

## **Increasing Student Success through First-Year Experience Courses Making the Case Data**

### **Increased Retention and Persistence**

Belcher, M. J. (1993). Mimi-Dade Community College. In B. O. Barefoot (Ed.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting outcomes of freshman seminars* (Monograph No. 11) (p. 21). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED367214>

*At Miami-Dade Community College, students taking a one- credit first- year experience course with faculty mentors had a higher retention rate (67%) as compared to those that did not take the course (46%).*

Blanton, K., McLaughlin, J., & Niese, M. (n.d.). FYE continuous quality improvement. Unpublished document.

*Students who completed the first- year experience course at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College with a C or better had higher persistence rates from Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 (87.7%) as compared to those who did not enroll in the course (62%). In terms of persistence, students who completed the FYE course had higher retention rates compared to those who did not enroll in the course (60.5% to 42%).*

Bushko, A. A. (1995). Freshman seminar improve student retention at Widener University. *Freshman Year Experience Newsletter*, 8(2), p. 9. Retrieved from:  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1092432.pdf>

*At Widener University, students taking the first- year experience course were 17% more likely to attend college as a sophomore (87.3% to 69.6%).*

Cho, S., Karp, M. M., & Columbia University, C. C. (2012). Student Success Courses and Educational Outcomes at Virginia Community Colleges. CCRC Working Paper No. 40. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED529867>

*Students in The Virginia Community College System enrolled in a first-year experience course were more likely to earn college- level credits after their freshman year than students who did not take the course (88% to 67%) and were more likely to enroll in classes as sophomores (65% to 31%).*

Goodman, K., & Pascarella, E. T. (2006). First-Year Seminars Increase Persistence and Retention: A Summary of the Evidence from How College Affects Students. *Peer Review*, 8(3), 26-28.

*Results from 1973-1996 at the University of South Carolina revealed that students who took the first- year experience course were more likely to persist to sophomore year in 15 of the 23 years. The summary of first- year seminars also reported 7-13% higher persistence rates into the second year when students took the FYE course.*

Jackson, B. (2005). Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. In B. F. Tobolowsky, B. E. Cox, & M. T. Wagner (Eds.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting research on first-year seminars, Volume III* (Monograph No. 42) (pp. 61-65). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503190.pdf>

*Students enrolled in Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis first-year experience course had significantly higher first-year retention rates (60% to 69%) and higher GPA's (2.36 to 2.07) even after controlling for student background characteristics and participation in support programs.*

Jaijairam, P. (2016). First-Year Seminar (FYS)--The Advantages That This Course Offers. *Journal of Education And Learning*, 5(2), 15-23. Retrieved from: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1092432>

*Data analysis from the University of South Carolina, Ramapo College in New Jersey, and Widener University in Pennsylvania indicated that the first-year experience course positively impacted retention rates.*

Karp, M. M., Raufman, J., Efthimiou, C., & Ritze, N. (2015). Redesigning a student success course for sustained impact: Early outcomes findings. *CCRC Working Paper No. 81*. Retrieved from: <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-student-success-course-sustained-impact.html>

*Students at Bronx Community College who participated in a revised first- year experience course had higher one-year retention rates than students who did not complete the course (64.4% to 54.1%). In addition, students who completed the first- year experience course completed more college credits after the academic year (22 to 17.5).*

Miller, J. W., Janz, J. C., & Chen, C. (2007). The retention impact of a first-year seminar with varying pre-college academic performance. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 19(1), 47-62.

*Students who took the first-year experience course had higher levels of enrollment for sophomore year of undergraduate study. This was true for all ability levels.*

Permzadian, V., & Crede, M. (2016). Do first-year seminars improve college grades and retention? A quantitative review of their overall effectiveness and an examination of moderators of effectiveness. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 277-316.

*Based on a meta-analysis of 284 studies, 195 of which focused on retention, it was found that students who participate in the first-year experience course have higher retention rates 1 year later. Even though the retention increases were minimal, the financial implications for the institution can be quite significant. Permzadian and Crede (2016) note that the net gain for a bachelor-degree granting institution can range from approximately \$3,000,000-\$5,000,000 for public and private institutions respectively.*

Pittendrigh, A., Borkowski, J., Swinford, S., & Plumb, C. (2016). Knowledge and community: The effect of a first-year seminar on student persistence. *Journal of General Education: A Curricular Commons of the Humanities and Sciences*, 65(1), 48-65.

*Persistence rates were higher for all students who took the seminar. More specifically, the persistence rate was 84.2% for students taking the FYE course and 72.4% for students not taking the course. Students who were considered high-risk, as measured by low levels of motivation on the College Student Inventory, benefitted more than low-risk as evidenced by higher levels of persistence.*

Starke, M. C., Harth, M., & Sirianni, F. (2001). Retention, bonding, and academic achievement: Success of a first-year seminar. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 13(2), 7-35.

*Compared to students who did not complete the first- year experience course, students had significantly higher retention rates, grade point averages and graduation rates.*

Strumpf G., & Hunt, P. (1993). The effects of an orientation course on the retention and academic standing of entering freshmen, controlling for the volunteer effect. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience*, 5(1), 7-14.

*Students at the University of South Carolina who participated in the first- year experience course had higher retention rates than students who did not take the course. Students who participated in the course displayed had higher levels of retention during the first four semesters.*

Stupka, E., & Sacramento City Coll., C. (1993). An Evaluation of the Short Term and Long Term Impact a Student Success Course Has on Academic Performance and Persistence. Retrieved from:

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED364300>

*Research from Sacramento City College indicated that students taking the first-year experience course were 50% more likely to complete their first semester, earn 4X as many satisfactory grades in mathematical courses, 3X as many satisfactory grades in writing courses and close to 2X as many satisfactory grades in reading course work as compared to students who did not complete the first-year experience course.*

Vaughan, A., Parra, J. & Lalonde, T. (2014). First-generation college student achievement and the first-year seminar: A quasi-experimental design. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(2), 51-67.

*As compared to matched peers, first-generation students who took the first-year experience course were more likely to complete the fall semester and persist in college. More specifically, participants in the FYE course had higher GPA's than their matched peers (a difference of .71 points) and increased persistence of 17% compared to their peers.*

VerDuin, S. (2005). Northern Michigan University, San Marcos. In B. F. Tobolowsky, B. E. Cox, & M. T. Wagner (Eds.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting research on first-year seminars, Volume III* (Monograph No. 42) (pp. 115-117). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED503190.pdf>

*At Northern Michigan University, higher levels of persistence into third and fourth year of college were seen among those who took first-year experience course. More specifically, during the second year of enrollment retention rates were 72% to 67.5%, during the third year rates were 61% to 54% and fourth year rates were 55% to 48%. Students who completed the FYE course also benefited from higher graduation rates of 47% to 44.6% after five years.*

### **Increased Graduation Rates**

Blowers, A. N. (2005). University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In B. F. Tobolowsky, B. E. Cox, & M.T. Wagner (Eds.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting research on first-year seminars, Volume III* (Monograph No. 42) (pp. 175-178). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

*At University of North Carolina at Charlotte, commuter and residential students who took a first- year experience course graduated within 4 years at higher rates than students who did not take the course (28% to 17%).*

Clouse, W. A. (2012). *The effects of non-compulsory freshman seminar and core curriculum completion ratios on post-secondary persistence and baccalaureate degree attainment* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

*In a study of over 8,000 students, Clouse (2012) found that students who took the FYE course were more likely to graduate. In addition, students who take first- year experience courses are more likely to graduate with fewer credits (as cited in What Works Clearinghouse, 2016).*

Lang, D. J. (2007). The impact of a first-year experience course on the academic performance, persistence, and graduation rates of first-semester college students at a public research university. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 19(1), 9-25.

*At SUNY-Buffalo, students who took the first- year experience course graduated at higher rates as compared to students who did not take the FYE course. A matched cohort approach was used. Specifically, students were matched on gender, race, SAT score, HS GPA and intended major. Students who completed the first-year experience course graduated within 4 to 6 years more frequently than their similar peers who did not participate in the course.*

Miller, J. W., & Lesik, S. S. (2015). College persistence over time and participation in a first-year seminar. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 16(3), 373-390.

*Retention and graduation for 1,913 traditional full-time college students were analyzed to assess of a first- year experience course. The article supports the efficacy of a first- year experience course. More specifically, “students who participated in the FYS were 1.5 times more likely to graduate in year four as compared to students who did not participate in the FYS”.*

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students, Volume 2: A third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

*Pasarella and Terenzini’s review of over 40 studies determined that students who completed a first- year experience course were more likely to graduate in 4 years.*

Schnell, C. A., Louis, K. S., & Doetkott, C. (2003). The First-Year Seminar as a Means of Improving College Graduation Rates. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students In Transition*, 15(1), 53-75.

*Analysis of the research indicated students who had taken the first-year experience course had a higher rate of graduation within 5 years than a matched group who had not taken the FYE course (40% to 32%).*

Zeidenberg, M., Jenkins, D., & Calcagno, J. C. (2007). *Do student success courses actually help community college student succeed?* Community College Resource Center Brief, 36, 1-6.

*Based on statewide data from the Florida Community College System for approximately 37,000 students, it was found that students taking an FYE course are 8% more likely to earn a credential as compared to students who do not take an FYE course.*

## Improved Academic Experience

House, J. D. (2005). Northern Illinois University. In B. F. Tobolowsky, B. E. Cox, & M. T. Wagner (Eds.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting research on first-year seminars, Volume III* (Monograph No. 42) (pp. 103-106). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

*At Northern Illinois University, after controlling for ACT scores, students taking the first- year experience course earned higher GPAs than those who did not take the course. Specifically, students who completed the FYE course earned higher first semester GPAs (2.54) compared to students who did not enroll in the course (2.42). This trend continued after the first year of undergraduate work with students who had taken the FYE course averaging 2.62 GPA's as compared to their similar peers who did not enroll in the course (2.55).*

Jaijairam, P. (2016). First-year seminar-The advantages that this course offers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(2), 15-23. doi: 10.5539/jel.v5n2p15

*As stated in Jaijairam, "freshmen who receive a high grade in FYS are more likely to achieve better grades for courses that they take when they are sophomores or juniors" (p. 21).*

Jamelske, E. (2008). Measuring the impact of a university first-year experience program on student GPA and retention. *Higher Education*, 57, 373-391.

*In a study of approximately 2,000 students, it was found that students who took a first- year experience course had higher GPAs as compared to students who did not take the course 1 year after taking the course.*

Jenkins-Guarnieri, M. A., Horne, M. M., Wallis, A. L., Rings, J. A., & Vaughan, A. L. (2015). Quantitative evaluation of a first year seminar program: Relationships to persistence and academic success. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 16(4), 593-606.

*Researchers determined that students who successfully completed the first-year experience course had higher-levels of academic performance than students who did not take the FYE course. This was true even after the researchers controlled for other variables such as prior academic performance and first-generational status.*

Karp, M. M., Raufman, J., Efthimiou, C., & Ritze, N. (2015). Redesigning a student success course for sustained impact: Early outcomes findings. *CCRC Working Paper No. 81*.

*After completing the first- year experience course, research has shown that semester grades are close to a half-grade higher for FYE students as compared to those who did not enroll in the course. Furthermore, FYE students were more likely to earn more college credits during their first semester. All of these academic advantages seem to last for 1-2 years.*

Schwartz, D. & Grieve, K. (2008). In A. M. Griffin & J. Romm (Eds.). *Exploring the evidence, Volume IV: Reporting on first-year seminars* (pp.41-44). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Retrieved from: [http://sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/pdf/MExpEvid\\_IV.pdf](http://sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/pdf/MExpEvid_IV.pdf)

*Students at Lourdes College deemed underprepared for reading and writing at the college level who took the 3- credit first-year seminar course had a higher grade point average than students who did not take the course. More specifically, the average GPA for students taking the course was 3.04 as compared to 2.60 for students who did not take the first-year seminar course. Students who took the first-year seminar course had similar high school grades and ACT scores to those who did not take the course.*

Vaughan, A., Parra, J. & Lalonde, T. (2014). First-generation college student achievement and the first-year seminar: A quasi-experimental design. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(2), 51-67.

*First-generation college students who took an FYE course had higher GPAs as compared to peers in the matched control group. More specifically, participants in the FYE course had higher GPA's than their matched peers (a difference of .71 points) as well as increased persistence of 17% compared to their peers.*

Wahlstrom, C. M. (1993). Genesee Community College. In B. O. Barefoot (Ed.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting outcomes of freshman seminars* (Monograph No. 11) (pp. 15-16). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience.

*At Genesee Community College in New York, students taking the FYE course had higher first-term GPAs as compared to students not taking the course. More specifically, the GPAs for those taking the FYE course were one-half point higher than the students in the matched control group (2.87 to 2.38).*

## **Sense of Belonging**

Jaijairam, P. (2016). First-year seminar-The advantages that this course offers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(2), 15-23. doi: 10.5539/jel.v5n2p15

*Researchers have investigated the effectiveness of this course at several different institutions and have found that students who take the course are more likely to stay in college, have better grades, and graduate on time as compared to peers who did not take a first-year seminar course. Research also showed that students who took the first-year seminar course were more likely to reflect on academic performance and progress, think critically, participate in class, feel more confident, and have a better sense of career options.*

Keup, J. R. & Barefoot, B. O. (2005). Learning how to be a successful student: Exploring the impact of first-year seminars on student outcomes. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 17(1), 11-47.

*Research analyzes the effect of first- year experience on student relationships, social experiences, connections and networking skills with college faculty and peers, as well as student levels of confidence.*

O'Gara, L., Karp, M. M., & Hughes, K. L. (2009). An Exploratory Study of Student Perspectives. *Community College Review*, 36(3), 195-218.

*Students who completed a first- year experience course found that information to be personally beneficial. Specifically, students reported that they gained valuable information about their college, developed skills to support their academic work, and forged important relationships.*

## **Benefits ALL Students**

Davis, B. O., Jr. (1992). Freshman seminar: A broad spectrum of effectiveness. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience*, 4(1), 79-94.

*Students with highest SAT benefitted more fro FYE course as compared to those with lower SAT scores. More specifically, the data suggests that students with higher SAT scores (over 900) who completed the first- year experience course had higher rates of retention over six quarters with close to a 20% higher rate of retention as compared to the control group.*



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

*Students enrolled in a first- year experience class at an urban university had gains in feeling prepared for college, overall confidence levels, increased knowledge of campus resources, and an increase in study skills knowledge.*

Miller, J. W., Janz, J. C., & Chen, C. (2007). The retention impact of a first-year seminar with varying pre-college academic performance. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 19(1), 47-62.

*This study found that students of all ability levels benefitted from the first- year experience course. Variables include students who had low, middle, or high level academic preparation, as measured by high school rank, ACT scores and the number of college preparation courses.*

Pittendrigh, A., Borkowski, J., Swinford, S., & Plumb, C. (2016). Knowledge and community: The effect of a first-year seminar on student persistence. *Journal of General Education: A Curricular Commons of the Humanities and Sciences*, 65(1), 48-65.

*Persistence rates were higher for all students who took the seminar. More specifically, the persistence rate was 84.2% for students taking the FYE course and 72.4% for students not taking the course. Students who were considered high-risk, as measured by low levels of motivation on the College Student Inventory, benefitted more than low-risk as evidenced by higher levels of persistence.*

## **Number of Credits**

Blanton, K., McLaughlin, J., & Niese, M. (n.d.). *FYE continuous quality improvement*. Unpublished document.

*Cincinnati State Technical and Community College compared student opinions regarding 1,2, and 3 credit first- year experience courses. Students consistently rated the 2 and 3 credit- hour courses higher than the 1 credit first- year experience course.*

Cuseo, J. (n.d.). The empirical case for the first-year seminar: Evidence of course impact on student retention, persistence to graduation, and academic achievement. Unpublished manuscript.

*Cuseo determined seminar courses that are less than 3 credits can send the message that they are not important and as a result, students and faculty will not place a high level of value on this course. A 3-credit course allows for the use of high-impact practices such as using teaching methods that engage students with one another and the course content.*

Du, F. (2016). Using National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) findings to enhance the cocurricular and advising aspects of a first-year seminar. *Assessment Update: Progress, Trends, and Practices in Higher Education*, 28(3), 1-2.

*After adopting a 4-credit model of their first- year experience course during the fall of 2012, The University of Mount Union found increases in student perception of faculty-student interactions as well as significant increases in retention.*

Jessup-Anger, J. E. (2011). What's the point? An exploration of students' motivation to learn in a first-year seminar. *The Journal of General Education*, 60(2), 101-116.

*Analysis of research from a one-credit, pass-fail first- year experience course at a Midwestern University indicated both students and instructors expressed decreased motivation for a 1-credit FYE course. In particular, reduced expectations and effort were associated with a 1-credit course.*

Swing, R. L. (2002, September 17). *How many weekly contact hours is enough?* (Seminar Research – Essay 3).

*Swing found seminars with more contact hours had the most gain. Students who completed the first- year experience course rated the course as highly effective as compared to 1 and 2 credit versions of the course on 7 out of 100 possible learning outcomes and on measures of course effectiveness. More specifically, student gains were noted in academic skills and critical thinking skills.*

## **Discipline-Specific**

Cuseo, J. (n.d.). The empirical case for the first-year seminar: Evidence of course impact on student retention, persistence to graduation, and academic achievement. Unpublished manuscript.

*Cuseo noted that discipline specific are the least effective type of seminar. Seminars need to include both academic and non-academic elements in order to be most effective.*

Friedman, D. B., & Marsh, E. G. (2009). What type of first-year seminar is most effective? A comparison of thematic seminars and college transition/success seminars. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 21(1), 29-42.

*In this study of 177 first-semester students enrolled in nine different sections of the FYE course, there were no significant differences between transition focused courses and discipline specific courses in GPA or retention. However, the students in the transition- focused courses did report higher levels of outside of class experiences and knowledge of campus policies.*

Rogerson, C. L., & Poock, M. C. (2013). Differences in Populating First Year Seminars and the Impact on Retention and Course Effectiveness. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 15(2), 157-172.

*Students in courses by major were retained at higher rates (80%) as compared to their peers in in generic FYE classes (76%)*

## **Career Planning**

Adams, P., Thomas, J. H., McDaniel, C. R. (2008). Northern Kentucky University. In A. M. Griffin & J. Romm (Eds.). *Exploring the evidence, Volume IV: Reporting on first-year seminars* (pp. 57-60). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

*Students who took the first-year seminar, as opposed to those who did not, had higher career decision-making self-efficacy and career decidedness.*

Belson, K., & Deegan, R. (1993). Irvine Valley College. In B. O. Barefoot (Ed.), *Exploring the evidence: Reporting outcomes of freshman seminars* (Monograph No. 11) (pp. 17-18). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience.

*Students who took an FYE course, as compared to those who did not, reported more focused career and academic goals immediately after the course and also after completing their third semester of college. More specifically, student indecision regarding major reduced from the beginning to the end of the course (60% undecided to 20%).*

Jaijairam, P. (2016). First-year seminar-The advantages that this course offers. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(2), 15-23. doi: 10.5539/jel.v5n2p15

*Based on a survey sent to over 500 students, 85% of students completing a survey reported having a better sense of career options.*

Peterson, K. & Stubblefield, R. (2008). University of Minnesota. In A. M. Griffin & J. Romm (Eds.). *Exploring the evidence, Volume IV: Reporting on first-year seminars* (pp.73-78). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

*Students who took a first-year seminar reported that they were more aware of careers that might interest them and were more familiar with career exploration tools and resources at the end of the course.*

## Included in the Curriculum

Cuseo, J. (n.d.). The empirical case for the first-year seminar: Evidence of course impact on student retention, persistence to graduation, and academic achievement. Unpublished manuscript.

*Cuseo noted, "One key advantage of offering the FYS as a component of the general education curriculum is that it sends a message to students, as well as to other members of the college community, that the course is deemed central to the undergraduate experience." (p. 1).*