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2002

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### Recommended Citation

Pierard, Cindy and Kathryn A. Graves. "The Greatest Problem with Which the Library is Confronted: A Survey of Academic Library Outreach to the Freshman Course." *Making the Grade: Academic Libraries and Student Success* (2002).

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# The Greatest Problem with Which the Library Is Confronted: A Survey of Academic Library Outreach to the Freshman Course

Cindy Pierard and Kathryn Graves

## Introduction

The Freshman Year Experience movement has created an excellent opportunity for academic library outreach. Its values, which include collaboration among various campus units charged with supporting student success and a focus on student mastery of key academic skills, correspond well with the objective of many college and university libraries: to become a more central part of the institution's educational mission. This chapter provides a discussion of academic library outreach to one of the movement's most significant components, the freshman course. The aim is to provide an overview of both the historical development of and contemporary trends in postsecondary freshman programming and corresponding library outreach efforts. A final section explores research findings related to student outcomes.

## Origins and Evolution of the Freshman Course Concept

It is generally recognized that the most pressing problem of higher education in America today is the care of the underclassman, the Freshman, and the sophomores...[this care] naturally divides itself into two elements, training in personal habits and training in scholarship....Whatever the system of handling Freshmen, there should be an evident purpose behind it, and this purpose should be a moral one (Jordan 1910, 442).

What are the problems associated with retaining today's college freshmen? The 1999–2000 report of the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) reported that more than half of the students who leave an institution do so during their freshman year. The picture is especially grim for minority students, with some studies finding the departure rate for black and Hispanic students to be approximately twice the rate for white students (Tinto 1993; CSRDE 2000).

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*The authors would like to extend their appreciation to Kathryn Nemeth Tuttle, director, Freshman-Sophomore Advising Center at the University of Kansas, who graciously shared her knowledge of the history of American higher education and whose input strengthened several sections of this chapter.*

Because the first year of college is a particularly critical time for attrition, colleges and universities have implemented a variety of programs designed to help new students with this transition. Included among those programs are the development of incentives for faculty who work with freshmen, an enhanced and expanded model of precollege orientation, reinforcement of tutoring and study skills workshops, programs that address the role of student advising, and programs designed for specific freshman populations such as minority, commuter, international, and nontraditional students. One of the most persistent programmatic responses has been the development of a special class designed specifically for freshmen, often called the freshman seminar or freshman orientation course (Gardner, Decker, and McNairy 1986).

Although the vast majority of freshman orientation courses were developed after 1980, it should be noted that various forms of “the freshman course” have long been a part of American higher education. One of the first formal orientation programs was offered by Boston University more than one hundred years ago (1888) with emphases on helping students adapt to the physical environment, social structure, and academic requirements and expectations of the institution. In 1900, Oberlin College initiated the first required noncredit freshman orientation course in the country, and in 1911, Reed College offered the first for-credit course, which covered topics such as the purpose of the college, student honesty, intercollegiate athletics, and college religion (Gordon 1989).

Growth in freshman programming spread rapidly in the first two decades of the twentieth century and particularly in the years following World War I as a reaction to the steady democratization of universities and the rise of the student personnel movement. Students from diverse social and academic backgrounds were arriving on college campuses with different goals for their education, including social and vocational goals that they held to be as important as, if not more important than, traditional intellectual values. American universities began to seek some means of addressing the difference between the more traditional German model of the research university, with its emphasis on intellectual rigor and specialized graduate study, and the aspirations—many of them decidedly nonintellectual—of this new, more diverse student body. One significant response was to develop an array of student personnel services covering functions such as athletics, discipline, educational testing, financial aid, mental and physical health, and vocational guidance. The aim was to better integrate the curricular and extracurricular aspects of student life and to help ensure that both the intellectual and nonintellectual needs of students were met. A direct outcome of this concern with developing “the whole student” was considerable expansion of the freshman course concept:

For general guidance, the device most often resorted to was some form of orientation course or program. In a number of cases, this assumed the definite form of a “Freshman Week,” an introductory

period of from one to seven days preceding the regular work of the term and devoted to the task of adjusting the entering student to his new environment. In contrast to this, the general orientation course, while attacking much the same problem, extended the time over a longer period varying from two weeks to a full college year.... Courses of this type usually tried to teach freshmen how to use the library, how to study, what the purposes and aims of the college were, and how to participate in campus activities (Brubacher and Rudy 1997, 343).

In 1916, only six colleges had implemented for-credit orientation courses. A decade later, in 1926, this number jumped to eighty-two schools, including Princeton, Columbia, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Johns Hopkins, Indiana, Missouri, and Stanford (Gordon 1989). A review of the literature of this period reflects the growth of the freshman orientation movement. In the bibliography for their comprehensive monograph, *The Construction of Orientation Courses for College Freshmen*, Fitts and Swift (1928) referenced 116 articles published between 1910 and 1927 concerning the unique needs of college freshmen and the development of effective orientation programs.

In the ensuing five decades, a variety of societal forces influenced higher education, shifting the emphasis on the importance of freshman orientation. For example, the enrollment boom following World War II (encouraged by the G.I. Bill of 1944) and later expansions in the 1970s promoted an increase in orientation efforts as university administrators struggled to provide adequate housing and to address the concerns of a more heterogeneous student body. Other periods such as the Great Depression and the Vietnam era stifled efforts as administrative personnel found themselves either financially exhausted or distracted by greater forces of social upheaval (Levine 1978).

The steady growth and diversification of the student body has been an undeniable force in the development of twentieth-century American higher education. In his recent study of college students, Arthur Levine noted that “between 1900, when 4 percent of all eighteen-year-olds attended college, and 1997, when 65 percent of all high school graduates continued to some form of post-secondary education, the nation moved from what has been characterized as elite to mass to universal higher education” (Levine 1998, 145). This dramatic shift has presented considerable challenges to colleges and universities. Some critics have charged that the response has been slow and uneven.

In 1993, the Wingspread Group, a foundation-sponsored assembly of some sixteen prominent educators and policymakers, issued a damning report entitled *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*. The report was sharply critical of the state of American higher education, finding that colleges and universities handed out credentials rather than focusing on actual student learning and that the pursuit of research money

had led many institutions too far from an emphasis on excellence in teaching. Colleges and universities were doing a poor job of articulating their expectations and preparing students to meet high standards: “Like the rest of American education, the nation’s colleges and universities appear to live by an unconscious educational rule of thumb that their function is to weed out, not to cultivate, students for whom they have accepted responsibility” (Wingspread Group 1993, 1).

These calls for accountability, coupled with a need for increased tuition dollars, caused many postsecondary institutions to take a hard look at both the broader research on student persistence and more specific studies of successful institutional responses to attrition. Since the mid-1970s, Vincent Tinto and others have extensively researched student persistence in various types of academic institutions. Tinto’s model of student retention focuses on the integration of the individual student within his or her institutional environment, both socially and academically. Higher persistence rates are related to positive involvement with faculty and students, outside the classroom as well as within. Involvement is particularly essential during the freshman year when attrition rates are high because of factors such as lack of academic preparation, perceived lack of curricular relevance, financial pressures, transitional difficulties that may result in feelings of social isolation, and uncertainty about academic and career goals.

Tinto’s research has encouraged colleges and universities to develop programs such as freshman seminars, mentoring partnerships, and shared learning communities. It has also resulted in numerous studies undertaken by other researchers (e.g., Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson 1997; Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler 1995; Levitz, Noel, and Richter 1999; Pascarella and Terenzini 1983; Stage 1989) whose work supports and reinforces Tinto’s basic tenet: the greater the students’ integration into the campus environment, the greater the chance that they will persist until graduation. Considering the amount of academic attention and research devoted to student persistence, it is perhaps not surprising that approximately 70 percent of American colleges and universities recently reported that they have developed some type of freshman seminar or first-year course. Although these may vary in design and scope, the overwhelming majority of them (about 70%) “are designed to provide students with essential strategies and information to enhance the likelihood of their retention and academic/social success” (National Resource Center 2000). Some features of these courses and other current trends in programming for first-year students are discussed in a later section of this chapter.

### **“Strange Books, Strange People, Strange Tools”: The Origins of Library Outreach to Freshman Seminar Programs**

It is my belief that every college should offer and require some kind of training in the use of the library. I also believe that this

training should begin with the freshman year.... I have found that the freshmen provide the greatest problem with which the library is confronted (English 1926, 779).

Many of the early freshman programs described in the previous section included the use of the library as a key skill to be taught. For example, one of the five aims of Amherst's President Alexander Meiklejohn in his conceived orientation course in 1914 was "to teach Freshmen to use the library, read newspapers and magazines, make reports and carry on discussions of live topics and issues.... Teach them to think, if possible" (Fitts and Swift 1928, 159). Soon thereafter, Brown University introduced a required freshman course of Orientation Lectures, in which one of the objectives was "to describe the libraries, laboratories, and the other facilities for study" (160).

Despite the inclusion of library skills as a key objective, the execution of actual library instruction for first-year courses was rather uneven. In their 1928 study concerning the development of freshman orientation courses, Fitts and Swift found that only ten of the forty-two institutions surveyed (23.8%) offered a library instruction component in their orientation courses. In comparison, 71.4 percent included how-to-study methods, 40.5 percent presented information on college life and activities, and 26.2 percent addressed vocational guidance.

Before World War I, most orientation courses focused on morality, college life in general, and information on the specific academic institution. Much of the early library work with freshmen was directed toward simple orientation: "An acquaintance with the library at the start should overcome the initial lack of assurance and the frightened and scared hesitancy about unfamiliar things—strange rooms, strange books, strange people, strange tools" (Drury 1928, 1024).

In the mid- to late 1920s, librarians indicated growing concern at students' apparent lack of library skills and librarians' ability to effectively teach all that was needed. In 1926, Ada Jeanette English, librarian at the New Jersey College for Women, decided "to find out, if possible, how other college librarians felt about the freshman problem and what was being done toward training students in the logical use of the library" (780). Her question apparently resonated with many librarians: She enjoyed an 88 percent response rate to the 116 questionnaires she sent to colleagues. Although the majority (57%) did not find freshmen to be more of a problem than any other students, those who did cited student unfamiliarity with libraries as the foremost problem. Respondents went on to note that they did not feel that their incoming students received adequate preparation in library skills at the secondary level, and many contended that the only way to resolve the situation was to institute a course on library skills: "A library course in the college curriculum ... develops better research students and sends out graduates equipped with familiarity in the use of books and libraries, who for

this reason will be more valuable as teachers or workers in any field” (782). Deterrents to providing the necessary level of instruction will resonate with many contemporary readers: too few staff to develop and teach the courses, too little space, and insufficient funding from university administrators.

The problems voiced by English’s survey respondents resurfaced throughout the next few decades and included despair over how to teach library skills effectively in a single hour (Eldridge 1928) and concern for how best to work with students who found library instruction irrelevant and unnecessary (Young 1937). Librarians often found the instruction window provided to them by traditional freshman seminar courses to be inadequate and ill timed: “students are still too preoccupied with becoming acquainted with their instructors and textbooks and making general adjustments to college life” (Hartz 1964, 78). In many cases, librarians argued that no real introduction of skills could be approached until students arrived at a more teachable moment when the skills were actually called for by an assignment, such as in introductory composition courses.

Librarians developed various responses to these challenges. Whereas some continued to provide a brief library orientation tour and/or lecture during Freshman Orientation Week or within the context of a general freshman orientation course, others decided to focus their first-year outreach efforts on introductory subject courses such as composition or English I. Yet another development in the early to mid-twentieth century was the establishment of credit and noncredit courses on library skills. Then, as now, there was ongoing debate on whether library instruction courses should be credit or noncredit and required or elective: “If it is required of all freshmen, there is likely to be much disturbance in the reading rooms, and if not required, it is often not elected by the students who need it most” (Little 1936, 19).

One trend surfacing in the 1930s was the move to assess student library skills more formally and to redirect instruction to meet those needs. Margaret Barkley, librarian at Towson State Teachers College (Maryland), administered a four-part preliminary test to incoming freshmen that measured their knowledge in the general use of books and libraries, locating information, arranging lists, and identifying sources (1939). Upon reviewing the test results, she would provide “directional arrows” to freshmen to help acclimate them to library services and resources. Similarly, librarians at the Teachers College of Kansas City began their nine-session orientation with a test of basic library skills. Accompanying the text, *The Library Key*, was “instruction in classification, shelf arrangement, parts of a book, alphabetizing, the catalogue, reference books, magazine indexes, abbreviations, and bibliography, followed by a final skills assessment” (Meyering and Pierson 1939, 448). The tests offered “a convenient, effective method of determining in which areas a class needs specific instruction, indicating what the results of definite training are, and most important of all, introducing the individual to the resources of his library” (449).

In addition to conducting formal skills assessments, librarians continued to demonstrate an interest in developing other forms of evaluation for their outreach efforts: “although wisely-planned instruction in the use of books and the library might be very useful and stimulating to a great many students, a poorly advised program might have the unfortunate result of not only discouraging but also irritating and repulsing the ordinary student who might otherwise have drifted into a passable use of the library if he had not been forcefully subjected to an unjustifiable annoyance” (James 1941, 404).

The enrollment boom following World War II challenged librarians, in part because of difficulties in working with larger classes, but also because of a lack of agreement as to what instruction should be provided or whether instruction was even useful. Despite these broader trends, the literature attests to a variety of freshman library programs (Erickson 1949; Merritt 1956; Marteena 1956). The 1960s saw a renewed interest in instruction, with librarians reaching out to teaching faculty and seeking to develop partnerships for improved library instruction programs that moved beyond the freshman tour and extended through the junior and senior years (Hartz 1964). Of particular interest to librarians in the 1950s and onward was the use of technologies such as transparencies, slides and films, closed-circuit television, and computer-assisted instruction as a means of working with larger classes (McCoy 1962; Salony 1995).

During the period of educational reform in the 1970s, librarians gained a stronger foothold as educators in the use of the library and its resources, which has carried through to the present. Although academic librarians had historically played a limited role in orientation and instruction for students, members of the profession now advocated a stronger educational role, moving them beyond being “keepers of the books” to actively demonstrating how those books (and other tools such as catalogs, indexes, and bibliographies) could be used in support of classroom instruction.

Other, more recent developments within the field of library instruction include a shift away from the teaching of particular resources to concept-based instruction. Many librarians have embraced these pedagogical shifts and have altered their approach to all levels of instruction accordingly. Thus, even the one-shot programs that continue to dominate library instruction at the postsecondary level have been infused with an emphasis on teaching concepts as well as specific resources, incorporating active learning techniques and using individual instruction sessions as foundations for the greater goal of fostering lifelong learning among students. More direct evidence of this emphasis may be found in the section discussing current trends in library outreach to freshman programs.

### **Of FIGS and Forums: Trends in Programming for First-year Students**

Contemporary freshman courses may be divided into three general areas: those that are primarily orientation based; those that have a stronger academic



focus or content; and those that attempt a mixture of both. Although content areas may overlap, orientation courses tend to focus on basic adjustment and academic skills such as learning about student government or developing test-taking skills. In contrast, seminar-type courses tend to be topically driven, with a greater emphasis on intellectual rigor (Gordon 1989). However, a growing number of first-year courses attempt to cover both areas and the terms “freshman seminar” or “freshman orientation” are often used interchangeably. Courses may be elective or required and may carry different credits. Some are offered prior to the beginning of the first year as “bridge” programs that provide earlier opportunities for adjustment. In addition to formal classes, many colleges and universities have developed extracurricular programs such as living–learning halls or peer mentoring programs in an effort to help first-year students develop learning communities that foster both social and academic development.

Orientation courses are found at a large variety of two-year and four-year colleges and universities. Examples include the Freshman Year Experience: Learning Strategies for College Students at the University of Missouri; CAS 002 at the University of Pittsburgh; University 100 at California State University, Long Beach; College 101 at Southampton College; UNV 101 at Northern Kentucky University; GENS 101V—Freshman Seminar at Montana State University; and the Becoming a Master Student program, which is widely taught at community colleges and four-year state colleges. As mentioned above, these classes focus on building social and academic skills such as library use, test-taking, time management, health awareness, career planning, and academic advising. They tend to be discussion oriented and may be taught by graduate students, academic advisors, student affairs personnel, or faculty.

Freshman seminars or symposia are offered at many liberal arts colleges such as Amherst College, Carleton College, Earlham College, Lawrence University, Southwestern University, and Williams College, and models are also in place at Harvard University and the University of California at Berkeley. These seminars are often based on a broad theme, such as American Culture: Tradition and Trends (Southwestern) and Evolution and Intellectual Revolution (Amherst), or they propose a general cross-disciplinary study of canonical and counter-canonical thought as with Freshman Studies I-II (Lawrence). Freshman seminar courses frequently include explorations of the idea of the modern university/college and core liberal arts values such as critical inquiry, careful reading, and writing. The cultivation of close working relationships between students and faculty members is also a strong theme. For example, Harvard University’s Freshman Seminar brings together members of the faculty to work in partnership with first-year students to explore mutual research interests in such diverse courses as Dress and Identity in Britain, France, and the United States: 1750–1930; The Workplace: The Roles of Business, Labor, and Government; and The Hindu Temple.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of a “blended” freshman course is the University 101 program at the University of South Carolina (USC). The course was initiated as a response to both the student riots of the 1960s and the accompanying period of declining enrollments and reduced budgets. It was designed to focus on the needs of individual students, particularly previously neglected groups, such as first-generation, adult, and minority students, to help them succeed in adjusting academically and socially to college life. In 1986, USC expanded its research base by establishing the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. The center, which both draws from and serves as a research arm for University 101, has positioned itself as the nation’s foremost resource on freshman retention.

University 101 is an elective course available to all freshmen and first-year transfer students for three credits and a letter grade. Some colleges such as Engineering and Business Administration require the course; probationary students must also take University 101. In the 1997–1998 school year, faculty taught 116 sections, which enrolled approximately 80 percent of the freshmen. In addition to regular “skills” sections, the course also includes intensive reading and writing components. A newer development is to link University 101 student sections to students pursuing a particular major or academic interest as a means of strengthening peer support and/or providing a more focused point of application for the more general study skills components. These special sections have included students in the academic programs of business, education, and history and have also targeted evening students, honors students, and international students. This “linking” component is beginning to show up in other traditional orientation courses as well (George Mason University, University of Hawaii). Finally, it is noteworthy that the goals of University 101, and the goals of an increasing number of those programs modeled on it, are directed not only at entering students but also at faculty development. Thus, these programs include mandatory training and support for all faculty and instructional staff participants.

In addition to the freshman course, a number of innovations in programming have attempted to build on and enrich the classroom experience. One of the more recent developments is the emergence of freshman interest groups (FIGs). The common goal of FIG programs is to encourage the development of student learning communities. This goal is generally achieved by co-enrolling students in common classes such as core English or math classes or introductions to a particular discipline, or by requiring some other type of common group experience through either a special group academic seminar or common residence hall assignment (Tinto and Goodsell 1993; Student success story 1996). FIG programs have been implemented at a wide range of institutions, from large state universities such as the Universities of Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Montana, and Missouri to smaller two- and four-year colleges such as Seattle Central and LaGuardia Community Colleges.

Increasingly, programs for first-year students are taking advantage of new technologies. A particularly strong example is found in the University of Washington's UWired program, which is described as "a model project for integrating electronic communication and information navigation skills into instruction and learning on campus" (University of Washington n.d.). The UWired program, which began in 1984, has included various methods of incorporating technology and teaching, including sponsorship of a year-long technology seminar for first-year students, loans of laptop computers to participating students, and intensive instruction in library and computing skills with direct academic application. UWired has evolved to work with numerous special groups on campus such as FIGs, student athletes, the campus writing program, and even state and regional groups.

Other innovative programs target specific subgroups of first-year students such as honors students, adult students, minorities, commuters, students with disabilities, and students identified as being academically at-risk. Fordham University's Excel program offers special sections of its undergraduate core curriculum classes to new and continuing adult students. The sections focus on those teaching methods that are designed to facilitate adult student learning—such as the incorporation of life experience—and most classes are offered in the evenings. Other programs for adult students emphasize flexible scheduling, weekend seminars or other programs that promote student interaction, and targeted orientation sessions (Tinto 1993). The Running Start program at Northern Kentucky University (NKU) is designed for students with basic skill deficiencies. The summer bridge program consists of a six-credit-hour package focusing on writing or math skills and a general studies class, SOC 100, all of which are supplemented by tutoring support. Students in Running Start are co-enrolled in sections of NKU's freshman orientation course, UNV 100, in the fall. The STEP program at Vincennes University provides course instruction, advising, mentoring, tutoring, and monitored study for cohort groups of students with learning disabilities. The Mississippi Alliance for Minority Participation works to increase the number of minority students who enter one of the state's eight public universities in math, science, or engineering. The program begins with a summer bridge component that gives incoming students an opportunity to take an elective and a lab course related to their interest and to meet other students before the start of the academic year. In the fall, students are assigned a peer mentor (generally, a junior or a senior) and a study group. They also have the chance to get hands-on experience by assisting in a faculty research project. Alliance programs may be found in other regions, such as the Southern Rocky Mountain or Buffalo Area SUNY Region Alliance, and at individual institutions such as the University of Virginia, the University of Texas, and Georgia Tech.

Regardless of the institutional type or the specific group of students being targeted, successful programs for first-year students tend to share certain

features: the clear introduction of institutional expectations and subsequent programs that emphasize sources of support to meet those expectations; a genuine concern for not only retaining but also educating students; and a good understanding of the complex interplay of social and academic factors in student development (Tinto 1993).

### **Current Patterns in Academic Library Involvement with Freshman Courses**

Although libraries have long been a part of freshman orientation programs, there have been increased opportunities for outreach as the freshman-year experience movement has matured during the past decade. The strengthening and expansion of library instruction within the field of librarianship has also had a significant impact on how librarians approach orientation and instruction for first-year students.

In terms of both orientation courses and academic seminars, the typical pattern of library involvement takes two general forms that have not changed markedly over time: the provision of a library orientation tour or other general instruction session(s), and the administration of some type of exercise, assignment, or research paper designed to make use of library resources.

USCs University 101 mandates a general library orientation tour, as well as several informational chapters and a follow-up exercise on the library in the course textbook, *Transitions*. The focus extends beyond mastering the use of core library resources into evaluating how well the information found benefits the student's paper or class presentation (Gardner, Decker, and McNairy 1986). University 101 is also somewhat unique in that all faculty who teach the course take part in a mandatory four-day instructor training program, which stresses innovative teaching techniques, an orientation to the academic and social needs of first-year students, and sessions with instructional support staff from the library as well as other campus units. Faculty are encouraged to supplement the basic library orientation program by adding library research components to other writing or research tasks they develop for their students.

There are several other variations on the form of library outreach to freshman orientation courses. The library components for the University of Kansas's PRE101—Orientation Seminar require that students first complete an online tutorial, which introduces library services and resources and reinforces key concepts through an interactive quiz. Students then come to the library for hands-on sessions involving key electronic resources such as the online catalog and several periodical databases. Both the tutorial and an assignment that accompanies the hands-on session are graded, and students' scores are factored into their overall course grade. Questions about the library are also incorporated into midterm and final exams. The month-long Freshman Summer Institute incorporates additional library components: In addition to the orientation provided through PRE101, students enroll in one of several elective courses (introductions to anthropology, history,

English composition, environmental studies, etc.), which typically include a course-related research project for which library staff provide instruction.

In their 1995 article, Ury and King reported that library staff at Northwest Missouri State University (NMSU) provide a self-paced online library guide/follow-up quiz and a library treasure hunt to new freshmen. In addition, library staff members train student peer advisors to conduct walking tours during the orientation week prior to the fall semester. All components are designed with an informational focus that complements the introductory library research skills unit taught as part of NMSU's English composition courses. Other models for library integration into general orientation courses are found in the sidebar pieces from librarians at Wichita State University and the University of Toledo.

Models for the integration of library skills into freshman seminar courses are provided by library staff at Southwestern University and the University of the Pacific (Parks and Hendrix 1996; Fenske and Clark 1995). Librarians at Southwestern developed library assignments and conducted instructional sessions designed to build upon the texts and themes covered in sections of the Freshman Symposium. For example, a recent assignment had students read one book from a library-developed list having to do with the course's theme, American Culture: Unity and Diversity; find a book review and biographical information on the book's author; and use the information to prepare an oral report and paper for their symposium section (Parks and Hendrix 1996). Because the symposium theme changes each year, library staff members make concerted efforts to bolster their collections in theme areas and develop comprehensive reading lists for the course.

At the University of the Pacific, students participate in a two-semester Mentor Seminar program. The second semester of this program has students investigating societal dilemmas such as global environmental issues, AIDS, cultural diversity, and drug legalization. Students are assigned to research teams covering one of the aforementioned topics and are charged to write a research-based policy paper with an accompanying bibliography on that issue. Library staff members offer a series of workshops focusing on each of the topics in which general research tools (the online catalog, indexes, reference books, etc.) are introduced in a setting that blends demonstration and hands-on practice. Students' library skills are also pre- and posttested to help staff evaluate students' skills and determine what instruction areas need to be reinforced (Fenske and Clark 1995).

In addition to their work with formal courses, it should be noted that librarians are increasingly involved with some of the broader aspects of developing learning communities for first-year students. A spring 1998 discussion on BI-L (Bibliographic Instruction Listserv) elicited postings from librarians in South Carolina, Michigan, Indiana, and Hawaii who reported playing significant roles in helping their institutions plan and assess learning objectives for freshmen and who described freshman programs that included

everything from the sponsorship of one-on-one research tutorial sessions in residence halls to the development of linked courses addressing the interplay of information and scholarship.

Just as librarians are responding to broader trends in freshman programming, their outreach efforts also reflect trends in teaching techniques and technologies. Many of the pedagogical focal points of library instruction in the past decade—concept-based instruction, active learning, critical thinking, information literacy, etc.—are evident in contemporary freshman outreach programs. Emily Werrell of Northern Kentucky University (NKU) has written about her staff's involvement with the creation of a variety of library assignments that encourage collaborative learning, selection and evaluation of sources, and some form of final presentation. Care is taken to craft assignments that relate to the issues that students are covering in NKU's UNV 101 course, such as HIV, alcohol and drug addiction, and diversity. Librarians also conduct workshops for UNV 101 instructors in which the assignments and the educational goals behind them are discussed (Werrell 1996). At California State University-San Bernadino, library staff developed an instruction module that features the use of active learning techniques such as librarian-led group discussions and assignments that involve teamwork (Dabbour 1997).

Contemporary library instruction has also been powerfully influenced by technology, as both a teaching tool and a teaching subject. Librarians at California State University-Long Beach employed a quick and upbeat "library infomercial" as a means of motivating students to feel more comfortable using library resources and asking questions—something that is particularly important given the size of their University 100 program (2,000+ students). University of Washington library staff members were key participants in the innovative UWired program, which targets freshmen (and other groups) and integrates teaching, learning, and technology in a number of creative ways. A growing number of librarians at institutions such as Bowling Green State University, California Polytechnic State University, Cornell University, North Carolina State University, and Purdue University have developed online tours and tutorials covering everything from orientation skills to research strategies. Although many of these online tutorials are not directed specifically at first-year students, they emphasize the types of basic research skills typically covered in library instruction for freshman and sophomore students and offer innovations such as randomized questions, automatic feedback, and hyperlinks for quick and easy review of key points. In some cases, such as the *Information Literacy Skills Workbook* used by the University of Wisconsin at Parkside, there is a direct link to a freshman course (Scholz-Crane 1997). Occasionally, such as in the case of the Getting Published project (part of one module of a first-year course at California State University, San Marcos), a well-developed, technology-based program may prove counter-productive within the course framework. Getting Published was discontin-

ued because of the complexity of the subject matter, the students' lack of computer skills, and the determination that, for this purpose and audience, an interactive lecture and exercises were more successful teaching tools than the Web-based program (Sonntag 1999). However, technology will likely continue to serve as a tool for reaching out to large groups of new students who are increasingly computer literate.

### **Does It Make Any Difference? A Word about Outcomes**

Ultimately the success of our actions on behalf of student learning and retention depends upon the daily actions of all members of the institution, not on the sporadic efforts of a few officially designated members of a retention committee. Properly understood, institutional commitment is the commitment on the part of each and every member of the institution for the welfare, the social and intellectual growth, of all members of the institution (Tinto 1993, 212).

The logical question to follow this discussion of freshman retention programs and the library's role within them is, what works? Or, from the perspective of those who might view such courses as costly experiments in hand-holding, why bother? Tinto argues that there is "no single path to enhanced student retention, nor promises that all admitted students can be retained" (1993, 212). If this is the case, where is the evidence to support the assertion that freshman courses—and library involvement in such courses—makes any difference?

Since 1980, a number of studies (Upcraft, Finney, and Garland 1984; Chapman and Reed 1987; Fidler and Hunter 1989; Hoff 1996; Henschied 1999) have demonstrated that freshman orientation courses enjoy a positive relationship with student persistence and strengthened academic performance. Wilkie and Kuckuck (1989) tracked student participants in Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Freshman Seminar who were characterized as high risk. The authors found that, even in their junior year, student participants' grades were significantly higher, they reported increased use of university resources such as writing services and libraries, and their overall retention rate was 13 percent higher than their counterparts who did not participate in the course. Similarly, Shanley and Witten's 1990 study of University 101 at the University of South Carolina found that over the fifteen-year time span of their study, students who participated in the class had higher sophomore return rates and graduation rates despite the fact that many of these students "were less prepared academically and had a larger proportion of high risk undeclared and minority students than their nonparticipant counterparts" (345). Fidler and Hunter (1989) found that freshman seminar courses can be effective in improving the skills of all types of students, from those with the strongest academic skills to those in need of the most academic assistance.

Ketkar and Bennett (1989) found that freshman courses are cost-effective, generating revenue through increased student retention, which more than covers the cost of the course.

Other studies at schools such as Central Missouri State University, Elmhurst College, and the University of Maine have explored and recorded positive outcomes for faculty teaching styles, students' self-perception of abilities, and the behavior of students who are undecided about their majors (Barefoot 1993). In fact, Cuseo notes that "arguably, there may be more empirical research supporting the value of the freshman orientation seminar than for any other single course offered in higher education, simply because traditional courses have never had to document their value empirically" (1991, 3).

It may seem more difficult to link a discrete freshman library experience to long-term student success. However, one general outcome has an important bearing in this regard: the tendency of students who have had a positive introduction to libraries and other campus instructional support units to report higher use of those services throughout their four years (Wilkie and Kuckuck 1989; numerous institutional studies as reported in Fidler and Hunter 1989). It has been well documented by Constance Mellon (1986) and others that students are unlikely to seek help from professors, teaching assistants, or library staff—even when they realize they need it. Levitz and Noel (1989, 74) note that "if we wait for students to come to us, many will fall through the cracks." Other findings touch on outcomes related to everything from the importance of library experiences in promoting the critical thinking skills of first-generation college students (Pascarella 1995) to the impressions of the students themselves. For example, short-term evaluations of the library component for the University of Kansas's Freshman Summer Institute indicated that it was, in many students' estimates, one of the most important aspects of the program. As librarians become more actively involved in projects such as learning communities, there will be additional opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of a more integrated approach to the development of information literacy skills among first-year students. Clearly, there is a need for more research into the effectiveness of library instruction programs and it will become increasingly important for librarians to engage in the assessment of their instructional outreach both during and beyond the first year (Lindauer 1998; Pausch and Popp 1999).

Clearly, libraries also stand to benefit from these outreach efforts. As stated in Gardner, Decker, and McNairy, "the Freshman Year Experience programs involve a partnership of faculty, academic administrators, students personnel administrators, library administrators, and faculty librarians. Such programs recognize the total development of freshmen: academic, vocational, personal, social" (1986, 159). The development of these critical partnerships allows academic library staff to become a more visible and critical part of their institution's work with promoting student success. And academic libraries—



like the larger institutions of which they are a part—stand to benefit from any studies that help us to understand our patrons (in this case, students) and their needs. Whether data are collected informally through general observations at the reference desk or formally through literature reviews and pretesting of students, librarians who are able to base services on a stronger understanding of their users are better equipped to ensure that their efforts are useful—and even integral—to fostering student success.

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### Authors' Note

*Information about many of the programs mentioned in this chapter was obtained from secondary sources and follow-up checks on the home pages of those institutions.*