

## **First-Year Experience Program at California State University, Stanislaus Report for 2007-2008**

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 30 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 FYE Program continued to expand in Fall 2007 (the 4<sup>th</sup> year). There were 242 students enrolled in 12 learning communities and 39 students enrolled in a special adaptation of FYE for Liberal Studies majors for a total of 281 students. Two of the learning communities were linked to ENGL 1000 classes, classes taught for the first time to allow students who did not test into General Education English to increase their writing skills by receiving university credit. These two learning communities were also linked to the Faculty Mentor Program with students in the communities all becoming involved in the Faculty Mentor Program. One other new learning community was dedicated to athletes.

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 2007:**

1. Questions of Perception and Identity
  - ENGL 1001-02: First-Year Composition, Dr. Stephanie Paterson
  - PHIL 1010-05: 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. Shannon Polugar
3. Be an Effective Team Player
  - COMM 2110-01: Group Discussion Processes, Mr. Joe Carranza
  - MDIS 1040-03: Seminar in FYE, Ms. Sonya Williams

4. Be an Effective Team Player
  - COMM 2110-02 Group Discussion Processes, Dr. Marcella La Fever
  - MDIS 1040-04 Seminar in FYE, Ms. Sonya Williams
5. Be an Effective Team Player
  - COMM 2110-03 Group Discussion Processes, Dr. Keith Nainby
  - MDIS 1040-05 Seminar in FYE, Mr. Joe Carranza
6. Thinking it Through: Clarity in Science and Speech
  - COMM 2000-06 Public Speaking, Dr. Marcella La Fever
  - BIOL 1010-01 Principles of Biology, Dr. Michael Stevens
  - MDIS 1040-06 Seminar in FYE, Dr. Marcella La Fever
7. Crime and American Life
  - CJ 2250-02 Introduction to Criminal Justice, Dr. R. Werling
  - MDIS 1040-07 Seminar in FYE, Mr. Jared Coleman
8. Your Social World and Your Place in It
  - SOCL 1010-01: Introduction to Sociology, Ms. Cathy Wong
  - MDIS 1040-08: Seminar in FYE, Mr. B. Price
9. The Human Spectrum: From Sensation to Social Behavior
  - PSYC 2010-02 Introduction to Psychology, Dr. Dawn Strongin
  - MDIS 1040-09 Seminar in FYE, Ms. Karen Linam
10. Increasing Your Writing Skills
  - ENGL 1000-05 and ENGL 1000-06, L. Partan and G. Frank
  - MDIS 1040:11 Seminar in FYE, Mrs. Clarissa Lonn-Nichols
11. All the World's a Stage (or a Playing Field) *Athletes only*
  - THEA 1500-01/1502/01, Acting for Non-Theatre Majors, Dr. John Mayer
  - MDIS 1040-13 Seminar in FYE, Ms. Amye Leon
12. Increasing Your Writing Skills
  - ENGL 1000-03 and ENGL 1000-04, Ms. N. Mirzazadeh and Mr. M. Moberly
  - MDIS 1040-14 Seminar in FYE, Mrs. Clarissa Lonn-Nichols
13. Integrating Language Arts and Fine Arts in the Elementary Classroom
  - FA 1000-03 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 06. Peers were available to participate in 3 of the seminars. Topics in the Seminar in FYE include writing, speaking, critical thinking, time management, awareness of learning styles, listening, note-taking, participating in class, reading texts, and taking exams. Students complete weekly quizzes or reading checks and weekly 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**

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

## Conclusions

- For the 2007 year, two learning communities were linked to ENGL 1000, a new credit-bearing class for students who have not tested into General Education English composition. These communities were also linked to the Faculty Mentor Program. All students in these two learning communities joined the Faculty Mentor Program. The Director of Composition for the English Department commented that students in these ENGL 1000 classes did especially well in comparison to students in other ENGL 1000 sections.
- Because of the success in the past two years of learning communities connected to the Faculty Mentor Program (FMP)(all students in these learning community were required to join the FMP to fulfill their campus involvement requirement), two learning communities were again connected to FMP. These were the two sections of FYE that were linked to ENGL 1000 sections. The combination of being in the Seminar in FYE plus membership in the FMP may have combined to contribute to the success of these students in ENGL 1000.
- This year, a learning community was added for Athletes. This was an extremely successful community with a total of 44 athletes meeting together. The Seminar in FYE was taught by the athletic advisor and the linked class taught by the faculty representative to athletics. This allowed athletes to connect with their advisor and faculty representative and to interact with all other freshman athletes on campus, not just those in their own sport. This seminar was larger than optimal. It would be more effective to offer two sections of the seminar for athletes.
- An experiment with an online learning community that included ENGL 1002, First-Year Composition, and GEND 2020, Introduction to Women's Studies, was not successful because it did not receive sufficient enrollment and had to be cancelled. It was difficult to interest incoming freshmen in online instruction for their first semester.

## Challenges

The biggest challenge for the FYE Program since its inception has been enrolling students in learning communities. For the past two years, schedules have been developed and freshmen enrolled in classes prior to attending New Student Orientation. This method proved very useful this year because peers doing the scheduling were supportive of placing students in FYE. However, few undeclared students were enrolled in FYE, and EOP students are not enrolled in FYE.

Another reason enrollment in FYE was more successful this year is that an effort was made to link Seminars in FYE to introductory sections in department with large majors. With the support of these departments, many of their freshmen majors were placed in FYE, thus increasing class size in these seminars.

As was done last year, 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. In Fall 2006, class size in the seminars was increased from 25 to 30 to help off-set the attrition. In Fall 2007, final class sizes for all sections of the seminar, except for the athletics section, still did not reach 25.

A third challenge for the FYE Program in 2007-2008 was the lack of availability of peer leaders. Only 3 students were trained, resulting in only 25% of the learning communities having the benefit of a peer leader. Because peer leaders and instructors agree on the importance of having peer leaders in the seminars, extra effort was put into recruiting peer leaders for 2008-2009.