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 co-curricular 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

- 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