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Conditional Admission Program Provides Access to and Success in Higher Education

Without some assistance, many at-risk students do not achieve academic success and either drop out or are placed on academic probation or suspension during their first year. Many colleges and universities across the country have struggled with how to increase admission for at-risk students while simultaneously recruiting a high-caliber student cohort with a greater likelihood of retention and persistence. Beginning in fall 2007, the University of Central Missouri (UCM) addressed this dilemma by instituting a one-semester program that has been successful in both retaining at-risk students and assisting them in achieving academic success.

UCM's Conditional Admission Program (CAP) is designed for students who do not meet regular admission standards to the University but who have the potential to succeed based a variety factors, including ACT scores (average score of 18 with a 15-20 range), high school class rank or GPA (average 2.61 with a 2.0-3.3 range),



Photo courtesy of USC Creative Services.

and evidence of motivation to complete a degree. CAP students represent 10% of the approximately 1,550 incoming first-year class.

As a condition of admission to the University, CAP students (and their parent or guardian) must review and sign a Conditional Admissions Contract containing 15 policies and requirements regarding active participation in the program. For example, students

must attend a presemester orientation workshop, meet frequently with their academic advisor once the semester begins, and earn a semester GPA of at least 1.75. In comparison, students who meet regular admissions requirements must earn a semester GPA of at least 2.0. The consequence of failing to abide by this contract can result in suspension from the University. To ensure program compliance, students' overall performance is reviewed by the fourth week of class by the chair of the Department of Academic Enrichment and the students' academic advisor to determine whether they should stay in the program.

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All first-year, full-time UCM students, including CAP students, have their class schedules developed by their advisors. CAP participants are required to enroll in a CAP learning community comprised of four courses. These courses serve as the backbone of the program and are taught by the student's assigned academic advisor, a learning strategies specialist, and a UCM faculty member. CAP learning community courses include

- **Freshman Seminar (AE1400).** A one-credit, elective course designed to introduce students to university life and academics. This seminar-style class is intended for all new students at UCM who have fewer than 25 credits. Seminar sections vary in that some are theme-, major-, or interest-based, while others are general interest classes. CAP students attend a dedicated CAP section. The purpose of the course is to
 - o create a sense of UCM community by making academic, social, and personal connections;
 - o develop the discipline (e.g., motivation, commitment, behaviors) needed to reach long-term, academic, career, and personal goals; and
 - o learn about the UCM expectations, policies, and resources.
- **Learning Strategies (AE1820).** This two-credit course focuses on tools for college academic success, including strategies for reading college texts, note taking, time management, critical thinking, goal setting, memory and concentration, test taking, schedule planning, learning styles, and writing college-quality papers. The course also offers tips for understanding the UCM catalog and majors and minors.
- **Supplemental Instruction (SI - AE1826).** SI is a one-credit course providing specific strategies and support for selected sections of UCM's general education curriculum. The class is facilitated by an experienced student leader who has significant knowledge of the subject matter and is supervised by a faculty member from the Department of Academic Enrichment. SI allows students to study together in a relaxed yet structured environment.
- **General education course.** All CAP students enroll in at least one, three-credit general education course, such as biology, sociology, American government, or geography.

Although the University has a successful Early Alert Program for students who become at risk during the semester, most CAP students are referred to their academic advisor for intervention in the event that they develop academic difficulties. The CAP program has demonstrated significant success (Table 1) in the four years that data have been collected. The mean first-semester GPA of CAP students has consistently exceeded the program's minimum 1.75 GPA requirement, and between 75% and 89% of the students met all the conditions of their contract to continue to the spring semester, with 73-88%

“Without some assistance, many at-risk students do not achieve academic success ...”

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Table 1

CAP Student Profiles 2007-2010 and Non-Cap At-Risk Student Profiles 2010

| Year | Ave ACT | ACT range | Ave HS GPA | % minority | First-semester GPA | % Eligible for spring semester (% returned) | % First-year retention, CAP |
|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| <i>CAP students</i> | | | | | | | |
| Fall 2007 N=137 | 18.5 | 15-27 | 2.7 | 16 | 2.58 | 89 (88) | 65 |
| Fall 2008 N=137 | 17.8 | 13-24 | 2.6 | 36 | 2.51 | 85 (81) | 62 |
| Fall 2009 N=137 | 17.6 | 13-24 | 2.6 | NA | 2.15 | 75 (73) | 67 |
| Fall 2010 N=137 | 17.8 | 14-25 | 2.6 | 40 | 2.51 | 85 (85) | NA |
| <i>Non-CAP at-risk students</i> | | | | | | | |
| Fall 2010 N=137 | 17.6 | 9-20 | 2.4 | NA | 1.69 | 54 (50) | NA |

actually doing so. The slight decline in the percentage eligible to return for second semester in fall 2009 was due to a decrease in the number of faculty available to teach our various courses. Consequently, class size was significantly larger, and CAP students did not receive adequate individual attention and ongoing mentoring, which is vital to the program. In 2010, numbers climbed back to 85% because adjunct faculty were hired to assist in the teaching load. Although the University did not track the fall semester retention rate of at-risk students prior to the implementation of CAP in 2007, Table 1 shows that the CAP retention rate did increase from 65% in the fall of 2007 to 67% in the fall of 2009. Given that this increase is modest, when comparing percentages of CAP students to non-CAP students who were eligible to return in 2010, findings reveal that 85% of CAP students were eligible to return compared to only 54% of non-CAP students. Table 1 also shows that CAP students rated higher than non-CAP students in every measured category.

Based on these successes, UCM plans to continue CAP for at-risk students. Future changes and challenges to the program include


- **Expanding CAP enrollment.** There is a general lack of campus knowledge regarding the CAP program outside its immediate staff and the Department of Academic Enrichment. While continual marketing efforts are being made to promote CAP, and it still has great potential to expand and provide enhanced support for a larger portion of at-risk students, there are also concerns that expansion may diminish program quality or service. Currently, to handle the

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student load, additional adjunct faculty are hired to teach the learning strategies course; however, advisors are increasingly taxed by the growing Freshman Seminar enrollment. In addition, more SI instructors would need to be trained and hired to accommodate a significant increase in CAP students.

- **Expanding to a full-year program.** Based on the high first- to second-semester retention rate, a full-year program may have the potential to increase the first- to second-year retention rate to meet or exceed the University's overall rate. A downscaled version for all CAP students currently exists for the spring semester that includes mandatory periodic meetings with academic advisors (as part of their contract), but no other CAP participation requirements are in place. It is believed that more structure and a continuance of CAP learning communities would be needed to impact retention rates.

Numerous programs have been developed over the years to address the issue of student retention. For institutions that see working with at-risk students as an integral part of their vision and mission, the University of Central Missouri's CAP program model can be duplicated to maintain desired levels of student retention and provide access to higher education for those students who might otherwise be turned away. 

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Building a Fully Integrated University Common Reading Program

Shepherd University is a public, liberal arts institution located in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia and has a student population of 4,200. Since 2007, the University's First-Year Experience Program has included a common reading initiative, which is administered by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Goals for the Common Reading program include

- providing a shared intellectual experience;
- creating a sense of community;
- encouraging reading;
- promoting the critical engagement of ideas; and
- creating dialog and interaction between students, faculty, staff, and the local community.

History of the Program

At its inception, the Common Reading program collaborated with the University's Appalachian Heritage Writer-in-Residence project, and a regional book was selected (book selection has since encompassed a broader range of authors). Participation the first year was voluntary and although all students received a book midsummer, only one third of the 200 students who chose to participate in discussion groups at fall orientation reported they had read the book.

The program has evolved over the years based on assessment findings (i.e., event audience evaluations and questions on the Common Reading program included in student evaluations of the first-year seminar). The book is now a required text in first-year seminars that use a uniform course model (60% of all seminars on campus). For department-based first-year seminars (blended model – 40% of all first-year seminars), using the common reading is voluntary. Free copies of the common reading are available to all faculty to encourage them to use the book in their classes. Depending on the title, approximately 30-50 other courses (e.g., English, history, political science, biology, nursing, math, psychology, social work, environmental science, graphic arts), including upper-division courses, have used the book as a text or as additional reading, resulting in approximately 800 students per year reading the book.

To encourage student participation, an essay contest is held annually with a \$250 first-place prize and smaller prizes for second and third place. The contest is advertised through the

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The Shepherd University Jazz Band playing on the front porch of the Scarborough Library, September 2011, celebrating the essay, "Jazz is God Laughing" in the common reading book, This I Believe, edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman. Photo used with permission of the author.

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student newspaper, radio station, flyers, in-class announcements, e-mails, the program website, and social media outlets. A faculty committee judges the essays using a rubric developed by the English Department. The writing contest is open to all students.

In addition to book discussions, the program now includes multiple events tied to the chosen book's theme, such as movies, panels and lectures, field trips, theme dinners, musical performances, student experiments, readings, poster, art and information displays, cooking classes, radio shows, and, if affordable, author visits. As Table 1 demonstrates, the program has grown in both University and community offerings and attendance (i.e., students and community members).

Innovative Aspects

Three innovative aspects of the program are felt to have contributed to the initiative's success: (a) the book selection process, (b) community outreach and involvement, and (c) the use of technology. These elements are discussed in more detail below.

Book Selection

The Common Reading Committee consists of students, faculty, staff, and community members. Members volunteer for the committee based on personal interest. To gather

Table 1
Common Reading Events and Attendance, 2007-2012

| Year | Book | Events | Student attendance | Total attendance (students and community members) |
|-----------|--|--------|--------------------|---|
| 2007-2008 | Gates, H. (1994). <i>Colored People: A Memoir</i> | 2 | 214 | 289 |
| 2008-2009 | Satrap, M. (2003). <i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i> | 9 | 835 | 1,631 |
| 2009-2010 | Kingsolver, B. (2007). <i>Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life</i> | 11 | 854 | 1,998 |
| 2010-2011 | Etcoff, N. (1999). <i>Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty</i> | 16 | 670 | 1,302 |
| 2011-2012 | Allison, J. & Gediman, D. (Eds.). (2006). <i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> | 19 | 981 | 1,466 |

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faculty and student members, broadcast e-mail announcements are sent on campus, along with Facebook notices and tweets. Faculty and student government recommendations are also solicited. Flyers, press releases, announcements to the local library and book clubs, individual invitations, and word of mouth are used to engage community member participation.

Book nominations for the next academic year are solicited by the same methods used to recruit committee members. Suggestions are also solicited from event audiences.

The First-Year Experience program director compiles a list of recommended titles along with a short review of each book to assist the committee in its selection process. Titles are vetted for cost, availability, length, and appropriateness of the topic. Committee members read the edited list (i.e., approximately 20 books with one to two books assigned per member) over Winter Break and return in January to narrow the list to five.

In determining the final five books, readability, rigor, and level of student interest are considered. As one committee member noted,

If we want the campus community to take this project seriously, we must pick substantial books of merit. The common reading introduces students to the rigorous and invigorating world of academic discourse and—most importantly—invites them to take part in that conversation. Students begin to see the value of diving into a work of real substance and complexity. Choosing books of substance and highlighting those books through campuswide events and discussions will show them that they do not need to be intimidated by difficult books or subject matters, but rather that conversation about such ideas can help all of us (teachers, too!) make sense of our world.

Names and summaries of the final five books then go onto the Shepherd University website for voting, which is open to students, faculty, staff, and community members. This democratic process has ameliorated potential concerns about the credentials of the selection committee or perceived special interests. Further, it has increased stakeholder participation resulting in a greater number of books nominated and votes cast each year.

Community Involvement

Many community members have become loyal fans of the program and oftentimes comprise half the audience at an event. One member in particular provides financial



*A visit by Shepherd University students in September 2009 to a local organic farm in connection with the common reading, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver. Photo used with permission of the author.*

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support through the Shepherd University Foundation as well as suggestions for events and local resources. The same donor provides copies of the book to the University library, the Shepherdstown library, libraries in surrounding towns, and University faculty members willing to consider using the book in their lower- or upper-division courses.

Technology

The Common Reading program publicizes events through the University website, posters and flyers, a dedicated webpage www.shepherd.edu/commonreading, a Facebook page, a Twitter account, e-mails, and podcasts. Students have been instrumental in creating and using the social networking aspects of event advertising. For example, the program's marketing plan was developed as a student's capstone project, and students maintain the Facebook and Twitter accounts. Entering students are now encouraged to like the Facebook page during summer advising and registration so they will be automatically notified of program events. Increased communication and movement to an electronic submission process in 2008 has also resulted in more students submitting essays to the Common Reading Student Essay Contest (e.g., 32 in 2008; 39 in 2009; 42 in 2010; and 79 in 2011).

Conclusion

Shepherd University has embraced the Common Reading program, and each year provides multiple opportunities to bring students, faculty, staff, and community members together through the written word. This program continues to evolve and adapt to the needs of the University and local community. Jay Allison, editor of the book *This I Believe*, had this to say during his campus author visit in 2011: "I'm really impressed with how thoroughly you all have committed to the One Book program. I've visited a lot of similar efforts and yours stands out." What started out as an idea to increase first-year student engagement by way of a shared reading experience is now fulfilling its program goals in ways unimagined in the beginning of the program and having a positive campuswide and community-wide impact. 

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Summer Bridge: A Comprehensive College Outreach Program Helps At-Risk, First-Year Students Succeed

Higher education literature suggests summer bridge programs have the potential to prepare students for their first year of college and enhance academic success (Roderick & Engel, 2001; Roderick, Engel, & Nagaoka, 2003; Roderick, Jacob, & Bryk, 2002). Additionally, in recent years, Norfolk State University (NSU)—a midsized, urban, Historically Black College/University (HBCU)—became increasingly concerned over high student attrition after the first college year due to struggling academic performance and deficiencies in basic general education skills. Influenced by these observations, in July 2007, NSU implemented the ACCESS Summer Bridge Program, a four-week, nonresidential, college orientation initiative.

ACCESS Summer Bridge Program

The main goal of this initiative is to address retention and acclimation to university life (e.g., high school-to-college transitions) for academically challenged first-year students admitted to NSU. Specifically, the program endeavors to assist these students in improving their academic skills, developing rapport with campus personnel, preparing themselves psychologically for the challenge of college-level coursework, and developing peer-to-peer camaraderie. Summer Bridge also seeks to create networks with parents interested in learning more about the program by disseminating information to them when contacting their student during the recruitment process. These networks can become vital for keeping students engaged and committed to the program, as it is often parents who encourage participation.

ACCESS Summer Bridge is designed as a supplement to mandatory fall orientation for first-year NSU students. While the program is funded through a number of grants, personnel and resources remain limited; thus, admittance into the program is voluntary and restricted primarily to those students accepted to NSU who have either a low high school GPA (2.3 minimum) and/or a low cumulative SAT score (910 minimum). Candidacy for the program is initially determined by the NSU admissions office along these guidelines. A list of qualifying students is then sent to the Office of First Year Experience.

The Office formally invites potential students via direct mail and personal telephone calls. The program coordinator also solicits additional candidates from various social organizations (i.e., Greek societies) and collaboration with other departments and campus colleagues who may be aware of qualifying students. One unintended but significant

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Dr. Hamilton introduces the Summer Bridge concept to a class of incoming first-year students. Photo used with permission of the author.

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outcome of this supplemental networking has been the development of formal relationships with other campus departments to commit candidates to the program. For example, the NSU athletic department has become a fervent supporter of the summer bridge, contributing almost 5% to the total participation count for each of the last three cohorts.

Program Effectiveness

Since its inception, ACCESS Summer Bridge has averaged approximately 100 students each year, with each cohort participating in the same four courses: introduction to college composition, communication skills, basic algebra, and computer literacy. Courses consist of 50-minute lectures taught on NSU's main campus by full-time, tenure-track professors. Workshops are also provided by NSU academic advisors on such topics as time management, study strategies, and critical thinking. The involvement of professionally trained academic advisors has been key to the program. By offering skills development to increase academic potential and counseling expertise on a wide range of problems, it was felt the advisors would have a positive impact on both classroom performance and persistence. In addition, the relationship development between advisors and students could serve as an early intervention for performance problems of bridge students who become at risk during the regular term.

Data from the previous five ACCESS Summer Bridge cohorts has yielded promising findings regarding the program's retention effectiveness. At least 95% of the students who completed the summer bridge also enrolled for the subsequent fall semester; and since 2008, at least 90% were retained to the spring semester. In addition, first-to-second year retention of students completing the bridge program was 14% greater than the overall NSU retention rate for the first-year cohort.

In light of compelling evidence linking retention to grade performance and strength of academic support (Pang, 2010; Roderick & Engel, 2001; Tinto, 2006), the first-year GPAs of summer bridge students were tracked. Since 2007, the cumulative semester GPAs of ACCESS students ranged from 2.4 to 2.6, which compares favorably to the 2.77 University-wide average for first-year NSU students. Further, results from a 2011 student evaluation ($N = 59$, 55% return rate) of the program (Table 1, see p. 11) suggest bridge participants were able to overcome, or at least learned to manage, the academic deficiencies and anticipated hardships that initially brought them to the attention of program recruiters.

Findings also suggest participants felt the program increased their awareness of university rules and regulations, which assisted in their transition from high school to college; helped them develop more realistic academic expectations; and provided an opportunity to network with NSU faculty, staff, and peers. Further, 95% of participants said they would recommend the program to other high school students. Overall program assessment

“The involvement of professionally trained academic advisors has been key to the program.”

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Table 1.


2011 Cohort Summer Bridge Program Evaluation (N = 59)

| Variables | M | SD |
|---|-----|------|
| Summer Bridge has assisted me with preparing to meet the demands of college-level course work. | 4.8 | .52 |
| Summer Bridge has provided academic skills information that was beneficial for my transition from high school to college. | 4.8 | .48 |
| Summer Bridge's mentoring services were beneficial. | 4.2 | 1.06 |
| Summer Bridge helped me become familiar with university campus life. | 4.7 | .54 |
| Summer Bridge has made me aware of the University's rules, regulations, policies, and procedures. | 4.6 | .72 |
| Summer Bridge helped me become familiar with academic expectations in higher education. | 4.8 | .53 |
| Summer Bridge activities provided an opportunity to interact with NSU students. | 4.6 | .72 |
| Summer Bridge activities provided an opportunity to network with NSU faculty and staff. | 4.6 | .74 |
| I believe Summer Bridge instructors were knowledgeable in the courses they taught. | 4.6 | .77 |
| Summer Bridge has made me feel more "ready" for college. | 4.8 | .47 |
| I would recommend Summer Bridge to other high school students. | 4.9 | .42 |

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Highly Agree

results support the value of networking pathways to a student's overall success in higher education settings (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2007; Granovetter 1973; Mannan 2007).

Conclusion

NSU's ACCESS Summer Bridge program is fulfilling its intended objectives to positively impact student retention and prepare at-risk students to perform successfully in higher education. Since its inception, the program has grown significantly each year, as evidenced by a 58% increase in enrollment between 2008 and 2009 alone. Future program changes will be driven by assessment results. It has been suggested qualitative assessment of student experiences during and following program participation could provide greater insight into the initiative's impact and that assessment of bridge participants' retention continue across the full span of the students' academic careers. For institutions seeking to increase retention of first-year, at-risk students, the ACCESS Summer Bridge program offers a model that can easily be replicated on other campuses. 

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Implementing a Consistent, Customizable Library Session for a First-Year Seminar

The transition from a small public or school library (or no library experience at all) to a university library can be overwhelming for first-year students. Even those who knew their way around their hometown public library can become confused by a much larger, multistory building or the discovery that the Library of Congress call-number system has replaced the familiar Dewey Decimal System. Ensuring all first-year students receive the same basic introduction to the library is beneficial for both students and faculty; students find themselves better prepared to meet faculty expectations, which increases their confidence and reduces frustration, and faculty teaching upper-level classes can be more certain about the library research skills of rising students. It is reasonable to assume a student body that has uniformly had the opportunity for orientation to the academic advantages of the university library is more likely to excel.

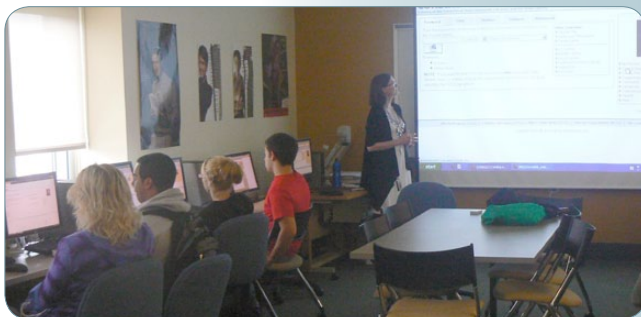
To achieve more consistent and effective library instruction, the First-Year Experience (FYE) Program at Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) piloted a new library information session in the first-year seminar, INQ 101: Intellectual and Creative Inquiry. The seminar is required for all first-time SCSU students, and although some content is common to all seminar sections, to a large extent, each faculty member determines his or her class goals and activities. This model presented challenges to the university librarians who needed to coordinate visits to as many as 62 course sections, each with potentially different library assignments.

To balance first-year students' need for basic library knowledge with faculty members' need for academic freedom, a consistent but customizable INQ 101 library assignment and session were developed to replace the individually planned library visits in fall 2011. The assignment complied with the Association of College and Research Libraries' 2000 Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and included brief activities designed to raise students' awareness of library resources, increase their facility with using those resources, and help them reflect on their research. Students' research culminated in a short essay for which the faculty member requesting the session chose the topic. Thus, the library assignment could either serve as preliminary work for another assignment or as a stand-alone exercise. A sample library assignment worksheet can be found at <http://libguides.southernct.edu/content.php?pid=86486&sid=643886#2048249>.

Seminar faculty were made aware of the new library program through e-mail notification, and participation in the pilot was voluntary. Of the 62 seminar sections offered in fall 2011, 44 (25 instructors) took part in the new library sessions, representing an 18% increase in library visits (76%) over prepilot instructor-planned sessions (58% in 2010). Each participating faculty member met individually with the librarian heading the pilot to learn more

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Students follow along on a tutorial on how to use the library guide. Photo used with permission of the author.

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about the program and customize the library assignment. Pilot students began their library session with a brief facility tour highlighting the difference between the reference and circulation desks, followed by a demonstration of how to log on to their library accounts from off-campus, and ending with the viewing of an infographic showing how much information is unavailable through Google. The remainder of the class period (i.e., approximately 40-60 minutes) was devoted to students working on their library assignment with the help of a specially created library guide (LibGuide; <http://libguides.southernct.edu/inq101>). Students were able to work at their own pace, ask for help when they needed it, collaborate with their peers, and take mini field trips into the stacks to find books.

Assessment of the pilot included (a) an end-of-semester survey of all INQ 101 faculty members, both pilot participants and nonparticipants; (b) an informal discussion among the librarians to determine strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement; and (c) data from library-specific questions on end-of-semester student evaluations of the FYE program (i.e., a comparison of pre and postpilot results and participating vs. nonparticipating students). The faculty survey was sent to all 38 seminar instructors and had a 55% response rate (i.e., 76% pilot participants, 24% nonpilot participants). Of the responding pilot faculty, 82% found the new session to be an improvement over previous instructor-planned library sessions. The majority of all survey respondents (90%) said they would have their classes attend the INQ 101 library session in the future. The nonpilot instructors who anticipated future participation cited various reasons for not having participated in the pilot (e.g., scheduling problems, a pre-arranged library activity); however, learning more about the customized session seems to have encouraged them to integrate it into their classes. An unanticipated outcome of the faculty survey was that several instructors stated in an open-ended comment section that they were now exploring better ways to incorporate information literacy and library assignments into their courses.

Table 1 (see p. 14) shows the pre and postpilot library-specific FYE program assessment data from self-reported student evaluations using a 5-point Likert scale. Findings suggest the new library session increased students' confidence in their library skills knowledge and abilities. In addition, Table 2 (see p. 14) illustrates the statistically significant improvement in the means of three of the questions for students participating in the pilot program versus nonparticipants (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), reaffirming the efficacy of the library session in improving students' information literacy.

An additional assessment of the program was added in spring 2012: a minute-paper evaluation completed by students at the end of their session describing the most signifi-



*A student takes a mini field trip into the stacks to find a book.
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Table 1

Comparison of Pre- and Postpilot Student Self-Reported Knowledge of Library Skills and Services, Fall 2011

| Survey question | Prepilot % agree or strongly agree (N = 994) | Postpilot % agree or strongly agree (N = 902) |
|---|---|--|
| I am learning which SCSU online databases to use and how to search them. | 59 | 69 |
| I am aware that SCSU librarians can help me plan and structure a research project. | 62 | 75 |
| I am aware that I can set up an appointment and meet with a librarian one-on-one. | 54 | 72 |
| It is easy to navigate the library's website (e.g., I can find books, online databases). | 55 | 66 |
| I am being provided with appropriate training and support to make effective use of library and information resources. | 55 | 67 |

Table 2

Mean differences in Student Self-Reported Knowledge of Library Skills and Services, Fall 2011

| Survey question | Participated in library session <i>M</i> | Did not participate in library session <i>M</i> |
|---|--|---|
| I am aware that SCSU librarians can help me plan and structure a research project. | 3.9 | 3.7 |
| I am aware that I can set up an appointment and meet with a librarian one-on-one. | 3.9 | 3.5 |
| I am being provided with appropriate training and support to make effective use of library and information resources. | 3.9 | 3.5 |

$p < 0.01$.

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cant or meaningful thing they learned during the library session. Initial feedback was encouraging with answers ranging from how to access particular resources, surprise at the number of resources the library offers, to all the ways to access the help available from librarians.

As a result of assessment findings and the librarians' feedback, several changes were made in the program, including

(a) restructuring of the LibGuide to make navigation easier for students, (b) offering three culminating project options (i.e., essay, annotated bibliography, or citation exercise) instead of the original essay-only option, and (c) rewording the assignment to emphasize finding the full text of articles regardless of format or method of retrieval. Modifications to the library session initiative will continue to be made based on assessment data; however, future plans and goals include

- ***Creating an in-house LibGuide detailing the difference between primary and secondary sources for various majors.*** The current LibGuide provides this information through a link to a guide created by the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) library, which has caused some SCSU students to unwittingly search the BMCC catalog. An in-house guide will eliminate this confusion.
- ***Achieving 100% participation of INQ 101 sections in library sessions.*** Continued outreach (e.g., a presentation at the 2012 SCSU Teaching Academy and personal calls and e-mails to FYE faculty) will be used to reach this goal.
- ***Exploring collaboration with SCSU's FYE learning communities (i.e., linked INQ class and Critical Thinking class).*** Students would attend the library session in their INQ class and return for a follow-up session in the Critical Thinking class to collectively address any lingering confusion. A goal of this strategy would be to demonstrate that library and information literacy skills are portable and can transfer to other classes as well as encourage greater development of and reflection on these skills.

For campuses interested in implementing a similar information literacy initiative, the key components to consider are (a) creating an assignment worksheet to keep students on task and (b) building an online library guide, which allows the librarian to answer students' questions individually and permits students to work at their own pace. Introducing students to library and research skills as they enter college is critical since information literacy is no longer optional for a successful higher education experience. 

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Resource Spotlight: Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Completing College—Online Lessons

Unplanned pregnancy has serious consequences for student success, retention, and completion. A study of community college students (Bradburn & Carroll, 2002), for example, found that 61% of women who had children after enrolling in community college failed to finish their degrees, which was 65% higher than the rate for those who did not have children.

As part of the effort to improve college students' success and completion, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has developed a set of three free online lessons that may be used in first-year seminars or other college success courses to educate students about sex and healthy relationships. The Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy and Completing College lessons are comprised of three web-based modules: Lesson 1—Why Should You Care About Preventing Unplanned Pregnancy? Lesson 2—How Much Do You Know About Sex and Birth Control? and Lesson 3—Make a Plan and Take Action.


Lesson Descriptions

Given the sometimes personal nature of the material, the self-paced, online format is ideal for students. Each lesson uses web-based resources (i.e., videos and websites) so that the material stands alone without the need for additional texts, and assignments can be completed entirely online in one 30-40 minute sitting. In the lessons, students hear from peers who describe their experiences related to relationships, sex, birth control, and parenthood. Additionally, students are directed to websites for information that helps them assess their birth control choices and make plans to avoid unplanned pregnancy. Learning objectives encourage students to

- examine their attitudes about sex and birth control;
- evaluate their knowledge about sex and birth control;
- identify changes (behavioral and other) needed to decrease their chances of unplanned pregnancy;
- identify ways to communicate about sex and birth control with partners or potential partners;
- choose birth control that suits their values, life styles, relationships; and
- make an action plan to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

Each lesson includes interactive learning activities and self-checks that help students assess their knowledge while providing individual feedback. Lesson study guides and worksheets focus student attention. Finally, at the end of each lesson, students verify their completion by taking a brief assessment.

Faculty Support

The lessons have been designed to minimize faculty preparation time. A faculty guide with suggested assignments and ways to integrate the lessons is downloadable from The National Campaign website. More information about the program and access to the online lessons can be found at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/colleges>. 

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Prevent Teen and Unplanned
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Research Spotlight: 2011 National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences


While definitions vary, the senior capstone is generally defined as a culminating experience—either course-based or project-based—for students in their final year of undergraduate study (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Gardner, Van der Veer, & Associates, 1998; Kuh, 2008; Levine, 1978). Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), suggested a positive relationship exists between participation in a senior capstone experience and deep or integrative learning has been established (Kuh, 2008) and self-reported cognitive gains (NSSE, 2009). Based on these perceived benefits, the Association of American Colleges and Universities has identified the senior capstone experience as a high-impact practice (Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Kuh, 2008).

In fall 2011, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition conducted its second national study to gather information on senior culminating experiences. Invitations to participate in the 2011 National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences were sent to 3,516 institutions of higher education. A total of 276 institutions responded to the survey (7.8% return rate).

Of the respondents, 268 (97.1%) offered a senior capstone experience. More than half of all institutions reported the primary senior culminating experience on campus was a discipline-based capstone course (59.6%), followed by interdisciplinary capstone course (12.9%), senior thesis or undergraduate research paper (12.9%), other capstone experience (e.g., combination of multiple capstone experiences, student teaching (7.9%), internship (3.9%), comprehensive exam (2.4%), and exhibition of arts (1.2%).

Other notable findings included

- The most frequently reported course objectives for senior capstone experiences were (a) development of critical thinking, analytical, and/or problem-solving skills; (b) ability to conduct scholarly research; and (c) career preparation.
- The most frequently reported good practices within senior capstone experiences were (a) integrative learning, (b) communication of high expectations, and (c) instructor encouragement of active learning.
- More than three fourths of the respondents stated that either tenure-track faculty (57.8%) or full-time, non-tenure-track (18.3%) served as the primary instructor for the senior capstone experience.
- Less than one third of all respondents offered training for senior capstone experience instructors.
- More than half of the responding institutions formally assessed or evaluated the senior capstone experience.

Additional findings are available in the executive summary, which can be found on the National Resource Center website at http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveys/survey_instruments and in the forthcoming research report *2011 National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences: Institutional-Level Data on the Culminating Experience* (Padgett & Kilgo, 2012). 

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