

## **First-Year Experience Program at California State University, Stanislaus Report for 2006-2007**

The First-Year Experience (FYE) Program at California State University, Stanislaus began in Fall 2004. The program offers first-time freshmen the opportunity to join a learning community with a maximum of 25 other students. For Fall 2004, 84 students were enrolled in a total of 5 learning communities. In the second year (Fall 2005), 122 students were enrolled in 7 learning communities, and 28 students were enrolled in a special adaptation of FYE for Liberal Studies majors for a total of 150 students. For Fall 2006, 138 students were enrolled in 8 learning communities, and an additional 40 students were enrolled in the special adaptation of FYE for Liberal Studies majors for a total of 178 students. One of the 8 learning communities was a pilot of remedial English classes in FYE. Students in one section of ENGL 0100, ILE English, and one section of ENGL 0111, Writer's Workshop, were placed together in a Seminar in FYE.

The classes in each learning community are integrated around an interesting theme and are linked to a seminar that prepares students for academic success and encourages involvement in campus activities. The seminars are co-taught by faculty and peer leaders (when available), successful CSU Stanislaus students who serve as mentors.

The FYE Program offers two formats. One format, a 3-course format, integrates 2 GE courses with the Seminar in FYE, which also fulfills a GE requirement. The second format integrates 1 GE course with the Seminar in FYE, which also fulfills a GE requirement. This second format was designed to accommodate students in majors that require freshmen to take several courses in the major during the first semester and for students who are enrolled in developmental math and English classes.

### **Learning Communities for Fall 2006:**

1. Questions of Perception and Identity
  - ENGL 1001-02: First-Year Composition, Dr. Stephanie Paterson
  - PHIL 1010-02: Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Andy Young
  - MDIS 1040-01: Seminar in FYE, Dr. Stephanie Paterson
2. Business in Today's World
  - BUS 1500-01: Introduction to Business, Mr. Jack Doo
  - BUS 1040-01: Seminar in FYE, Ms. S. Clapper
3. Be an Effective Team Player
  - COMM 2110-04: Group Discussion Processes, Ms. R. DeHeck
  - MDIS 1040-09: Seminar in FYE, Dr. F. Edmondson
4. Identity, Community, and Opportunity
  - ENGL 1002-05: First-Year Composition, Dr. K. De Vries
  - GEND 2020-01: Introduction to Women's Studies, Dr. B. Eudey
  - MDIS 1040-02: Seminar in FYE, Dr. K. De Vries and Dr. B. Eudey
5. Be an Effective Team Player
  - COMM 2110-07 Group Discussion Processes, Ms. R. DeHeck
  - MDIS 1040-04 Seminar in FYE, Dr. F. Edmondson
6. Your Social World and Your Place in It
  - SOCL 1010-01: Introduction to Sociology, Ms. Cathy Wong
  - MDIS 1040-12: Seminar in FYE, Mr. B. Price
7. Increasing Your Writing Skills
  - ENGL 0100-05 and ENGL 0111-03, Ms. J. Wilson & Ms. N. Mirzazadeh

- MDIS 1040-08: Seminar in FYE, Ms. Shannon Polugar
8. Be an Effective Team Player  
 COMM 2110-03: Group Discussion Processes, Ms. E. Tucker  
 MDIS 1040-03: Seminar in FYE, Ms. Sonya Williams
9. Integrating Language Arts and Fine Arts in the Elementary Classroom  
 FA 1000 Introduction to Fine Arts, Dr. J. Mayer, Dr. R. Robbin, and Mr. G. Mulder  
 LIBS 1000 Beginning Field Experience, Ms. C. Gonzales  
 LIBS 1004 Seminar (Co-requisite to LIBS 1000), Ms. C. Gonzales

### **The Seminar in FYE**

Faculty members were trained in developing learning communities and in teaching the Seminar in FYE. Peer leaders were selected to co-teach the seminars and were trained in a semester-long course during Spring 05. Peers were available to participate in 6 of the seminars. Topics in the Seminar in FYE include writing, speaking, critical thinking, time management, learning styles, listening, note-taking, participating in class, reading texts, and taking exams. Students complete weekly quizzes and writing assignments, conduct library research, prepare a group presentation, participate in at least two campus activities, complete a portfolio in which they each analyze themselves as a learner, and develop a 4-year individual education plan (IEP).

### **Assessment**

Retention data for FYE students was compared to a cohort made up of first-time freshmen enrolled in the linked classes but not enrolled in the Seminar in FYE. For example, SOCL 1010 enrolled 87 students, 25 of whom were in FYE. The remaining first-time freshmen in SOCL 1010 were included in the comparison cohort.

Retention data indicate that the FYE Program is especially effective at retaining first-generation students:

- 62% of the FYE students were first generation students; 79.3% of these first generation students were retained to the second year.
- 44% of the comparison cohort were first generation students; 76.9% of these first generation students were retained to the second year.

The FYE Program was assessed using the First-Year Initiative (FYI) Survey from Educational Benchmarking, Inc. The results of the highest and lowest questions on the FYE Survey for 2006 can be found in Appendix A. Results indicate that the items closely related to the learning goals of the CSUS Seminar in FYE ranked high on the FYI Survey.

In addition to the FYI, students completed a writing exercise at the beginning and at the end of the semester. These writing exercises are designed similarly to the WPST with the intent of giving students practice at writing an essay from a prompt in a timed situation. Results indicate that since the FYE Program began, 46 FYE students have taken the WPST and 41 (89%) have passed on the first attempt. Of the comparison cohort, 19 have taken the WPST and 13 (68%) have passed on the first attempt.

## Conclusions

At the conclusion of the semester, faculty commented on whether to retain the writing assessment. Consensus was that students benefited from being given practice time that simulates the WPST and should be retained.

Comments from other learning communities are as follows:

- For the 2006 year, a learning community that served remedial English students was added to the program. Anecdotal evidence indicated that students benefited from being in a community with other students who struggled with writing. The group developed a strong bond and freely discussed the problems they were having with writing.
- Because of the success in 2005 of the learning community connected to the Faculty Mentor Program (FMP)(all students in this learning community were required to join the FMP to fulfill their campus involvement requirement), two learning communities connected to FMP were added for 2006. FMP reported that these students integrated into the program better than other first-time freshmen.
- The learning community for Liberal Studies majors was also very successful. Faculty members teaching Introduction to Fine Arts incorporated the language of California K-8 content standards in their course, providing students with valuable information that will contribute to their success as teachers and their ability to pass the CSET.
- A learning community for undeclared students had been offered. Very few undeclared students chose to enroll in this community, so it was converted to a learning community for all students midway through the enrollment process.
- The max on the Seminar in FYE was increased from 25 to 30 students. This did not have a negative impact on the seminars and did help to increase the class sizes.

## Challenges

The biggest challenge for the FYE Program is enrolling students in learning communities. The University has changed the procedure for enrolling freshmen in that the schedules for these students are built before they come to New Student Orientation. This has been helpful in enrolling students in FYE, but it has not solved the problem. The director of the FYE Program has been working with department chairs and the peers building schedules to encourage enrollment of freshmen in FYE. However, undeclared students are not selecting FYE in very large numbers and there is no easy way to label classes as FYE only. With scheduling being done by a number of peers, plus the Advising Resource Center (undeclared) and EOP, it is difficult to maintain linked classes only for FYE students.

Because of the difficulty enrolling undeclared student in FYE communities, several communities in Fall 2006 that would meet the needs of undeclared students rather than students in large majors were canceled because of low enrollment. For Fall 2007,

communities have been developed that link seminars to introductory sections in large majors rather than ones that rely heavily on undeclared students. A brochure was developed and sent to incoming freshmen to inform them about the program before they arrive on campus. This did result in several freshmen contacting the director and requesting specific first-year communities.

A second challenge for the FYE Program has been attrition of students. Upon receiving a schedule at New Student Orientation that includes a learning community, some students go home and then drop the Seminar in FYE on the web. By increasing maximum class size from 25 to 30 students in Fall 06, several class sizes were stabilized at 25, but many still remained lower than initially desired.

A third challenge is finding enough students to serve as peer leaders for the Seminar in FYE. Only 4 students were trained in Spring 2006. With many former peer leaders graduating, the number of seminars that will have peer leaders will be low for Fall 2007. One source of recruiting peer leaders is from FYE students who have benefited from having a peer leader. With so few classes scheduled to have peer leaders for Fall 2007, few FYE students will receive modeling from a peer leader and realize the benefits of becoming peer leaders themselves.