

Excerpts from Some of the Literature on Programs for First Year Students

There is a fair amount of literature about approaches to helping students adjust to university life and university-level study. This literature addresses the needs and perceptions of first year students and what helps them succeed. Studies on the outcomes of various programs geared to first year students also exist. Following are some excerpts from the literature with an emphasis on elements that will be part of the SJSU MUSE Seminar Program.

The Benefits of Attention to Helping Students Adjust to University Life from Their First Day on Campus

From: Bette LaSere Erickson and Diane Weltner Strommer, *Teaching College Freshman*, Jossey-Bass (1991):

Studies have shown that the first six weeks of the freshman year is the "critical determinant of ultimate graduation." [page 44]

From: Robert Leamson, *Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students*, Stylus Publishing, 1999:

"After stating that new college students are generally not ready for learning at the college level, [Weingartner] continues:"

Accordingly, a signal, and not merely a symbolic one, must be given to the newly arrived, to the effect that most of them will encounter a significant break between the ways of the educational phase recently concluded and those of the educational venture now beginning. First-year student seminars are an effective method for meeting this goal and can initiate students into higher education by being a concentrated *example* of it - focused study of a quite specific topic in a small class, working in seminar, that is participatory in fashion, under the supervision of an experienced faculty member. This course would not be *about* thinking and learning, discussion and writing, but would *consist* of thinking, learning, discussing, and writing, in circumstances in which feedback would be well-nigh continuous. One must not be deluded into the belief that writing proficiency or critical thinking, for example, might be 'acquired' in such a seminar for all future purposes. But the value of insisting, at the outset, on intensive practice of these capacities not only has immediate pedagogic value, but the kind of exemplary power that makes it an appropriate introduction to things to come, to the way of higher education. [Rudolph H. Weingartner, *Undergraduate Education: Goals and Means*, Macmillan, 1992.]

The Benefits of a Seminar with a Low SFR and an Active Learning Approach

From: M. Lee Upcraft and John N. Gardner, "A Comprehensive Approach to Enhancing Freshman Success" in *The Freshman Year Experience*, Jossey-Bass, 1989:

- "The key to freshman success is involvement (Astin, 1985). To succeed, freshmen must be committed to involving themselves in the intellectual and extracurricular life of the campus. To help them succeed, institutions must provide enriched opportunities for such involvement." [page 4]
- "Faculty involvement is vital to freshman success." [page 5]
- There is "conclusive evidence ... that the freshman seminar is a very powerful way of enhancing freshman success." [page 11]

From: Paul P. Fidler and Mary Stuart Hunter, "How Seminars Enhance Student Success," in *The Freshman Year Experience*, Jossey-Bass, 1989:

"These findings lend support to the conclusion that freshman seminars are associated with improved freshman academic performance. There is some evidence to suggest that faculty-student relationships, communication skills, and study habits may also be positively affected." [page 224]

From: Robert Leamnsnson, *Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students*, Stylus Publishing, 1999:

"There will be no real learning unless students themselves deal verbally with the content, in class and outside, both in speech and in writing." [page 74]

From: Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, sponsored by the National Institute of Education, *Involvement In Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, 1984:

"The fact that more learning occurs when students are actively engaged in the learning process has extensive implications for each faculty member and administrator in every institution. The most important implications of this fact can be stated in two fundamental principles of educational excellence everywhere:

1. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
2. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of taht policy or practice to increase student involvement in learning." [page 19]

The Benefits of Seminars with a Few Topics in Depth About Which the Professor is Passionate

From: Robert Leamnsnson, *Thinking About Teaching and Learning: Developing Habits of Learning with First Year College and University Students*, Stylus Publishing, 1999:

"Freshmen will start out being more interested in you than in the subject matter. People's natural interest in other people can be a powerful tool for teachers and that fact can be put to good use. Think of the many kids who developed an interest, in baseball or the piano, because a parent clearly exhibited such an interest. Kids don't play sports spontaneously or because they are told to. It was some valued person's interest that was contagious and got things started. One of the surest ways for a student to develop interest is to 'catch it' from a beloved teacher. ... most freshmen need something like a breakthrough to discover the kind of satisfaction that comes with intellectual activity. An admired teacher with a contagious love of his subject (and a sincere love of students) can be a more effective cause of such a breakthrough" [pages 75, 77]