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FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE) AND FRESHMEN INTEREST
GROUP (FIG) PROGRAMS COMPARED:
FALL, 2006, COURSE OFFERINGS

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SEMINAR SURVEY FINDINGS - FIGs/FYE COMPARISON

Because the FIGs and FYE programs share a common set of student learning outcomes (SLOs), and an ostensibly similar seminar configuration, and since both programs target first-time, in-coming freshmen, the same pre/post survey form was administered in both FIGs seminars and FYE courses. Technically, however, FYE offerings are not considered seminars, but rather lower-division, capped-enrollment courses that instructors in the various departments might routinely teach as large lecture courses. The big differences being 1) the class size was limited to around 25, and 2) the class was limited to freshmen only. Moverover, FYE course instructors volunteer to teach FYE courses, and have committed to the idea of a freshmen-level transition course, and all the pedagogy implied by such an endeavor. Thus while technically not a seminar per se, FYE courses have both a seminar feel, and the intentionality on the instructors part to teach in a more seminar-like manner, including a strong emphasis on discussion. This design definitely sets FYE courses apart from regular department course offerings for freshmen; an FYE course offered in the usual configuration might have as many as a 100 or more students, and often is lecture- not discussion-based.

Yet even as both programs share SLOs and appear to outsiders as seminars, it still may not be fair to compare FIGs seminars to FYE courses. For one, FYE courses are taught by tenured faculty, while FIGs courses are taught by qualified Western staff. (Qualified, in this case, means that FIGs seminar instructors all have at least a Master's degree. Over the years, there have been concerns noted by Western administrators and faculty committees that FIGs courses have been taught by Western students, even lower-division students. Such has never been the case, and never would be. Indeed, FIGs seminar instructors are better qualified to teach at the university level than most of the graduate students that teach English and mathematics courses. They have, after all, already earned their degrees, plus have acquired years of practical experience.)

Another reason that it may be unfair to compare FIGs seminars to FYE courses is that the FIGs has had eight years to learn from its mistakes, make changes, and develop into a mature program, both solid and effective. The FYE program, on the other hand, is in its first full year of existence, and has not had the same chance to grow, learn, and change. (In the fall, 2005, three FYE's were offered, but those courses were even less than a pilot and more a testing of the waters.)

Yet interest runs high to compare the programs, and while all the reasons listed above are valid, it is also potentially to the advantage of both programs that they learn from each other. As the popular song writer Kris Kristofferson noted, one of the best ways to learn the craft of songwriting is to sit around with other songwriters and steal their ideas. So, too, might first-year instructors from either the FIGs or FYE program sit around and steal pedagogical, strategic, and practical ideas from one another—especially as the end result might very well be improvement for all. So with many reasons not to conduct a comparison, but with one compelling reason to continue with the comparison, it will continue—at least this year and in this report.

DISCUSSION OF THE FIGs/FYE SEMINAR POST SURVEY FINDINGS

First, it's important to take careful note of the fact that the lower the number in the FIGs/FYE seminar survey findings the higher the satisfaction. In other words, if the overall mean score on a question was 2.00, and the mean score for a program was 1.50, then the program received higher positive ratings than the overall mean. Please also note that the survey is an opinion poll, not quantitative data, and is open to all the limitations that surveys entail. Most especially, this means that it is important to use both qualitative (survey) and quantitative (hard) findings to come to an overall conclusion about a program's effectiveness.

There were eighteen questions on the FIGs/FYE post survey. When the means for each question were separated by program, in seven of the questions FIGs students gave higher positive ratings than did FYE students. These included the following questions:

- Enrolling in a FIG helped my transition to Western.
- Enrolling in a FIG was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule.
- To what extent did the FIGs seminar help you create connections with peers?
- To what extent did the FIGs seminar provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?
- How well prepared you feel to: develop close friendships with other students?
- How well prepared you feel to: utilize campus services available to students?
- Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Talk about the main ideas or themes of the course.

For the post seminar survey, there were no other statistical differences between the responses to the eighteen questions. Of the seven differences, one ("Enrolling in a FIG was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule") is explained by the logistical make-up of the FIGs program, which is to offer two large lecture courses and a seminar as a package worth from 9-12 credits. The FYE offerings, on the other hand, while worth more credits individually, were stand alone courses, no packaging with other courses. Thus the higher ratings for FIGs on this question make complete sense.

Four of the differences (transition to Western, create peer connections, prepared to develop close friendships, prepared to utilize campus services) might also be explained by the overarching philosophical differences between the FIGs and FYE programs. From its inception, the FIGs has placed a major emphasis on transitioning students from high school to college. Academics have always been equally important, yet no more or less

important than transition issues. And while the FYE program definitely gives a strong nod to transition issues, at this point in its development, the program probably does not place as strong an emphasis on transition pedagogy as does the FIGs, but rather places more emphasis on academic issues and content.

Two of the differences are less easily explained, as they directly address academic concerns. FIGs students more than FYE students noted that the seminar had provided some skills and strategies that would help in future courses. Also, FIGs students rated themselves more competent to talk about the main ideas or themes of their large lecture courses.

One curious finding was that no difference existed between FIGs and FYE students when asked how well they felt prepared to get to know faculty. This finding is curious in that Western faculty taught FYE students and had them in a small course setting four hours a week, while FIGs students met their large lecture course faculty in a seminar setting only two or three times throughout the quarter.

It is also interesting to note that for the other three questions concerned with the programs' shared student learning outcomes (use accurate vocabulary, ask relevant questions, and state a supportable point of view), FIGs and FYE student responses were equal. It should be pointed out again, however, that a survey is an opinion poll, not hard data, and therein some answer to the lack of difference may exist.

Seminar Survey Findings - FIGs/FYE Comparison, 2006

(Note that lower scores indicate more positive responses.)

		N	Mean
Enrolling in a FIG helped my transition to Western*	FYE	143	2.13
	FIG	208	1.90
	Total	351	1.99
Enrolling in a FIG was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule*	FYE	142	2.29
	FIG	208	1.67
	Total	350	1.92
To what extent did the FIGs seminar help you create connections with peers?*	FYE	139	1.97
	FIG	208	1.59
	Total	347	1.74
To what extent did the FIGs seminar assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?	FYE	141	2.23
	FIG	208	2.13
	Total	349	2.17
To what extent did the FIGs seminar provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?*	FYE	141	1.77
	FIG	208	2.00
	Total	349	1.91
Based on your experiences in your FIG, are your feelings about it:	FYE	140	1.98
	FIG	208	2.17
	Total	348	2.09
How well prepared you feel to: understand what your instructors expect of you academically?	FYE	143	1.59
	FIG	209	1.53
	Total	352	1.56
How well prepared you feel to: utilize effective study skills?	FYE	143	1.75
	FIG	208	1.68
	Total	351	1.71
How well prepared you feel to: adjust to the academic demands of college?	FYE	143	1.63
	FIG	209	1.58
	Total	352	1.60

Seminar Survey Findings - FIGs/FYE Comparison, 2006

(Note that lower scores indicate more positive responses.)

		N	Mean
How well prepared you feel to: manage your time effectively?	FYE	143	1.82
	FIG	208	1.76
	Total	351	1.78
How well prepared you feel to: get to know faculty?	FYE	143	1.77
	FIG	208	1.79
	Total	351	1.78
How well prepared you feel to: develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals?	FYE	143	1.73
	FIG	208	1.69
	Total	351	1.71
How well prepared you feel to: develop close friendships with other students?*	FYE	143	1.64
	FIG	208	1.38
	Total	351	1.49
How well prepared you feel to: utilize campus services available to students?*	FYE	142	1.77
	FIG	208	1.57
	Total	350	1.65
Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Use the vocabulary accurately.	FYE	143	1.59
	FIG	208	1.59
	Total	351	1.59
Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Ask relevant questions.	FYE	143	1.61
	FIG	208	1.62
	Total	351	1.62
Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: State a point of view I can support.	FYE	143	1.58
	FIG	208	1.51
	Total	351	1.54
Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Talk about the main ideas or themes of the course.*	FYE	142	1.55
	FIG	204	1.41
	Total	346	1.47

*The difference tested for statistical significance.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS REVISITED - FIGs/FYE COMPARED

WESTERN GRADE POINT AVERAGE

To set the groundwork for some of the findings presented in this section of the report, please take note of the following Admissions Index (AI)^{*} scores:

Fall, 2006	Admissions Index (AI)
All new frosh	56.9
FYE frosh	57.6
FIGs frosh	54.3

The AI's importance to the rest of this memo is that when using Western grade point average as an indicator, the AI is the strongest predictor of academic success. Please note that FIGs students have an AI lower than the average, while FYE students have an AI higher than the average. Therefore, based on AI scores, predicted WWU gpa's for FIGs students as a group should be lower than the average, while predicted WWU gpa's for FYE students as a group should be higher than the average. Here are the actual WWU gpa's earned by freshmen in the fall quarter, 2006:

Fall, 2006	WWU gpa
All new frosh	2.77
FYE frosh	2.85
FIGs frosh	2.94

The findings indicate that the group expected to receive WWU gpa's lower than the average, FIGs students, actually received gpa's higher than the average. On the other hand, FYE students performed as expected: they, too, received WWU gpa's higher than the average, though not as high as the gpa's earned by FIG's students.

Yet one more finding needs presenting. One criticism of the FIGs program is that the seminar grades are "inflated" and thus raise the overall average WWU gpa of FIGs students "unnaturally". To test this hypothesis, the overall WWU gpa earned has been recomputed, eliminating the grade earned by FIGs students in their seminars. Similarly, to play fair, the overall WWU gpa earned by FYE students has also been recomputed, again eliminating the grade earned by FYE students in their seminars.

^{*}The Admissions Index is a number between 0-100 that is derived by a formula combining high school grade point average and SAT score. The AI is used in assisting state universities and colleges in their admissions processes.

Fall, 2006	WWU gpa with seminar grades eliminated
All new frosh	2.77
FYE frosh	2.77
FIGs frosh	2.83

Here it is interesting to note that elimination of the seminar grade from the overall WWU gpa of both FIGs and FYE students lowers their overall WWU gpa almost exactly one-tenth of a point: in the case of FIGs students from 2.94 to 2.83, and for FYE students from 2.85 to 2.77. The inference is that students participating in either the FIGs or FYE program earn grades in their seminars that raise their overall WWU gpa at an equal ratio. In other words, taking a FIGs or FYE seminar in the fall quarter, 2006, increased a student's overall WWU gpa by about one-tenth of a point.

It is further interesting to note that without their FYE seminar grade, FYE students, expected to earn gpa's above the average, don't. On the other hand, without their seminar grade FIGs students, expected to earn gpa's lower than average, still earn gpa's higher than the average.

DISCUSSION OF THE FIGs/FYE PROGRAMS COMPARISON OVERALL

By any standards currently available to researchers, whether survey or quantitative findings, the FIGs appears to present a strong case for the ability of time, persistence and effort to craft and deliver a strong program. From quantitative data it is apparent that the FIGs delivers on its promise of an academically-engaging experience. FIGs student, who upon entering Western are expected to perform under the average of all entering Western freshmen, perform above the average. From survey data, it is equally apparent that the FIGs program delivers on its promise to to help freshmen make a smoother transition from high school to college. Overall, there is a solid body of data, both current and historical, quantitative as well as qualitative, that points to a strong program.

On the other hand, the FYE is just entering the waters of first-year programs. Whether quantitative or qualitative, findings in some areas were promising, in a few areas fairly strong, and in other areas inconsistent. (For what it's worth, this was equally true for the FIGs program in its first two years of existence.) It has to be disappointing to the FYE program that many students didn't recognize that anything special was being offered them, yet on the other hand, students overall appeared to appreciate the courses. It was a bit perplexing that without their seminar grades FYE students achieved at only an average level when they were expected to achieve at an above average level. That finding might make for an interesting disucussion in and of itself. Yet inconsistencies are part and parcel of the nature of a new program. Findings are bound to cross the spectrum. Yet inconsistencies notwithstanding, the data on the FYE program overall paints a picture of a solid young program that should just keep getting better, if it is nurtured and can find leadership and continued administrative support.

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q1: Enrolling in a FIG/FYE helped my transition to Western	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	58	27.9	27	18.9
Agree	116	55.8	76	53.1
Disagree	31	14.9	35	24.5
Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	5	3.5
Total	208	100	143	100

Q2: Enrolling in a FIG/FYE was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	91	43.8	15	10.6
Agree	98	47.1	82	57.7
Disagree	16	7.7	34	23.9
Strongly Disagree	3	1.4	11	7.7
Total	208	100	142	100

Q3: To what extent did the FIGs/FYE seminar help you create connections with peers?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
A great deal	92	44.2	31	22.3
Somewhat	109	52.4	81	58.3
Not at all	7	3.4	27	19.4
Total	208	100	139	100

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q4: To what extent did the FIGs/FYE seminar assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
A great deal	30	14.4	22	15.6
Somewhat	122	58.7	67	47.5
Not at all	56	26.9	50	35.5
Total	208	100	141	100

Q5: To what extent did the FIGs/FYE seminar provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
A great deal	42	20.2	54	38.3
Somewhat	123	59.1	69	48.9
Not at all	43	20.7	16	11.3
Total	208	100	141	100

Q6: Based on your experiences in your FIG/FYE, are your feelings about it:	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Very positive	55	26.4	49	35.0
Positive	82	39.4	50	35.7
Neutral	54	26.0	37	26.4
Negative	14	6.7	3	2.1
Very negative	3	1.4	1	0.7
Total	208	100	140	100

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q7: How well prepared do you feel to: understand what your instructors expect of you academically?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	101	48.3	61	42.7
Somewhat prepared	105	50.2	79	55.2
Not prepared	3	1.4	3	2.1
Total	209	100	143	100

Q8: How well prepared do you feel to: utilize effective study skills?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	75	36.1	42	29.4
Somewhat prepared	124	59.6	96	67.1
Not prepared	9	4.3	4	2.8
Total	208	100	143	100

Q9: How well prepared do you feel to: adjust to the academic demands of college?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	93	44.5	59	41.3
Somewhat prepared	110	52.6	78	54.5
Not prepared	6	2.9	6	4.2
Total	209	100	143	100

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q10: How well prepared do you feel to: manage your time effectively?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	63	30.3	41	28.7
Somewhat prepared	132	63.5	89	62.2
Not prepared	13	6.3	12	8.4
Total	208	100	143	100

Q11: How well prepared do you feel to: get to know faculty?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%		
Completely prepared	62	29.8	49	34.3
Somewhat prepared	128	61.5	80	55.9
Not prepared	18	8.7	12	8.4
Total	208	100	143	100

Q12: How well prepared do you feel to: develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	80	38.5	48	33.6
Somewhat prepared	113	54.3	85	59.4
Not prepared	15	7.2	10	7.0
Total	208	100	143	100

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q13: How well prepared do you feel to: develop close friendships with other students?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	135	64.9	64	44.8
Somewhat prepared	67	32.2	66	46.2
Not prepared	6	2.9	13	9.1
Total	208	100	143	100

Q14: How well prepared do you feel to: utilize campus services available to students?	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Completely prepared	97	46.6	48	33.8
Somewhat prepared	104	50.0	79	55.6
Not prepared	7	3.4	15	10.6
Total	208	100	142	100

Q15: Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Use the vocabulary accurately.	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Above average	89	42.8	60	42.0
Average	116	55.8	81	56.6
Below average	3	1.4	2	1.4
Total	208	100	143	100

FIGs/FYE Post Survey Fall 2006 Descriptive Statistics

Q16: Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Ask relevant questions	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Above average	84	40.4	60	42.0
Average	119	57.2	79	55.2
Below average	5	2.4	4	2.8
Total	208	100	143	100

Q17: Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: State a point of view I can support	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%	N	%
Above average	104	50.0	68	47.6
Average	101	48.6	69	48.3
Below average	3	1.4	4	2.8
Total	208	100	143	100

Q18: Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Talk about the main ideas or themes of the course	FIGs		FYE	
	N	%		
Above average	123	60.3	71	50.0
Average	79	38.7	66	46.5
Below average	2	1.0	4	2.8
Total	204	100	142	100