IMPROVING COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION VIA A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

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KEY TERMS

- Retention = return to same institution in 2nd year
- Persistence = semester-to-semester enrollment
- Attrition = stop out or transfer
- First-Year Seminar = retention targeted course (time mgt., campus resources, goal setting)
- First-Year Experience = First-Year course with additional program
- Learning Communities = cohorts (smaller groups; common purpose; e.g., residents)
- HIP = High Impact Practices

APRIORI TRUE OR FALSE QUIZ

- I) A first-year seminar course can be in any academic discipline.
- 2) Students are retained when they earn a passing grade in a class.
- 3) Peer self-disclosure has been associated with higher rates of retention.
- 4) Belongingness is the strongest predictor of college student retention.
- 5) Teaching quality is a strong predictor of retention.

SCHNEIDER, D. (2022). UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING COMMUNITY COLLEGE RETENTION: A REVIEW WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL ATTACHMENT. <u>THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENTERPRISE</u>, 28, 1, 28-40.

- Attrition rates high but stable; college bound students have doubled over last 40 years.
- More problematic for comprehensive 4-year institutions and community colleges
- Many students need developmental coursework to succeed (No substitute for 3 Rs).
- College is an experience rather than a collection of credits.
- Faculty/Staff Paradox
- Peer-based interventions, especially for working class and minority students
- Consider embedded retention assignments.
- We need to promote organizational identification (belongingness).

CREDE & NIEHORSTER (2012). ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE AS MEASURED BY THE STUDENT ADAPTATION TO COLLEGE QUESTIONNAIRE: A QUANTITATIVE REVIEW OF ITS STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CORRELATES AND CONSEQUENCES. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW, 24, 133-165.

- Meta-analysis: 700 studies (237 samples); 100 years
- Demographic profiles do not predict success or failure.
- Personality predictors: conscientious, agreeable, extraverted, self-efficient, internal locus of control, and positive self-esteem
- Problem solving coping strategies > Emotional coping strategies
- Faculty & Staff support = moderate relationship to adjustment
- Two adjustment levels: I) faculty/academics, 2) peer/social
- Parental (secure attachment) = moderate positive adjustment
- College grades = strongest sole link to retention
- Organizational identification (belongingness) = strongest link to grades and retention

PERMZADIAN & CREDE (2016). DO FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS IMPROVE COLLEGE GRADES AND RETENTION? A QUANTITATIVE REVIEW OF THEIR OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS AND AN EXAMINATION OF MODERATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS. <u>REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL</u> <u>RESEARCH</u>, 86, 1, 277-316.

- Meta-analysis of research in USA and Canada
- N = 284 samples (89 FYS and GPA; 195 FYS and Retention)
- Found small effect on FYS and GPA and small effect on FYS and retention
- Small effect = attrition rate drop from 32% to 27% for small institution
- Orientation course focus rather than an academic course focus
- Full-time faculty and staff instructors rather than GTAs
- Should include all students rather than underprepared students
- Better as stand-alone course than as part of learning community

CULVER & BOWMAN (2020). IS WHAT GLITTERS REALLY GOLD? A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS AND COLLEGE STUDENT SUCCESS. <u>RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION</u>, 61, 2, 167-196.

- Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Data Base
- N = 16,337 (time 1) N = 4,084 (time 3) from large and small 4-year schools
- No consistent relationship with academic outcome variables (retention, graduation, gpa, etc.)
- No difference between FYS formats (orientation or academic content)
- FYS were associated with satisfaction for lower ACT scores and for Black students.
- Speculate that effectiveness depends on implementation
- Some efforts were counter-productive (retention decrease).
- Question the value of a unidimensional approach.
- Consider the value of FYS with respect to different types of students and institutions.

BOETTLER, GOLDFINE, LEECH, SIEGRIST (2022). ACADEMIC SKILLS, COMMUNITY ENGAGED, LEADERSHIP, AND GLOBAL THEMED FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS: COMPARISONS IN STUDENT SUCCESS. JOURNAL OF COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION, RESEARCH, THEORY AND PRACTICE, 24, 1, 213-233.

- Compared 4 first-year seminars: traditional, global, community engagement, leadership
- Compared Learning Community Experience (Students in FYE and one other course)
- N = 2,000 (500 each seminar type), Class size 25-28, (83% retention rate)
- All four types included academic success, life skills, global learning, campus community.
- 4-year public; retention= 2nd year return; academic performance = gpa
- No differences in retention or academic performance based on seminar type
- Learning Community = significantly higher retention rate

SCHNEIDER, K., NAIR, STRANEY, LANCEY & TRIPP (2021). FIRST-YEAR STEM RESEARCH PROGRAM FACILITATES LONG-TERM ACADEMIC SUCCESS. JOURNAL OF COLLEGE SCIENCE TEACHING, 50, 1, 11-16.

- Learning Environment and Academic Research Network (LEARN)
- Live together, take intro research course together, and move into research apprenticeship
- N = 231 students over 8 years (cohorts) vs N = 802 comparison group
- All STEM majors in LEARN more likely to graduate (71%) than comparison group (55%)
- LEARN students more likely to remain STEM majors (84% to 76% comparison group)
- Results held for underrepresented students (demographics)
- Conclude that retention is better addressed from a wraparound approach

PITTENDRIGH, BORKOWSKI, SWINFORD & PLUMB (2016). KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY: THE EFFECT OF A FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE JOURNAL OF GENERAL EDUCATION: A CURRICULAR COMMONS OF THE HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES, 65, 1, 48-65.

- Knowledge and Community (FYS) = focus on knowledge creation, cultural influence on self, and how inquiry, dialogue and community influence democracy (defines college)
- Discussion format instruction; course cap 16; writing and speaking assignments
- N = 1,964 (397 students took seminar); measured CSI, KC survey, Persistence
- Persistence rates improved for all KC students.
- Effect on high-risk students doubled (58 to70%) vs low-risk students (75 to 80%).
- Suggests integrating high and low risk students (motivation can be contagious)

DAS, SCHMITT, STEPHENSON (2024). A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR OUTCOMES AT A LARGE UNIVERSITY. JOURNAL OF COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION: RESEARCH, THEORY & PRACTICE, 25, 4, 940-954.

- N=1,225 took FYS at large R1: two semester experience (second semester optional)
- Class met Ihr week (14 weeks); course cap 30 students
- Measures: Fall gpa; Spring gpa; 2nd Fall gpa; Retention (2nd yr)
- Second Fall term gpa higher for FYS students
- Significant retention difference: 91% FYS compared to 88% non-FYS
- FYS = continuous gpa improvement, although not significantly higher until 2nd Fall
- Qualitative results: non FYS felt stronger about ability to succeed and to prepare for tests
- Qualitative results: FYS students more comfortable seeking help when needed

COWAN, BRADY, ARVIZU, REECE, WEINMAN, ZIVOT (2024). CULTIVATING NOT WEEDING: STEM FIRST YEAR LEARNING COMMUNITY FOSTER STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND ENGAGEMENT. JOURNAL OF COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION RESEARCH THEORY AND PRACTICE, 26, 2, 500-527.

- BOND (Building Opportunities Networks of Discovery), CSM (College Science & Math)
- BOND = 4-day summer experience; peer & faculty interaction; active learning
- BOND = Two-semester general education course sequence
- Higher STEM major retention but no difference with university-wide retention
- BOND = 1.93 times more likely to be CSM after 4 years
- BOND = more support resources used (tutoring, advising, and supplemental instruction)

LANE & SAXON (2024). INTEGRATING LEARNING SUPPORT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR ENROLLMENT AND STUDENT SUCCESS IN DEVELOPMENTAL MATHEMATICS. JOURNAL OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, 48, 1, 31-45.

- Studied FYS in relation to Developmental Mathematics and Entry Level Mathematics
- Students self-selected FYS (took multiple courses together by major in addition to the math class)
- N = 241 Developmental and N = 405 Entry Level
- Developmental FYS students 2.14 times more likely to earn passing math grade than Developmental no FYS students
- Entry Level FYS students 2.14 times more likely to earn passing math grade than no FYS

SULLIVAN AND HALLER (2018). FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR PROGRAM EVALUATION: A FOCUS GROUP STUDY. <u>CURRENTS</u>, MAY 109-117.

- N = 26 First-Year students in second semester who had completed a FYS
- Students value more rigorous FYS coursework and respond to passionate instruction.
- Students value peer interaction during class, especially with those outside their major.
- Faculty training is needed so that retention practices can be incorporated into courses.
- Out of class communication is valued (faculty, other students, staff).

RASCO, DAY & DENTON (2023). STUDENT RETENTION: FOSTERING PEER RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH A BRIEF EXPERIMENTAL INTERVENTION. JOURNAL OF COLLEGE STUDENT <u>RETENTION</u>, 25, 1, 153-169.

- N = 207 from HSI (49% White, 31% Latinx, 11% Multiracial, 5% Black)
- Closeness Induction Task (3Qs of self-disclosure to peer) vs Control (Small Talk)
- Follow-up survey one semester later; retention = returning year
- CIT students retained at significantly higher rate than Small Talk
- Student of color retention rate: Closeness Induction 92% vs Small Talk 74%
- Findings not mediated by partner impression (specific person in conversation)

QUIZ ANSWERS

- I) True (Any introductory course in any discipline can be a FYS.)
- 2) False (Passing a class and staying at the institution are not the same.)
- 3) True (Peer to peer self-disclosure is related to retention.)
- 4) True (Belongingness is the single strongest link to grades and retention.)
- 5) False (Teaching quality is a paradox and weakly related to retention.)

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

• Generate a short list of activities (5-6) that would draw students from the same class into a peer-based interaction on campus but outside of class.

• Generate a short list of activities (5-6) that would draw students from class into a faculty-staff interaction on campus but outside of class.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

- Target general education courses or introductory courses.
- Teach time management in coordination with class assignments.
- Encourage F2F peer interaction during class (pair shares, group work, class discussion).
- Facilitate out of class peer communication.
- Facilitate out of class campus-based communication with faculty and staff.
- Develop a reasonable due date policy and enforce it.
- Develop a reasonable attendance policy and enforce it.
- Build a course that really requires class attendance (online support = poor substitute).
- Best approach for all courses across institution (not just designated FYS)



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