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# The First-Year Experience (FYE) Program Report: Course Offerings in Fall, 2006

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THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE) PROGRAM REPORT:  
COURSE OFFERINGS IN FALL, 2006

REPORT 2007-02

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Chris Stark  
Pat Fabiano

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## REPORT ON THE 2006 FYE PROGRAM

### INTRODUCTION

In the fall, 2005, three sections of the Freshman Interest Experience (FYE) Seminars were offered to in-coming freshmen as a first-year academic program option and complement to the already established FIGs Program. The FYE and the FIGs share several important characteristics; foremost, they are similarly focused on the first-year student population and they are both designed to meet at least two of the following learning outcomes:

- Demonstrate an understanding of inquiry and creative processes from disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary perspective(s).
- Articulate individual learning goals in the context of a liberal arts education and identify means for achieving these goals.
- Enhance competency in academic skills including: framing questions/posing problems, critical literacy, evaluating information sources, writing, oral communication, and collaboration.

Given these similarities, there are also important structural differences in the programs; specifically, the FYE differs from the FIGs in four ways:

- 1) The FYE seminars are stand-alone seminars, not linked to a GUR course as are the FIGs.
- 2) While the FIGs are taught by faculty and qualified staff, the FYE seminars are taught only by full-time faculty.
- 3) FYE seminars are offered in the fall, winter, and spring quarters, whereas the FIGs are available only in the fall of each year.
- 4) The FYE program does not have a mission statement that brings together a unified purpose for all the FYE seminars. Rather, each seminar is more closely aligned with disciplinary and/or departmental goals.

Assessment of the pilot FYE seminars in the fall, 2005, was carried out, but its significance was curtailed by the relatively small numbers of students in only three sections and by enrollment errors that inadvertently resulted in non-first year students enrolling in the FYEs.

Fall quarter, 2006, saw the first full complement of FYE seminars. Eight stand-alone seminars were offered in the fall 2006 with over 150 first-year students enrolled. Three

additional FYE seminars were offered in winter 2007, and one in spring quarter 2007. These seminars profited from the "culture of assessment" that has long characterized the operation of the FIGs. Like their FIGs counterparts, FYE students enrolled in the fall 2006 seminars completed the first-year academic programs pre/post seminar survey. These fall 2006 pre/post seminar survey findings are the first assessment conducted on the FYEs, and they provide a profile of student satisfaction with the FYEs and the effectiveness of the seminar to reach student learning outcomes.

Additionally, a supplemental survey of first-year academic programs was developed in the fall 2006. This 50-item survey consisted of four sets of questions tapping students' experiences and intermediate learning outcomes in first year academic programs. The assessment of experiences and intermediate outcomes was conducted in order to investigate the conditions under which long-term learning outcomes associated with effective first-year programs are being achieved (Barefoot, 2000; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, 2005; Swing, 2004). In fall 2006, the survey was administered to FYE and FIG students, and also to a control cohort of freshman enrolled in neither program.

These two survey instruments—the first-year academic programs pre/post seminar survey and the supplemental survey of first-year students' experiences and intermediate learning outcomes—together, and along with quantitative data taken from the Data Warehouse, represent the first full assessment of FYE student learning experiences at Western.

Finally, please note that as the FYE is in its first full-year of operation, there are no findings yet available for fall-to-fall retention, nor, of course, for graduation rates.

## FYE SEMINAR SURVEY FINDINGS

In its first full year, the FYE program looked to the FIGs for guidance in the area of assessment, and administered a pre/post seminar survey. Since the programs share a set of learning outcomes, and are also offered to freshmen only, in hopes of addressing the issue of a strong first-year experience, the questions included on the FYE survey were the same as on the FIGs survey (with, of course, the language altered from FIGs to FYE). The 2006-07 survey asked eighteen multiple-choice and four open-ended questions. As does the FIGs seminar survey, the FYE seminar survey is concerned with two issues: satisfaction with the seminar, and the effectiveness of the seminar to reach its student learning outcomes (SLO) goals. (Granted, a survey is only opinion, but when combined with quantitative data, these opinions do help create an overview of the programs' overall effectiveness.)

## Pre-Post FYE Survey Comparisons - Fall 2006

		Percents below are for responses "Strongly agree" or "Agree"	
		2006	Gap
Pre	I expect that enrolling in a FYE will help with my transition to Western.	86%	
Post	Enrolling in a FYE helped my transition to Western	72%	-14%
Pre	Enrolling in a FYE is worthwhile because it has provided me with a partial fall term schedule.	95%	
Post	Enrolling in a FYE was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule	68%	-27%
Percents below are for responses "A great deal" or "Somewhat"			
Pre	To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will help you create connections with peers?	95%	
Post	To what extent did the FYE seminar help you create connections with peers?	81%	-14%
Pre	To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?	85%	
Post	To what extent did the FYE seminar assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?	63%	-22%
Pre	To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?	94%	
Post	To what extent did the FYE seminar provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?	87%	-7%
		2006	Gap
Percents below are for responses "Very positive" or "Positive"			
Pre	So far, based on your experiences in your FYE, are your feelings about it:	68%	
Post	Based on your experiences in your FYE, are your feelings about it:	71%	+3%

## Pre-Post FYE Survey Comparisons - Fall 2006

	Percents below are for "Completely" or "Somewhat" prepared	2006	Gap
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to understand what your instructors expect of you academically?	98%	
			0%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: understand what your instructors expect of you academically?	98%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to utilize effective study skills?	95%	
			+2%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: utilize effective study skills?	97%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to adjust to the academic demands of college?	96%	
			+0%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: adjust to the academic demands of college?	96%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to manage your time effectively?	95%	
			-4%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: manage your time effectively?	91%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to get to know faculty?	88%	
			+2%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: get to know faculty?	90%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals?	92%	
			+1%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals?	93%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to develop close friendships with other students?	94%	
			-3%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: develop close friendships with other students?	91%	
<b>Pre</b>	How well prepared do you feel to utilize campus services available to students?	94%	
			-5%
<b>Post</b>	How well prepared do you feel to: utilize campus services available to students?	89%	

### FYE Seminar Survey: Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Questions

Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Use the vocabulary accurately.

	N	%
Above Average	60	42.0
Average	81	56.6
Below Average	2	1.4
Total	143	100

Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Ask relevant questions

	N	%
Above Average	60	42.0
Average	79	55.2
Below Average	4	2.8
Total	143	100

Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: State a point of view I can support

	N	%
Above Average	68	47.6
Average	69	48.3
Below Average	4	2.8
Total	143	100

Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to: Talk about the main ideas or themes of the course

	N	%
Above Average	71	50.0
Average	66	46.5
Below Average	4	2.8
Total	142	100

## DISCUSSION OF THE SURVEY FINDINGS

As it is with programs of many natures, an issue facing the FYE program will be promoting the program enough to keep participation up, yet also explaining itself to interested students clearly enough to fulfill expectations. As the FIGs program is well aware of, fulfilling student expectation can be difficult, and the language a program uses to explain itself is critical. In this regard, it may be important for program administrators to note that actual experiences in the seminars fell short of expectations when it came to helping a student's transition to Western (pre=86% vs. post=72%, a -14% gap), and creating connections with peers (pre=95% vs. post=81%, also a -14% gap). It should be quickly noted, however, that a negative gap between experiences and expectations is not uncommon. Meeting expectations is difficult, especially for a young program. Yet the more important question to the program is whether transitioning and connecting students to peers are important at all to the program's mission. If they are not, then the findings are moot, and next year the questions can be replaced by more germane ones. But if they are issues the program is trying to address, then the findings may help guide program design.

The questions about providing a partial fall schedule and assisting a student's learning in other courses should probably be considered as unnecessary to next year's FYE seminar survey. Neither issue appears to have particular relevance to the program's design.

The good news begins with the question about whether students felt the seminar gave them some skills and strategies to help them in future courses. While experience again fell short of expectation, the gap was only -7% (pre=94% vs. post=87%). This is a decent number, given the nature of the relationship between student expectation and experience and the short time the program has been in place. Moreover, when asked about their overall feelings about the FYE seminar, students experience slightly out-paced expectation (pre=68% vs. post=71%, a gap of +3%). This is good news indeed, and a great place to begin building for next year's offerings.

Pre/post seminar survey findings also note other positive influences of the FYE program. In a series of questions exploring students' preparedness for college academics—understanding what instructors expect, utilizing study skills, adjusting to academic demands, and managing time effectively—all post survey responses were either higher than, equal to, or only slightly lower than pre survey responses. And while both pre and post findings were high (all around 90% or higher), the post survey still points out that students' perceived strengths were at minimum reassured, and possibly improved.

In a series of FYE seminar questions meant to explore how well the program's student learning outcomes were met, findings were again encouraging. Using a three-point



scale ("above average", "average", and "below average"), and referring to the GUR courses student took during the fall, FYE students were asked about their abilities to use the vocabulary of the discipline (42% above average), ask relevant questions (42%), state a supportable point of view (48%), and talk about the main themes or ideas (50%). The percentage of students rating themselves "below average" was less than 3%. And while these findings alone are both interesting and inconclusive, when added into quantitative findings will help form a more complete understanding of the programs' overall effectiveness—a connection that will be made later in the report.

## FYE SURVEY OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES - FALL, 2006

Along with multiple choice questions, the FYE (Freshman Year Experience) seminar survey included open-ended questions. All FYEs survey respondents answered at least one of the open-ended questions; 78% responded to all four questions. The forms were randomized, then 100 were sampled. These 100 responses were read, categorized, and the numbers tallied. Students could have more than one response to each question.

### “WHY DID YOU ENROLL IN A FYE?”

The three top responses to why students enrolled in a FYE were 1) the subject matter/course sounded interesting (38%); 2) to get GUR credits and/or credits toward their major (15%); and 3) the availability of the course and/or schedule fit. The second top response to the question, however, was quite interesting: 37% of students noted that they didn't realize the course was a FYE, with most of those claiming they didn't know what a FYE was.

Students also enrolled to meet people/make friends (7%), to make the transition to college easier (6%), and to make a connection with the professor, or because their parents or an advisor suggested it (5%).

Table 1: Why did you enroll in a FYE Seminar?

	2006 (n=100)	
Subject matter/course sounded interesting	38	38%
Didn't know it was a FYE	37	37%
Credits toward major/GURs	15	15%
Availability/schedule fit	12	12%
Class size	12	12%
To meet people/make friends	7	7%
Make transition to college easier	6	6%
Make connection with professor	5	5%
Parents or advisor suggested it	5	5%

**“WHAT ASPECTS OF THE FYE SEMINAR DID YOU FIND THE MOST VALUABLE?”**

When asked what aspects of the FYE seminar students found most valuable, the most common was response was the seminar’s class size (34%); its academic content (23%), and the class discussions (21%). Students also found valuable the connection to their professors (10%), the connections they made to other students (7%), and that the class was for frosh only (6%).

Table 2: What aspects of the FYE seminar did you find the most valuable?

	2006 (n=100)	
Small class	34	34%
Academic content	23	23%
Discussions	21	21%
Connection with professors	10	10%
Connections with other students	7	7%
Frosh only	6	6%
Didn't know it was a seminar/thought it was a "regular" course	5	5%

**“IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT YOUR FYE SEMINAR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?”**

When students were asked what one thing about their FYE seminar they would change, the most common response was various criticisms of the seminar pedagogy (41%), followed by nothing (no changes) (17%); and to make the seminar “less challenging” in various ways (9%).

Table 3: If you could change one thing about your FYE seminar, what would it be?

	2006 (n=100)	
Criticisms of pedagogy	41	41%
Nothing	17	17%
Make it less challenging	9	9%
Have clearer expectations	5	5%

**“HAS BEING WITH THE SAME GROUP OF STUDENTS (IN THE FYE SEMINAR) HELPED YOU THIS YEAR? IF YES, PLEASE LIST TWO WAYS.”**

The most common response from FYE seminar students as to the question of being with the same group of student being helpful was yes (42%). Yet quite a few FYE students also indicated that it was not helpful (36%). Mostly, being with the same group of students made it easier to meet people and/or make friends (27%), and to form study groups and/or find help with classes (21%). Students also noted that being with the same group of students made transition to college more comfortable in various ways (11%).

Table 4: Has being with the same group of students (in the FYE seminar) helped you this term? If yes, please list two ways.

	2006 (n=100)	
No	36	36%
Yes	42%	42%
If Yes, list two ways:		
Meet people; make friends	27	27%
Study groups; help with classes	21	21%
More comfotable with transition to college, professors, people	11	11%
Connect with professors	3	3%

**DISCUSSION OF THE OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS FINDINGS**

The responses to the open-ended FYE seminar survey questions indicate a program in a position of trying to find itself. There were very positive indicators (for instance, that students enrolled because they found the course and/or subject interesting), but the fact that so many students didn't even know they were in a FYE seminar, or what a FYE seminar was, or that the FYE seemed any different from their other courses points out that the FYE program is still a few years away from establishing an identity.

FYE seminar students did find the small class size valuable, as well as the academic content and the emphasis on discussions. These are positive findings and might serve as part of the base for a program identity: small classes with good academic content and an emphasis on discussions—not a bad potential catch phrase. On the other hand, students were also more likely to indicate the value of a connection to a professor than they were to other students, which may or may not be the message the FYE program wants to promote. Indeed, nearly as many students indicated that being with the same group of seminar students did *not* help them as indicated it did. This would seem to be an area of important discussion among those guiding the development of the FYE program.

## FYE 2006 – QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

### WESTERN GRADE POINT AVERAGE

The fall quarter, 2006, saw the first full offering of FYE seminars, eight altogether, with two more planned for winter quarter, 2007, and one more in spring, 2007. To set the groundwork for some of the findings presented in this section of the report, please take note of the following Admissions Index (AI)<sup>1</sup> scores:

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

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

Fall, 2006	Western GPA
All new frosh	2.77
FYE frosh	2.85

The findings indicate that the group expected to receive WWU gpa's higher than the average, FYE students, did indeed received higher gpa's than the average. Yet one more finding needs presenting. One criticism of the FIGs program has been that the seminar grades are "inflated" and thus raise the overall average WWU gpa of FIGs students "unnaturally". Is this also true of FYE seminars? Do they, too, raise the overall WWU gpa's of FYE students? To test this hypothesis, the overall WWU gpa earned has been recomputed, eliminating the grade earned by FYE students in their seminars.

Fall, 2006	Western GPA without FYE seminar grade
All new frosh	2.77
FYE frosh	2.77

Here it is interesting to note that elimination of the seminar grade from the overall WWU gpa of FYE students lowers their overall WWU gpa almost exactly one-tenth of a point: from 2.85 to to 2.77, equal to the overall average gpa. Yet FYE students were expected to earn gpa's higher than the average.

<sup>1</sup>The Admissions Index is a number between 0-100 that is derived by a formula combining high school grade point average and SAT score. The AI is used in assisting state universities and colleges in their admissions processes.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FYE FINDINGS OVERALL

In the fall, 2006, the FYE program offered its first full complement of courses, eight courses spread among six departments: history (3), philosophy (1), psychology (1), anthropology (1), education (1), and engineering (1). About 90% of the available seats were taken. Findings from the seminar survey (qualitative), and the Data Warehouse (quantitative) pointed to a program on its first steps, solid yet without a strong identity outside of the individual departments represented by the instructors. Some bullet points of interest include:

- When asked about their FYE experience overall, experience outpaced expectation by 3%, a very solid finding for a program in its first year.
- Based on their Admissions Index scores (created by combining high school grade point average and SAT scores), FYE students enter Western expected to earn Western gpa's above the average, and did so, but not when their FYE seminar grades were taken out of the equation. (Note: in tests of prediction, when using Western gpa as the benchmark, the AI is consistently the strongest predictor of academic success.)
- A surprising number of FYE students indicated they did not know what an FYE course was, that they were in one, or that the FYE courses were different from their other GUR courses.
- Other positive outcomes were the small class size, good academic content, and emphasis on discussions. These are potential program identifying points that might be considered. On the other hand, students did not feel they got a lot of help with their transition to Western, nor did they feel that the seminar created a strong connection to their peers.

At this point, the FYE should probably consider how they might establish an identity and a mission that defines the program, one that can work equally comfortably with the missions of the individual departments offering FYE courses. Issues that might be considered are the importance to the program of college transition issues such as helping students make peer connections and become more comfortable with student services. It may be these issues are not particularly important to the program. If so, then they need not be included in future assessments. There might also be some discussion as to the reasons students predicted to receive above average Western gpa's receive only average Western gpa's once their seminar grades are taken from the equation. Again, it may not be the intent of the program to deliberately promote academic skills that can be transferred to other courses or academic areas. If so, then this issue, too, can be eliminated from future assessments.

## FINDINGS FROM THE SUPPLEMENTAL SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMS

A supplemental survey of first-year academic programs—which to date include the Freshmen Interest Group (FIGs) program, and the First Year Experience (FYE) program—was developed in the fall, 2006. This 50-item survey consisted of four sets of questions tapping students' experiences and intermediate learning outcomes in first year academic courses. The assessment of experiences and intermediate outcomes was conducted in order to investigate the conditions under which long-term learning outcomes associated with effective first-year programs are being achieved (Barefoot, 2000; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella, 2005; Swing, 2004).

Items for the survey were developed by combing themes derived from analyses of two focus groups with first-year experience instructors and faculty and factors suggested by the literature review as central to effective first-year student learning experiences. The survey was administered to FIGs and FYE students, of course, but also to a control cohort of freshmen enrolled in neither program. The final survey consisted of the following sections:

- *GUR Experiences: Set 1.* This section addressed the extent to which students found that the instructors in their FIGs, FYE, or other GUR courses structured their courses in such a way that encouraged the development of conditions that lead to first year learning.
- *GUR Outcomes.* This section addressed the extent to which students would say that their instructors, seminar leaders, or TAs helped them in a variety a ways that contribute to key learning outcomes.
- *GUR Experiences: Set 2.* This section asked students whether they had experienced a second set of conditions that contribute to learning.
- *Personal Outcomes.* This section addressed students' personal feelings and behaviors during the Fall Quarter, 2006.

The Supplemental Survey was web-based and administered by the Office of Survey Research during the final week of the fall quarter, 2006. Response rates are presented below.

First-Year Supplemental Survey - Response Rates

	Total in group	Completed surveys	Response rate
FIGs	221	142	64.3%
FYE	153	85	55.6%
Control	602	269	44.7%



## GUR EXPERIENCES: SET 1

"Thinking back over this past quarter and the experiences you had in your GUR courses (including any FIGs or First Year Experience Seminars you may have been enrolled in), to what extent did the instructor in any of these courses, or the course structure itself, encourage or help you in each of the following ways?"

This question had a five-point Lickert scale: 1=Not at all; 2=Very little; 3=Somewhat; 4=Quite a bit; and 5=A lot.

### First-Year Supplemental Survey - GUR Experiences: Set 1

Question number	Wording	FIGS	FYE	Control
2	Knowing how to find information from the library, internet, or other sources to answer questions.	3.49	2.64	2.79
3	Determining whether or not information or sources are credible.	3.25	2.91	2.76
5	Using multiple methods (e.g., written, oral, visual, etc.) for expressing your ideas.	3.47	3.34	3.16
6	Expressing yourself in a way sensitive to the feelings and culture of others.	3.56	3.46	3.21
10	Exploring your potential academic interests (e.g., potential major field of study).	3.35	3.46	3.02
11	Working effectively in a group.	3.72	3.12	2.79

In all the cases above, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the control group. That is, they tended to report that the course structure and/or instructor provided greater encouragement in the described areas than those in the control group. Additionally, FYE participants showed significantly higher scores than the control group for question #10. Finally, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the FYE students for questions #2 and #11. There were no other differences.

## GUR OUTCOMES

"To what extent would you say your instructors, seminar leaders or TAs during Fall quarter helped you in each of the following ways?"

This question had a five-point Lickert scale: 1=Not at all; 2=Very little; 3=Somewhat; 4=Quite a bit; and 5=A lot.

### First-Year Supplemental Survey - GUR Outcomes

Question number	Wording	FIGS	FYE	Control
2	Ability to understand the difference between college and high school	3.63	3.73	3.39
3	Ability to adjust to the academic demands of college	3.56	3.42	3.11
4	Ability to manage my time effectively	3.31	3.21	2.95
5	Development of the skills and strategies that will help me succeed in other courses	3.51	3.48	3.20
7	Development of a plan of study to achieve my academic goals	3.23	3.27	2.88
8	Development of close friendships with students	3.41	3.06	2.71
9	Connections with other students	3.60	3.26	2.99
12	Awareness of campus services available to students for academic success	3.80	3.29	3.43
13	Awareness of campus events and learning opportunities	3.52	3.21	3.16

With the exception of question #2, in all the cases above, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the control group. That is, they tended to report that their instructors, seminar leaders or TA's helped them in the described ways to a greater extent than those in the control group. Additionally, FYE participants showed significantly higher scores than the control group for questions #2 and #7. Finally, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the FYE students for questions #11 and #12. There were no other differences.

## GUR EXPERIENCE: SET 2

“During your first quarter at Western, to what extent did you experience each of the following types of learning experiences in your courses?”

This question had a five-point Lickert scale: 1=Not at all; 2=Very little; 3=Somewhat; 4=Quite a bit; and 5=A lot.

First-Year Supplemental Survey - GUR Experiences: Set 2

Question number	Wording	FIGS	FYE	Control
1	One-on-one meetings with your instructors in their office	2.23	2.62	2.36
2	Informal meetings with your instructors other than during class time or office hours	2.13	2.22	1.78
3	One-on-one meetings with TAs or seminar leaders other than your instructors.	1.82	1.62	1.55
4	Informal meetings with TAs or seminar leaders other than your instructors outside of class time or office hours.	1.87	1.60	1.48
5	Structured exchanges (e-mail, blackboard, electronic bulletin boards, etc.) with other students in the class about course content.	3.68	2.84	2.77
6	Participation in group projects.	3.63	2.56	2.35
7	Production of papers or writing assignments of more than 2 pages	3.30	3.59	2.98
8	Participation in class discussions.	3.51	3.79	3.34
9	Class attendance at a campus learning event like the Distinguished Lecture Series, etc.	2.77	2.28	1.91
10	Class attendance at a campus arts event.	2.05	1.89	1.70

With the exception of questions #1, #7, and #8, in all the cases above, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the control group. That is, they tended to report more of the described learning experiences than those in the control group. Additionally, FYE participants showed significantly higher scores than the control group for items #2, #7, #8, and #9. Finally, FIGs participants demonstrated significantly higher scores than the FYE students for items #5, #6, and #9. In one case, question #1, FYE students reported higher scores than FIGs students. There were no other differences.

## PERSONAL OUTCOMES

“Finally, what about your own personal feelings and behaviors. During the past quarter, to what extent did you experience each of the following?”

This question had a five-point Lickert scale: 1=Not at all; 2=Very little; 3=Somewhat; 4=Quite a bit; and 5=A lot

### First-Year Supplemental Survey - Personal Experiences

Question number	Wording	FIGS	FYE	Control
7	A change in the way I look at the world.	3.23	3.35	3.01

FYE participants showed significantly higher scores than the control group for the above item. That is, FYE participants felt a change in the way they look at the world to a greater extent than those in the control group. There were no other differences.

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST-YEAR SUPPLEMENTAL SURVEY

Findings from the First-Year Supplemental Survey demonstrate clearly the ability of first-year programs to positively effect students' experiences in a variety of ways—academic, social, and logistical. From the ability to find resources in the library to making connections to peers, from working effectively in a group to managing their time effectively, survey responses from students taking first-year programs were higher than that for students not enrolled in a first-year program. Responses from FIGs students, especially, were higher than those for students not enrolled in a first-year program.

## SEMINAR SURVEY FINDINGS - FIGs/FYE COMPARISON

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

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

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

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

## Seminar Survey Findings - FIGs/FYE Comparison, 2006

(Note that lower scores indicate more positive responses.)

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

## Seminar Survey Findings - FIGs/FYE Comparison, 2006

(Note that lower scores indicate more positive responses.)

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

\*The difference tested for statistical significance.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FIGS/FYE SEMINAR POST SURVEY FINDINGS

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS REVISITED - FIGs/FYE COMPARED

### WESTERN GRADE POINT AVERAGE

To set the groundwork for some of the findings presented in this section of the report, please take note of the following Admissions Index (AI)<sup>7</sup> scores:

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>7</sup>The Admissions Index is a number between 0-100 that is derived by a formula combining high school grade point average and SAT score. The AI is used in assisting state universities and colleges in their admissions processes.

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

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

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

## DISCUSSION OF THE FIGs/FYE PROGRAMS COMPARISON OVERALL

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

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

**APPENDIX A:**

**FYE PROGRAM COURSE CRITERIA AND  
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

## FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE CRITERIA

### *Scope*

As part of the first-year experience of entering students, the First-year Interest Groups Program at WWU intends to:

- Give first-year students a small group experience to help them integrate into university life.
- Give first-year students the opportunity for more interaction with instructors.
- Communicate high academic expectations to students.
- Help students recognize and take advantage of the roles that various campus resources play in their academic lives.

### *Intentions*

A proposal for a First Year Experience course should identify an existing course or propose a new course with the following features:

- First-year courses will have academic content and be offered for academic credit (either as GUR or elective credits)
- First-year courses will be taught in small sections, with an expected maximum enrollment 30
- First-year courses will restrict enrollment to first-year students
- The course may be a stand alone course or offered as part of a link or sequence of courses
- The course may be letter-graded or pass/fail if it is not offered as a GUR course

### *Learning Outcomes*

First-year courses should be designed to meet at least two of the following learning outcomes:

- Demonstrate an understanding of inquiry and creative processes from disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary perspective(s)
- Articulate individual learning goals in the context of a liberal arts education and identify means for achieving these goals.
- Enhance competency in academic skills including: framing questions/posing problems, critical literacy, evaluating information sources, writing, oral communication, and collaboration

### *Proposal Development*

Courses in this group can be altogether new courses or special offerings of existing courses.

Additional learning outcomes are strongly encouraged in the first-year courses, and a comprehensive listing of the most common first-year learning outcomes and appropriate assessment methods will be available online to faculty as they design their first-year course.

**APPENDIX B:**

**FIGS SEMINAR SURVEYS: PRE AND POST**

## FYE SURVEY – FALL, 2006

This survey is designed to elicit information from you that will assist in structuring assignments/projects and providing the highest quality instruction. Please try to answer all questions. This survey is confidential; you **do not** have to enter your name or other identifiers.

**1. What was the most important source of information about the FYE cluster you are taking?**

- a. Mailer/pamphlet
- b. SummerStart staff, peer advisors, or faculty advisor
- c. Information sent via email
- d. Web site
- e. Family or friends

**2. What is the primary reason why you decided to enroll in a FYE?**

- a. The idea/courses interested me
- b. No other courses to take/other courses full
- c. Recommendation of SummerStart faculty advisor
- d. Family or friends encouraged me
- e. The ability to register in advance for popular classes

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

**3. I expect that enrolling in a FYE will help with my transition to Western.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

**4. Enrolling in a FYE is a good way to fulfill a GUR requirement.**

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

The following are some questions about your FIGs seminar.

**5. To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will help you create connections with peers?**

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

**6. To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?**

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

**7. To what extent do you expect the FYE seminar will provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?**

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

**8. So far, based on your experiences in your FYE, are your feelings about it:**

- a. Very positive
- b. Positive
- c. Neutral
- d. Negative
- e. Very Negative

How well prepared you feel to:

**9. understand what your instructors expect of you academically**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**10. utilize effective study skills**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**11. adjust to the academic demands of college**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared



**12. manage your time effectively**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**13. get to know faculty**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**14. develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**15. develop close friendships with other students**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

**16. utilize campus services available to students**

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

And finally:

**17. Compared to your GUR courses this quarter, how challenging do you expect the FYE seminar to be?**

- a. More challenging
- b. Less challenging
- c. Equally challenging

18. I expect my investment of \_\_\_\_\_ (a=minimal, b=average, c=maximal) effort...

19. ...will earn me a grade of \_\_\_\_\_ (a=A, b=B, c=C, d=D, e=F) in this class.

For question 23, simply circle yes or no.

20. There are specific circumstances that might affect my learning in this class.

YES / NO

If yes, briefly describe these circumstances:

(A note about Question 20: Because this survey is anonymous, you are encouraged to meet with your instructor to discuss these circumstances.)

## FYE SURVEY – FALL, 2006

- ❖ Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below. (This survey is confidential; no identifiers are needed.)

1. Enrolling in a FYE helped my transition to Western.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

2. Enrolling in a FYE was worthwhile because it provided me with a partial fall term schedule.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

- ❖ The following are some questions about your FYE seminar.

3. To what extent did the FYE seminar help you create connections with peers?

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

4. To what extent did the FYE seminar assist your learning in your other courses this quarter?

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

5. To what extent did the FYE seminar provide you with some skills and strategies that will help you in future courses?

- a. A great deal
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not at all

6. Based on your experiences in your FYE, are your feelings about it:

- a. Very positive
- b. Positive
- c. Neutral
- d. Negative
- e. Very Negative

- ❖ How well prepared you feel to:

7. understand what your instructors expect of you academically;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

8. utilize effective study skills;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

9. adjust to the academic demands of college;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

10. manage your time effectively;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

11. get to know faculty;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

12. develop a plan of study to achieve your academic goals;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

13. develop close friendships with other students;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

14. utilize campus services available to students;

- a. Completely prepared
- b. Somewhat prepared
- c. Not prepared

- ❖ Thinking about your GUR courses this quarter, rate your ability to:

15. Use the vocabulary accurately.

- a. Above average
- b. Average
- c. Below average

16. Ask relevant questions.

- a. Above average
- b. Average
- c. Below average

17. State a point of view I can support.

- a. Above average
- b. Average
- c. Below average

18. Talk about the main ideas or themes of the course

- a. Above average
- b. Average
- c. Below average

Don't forget the open-ended questions on the other side!

Why did you enroll in a FYE Seminar?

What aspect of the FYE Seminar did you find the most valuable?

If you could tell your instructor one thing that would improve the content or instruction of this course, what would it be?

Has being with the same group of students in the FYE Seminar helped you this term? If yes, please list two ways

**Thanks!**