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Lessons From the Road: Facilitation Workshops to Enhance Faculty Development

At the University of South Carolina, more than 80% of all first-year students elect to enroll in University 101, a three-credit, first-year seminar. In fall 2010, 145 instructors taught 160 sections of University 101 to meet the demand. This dedicated corps of instructors consisted of faculty and staff from across campus, representing 70 different departments. While prior teaching experience is not a requirement for a seminar instructor, candidates must hold a master's degree or higher in their field and express a desire to teach and a commitment to first-year student success.

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To ensure a high-quality experience for students, University 101 utilizes a comprehensive and ongoing faculty development model (http://sc.edu/univ101/instructors/pd/) to prepare, develop, and support new and continuing instructors. In addition to workshops and meetings, instructors are provided with a host of resources to help them achieve course learning outcomes, including a 600+ page *University 101 Faculty Resource Manual* (Friedman, Latino, & Powell, 2010) and an intranet stocked with sample lesson plans, activities, and assignments.

Photo courtesy of USC Creative Services.

Program assessment data from multiple instruments, and particularly the First-Year Initiative Survey (by Educational Benchmarking Incorporated), consistently demonstrate that the use of engaging pedagogy is the number one predictor of overall course effectiveness in University 101. However, despite attention paid to engaging pedagogies and active-learning strategies in faculty development events and materials, this concept, as opposed to the traditional pedagogical triad of lectures-papers-tests, was challenging to introduce to some first-time instructors and veteran faculty. Program feedback indicated that several instructors felt unprepared to facilitate certain activities in the classroom and, more notably, to help students make meaning of those activities.

Based on these findings, the Lessons From the Road faculty development workshop series was piloted. The purpose of this series was to (a) give instructors the opportunity to

experience and participate in the effective facilitation and processing of tried-and-true lesson plans, (b) add a new activity to instructors' toolboxes, and (c) discuss effective facilitation techniques. The goal was for instructors to feel more confident using these lesson plans through experiencing them. Two workshops were offered in spring 2011; the first demonstrated a values clarification activity (30 Values), and the second demonstrated a diversity activity (Attaching a Story). During both sessions, a staff member from University 101 Programs walked participants through the activity as if they were students in a seminar. While facilitating the experience, the staff member commented on potential pitfalls or challenges and offered suggestions and commentary on the instructor's role in facilitating the learning experience. Upon completion of the activity, the staff member processed the activity, and the effective facilitation of it, with the participants. Participants were able to express concerns with the activity, discuss unique approaches to using it, and share best practices in achieving course learning outcomes.

The 30 Values activity helps students identify and clarify what is of utmost importance in their lives. Students begin by writing on individual squares of paper their five most important family members, nonfamily members, places, things, experiences, and goals (i.e., 30 total). The facilitator then asks students to remove sets of 1-6 squares from their pile,

Photo courtesy of the National Resource Center.

requiring them to examine and narrow their lists down to the top three or single thing they value most. This can be a challenging activity for students as they struggle to prioritize their values and reflect on whether their actions and behaviors support their choices. Workshop participants are guided in facilitation techniques that help students avoid negative feelings (e.g., shame or guilt in choosing certain values over others) and make meaning of their newly prioritized lists to better align their actions with their values and institute changes where necessary.

In the Attaching a Story activity, students sit in a circle and are given a single descriptor identity label to wear that does not reflect who they are (e.g., Black, female, Muslim, basketball player, HIV+). Hidden behind the label is a more detailed description of that character. Students write down 3-5 characteristics of their new identity as well as the identities of two other group members. After sharing their descriptors with the person wearing that label and receiving feedback on their assumed identity, they process what they heard and how it made them feel. Finally, each student shares what they wrote about their new identity and reveals the hidden description of their character.

"Real examples and templates are key to improving instructor skills."

<< Continued from FACULTY DEV p. 2

This more detailed description can challenge students' assumptions of certain identities (e.g., basketball player could be a young girl) and expose instances of stereotyping. Workshop participants learn effective facilitation practices to redirect insensitive comments, deal with students' discomfort with certain labels, guide discussion on stereotypes and assumptions, and show students how diversity impacts their lives.

Following the workshops, a survey was administered to assess the value and impact of the series. The survey was sent to all 26 participants (2 attended both workshops) via Student Voice, an online survey development tool. The response rate was 65% (i.e., $n = 8$, 30 Values workshop; $n = 11$, Attaching a Story workshop). Overall, the results were very positive. All respondents reported that the workshops were valuable experiences, and that as a result of a workshop, they felt more comfortable facilitating the demonstrated lesson plan (i.e., a rating of either 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale). In addition, 94.7% of respondents reported feeling more comfortable facilitating and processing conversations or activities in general ($M = 4.58$). The ability to see an activity facilitated proved to be a powerful experience as evidenced by the following open-ended comments:

> *I loved that it was actually something I could do in my class—I could walk away and do it immediately after if I wanted to.*

> *I really appreciate[d] the opportunity to see the lesson in real time because sometime[s] reading it in the Resource Binder just doesn't do it justice!*

> *This [workshop] aided in my overall understanding of the purpose of this activity, thus, making it much easier to facilitate versus reading it and trying to understand the activity entirely.*

> *I saw firsthand the impression that this activity had on those sitting around me. I can only hope that it will have that much of an impact on the students in my class.*

The evaluation demonstrated that this workshop series met a real need for the instructors by bringing course resources to life, giving them a better sense of how to use active-learning strategies in the classroom, and helping them understand how to assist students make meaning of those experiences. University 101 plans to continue offering Lessons From the Road workshops in fall 2011.

The simple demonstration of tried-and-true lesson plans is something a variety of programs on other campuses can introduce to enhance effectiveness. By identifying strong facilitators and valuable activities, workshops like Lessons From the Road can be beneficial for improving the skills of all instructors and, therefore, making positive impacts on an entire program and the students who participate in it. The demonstration of best practices is a valuable tool in teaching, most importantly because it responds to the multiple learning styles of faculty, staff, and students. By widely demonstrating effective practice, entire programs can benefit, especially when rooted in continuous assessment and development efforts. e

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Fostering the Career Development of First- and Second-Year Students

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The Career Services Network (CSN) at Michigan State University (MSU) is dedicated to helping its students set the foundation for future professional success. This team works diligently to provide an ever-growing and diverse student population with practical opportunities to learn more about the professional world. The CSN is constantly challenged to think outside the box to implement unique ways to foster students' experiential learning early in their college careers. To step beyond the limitations of career fairs and information sessions and to physically expose students to corporate America, CSN created the Spring Break Corporate Tour (SBCT) in 2007.

SBCT is a cutting edge career development program that gives first- and second-year students a hands-on opportunity to explore different professions and deeply reflect about their future career paths. Students take part in a week-long excursion consisting of six corporate and manufacturing facility visits where they learn first-hand what full-time employees and interns do in each company. They practice their professional development skills by actively participating in panel discussions, leadership training, corporate presentations, roundtable discussions, networking meals, and manufacturing tours. Underclassmen are specifically targeted for SBCT since they tend to have less knowledge about career paths and fewer experiential opportunities.

SBCT 2011 participants on a visit to the Alcoa manufacturing plant in Alcoa, TN. (Used with permission of the author.)

During the week, students acquire information about different career paths and learning more about each company's structure, operations, and culture, while gaining lifelong professional development and networking skills. They also experience new environments and geographic locations. Participants are encouraged to collect and reflect upon the information they have gained and are challenged to use this knowledge when making decisions about future internships, job shadowing placements, or other career opportunities.

Grounded in Kolb's (1984)) experiential learning theory, which states "knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 41), students progress through the four-stage experiential learning cycle: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. The SBCT coordinators work closely with each company to plan a packed agenda (experiencing). The corporate hosts are encouraged to provide

hands-on activities and interactive discussions. These activities promote more comprehensive learning and provide participants with a better understanding of each company. For example, one company stressed the importance of cross-functional collaborations in their organization by teaming business students and engineering students together to design, build, and promote a new product. This type of experience allowed the students to learn about the values of the company while involving them in a realistic project.

Before, during, and after the trip, career advisors facilitate group discussions regarding each visit (reflecting and thinking). Discussions allow students to reflect on what was learned and how they can continue to prepare for internships and full-time careers within each corporation. Debriefing sessions, which usually occur during the bus rides to and from locations, further allow students to see the growth they experienced in just one week and how to increase and best market their skills to attain professional opportunities in the future. It also helps them start thinking about whether or not they have chosen the right major for their ideal career path.

A SBCT 2008 student participant practices his business handshake with a representative from Norfolk Southern at the company's headquarters in Norfolk, VA. (Used with permission of the author.)

The thinking and acting stages of Kolb's Theory tend to occur more frequently after students return to campus. Student feedback reveals that after the trip they feel more confident when talking with employers, know more about the importance of company culture when making job-related decisions, and see the relationship between class work and what happens in the industry. Despite the fact that students give up their traditional spring break of fun in the sun for a week of intense professional development, the participants come back satisfied and ready to share their experiences with others.

First- and second-year students of all majors are encouraged to apply to the SBCT as long as they express a strong interest in learning about various companies. Students provide CSN their contact information, a résumé, a list of references, and a short essay on why they should be selected for the SBCT. An average of 25 candidates are chosen based on their professional goals and demonstrated leadership. Participation is limited by how many visitors each company can accommodate, cost per student to travel, as well as the coordinators' preference for keeping the groups more intimate. In addition, the SBCT team is committed to ensuring the participants reflect the diversity of the MSU campus.

> "Despite the fact that students give up their traditional spring break of fun in the sun for a week of intense professional development, the participants come back satisfied…"

Corporations are selected based on their interest in recruiting MSU students for internship and full-time positions, geographic location, and their ability and desire to host the group. Partnering companies are promoted heavily to students during the year through SBCT promotional materials and visibility at Michigan State's largest career event: Career Gallery. CSN also advertises the partnering companies' materials in a display case in the main student hallways all year round. SBCT ultimately encourages a stronger partnership between MSU and the participating companies, establishing the mutual benefits of company exposure and developing more experienced and professionally attractive students. This company exposure can influence the future career decisions of the impressionable student participants, strengthen existing business partnerships with MSU, increase Michigan State hires, and establish new corporate contacts for the Career Services Network.

At the conclusion of the week, both corporate hosts and student participants assess SBCT using a qualitative online survey; the results have been consistently positive. The hosts reported enjoying the opportunity to show off their company offices and manufacturing facilities. Several companies have even offered to sponsor the group more than once due to their perceived success of the visit. Additionally, many company participants have gone above and beyond expectations by providing monetary donations to help fund the trip and keep students' costs down.

The success of the program can also be shown by the accomplishments of SBCT students in the following years. Ongoing communication with past participants through advising appointments, SBCT reunions, and social media groups reveal that they have consistently secured internships and co-ops with participating employers and have taken on leadership positions in student organizations. The students often attribute these achievements to their increased networking skills gained from interacting with employers on the SBCT. All participants of the first SBCT in 2007 graduated and successfully gained employment. Some of these graduates even shared the SBCT concept with their current employers and are hoping to host the tour in the future.

Further success is demonstrated by the program's growth (i.e., beginning with 15 applications from one college in the first year to more than 50 applications across five MSU colleges by the fourth year) and SBCT's college, campuswide, and national recognition. In the fall of 2009, the creator of the SBCT was recognized by The Eli Broad College of Business with the Richard J. Lewis Quality of Excellence Award. The SBCT coordinators have also presented at several national conferences helping to spread awareness of this unique experiential education opportunity to other career center professionals and employers across the nation.

SBCT will continue in 2012 and into the future. Other Michigan State colleges have considered adopting the hands-on approach of exploring career paths and company cultures. The James Madison College, a residential college at MSU preparing students for careers in government, politics, social services, and public administration, has been

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Getting Students to Turn Off Digital Distractions and Tune Into Lectures and Learning

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One of the many challenges that can hinder academic success for college students is the barrage of information and entertainment that emanates from their laptops, cell phones, iPods, and other digital devices. Many professors decry the fact that students are surfing the web and playing games during lectures rather than paying attention. Some have even tried to ban computers in class, but such restrictions are difficult to enforce. Moreover, the distractions are equally problematic outside the classroom as students attempt to study and complete class assignments. Rather than forbidding or mandating behavior, it can be more effective to motivate students to change, especially when they believe it is to their advantage. Students can be persuaded to moderate their digital connections if they are exposed to research findings on multitasking and information overload in a way that they perceive as empowering rather than judgmental. This article describes the essential elements of a program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) that was designed to achieve this goal.

The Thriving on Campus and in Cyberspace Program

The Thriving on Campus and in Cyberspace: Staying Connected While Succeeding in School program (Cantor, 2010) is an interactive lecture and was offered to first-year students during the 2010-2011 academic year. The UW Center for the First-Year Experience arranged for two presentations: (a) one in a first-year residence hall as part of Wisconsin Welcome activities (voluntary attendance, $n = 18$) and (b) one in a one-credit adjustment-to-college class ($n = 16$). Because of interest expressed by various faculty members, the program was also presented in venues that included upper-class as well as first-year students, specifically two communication arts classes ($n = 93$ and $n = 58$) and a human ecology class ($n = 58$). In addition, communication arts students in four courses were invited to an optional lecture for which they could receive extra credit ($n = 67$). The key components of the program are described below.

Empathy Rather Than Judgment

The contributions and benefits of digital devices are first addressed as well as the fact that students have many more distractions at their fingertips and in their pockets compared to 10 years ago. Because of these devices, students have constant access to limitless information, endless entertainment, and 24/7 communication with friends. However, these same devices can present challenging diversions to completing necessary work and lead to multitasking and information overload, two processes which can interfere with both productivity and creativity (Cantor, 2009).

Active Learning on Multitasking and Information Overload

Students engage in a series of simple exercises to demonstrate that multitasking and information overload reduces the brain's workable IQ, thereby "dimming their bulb." An adaptation of the Stroop Test (Stroop, 1935; Figure 1) is used to show how difficult it is for the brain to multitask. As students yell out the color of letters flashed on a screen (rather than read the word), they directly experience the struggle the brain encounters when switching back and forth between modes, something that happens during multitasking. A written activity adapted from Crenshaw (2008) has students write two short sentences, one immediately after the other (single-tasking); the exercise is repeated in a multi-tasking mode by alternating writing each word of the two sentences (e.g., first word, first sentence; first word, second sentence; second word, first sentence; second word, second sentence; and so forth). The activity demonstrates that it takes longer to do two tasks at once than to do them one after the other, and that trying to do them simultaneously produces more errors and increases stress. In a brain exercise to experience information overload, students trying to perform three-digit subtraction problems in their heads and observe how they intuitively shield their eyes from receiving distracting visual input. Research studies are cited to reinforce these active-learning exercises, including Foerde, Knowlton, and Poldrack (2006); Iyengar and Lepper (2000); and Ophir, Nass, and Wagner (2009).

Students are advised to limit multitasking when starting a new learning activity or when learning, memory, quality, and efficiency in the task are important. For example, rather than responding to every message as it comes in, they are encouraged to save interruptions for logical breaks during work and to turn off alerts, for even brief periods, to make this easier.

The Stroop Test

Red
Blue
Green
Blue
Red
Yellow

Figure 1. In the Stroop Test, students must call out the color of the letters rather than what each word says.

"The activity demonstrates that it takes longer to do two tasks at once than to do them one after the other, and that trying to do them simultaneously produces more errors and increases stress."

Colorful Visual Images and Metaphors

In demonstrating how information overload blocks creativity, familiar, colorful objects are used to represent what goes on in the brain. For example, a completely full jar of jelly beans segregated by color (Figure 2) represents how difficult it is to make creative connections (i.e., mixing the colors) when too much information is crowded into a small space. Shaking the jar does not allow the colors to mix. However, when those jelly beans are poured into a larger container, the colors can easily mix together (representing creative solutions; Figure 3). Moving from the smaller to the larger container is a metaphor for getting away from tight focus on a problem and allowing the ideas to marinate and consolidate at a subconscious level. It also illustrates the importance of taking breaks when experiencing information overload and coming back with a fresh perspective.

Your Overloaded Brain

Figure 2. Metaphor for the overloaded brain that has difficulty making creative connections.

More Space

Figure 3. The larger container, a metaphor for broadening one's focus and allowing ideas to mix and expand.

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Promotion of Brain-Enhancing Breaks

Students are encouraged to take breaks (i.e., exercise, nature, and sleep) for brain enhancement and when their brains get too full of information. These activities also promote health and wellness. Studies are cited demonstrating that it is more effective to take breaks from studying or working than to plow through hour after hour (Cepeda, Pashler, Vul, Wixted, & Rohrer, 2006) and that physical exercise can promote the creation of connections between neurons (Medina, 2008). The work of Kaplan (1995) is also introduced showing that exposure to nature refreshes the brain better than looking at mortar and bricks, as are studies on the effects of sleep on test taking and enhanced creativity (Mednick, Cai, Kanady, & Drummond, 2008; Wagner, Gais, Haider, Verleger, & Born, 2004). By promoting taking breaks, the Thriving on Campus program encourages a balanced lifestyle rather than workaholism; it also emphasizes the importance of stress reduction for both academic success and personal well-being (Cantor, 2009). Students are reminded to have fun and interact with friends as ways to reduce stress (Thompson, 2009), while practicing good time management to allow for work periods.

Evaluation

Students who attended these talks filled out an optional evaluation form immediately after the program. Because the program sometimes ended precisely as a class period ended, some students did not have time to participate in the evaluation. A total of 310 students attended the lecture, and 207 completed the evaluation (68%). Beyond asking the students to indicate their class level and gender, the initial form contained only one open-ended prompt: comments about the presentation and the ideas and strategies you learned about today. Due to student feedback, a question asking whether or not the student would recommend the program was later added to the evaluation form. Almost all attendees who received this question (96%, $n = 192$) responded affirmatively. Comments about the exercises, the research findings, and the recommendations were primarily positive (negative comments were rare), and many students also indicated an interest in trying some of the guidelines as illustrated below:

> The information was very applicable and interesting and I can't wait to put it to use.
>
> I text a lot and go on Facebook while I'm working; I'm going to try to do that less.

A few weeks after attending the program, the students in one of the classes ($n = 93$) answered a follow-up question asking whether they had adopted any of the recommended behaviors. Most of these (93%) reported that they had tried at least one of

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Moving the First-Year Seminar Online

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Photo courtesy of SXC photos.

As universities continue to grow, space constraints have fostered an increased interest on the part of both students and administrators in online and hybrid courses (i.e., hybrids vary in format but include a mixture of classroom and online meetings and activities). In addition, students' attraction to new technologies can add to the appeal of hybrid and online offerings. To address these concerns, Kennesaw University has offered hybrid first-year seminars since 2007 and an entirely online section since 2009.

In developing these courses, an effort was made to create an online classroom environment that would be both easy for the instructor to manage and intuitive for the students to navigate and understand. After attempts to create online and hybrid courses that met these criteria produced mixed results, it was decided to survey the students to identify (a) the skills they believe they need to succeed in the online environment and their level of proficiency in these skills, (b) what they consider to be the most important values or concerns regarding their academic careers, and (c) the course content they feel is most important to their academic success.

To gather the data, in fall 2009, students in the hybrid and online sections of the first-year seminar were asked to self-assess in the three target areas. Four forced-choice instruments were administered: (a) the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Self-Assessment (Rosenberg, 1965), (b) the Personal Report on Communication Apprehension (Mc-Crosky, 1982), and (c) two surveys developed specifically for this research that asked students to rank their values and course content.

The assessment results revealed that, in terms of the skills necessary to succeed in the online environment, students in both the hybrid and online sections believed that time management skills were important; yet 49.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they possessed these skills. Students in all sections also identified communication skills as important; however, hybrid students reported a high degree of communication apprehension, which could be attributed to the fact that they were not always fully aware of the format of a hybrid class or that they had registered for a hybrid section. Conversely, online students were fully aware that they were registering for an entirely online course. When asked which values or concerns they considered most important in the context of their academic careers and success, both student groups

identified the following five as most important, in rank order: (a) family, (b) attending college classes, (c) faith or spirituality, (d) studying for college classes, and (e) planning for my future. The bottom five values or concerns, in rank order, were alcohol and/or drug abuse, sexual disease, homesickness, utilizing campus resources, and dating. Finally, regarding the course content students found most important, both hybrid and online students cited the following top three factors, in order of importance: (a) clear instructions provided by professor, (b) student self-motivation, and (c) time management skills. The least important components, as identified by the students, were required online live class meetings, weekly course plan presented by professor, and reading comprehension.

Photo courtesy of USC Creative Services.

The findings from this assessment suggest that students were well aware of the skills they need, even as they recognized and professed their inadequacy in these areas. Therefore, if these students are to be successful in hybrid and online classes, they will need to develop these skills, and faculty and staff can help them to do so by providing some of the content and guidance they have asked for. At Kennesaw, in addition to now ensuring that hybrid courses are clearly distinguished and explained in the registration process, the following strategies have been implemented to improve the hybrid and online courses and to meet the student needs identified in the assessment. All instructors are encouraged to consider these strategies as they move their courses into the online environment:

- Develop assignments and activities that promote the development of those skills students will need to succeed in their hybrid and online courses, such as
  - » Practice quizzes and exams to ensure students understand online instructions and gain experience in the use of the technology before taking graded quizzes and exams
  - » Online collaborative exercises and group projects to promote individual and group time-management skills as students coordinate efforts with teammates and meet personal obligations to the group
  - » Online introduction assignments and discussion boards to foster peer and faculty connections in the online environment
  - » Technology instruction in the classroom or computer lab (for hybrid courses) to ensure students are skilled in the types of technology required for completion of the course assignments and activities

> "...students were well aware of the skills they need, even as they recognized and professed their inadequacy in these areas."

> » Self-assessments to help students gauge their ability for success as online learners, such as the free Online Course Readiness Assessment (University of Oklahoma, n.d.)
> » Utilization of the learning management system (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle, Vista) to its fullest extent (e.g., selective release, folders, learning modules, discussion boards, chat rooms, virtual office)

- Start slow (e.g., offer two or three days of online class meetings or activities during a semester of a traditional face-to-face section of the course in order to develop skills and comfort level in the online environment)

- Develop clear and detailed instructions for all assignments, activities and tests; establish communication guidelines; and offer directions for successful group conduct

Given college students' love of and immersion in technology, as is evidenced by the popularity of Facebook, texting, Twitter, and the like, it seems inevitable that hybrid and online courses will continue to be part of college course offerings. Consequently, those instructors who wish to promote student success in the online environment would be well advised to understand both the needs of their students and the best ways to present their course material. Finally, institutions looking to maximize physical space while attracting more of today's technologically savvy students will need to embrace the online learning environment; provide the necessary training for faculty; and expand their online course offerings, programs, and degrees. ℮

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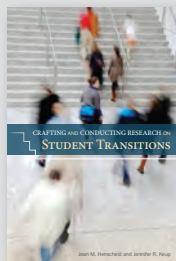## Newly Released Publications!

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working with the SBCT team to create a spring break experience for its students and alumni in Washington D.C. as early as spring 2012. The SBCT planning team hopes to expand the concept beyond MSU by encouraging other universities across the nation to explore alternative options for experiential education. A highly individualized logistical blueprint of the SBCT concept can be created for any institution or department to support its student populations' needs and expectations. Whether the travel is local, regional, or national, giving first- and second-year students a hands-on opportunity to explore career options is the best way to foster students' experiential learning. e

the suggestions. Of those who tried at least one, 73% reported a positive effect. Typical comments included:

> I have started to multitask less while in lectures, and this has really helped me to understand lecture material much better the first time around.

> When I study and do homework, I have started to turn my phone off and not allow myself to go on Facebook. It is EXTREMELY difficult! BUT, it has had an amazing effect on my work already. I get things done much faster and I understand the material much better.

> In my study habits, instead of trying to cram for large amounts of time, I now go for a few hours and break. I find it very helpful in keeping me more sharp and focused for when I try to gain more information. It has definitely been a positive result when studying.

Transferability

The information conveyed in this program is straightforward and research-based, and the techniques and exercises are easily adaptable to any college program that wants to promote both academic success and emotional health. Although students at all levels have responded positively, the program seems particularly well suited to first-year students because they are in the process of establishing new study habits and are usually without parental supervision for the first time in their lives. The elements can be included in an orientation lecture or in first-year seminars, or they can be included in individual counseling sessions. The message can be useful at any time of the semester or year. More specific details of the program can be found at www.yourmindonmedia.com/thriving-on-campus-and-in-cyberspace. e

Using Peer-Reviewed Research to Teach Academic Study Skills in First-Year Seminars

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In first-year seminars and student success courses, credibility can be an issue for students and faculty alike. Students often enter the seminar believing that they have already learned how to study effectively and, therefore, may not place much value on the class (Rhodes & Carifio, 1999). From the faculty perspective, instructors teaching seminars can find themselves defending academic credibility despite the fact that first-year seminars have been in existence for decades (Hunter & Murray, 2007) and that much research supports their value in improving student success (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Griffin & Romm, 2008; Howard & Jones, 2000). Further, the need for explicit instruction in learning and study strategies is clear given the research indicating that first-year and upper-level students are not demonstrating skills commensurate with college-level expectations (Lynch, 2007; Rachal, Diagle, & Rachal, 2007). Incorporating peer-reviewed research studies as a tool for teaching academic skill strategies in first-year seminars can be an effective pedagogy for addressing a range of issues, including improving course credibility, preparing students to use research studies throughout their college careers, and providing shared content that can be used as a foundation from which to apply the study strategies being learned.

Photo courtesy of SXC photos.

How to Use Research Studies

While using peer-reviewed research studies on a wide range of topics would be appropriate, focusing on literature related to student success strategies allows faculty members to teach students both content and process simultaneously. Instructors set up learning scenarios where students can practice college-level skills (e.g., reading, note taking, critical thinking, writing, research techniques) with shared content that is directly relevant to the course. With this teaching tool, students are introduced to brief research studies on student success strategies, such as test taking, studying approaches, or the importance of getting involved in campus activities. Students gain access to research-based information, which adds to the credibility of the course and reinforces the fact that the skill sets they are learning are higher level compared to high school and evidence based rather than simply the opinion of the instructor. Key elements in incorporating this strategy in the seminar curriculum include (a) a communicated high expectation that students can complete this level of coursework even in their

first semester of college; (b) selection of brief, relevant, and easy to understand studies; (c) frequent and comprehensive support; and (d) progressively more challenging individual and/or group assignments related to the research.

Expectation

High expectations can lead to higher levels of performance (Román, Cuestas, & Fenollar, 2008; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Findings from a large-scale research study conducted by Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) indicated that "students' sense of support, levels of cognitive and academic engagement, and perceptions of institutional challenge were directly related to their students' reported gains in academic competence" (p.169). In addition, researchers have found that confidence and self-efficacy are important contributors to high academic performance (Majer, 2009; Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). When students believe in their ability to use scholarly sources, they are more likely to use these sources in their future coursework.

Study Selection

Williamson (2008) found that even students who graduated with high reading skills experienced a drop in terms of comprehension when reading college-level material. Using instructor-selected articles that progress in complexity can help students build higher level reading skills while increasing their self-confidence in understanding research material. This is consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural model that speaks to the importance of creating tasks that are within a student's zone of proximal development and then providing the appropriate scaffolding or support to help them meet with success (Myers, 2011). In addition to providing the class with a shared learning experience, using a preselected article can maximize grading time since faculty will be familiar with the study and its key components.

Support

Students are not always explicitly taught the skills needed to read, think about, and use information from peer-reviewed research, yet they are expected to incorporate information from these sources into college papers. Faculty should provide extensive modeling, support, and detailed instructions on how to read and think critically about research studies to help students succeed on assignments. For example, the purpose of the different sections of a study (e.g., abstract, introduction, methods, findings) can be explained in class. The focus can be fairly broad and simple in nature given the seminar is not a research methods course. Using an actual study, the instructor can show students where to find the research question and demonstrate how it is easier to read the abstract, introduction, and discussion before moving into the method and results sections. Supportive materials and instructions can also be posted online so students can review these resources throughout the semester as needed. For

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Howard, H. E., & Jones, W. P. (2000). Effectiveness of a freshmen seminar in an urban university: Measurement of selected indicators. *College Student Journal, 34*, 509–515.

Hunter, M., & Murray, K. A. (2007). New frontiers for student affairs professionals: Teaching and the first-year experience. *New Directions for Student Services, 117*, 25-34.

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Majer, J. M. (2009). Self-efficacy and academic success among ethnically diverse first-generation community college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2*(4), 243-250. doi:10.1037/a0017852

Myers, D. G. (2011). *Exploring psychology* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Worth.

Rachal, K., Daigle, S., & Rachal, W. S. (2007). Learning problems reported by college students: Are they using learning strategies? *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 34*(4), 191-199.

instance, faculty could narrate comments on a PDF-formatted version of the article using software such as Adobe Pro or create screencast videos or narrated PowerPoint presentations that describe the elements of a research study. Constructive feedback on assigned tasks and classroom discussions can further reinforce the development these new skills.

Assignments

In order to practice the acquisition of newly learned academic success strategies, faculty should assign individual or groups tasks related to the article. For example, students could be asked to take notes on the article, write summaries on different sections or the entire study, or create a visual aid that captures the research question and findings. As students become more skilled with using the research studies, instructors should introduce more challenging tasks, such as having students search the library databases for research on different student success topics and complete oral or written assignments.

Summary

The ultimate benefit of using peer-reviewed research studies to teach student success strategies is to build skills and confidence that translate into improved academic performance throughout college. The first-year seminar provides a perfect opportunity to address these skills, bridging content and process.

Sample list of research articles on student success topics

Study Strategies
Dickinson, D. J., & O'Connell, D. Q. (1990). Effect of quality and quantity of study on student grades. *Journal of Educational Research, 83*(4), 227-231.

Cell Phones and Academic Performance
End, C. M., Worthman, S., Mathews, M. B., & Wetterau, K. (2010). Costly cell phones: The impact of cell phone rings on academic performance. *Teaching of Psychology, 37*(1), 55-57. doi: 10.1080/00986280903425912

Study Strategies and Role of Distracters
Gurung, R. A. R. (2005). How do students really study (and does it matter?). *Teaching of Psychology, 32*(4), 239-241.

Student Versus Faculty Perception of Study Strategies
Lynch, D. (2007). I've studied so hard for this course, but don't get it! Differences between student and faculty perceptions. *College Student Journal, 41*(1), 22-24.

Reading Techniques
McDaniel, M., Howard, D., & Einstein, G. (2009). The read-recite-review study strategy: Effective and portable. *Psychological Science, 20*(4), 516-522. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02325.x

Ramos-Sánchez, L., & Nichols, L. (2007). Self-efficacy of first-generation and non-first generation college students: The relationship with academic performance and college adjustment. *Journal of College Counseling, 10*(1), 6-18.

Reason, R., Terenzini, P., & Domingo, R. (2006). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(2), 149-175. doi:10.1007/s11162-005-8884-4

Rhodes, L., & Carifio, J. (1999). Community college students' opinions regarding the value of the their freshman seminar experience. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice, 23*(5), 511-523. doi:10.1080/106689299264701

Román, S., Cuestas, P., & Fenollar, P. (2008). An examination of the interrelationships between self-esteem, others' expectations, family support, learning approaches and academic achievement. *Studies in Higher Education, 33*(2), 127-138. doi:10.1080/03075070801915882.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Williamson, G. L. (2008). A text readability continuum for postsecondary readiness. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 19*(4), 602-632.

Related Articles in *E-Source*

Castro, S. M. (2009). Engaging first-year students in critical thinking and scholarly inquiry. *7*(1), 6.

Gannon, K., & Getty, A. (2006). Pooling our resources: Developing student research strategies in a learning community. *4*(1), 6.

Stallings, H. (2007). Using cognitive development and critical thinking in teaching first-year seminars. *4*(3), 9.

Ward, V. E. (2007). Why aren't they using Griffith Park? Involving first-year students in field-based research. *4*(6), 13.

Research Spotlight:

Emerging Evidence From the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars

The first-year seminar is traditionally defined as a "course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of specific topics, which vary by seminar type; (b) to essential skills for college success; and (c) to selected processes, the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group" (Barefoot, 1992, p. 49). In their encyclopedic meta-analysis on college impact, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest that first-year seminar participation has "statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college" (p. 403). Participation in first-year seminars has also been positively linked to involvement in campus activities (e.g., Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001), student engagement (Kuh, 2005), interaction with faculty (e.g., Keup & Barefoot, 2005), and inquiry learning (Padgett & Keup, 2010).

Despite the voluminous literature base on the impact of first-year seminars on students' experience, development, and persistence, limitations still exist within the literature. A significant limitation is the overreliance on single-institution studies, which ultimately reduces the generalizability of findings across various institution types. Moreover, prior research examining the effects of first-year seminars primarily uses student-level data. These data only measure students' level of involvement in first-year seminars and provide no contextual description of the first-year seminar, including seminar type, instruction, and course content. An examination of first-year seminars using a large, national institutional-level dataset would provide practitioners with a conceptualization of the impact of the first-year seminar across a multitude of institutional characteristics (e.g., type, control, size).

The 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, conducted tri-annually by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, collects data on the organization, content, pedagogy, and administration of first-year seminars across American colleges and universities. Most recently administered in fall 2009, an invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 3,225 institutions. After a six-week survey administration cycle, 1,019 usable responses were received (i.e., a 32% response rate).

Of these participating institutions, 890 (87.3%) offered a first-year seminar. Further, 41.1% reported the primary first-year seminar type on their campus was an extended orientation seminar, followed by academic seminar with uniform content (16.1%), academic seminar on various topics (15.4%), hybrid (15.3%), basic study skill seminar

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Kuh, G. (2005). Student engagement in the first year of college. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, & B. O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 86-107). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Padgett, R. D., & Keup, J. R. (2010, November). *The impact of first-year seminars on college students' need for cognition.* Paper presented at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Indianapolis, IN.

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(4.9%), preprofessional or discipline-linked (3.7%), and other (3.5%). Extended orientation was consistently the dominant seminar-type across all institutional controls (i.e., type, control, and size).

Other notable findings included:

- At the national aggregate level, the approximate class size for a section of a first-year seminar exceeded 20 students.

- The three most commonly reported objectives for first-year seminars were (a) developing academic skills, (b) developing a connection with the institution, and (c) providing an orientation to various campus resources and services.

- Approximately one third to one half of first-year seminars incorporated either online components, service-learning, linked courses, and/or common reading within the seminar.

- Training for first-year seminar instructors was offered by more than three fourths of all participating institutions.

- More than half of the participating institutions formally assessed or evaluated the first-year seminar.

Additional findings are available in the executive summary, which can be found on the National Resource Center website at http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/survey_instruments/ and in the forthcoming research report *2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Ongoing Efforts to Support Student in Transition* (Padgett & Keup, 2011). e

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