

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING (GSD 101) PILOT FOR FALL 2008

Please see the Background & Implementation document for further details: (<http://www.universityprograms.eku.edu/OEPcourse/Background-Implementation.pdf>).

What is the purpose of the new first year course?

- To fulfill one major component of the ECU Quality Enhance Plan (QEP)
- To provide students with foundational knowledge and skills in critical and creative thinking
- To better prepare students for subsequent courses, and increase student success
- To increase student persistence

How will you know if the course has met its purpose?

- A dedicated team of faculty & staff will develop and apply a rigorous program assessment plan to measure several outcomes, both at the course level and the program level
- Outcomes will include course learning objectives, student perceptions, student success variables and retention

What is the evidence that this course can help student success?

In a meticulous synthesis of more than 2600 postsecondary studies relating to how college programs and experience affect student development, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) concluded that, "The weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar is positively linked with both freshman-year persistence and degree completion. This positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account" (pp. 419-420). In a more recent synthesis, which reviews research published after their original volume in 1991, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reach a similar conclusion:

With rare exceptions they {first-year seminars} produce uniformly consistent evidence of positive and statistically significant advantages to students who take the courses. Some of this evidence comes from studies in which participant and nonparticipant groups are "matched" on various combinations of precollege characteristics. These studies consistently find that FYS [first-year seminar] participation promotes persistence into the second year and over longer periods of time. More recent studies employ various multivariate statistical procedures to control for academic ability and achievement and other precollege characteristics. Whatever the procedure, the research points to the same conclusion, indicating positive and statistically significant net effect of FYS participation versus nonparticipation on persistence into the second year or attainment of a bachelor's degree. In short, the weight of evidence indicates that FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion (pp.400-401 & 402-403).

Consistent with Pascarella and Terenzini's critical reviews of the literature is the conclusion drawn by Hunter and Linder (2005)—based on their review of research on first-year seminars published in *The Journal The First-year Experience and Students in Transition* and in three volumes of studies published as monographs by the National Resource Center at the University of South Carolina:

The overwhelming majority of first-year seminar research has shown that these courses positively affect retention, grade point average, number of credit hours attempted and completed, graduation rates, student involvement in campus activities, and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education, as well as faculty development and methods of instruction (p. 288).

Keup and Barefoot (2005) used multiple regression analysis to analyze the results of two surveys (involving 3,680 students at 50 institutions) with the intent of identifying whether or not there was any relationship between students' participation in a first-year seminar and their experiences and performance during the first year of college. Based on the resulting data, these researchers reached the following conclusion:

The findings of this study indicate that first-year seminar participation is related to a host of positive academic and social experiences in college. Course participants are more likely to report interacting with faculty and engaging good classroom practices such as speaking up in classes, academic collaboration with other students, and course attendance. With respect to interpersonal relationships and social involvement in college, students who took a first-year seminar indicated that they are more engaged in the campus community and are more likely to develop close friendships with other students than their peers. Taking a first-year seminar is not only associated with students' behaviors but with their perceptions and feelings about the college experience. Course participants are more likely to report feeling integrated into the campus community and more successful at various aspects of campus life (p. 36).

In their review of the impact of first-year seminars on student retention, Ishler and Upcraft (2005) concluded that *"the first-year seminar is one of the most powerful predictors of first-year student persistence into the sophomore year. In general, first-year students who take these first-year seminars are more likely to persist into the third semester than those who do not, even when controlling for other precollege and during-college variables that may influence that outcome"* (pp. 41-42).

Why three-credit-hours?

- To align with successful national models
- To provide sufficient class contact time and breadth of coverage
- The proposed book for the course is the most researched book of its kind, with 13 chapters, 400+ pages and over 700 academic references
- Research evidence suggests that the course requires more contact time with students, thus more credit hours. Research conducted by Swing (2002b) indicates that FYE courses carrying more units are more strongly associated with positive outcomes. This is not to say that one-unit seminars have no impact. Swing did find that first-year seminars offered for one, two, or three credit hours were all associated with positive

learning outcomes. However, students enrolled in seminars that carried more contact hours generally reported more gains in learning outcomes than students enrolled in seminars with fewer contact hours. In the investigator's words: "Three-contact hour courses exceeded both 1- and 2-contact hour courses on the two factors measuring gains in academic skills (writing, speaking, and library skills), and critical thinking skills. Overall, the data show that 3-contact hour courses produce the widest range of [positive] learning outcomes. These data confirm the common wisdom applied to first-year seminars that 1-contact hour is better than none, 2 are better than 1, and 3 are better than 1 or 2 (Swing, 2002b, p. 2).

Who developed the course and how?

- A committee of faculty (representing all colleges), staff and retention experts who used heavily researched national best practices
- The identified instructors will continue the development process during spring & summer 2008.

How was the course vetted and through which committees and groups? A packet of materials was put together that included:

- Background & Implementation Plan (<http://www.universityprograms.eku.edu/QEPcourse/Background-Implementation.pdf>)
- Draft Syllabus (<http://www.universityprograms.eku.edu/QEPcourse/Background-Implementation.pdf>)
- Draft Tentative Course Outline For Instructor Use (<http://www.universityprograms.eku.edu/QEPcourse/CourseOutline.pdf>)

The packet, along with the Curriculum Change Form was presented for a vote to the following committees and groups before going forward to the Council on Academic Affairs for approval:

- University Programs Curriculum Committee
- First Year Experience Working Group (made up of administrators within Academic and Student Affairs)
- First Year Course Development Committee (made up of faculty from each college, academic affairs professionals, student affairs professionals, and administrators)
- The Provost Office.

Who will take the course?

- First-time students who are entering ECU with fewer than 30 academic credits who desire to take the course to fulfill their Academic Orientation requirement
- The course is optional and not required of anyone
- The advisors for undeclared students will explain the potential benefits of the course to the appropriate students, but students will make the choice of whether to take this course, or the regular one-credit orientation course (GSO 100)

Is the course intended for developmental students?

- No. It has been developed for first-year students who are considered "college ready" with no more than one developmental need area.

- The course is intended to further develop skills essential for college level work, often those that were not addressed in their high school experience.
- Students requiring two or more developmental areas will continue to enroll in the existing GSO 102 and be restricted to 13 credit hours, as in the past.

Why do ECU students need a course like this?

- ECU desires to increase student persistence and graduation rates
- ECU students consistently report a need for this kind of course. See the Background and Implementation document for more specifics (<http://www.universityprograms.ecu.edu/QEPcourse/Background-Implementation.pdf>).

Where does the research for the course come from?

- The research and literature on the impact of first year seminars is extensive. It is probably the most researched course in higher education. Please see the Bibliography at <http://www.universityprograms.ecu.edu/QEPcourse/bibliography.pdf>.
- For instance, in their book, *How College Affects Students, Volume 2: A Third Decade of Research*, Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) conduct a meticulous and exhaustive synthesis of the literature on how college affects students. They draw a very strong conclusion that seminars are among the most powerful success-promoting experiences that a college or university can provide its students.

Who will teach the course?

- Instructors who are enthusiastic about teaching first-year students, have a particular interest in teaching the course, and have permission from their Chair or supervisor
- The goal is to have a minimum of 50% tenure-track faculty, with the other instructors drawn from master's level professional staff who have extensive experience, with no more than 10% adjunct faculty (with their Chair or Supervisor's approval).

What compensation will instructors receive?

- Instructor pay commensurate with ECU policy and procedures.

Will it cost my academic department if I teach the course?

- Academic departments will be reimbursed for reassigned time.

What professional development opportunities will be provided?

- Course development and assessment assistance will be provided to the team of identified instructors who will teach the course in Fall 2008.

What expectations are there of instructors?

- Participating in the *Foundations for Learning Instructor Learning Community (ILC)*, beginning in spring 2008.
- Meeting regularly with the ILC to develop the course, share instructional methods and resources, develop common assessment items that address the core learning objectives, and to continually evaluate and critique the course outcomes.
- Participating in professional development during the week of May 12-16, 2008 (for a stipend).
- Developing individual course over the summer of 2008.

- Teaching a section of GSD 101 in Fall 2008.

How can I express my interest in teaching the course in Fall 2008?

- Visit the website at: <http://www.universityprograms.eku.edu/QEPcourse/> and follow the link to apply to teach the course after discussing with your department chair or supervisor.

Who will administer the course?

- The Office of the Dean of University Programs, with assistance from faculty and staff co-curricular oversight/advisory groups

Will the course fulfill the currently required one-credit-hour Academic Orientation course? Yes. The additional two hours would be treated as elective hours.

Why does the course need to begin in Fall 2008?

- To have time to assess its effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the QEP
- ECU must report assessment data to SACS in four years.

How many sections will be offered in Fall 2008?

- Up to 20 section, depending on the number of instructors identified and up to 500 students
- Class size will be restricted to 25.

Is there a specific discipline connected to the course?

- No. There is evidence that indicates that "discipline-specific" seminars are the least effective for promoting positive learning outcomes.

At the Policy Center for the First Year of College (Brevard, NC), Randy Swing (2002a) conducted an extensive study that compared the impact of different types of first-year seminars. Based on self-reported student outcomes from over 31,000 students attending 62 institutions, he found that college-transition seminars, which focused on academic and non-academic (holistic) topics, "performed best overall across the ten learning outcomes investigated" (p. 1). Holistically focused seminars were especially more effective than discipline-based seminars, which were housed in academic departments and focused on introducing first-year students to an academic discipline or major field of study.

The course is designed specifically with a global focus in mind, attending to the curricular and co-curricular needs of first-time, first-year students. The goal is to allow students to look beyond specific disciplines and appreciate the foundational context that liberal (general) education provides for all disciplines. The idea is that students receive the opportunity to see the trans-disciplinary value of liberal education and higher-level (critical & creative) thinking as lifelong learning skills, which permeate the curriculum and their life outside the classroom.

References:

Updated 2/15/2008

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