention, March 5-8, 2015, in Tampa, Florida. She is one of 19 to be inducted into the 2015 honor roll of the Foundation's Diamond Honorees.

### 2018 Cohort of the National Resource Center Advisory Board

The National Resource Center is pleased to announce its newest advisory board appointees, whose terms end in 2018. Board members serve in a consultative role for the Center giving advice and contributing suggestions for publications, marketing and funding strategies, research topics, and conference speakers, as well as authoring articles for Center publications. Members include leaders and experts in higher education representing a variety of institutional types, professional associations, and research centers. The board consists of 16 advisors serving terms staggered over a four-year period. The contributions of these individuals have been and continue to be vital to the National Resource Center's work in improving the lives of students. The following are the newest board members:

- **Stephanie Foote**, Director of the MS in First-Year Studies and Associate Professor of Education in the Department of First-Year and Transition Studies, Kennesaw State University
- **Ken O'Donnell**, Associate Dean in the Office of the Chancellor, California State University
- **Russell Lowery-Hart**, President, Amarillo College
- **Victor Saenz**, Coordinator of Higher Education Leadership Program and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration, University of Texas at Austin

### Inaugural Institutional Excellence in Students in Transition Award

The National Resource Center has launched a new award recognizing Institutional Excellence for Students in Transition. The award will be presented annually to institutions that have designed and implemented outstanding collaborative initiatives enhancing significant transitions during the undergraduate experience. Award recipients will have demonstrated the effectiveness of the initiative in supporting student success, learning, and development at a variety of transition points beyond the first college year and in responding to unique institutional needs. We are proud to announce this year's award recipients:

#### Arizona State University

The Guided Pathways to Success (GPS) program targets Arizona community college students who aspire to transfer to and complete a bachelor's degree at Arizona State University (ASU). ASU has signed agreements with every public community college in the State of Arizona to "create a culture of transfer." Over the course of five years, the institution has implemented significant process improvements, developed innovative tools, and improved communication to students, parents, advisors, faculty, and others who support students who wish to transfer.

### E-Source Submission Guidelines

For complete guidelines and issue dates, see [tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/esource/web/submission.php](http://tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/esource/web/submission.php).

**Audience:** *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields interested in student transitions. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

**Style:** Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style.

*E-Source* does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

**Format:** Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

**Length:** Original feature-length articles should be 750-1,200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

### Please address all questions and submissions to:

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National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition  
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Columbia, SC 29208  
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Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the fall 2015 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new

issues, please go to  
[www.sc.edu/fye/esource](http://www.sc.edu/fye/esource)

## Governors State University

The Dual Degree Program (DDP) supports the college completion agenda through partnerships between Governors State University and 17 Chicago-land community colleges. In collaboration with community college partners, the institution provides full-time community college students with an excellent pathway to earn quality and affordable bachelor's degrees. The DDP philosophy support completion through the provision of proactive advising, peer mentors, policies that promote completion, and financial incentives to encourage success and completion.

## University of North Carolina, Wilmington

The University College (UC) Students in Transition (SiT) Program provides academic advising, courses, and programs that support students at various points of transition into majors (e.g., incoming transfer students who have not yet met certain prerequisites and current students changing majors) as well as transfer and military students as they transition into the institution. The SiT Program provides structured, proactive, and dedicated support to transfer students during their transition to the University and students into their majors.



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## The Toolbox

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*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, South Carolina.

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

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