E-SOURCE FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS
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Wilderness Orientation Programs Provide an Ethical Alternative to Hazing

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Challenge is important to growth, learning, development, and building bonds. Unfortunately, in trying to create challenges, our students often come up with some poor ideas, taking challenges to a level that are unethical and, at times, contrary to learning goals. In short, challenge rituals on college campuses often devolve into abusive and humiliating hazing experiences. Of equal concern, institutions often make mistakes on the other end of the spectrum. Our orientation programs—time for great bonding rituals and building student relationships with the institution—are squandered with low-risk activity fairs, picnics, and ice cream socials. Not that these events should be deemed unimportant, but they should not be the replacement for ritual and challenge—challenges that our students often seek and find themselves if we do not provide them.

If we want to organize powerful orientation experiences for students, we need to find challenging ways to introduce students to college and each other without subjecting them to hazing. Adventure and wilderness programs do just this. Rather than create the artificial challenges that characterize hazing, guides on wilderness programs provide support and care for authentic challenges: If a tent is set up poorly and it rains, no one will be publicly humiliated, but its occupants will get wet and cold. The Harvard First-Year Outdoor Program (FOP), designed in the spirit of an Outward Bound course, is an ethical alternative to hazing. At the same time, it moves orientation programs away from low-risk bonding activities.

The Harvard FOP program is one of 110 wilderness orientation programs at colleges and universities across the country. At Harvard, about 300 first-year students, out of a class of 1,600, volunteer to participate in the program. The program has been run through the Freshman Dean's Office for 25 years and has had more than 6,000 participants to date.

On FOP's six-day backpacking trips, new students meet challenges and process the lessons that come from living in the mountains assisted by upperclass instructors and guides trained to manage environmental risk. The leaders demonstrate how to work together to reach trip goals, and they point out lessons the trail provides. Groups work together on their common problem, getting from point A to B while taking care of each other emotionally and physically.

Leaders emphasize self-care—staying dry, warm, and hydrated along the trail, but also ask students to be prepared to help others and assist as part of a community. They help students transfer the metaphor of self-care to the challenges they will face as they start college. At Harvard, the students will begin four years of intense study. Some parts of the journey are more difficult than others, but by pacing themselves, asking for help when they need it, and helping others when they have more to give, the students can one day stand on top of an academic mountain feeling proud, healthy, warm, happy, and surrounded by friends.

My role as director is to work with students on developing leadership training programs and managing the risks of wilderness travel. Ultimately, however, I see my role as providing great educational experiences for students. One risk I need to consider is how to prescribe the appropriate challenge to a group of young adults. My student leaders and I are constantly evaluating the delicate balance between providing sufficient challenge to encourage growth and learning without overburdening a new student. And, in a group of 8 to 10 first-year students, challenge may have 8 to 10 different definitions. For high school athletes, hiking with a heavy pack may be easy, yet negotiating group dynamics may tax them. Students from urban areas might find simple tasks of backwoods hygiene daunting. Natural leaders and wallflowers alike face challenges by participating in this small trail community.

Yet students love the challenge of travel in the woods and the ritual events groups

participate in throughout the week. After four nights traveling together, the group stops for an evening to discuss fears of going to college in an anonymous format (as anonymous as you can get in a group of 10). What students learn is that they are all afraid of college. They also learn that they have similar fears about making friends, succeeding academically, and changing relationships with those at home. Members of groups learn to trust each other throughout the week—first physically and then emotionally.

Adventure and wilderness orientation programs go far beyond simply protecting vulnerable students from the horrors of hazing. After all, the ice cream socials can claim the same, but offer no challenge to students. Through ritual and challenge, FOP imbues in students a sense of accomplishment, and a strong connection to other students and the institution. In short, wilderness orientation programs provide the beneficial elements of hazing—those qualities that perpetuate its practice despite ongoing efforts to eradicate it—without hazing's abusive and often dangerous side effects. Wilderness orientation programs, then, may indeed provide colleges and universities with an ethical alternative to hazing.

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Show Choirs Recruit and Retain Mississippi Students

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Because many Mississippi high schools have show choirs, students are eager to continue performing in these groups at the college level. Community colleges in Mississippi provide students with such opportunities while representing their institutions to the community through show choirs. These choirs, featuring talented singers and dancers, help institutions recruit and retain students, while easing the students' transition to college.

Most community colleges hold auditions in the spring semester, recruiting new members from local high schools. Because the most talented students are selected, show choirs are high-profile groups on college campuses. Vicki Blaylock, director of the show choir Ac'cents at East Central Community College (ECCC) in Decatur, confirms that student members of the show choir are seen as an elite group and are often considered the leaders on campus because of their participation. These students' sense of pride translates into a sense of belonging to the institution and a greater investment in their own education. Thus, involvement in show choirs are not only effective recruiting tools, they also have the potential to increase retention and persistence to graduation.

Other benefits of participating in show choirs include:

Financial aid. Students at ECCC are awarded a full tuition scholarship for being selected to Ac'cents. This financial benefit helps students remain focused on their academics and is an incentive to finish their degree programs.

Travel. Show choirs typically perform several times a semester. At Pearl River Community College, Poplarville-Hattiesburg, the show choir has performed in New York City, Los Angeles, and aboard Carnival Cruise Lines, according to director Mark Malone. This extensive travel is an opportunity for students to broaden their horizons.

Connections to other students. Show choir also provides first-year college students with an opportunity to connect to other students. At most schools, first-year students make up more than half of the group. This allows students to meet other first-year students and find mentors among returning choir members. The students bond with one another during the many hours of rehearsal, travel, and performance.

Academic skills. According to Karen Davis, co-director of the Center Stage show choir at Itawamba Community College at Fulton and Tupelo, being part of a show choir also teaches the students important skills that can help in their transition to college and beyond. At most schools, these students are required to maintain a good grade-point average. Thus, students must master time management in order to balance rehearsals and performances with academics. To perform well, the students need discipline, commitment, and self-confidence. They often have to travel to compete or perform, which demands working out alternate assignment plans with faculty members. This increased interaction with faculty helps the students to know and be known by their professors. The students in a show choir learn to work as a team to set and reach their goals. All these skills are invaluable to college students, but these community college students acquire these skills by doing something they love. (For photographs and information about the show choir at ICC, see http://www.icc.cc.ms.us/stu_activities/center stage/index.htm).

Community colleges in Mississippi have truly found a co-curricular program that not only benefits the institutions and the communities in which they are located but that also meets the interest of many of its students.

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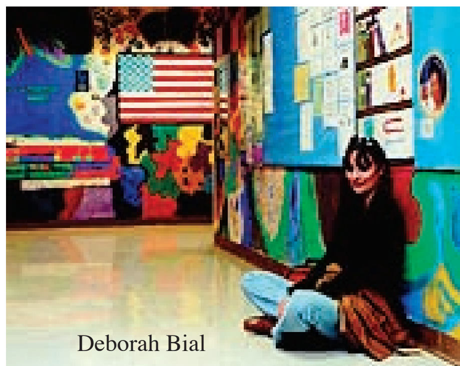
Non-Traditional Students, Non-Traditional Access: The Posse Foundation


Deborah Bial

More than 14 years ago, Deborah Bial listened to another heartbreaking story: a smart and talented student explained why she dropped out of college. The student said, "I never would have dropped out if I had my posse with me." Deborah Bial was startled and wondered, "What if that student had faced the challenges of college not alone, but as a member of a posse?" She put the idea into action, and the Posse Foundation was born. It is a scholarship foundation with a two-fold focus: (a) to recruit students who have extraordinary leadership ability and academic potential and who might be overlooked by the traditional university selection process and (b) to devote the resources and support necessary to allow those students to achieve personal and academic excellence, reach graduation, and effect positive changes on their college campuses and in their communities.

The Posse Foundation identifies, recruits and selects student leaders from public high schools to form multicultural teams called "posses." The concept of a posse is rooted in the belief that a small, diverse group of talented students, carefully selected and trained, can serve as a catalyst for increased individual and community development. Responsibility for the final selection of students is shared by both the participating universities and the Posse Foundation. After selection, these teams undergo an intensive eight-month Posse Training Program and then enroll at top universities nationwide to pursue their academics and to help promote cross-cultural communication on campus.

The Posse Program has exhibited great success over the past 14 years, placing 721 students into top colleges and universities. These students have won more than $63 million in scholarships from Posse partner universities and are persisting and graduating at close to 90%—a rate higher than the national averages at institutions of higher education. Posse currently has sites in five major cities across the United States: New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC.

The Posse Foundation believes that as the United States becomes an increasingly multicultural society, those individuals sitting at the bargaining tables of the next century should be more representative of this rich demographic mix, that the nation's future will depend on the ability of strong leaders from diverse backgrounds to develop consensual solutions to complex social problems. One of the primary goals of the Posse Program is to train these leaders of tomorrow. To achieve this goal, the Posse Foundation establishes partnerships with select universities and works with them in three principal areas: recruitment, assessment, and retention.

Unlike traditional scholarship programs, Posse focuses on academics and leadership. It sends students to college in a team. It relies on ongoing university participation to ensure continuous improvement in the process and assessment of the student's change initiatives. It gives students the chance to succeed individually and as a group, an excellent foundation for the workplace. It increases the graduation rate for non-traditional students.

In spite of the astonishing success of the Posse Program, Deborah Bial is not satisfied. "We know this works, but one of the biggest frustrations is that this year we had 4,000 students nominated for 192 scholarships. We turn away thousands of kids."

Contact:
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Let Me "Edutain" You: Games in the Classroom[1]

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Edutainment, broadly defined as the "marriage of education and entertainment in a work or presentation," (http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0,,sid9_gci538402,00. html) is popping up more often today both in and out of the classroom.[2] Beginning with Sesame Street, today's students have been "edutained" all their lives.[3] The familiarity of such approaches may make them effective with undergraduate and graduate students.

I teach legal research to first-year law students. To be honest, I must state that while I find legal research fascinating, it is almost always boring to my students, especially since they must learn it without having a need to apply it. I began to look for ways to make the class more engaging. However, I was worried that using games would be looked upon by other law professors and my students as inappropriate and silly. I was wrong. They all loved the games.

Games help learners sustain their interest in a subject. Because they are amusing and interesting, games are highly motivating. Games lower anxiety, reducing an affective barrier to learning. They are a welcome break from the usual routine. Law school does not provide much positive feedback in the first semester, so classes that incorporate games are not only a break in routine but also a non-threatening chance to succeed and be acknowledged.

Games should be chosen with care. A classroom game must be more than just fun. It should involve friendly competition. This is particularly important in law school, where competition is often rather unpleasant. A game should keep all students involved and interested. One that eliminates people or groups too quickly, leaving them as observers, is not the best choice. The game should give the students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific material or concepts.

Continued on page 4

Let Me Edutain You, continued

In my first class, I divide the students into three teams and give each team a picture puzzle. I time them as they race to complete the puzzles. When all three are completed, we discuss the strategies each team used, and I relate these strategies to researching a legal problem. The students invariably love the puzzles. They are just getting to know each other and feeling their way around law school. This game puts them at ease and gets them thinking about legal research as a process with a goal and not just a series of discrete bits of information they must memorize.

In my last class, we review using a version of *Jeopardy* that I have developed, which allows us to cover a great deal of information. TV game shows are a natural for educational use because they are instantly recognizable; the rules are familiar; they are visually oriented; and we now have the technology to replicate them easily, using PowerPoint or HTML coding. Games can be simple (puzzles) or technologically complex (HTML files), but the end result should be a livelier learning environment. These strategies should be equally effective with undergraduate students.

Notes

[1]This article is an adaptation of presentations given to the 2003 Conference on Law School Computing at Duke University School of Law in June, 2003, and to the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries in Boston, MA in July, 2004.

[2]A Google search for "edutainment" produced around 451,000 hits, many of the links to educational products and web sites.

[3]For a discussion of the traits of the NextGens which affect the way they learn, see Abrams, S., & Luther, J. (May 1, 2004). Born with the chip. *Library Journal, 129*(8), 34-37.

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Institutional Commitment Regarding Students with Learning Disabilities Transitioning to Higher Education

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Students with learning disabilities are the fastest growing group of students enrolling in colleges and universities (Costello & English, 2001). Lerner (2000) defined a learning disability as a general term for a variety of specific subtypes including: dyslexia (reading disability), dyspraxia (speech disability), dysgraphia (writing disability), and dyscalculia (mathematics disability). College students with learning disabilities may display the following characteristics and challenges in their efforts to produce academic assignments: (a) difficulty following written directions, (b) poor sentence structure in writing assignments, (c) frequent spelling errors, (d) difficulty with organizational skills, (e) slow to start and complete assignments, and (f) difficulty preparing for and taking tests under time limits (Association on Higher Education and Disability, 2001a). While in high school, students with learning disabilities are assured services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 where multidisciplinary teams, special classes, tutors, and resource room instruction are provided. When students with learning disabilities transition to college, however, they are no longer covered by this legislation.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) assure students with learning disabilities accommodations and services but do not require universities to provide the degree of support offered in K-12 settings. In essence, students move from an environment where the responsibility for their success lies with educators to a college environment where the responsibility for success lies with themselves (Hadley, Twale, & Evans, 2003). Although the types and levels of services mandated for the K-12 setting by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) do not apply to higher education, under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), colleges and universities may not discriminate against students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified for admission. Institutions must provide reasonable modifications, accommodations, or auxiliary aids that will enable qualified students to have access to, participate in, and benefit from the full range of the educational programs and activities which are offered to all students on campus (Hadley, in press).

In their transition from high school to college, students with learning disabilities may need the support of special services and academic accommodations to successfully access and integrate into the campus community. Institutional commitment in terms of budget is essential to the support of this student population on the campus. Administration will need to make budgetary decisions about unique academic accommodations for this student population. To defray the burden on one department or any particular division, Hadley et al. (2003) suggests that the division of student affairs and the office of the provost share the financial responsibility and costs involved with providing services for students with learning disabilities. Some of the most frequently requested services include: books on tape, the option to tape-record lectures, access to class notes, and testing in special locations as needed academic accommodations.

Students with learning disabilities may want to prepare themselves for college by bringing a copy of the most recent evaluation or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In order to receive services in college, students will need to provide this document or be re-evaluated in order to receive services. Secondly, students can help themselves by increasing their understanding of the nature of their learning disability before discussing their specific needs, early in the semester, with their professors (AHEAD, 2001b). In addition to "specially designated dollars," institutional commitment to students with learning disabilities means addressing requested accommodations in a timely manner. On many campuses, the division of student affairs is a key unit in the issue of institutional commitment because of the necessity of services from offices such as the Office for Students with Disabilities, Counseling Center, and Learning As-

Continued on page 5

Learning Disabilities, continued

sistance Center. Students with learning disabilities should be encouraged to use the campus resources available through these offices. The resources include academic tutorial assistance, peer support groups, study skills workshops, and developmental skills courses.

While increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities are enrolling in colleges and universities, many institutions are faced with the challenge of developing additional institutional support at a time when budgets are tight or being cut. Having students with learning disabilities on campus as well as developing strategies for integrating them into the campus community may be challenging to administration. A commitment from the administration to support the accommodations necessary for students with learning disabilities to be successful on campus is not optional; it is a legal requirement. Institutional commitment to provide for the varied needs of students with learning disabilities must come from the highest levels of the administrative body. Attitudes toward students with learning disabilities can be influenced by policies, procedures, and initiatives supported by both academic and student affairs divisions.

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First-Year Students Offer Advice to Parents

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Over the past 20 years, educators at colleges across the country have observed differences in parent-child relationships and experienced changes in parent-college interactions. Increasingly, colleges and universities are developing specialized programs to orient families to the college experience and to help them understand the types of challenges, opportunities, and changes their students will experience.

McDaniel College, a small, private liberal arts college in Westminster, MD, is one such institution that helps families feel connected right from the start. McDaniel offers a two-tier orientation process. *Transitions* is a one-day orientation program offered on four consecutive Fridays in May and June for incoming students and families. While students are taking placements tests, their parents are hearing about the importance of the college transition—of letting go and learning to communicate from a distance. Deans and directors from academic affairs and student affairs talk to the parents about some of the issues the students are likely to face during this transitional period.

The second stage of orientation takes place over four days in late August. On the first day, most students arrive on campus with their families. After moving into residence halls, families are invited to be guests of the College for lunch and then to attend programs planned especially for them. New students meet their peer mentors for the first time and prepare to process into Big Baker Chapel for the academic convocation.

At the same time, their younger brothers and sisters, ages 4 to14, are encouraged to attend "For Siblings Only"—a program designed by the residence life staff—to talk about the changes these siblings can expect at home. As a culminating activity at this session, siblings write letters or draw pictures for their brothers or sisters entering the College. These letters or pictures are taken to the McDaniel College post office for distribution to student mailboxes, and they become the first mailings received by new students.

Meanwhile, parents are invited to attend a concurrent information session. The dean of students and the associate dean of the First-Year Program talk about what changes to expect, and they make recommendations about how parents should communicate with the College and their first-year students. At this session, parents also hear words of advice from the previous year's first-year students. The advice focuses on the student's initial perception of the college and concrete actions parents can take to help their students. Student comments cover a wide range of themes, and their responses are funny and poignant. Some common themes include:

Communicating. Students found that communication sometimes improved with distance; at other times, it was strange and difficult as family members struggled to make their own transitions. No matter what, communication was seen as vitally important and gave students peace of mind. One student noted, "I'm closer to my family now than when I lived at home. It's like I understand now what all their lecturing was about."

Sending the right message. Students valued conversations with parents that affirmed the parents' belief in their ability to meet the challenges of college. But sending the right message is about striking a balance. Students want parents to help them develop financial responsibility, but they do not want to be nagged about their spending habits. They also appreciated opportunities to talk about their spiritual development and their futures. However, some students felt too much pres-

Continued page 6

Advice to Parents, continued

sure from parents who were "trying to decide what we want to do with the rest of our lives." Students advise parents to be supportive but not overly protective, patient, and willing to let their students make their own mistakes. It is clear that students still want and value their parents' involvement in their lives, but they also want parents to begin letting go.

Staying connected. While students want to find their independence, connections to home are important. They want parents to call, write letters, and send e-mails or cards. This communication is particularly important to students early on. They also want parents to visit—occasionally—to walk around campus, meet their new friends, watch sporting events, catch up on family news, and go shopping for their needs.

Coming home. The first visit home from college can be exciting and frustrating for both students and families. Students worry that they will come home to find all their stuff has been sold and their room converted to an office or guest room. They need reassurance that they are still a valued member of the family and suggest that a home-cooked meal, help with their laundry, and a little pampering will help them feel that way. Students also want family members to respect the new freedoms they have enjoyed at college by relaxing curfews.

How do parents react to this advice? As you might imagine, hearing from students touches them. They laugh. They cry. Many parents tell us they leave this program with a sense of confidence, knowing their children have joined a caring college community where families are valued. We also suspect that these words of wisdom continue to reverberate for families long after their students are tucked into this campus and they have begun their journeys back home.

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Engaging First-Year Students Through a Skills Perspective

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According to the CIRP Freshman Survey for fall 2003, more than 70% of first-year students list career preparation as very important for going to college. Yet, a focus on general education or liberal arts early in the college career may do more to promote the life of the mind than expertise in a career field. Students need to see their coursework and experiences during their college years, no matter how specialized, as helping them develop some clearly defined list of general professional skills.

One way to close the gap is through a focused emphasis on the general professional skills employers want their employees to have. I suggests 38 skills below (see page 7), but similar lists of skills are provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the Business and Higher Education Forum though an exact list of skills is not really important. What is important is a focus on skills.

The skills message can be added to other messages about learning for its own sake, exploring the self, and developing citizenship. All these messages can be simultaneously delivered through admissions, advising material, orientation, and first-year programs. They can be re-enforced by career services, student employment programs, and by those faculty willing to do so.

Colleges now provide students with the opportunity to learn career-related skills in both student and academic affairs. Athletics, student government, or Greek activities provide venues to develop the soft skills of teamwork, oral communications, and problem-solving as well as the more analytical skills of number crunching, information-gathering, and critical thinking.

With respect to academic programs, faculty need not change their curriculum or give up their commitment to learning as a primary educational goal. Most of these skills can be introduced in the liberal arts classroom, not just in professional programs. At a minimum, faculty can articulate these skills more clearly in the syllabi, in their class discussions, and assignments.

This is not to say that both student affairs and academic affairs do enough to increase general professional skills development. Student affairs programs could ask for more written reflection on activities and expect more professional behavior with respect to meeting deadlines and dealing with finances. Academic programs could identify career-related skills as one of the most important benefits of participating in class. To reinforce these benefits, faculty could permit more credit opportunities from internship and service-learning activities. Moreover, they could employ more active learning within the classroom and offer more applied courses in statistics and research.

A skills perspective says that a college education is not just 120 credits completed with a respectable GPA, but the total sum of experiences students have during their years in college. Students need to see that experiences outside of the classroom during the academic year and in the summer are a chance for them to develop the skills they begin to develop in their classes.

A skills perspective will guide first-year students as they select courses, student activities, internships, community service, and part-time jobs. It takes some of the pressure off choosing a major and the tradeoff between studying what they are interested in versus getting practical training for a specific job. A list of professional skills will serve as a beacon for first-year students who are confused and angry about the gap between their expectations and faculty expectations. It will show them that indeed their college experience can lead to a rewarding career.

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Skills for Any Professional Career

Establishing a Work Ethic
Be Pro-Active • Be Honest • Manage Your Time • Manage Your Money

Developing Physical Skills
Stay Well • Look Good • Type 35 WPM Error Free • Take Legible Notes

Communicating Verbally
Converse One-on-One • Present to Groups • Use Visual Displays

Communicating in Writing
Write Well • Edit and Proof • Use Word-Processing Tools • Send Information Electronically

Working Directly with People
Build Good Relationships • Work in Teams • Teach Others

Influencing People
Manage Efficiently • Sell Successfully • Be Diplomatic • Lead Effectively

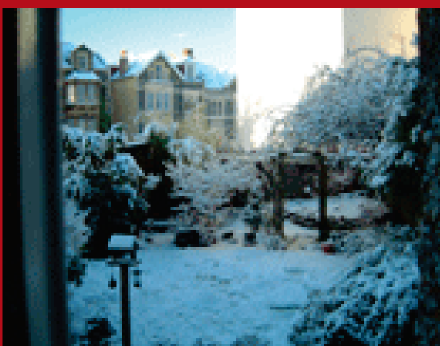
Gathering Information
Use Library Holdings • Use Commercial Databases • Search the Web • Conduct Interviews • Use Surveys • Keep and Use Records

Using Quantitative Tools
Use Numbers • Use Graphs and Tables • Use Spreadsheet Programs

Asking and Answering the Right Questions
Detect Inconsistency • Pay Attention to Detail • Apply Knowledge • Evaluate Actions and Policies

Solving Problems
Identify Problems • Develop Solutions • Launch Solutions

Based on William Coplin's *10 Things Employers Want You to Learn in College* (2003). Web page: http://www.genuinedogooder.com/10Skills%20-%20main.htm



Have a Wonderful Holiday Season and a Happy New Year!
from all of us at National Resource Center

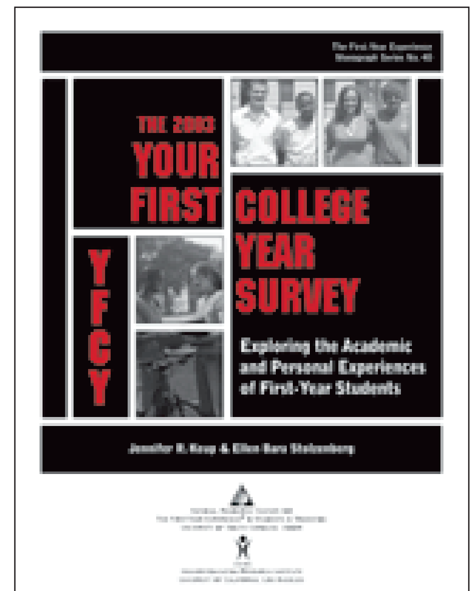
What's Happening at the Center?

Conferences

24th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 4-8, 2005, Phoenix, Arizona.

18th International Conference on The First-Year Experience, July 11-14, 2005, Southampton, England. Deadline for papers: March, 2005.

Publications



Monograph No. 40
The 2003 Your First-College Year (YFCY) Survey: Exploring the Academic and Personal Experiences of First-Year Students by Jennifer R. Keup and Ellen Bara Stolzenberg.

Keup and Stolzenberg report findings from a relatively new and unique instrument that paints a portrait of the cognitive and affective development of first-year students who entered college in fall 2002. The monograph includes a description of the first-year experience by key subgroups (commuter and residential populations are included) and provides an analysis of students' development over the course of the first year and offers strategies for using these findings to provide intentional, effective initiatives on individual campuses.

A Japanese Educator Shares the Experience of Her "First Year"

Yoshiko Kato
Appalachian State University

Yoshiko showing Japanese breathing exercise.

Yoshiko with Watuga first-year students on Turtle Island.

I came to the United States in July 2003 as a visiting professor from Japan to teach and conduct research on the first-year experience. My appointment is at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. In many ways, my first year in the U.S. has been like that of a first-year college student. Like many students, I find myself far away from friends and family. I have never lived outside of Japan, and my home and family are now thousands of miles away from where I live and work. When I arrived, I had no close friend at the college or in my neighborhood. Most important, I was living in an entirely different culture. I want to share with you the adventures and surprises of my "first year" and describe my journey to American sophomore status.

One of the things I discovered about American colleges is that they seek to facilitate individual development and educate students so that they are well-balanced people with both group and individual perspectives. Interestingly enough, this is exactly what Japanese colleges are hoping to do; however, the approach in Japan is very different.

What most struck me about Americans is their maturity as individuals. While some people were frustrated talking to me because English is not my first language, many people—including students—spoke clearly so that I could understand; asked good, non-threatening questions; and listened to me carefully and patiently. I noticed this in many situations, not just in conversations involving myself. Americans say precisely what they think and feel. They make themselves understood, listen to each other, and discuss issues respectfully. In Japan, people see more importance in a social or group harmony than in an individual freedom, and sometimes people cannot say what they really feel. This is particularly true for young women like myself.

But the maturity I observed in many Americans was not necessarily true of first-year college students. I had a very hard time in a first-year class, because it was extremely difficult for me to understand what the students were talking about. The teenagers' language is almost impossible to decipher, particularly when it is infused with a Southern dialect. When I asked my students to speak slowly and clearly, they did for a few minutes, but soon slipped back into their old speech habits. I was disappointed by my language ability, and some of my students suggested that I carry a dictionary with me or take an English class. I was also having problems teaching Japanese culture to the students. I needed help, but I did not know where to go or whom to ask for help. I knew had to begin whatever action would get me out of this situation, but this was difficult for me. In Japan, somebody would notice my problem and give me a helping hand before I had a chance to ask. While being assertive when you need help is a valuable trait in American culture, it is not expected in a group-oriented society. Thus, I thought my colleagues' failure to anticipate my needs and offer help might be a message of disapproval for my performance.

When I did receive help, my colleagues did not give me a prescription but simply backed me up. I received support, not solutions—something more common to individual than group-oriented societies. When I talked to some of my colleagues about my problems, they told me that my English was fine and that the communication problems were on the students' end. One colleague offered to serve as a guest speaker when I was scared to teach. Another introduced me to some interesting books and articles that helped in teaching the class. The faculty support center helped me develop classroom management strategies. No one ever said that it might have been my fault, which was a big surprise to me. Their support gave me confidence in myself as a teacher.

Through this incident, I learned that the maturity I admired in many Americans was the result of college education, in particular role modeling that helped them become better people. I encountered these problems in a class of all first-year students in the spring semester. I did not have these problems in the fall semester, because I was team-teaching and had the support of another instructor in the classroom with me. Also, the course I taught in the fall enrolled several upper-class students. They have a better sense of what they do not understand than first-year students and know how to ask questions to get the answers they need. In fact, these students often asked questions I had not thought of. Because they were more adept at assessing their knowledge and asking questions, the upper-class students in my classes served as a bridge between the first-year students and me. To serve as a bridge between different people, one has to ask questions and gain support. Thus, the upper-class students modeled an important and valuable skill for me and for the other students.

Education is a mirror of society, and different educational systems highlight the differences between cultures. For example, American higher education tends to value the development of strong individuals and future leaders, sometimes at the expense of teaching students how to work in groups. On the other hand, Japan is a nation with a strong sense of one-ness, and it needs more strong individuals to break the old traditions. For this reason, I see the value of the first-year seminar. It allows students to develop as individuals, but it also emphasizes community building and group work.

Japanese colleges have just begun designing first-year experience programs. I plan to spend another year in the US, attempting to customize this American program for the Japanese context. In particular, I am now looking for ways that Japanese college students can free themselves from their group identity to develop as individuals.

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What's Happening at the Center?

Teleconferences

You and your campus colleagues have maximum flexibility: You can choose to view one, two, or all three teleconferences or order videos of the broadcasts for viewing at other times.

Facilitating Transfer Student Success: Creating Effective Partnerships

March 3, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Frankie Santos Lanaan** - Assistant Professor of Higher Education, Iowa State University; **Mark Allen Poisel** - Associate Vice President for Academic Development and Retention, University of Central Florida; **Diane Savoca** - Coordinator of Student Transition, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley

Learning Communities: Pathways to Deep Learning and Campus Transformation

March 24, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Jean Henscheid** - Fellow, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, Managing Editor of *About Campus*; **Jean MacGregor** - Senior Scholar, Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education; **John Tagg** - Associate Professor, English, Palomar College, San Marcos, California.

First Encounters: Creating Purposeful Strategies to Engage New Students

April 21, 2005, 1:00 – 3:00 pm EST.

Panelists: **Peter Magolda** - Associate Professor, College Student Personnel, Miami University, Ohio; **Gail Mellow** - President, La Guardia Community College, New York; **Richard Mullendore** - Professor, College Student Affairs Administration, University of Georgia, former President of National Orientation Directors Association.

Research and Resource Development

As our name implies, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is constantly working to provide valuable resources to the higher education community. One area of recent focus has been assessment of the first college year. Our new assessment web page, announced over the Center's listserv and in the last issue of *E-Source*, recently received another update. To help readers conduct valid and effective course evaluations, we have added Joe Cuseo's comprehensive guide to successful classroom assessments. Visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/index.html to find our assessment resources.

Bringing back one of the most sought-after resources established for first-year students, the Center recently reinstated the invited essay series on the FYA-List. Jean Henscheid's October 5th essay offered insights from the National Learning Communities Project. During the first week of November, Heather Langdon and Joni Webb Petschauer of Appalachain State continued the learning communities theme with their essay "Seven Questions to Guide Learning Community Assessment." To view these essays or join the FYA-List and receive future essays in your mailbox, please visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/index2.html.

The Center's most active listserv, the FYE-List, has had lively discussions over the past few months. Recent topics have included college fairs, exit interviews, multiculturalism, math placement tests, and peer leaders. The variety of topics and the high quality of the postings make this list both interesting and valuable. Because so much information passes over the list each year, the Center recently began creating a categorized archive of list discussions. We have already pieced together discussions related to course scheduling, gender and FYE courses, library orientation, and online seminars. More topics will be added shortly. To explore the archive, visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/listserv/archives.html.

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