

DESIGNING A FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY RESOURCE SITE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES: AN  
ONLINE PRODUCT FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

by

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## ABSTRACT

Students who enroll at community colleges often need to balance work, family obligations, and other factors that may prevent them from achieving their academic goals. Community college students are also more likely to be underprepared for college-level coursework when compared to traditional students who attend 4-year institutions. To support learners as they adjust to the responsibilities associated with being a college student, many higher education institutions offer or require a first-year seminar (FYS).

FYS are often taught by a variety of educators, including full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, administrators, and staff. By having a diverse group of instructors teaching these seminars, ensuring curricular consistency across all sections can be challenging. To streamline the processes of recruiting, training, and ultimately retaining quality FYS faculty, this product dissertation introduces the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site, an online tool that provides educational content faculty can use when developing their FYS. The research throughout this dissertation will explore the common themes and skills typically taught in FYS. It will also highlight ways institutions can support faculty when they are designing their own FYS.

**KEY WORDS:** First-year seminars, community colleges, faculty development

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Background of Community Colleges .....	3
Challenges Community Colleges Face: Increasing Credentials .....	4
Challenges Community Colleges Face: Open Admission .....	6
First-Year Seminars .....	8
History of First-Year Seminars .....	10
Characteristics of First-Year Seminars .....	12
Purpose of the FYS Faculty Resource Site .....	13
Guiding Principles .....	16
Limitations .....	16
Definition of Terms .....	17
Summary .....	18
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	20
Introduction .....	20
Structure of First-Year Seminars .....	20
Seminar Types.....	21
Credit Classification .....	21
Mandatory vs. Voluntary .....	22
Objectives .....	23
First-Year Seminar Faculty .....	23
Recruiting and Retaining FYS Faculty .....	25
Professional Development for FYS Faculty .....	26
FYS as a High-Impact Practice .....	32
Summary .....	36
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	37
introduction .....	37
First-Year Seminars and Equity .....	38
Contributing Knowledge and Experience.....	39
Guiding Principles .....	39
Creating the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site .....	42
Design and Implementation of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site.....	44

Summary .....	46
CHAPTER 4: THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY RESOURCE SITE .....	48
Introduction .....	48
Module I: Introduction to First-Year Seminar .....	52
Module II: College Knowledge and Campus Resources .....	55
Module III: Academic Planning and Time Management .....	59
Module IV: Study Strategies.....	64
Module V: Test-Taking and Stress Management .....	67
Module VI: Financial Literacy .....	70
Module VII: Information Literacy .....	74
Module VIII: Beyond FYS .....	79
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....	85
Introduction .....	85
Approaches for Implementation.....	86
Assessment of the FYS Faculty Resource Site .....	88
Limitations .....	89
Summary .....	90
REFERENCES .....	92

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Site Map of the FYS Faculty Resource Site .....	46
Figure 2. FYS Faculty Resource Site Welcome Message.....	50
Figure 3. FYS Faculty Resource Site Modules.....	51
Figure 4. Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar .....	52
Figure 5. Module I: Introduction to First-Year Seminar .....	53
Figure 6. Module I, Folder “c”: Introduction to Blackboard for Students .....	54
Figure 7. Module I Folder “d”: Syllabus Quiz.....	55
Figure 8. Module II: College Knowledge and Campus Resources.....	56
Figure 9. Module II, Folder “a”: Student Engagement and Campus Resources .....	57
Figure 10. Module II, Folder “b”: Academic Integrity.....	58
Figure 11. Module III, Folder “c”: Communicating with Faculty .....	59
Figure 12. Module III: Academic Planning and Time Management .....	60
Figure 13. Module III, Folder “a”: Establishing Your Goals.....	61
Figure 14. Module III, Folder “b”: Academic Planning .....	63
Figure 15. Module III, Folder “c”: Time Management.....	64
Figure 16. Module IV: Study Strategies.....	65
Figure 17. Module IV, Folder “a”: Study Strategies.....	66



Figure 18. Module IV, Folder “b”: Active Reading.....	66
Figure 19. Module IV, Folder “c”: Note-Taking Techniques .....	67
Figure 20. Module V: Test-Taking and Stress Management .....	68
Figure 21. Module V, Folder “a”: Strategies for Taking Tests .....	69
Figure 22. Module V, Folder “b”: Stress Reduction Techniques .....	70
Figure 23. Module VI: Financial Literacy .....	71
Figure 24. Module VI, Folder “a”: Money Management.....	72
Figure 25. Module VI, Folder “b”: Financial Aid .....	74
Figure 26. Module VII: Information Literacy .....	75
Figure 27. Module VII, Folder “a”: Introduction to Academic, Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles ..	76
Figure 28. Module VII, Folder “b”: Navigating the Library’s Resources .....	78
Figure 29. Module VII, Folder “c”: Annotated Bibliography Assignment.....	79
Figure 30. Module VIII: Beyond FYS .....	80
Figure 31. Module VIII, Folder “a”: Transferring to a 4-Year Institution .....	81
Figure 32. Module VIII, Figure “b”: Major to Career .....	83
Figure 33. Module VIII, Folder “c”: Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students.....	84

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are experiencing more pressure than ever to produce graduates, facilitate transfers to 4-year institutions, and meet the community's demand for skilled workers. As community colleges strive to meet these needs, they also face challenges related to declines in enrollment, changes in funding models, college readiness, and providing open access to higher education for all. In addition to these challenges, community colleges are expected to provide the resources and support services their students need to achieve their goals.

Moreover, community colleges may face an additional challenge regarding students' goals because some students may not necessarily enroll to earn an associate degree. For example, when a student enrolls at a 4-year institution, the goal is clear: to earn a bachelor's degree.

Community colleges serve all students, many of whom have unclear academic goals. When not limited to only one reason, students reported various reasons for enrolling at a community college: 46% enrolled for personal interest, 43% planned to earn an associate degree, 42% sought job skills, 36% intended to transfer to a 4-year institution, 17% wanted to earn a certificate, and 15% planned to transfer to another college (Horn & Nevill, 2006).

When serving students with such a wide variety of goals, it is critical that community colleges establish a connection with their students, build their confidence as learners, and communicate how their goals can be achieved early on, preferably via collaborative planning. In

discussing why students choose to enroll in a community college and do not end up achieving their goals, Goldrick-Rab (2010) stated:

Some students enroll at 2-year colleges because they want to, others because they feel they have few other options. That so many fail to make progress, getting stuck often very early in their trajectories, is evidence of both the numerous barriers that these students face and a failure by colleges and states to identify and implement effective reforms. (pp. 458–459)

One of the ways community colleges can prevent students from getting “stuck” early in their higher education journey is to critically evaluate the process in which colleges onboard their new students via their first-year seminar (FYS) course (Amster, 2020). According to Sullivan & Haller (2018), “These seminars are often designed to ease students into challenging college expectations by showing them available resources and broadening their thought processes through critical thinking and active learning” (p. 109). Even though an FYS has been identified by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2014) as one of 13 high-impact practices that can contribute to improving student outcomes, it is not offered at every community college. A report by Alamuddin and Bender (2018) found that about 13% of community colleges do not offer an FYS to support students in their first semester. However, of the community colleges that do offer a first-year seminar, the majority do not require it. Young and Skidmore (2019) reported that only 29% of 2-year institutions required their FYS, whereas 4-year colleges and universities required it at almost twice that rate (57%).

A unique aspect of first-year seminars, compared to other courses offered at higher education institutions, is that a variety of professionals can teach the course. Community colleges often have a mix of faculty, student affairs staff, and other campus professionals, such as librarians and academic administrators, teaching their FYS (Tobolowsky & Associates, 2008).

A challenge that arises with having such a diverse group of professionals teaching such a course is ensuring curricular consistency, especially if instructors are responsible for designing their own sections. Amster (2020) found that, when some FYS faculty struggled to fill class lectures and create assignments, they tended to rely on content from the courses they typically teach in their home department, which made some students feel as if they were enrolled in a content-specific course from that faculty member's discipline (e.g., math, psychology).

Nonetheless, teaching a first-year seminar provides an excellent opportunity for faculty to step out of their specialty or discipline and connect with students in a new way. To support FYS faculty with course design and improve curricular consistency across all FYS sections, this dissertation will introduce the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site—an online product any community college can use when designing their first-year seminar. The FYS Faculty Resource Site includes recommended modules and topics that can be used to facilitate an effective first-year seminar. With student retention rates at 2-year institutions averaging about 48% from 2009 to 2017 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019), it has been argued that more time needs to be devoted to the educational quality of first-year seminars at most institutions (Koch & Gardner, 2014).

## **BACKGROUND OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

From the time they were first established in the early 20th century, community colleges have become more prominent as the United States expanded its industries, realized an increase in demand for trained workers, and responded to the drive for social equality (Cohen & Brawer, 2009). Community colleges are defined as “regionally accredited institutions, which primarily award the associate degree as their highest award” (American Association of Community

Colleges, 2019, p. 2). Benefiting from increased public support for education, community colleges were established in every state by the 1960s (Cohen & Brawer, 2009). Koch and Gardner (2014) identified five factors that contributed to the expansion of postsecondary education during this time: (a) a large number of traditional-aged college students that became the post-World War II Baby Boomer generation; (b) a strong economy that provided jobs for college graduates; (c) the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that desegregated higher education institutions; (d) the Higher Education Act of 1965, which spawned the creation of federal financial aid programs and academic support initiatives for economically disadvantaged students; and (e) draft deferments that were granted to men if they chose pursue a college degree in lieu of serving in the armed forces during the Vietnam War.

In 2020, there were 1,050 community colleges (942 public, 35 tribal, and 73 independent) serving 6.8 million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). Community colleges are tasked with taking on difficult challenges in the higher education system, including providing open access to postsecondary education, increasing and expanding credentialing rates, and serving as the primary source to bring underprepared students up to proficiency for college-level work (Young & Keup, 2016).

### **Challenges Community Colleges Face: Increasing Credentials**

In reference to increasing and expanding credentialing rates, a more recent challenge community colleges face is related to changes in how states are funding higher education institutions, transitioning away from metrics like enrollment and moving toward performance-based measures, like awarding certificates and degrees and transfers to 4-year institutions

(Ohio Higher Ed., 2011). Unfortunately, with completion rates being traditionally low, this will likely negatively impact community colleges. Goldrick-Rab (2010) reported:

After 3 years just 16% of first-time community college students who began college in 2003 attained a credential of any kind (certificate, associate's degree, and/or bachelor's degree), and another 40% were still enrolled. When students are given 6 years to complete instead of 3, completion rates improve somewhat—for example, 36% of students entering community colleges in 1995 attained a credential by 2001. Moreover, another 17.5% were still enrolled. Although this indicates that completion rates need to account for the pace of progress toward completion, the noncompletion rate (no degree, not enrolled) hovers very close to 50%—even given longer time horizons. (p. 440)

According to Goldrick-Rab (2010), many students who want to advance their education find that the community college is their only viable choice. Because of this, community college students enter with a wide variety of ability, motivation, goals, availability, financial resources, and personal support. This makes it more difficult to identify what “success” really is for a community college student. As Gardner et al. (2015) pointed out:

Some students attend two-year colleges to complete their first two years close to home and at a low cost; then they move on to a four-year college or university for a higher degree. Others want to be trained for specific careers and get a job after graduation. Still others may already have a job but want to change their careers or improve their chances for a promotion. (p. 6)

Unfortunately, the success of community college students is measured in an identical way for students enrolled at 4-year institutions, even though it is not an equitable approach. According to Bragg (2001), “Variables such as personal finances, hours of employment, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer can be important predictors of how 2-year students perform and whether they finish college” (p. 105). Community colleges have a history of providing educational opportunities to a large portion of students who need developmental coursework while also attempting to overcome personal, demographic, and academic barriers

that suggest they are at risk of not achieving their goals. Current funding models have created a shift among community colleges from focusing on providing access to the community to one of increasing their completion rates: “If the definition of college success shifts from access to completion without recognizing that access and success are inextricably linked, community colleges are vulnerable to criticism and possibly reduced public support” (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, as cited in Bragg & Durham, 2012, p. 107).

Although examining graduation rates seems like a logical measure to assess a higher education institution’s effectiveness, especially with respect to performance-based funding, other ways in which a community college’s “performance” can be measured are often overlooked. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Chronicle Staff, 2020) argues that other student success measures, like transfer and remaining enrolled at the original community college, are not reported in data from the U.S. Department of Education. When accounting for first-time, full-time students who completed within 150% of the normal time, transferred to another higher education institution, or were still enrolled at the original college, it was found that 57% of community college students accomplished one of the three goals, even though graduation rates alone were under 30% (Chronicle Staff, 2020).

### **Challenges Community Colleges Face: Open Admission**

In addition to increasing their completion rates, community colleges are also expected to maintain their open admission policies. Provasnik and Planty (2008) estimated that about 95% of community colleges have an open-admissions policy. Although it may seem appealing for community colleges to increase their completion rates by reducing access for students who are deemed unprepared, it would likely result in even greater social and economic disparities

for people from marginalized backgrounds. This is supported by Bragg and Durham (2012), who stated, “Policy and program efforts that disassociate access from outcomes, failing to recognize that equity necessitates linking access and outcomes, have the potential to lead to even less equality among diverse students in higher education than occurs today” (p. 120).

Because they serve high proportions of students from marginalized backgrounds, including people of color and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011), community colleges offer racial and ethnic minority, low-income, immigrant, and first-generation students an opportunity to pursue a college education. As of 2020, the demographics of students enrolled in credit courses at community colleges were as follows: 45% white, 26% Hispanic, 13% Black, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% unknown, 4% two or more races, 2% nonresident, and 1% Native American (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). According to the Community College Research Center (2013), the reported income levels for community college students fell within the following brackets: (a) less than \$20,000—37%, (b) \$20,000-\$49,999—30%, and (c) \$50,000 and up—33%. Further, 36% of community college students attended full-time, 64% attended part-time, and 33% of students received Pell Grants (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020).

Although community colleges provide an open door to higher education for all, many of the students who decide to pursue a college education may already have the odds stacked against them. Bragg and Durham (2012) discussed the challenges community colleges face regarding improving their completion rates, mostly because they historically serve individuals who are underprepared for college-level coursework, first-generation college students, enrolled



part-time, non-traditional in age, low-income, and from a minority population. Community colleges also play a vital role in providing access for underserved groups by helping them develop the skills needed to be successful college students. Approximately 98% of all community colleges offer some developmental education coursework, compared to 80% of public 4-year institutions and 59% of private 4-year institutions (Attewell et al., 2006). According to Complete College America (2017), 34% of students were enrolled in a remedial English course and 52% were enrolled in a remedial math course at 2-year institutions throughout the United States.

The American Association of Community Colleges (2020) provided the following data on other significant demographics community colleges serve: 29% were the first generation to attend college, 20% were students with disabilities, 15% were single parents, 9% were non-U.S. citizens, 8% were students who previously earned a bachelor's degree, and 5% were veterans. Non-traditional students are 25 years old and older and are likely to be balancing other responsibilities in addition to those of a traditional college student. In 2020, the average age of a community college student was 28 years old; 38% of students fell within the age range of 22-39, and 9% were 40 years and older (American Association of Community Colleges, 2020). According to Goldrick-Rab (2010), "Older students are disproportionately likely to juggle enrollment with work and family and thus more likely to enroll part time and also to experience life events such as marriage, childbirth, or divorce, which compete with schooling" (p. 454).

## **FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS**

With community colleges being called upon to produce more graduates while also maintaining their commitment to function as open-admission institutions, it makes sense for

these institutions to invest their resources in the development of interventions that are designed to guide and support students at the beginning of their higher education journey. Koch and Gardner (2014) stated that “the ‘retention and completion agenda’ has been the single greatest motivator for U.S. institutions to adopt the first-year student success-focused efforts” (p. 13). One intervention that can be particularly useful for brand-new college students is the first-year seminars. These courses may also be referred to as “first-year experience (FYE) courses” or “orientation to college courses,” but Young and Chung (2019) maintain that these courses are mistakenly labeled and should be referred to as first-year seminars.

Barefoot and Fidler (1996) described freshman seminars in the 1994 National Survey of Freshman Seminar Programs:

Through the freshman seminar, students are provided a small “community of learners” who become friends, they have the opportunity to practice the academic skills essential for college success, and they are provided a classroom structure in which social interaction is the norm rather than the exception. Interaction and mutual support comprise the essence of the seminar; without those essential processes, these courses lose their power to affect positively the success, satisfaction, and retention of first-year students. (p. 9)

Koch and Gardner (2014) described first-year seminars as “small enrollment courses that help beginning students with their academic and social transition” (p. 16). Sullivan and Haller (2018) stated that first-year seminars are “often designed to ease students into challenging college expectations by showing them available resources and broadening their thought processes through critical thinking and active learning” (p. 109). Permzadian and Credé (2016) defined a first-year seminar as “a course specifically designed to equip new students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to successfully meet the different transitional and developmental challenges that are faced in the first year of college” (p. 287).

Alamuddin and Bender (2018) stated that first-year seminars are “courses that help students build social support networks, soft skills needed for the first year, and college know-how” (p. 1). First-year seminars have also been described as courses that generally focus on teaching new undergraduates student success skills, such as time management, college-level research and writing, how to connect with campus resources, and how to effectively communicate with faculty (Sobel, 2018). Lastly, the goals of first-year seminars are to help new students—whether right out of high school or from non-traditional backgrounds—successfully transition to a college environment, increase academic performance, and return for their second year and beyond (Alvarez & Towne, 2016).

### **History of First-Year Seminars**

Barefoot and Fidler (1996) stated that the oldest first-year seminar dated back to 1882 at Lee College in Kentucky. However, Young and Skidmore (2019) noted that further research indicates there was a Lees College (not Lee College) in Kentucky, but it was founded in 1883 and did not start offering postsecondary education until 1891. Boston College is referenced as offering the first extended orientation seminar in 1888, which helped first-year students with their adjustment to college life and taught content focused on academic success (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2002). According to Koch and Gardner (2014), Reed College in Oregon launched the initial first-year seminar/experience course in 1911. In the years that followed, other higher education institutions began offering their own first-year seminar as a support for their new students.

According to Tobolowsky and Associates (2008), by the late 1930s faculty had become increasingly frustrated with the “life adjustment content” of the curriculum of first-year

seminars, which led to fewer faculty recruited to teach the course and a decline in the course's popularity (p. 1). These views led to gradual declines in institutions offering FYS throughout the 1950s. The declines eventually became so severe, according to Gordon (1991), that freshman orientation courses became "nearly obsolete" during the 1960s (p. 8). However, during the 1970s, first-year seminars experienced a revival as colleges and universities began experiencing financial and academic challenges. As stated in Barefoot and Fidler (1996),

Decreasing numbers of traditional-age students, demographic shifts in the entering student population, a commitment to access for students previously excluded from higher education, the alarming student dropout rate which peaks between the freshman and sophomore year, a renewed concern about the quality of undergraduate education—all these issues have converged to generate increased interest in the first college year and curricular programs that ease the transition of students into college life. (p. 5)

During the mid-1970s, John Gardner and Paul Fidler found that their efforts to add more course structure and academic content to the University of South Carolina's first-year seminar, University 101, resulted in an increase in enrollment and data that students benefited from taking the course (Koch & Gardner, 2014). In 1975, research completed by Fidler and his associates concluded that University 101 contributed to student retention, stating

Students who started at the University of South Carolina during the fall of one academic year were more likely to return for the start of the next academic year in the subsequent fall if they had enrolled in the University 101 first-year seminar. (Koch & Gardner, 2014, p. 17)

Their research also found that students who completed the first-year seminar were more knowledgeable about the university, used the university's resources and services more frequently, and were more engaged in extracurricular activities when compared to students who did not take the seminar (Koch & Gardner, 2014).

Since the 1980s, higher education institutions have moved away from their position that the responsibility to be successful rests solely on the student and have invested their resources to establish policies and interventions that improve the probability of retention and success, including first-year seminars (Skipper, 2017). Because of this change in perspective, first-year seminars have become a more widespread and stable presence in higher education.

### **Characteristics of First-Year Seminars**

Barefoot and Fidler (1996) wrote that first-year seminars can take two forms:

. . . the first focusing on providing students an extended orientation to the campus and the world of higher education, and the second replicating a more traditional academic seminar in which students work with faculty on a specific academic topic of common interest. (p. 5)

Skipper (2017) provided a breakdown of the four most commonly reported first-year seminar types: (a) extended orientation (the most common type), which introduces students to campus resources, time management skills, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and personal development; (b) academic seminars with uniform content, which focus on academic themes and have an emphasis on academic skills, such as critical thinking and expository writing; (c) academic seminars with variable content, which are similar to the uniform format but are more focused on the instructor's discipline and research interests; and (d) hybrid formats, which include a blend of one or more of the other three types. According to Young and Skidmore (2019), the top three types of first-year seminars offered at 2-year institutions were extended orientation format as the most frequent, followed by the academic seminar with uniform content, and then basic study skills seminars. Permzadian and Credé (2016) concluded that, of the various first-year seminar types, the extended orientation format

was the most effective at increasing one-year retention rates (first to second year). For the purposes of this dissertation, the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site was created using the extended orientation format.

In discussing skills students should learn in first-year seminars, Kuh (2008) stated that “the highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies” (p. 1). According to Young and Skidmore (2019), the five most identified objectives of first-year seminar courses were to “(a) teach academic success strategies; (b) develop a connection with the institution or campus; (c) cultivate a knowledge of campus resources; (d) foster analytical, critical-thinking, or problem-solving skills; and (e) provide an introduction to college-level academic expectations” (p. 75). In comparing the objectives of first-year seminars between 2-year and 4-year institutions, academic success strategies, academic planning or major exploration, and knowledge of campus resources were more frequently taught at 2-year institutions (Young & Skidmore, 2019). Young and Keup (2016) noted, “The combination of poor retention statistics and a renewed emphasis on student transition, learning, development, and academic performance in the first year and throughout the undergraduate experience has rekindled an interest in the first-year experience (FYE) in community colleges” (p. 58).

#### **PURPOSE OF THE FYS FACULTY RESOURCE SITE**

The purpose of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is to support any community college’s faculty in the development and design of their course, establish curricular consistency across all FYS sections, and ensure that students learn information during their first

semester that is vital to their success. This is important because some community college students have reported feeling their institution did not adequately prepare them to be successful at the beginning of their higher education journey (Karp & Bork, 2012). Additionally, Karp and Bork (2012) identified the following four aspects that higher education professionals can review with new community college students to better position them for success:

(a) academic habits, including school-related activities that support their academic success; (b) cultural know-how, helping the student follow unwritten institutional norms; (c) balancing multiple roles, like being a family member and/or employee in addition to being a college student; and (d) help-seeking, which addresses how community college students are expected to self-direct themselves for help in a timely manner. All four of these roles are addressed throughout the modules of the FYS Faculty Resource Site.

Although marketing and recruiting students to attend a community college can be helpful in increasing enrollment, it is critical that institutions do not let students fall through the cracks during their first semester. Butt and Rehman (2010) supported this notion and discussed how, in addition to increasing enrollment, institutions also have to actively manage their students if they hope to retain them. They completed a study on student satisfaction in higher education and recommended institutions implement the following guidelines to improve satisfaction among students:

1. Effectively onboard, develop, and retain the talents of faculty.
2. Design courses that prepare students for success in future semesters and teach them skills relevant to the current job market.
3. Promote an interactive learning environment in which faculty and students can discuss educational pathways and support services.

Whereas these recommendations were made in the general context of undergraduate satisfaction, they can also be applied toward a community college's FYS course.

The importance of training and retaining quality FYS faculty cannot be discounted. A consequence of losing quality, experienced FYS faculty means that new instructors will have to be recruited and trained, which can take up to a couple of years before they feel comfortable teaching the course (Sobel, 2018). Thus, having dedicated faculty committed to teaching first-year seminars is one way the onboarding experience for new students can be improved. These are the needs the FYS Faculty Resource Site is attempting to fulfill. By providing FYS faculty with a resource that includes sample syllabi, recommended readings, and well-designed assignments and in-class activities, community colleges can help new learners establish a connection with the campus community at the beginning of their higher education journey, so they are encouraged to enroll in subsequent semesters. Because the majority of full- and part-time faculty do not have formal training in educational methods (Alvarez & Towne, 2016), the FYS Faculty Resource Site will serve as a tool that supplements this lack of training by providing assignments and activities that incorporate active teaching and learning methods.

Like other consumer-driven organizations, community colleges must offer products, programs, and services that help them stand out against the competition (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). Although the FYS Faculty Resource Site is a product that is not visible to students, it has the potential to be a valuable tool to recruit and train FYS faculty. The site may also motivate faculty who have had interest in teaching their institution's FYS course but never did, because they did not have time to plan and design their own section from scratch. Because community colleges serve students who are underprepared for college-level coursework, first-generation



college students, enrolled part-time, nontraditional in age, low-income, and a minority (Bragg & Durham, 2012), a well-designed First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site can be used by faculty to help prepare students who are a part of these at-risk populations to be successful in college. Campus-wide support for using this product is one way to bridge the achievement gap for underprepared students, promote equity, and improve the retention rates for community colleges. Although FYS faculty support students as they adjust to the academic and social qualities of being a college student, institutions should also develop and actively manage their FYS programs to ensure they function as a high-impact practice. (Sullivan & Haller, 2018).

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The following guiding principles have been designed for this product and will be used to ensure that the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site addresses the following:

- What common themes and skills are typically taught to students in first-year seminars at community colleges?
- How should topics be sequenced to best prepare a student for success in first-year seminars?
- What resources can be provided to faculty to assist them in facilitating an effective first-year seminar?
- What skills should FYS faculty possess to support learners as they manage the responsibilities associated with being a new college student?

## **LIMITATIONS**

The content in the First-Year Seminar Resource Site should be consistent with the course outcomes of the institution that uses it. As previously mentioned, one of the purposes of this product is to ensure quality control and curricular consistency across any community college's FYS sections. A limitation of this research and the product is that it is a snapshot of the

time in which this dissertation is written, meaning the modules and topics of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site will continue to evolve. If community colleges use the FYS Faculty Resource Site included in this dissertation as a guide to create their own, it is important to note that regular maintenance of the site is required to ensure that links to websites and reading assignments are still active. Another limitation is that assignments and in-class activities that are included in the site will also need to be evaluated frequently to ensure they are current and relevant to the evolving needs of first-semester community college students. Continuously collecting feedback from students about their experiences while taking the course and making necessary updates to the curriculum will also be required by the individual who oversees the institution's FYS course.

In order for the product to be truly effective, institutions must train their faculty on how to use their learning management system and how to navigate the FYS Faculty Resource Site. This is particularly true in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as interventions to limit the spread of the virus via social distancing practices require institutions to embrace technological innovations that will reimagine the way faculty trainings are facilitated. Faculty will also need to learn how to copy content from the resource site and paste it into the course site for their class in the learning management system.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

This dissertation will use the term *first-year seminar* and the abbreviation "FYS" to describe a course that is designed to teach brand-new community college students a wide range of skills so they can achieve their academic goals. The term *faculty* is used to describe all

faculty or instructors who teach the first-year seminars. The label *faculty* is not a reference to academic rank.

## **SUMMARY**

As community colleges are called upon to produce more graduates, facilitate transfers to universities, and provide job-ready training that meets the community's need for trained employees, they continue to face challenges related to their mission of providing an open door to all who seek a college education. By providing this opportunity, community colleges are more likely than their 4-year university counterparts to serve students who may be considered "at-risk" of achieving their academic goals. Examples of these student populations include those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students whose academic skills may not be labeled as "college-ready," and nontraditional students who are likely balancing work and family obligations.

To help onboard new students, many higher education institutions either offer or require a first-year seminar to help with students' adjustment to taking on the responsibilities of a college student. Because the FYS faculty at community colleges are a mix of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, and staff, these courses are vulnerable to curricular inconsistencies that may put new students at a disadvantage in having a successful first semester. In addition, well-meaning faculty who are interested in teaching a first-year seminar may not have the time to research or design assignments and activities that the students will find engaging and relevant to their situation. To help support faculty in facilitating an effective first-year seminar and ensure curricular consistency, this dissertation introduces the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site, an online product designed to provide faculty with

recommended topics, readings, assignments, and activities they can include in their first-year seminar.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation provided an introduction into community colleges, first-year seminars, and the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site. Chapter 2 will summarize the existing research and evaluate how it is significant to the modules of the FYS Faculty Resource Site. Chapter 3 will provide details on how the product was developed, its content, and the factors that contributed to its structure and organization. Chapter 4 will provide images of the FYS Resource Site, a summary of each module, and descriptions of the content included in each module. The final chapter, Chapter 5, will review the product's limitations, provide recommendations for future research, and offer an appraisal of the relevance of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site as it relates to the existing research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

First-year seminars (FYS) have become one of the most common interventions to help new students adjust to the demands of pursuing an undergraduate degree. Although it is commendable that college and universities are addressing the need to assist their students with the onboarding process, this has not always been a priority. Skipper (2017) discussed how the responsibility of being successful in college had traditionally fallen on the student. However, since the 1980s, higher education institutions have been creating policies and interventions that are designed to increase student success measures, such as retention, transfer, and graduation rates. This chapter will explore the current related literature on first-year seminars, including how they are designed, topics that are typically taught, professional development opportunities for instructors, and how they are regarded as a high-impact practice.

### STRUCTURE OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

The *2017 National Survey on the First-Year Experience* (Young & Skidmore, 2019) was a continuation of previous surveys from the University of South Carolina that researched data on first-year seminars at higher education institutions throughout the United States. It provided the most current data on how colleges and universities structured their first-year seminars at the time of this research: “Since 1988, the National Resource Center has conducted and encouraged national research on student learning, development, and success, including high-

impact practices like the first-year seminar, sophomore initiatives, peer leadership, information literacy, and senior capstone experiences” (National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2019, para. 1). The following sections highlight the 2017 survey’s results on the types of FYS that are offered, how credit is awarded, whether they are mandatory, and the most commonly reported objectives.

### **Seminar Types**

When comparing the different formats of FYS offered by the institutions that participated in the *2017 National Survey on the First-Year Experience*, Young and Skidmore (2019) reported the following frequencies: extended orientation (47.6%); academic courses with content that varies across sections (33.0%); academic courses with uniform content across all sections (31.4%); hybrid seminars that include two or more elements of the other seminar types (20.2%); preprofessional, discipline-linked, or major-specific courses (16.5%); and seminars with a focus on basic study skills (15.2%). The top three seminar types reported by 2-year institutions were extended orientation seminars, academic seminars with uniform content, and basic study skills seminars (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

### **Credit Classification**

Young and Skidmore (2019) reported that 96% of the institutions that participated in the survey offered their FYS as a credit-bearing course. Many institutions indicated that their FYS was either one credit (39.2%) or three credits (32.8%). Two-year and 4-year institutions reported offering their FYS as a one-credit course at almost the same rate, 40.3% and 39%, respectively. However, the results of the survey revealed that 2-year colleges offered their FYS

as a three-credit course at a higher frequency than 4-year colleges and universities. On the topic of how credit is applied toward degree requirements, 57.1% of institutions reported that their FYS is applied toward general education requirements, whereas 32.5% count the course as elective credit(s). Two-year institutions were almost evenly split between counting FYS toward general education and elective credit, with elective credit being awarded slightly more often (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

### **Mandatory vs. Voluntary**

When examining whether higher education institutions require FYS for all first-year students or specific populations, Young and Skidmore (2019) reported that more than half (51.8%) of institutions require the course for all students. Institutions that required the course for specific populations reported doing so for students enrolled in developmental/remedial courses, honors students, first-generation students, and students who did not fully satisfy the institution's admission criteria at the time they applied (provisional admittance) (Young & Skidmore, 2019). The survey also found that many institutions required FYS for "other" subpopulations of first-year students, including

students below a certain number of credits (e.g., those who had earned fewer than 30 semester hours), traditional-age first-year students, students in specific academic programs on the responding campus, students in specific scholarship or grant programs, students in residential programs, and even students with academic risk factors such as late registration or low incoming GPA. (Young & Skidmore, 2019, p. 74)

Two-year colleges were more likely to require FYS for students who were enrolled in developmental/remedial courses and those who belonged to the "other" subpopulations (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

## **Objectives**

The top five objectives of FYS reported by colleges and universities that participated in the survey include: (a) teach strategies that will contribute to academic success, (b) help students develop a connection with the campus community and institution, (c) increase awareness of campus resources, (d) encourage and cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and (e) introduce students to college-level academic expectations (Young & Skidmore, 2019). As stated in Chapter 1, the academic goals of community college students are likely to differ from those who attend 4-year institutions. Community colleges are also more likely to serve students who have characteristics that are defined as “at-risk” of being able to achieve those goals. As such, these differences are reflected in the objectives of FYS at 2-year and 4-year institutions. For example, “academic success strategies (71.6% two-year, 43.0% four-year), academic planning or major exploration (35.0% two-year, 18.0% four-year), and knowledge of campus resources (44.8% two-year, 27.2% four-year) were more frequently identified as objectives by two-year colleges” (Young & Skidmore, 2019, p. 75).

## **FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY**

The current related literature provides context regarding who teaches first-year seminars throughout colleges and universities in the United States. Groccia and Hunter (2012) pointed out that institutions typically do not have faculty who are solely dedicated to teaching first-year seminars. Instead, sections are often taught by a variety of full-time and part-time faculty, along with other campus professionals who have not been trained for college-level teaching, like academic advisors, librarians, and student affairs administrators (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). The notion of FYS faculty consisting of a variety of instructors with other



responsibilities on the campus is supported by Sobel (2018), who stated, “Most faculty members who teach first-year seminars do so in addition to their regular roles, or as a substitute for some part of their regular roles” (p. 69).

Data from the *2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars* reported that higher education institutions in the United States use the following types of professionals to teach their first-year seminars: (a) full-time, tenure-track faculty, 61.4%; (b) full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, 54.4%; (c) student affairs professionals, 48.2%; (d) adjunct faculty, 46%; and (e) other campus professionals, 29.9% (Padgett & Keup, 2011). Results from the *2017 National Survey on the First-Year Experience* (Young & Skidmore, 2019) revealed increases in each group, except for “other campus professionals.” However, the updated survey added “academic advisors” as a category, which likely explains the decrease: (a) full-time, tenure-track faculty, 69.3%; (b) full-time, non-tenure-track faculty, 68.2%; (c) student affairs professionals, 53%; (d) adjunct faculty, 52.7%; (e) other campus professionals, 22.8%; and (f) academic advisors, 46.2% (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

The survey also revealed that 2-year institutions were more likely than 4-year institutions to have academic advisors teach their first-year seminar course. Tenure-track and non-tenure-track full-time faculty were more frequently reported to teach FYS at 4-year institutions than 2-year institutions. Lastly, the survey found that student affairs professionals were more likely to be FYS instructors at public institutions (59.3%) than private institutions (44.2%) (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

## **Recruiting and Retaining FYS Faculty**

Since FYS programs rely on faculty who teach for other departments and professionals who serve in other capacities for the institution, recruiting and retaining quality faculty to continue teaching the seminar is a major challenge seminar leaders face. Groccia and Hunter (2012) identified the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate higher education professionals to teach their institution's first-year seminar course. Intrinsic motivators included (a) an interest in teaching students in their first semester; (b) belief in the mission, goals, and learning outcomes of the program; (c) a desire to give back to the institution and/or students; and (d) an interest in teaching in a smaller, more interactive setting and developing close working relationships with students. Extrinsic motivators included (a) financial compensation, (b) career advancement opportunities, (c) support from department chairs and supervisors, (d) a professional development opportunity for full-time faculty, (e) an additional course to add to their list of experience for adjunct faculty, and (f) additional expertise in another area for campus administrators and professionals.

Sobel (2018) reviewed literature on recruiting, training, and retaining faculty to teach in first-year seminar programs at various higher education institutions. Some of the challenges discussed include how "well-regarded faculty members often have many demands on their time already, including teaching and research" (p. 67). Sobel identified three findings on recruiting, training, and retaining FYS faculty:

1. The importance of enticing faculty to continue teaching the course for 2 years or more is key to keeping an FYS program strong.
2. Faculty who continue teaching FYS for more than 2 years tend to do so because of intrinsic motivators instead of extrinsic motivators, like payment. An intrinsic motivator discussed was having a sense of belonging to a "supportive, energetic

community of instructors” away from their home department (p. 77). Other intrinsic motivators included getting to share techniques, support, and enthusiasm with other FYS faculty; having the opportunity to continually update their teaching strategies; and getting to know the students better than they would in other classes they teach.

3. An institution that can communicate the value and importance of a strong first-year seminar as it relates to student success can effectively promote the program to the faculty and other key stakeholders. (Sobel, 2018)

### **Professional Development for FYS Faculty**

In a study by McClure et al. (2008), focus groups were conducted with 20 faculty members who taught first-year seminars to determine if participating in a first-year program influences how they teach their other courses. Of the faculty who participated, 30% were “new” FYS faculty (those who taught the course for at least one semester) and 70% were “experienced” FYS faculty (those who taught the course for two semesters or more). The program required the faculty to attend teaching workshops and monthly meetings in which pedagogy and teaching philosophies were discussed in an interdisciplinary environment. The study concluded that the faculty who participated in the program created “positive transfer effects” in the following areas: “(a) reflecting on teaching methods; (b) using formal measures to assess critical thinking; (c) devoting class time to discussions about critical thinking; and (d) reevaluating how they see themselves as instructor” (McClure et al., 2008, p. 31). Participants also reported benefiting from processing solutions for challenges in a collaborative environment and enhancing their understanding of how first-year students learn.

In the *2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars*, Padgett and Keup (2011) reported that 21% of institutions do not offer training for their FYS faculty. Of the institutions that do offer training, only half require it. Details about training revealed that 36.7% of institutions have

a training program that is half a day or less, 21.7% offer a 1-day event, 20.7% have training in an unspecified format and timeframe but include ongoing training and one-on-one mentoring, 11.5% offer 2-day events, 5.1% offer 3-day events, and 1.2% offer training that lasts 4 days (Padgett & Keup, 2011).

Results on the topics typically taught revealed that 47.6% of institutions include an overview of campus resources and services. Details on who teaches FYS revealed that institutions typically have a mix of full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators teaching the course. With such a wide variety of higher education professionals teaching first-years seminars, these statistics suggest that reviewing information about campus resources like tutoring, counseling, advising, services for students with disabilities, and the library should be included in FYS faculty training so instructors can competently share the information with their students and make appropriate referrals when needed.

Carstens and Howell (2012) published an article on the redesign of their institution's first-year seminar program and how they transitioned the pedagogy to an inquiry-guided learning (IGL) model. The authors described inquiry-guided learning as

a range of activities that have in common the student's central role as someone who actively takes charge of his or her learning, raising questions, challenging pre-packaged answers, seeking out necessary information, weighing different perspectives against one another, and making real choices about what to believe and what to do. (p. 53)

The institution's FYS steering committee focused on inquiry to improve student learning, promote critical thinking, and satisfy information literacy objectives. The article mentions that, although faculty were initially reluctant about IGL's effectiveness, after receiving training, using it in the classroom, and participating in the development of how it is applied in the program,

they eventually expressed more positive attitudes toward integrating the model to the content of their first-year seminar.

Groccia and Hunter (2012) researched the importance of training FYS instructors and pointed out that, because the first-year seminar is a relatively new discipline, many of those who are teaching the course may not have taken it themselves during their own college experience. The authors noted that this prevents some FYS instructors from being able to draw from their own personal experiences when designing and establishing goals for their course. In addition, “The majority of faculty members, including, in some cases, those who teach first-year seminars receive little or no training in effective college-level teaching prior to assuming their academic appointments” (Groccia & Hunter, 2012, p. 2). The authors stated that faculty development for FYS instructors is important and recommended that a training program should extend beyond a one-time workshop and involve continuous professional development opportunities covering a broad range of topics (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

Groccia and Hunter’s book also provides strategies for building and maintaining a community of FYS instructors. The researchers discussed the importance of retaining faculty to continue teaching the course because it enhances their effectiveness and contributes to the overall strength of the program (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). Some strategies recommended to FYS leadership include:

1. Community development: creating a sense of community among instructors because they likely work in various departments and are scattered across the campus. Having regular FYS faculty meetings that engage participants and provide opportunities to share ideas about assignments and activities, pedagogical strategies, and solutions for classroom management are among the suggestions provided.

2. Communication: FYS leadership should communicate regularly to faculty and include messages that provide relevant information that is timely and useful to all instructors.
3. Academic freedom, challenge, and support: being mindful of the balance between academic freedom and support, going beyond simply helping faculty prepare for teaching the course, and creating opportunities where they can continuously enhance their teaching skills.
4. Ongoing professional development: including information on content development, a speaker series, and an annual conference or event for instructors and stakeholders.
5. Activating instructors to participate in program development via focus groups, committees, and one-on-one meetings (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

The authors concluded that continuously building and maintaining a community of FYS faculty will keep the program fresh and up to date:

Recognizing that faculty and staff who teach the first-year seminar are individuals with unique needs and desires is a foundational assumption that can guide comprehensive and ongoing efforts to create learning opportunities, engage instructors in their own development, achieve continuous program improvement, and ultimately yield student learning and success. (Groccia & Hunter, 2012, p. 89)

Gordon and Foutz (2015) researched the development of a faculty learning community (FLC) for the first-year seminar at their institution. Members of the FLC included faculty from a variety of disciplines. The FLC was created out of the awareness that the interaction between students and faculty in a first-year seminar is likely to be different from other courses offered at the institution: "Faculty accustomed to upper-level classes or lecture-style classes, or who are some years removed from teaching first-year students, may need to refresh themselves on the most effective teaching modalities" (Gordon & Foutz, 2015, p. 81). The goals that were accomplished during the FLC included (a) providing an environment where faculty could openly discuss challenges and work collaboratively in figuring out solutions; and (b) gaining feedback that would support future FYS faculty in planning activities that would stimulate class

discussion, especially with first-year students who are reluctant to participate (Gordon & Foutz, 2015).

Gordon and Foutz (2015) noted that, although faculty were initially motivated to teach FYS so they could interact with first-semester students, their participation in the FLC became more focused on identifying common teaching challenges and collaborating on how to overcome them, meeting the objectives of the seminar, and developing pedagogical strategies that would improve their students' engagement throughout the course. The authors concluded that the FLC allowed faculty to build relationships with each other, view the members of the community as a resource, and provide a space where faculty could observe their own growth and improvement (Gordon & Foutz, 2015).

Alvarez and Towne (2016) advocated having academic advisors teach first-year seminars because they could be a good fit. The authors argued that similar to the role of an advisor, first-year seminars help students with their adjustment to college and connect them to supports and resources. The authors noted that the typical one-on-one method in which advisors typically work may not translate well in a classroom setting; however, the continuing professional education (CPE) opportunities that allow advisors to develop teaching competencies are rare (Alvarez & Towne, 2016).

Alvarez and Towne (2016) recommended that a program focused on classroom assessment techniques (CATs) could be effective in training academic advisors on learner-centered and active learning methods: "Introducing the action research element of CATs to academic advisors in a way that also encourages forming communities of inquiry could contribute data that would help researchers gain additional insight into the first-year

experience” (Alvarez & Towne, 2016, p. 14). The authors pointed out that an outcome of this training could be having participants apply at least one of the CATs they developed to their FYS course and create a plan to administer, document, and share the results as action research with their colleagues. They also mentioned that providing this type of CPE for academic advisors who teach FYS could have a positive impact on student success measures, including improved retention, persistence, and graduation rates. In addition, Alvarez and Towne indicated that a CATs workshop can provide professional development in active teaching and learning, in which faculty are not typically trained prior to becoming instructors at higher education institutions.

Eiselein (2019) researched the structure and impact of a year-long Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) course on effective teaching practices that FYS faculty participated in. While addressing the need for training, the author discussed how most FYS faculty are not trained in topics related to student development or effective teaching methods that facilitate student learning. The FYS faculty who participated in the training included novice faculty, adjunct faculty, student life professionals, and experienced professors. Topics covered in the training included “(1) designing an effective course and class, (2) establishing a productive learning environment, (3) using active learning techniques, (4) promoting higher order thinking, and (5) using assessment to inform instruction and promote learning” (Eiselein, 2019, p. 44). In addition to learning research-based teaching practices, participants were also part of a learning community where ideas and success stories were shared. At the end of the training, faculty were motivated to apply their new knowledge in the classroom, reported increased confidence in their pedagogical skills, and committed to a “community of teachers



with a collective identity oriented toward improving teaching excellence in first-year courses” (Eiselein, 2019, p. 47).

Research by Smith and Barrett (2019) highlighted the value of supporting FYS faculty via a combination of a “curricular package” in the institution’s learning management system and a faculty learning community (p. 21). The curricular package allows for consistent communication of resources and storage of lesson plans (Smith & Barrett, 2019). The learning community allows FYS faculty to practice pedagogical strategies and activities before facilitating them with their students. Learning community meetings also provide an opportunity for faculty to process and discuss strengths and opportunities for growth from the previous class (Smith & Barrett, 2019).

An assessment using an anonymous survey that measures participants’ agreement with statements related to the objectives of the learning community is distributed at the end of the semester. Open-ended questions are also included, which allows for more detailed feedback. The researchers concluded that regular training via learning communities enhances faculty confidence and fosters empathy when supporting students, which can also create a sense of belonging for students who are more likely to face barriers when accomplishing their academic goals (Smith & Barrett, 2019).

### **FYS AS A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE**

The American Association of Colleges and Universities identified first-year seminars as one of 10 high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008). The other nine high-impact practices identified include (a) common intellectual experiences, (b) learning communities, (c) writing-intensive courses, (d) collaborative assignments and projects, (e) undergraduate research, (f) diversity

and global learning, (g) service learning and community-based learning, (h) internships, and (i) capstone courses and projects. To be considered a “high-impact practice,” the interventions needed to provide evidence in educational research that they contributed to an increase in student retention rates and student engagement (Kuh, 2008). To improve student success, Kuh (2008) recommended that higher education institutions should have every student participate in at least two high-impact practices throughout their undergraduate journey, one in the first year and the other later on, preferably related to the student’s major.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities published a book by Kuh and O’Donnell (2013) that expanded on Kuh’s (2008) work on high-impact practices (HIP). It provided a framework “for evaluating whether something that is ‘called’ a HIP has the necessary quality dimensions that foster student accomplishment in terms of persistence, graduation rates, and desired learning outcomes” (Kuh & O’Donnell, 2013, pp. 7-8). Kuh and O’Donnell reviewed the following eight characteristics designed to increase engagement, provide support, and, thus, enhance students’ overall undergraduate experience:

- (1) performance expectations set at appropriately high levels;
- (2) significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time;
- (3) interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters;
- (4) experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which students are familiar;
- (5) frequent, timely, and constructive feedback;
- (6) periodic, structured opportunities to reflect on and integrate learning;
- (7) opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications;
- (8) public demonstration of competence. (p. 10)

Kuh and O’Donnell stated that students benefit from first-year seminars because they “effectively compel students to reach high standards of performance while providing ample feedback along the way from peers as well as teachers” (p. 2).

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2013) published a report exploring how high-impact educational practices contribute to an increase in student engagement in community colleges. The report stated that first-year seminars have a “notably positive relationship with the *CCSSE support for learners* benchmark” (p. 14) as well as positive relationships with three Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) benchmarks: early connections, effective track to college readiness, and engaged learning. The report reviewed a case study by Zane State College that reported a 10% increase in fall-to-fall student retention in the first year it implemented its mandatory FYS (CCSSE, 2013).

Young and Keup (2016) explored how first-year seminars are considered a high-impact practice in community colleges. Their research analyzed national survey data on how community colleges are structuring their FYS to support students and meet their educational needs. The results of the data revealed that 62% of community colleges have two or more high-impact practices embedded in their course (Young & Keup, 2016). Since FYS is also considered an HIP, the authors noted that these institutions are including three high-impact interventions in their students’ first year of college alone. With Kuh’s (2008) recommendation that participation in at least two HIPs is essential to “enhance student engagement and increase student success” (p. 19), the researchers argued that FYS is an important intervention toward satisfying these metrics, especially for community college students. “The HIPs that were most frequently included or connected to the FYS in community colleges included collaborative assignments and projects (70.2%), diversity or global learning (46.8%), and learning communities (32.8%)” (Young & Keup, 2016, p. 65).

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina published a report that included data from a variety of institutions and evaluated whether their first-year seminars included qualities of a high-impact practice (Skipper, 2017). The authors analyzed the degree to which FYS employed the eight characteristics proposed by Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) that were designed to enhance student success. The report included contributions from 27 colleges and universities, including 2-year, 4-year, public, and private institutions.

The report described high-impact activities as experiences that (a) engage students in learning interventions that they can apply to real-life situations in both the classroom and the community; (b) provide opportunities for students to interact with and learn from people who are different from themselves, including peers and faculty; and (c) help students attain learning outcomes via feedback about performance and by providing an environment in which students can make changes and enhance their skills (Skipper, 2017). It was found that institutions reported an average of 5.3 effective educational practices in their FYS. Skipper (2017) discussed how institutions do not need to incorporate every effective practice into their FYS for it to be considered "high-impact"; however, "simply having the conditions to support an educational practice does not mean that the practice will be enacted or that it will be high quality" (p. 15). The report concluded that the first-year seminar has the potential to be an impactful experience for first-year undergraduate students, especially if effective educational practices and high-impact activities are appropriately integrated (Skipper, 2017).

Keup and Young (2018) reviewed the literature on best practices in FYS and examined whether they embody any of Kuh and O'Donnell's (2013) eight characteristics that increase

engagement, provide support, and enhance the student experience. The authors determined that pedagogical approaches are vital to the quality of an institution's FYS, and they alone have the potential to embody up to four characteristics: "(a) opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications; (b) public demonstrations of competence; (c) periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning; and (d) frequent, timely, and constructive feedback" (Keup & Young, 2018, p. 110).

## **SUMMARY**

First-year seminars have become one of the most traditional and widely used interventions to help new students transition to the responsibilities associated with being a college student. However, the research in this chapter emphasizes that the approaches higher education institutions use to carry out their first-year seminar programs can differ in a variety of ways. For example, some colleges and universities make their FYS mandatory for every new student, whereas others make it mandatory for specific populations. Additionally, it is common to have a variety of faculty, administrators, and staff teach FYS, and the approach institutions take in preparing them to teach the course also varies.

The review of the literature in this chapter confirms that a well-designed first-year seminar has the potential to enhance the onboarding experience for a first-year student while also increasing an institution's student success metrics. However, it is important to note that simply offering an FYS because of its history and acceptance as a high-impact practice is not enough. Institutions must also be committed to continuously assess, evaluate, and innovate their first-year seminars to ensure that they are effective in preparing new students for success in their higher education journeys.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

The First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is a product designed to support faculty who teach first-year seminars (FYS). The resource site was created using the learning management system (LMS) Blackboard; however, it can be adapted using other LMSs. As discussed in Chapter 2, since full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, and staff often teach FYS (Alvarez & Towne, 2016; Gordon & Foutz, 2015; Groccia & Hunter, 2012; Young & Skidmore, 2019), ensuring curricular consistency throughout an institution's FYS program can be challenging. Since FYS faculty may not have the time to design and develop their own section, the FYS Faculty Resource Site includes topics, assignments, and activities that faculty can use to facilitate their course. This can benefit institutions regardless of whether they use a canned or more flexible curriculum. The FYS Faculty Resource Site also supports institutional accreditation requirements as evidenced by the Higher Learning Commission's *Accreditation Criteria for Accreditation*, which states that higher education institutions should provide "support for student learning and resources for effective teaching" (Higher Learning Commission, 2017, section 3). Chapter 4 includes images and descriptions of the content in the FYS Faculty Resource Site so community colleges can design a similar product to support their faculty.

## **FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS AND EQUITY**

As addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, an aspect that makes FYS particularly unique is that those who teach the course have a variety of educational backgrounds and professional experiences. Similarly, students who take FYS, especially in community colleges, enroll with differing levels of knowledge and academic skills, which might pose as a barrier to their success. This makes the topic of equity especially important when designing FYS. While equality focuses on making sure everyone gets the same thing, equity is focused on making sure everyone gets what they need to be successful (Association of American Colleges & Universities [AAC&U], 2015). For example, a community college having a policy that all first-semester students need to take FYS is an example of equality, while using FYS to connect students with the tools and resources they need to succeed can be an example of equity.

The AAC&U (2015) noted that due to the equity gaps in education, income, race, and wealth, students enroll at higher education institutions with “dramatic differences in college readiness” (p. 17). With objectives like teaching academic success strategies, connecting students with the campus community, communicating effectively with faculty, and explaining academic expectations at the college level (Sobel, 2018; Young & Skidmore, 2019), a well-designed FYS has the potential to promote equity and reduce the impact of equity gaps that exist for minoritized students and learners who might be characterized as underprepared. This is the need the FYS Faculty Resource Site is attempting to meet: to provide faculty with a tool that includes topics and content that are relevant for first semester students, regardless of their background and experience.

## **CONTRIBUTING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**

This researcher, Rick Amster, is an associate professor of counseling at Lakeland Community College in Kirtland, Ohio. He has taught FYS for over 5 years and has been serving as the First-Year Experience (FYEX) coordinator at Lakeland since 2018. He earned a Master of Education in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Ohio.

The foundation of this product resulted in this researcher's experience collaborating with Lakeland Community College's First-Year Experience Advisory Committee in creating a web-based resource to support faculty after the FYEX textbook was discontinued in favor of adopting open-education resources (Amster, 2020). After receiving positive feedback from faculty, realizing that it promoted curricular consistency, and observing positive comments from student evaluations after the tool was launched, this researcher decided to create the FYS Faculty Resource Site that is featured in this dissertation. The product was created to support faculty who teach FYS in community colleges.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

This study used four guiding principles as a foundation for creating the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site product. It is important to note that the guiding principles also mirror the intended outcomes of the FYS Faculty Resource Site:

- What common themes and skills are typically taught to students in first-year seminars at community colleges?
- How should topics be sequenced to best prepare a student for success in first-year seminars?



- What resources can be provided to faculty to assist them in facilitating an effective first-year seminar?
- What skills should FYS faculty possess to support learners as they manage the responsibilities associated with being a new college student?

The first outcome addresses common themes and skills that are typically taught in first-year seminars. Karp and Bork (2012) recommended that higher education professionals review the following four topics with new community college students to prepare them for success:

1. Academic habits and activities that can support students' academic success.
2. Helping students understand the culture of higher education, including unwritten norms.
3. Addressing how to balance roles students may have in addition to being a college student, like work and family obligations.
4. Assisting students with knowing the specific resources available to them if they need help (p. 10).

Young and Skidmore (2019) reported that the top three objectives taught in FYS at 2-year institutions are academic success strategies, academic planning/major exploration, and knowledge of campus resources. Other objectives frequently reported by both 2-year and 4-year institutions include connecting students with the campus community and helping them understand expectations at the college level (Young & Skidmore, 2019).

The second intended outcome of the resource site is to offer a suggested sequence in which topics can be delivered to support new students. For example, assigning a high-stakes research paper within the first two weeks would likely be overwhelming for students; however, teaching study strategies and time management techniques early in the course can help students as they adjust to managing the responsibilities associated with being a college student. The suggested sequence in the FYS Faculty Resource Site is not intended to interfere

with academic freedom. While the order in which topics are taught in FYS varies across institutions (Young & Skidmore, 2019), the sequence presented in the FYS Faculty Resource Site is simply based on this researcher's experience facilitating the course. Institutions that adopt the FYS Faculty Resource Site do not need to follow verbatim the sequence in which topics are presented.

The third outcome of the FYS Faculty Resource Site is to provide resources to support faculty who teach the course. To implement the FYS Faculty Resource Site and get buy-in, faculty learning communities can be created to teach faculty how to use the product, collect feedback on user interface navigation, and gather suggestions for content. Complementing the FYS Faculty Resource Site with a faculty learning community provides the following benefits, which were highlighted by Smith and Barrett (2019) in Chapter 2: consistent communication of resources, storage of lesson plans, and a space where FYS faculty can practice pedagogical strategies and activities before facilitating them with their students.

Similar to how the second outcome is not intended to impede academic freedom, the content within the resource site should not be presented in a way that feels prescribed and may inadvertently convey a message to faculty that their creativity is not valued. Groccia and Hunter (2012) supported the notion of not providing all the resources faculty need to facilitate an FYS course by stating,

Many well-meaning first-year seminar directors feel that if they provide a structured syllabus and teaching resources, detailed down to the individual lesson plans, then instructors will find teaching a first-year seminar easy, will therefore enjoy it, and will continue to teach year after year. Unfortunately, this is not reality in many cases. (p. 85)

While the researchers acknowledged the benefits of developing a web-based tool in which faculty can share documents, resources, and information with each other, they also

stressed the importance of giving faculty space to be creative so they can make the course their own (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

The fourth outcome of the FYS Faculty Resource Site is to equip faculty with the knowledge and skills needed to support learners as they adjust to taking on the responsibilities of a college student. For example, a biology professor may be effective in teaching concepts related to cell structure and the different systems of the human body, but when teaching FYS for the first time, they may not feel prepared to answer a student's question about the college's clubs and organizations. They may also not feel comfortable teaching other FYS-related topics, such as active reading techniques or note-taking strategies. Instead of researching the content independently, that professor can use information in the FYS Faculty Resource Site to learn about the material and then research the topic further if needed. According to Groccia and Hunter (2012), teaching FYS provides the opportunity for faculty to step outside of their discipline and grow professionally. In summary, the FYS Faculty Resource Site streamlines the process of planning and researching FYS topics so that any higher education professional is able to do so without feeling like they have to design their section without support.

### **CREATING THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY RESOURCE SITE**

The idea to create a FYS Faculty Resource Site came shortly after this researcher became the coordinator of the FYS course at his institution. After communicating with FYS faculty and sharing ideas for assignments via email before the semester, some faculty would later send emails to this researcher asking him to resend the ideas or documents because they had lost or inadvertently deleted the email. In addition, this researcher learned that many of the FYS faculty had in-class activities or assignments that students were receptive to, but an established

system in which these ideas could be shared with other FYS faculty did not exist. Moreover, since the FYS faculty at this researcher's institution included full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, and student support professionals throughout the campus, getting everyone together for meetings proved to be challenging. Thus, it was decided to store FYS course content in a web-based application that could be accessed only by faculty who teach FYS.

The First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site was created using a learning management system, Blackboard. Learning management systems (LMS) are online applications that enable faculty to deliver and manage educational content using web browsers on devices like computers and mobile devices (Kasim & Khalid, 2016). In addition to assisting faculty with course design, development, and implementation, LMSs are also beneficial from the student perspective. Further, LMSs provide students with a platform in which they can access course materials, interact with peers, complete assignments, and track their progress and grades (Cavus, 2015). According to Wichadee (2015), LMSs are comprised of the following three tools:

1. Learning skills tools allow faculty to post learning modules, content for lectures, links for websites and videos, assignments, and tests and quizzes.
2. Communication tools allow faculty to communicate with students via announcements and emails. The communication tools within LMS also enable students to communicate with each via features like group chats and discussion forums.
3. Productivity tools allow faculty and students to upload and download documents. Other examples of productivity tools include record-keeping features, like gradebooks and course evaluations, and access to data that tracks student access and usage within the LMS course site. (p. 53)

Of the three LMS tools summarized above, the content in the FYS Faculty Resource Site is mostly comprised of learning skills tools because it includes learning modules, links for websites and videos, and ideas for activities, assignments, and quizzes relevant to FYS. Higher

education institutions can choose LMSs that are open source (free), such as Moodle and Sakai, or commercial (paid) platforms, such as Blackboard and Canvas (Kasim & Khalid, 2016). The FYS Faculty Resource Site was created using Blackboard because it is the LMS this researcher's community college uses.

While some faculty may use the LMS only for course delivery, researchers have also acknowledged that it can be used as a repository of information in which faculty can share course content and ideas with each other (Cavus, 2015; Walker et al., 2016). For example, rather than sharing ideas for an assignment with faculty via email, which puts the material at risk of being lost or deleted by the recipient, the FYS Faculty Resource Site exists in its own course site in Blackboard, so faculty are able to easily access it. Having the product stored in a course site also allows LMS administrators to control who can access the resource site, limiting it to only faculty who teach FYS. This also helps reduce the risk of students accessing the resource site, which can potentially put the academic integrity of an institution's FYS course at risk.

#### **DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY RESOURCE SITE**

The First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is a product designed to promote faculty development within FYS at community colleges. The site is meant to serve as a model that other community colleges can use and customize to support the faculty who teach FYS. The first folder in the product is titled "Getting Started: Resource to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar." One of the items in this folder is the FYS course outline. Since course outlines typically include the course's description, outcomes, and performance indicators, it is essential that faculty can easily access it when designing their FYS course. The folder also includes items

meant to assist faculty with navigating and using the LMS. Specifically, the FYS Faculty Resource Site includes “how to” guides that shows faculty how they can create assignments, set up and facilitate discussion forums, and create tests and quizzes within the LMS. There is also guide that provides the step-by-step procedure so faculty can copy content within the resource site and paste it to their own FYS course site.

The remaining folders in the FYS Faculty Resource Site consist of eight modules that address topics relevant to FYS. When gathering and organizing the content, this researcher reflected on his own experience teaching FYS and serving as the first-year experience coordinator at his institution. He also referred to current research to ensure that topics other higher education institutions include in their FYS, such as tips for communicating with faculty (Alamuddin & Bender, 2018), ensuring a successful transition to the college environment (Alvarez & Towne, 2016), time management strategies, knowledge of college resources (Karp & Bork, 2012), academic success skills (Permezadian & Credé, 2016), college-level research (Sobel, 2018), active learning techniques (Sullivan & Haller, 2018), academic planning, and career exploration (Young & Skidmore, 2019), are included in the FYS Faculty Resource Site.

The eight modules of the FYS Faculty Resource Site that will be presented and described in Chapter 4 are:

1. Introduction to the First-Year Seminar
2. College Knowledge and Campus Resources
3. Academic Planning and Time Management
4. Study Strategies
5. Test-Taking and Stress Management
6. Financial Literacy

7. Information Literacy
8. Beyond FYS

The site map in Figure 1 provides a visual of how the “Getting Started: Resource to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar” folder and eight content modules are organized within the FYS Faculty Resource Site.

*Figure 1. Site Map of the FYS Faculty Resource Site*



## SUMMARY

The FYS Faculty Resource Site presented in this dissertation can serve as a tool for community colleges to support faculty who teach FYS. The resource site is adaptable so users can apply all its content or adjust it to meet the learning outcomes specific to their institution’s FYS course. Current research on the topics typically taught in FYS, along with this researcher’s firsthand experience teaching FYS, contributed to the modules and content included in this

product. Chapter 4 will present the FYS Faculty Resource Site as it appears in the LMS. Each image is accompanied by a narrative that describes the content included in each module. With the use of this product, community colleges can ensure curricular consistency across all FYS sections and equip faculty with the knowledge and tools needed to facilitate their own FYS section.



## CHAPTER 4: THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR FACULTY RESOURCE SITE

### INTRODUCTION

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) Faculty Resource Site is a product designed to assist community college professionals in designing their own FYS course. The site was created using the learning management system (LMS) Blackboard; however, it can also be adapted to other learning management systems. The product displayed in this chapter includes a framework and content that other community colleges can use if they develop a resource site for the first-year seminar faculty at their institution. In lieu of a textbook, this resource site was developed with the intention to use open educational resources to reduce the overall cost of taking the course for students.

Figure 2 is a visual of the welcome message users see when they log into the site. The message informs the user that the resource site includes recommended readings, videos, assignments, and in-class activities to help faculty plan and facilitate their first-year seminar class. The welcome message also lists the eight modules that make up the FYS Faculty Resource Site:

- I. Introduction to the First-Year Seminar
- II. College Knowledge and Campus Resources
- III. Academic Planning and Time Management
- IV. Study Strategies

V. Test-Taking and Stress Management

VI. Financial Literacy

VII. Information Literacy

VIII. Beyond FYS.

The welcome message informs users that they do not need to plan their FYS course exactly how the modules are presented, and they are welcome to design the content in the order they think makes the most sense. The welcome message also includes a link that takes users to a website that displays the procedure for copying content from the resource site and pasting to their own FYS course site. The name and contact information for the leader of the FYS program is also listed. For the purpose of this dissertation, this researcher's name and email are provided as an example.

Figure 2. FYS Faculty Resource Site Welcome Message

## Announcements

**Welcome to the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site!**  
Posted on: Sunday, May 16, 2021 5:36:22 PM EDT

Hello FYS Faculty,

Welcome to the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site! This site includes recommended readings, videos, assignments, and in-class activities to help you plan and facilitate your first-year seminar class.

While reviewing the course content section of the site, you will see the following eight modules:

- I. Introduction to the First-Year Seminar
- II. College Knowledge and Campus Resources
- III. Academic Planning and Time Management
- IV. Study Strategies
- V. Test-Taking and Stress Management
- VI. Financial Literacy
- VII. Information Literacy
- VIII. Beyond FYS

You don't have to design your course in the order these modules are listed. Teach the material in the order you think is best. This site is here to support you and provide ideas you can include in your class.

If you see something in the resource site that you'd like to use, the link below will show you the step-by-step procedure on how to copy content from this site and paste it into your own FYS course site:

[How to Copy Content from One Course Site and Paste it to Another](#)

Good luck as you plan and design your first-year seminar!










Best regards,

Rick Amster  
First-Year Seminar Coordinator  
[amsterr@ferris.edu](mailto:amsterr@ferris.edu)

Figure 3 provides a visual of how the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is formatted. The “Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar” folder

provides information that can help faculty build their course site using their institution’s LMS. Figure 3 also displays the eight modules of the resource site, which includes recommended topics faculty can include in their course. FYS program leaders can use this resource site to upload recommended assignments, discussion forum topics, reading assignments, tests and quizzes, and in-class activities.

Figure 3. FYS Faculty Resource Site Modules




First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site	
<p> <b>Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. First-Year Seminar (FYS) Course Outline</li> <li>II. Sample FYS Syllabi</li> <li>III. Navigating the Learning Management System (LMS)</li> <li>IV. How to Copy Content from This Resource Site to Your FYS Course Site</li> <li>V. Guest Speaker List</li> </ul>	<p> <b>IV. Study Strategies</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Study Strategies</li> <li>b. Active Reading</li> <li>c. Note-Taking Techniques</li> </ul>
<p> <b>I. Introduction to First-Year Seminar</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Icebreaker Activities</li> <li>b. Navigating the Student Portal</li> <li>c. Introduction to the Learning Management System</li> <li>d. Syllabus Quiz</li> </ul>	<p> <b>V. Test-Taking and Stress Management</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Strategies for Taking Tests</li> <li>b. Stress Reduction Techniques</li> </ul>
<p> <b>II. College Knowledge and Campus Resources</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Student Engagement and Campus Resources</li> <li>b. Student Handbook</li> <li>c. Communicating with Faculty</li> </ul>	<p> <b>VI. Financial Literacy</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Money Management</li> <li>b. Financial Aid</li> </ul>
<p> <b>III. Academic Planning and Time Management</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Establishing Your Goals</li> <li>b. Academic Planning</li> <li>c. Time Management</li> </ul>	<p> <b>VII. Information Literacy</b> <sup>▲</sup><sub>†</sub></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduction to Academic, Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles</li> <li>b. Navigating the Library’s Resources</li> <li>c. Annotated Bibliography Assignment</li> </ul>
	<p> <b>VIII. Beyond FYS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Transferring to a 4-Year Institution</li> <li>b. Major to Career</li> <li>c. Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students</li> </ul>








The content in the first folder in the FYS Faculty Resource Site, “Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar,” is shown in Figure 4. The folder includes the institution’s first-year seminar course outline, sample syllabi, “how to” guides for the LMS, and a guest speaker list. For the purpose of this dissertation, the LMS information includes step-by-step guides on how to create tests, quizzes, assignments, and discussion forums in Blackboard. To help connect students with the resources available to them on campus, a guest










speaker list has also been added to this folder. The guest speaker list includes names, job titles, and contact information for college employees who will come to their class and present information on their department or program. Some recommended departments to include on this list are Career Services, Counseling & Advising, Financial Aid, the Learning Center (tutoring and the Writing Center), the Library, Student Activities, and the Transfer Center.




Figure 4. Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar




### Getting Started: Resources to Help You Design Your First-Year Seminar

 **I. First-Year Seminar (FYS) Course Outline**  
Attached Files:  [First-Year Seminar Course Outline.pdf](#)  (148.402 KB)

 **II. Syllabus Template and Sample FYS Syllabi**  
Attached Files:  [Institution's Syllabus Template.docx](#)  (72.868 KB)  
 [Syllabus Sample 1.docx](#)  (64.844 KB)  
 [Syllabus Sample 2.doc](#)  (148 KB)

 **III. Navigating the Learning Management System (LMS)**  
Attached Files:  [How to Create Assignments in Blackboard.pdf](#)  (5.127 MB)  
 [How to Create and Facilitate Discussion Forums in Blackboard.pdf](#)  (1.438 MB)  
 [Intro to Blackboard\\_A Guide for Faculty.pdf](#)  (1.587 MB)  
 [How to Create Tests and Quizzes in Blackboard.pdf](#)  (5.934 MB)

 **IV. How to Copy Content from This Resource Site to Your FYS Course Site**  
Attached Files:  [Copy Content to Your FYS Course Site.pdf](#)  (931.982 KB)

 **V. Guest Speaker List**  
Attached Files:  [Guest Speakers List with Contact Information.pdf](#)  (57.337 KB)

## MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

While the first folder in the FYS Faculty Resource Site is devoted to foundational information on navigating the LMS, viewing the FYS course outline, and sample syllabi from

seasoned FYS instructors, the rest are designed as eight modules that include content and resources that faculty can use to plan and design their first-year seminar. Figure 5 provides a visual of content that can be included in the first week of the course. Folder “a” is devoted to uploading icebreaker activities that are effective in helping students get to know each other during the first week. Folder “b” includes information and assignments that teach students how to navigate their student portal. Presentations, activities, and assignments in this folder can demonstrate how to access their student email, view their schedule, navigate the degree audit system, view financial aid information, access the LMS, etc.

*Figure 5. Module I: Introduction to First-Year Seminar*











<b>I. Introduction to First-Year Seminar</b>	
	<b><u>a. Icebreaker Activities</u></b>
	<b><u>b. Navigating the Student Portal</u></b>
	<b><u>c. Introduction to Blackboard for Students</u></b>
	<b><u>d. Syllabus Quiz</u></b>

Figure 6 displays folder “c,” which includes content that teaches students how to navigate the LMS. Supportive resources in this folder includes “how-to” guides on taking a test

or quiz, submitting assignments, participating in discussions, and contacting technical support for assistance.

Figure 6. Module I, Folder “c”: Introduction to Blackboard for Students



<b>c. Introduction to Blackboard for Students</b>	
	<b><u>How to Submit an Assignment Using Blackboard</u></b>
	<b><u>How to Take a Quiz, Test, or Exam Using Blackboard</u></b>
	<b><u>How to Check Your Grades in Blackboard</u></b>
	<b><u>How to Participate in a Discussion Forum in Blackboard</u></b>
	<b><u>Technical Assistance with Blackboard for Students</u></b> 



The last folder in Module I is folder “d,” where FYS faculty can upload content to assign a syllabus quiz. Since many first-time college students may not have seen a syllabus before, providing an assignment where students get to learn about and explore the different sections of a syllabus (instructor contact information, course description, assignments that will be due,

and attendance policies) can be beneficial. Figure 7 provides a visual of how the content for a syllabus quiz can be represented in the resource site.

Figure 7. Module I Folder “d”: Syllabus Quiz

### d. Syllabus Quiz



 **FYS Week 1 Sample Syllabus Quiz** 



Attached Files:  FYS Week 1 Syllabus Quiz Sample.docx  (17.707 KB)

This assignment is designed to familiarize students with reading a syllabus and completing a test/quiz in Blackboard.

Attached is a document that includes recommended questions and answers for the quiz. Faculty are able to customize the quiz so it is specific to their section.

---

 **FYS Syllabus** 

Attached Files:  First-Year Seminar Syllabus.docx  (64.993 KB)

Upload an electronic version of the FYS syllabus so students can download it and refer to it while completing the Syllabus Quiz.

## MODULE II: COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

The second module of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is labeled “College Knowledge and Campus Resources.” The topics covered in this module include:

- Student engagement
- Student success resources available at the college
- Academic integrity
- Tips for writing professional emails.



A screenshot of the three folders in this module, “Student Engagement and Campus Resources,” “Academic Integrity,” and “Communicating with Faculty,” can be viewed in Figure 8.

*Figure 8. Module II: College Knowledge and Campus Resources*





Figure 9 provides a visual of the content in folder “a” of this module, which is focused on familiarizing students with the campus. Content in this folder includes the institution’s student handbook, a campus scavenger hunt, and a college resource quiz. The campus scavenger hunt allows students to locate various departments, amenities, and resources on the campus. To give students an opportunity to connect with each other, it is recommended that they complete this activity in small groups.



The college resource quiz gives students a virtual tour of the websites for various resources and supports. This can be used as a supplement to the on-campus scavenger hunt or can be assigned in lieu of it for online sections. While Figure 9 displays hyperlinks for the

Learning Center (tutoring), Counseling & Advising, Student Activities, and Career Services websites as an example, other departments such as Financial Aid, Student Accommodations, and Registration can also be included.

Figure 9. Module II, Folder “a”: Student Engagement and Campus Resources


### a. Student Engagement and Campus Resources



 **Student Handbook** 

Attached Files:  Student Handbook PDF.pdf  (1.155 MB)



The attached student handbook provides information on academic policies and procedures, support services available, the Student Code of Conduct, and campus life.



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 **Campus Scavenger Hunt**

Attached Files:  Campus Scavenger Hunt.docx  (16.937 KB)

---

 **College Resources Quiz** 

Attached Files:  College Resources Quiz.docx  (47.457 KB)

The attached document includes sample quiz questions pertaining to various campus resources available to students. Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

Below are hyperlinks for the Learning/Tutoring Center, Counseling & Advising Center, Student Activities Department, and Career Services websites. Students are encouraged to visit the websites and learn about each resource before taking the quiz.



[Learning Center Website](#)  
[Counseling & Advising Center Website](#)  
[Student Activities Department Website](#)  
[Career Services Website](#)

Folder “b” of this module covers academic integrity. Teaching academic integrity is important because it educates first-year students about the policies, procedures, and consequences associated with being accused of academic misconduct. However, academic integrity doesn’t need to be presented in a way that scares students from cheating. It’s also an opportunity to teach them about the importance of earning their education honestly and preserving the reputation of their institution within the community. Figure 10 shows an



academic integrity reading and quiz FYS faculty can assign their students. It also displays a link for a video on plagiarism.



Figure 10. Module II, Folder “b”: Academic Integrity

### b. Academic Integrity

 **Reading: Academic Honesty** 



Click on the link above to access the Table of Contents of this open educational resource textbook. Then, click on the "Academic Honesty" link to access the chapter.

 **Academic Integrity Quiz** 

Attached Files:  **Academic Integrity Quiz.docx**  (21.985 KB)

The attached document includes sample quiz questions and answers based on the Academic Honesty chapter above.

Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.



 **Video: Plagiarism (6 minutes)** 

This video introduces students to the concept of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. It also provides details about how cases of academic dishonesty are handled.

Folder “c” includes information related to communicating with faculty, which can be viewed in Figure 11. The FYS Faculty Resource Site includes a link for an open educational resource chapter on this topic, along with an assignment that teaches students about the importance of writing emails that include a subject, salutation, their student ID number, and details about the class for which they are enrolled (day, time, and section number).



Figure 11. Module III, Folder "c": Communicating with Faculty



### c. Communicating with Faculty

 **Chapter: Working with Instructors** 

Click on the link above to access the Table of Contents of this open educational resource textbook. Then, click on the "Working with Instructors" link to access the chapter.

---

 **Activity: Tips on Writing Emails to Your Instructors** 

Attached Files:  [Writing Professional Emails Activity.pdf](#)  (59.031 KB)

This activity can be facilitated individually or in groups. Students will use the reading above to review best practices with writing emails to instructors. They will then view examples of poorly written emails (attached) and rewrite them based on the information they learned.

## MODULE III: ACADEMIC PLANNING AND TIME MANAGEMENT

The third module of the FYS Faculty Resource Site focuses on academic planning and time management. Figure 12 shows the three folders included in this module:

- a. Establishing Your Goals
- b. Academic Planning
- c. Time Management.

Figure 12. Module III: Academic Planning and Time Management

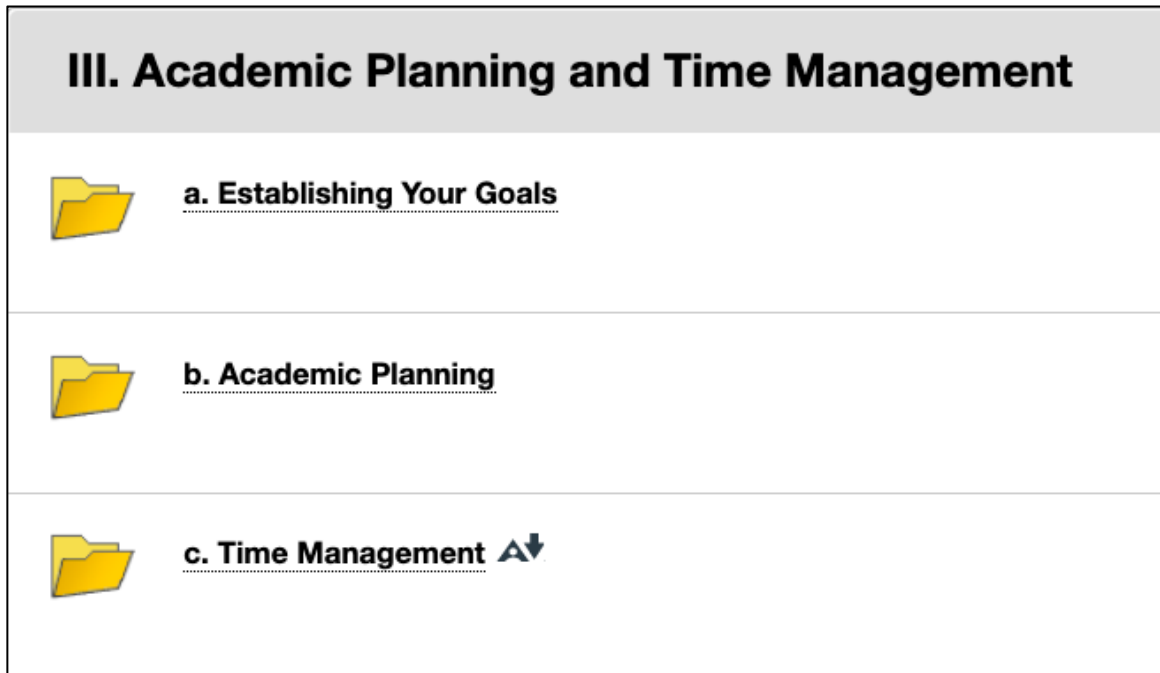




Figure 13 displays folder “a,” “Establishing Your Goals.” This folder includes a reading that teaches students to set goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (S.M.A.R.T. goals). There is also a document that provides instructions for a discussion forum where students create and share their short- and long-term goals using the S.M.A.R.T. acronym. This activity can also be facilitated in the classroom.



Figure 13. Module III, Folder “a”: Establishing Your Goals



### a. Establishing Your Goals

 **Reading Assignment: The Five Golden Rules for Goal-Setting (Mind Tools)** 

This open education resource reading introduces students to S.M.A.R.T. goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely).

---

 **Assignment: Reading and Online Discussion Forum on SMART Goals** 

Attached Files:  [SMART Goal Discussion Forum Instructions.docx](#)  (28.402 KB)

This link will take you to a reading on setting S.M.A.R.T. goals. Attached are instructions for an online discussion forum assignment in which students can share their short and long-term goals with each other.

Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the discussion before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

Figure 14 shows folder “b” of the third module, which covers academic planning. The folder includes a reading and video that help students prepare for an assignment in which they meet with a counselor or advisor for an academic planning session. Meeting with a counselor or advisor during the first semester gives students an opportunity to discuss how they are adjusting to the responsibilities associated with being a college student. If the student reports experiencing any challenges, the counselor or advisor will be able to connect them with the appropriate support service(s). Completing a planning session during the first semester also gives students a chance to ask questions about their program of study and plan for the next semester’s registration.

To ensure that students are aware of the courses they need to achieve their academic goals, the last item in the Academic Planning folder includes information on Guided Pathways. According to the Community College Research Center (CCRC, 2015), “College students are more


likely to complete a degree in a timely fashion if they choose a program and develop an academic plan early on, have a clear road map of the courses they need to take to complete a credential, and receive guidance and support to help them stay on plan” (p. 1). Since this researcher’s community college is in Ohio, a link for the Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) has been included in the Academic Planning folder.



The OGTPs “are designed to provide a clearer path to degree completion for students pursuing associate degrees who plan to transfer to an Ohio public university to complete their bachelor’s degree” (Ohio Higher Ed, 2019, para. 2). The OGTPs are an agreement between public community colleges and 4-year institutions that guarantees courses transferred from community colleges will satisfy general education requirements toward a bachelor’s degree (Ohio Higher Ed, 2019). It is recommended that FYS faculty review resources similar to the OGTPs, so students are aware of the courses they need before they complete the academic planning assignment. The OGTPs are comprised of the following eight clusters:



1. Business
2. Social and Behavioral Sciences
3. Arts & Humanities/History & Communication
4. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
5. Education
6. Public Safety
7. Health Sciences
8. Undecided (Ohio Higher Ed, 2019).

Figure 14. Module III, Folder “b”: Academic Planning



## **b. Academic Planning**

 **Reading: 10 Ways to Make the Most Out of Your Academic Advising Appointment**


 **Assignment: Meeting with a Counselor/Advisor for an Academic Planning Session** 

Attached Files:  [Instructions for the Academic Planning Assignment.docx](#)  (16.289 KB)

This assignment gives students an opportunity to discuss their progress in their first semester by meeting with a counselor or advisor for an academic planning session. Students can also review information related to their major and process which courses they should take in their future semesters.

 **Video: Meeting with a Counselor or Advisor to Create an Academic Plan (6 minutes)** 

This video reviews the importance of developing an academic plan with a counselor. It also highlights the degree and certificate options offered by the college.

 **Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways**

“The Ohio Guaranteed Transfer Pathways (OGTPs) are designed to provide a clearer path to degree completion for students pursuing associate degrees who plan to transfer to an Ohio public university to complete their bachelor’s degree” (Ohio Higher Ed, 2019, para. 2).

The OGTPs are comprised of the following eight clusters:



1. Business
2. Social and Behavioral Sciences
3. Arts & Humanities/History & Communication
4. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
5. Education
6. Public Safety
7. Health Sciences
8. Undecided (Ohio Higher Ed, 2019).



The third and final folder in this module covers time management. Since many community college students often balance additional responsibilities, such as work and/or family obligations in addition to their studies, it is crucial that first-year seminars include interventions associated with time management. The resources displayed in Figure 15 include a chapter, a video, and an out-of-class intervention in which students document how they spend each hour of a given week so they can reflect and identify ways they can use their time more efficiently.



Figure 15. Module III, Folder "c": Time Management

### c. Time Management



 **Reading: Time Management Chapter** 



Attached Files:  [Your Use of Time Quiz Questions.docx](#)  (20.132 KB)

To read this open educational resource chapter, click on the "Reading: Time Management Chapter" link and select the "Your Use of Time" chapter in the Table of Contents.

Sample quiz questions based on the reading are attached. Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

---



 **Video: How to Stop Procrastinating - The Pomodoro Technique (7 minutes)** 



Attached Files:  [Pomodoro Quiz Questions.docx](#)  (20.182 KB)

This video introduces students to the pomodoro technique and how it can be used to improve time management skills.

Sample quiz questions based on the video are attached. Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

---

 **Assignment: One Week Time Management Template (Hourly)** 

Attached Files:  [Hourly Time Management Weekly Schedule.pdf](#)  (72.546 KB)

This assignment has students document how much time they spend in a given week studying, completing homework assignments, working, exercising, participating in co-curricular activities, taking care of their family, sleeping, etc.

Students can then write a reflection paper based on what they learned or come to the next class prepared to discuss their findings with their fellow classmates.

## MODULE IV: STUDY STRATEGIES

The fourth model of the FYS Faculty Resource Site is dedicated to study strategies. The module contains three folders of content:

- a. Study Strategies
- b. Active Reading
- c. Note-Taking Techniques.

Figure 16 provides an image of what the module looks like.

Figure 16. Module IV: Study Strategies

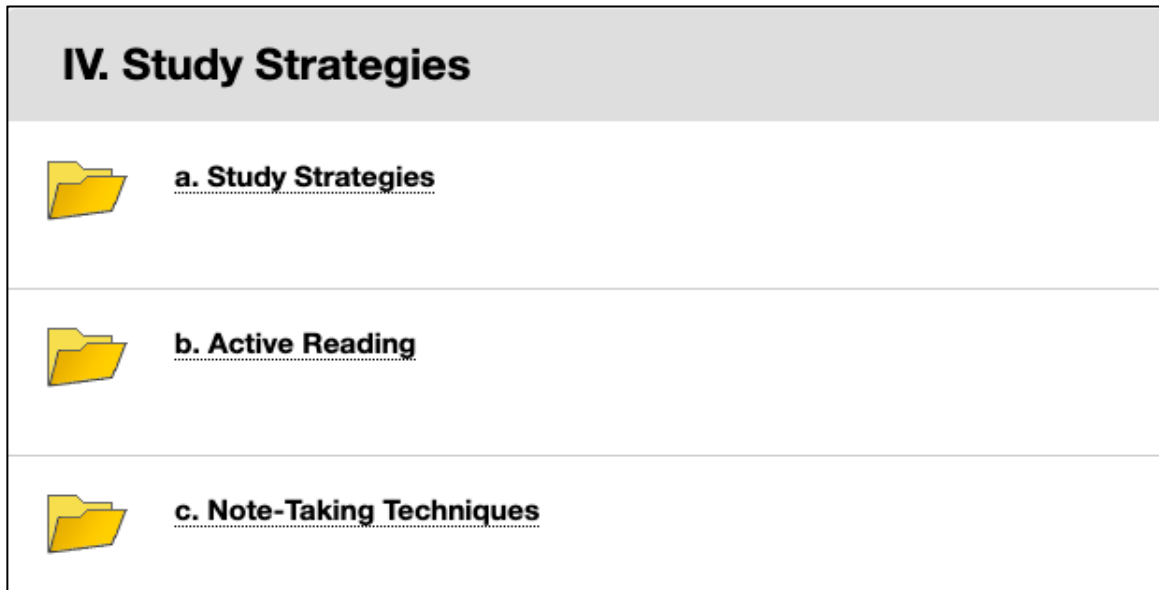





Figure 17 displays folder “a,” which, like the title of the module, is titled “Study Strategies.” The folder includes a video that provides tips on developing strong study habits. The folder also includes an Academic Strengths Inventory, which is a self-scoring assessment that students can complete as an in-class activity or for a homework assignment. The inventory is designed to assess a student’s knowledge of topics that are relevant to first-semester students, including motivation, wellness, time management, policies, studying, and resources. After completing the inventory, students rank their scores, identify strengths and opportunities for growth, and write a reflection paper based on the results.



Figure 17. Module IV, Folder “a”: Study Strategies

### a. Study Strategies

 **Video: Study Less, Study Smart (6 minutes)**

---

 **Academic Strengths Inventory** 


Attached Files:  [Academic Strengths Inventory.pdf](#)  (94.518 KB)

This self-scoring assessment gives students insight into their knowledge of the following categories: motivation, wellness, time management, policies, studying, and resources. Using the results from the inventory, students can rank each category and write a reflection paper on their strengths and opportunities for growth.


Folder “b” is devoted to active reading and includes a video that reviews different active reading techniques. To ensure students watch the video and understand the key points, the folder also contains a sample quiz based on the content of the video. Since the quiz questions and answers are in a Word document, instructors can copy and paste the items into a test in their learning management system. They can also customize the document by changing, adding, or deleting questions. Figure 18 displays a visual of folder “b.”



Figure 18. Module IV, Folder “b”: Active Reading

### b. Active Reading

 **Video: Active Reading Strategies (7 minutes)**

---

 **Active Reading Quiz** 

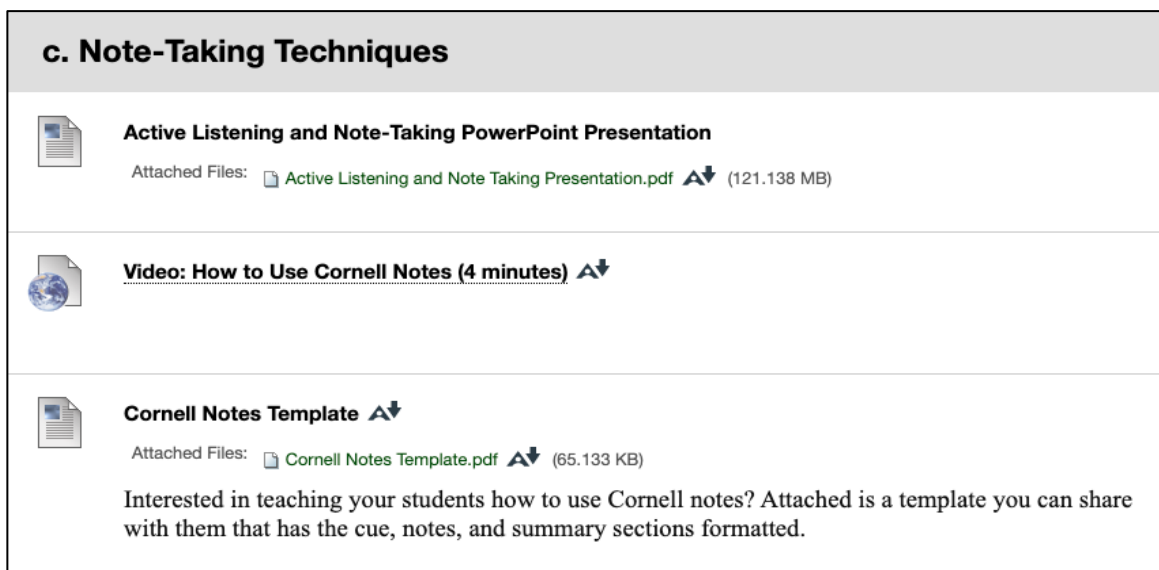
Attached Files:  [Active Reading Quiz.pdf](#)  (74.061 KB)

The attached document contains sample questions and answers that can be used to create a quiz based on the "Active Reading" video above.




Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.



Figure 19 is a visual of folder “c,” which includes information that can support first-year seminar faculty in teaching their students how to take quality notes. The folder also includes a PowerPoint presentation on active listening and note-taking strategies. The last item in the folder is an introductory video on the Cornell Note Taking System along with a downloadable template that shows how cue, notes, and summary sections are formatted.





*Figure 19. Module IV, Folder “c”: Note-Taking Techniques*



**c. Note-Taking Techniques**

 **Active Listening and Note-Taking PowerPoint Presentation**  
Attached Files:  [Active Listening and Note Taking Presentation.pdf](#)  (121.138 MB)

 **Video: How to Use Cornell Notes (4 minutes)** 

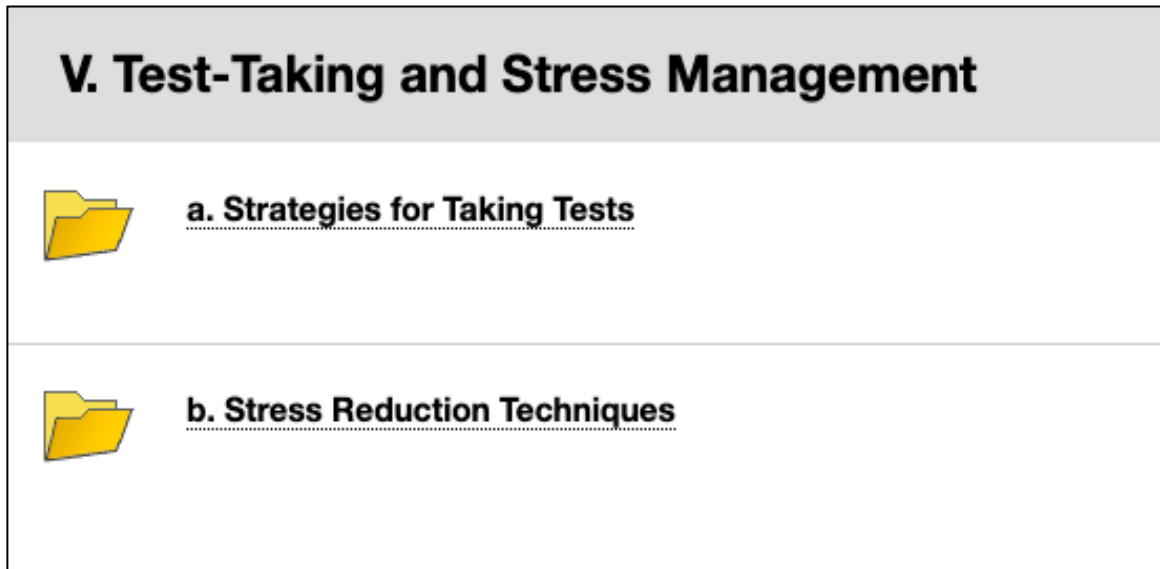
 **Cornell Notes Template**   
Attached Files:  [Cornell Notes Template.pdf](#)  (65.133 KB)  
Interested in teaching your students how to use Cornell notes? Attached is a template you can share with them that has the cue, notes, and summary sections formatted.

## MODULE V: TEST-TAKING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Model V contains information on test-taking strategies and stress management. These two topics are paired together because some students may find that the stress-reduction techniques they learn can be useful if they struggle with test anxiety. Figure 20 displays how the module is presented in the FYS Faculty Resource Site. This module includes the following folders:

- a. Strategies for Taking Tests
- b. Stress Reduction Techniques.



Figure 20. Module V: Test-Taking and Stress Management



Folder “a,” Strategies for Taking Tests, includes a reading that reviews tips on what students can do to prepare to take a test, how anxiety impacts a student’s ability to take tests, and techniques to improve testing performance. The folder also contains a sample quiz based on the reading. FYS faculty can copy and paste the quiz questions into the learning management system, or they can make the quiz their own by changing or adding quiz questions. The last item in the folder includes a video that shares tips on what students can do to overcome test anxiety. A visual of this folder can viewed in Figure 21.



Figure 21. Module V, Folder “a”: Strategies for Taking Tests



### a. Strategies for Taking Tests

 **Reading: Testing Strategies** 

Click on the "Reading: Testing Strategies" link above to access the Table of Contents of this textbook. The "Testing Strategies" chapter is located in the Study Skills and Classroom Success section.

---

 **Testing Strategies Quiz** 

Attached Files:  **Testing Strategies Quiz.pdf**  (65.212 KB)

The attached document includes sample quiz questions and answers based on the Testing Strategies reading above.

Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

---


 **Video: Overcoming Test Anxiety (9 minutes)**


Figure 22 display folder “b” of this module, which includes content to help first-semester college students learn about stress reduction techniques. One of the items in the folder is an in-class activity in which students anonymously share a stressor they are currently experiencing and people in the classroom share their ideas on how they would personally handle that stressor. In addition to creating a sense of community and empathy among students, this activity also provides an opportunity for the FYS instructor to connect students to possible resources that can help alleviate that stressor. For example, if a student shares that their stressor is related to not having a job, the instructor can educate the class about the services available at the college’s Career Services office.


The second item in folder “b” is a template for a discussion forum in which students are encouraged to share their go-to stress reduction techniques. Response posts to fellow classmates are recommended to address whether the techniques they learned about are things

that also work for them or are a new activity they might consider trying. Similar to the in-class activity, this discussion topic aims to create a sense of community in a virtual format.

Figure 22. Module V, Folder “b”: Stress Reduction Techniques


### **b. Stress Reduction Techniques**


 **In-Class Stress Management Activity** ▲▼

Attached Files:  [Stress Management Activity.pdf](#) ▲▼ (38.912 KB)

The attached document provides instructions for an activity that gets students to support each other in overcoming stressors. This activity also creates an opportunity for FYS faculty to educate or remind students of the resources available on campus.

---

 **Assignment: Stress Management Discussion Forum** ▲▼

Attached Files:  [Stress Management Discussion Forum Instructions.pdf](#) ▲▼ (42.063 KB)

There is no doubt that making the decision to pursue a college education will bring additional stress to the lives of your students. For this discussion, have your students share some of their go-to stress reduction techniques. For the response posts, ask them to share whether their classmate’s technique is something they have done in the past that has worked, hasn’t worked, or is something they might like to try.

## **MODULE VI: FINANCIAL LITERACY**

Module VI contains information related to financial literacy. As seen in Figure 23, the two folders in this module focus on money management and financial aid. Since courses on managing personal finances or navigating the financial aid process are not typically included in an institution’s general education requirements, first-year seminars create an ideal platform to educate students about these topics.

Figure 23. Module VI: Financial Literacy

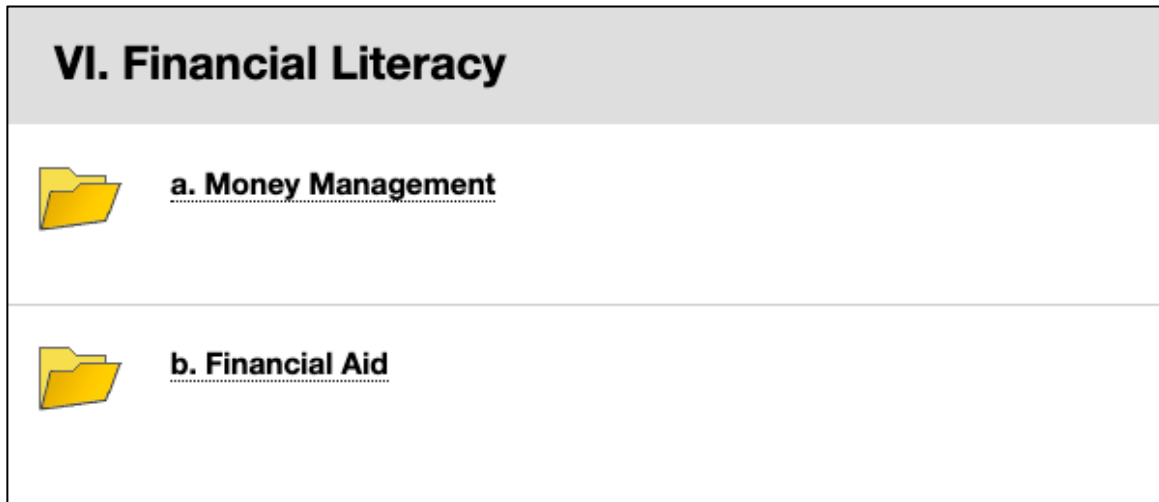


Figure 24 displays the content included in folder “a” of this module, which is devoted money management. The folder includes readings on personal finance and credit and is accompanied by a quiz that assesses students’ understanding of the material. The quiz includes sample questions and their respective answers; however, FYS faculty are welcome to add or modify the questions at their discretion.

This folder also contains an introductory video on money management that was created specifically for college students. Lastly, the folder includes a reading that provides tips for creating a budget. Specifically, this resource introduces students to the 50/30/20 rule of budgeting, which recommends that 50% of an individual’s budget is allocated to essentials, 30% on wants, and 20% for savings.



Figure 24. Module VI, Folder “a”: Money Management







<b>a. Money Management</b>	
	<b><u>Reading: Personal Finance</u></b> ▲▼ Click on the "Reading: Personal Finance" link above to access the Table of Contents of this Open Educational Resource textbook. Then, click on the "Personal Finance" chapter that is located under the Financial Management Section.
	<b><u>Reading: Credit</u></b> ▲▼ Click on the "Reading: Credit" link above to access the Table of Contents of this Open Educational Resource textbook. Then, click on the "Credit" chapter that is located under the Financial Management Section.
	<b>Personal Finance &amp; Credit Quiz</b> ▲▼ Attached Files:  <a href="#">Personal Finance and Credit Quiz.pdf</a> ▲▼ (66.874 KB) The attached document includes sample quiz questions and answers based on the Personal Finance and Credit chapters above.  Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.
	<b><u>Video: Money Management 101 for College Students</u></b>
	<b><u>Reading: Budgeting Tips</u></b> ▲▼ This article introduces the 50/20/30 rule for managing your finances.



Figure 25 displays folder “b,” which contains information on the topic of financial aid. If FYS faculty are not knowledgeable on the intricacies of financial aid, this folder includes a variety of resources that will allow them to competently review information related to this topic. The folder includes a reading and a video that reviews the different types of financial aid that is available to college students, including grants, loans, work study, and scholarships. The folder also contains a sample quiz that can be used to assess students’ understanding of the topic. The sample quiz includes questions and their respective answers that FYS faculty can use

or customize before assigning to students. Faculty are also able to add or modify the questions for their own section if they choose.

The last item in the folder includes a link for a short documentary that interviews college students and graduates who borrowed a significant sum of money while pursuing their college education. Some of the individuals discuss how they borrowed more money than they can reasonably expect to pay back, while others discuss how their debt has prevented them from advancing their education in graduation school. Further, the students discuss how the interest on their loans impacts their ability to pay off the principal. The video also provides comments on the value of a college education and tips on how to avoid taking on a large amount of debt. All the information in this folder is essential for first-year seminar students to understand, especially those who are first-generation college students.



Figure 25. Module VI, Folder "b": Financial Aid

## b. Financial Aid

 **Reading: Financial Aid** 



Click on the "Reading: Financial Aid" link above to access the Table of Contents of this Open Educational Resource textbook. Then, click on the "Financial Aid" chapter that is located under the Financial Management section.



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 **Video: How Do I Pay for College? (8 minutes)** 

This video reviews important information about paying for college and the different options available, including FAFSA, scholarships, grants, work-study, and loans.

---



 **Financial Aid Quiz** 

Attached Files:  [Financial Aid Quiz.pdf](#)  (66.235 KB)

The attached document provides sample quiz questions and answers based on the content in the "How Do I Pay for College?" video above.

Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

---

 **Video: The Student Loan Crisis - Don't Major in Debt (11 minutes)** 

This video is a short documentary about actual students who have borrowed more to pay for their college education than they can reasonably expect to payback. It also includes tips on how students can pursue a college education without taking on an exorbitant amount debt.

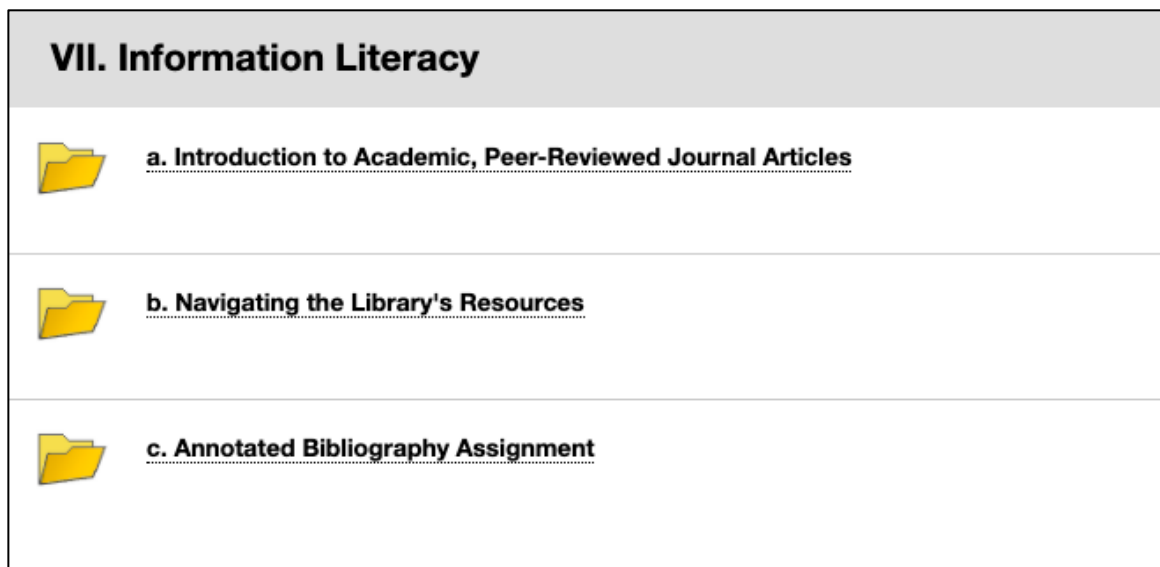
## MODULE VII: INFORMATION LITERACY

The seventh module of the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site is devoted to information literacy. Since community colleges serve students with varying levels of experience with writing research papers, this module aims to level the playing field by introducing all first-semester students to the resources and competencies needed to write research papers at the college level. In this researcher's experience teaching first-year seminars, even students who recently graduated from high school report inconsistent feedback regarding whether they've completed an annotated bibliography before.

Since community colleges also serve adult learners who may not have written a research paper in several years, this module will also serve as a way to ease students into college-level writing before higher-stakes research papers are assigned in other courses. Figure 26 shows the Information Literacy module and its three additional subfolders:

- a. Introduction to Academic, Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles
- b. Navigating the Library's Resources
- c. Annotated Bibliography Assignment.

Figure 26. Module VII: Information Literacy




Since first-semester community college students may have limited or no previous exposure to academic, peer-reviewed journal articles, folder “a” of the Information Literacy module provides resources to assist FYS faculty in introducing these articles to their students. The folder includes a video that educates students about the peer-review process for publication in a scholarly journal. The folder also contains a video that highlights the difference


between scholarly articles and articles from popular publications, like a newspaper or magazine.



Because an academic journal article might be intimidating to the uninitiated, the last item in folder “a” is a group activity designed to educate students about the different sections of academic research articles. The folder includes a sample article that was written in the IMRaD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion), which FYS faculty can print and hand out to students. To carry out the activity, the instructor reviews the information in the Abstract section and then breaks the class up into four groups. Each group is assigned to read, evaluate, and report on the contents of the Introduction, Methods, Results, or Discussion sections. By the end of the activity, students should have a better understanding of the composition of academic journal articles before they are assigned a research-focused assignment, like an annotated bibliography. Figure 27 provides a visual of the folder.



*Figure 27. Module VII, Folder “a”: Introduction to Academic, Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles*

### **a. Introduction to Academic, Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles**

 **Video: The Peer-Review Process for Academic Journal Articles (3 Minutes)**

 **Video: Anatomy of Academic Journal Article (5 minutes)**

 **Activity: Reviewing a Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal Article** 






Attached Files:  **Sample Academic Journal Article.pdf**  (253.902 KB)

Attached is a sample academic journal article, which can be used to facilitate an activity that shows students how these articles are designed and formatted. Ideally, the activity should be completed prior to assigning a research-focused assignment, like an annotated bibliography.

Folder “b” of this module introduces students to resources and supports at the college’s library. The first item is a link to the library’s homepage, which includes important contact information, services offered at the library, profiles of librarians, and a list of upcoming events that the department is hosting. Remaining items in this folder are videos that show students how to navigate the college’s research database.

The first video shows students how to get to the research database from their student portal. The second video reviews tips for using the database’s search feature. The third video shows the procedure on applying filters to the databases results. Examples of filters include types of articles (academic journals, magazines, trade publication, newspapers, etc.), dates articles were published, and the format of the article (PDF, full text, etc.). The fourth video shows how to use the database’s citation generator so students can select whether they’d like their citation to be in APA, MLA, etc. Figure 28 provides an image of folder “b.”













Figure 28. Module VII, Folder “b”: Navigating the Library’s Resources

<b>b. Navigating the Library's Resources</b>	
	<b><u>Library Homepage</u></b> This link will take students to the library's homepage where they can view the hours of operation, contact information, profiles of librarians, and details for special events.
	<b><u>Video #1: Accessing Library Resources through Your Student Portal</u></b>
	<b><u>Video #2: Searching Your Topic Using the Research Database</u></b>
	<b><u>Video #3: Applying Search Filters - Date, Source Types, and Full Text</u></b>
	<b><u>Video #4: Using the Citation Generator</u></b>

The third folder in this module includes content for FYS faculty to assign an annotated bibliography assignment. The information in the first two folders is meant to give students a strong foundation on college-level research, and the annotated bibliography assignment allows them to apply the information they learned. The first item is an attachment that includes instructions for an annotated bibliography assignment. The second item is a sample annotated bibliography that shows students how they are formatted, where the citations are located, and what details should be included in the annotations. The third item is a template for a rubric to assist FYS faculty with grading the annotated bibliographies. The fourth item is a link for a research guide the library has created that includes resources to help students select a research topic, view annotated bibliography samples, and contact a librarian for research assistance. The fifth and final item in this folder is a link to the institution’s Writing Center, which is another

resource students can use for assistance with completing the annotated bibliography assignment. Figure 29 provides an image of folder “c.”

Figure 29. Module VII, Folder “c”: Annotated Bibliography Assignment

<b>c. Annotated Bibliography Assignment</b>	
	<b>Annotated Bibliography Instructions</b> Attached Files:  <a href="#">Annotated Bibliography Instructions.pdf</a>  (71.951 KB)
	<b>Sample Annotated Bibliography</b> Attached Files:  <a href="#">Sample Annotated_Bibliography.pdf</a>  (116.692 KB)
	<b>Sample Rubric for the Annotated Bibliography Assignment</b> Attached Files:  <a href="#">Sample Annotated Bibliography Rubric.pdf</a>  (10.684 KB)
	<b><u>Library Research Guide</u></b>  This link takes students to the Library's website, which includes resources to help students select a research topic, view sample annotated bibliographies, and contact a librarian for research assistance.
	<b><u>The Writing Center</u></b> This link takes students to the Writing Center, which is a resource where students can collaborate with consultants to improve their writing skills and get assistance with research papers.

## MODULE VIII: BEYOND FYS

The eighth module of the FYS Faculty Resource Site is titled “Beyond FYS.” Since this is the last module in the resource site, it includes topics relevant to students as they persist into their second semester and beyond. Figure 30 shows the three subfolders in this module:

- a. Transferring to a 4-Year Institution
- b. Major to Career
- c. Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students.



Figure 30. Module VIII: Beyond FYS




The first folder includes information on transferring to a university. While it may seem counterintuitive to discuss transferring after students are about to complete their first semester, Chapter 1 of this dissertation reviewed data that show students enroll at community colleges for a variety of reasons. Some students may not transfer until they earn an associate degree, but others may plan on transferring after one or two semesters. This means first-year seminars may be the only opportunity students have to learn about transfer opportunities in a classroom environment.

Figure 31 provides an image of folder “a,” which includes a link to the institution’s Transfer Center website. The second item in the folder is a video that promotes the institution’s


university partnerships. The third item is a document that includes sample quiz questions about the Transfer Center website and the university partnership video.

Figure 31. Module VIII, Folder "a": Transferring to a 4-Year Institution



### a. Transferring to a 4-Year Institution



 **Transfer Center Website**

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 **University Partner Video (10 minutes)**

---

 **Transfer Quiz** 

Attached Files:  [Transfer Quiz.pdf](#)  (80.793 KB)

The attached document includes sample quiz questions and answers based on the content of the "Transfer Center" website and "University Partnerships" video above.

Faculty are able to edit the document to customize the content of the quiz before uploading it to their own FYS course site.

The second folder in the Beyond FYS module is devoted to career exploration. Although some students may not know what their major is in their first semester, the resources in this module can also help students process options related to career choice. Figure 32 displays the content included in this folder. The first item is a group activity that can be facilitated in the classroom by having the students break into groups of 4 or 5. The groups are given a set of flashcards with 20 different job skills. Next, the students work within their groups to identify the top 10 skills they think employers want. The attached PowerPoint in the folder provides the answers for the 10 top skills employers look for on a candidate's resume, according to the


National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018). After revealing the answers, the FYS instructor can then lead a class discussion with the students and process the results.



The Career Exploration Reflection Paper assignment gives students an opportunity to research a career they're interested in learning more about. The assignment provides a link to an Occupation Search website where students can research the work activities, skills, education, pay, and outlook for a variety of careers. Students are then asked to write a reflection paper that summarizes the information they learned. Possible reflection prompts can include (a) challenges they might encounter while pursuing the career; (b) whether they think the salary for the career is enough to support themselves and/or their family; (c) whether the skills the career requires match their own personal strengths; and (d) whether the student feels more, less, or about the same regarding their interest in pursuing the career they researched.

The third and final resource in the "Major to Career" folder is a Work Values Inventory that can be completed and scored by the students. The purpose of the inventory is to show students how their values align with a variety of work environments. For example, students can see if they value a higher salary over free time, or whether they'd rather have a career that requires frequent travel over one that doesn't. Based on the results, students can rank the values that are most and least important to them. FYS faculty can then lead a discussion in which students process the results of their inventory.

Figure 32. Module VIII, Figure “b”: Major to Career

### b. Major to Career


 **Activity: Skills Employers Want** ▲▼


Attached Files:  Skills Employers Want Flashcards.pdf ▲▼ (3.972 KB)  
 Skills Employers Want PowerPoint.pptx ▲▼ (749.384 KB)

Attached is a PDF of 20 job-related skills. The PDF can be printed out and cut into flash cards. Have the students work in groups to identify the top 10 skills they think employers want.

The attached PowerPoint provides the answers for the 10 top skills employers are looking for according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

---


 **Career Exploration Reflection Paper** ▲▼


Attached Files:  Career Exploration Assignment Instructions.pdf ▲▼ (594.006 KB)

This assignment gives students an opportunity to research a career they're interested in learning more about. The attached document includes instructions for the Career Exploration Reflection Paper. The link to Occupation Search website below provides information about the skills, education, pay, and outlook for a variety of careers. Students are then asked to write a reflection paper based on the information they learned.

[Occupation Search Link](#)

---

 **Activity: Work Values Inventory** ▲▼

Attached Files:  Work Values Inventory.pdf ▲▼ (140.478 KB)


The attached Work Values Inventory provides insight into how students' priorities align with a variety of workplace values. This is a self-assessment that students can complete and score in the class.

Figure 33 displays one of the last assignments that can be included in a first-year seminar. The “Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students” assignment gives students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences during their first semester as a college student. Students are also encouraged to share any tips they think future FYS students should know. This assignment is a great way to wrap up the course because it gives students the opportunity to reflect on the things they learned throughout the course. It also empowers the students by giving them an opportunity to share their newfound wisdom with the future FYS students who

will soon take their place. FYS faculty can choose to keep the letters anonymous if they'd like to share these letters with their future FYS students.

Figure 33. Module VIII, Folder "c": Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students

### **c. Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students**



**Assignment: Welcome Letter to Future FYS Students**

Now that you're about to complete your first semester of college, the final assignment is to write a welcome letter to future FYS students who will be taking this class. This also allows you to share your wisdom with new students while also reflecting on your experiences throughout the course. You can write about whatever you think is appropriate, but there are some ideas to help the writing process below:

1. What you liked and/or found valuable about the course.
2. Improvements that you think can be made.
3. Were there any topics you would have liked to cover? Were there any topics you would have liked to spend more time on? Were there any topics or assignments you think did not need to be included?
4. Share any topics or assignments you found to be especially useful. Include why you feel that way
5. Include any tips that you think future first-semester students should know.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### INTRODUCTION

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) Faculty Resource Site presented in this dissertation is an online product to support the development of faculty who teach FYS in community colleges. As discussed in Chapter 1, community colleges are more likely to serve students who are:

- First-generation college students
- Enrolled part-time
- Nontraditional in age (24 and older)
- Low-income
- Members of an ethnic or racial minority group. (Bragg & Durham, 2012).

Community colleges are also more likely to serve students with risk factors that negatively impact their likelihood of achieving their academic goals (Mullin et al., 2015).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2015) noted that educational equity gaps experienced as early as pre-kindergarten can have a long-term impact on students' academic readiness for the college curriculum. To help bridge equity gaps for underprepared students, first-year seminars have been recognized as a high-impact practice because of their potential to help students build meaningful relationships with peers, faculty, and supportive resources early in their academic journey (Ribera et al., 2017). However, according to the *2017 National Survey on the First-Year Experience*, the prevalence of institutions offering FYS has declined from 89.7% to 73.5% when compared to data that were

collected in 2012 (Young & Skidmore, 2019). This might mean that some colleges and universities determined that their FYS programs were not effective in supporting first-semester students and/or improving retention rates. To help first-year seminars regain credibility within the academic community, the FYS Faculty Resource Site aims to support faculty and promote curricular consistency, which ensures that each FYS section meets its stated course outcomes.

### **APPROACHES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

A critical element for implementing the FYS Faculty Resource Site is to make sure that only FYS program leaders and FYS faculty have access to it within the learning management system (LMS). This safeguards the academic integrity of FYS programs because it prevents students from accessing the assignments, quizzes, and tests that are stored within the resource site. One or two FYS program leaders should be in charge of managing the resource site to make sure that content is not inadvertently altered or moved by faculty users. The person(s) who manages the resource site should also monitor it to make sure the links within the site are still live/active. To create buy-in among FYS faculty to use the resource site, FYS leadership should encourage faculty to share ideas for content that can potentially be added to it. This can help foster a sense of community among FYS faculty, which was an important element for faculty development highlighted in Chapter 2 (Eiselein, 2019; Gordon & Foutz, 2015; Groccia & Hunter, 2012; Sobel, 2018).

A key consideration with the implementation of the FYS Faculty Resource Site is to take proactive measures to ensure its content is not inadvertently altered. To achieve this, the LMS administrator(s) can assign specific roles to users to control who is able to add, edit, or remove content within the site. For example, the FYS program coordinator and LMS administrator can

be given an “instructor” role, so they are able to update content within the resource site. FYS faculty who use the site can be assigned “teaching assistant” roles so they can view and copy content, but will not be able to add, remove, or edit it.

Once the FYS Faculty Resource Site is completed, a communication campaign should be established to make FYS faculty aware of the product. This can be done via email blasts, campus-wide bulletins, and word-of-mouth communication. It is also important that faculty who have access to the resource site are trained on how to use it. While the FYS Faculty Resource Site includes a folder dedicated to navigating the product, faculty can also benefit from training that is more interactive (individual or group). This will allow them to observe a demonstration on how to use the product and have their questions answered in real time. Trainings will also provide an opportunity for FYS leadership to collect feedback from faculty on how the resource site interface can be enhanced.

Chapter 2 discussed how retaining faculty for 2 years or more is essential to keeping FYS programs strong (Sobel, 2018). In addition, Sobel (2018) concluded that faculty who teach FYS for 2 years or more tend to do so because of intrinsic motivators (e.g., belonging to a supportive community of faculty and getting to know students better) instead of extrinsic motivators (payment or other incentives). This suggests that the FYS Faculty Resource Site does not need to be a stand-alone tool to support faculty. Instead, the resource site can be used in addition to other faculty development methods, like faculty learning communities (FLC) (Smith & Barrett, 2019). In addition to educating faculty about the content within the resource site, FLC can provide a space where faculty discuss approaches to overcome challenges, develop



pedagogical strategies to engage students, and ultimately create a sense of community among other FYS faculty (Gordon & Foutz, 2015).

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE FYS FACULTY RESOURCE SITE**

The review of the literature in this dissertation confirms that a well-designed first-year seminar has the potential to enhance the onboarding experience for first-year students while also increasing an institution's student success metrics (Koch & Gardner, 2014; Kuh, 2008; Permzadian & Credé, 2016; Skipper, 2017). However, simply offering an FYS because of its history and acceptance as a high-impact practice is not enough. Institutions must also be committed to continuously assessing, evaluating, and innovating their seminar to ensure that they are effectively preparing new students for success. Likewise, if institutions choose to adopt the FYS Faculty Resource Site, they will also need to assess whether the product is achieving what it is designed to. To accomplish this, assessment of this product will focus primarily on faculty development.

As presented in the Guiding Principles in Chapter 3, FYS leadership will know the resource site is achieving its designed outcomes by assessing whether faculty found valuable course content after using the resource site. Data can be collected from seasoned FYS faculty to assess whether the site included content they thought was useful when developing their own sections. Data can also be collected from faculty who have not previously taught the course to assess if the sample syllabi, readings, assignments, and activities were helpful as they developed and designed their section for the first time.

It is also important to assess whether faculty find the FYS Faculty Resource Site easy to navigate. This data can be collected via faculty feedback surveys and brief interviews. If faculty

feedback surveys are used, it is recommended that FYS leadership assess (a) which items faculty used from the resource site, (b) whether faculty developed their own content for the course, (c) whether they would like to share their content by having it included in the resource site, and (d) if faculty have suggestions for how the resource site can be improved.

Another way the FYS Faculty Resource Site can be assessed is by collecting the syllabi of FYS faculty to verify curricular consistency across all FYS sections. FYS leadership should also continuously collect feedback from students who completed the course. This can be done by reviewing end-of-semester course evaluations and conducting individual interviews or focus groups. This data will allow FYS program leaders to make necessary updates to the curriculum and content within the resource site.

## **LIMITATIONS**

As addressed in Chapter 1, a limitation of this product is that it is a snapshot of the time in which this dissertation is written, meaning the modules, topics, and content within the First-Year Seminar Faculty Resource Site will continue to evolve. Further, it is important that FYS leadership manages and maintains the resource site to ensure that links for websites are still active. Ideally, this should be done before faculty begin planning their courses for the next semester. If faculty use the resource site for ideas to design their FYS section but find that many of the links for videos and open education resources (OER) chapters are not active, it could jeopardize the reliability of the product, which then decreases the chances of faculty using it in the future. It is also imperative that the content within the site is frequently evaluated to ensure it is current and relevant to the changing needs of first-semester community college students. Another limitation is that the FYS Faculty Resource Site, as it is presented in this

dissertation, is designed for general, extended orientation seminars. Therefore, FYS programs that are discipline-focused or major-specific will require the product to be modified so it aligns with the alternative format.

It is recommended that institutions do not use the FYS Faculty Resource Site to create a “canned” program. Chapter 3 discussed that, while there are benefits to developing a tool like the FYS Faculty Resource Site, it is also important to support academic freedom and give faculty space to be creative when developing their course (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). Although the resource site should be used as a tool to support faculty in designing their FYS courses, it is also critical that FYS leadership communicates that the creativity of faculty is valued. It should also be communicated to faculty that if they create assignments or activities that students are receptive to, it is possible that their content can be added to the resource site so it can be shared with other faculty.

Recommendations for future research include collecting data from faculty about their experiences using the FYS Faculty Resource Site. As discussed in the Assessment of the FYS Faculty Resource Site section above, researchers can investigate items within the FYS Faculty Resource Site that faculty found useful. Data from faculty can also be collected to assess ways the product can be improved. Future research can also explore whether combining the FYS Faculty Resource Site with a faculty learning community can be effective in helping faculty design, develop, and facilitate their first-year seminars.

## **SUMMARY**

The FYS Faculty Resource Site is a product that can be used to recruit, train, and retain faculty for a community college’s FYS program. Because the professionals who teach FYS can be

a mix of full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, administrators, and staff, the FYS Faculty Resource Site provides a platform in which syllabi, recommended readings, ideas for assignments, activities, and quizzes and tests can be stored and shared among faculty who teach FYS at their institution. Use of the resource site will also help ensure curricular consistency across all FYS sections at the institution.

First-year seminars have the potential to be an equitable intervention that introduces new students to the campus community, academic success strategies, and college-level expectations. This is especially true for community colleges, since they traditionally serve higher-risk student populations who can benefit the most from engaging in quality high-impact practices like FYS (Young & Skidmore, 2019). By providing a well-designed FYS, community colleges can effectively onboard new students, identify and bridge academic equity gaps, and create an environment in which every student, regardless of their background and experience, is able to achieve their academic goals.

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