

2000

Evaluation of the Freshman Seminar Program at Eastern Illinois University and Its Perceived Impact on First-Year Student Development

Jennifer E. Donahoe

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Donahoe, Jennifer E., "Evaluation of the Freshman Seminar Program at Eastern Illinois University and Its Perceived Impact on First-Year Student Development" (2000). *Masters Theses*. 1638.
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/1638>

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

**THESIS/FIELD EXPERIENCE PAPER
REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE**

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of request from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

5-19-00
Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University **NOT** allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

Author's Signature

Date

EVALUATION OF THE FRESHMAN SEMINAR PROGRAM AT EASTERN ILLINOIS

UNIVERSITY AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPACT ON FIRST-YEAR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT
(TITLE)

BY

JENNIFER E. DONAHOE

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2000
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

May 15, 2000
DATE

5-15-2000
DATE

Running Head: FRESHMAN SEMINAR

EVALUATION OF THE FRESHMAN SEMINAR PROGRAM
AT EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPACT ON FIRST-YEAR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

by

Jennifer E. Donahoe

Committee Members:

Dr. Charles Eberly
Dr. Barbara Powell
Dr. Kip McGilliard

ABSTRACT

This study examined the development of first-year college students at Eastern Illinois University in order to determine if student development was strengthened with the assistance of an eight-week Freshman Seminar course. Additionally, this study evaluated the fall semester, 1999 Freshman Seminar course in order to determine students' perceptions of the course and its content both at the start and completion of the course. The research population consisted of first-year students who were enrolled in Freshman Seminar (N = 303) and first-year students who were enrolled in an Introductory Speech Communications (SPC 1310) course, but not enrolled in Freshman Seminar (N = 215). This study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The locally-developed, quantitative First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) and qualitative Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS), along with the confirmation of a Freshman Focus Group, supported the following results: 1) Based on scores from the FYSDS, student development took place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college regardless of their enrollment in Freshman Seminar. 2) There was no significant difference in the initial perceived level of student development between Freshman Seminar students and Non-Freshman Seminar students on the FYSDS. 3) At the end of the first eight weeks of college, there was a higher level of student development reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar on the FYSDS than first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar. 4) Students who took Freshman Seminar reported the course to have positively assisted them in their initial transition to college. 5) First-year students who took Freshman Seminar recommended that other incoming first-year students take the course in subsequent years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for their time and dedication in helping me to develop this thesis. Dr. Charles Eberly, your support and guidance throughout this entire project is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your encouragement, insights, and resources. Dr. Barbara Powell, thank you for helping me with the statistical analyses of this research. Your knowledge of research statistics and SPSS were an asset in this project. Dr. Kip McGilliard, your experience in research and with the Freshman Seminar program helped to improve this thesis and provided me with new ideas for future research. Thank you for being a part of my committee.

Thank you to all of the Freshman Seminar instructors and Speech Communication 1310 instructors for allowing class time for me to collect data. Without your support, this project would not have been as successful.

I would additionally like to thank the Office of Academic Affairs and the Freshman Seminar Advisory Council for allowing me to make copies of my surveys and for providing me with information and documents of the Freshman Seminar course. Also, thank you to Mary Herrington-Perry for taking the time to review and edit my thesis draft and Mickey Carroll and the Office of Testing and Assessment for providing the necessary scan-tron sheets and for scanning my data.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction to the Research Problem.....	1
B. Purpose.....	4
C. Research Questions.....	5
D. Limitations of the Study.....	5
E. Terminology.....	7

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Academic Support.....	8
B. Campus Resources.....	10
C. Student Involvement.....	12
D. Autonomy.....	13
E. Social Support.....	14
F. Diversity.....	15
G. Financial Management.....	17
H. Student Satisfaction.....	18

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Purpose.....	20
B. General Method.....	20
C. Sample.....	21
1. Freshman Seminar Participants.....	21
2. Non-Freshman Seminar Participants.....	21
D. Instrumentation.....	21
1. First-Year Student Development Survey.....	21
2. Freshman Seminar Survey.....	23
E. Procedure.....	24
1. Survey Instructions.....	24
2. Pre-Course Survey Administration.....	25
3. Post-Course Survey Administration.....	26
4. Focus Group.....	26
F. Data Analysis.....	27
1. Coding Procedures.....	27
2. Quantitative Procedures.....	27
3. Qualitative Procedures.....	29

IV. RESULTS

A. Quantitative Results.....	34
Table 4.1.....	34
Table 4.2.....	35
Table 4.3.....	36
Table 4.4.....	37
Figures 1 – 4	38
B. Qualitative Results.....	39
Table 4.5.....	40
Table 4.6.....	41
Table 4.7.....	42
Table 4.8.....	44
Table 4.9.....	46
Table 4.10.....	48
Table 4.11.....	51
Table 4.12.....	54
Table 4.13.....	56
Table 4.14.....	57
Table 4.15.....	59
Table 4.16.....	61
Table 4.17.....	62

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Quantitative Discussion and Implications.....	64
B. Qualitative Discussion and Implications.....	66
C. Implications for Further Research.....	74

VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

VII. APPENDIX

A. Survey Instructions.....	83
B. First-Year Student Development Survey.....	84
C. Freshman Seminar Survey (Pre-Course).....	85
D. Freshman Seminar Survey (Post-Course).....	86
E. First-Year Student Development Survey Coding Form.....	87
F. Freshman Seminar Survey Coding Form (Pre-Course).....	88
G. Freshman Seminar Survey Coding Form (Post-Course).....	91
H. EIU 1004 Course Outline.....	94
I. EIU 1004 Course Evaluation.....	98

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Introduction to Research Problem

The transition from high school to college introduces many new experiences to the traditional first-year student. These experiences consist of both positive and negative changes including challenges and opportunities for growth, but also the loss of what is familiar and the fear of the unknown. The transition to college can promote independence, a coherent sense of identity, and new relationships. However, it is just as common for first-year students to experience difficulty with the separation from their family, increased interpersonal conflicts, and academic problems (Paul & Kelleher, 1995).

Both individual and environmental factors appear to affect college adjustment among first-year students. Individual factors include problem-solving skills, coping skills, and personality characteristics such as self-esteem, optimism, assertiveness, and emotional stability. Environmental factors include distance from home, social support, and exposure to stressful events. These different variables can be significant indicators in determining the degree to which students are able to adapt during their first year of college (Brooks & DuBois, 1995).

How an individual relates to the environmental aspects of the transition is important to their process of adaptation. An individual who views a negative environmental factor as a threat, may be more concerned with the possible negative outcomes and therefore try to deny or avoid that stressor. For example, a student who is

worried about losing high school friends may withdraw from new social activities in college and, as a result, have difficulty interacting socially with other students. However, if an individual views the negative environmental factor as a challenge, he or she may be more concerned with what might be gained and therefore apply coping skills to deal with the problem. For example, a student who is worried about the increased level of difficulty in college academics may study harder and therefore develop strong academic skills (Brooks & DuBois, 1995).

Needs assessment research has indicated that students reported academic concerns, time management, and career planning as their most important needs upon entering college (Carney & Barak, 1976; Archer & Lamnin, 1985; Evans, 1985; Barrow, Cox, Sepich & Spivak, 1989). Additional leading stressors among college students included peer acceptance and relationships (Archer & Lamnin, 1985; Evans, 1985; Barrow, Cox, Sepich & Spivak, 1989). A later study by Gallagher, Golin, and Kelleher (1992) found that students reported highest needs in developing self-confidence, overcoming procrastination, and increasing motivation. In 1993, Murphy and Archer (1996) replicated these studies to determine the types of stressors that today's college students encounter. They found similar results, with students reporting academic concerns, motivation, career decisions, and relationships as their highest stressors.

Russel and Petrie (1992) investigated the effects of various stressors on student development and found that there was an inverse relationship between the stressors and student success and retention. To understand how a course, such as a freshman seminar, would influence this effect, Petrie and Helmcamp (1998) conducted an evaluation of a study skills course. They found that after completing the course, students reported that

they had learned how to deal with their stressors through particular skills and indicated that they were experiencing less anxiety.

Freshman seminar programs have proven to be a useful intervention model for promoting college adjustment by providing realistic information about the transition to college and by creating a socially supportive environment. Although universities offer various sources of support to students during their first year of college, freshman seminar programs serve as an initial and direct source that is continuous throughout the beginning of the first year of college (Gordon & Grites, 1984).

The Freshman Seminar program at Eastern Illinois University, EIU 1004, is held during the initial eight weeks of a students' college experience and serves to assist the various needs of first-year students during their transition to the university. The course content is based on knowledge and information gathered from faculties of other universities where similar programs are offered (Appendix H). According to the EIU 1004 course proposal, the set goals of the Freshman Seminar course are:

- To improve retention of freshmen students.
- To increase students' understanding of the customs, expectations, systems, services, and methods of the university.
- To assist students in the transition from high school to college.
- To provide faculty with opportunities to develop a professional network with members of other departments.
- To provide faculty with opportunities to increase their knowledge about university systems and services.

The set objectives of the Freshman Seminar course are:

- To provide students enrolled in the course with a variety of experiences designed to develop their knowledge of specific services offered by the university, such as library services, tutorial services, counseling, etc.
- To provide students with an understanding of the terminology and protocols peculiar to higher education in general and the university in particular.
- To provide students with a clear understanding of the expectations of their instructors.
- To encourage students to develop organized social and academic commitments which provide challenge and satisfaction.
- To provide a mentor and a peer social group to offer support during the transition from high school and home to college.
- To help students learn effective methods of studying, organizing time, budgeting money, negotiating relationships, and maintaining personal health.
- To encourage understanding and acceptance among our students of diverse value systems, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences.
- To encourage students to feel a sense of accomplishment and engagement with the university.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate first-year student development in order to determine if there was a significant difference in the level of self-perceived student development of first-year college students who took Freshman Seminar compared to that of first-year college students who did not take Freshman Seminar. Additionally,

this study assessed the fall semester, 1999 Freshman Seminar program at Eastern Illinois University in order to determine students' perceptions of the course and its content at both the start and completion of the course.

Research Questions

The primary research questions were as follows:

1. Does student development take place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college?
2. Do students who take Freshman Seminar enter college with a different perceived level of student development than students who do not choose to take Freshman Seminar?
3. At the end of the first eight weeks of college, is there a difference in the level of student development reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar compared to first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar?
4. Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have benefited them in their initial transition to college?
5. Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that others take the course in subsequent years?

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations affect the results of this study. First, Freshman Seminar is an eight-week course taught from August to mid-October. Post-test data for this study were collected at the conclusion of the course, so the study only covered student perceptions for the first eight weeks of the college experience.

Second, not all students followed the directions to complete all parts of the survey. Therefore, analyses were based on a smaller than expected number of students who provided complete information. Approximately 448 Freshman Seminar students were surveyed, but only 303 participants with complete responses were included in the study. Additionally, approximately 394 Non Freshman Seminar students were surveyed, but only 215 participants with complete responses were included in the study.

Third, the pre-test and post-test experimental group research design used for this study did not permit the influence of student interaction with their instructors to be separated from the overall influence of the course as a whole. Therefore, this study was unable to determine whether various aspects of student perceptions about their experience were influenced by the course or by the particular instructor for the course section.

Additionally, this study did not identify first-generation college students from those new students who had at least one parent or sibling with a college education, nor did it consider gender differences as a factor in students' levels of development in college. Also, random assignment was not used in the selection of the research sample. Instead, the participants were selected from both Freshman Seminar and Speech Communication 1310 sections based on specific criteria such as first-year student status.

Finally, every effort was made to select a sample of students from Speech Communications courses who were comparable to students enrolled in the Freshman Seminar program. However, there was a possibility that the two groups of students were not statistically comparable because criteria such as ACT scores, high school grade point averages, and other possible measures of development were not available to this researcher.

Terminology

Terms defined for this study are as follows:

1. Freshman Seminar – A course offered by Eastern Illinois University and other Universities, designed to promote a successful college transition for first-year students. At EIU, Freshman Seminar (EIU 1004) is an eight-week, one credit course which focuses on the academic, social, and personal development of first-year college students. The standard course outline can be found in Appendix (H).
2. Non-Freshman Seminar Students – First-time, first-year students enrolled in Speech Communication 1310 who were not enrolled in the Freshman Seminar course.
3. First-Year Students – Traditional-aged college students between the ages of 17 and 19 who are first-time college students and who have completed less than 30 credit hours.
4. First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) – Locally developed data collection instrument distributed to both the Freshman Seminar sample and the Non-Freshman Seminar sample. This instrument was designed to assess perceived student development during the first eight weeks of college (Appendix B).
5. Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) – Locally developed data collection instrument distributed only to the Freshman Seminar sample. This instrument was designed to evaluate the fall semester, 1999 course (Appendix C and D).

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter presents a summary of the literature of several primary areas related to student adaptation to college including academic support, campus resources, student involvement, autonomy, social support, diversity, financial management, and student satisfaction.

Academic Support

The first year of college can create a difficult academic transition for students. The reasons for academic problems often include lack of personal discipline, an unexpected increase in the amount of work necessary for success, too much involvement in extracurricular activities, and incompatibility with the college environment (Hart & Keller, 1980). Additionally, the expectations of college professors are generally higher than the expectations of high school teachers, and students must learn to take more responsibility for their learning (DeBoer, 1983). Many first year students have reported that high school grading was too easy and therefore, have been unrealistic about their expectations for college courses. Students are often unprepared for the sudden increase in academic expectations, and as a result, experience poor academic adjustment during their first year (Hart & Keller, 1980).

The key factors reported by the students from Hart and Keller's (1980) study that contribute to poor academic performance during the first year of college include poor time management, failure to attend class, poor study habits, difficulty with taking examinations, and lack of interest in course material. These factors were all related to the

that other factors such as the instructor's teaching quality, residence hall atmosphere, demanding course requirements, and lack of quality academic advising also played a major role in their poor adaptation to college academic performance (Hart & Keller, 1980).

The effect of freshman seminar participation on academic performance has been a focus of study at many institutions. Messer (1996) mentioned several academic-related skills that have been covered in freshman seminar courses such as communication skills, note-taking skills, and time-management skills. Other areas of importance that freshman seminar courses have incorporated to assist students with academics include study skills, choosing a major, consideration of career possibilities, and academic planning such as course selection, grading systems, and general course requirements. These areas are important to new first-year students to get them on the right track with academics in order to become academically successful (Cohen & Jody, 1978). Students also benefit greatly from lessons on stress management, motivation, and responsibility. These topics may not appear to be academically focused, but according to Wilkie and Redondo (1996) these skills are essential for improving learning attitudes and behavior, which directly influence academic achievement.

Student success in higher education is related to the use of effective study skills; therefore, teaching study skills to new students and especially at-risk students is crucial. Freshman seminars focus on specific learning strategies to aid memory and enhance motivation, critical reasoning and problem solving techniques, and strategies for transferring study and life skills both in the classroom and out in society (Forster, Swallow, Fodor, & Foulser, 1999). Recent studies have also confirmed that students who

Swallow, Fodor, & Foulser, 1999). Recent studies have also confirmed that students who participated in Freshman Seminar courses were more likely to complete more credit hours, earn higher cumulative grade point averages, and have higher rates of retention than students who did not participate in the course (Sidler & Reynolds, 1999).

Campus Resources

Another important aspect of the freshman seminar is to introduce new students to various campus resources and services (Schwitzer, McGovern & Robbins, 1991). Past research found that less than half of college students had a general awareness of the resources and services that were available to them through their institution (Johnson, Nelson & Wooden, 1985). Another study found that only 54 percent of students were aware of campus resources, while only 14 percent could identify the locations of those resources (Benedict, Apsler & Morrison, 1977). Johnson et al. (1985) investigated students' factual knowledge of campus resources and found that even though students were aware that certain resources existed on campus, they generally did not know what services these centers provided, which led to less use of these resources. Therefore, it has been assumed that the low number of students using resources may be correlated with this lack of knowledge.

Through participating in freshman seminar programs, students have the opportunity to enhance their college experience by learning about resources both on campus and in the community. Freshman seminar programs provide students with various types of resource knowledge. This includes academic resources such as the library and computer labs, and professional resources such as financial aid, counseling centers, and academic advising centers (Rathus & Fichner-Rathus, 1997). According to

Brigham Young University was to enable students to identify and use campus resources. It was evident from their research that students who participated in the program were more likely to use student resources and services than those who did not participate in the program.

A literature review by Fidler and Hunter (1989) also showed that freshman seminar students at Bowling Green State University were more familiar with campus resources than other students due to their exposure to the different types of resources during the seminar. Additionally, a survey conducted at Columbus College and the University of South Carolina concluded that there was a greater knowledge and use of campus resources among students who completed the freshman seminar program than those who did not complete the program. At Marietta College, studies have indicated that freshman seminar participants utilized the career-planning center, counseling center, and writing center to a greater degree than did non-participants (Fidler & Hunter, 1989).

One way that Freshman Seminar programs have incorporated information about campus resources into the classroom is by providing opportunities for students to come into contact with staff members through class presentations (Hanley & Olson, 1996). At the University of South Carolina, various student affairs professionals, including career planning, counseling, and health services staff, made classroom presentations. Not only did these presentations introduce students to the particular services, but it also allowed them to connect the staff members with the particular services. Follow-up studies have indicated that students who took freshman seminar were more likely to use these services compared to students who did not take freshman seminar (Fidler & Hunter, 1989).

Student Involvement

Student involvement appears to benefit students' academic and intellectual development. When extracurricular experiences complement academics, student learning and personal development are strengthened (Terenzini, Pascarella & Bliming, 1996). Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) found that when students became involved outside of the classroom, they were typically more positive about the numerous aspects of the college experience which often led to the discovery of interests, thus leading to greater college success.

Active involvement is a way to enhance almost all aspects of a student's cognitive and affective development. Focusing on academics alone tends to limit student development to the traditional cognitive outcomes such as knowledge and critical thinking. The incorporation of active involvement assists with affective outcomes such as leadership, citizenship, character, and social responsibility. Both types of student outcomes are necessary to develop the student as a whole (Astin, 1993).

Student involvement provides opportunities for students to learn leadership skills such as teamwork and decision-making. Additionally, when students become involved outside the of classroom, their critical thinking skills are developed and strengthened (Twale & Sanders, 1999). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), critical thinking is an individual's ability to interpret, evaluate, make informed judgments, and reason. This is an important skill for students to develop during their first-year of college, which they will need both in the classroom and in the community.

In a study on involvement, Astin (1984) concluded that students who were actively involved in extracurricular activities were more likely to be satisfied with their

college experience compared to those who were not actively involved. Fitch (1991) found evidence to support that involvement was associated with increased maturity and enhanced decision-making skills because involved students were exposed to commitment, planning, balancing time and emotions, and dealing with authority figures through their experiences. Fitch (1991) also stated that these results supported the positive relationship between post-college success and levels of involvement in college activities.

Autonomy

Leaving home, both emotionally and physically, is recognized as a normal developmental process of adjustment. The developmental task of leaving home for college is a process of developing autonomy, becoming less dependent on parents while simultaneously forming friendships, and becoming more interdependent on peers. Although emotional attachment to parents is important for development, factors such as economic independence, feelings of emotional control, and the ability to make decisions and think for oneself have been more important in predicting college adjustment (Kenny, 1987).

Many college students believe that they should become independent and rely less on their parents once they begin college and are often embarrassed when they realize that they still need their parents. Therefore, students need to be reassured that it is not a sign of immaturity to value their parental relationships and to turn to their parents for support. Parents also need to realize that they can respond to their child's needs without feeling like they are intruding. It is important, however, for parents to understand that supporting

their child may mean supporting or accepting an idea or value that is different from their own (Kenny, 1987).

Social Support

Researchers have found a positive relationship between levels of social support and emotional adaptation in college. The more social support that individuals believe they have, the better chance they have for stronger emotional development (Brooks & DuBois, 1995). A common source of college adjustment involves the acceptance of the loss of pre-college relations and the development of new friendships. Developing new friendships is an important factor in adjustment and self-esteem, thus leading to a positive first-year transition. First-year students who are positive about their transition may be focused on forming new friendships in college, thus building self-esteem, and therefore, may be more likely to experience a positive adjustment to college. However, first-year students who view the transition as a threat may be more focused on pre-college friendships, causing them to be withdrawn from college life, and therefore have a difficult time adjusting to college (Paul & Kelleher, 1995).

One common aspect of many freshman seminar courses is the focus on building networks (Bruss, 1996). The development of peer relationships is an important transitional benefit that the freshman seminar offers since friends are often a source of support in difficult situations. Many new students tend to make friends with other students of the same race, age, and social class; however, freshman seminars focus on helping students find friends who share common interests regardless of race, age, and social class (Rathus & Fichner-Rathus, 1989). Disbro (1996) notes that first-year students need to understand the importance of networking and interacting with people.

Orientations such as freshman seminars promote associations and help students to connect with the college, thus providing direction in their personal adjustment to campus life (Cuyjet & Rode 1987).

Diversity

The composition of today's freshman class is becoming more diverse in terms of culture, gender, age, and sexual orientation (Rathus & Fichner-Rathus, 1997).

Therefore, college and university faculty and staff must facilitate the development of tolerance and cultural awareness among students. According to Taylor (1998), tolerance is "an openness to human differences that leads to acceptance and respect (p. 284)."

Astin (1993) stated that cultural awareness develops a student's understanding and appreciation of other races and cultures and that focusing on diversity may strengthen a student's personal commitment to promoting an understanding between cultures.

Students' experiences with diverse cultures have been related to an increase in overall academic development and participation in racial/cultural workshops has appeared to positively influence critical thinking within first-year college students.

The first year of college may be a student's first opportunity to develop relationships with individuals of different backgrounds, experiences, and lifestyles (House & Kuchynka, 1997). According to Saddlemire (1996), some college students have little or no interaction with individuals of diverse cultures or backgrounds before coming to college and they have even less interaction after their first year of college other than chance interactions and observations.

Many students are not adequately prepared to work with individuals of different cultural backgrounds or lifestyles (McEwen & Roper, 1994). First-year college students

may not understand how attitudes and assumptions are culturally biased, thus interfering with their learning. Many students recognize and challenge their beliefs and attitudes about race for the first time at college. Because there is still de facto segregation in our country, many first-year students are not prepared for the diverse population they encounter (Rathus & Fichner-Rathus, 1997).

Freshman seminar programs encourage students to learn about diversity through direct experiences, and aim to challenge students' personal beliefs and attitudes towards diverse issues. Critical thinking and communication skills provided by freshman seminar programs help students to understand issues related to diversity and to teach them how to move beyond intolerance and ignorance. The focus of diversity in freshman seminars is to encourage students to interact with people who are different from themselves rather than insulating themselves in their own, more comfortable backgrounds (Rathus & Fichner-Rathus, 1997).

Evans (1997) discussed the incorporation of a Multicultural Immersion Project within freshman seminar classes. This project required students to learn about diversity through experiencing different multicultural activities on campus. The purpose for this project was to encourage students to investigate their personal feelings, stereotypes, and fears. Results of this study showed that students reported that the project created a greater awareness and improved their perceptions and behaviors towards issues and people of diverse populations.

Financial Management

One component of personal development that is often overlooked is student financial management. For many students, college is the first time that they are held accountable for what they purchase, how much they spend, and how they pay for their purchases. Institutions offer services such as financial aid offices to help students to acquire financial resources but they rarely offer services to assist students with managing their personal finances (Danes & Hira, 1987).

Hirt and Nick (1999) researched college students' attitudes about money, knowledge of financial management, and financial needs while in college. They found that on-campus, first-year students received the majority of their money from allowances rather than earnings and that they spent more money on food and entertainment than other students, suggesting that first-year students may be more likely to pursue social activities to meet new people than upper class students. Additionally, the first-year students in this study reported higher phone bills for long distance calls and higher gasoline bills, which suggests that they may be more likely to retain ties at home than upper class students. Hirt and Nick (1999) were also able to determine that the first-year students in this study spent five times more than their income during the period of their study, suggesting that these first-year students were not successful in their financial management.

Several studies have also investigated credit card use among college students. Many students have a limited understanding of credit cards and have demonstrated poor use of credit cards (Hira & Brinkman, 1992). Credit card companies target students and count on them to have lingering balances at the end of the month in order to make a

profit. One study revealed that 70 percent of students left a balance on their credit cards each month. Out of this group, 15 percent had a debt under \$200, 25 percent had a debt between \$201 and \$600, 15 percent had a debt between \$601 and \$1,000, 10 percent had a debt between \$1,001 and \$1,600, and 6 percent had a debt between \$1,601 and \$1,800. Because many students do not always know how to use credit cards properly and thus place themselves at risk for credit card debt, it is important that they be taught how to use their credit cards properly and how to better manage their finances (Munro & Hirt, 1998).

Student Satisfaction

In order to be truly successful, freshman seminar programs must be perceived as beneficial by the students themselves. If the students do not believe that they gain anything by participating in the program, then any goals set for the seminar by faculty or student affairs administrators have not been accomplished. An evaluation of another Freshman Seminar program concluded that the majority of students thought that the course was beneficial to them in their understanding of the purposes of a university education, helped them to feel more comfortable as members of the campus community, and increased their belief that they could succeed at this particular institution (Sidler & Reynolds, 1999).

Students from the University of South Carolina indicated that they found individual conferences with the instructors, social activities outside the of classroom, conflict-management exercises, and personal life-style inventories to be both worthwhile and enjoyable. The same students found planning academic schedules, resume writing, and learning about the purpose of higher education to be worthwhile, but not enjoyable. In a follow-up study four years later, surveys were mailed to the same students. Of the

returned surveys, over half of the individuals confirmed positive outcomes in the areas of university knowledge, self-understanding, and student involvement from their freshman seminar (Fidler & Hunter, 1989).

At Glassboro State College in 1984, 84 percent of the students stated that they would recommend the class to other incoming first-year students and 35 percent recommended that the course be mandatory for all new first-year students to take (Fidler & Hunter, 1989). Recommendations are a highly beneficial way to promote such programs. Student Satisfaction studies conducted by the University of South Carolina reported that students took the course because it was highly recommended, and they believed that it would help them meet new people and become better acquainted with the university (Fidler & Hunter, 1989).

The literature review reflects on some of the major elements that affect the transition and overall adjustment of first-year college students. It is important for institutions to recognize these elements, which have shown to possibly influence student development, and create ways to address them. It has been demonstrated how various Freshman Seminar programs across the country have addressed these elements and thus provided a source of support, information, and knowledge for first-year students. In this study, I investigated these elements and applied them to the fall semester, 1999, first-year students at Eastern Illinois University in order to determine how their development was affected by either the presence or absence of the Freshman Seminar program experience.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate first-year student development to determine if there was a significant difference in the level of self-perceived student development of first-year college students who took Freshman Seminar compared to that of first-year college students who did not take Freshman Seminar. A second objective was to conduct a course evaluation of the fall semester, 1999 Freshman Seminar at Eastern Illinois University, to determine the self-perceived impact that the Freshman Seminar had on first-year students' transition to college during the first eight weeks of enrollment.

General Method

This formative evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The quantitative methodology consisted of a locally-developed, 13-item, pre-course/post-course survey. The survey was administered to students enrolled in the fall semester, 1999, Freshman Seminar as well as to students who were not enrolled in Freshman Seminar. The qualitative methodologies employed consisted of an open-ended, free-response, pre-course/post-course survey only for Freshman Seminar students to complete. This survey was then content analyzed into a quantitative format. Follow-up focus groups were conducted with students who completed the Freshman Seminar program in order to obtain greater detail about the categories identified through the qualitative survey content analysis.

Sample

Freshman Seminar Participants.— The research sample consisted of first-year students who were enrolled in the Freshman Seminar during the fall semester, 1999, at Eastern Illinois University. The total number of students surveyed in Freshman Seminar across the twenty-three sections taught in fall, 1999 was 448. After surveys were eliminated for students who did not complete both pre- and post-course surveys and those who did not complete the necessary tracking information (N = 145), the final research sample consisted of 303 Freshman Seminar students from nineteen sections.

Non-Freshman Seminar Participants.— The control sample consisted of students from twenty-three sections of Introduction to Speech Communication, SPC 1310 (N=394). Students in SPC 1310 who did not complete both pre- and post-course assessments and who did not provide tracking information (N = 53), and who were either enrolled in Freshman Seminar or were upperclass students (N = 126) were eliminated from the final sample. A total of 215 Speech Communication students were included in the Non-Freshman Seminar sample for the purposes of analysis.

Instrumentation

First-Year Student Development Survey.— The First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) was administered to both the Freshman Seminar sample (N=448) and the Non-Freshman Seminar sample (N=394). It was developed to illustrate the level of student development experienced by first-year students during the first eight weeks of college. The survey consisted of a 13-item, self-rating scale in which students indicated their perceived level of development at the beginning of their college experience and again after an eight-week time period (Appendix B).

Specific questions were formulated to represent six various elements of student development. They included, academic skills, campus knowledge, student involvement, autonomy, social skills, and diversity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The first element, academic skills, consisted of three specific questions focusing on time management skills, study skills, and test-taking skills. The second element was campus knowledge. This element consisted of four specific questions focusing on students' knowledge of campus resources, knowledge of the university and its traditions, understanding of university policies and procedures, and knowledge of the campus layout. The third element, student involvement, consisted of two specific questions that focused on students' knowledge of campus activities available at EIU and their motivation to become involved in campus activities. The fourth element, autonomy, investigated students' ability to make informed decisions about drugs and alcohol as well as practicing personal responsibility. The fifth element, social skills, questioned students' confidence in making friends at EIU. Diversity, the final element, focused on students' understanding and acceptance of the diverse nature of students at EIU. The final element,.

Several of the scaled items were selected from the EIU 1004 Freshman Seminar Course Evaluation optical-scanning form (Appendix I). Questions such as making informed decisions about drugs and alcohol and understanding university policies and procedures were taken directly from the EIU 1004 Freshman Seminar Course Evaluation. Other questions focusing on understanding and accepting the diverse nature of students at EIU, time management skills, test-taking skills, and knowledge of campus resources were based on, and therefore similar to, various questions on the EIU 1004 Freshman Seminar

Course Evaluation. The remaining questions were developed by the author in order to learn about additional areas of possible student development.

Students were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 (high) to 5 (low) on each of the thirteen items. Total possible summed scores for the scale ranged from a high of 13 to a low of 65. Thus, a lower score indicated a higher level of self-reported student development.

Freshman Seminar Survey.— In order to gather information about student opinions of the Freshman Seminar program, an open-ended, self-report survey was developed by the author based on information and other questions previously used to evaluate freshman seminar programs. The purpose for the open-ended format was to allow students the opportunity to answer freely and as honestly as possible without being confined to a limited set of predetermined choices for each item (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) was administered only to the Freshman Seminar sample (N=448) (Appendix C and D).

The survey measured several different aspects of student opinions related to the Freshman Seminar course. The pre-course survey focused on students' perceptions of what they thought the purpose of the course should be, what topics should be covered, what topics should not be covered, anticipated transitional challenges, and how taking the seminar would benefit them and help their transition. Additionally, the survey investigated why students chose to take the course and how they learned about the course.

The post-course survey was designed to follow-up the questions included on the pre-course survey. This survey therefore focused on students' perceptions of how the

course related to the college experience, which topics were significant to first-year student needs, which topics were not significant to first-year student needs, which transitional challenges were experienced, and if the course was beneficial in assisting students in working through those challenges. Additionally, the survey explored student perceptions of topics that were not covered in the course that would have been helpful to first-year students and suggestions for improving the course. The final part of the survey focused on whether students would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students and if they thought that the course should be required for all first-year students at EIU.

Procedure

Survey Instructions.— Each student taking the First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) and the Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) received a set of instructions about how to complete the survey, along with an explanation for the purpose of the research project (Appendix A). The explanation for the research did not mention the evaluation of Freshman Seminar. Instead, the explanation focused on the degree of first-year student development. The purpose for this was to avoid any preconceived notions students might have had about the Freshman Seminar course and its content (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

For both the Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar student samples, survey instructions asked students to include the last four digits of their Social Security Number (SSN). Asking for the SSN was done to track individual student development within course sections in both samples by comparing the pre-course and post-course responses of all students individually. Survey administrators carefully explained to

students in both samples that their entire Social Security Number was not necessary to track information, therefore eliminating the possibility of determining the identity of the students. Students were assured that their confidentiality would be maintained and results reported only in a group form. Students in both groups who did not report their SSN were eliminated from the sample due to lack of tracking information. Of these, 145 students were in Freshman Seminar, and 53 students were in the Speech Communication 1310 course.

Students in the Non-Freshman Seminar sample were additionally instructed to indicate their year in school and whether they had taken Freshman Seminar. The purpose for this was that not all students enrolled in Speech Communication 1310 were first-year students, and it was possible for these students to be enrolled in Freshman Seminar concurrently. Any student who was not a first-semester freshman or who was enrolled in Freshman Seminar (N=126) was eliminated from the final sample.

Pre-course Survey Administration. — Pre-course surveys were administered to all Freshman Seminar classes on the first day of class, prior to the distribution of the course syllabus and before the instructors explained the purposes or content of the course to students. The purpose for survey distribution prior to course explanation was to determine what students thought the purpose and content of the course should be without being given specific information about the course.

Pre-course surveys were administered to the Non-Freshman Seminar, Speech Communication 1310 classes during the second week of school. The week's delay was due to the number of sections being surveyed and the need to stretch the data collection over a two-week period to accommodate instructor preferences.

Post-course Survey Administration. — Post-course surveys were distributed to all Freshman Seminar sections during the last (eighth) week of the course, and included identical directions to those given for the pre-test survey.

Post-course surveys were administered to the Non-Freshman Seminar, Speech Communication 1310 sections during the tenth week of school. Thus, Non-Freshman Seminar respondents had an opportunity to report student development over a time frame one week longer than Freshman Seminar respondents, since Speech Communication 1310 mid-term examinations required a delay of one week in data collection.

Focus Group. — Students had the opportunity to indicate on the Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) if they would be willing to participate in an interview to further discuss their experience in Freshman Seminar. Students who agreed to further participation were instructed to include their name and telephone number in the space provided at the bottom of the survey. A total of fifty-seven students indicated interest in participating. However, because thirteen of these students only provided either their name or their telephone number, it was not possible to contact them. Of the forty-four students who provided all of the necessary information, seventeen had moved and therefore changed their telephone number, thus eliminating them from being contacted. The final list of possible focus group participants was twenty-seven students. Of this list, seven students committed to participating in a focus group on Wednesday, March 1, 2000. An additional six students said that they would try to attend, and the remaining fourteen students had prior engagements or did not reply. The final focus group for this study (N = 4) consisted of two men and two women who took the fall semester, 1999 Freshman Seminar.

The four students who participated in the focus group were each in different sections of Freshman Seminar and had different perceptions of how the course impacted their first-year experience. Bill was African American male from a larger city in the Chicago area. Tim was a White male from a small town in Illinois with a high school graduating class of less than 50 students. Ann was a White female, also from a small town in Illinois with a high school graduating class of less than 50 students. Sue was a White female from a larger city in Illinois. The students' comments about their individual experiences in Freshman Seminar were useful in supporting the results of the Freshman Seminar Survey and for generating a greater understanding of the impact of the course.

Data Analysis

Coding Procedures. — Each survey was numerically coded with a 9-digit individual tracking code. The first two digits identified the sample group (01 = Freshman Seminar sample, 02 = Non-Freshman Seminar sample). The third digit represented the test number (1 = pre-course survey, 2 = post-course survey). The fourth and fifth digits represented the 2-digit section numbers from either the Freshman Seminar courses or the Speech Communication 1310 courses. Finally, the sixth through ninth digits identified the last four digits of individual students' Social Security Number.

Quantitative Procedures. — The First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) consisted of a 13-item, self-rating scale made up of questions related to various elements of student development. The survey was designed to measure individual student development across both samples. The purpose of the survey was to determine if student development was apparent after the first eight weeks of college and if there was a

difference in the level of development between Freshman Seminar students and Non-Freshman Seminar students (Appendix B).

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of student responses across the items for the pre-course and post-course data of both the Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students. Alphas range from 0 to 1 with 0 indicating weak internal consistency and 1 indicating strong internal consistency. An instrument is internally consistent if the alpha is above .60. The alpha for the Freshman Seminar pre-test was .7996 and the Freshman Seminar post-test was .8635. The alpha for the Non-Freshman Seminar pre-test was .8725 and the Non-Freshman Seminar post-test was .8710 (Table 4.4). The relatively high reliabilities reported support the homogeneity of the scaled items, and support the unidimensionality of the scale's underlying construct, student development (Drummond, 1996).

T-tests of the Difference Between Means. — T-tests of the difference between means on pre-test and post-test scaled scores were performed for both Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar groups to determine if a statistically significant change had occurred across the eight-week time period of this study for each sample. This was done to address the research question: Does student development take place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college? The first t-test compared the pre-test data and the post-test data of the Freshman Seminar group to determine if development had occurred over the eight-week time period. The second t-test compared the pre-test data and the post-test data of the Non-Freshman Seminar group to determine if development had occurred within this group over the eight-week time period.

A t-test was also performed to determine if there were any differences in the initial level of student development between students who took the Freshman Seminar course and those who did not. This was done to address the research question: Do students who take Freshman Seminar enter college with a different perceived level of student development than students who do not choose to take Freshman Seminar? The t-test compared the pre-test data of the Freshman Seminar group with the pre-test data of the Non-Freshman Seminar group to determine if there was a significant difference in students' initial level of development prior to the college experience.

An additional t-test was performed to determine if Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students differed in their level of development after an eight-week time period. This was done to address the research question: At the end of the first eight weeks of college, is there a difference in the level of perceived student development reported by students who took Freshman Seminar compared to students who did not take Freshman Seminar? The t-test compared the post-test data of the Freshman Seminar group to the post-test data of the Non-Freshman Seminar group to determine if there was a significant difference in the level of development between the two samples after eight weeks of college.

Qualitative Procedures. – The Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) consisted of open-ended questions to which students answered a variety of topics related to the Freshman Seminar course. The purpose for using an open-ended format was to allow students to develop responses to each question based on their own opinions and needs (Appendix C).

Each completed survey was read in sequence, one question at a time, in order to record individual students' responses into categories. Surveys were read for each

individual item until enough coding categories were identified that no new categories appeared. Categories were then numbered within survey items on individual student surveys in order to record responses into a numeric format (Appendix E). The numeric responses for individual student surveys were then transferred onto a scan-tron form with that individual student's appropriate coding information.

The survey questions dealing with course purpose, topics that should be covered, topics that should not be covered, and transitional concerns, were designated to measure pre-course/post-course perceptions for the same items and therefore their results are comparable. However, the remaining items were not intended to be parallel, and therefore no comparisons were made. Of the four comparable questions, the pre-course questions served as an investigation of what the students expected from the course, while the post-course questions served to evaluate the course and to determine if students' expectations were met. The non-comparable questions were used only to discover potentially important information about the course.

Frequency Distributions. — Frequency distributions were used to address the remaining two research questions in this study. Frequency data were used to determine the number of students who answered “yes”, “no”, and “somewhat” in addressing the question: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have been beneficial to them in their adaptation the first semester of college? (Table 4.5) Frequency data were also used to determine the number of students who answered “yes”, “no”, and “maybe” to the research question: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that other first-year students take the course in subsequent years?

(Table 4.6) Additionally, a frequency distribution was used to determine if students thought that the course should be required among all first-year students (Table 4.7).

In order to determine students' initial perceptions of the goals for the Freshman Seminar course and their final perceptions of what the course actually accomplished by the end of the eight-week time period, a frequency distribution was performed. The frequency distributions were used to rank the reported goals from the pre-course data and the reported accomplishments from the post-course data (Table 4.8).

Frequency distributions were also used to determine course topics students thought would be helpful at the start of college compared to course topics they perceived to actually be relevant once they experienced college for eight weeks (Table 4.9), which topics students thought should not be covered in Freshman Seminar and which were topics were covered that should not have been (Table 4.10), and which topics were not covered in the course that should have been (Table 4.11). Again, the frequency distributions were used to rank the reported topics in order of their perceived level of significance from both the pre-course and post-course data.

Frequency distributions were also used to determine which transitional challenges students anticipated at the start of college and which transitional challenges they actually experienced during the first eight weeks of college. The frequency distributions were used to rank the primary transitional concerns of these students from pre-course data and the actual transitional experiences of these students from post-course data (Table 4.12). An additional distribution was used to determine if Freshman Seminar students thought that the course helped them to overcome the various challenges that they experienced (Table 4.13).

Finally, frequency distributions were used to learn how the course helped students adjust to college (Table 4.14), what suggestions the students had for improving the course (Table 4.15), why students chose to enroll in the course (Table 4.16), and how students found out about the course (Table 4.17).

Focus Group. — A focus group was also used in the data analysis of this study. Focus groups are a qualitative research method useful to obtain opinions, perceptions, and insights of a small group of individuals with knowledge of a particular area, such as the Freshman Seminar. One important benefit of the focus group research was the generation of ideas that the researcher had not previously considered. Additionally, the focus group research could be implemented later in the research process to further support and clarify results (Pondsford & Master, 1998). The focus group for this study consisted of students ($N = 4$) who took the fall semester, 1999 Freshman Seminar. The purpose of the focus group was to have conversations with students to better understand their perspectives of the Freshman Seminar. The results of the focus group were used to gain further insight into various perceptions of Freshman Seminar and to further support the analysis of data from the open-ended surveys.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter presents a detailed account of both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study. T-tests were performed on the quantitative First Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) data to determine if any differences existed between students who took an eight-week Freshman Seminar course and students from an Introductory Speech Communication class on the following quantitative research questions: (1) Does student development take place among first year students during the first eight weeks of college? (2) Do students who take Freshman Seminar enter college with a different perceived level of student development than students who do not choose to take Freshman Seminar? (3) At the end of the first eight weeks of college, is there a difference in the level of student development reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar compared to first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar? It should be noted that a lower score on the FYSDS indicates a higher perceived level of student development.

Frequency distributions from a content analysis of students' written comments on an open-ended pre- and post-course Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) were reported for the following qualitative research questions: (4) Do first year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have positively assisted them in their initial transition to college? (5) Do first year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that others take the course in subsequent years? Student comments from a post-course

focus group were included to provide a sense of the students' "voice" about selected topics (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Quantitative Results

The first question to be addressed was whether student development took place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college. On the First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS), Freshman Seminar students had an overall mean of 36.15 (s.d. = 7.68) at the beginning of the semester and an overall mean of 28.70 (s.d. = 7.71) at the end of the first eight weeks' instruction (Table 4.4, Figures 1 & 2). Non-Freshman Seminar students had an overall mean of 35.87 (s.d. = 9.14) at the beginning of the semester and an overall mean of 33.16 (s.d. = 8.35) at the end of the eight weeks' instruction (Table 4.4, Figures 3 & 4). A t-test showed that the post-test scores were significantly higher than the pre-test scores for both the Freshman Seminar sample ($t(df = 302) = 13.783, p < .0001$) and the Non-Freshman Seminar sample ($t(df = 214) = 3.879, p < .0001$) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Self-Reported Student development of Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students after eight weeks of college

Comparison	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
FS Pre-test – FS Post-test	13.783	302	<.0001
NFS Pre-test – NFS Post-test	3.879	214	<.0001

The second question to be addressed was whether students in Freshman Seminar reported a different level of perceived student development at the start of their college experience than did Non-Freshman Seminar students. At the start of their college experience, Freshman Seminar students had an overall mean of 36.15 (s.d. = 7.68) on the First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) and Non-Freshman Seminar students had an overall mean of 35.87 (s.d. = 9.14) (Table 4.4, Figures 1 & 3). A t-test of independent means was conducted on the pre-tests of both the Freshman Seminar sample and the Non-Freshman Seminar sample in order to determine if the two groups had similar initial levels of perceived student development. The results indicated that there was not a significant difference in the initial level of self-perceived development among Freshman Seminar students and Non-Freshman Seminar Students at the beginning of the fall semester ($t(df = 516) = .371, p = .710$) (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Comparison of the initial level of self-reported student development of Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students

Comparison	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
FS Pre-test – NFS Pre-test	.371	516	.710

The third research question addressed whether there was a difference in the level of student development at the end of the first eight weeks of college reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar compared to first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar. The overall mean of the freshman seminar sample post-test was 28.70 (s.d. = 7.71), while the overall mean of the Non-Freshman Seminar sample post-test was 33.16 (s.d. = 8.35) (Table 4.4, Figures 2 & 4). The t-test showed that the post-test scores of the Freshman Seminar sample were significantly higher than the post-test scores of the Non-Freshman Seminar sample ($t(df = 515) = 6.265, p < .0001$) (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Comparison of the final level of self-reported student development of Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students after eight weeks of college

Comparison	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
FS Post-test – NFS Post-test	6.265	515	<.0001

Table 4.4

Mean Scores of Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar Pre-tests and Post-tests

	N	M	SD	Var.	Coef. α
<u>Freshman Seminar</u>					
Pre-test	303	36.15	7.68	59.00	.7996
Post-test	303	28.70	7.71	59.50	.8635
<u>Non-Freshman Seminar</u>					
Pre-test	215	35.87	9.14	83.49	.8725
Post-test	215	33.16	8.35	69.80	.8710

Figure 1: Freshman Seminar Pre-Test Scores

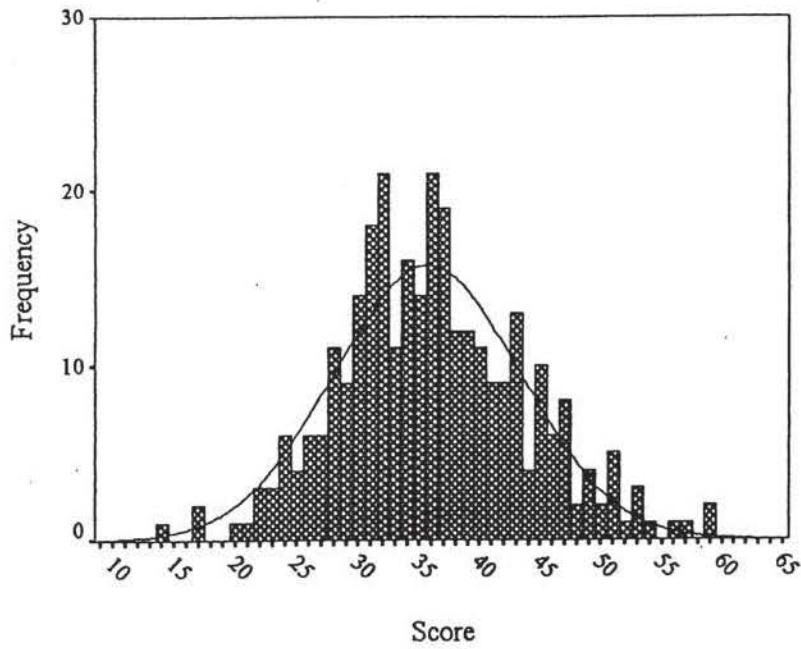


Figure 3: Non-Freshman Seminar Pre-Test Scores

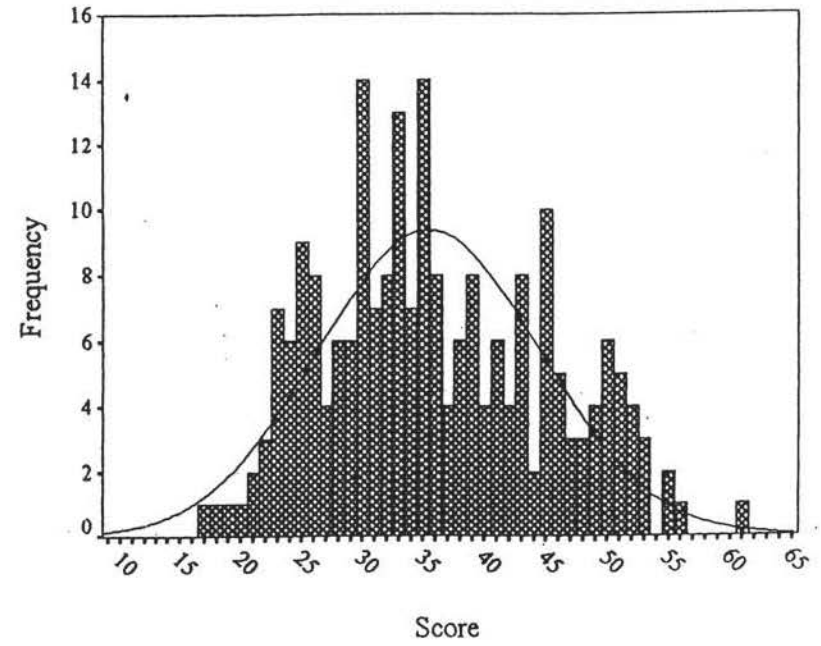


Figure 2: Freshman Seminar Post-Test Scores

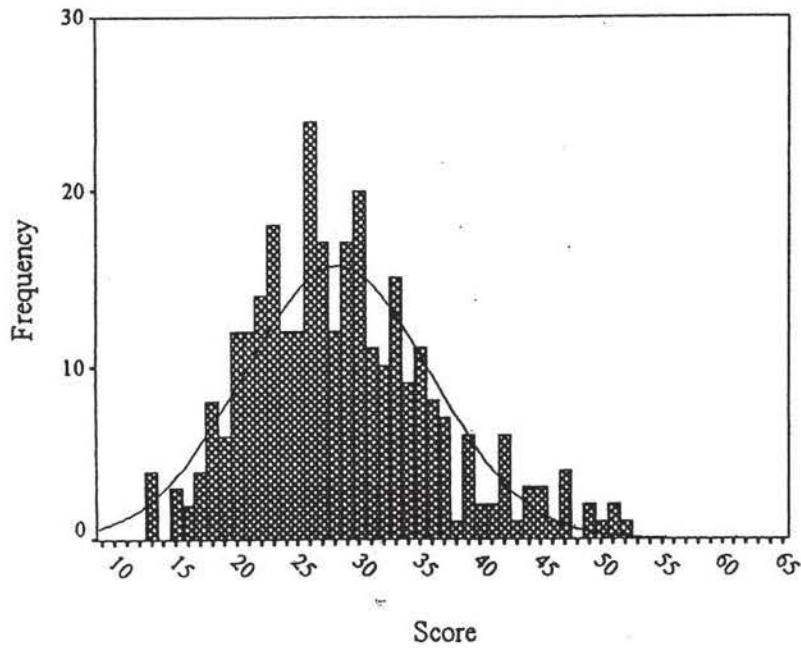
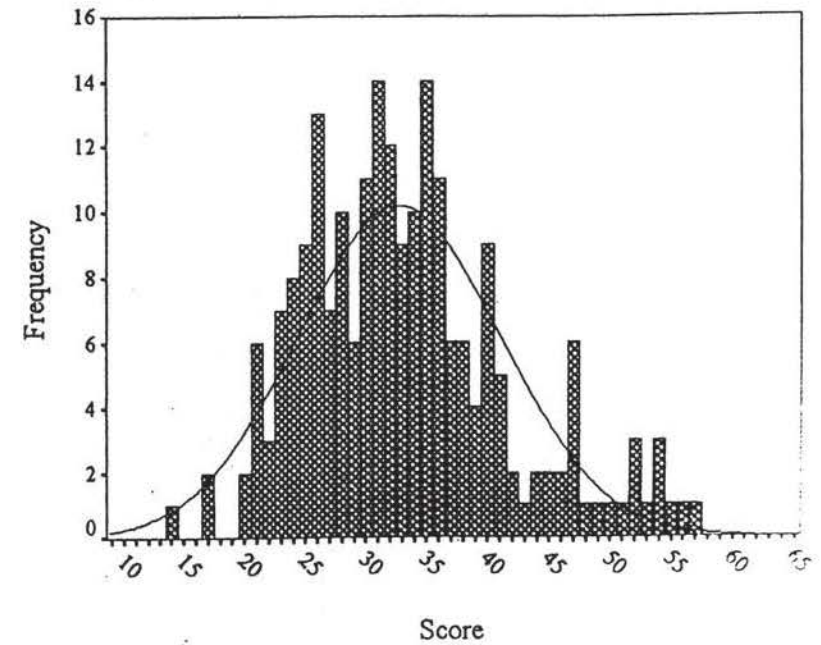


Figure 4: Non-Freshman Seminar Post-Test Scores



Qualitative Results

Students were asked to complete an open-ended Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) at the beginning and the end of the course. Data were expected to be reported in greater detail, however, students commonly provided phrases and one-word responses rather than detailed explanations of their opinions and experiences. Thus, the students' free responses to these open-ended items were coded into a quantitative format by doing a content analysis of the responses. Initial codes were collapsed into categories, and the categories treated as quantitative data from which frequency distributions were developed.

Initial Adjustment to College. — In addition to determining if statistical results indicated that Freshman Seminar benefits the development of first-year students, it was important to recognize if the students themselves actually perceived and reported the course to have been helpful in their adjustment to college. Therefore, the fourth research question to be addressed was: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have benefited them in their initial transition to college (Item 8, FSS-post, Appendix D)? At the end of the eight weeks, 73.9 percent of the students sampled reported that Freshman Seminar was beneficial to them in their adaptation to their first eight weeks of college at Eastern Illinois University. Another 3 percent thought that the course was somewhat beneficial to their transition and 23.1 percent of students did not perceive the course to be beneficial (Table 4.5).

This same research question was discussed during the focus group in order to determine if these particular students thought that the course was beneficial to their development. Two students, Bill and Tim thought that the course was beneficial to their

initial transition. Ann thought that the course helped but commented that “most of what I learned was from my own experiences [rather than from the course].” Sue commented that the course did not benefit her college transition, and was actually “a waste of time.” She did mention that “some of the stuff could have been useful, but the teachers did not teach us in a helpful way” and that if the content was better developed, “the course has the potential to be successful.”

Table 4.5

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: Do you think that Freshman Seminar was beneficial to you in adapting to your first year as a college student at Eastern Illinois University? (Item 8, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=3)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Yes	224	73.9	1
No	70	23.1	2
Somewhat	9	3.0	3

Would students recommend the course to others? — An additional way to determine if students perceived the Freshman Seminar course to be beneficial was to find out if they would recommend the course to other students. This led to the final research question: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that others take the course in subsequent years? The results of this study indicated that 78.2 percent of the students sampled would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students (Item 9, FSS-post, Appendix D). An additional 1.3 percent of students stated that they would maybe recommend the course to other incoming first-year students and 20.5 percent of students reported that they would not recommend the course to other first-year students, and (Table 4.6).

In the focus group, Bill, Tim, and Ann stated that they too would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students. Sue, however, stated that the course “was more of a hassle than a help,” and therefore would not recommend the course to others.

Table 4.6

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: Would you recommend Freshman Seminar to other incoming first-year students? (Item 9, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=3)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Yes	237	78.2	1
No	62	20.5	2
Maybe	4	1.3	3

Should Freshman Seminar be required? — In addition to discovering if students would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students, they were also asked if the course should be required of all incoming first-year students (Item 10, FSS-post, Appendix D). 65.3 percent of students reported that the course should not be required and 34.3 percent of students reported that it should be required (Table 4.7).

The students in the focus group all agreed that the course, although helpful, should not be required among all first-year students. According to Ann, “it should not be required because students have so many other requirements to take and not all students have time for this extra course.” Bill agreed stating that he would “highly recommend it, but it shouldn’t be required.” Tim thought that it was important to add that “not all students need or want a course like this, so it wouldn’t be good for them.”

Table 4.7

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: Do you think that Freshman Seminar should be a required course for all incoming first-year students?
(Item 10, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=3)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
No	198	65.3	1
Yes	104	34.3	2
Maybe	1	0.3	3

Students' initial course perceptions versus perception of course impact. — On the FSS pre-course survey, students were asked their perceptions of “the purpose of the Freshman Seminar course” (Item 1, Appendix C). Similarly, on the FSS post-course survey, students were asked to indicate “how the Freshman Seminar impacted [their] college experience” (Item 1, Appendix D). After content analysis and coding were completed, over 10 percent of students reported “assisting students in adjusting to college,” “becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University,” and “meeting new people” as general purposes and influences of the course (Table 4.8). These responses received the three highest rankings for both pre- and post-course surveys. The response, “assisting students in adjusting to college” received the highest ranking on the pre-course evaluation, but was ranked second on the post-course evaluation. “Becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University” was ranked second on the pre-course evaluation, yet it received the highest rank on the post-course evaluation. “Meeting new people” was ranked third on both the pre- and post- course evaluations. Students also reported several specific purposes and influences of the course including “understanding how college is different from high school,” “learning about campus activities,” “learning academic skills,” and “becoming aware of campus services and resources.” Additionally, on the post-course evaluation, 12.5 percent of students reported that the Freshman Seminar course had not impacted their first-year college experience (Table 4.8).

The students in the focus group made various comments about what they perceived to be the purpose of the course and how the course actually influenced their transition. Bill thought that the purpose of the course should be “to teach [students] how to study and prepare for tests in college.” He thought that the course did help in this area.

Tim thought that the purpose of the course was “to meet people” which he stated was the reason he why he took the course, and Ann perceived that the purpose of the course was “so that students could get a better feel for the school.” Sue thought that the course was to help students adjust to college; however she commented that she was one of the students whom “it did not help.”

Table 4.8

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What do you perceive to be the purpose of the Freshman Seminar Course? (Item 1, FSS pre-survey)

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: How has Freshman Seminar impacted your college experience? (Item 1, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=8)	Pre-Course (N=303)			Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Adjusting to college	153	50.5	1	98	32.3	2
Becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University	100	33.0	2	114	37.6	1
Meeting new people	48	15.8	3	39	12.9	3
Understanding how college is different from high school	23	7.6	4	11	3.6	8
Learning about campus activities	22	7.3	5	29	9.6	6
Learning academic skills	22	7.3	6	16	5.3	7
Becoming aware of campus services	18	5.9	7	38	12.5	4
It did not help	0	0.0	8	38	12.5	5

Course topics of interest. — Students were initially asked on the pre-course survey what topics they thought should be covered in the course, and then on the post-course survey, what topics were the “most important” (Item 2, FSS). Six of the seventeen coded topics were initially identified by more than 10 percent of the student sample on the pre-course evaluation (Table 4.9); however, only four topics were selected by more than 10 percent of the sample on the post-course evaluation. The most reported topics (10 percent or more) that students thought should be covered in Freshman Seminar at the start of the course were, “academic skills,” “campus activities,” “building locations,” “time management,” and “campus services and resources.” Additionally, 21.1 percent of incoming students responded that “everything that relates to the first-year of college” should be covered in the Freshman Seminar. By the end of the course, 10 percent or more of students reported that information on “drugs and alcohol,” “time management,” “guest speakers,” and “academic skills” were the most important topics that were covered that related to their needs as first-year students (Table 4.9).

The students in the focus group agreed that campus resource locations, guest speakers, and time management were important topics to be covered during the course. Ann commented that “time management was never anything I thought I had to worry about until I got to college.” Tim thought that the best topic covered was financial management. “We had to keep a log of how much money we spent. At first, I thought that it was stupid, but when I saw how much money I had spent, I realized that it was really helpful.” Bill thought that academic skills were the most important topic covered. He stated that “in high school, it was natural, but when I got here, I didn’t make the same grades anymore. College is a lot different than high school.”

Table 4.9

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What topics do you think should be covered in the Freshman Seminar? (Item 2, FSS pre-survey)

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What do you perceive to be the most significant topics covered in Freshman Seminar? (Item 2, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=17)	Pre-Course (N=303)			Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Academic skills	122	40.3	1	42	13.9	4
Everything that relates to the first year of college	64	21.1	2	19	6.3	13
Campus activities	57	18.8	3	28	9.2	6
Building locations	41	13.5	4	29	9.6	5
Time management	39	12.9	5	48	15.8	2
Campus services and resources	31	10.2	6	26	8.6	9
Communication skills	28	9.2	7	2	0.7	17
Academic expectations	25	8.3	8	21	6.9	11
History, traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University	16	5.3	9	5	1.7	15
Financial management	15	5.0	10	28	9.2	7
Sex	14	4.6	11	23	7.6	10
Drugs and alcohol	13	4.3	12	70	23.1	1
Roommates	13	4.3	13	28	9.2	8

Table 4.9 (Continued)

Qualitative Codes (N=17)	Pre-Course (N=303)			Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Coping skills	7	2.3	14	20	6.6	12
Academic and career planning	5	1.7	15	0	0.0	16
Diversity	1	0.3	16	16	5.3	14
Guest speakers	0	0.0	17	43	14.2	3

Topics students would avoid. — Students had the opportunity to specify which topics should not be covered in the pre-course survey and which topics were covered that were not beneficial in the post-course survey (Item 3, FSS). During both pre- and post-course surveys, the most common statement was that “all topics would be helpful” (Table 4.10). Some students did report specific topics that they perceived to be irrelevant to their transition. At the beginning of the course, students reported that “individual personal issues,” “discussions from other classes,” “social experiences,” “drugs and alcohol,” “homework,” and “sex” should not be covered in Freshman Seminar. At the end of the course, however, students specifically wrote that the “library tour,” the “course textbook,” “diversity issues,” “individual personal issues,” and “specific guest speakers” were not beneficial to their college transition (Table 4.10).

In the focus group, students had various comments about what topics should be avoided in the Freshman Seminar. Ann thought that the vocabulary lessons were

“pointless.” She stated that “by the time you get to college, you know what G.P.A. stands for, and what freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors are.” Sue agreed and commented that “instructors need to realize that this is our first time at Eastern, not our first time being a student.” Sue also mentioned that the course should “stick to issues related to freshman interests.” Bill did not think that the library tour was helpful since it was his third tour in two weeks. “I had the same library tour in three of my classes. You would think that teachers would know that other teachers are taking their classes to the library too and maybe talk about it and plan better.” Tim agreed that collaboration would be helpful to avoid an overload of library tours.

Table 4.10

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What topics should not be covered in the Freshman Seminar? (Item 3, FSS pre-survey)

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What topics were covered in Freshman Seminar that you do not perceive to be significant to first-year students? (Item 3, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=15)	<u>Pre-Course (N=303)</u>			<u>Post-Course (N=303)</u>		
	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
None – all topics would be helpful	36	11.9	1	93	30.7	1
Individual personal issues	11	3.6	2	11	3.6	5
Discussions from other classes	9	3.0	3	0	0.0	0
Social experiences	7	2.3	4	0	0.0	0

Table 4.10 (Continued)

Qualitative Codes (N=15)	Pre-Course (N=303)			Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Drugs and alcohol	7	2.3	5	9	3.0	7
Homework	5	1.7	6	4	1.3	10
Sex	5	1.7	7	3	1.0	11
History, traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University	4	1.3	8	9	3.0	8
Diversity	2	0.7	9	12	4.0	4
Political/Controversial issues	2	0.7	10	0	0.0	0
Ice Breakers	1	0.3	11	0	0.0	0
Library tour	0	0.0	0	22	7.3	2
Course textbook	0	0.0	0	13	4.3	3
Specific guest speakers	0	0.0	0	10	3.3	6
Financial management	0	0.0	0	7	2.3	9

Topics not covered. — Students also had the opportunity to indicate topics that were not covered in their particular section of freshman seminar that would have been potentially helpful in their first-year adjustment. A large proportion of students (N = 198) did not answer this particular question (Item 4, FSS-post, Appendix D). However, the most frequent topics for which students wished specific instruction included “academic skills,” “differences between high school and college,” “alcohol and sex,” “social activities,” “roommates,” and “academic and career planning” (Table 4.11).

Students in the focus group thought that in addition to the existing guest speakers, that it would be very helpful to have a sophomore student speak to the class since they would have just completed their first-year of college and could provide potentially helpful information. They did not think that seniors would be helpful because according to Ann, “seniors have learned the tricks and they are ready to leave anyway, so their advice probably wouldn’t help us with much.” Additionally, Bill thought that the course should also include information about off-campus opportunities and resources. “We need to know where to get food and how to get to Wal-Mart. We also need know where to go to do fun things on the weekends other than stay on campus.”

Table 4.11

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What topics do you perceive to be important to first-year students that were *not* discussed in Freshman Seminar? (Item 4, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=6)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Academic skills	30	9.9	1
Differences between high school and college	22	7.3	2
Alcohol and sex	20	6.6	3
Social activities	13	4.3	4
Roommates	11	3.6	5
Academic and career planning	9	3.0	6

Transitional challenges. — The first-year college students in this study anticipated and experienced a number of transitional challenges. Anticipated transitional challenges refer to the comments listed from Item 6, FSS-pre, while the experienced transitional challenges refer to remarks made on Item 6, FSS-post (Table 4.12). Five of the ten coded categories for this item were reported by more than 10 percent of the sample on the pre-course survey, while another five coded categories were reported by more than 10 percent of the sample on the post-course survey. Adjusting to the “academic expectations” of college was the main transitional challenge anticipated by students at the beginning of college as well as the main transitional challenge experienced by students after the first eight weeks. “Making good grades” was the second highest anticipated transitional challenge, but was the third highest experienced transitional challenge. “Time management” was reported as the second highest transitional challenge experienced even though it was initially ranked sixth as an anticipated transitional challenge. Although “meeting new people” was reported as the third highest anticipated challenge, it was ranked as the sixth highest challenge experienced. “Homesickness” was ranked fourth as both an anticipated challenge and an experienced challenge. “Independence” was ranked fifth as an anticipated transitional challenge, but was ranked eighth as an experienced transitional challenge. “Roommates” was ranked seventh as an anticipated transitional challenge, but was ranked fifth as an experienced transitional challenge. “Knowing where things are on campus”, “financial management” and “dating issues” were reported by less than 10 percent of the sample and had similar rankings on both the pre- and post-course evaluations (Table 4.12).

The focus group supported many of these transitional challenges. Bill indicated that the new academic expectations were one of his biggest fears. "Here, teachers don't know you. An 89.9 is an 89.9 B. Teachers can't give you the benefit of the doubt if you are a good student and deserve the A." Making good grades was another challenge for Bill. "I was an A student in high school. Now I make some A's but mostly B's. Tim indicated that he did not anticipate that financial management would be a challenge, but he has since realized that "it is amazing how fast you can spend money when you don't pay attention to it." Tim was also afraid of meeting people. "I came from a small school where I knew everyone and I was afraid that I would come here and not know anyone." Sue reported that dealing with roommates has been somewhat of a challenge and that "not only do you have to put up with your roommate, but your roommate's boyfriend too." Ann's main transitional challenge was adjusting to eight o'clock classes. She stated that it was difficult to have early morning classes, but she has learned the hard way that "once you skip, you're in trouble."

Table 4.12

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What areas of your college transition concern you the most? (Item 6, FSS pre-survey)

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What stressors have you encountered as a first-year student? (Item 6, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=10)	Pre-Course (N=303)			Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Academic expectations	108	35.6	1	136	44.9	1
Grades	74	24.2	2	40	13.2	3
Meeting new people	65	21.5	3	28	9.2	6
Homesickness	49	16.2	4	40	13.2	4
Independence	33	10.9	5	21	6.9	8
Time management	21	6.9	6	99	32.7	2
Roommates	12	4.0	7	39	12.9	5
Knowing where things are on campus	8	2.6	8	16	5.3	9
Financial management	7	2.3	9	24	7.9	7
Dating Issues	4	1.3	10	4	1.3	10

Did course assist with transitional challenges? -- With respect to understanding the transitional challenges of first-year students in this sample, the survey also investigated if students thought that the course assisted them in overcoming the challenges that they experienced during their first year of college (Item 7, FSS-pre). Nearly half of all students stated that the course did in fact help them deal with their transitional challenges. An additional 6.6 percent of students thought that the course helped them to some degree, while 43.6 percent of students stated that the course did nothing to help their transitional challenges (Table 4.13).

The focus group students commented that the Freshman Seminar course did discuss these challenges, however, as Ann stated, "it would be impossible for any class to make these problems go away." Tim's transitional needs were met since his section spent several class periods focusing on students getting to know one another. He said that most of his friends are friends that he made through the course and that he met his best friend in class. Sue remarked that it was helpful talking about roommate problems in class because although her problems were not solved, she was able to "realize that other students shared the same problem," which made her feel better about her situation.

Table 4.13

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: Did Freshman Seminar help you overcome the stressors associated with your first-year of college?

(Item 7, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=3)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Yes	151	49.8	1
No	132	43.6	2
Somewhat	20	6.6	3

How will Freshman Seminar be beneficial?--Another question that the Freshman Seminar pre-course survey (Item 7) inquired about was how students thought the Freshman Seminar course would benefit them in their transition to college. Five general responses were coded. These included “adjusting to college life,” “learning about campus,” “meeting new people,” “learning academic skills,” and “providing a support group” of other first-year students with similar adjustment needs (Table 4.14).

The students in the focus group remarked that “adjusting to college life,” “meeting new people,” and “learning academic skills” were the main ways that they thought Freshman Seminar would benefit them, however they agreed that “learning about campus” and “providing a support group” were also very important.

Table 4.14

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: In what ways do you think Freshman Seminar will be beneficial to you in adapting to your first year as a college student at Eastern Illinois University? (Item 7, FSS pre-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=5)	<u>Pre-Course (N=303)</u>		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Adjusting to college life	86	28.4	1
Learning about campus	66	21.8	2
Meeting new people	57	18.8	3
Learning academic skills	29	9.6	4
Providing a support group	29	9.6	5

Student suggestions for improvement.--Students also had the opportunity to voice their suggestions for improving the course on the FSS-post (Item 5). The most common coded response was that the course “should not be changed.” Suggestions included “less busy-work,” “more interaction among students,” a “shorter class period,” “make class more fun,” “no textbook,” “stronger focus on academic skills,” “campus tours,” “more guest speakers,” and “no exams” (Table 4.15).

The students in the focus group had many suggestions for improving the course. According to Sue, there is too much “busy-work.” Ann supported this comment by stating that “doing work wouldn’t be bad if it was something that was interesting and that would really help us, but the work we get is usually pointless and doesn’t help us at all.” Sue made an additional comment that “all [she] learned to do was glue.” Bill thought that “teachers should encourage more social activities for students. Why not organize games in the ‘Rec’ or do fun things for class where we learn how to interact with each other.” Bill additionally, brought up the idea of having class in different locations throughout campus. “The classrooms don’t show us anything about the school and maps don’t do anything.” Sue agreed and stated that “you come, you sit, you leave.” Tim discussed the length of the class as another area for improvement. “I think that it should be for one hour a week for the whole semester.” He further argued that “it would help to meet before finals so that we can ask questions and prepare for them.” Sue also addressed the length of the class periods. She stated that “the last 15 minutes feel like forever.” Bill agreed that it was sometimes hard to pay attention after a certain point. Ann added that having more guest speakers would be good as long as it was “more organized.”

Table 4.15

Post-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: What are your suggestions for improving Freshman Seminar? (Item 5, FSS post-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=10)	Post-Course (N=303)		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%(Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
It should not be changed	46	15.2	1
Less busy-work	43	14.2	2
More interaction among students	40	13.2	3
Shorter class period	31	10.2	4
Make class more fun	24	7.9	5
No textbook	11	3.6	6
Stronger focus on academic skills	10	3.3	7
Incorporate campus tours	9	3.0	8
Schedule more guest speakers	7	2.3	9
No exams	2	0.7	10

Motivators for enrolling in Freshman Seminar. — Motivators for taking the Freshman Seminar Course were assessed in Item 5 of the FSS-pre. Seven of the ten coded categories were found on more than 10 percent of all surveys. These motivators were to earn an “extra credit hour,” it was “recommended by an Academic Advisor,” “sounded like a good class,” “to learn about Eastern Illinois University,” “to help adjust to the first year of college.” “easy ‘A’,” and “to meet new people” (Table 4.16).

During the focus group, Tim said that the reason he chose to take Freshman Seminar was so that he could meet people. Ann admitted that “if anything, its an easy A,” whereas Bill and Sue stated that they wanted to learn academic skills and how to “survive their first year of college.”

Table 4.16

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: Why did you decide to enroll in Freshman Seminar? (Item 5, FSS pre-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=10)	<u>Pre-Course (N=303)</u>		
	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Extra credit hour	54	17.8	1
Recommended by Academic Advisor	49	16.2	2
Sounded like a good class	43	14.2	3
To learn about Eastern Illinois University	42	13.9	4
To help adjust to the first year of college	41	13.5	5
Easy "A"	36	11.9	6
To meet people	34	11.2	7
Required through the Gateway program	21	6.9	8
To raise grade point average	5	1.7	9
Other friends were enrolled	3	1.0	10

How student found out about Freshman Seminar. — Students were asked how they found out about the Freshman Seminar course at Eastern Illinois University (Item 4, FSS-pre). The majority of students stated that they learned about the course from their “academic advisor”, while 15.2 percent of students indicated that they had been informed of the course by their summer “orientation leader.” A small group of students mentioned that they learned about the course through “friends,” “the course catalog,” “siblings,” and “parents” (Table 4.17).

In the focus group, Ann commented that she took the course because her older sister told her that the course “was easy and didn’t take up too much time.” Bill, Tim, and Sue each found out about the course from their academic advisor.

Table 4.17

Pre-Course Student Responses to the Free Response Question: How did you find out about the Freshman Seminar course at EIU? (Item 4, FSS pre-survey)

Qualitative Codes (N=6)	<u>Pre-Course (N=303)</u>		
	<i>f</i>	<i>% (Total)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Academic Advisor	233	76.9	1
Orientation leader	46	15.2	2
Friends	11	3.6	3
Course catalog	6	2.0	4
Siblings	4	1.3	5
Parents	2	0.7	6

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Implications

This study assessed the self-reported level of student development among first-year students who took Freshman Seminar, EIU 1004, at Eastern Illinois University compared to students who did not take the course. This study further examined student perceptions of the Freshman Seminar course in terms of initial perceptions of the course, its content, and final perceptions of the influences the course had on their college adjustment after eight weeks.

The study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative measures. The First-Year Student Development Survey (FYSDS) was used to measure the self-reported student development of both Freshman Seminar and Non-Freshman Seminar students. Data from the FYSDS were analyzed by performing t-tests of the difference between means for each of three research questions: (1) Does student development take place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college? (2) Do students who take Freshman Seminar enter college with a different perceived level of student development than students who do not choose to take Freshman Seminar? (3) At the end of the first eight weeks of college, is there a difference in the level of student development reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar compared to first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar?

The Freshman Seminar Survey (FSS) was used to determine students' perceptions of the Freshman Seminar course, its content, and its influence on college adjustment. The FSS was content analyzed and then quantitatively coded by item in order to develop

coded nominal categories within each item. Data were analyzed by performing frequency distributions of the data for each item in order to address the two final research questions: (4) Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have benefited them in their initial transition to college? (5) Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that others take the course in subsequent years?

Quantitative Discussion and Implications

The first research question to be addressed was: Does student development take place among first-year students during the first eight weeks of college? The statistical analysis for this research question indicated that student development did occur within the first eight weeks of the college experience (Table 4.1). This implies that both students who took Freshman Seminar and students who did not take Freshman Seminar experienced some level of development during the first eight weeks of college regardless of enrollment in a Freshman Seminar program. Therefore, it is not necessary to take a Freshman Seminar course in order to experience student development during the first eight weeks of college.

The second research question to be addressed was: Do students who take Freshman Seminar enter college with a different perceived level of student development than students who do not choose to take Freshman Seminar? The results indicated that there was no difference in students' initial level of development (Table 4.2). The initial mean scores on the FYSDS (Table 4.4) suggest that in this study, the Non-Freshman Seminar sample had a slightly better initial mean than the Freshman Seminar sample, however, the t-test showed that the difference was not significant and therefore could be due to chance. This implies that the students in both samples were similar in their levels

of development at the start of college, and therefore, the two groups were statistically comparable.

The third research question to be addressed was: At the end of the first eight weeks of college, is there a difference in the level of student development reported by first-year students who took Freshman Seminar compared to first-year students who did not take Freshman Seminar? The final mean scores indicated that the Freshman Seminar sample had a higher level of student development by the end of the eight-week time period than the Non-Freshman Seminar sample (Table 4.4). The t-test supported this result by showing that the post-test scores of the Freshman Seminar sample were significantly higher than those of the Non-Freshman Seminar sample, meaning that the results were not due to chance (Table 4.3). Therefore, in this study, it can be stated that the Freshman Seminar sample had a higher level of student development than the Non-Freshman Seminar sample after eight weeks of college experience. Exposure to a Freshman Seminar program thus appears to accelerate student development compared to students who do not have the benefit of such a developmental instructional program.

Implications. — The results of this study illustrated that student development did take place during the first eight weeks of college regardless of whether a student participated in Freshman Seminar or not. This means that development naturally takes place when students are exposed to the college experience. However, although both Freshman Seminar students and Non-Freshman Seminar students were similar in their initial levels of student development, the results indicated that after eight weeks of college, students who took Freshman Seminar experienced a greater level of self-perceived student development than those who did not take the course. This implies that

in general, participating in Freshman Seminar is associated with greater student development after an eight-week time period and that Freshman Seminar provides assistance to further enhance student development.

Qualitative Discussion and Implications

Initial Adjustment to College. — The fourth research question to be addressed was: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar report the course to have benefited them in their initial transition to college? It was evident from the results that most students who took Freshman Seminar perceived the course to have been beneficial to them in their initial transition to college; however, not all students found the course to be beneficial (Table 4.5). There are a number of reasons why the course was a positive experience for some and not for others. One assumption could be the motivating factors that students reported (Table 4.16). Students who reported developmental motivators such as, “it sounded like a good class,” “to learn about Eastern Illinois University,” or “to meet people,” may have perceived the class to be beneficial, whereas students who reported motivators, such as, to receive an extra credit hour, to get an easy “A”, or to raise grade point average, may have perceived the course to be less beneficial. Further studies could compare the two items to determine if course satisfaction was related to motivating factors. Another assumption is that the students who did not benefit from the seminar may have had a poor teacher-student relationship, or maybe did not want to take the course, but they were either recommended to enroll by academic advisors because they were classified as an “at-risk” student, or required to enroll through the University Gateway program.

Would students recommend the course to others? — The final research question to be addressed was: Do first-year students who take Freshman Seminar recommend that others take the course in subsequent years? This was another way to determine if students were satisfied with the course. The majority of the students (78.2%) reported that they would recommend the course in the future, and only a small number of students (20.5 %) stated that they would not recommend the course to future first-year students (Table 4.6). These results were similar to those at Glassboro State College in 1984, where 84 percent of Freshman Seminar students stated that they would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students (Fidler & Hunter, 1989). The frequencies in this study were similar between the students who thought the course was beneficial and the students who would recommend the course to other incoming first-year students, as well as students who did not think the course was beneficial and who would not recommend the course to other first-year students. The fact that these numbers are so similar, suggests that possibly, the same students who thought the course was beneficial would recommend it, while the students who did not think the course was beneficial, would not recommend it.

Should Freshman Seminar be required? — The majority of students (65.3%) did not think that the Freshman Seminar course should be required for all incoming first-year students; however, 34.3 percent of students thought that the course should be required (Table 4.7). Again, this is very similar to the findings at Glassboro State College in 1984 in which 35 percent of students reported that the class should be required for all new first-year students (Fidler & Hunter, 1989). This suggests that even though the majority of students thought that the course was beneficial (Table 4.5) and would recommend it to

other students (Table 4.6), they still thought that the class should be a choice only for students who decide that they want or need this experience. This demonstrates that students were able to clearly recognize the purpose and benefits of the course. Students were aware that the course offered specific assistance and that not all students would benefit from the course or have the time to take it. Therefore, even though most students thought that the course was helpful, they understood that it was not possible for the course to meet the needs of all first-year students.

Students' initial course perceptions versus perception of course impact. — The results for this item (1, FSS-pre/post) demonstrated that the rankings of the coded categories were very similar between the pre- and post-course surveys (Table 4.8). Therefore, it was assumed that students perceived the same purposes to be important both at the start and conclusion of the course. Students thought the general purpose of the course was to focus on adjusting to college, becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University, and meeting new people (Table 4.8). Because they ranked these same categories as what the course had actually accomplished, it can be noted that students perceived that the course met its objectives. These results most likely had an influence on students' overall perceptions of the course and determined their level of satisfaction with the course. Even if the course did not meet all of their needs, if the course accomplished what the students initially perceived that it would accomplish, then it was likely that they would think that the course was successful.

Course topics of interest. — Students reported many of the same topics in both the pre- and post-course data as being relevant to first-year student needs. However, after taking the Freshman Seminar course, students discovered new topics and recognized

others as more important than they previously thought (Item 2, FSS). Over 10 percent of the students identified “guest speakers,” as an important topic covered in the course, which was not previously mentioned on the pre-course surveys (Table 4.9). This suggests that “guest speakers” was not something that first-year students generally thought of when determining which course topics would meet their needs. However, it was something new that was introduced to them, which they apparently decided had benefited their college experience. At the end of the course, students recognized “drugs and alcohol” and “time management” as important topics to be covered in the course (Table 4.9). These particular responses were previously mentioned on the pre-course survey, but did not receive high frequency rankings, thus indicating that during their first eight weeks of college, students had some experiences in dealing with drugs and alcohol and time management to make them realize that these topics were more important than they once perceived. Students from the focus group also commented that guest speakers were very important for learning about different issues and resources on campus and that time management was a skill that students needed to better develop.

Topics students would avoid. — The most frequent response on both the pre- and post-course survey was “all topics would be helpful” (Table 4.10). On an item where students were asked which topics to avoid (Item 3, FSS), a response such as this indicates that students did not want topics to be avoided at this point in their development or that they did not yet know what topics existed to be discussed. Perhaps they had not had enough experience to be able to answer this question. This could indicate why some students left this item blank. The fact that the frequency for this response increased on the post-course survey suggests that, overall, students perceived most of the topics to

have been helpful to the first-year experience. Additionally, the other responses mentioned did not have high levels of frequency, which suggests that most students did not indicate that these were irrelevant topics. The focus group provided specific topics covered in their particular sections of the course.

Topics not covered. — Again, students often left the question blank, which asked if there were topics not covered in the course that they would like included (Item 4, FSS-post). However it is important to note that of the students who did respond to this item, most of them wanted more information on academic skills, differences between high school and college, alcohol and sex, social activities, roommates, and academic and career planning (Table 4.11). This indicates that these are the areas that students had experienced most often throughout the first eight weeks of college and therefore would like to have spent more time on those particular topics. Students from the focus group agreed that those were the issues that they had commonly experienced and thought that it would be helpful to students if instructors would place more emphasis on these topics.

Because academic concerns are a continuous challenge for first-year students, it is important for Freshman Seminar programs to provide assistance in this area.

Additionally, because many of the academic concerns are a result of the differences between high school and college, Freshman Seminar programs can help students by providing information about the important differences (Hart & Keller, 1980; DeBoer, 1983). Additionally, according to research on college student needs, career planning is also one of the main concerns of students (Murphy & Archer, 1983). There was not much information to suggest that students had previously reported drugs and alcohol as a critical issue. However, in this study, students reported that it should be covered more.

Transitional challenges.— Students experienced many of the same challenges that they had initially anticipated. The main challenge that students anticipated and experienced was academic expectations. Failure to make good grades was stated as a primary fear of students. Academic workload was also reported as an experienced challenge, along with time management (Table 4.12). These responses indicate that students came to school worried primarily with their academics. The results suggest that this was a validated fear because students continued to experience the academic challenges, even when all other challenges seemed to improve. It was mentioned in the focus group as well that academics were a source of concern for first-year students.

Academic success has been a continuing challenge for first-year college students. More than ten years ago, students reported academic concerns and time management as primary challenges to their college transition (Carney & Barak, 1976; Archer & Lammin, 1985; Evans, 1985; Barrow, Cox, Sepich & Spivak, 1989). More recently, academic concerns and time management were still a source of stress affecting students (Murphy & Archer, 1996) and this research supports that they appear to be continuing challenges of present first-year students.

Did course assist with transitional challenges?— Because nearly half of the students indicated that Freshman Seminar helped them deal with their transitional challenges, it is assumed that the course did make a difference in the development of first-year students (Table 4.13). Although the other half of the students stated that the course did not assist them with their transitional challenges, it can be assumed that these students gained assistance in other areas of the course since many of these students still reported that they would recommend the course to others. The focus group students

stated that although the course did not solve their problems or make their problems go away, it had helped them in some ways to understand and work through their transitional problems and to realize that other students were experiencing the same problems.

How will Freshman Seminar be beneficial?— Students reported five general ways that they thought Freshman Seminar would be helpful to them in adjusting to college. These were “adjusting to college life,” “learning about campus,” “meeting new people,” “learning academic skills,” and “providing a support group” (Table 4.14). These responses were similar to several of the researched elements from the Literature Review (Chapter II) and to those discussed by Chickering and Reisser (1993), suggesting that at the start of the course, students had some idea about what would be helpful to their college adjustment. They were able to recognize that in order to have a successful college adjustment, specific elements such as campus knowledge, academic skills, and social interactions were important to their development.

Student suggestions for improvement.— Students listed several different suggestions that they perceived would improve the course. Although the most frequent response was that “it should not be changed,” specific changes such as decreasing the amount of “busy-work,” increasing the “interaction among students,” “shorten the class period,” and discontinue the use of the course textbook (Table 4.15). These findings suggest that students did not necessarily wish to change the content of the course, indicating that they were pleased with the content, but that perhaps some of the characteristics of the course should be modified to meet student preferences. When students got together in the form of a focus group to voice their opinions, many

suggestions were provided indicating that maybe it was easier for students to write on the survey that the course was fine rather than take the time to think of ways to improve it.

Motivators for enrolling in Freshman Seminar. — There was a combination of reasons why students took the Freshman Seminar course. Some students took the course to get the extra credit hour or to get an “easy A” (Table 4.16). These students most likely did not receive all of the potential benefits of the course because all they showed interest in was the end result. Students who stated that they wanted to adjust to their first-year, meet people, and learn about the university most likely gained the benefits of the course because they demonstrated through their responses that they were looking to develop and therefore, were most likely to be open to the challenges of the course. The students in the focus group served as a representation of these differences. Students can get what they want out of Freshman Seminar and even more, they will get what they put into it. These differences in motivators suggest the levels of commitment from the students, which therefore implies their level of development from the course.

How students found out about Freshman Seminar. — According to the results (Table 4.17), the main way that students found out about the Freshman Seminar course was through their Academic Advisor. In knowing this information, it is possible to strengthen this link by keeping Academic Advisors informed about the course and suggesting ways of encouraging students to enroll. If students are informed that the course is just “an easy A,” they may have a different perception of the course than if they thought that the course would actually help them succeed in the years that they attend the university. Also, this information will allow the university to target students better so that those who would benefit from the course would have the opportunity to enroll.

Implications for Further Research

This study used a nine-digit tracking system for each individual survey to confirm that the same exact students completed both pre- and post-course data. Without the tracking system, it would have been impossible to know whether the pre-course samples were comparable to the post-course samples. However, this study did not use the tracking information to determine the individual development among students. Although this would be an extremely lengthy process, it would be beneficial to test the data for individual student development by comparing the pre-course data and post-course data of each individual student in the sample. This would allow a more in-depth investigation of the influence that the Freshman Seminar had on individual student development.

The tracking information could also be used to determine student development within specific sections of the Freshman Seminar. This would be helpful in determining if there were higher or lower levels of development in particular sections, thus indicating that the development could be associated with student-teacher relationships. This would provide insight into whether the course content influenced student perceptions of the course or whether the particular course instructor influenced students' perceptions of the course.

With respect to investigating individual course sections, the tracking information would also allow researchers to determine which sections had been taught by faculty members and which had been taught by staff members. This would provide a greater understanding of how the two different types of instructor styles may have influenced student development. Research by Blackhurst and Pearson (1996) found that Freshman Seminar courses have been additionally beneficial to students when they were taught by a

combination of both faculty members and student affairs administrators. It has been perceived that faculty members place the strongest emphasis on the cognitive outcomes of student development, such as academic and intellectual development, whereas, student affairs administrators generally emphasize the affective outcomes of student development, such as personal, emotional, and social adjustment. Blackhurst and Pearson (1996) also reported that faculty members generally do not think that student affairs administrators encourage the cognitive development of students, and student affairs administrators generally do not think that faculty members encourage the affective development of students. By encouraging the course to be team-taught by both faculty and staff, students would likely receive both cognitive and affective aspects of development, leading to a more well-rounded developmental experience (Blackhurst & Pearson, 1996).

Additionally, it would be beneficial to retest the same group after the entire first year in order to determine how the influence of Freshman Seminar continues to assist students throughout their first-year of college. It would also be helpful to look at the students after four or five years of college in order to study retention rates and graduation rates of Freshman Seminar students compared to Non-Freshman Seminar students.

Although the results indicated that the students in this study did not have significant differences in their initial levels of self-perceived student development, it would be useful to determine if particular differences do exist between the two groups. In future research it would be useful to investigate the high school grade point averages, ACT scores, SAT scores and other possible variables to determine the initial levels of

student development and then compare that to the students' perceived level of student development.

This research could be very useful to the Freshman Seminar program at Eastern Illinois University. The current Freshman Seminar course is in the process of revision in order to update the content and improve the potential outcomes. Therefore, the results of this study should be seriously considered and possibly implemented into the new course outline. In conducting this research, it has become evident how important it is for students to have a voice in the structure of a course such as the Freshman Seminar. The issues that relate to first-year college students continue to change throughout the years, however, faculty and administrators may not always realize the types of changes that occur and how to satisfy student needs effectively. Therefore, it is important to consider student input in order to effectively meet those needs and encourage development. Through this data, students have been able to have some level of input as to what issues and concerns they need to have addressed as they integrate onto campus. They have been able to communicate their needs as well as make some direct suggestions regarding the improvement of the Freshman Seminar course. This input can be implemented into the new program so that Freshman Seminar can focus on the issues and concerns that affect first-year students today, thus leading to the enhanced development of these students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archer, J. & Lamnin, A. (1985). An investigation of personal and academic stressors on college campuses. Journal of College Student Personnel, 26 (3), 210-215.

Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. Journal of College Student Development, 25 (4), 297-308.

Astin, A. (1993). What works in college? Four critical years revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barrow, J., Cox, P., Sepich, R., & Spivak, R. (1989). Student needs assessment surveys: Do they predict student use of services? Journal of College Student Development, 30 (1), 77-82.

Benedict, A., Apsler, R., & Morrison, S. (1977). Student views of their counseling needs and counseling services. Journal of College Student Personnel, 18, 110-114.

Brooks, J. II & DuBois, D. (1995). Individual and environmental predictors of adjustment during the first year of college. Journal of College Student Development, 36, 347-360.

Bruss, K. (1996). Using the case method to promote freshman seminar goals. Journal of College Student Development, 37 (1), 98-100.

Carney, C. & Barak, H. (1976). A survey of student needs and student services. Journal of College Student Personnel, 17, 280-284.

Chickering, A.W. & Reisser, L. (1993). Education and identity, 2nd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Cohen, R. & Jody, R. (1978). Freshman Seminar: A New Orientation. Westview Special Studies in Higher Education.

Cuyjet, M. & Rhode, D. (1987). Follow-up of orientation contacts: Effects on freshman environmental satisfaction. Journal of College Student Personnel, 28 (1), 21-27.

Danes, S.M. & Hira, T.K. (1987). Money management knowledge of college students. Journal of Student Financial Aid, 17 (1), 4-16.

DeBoer, G. (1983). The importance of freshman students' perceptions of the factors responsible for first-term academic performance. Journal of College Student Development, 24, 344-349.

Disbro, W. (1996). 100 things every college freshman ought to know. New York: Cambridge Stratford.

Drummond, R.J. (1996). Appraisal procedures for counselors and helping professionals, 3rd Ed. Columbus: Merrill.

Evans, N. (1985). Needs assessment methodology: A comparison of results. Journal of College Student Personnel, 26, 107-114.

Evans, N. (1997). Multicultural immersion: Using learning styles to educate about difference. Journal of College Student Development, 38 (2), 195-197.

Fidler, P. & Hunter, M. (1989). How seminars enhance student success. In M. Upcraft & J. Gardner, The freshman year experience (pp. 216-237). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Fitch, R. (1991). The interpersonal values of students at differing levels of extracurricular involvement. Journal of College Student Development, 32 (1), 24-30.

Forster, B., Swallow, C., Fodor, J.H., & Foulser, J.E. (1999). Effects of a college study skills course on at-risk first-year students. NASPA Journal, 36 (2), 120-132.

Gallagher, R., Golin, A. & Kelleher, K. (1992). The personal, career and learning skills needs of college students. Journal of College Student Development, 33, 301-309.

Gordon, V. & Grites, T. (1984). The freshman seminar course: Helping students succeed. Journal of College Student Personnel, 25 (4), 315-320.

Hanley, G. & Olson, S. (1996). Preparing incoming students for the university educational process: From the students' perspective and retrospective. Journal of the Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition, 8 (1), 47-77.

Hart, D. & Keller, M. (1980). Self-reported reasons for poor academic performance of first-term freshmen. Journal of College Student Development, 21, 529-534.

Hira, T.K. & Brinkman, C.S. (1992). Factors influencing the size of student debt. Journal of Student Financial Aid, 22 (2), 33-49.

Hirt, J.B. & Nick, H. (1999). How students manage money: Some developmental implications. NASPA Journal, 37 (1), 349-360.

House, J. & Kuchynka, S. (1997). The effects of a freshman orientation course on the achievement of health sciences students. Journal of College Student Development, 38 (5), 540-542.

Johnson, D., Nelson, S. & Wooden, D. (1985). Faculty and student knowledge of university counseling center services. Journal of College Student Personnel, 26 (1), 27-32.

Kenny, M. (1987). Family ties and leaving home for college: Recent findings and implications. Journal of College Student Development, 28, 438-442.

Kuh, G.D., Schuh, J.H., Whitt, E.J., and Associates (1991). Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McEwen, M. & Roper, L. (1994). Incorporating multiculturalism into student affairs preparation programs: Suggestions from the literature. Journal of College Student Development, 35 (1), 46-53.

McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (1997). Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction, 4th Ed. New York: Longman.

Messer, M. (1993). The impact of freshman seminar on the academic, social, and personal development as perceived by students completing the course at Eastern Illinois University fall semester 1989. Dissertation.

Munro, J. & Hirt, J.B. (1998). Credit cards and college students: Who pays, who benefits? Journal of College Student Development, 39 (1), 51-57.

Murphy, M. & Archer, J. (1996). Stressors on the college campus: A comparison of 1985 and 1993. Journal of College Student Development, 37 (1), 20-28.

Paul, E. & Kelleher, M. (1995). Pre-college concerns about losing and making friends in college: Implications for friendship satisfaction and self-esteem during the college transition. Journal of College Student Development, 36, 513-521.

Pascarella, E.T. & Terenzini, P.T. (1991). How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Petrie, T. & Helmcamp, A. (1998). Evaluation of an academic study skills course. Journal of College Student Development, 39 (1), 112-116.

Pondsford, B.J. & Master, L.A. (1998). How to use focus groups in higher education. College and University, 73 (3), 2-9.

Rathus, S. & Fichner-Rathus, L. (1997). The Right Start. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Russel, R. & Petrie, T. (1992). Academic adjustment of college students: Assessment and counseling. In S. Brown & R. Lent (Eds.), Handbook of counseling psychology (pp. 485-511). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Saddlemire, J.R. (1996). Qualitative study of white second-semester undergraduates' attitudes toward African American undergraduates at a predominantly white university. Journal of College Student Development, 37 (6), 684-691.

Schwitzer, A., McGovern, T., & Robbins, S. (1991). Adjustment outcomes of a freshman seminar: A utilization-focused approach. Journal of College Student Development, 32 (6), 484-489.

Sidler, M.W. & Reynolds, J. (1999). The freshman year experience: Student retention and student success. NASPA Journal, 36 (4), 288-300.

Taylor, S.H. (1998). The impact of college on the development of tolerance. NASPA Journal, 35 (4), 281-295.

Terenzini, P.T., Pascarella, E.T. & Bliming, G.S. (1996). Students' out-of-class experiences and their influence of learning and cognitive development: A literature review. Journal of College Student Development, 37 (2), 149-162.

Twale, D., & Sanders, C.S. (1999). Impact of non-classroom experiences on critical thinking ability. NASPA Journal, 36 (2), 133-146.

Upcraft, M.L. & Schuh, J.H. (1996). Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers .

Wilkie, C. & Redondo, B. (1996) Predictors of academic success and failure of first-year college students. Journal of the Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition, 8 (2), 17-32.

APPENDIX A

Graduate Thesis Survey

As a current graduate student in the Department of Counseling and Student Development, I am doing research on college student development to determine how first-year students adapt to their new college environment.

The purpose of this survey is to determine your personal development as associated with campus and the college environment.

The information in this survey is confidential and is intended only to provide information that will help the University to better assist first-year students in their transition to college. In order to learn about individual student development, it is necessary to code each survey. Therefore, please include the last four digits of your social security number at the top of each page.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this survey and thank you for your responses.

Would you be willing to participate in a short interview regarding the contents of this survey?

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, please provide your name and telephone number

Jennifer Donahoe
Graduate Student
Department of Counseling and Student Development

APPENDIX B

First-Year Student Development Survey

Please circle your year in school

1st Semester Freshman - 2nd Semester Freshman - Sophomore - Junior - Senior

Are you currently enrolled in a Freshman Seminar course? Yes No

How would you rate yourself on the following:	1 – High					5 – Low				
1. Knowledge of campus activities available at EIU	1	2	3	4	5					
2. Motivation to become involved in campus activities	1	2	3	4	5					
3. Knowledge of campus resources (career center, financial aid, writing center, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5					
4. Understanding and acceptance of the diverse nature of students at EIU	1	2	3	4	5					
5. Making informed decisions about drugs and alcohol	1	2	3	4	5					
6. Knowledge of the university and its traditions	1	2	3	4	5					
7. Time management skills	1	2	3	4	5					
8. Study skills	1	2	3	4	5					
9. Test-taking skills	1	2	3	4	5					
10. Understanding of university policies and procedures	1	2	3	4	5					
11. Confidence in making friends at EIU	1	2	3	4	5					
12. Personal responsibility	1	2	3	4	5					
13. Knowledge of campus layout	1	2	3	4	5					

APPENDIX D

Freshman Seminar Survey

Post-Course

1. How has Freshman Seminar impacted your college experience?
2. What do you perceive to be the most important topics covered in Freshman Seminar?
3. What topics were covered in Freshman Seminar that you do not perceive to be important?
4. What topics do you perceive to be important to first-year students that were not discussed in Freshman Seminar?
5. What are your suggestions for improving Freshman Seminar?
6. What stressors have you encountered as a first-year student?
7. Did your Freshman Seminar help you overcome these stressors?
8. Do you think that Freshman Seminar was beneficial to you in adapting to your first year as a college student at EIU?
9. Would you recommend Freshman Seminar to other incoming first-year students?
10. Do you think that Freshman Seminar should be a required course for all incoming first-year students?

APPENDIX E

First-Year Student Development Survey Coding Form

How would you rate yourself on the following:

1. Knowledge of campus activities available at EIU
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
2. Motivation to become involved in campus activities
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
3. Knowledge of campus resources (career center, financial aid, writing center, etc.)
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
4. Understanding and acceptance of the diverse nature of students at EIU
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
5. Making informed decisions about drugs and alcohol
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
6. Knowledge of the university and its traditions
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
7. Time management skills
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
8. Study skills
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
9. Test-taking skills
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
10. Understanding of university policies and procedures
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
11. Confidence in making friends at EIU
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
12. Personal responsibility
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5
13. Knowledge of campus layout
A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

APPENDIX F**Freshman Seminar Survey Coding Form****Pre-Course**

1. What do you perceive to be the purpose of the Freshman Seminar course?
 - a. Understanding how college is different from high school
 - b. Adjusting to college
 - c. Meeting new people
 - d. Learning about campus activities
 - e. Becoming aware of campus services
 - f. Learning academic skills
 - g. Becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University
 - h. I don't know

2. What topics do you think should be covered in Freshman Seminar?
 - a. Campus activities
 - b. Campus services and resources
 - c. Building locations
 - d. History and traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University
 - e. Academic expectations – (workload, teacher expectations)
 - f. Academic and career planning
 - g. Study skills
 - h. Note-taking skills
 - i. Test-taking skills
 - j. Computer skills
 - k. Communication skills
 - l. Organizational skills
 - m. Time management
 - n. Financial management
 - o. Drugs and alcohol
 - p. Sex
 - q. Roommates
 - r. Diversity
 - s. Coping skills – (stress relief, homesickness)
 - t. Guest speakers
 - u. Everything that might relate to the first year of college

3. What topics do you think should not be covered in the Freshman Seminar?
 - a. Drugs and alcohol
 - b. Sex
 - c. Social experiences
 - d. History, traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University
 - e. Personal issues

- f. Diversity issues
 - g. Political/Controversial issues – (abortion, capital punishment)
 - h. Discussions from other classes
 - i. Ice breakers
 - j. Homework
 - k. None – all topics could be helpful
4. How did you find out about the Freshman Seminar course at Eastern Illinois University?
- a. Academic Advisor
 - b. Orientation Leader
 - c. Friends
 - d. Parents
 - e. Siblings
 - f. Course catalog
5. Why did you decide to enroll in Freshman Seminar?
- a. Easy “A”
 - b. Extra credit hour
 - c. To raise grade point average
 - d. Recommended by Academic Advisor
 - e. Required through the Gateway program
 - f. To meet people
 - g. To help adjust to the first year of college
 - h. To learn about Eastern Illinois University
 - i. Sounded like a good class
 - j. Other friends were enrolled
6. What areas of your college transition concern you the most?
- a. Roommates
 - b. Homesickness
 - c. Dating Issues
 - d. Academic expectations
 - e. Grades
 - f. Deciding a major
 - g. Using computers
 - h. Independence
 - i. Knowing where things are on campus
 - j. Meeting new people
 - k. Time management
 - l. Financial management
 - m. Date rape

7. In what ways do you think Freshman Seminar will be beneficial to you in adapting to your first year as a college student at Eastern Illinois University?
 - a. Meeting new people
 - b. Learning about campus
 - c. Learning academic skills
 - d. Adjusting to college life
 - e. Providing a support group

APPENDIX G

Freshman Seminar Survey Coding Form

Post-Course

1. How has Freshman Seminar impacted your college experience?
 - a. Understanding how college is different from high school
 - b. Adjusting to college
 - c. Meeting new people
 - d. Learning about campus activities
 - e. Becoming aware of campus services
 - f. Learning academic skills
 - g. Becoming familiar with Eastern Illinois University
 - h. It did not help

2. What do you perceive to be the most important topics covered in Freshman Seminar?
 - a. Campus activities
 - b. Campus services and resources
 - c. Building locations
 - d. History, traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University
 - e. Academic expectations
 - f. Academic and career planning
 - g. Study skills
 - h. Note-taking skills
 - i. Test-taking skills
 - j. Computer skills
 - k. Communication skills
 - l. Organizational skills
 - m. Time management
 - n. Financial management
 - o. Drugs and alcohol
 - p. Sex – (health risks, date rape)
 - q. Roommates
 - r. Diversity
 - s. Coping skills – (stress relief, homesickness)
 - t. Guest speakers
 - u. Everything was important

3. What topics were covered in Freshman Seminar that you do not perceive to be important?
 - a. Drugs and alcohol
 - b. Sex
 - c. Library tour
 - d. History, traditions, and rules of Eastern Illinois University

- e. Personal issues
 - f. Diversity
 - g. Specific guest speakers
 - h. Financial management
 - i. Text book
 - j. Homework
 - k. Everything was important
4. What topics do you perceive to be important to first year students that were not discussed in Freshman Seminar?
- a. Academic skills
 - b. Alcohol and sex
 - c. Social activities
 - d. Academic and career planning
 - e. Roommates
 - f. Differences between high school and college
5. What are your suggestions for improving Freshman Seminar?
- a. Shorter class period
 - b. Make class more fun
 - c. More interaction among students
 - d. More focus on academic skills
 - e. More guest speakers (more interesting topics)
 - f. Campus tours
 - g. Less busy-work
 - h. No exams
 - i. No text book
 - j. It should not be changed
6. What stressors have you encountered as a first-year student?
- a. Roommates
 - b. Homesickness
 - c. Dating issues
 - d. Academic expectations
 - e. Grades
 - f. Procrastination
 - g. Computers
 - h. Independence
 - i. Knowing where things are on campus
 - j. Meeting new people
 - k. Time management
 - l. Financial management
 - m. Decision making

7. Did your Freshman Seminar help you overcome these stressors?
A. Yes B. No C. Somewhat

8. Do you think that Freshman Seminar was beneficial to you in adapting to your first year as a college student at Eastern Illinois University?
A. Yes B. No C. Somewhat

9. Would you recommend Freshman Seminar to other incoming first-year students?
A. Yes B. No C. Maybe

10. Do you think that Freshman Seminar should be a required course for all incoming first-year students?
A. Yes B. No C. Maybe

APPENDIX H

EIU 1004 Course Outline

1. Catalog Description

- a. Course Number : EIU 1004
- b. Title: Freshman Seminar
- c. Credit: 1 - 0 - 1
- d. Term Offered: Fall
- e. Short Title: Freshman Seminar
- f. Course Description: This course develops student knowledge of university organization, traditions, and methods. It provides a conceptual framework for engaging successfully in the university experience.
- g. Prerequisites: Freshman standing (less than 30 semester hours of earned credit). This course may not be taken C/NC.

Rationale: This course is designed to meet the needs of freshmen students as they make the transition to university life. Such a course seems particularly appropriate because of the traditionally high number of first generation students who attend Eastern.

Because both the material in the course and the need for it are most appropriate for the initial weeks of the student's career, the course has been organized so that it may be completed during the first eight weeks of the semester. The content of the course draws upon the experience of many faculties at other universities where similar courses are being taught.

Because of the extent of the material to be covered, the discussion format of the course, and the inclusion of testing and other types of assignments, it is recommended that each class meeting be for seventy-five minutes; enrollment limited to 25 per section.

2. Outline of Course

Week One	<p>Introduction: Making the Transition to College Readings: Unit 1, pg. 7 and Unit 2, pg 35 <u>Foundations A Reader for New College Students</u> Virginia N. Gordon and Thomas L. Minnick</p> <p>Understanding the Campus Readings: Unit 2, pg. 49 in Gordon and Minnick</p>
Week Two	<p>Study Skills and Time Management Readings: Unit 3, pg. 89 & 101 & 113 in Gordon and Minnick</p>

- Week Three Using the Library and Using University Services
Reading: Unit 3, pg. 107 in Gordon and Minnick
EIU Student Survival Guide
Guest Speakers from and visits to Booth Library, the
Writing Center, Counseling Center, Computer Center,
Reading Center, the Learning Assistance Center.
- Week Four Living with Other People: Personal Relationships to
Include Roommates, Negotiating Conflicts, Ethnic Diversity,
On and Off Campus Environments
Readings: Unit 2, pg. 59 & 61 in Gordon and Minnick
- Developing a Social Life: To Include Social Organizations,
Dating, Community Involvement
Readings: Unit 7, pg. 225 in Gordon and Minnick
- Week Five Developing a Healthy Life Style: Anxiety Management,
Drugs and Alcohol, Student Conduct Code, Personal Safety
Readings: Unit 2, pg 45 and Unit 6, pg 189 & 194 in Gordon
and Minnick
Guest speakers from Counseling Center, Student Judicial
Board, Department of Health Studies
- Week Six Making the Best Use of the University: Cultural
Opportunities, Volunteer, Academic and Service Groups
Readings: Unit 2, pg. 64 and Unit 5, pg. 168 in Gordon and
Minnick
- Making Ends Meet: Financing a University Education and
Money Management
Unit 2, pg. 55 in Gordon and Minnick
- Week Seven Non-Traditional Life on Campus: Minorities, Disabled and
Adult Learners, Part-time Students and Commuter Students.
Readings: Unit 7, pg. 234 and 238 in Gordon and Minnick
- Week Eight Final Look: What Differences can a College Degree Make?
Readings: Library materials and hand outs are available
Unit 8, pg. 255 & 274 in Gordon and Minnick
- Choosing a Major - Planning a Career
Readings: Unit 4, pg. 123 & 132 and Unit 5, pg. 168 & 175
in Gordon and Minnick

Evaluation Students will be evaluated on a point system based on attendance, quizzes, examinations, assignments, activities, and completion of writing assignments in a journal.

3. Implementation

a. Instructors will be recruited from faculty volunteers across the campus. Instructors will receive specialized training and aid in scheduling activities and speakers.

b. Textbook: The text to be issued to students will be:

Gordon, Virginia N. and Minnick, Thomas L. Foundations A Reader for New College Students. Wadsworth Publishing, 1996

- A supplementary text will be made available to instructors:

Gardner, John N. and Jewler, A. Jerome. Your College Experience

Copies of the supplementary text will be on reserve at Booth Library and resources permitting, on reserve at the desks of freshman residence halls.

Any additional supplementary or resource materials will be placed on reserve in Booth Library.

c. No exceptional costs are anticipated.

d. First term offered: Fall, 1989

4. Rationale

a. Purpose and need of this course is to strengthen the academic performance, social adjustment, and personal growth of students entering the University, leading to greater student and faculty satisfaction with the educational process and to increase student retention. There is no consistent method by which students may receive information about the organization of the university, its traditions, protocols, requirements, etc. Nor is there currently an opportunity for students to discuss standards of social and interpersonal relationships and development which are thrust upon them as freshmen on the campus of a residential university. Present sources of such information do not consistently include faculty, and frequently omit off-campus, non-traditional, transfer, and commuter

- b. students. This course will not replace any current programs for testing, advising, or preregistering students. The content of this course is particularly appropriate for students attending college for the first time.
 - c. The course is intended for freshmen (fewer than 30 s.h. earned).
 - d. Similarity to existing courses: none. No course will be deleted.
 - e. This course will be an elective for students with less than 30 s.h. of credit.
5. Community College Transfer: Because of the special content of this course relative to Eastern Illinois University, a community college course will not be judged equivalent to this course.

APPENDIX I

EIU 1004 Course Evaluation

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY SURVEY - QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

IMPORTANT DIRECTIONS FOR MARKING ANSWERS



- Do **NOT** USE PENS.
- Make heavy black marks that completely fill circle.
- Erase clearly any answer you change.
- Make no stray marks.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

EIU 1004-FRESHMAN SEMINAR COURSE EVALUATION
Rate the usefulness of the course in each of the areas listed below. Use the following scale.

- 5 - strongly agree
- 4 - somewhat agree
- 3 - no opinion
- 2 - disagree
- 1 - strongly disagree

THE FRESHMAN SEMINAR ASSISTED ME IN:

CODES									
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

1. becoming more aware of campus resources. (offices, services, activities, etc.)	5 4 3 2 1
2. making contact with and using more campus resources.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
3. becoming more aware of campus organizations. (social, political, religious, and etc.)	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
4. understanding university policies and procedures.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
5. managing my time more effectively.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
6. improving my effectiveness in taking class notes.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
7. developing better relationships with my living partners. (my roommate, and others).	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
8. gaining a better understanding of dating relationships.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
9. gaining a better understanding of relationships with my parents.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
10. understanding my values and how they affect my choices.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
11. being more accepting of individuals with values that differ from mine.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
12. understanding and being more accepting of personality differences.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
13. preparing and taking tests and exams.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
14. interacting with instructors.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
15. understanding and accepting my instructors as individuals.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
16. gaining an awareness of the library and its resources.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
17. understanding and being more accepting of cultural differences.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
18. dealing with stress and other mental factors that can affect my success as a student.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
19. exploring or confirming possible choices of a major.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
20. more effectively managing my finances.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
21. making informed choices about alcohol and drugs.	○ ○ ○ ○ ○