First-Year Experience Program
California State University, Stanislaus

Report for 2004/2005

Submitted by Dr. Marjorie Jaasma, Director of the FYE Program
May 19, 2005

Introduction
The First-Year Experience (FYE) Program at CSU Stanislaus, was offered for the first time in Fall 2004. The program consisted of 5 learning communities, four that integrated two General Education classes with the Seminar in FYE, and one that linked one General Education class with the Seminar in FYE. The Seminars in FYE were taught by faculty in the learning community assisted by peer leaders, successful CSUS students who were trained in teaching and mentoring. Eighty-four first-year students completed the program.

Courses Offered in Fall 04
The following were the learning communities available to students:

Learning Community 1: Interconnections: Nature and the Human Condition
While discovering the principles and processes underlying life, explore the exciting ways we seek, create and express our relationships with nature. Some of the wide variety of genres we will explore, both by reading and writing, are science fiction, nature and travel writing, humorous historical accounts, satirical editorials, investigative articles, scientific journals, and documentaries.
ENGL 1002-02, First-Year Composition, Ms. Mary Ann Simoneau
BIOL 1010-01, Principles of Biology, Dr. Mark Grobner
MDIS 1040-03, Seminar in FYE, Ms. Mary Ann Simoneau

Learning Community 2: Movements in History
See American history and women’s history through events that made a difference. Whether through the physical movements of plants, people, and diseases, the spread of ideas, or the action-packed crusades of dedicated activists, we will explore exciting, non-traditional views of the past.
GEND 2020-01, Introduction to Women’s Studies, Dr. Betsy Eudey
HIST 2600-03, Problems in U.S. History, Dr. Nancy Taniguchi
MDIS 1040-02, Seminar in FYE, Dr. Betsy Eudey and Dr. Nancy Taniguchi

Learning Community 3: Questions of Perception and Identity
Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going? Through questions like these we explore themes and issues related to perception and identity. We will discover how careful observation and deep questioning can lead to powerful writing and thinking through an introduction to major philosophical thinkers and contemporary writers.
ENGL 1001-02, First-Year Composition, Dr. Stephanie Paterson
PHIL 1010-03, Introduction to Philosophy, Dr. Andy Young
MDIS 1040-01, Seminar in FYE, Dr. Stephanie Paterson
Learning Community 4: Connecting the Brain and the Mouth
Are you curious how your brain controls, and even alters, your perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and personality? How does your brain interpret information differently in each hemisphere? Learn to make a captivating and memorable presentation by activating the minds of your audience.
  COMM 2000-01, Public Speaking, Dr. Vickie Harvey
  PSYC 2010-01, Introduction to Psychology, Dr. Dawn Strongin
  MDIS 1040-04, Seminar in FYE, Dr. Vickie Harvey and Dr. Dawn Strongin

Learning Community 5: Business in Today’s World
Have you ever considered the opportunities in business? Learn about how organizations function, the strategies they employ, and the impact they have on modern American society. Be exposed to interesting guest speakers, including many local entrepreneurs, who reinforce the course material through practical application.
  BUS 1500-01, Introduction to Business, Mr. Jack Doo
  BUS 1040-01, Seminar in FYE, Dr. Marge Jaasma

Learning Objectives for the Seminar in FYE
1. Explain how key ideas in one course relate to content of the second course.
2. Develop the literacy skills necessary to be successful in these academic courses.
3. Demonstrate understanding of the relationship between the linked classes and general education goals.
4. Locate and understand the uses for campus resources and services.
5. Demonstrate how participation in campus activities has contributed to personal and educational growth.
6. Develop an individual education plan.
7. Demonstrate ability to locate, evaluate, and use information related to course assignments and activities.

Course requirements addressed these learning objectives:
1. Participation and Attendance: Students will be given a participation grade by the instructor(s) and the peer leader. Students are permitted 2 hours of absence without penalty to the participation grade.
2. Weekly quizzes or reading checks.
3. Assignments: Students will complete weekly assignments (reading responses and computer search assignments).
4. Group Presentation: Students will participate in a group presentation.
   1) Group presentation could be on a topic in the text not covered in class or a topic from one of the linked classes. Examples from the text include stress management, sexual decisions, alcohol and other drugs, developing and maintaining effective relationships with friend and/or family.
   2) Groups should be about 5 students.
   3) Each group will give a 20-minute multi-genre presentation.
   4) Each student will submit an annotated bibliography of 3-5 reliable sources, not duplicated with anyone else in the group.
5. Portfolio: Students will submit a portfolio that includes the following:
   1) Reflective cover letter: this is a very detailed letter where you reflect on yourself as a learner and include information from your reading responses as examples.
      a. What have you learned about how you learn?
      b. What have you learned about ways of reading and seeing?
      c. What have you learned about ways of locating sources, generating questions, making connections?
      d. What have you learned about the value of participation in campus activities?
      e. What have you learned about the way your classes this semester are linked to the goals of general education?
   2) Copies of your reading responses.
   3) Your individual education plan.

6. Students will join one campus group or attend at least 2 campus activities this semester. Ideas include the Faculty Mentoring Program, intramural sports, ASI, fraternity/sorority...

Assessment

First-Year Initiative

CSU Stanislaus participated in the First-Year Initiative (FYI) Survey, a nationally benchmarked survey conducted by Educational Benchmarking, Inc. Students completed the FYI Survey during the final week of the semester. On a 1-7 scale (1=not at all; 2-4= somewhat; 5-7= significantly), students rated questions concerning the FYE program. The highest mean questions as rated by CSUS students were as follows:

1. The degree that student wants to return to this college/university for the next fall term (N=69; Mean=5.61, Std. Dev.=1.76)
2. Course increased understanding of available library resources (N=71; Mean=5.58; Std. Dev.=1.46)
3. The degree that student is accepted by students at this college/university (N=65; Mean=5.52, Std. Dev.=1.35)
4. Course improved efforts to get to know students in my classes (N=70; Mean=5.50; Std. Dev.=1.44)
5. The degree that student would recommend this college/university to a friend (N=69; Mean=5.43; Std. Dev.=1.82)
6. Course improved ability to find what I need through the library (N=71; Mean=5.41; Std. Dev.=1.58)
7. Course/experience included encouragement for students to work together (N=71; Mean=5.39; Std. Dev.=1.53)
8. Course/experience included encouragement to speak in class (N=71, Mean=5.30; Std. Dev.=1.78)
9. The degree that student’s college experience was a positive experience (N=69; Mean=5.22; Std. Dev.=1.84)
10. The degree that it is easy to make new friends at this college/university (N=67; Mean=5.15; Std. Dev.=1.60)
11. The degree that student is able to identify other students with similar interest (N=68; Mean=5.09; Std. Dev.=1.56)
12. Level of effort in this course (N=69; Mean=4.94; Std. Dev.=1.73)

The lowest mean questions as rated by CSUS students were as follows:
1. Course increased volunteering time for worthwhile causes (N=67; Mean=2.69; Std. Dev.=1.76)
2. Course increased attending campus cultural events (N=68; Mean=2.88; Std. Dev.=2.01)
3. Course increased contributing to the success of campus-sponsored organizations (N=68; Mean=3.09; Std. Dev.=1.76)
4. Course improved understanding of college students’ sexual issues (N=65; Mean=3.23; Std. Dev.=1.93)
5. Course improved computer skills (N=68; Mean=3.26; Std. Dev.=1.83)
6. Course improved understanding of the impact of drug use (N=66; Mean=3.48; Std. Dev.=1.85)
7. The course improved understanding of the impact of alcohol consumption (N=66; Mean=3.50; Std. Dev.=1.86)
8. The course improved understanding of academic probation policies (N=68; Mean=3.71; Std. Dev.=1.94)
9. Course readings were interesting (N=70; Mean=3.73; Std. Dev.=1.91)
10. Course improved understanding of the impact of exercising regularly (N=69; Mean=3.75; Std. Dev.=1.88)
11. Course improved reviewing class notes before the next class meeting (N=71; Mean=3.76; Std. Dev.=1.89)
12. Course improved reading skills (N=71; Mean=3.77; Std. Dev.=1.52)

Faculty goals for the Seminar in FYE had been to provide an academic experience for students to give them an opportunity to improve in readiness to succeed in college courses and to assist in their adjustment to college. Analysis of the results from the FYI indicated that students thought the program had positively facilitated their understanding and use of the library, had promoted efforts to get to know students in their classes, had improved oral presentation skills and writing skills, had encouraged students to work together, had encouraged students to speak in class, and had resulted in students feeling accepted by students at this university. These results were consistent with faculty goals of improving academic readiness and promoting social integration into the university.

The lowest mean questions on the FYI (listed above), indicate that students thought the program had not promoted volunteerism and awareness of issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. Since the Seminar in FYE had not focused on issues such as these, it is understandable that students rated these low on the FYI. However, two areas that faculty had concentrated on were rated relatively low: time management and student-faculty out-of-class interaction. These are the two areas for improvement that will become the focus of the seminar in Fall 05. To improve student awareness of time management, faculty will share exercises and strategies for teaching time management and integrating this throughout the semester. To improve student perception of student-faculty out-of-class
interaction, a requirement has been added that all seminar faculty have two personal out-of-class interactions with each student (office visit, email, or phone). A requirement was also added that each peer leader initiate two personal out-of-class interactions with each student, one of those being within the first two weeks of the semester.

Two institutional questions were added to the FYI to gather student input on the General Education goals at CSU Stanislaus and on the success of integrating knowledge through a learning community:

1. Knowledge of the General Education goals (N=62; Mean=4.95; Std. Dev.=1.34)
2. Degree to which courses in the learning community were linked (N=62; Mean=4.90; Std. Dev.=1.58)

These results indicate that students are gaining an awareness of the General Education goals and of the linkages between the courses in the learning communities.

Writing Assessment
Students in the Seminar in FYE completed essays based on a writing prompt during the first week of the semester and during the final week of the semester. In Summer 05, a team of faculty and graduate students will score the essays using an established rubric. The results of the writing samples from the first week of the semester will be compared to the results from the final week. In addition, each student’s work can be compared in terms of pretest and posttest.

Courses Scheduled for Fall 05

Eight learning communities have been scheduled for the FYE Program for Fall 05. The first seven of these learning communities do not include Liberal Studies, and the eighth is offered specifically for Liberal Studies students. The following are the learning communities available to students:

Learning Community 1: Questions of Perception and Identity
Who am I? How did I get here? Where am I going? Through questions like these we explore themes and issues related to perception and identity. We will discover how careful observation and deep questioning can lead to powerful writing and thinking through an introduction to major philosophical thinkers and contemporary writers.

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BUS 1500-01, Introduction to Business, Mr. Jack Doo
BUS 1040-01, Seminar in FYE, Dr. Marge Jaasma

Learning Community Four: Be an Effective Team Player
We are all part of many groups in our lives. Make the groups you are part of satisfying and effective by learning strategies for effective communication. Learn these strategies in an interactive environment where you learn by practicing skills in experiential activities.
COMM 2110 Group Discussion Processes, Dr. M. Jaasma
MDIS 1040 Seminar in FYE, Dr. M. Jaasma

Learning Community Five: Study Skills for English Language Learners
If you are a student learning English as a second language, join this learning community to work in a supportive environment to improve your academic reading and writing skills. You will build your vocabulary, apply reading strategies for comprehension, and do reading-based writing to address academic questions.
Students enrolling in this learning community must have the appropriate level of English as determined by diagnostic testing
ESL 1005 Intermediate English for ESL, Ms. M. Simoneau
MDIS 1040 Seminar in FYE, Ms. M. Simoneau

Learning Community Six: All the World's a Stage
To be effective in many situations, such as group presentations, we need comfort and skill in front of an audience. Develop these strengths through theatre games, relaxation techniques, observation exercises, and vocal work. Stimulate the imagination and free the body and voice to allow a more spontaneous and adaptable approach to performance and life.
THEA 1500 Acting for Non-Theatre Majors, Ms. P. O'Donnell
MDIS 1040 Seminar in FYE, Ms. P. O'Donnell

Learning Community Seven: Be an Effective Team Player
We are all part of many groups in our lives. Make the groups you are part of satisfying and effective by learning strategies for effective communication. Learn these strategies in an interactive environment where you learn by practicing skills in experiential activities.
COMM 2110 Group Discussion Processes
MDIS 1040 Seminar in FYE, Ms. Genine Holguin

Learning Community Eight: 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, Dr. J. Wink
LIBS 1004  Seminar (Co-requisite to LIBS 1000)

If you are beginning your studies to become an elementary school teacher, join this learning community for an introduction to Integrating Language Arts and Fine Arts in the Elementary Classroom. Students learn how to integrate and develop strategies for teaching in K-3 classrooms through field experience in local schools.