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## A Multiple case study of college first-year seminars

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A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE  
FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

by

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ABSTRACT

**A Multiple Case Study Of College First-Year Seminars**

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John N. Gardner in 1972 advocated a new concept called the first-year seminar to increase academic performance and retention for freshmen students. The term “first-year seminar” defined a fairly diverse instructional construct, but the goal was clear and focused. It was to improve student retention rates. Research trends indicated a positive and almost always statistically significant relationship between first-year seminar participation and college achievement and higher persistence rates. Existing studies reflected a variety of significant methodological issues. Also; few cross-institutional research studies were reported and far fewer considered the content of the construct called a first-year seminar. The purpose of this investigation was to address these shortfalls by defining the multiple dimensions of first-year seminars and a prescription for future success. Case study methodology was used to investigate the process aspects of

first-year seminar programs at three different institutional sites. The sites selected were research universities in the southeastern United States, the Rocky Mountains, and the southwestern United States. Results suggested that first-year seminar programs were very diverse across the three campuses. For example, two course designators were used to identify three different types of courses at the Rocky Mountain institution. Senior faculty members were the preferred instructors. The southeastern site had a dedicated management structure and course identifier, published the primary textbook, established well-defined instructional requirements, and hired the course's instructors from across the campus. These instructors were drawn predominately from the institution's professional staff. The southwestern institution's program rested upon the rise and fall of independent instructional efforts within several different Colleges. Instructors varied and ranged from graduate students to staff members to faculty. A multitude of reasons were identified for why a seminar should be established, but student retention was one of the least cited reasons. The evidence indicated the cases shared some inter-site and intra-site commonalities and differences in their expectations and courses. The cases emphasized, either directly or indirectly, one or more aspects associated with students' development of self-regulation. This emphasis on self-regulatory strategies suggests a different theoretical basis for first-year seminars. A first-year seminar model based on the social-cognitive perspective of self-regulation is proposed.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The American college student profile changed dramatically during the past 20 years. The percentage of high school graduates electing to attend colleges and universities grew from 40% to 63%. The attendance of minority students, first-generation students, students with jobs to cover college costs, and students who lack basic skills increased. Projections indicate continued growth by these populations until the end of the decade. However, the majority of these students, almost 60%, fail to complete their degrees within five years and nearly half of the students leave their initial institution during their first year of college (McGrath, 2004).

Today's student attrition problems are neither new nor unique. Tinto (1982) observed student dropout rates from higher education remained remarkably constant over the past 100 years at about 45%. Levitz and Noel (1989) noted:

Approximately one-third of each year's full-time entering freshmen are not at the same institution one year later....More than any other, the freshman year presents attrition hazards that institutions must counter....If students make it through that first year successfully, the chances that they will persist improve considerably....During the freshman year, an institution is presented with a window of opportunity for establishing a firm and positive relationship with the freshman—but that window is

narrow indeed. The freshman's most critical transition period occurs during the first two to six weeks. (p. 65)

John N. Gardner in 1972 pioneered a new concept to increase academic performance and freshman student retention at the University of South Carolina. This concept was called the first-year seminar. Ninety-four percent of America's accredited four-year colleges and university offered a first-year seminar to at least some students by 2002. Further, more than half of the institutions offered first-year seminars to at least 90% of their first year students (Porter & Swing 2006).

The term "first-year seminar" defines a fairly diverse instructional construct. A first-year seminar can be a required or elective course. It can be offered to all new students or to selected groups. Additionally, these courses vary widely in content, duration, structure, pedagogies, and credit value. However, even with these differences, all of these courses seek to promote academic performance, persistence, and degree completion (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The specific character of first-year seminars fluctuates depending upon the particular institution, but the courses' goal remains consistent. Research concerning first-year seminars has shown problematic, but consistent evidence. The trend leans towards a positive and almost always statistically significant relationship between first-year seminar participation and college achievement over a variety of time spans. Prior studies also point to a variety of other positive and statistically significant effects and higher persistence rates for participants of first-year seminars (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

This research trend is potentially misleading concerning the effectiveness of current first-year seminars. The existing studies of first-year seminars frequently reflect a variety

of significant methodological issues which call into question the results achieved by the studies. These issues range from using disproportionate group sizes for the control and experimental groups to using descriptive statistics as the basis for intimating causality. Further, Swing (2002) highlighted few cross-institutional research studies have been reported and far fewer have considered any of the broader implications associated with first-year seminars. Tinto (1982) contends no program to reduce attrition was more successful than the program's implementation and management within its institution. The basis for the instructional design and implementation of first-year seminars at each institution rests upon decisions made independently by that institution. This concept makes first-year seminars dependent on the lessons learned and retained in isolation by each institution when being considered as a national intervention to reduce student attrition.

### Purpose

The purpose of this project is to define for the reader the multiple dimensions of first-year seminars and to propose some thoughts that may improve the future success of these classes. The objective is to move beyond the perspective of academic performance, persistence, and degree completion goals when considering the specific character of first-year seminars. This effort uses qualitative methodology to define what program variables were encountered and how the design, implementation, and outcomes of first-year seminars compared with each other. Program variables are viewed from the perspectives of various participants involved with the courses at different institutions. The anticipated

result is a well defined prescription or direction for consideration by future first-year seminars (Merriam, 1998).

### Research Questions

The central question for this research was what should be the key components of a first-year seminar? The answer to this question flowed from the investigation of five principle questions.

1. What are the expectations of the first-year seminar from the perspective of various participant levels?
2. What conclusions can be drawn from the course content at each case study site?
3. What are the potential explanations based on the evidence?
4. How might first-year seminars be modified or maintained based on the observations, interpretations, and analysis of what is happening in each setting?

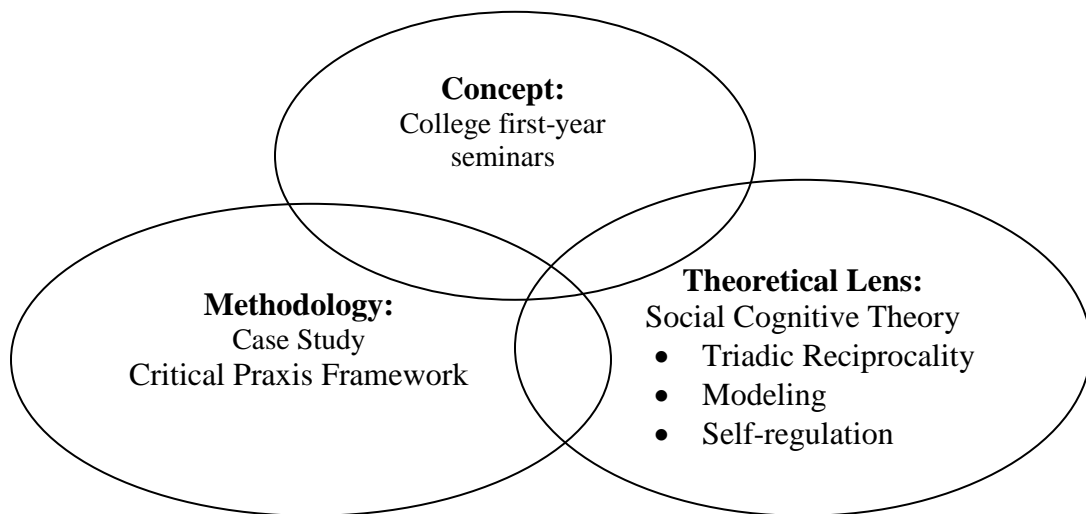
### Research Design and Theoretical Framework

Case study methodology was used to concentrate on the process aspects of the phenomenon. The cases chosen for investigation were the first-year seminar programs at three different institutional sites during 2008. The sites selected are research universities in the southeastern United States, the Rocky Mountains, and the southwestern United States.

Interviews, observations, and document analysis provided the basis for defining the context of the cases at each site. On-site investigations focused on observing what was happening at the site, conducting formal and informal interviews, and examining

documents and materials that related to each case. Emphasis was placed on the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations and subtle factors (Merriam, 1998).

The theoretical framework rests on three aspects: the concept of college first-year seminars proposed for study, the methodological approach used to orient the research, and the theoretical lens used to establish the analytical perspective (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Theoretical framework

This multiple case study uses a critical praxis framework (Wink & Putney, 2002; Putney, Wink & Perkins, 2006) to guide the over arching approach to case study methodology. This framework emphasizes three phases: NoteTaking, NoteMaking, and NoteRemaking. The questions what, why, and how are addressed during the

investigation's progression across the three phases (See Appendix A). Also, the critical praxis framework is complementary to the use of a systematic program evaluation perspective (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004).

Systematic program evaluation emphasizes the gathering and interpreting of information to address questions concerning a program's performance and effectiveness. Generally, evaluation questions focus on the need for the program and the program's conceptualization and design, implementation and operation, and outcomes and impact. This perspective defines the key components examined within the individual first-year seminar cases (see Appendix B).

A theoretical lens provides the focus for interpreting the significance of the data during cross-case analysis. Social cognitive theory was selected as the interpretive lens prior to the site visits. Three specific aspects have proven beneficial in interpreting the significance of the data. The first aspect is triadic reciprocity or the interactions that exist between three causal factors: behavior, environment, and the individual's cognitive and other personal factors. The second aspect is modeling or the vicarious capability gained by observing the actions performed by others. The third aspect is self-regulation or the thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and adapted in a cyclical manner to attain personal goals.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Student Changes in College

The conceptual foundations used to study college's effects on students have varied. The need to orient students to their new physical environment, social environment, and academic expectations was recognized early in the history of American higher education (Dwyer, 1989 and Brier, 1984). Current models, by and large, were related to the development or growth of adolescents and young adults. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) contended these models generally related to the theoretical frameworks associated with psychosocial theories, cognitive-structural development theories, or college impact models.

The psychosocial development perspective was drawn from the theoretical work of Erik Erikson. The dominant psychosocial based model in higher education was proposed by Chickering in 1969. Other prominent psychosocial based models have related to identity development either from a general perspective of late adolescent identity crisis (Marcia, 1966) or a specific dimension of identity such as psychosexual conflict and defenses (Josselson, 1973).

Erikson maintained all people share the same basic needs. Personal development occurred in response to these basic needs and depended upon the nurturing and encouragement provided by the social environment. He perceived that developing

individuals move through a series of eight psychosocial crises over the duration of their life span. Each crisis was present in one form or another throughout the individual's life, but had special significance during certain life cycle periods due to the interaction of biological and social forces. This interaction brought each crisis into prominence.

Erikson defined his eight crises stages as a continuum where each stage possessed positive and negative poles and each crisis built upon the previous ones. The initial crisis, called "trust versus mistrust," occurred during infancy and focused on the child establishing a sense of trust or security towards their caregivers. Succeeding crises occurred during early childhood ("autonomy versus shame and doubt"), the preschool years ("initiative versus guilt"), the early school years ("industry versus inferiority"), adolescence ("identity versus confusion" or "identity versus identity diffusion"), early adulthood ("intimacy versus isolation"), adulthood ("generativity versus stagnation"), and old or mature age ("integrity versus despair").

Resolving each crisis was a matter of tipping the positive or negative pole balance more in one direction than the other; however, no crisis was permanently resolved. Successful resolution of each challenge was facilitated by achieving a healthy resolution of previous crises stage challenges. Establishing a healthy sense of identity was more likely to result if the individual had already established a healthy sense of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Resolving the adolescent identity crisis was intertwined with the outcomes of previous childhood crises and impacted the approaches used in dealing with future adult challenges (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007 and Steinberg, 2002).

Erikson's perspective highlighted several basic concepts that served to promote the establishment of first-year seminars. These concepts related to all people sharing the same basic needs, the importance of a nurturing and supportive social environment, and the relationship of childhood crises to the successful resolution of an adolescent identity crisis. The concepts of resolving the adolescent identity crisis and social environment were further expanded and applied to higher education by Chickering in 1969.

Chickering's seven vector model was the dominant psychosocial based model in higher education. This model was later revised by Chickering and Reisser in 1993. Identity development served as the focal point for Chickering's model with the seven vectors providing specificity and definition for the developmental dynamics. The seven vectors initially proposed by Chickering (1969) were competence, emotions, autonomy, identity, interpersonal relationships, purpose, and integrity. He thought each of these seven vectors possessed major internal components and offered both direction and magnitude during identity development.

Competence was viewed as a three-tined pitchfork with intellectual competence as one tine, physical and manual skills as a second tine, and social and interpersonal competence as the third tine. The pitchfork handle represented the individuals' confidence in their ability to cope and succeed. Chickering proposed there were two major emotional impulses, aggression and sex, that needed to become controlled and integrated during identity development. Autonomy required emotional independence, coordinated coping behaviors to achieve personal and social ends, and recognition of the individual's interdependences.

Chickering thought identity development was partially dependent on, but went beyond the establishment of competence, emotions, and autonomy. Development of identity involved both conceptual clarification of physical needs, characteristics, and personal appearance, and clarification of sexual identity, roles, and behavior. This sense of identity subsequently freed interpersonal relationships through the development of tolerance for a wider range of people, greater trust, independence, and individuality. Development of purpose reflected increasing clarity and conviction concerning avocational and recreational interests, vocational plans and aspirations, and general life-style concerns. Finally, development of integrity offered clarification of an individual's personal set of relatively consistent beliefs and at least a tentative behavioral guide.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised and reordered the original seven vectors and their specifications based on research completed after the original model was presented. This revised model was proposed to be applicable for college students of all ages. This version suggested the rate of movement along any of the vectors could vary and was not necessarily stage like. Further, it was possible to move backward and retrace steps during the identity development process. Also, this revision supported the concept that first-year seminars should be targeted to both the needs of traditional and nontraditional students who were entering or transferring within higher education's institutions.

Cognitive-structural theories of student development originated from the theoretical work of Jean Piaget. Cognitive-structural theorist sought to explain the nature and processes of change from the perspective of the epistemological structures individuals use for construction of meaning. These theorists proposed series of predominately hierarchical stages that were transitioned by individuals during the development process.

Progression through these stages tended to be irreversible. These theorists focused on how meaning was structured rather than what was known or believed (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Historically the most influential of these theorist studying college students have been William Perry and Lawrence Kohlberg. William Perry sought to conceptually map the structures that college students used to construe the nature and origins of knowledge, value, and responsibility. He defined nine, positions to describe students' progression as they transition from a simplistic, categorical perspective to a more contingent view of knowledge and relative perspective of values. These positions were classified into three general categories: dualism, relativism, and commitment.

The first four positions Perry contended involved a dualistic perception dominated by an absolute orientation that was mirrored in the students' perceptions of knowledge, values, and people. Students perceive in position one that right answers exist for everything in an absolute manner. Authority (the teacher) possessed these answers and it was authority's role to teach these answers to students. Further, knowledge and "goodness" were sought after through hard work and obedience. Position two perceptions focused on the diversity of opinion and uncertainty encountered by students. Students accounted for these perceptions as unwarranted confusion and lack of qualification by authorities or forced attempts to make students find answers for themselves.

Position three was perceived to reflect students accepting diversity and uncertainty, but only in areas where authority had not found the answers. The standards used by authority to grade these areas are puzzling to students, but accepted. Finally, the student was proposed to recognize legitimate uncertainty and diversity of opinion in position 4.

This point promoted the concept that each individual has a right to their own opinions. Students' perceptions that authority's realm is dominated by a sense of right-wrong are replaced by more contextual, relativistic reasoning.

Individuals perceived both multiple points of view and the vagueness associated with defining "truth" during position five. All knowledge and values were viewed as contextual and relativistic in position five and concepts of right-wrong function in the context of "a special case." Perry's final four positions involved students refining their ability to function in a relative world and establish personal commitments. Position six highlighted the necessity for the student to use some form of personal commitment to orient themselves in a relativistic world. Students made an initial commitment in some area during position seven. Position eight reflected students' experience with the implications of commitment and the issues of responsibility. Finally, position nine reflected the affirmation of students' identity through responsibilities and commitment to activities that express their life styles (Perry, 1998; Zhang, 1995).

Perry's theory targeted tracing the development of college students' ways of making sense of their experiences. This theoretical framework offered an epistemological basis upon which to view first-year seminars. It was based on the concept that individual's forms of reasoning transcended their content domains and less adaptive forms of reasoning would be replaced by more adaptive forms of reasoning. This resulted in students moving from lower levels of reasoning to higher levels as they progressed through college. Also, Perry proposed that development of the individual's reasoning resulted from interaction between the person's expectancies and the college's environmental structure (Zhang, 1999).

Lawrence Kohlberg concentrated on moral development and the reasoning process used to make moral decisions. He contended advanced moral reasoning depended upon the development and use of advanced logical reasoning. He concluded all people progress through six stages in an established order, but at different rates during the development of moral reasoning. This theoretical framework offered a basis for viewing the development of logical and moral reasoning by college students as part of a first-year seminar and throughout the college development experience. Kohlberg described moral development from the perspective of three separate levels, each consisting of two stages.

Kohlberg's Level I, Preconventional Ethics, reflected an egocentric perspective focused on the moral consequences to the individual with the rules established by others. Kohlberg proposed this was the level of most children under age nine, some adolescents, and many adult and adolescent criminal offenders. These individuals have not reached the point at which they understand and can uphold society's rules, conventions, and expectations.

The two stages associated with Level I were the Heteronomous Morality and the Individualism, Instrumental Purpose, and Exchange stages. The Heteronomous Morality stage was characterized by an individual avoiding the breaking of rules in order to avoid punishment by authorities with superior power. The Individualism, Instrumental Purpose, and Exchange stage was characterized by achieving one's own needs or interests by recognizing that other people have their own interests, too. The concept of right is defined in terms of achieving one's own interests and needs, while letting others do the same thing.

Level II, Conventional Ethics, reflected a desire to conform to the rules and societal conventions defined by others. Most adults and adolescents were expected to achieve and function on this level. Kohlberg contended that the term “conventional” referred to conforming to and abiding by the rules, conventions, and expectations of society just because they are society’s rules, conventions, and expectations. This level contained the Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity and the Social System and Conscience stages.

The Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Interpersonal Conformity stage was based on the need to be viewed, internally and externally, as a “good person.” This stage is predicated on the desire to maintain rules and authority in support of stereotypical concepts of “good behavior.” The Social System and Conscience stage concentrated on keeping institutions going as a whole by fulfill duties to which you have agreed. This stage promoted that laws are to be upheld, except in extreme cases where they clash with other social duties. Defined obligations should be met to avoid a breakdown of the system.

Kohlberg proposed Level III, Postconventional Ethics, was achieved by a relatively small percentage of the population and focused on the concepts underlying society’s rules. This level is usually reached only after the age of 20 years old. The stages associated with this level were Social Contract, where rules and laws are abided unless changed to better meet society’s needs, and Universal Ethical Principles, where ethics and general societal principles were defined (Kohlberg, 1984).

More recent proposed cognitive-structural models include King and Kitchener’s reflective judgment model. Like Perry’s work, this theoretical framework offered an



epistemological basis upon which to view the college experience and first-year seminars. King and Kitchener based their seven stage model upon how people justify their beliefs when faced with complex problems. Each stage of the model built on the skills from the previous stage and laid the groundwork for the next stage. The higher stages were progressively more complex, differentiated and abstract.

King and Kitchener labeled the reasoning for stages one, two, and three of the model as pre-reflective thinking. Stage one was characterized by its “concrete, single-category belief system.” The thinking in this stage was the embodiment of cognitive simplicity. Stage two flowed from the belief that a true, absolute reality could be know, but not known by everyone. Knowing in stage three rests on the belief that concrete truth, knowledge, and evidence exist, but are bound by the situation in which they exist.

The reasoning related to stages four and five was labeled “Quasi-reflective.” Assumptions associated with these stages were derived from ill defined problems and the knowledge gained contained a degree of uncertainty. Students used evidence, but had difficulty drawing reasoned conclusions to justify their conclusions or beliefs. Stage four marked the emergence of knowledge as an abstraction, not just a concrete instance or event. A major development was the recognition that in some areas knowledge would never be certain. Stage five was distinguished by the belief that while knowledge might not be certain, it could be known within a context based on subjective interpretation of the evidence.

The term “reflective was used to describe the reasoning associated with stages six and seven. Those who attained these stages argued that knowledge was not a “given,” but was actively constructed and understood in relationship to the context in which it was

generated. Judgments were required to be grounded in relevant data, but conclusions were open to reevaluation. Stage six reflected the belief that knowing was a process that required action by the knower to overcome the inadequacy of strictly contextual and subjective knowledge. Stage seven was where epistemically justified conjectures about problems under consideration were derived from the interpretation of evidence and opinion (King & Kitchener, 1994).

College impact models were less specific than the theories of individual development and focused more on the origins and processes of change within the college experience. One of the first and most durable of the impact models was Astin's input-environment-outcomes (I-E-O) model. This model provided a conceptual and methodological framework with which to study the effects associated with college (Astin, 2003, 1993). College results were seen from the perspective of three groupings of elements: 1) inputs: the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds, and academic and social backgrounds students bring to college; 2) environment: the range of people, programs, policies, cultures, and experiences encountered by college students; and 3) outcomes: the student characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills that exist following the college experience. The inputs that students brought with them to college were presumed to be directly and indirectly impacted by the students' engagement with the institution's environment.

The I-E-O model was designed to support investigation of naturally occurring variations in college and university environmental conditions. It was intended to approximate the methodological benefits of true experiments through the use of longitudinal data base(s) and multivariate statistical analysis (Astin, 2002). Astin

proposed cross-tabulation and regression could be used to implement the I-E-O model for causal analyses. Three variables, one each for input, environment, and output, were required to apply the I-E-O model using cross-tabulation. Large numbers of variable could be controlled using multiple regression analysis. This approach was proposed so an investigator could use two or more independent (input) measures to predict a dependent (outcome) measure. Astin (2003) gave an extensive explanation of how to apply his analysis in chapters 3 and in the Appendix based upon what the questions were that an institution wanted to investigate. Pedhazur (1997) noted the questionable meaningfulness associated with some of these techniques and that the results raised questions.

The rationale for Astin's investigative approach was to avoid the limitations associated with experimental designs and make it possible to consider the effects of multiple environmental variables simultaneous. The belief was that this would improve understanding concerning the conditions under which certain educational environments and practices would be most effective. Studies based on this model sought to explain the impact of environmental influences on student change or growth by concentrating on the factors controlled by the institution.

Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure was similar to Astin's I-E-O model in terms of underlying dynamics. His model had an underlying dynamic based on students' integration into the academic and social system of an academic institution. His areas of interest were predominately the influence placed on students by other students, faculty, family, and non-college peers. However, Tinto's model was designed to explain the process of college student withdrawal and served as a more explicit, longitudinal, and

interactional model. Tinto's theoretical perspective reflected predominately a sociological orientation (Tinto, 1975, 1987).

The general causal model for assessing the effects of differential environments on student learning and cognitive development was proposed by Pascarella. This causal model was based on consideration of both an institution's structural characteristics and environmental aspects. Pascarella proposed growth was a function of the direct and indirect effects of six groups of elements: structural/organizational characteristics of institutions, student background/precollege traits, institutional environment, interaction with agents of socialization, quality of student effort, and learning and cognitive development. This model was initially designed to explain changes in students' learning and cognitive development; however, it evolved to include the examination of other student outcomes (Pascarella, 1985).

#### Student Retention: An Institutional Mandate

American institutions of higher education have stressed that retaining students was a major problem since the 1980s. Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2005) highlighted that the average American, four-year college or university was losing a quarter of its new students before the start of the students' second year. The average freshman retention rate in 1996 was 75% (Lau, 2003). Further, Lau (2003) noted colleges with higher freshman retention rates were more likely to have a greater percentage of students graduating within four years. The first year of college was viewed as a critical time not only to students' learning, but as the foundation upon which future academic success and persistence rested.

During a six year period, only 55% of the students who began a bachelor's degree program at a four-year institution were expected to complete their degree at the same university or college (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo 2005). The average four-year graduation rate was 38% in 1995, while the five-year graduation rate was 50% and the six-year rate was 54% (Lau, 2003) Additionally, Zea, Reisen, Beil, and Caplan (1997) noted that African American, Latino, and American Indian students increased their enrollments to 14% in four-year colleges and universities over the period from 1982 to 1992. However, only 10% of those students who graduated in 1992 were African American, Latino, or American Indian. Non-White groups have consistently shown higher attrition rates than Whites.

Literature concerning higher education's dropouts was extensive in 1975 when Tinto noted much of the research failed to distinguish between those leaving due to academic failures and those who voluntarily withdrew. Recent emphasis on student retention assumed new meaning when consideration was given to the fact that the rate of student dropout from higher education has remained constant at about 45% over the past 100 years (Tinto, 1982). Barefoot (2004) noted that high drop-out rates were frequently considered an indicator of institutional status during the 1950s and 1960's, but the concept changed dramatically with the Federal Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1991.

This law mandated that institutions disclose information concerning their completion or graduation rate to current and prospective students (Astin, 1997). The intent was to make useful information available to students who were attempting to make decisions about where to attend college. Inherent in this legislation was the concept that the higher

the retention rate, the better the institution of learning. Prospective students were urged to avoid institutions with low retention rates and seek institutions with high rates.

Attempts to recognize dropout potential and improve institutional student retention rates were well established prior to the Federal Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1991. The research indicated student departures during college happened for a variety of reasons. The key predictor of student persistence was learning and the value students found in their learning. The inability to learn or difficulties in learning were crucial factors in students' decisions to leave college. Current research has identified seven major reasons for student to withdraw from college: academic difficulty, adjustment difficulties, goals, commitments, finances, fit, and involvement (Tinto, 2006).

Academic difficulty reflected that students were either unable or unwilling to achieve minimal academic standards at an institution. These departures resulted from predominately either a lack of academic skills or poor study habits. Departures due to academic reasons reflected 30% to 35% of the institutional departures national.

Adjustment difficulties reflected problems transitioning from secondary school to the demands of college. These difficulties frequently reflected feelings of awkwardness among strangers, difficulty dealing with other new students, lack of preparation for the diversity others represented, and marked differences in backgrounds. The more demanding academic work and diverse social requirements associated with college were seen as difficult and led to an early withdrawal from college. These attritions often occurred during the initial six weeks of the first semester.

Many students entered college with only a vague concept of why they had done so and possessed either ill defined or limited goals. Entering students differ in the degree of

clarity and intensity associated with their purpose for attending college. Undergraduates frequently experienced uncertain career goals, possessed narrow or limited goals, or viewed their institution as a “stepping stone” for transfer to another school. This lack of defined direction undermined students’ motivation to do the work required to remain in college. Likewise, some students altered their goals over time and either pursued multiple career options or sought enrollment in other institutions

Completion of a baccalaureate degree required a significant level of commitment and some students were unwilling to expend the required effort. These students often had the ability to perform the academic work, but lacked the personal commitment or faced external commitments that pulled them away from college. The majority of students departing due to commitment frequently became “stop-outs” from the academic process not “drop-outs.” Those who stopped-out were known frequently to return to college later if the opportunity existed and external circumstances changed; however, drop-outs rarely returned to the academic environment.

Students faced financial crises and discovered they simply could not afford to stay in college. More than a few students found they were unable to endure the direct and indirect costs of attending college or their financial needs changed. This was especially true for those from low-income, working class, or disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of these individuals would continue working towards degrees on a part-time basis or return to college at a later time. Others elected to leave and never return. However, institutional research has been known to overstate the importance of finances as the basis for students’ decisions to leave college through the use of exit interviews or surveys. The term

finances has sometimes reflected less the cost associated with attending college than with the perceived value associated with what a student was receiving.

The issue of “fit” reflected the level of social and/or academic congruence that existed between the individual student and the institution. Some individuals left because they found they were socially bored or intellectually unchallenged by their current institution and wanted to pursue a more demanding environment. These people usually transferred from their current institution rather than withdraw from higher education.

Some students left their institutions because they felt socially isolated. These individuals expressed that they did not believe they had made significant interpersonal connections or identification with the institution. This need for feeling involved was repeatedly highlighted in the research as the single most important predictor of student persistence, especially during the first year of college.

Many colleges and universities established a variety of retention programs in response to student departures. Retention programs expanded over the years to include improved student advising, expanded orientation courses, tutoring and developmental education efforts, peer mentoring, new residence hall arrangements, and freshman seminars (Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989). Tinto (2006) contended the basis for successful student retention rested in providing better education during the students’ first year. Better education would be predicated on faculty becoming more actively involved in retention efforts and retention programs emphasizing initiatives that changed the daily academic experience of students. Students had to become keenly involved in their college learning from the first month or they would remain reluctant to remain.



## College First-Year Seminars: A Long-Standing Intervention

Historically, freshman courses were referred to as “orientation courses.” These courses evolved from the need to assist freshmen in adjusting to the college environment and higher education’s “counseling movement” (Gordon, 1989). John N. Gardner in 1972 advocated a new concept at the University of South Carolina to increase academic performance and retention for freshmen students. This concept was called the first-year seminar.

This intervention became a mainstay and was offered in some form at over 90% of the American colleges and universities by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The specific nature of these courses varied based upon the institution where the course was taught, but the goal remained to improve student retention rates (Barefoot, 2004). Debated issues associated with these seminars include what the course should contain, who should teach it, how to train instructors, whether students should be used as peer facilitators, whether academic credit should be awarded and how much credit, how to market the course to students, and what should be the involvement of faculty and student services personnel (Gordon, 1989; Cohen & Jody, 1978; Jewler, 1989; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; Gardner, 1989; and Siegel, 1989).

The First-Year Initiative benchmarking study conducted by the Policy Center on the First Year of College at the University of South Carolina in 2001 yielded several key findings concerning first-year seminars based on a large cross-institutional database (Swing, August-September 2002). Overall, the survey results indicated more contact hours tended to produce more learning outcomes than would fewer contact hours, seminars that used a major or academic department orientation (discipline-based) were

less effective than those that used a transition or interdisciplinary theme, and elective courses produced more learning outcomes than mandatory seminars. Likewise, seminars linked to other courses produced greater learning than did independent first-year seminars. Similarly, the use of undergraduate teaching assistants resulted in more learning outcomes except in critical thinking and academic skills.

Porter and Swing (2006) conducted a cross-institutional study to isolate the impact of various aspects of first-year seminars on persistence. A multilevel modeling approach was used to model the intent to persist for almost 20,000 first-year students at 45 four-year institutions. Five measures of learning outcomes in transition-themed first-year seminars were used to investigate the impact on the intent to persist. Two of the five measures, study skills and academic engagement and health education, were found to have a substantial impact on students' early intention to persist.

First-year seminar research has relied predominately on single institution studies. Most of these studies were designed to identify students who participated in a seminar course. The studies then investigated the students' retention or grade performance during the remainder of their first year or their sophomore year. Scherer (1981) investigated whether the two-credit elective course at Bowling Green State University positively affected the retention rate for students who took the course by helping them make a successful transition. The basis for determining whether a successful transition took place was if the student remained enrolled one or two years after completing the course. The retention rates for students completing the course were compared with the attrition rates for their freshman class as a whole. There were no matched comparisons to establish a control group in this study. The researchers concluded it appeared students who took the

course made a successful transition and tended to have a better retention rate than students in general.

Strumph and Hunt (1993) conducted a study designed to control for the effect of motivation at the University of Maryland at College Park. Students who indicated equivalent motivation for enrolling in a freshman orientation course were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. Study results suggested participation in a freshman orientation had a significant and long-term impact on retention and good academic standing for students.

Simmons, Wallins, and George (1995) studied the effects of an evolving freshman seminar on at-risk students (under-, over-, and low achievers) from 1989 to 1991. The researchers sought to refine their understanding of the students' needs by establishing the three groups of at-risk students and comparing each group to a control group. The control group was selected based on entrance test scores and high school grade point averages for freshmen entering in 1989. The control groups and at-risk student seminar groups were comprised of disproportionate group sizes. The underachieving group, for instance, contained 65 seminar attendees and 283 control subjects versus the low achieving group with 202 seminar attendees and 652 in the control population. Content of the seminar and delivery methods were assessed and altered based upon the course's performance on more than one occasion during the three year period.

Blackhurst (1995) investigated the relationship between gender and students' psychosocial development during the first semester of college. This investigation also considered the effect of gender on the mentoring relationship between students and their first-year seminar instructors. Results indicated a female seminar instructor did not

contribute significantly to the development of purpose or autonomy by female students. However, interaction between the student sex and instructor sex appeared to influence the development of mature relationships in male students. The researchers concluded it appeared that the need existed to continue investigating the relationship between cognitive and affective outcomes in freshman seminar courses.

Fidler and Moore (1996) investigated the effects of living on campus and participation in a freshman orientation seminar on freshman dropout rates from 1986 to 1993. The freshman dropout rate was defined as the percentage of students not returning for the sophomore year. Findings indicated both of the two factors independently reduced the freshman dropout rate. The percentage of freshman dropouts resulting from not living on campus (7.8%) exceeded the percentage of those resulting from not taking the freshman seminar (4.1%). The results showed the lowest average dropout rate for the eight years (14.4%) occurred when both campus residence and seminar participation were examined together. The researchers concluded students who took the seminar and lived on campus had the lowest dropout rates and those who did neither had the highest rates. The researchers proposed each of the two variables had elements that should lessen the chance of students leaving college, but also acknowledged the associations noted during the study did not prove causality.

Hyers and Joslin (1998) investigated the relationship between high school ranking, SAT scores, GPAs earned in college, and achievement in the first-year seminar at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Results indicated SAT scores correlated weakly with high school ranking and college GPA, but not with first-year seminar grades or

persistence. The researchers concluded first-year seminar grades were a useful surrogate for many cognitive and noncognitive variables which may correlate with retention.

Dick (1998) and Evenbeck and Borden (2001) considered the success of the first-year seminar courses at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis following implementation of first-year seminars in the 1980s. Their results indicated seminar participation results in greater retention and a higher percentage of high grades than was achieved by non-participants.

Starke, Harth, and Sirianni (2001) used multiple assessment measures to follow the progress of eight student groups exposed to a first-year seminar between 1986 and 1993 and compared their experience to those of students who did not take the course. The data indicated that students who participated in the first-year seminar did significantly better on measures of retention and graduation rates; academic performance; satisfaction with their college experience; interaction with the faculty; investment in extracurricular activities; and a host of academic, personal, and social skills than did students who did not take the seminar. Enrollment and grade from the first-year seminar were found, among the nine variables analyzed, to explain the greatest amount of variation in the students' grade point averages.

Dooris and Blood (2001) and Crissman (2001-2002) studied the impact of institution-wide first year seminars at Pennsylvania State University. The objectives of the first-year seminar were to encourage rapid learning, establishment of a scholarly community, and adjustment to the expectations and demands of college. The requirement to attend the course was universal for all freshmen, but colleges, departments, and each campus had the latitude to determine the courses' content and structure. The impact and outcomes of

the first-year seminar program was assessed by Dooris and Blood using student and faculty focus groups and student surveys. Results indicated the university should continue to offer first-year seminars. Crissman concentrated on the retention rate impact achieved by clustering a first-year seminar with an English composition course. Results showed no significant difference between first-years seminars that were clustered and nonclustered.

A recurring criticism concerning first-year seminars is the lack of longitudinal studies. Of the few longitudinal studies performed, a *post facto* study was conducted using matched student groups at the University of South Florida (Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994). Students were matched based on race, sex, high school academic record, admission test scores, admission status, and university major. Students admitted between 1987 and 1990 were compared in 1991. Findings showed seminar participants performed better than non-participants in terms of retention and academic performance, but there was no statistically significant difference in graduation rates. The researchers recommended further research be conducted to determine why the positive relationships existed between completion of the freshman course and the academic performance and retention of course participants.

Shanley and Witten (1990) and Fidler (1991) produced detailed, comprehensive studies regarding students enrolled at the University of South Carolina. Unfortunately, both of these studies compared the performance records for students who completed the first-year seminar with data representing all students who did not enroll in the seminar. There were no matched student comparisons. The results of Shanley and Witten's exploratory study confirmed the existence of a "strongly positive association" between successful completion of the first-year seminar and increased retention, persistence, and

graduation rates for the institution. Fidler's results indicated process and content variables were more likely than input variables to account for the higher return rates of first-year seminar participants.

Davis (1992) conducted a longitudinal retention study involving the freshman classes of 1984, 1985, and 1986. Students, who completed the first-year seminar, were the experimental group for each year. Students, who did not enroll in the first-year seminar, were the control group. The researcher elected to reduce the control group "to a more manageable number" by "systematically" selecting every third student from the institutional database. No effort was made to match significant characteristics of the control group (i.e., gender, high school grades, national test scores, etc.) with the characteristics of the experimental group. The researchers introduced the potential that differences that were attributed to the dependent variable, the first year seminar, were actually due to significant differences in the characteristics associated with the make-up of the two groups.

Williford, Chapman, and Kahrig (2000-2001) investigated the relationship between participation in a first-year seminar and student performance, retention, and graduation. Participants selected for the study were first-year students from the ten entering classes between 1986 and 1995. These participants were divided into two groups, those who took the first-year seminar and those who did not take the seminar course. Participants who took the first-year seminar represented approximately 13% of the total participants. Results showed the first to second year retention rates for seminar participants was higher in seven of the ten years than the retention rate for non-participants. Also, the end-of-year

GPA for participants was higher than the GPA for the general population even though the ACT scores and high school ranks were lower for course participants.

Schnell and Doetkott (2002-2003) used institutional database searches and identified students who entered the institution during the 1991 through 1994 fall terms. A list of students, who participated in the first-year seminar each year, was generated on the basis of descending ACT scores, high school class rank, size of graduating high school class, and academic major. This list was matched to a second list of students, who had not attended the seminar, on the basis of the same four criteria to establish a matched cohort for each of the four years. The study used group membership (seminar attendees and matched comparison group), gender, ACT composite scores, high school rank, and high school class size as independent variables. The dependent variable was retention or continuous enrollment. Chi-square analysis was used to determine retention rates were significantly greater for students in the seminar group than those in the comparison group.

The existing research reinforced the belief that first-year seminars not only contributed to, but caused student retention and advancement, despite methodological limitations. This belief in the impact of first-year seminars contributed to over 90% of the colleges and universities offering some form of first-year seminar. However, Lau (2003) noted the average five-year graduation rate was 50% and six-year rate was 54%. These facts indicated a need to also consider first-year seminars from the perspective of the learner.



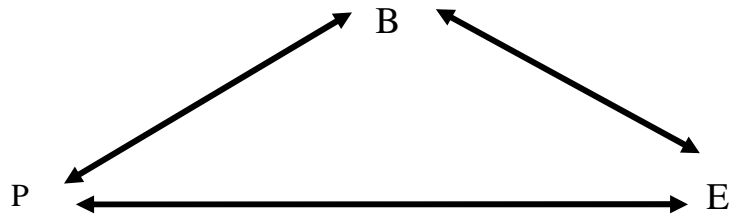
## A Different Conceptual and Theoretical Orientation

Simpson, Hynd, Nist, and Burrell (1997) proposed academic assistance programs, such as first-year seminars, flourish for a variety of reasons, but emphasized that college students, particularly freshmen, were not self-regulated learners. The lack of self-regulation reduced the learners' ability to activate and sustain cognitions, behaviors, and affects oriented towards attaining goals (Zimmerman, 1986; Shunk & Zimmerman 1997). Academic processes impacted by this lack of self-regulation include time management; monitoring and concentrating on instruction; strategically organizing, rehearsing, and coding information; establishment of a productive work environment; and effective use of social resources. Students' motivational processes impacted by a lack of self-regulation include setting performance goals and outcomes; establishing positive self-beliefs; valuing learning and its expected outcomes; and experiencing constructive affects in response to one's efforts (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Pintrich (2004 & 2005) observed that a multitude of self-regulation models existed, but they shared four common assumptions. The first assumption was that learners actively construct "their own meanings, goals, and strategies" from both information in the external environment and the individual's own mind. The second assumption was that learners have the potential to "monitor, control, and regulate certain aspects of their own cognition, motivation, and behavior" as well as aspects of their environments. This did not assume that learner control was possible at all times or in all contexts, just that such control was possible. The third assumption was that learners set goals or standards, monitor their progress toward them, and make changes as necessary to reach their goals. The final assumption was that individuals' self-regulation of cognition, motivation, and

behavior mediates the relationship between the individual, classroom learning context, and eventual achievement.

Zimmerman (1986, 1989, 1994) contended that self regulation reflected the degree to which students were metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own process of learning. The basis for this contention, Bandura's social cognitive theory, highlighted the interaction of the student's intentions, the context of learning, and demonstrated behavior. Social cognitive theory proposed behavior (B), individual's cognitive and other personal factors (P), and environmental influences (E) interact and serve as determinants for each other. Bandura (1986) defined each of these determinants as a causal factor that interacts with the others determinants. The three determinants served as the basis for a triadic relationship and mutual or reciprocal interactions existed between the three causal factors (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* “Schematization of the relations between the three classes of determinants in triadic reciprocal causation” from SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF THOUGHT & ACTION: A SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY by Albert Bandura, copyright © 1986 by Prentice Hall, Inc. Used by permission of Prentice Hall, Inc.

Reciprocity did not mean simultaneous influence or that there was equivalency in the strength of the bidirectional influences of the three determinants. The influence exerted by the determinants varied for different activities, individuals, and circumstances. However, the development and activation of the three determinants was generally based upon the concept of interdependence (Bandura, 1986).

Environmental conditions could emerge as an overriding determinant when exerting constraints on behavior (Bandura, 1986). However, Bandura contented the “practice of searching for the ultimate environmental cause of behavior” was a pointless exercise. Environments were not viewed by Bandura as a fixed property that imposed upon individuals. An environment was inoperative until actualized by appropriate action. This meant a professor’s lectures could not influence students unless the students attended the classes or textbooks would not affect students unless students selected and read them (Bandura, 1997).

Personal factors could be the predominant determinant when situational constraints were weak. An individual’s preferences or beliefs could act as the predominate influence. What people thought, believed, and felt impacted how they behaved (Bandura, 1986). Archer, Cantwell and Bourke (1999) noted that students who maintained a fixed approach to all of their academic work, even when they knew the approach was not a good one, did not perform as well as other students.

Self-regulation required not only the behavioral skills to manage environmental contingencies, but also the knowledge and sense of personal agency, or belief that an individual possessed the ability to produce results, to use the skill in relevant contexts. The concept of self-regulation encompassed the thoughts, feelings, and actions that are

planned and adapted in a cyclical manner to attain personal goals. Self-regulatory process and the beliefs that accompany them fall into three phases. These cyclical phases began with forethought, where the processes laid the ground work for action. They cycle then progressed to performance or volition, where action occurred. The cycle ended with self-reflection, where the person considered what had occurred and used it to influence future forethoughts (Zimmerman, 2005). This cyclical process produced goal-directed activities that were started, modified, and sustained by students. Students were viewed not as passive recipients of information, but as the ones who exercise control over their goal attainments (Shunk, 2001).

Forethought contained two closely related concepts: task analysis and strategic planning. Task analysis focused on goal setting and strategic planning. Goal setting was based on the establishment of desired future events that then fostered the behavior most likely to result in the realization of those events (Bandura, 1986). Goals reflected the intention to achieve a specific proficiency standard, based upon process and product within a specified time limit, and were subject to self-monitoring (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997, 1999). Individuals, who were highly self-regulated, tended to have hierarchically organized goal systems in which process goals served as proximal regulators for more distal outcome goals (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986, 1988, 1990). The goal's effect could also depend upon whether it was denoted as a learning or as a performance outcome (Ames, 1992)

Zimmerman (1989) proposed self-regulated strategies were intentional personal processes and actions targeted at either acquiring or displaying skills. Weinstein, Husman, and Dierking (2005) contended learning strategies should include any thoughts,

behaviors, beliefs, or emotions that resulted in the acquisition, understanding or subsequent transfer of new knowledge and skills. Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) noted cognitive strategies used without the simultaneous use of self-regulatory strategies were not conducive to academic performance. Hattie, Biggs, and Purdue (1996) sought to identify the features of study skill interventions that were most likely to lead to students' success. They considered interventions that focused on task-related skills, self-management of learning, or such affective components as motivation and self-concept.

The research of Hattie et al. (1996) revealed most intervention will work the majority of the time. Typical study skills packages were not as effective as metacognitive and contextual interventions, but worked better for younger students and marginally so for college students. They contended it was difficult to change students' acquired study skills and older students were more resistant to change.

Adults and university students demonstrated less impact on their performance outcomes and greater results on their affect from the intervention. Affective changes related either to students' attitudes towards learning or a reduction of anxiety. Students had more positive attitudes towards their studies, but those attitudes did not necessarily translate into performance outcomes. Efforts to improve learning by manipulating study skills often failed to consider the interaction between the students' intentions and the context of the learning. These findings tended to confirm that no self-regulatory strategy would work equally well for all individuals and few would work optimally for any single individual on all tasks or occasions (Zimmerman, 2005).

A second major component of forethought was self-motivational beliefs. Social cognitive theory proposed self-regulatory skills was useless unless an individual

motivated themselves to use the skills. Two key self-motivating beliefs proposed were self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy focused on the individual's belief that they possessed the means to learn or perform effectively (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs impacted such regulatory processes as learning strategies, time management, resisting adverse peer pressures, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and goal setting (Zimmerman, 2005). Outcome expectations were viewed as beliefs about the relationship between actions an individual took and the outcomes achieved, not personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These anticipated consequences of an action or the outcome expectation was influential because people engage in activities they believed would lead to positive outcomes or a perceived value (Shunk & Ertmer, 2005).

Performance or volitional control processes were the second phase in the cyclical self-regulatory process. The two key aspects of this phase were self-control and self-instruction. The self control process was targeted at helping learners or performers focus on a specific task in order to optimize their efforts. A student's self-observation involved tracking specific aspects of their performance, the conditions associated with that performance, and the effects produced (Zimmerman, 2005).

The self-reflection phase emphasized two processes: self-judgment and self-reactions (Bandura, 1986). Self-judgment was evaluating your own performance and attributing causal significance to the results you achieved. Self-evaluation involved comparing your self-monitored information against a standard or goal. The four distinct criteria used for self-evaluation include mastery, prior performances, normative performance, and a collaborative criterion (Zimmerman, 2005).

Bandura (1986, 1997) contended an individual's perception of themselves and the world around them developed through four different processes: direct experience, vicarious experience based on actions taken by another person, the judgments voiced by others, and derivation of knowledge from what was already known by using the rules of inference. Social cognitive theory has contended modeling, or the observation of others, was a central component in how human behavior was learned.

Social learning was promoted by observing others' performances and the consequences associated with those performances. Observers gained new cognitive skills and behavioral patterns by observing the actions performed by others. Modeling was a source of the concepts and rules needed to generate new or different forms of behavior with which to address different purposes and circumstances. Modeling was acknowledged as one of the most significant contributors to the transmission of values, attitudes, and thought and behavior patterns.

Modeling could either strengthen or weaken previously learned behavioral inhibitions. The types of models presented in an environment partly determined which behavioral qualities were implemented. Models not only served as prompts for behaviors, but also drew the observers' attention to objects and environmental settings. The rate and level of observational learning an individual engaged in was impacted by the prominence, discriminability, and complexity of the modeled activities. Likewise, the influences of modeling changed quickly and reliably when adjusted for the cognitive abilities of observers (Bandura, 1986).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### Selection of Site and Participants

The sites selected for this study were a southeastern university with very high research activity, a Rocky Mountain university with very high research activity, and a southwestern university with high research activity. The research university in the southeastern United States was the birth place for one of the longest lasting and best known first-year seminar programs in the United States (Jewler, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This program evolved from the campus unrest of the 1970s. The program's maturation led to affiliation with the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition on the university's campus.

The research university in the Rocky Mountains of the United States initiated an institution-wide effort in 2005 to enhance its student retention resulting in a revamping and realignment of its first-year seminars. Emphasis was placed on assessing current first-year seminar models, evaluating alternative models, and investigating how seminars could be strengthened and expanded to serve more students. This university also possessed similar institutional and case characteristics that appeared to make it a viable bridge between the southeastern and southwestern case study sites. The research university in the southwestern United States' program appeared to have the least organization and institutional emphasis of the three sites.



The three sites were relatively comparable in terms of institutional type, academics, cost, financial aid, admissions, and student body (USNews.Com: America's Best Colleges 2007). There were similarities in several areas across the sites, such as type of institution, setting, and faculty to student ratio; however, there are sizable differences in areas, such as costs, housing arrangements, acceptance rates, freshman retention rate, and graduation rate.

Tuition and fee costs were approximately twice as much at the southeastern institution as at the southwestern institution with the Rocky Mountain university's costs being approximately half-way between the other two institutions. However, the trend between the southeastern and southwestern universities was reversed when room and board expenses were considered. The southeastern university offered the least expensive room and board and had the greatest number of students living on campus (40%). The southwestern school offered the most expensive room and board and had the fewest number of students living on campus (7%).

Acceptance rates ranged from 63% for the southeastern university to 75% for the southwestern university to 86% for the Rocky Mountain university. Freshman retention rates were the lowest at the southwestern university (72%) while the rates at the southeastern and Rocky Mountain institutions ranged from 85% to 83%. The southeastern and Rocky Mountain institutions had graduation rates of 63% and 65%, while southwestern university's rate was 39%.

A purposeful selection strategy was used to select participants at the case sites prior to data collection. Review of each institution's website indicated certain individuals had the experience necessary to discuss their institution's first-year seminar program from the

perspective of various organizational levels. The objective was to recruit individuals who were knowledgeable from the perspectives of institutional leadership, program management, instructor, and student.

Multiple individuals at the southwestern site were identified and then contacted and asked to participate using the campus email system. These individuals reflected institutional leadership, first-year seminar program management, and instructors. The two individuals initially selected at the southeastern and Rocky Mountain sites were from institutional leadership positions. These individuals volunteered to participate and assisted in the identification and recruitment of other participants from their campus communities.

Initially selected individuals formed the bedrock used in expanding the pool of interview participants through the use of “snowball” sampling (Merriam, 1998). This strategy enabled known informants to refer the researcher to other participants. Interviews were tailored to address each individual’s anticipated knowledge concerning the need for the course, the course’s design or conceptualization, course operations and delivery, or course outcomes (see Appendix C). The criteria for terminating the snowball sampling at each institution were when no new information was derived from the interviews.

A total of 107 individuals participated in interviews either individually or as part of a focus group. The number of interviews varied across the three sites. A total of 53 individuals were interviewed at the Rocky Mountain site, including 9 administrators from the university and College levels, 15 faculty, 26 students, and 3 peer mentors. A total of 32 individuals were interviewed at the southeastern site. This total contained 11 administrators and/or campus partners, 13 faculty, 4 peer mentors/graduate leaders, and 4

students. A total of 22 people were interviewed at the southwestern site, including 10 administrators from the university and College levels, 3 instructors, and 9 students.

### Instruments/Materials

Formal interviews were held with groups and individuals at each case study site. These interviews were guided by a limited list of questions developed by the researcher. Five categories of questions were considered and four types of questions were interspersed in writing the original interview questions: open-ended, topic specific questions; hypothetical questions, devil's advocate questions, and ideal position questions (see Table 1).

Preliminary and follow-up questions, tailored to the interviewees' areas of expertise, were written (see Appendix D). These questions began and guided the interviews, but neither the exact wording nor order of the questions was absolute. Interpretive questions were also used during the interviews (Merriam, 1998). The manner in which the interviews were planned to occur allowed the interviewer to respond to the immediate situation, the respondent's perspective, and new ideas that emerged during the interviews.

### Procedures

The original site visit timelines were based on the Spring 2008 academic calendars for each of the institutions. These dates were capable of being adjusted based upon the availability of individuals at the sites. It was anticipated that determining the final dates would rest upon the greatest availability of interviewees.

Table 1

Five types of proposed questions

Type of Question	Purpose of Question	When to Use
Open-Ended, Topic Specific Questions	Extract the desired information	To access the respondent's perspective and understandings of the world
Hypothetical Questions	To find out what the respondent might do or what it would be like in a specific situation	To access a description of the respondent's actual experience
Devil's Advocate Question	Challenges the respondent to consider an opposing view	To gain the respondent's opinions and feelings when the topic is controversial
Ideal Position Question	Asks the respondent to describe an ideal situation	To elicit both information and opinion (particularly good to review both positives and negatives concerning a program)
Interpretive Questions	Advance the interviewer's tentative understanding of what has been said	To seek clarification of what has been said or reaction from the respondent

The timeline envisioned began at the southeastern university during the latter part of January, the southwestern school during the middle of February, and the Rocky Mountain institution during the middle of March. This plan was overly optimistic and overlooked several administrative necessities associated with each of the institutions. The ability to initiate this study was ultimately dependent upon gaining access to commence research activities at each site, coordination of timelines for data collection, and gaining cooperation from the individuals necessary for the study.

The first step required gaining institutional approval to conduct the study at the three sites. Gaining approval to conduct research at the southwestern university was tied to the submission and approval of the Research Protocol Proposal from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at the southwestern university. Approval to conduct research at the southeastern and Rocky Mountain institutions was dependent upon receipt of a Letter of Authorization from each of those institutions. These research sites were required to indicate their institution's willingness to participate in the research before the southwestern university's Institutional Review Board would approve the study protocol.

Contact was made with the southeastern university's Executive Director of University 101 Programs explaining the purpose of the research and requesting permission to conduct research. The proposed Letter of Authorization was reviewed and approved by the southeastern school's Institutional Review Board prior to submission to the southwestern school's Office for the Protection of Research Subjects. The Vice President of Student Affairs was contacted at the Rocky Mountain institution and assisted in addressing his institution's concerns prior to their submission of the Letter of Authorization to the southwestern university. The research protocol was submitted at the southwestern university in early February, revised in early March, and subsequently approved.

The revised timetable was to visit the Rocky Mountain university during the middle of April 2008 followed by a week at the southeastern institution during the latter part of April. The interviews at the southwestern site were conducted during late April through early June. Student interviews for the southwestern seminars were conducted during early December 2008.

Observations were intentionally conducted and documented concerning the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations and subtle factors at each of the three sites (Merriam, 1998). Prolonged engagement periods at the three sites were not an attainable goal. Observations on the general campus and community environments were made at all three universities. A variety of artifacts were identified for collection at each of the three sites. Artifacts collected included course syllabi, course materials, institutional policy and procedural statements, and such items of interests as personnel listings and campus and community maps.

Video tape recordings of the campuses, faculty training session, seminar sessions, interviews, and focus groups were gathered, as were audio tape recordings during seminar sessions, interviews, and focus group sessions. Interviews at the Rocky Mountain institution were advertised and coordinated by the Vice President of Student Affairs. First-year seminar classes at the Rocky Mountain site were not available for observation during spring 2008. Interviews and seminar observations were planned with the Assistant Vice Provost, instructors, and students during the visit to the southeastern university. Interviews and seminar observations at the southwestern institution were scheduled by the researcher. A telephone interview was required to gather information from one of the participants due to non-availability during the site visit. Interviewees at each of the three sites were asked to identify individuals whom they thought the researcher should contact. Each interviewee was advised that the interviewer would contact them, as necessary, for any additional information

Three instructional events were observed during the site visits. A faculty training session was observed at the southeastern site. This session was attended by

approximately 50 University 101 instructors and involved presentations from the University 101 staff and campus partner organizations. The second instructional event was a UNIV 101 class conducted during the final week of classes at the southeastern site. Students made presentations about campus service organizations each presenter felt could benefit the other students in the class. The third instructional event observed was a UNS 100 class conducted during the final week of classes at the southwestern site. Students made presentations about a campus organization they had found interesting and felt could benefit the other students in the class. The class was reminded to complete an evaluation of the course for the instructor prior to departing.

The “gatekeeper” role for entry into the instructional settings rested with the Executive Director of University 101 Programs at the southeastern site and the instructor who was currently teaching a seminar at the southwestern research university. The researcher’s role during these observations was as “observer-participant” with the purpose of “information gatherer” (Merriam, 1989). Repetitive observations were not possible due to completion of the semester’s first-year seminar class sessions during the data gathering period.

The researcher used available time during the site visits to finalize case notes and review artifacts and the audio and video recordings. Audio and video recordings were submitted to professional transcribers in Las Vegas for transcription during the May through July 2008 timeframe. Transcripts were made in December for the student interviews conducted at the southwestern site. Each transcript produced was reviewed and copied by the researcher prior to analyzing the data.

## Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) asserted "...qualitative analysis requires the analyst to create or adapt concepts relevant to the data rather than apply a set of pre-established rules" (p. 165). This concept was applied in analyzing how the data in each case related to the program evaluation perspective (See Appendix B). Stake (1995) contended that "...analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). The cross-case comparison provided the opportunity to return to the impressions gained from each case and built upon them in defining how to improve future first-year seminars. The analysis process was dependent upon the data, analyst's skills and creativity, and recursive interaction between the researcher and the data. The approaches used to analyze the data for individual cases and cross-case were domain, taxonomy, and componential analysis.

Spradley (1980) noted domain analysis was the first type of ethnographic analysis used to discover the cultural patterns associated with any social situation. Domains were categories of meaning that defined and gave meaning to the objects, events, and activities observed by the researcher. The "cover term" provided the name for each overarching domain. Cover names for each domain were derived from the four phases associated with the systematic program evaluation perspective (see Appendix B). "Included terms" gave names to each of the smaller categories inside of the overarching domain. The third element associated with domains was the semantic relationship used to link together the cover and included terms. The semantic relationships found most beneficial in analyzing the data for this study were strict inclusion, cause-effect, rationale, means-end, function, and attribution.



Taxonomy analysis differed from domain analysis by showing the relationships among all of the included terms in each domain. The taxonomies established for each of the case studies demonstrate the numerous relationships that occurred within each domain associated with the program evaluation perspective. Spradley (1980) highlighted that meaning derived from data comes not only from the similarity within patterns, but from patterns based on contrasts. Componential analysis was used to highlight the contrasts discovered in the data. Componential analysis included the process of searching for contrasts within the domains, taxonomies, and cases; sorting them out, and then grouping some together as dimensions of contrast.

The multiple case study was expected to be generalizable to theoretical propositions, but not the general population (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Rich, thick description was used to describe the participants and setting in adequate detail, so readers could determine whether the findings could be transferred (Creswell, 1998). Independent interpretive case studies were used to gather and analyze the information from each of the three sites. The basis for defining the domains used for this analysis was the systematic program evaluation perspective. Cross-case analysis was then used to establish generalizations across the three cases and explanations that fit (Merriam, 1998). The social-cognitive lens was applied during the cross-case analysis.

Triangulation was used to increase the probability that credibility or internal validity was met by the study and to test the extent to which it was met. It was used to see if what was observed and reported carried the same meaning when considered under different circumstances. Triangulation was based on multiple sources of data collected using multiple methods: artifacts, interviews, and observations.

An audit trail was established and a competent, disinterested third-party was used to establish the dependability and confirmability of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 2007). Successfully meeting audit requirements rested on the organization and clarity of the research documentation files and the depth and applicability of the descriptive passages used to bring the reader into the case sites. An independent audit of the interview transcript codings was conducted by another doctoral student during February 2009. A 25% sampling of the transcripts from each of the three sites was randomly identified for review. The purpose of the review was to examine the consistency with which the researcher applied her coding interpretations.

Coding interpretations were reviewed and discussed by the researcher and reviewer. The transcript review for the Rocky Mountain site revealed the researcher's interpretations appeared to be consistent for 89.9% of the codings. The interpretive consistency rose to 97.6% following reconciliation of the differences noted by the reviewer. Interpretive coding consistency for the southeastern site rose from 98.1% to 100% following the review of differences. Coding consistency rose from 97.5% to 100% for the southwestern site's transcripts. The independent review indicated the consistency with which the researcher applied her coding interpretations across the three cases rose from 94.13% to 98.9% following discussion of the interpretation with a disinterested party.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROCKY MOUNTAIN SITE RESULTS

How often does an individual have the experience to live under the shadow of the infamous Rocky Mountains and the privilege to thrive in America's number one choice city? For a select few, this question is answered and brought to life in [this] unique town....From the town's first humble beginnings as a basic military outpost to the current bustling community of today, [our community]...has a rich and vibrant history that can be observed from every part of the city' distinctive culture. At the center of this beautiful town, [Rocky Mountain Site] University presides as a testament and landmark to the life of this great city....Although I've lived in this town for over ten years, the Freshman Seminar over the history of [this city] has allowed me to further experience what makes the nation's most desirable city so appealing....(Floria, 2007)

#### Description of the Rocky Mountain Site

The Rocky Mountain Site was located in a community of approximately 100,000 people on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. The community was the fifth most populous city in the state and resided at the base of foothills leading to the Rocky Mountains on the western edge with the Great Plains stretching east from the community. A major river descended eastward through the mountains and emerged from the foothills

north of the city before flowing eastward across the plains. It was spring time in the Rockies and the bulbs were blooming while the weather fluctuated from clear, sunny skies one day to snow flurries the next day.

The university was located south and adjacent to the community's "old town." with thoroughfares crisscrossing through the main campus. The various stores and eating establishments reflected a community image of "college town" in keeping with the university's status as the city's largest employer. The campus' academic buildings were predominately on the eastern side of the campus with residence halls located to the west. The library and student union were placed between the academic buildings and the residence halls. The campus had approximately 25,000 students, 80% of whom were from within the state. The university was comprised of eight Colleges with curriculum emphasis including agricultural sciences, business, engineering, liberal arts, applied human sciences, veterinary medicine and biomedical sciences, and natural resources.

This institution of higher education was a land-grant institution founded as an agricultural college in 1870, six years before the territory gained statehood. The institution's name has changed three times since it was founded with the most recent change in 1957. Today the university awards both undergraduate and graduate degrees with emphasis in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics for the doctoral programs. The Carnegie Foundation categorized the school as a research university with very high research activity. Commitment to the university's research mission was a key issue raised repeatedly in looking at the site's first-year seminar program.

## Beginning of the First-Year Seminar Program

The site categorized its program as one of the initial mandatory first-year seminar programs, if not the first mandatory program in the country. The program was initiated by the university's President approximately ten years ago. A Vice Provost, who had participated in establishing the first seminars, recalled the conceptual framework envisioned for the program.

...very much reflected what the College of Liberal Arts had done ... in a very, very successful first year seminar program, but it was one that was entirely voluntary. In which it was really a full-fledged, three-credit academic course on a defined topic, which students chose, and really gave them almost a small Liberal Arts College feel for a really intellectually intense environment. The students who took that voluntarily ... loved it.... what happened when it was required is that we had a set of guidelines in the Core curriculum which defined it as fundamentally academic....The people who were in favor of freshman seminars were in favor of it as an opportunity for a challenging intellectual environment and assumed that the best way to prepare students to succeed in college was to give them a really academically challenging course. They were not interested in orientation. They were not interested in anything that they regarded as warm and fuzzy. This was not about orienting people, except by showing them what it took intellectually to succeed, and that's what faculty council passed and then what happened was it didn't get implemented that way.

The program was intended to require each of the Colleges to establish mandatory, Core curriculum courses using the course designation of 192. The Vice Provost recalled "we had a three or four year period when they were required as part of the Core

curriculum and then we were offering something like 260 or 270 sections.” One of the Associate Deans vividly remembered implementing the mandatory program.

...the original 192 was a required course in our Core so every freshman had to take it. The President at that time wanted no more than 19 students in it and they were based on majors. Well, this was one of the unfounded mandates. I had the Department of Psychology. So we had Psychology with almost 1,000 majors, 300 freshmen each year and we had to do 12 sections of these and they had to be taught by regular faculty members and it had to have no more than 19 students. And then to make it worse, for at least our department minds, was that they were required to teach things that they didn't feel they should be teaching: like drug awareness, alcohol addiction issues, orientation to their community, it was this whole Student Affairs curricula that they were supposed to integrate.

This program initiative met with resistance from the faculty. The Vice Provost saw the reasons for the resistance from the perspective of “...We made the mistake...in believing that the desire to be that intellectually challenged was more broadly held across the university and that we could export that model to the university as a whole.” The Associate Deans, who were in the Colleges when the program was implemented, had a different perspective. One Dean described it as “...Well there was this big upheaval, at least in our College, that we can't do it and if you're not going to pay us then we definitely can't do it.” Another Dean described it as “...we started out with this one-size fits all and you have to do it....” Another Dean recalled “...it was even worse because the Student Affairs things, some of the topics that one was supposed to teach, faculty didn't believe in them in the first place.” Further discussion indicated “...I'm not going to tell

somebody not to drink because I think they should do it at 16 and not drive. Then we aren't Student Affairs people and we don't have that training."

The Deans agreed "...You have to have faculty buy in, it's critical." However, the original mandatory first-year seminars did not receive faculty agreement and were quickly a contentious issue for the campus. The Vice Provost remembered how the university moved beyond the initial seminars:

....what then happened, mercifully in my view, is the State had the largest cut in funding of any state in the union since WWII and so we couldn't afford to pay for it anyway. So we got rid of it as a requirement and then replaced it with opportunities to create a variety of different things.

One of the Associate Deans remembered finding a new concept to replace the mandatory 192 courses and the birth of the IU 193 courses. These courses were expected to provide an optional academic experience that would accept any freshmen student, without regard to the student's participation in a specific College or department.

So I was on the committee of three people that were trying to redesign the 192s to make them more acceptable, fiscally achievable and one thing that we came up with was let's just drop it and they'd get just whatever the department can do. And President Henley said 'no, the freshmen are going to have a seminar and it's going to be open to everybody but it doesn't have to be required.' So we dropped the requirement and got it out of the Core and then he said 'I want all the open option students to be able to get in these. If they're not in a major how do they get in?' Hence the 193 are with the IU in front of it – inner university.

The President, who initiated the mandatory 192 courses, left the institution after a few years. However, the seeds planted during that period continued to grow and served as the basis for the current first-year seminar program.

### Current First Year Seminar Program

#### *First-Year Seminar Needs*

The interviews with faculty and administrators indicated underlying expectations exist that students entering the institution as adults who want to be here, are excited about learning, and can't wait to start their scholarly experience and interact with faculty. However, what was discovered was that these expectations may not reflect the complexity of the university experience from the perspective of some students. One senior administrator described this schism as:

...They do have a desire they just don't know how to go about doing. So, if you have professors on one hand who are assuming...the students want to be here and want to be engaged, they're going to come to class, they know what I'm expecting and they're going to do these things. And then you have students over here on the other hand who are saying, 'well the faculty is not asking me to be their TA', 'they're not asking me to come to the Lab', (or) 'I'm having problems but no one's asking if I need help.' Well, how do you bring those together?

Some faculty held the expectations that their students would not only be motivated to succeed at the university, but know what was expected of them in their new environment. Conversely, new students expected support from their new environment to help them adapt.



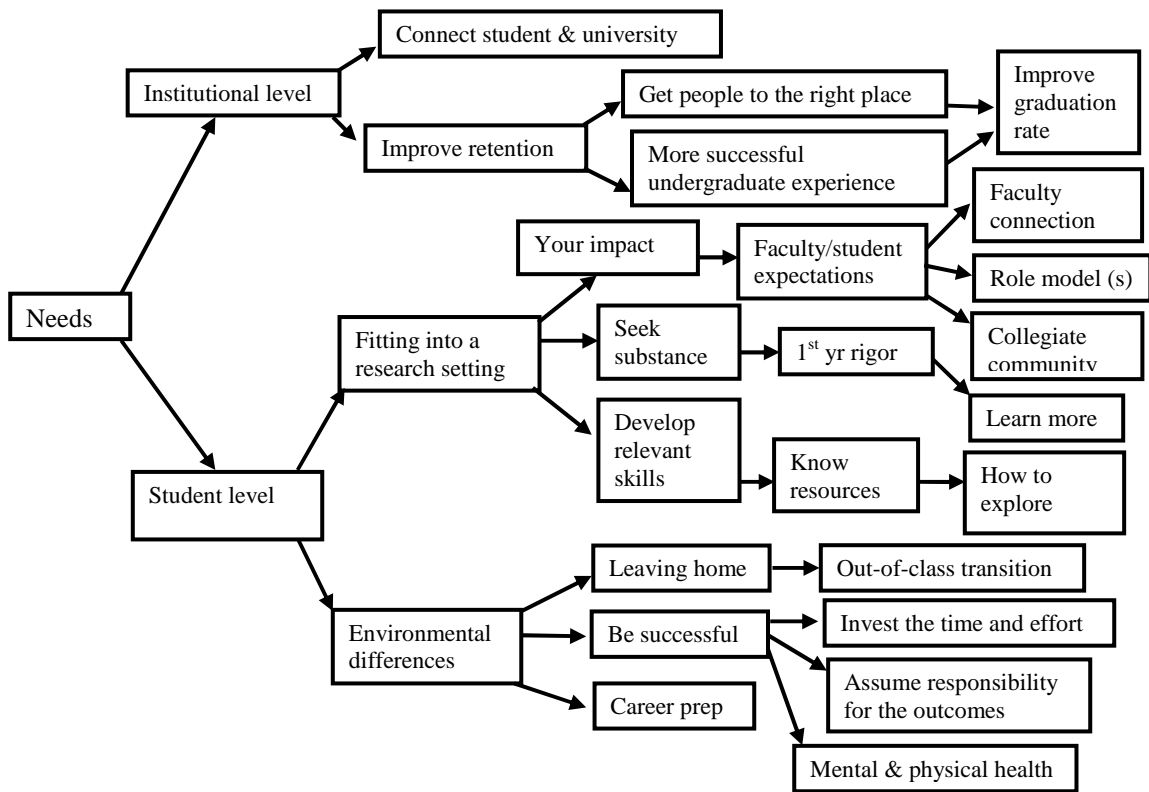


Figure 3. Rocky Mountain first-year seminar needs

The current program had a patchwork design that appeared to address a variety of needs both from an institutional and student perspective (See Figure 3). Identification of first-year seminar needs at the institutional level was most prevalent among participants at the administrative level. One administrator addressed these needs in the following manner:

...maybe we just don't have a good training program for students to be students....designing experiences to help them be successful. So if first year seminars

is one possible strategy in that direction then some of the things I think that we'd want to help students with are absolutely understanding what scholarship learning, academics, knowledge; what all that is in our case in a university research setting. That is really a primary value at a research institution, so what's all that about? What is discovery all about? What's research all about? What's academic discourse? How do you talk to one another from an academic base? What's appropriate in the classroom, or what's not appropriate? So that's one whole category of things in helping students understand what it is that is the focus here of learning.

The Vice Provost emphasized the first-year seminar need from the perspective of "...we hope it will affect retention, graduation, and the quality of learning that takes place in their other classes....;" however, "...one course is not going to move the whole thing."

The role of the first-year seminar in resolving these needs was perceived as:

...we're really hoping that this will be a piece in combination with the other pieces that will produce a more successful undergraduate experience for students we think are coming in increasingly large numbers unprepared to do it on their own. Not necessarily academically unprepared, but in terms of survival skills unprepared....We have more students who are coming whose parents have been very involved in their lives and have done a lot of things for them and some of them just simply don't have the skills to know how to advocate for themselves.

A senior faculty member, who was currently teaching one of the seminars, articulated that the need for a seminar at the student level went beyond the scope of self advocacy. This professor indicated "...they really have no clue." Another professor indicated that

the need for the seminar ties into the differences between high school and college expectations in terms of achieving success.

It's very different, high school and college are very, very different....Nobody is going to ask them to read every week or to work on things every week, but you better do it. In a high school, the teacher is guiding that, yeah., so for the first time they have to understand and sort of predict how they learn, how to do well, how to study, where they're going to study, how to do that without a teacher.

An administrator acknowledged "there is the whole issue of out-of-classroom issues, transition issues, roommate issues, residential hall issues, and homesickness, all of those." Another faculty member articulated the need that "students...get a close connection to a faculty member that they couldn't get in their freshman year normally." One of the students articulated that the need for the course was because "It was scary....it's a huge school and the classes are 300 people compared to my high school."

Some of the identified needs for a first-year seminar were articulated by multiple individuals across different levels of responsibility within the institution (students, faculty, and administration). Other needs were identified by individuals within a single level of responsibilities. There was neither a unanimous nor a universally agreement concerning what needs the first-year seminar program was intended to address.

#### *First-Year Seminar Concept*

The cornerstones for the current seminar program appeared to have evolved from some of fundamentals of the original program (See Figure 4). The program was anticipated to be fundamentally an academic experience based on small classes in a less formal setting that supported interpersonal interactions among the teacher and students.

The current concept supported the use of an array of seminars that were optional with the expectation that students can and would make the right decisions. Likewise, the institution had committed to make resources available to support the array of seminars and the seminars were anticipated to help students achieve success.

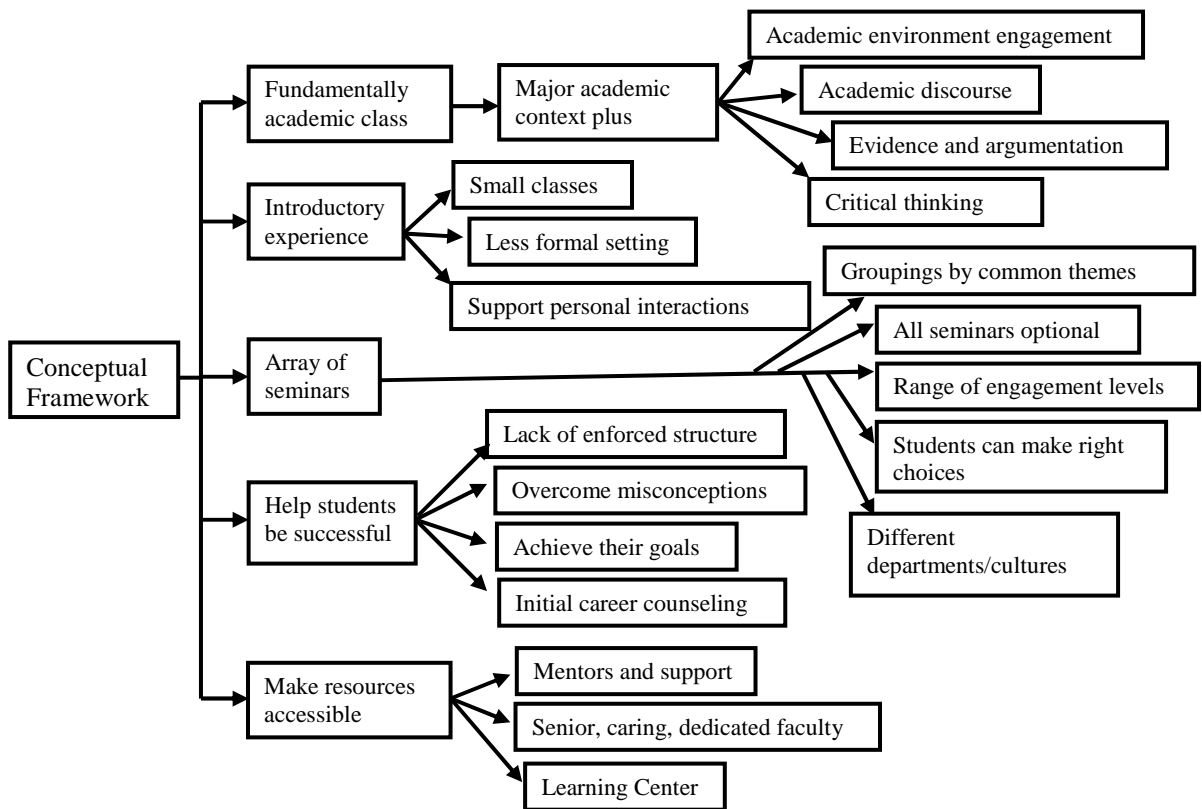


Figure 4. Rocky Mountain first-year seminar concept

A senior administrator emphasized “...the purpose [of the seminars] would be to use ideas as hooks for engagement intellectually so that when they go to their other courses

the engagement will be used as the foundation of the disciplinary learning.”

Administrators, students and faculty generally agreed that the seminars should be fundamentally an academic experience and that within the academic context other skills should be taught. These skills could include academic discourse, argumentation, and critical thinking. Likewise, it was believed that the seminars should help identify how to engage in an academic environment and have a reflective element of discussion.

First-year seminars were viewed as a way to offer an informal setting through small classes where fairly personal interaction between the faculty and the students were possible. The current concept was that the seminars should be neither mandatory nor based on a model of only one seminar. A senior administrator emphasized the diversity of the experiences the university sought to create.

... provide an array of seminars; all of them optional – none of them required, that students can take and engage the seminars for a fairly light experience or, there are options for engaging at a pretty substantial high demand kind of level and that students may be the best at figuring out what level it is at which they should engage.

Emphasis was on designing experiences to help students be successful. Some believed preparing for college success rested on participating in an academically challenging course. Others proposed success should be defined in terms of all aspects of the students’ academic and social lives. Still others proposed that students, who were in the right place sooner, were more likely to succeed and have a greater sense of engagement in their learning and attachment to the experience.

The majority of faculty and administrators interviewed agreed that helping students succeed involved helping students see how they could achieve their goals in college.

Students needed to learn how to function in a less structured environment than what had existed during their previous academic experiences. One instructor explained “...there are some terrible misconceptions, especially in that first semester, about what college is about” and the seminars were targeted to help overcome those misconceptions. Two of the misconceptions the College associate deans felt the seminars needed to address related to initial career counseling and the issues of major exploration and resolution. One associate dean discussed this issue from the perspective of seminar class assignments made based on the career expertise groupings in his college.

...Every one that they go into they find out something about what that discipline is and what some of the others are, so one of our objectives is to give them a chance to know what they are getting into so that they can make sure that, 1) they want to be in Engineering, so we talk about what Engineering is, 2) that they are in the right location.

The final leg in the current seminar design was making resources accessible to students. Seminars should be taught by a senior faculty member not only so students would feel the seminar was important, but so junior faculty could concentrate on the research work needed to earn tenure status. Likewise, mentors should be provided who knew the students and their support requirements. Finally, students needed to know resources were available through the Learning Center, Resident Assistants, and Key Academic workshops to assist them with tutors, time management, and learning skills.

#### *First-Year Seminar Operations*

Three course designations were used to describe courses associated with the first-year seminar program (See Figure 5). The course designation implemented, when the

mandatory course requirement was discarded, was the “inner university” or IU193 course. Remnants of the mandatory 192 courses that were taught within the various Colleges remained. The most recent course designation addition was the Key 192 course developed to support the campus’ learning community experience.

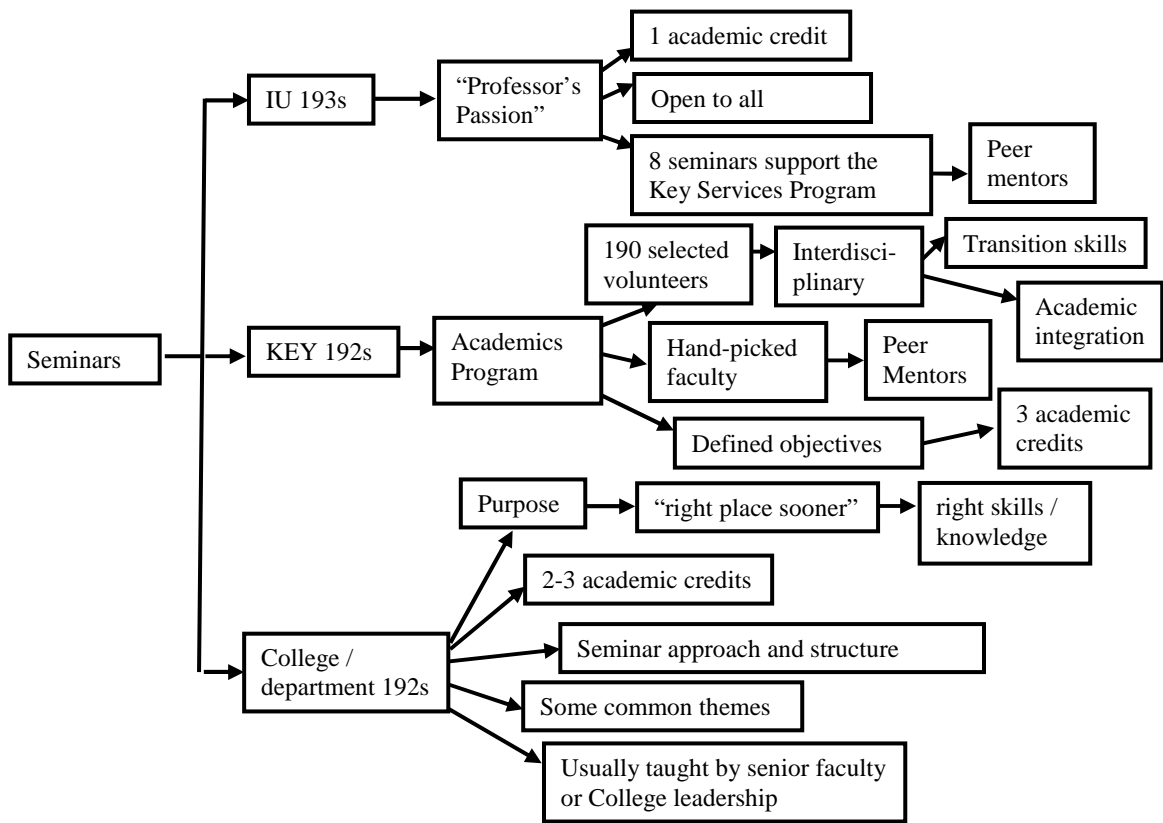


Figure 5. Rocky Mountain first-year seminar operations

*IU 193 seminars.* The IU 193s were referred to as “professor’s passions”. These courses provided students the opportunity to interact with a faculty member while the

faculty member was involved in something of great interest to themselves. One professor described his understanding in this way:

...193, that's sort of embedded if you will in the things that interest us. So it gives us an opportunity to hopefully inspire, if that's possible, them in what you're doing and plant a seed that could move them towards your area.

Examples of IU 193 seminar content discussed ranged from "...focusing on a different aspect of what has made this community what it is, how it's evolved, the values that seem to be embedded in the community..." to "...a discovery process about what turns you on, what you like and what you don't like. And what does it take to perform in a job?..." to "...[a] report they put together, [in which] their typical family medicine doctor would not understand what they know about the disease." These seminars were open to any student and enabled students to know the faculty member on a first name basis while participating in a small class setting.

Several aspects of these courses were viewed as weaknesses in relationship to the other two types of seminars. IU 193 courses were established as one academic credit courses which translated into a class that met only once per week for approximately one hour. The perception was that this lack of time for interaction translated into a limited quantity of learning objectives for the courses. The success of these courses often relied upon the professor's personality and ability to engage students in the topic. Expectations for the courses were relatively unclear. One instructor expressed this uncertainty as "...It was never made clear to me what I was supposed to do. And so in my mind I sort of came up with this notion..." This instructor used the latitude he was given and "...I



chose a topic that had nothing to do with becoming a content expert as much as...becoming a community expert.”

Eight of the IU 193 courses became part of the Key Service Program in 2005 when that program was established to support up to 150 students. The Key Service IU 193 seminars were intended to offer students the opportunity to “...develop a personal philosophy through discussion, service, and reflection about their role in the world....” A Key administrator described how the first-year seminars were integrated into the new program as “...we wanted them to tie that seminar to another course that they could take together and so we picked one other course...that ties to the overall theme....” These IU193 courses were a seminar of 19 students offered only for the Key Service community. Key Service participants attended both their IU 193 and the other theme based courses and performed service and volunteer work during the year. One instructor described teaching one of the Key Service IU 103 courses as:

...it's kind of a combination of experiencing some of the concept...and then doing some service. This coming Saturday we'll be going to some fish hatcheries. I'm not sure what their service project is going to be. They're supposed to tell me, you know, sometime in the next day or so. But I have them do that. So sometime earlier in the semester they cleaned out a horse barn where they have horses for children and handicapped people to ride and love on. And so they cleaned out the horse barn. But its things they want to do. And then we go places.

Mentors were assigned to each of the Key Service clusters and these individuals served as teaching assistants during the IU 193 courses.

*Key 192 seminars.* Key 192 seminars were interdisciplinary in concept and used to support the Key Academic Program that was established in 1998. The Key Academic Program was designed to offer students “three support structures.” The first of these support structures was a reserved space in Braiden Hall, the most centrally located residence hall on campus, for the 190 students in the Key Academic Community. Potential members of the community applied for admission to the Key Academic Community and were selected from the applicant pool. These students moved to the campus early for a two day orientation concerning the Key program and the university, so they were settled and established by the time the other students arrived.

The next support component was organizing the students into ten groups of 19 students each, who co-enrolled in a specific course cluster. The ten course clusters ranged from more science oriented to liberal arts to business. The course clusters accommodated most academic majors offered by the university. Each course cluster varied in academic emphasis. The cluster defined at least three courses that the students in that cluster would be required to attend together. The cluster also accounted for nine to ten of the academic credit hours the students would complete during their first semester. Each course cluster contained a Key 192 “interdisciplinary seminar.”

The Key 192 seminars were intended to assist students in integrating the concepts gained from their two other cluster courses. Instructors selected to teach the Key seminar were required to teach one of the two primary courses in the cluster. One of the Program administrators described how courses were selected for inclusion in an academic cluster.

...we asked [a senior instructor] what would be really exciting for you to teach if you were to bring together two different subjects? He said psychology and biology

because we often teach both of those in a vacuum and so I want to talk to students about stress and week 4 in college when they start experiencing a lot of stress, and help them understand what is happening under stress both psychologically and biologically and link the two together.

Instructors, who taught the Key seminars, expressed the opinion that their seminars promoted more than the integration of content from two courses. One professor expressed that the seminar's role extended "on top of that, for me, it is looking at academic success" She defined this success in terms of "help them think about what they are doing right now in terms of their own scholarship and...to help them with their own study skills." Another professor advocated "there are some terrible misconceptions, especially in that first semester, about what college is about." He recounted having to let the students know "what assistant and associate and full professor really means because they really don't know any of that."

The professors agreed that the Key seminar presented a forum that could be used to accomplish a variety of goals. One professor articulated the Key seminar's multifaceted role in the following manner:

...We talk about what is science? What separates science from other things and that leads on to discussions of other things like ethics for instance. Why is it that scientist should be honest? Why can't you fake your data? The other half of the class is kind of classical university 101 stuff. We talk about services on campus.... we also address this business of failing the first test because somebody in the class didn't fail it and they can provide some insight into what they did and that leads to a discussion that maybe study groups would be a good idea or maybe the study habits you had in high

school, high school being a totally different place, aren't really adequate for here or even the place. Where do you study?

A combination of tenured faculty and university staff taught the seminars as instructors. Two core variables helped shape the opportunities these individuals had to be successful as instructors. Expectations for how the Key seminars would be developed and taught were provided to the instructors by the Key Coordinator's office. These instructions reflected the following objectives:

...Although the university no longer has a first year seminar requirement [the original mandatory course], we are hoping that you will continue to integrate important aspects of the first year seminar into the course....A. appreciation of the norms and values of...an intellectual community through a challenging and stimulating experience; B. understanding of the breadth of educational and intellectual opportunities...C. sense of community by fostering substantive interactions...D. basic competencies by involving them in active learning experiences, including oral presentations, writing papers, and ...logical/critical thinking skills;...E. awareness, understanding, and use of...resources to ensure academic survival.

The second variable for success rested on the recruitment and retention of the Program's instructors. Individuals selected to teach the seminars were specifically recruited based upon being "known as one of those professors that everyone talks about and is thought to be really great." One of the Program administrators noted:

...Our faculty just don't change very often. Our 10 faculty members have been with us for a long time because once they start teaching they tend to have a great

experience, they really enjoy it, we hardly give them anything to do this, but we don't have a lot of turn over of faculty.

The final support component for the Key Academics Program was the student mentors assigned to each cluster. A senior administrator from the Center for Advising and Student Achievement defined the mentor role as "... a huge role in helping students through their transition and guiding students through their experience their first year." These mentors were teaching assistants for the Key 192 seminar with an instructional role negotiated between the mentor and seminar instructor. Mentors also met outside of class with their cluster's students on a one-on-one basis to help them establish goals: academic goals, social goals, leadership goals. They then met throughout the whole year to help the students see how they could meet their goals in college.

*College/department 192 seminars.* These seminars tended to be focused more on the College or disciplines, generated greater commitment from the departments, and were viewed as a more legitimate undertaking for faculty. The prefix used for these courses depended upon whether they were sponsored by the College or a department within a College. An Associate Dean described her College's first-year seminars in the following manner:

...it is discipline specific, it does have career advising. I think all of ours have career pieces, library pieces.... It is all content driven and it's all within a major. Some of the majors require it and some of them do not. Some are taught by the department head, some are not.

Other Deans described a major purpose of their Colleges' 192 seminars as providing students with an introduction to what the particular disciplines or concentrations were within that College.

Another Dean described how their College used the seminar "as a connection" to the College's culture as a "non-judgmental environment" and as a "support system." Instructors emphasized on the first day in each section that "what is said here, stays here." Most of the Deans agreed the "goal is to get the students in the correct concentration at the very beginning." Consequently, a major consideration for their Colleges' 192 seminars was to help freshmen find the right place for themselves as soon as possible or "get them in the right place sooner."

Most of these seminars were worth two or three academic credits. These academic credits were, in some cases, shared between activities in a classroom setting and time spent in a laboratory setting. Most of the seminars were considered an academic requirement of either the College or individual departments. One of the Colleges allowed seminar credits to transfer between the departments within the College when students elected to change departments.

Approaches to the first-year seminar concept varied among the Colleges, but repeatedly common themes such as study skills, resource management, and career preparation were articulated when discussing the seminar content. One College emphasized:

...We do some introduction to resources at the university. We do some stuff on study skills. We do some stuff on what we expect in terms of requirements for homework or we do some stuff on exams. Then we do a course salon and basic introduction to

particular disciplines. So the focus of the course is broad and there is not a lot of depth in any one area.

Another Associate Dean emphasized students could not select a concentration for their academic major until they had completed the first-year seminar. This Dean described the thrust of their seminar as:

...Librarian shows them how to use the...databases that they can use for doing... research and then we also have the Career Advisors come in twice because we want our students to start thinking from day one about having a career, finding a job, what they have to do so we make them all do a resume and also look at the tools that are available on campus for doing research into different jobs and careers and things like that.

Still another Associate Dean emphasized their seminars worked to help students develop a longer term perspective on their academic program.

...we stress the whole four year program. This is what you are going to be taking. We give them spreadsheets that they have to keep for the rest of their career where they put in their grades and they track their progress so that they, we try to give them the whole picture of what they are going to have to do.

The sizes of the seminars and use of teaching assistants reflected the resource commitments and course structures used by each College. One seminar instructor was tasked to teach “all 300 freshmen in these sections” and was given a teaching assistant to help with grading. Another College dedicated three teaching assistants because of the labs associated with the seminar. The labs were limited to no more than 25 students.

Most of the Associate Deans admitted restricting the first-year seminars to 18 students was not possible for their Colleges due to resource constraints. One Dean stated “You can’t do that and teach five sections. It’s resource impossible.” Another Dean articulated “there weren’t even enough classrooms on the campus for sections of 19.” The preferred approach with the College/department 192 seminars was to “find what works” because “some do better in small and some do better in large.”

#### *First-Year Seminar Outcomes*

The outcomes of the Rocky Mountain program were looked at from the perspectives of measurable impacts, the lessons learned, and satisfaction reported by the program recipients (See Figure 6). It appeared consistent attempts had not been made to assess the impacts associated with the three seminar options. Assessment efforts had been made in relationship to the Key program. A recent survey was done to assess the motivation of the faculty who taught both Key 192s and Key IU193s courses. One senior administrator described the assessment efforts associated with the Key Program:

...they do a lot of assessments and so they not only do assessments of the students to ask them to assess their own experience; how they are feeling about things, but they also look at their GPA’s. What kinds of activities students have been involved in.

They look at the data in many ways so not just what the GPA’s are of all students but how to pick and compare students who weren’t in it...So they do the qualitative and the quantitative.

Two recurring variables used frequently in assessing the effectiveness of the Key program were retention and the grades earned by students participating in the program.



The results indicated the Key retention rate was higher and Key students outscored the campus' non-Key students in terms of their grades.

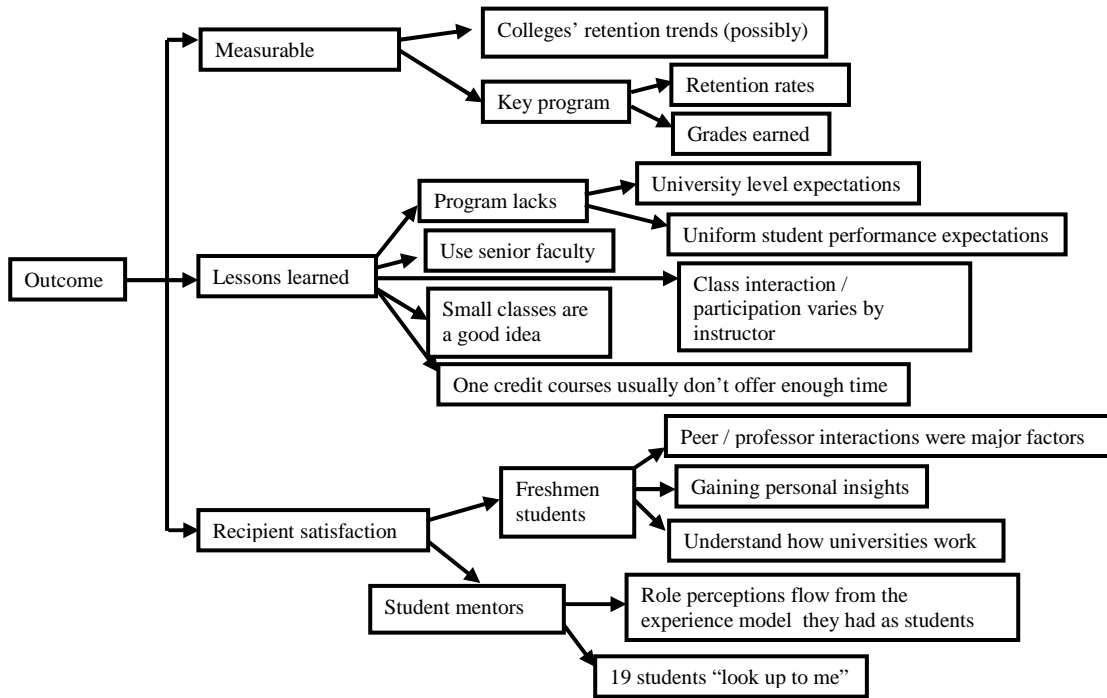


Figure 6. Rocky Mountain first-year seminar outcomes

It appeared efforts to assess the effectiveness of the Key first-year seminars were impacted by embedding the seminar courses within the framework of the Key Program. The impact of the total Key experience was articulate in the following way by one of the students.

I would definitely recommend doing a Living and Learning Community to any freshman because you know, I mean for me there were so many different things that you can join. There is an academic one, one where you serve together in the

community, there are a couple other ones just within Key and there is so much other stuff outside of Key. I just think it just like helps you to meet people and get to know people fast and well.

Additional instructions from the researcher were required during interviews with Key students to assist them in separating the impact of the first-year seminar from the overall Key Program. The ability to determine with certainty the impact or value associated with any aspect of the Key Program appeared confounded by the presence of the other components and the interaction of the program elements. This confounding effect necessitated caution when considering the role played and the impact made by these first-year seminars.

Participants familiar with the current seminar program articulated several “lessons learned.” The basis for the current seminars appeared to lack both university-level expectations and consistent, measurable outcome goals. One administrator highlighted that the seminars, while viewed as a good idea, had not been integrated “in the university’s strategy for learning and transition.” Another administrator felt the program lacked clarity concerning “what the underlying educational objective is for the first-year seminars.” Another observation indicated that there existed a “lack of uniform student performance expectations across the same course designations.” One professor appeared to summarize the disappointment associated with this perceived lack of institutional expectations.

...Then they went to specific 192s and specific 193s because they just didn’t have a vision, as a university, for what freshman seminars truly should have. It’s not as if they gave it to the agriculturist and said ‘create your own vision, you have your vision

and Liberal Arts has a vision and the sciences have a vision.’ No, they gave it to the instructors, all of the instructors, and they said ‘create your own vision’, which is really problematic. Some students got a lot out of it and quite frankly for some students it was just a waste of time....

Senior faculty members were viewed as the preferred instructional force for first-year seminars. Several reasons were articulated for this decision. One administrator articulated three major benefits associated with using senior personnel to teach the seminars: “they tend to have a great experience, they really enjoy it, and we hardly give them anything to do this.” Senior faculty members acknowledged they generally enjoyed the experience. Some faculty members felt compelled to teach the seminars so junior faculty could concentrate on fulfilling their requirements for a successful tenure decision. A common point of agreement was that the levels and types of class interaction and participation varied by instructor.

A generally accepted lesson learned was that “smaller classes are better” and that they offer an instructor greater opportunities to interact with the students and evaluate learning differently. Smaller seminar settings were preferred and resource constraints sometimes made it necessary to creatively seek ways in which to achieve this goal. Creativity was particularly a requirement for the larger Colleges as they addressed physical space and instructor requirements.

Impressions concerning the one-credit IU 193 courses were mixed. The inputs received ranged from “193s are totally ineffective” to there was “no specific reason to get rid of 193 seminars.” What was generally accepted was that “one credit is not enough time.” One instructor provided the insight that “I missed the material that I couldn’t

include...I missed the actual face time with the student” as part of the rationale for why additional credit and time were required.

Recipients’ satisfaction with the first-year seminars was considered from the perspective of two groups: first-year students and student mentors. Repeatedly first-year students emphasized how the seminars differed from their other classes and how that was important to them. One student said “there was more closeness in our group, between our professor, our mentor, and us.” Consistently, the professors were viewed as a major ingredient in helping students succeed in their seminars. Students said things like “the professor...made me feel a lot more comfortable and relaxed”, “a lot of it depended on our teacher”, and “it was fun because it was more student-led in how it was oriented.”

The personal insights gained by the students varied according to the perspective of each student. One student articulated this change as “I learned about myself...my own beliefs.” A second student felt the “seminar taught me to be more open and aware.” Another student stated “I’ve learned this is what I have to do so I can be on my own...and...do it by myself now.” The classroom environment played a significant role during the seminar. One student described the importance of the environment as “I learned a lot about like myself...anyone could talk and say anything you wanted...it wasn’t overpowering like lecture.”

Another recurring theme among the students was how the seminar helped them adjust to the university environment. One student believed the “seminars...teach you how the school works, how tests work, and how lectures work” which were “a good thing to learn about as a freshman.” Another student described that the seminar “gave me a great foundation for everything.” This foundation included “which professors I should

probably take classes from”, how to navigate through the College so “I didn’t get lost every time I went over...”, and “that you should definitely make friends in your...classes.”

The student mentors had a slightly different perspective concerning what the seminars meant to first-year students and to themselves. One mentor felt that the students in the seminar gained:

...the skills to equip them to be successful in college: good study habits, good testing habits, the confidence to go to a professor during office hours and say ‘I don’t understand’, respectful classroom behavior, good discussion, respect for people who are different from them, appreciation in diversity, and then just basic skills.

However, this mentor also felt the students did not realize what they gained from the experience until after they left the seminar.

It appeared, when current mentors were asked why they decided to become mentors, the mentor role modeled by previous mentors was a significant influence. Most of the current mentors made some reference to the mentor from the seminar they attended. One of the current mentors described her seminar mentor as “my saving grace.” Another mentor indicated “my mentor didn’t do a great job and...inspired me to do a better job.” This variation in prior experiences might have reflected the availability of time by the role model, the level of training provided to the prior mentor, or possibly the demands made by the seminar instructor on the mentor model.

Current mentors felt time they spent being mentors was beneficial. The benefits gained from the experience appeared to appeal from different motivational perspectives. The first perspective was more in terms of achieving a performance goal. One mentor

articulated this perspective as we “get credit for being a TA and it’s anywhere from one to three credits depending upon how much work the professor wants us to do.” The other perspective appeared more aligned with a more internally based, mastery viewpoint. One mentor indicated being a mentor was “the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done.” Another response indicated the role could appeal to both internal and external goals. This individual felt the experience was “pretty much a priceless experience” because “I don’t think I’ll have 19 students that look up to me again.”

### Future First Year Seminar Program Directions

Determining future directions for this institution’s program rested upon understanding how the current program was performing in relationship to the needs and conceptual basis for the program (See Table 2). Componential analysis was used to consider how the needs for a first-year seminar program were met by the three types of seminars. The analysis reflected which seminar approach addressed each of the identified needs and the quantities of needs addressed by each seminar type. The IU 193 seminars addressed the fewest of the needs. The Key and College/department seminars addressed comparable quantities of needs, but not always the same needs.

Institutional and student level needs focused on connecting students and the university. Establishing expectations and connections within the research setting were emphasized by all three types of first-year seminar. The IU 193 seminars and the Key 192 seminars made emphasizing academic substance a priority in their approach. The IU 193 seminars and the College/department 192 seminars were designed to address career preparation needs, but from different perspectives.

Table 2

## Analysis of needs being met by type of course

DOMAIN: First Year Seminar Need		DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
		IU 193s	KEY 192/193s	OTHER 192s
Connect Student & University		Yes	Yes	Yes
Improve Retention	Right Place Sooner More Successful Experience Improve Graduation Rate		Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes
Fitting into a Research Setting	Expectations and Connections Academic Substance Develop Relevant Skills	Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes  Yes
Environmental Differences	Leaving Home Individuality Be Successful Career Preparation	Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes

The IU 193 approach made exposure to the interests of a professor and potentially a mentoring relationship with that professor the basis for future career decision-making and preparation. This approach enabled students from any Colleges to have access to the professor's content area and the professor. The downside of this approach was that, once they were exposed to the professor's content area for a semester, many of the students elected to not pursue that curriculum area.

The College/department 192 approach to career decision making rested more on the belief that students might not know exactly how and where they would fit in a specific

College, but that they felt the College was a reasonable match with their interests. This approach exposed students to the types of academic and career paths available to students within that College. Emphasis was placed on helping students address their career misconceptions and determine as quickly as possible where they belonged within the university. These seminars were specifically targeted to addressing the issue of finding the “right place, sooner.”

The Key seminars and the College/department seminars targeted many of the same or similar needs. Both seminar strategies concentrated on helping students have a more successful college experience with an envisioned goal of graduating from the institution. Both seminars emphasized development of relevant skills concerning resources and exploration to facilitate the students’ ability to fit into a research setting.

Differences were more evident between the Key and College/department seminars when considering individuality and success needs. College/department seminars were more focused on the development of these two needs from the perspective of the students’ academic major, future opportunities for experiences, and career options. The Key seminars assumed a broader perspective based on students resolving the academic and nonacademic aspects of these needs.

Componential analysis was used to consider how the conceptual framework for a first-year seminar program was addressed by the three types of seminars (See Table 3). The analysis reflected which seminar approach addressed each aspect of the concept and the quantity of concept elements addressed by each seminar type. The Key seminars appeared to relate to most of the individual elements in the conceptual framework followed by the College/department seminars and finally the IU 193 seminars.



Table 3

## Analysis of program concepts addressed by type of course

DOMAIN: First Year Seminar Concept		DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
		KEY		
		IU 193s	192/193s	Other 192s
Fundamentally Academic Class		Yes	Yes	
Introductory Experience	Small Classes	Yes	Yes	Preferred
	Less Formal Setting	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Support Interaction	Yes	Yes	Yes
Array of Seminars	Grouping by Common Theme		Yes	Yes
	All Seminars Optional	Yes	Yes	
	Range of Engagement Levels	Yes		
	Students Make Choices	Yes	Yes	
	Different Departments / Cultures		Key Service	Yes
Help Students Be Successful	Lack of Enforced Structure		Yes	Yes
	Overcome Misconceptions	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Achieve Their Goals		Yes	Yes
	Initial Career Counseling	Yes		Yes
Make Resources Accessible	Mentors and Support	Some	Yes	Yes
	Senior, Caring, Dedicated Faculty Learning Center		Yes	Yes

This institution's concept of fundamentally academic classes rested on the belief that the "best way to prepare students to succeed in college was to give them a really academically challenging course." Such challenging courses were expected to provide a

challenging intellectual environment. This was the conceptual basis for the IU 193 and Key seminars. IU 193 and Key 193 seminars emphasized a range of content areas and instructional models, but remained grounded in the concept of intellectually engaging students. The Key 192 model was based on using the seminar setting to facilitate academic discourse and critical thinking about different course content areas.

All three types of first-year seminars were committed to providing students with an introductory experience that emphasized smaller classes, less formality, and greater student-to-student and/or student-to-professor interaction. The IU 193 and Key seminars usually capped their seminar attendance at 18 students. The College/department 192 courses preferred smaller seminars of 18 students, but faced a range of resource challenges, particularly in the larger Colleges, that made a limitation of 30 students more feasible.

The institution offered an array of seminars and the different seminars contributed in varying ways to this institutional goal. Common theme groupings were emphasized by the Key 192 and the College/department 192 seminars. The IU 193 seminars offered students the greatest opportunity to make choices and select an optional seminar, followed by the Key 192 and 193 seminars, which were embedded components within the voluntary Key Program. The College/department 192 seminars were frequently an internal requirement of the academic majors offered by the College/departments. The IU 193 seminars emphasized the broadest range of student engagement levels within the framework of the three types of seminars. These seminars ranged from using bicycle tours to become a community expert to writing a report their typical family medicine doctor would not understand. The College/department 192 seminars and Key 193

seminars were most reflective of the different departmental cultures and College missions.

Another goal of the three seminars was to help students be successful. Each of the seminars approached this goal from slightly different perspectives. All three seminars sought to help students overcome their misconceptions. The IU 193 seminars predominately targeted misconceptions related to content areas. The College/department 192 seminars concentrated on misconceptions concerning academic majors and career options. The Key 192 emphasized the broadest perspective by addressing misconceptions involving content areas, college myths and expectations, and career expectations.

Both the Key seminars and College/department 192 seminars sought to assist students in adjusting to the lack of an institutionally enforced structure. Key students received assistance from each other, the residence hall assistants, and their group mentors to establish goals and work towards them, while assuming responsibility for their time management. The establishment of Key program goals was based on the students' priorities and included both academic and nonacademic or personal goals. The College/department 192 seminars sought to establish a sense of community and offered the academic advisement required for students to establish and achieve their own milestones towards defined academic and career goals.

Initial career counseling and affiliation were cornerstones for the IU 193 and College/department 192 seminars. The IU 193 seminars were designed to enable an instructor to share their passions with students and identify students with similar interests. Those students, with interests similar to the instructor's, were encouraged to consider career areas compatible with those interests. The emphasis for College/department 192

seminars focused predominately on the academic and career opportunities available within each College.

The final goal of the first-year seminar program was to make resources accessible to students. Mentorship and support resource usage within the IU 193 seminars depended on the role elected by the professor. Conceptually, IU 193 professors were expected to assume a mentorship role for students who shared their interests. Several of the students and professors indicated class tours and outings were common occurrences within the Key 192 and 193 frameworks and student mentors were an integral part of each cluster structure. The College/department 192 seminars used student mentors in classroom or labs and College or campus resources to expand students' understanding of the resources they would need to use in various academic fields. Senior faculty members were actively recruited and used to teach the Key and the College/department 192 seminars.

The institution had a Learning Assistance Center in the Counseling Center and a Student Success Program to help students learn more effective study, time management, and test taking skills. These initiatives were available, to specific populations or the general community, and advertised during the initial campus orientation. Efforts were underway to create a Learning Center where time management and other academic skills and assistance would be provided. The expectation was that students who needed these services would be referred to the Learning Center when it was established.

A major consideration the institution should consider with implementation of the university's Learning Center was how to interface the services of the Learning Center with what was already happening in the first-year seminars. The IU 193 seminars appeared to not be particularly concerned with addressing these concerns. However, the

Key Program already offered an Academic Success Workshop Series during the fall and spring semesters.

These seminars emphasized time management, textbook reading, note taking, study skills, and test taking skills. Participation in Key was a requirement for attending the workshops and “anywhere from 20 to 120 students attend each one of those.”

Additionally, Key 192 instructors discussed how they addressed these types of performance issues during their seminar classes. Similarly, some form of study skills were taught in several of the College/department 192 seminars. It appeared these skill issues were a frequent area of concern during the various seminars. Many of the seminars were already addressing them as part of the seminar.

## CHAPTER 5

### SOUTHEASTERN SITE RESULTS

I think University 101 is the university....The reinvention group just met in Miami and there were 34 different institutions from across the country that all have undergraduate programs at major research institutions. And this group is trying to see how we can utilize all the factors and benefits and elements of a big research university to improve undergraduate education. And what was apparent to me was is that people were very interested in [our] University...because as a person they said if you don't have a University 101 class or you can't start one there's not a research university in the country...that feels like they could go and get 80 plus percent of their students to take a four credit course. And it's not just that they couldn't get the students to take the course, they couldn't get the faculty curriculum and standards and judicial committees and others to approve a course that will provide for 170 sections in the first year of a student's matriculation. So we feel very fortunate to have this course. (F.N. Senior Administrator, April 24, 2008)

#### Description of the Southeastern Site

It was late spring and the kaleidoscope of azalea blossoms were just past their prime, beginning to wilt, and fall to the ground. The southeastern site was the state's flagship institution of higher education and an urban university located downtown in the state's

capitol, not far from the State House. This community of approximately 125,000 residents was 13 miles northwest of the state's geographical center, within two hours driving distance from the mountains or the beaches. The city was selected as the new state capital in 1786 and became one of the first planned cities in the United States. Two rivers merged on the fall line along the western side of the city creating a major river that was the farthest inland point of river navigation. Energy created by the falling waters from this fall line was used to power the city's early mills.

The university was chartered as a state college in 1801 and became the home to over 200 years of history and tradition. The 350 acre campus site was selected to both help unite the state's geographically dispersed citizens and ensure leadership could monitor the school's development and progress. The university began in 1805 as a single building that was rapidly joined by ten additional buildings to form the heart of the campus, the Horseshoe. The campus' 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural structures continued to expand and red brick walkways crisscrossed the lush expanses of grass beneath towering trees amongst a multitude of flowering azalea bushes. The university had recently expanded west towards the river to support the campus' research initiatives with three separate research sites.

### Beginning of the First-Year Seminar Program

University 101 began as a reaction to students rioting on campus during the early 1970s in response to unrest in the country. One administrator indicated the students "felt like they weren't being heard." The story was that the students literally locked the university's President in his office overnight and demanded they be heard on some issues. The President decided that, instead of retaliating against the students when he was

released, he needed answers and sought to know: Why isn't someone listening to them?  
Why am I locked in my office?

The faculty, including John Gardner, gathered with the President and decided what needed to be done for the students. Faculty members were asked to develop a seminar structure and find a space where the students could be heard. Gardner gathered some colleagues and they participated in a semester long training session to help them design the course. The outcome was a one credit course.

One administrator noted that, in the early days, the “course was less content oriented, more process oriented.” The seminar was a pass/fail class. The primary goal was to have a small close knit community of students who felt like they were comfortable talking about any issues of the day. The purpose was to provide students a place to be heard. It was hoped that if they understood campus governance more, then students would understand the decisions that were being made. Further, if they understood the philosophy and mission of higher education, students would support the institution and the decisions that they made. The seminar evolved over the next 35 years to become the basis of what was taught as University 101 during spring 2008

### Current First Year Seminar Program

#### *First-Year Seminar Needs*

Needs addressed by the first-year seminar existed both at the institutional level and the student level (See Figure 7). Institutional needs focused on students being able to smoothly transition from their high school learning experience into the university



environment where they become part of a mutually supportive community of learners. A senior administrator highlighted the complexities of this institutional transition need.

...make sure that every student when they come to the university...feels welcome, that we create high expectations for them. We provide a sense of relevance to them about why they're in higher education. We want them to have an understanding that they're only going to spend 15 percent of their time in the classroom, 85 percent of the time outside of the classroom and that because of that they're going to have a lot of self responsibility for their own learning.

This transitional need was viewed as further complicated by the diversity of the prior experiences students brought with them to the institution because students “come from a variety of high schools and backgrounds.”

The institutional retention rate for first year students was considered a significant need for the seminar. One senior administrator described this need as:

...we can't let these students fail. We can't let them fall between the cracks and become invisible....for most of us in higher education we've got to think about the fact that we all are investing too much as a country, too much as an institution, too much as families and too much as the faculty are investing their time to let these students fail and because the competition for institutions like ours are so high.

This institution had over 17,000 applications for 3,500 freshman seats that were available during the current academic year. A failure to retain one of the few students selected to attend the institution meant not only the loss of that student, but that the institution denied access to a student who could have succeeded.

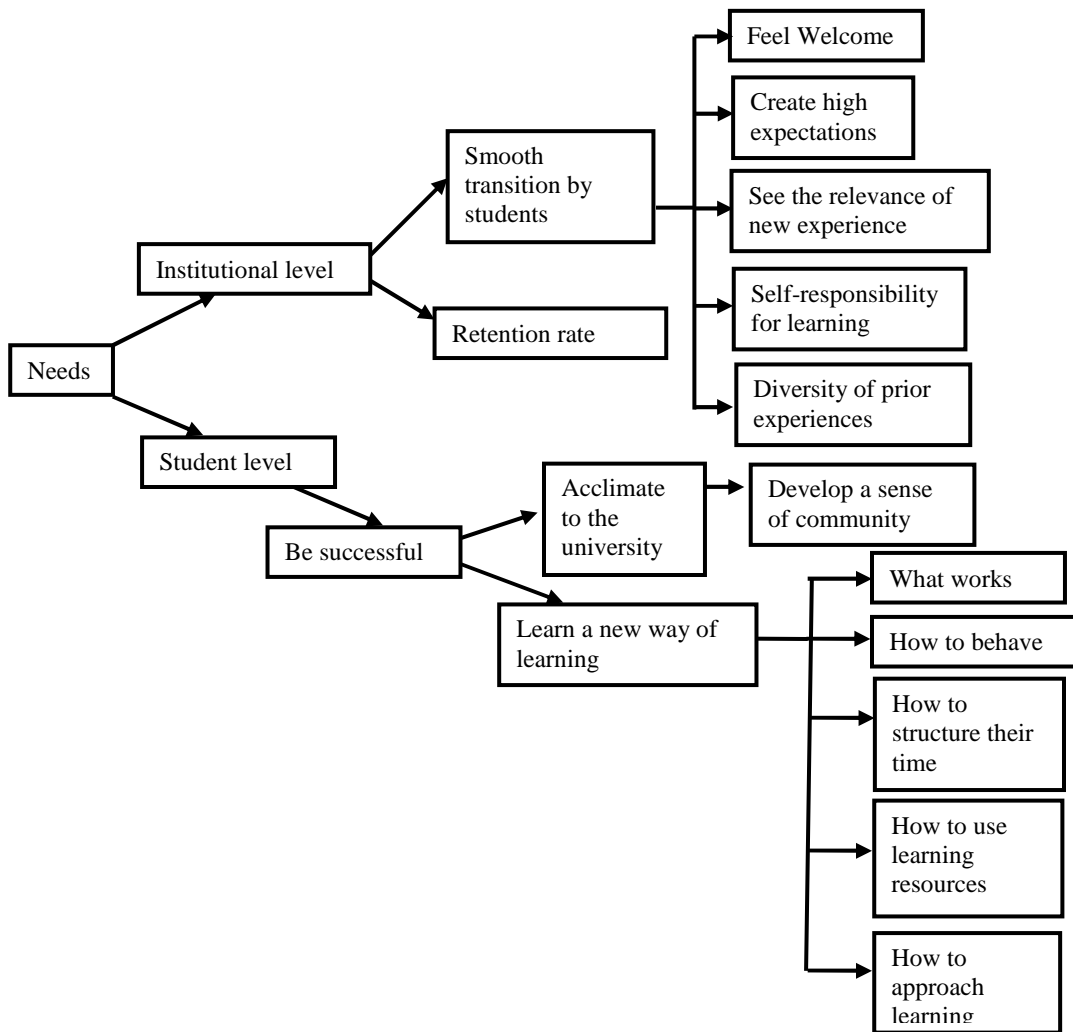


Figure 7. Southeastern first-year seminar needs

The student level need was to be successful and that success was dependent upon acclimating to the university and learning a new way of learning. A faculty member described this acclimation as developing a “sense of community.” Two students reflected this acclimation need more from the perspective of “get in tune with what’s going on here

at the university.” A senior administrator felt the key to addressing the learning need for success was based on how students approached learning in their new setting.

...to help them know what works. We have to help them know how to behave, how to structure their time, how to approach learning, how you use the learning resources that are now available to them. So, they just have to learn a new way of learning.

### *First-Year Seminar Concept*

The concept behind the first-year seminar rested on four key components: rationale for the seminar, fundamentals in designing the seminar, support structure, and course execution (See Figure 8). The seminar’s rationale was student-focused and advocated helping each student successfully transition and succeed at the university. The seminar should provide a balance between intellectual or academic challenge and support for the adjustments encountered by the student.

One faculty member captured this balance when she said “if they are trying then there is no way they are going to fail University 101.” A “sense of community” was needed within the seminars to “promote a sense of belonging and to create a safe and welcoming learning environment.” University 101 should be an enjoyable learning experience. Teaching the seminar should not rest on the concept of “making assumptions that there's a canned curricula that you can put in place at this institution.” Each student enrolled in a seminar section brought their own background and development. The make-up of each seminar section had a personality of its own based upon who was attending the section.

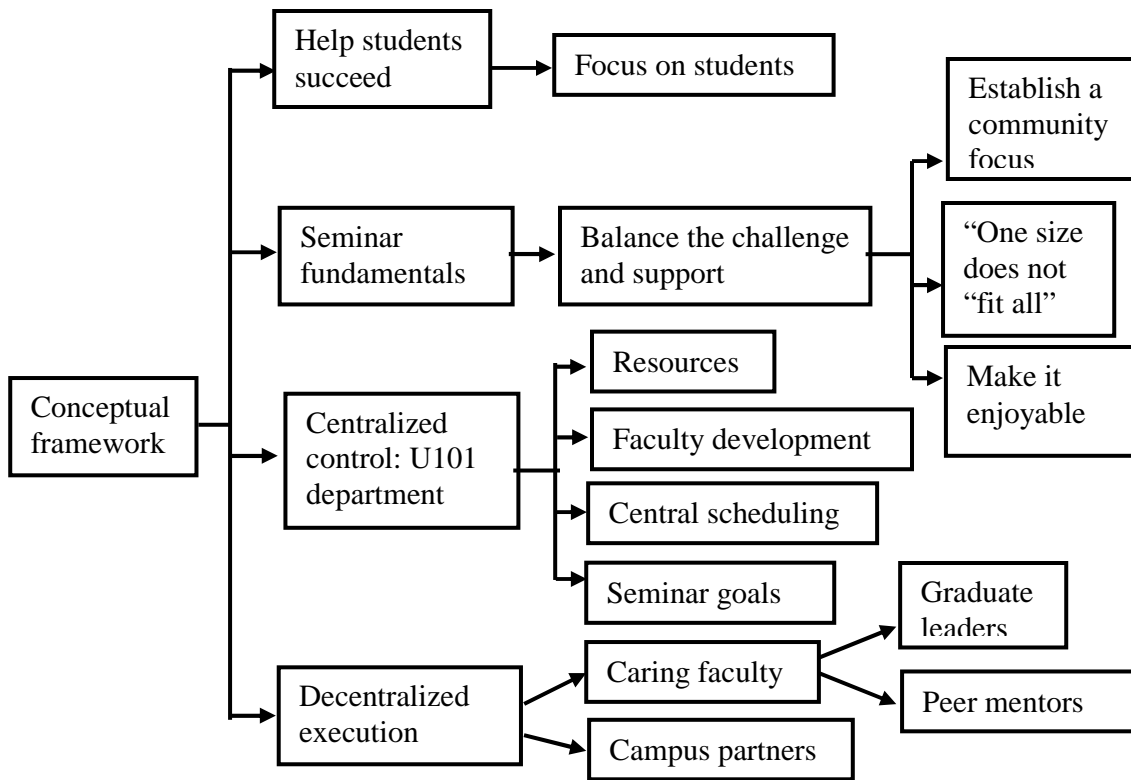


Figure 8. Southeastern first-year seminar concept

Management of the University 101 program was designed to be conducted by a central organization or department (U101) within the university. One administrator described this organization as:

...we are an academic unit reporting through the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs to the Chief Academic Officer. We have a Director and Assistant Director and support staff.

This department functioned as an academic department. The Director served as chief administrator for the program and as the Dean of the department. Personnel assigned to the department were required to understand student affairs functions, but the department

and UNIV 101 were viewed as an academic program that reported through a provost structure. The program was funded by tuition dollars. One administrator described this relationship as “we get the respect of our student affairs partners and we get the respect of our academic partners because we're both/and. We're not either/or.”

The U101 Department was responsible for overseeing and supporting the day-to-day operations of the University 101 program. The Department determined and secured the resources needed to support the program (i.e., classrooms, instructors, learning materials). A key goal for the U101 Department was to provide “a significant faculty development path.” The Department recruited and selected instructors, provided initial instructor training, and annually provided refresher training to returning members of the UNIV101 faculty. Classrooms and presentations by guest partner organizations were centrally scheduled by the U101 Department to support the instructional timetable for each semester of classes. Instructional consistency was sought by centrally defining the goals, instructional outcomes, and course requirements expected by each seminar class. One administrator described this part of the Department’s role as being “very prescriptive about some of the content that is delivered.” Syllabi for each class were submitted by the instructor to the U101 Department.

Actual implementation of the seminar instruction was intended to be done by trained faculty and through partnership with key support service providers on the campus. Faculty members were required to be both caring and knowledgeable about the university. The goal was to give students “access to a caring, available, acceptable faculty representative who gets to know them as an individual.” The first group of undergraduate peer leaders was introduced in 1993 followed by graduate leaders in 1994 to form an

instructional team within each classroom. This provided each seminar with an instructional team whose goal was to benefit the class environment from their different perspectives.

Partnerships were established with other offices considered “critical to the success of [the] program.” These partners provided content expertise and presentations on their area of expertise during each of the UNIV 101 classes. One administrator expressed this relationship as “the mission of their work is supported by the enrollment of our course. And the mission of our course is supported by the work that they do.”

#### *First-Year Seminar Operations*

No instructional objectives were defined for the first-year seminars (See Figure 9). However, three broad goals were articulated for the course: 1) Foster academic success, 2) Help students discover and connect with the university, and 3) Prepare students for responsible lives in a diverse, interconnected, and changing world. Thirteen learning outcomes were associated with the three goals. These outcomes emphasized academic strategies, academic resource use, institutional roles and values, goal setting, and critical thinking.

UNIV 101 was advertised, scheduled, and conducted as a three credit course. Over 180 sections of the course were conducted annually. Each seminar was scheduled to contain about 28 class meetings. Six of the scheduled class meetings were centrally scheduled by the U101 Department for presentations by campus partners: 1) financial presentation, 2) career center, 3) library, 4) healthy relationships, 5) alcohol and drug use, and 6) sex and the college student. Instructors were told “You will do these things on these days” when addressing the campus partner presentations. The remaining scheduled

class meetings were the responsibility of the instructor assigned to each seminar. It was not anticipated that the “only time a student of U 101 talks about financial responsibility is on the date when that presentation is scheduled.”

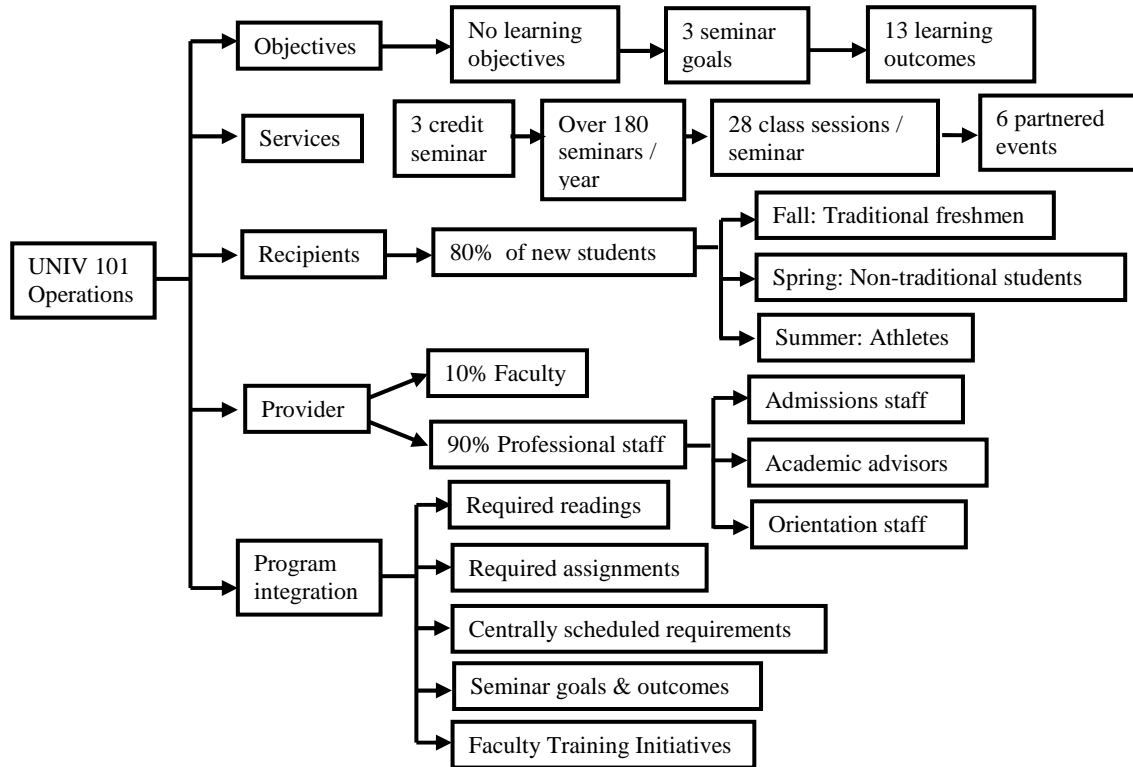


Figure 9. Southeastern first-year seminar operations

Seminar classes were scheduled to accommodate 80% of the university’s first year cohort in the fall. The emphasis was that this was a first year course not a freshman course; however, one administrator noted “we are very much a traditional aged kind of campus.” UNIV101 enrollments in the fall reflected more traditional expectations of transfer and freshmen participants. Classes in the spring were offered for students who

were admitted for January. Spring students were more often transferred students from another institution or deferred enrollments from the fall. Spring students also included students who had started at the university in August, but didn't take the seminar class and later reconsidered that decision. Each summer two sections were offered and traditionally these sections were almost entirely filled by athletes “just because that's who's on campus.”

Students enrolled in UNIV101 were predominately recruited for the seminar during the campus' orientation program and student academic advisement. The remaining 20% of the students, who were not scheduled to attend the first-year seminars, were “students in the College of Music”, “our engineering students”, and “students in our honors college.” A variety of factors made enrollment by these students in UNIV101 a prohibitive concept.

First-year seminar instructors were recruited from the university's faculty and professional staff. Approximately, 10% of the UNIV101 instructors were drawn from the faculty ranks. The university's process for compensating faculty historically had required that UNIV101 be taught as a teaching overload. This compensation issue discouraged greater participation by faculty members. The remaining UNIV101 faculty members were from the university's professional staff. It was possible for the U101 Department to provide a stipend to staff members who taught UNIV 101 because the teaching load was above and beyond the duties of their assigned job. One administrator described the instructional role played by the institution's professional staff in the following manner:

...our instructors, who are not faculty, understand the process of communicating with faculty and their role on campus and they do a great job with helping students



negotiate that relationship and kind of understand that relationship without actually having to be faculty on their own.

Instructors from the professional staff were actively recruited from the university's admissions staff, academic advisors, and orientation staff.

Three additional components that contributed to the UNIV101 program's integration were the required readings, required assignments, and faculty training initiatives. Course readings for UNIV 101 focused on two to three requirements. All seminars were required to use the textbook, *Transitions: Building a New Community*, as the course's primary instructional text. This text was created by members of the U101 Department and campus partners then distributed to the seminars. Contents of the book were aligned with the seminar's primary goals and learning outcomes. The second required reading was a textbook selected by each seminar's instructor. All seminar instructors were required to select one additional textbook for use in their class. The third requirement was the book selected for the university's Common Reading Experience. Students were required to read an assigned book during the summer prior to attending the university and arrive at their first UNIV101 class prepared to discuss that book.

Five activities were defined as required assignments for the seminar. These requirements were some form of regular written reflection, a formal paper, formal presentation, midterm, and final exam. How these requirements were achieved was left up to each instructor to determine. The expectation was that instructors would use assignments that helped them understand if their students were learning. All classes were required to give a midterm and a final examination. One program administrator, who was also an instructor, described these examinations in the following manner:

...And those should be reflective exams, not, you know, regurgitate information. It's not do you know the phone number to the financial aid office? That is not important. That's something they can find on the web. That's something they can find in a brochure or in their book. But do they understand the functions of that office? Well, that's more important for us.

Instructors were also expected to have their students fulfill a community service requirement and engage their students in some type of research.

A central objective of the faculty training initiatives was to “make sure that every person in the classroom has received some kind of teaching instruction”, including peer leader training and graduate leader training. One of the program administrators described this training as “a multifaceted process.” Initial training was conducted during the Teaching Experience Workshop for anyone interested in teaching the course. This workshop was a two and a half day event during which potential UNIV 101 instructors were introduced to the specific pedagogies used during the seminar, the needs and challenges of first year students, and the importance of the components in UNIV 101 classrooms. Each year UNIV 101 faculty, who were scheduled to teach in the fall, were required to participate in additional training during the spring. Additionally, a team builder piece was conducted during the spring. The purpose of the team builder was to enable each instructor and their peer leader to come together, discuss their classroom roles, and start thinking about their syllabus.

#### *First-Year Seminar Outcomes*

The outcomes of the southeastern program were looked at from the perspectives of measurable impacts, the lessons learned, and satisfaction reported by the program

recipients (See Figure 10). A consistent theme was that the weakest aspect of the UNIV101 program was the measurable impacts. A senior administrator identified a key challenge when trying to determine measurable impacts for this program.

...difficulty for us is we've never not had University 101 and we've never had a huge pool of students who didn't take the University 101, except for our most talented and gifted students.

UNIV 101 was assessed predominately based on the information gained through seminar evaluations and anecdotal information collected in relationship to the seminars.

End-of-course evaluations were conducted for each seminar during the year by the U101 Department. The survey used to conduct the evaluation was designed for consistency across all of the sections. One administrator described this process as “...using a consistent evaluation...knowing that there is inconsistency in the method...instructors use to teach these students.” Instructors were given the evaluations early in the semester and provided insight concerning the various areas measured by the evaluation. Results of the evaluation were shared with each instructor. Generally, a small portion of the evaluation requested information concerning the quality of instruction and the work done by the instructor and the peer educator. The majority of the evaluation concentrated on whether the students perceived that what they had received during the seminar had enhanced their learning in the various areas addressed by the class. Open ended questions and Likert rating scale items were used to gather information from the students. Additional survey based evaluations were conducted by at least one of the participating campus partners. This campus partner used the campus email system to collect specific feedback concerning the perceived effectiveness of their programs.

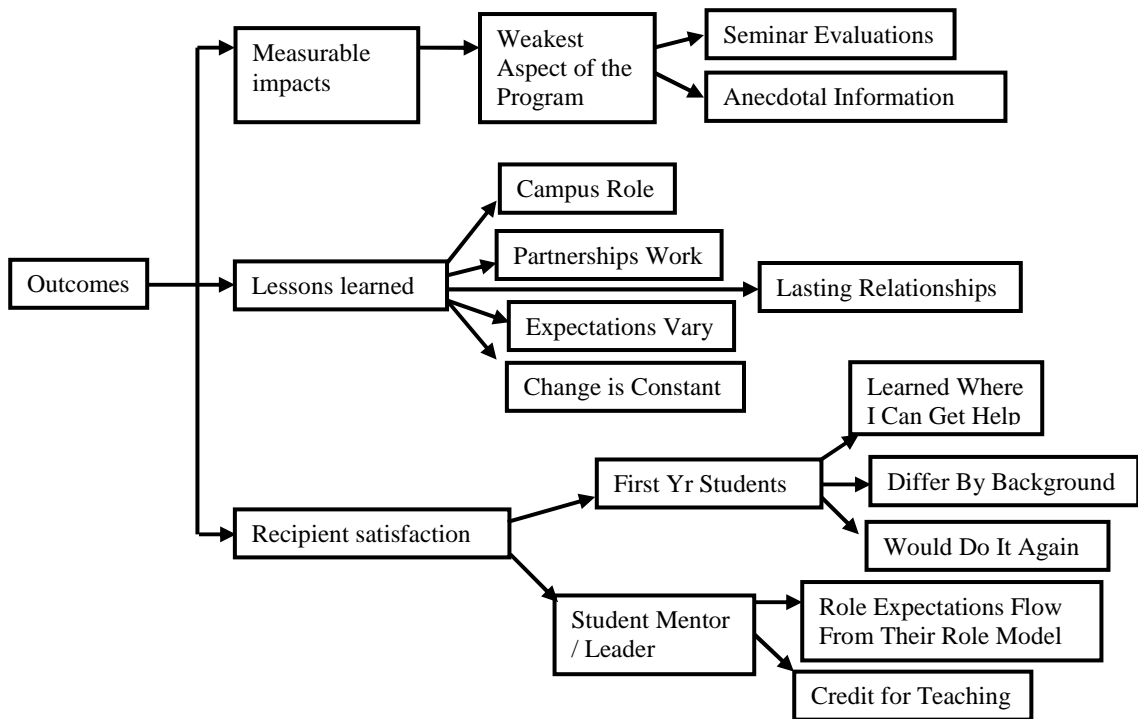


Figure 10 Southeastern first-year seminar outcomes

More subjective measurements of the program’s impact were made from a variety of perspectives. Instructors were encouraged to constantly seek and assess feedback from students throughout the semester. Many of the instructors used assignments to help them understand whether students were learning. All seminar classes were required to conduct a midterm and a final examination. Some instructors used an individual conference with their students halfway through the semester. These conferences enabled the instructors to talk with their students in a one-on-one basis about what each student thought about the class. Other instructors used “a note card every two weeks” to ask members of the class

for their opinions concerning the class. One administrator perceived the role and value of these instructor-based assessments from the following perspective.

...I mean the variety of ways in which they collect feedback on their own is extensive. But I'm fairly certain they are all doing it to kind of gauge their own success and 'is anybody out there?' kind of thing. You know, are the students getting it?

The range of anecdotal evidence used to assess the impact of the course varied with the role and responsibilities of the individual discussing the seminar's impact. One instructor described the proof of the seminar's influence as "...if they are successfully navigating their next semester, in some ways that's proof, if they're keeping in touch and doing well...." Another perspective articulated was that we "have lots of anecdotal information because in all of our University 101 courses we require a pretty wide--a pretty rigorous writing component." A senior administrator approached the impact of UNIV101 when considering the institution's retention rates.

...We do know that we have a high retention rate for those students who take university--in fact, if you take University 101 and live in the residence hall your retention rate's pretty good, much better than a student who might not do either of those two if you look at the amount of engagement that our students have over the following three years

Several major lessons learned were evident with this program. One of the most evident lessons was that the program benefited by being "situated in an academic space because that's the work that we do." The advantages of housing UNIV 101 in the U101

Department were viewed as “we get the respect of our student affairs partners and we get the respect of our academic partners....”

The bond between the U101 Department and its campus partners appeared to be a symbiotic relationship. Ongoing efforts were made to “foster those cooperating kind of pieces of our curriculum with folks on our campus.” The Library partner noted how this shared cooperation had proven mutually beneficial in that “...a lot of the departments are requiring that their students take U101. It is as a matter of fact the largest Library instruction program that we have here....” Another campus partner saw the relationship from the perspective that “we're not going to get another shot at connecting with that many students in such a very organized way.”

Students appeared to leave UNIV 101 bolstered by the relationships developed during the course. One faculty member captured this concept in the following way.

...a semester out, a year out, three years out, they still are processing and reflecting on the benefit. They will tell you they met their very best friends in the course. They stay in close contact with them.

Another faculty member felt that what was missed by recent graduates of the seminar was the “sense of connection” that classes developed. A Graduate Leader expanded upon this sense of connection by noting the experience gave you “an advocate on campus in your instructor.”

Another lesson associated with the program was that the expectations associated with UNIV101 varied. An instructor focused on course expectations from the perspective that “there needs to be a little bit more consistency between not necessarily how we teach, but what we teach.” Another instructor recalled how her students had reacted negatively

when they discovered they were expected to do more than their friends in another seminar section. Both of these sets of varying expectations were captured by a faculty member who noted that “some instructors go a very different direction than others. And I think it's largely by chance which section you end up in....” A key administrator viewed the expectations associated with the course more from the impact felt by the modifications made to the course.

...one of the things that we have done is over the years is to add more and more and more and more expectations and we have been reluctant to shed anything. I think that what we were expecting of our instructors now is very difficult for them to deliver.

Part of what appeared to impact the consistency of the expectations associated with the course was a final lesson learned: change is a constant, on going process for UNIV 101. One instructor noted that “next year if you were evaluating this course, you'd see a very different program.” A similar theme was voiced by a senior administrator who noted “we've been leading the field for a number of years, but we need some invigoration in that course right now.” The next round of changes were anticipated to begin with “...looking at the curriculum and we're going to be looking at the pedagogy, the training of instructors, how we use peer educators.”

Recipients' satisfaction with the seminars was considered from the perspective of three groups: first-year students, graduate leaders and student mentors. Satisfaction for first-year students appeared closely related to their prior experiences and background. A transfer student found portions of the seminar did not relate to their experience. This student indicated “I didn't live on campus and I had already been living on my own for more than a year. So I felt like a lot of it wasn't necessary.” Satisfaction with the content

varied depending on the individual's background. The transfer student felt "I definitely learned things. But, I think I'll have to say no, I wouldn't take it again." Other students indicated not only did they benefit from the course's content, but they would take it again. One of the most prevalent reasons given for recommending the course was "I've learned where I can get help if I need it on campus." Other aspects of the seminar students found satisfying included learning to interact with other students and teachers, getting to do things like community service, building confidence, and having someone who would answer their questions.

The satisfaction levels achieved by students serving as peer mentors and graduate leaders were mixed. Peer mentors were actively recruited from the Honors College as potential role models based on their academic and campus achievements, despite having not attended UNIV 101. Students who attended UNIV 101 and returned to serve as peer mentors were often influenced by the relationship they established with their peer mentor. One mentor described the importance of this relationship as "I really was close to my peer leader. Like, having her in my class definitely helped me figure out what I wanted to do here on campus." These relationships led to future mentors who described their decisions to become peer mentors from the perspective of "I did it because I was positively influenced by my peer leader and I want to kind of like give back to the university in a way. Like, she did it why can't I."

Graduate Leaders viewed their UNIV 101 experience from the perspective of "we're getting credit for teaching." This was an opportunity for the student to "co teach with a full time professor." These graduate students assumed some form of an instructional role in the UNIV 101 seminars. The level and type of experience they gained differed from



graduate student to graduate student. Graduate Leaders helped write syllabi, selected teaching strategies and materials, conducted class activities, and graded or evaluated student performance. One Graduate Leader summarized the positive aspects achieved by serving in the role as “there's no monetary compensation, but there is an incentive that, you know, you're going to get credit for your role in this.”

#### Future First Year Seminar Program Directions

Future directions for this program reflected an ongoing effort for over 35 years to make UNIV 101 an effective tool for the university and the students. A major hurdle to overcome in determining how to best achieve this goal was the lack of objective measurable impacts for the program. Anecdotal evidence from students, faculty, and administrators indicated they perceived the current course supported the needs for a smooth transition by students and acclimation to the university. The data collected concerning the need for UNIV 101 to impact the institution's retention rate was not definitive and appeared to be confounded by other retention initiatives implemented by the university.

Portions of the need for students to learn a new way of learning to be successful at the university appeared to be met by the current seminars. Students were learning what worked at the institution in terms of social interactions, how to behave, and how and what learning resources were available. A less well defined effort appeared to exist when considering what students learned about structuring their time and their approach to learning. It was possible that addressing these needs with UNIV 101 was either a redundant effort or that further definition of what the need represented was required. A

recurring theme articulated by faculty and some administrators when considering the current seminar was that it was “very difficult to do all the things that are mandatory and then do all the things that you want to do and that you think should be done.” Renewed efforts to “look at exactly what we are asking our instructors to do, looking at our content, and probably doing a total revision of how we approach our first year seminar” were scheduled to begin. Two areas such an effort could consider would be the addition of defined student learning objectives and stand alone, measurable needs for the UNIV 101 program.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOUTHWESTERN SITE RESULTS

...many of these students are pre-professional majors, pre-dentistry, premedical, and many of them are there because somebody said to them 'you're good in science, you ought to be a doctor when you grow up.' So, that is very telling for a couple of reasons. One, those students typically have absolutely no study skills. They did well in high school and they never really probably even had to open their textbooks or study. So, now, they are getting into an environment where it's becoming more competitive. You need to do some studying ahead of time. You need to learn how to become more organized and take notes and do test taking skills. So, they're missing that whole package of skills because it really wasn't necessary before. Coupled with the fact that many of them don't really understand what these programs mean. 'A doctor's great, I'm going to go out and make a lot of money', but nobody knows what a doctor does or how you grow up to become a doctor....They just don't understand what is actually involved. So, this is the only class where that is really discussed: 'What do you mean you want to be a doctor?' Well, that's great, but 'what is the course to get you there?' (F.N. Seminar Administrator and Instructor, May 1, 2008)

## Description of the Southwestern Site

The heat shimmered from the sidewalks as students crossed the sun drenched spaces between the trees' leafy canopies. It was early June, middle of the first summer session, and the temperatures had already exceeded 100 degrees. The southwestern site was located on the desert floor in a metropolitan community of roughly 2 million people. Mountain ranges encircled the desert on the western and northern ends with foothills along the southern and eastern edges. Southeast of the community the Colorado River flowed into one of the nation's largest man-made lake and power generation dam. The community ranked as one of the fastest growing cities in the United States repeatedly for the past ten years with expansion fueled by tourism and the entertainment industry sector.

The campus was originally build on the desert outskirts along the southern edge of the community, but 50 years of thriving urban growth had encapsulated the campus. The university was located directly in the flight path and northeast of one of the nation's busiest commercial airports. The bright lights and booming commerce of the community's major tourist sector was less than a mile from the campus. Urban traffic rushed pass the university on major thoroughfares supporting the community's 24-hours-per-day, seven-days-per-week life style.

This institution of higher education began during the 1950s as a southern region extension program for the state's original land-grant institution. The university was established as an autonomous institution in 1968 with a 350-acre main campus and spent the next forty years expanding to meet the community's and State's growing needs. The campus had approximately 28,000 students, 76% of whom were from within the state. About 30% of the freshmen students resided on campus and only 10% of all the

undergraduates lived on campus. Degree programs were available for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. The Carnegie Foundation categorized the school as a research university with high research activity and a high undergraduate enrollment profile.

### Beginning of the First-Year Seminar Program

First-year seminars began at this institution during the 1990s in response to concerns about student retention. One department head recollected “there was a need university-wide for a class that would orient freshmen to the collegiate environment, provide some specific training in effective study skills....” The Student Development Center designed and implemented a two credit “freshman seminar course” taught by professional staff and Student Services administrators. This seminar used the course designation EPY 101 from the Educational Psychology Department. The purpose of the seminar was to:

- ...provide students with critical thinking skills, writing skills, information, and
- ...improve their academic success rate and aid in developing realistic academic and career planning goals. (Howard & Jones, 2000, p. 510)

The assumption was that freshmen could be taught how to be successful students if given accurate information and enough support to feel secure in their new environment. A department head familiar with the original course remembered it “was never a required course and early enrollments actually were rather large.”

Course attendance decreased by academic year 2003-2004 and the Educational Psychology Department assumed a more active partnership role in managing the course. A new syllabus was proposed and the course increased from a two credit to a three credit

course the following academic year. Additional efforts were made to standardize the course's syllabus and textbook, emphasize greater instructional commonality across the various classes, and integrate more instructors with experience in educational psychology. Formative and summative evaluations were made of the course's two versions during academic year 2004-2005.

### Current First Year Seminar Program

#### *First-Year Seminar Needs*

Some difference of opinion existed about whether there was a need for a first-year seminar (See Figure 11). Those disputing the need for the course felt the concept of campus learning communities might be used to focus on the needs normally addressed by using first-year seminars. The perspective that predominated was that the need for a first-year seminar existed at both the institutional and student level. Institutional needs focused on students being able to smoothly transition from their high school learning experience into the university environment and reducing the institution's attrition rate. A smooth transition was anticipated to help instill a sense of university culture and belonging while integrating students into the academic community and one of the available functional communities. Reducing the campus' attrition rate was expected to contribute to increased retention and graduation rates.

Student level needs focused on how to be successful. One aspect of this success rested on students acclimating to the university and establishing a sense of "belongingness." The other aspect of success was transitioning into college life with

emphasis on self reflection, the “skills that they need to learn when they're independent for the first time”, and “regulation skills.”

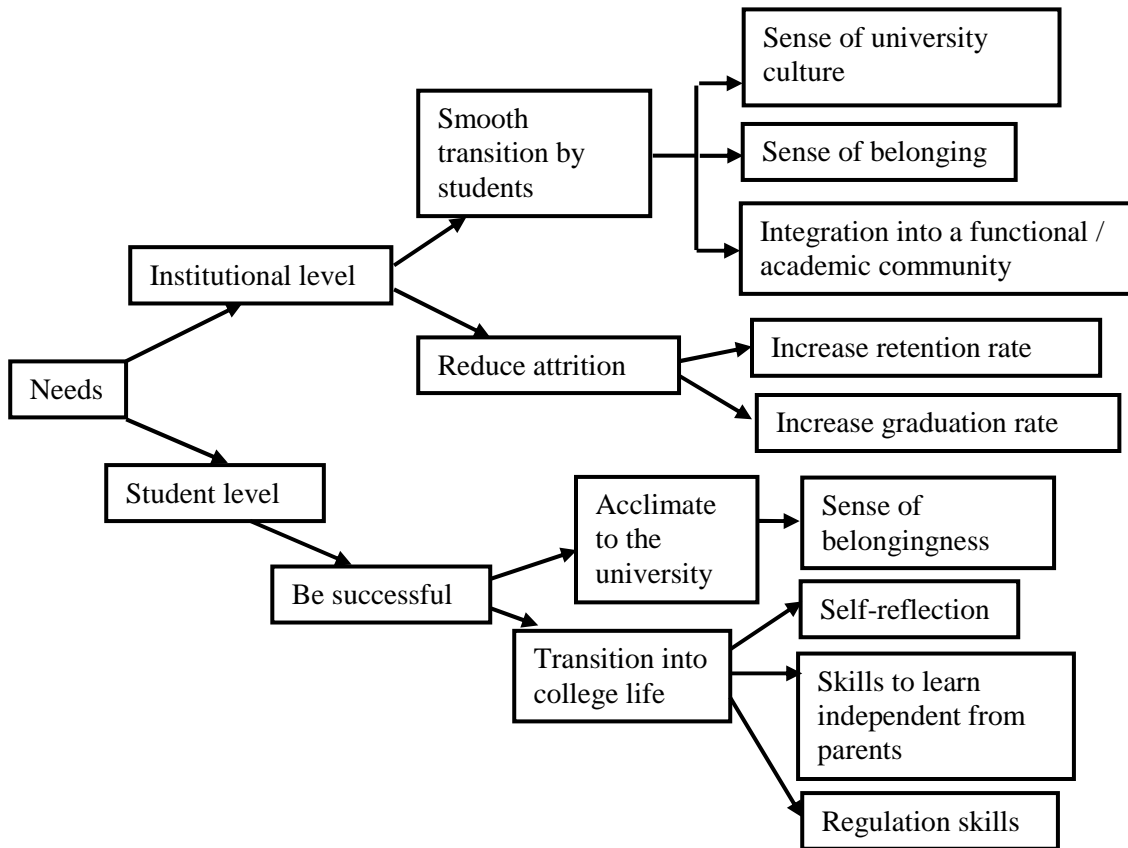


Figure 11 Southwestern first-year seminar needs

*First-Year Seminar Concept*

The conceptual framework for a first-year seminar program appeared to rest on five central concepts (see Figure 12). The first concept was that the institution should continue to explore divergent solutions to the needs it felt should be addressed.

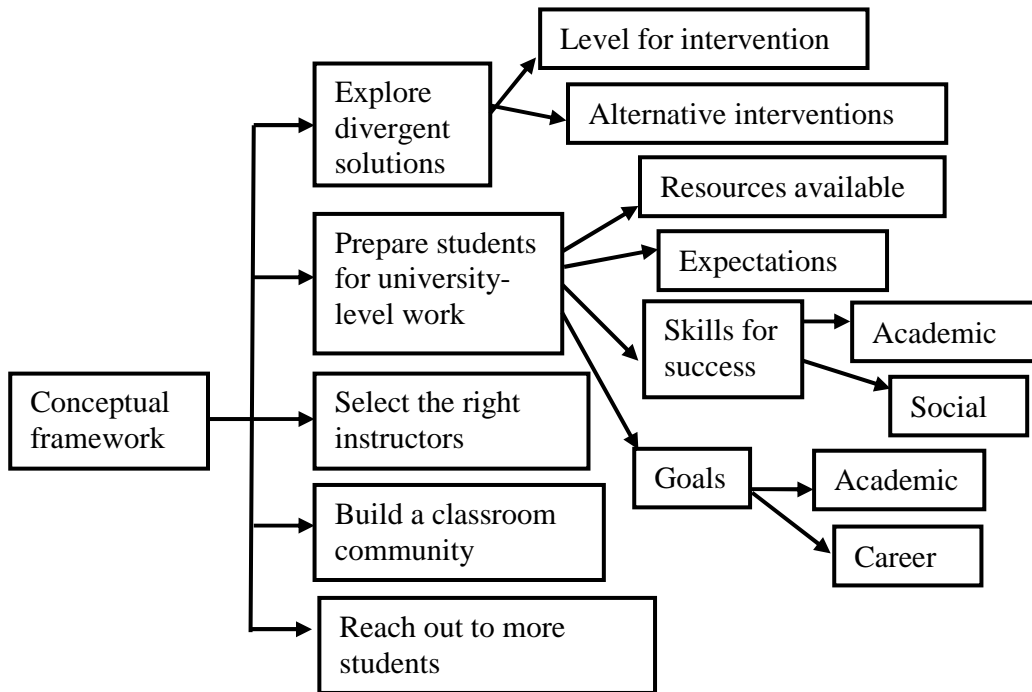


Figure 12. Southwestern first-year seminar concept

The level of intervention required to address student and institutional level needs could range from a university-wide course for all students to College or department specific courses targeted to fewer participants. One Dean stated “a first year seminar course can stand alone depending...on the purpose.” Consideration was also given to whether alternative interventions, such as the Academic Success Center, would be more effective. One administrator described these alternatives in the following ways:

...all freshmen and new transfers will have access to first year programs. We're defining first year programs as the sources of support and the writing centers and the tutoring labs and career services. Those are the things that we're calling first year



programs at [our institution]. The learning support will be the learning communities. And those are mostly going to be linked courses. They are one course from urban affairs, one course from the university college, one course from business. So it's not as though the faculty will get together for the common good of education that might travel across the disciplines. It's for the purpose of students having the peer to peer mentorship in each class. So we're at a development level here....

The second concept was articulated by one of the faculty members when he said “K-12 is not necessarily doing the job that they need to prepare students for college level work....” However, there was also some agreement that first-year seminars should not be viewed as “remedial,” but as a “different way of learning.” General agreement was that “even an academically gifted student needs to be exposed to this.” Deficiencies were perceived in terms of knowledge of campus resources, expectations, skills for college success, and goals. Overall consensus was that students should be “aware of” the campus resources that were intended to support them during their academic career. These resources were generally thought to include advising centers, career resource center, and library. A major focus of first-year seminars should involve telling students “what the expectations are” and “how they can best meet those expectations.” One Dean emphasized this understanding of expectations should extend beyond the first-year seminar and give students “understanding of what’s going to be expected of them during their time as a student....”

One instructor noted that students “need skills for life that they haven’t learned in high school.” The skills required for success at the university exist both in terms of academic skills and social skills. It was felt that a first-year seminar should provide

“some specific training in effective study skills.” A senior administrator highlighted students who arrived from high school “may have only gone to school for a few hours a day, maybe relatively little homework, cram for the test the night before, very little reading....” Significant concepts that students should master were believed to include:

...the notions of independence and studying on your own schedule....” Academic skills could emphasize “study skills, note taking, test taking, time management, [and] critical thinking skills....money management,...setting priorities and goals....[and developing] confidence in their own abilities, own sense of self-worth and [ability] to monitor themselves.

One program coordinator emphasized these skills needed to be addressed at an application level rather than knowledge level. The requirement was to “apply and demonstrate particular skills...rather than just say ‘yes, here are the skills that I need, here’s what I need to do.’”

The social skills and their envisioned role were viewed from different perspectives. One senior administrator viewed the development of social skills as a “kind of social cultivation.” Another administrator felt “confidence has a lot to do with it....the student’s level of independence...” and “their social network.” Similarly, this set of skills impacted the students’ “sense of community” or degree to which they felt they belonged to a community of some sort within the university. Diversity was considered to be a particularly important component since the university served a more diverse population. Another administrator emphasized the role of “belongingness” and the support students received to mentor each other. It was believed that establishing relationships played a major role in providing both academic and social support

Student goals were envisioned from two perspectives: academic goals and career goals. Students were anticipated to ultimately select an academic major that matched their stated career goals. However, it was generally believed that students' goals and expectations would evolve and change during their academic experience. One senior administrator envisioned that "a first-year course can help a student narrow down a broad area of interest."

The three remaining central goals for first-year seminars focused on selecting the right instructors, building a classroom community, and reaching out to more students. A major concern voiced by a senior administrator in one College was to "identify instructors who are genuinely interested and want to work with the students." Another administrator felt that "when they approach the content of this seminar, it should be as a scholar of that content because you can teach a class like this poorly."

Differences surfaced in defining the breadth and depth required of an individual's scholarly background. Some felt the background that was required should provide understanding of first year student issues including skills gaps and how to connect to services, programs and people at a university. Others felt the requirement was for a sound background in educational psychology. Overall the agreement was that these individuals needed to be student centered, interested in helping freshman adapt to the university environment and possess an understanding of what incoming freshman or transfer students were most likely experiencing.

The concept of building a classroom community was expressed from several perspectives. An instructor articulated the concept as letting students know "there are more factors to learning than simply a class lecture." A former seminar instructor

approached the concept more as providing a smaller classroom environment where “they can interact with each other and the professors.” The consensus was that first-year seminars should be taught in a smaller classroom environment that would support greater interaction between students and the students and the instructor.

The final goal was that more students needed to be reached with the information presented in first-year seminars. Several sources felt that 80% to 100% of the entering students would benefit from a first-year seminar. It was generally agreed that even the “academically gifted” or just brighter students needed exposure to the seminar. One administrator expressed this need from the perspective that the “brighter I am...less likely anyone has ever given me any direct training in how to study, how to retrieve, how to retain and so on.” Along a similar line was the feeling that a “lot of...students...who have been successful...never had to take notes...learn so much material...interpret materials as opposed to regurgitating material.”

#### *First-Year Seminar Operations*

Four first-year seminars were either taught during Academic Year 2007-2008 or planned to be taught during Academic Year 2008-2009. These seminars were EPY 101, offered by the Educational Psychology Department in the College of Education; UNS 100, offered by the University College; COM 100, offered by the College of Urban Affairs; and SCI 101, conducted by the College of Science (see Figure 13)

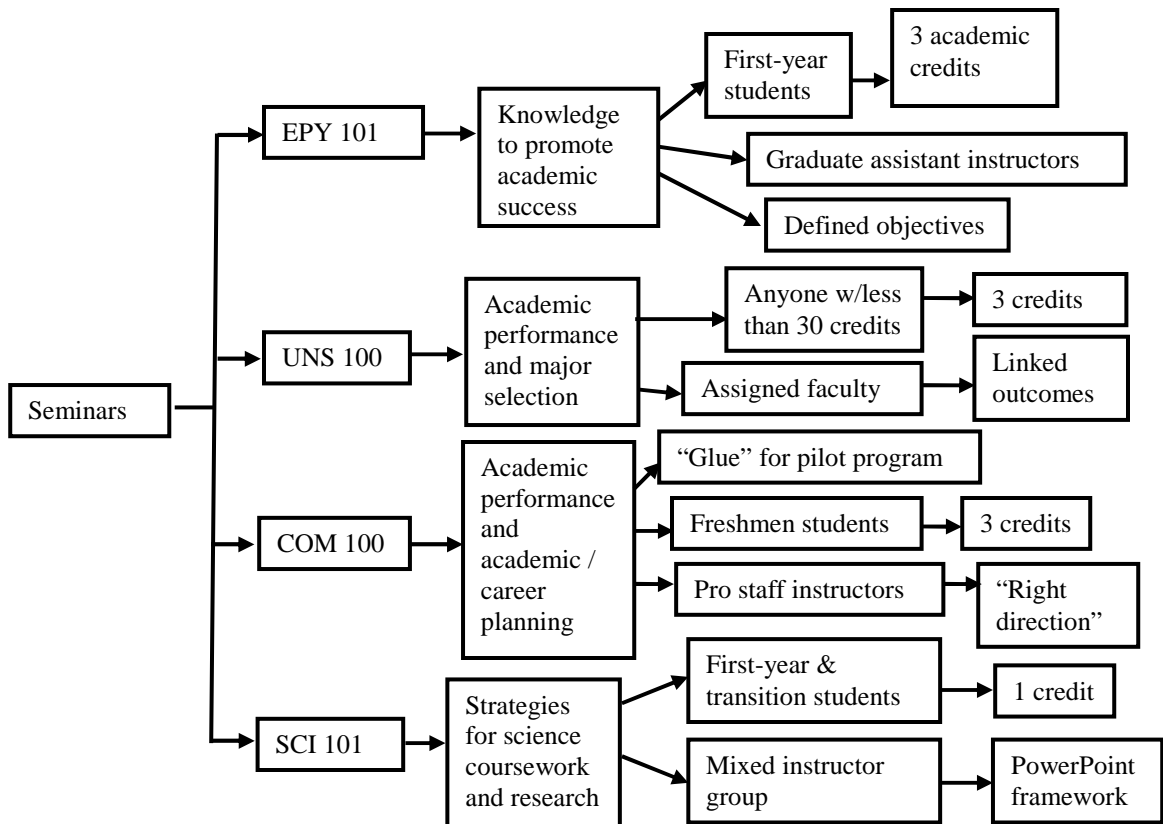


Figure 13. Southwestern first-year seminar operations

EPY 101 appeared to have been taught for the longest period of time at the university. It was taught during the fall semester of Academic Year 2007-2008, but lacked adequate enrollment to offer any classes during the spring semester. Adequate enrollments were not anticipated to support teaching the seminar during Academic Year 2008-2009. EPY 101 emphasized providing students with the “skills, information, and knowledge to promote academic success.” The seminar was targeted to the needs of any first-year student attending the university. It was a three academic credit course. The instructors for this course were Part-time Instructors/Graduate Assistants who participated in one of the

Educational Psychology Department's doctoral programs. The objectives defined for the course emphasized development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in keeping with the College of Education's Core Principles.

Knowledge: (COE Core Principles 1 and 2)

Students will:

- 1) learn how to set goals,
- 2) learn about campus practices, policies, resources, services, and opportunities,
- 3) gain knowledge of the importance of time management and planning,
- 4) learn about wellness and health issues relevant to the college experience.

Skills: (COE Core Principles 4, 5, 6 and 7)

Students will:

- 1) demonstrate ability to utilize library resources and campus resources,
- 2) learn specific study skills and learning strategies,
- 3) learn writing skills and strategies,
- 4) enhance critical thinking skills,
- 5) enhance speaking skills,
- 6) apply effective test-taking strategies,
- 7) gain skills in decision making, goal setting, and problem solving strategies.

Dispositions: (COE Core Principles 3, 9 and 10)

Throughout the course, students will:

- 1) demonstrate ethics and honesty,
- 2) gain awareness of the impact of self-concept on learning,
- 3) identify own areas of strength and areas of improvement,

4) promote and participate in a healthy lifestyle.

UNS 100 was taught during the fall and spring semesters of Academic Year 2007-2008, but was not scheduled to be taught during Academic Year 2008-2009. UNS 100 began as a transition from EPY 101. The Course Coordinator described how the seminar was established in the University College.

...When it arrived here at University College, one of the big changes that occurred almost instantly was that the first academic year UNS100 and UNS101 were both acceptable first courses in the sequence for the Bachelors of University Studies.

Because of that, it had to take on some other characteristics. So what happened was it kept the general study skills, study strategies facets and then also took on an overview into the school of studies, what it was, how the studies fitted into the current collegiate model and the students had to write papers, papers that would ultimately become part of their portfolio for the Bachelors of University Studies. UNS100 was the course that was taken by anybody who was a frosh or soph and anybody who was a junior or a senior took UNS101. After the first year, UNS101 migrated into UNS201 and the official first course in the sequence UNS100 continued for one semester as the “anybody could do it” as the basis for the sequence and then it changed into strictly UNS 100, wasn’t part of the degree sequence, and it more closely mirrored a first year seminar.

UNS 100 was a course available to any student who possessed fewer than 30 academic credits and attended the university during Academic Year 2007-2008. Content of the course focused “way more on the nuts and bolts: where do you read to get ahead and succeed as a student.”

...Highlighting elements of the study strategies, elements of learning styles, elements of reading textbooks, elements of exam prep, elements of the psychological stuff like motivation, student role, student future role. It had elements of career exploration or major exploration depending upon what was more appropriate for them. Always kept a presentation element to it. Always kept WebCt linked to it. Always kept a final paper to it, usually reflective in nature often derived from an ongoing journaling sort of experience. So, journaling became a big part of UNS 100.

The course was assigned three academic credits and “majority of people teaching it were faculty members not instructors.”

The thrust of UNS100 was linked to outcomes defined by the University College. How this process worked was described by the Course Coordinator.

...What has typically happened is whole sections are filled based upon the instructor and while there is a common set of learning outcomes it is so generic that it really varies depending upon who is teaching. Some instructors will certainly focus much more on the journaling and personal growth side of it and some may focus way more on sort of nuts and bolts of study skills side of it. Some may concentrate more on the psycho-social development side of it and so I think you actually have different class sections based on the instructors’ need

COM 100 was the College of Urban Affairs’ “first year transition to college class....our version of EPY 101 or UNS 100.” The course’s title in the university’s undergraduate catalogue was “Educational, Career, and Personal Development,” the same course title used for the EPY 101 syllabus. This seminar was linked with groupings of two other courses offered by the College to form three different “Learning Communities”



during Academic Year 2008-2009. The Learning Community course combinations were conducted as a pilot program. A total of 81 students were anticipated to participate in the seminar. COM 100 was viewed as "...the glue to the whole program because then we're the ones that can link a lot of the material together for people."

Freshmen students were actively recruited to participate in the Learning Community pilot project and COM 100 was anticipated to provide them with "time management, study skills, diversity, career planning, things of that nature, typical things you would cover in it." The seminar increased from two academic credits to three academic credits in conjunction with the pilot program. Students were not allowed to enroll in COM 100 without enrolling in a Learning Community.

Individuals recruited to teach COM 100 were required to possess "a master's degree...be in a professional staff position, something student services related, and...want to teach the stuff." The textbook selected to support the first-year seminar emphasized goal setting, learning, resources, managing time and energy, critical thinking, creative thinking, listening, note taking, memory exercises, reading and studying, taking tests, writing and speaking, diversity, career advice, and overall wellness. The goal of COM 100 was to "...by the end of the 15 weeks,...give them some semblance of the direction they're headed."

The College of Sciences began SCI 101 in Academic Year 2006-2007. The syllabus reflected the purpose of the seminar was to emphasize "improvement of overall academic performance, critical thinking, and students' understanding of scientific discourse and methodology." SCI 101 was offered as a one academic credit, elective course available to only students within the College of Science. Each department within the College of

Science required their first-year students and transfer students, with fewer than 30 credits and no record of completing a comparable course, to take SCI 101. The syllabus reflected the course's five central objectives.

1. To provide an orientation to the nature, the functions, and the resources of the university most relevant to science majors.
2. To help students develop and use specific study methods, practice time management, acquire deeper critical thinking skills, and produce clear reports and presentations following the norms of the scientific research community.
3. To help students develop and use their abilities to find, evaluate and use information effectively and ethically.
4. To identify and discuss individual learning styles, motivations and competencies as they relate to academic and professional goals.
5. To engage the imagination and the intellect of students with the excitement and rewards of scientific discovery.

Discussions with the Course's Originator and the current Coordinator revealed the thrust of the course concentrated on "note taking skills, test taking skills, library skills, and then essentially preparation skills like how to do research, how to cite research once you have found it, things of that nature." The emphasis in teaching these skills related to how the skills would be used in the College of Science and needed by the student as future scientists.

A total of five instructors were used to teach the seminar during Academic Year 2007-2008. Two of the instructors were librarians. Two of the instructors were Graduate Assistants from the College of Science. The remaining instructor, the course's

Coordinator, taught the greatest number of classes presented. PowerPoint presentations were created for each lecture to establish a framework for the seminar and ensure a certain amount of consistency across all of the classes. However, latitude was also given to each instructor, so they could “bring their personality to it.”

### *First-Year Seminar Outcomes*

The first-year seminar program’s outcomes were looked at in terms of measurable impacts, lessons learned, and recipient satisfaction (See Figure 14). EPY 101 and UNS 100 were studied on one or more occasions using pre/post course survey designs to gather input from students participating in the courses. The former Program Coordinator for EPY 101 remembered using a “program evaluation approach where we had surveys and interviews that gave us quite a bit of insight into what was working, what wasn’t working, what needed to be improved.” The University College developed learning outcomes or “things that we want them to know.” The pre/post design was used to assess where students were on the desired learning outcomes at two points in the course and then “map back directly to the desired learning outcomes.” UNS 100 also assessed its students’ abilities at the end of the semester in terms of 1) doing a presentation, 2) creating an initial proposal that reflected basic knowledge of two academic majors or areas of study they wanted to pursue, and 3) writing a proposal for their potential capstone experience.

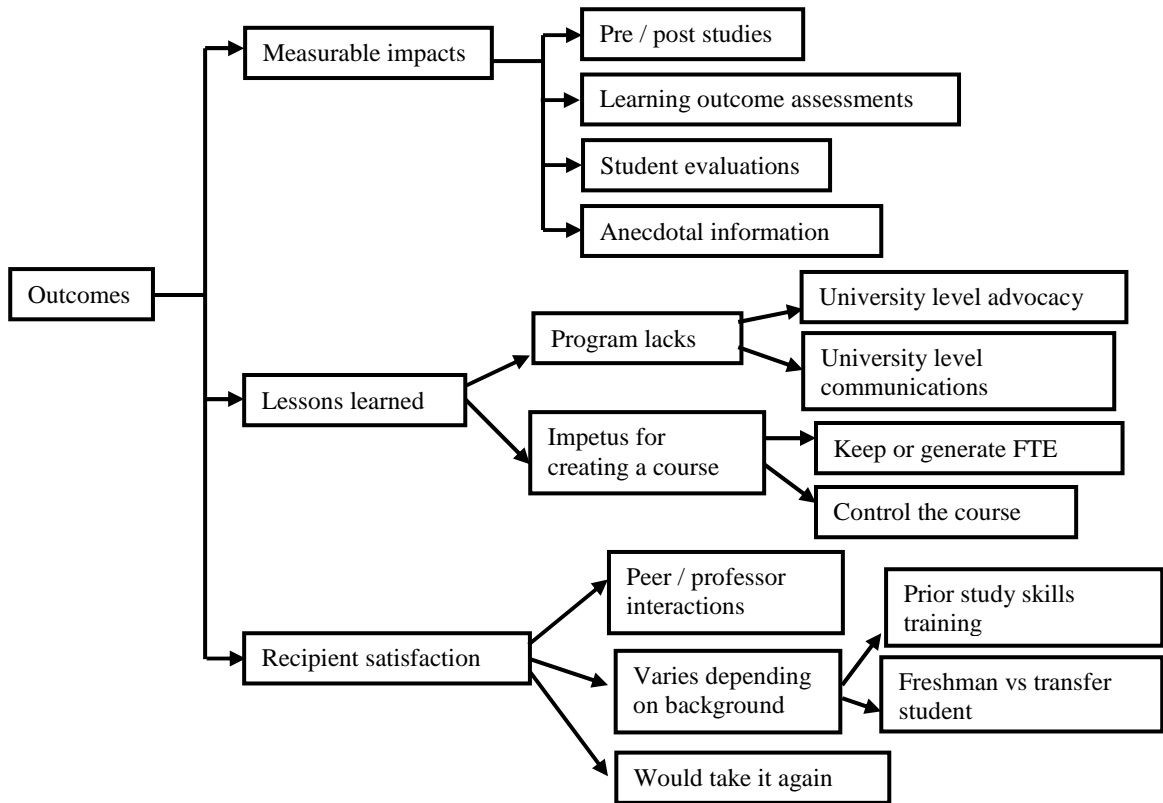


Figure 14. Southwestern first-year seminar outcomes

Student evaluations were conducted at the end of each semester. These provided an opportunity to gather feedback from the students concerning how they felt about each course. These evaluations provided insight concerning what students believed was effective or least effective in the course and why. This information was used by instructors and course managers to refine the content of their courses.

The effectiveness of the assessment designs used to measure or evaluate the effectiveness of the institution's first-year seminars did not always appear reasonable. One former course coordinator proposed the following methodology to determine the long-term effectiveness for one of the courses.

...long term what we want to track is how does the class impact overall matriculation and retention. I think that if say four or five years down the line if we see students performing better, being more successful, graduating in a more timely way; I think that's probably the best indicator of the success of the course. In the short term, I think it's very informal at this point.

Anecdotal information was a readily accepted basis for measuring the impact for some of the courses. One instructor recalled the following exchange with a student:

...I've even had a student tell me 'I made flashcards like you told me to and when I met in a study group, I was the only one with flashcards and I knew all the equations and they didn't.' So, having that type of feedback definitely encourages them to kind of continue a positive thing.

Another instructor recalled seeing the impact of his instruction from the perspective of "just see the growth because as incoming freshmen, they don't typically talk in class." This instructor also described how long term observations indicated the impact of his first-year seminars.

...another reason how I know it helps is the relationships I forged with these students. I typically mentored them all the way through graduation. Even if they're not in my College, I tend to have an existing relationship with them. So I know it works because of that as well.

The lessons learned from this first-year seminar program reflected what the program lacked and the incentives for creating a course. Two key components that were missing from the program were university advocacy and communication. The impact of the lack of advocacy was best captured in statements from one of the university's Vice Provost.

...Are you getting the impression that it's disjointed? Because it's hard to invest in anything when there's no clear leader that's been established, you know. I just can't buy in to forcing the advising centers to require students to go through these courses if there are no measurable outcomes and then demonstrated successes as a result, you know.

Similarly, the lack of communication was emphasized in statements such as the following:

...I would not have access to any outcome that impacts retention or impacts some type of increase in freshman to sophomore persistence to greater scores in intro courses or to more investment in a major...whatever those goals are they may be met in the college, but at the institutional level that information isn't shared.

The incentives for creating a first-year seminar appeared to arise from two concerns: 1) the desire to retain or generate full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollments and 2) the desire to directly influence or control the course. Both of these concepts were reflected in the comments of one individual.

One of the impetuses we had for creating the course was to preserve more of our FTE. Why send students to another College and give them FTE when we can keep them in our college and instill the types of things we want them to know? And then we generate FTE that way.

Similar thoughts concerning the gain or loss of FTE were voiced by another administrator in looking back at the establishment of UNS 100 and that the “course not to be an EPY generating FTE, but to be a University College generating FTE.” The originator of one of the courses remembered, when asked why one of the established seminar courses had not

been used, that "...All I know is that our dean didn't like that course. He thought it wasn't appropriately aligned with the needs of the College...."

The ability to determine seminar recipient satisfaction was limited to those students who attended seminars during fall 2008 and were willing to participate in interviews. Volunteers were received from several sections of SCI 101. These individuals felt a major source of their satisfaction with the seminar rested on the interactions they had with their professor and peers.

The degree of satisfaction expressed during interviews varied depending the quantity and type of prior study skills training received and whether they were a first-year or transfer student. Common sources of satisfaction for both first-year and transfer students were the instruction given concerning some study skills, healthy eating, stress relief, and testing strategies. The unanimous opinion was that these students would take the course again and recommend other College of Science students take it. One of the students, who had a relative in another College at the university, expressed disappointment that their relative could not attend SCI 101. This student felt all students should have access to a similar first-year seminar at the university.

#### Future First Year Seminar Program Directions

Determining future directions for this institution's program rested on understanding how current first-year seminars were performing in relationship to the needs and conceptual basis for the program. Componential analysis was used to consider how the needs for a first-year seminar program were met by the different seminars (See Table 4). The analysis reflected which seminar approach addressed each of the identified needs and

the quantities of needs addressed by each seminar type. All four of the seminar courses appeared to contribute to a smooth transition by students in terms of establishing a sense of culture or belonging. However, only COM 100 and SCI 101 appeared targeted to integrating their students into a functional or specific academic community.

Table 4

Analysis of needs being met by each course

DOMAIN: First-Year Seminar Need		DIMENSION OF CONTRAST			
		EPY 101	UNS 100	COM 100	SCI 101
Smooth Transition by Students	Sense of Culture	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Sense of Belonging	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Integration in a Functional / Academic Community			Yes	Yes
Reduce Attrition	Increase Retention Rate Increase Graduation Rate				
Acclimate to the university	Sense of Belongingness	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Transition into College Life	Self-reflection	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Skills to Learn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Regulation Skills	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Prior impact measurements had not reflected consideration or whether these courses increased the institution's retention rate or graduation rate. This appeared to be a significant area for further investigation both in terms of individual course contributions



and cross-course comparison. Consideration should be given to avoid the pitfalls associated with prior research comparisons involving retention and graduation rates.

All four of the courses appeared to contribute to students' acclimation to the university in terms of establishing a sense of belongingness. Similarly, all four of the courses appeared to address issues associated with the transition into college life. There were striking similarities in terms of the skill needs addressed across the four courses.

Componential analysis was used to consider how the conceptual framework for a seminar program was addressed by the four types of seminars (See Table 5). The analysis reflected which seminar addressed each aspect of the concept and the institutional level addressed by each seminar. The EPY 101 and UNS 100 courses were targeted to addressing the university's population while COM 100 and SCI 101 appeared more tailored to the students attending each of their two Colleges. COM 100 was the only seminar participating as part of one of the alternative interventions under consideration by the university.

There were significant similarities across the four courses in the emphasis to prepare students for university work. Course managers for each seminar made a concerted effort to select what they believed were the right instructors for their courses. These instructors ranged from graduate assistants to professional staff to full-time faculty members. One course administrator admitted to weighing individuals' content qualifications and instructional qualities to establish a pool of potential seminar instructors. This individual then used a basic concept to help determine who should be considered to teach when it came time to make the decision.

...best person might be the pro staff, the best person might be the student, the graduate student, or the best person might be the tenured faculty. So when I'm looking at the criteria, that's not the one I'm looking at. Actually, if everything else is equal, then I get them cheaper if I can.”

Table 5

Analysis of program concepts addressed by each course

DOMAIN: First-Year Seminar		DIMENSION OF CONTRAST			
Concept		EPY 101	UNS 100	COM 100	SCI 101
Explore Divergent Solutions	Level of Intervention Alternative Interventions	Univ	Univ	Col Yes	Col
Prepare Students for University Work	Resources Available	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Skills for Success	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Expectations	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Goals	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Select the Right Instructors		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Build a Classroom Community		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reach Out to More Students		Yes	Possibly	Yes	Required

A concerted effort was made across all four seminars to build a classroom community. A common strategy used to facilitate these communities was limiting the

number of enrollments allowed in each section. These limitations ranged from 20 students to 27 students. Efforts were on going to market what their seminars offered to more students for COM 100 and EPY 101. SCI 101 had an established audience within the College of Science that required the course. UNS 100 faced discontinuation when the University College closed, but was under consideration to become “part of the interdisciplinary studies degree” or transition to the new Academic Success Center.

The future of first-year seminars at this institution appeared to exist in a state of flux. A key consideration was what role the campus’ new Academic Success Center would play in shaping the future. One expectation articulated was that “Every first year student will belong to the Academic Success Center.” Another variable discussed was the concept of “first-year programs.” One senior administrator explained that the momentum was moving toward the establishment of “first-year programs.”

We're defining first year programs as the sources of support and the writing centers and the tutoring labs and career services. Those are the things that we're calling first year programs at [our institution]. The learning support will be the learning communities. And those are mostly going to be linked courses. They are one course from Urban Affairs, one course from the University College, one course from Business. So it's not as though the faculty will get together for the common good of education that might travel across the disciplines. It's for the purpose of students having the peer to peer mentorship in each class. So we're at a development level here.

Enrollment for the university's established first-year seminar has declined for several years. One course coordinator explained he knew why students enrolled in his course, but not why they declined to enroll.

It appeared several issues would require attention as the institution contemplated its future. One issue was how the needs currently addressed by the seminars would be resolved. Another issue was how the success of an alternative approach would be assessed and determined. Consideration appeared to be needed to address the lessons learned with the seminar program and ensure future alternatives would not face comparable lessons.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The basis for this chapter was the review of findings that related to each of the primary research questions with discussion highlighting the conclusions. These discussions led to recommendations proposed for future research.

#### What Are The Expectations of The First-Year Seminar From The Perspective of Various Participant Levels?

Similarities and differences appeared to exist across the three cases in defining participants' expectations for their seminar programs. The various participant level perspectives were defined as student, faculty, and administrators when considering first-year seminar expectations. Core expectations appeared to vary not only in terms of the institutions' seminar programs, but also the participant's level of involvement with the program. The group that appeared to have the least defined expectations concerning the first-year seminar experience was the students (See Table 6).

Overall, the views expressed by students appeared to be defined by the context associated with their specific first-year seminar. Expectations expressed by students at the southwestern site reflected that these students participated in the site's only mandatory seminar. Their expectations generally appeared indicative of a need to better

communicate the course's purpose; however, it was understood that the course had to be taken and students attempted to optimize their flexibility in scheduling the course.

Table 6

Analysis of student expectations by case site

DOMAIN: Student Expectations	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Had no idea what classes to take			Yes
Never knew what kind of class it was			Yes
Really didn't think I needed it (transfer)			Yes
Wanted to find a way to get in tune with what's happening at the university		Yes	
It would be a way to keep up with my friends	Yes		
Figured a teacher with more seniority would help me learn more	Yes		
Figured smaller classes would help me learn more	Yes		
Knew it was going to be a task for me to do my assignments on time and keep up with everything	Yes		
Had to take it			
Required as part of the Key Program (and other Learning Communities)	Yes		Yes
Required by department			Yes
Needed 3 more credit hrs for my scholarship		Yes	
Had no idea what to expect	Yes		Yes
Fit with my schedule	Yes	Yes	Yes
It was available	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sounded helpful or interesting	Yes		Yes

Student inputs from the southeastern site appeared to support the expectations that the seminar was accepted as part of a student's first-year experience, could serve as a "gateway" to the university, and the credits could be used to complete your first semester's academic load. Likewise, students from the southeastern site appeared to optimize their flexibility in scheduling their section of the course.

Students interviewed at the Rocky Mountain site were participants in the Key program. It appeared difficult for these individuals to differentiate between their reasons for joining the Key program and the specific Key seminar they attended. However, it was common knowledge that either a one credit or a three credit seminar was required as part of the Key cluster selected by each student. Students at the Rocky Mountain site shared the same perspective with students at the other two institutions by seeking to ensure the seminar course they selected fit their schedule and was available for enrollment.

Students at the Rocky Mountain and southwestern sites appeared to share two common viewpoints. One of these views was that they were not clear about what to expect from the course. This was not a concern voiced by students at the southeastern site. The second view was that it appeared the seminar might be interesting or helpful based on what they had heard about the seminar.

In general, students appeared to possess the fewest expectations concerning what their first-year seminar course would provide them. Students participating in first-year seminars in conjunction with other learning experiences appeared to co-join their expectations of the two programs. The data suggest that two variables that were most important for students considering whether or not to take a first-year seminar were: whether the course was still available for enrollment and if the sessions that were

available fit into their academic schedule. It appeared that most students entering a first-year seminar entered the course without many pre-existing expectations concerning the course's content.

Faculty expectations appeared to be unique in some aspects and shared across the three sites in others (See Table 7). Rocky Mountain site faculty indicated they expected to discuss misconceptions and expectations with their students. Such discussions ranged from the material directly related to the seminar's defined goals to the students' beliefs and expectations concerning the college experience. Rocky Mountain faculty indicated it was necessary to adjust their instructional approaches to provide incentives for their students. The incentives were directed at promoting greater engagement of students in the class content. Examples of such instructional incentives included: conducting bicycle tours of the campus and community to promote more active learning and using pioneer cooking techniques for venison cook-outs in mountain meadows to promote student interest in mountain ecology.

The data suggested that expectations unique to faculty at the southeastern seminars covered three aspects: (1) Faculty indicated that they were faced with a dilemma in how to structure their courses so that they addressed mandatory content and had an opportunity to introduce material perceived to benefit the students. (2) They expected their course would not be the one that required the most time from students outside of the class. (3) These instructors shared the notion that it was necessary for them to adjust their instructional approaches, but indicated such adjustments should be made based upon the "class' personality." Their expectations were that some classes would prefer to engage in



more discussions or more lecture time or more project based interactions than other classes.

Table 7

Analysis of faculty expectations by case site

DOMAIN: Faculty Expectations	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Need to talk about misconceptions and expectations	Yes		
Draw your students into the topic through your instructional approach	Yes		
Difficult to do all the mandatory things and things you want to do or think should be done		Yes	
Don't want this to be the one with the most homework		Yes	
Have to adjust your teaching approach to your class' personality		Yes	
Offer academic rigor	Yes	Yes	
Different perspectives exist among instructors about what the class is and should be expected of students	Yes	Yes	
Class will have peer mentors/graduate leaders	Yes	Yes	
Course should impact retention	Yes		Yes
Should help students link material/courses together	Yes		Yes
Students are not prepared for college level work		Yes	Yes
Spring students are different than fall students		Yes	Yes
Need to raise students' preparation for the future	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teach college skills to students	Yes	Yes	Yes
What we're doing is not remedial	Yes	Yes	Yes
Develop students' self-worth and ability to monitor themselves	Yes	Yes	Yes
Class size should be limited	Yes	Yes	Yes
Class develops a sense of connection and/or community	Yes	Yes	Yes
Serve as a major influencer of the course's content direction	Yes	Yes	Yes
This is a different type of class	Yes	Yes	Yes

Rocky Mountain and southeastern faculty appeared to share some expectations concerning their first-year seminars. They both indicated they expected that their seminars would offer academic rigor. The expectation was that instructors would bring different perspectives to each seminar concerning what should happen during the seminar and be expected of the seminar students. Rocky Mountain and southeastern site faculty indicated their seminars benefited from the use of peer mentors and or graduate leaders. The classroom roles assigned in both settings to these students was negotiated between the student and the faculty member.

The southwestern faculty appeared to share some expectations with those of faculty at the Rocky Mountain site and others with faculty at the southeastern university. Southwestern and Rocky Mountain faculty indicated they expected their seminars to impact their institutions' student retention. Some of the seminar faculty at these two institutions contended the seminars should assist students in linking together concepts from other courses. Southeastern and southwestern faculty expressed that they expected their students to be unprepared to begin college level work. Also, these institutions' faculty indicated that they expected spring semester students would be different than the students who enrolled during the fall. Spring seminars were expected to contain more transfer students and students who were either unable to enroll in the institution during the fall semester or who enrolled, but were not successful.

Faculty at all three institutions indicated certain shared expectations concerning their seminar courses and students. The seminars were expected to be a different type of class than what the students would encounter during their first-year at the three institutions. Faculty expected the seminars to increase students' preparation for the future. These

seminars were seen as courses that could be used to teach college skills to students, but not as remedial courses. Participation in the seminars was viewed as a way to help students develop self-worth and the ability to self-monitor. Class size was anticipated to be limited and seminars to help students develop a sense of connection and/or community. Also, faculty appeared to share the expectation that they should be a major influence on the content direction taken in designing the seminar courses. Some faculty members indicated the thought their role in the design of the seminar had been minimized in the past.

Overall, it appeared faculty expectations were based on the idea that a first-year seminar should be a different type of class or learning experience than what the students experienced in their other classes. Part of this expectation seemed to rest on an expectation that the class size should be limited to support more interaction within the seminar setting. Also, the limited class size was expected to provide opportunities for discussion of students' misconceptions and expectations in a more intimate setting. Another expectation seemed to be that what first-year seminar students needed was not a remedial skills class. The class content should provide students with an academically rigorous experience. Instructors indicated they expected their seminars to help students prepare for the future by teaching them what the instructor perceived to be the college skills students required for college level work. Peer mentors seemed to be expected to fulfill roles that ranged from assignment grader to student mediator, but defining that role was an instructor's responsibility.

The general expectation among faculty members appeared to be that different perspectives existed among instructors concerning what first-year seminar students

needed to receive from the course. Some instructors thought the seminar should be structured to help motivate students by drawing them into a topic or content area. Other instructors indicated they thought the content should be adjustable to better address the mix of needs and personalities in each class. Still other instructors expressed that they expected their seminars would serve as more intimate settings in which students could synthesize ideas derived from other courses.

The impact of conceptual differences at each site appeared to be most noticeable when considering the perspectives voiced by administrators. Some expectations were unique to the administrators at only one site (See Table 8), while others were shared by administrators across the sites.

Expectations that were unique to administrators at a site appeared to either serve as major contributors in shaping the first-year seminar program at that institution or as conflicting views in relationship to the existing program. The preponderance of unique expectations articulated for the Rocky Mountain and southeastern sites appeared to reflect the core concepts behind those programs. Rocky Mountain administrators seemed to emphasize the perspectives that their seminar program should be based on ideas and seek to connect students to the seminar as an “academic enterprise.” However, Rocky Mountain administrators also indicated they thought their seminar program was incoherent and that no single seminar could do everything envisioned by the institution.

Table 8

## Analysis of unique administrative expectations by case site

DOMAIN: Unique Administrative Expectations	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Important for students to be confident	Yes		
No first-year seminar can do everything that we might want it to do	Yes		
Connect students to the university from right in the very beginning	Yes		
What our existing seminars achieve educationally is really quite varied	Yes		
You should use ideas, topics, issues, intellectual excitement to connect people to the academic enterprise in a seminar	Yes		
Intellectual engagement established in a seminar will serve as the foundation for the learning of a discipline	Yes		
Increase intellectual engagement and connection to the university as an intellectual community	Yes		
Right now our seminars don't do anything very coherent	Yes		
Instill a sense of an obligation to be an educated person		Yes	
Teach them about the virtues of a college education and expose them to the vices		Yes	
Must have a core of a curricula that is nonnegotiable		Yes	
Program administrators participate in teaching first-year students		Yes	
Have a good fit with our students and they know what they're getting		Yes	
Role of the course is multifold		Yes	
Everybody's going to need help at some point in time		Yes	
There are certain things in the university cycle that will have an effect on new students		Yes	
Need to get information to the students in a timely manner as part of a teachable moment		Yes	
More interested in them sort of grasping some fundamental concepts			Yes
Opportunity is needed for students to mentor each other and establish academic and social support			Yes
We need different types of first year experiences			Yes

Data suggest that southeastern administrators emphasized the perspectives that their seminar program should fulfill a multifold role with the expectation that all students would need help at some time during the course. Further, a nonnegotiable core curriculum appeared to be the vehicle through which the administrators expected the course to instill a sense of obligation by emphasizing the virtues and vices associated with a college education. Additionally, the southeastern administrators seemed to perceive that their seminar was a known commodity for students and provided a “good fit” to the students’ needs. This expectation appeared to agree with the students’ expectation that the seminar would provide them a vehicle with which to “get in tune with what’s happening at the university.”

The unique expectations articulated for the southwestern site appeared to reflect emerging perspectives under consideration by the institution. Administrators seemed to perceive that students need to possess some “fundamental concepts,” but were not sure these concepts could be transmitted through one type of single “first year experience.” However, it appeared that an expectation existed that the students should have opportunities to mentor each other and provide academic and social support.

Seven administrative expectations appeared to be shared by administrators across the three sites (See Table 9). These expectations seemed to concentrate on how to integrate students into the university setting and the need to help students be successful in the new environment. These shared administrative expectations appeared to be translated into unique first-year seminar programs when implemented at each of the three sites. However, administrators’ shared expectations seemed to support the expectations generally held by first-year seminar faculty.

Table 9

## Analysis of shared administrative expectations by case site

DOMAIN: Shared Administrative Expectations	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Students need to understand what scholarship, learning, and academic knowledge are about in a university	Yes		Yes
Help students become excited about knowledge and learning	Yes		Yes
Introduce students to what their particular discipline is	Yes		Yes
Help them determine if they are in the right place	Yes		Yes
Need to establish a community both in and out of the classroom	Yes	Yes	
There are out-of-classroom issues (transition issues, roommate issues, resident hall issues, etc) that have to be resolved	Yes	Yes	
Help students find constructive ways to deal with the challenges they are going to face	Yes	Yes	
Help students make a connection between their living and learning in the classroom	Yes	Yes	
Identify and implement strategies that will make students successful		Yes	Yes
Need to think carefully about the skills, attitudes, confidences, and environments in which students operate	Yes	Yes	Yes
Make university personnel and resources known and accessible to students	Yes	Yes	Yes
Need to design experiences so students can be successful	Yes	Yes	Yes
The university is different from the environments students come from	Yes	Yes	Yes
Need to help students figure out how to function in the university environment	Yes	Yes	Yes
Help them make the transition to being university students	Yes	Yes	Yes
Establish some group norms, some group expectations	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Rocky Mountain and southwestern site administrators appeared to share expectations that related to students' integration into the academic experience. These administrators seemed to share an expectation of first-year seminars assisting students to become excited about knowledge and learning. Other administrative expectations shared between the administrators at these two sites appeared to reflect similar frameworks for helping students identify their long-term academic and career directions.

Some of the administrative expectations central to the first-year seminar program at the southeastern site appeared to be independently shared by the Rocky Mountain site or by the southwestern site. Southeastern administrators' expectations that seemed to be shared by the Rocky Mountain administrators were the ones most in synch with integrating students into the total campus experience. This similarity of expectations concerning integration of in- and out-of-class issues might reflect that first year students on both campuses represented a preponderance of the residence hall population. Southeastern and current southwestern first-year seminar administrators appeared to share the expectation that their seminars should help students identify and implement student success strategies.

What conclusions can be drawn from the  
course content at each case study site?

Componential analysis of the course content across the case study settings indicated there were some unique and some shared aspects to the three cases (See Table 10). Both the Key program at the Rocky Mountain site and the COM 100 course at the southwestern site targeted helping students think about how academic content areas



related to each other. The seminars at all three institutions sought to offer rigorous, but not overpowering experiences.

The southeastern and southwestern universities appeared to expect their seminars to help students learn about school traditions, policies, and campus practices to some extent. The southeaster seminar appeared designed to place greater emphasis on this area in its curriculum. The need to learn about academic programs and career choices was emphasized by seminars at all three institutions. The greatest emphasis was placed on these areas by the southeastern site, followed by the southwestern site. The Rocky Mountain site emphasized these areas predominately in the seminars offered by its Colleges/departments.

All three institutions placed some emphasis on getting to know about key campus resources during first-year seminars. The greatest emphasis in this area was placed by the southeastern site followed by the southwestern. Some emphasis was placed on getting to know about the library and advisors at the Rocky Mountain site. The issue of substance abuse was dealt with indirectly by some of the instructors at the Rocky Mountain site.

First-year seminars at the southeastern and southwestern sites emphasized college success strategies. Goal setting was a success strategy addressed in general by the Key seminars and in terms of academic major and career choices by the College/department seminars at the Rocky Mountain site. The other success strategies were addressed informally and at the discretion of the instructor during Rocky Mountain seminars. These issues were expected to be addressed through other campus programming initiatives at the Rocky Mountain site.

Table 10

## Analysis of what is evident from course content at case site

DOMAIN: Evident through the interactions	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Think about how academic content areas relate to each other	Yes (3)	(0)	COM 100 (2)
Want the learning more rigorous than high school, but not overpowering	Yes (10)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Want Students to Learn About School Traditions, Policies, and Campus Practices	(0)	Yes (10)	Yes (5)
Need to Learn about Academic Programs	Yes (3)	Yes (10)	Yes (5)
Need to Learn about Career Choices	Yes (3)	Yes (10)	Yes (5)
Need to Know About Key Campus Resources			
Library	Yes (4)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Career Center	(0)	Yes (10)	Yes (8)
Advisors	Yes (4)	Yes (10)	Yes (8)
	Indirectly		
Substance Abuse	(2)	Yes (10)	(0)
Finance Center	(0)	Yes (10)	(0)
Health Center	(0)	Yes (10)	(0)
Writing Center	(0)	Yes (10)	Some (3)
Need core strategies / skills for college success			
Goal Setting	Yes (7)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
	Informally		
Time Management	(3)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
	Informally		
Note Taking	(3)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
	Informally		
Test Taking	(3)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Relaxation techniques	(0)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
How to stay healthy	(0)	Yes (10)	Yes (8)
	Depends Upon the Professor		
Writing skills and Strategies	(4)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
	Depends Upon the Professor		
Speaking Skills and Experience	(4)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Diversity	Yes (2)	Yes (10)	Yes (8)
Critical Thinking	Yes (10)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Select the Right Instructors			
Should be Approachable Knowledgeable concerning the course content	Yes (7)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Want to Work with These Students	Yes (10)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Freshmen and New Transfers Need the Course	Yes (7)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Need to know about campus and community opportunities	Yes (5)	Yes (10)	Yes (3)
Class should offer opportunities to interact	Yes (10)	Yes (10)	Yes (10)
Offer Peer Mentors/TAs	Yes (5)	Yes (10)	(0)

DOMAIN: Evident through the interactions	DIMENSION OF CONTRAST		
	Rocky Mountain	Southeastern	Southwestern
Course should be Optional	Yes (7)	Yes (10)	Depends on the Course (5)
Course should be Mandatory	Some College Seminars (3)	(0)	Depends on the Course (5)

Note: A bracketed rating was used to indicate the apparent degree of emphasis placed on each domain item by each contrast dimension. The rating scale used was 0 to 10 with 0 representing no importance and 10 representing very important.

Selection of the “right instructors” for first-year seminars was emphasized at all three sites. The interpretation of who was the “right” person to teach the seminars varied across the sites, but common desired characteristics were that 1) the instructor be approachable by students, 2) knowledgeable of the course’s content, and 3) want to work with students attending the seminars. Rocky Mountain instructors, who taught the “Professor’s Passion” seminars, were expected to possess a high level of content understanding, but not necessarily a desire to work with first-year students.

The needs for students to attend a first-year seminar and know about campus and community opportunities were evident at all three sites to varying degrees. They were most evident at the southeastern site where 80% of the students attended the seminar. These needs were supported to a lesser degree at the Rocky Mountain site and least support at the southwestern site.

All three of the institutions indicated the belief that the seminars should offer opportunities for interaction by the students and among the students and faculty member. These interactions were augmented by offering peer mentors and/or teaching assistants at the southeastern and Rocky Mountain sites. Peer mentors were actively recruited and

assigned to the first-year seminars at the southeastern site. The mentors served more of a teaching assistant or lab assistant role at the Rocky Mountain site.

The prevailing belief across the three sites was that first-year seminars should be offered as optional courses. All of the seminars offered at the southeastern site and all but a few of the seminar sessions offered in the Colleges/departments at the Rocky Mountain site were voluntary. The southwestern site's two most recent seminar courses were mandatory while enrollment was optional for the original two courses.

### What Are The Potential Explanations Based On The Evidence?

The evidence indicated expectations varied tremendously across the three sites and rested on different perspectives in defining the purpose for each institution's first-year seminar program (See Table 11). The Rocky Mountain site's expectations appeared to be based on the concept that ideas, topics, issues, and intellectual excitement should form the foundation for their seminars. New students were expected to connect to the university as an intellectual, research community through intellectual engagement. Discussions of the interactions taking place at the site indicated faculty-student exchanges extended beyond the scope of establishing intellectual excitement. These interactions appeared to match more correctly with the administrative expectations that the existing seminars were not very coherent and a single seminar could not do everything desired. A similar expectation concerning the need for different types of first-year experiences was voiced by administrators at the southwestern site.

Table 11

Comparison of site expectations	
	Program Expectations
Rocky Mountain	Intellectual excitement with emphasis on ideas, topics, and issues
Southeastern	Assisting with student needs/keep pace with changing student needs
Southwestern	No single seminar could do everything/need different types of experiences

The southeastern site appeared to expect their seminar experience to keep pace with their evolving student population. A central expectation was that every student would need assistance at some point in their academic career and the seminar should provide the required information in a timely manner as part of a teachable moment for the student. Students completing the course were expected to possess the skills necessary for success at the university and know both the virtues associated with a college education and the vices they should avoid.

Analysis of the courses at each case site appeared to reflect some of the results noted in the literature and that the cases shared some inter-site and intra-site commonalities and differences (See Table 12). Simpson, Hynd, Nist, and Burrell (1997) proposed first year interventions or academic assistance programs existed along a continuum from those designed to improve students' functional reading skill level or proficiency to those focused on developing students' learning strategies. Five prevalent program delivery models existed along this continuum: (a) learning-to-learn courses, (b) supplemental

instruction, (c) required programs for under prepared students, (d) courses integrating the processes of reading and writing, and (e) learning assistance centers.

Table 12

Comparison of intervention model and course design		
	Intervention Model	Course Design
Rocky Mountain	Learning assistance centers	Mix of intentional and serendipitous
Southeastern	Learning to learn course	Direct instruction
Southwestern	Learning to learn course	Direct instruction

Simpson et al. reported the learning assistance centers model varied according to the type of services offered and cliental supported. The purpose of assistance centers was to provide students academic help, but how that help was delivered differed based on the academic demands placed on students, available resources, political pressures, and the theoretical basis for instructional practices. Learning centers were dissimilar in their approaches to teaching skills or strategies, promoting transfer of strategies, focusing on motivation, and analysis of learning tasks for inclusion in classroom contexts. A weakness of this model was reported to be the lack of comprehensiveness and the inconsistency of the evaluation designs used across various assistance center programs. The Rocky Mountain site emphasized this model for its self-regulatory skills through either campus assistance centers or workshops conducted as part of the Key program. The

southwestern site would potentially face these challenges with activation of the campus' new Academic Success Center.

The focus of learning-to-learn course interventions differed from institution to institution, but generally targeted promoting self-regulated, strategic learning based on learning theory and a developmental model. Students were taught a variety of learning and motivation strategies and tactics then expected to apply them to a variety of courses or new situations. Most learning-to-learn courses were elective and students did not need to take the course to gain admittance to the institution. This model appeared to most closely reflect the first-year seminar cases that existed at the southeastern and southwestern sites.

Hofer, Yu, and Pintrich (1998) raised the issues of course design and course content transfer in their discussions of teaching college students self-regulation. They contended multi-strategy programs that teach a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational strategies prepared students to have both the "skill" and "will" to use strategies correctly (p. 68). A second issue impacting course design was whether to establish a stand-alone or adjunct course versus an integrated program. Adjunct courses were viewed as easier to implement at the college level, but had to facilitate transfer of the strategies from the adjunct course to other disciplinary courses. This was the approach that appeared to be inherent in the learning to learn course seminars at the southeastern and southwestern sites.

The concept of an integrated program suggested some of the course design issues for first-year seminars at the Rocky Mountain site. Integrated programs embedded learning strategy instruction throughout students' curriculum. The work of Salomon and Perkins

(1989) indicated use of strategies in many different contexts and across different types of tasks and content areas should increase the probability that transfer of the strategies occurred. Consequently, the embedding of these strategies was an intentional feature of the course design.

The Rocky Mountain site seminars had what appeared to be a mix of intentional and serendipitous use of strategy instruction. The administrators indicated several seminars sponsored by the Colleges/departments intentionally emphasized cognitive and motivational strategies. A more serendipitous use of strategy instruction appeared to be employed by some of the faculty based upon the strategy related issues raised by students in their classes. Hofer et al. (1998) indicated many college faculty perceived their instructional goal to be teaching discipline-specific content and strategies, not general strategies for learning and self-regulation. This appeared particularly relevant for some of the first-year seminars. Instruction in skills for college success appeared in those instances to be dependent upon the knowledge, skills, and intervention of the faculty member.

Simpson et al. (1997) acknowledged that instructional methods used vary significantly both across and within different academic assistance programs. The spectrum of these teaching methods included more traditional approaches, such as direct instruction; methods emphasizing student dialogues and peer learning; and inductive instructional approaches, such as scenarios and discovery methods. The majority of direct instruction concentrated on (a) describing strategies, (b) the rationale for learning a strategy, (c) how to use the processes associated with a strategy, (d) when and where to use the strategy, and (e) how to know and what to do if a strategy did not work. Direct



instruction was recognizable based on having clear instructional goals, structured and sequential instructional materials, emphasis on providing explanation, practice, and feedback concerning the strategy being taught, and monitoring student performance. These techniques appeared prevalent in the first-year seminars taught at the southwestern and southeastern sites.

How Should First-Year Seminars Be Modified  
or Maintained Based On the Observations,  
Interpretations, and Analysis of What Is  
Happening In Each Setting?

An eclectic approach to learning theory appeared evident in determining the need for first-year seminars, how the first-year seminars were designed, and what they provided students at the three sites. These first-year seminars appeared to emphasize one or more aspects associated with a social-cognitive perspective, but none of the models integrated their components within the framework of the self-regulatory process. Adjunct courses, such as those at the southeastern and southwestern sites, and the mix of intentional and serendipitous use of strategy instruction at the Rocky Mountain site appeared to provide students with declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about strategy use. These efforts appeared to emphasize the need to adapt strategies to different goals, task, content areas and classroom contexts.

Weinstein and Meyer (1991) noted that cognitive strategies share several common characteristics, but are not “situation-specific” (p. 17). The strategies were goal-directed toward a standard of performance, intentionally selected based on such factors as prior

experience and commitment to goals, and required time and effort to use. The individual's goals, task requirements, and learning context interacted to determine which strategy was most effective under a given set of circumstances. However, Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) noted that cognitive strategies used without the simultaneous use of self-regulatory strategies were not conducive to academic performance.

Schunk and Zimmerman (1998) discussed several common features of academic self-regulation linked to theory and prior research. Teaching strategy was central to many of the interventions targeted at promoting self-regulated learning. Two additional components used to enhance learning and motivation were practicing self-regulatory strategies and providing feedback on strategy effectiveness. Emphasis was placed on students monitoring their application of strategies, the effectiveness of the strategy in solving tasks demands, and ways to modify the strategy. The final component was the social support from teachers and frequently peers. Social support was generally reduced and/or withdrawn as students become more competent in their use of strategies.

One implication of this research appeared to be that first-year seminars should more strongly emphasize the self-regulatory process, particularly if promoting transfer. Intellectual excitement can not compensate for the lack of skills. I am therefore posing a tentative model for how the self-regulatory process could be used as the basis for a first-year seminar (See Figure 15). Emphasis of the proposed first-year seminar model rests on the development of required skills and self-motivation while facilitating successful behavior in the college environment. The model separates students' proximal goals from their distal goals and proposes that proximal academic goals will be derived from each

student's current course syllabi requirements. These requirements will be based upon all of the courses taken by each student during the same semester as the first-year seminar.

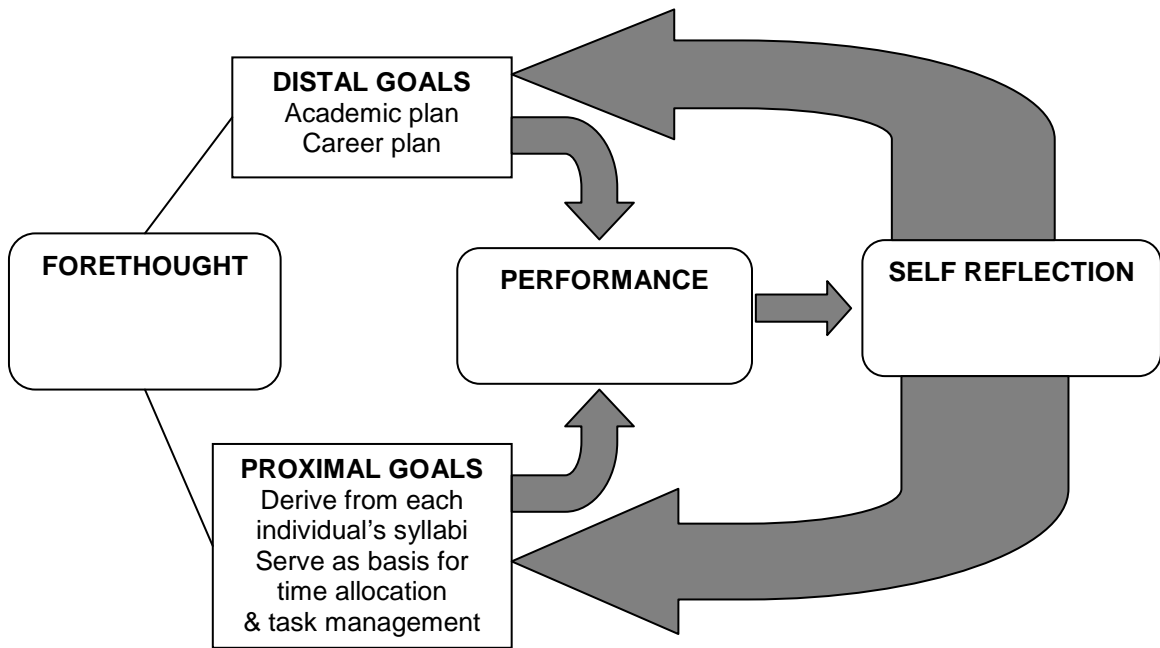


Figure 15. Proposed first-year seminar model

The syllabi requirements for individuals' courses will serve as the basis for defining students' time allocation and management during the semester. Time requirements associated with each student's extracurricular time commitments such as work schedules, family commitments, etc. will be added to the student's daily/weekly calendar. These proximal goals are anticipated to form the basis for the first-year seminar during the first half of the semester. Instructional and performance activities are anticipated to be targeted to the knowledge, skills, and strategies required by students' proximal goals. The

timing of each proximal goal and the degree of priority each student determines should be assigned to their goals are anticipated to shape which strategies and how many strategies will be taught during the first half of the semester. Each individual's proximal goal standards are anticipated to define the basis for self reflection and the motivational outcomes associated with the use of each strategy to achieve the goal.

Distal goals are anticipated to reflect each student's current concept of their academic and career plans. These goals would not be established or examined until after the semester's midterm exam week. Performance activities associated with these goals are expected to focus on researching academic requirements, career fields and the demands associated with them.

Peer mentors are expected to be used in each seminar class with the expectation that these role models would help in addressing the language, life styles, and practices associated with the university's cultural patterns. The instructor's teaching of learning strategies are expected to concentrate on how a strategy works, why it is important, and the situations when it should be used. Cognitive modeling could be used to offer an opportunity for the instructor to assist students in benefiting from the instructor's thinking while demonstrating the strategy. Students are envisioned to receive guided practice of the strategy in a small group setting during the seminar class. Emphasis would then be placed on the students performing independent practice of each strategy prior to the next seminar class. Members from the small group would be encouraged to discuss the results of their independent practice of each strategy at the beginning of the next seminar class.

It is anticipated that assessment methods targeted at determining each student's performance and self reflections results might be appropriate to this model. Students

might use a daily reflection log to document their established goals, actions taken during the course, reflections made, and how reflections impacted each goal. Also, a portfolio could be established for each student to collect and evaluate the student's learning during the first-year seminar. The anticipated purpose of the portfolio would be to show-case what the students thought were their best examples of how they applied the concepts learned during the first-year seminar.

### Summary and Conclusions

This project was intended to define for the reader the multiple dimensions of the first-year seminars at three different sites and to propose some thoughts that could be considered to improve the future success of these classes. The objective was to move beyond the perspective of academic performance, persistence, and degree completion goals when considering the specific character of first-year seminars. The results indicate there is not only a basic tension between using first-year seminars for intellectual excitement and social adjustment, but the extent to which first-year seminars teach strategies and self regulatory skills.

Qualitative methodology was used to define what program variables were encountered and how the design, implementation, and outcomes of the three first-year seminars compared with each other. Case study methodology was used to concentrate on the process aspects of the first-year seminar phenomenon. Interviews, observations, and document analysis provided the basis for defining the context of the cases at each site. On-site investigations focused on observing what was happening at the site, conducting formal and informal interviews, and examining documents and materials that related to

each case. Program variables were viewed and discussed from the perspectives of the various participants involved with the courses at different institutions.

Several important findings emerged from data and observations made when the three sites were compared with each other.

- Inconsistent course goals among the sites.
- Inconsistent assessment of course outcomes among the sites.
- Consistent emphasis on self-regulatory skills among the sites.

Each of the important points will now be discussed in greater detail.

#### *Inconsistent course goals among the sites*

The specific character of each first-year seminar fluctuated depending upon the particular institution, and course goals were not consistent across the three sites. This appeared problematic based upon the prior claims of significant effects and higher persistence rates for participants of first-year seminars. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) contended all first-year seminar courses seek to promote academic performance, persistence, and degree completion. However, the expectations of what a first-year seminar program would do for students varied during this study both in terms of the goals defined for the course and the needs envisioned by the various participant levels associated with the institutions' first-year seminar programs.

A recurring theme presented by the three cases was that differences of opinion existed in defining the goals expected to be achieved by a first-year seminar. The impact of these diverse goals appeared to be reflected in the diversity of the course options and the divergent student performance expectations established by each instructor at one site. The lack of universal or common goals also seemed to be reflected by the annual escalation of

course content reported by another site. Finally, the lack of more universal goals appeared to significantly impact the level of institutional support and advocacy gained by the program at the third institution.

*Inconsistent assessment of course outcomes among the sites*

The lack of consistent measurement of the outcomes associated with the existing programs appeared to be worth further consideration. The determination of measurable outcomes varied across the sites from the consideration of retention trends and grades earned to the use of seminar class evaluations to the use of pre/post studies and student learning outcome assessments. A central tool used to assess the effectiveness of the seminar programs appeared to be anecdotal information collected at each site. These approaches appeared to indicate the programs were lacking in terms of consistent, definitive information with which to evaluate the effectiveness of the program's processes and products.

*Consistent emphasis on self-regulatory skills among the sites*

It appeared that the need to assist students with the establishment of self-regulatory skills was either directly or indirectly acknowledged at all three sites. The Rocky Mountain site emphasized self-regulatory skills through either campus assistance centers or workshops. However, there was an additional emphasis on helping students think about their own scholarship and study skills in many of the seminar classes. Goal setting was a success strategy addressed in general and in terms of academic major and career choices at the Rocky Mountain site. First-year seminars at the southeastern and southwestern sites emphasized college success strategies. These first-year seminars appeared to emphasize one or more aspects associated with a social-cognitive perspective

of self-regulation. This appeared to be a common theme across the three sites and their first-year seminars.

### Suggestions for Further Research

This research suggests several areas to pursue for future research. For example, student retention was often one of the least cited reasons for establishing and retaining first-year seminars. First-year seminars can be viewed as contributors to student retention and timely advancement, but not necessarily prime contributors. Methodological issues appeared to impact much of the prior research conducted to determine whether first-year seminars significantly influence students' decisions to remain and advance in college. More research is needed to either establish or refute this notion.

Additional classroom investigation could target how first-year seminars are taught. Questions addressed could include: (1) How the textbook selected influences the instruction presented? (2) How does course content affect student attendance in the course during the semester? (3) How does classroom collective efficacy impact interactions within seminar classrooms? (4) What explains the differences and similarities among institutional approaches to first-year seminars?

Institutions with multiple first-year seminars and multiple institutions offering first-year seminars offer opportunities to investigate the similarities and differences associated with students attending those courses. More specifically: (1) How do the student characteristics compare across the courses? (2) What were retention and advancement trends for students enrolled in the various courses? (3) How did students perceive their need for the course prior to beginning the course and after attending it? (4) What



differences were evident based on decisions made in selecting an instructor for a first-year seminar?

I proposed a new model for first-year seminars based on using the self-regulation process in this study. This course model is suggested for investigation to determine what happens when it is used and in relationship to what happens in other seminar courses. Consideration could be given to what impact the proposed course has on students' development of greater self-regulation during their first-year.

#### Limitations of the Study

Multiple case design was selected because it offered the potential to produce more robust results in terms of understanding similarities and differences among multiple sites and establishing greater depth to support both within- and between-case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003). This depth adds confidence to the study's results by strengthening the precision, validity, and stability of the findings during analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, the limitation was that a multiple case design reduced the level of analytical depth achievable for any single case.

## APPENDIX A

### CRITICAL PRAXIS AND SYSTEMATIC EVALUATION PERSPECTIVE

#### CRITICAL PRAXIS FRAMEWORK

Derived from the work of Drs. Putney, Wink, and Perkins

- **NoteTaking:** Describe what is happening in each campus setting
  - What are the **expectations** of the First Year Seminar (FYS) from the perspective of various participant levels (institutional leadership, program management, instructor, student)?
    - Need (student and institutional) for FYS
    - FYS conceptualization/design
    - FYS delivery and operations
    - Outcomes of previous and current FYS
  - What are the **responsibilities** of each level of participants?
  - What are the **actual outcomes and lessons learned**?
  - **What is evident** through the interactions taking place in each setting?
    - Actions
    - Events
    - Artifacts
- **NoteMaking:** Interpret why something happened based upon knowledge gained during NoteTaking
  - What are the **potential explanations** based on the evidence?
  - **What can be understood** about the people, events, and artifacts in each setting?
  - What was observed that could offer **different interpretations** in each setting
    - Who is saying what about the setting

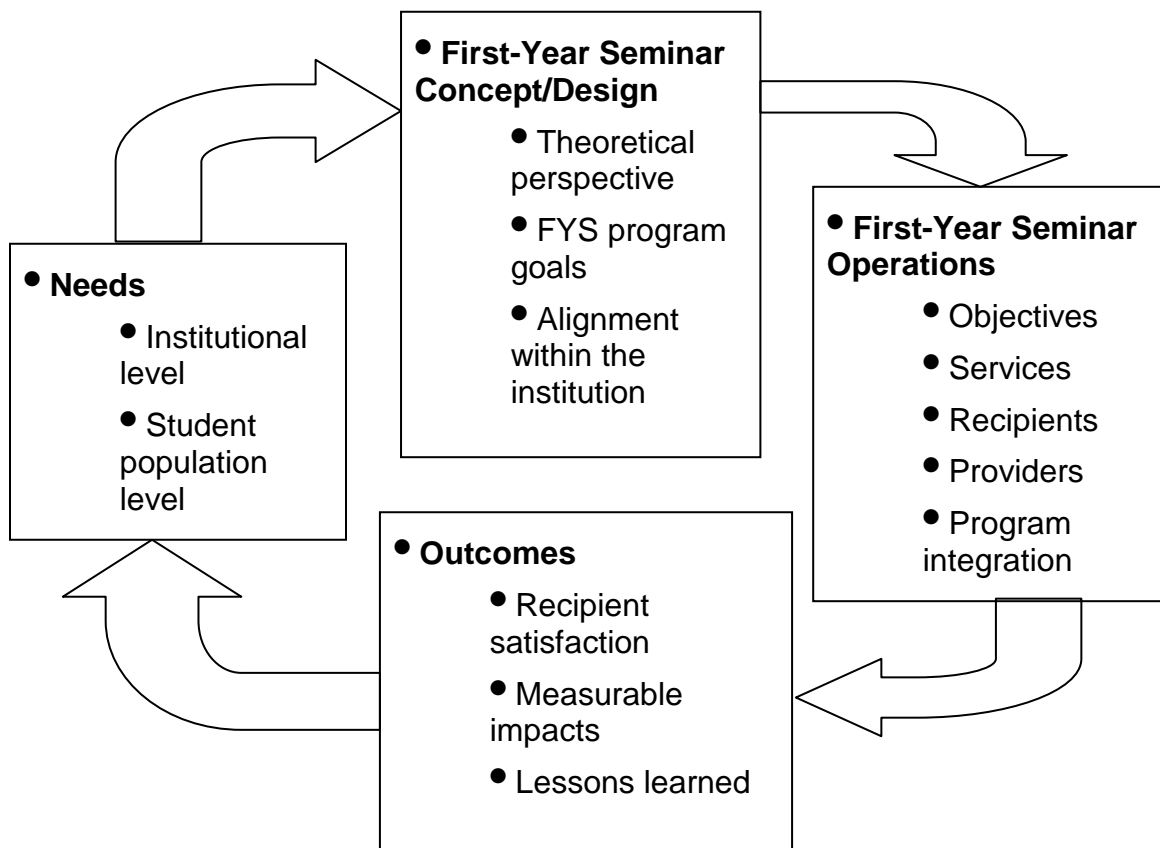
- Does a match exist between expectations and what appears to be happening?
  - Is there congruence or divergence between the FYS concept and FYS operations?
  - Compare and contrast what the participants expected to have happen in their setting with what appears to be happening
- **NoteRemaking:** Transform what is learned to offer recommendations to improve practice
  - How should the FYS be **modified or maintained** based on the observations, interpretations, and analysis of what is happening in each setting?

What are the **implications** of congruence or divergence for the institution?

APPENDIX B

SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM EVALUATION

PERSPECTIVE



## APPENDIX C

### INFORMANTS AND AREAS OF EXPERTISE

#### Anticipated Areas of Expertise

	Need for the Course	Course Design or Conceptualization	Course Operations and Delivery	Outcomes
Southeastern University				
Vice Provost for Academic Support	X	X	X	X
Assistant Vice Provost for UNIV 101 Course Coordinator	X	X	X	X
Focus group with 4-8 instructors currently teaching the course		X	X	X
Focus group with 5-12 students from one or more classes during the current session	X		X	X
Rocky Mountain University				
Sr Vice President/Provost	X	X		X
VP for Student Affairs	X	X	X	X

	Need for the Course	Course Design or Conceptualization	Course Operations and Delivery	Outcomes
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs	X	X	X	X
Undergraduate Student Success & Retention Director	X	X	X	X
Focus group with the 3-8 of the College Deans	X	X		X
Focus group with 5 – 12 department or college Undergraduate Program Coordinators	X	X	X	X
Focus group with 3-5 instructors from across the pool of current instructors		X	X	X
Focus group with students from one or more of the current session's classes	X		X	X
Southwestern University				
Executive Vice President & Provost	X	X		X
Dean, College of Education	X	X		X
Educational Psychology Dept Coordinator for EPY 101	X	X	X	X
Current EPY 101 Instructor		X	X	X

	Need for the Course	Course Design or Conceptualization	Course Operations and Delivery	Outcomes
Dean, University College	X	X		X
Dept Coordinator and Lead Instructor for UNS 100 and UNS 201	X	X	X	X
Dean, College of Sciences	X	X		X
Dept Coordinator and Lead Instructor for SCI 101	X	X	X	X
Focus group with students from one or more of the classes from the 3 Colleges	X		X	X

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Southeaster Research University Interviewees

##### Vice President for Academic Support and for Student Affairs

- How would you describe your institution's course called UNIV 101?
- What do you believe UNIV 101 does for the university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that UNIV 101 is responsible for these outcomes?
- Some people would say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
- How would you explain the organizational structure associated with UNIV 101?
  - What do you believe are the strengths associated with how UNIV 101 is organized?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the current course's design?
- If I were a tenured professor at this university, how do you think I would describe U101 and the need for the course?



- What do you view as the pros and cons of having faculty involvement in teaching UNIV 101?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

Assistant Vice Provost and Director

- What do you believe are the primary issues any institution should try to address with a first-year seminar program?
- How do you believe an institution should be able to tell whether their first-year seminar program is resolving those issues?
  - What metrics would you use?
- How would you describe UNIV 101?
- How have the problems the university has used UNIV 101 to address changed over the years?
- How are the students taking UNIV 101 today different from the students you taught in the earlier days of the course?
- What do you see as the three most important and lasting changes that have been made to UNIV 101 since it was founded?
  - What makes these changes important in your mind?
- What do you believe UNIV 101 does for the university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that UNIV 101 was responsible for these outcomes?

- Some people would say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
- How would you explain the organizational structure associated with UNIV 101?
  - What do you believe are the strengths associated with how UNIV 101 is organized?
- If you could build a perfect system what would you change about the current course's design?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Course Coordinator for UNIV 101

- What do you see as the most effective theoretical perspective for a first-year seminar?
- What role do you believe a theoretical perspective should play in the conceptual design of a first-year seminar?
  - What about in the daily operations of a first-year seminar?
- What would you describe as the purpose for the UNIV 101 course?
- What do you see as the three most important and lasting changes that have been made to UNIV 101 since it was founded?
  - What makes these changes important in your mind?
- How many sections of UNIV 101 do you conduct each semester?

- How would I recognize a typical UNIV 101 student if I saw one on the campus?
- What, if any differences should I expect to find between your fall and spring enrollees?
- What percentage of your enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in the course? (Is that the same for fall and spring)
- What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
  - How do you think this happens?
- Suppose I am a student, how would I know whether I should enroll in UNIV 101?
  - What choices would I face in making this decision?
- What is your process for ensuring that the syllabus for each seminar aligns with the purpose for the course?
  - If you could design a perfect system, what would you change about the syllabus process?
- What do you think the ideal instructor for UNIV 101 looks like?
  - What sort of assistance should I expect from you to help make my course successful (TAs, training, etc)?
  - How much latitude would I have in selecting my course materials?
- How do you monitor the success of UNIV 101?
  - What objectives do you believe need to be achieved to demonstrate success?

- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?

- How do you think they could help?

Content Area Experts (Alcohol & Drug Office, Career Center, Library)

- What campus need(s) is your organization chartered to address for the university?
  - Who are you predominately trying to help?
- What would you describe as the purpose for the UNIV 101 course?
- How and when did your organization start supporting the UNIV 101 classes?
  - What made you decide to start being involved with UNIV 101?
- How does your content area fit into the purpose of UNIV 101 from your perspective?
- How important is UNIV 101 to you in terms of trying to achieve your organization's purpose on the campus?
- Suppose it's my first semester as a new UNIV 101 instructor.
  - What would you do for me?
  - How would I learn about you and what you could do to help me?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

Instructor Focus Group

- What do you believe students should gain from their participation in your sections of UNIV 101?

- What do you see as the three most important and lasting changes that have been made to UNIV 101 since you've been teaching the course?
  - What makes these changes important in your mind?
- What do you see as the three worst changes that have been made to UNIV 101 since you've been teaching the course?
  - What makes these changes important in your mind?
- Some people might say your university doesn't need a first-year seminar any longer because most of the faculty knows how to teach first-year undergraduates. What would you say to them?
- Suppose it's my first day in your UNIV 101 class. What would it be like?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the process used to develop syllabi for UNIV 101?
- What objectives do you believe need to be achieved for your students to demonstrate success in UNIV 101?
  - How do you determine if those objectives have been met?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### UNIV 101 Graduate Assistants

- What is your role concerning UNIV 101 and the National Resource Center?
  - What kinds of stuff do you do as a GA?

- What do you believe undergraduate students should gain from their participation in UNIV 101?
- How do you believe your role contributes to students achieving what they believe they should gain from participation in UNIV 101?
- If you could change anything you wanted about UNIV 101 and the National Resource Center, what would that change be?
- What would you like to know from me?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Student Focus Group Questions

- How did you decide to enroll in UNIV 101?
  - Who was involved in your decision-making process?
  - What choices did you have to make in coming to the decision to enroll in the seminar?
- Would you make the same decision again?
- What is/was it like to be a student in your section of UNIV 101?
  - What do you like about the course?
  - What do you wish were different?
- What have you learned from UNIV 101?
- Suppose you could turn the clock back and relive any moment during your UNIV 101 class. What moment would you want to relive?

- What makes this special for you?
- What would you say to a student who was thinking about enrolling in the course?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Peer Mentors and Graduate Leaders

- What do you believe students should gain from their participation in your sections of UNIV 101?
- What is your role in UNIV 101 section(s)?
- How do you believe your role contributes to students achieving what you believe they should gain from participation in your section?
- Suppose I am a student, how would I know whether I should enroll in UNIV 101?
  - What choices would I face in making this decision?
- If you could change anything you wanted about UNIV 101, what would that change be?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about UNIV 101?
  - How do you think they could help?

## Rocky Mountain Research University Interviews

Vice President for Student Affairs and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs

- How would you describe the first-year seminar program at Colorado State University?
- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for your university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- What role does Student Affairs have concerning the first-year seminar courses at your university?
  - How would you change that role if you could?
  - What benefits would you expect to achieve by making those changes?
- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for your university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- Some people would say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
  - How has your university's first-year seminar program changed since the Plan for Excellence: Enhancing Undergraduate Education and Student Success was completed in 2006?
- How would you explain the organizational structure associated with the first-year seminars?



- What do you believe are the strengths associated with how your seminars are organized?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the way the current seminars are designed?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs

- Some people would say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
  - How has your university's first-year seminar program changed since the Plan for Excellence: Enhancing Undergraduate Education and Student Success was completed in 2006?
- What role does Student Affairs have concerning the first-year seminar courses at your university?
- We've talked about this issue on the phone, but I'd like to make sure we document it. How would you explain the organizational structure associated with your university's first-year seminars?
  - How have the various seminar programs evolved over the years?
  - What do you believe are the strengths and weakness associated with how the seminars are organized?

- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for your university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the way the current seminars are designed?
- Is there anyone else you would recommend I talk to while visiting the university that we haven't already thought about and contacted?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Focus Group with the College Deans

- What would you describe as the purpose for first-year seminar in your college?
  - What differences do you see between the purpose of the 192 and 193 series courses?
- Suppose I am a freshman student, how would I know whether I should enroll in one of the first-year seminars in your college?
  - What choices would I face in making this decision?
- How many first-year seminar sections does your College conduct each semester?
  - What percentage of your enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in the courses?
  - What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
    - How do you think this happens?
- What do you think the ideal instructor for a first-year seminar looks like?

- Is there a difference between an instructor for a 192 versus 193 course?
- What sort of assistance should I expect from you to help make my course successful, if I were teaching a first-year seminar for you (TAs, training, etc)?
- How much latitude would I have in selecting my course materials?
- How do you monitor the success of your first-year seminars?
  - What objectives do you believe need to be achieved to demonstrate success?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

Assistant Director of the Center for Advising & Student Achievement

- What is CASA?
- What is the theoretical basis for what you're doing?
- How have the various CASA programs evolved?
- How do the various 192 and 193 seminars tie into what you are trying to do with the Key Learning Communities?
- What student needs do you expect your first-year seminars to address?
- How are the basics of effective learning taught at this institution?
- How does the process work for selecting seminar instructors, seminar TAS/mentors, and matching them together?
- What objectives are you trying to achieve with the various Key seminars?

- How do you know if you are achieving them?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Instructor Focus Group

- How many of you teach 192/193/both courses?
- What do you see as the difference between the 192 and 193 courses?
- What do you believe students should gain from participation in your first-year seminar course(s)?
- What is the process in your department or college for ensuring that the syllabus for each seminar aligns with the purpose for the course?
  - If you could design a perfect system, what would you change about the process used to develop syllabi for first-year seminars?
- Some people might say your university doesn't need first-year seminars any longer because class sizes have been reduced and most of the faculty knows how to teach first-year undergraduates. What would you say to them?
- Suppose it's my first day in one of your first-year seminar classes. What would it be like?
- What objectives do you believe need to be achieved for your students to demonstrate success in your first-year seminars?
  - How do you determine if those objectives have been met?

- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Key Mentor/TA Questions

- What made you decide to become a Key mentor and TA?
- How many of you were/are TAs for a KA 192 course/KA 193 course?
  - What made you select your particular course?
  - Would you make the same decision again?
- What do you believe students should gain from participation in Key first-year seminars?
- What do you do as a TA?
  - How were the decisions made concerning your role in the seminar?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Student Focus Group Questions

- How many of you were enrolled in 192 courses/193 course?
- How did you decide to enroll in the course?
  - Who was involved in your decision-making process?
  - What choices did you have to make in coming to the decision to enroll in the seminar?

- Would you make the same decision again?
- What is/was it like to be a student in your first-year seminar course?
  - What do/did you like about the course?
  - What do/did you wish were different?
- What have you learned from your first-year seminars?
- Suppose you could turn the clock back and relive any moment during your first-year seminar class. What moment would you want to relive?
  - What makes this moment special for you?
- What would you say to a student who was thinking about enrolling in the course you took?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

## Southwestern Research University Interviewees

### Executive Vice President and Provost

- What does the term first-year seminar mean to you?
- What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
- How would you describe the current first-year seminar program at your university?
- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for your university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- How would you explain the organizational structure associated with your university's first-year seminars?
  - What do you believe are the strengths associated with how these seminars are organized?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the way the existing seminars are designed?
- Who would you recommend I talk to about your university's first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they would help?

### Executive Director of Academic Advising

- Some people say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with first-year seminar courses?

- How would you describe the current first-year seminar program at your university?
- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for the university?
  - How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- Suppose I'm a student, how would I know whether I should enroll in a first-year seminar?
  - What factors would I have to consider in making this decision?
- What percentage of the university's first year enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in a first year seminar course?
  - What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
  - How do you think this happens?
- Who would you recommend I see to learn more about the university's first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

Dean of the University College and Dean of the College of Sciences

- Some people would say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar program. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?
- What would you describe as the purpose for the first-year seminar in your college?
- Suppose I am a freshman student, how would I know whether I should enroll in the first-year seminar in your college?



- What choices would I face in making this decision?
- How many first-year seminar sections does your College conduct each semester?
  - What percentage of your enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in the courses?
  - What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
    - How do you think this happens?
- What do you think the ideal instructor for a first-year seminar looks like?
  - What sort of assistance should I expect from you to help make my course successful if I were teaching a first-year seminar for you (TAs, training, etc)?
  - How much latitude would I have in selecting my course materials?
- How do you monitor the success of your first-year seminars?
  - What objectives do you believe need to be achieved to demonstrate success?
- Who would you recommend I see to learn more about your first-year seminar?
  - How do you think they could help?

Assistant Dean of the University College

- What does the term first-year seminar mean to you?
- What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with a first-year seminar program?

- How did the University College get into the business of teaching its own first-year seminar?
- What would you describe as the purpose for the first-year seminar in the University College?
- Suppose I am a UNLV student, how would I know whether I should enroll in the first-year seminar in your college?
  - What choices would I face in making this decision?
- What percent of the students who should attend UNS 100 do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
  - How do you think this happens?
- How do you monitor the success of UNS 100?
  - What objectives do you believe need to be achieved to demonstrate success?
- Who would you recommend I see to learn more about your first-year seminar?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### University College Director of Academic Advising

- Some people say the answer to most issues involving first year students is a first-year seminar. What do you believe are the primary issues any institution could try to address with first-year seminar courses?
- How would you describe the current first-year seminar program in the University College?
- What do you believe the first-year seminars do for University College?

- How did you reach the conclusion that the seminars are responsible for these outcomes?
- Suppose I'm a University College student, how would I know whether I should enroll in UNS 100?
  - What factors would I have to consider in making this decision?
- What percentage of the University College first year enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in a first year seminar course?
  - How do you define who should attend a first year seminar?
  - What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
  - How do you think this happens?
- Who would you recommend I see to learn more about the university's first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Department Program Coordinators

- What would you describe as the purpose for first-year seminar in your department/College?
- How many sections of first-year seminar do you conduct each semester?
  - How would I recognize a typical first-year seminar student if I saw one on the campus?
  - What percentage of your enrollees do you estimate are the people you expect to see in the course?

- What portion of the students who should attend the course do you believe never take the opportunity to participate?
    - How do you think this happens?
- Suppose I am a new undergraduate student, how would I know whether I should enroll in a first-year seminar?
  - What choices would I face in making this decision?
- What is your process for ensuring that the syllabus for each seminar aligns with the purpose for the course?
  - If you could design a perfect system, what would you change about the syllabus process?
- What do you think the ideal instructor for first-year seminars looks like?
  - What sort of assistance should I expect from you to help make my course successful (TAs, training, etc)?
  - How much latitude would I have in selecting my course materials?
- How do you monitor the success of your first-year seminars?
  - What objectives do you believe need to be achieved to demonstrate success?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Instructor Questions

- What do you believe students should gain from participation in your first-year seminar course?
- Some people might say your university doesn't need first-year seminars because class sizes have been reduced and most of the faculty knows how to teach first-year undergraduates. What would you say to them?
- Suppose it's my first day in one of your first-year seminar class. What would it be like?
- If you could build a perfect system, what would you change about the process used to develop syllabi for your first-year seminar?
- What objectives do you believe need to be achieved for your students to demonstrate success in your course?
- Who would you recommend I see to learn more about your first-year seminar?
  - How do you think they could help?

#### Student Focus Group Questions

- What is it like to be a student in your first-year seminar course?
  - What do you like about the course?
  - What do you wish were different?
- What have you learned from your first-year seminars?
- Suppose you could turn the clock back and relive any moment during your first-year seminars class. What moment would you want to relive?
  - What makes this special for you?
- How did you decide to enroll in the course?

- Who was involved in your decision-making process?
- What choices did you have to make in coming to the decision to enroll in the seminar?
- Would you make the same decision again?
- What would you say to a student who was thinking about enrolling in the course?
- Who would you recommend I talk to while visiting the university to learn more about your first-year seminars?
  - How do you think they could help?

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