

November 21, 2014

First-Year Experience Course

Why are we pursuing this?

As a part of LLCC's commitment to provide quality educational programs and services that are accessible and responsive to individual and community needs, a first-year experience course is being developed. The goals of the course are (a) to promote a smooth and effective transition to college, and (b) to enhance first-year students' academic success, personal growth, and social development.

National studies have shown that the first-year experience course is one of the most important curricular tools for achieving the learning and developmental objectives of undergraduate education (Keup & Petschauer, 2011). One of the most attractive benefits of implementing such a course is the positive impact it has on student retention, persistence to graduation, and academic performance (2011). The most common understanding of how these courses accomplish these results is through a phenomena

known as integration. According to Barefoot (1992), the first-year experience course is intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of specific topics, which vary by course type; (b) to essential skills for college success; and (c) to selected processes, the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group.

Most first-year experience courses are implemented as seminars which are small discussion-based courses in which students and their instructors exchange ideas and information with an emphasis on creating community in the classroom (Hunter & Linder, 2005).

The course will be developed in partnership with a variety of representatives from across the college. If you are interested in participating, please contact Chris Barry at 786-2410 or christopher.barry@llcc.edu.

WHAT TYPE OF COURSE SHOULD WE DEVELOP?

Swing (2002) conducted a large-scale comparative study of outcomes linked with different types of first-year seminars. College transition seminars, which focus on academic and non-academic topics, performed best across learning outcomes investigated (2002). Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot (2005) also asserted, the most effective first-year seminars are those that are designed to facilitate first-year student success in both academic and non-academic facets of college life.

There are four main types of first-year courses.

College Transition Theme -cover academic topics exploring orientation to college, life transitions and academic skills.

Special Academic Theme -focus on a selected theme other than college transition. These are often taught as interdisciplinary seminars where a small

Continued on page 3

FYE Campus Forums

Overview of voices from across LLCC

Discussions about the FYE course were conducted at recent campus forums. Student needs were identified and reviewed. Some needs that were discussed included (a) a lack of adequate commitment to the college or their academic or career pathway, (b) the academic and life skills necessary to be successful in college, (c) access to and awareness of the support that is available and required to be successful, (d) difficulty adjusting to college level expectations, and (e) a lack of connection and engagement with the college community.

Ideas of how the course would help fulfill the college's mission were also discussed. Participants discussed how the course would help retain students, thus preserving the college's first goal of student access and success. The course would fill gaps in student need, thus responding to individual and community needs.

During the forums, a theme emerged of looking closely at student needs by student characteristics and how student characteristics are often associated with needs.

The student characteristic of commuting to campus was discussed as being associated with the need to be engaged in a classroom environment. The FYE course would fill a need to

provide support for students because few students stay on campus for anything other than formal classes. Commuter students also like to be connected to existing resources through electronic media.

Another student characteristic that was identified was age. Needs of traditional and non-traditional aged students were discussed. Non-traditional aged students need technology training, courses offered after work hours or in other modalities, childcare, conflict resolution skills, and efforts to overcome the feeling of isolation on campus. It was discussed how traditional aged college students often have different needs, including changing their mindset from high school expectations to college expectations, learning independence, and taking responsibility for their education.

Another student characteristic that was identified and discussed was newness to the college regardless of background. Some shared how this characteristic is associated with an unfamiliarity with our processes and lack of interpersonal skills especially in regard to communication with instructors and other college staff.

One participant suggested that these student characteristics may be an opportunity to develop different sections for

different students. Another participant suggested that placing students with different characteristics together in one class would result in a valuable opportunity for students to learn about other students' perspectives.

Current attempts to help new students overcome the challenges they face were also discussed. Some of the more notable attempts discussed were, new student orientation and the college success skills course (CSS 100). It was discussed that orientation addresses transitional need, but does not provide adequate support because it is not ongoing. While orientation provides a good start, it does not provide students with the time to internalize skills, processes, attitudes and behaviors associated with college success. Likewise, CSS 100 addresses several new student academic needs. However, it is often not taken by new students in their first semester, and they often share how they wish they would have taken it earlier. It also was discussed that CSS 100 is most helpful for transfer pathway students who are taking college-level coursework. Many students taking developmental coursework are not prepared for material covered in CSS 100.

To address the need to help students in their transition, it was

WHAT TYPE OF COURSE SHOULD WE DEVELOP?

Continued from page 1

group of students and a model learner/teacher use a variety of methods to investigate an important theme. Themes may be consistent across sections or different for each section.

Discipline-Based Theme - are offered as an introduction to a major or academic department. They are usually based in individual academic departments.

Remedial/Study Skills Theme -narrowly focused on basic study skills.

suggested that the course could be a required part of the new student's first semester. There were concerns about eligibility for financial aid and how it would need to be a part of an academic program. The requirement discussion led to a suggestion to include the course in the general education curriculum because it would focus on developing critical thinking, communication, cultural and global awareness and technology competency. The skills in the course would be transferable and summative. It would also allow the course to be a part of a program and thus eligible for financial aid.

It was also discussed that to have the desired effect, it would need to be required early in the student's academic career, perhaps during the first semester or first 15 credit hours.

The discussion also turned to the possibility of a connection between CSS 100 and the new course or a possible expansion

of CSS 100 to help students in their transition and to learn the skills associated with college success.

In all, the groups agreed that many students come to LLCC with a limited understanding of the opportunities and demands of college and lack the skills and direction needed to succeed. There were many points that helped illuminate just how complex an endeavor to development a first-year experience course will be.

To continue the discussion, two more campus forums have been scheduled:

- **Wed., Dec. 3, 3- 4 p.m.
Menard Hall 1168**
- **Thurs., Dec. 4 9 -10 a.m.
Menard Hall 2215**

This process has been enjoyable so far and I look forward to working with a cross section of people from across the institution. It should be fun to get to know some and become reacquainted with others.

References

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- Hunter, M. A., & Linder, C. W. (2005). First-year seminars. In M. L. Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, B. O. Barefoot, & Associates, *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Keup, J.R. & Petschauer, J.W. (2011). *The first-year seminar: Designing, implementing, and assessing courses to support student learning and success: Vol. 1. Designing and administering the course*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Swing, R. (2002). *What type of seminar is best?* Retrieved November 10, 2014 from http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/assessment/essays/swing-8.28.02_pdfs/essay4.pdf
- Upcraft, J. N. Gardner, B. O. Barefoot, & Associates (2005). *Challenging & supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This newsletter provides updates as LLCC implements and continuously improves the first-year experience. If you have material that you would like to submit for the next newsletter, please contact Chris Barry at christopher.barry@lcc.edu.