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What Makes a First-Year Seminar High Impact?

Exploring Conditions That Count

Tracy L. Skipper

USG Workshop on First-Year Seminars



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Session Overview

- Conditions Underlying High-Impact Practices
- What We Know About Their Deployment in First-Year Seminars
 - Prevalence of various conditions
 - Strategies for promoting conditions
- Using This In Your Own Context

The First-Year Seminar

FYS Literature

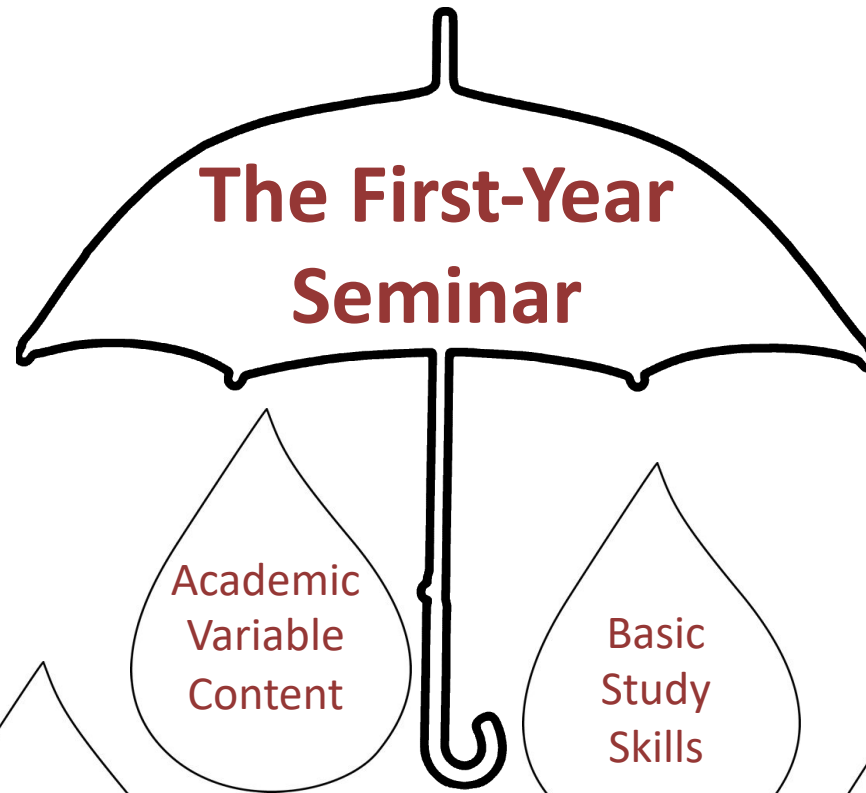
“A course designed to assist students in their **academic and social development** and in their **transition to college**. A seminar, by definition, is a small discussion-based course in which students and their instructors **exchange ideas and information**. In most cases, there is a strong emphasis on **creating community** in the classroom.” (Hunter & Linder, 2005, pp. 275-276)

HIPs Literature

“bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis and place strong emphasis on **critical inquiry**, frequent **writing**, **information literacy**, **collaborative learning**, and other skills that develop students' **intellectual and practical competencies**. First-year seminars also involve students with **cutting-edge scholarship** and with faculty members' own research.” (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013, p. 49)



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The First-Year Seminar

Extended Orientation

Academic Uniform Content

Academic Variable Content

Basic Study Skills

Pre-Professional

Hybrid



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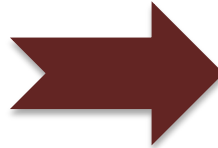
Call for Case Studies

What Makes the First-Year Seminar High-Impact? An Exploration of Effective Educational Practices

The responsibility for college success has historically rested with the student, but since the 1980s, educators have taken increasing ownership of this, designing structures that increase the likelihood of learning, success, and retention. These efforts have included a variety of initiatives—first-year seminars, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, common intellectual experiences, service-learning, undergraduate research, and senior capstones among others—that have come to be known as high-impact practices. Evidence suggests these experiences may play a central role in helping students achieve important learning outcomes for the global marketplace, such as intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative learning.

Kuh (2008) has examined the characteristics of these educational experiences and suggests their effectiveness stems from a number of key factors. First, high-impact activities demand that students devote considerable time and effort in completing educationally purposeful tasks. They engage students with faculty and their peers in formal and informal conversations "about substantive matters, typically over an extended period of time" (Kuh, 2008, p. 14). High-impact activities frequently engage students in authentic learning tasks, meaning that students have the opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to problems and situations on the campus and in the community. The interaction with peers and faculty and opportunities for real-world learning experiences also increase the likelihood that students will encounter people who are different from themselves. Such experiences "challenge students to develop new ways of thinking about and responding immediately to novel circumstances" (Kuh, 2008, p. 15). Finally, high-impact activities are effective in helping students achieve important learning outcomes because students participating in these activities typically receive frequent feedback about their performance, which allows them to make adjustments and increases the likelihood of their achieving outcomes in the future.

The first-year seminar is perhaps the most common high-impact practice on our campuses, with 96% of respondents to a study of student success initiatives at four-year institutions indicating that they offered such a course on their campuses (Barefoot, Griffin, & Koch, 2012). Among two-year institutions, 80% responding to a similar survey reported offering a first-year seminar (Koch, Griffin, & Barefoot, 2014). First-year seminars are also highly variable, with many institutions offering more than one type (Young & Hoop, 2014). A quarter century of research on first-year seminars has yielded tremendous knowledge about the structure, organization, and administration of these courses on U.S. college campuses. However, our understanding of course pedagogy and the presence of characteristics that



Research Reports on College Transitions | No. 7

What Makes the First-Year Seminar High Impact?

An Exploration of Effective Educational Practices

Tracy L. Skipper, Editor



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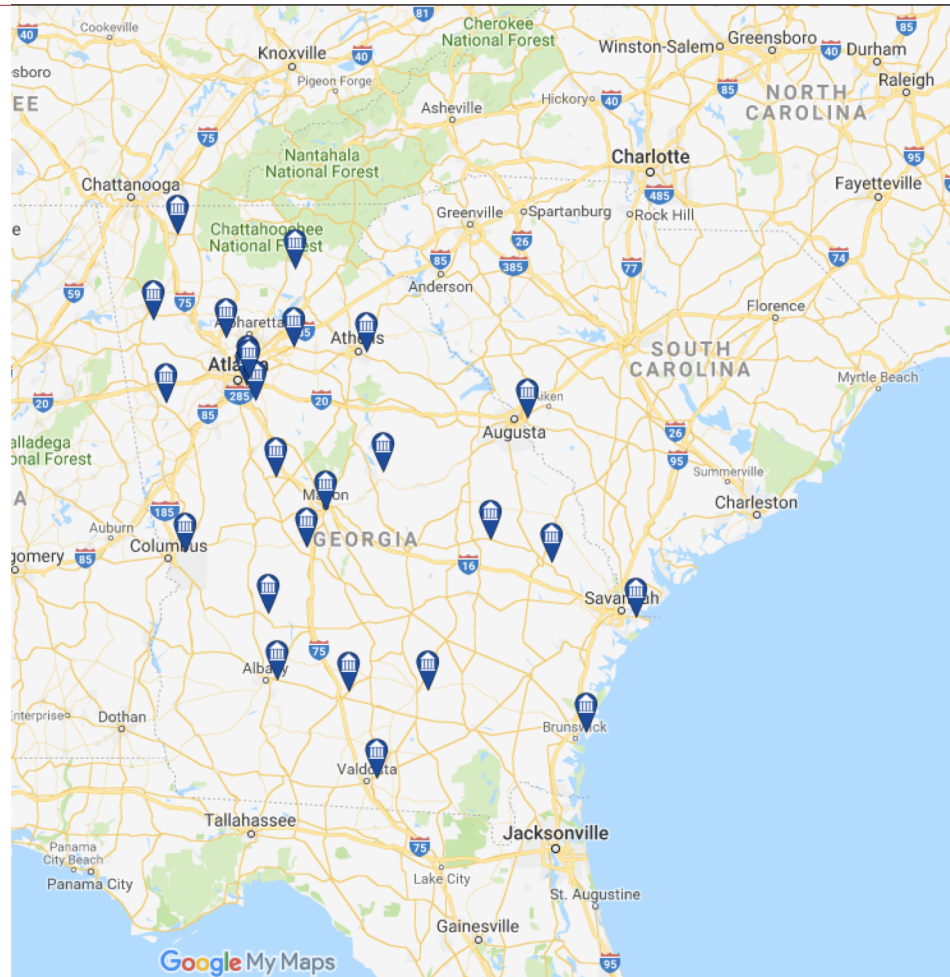
Effective Educational Practices

- expectations set at appropriately high levels
- significant investment of time and effort
- interactions with faculty and peers
- experiences with diversity
- frequent and constructive feedback
- periodic and structured opportunities for reflection and integration
- relevance through real-world applications
- public demonstration of competence



Start Local

- Find 2 or 3 colleagues with same color card.
- Briefly introduce yourself, your role with the first-year seminar, and how you would define the seminar on your campus.
- Talk about the ways that you think the effective educational practice on your card is currently embedded in the seminar on your campus.



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PREVALENCE OF

EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

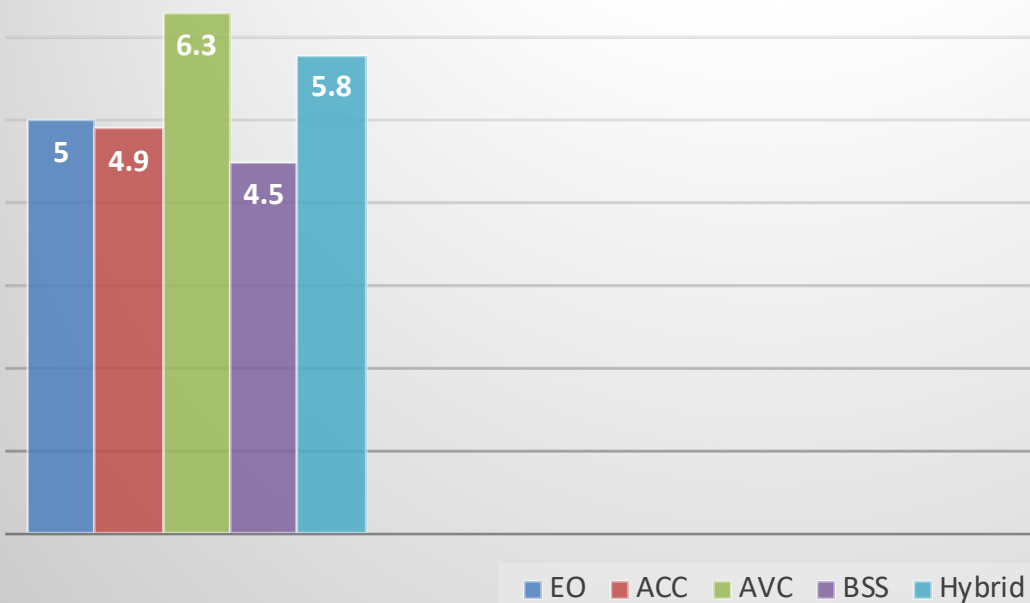


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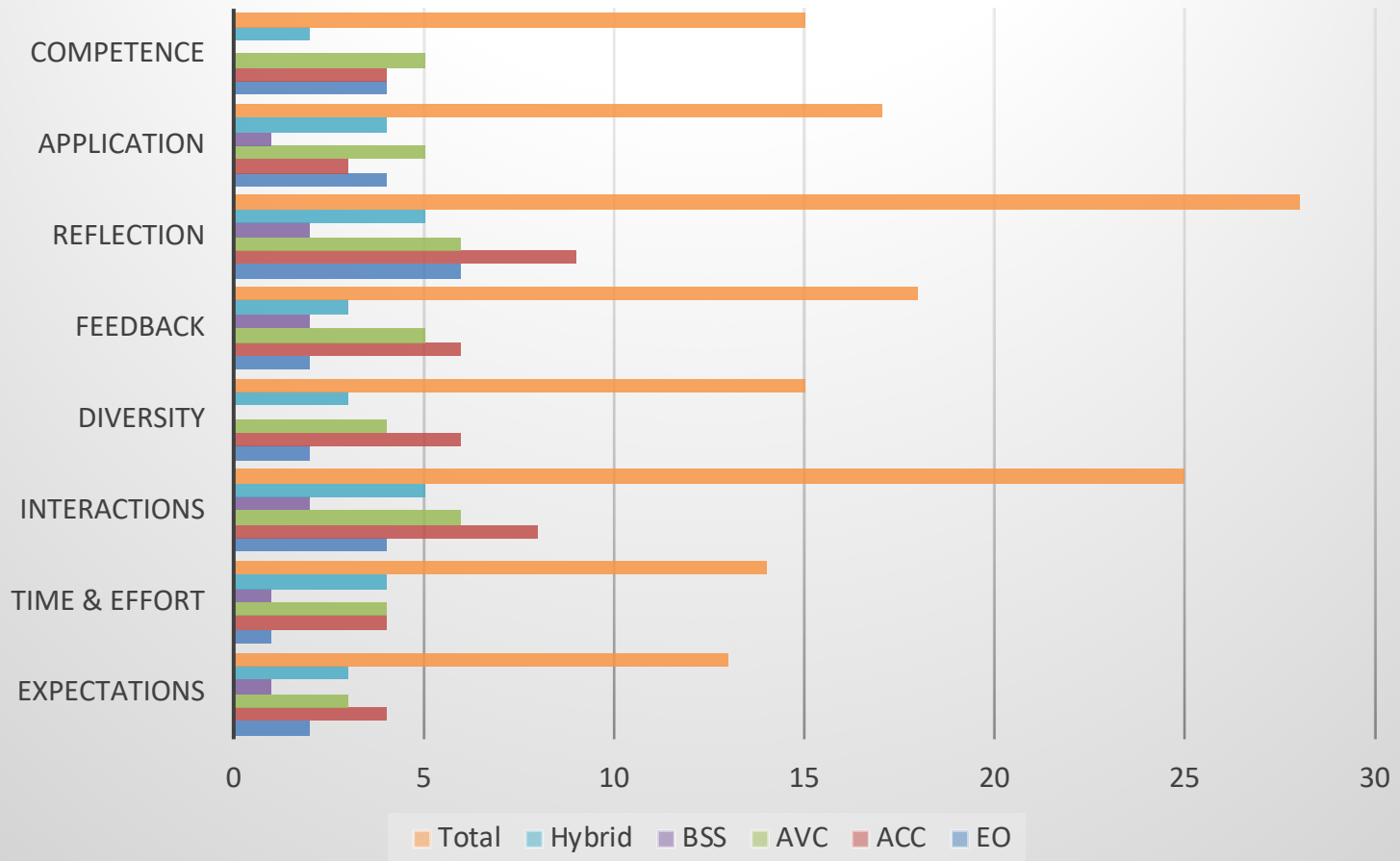
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Average Number of Practices by Seminar Type



Practices Used By Seminar Type



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STRATEGIES FOR INCLUDING

EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES



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Reflection and Integration

Pedagogical Practice	2012-2013	
	NSFYS	2017 NSFYE
Engage in goal-setting & planning	NA	70.9%
Writing-intensive experiences	42.5%	42.9%
Service-learning	31.8%	31.5%
Learning community	36.8%	41.0%
Common reading	38.1%	42.9%



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Reflection and Integration

- Reflective journal/weekly reflective exercises
- Reflective papers/assignments
- Self-assessment inventories (e.g., LASSI, personality inventories)
- Reflective essay (final) or pre/post reflective essays/letters to self
- Portfolio development
- Creation of concept maps



Interaction w/Faculty & Peers

Pedagogical Practice	2012-2013	
	NSFYS	2017 NSFYE
Collaboration and teamwork	67.2%	66.0%
Learning community	36.8%	41.0%
Undergraduate research	12.8%	13.9%



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Interaction w/Faculty & Peers

- Group presentation or project
- Structured classroom discussions
- Collaborative learning activities/small-group activities
- Learning community configuration
- Learning teams/peer teaching
- One-on-one conferences



Feedback

- Encourage use of campus writing center
- Videotape presentations
- Writing conferences
- Peer review workshops (writing/presentations)
- Use of rubrics
- Scaffolded assignments
- Required revisions



Real-World Applications

Pedagogical Practice	2012-2013	
	NSFYS	2017 NSFYE
Internships	NA	2.2%
Service-learning	31.8%	31.5%



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Real-World Applications

- Field trips/field experiences
- Participation in on-campus/off-campus experiences/out-of-class learning experiences
- Activities emphasizing connection between college & future careers
- Service-learning
- Research on real-world problems
- Alumni mentors



Competence

- Participation in undergraduate symposium/research showcase
- Oral presentations in class or public forum
- Submission of class work for publication
- Conduct primary research/present findings
- Public teaching demonstrations/outreach



Diversity and Global Learning

Pedagogical Practice	2012-2013 NSFYS	2017 NSFYE
Explore cultures, life experiences, and world views different from their own	58.8%	67.9%
Service-learning	31.8%	31.5%
Common reading	38.1%	42.9%



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Diversity and Global Learning

- Community service experiences
- Social barometer activities
- Course texts represent variety of perspectives, genre, etc.
- Connection to common read, emphasizing diversity issues
- Faculty development on inclusive teaching



Time & Effort

- Research papers (on academic topic, major)
- Academic papers (i.e., thesis-driven, argumentative)
- Attendance requirement
- Required reading
- Direct research experience
- Three-course sequence demanding substantial thinking, writing, revision, and collaboration



High Expectations

- Discussions about college-level academic expectations
- Scaffolded/staged writing assignments
- Student-led discussions/peer teaching
- Significant reading (quantity, difficulty)
- Gamification
- Direct research experiences



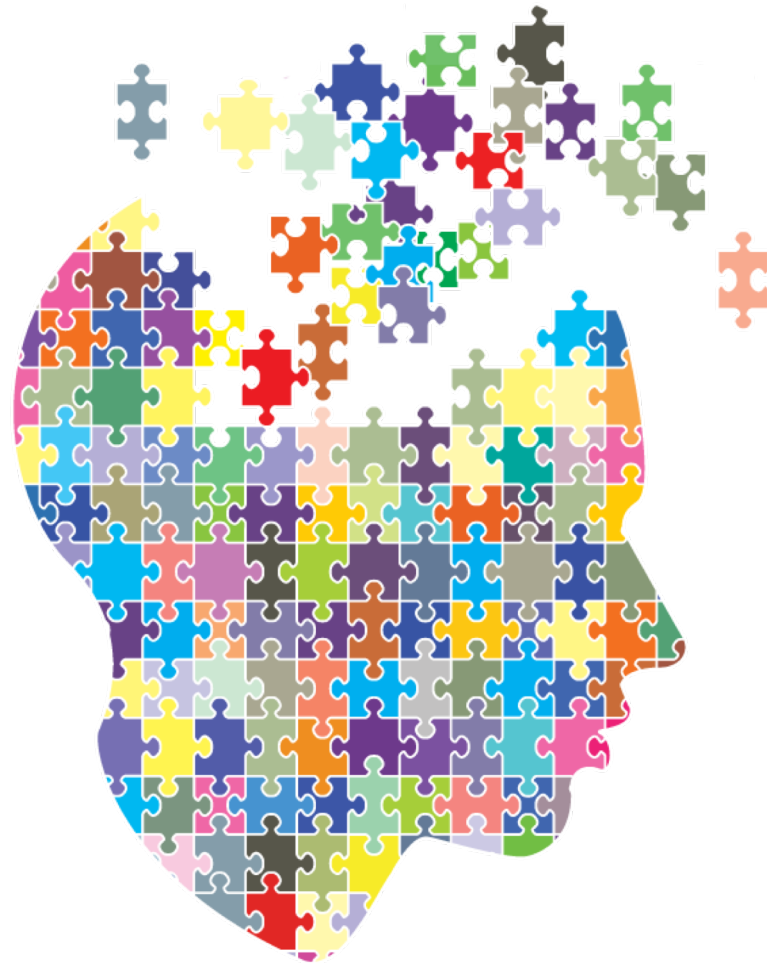
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(Skipper, 2017)

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What Does It All Mean for Me?

- Consider your context
- Look for ways to build synergy among practices
- Leverage connections to other high-impact practices on campus



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Consider Your Context

- What are the primary goals of the first-year seminar? Are there logical connections between those goals and specific practices?
- What's realistic given credit/contact hours?
- What are the required course elements?



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Build Synergy



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Leverage Connections

- Learning communities
- Service-learning
- Common reading
- Internships
- Undergraduate research



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Colin Greenwood - Radiohead

"Share your ideas with other people, and make something new."



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Thank You!

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