

PENNSTATE



Center for the Study of Higher Education

First-Year Seminars

Research Findings

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
- 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.

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 403).

Specific Findings

- Estimated 5 to 15% increase in likelihood of persistence to graduation based on a review of well over 40 empirical reports.
- 7 to 13% advantage in persistence to the 2nd year for FYS participants
- University of South Carolina: statistically significantly greater persistence of FYS students in 15 of 23 years (1973 to 1996).

Experiences related to persistence

- More frequent and meaningful contact with faculty
- Academic achievement as measured by GPA
- Greater sense of “academic challenge”
- More active involvement in cocurricular activities
- Improved perceptions of self-as-learner
- Greater self-reported gains (NSSE)
- Increased satisfaction with the college experience

Conditional Effects

- FYS has some positive effects for all students
- Emerging research shows African American students may receive greater indirect effect on persistence (through increased engagement)
- Type of seminars affect different students differently
 - Study skills formats affect “weaker” students to greater degree

Types of Formats

- College Transition 73%
 - Extended Orientation
- Study Skills 8%
- Academic Theme 14%
 - interdisciplinary
- Discipline-based 5%
 - Intro to major;
 - socialization to profession

Research specific to formats

■ College Transition

- Effective in many/most areas
- Most effective in “college success skills”
 - Study strategies, faculty-student interactions

■ Discipline-specific

- **Least** effective in promoting learning outcomes
- Most effective in knowledge of campus policies

Research specific to formats

- Academic Themes
 - Effective in many/most areas
 - Most effective in outcomes academic skills & critical thinking
 - Related to “engaging pedagogies”
- All formats increase “sense of belonging”

Engaging Pedagogies

- Engaging Pedagogies
 - Variety of approaches
 - Meaningful discussions and homework
 - Challenging assignments
 - Productive use of class time
 - Encouragement to engage in class

Engaging Pedagogies

- Biggest effects on
 - Critical Thinking Skills
 - Overall Course Effectiveness (student rating)
- Improved
 - Study strategies
 - Time management skills
 - Connections with faculty

So What?

- Connect goals to format
- Encourage “engaging pedagogies”
- More contact hours is better
- FYS is only one (very important) component of a larger first-year experience