



Curricular interventions for the First-Year Residential Student

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Overview

- Contemporary curricular intervention descriptions
- Brief history of first-year programs
- Student Development Theory applications to general design
- First-Year Seminars
- Learning Communities
- Service Learning
- Implications for implementation and practice
- Discussion

Introduction

- Curricular interventions in the 1st semester are a common retention tactic
- History of first-year curriculum for retention
- May be the period for greatest development and persistence (Tinto, 1993)
- Programs that go beyond “survival skills” enhance learning
- Three intervention structures understood to provide positive development and academic outcomes . . .

Introduction: 3 Contemporary Models

1. First-Year Seminars (FYS)
2. Learning Communities (LCs) and Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs)
3. Service Learning (SL)

Introduction: Why C. I.'s?

- Relatively recent studies have sought to assess effectiveness and to document measurable outcomes
- FYS, LC's, and SL are used in innovative academic programs to increase retention and to increase learning
- Ability to connect classroom experiences with out-of-class experiences increases campus involvement and is linked to student's perception of self-worth and involvement (Walters, 2003)

Introduction: Definitions

First-Year Seminar

- Small, discussion-based course
- Instructor and students exchange ideas to assist in social and academic development and transition to college
- Variety of course structures/focus

Introduction: Definitions

Learning Communities

- Clustered classes
- Interest Groups
- Themed multidisciplinary programs
- Strengthen a peer group's connection with one another, instructors, and course material beyond the classroom
- Sometimes linked to residential communities on campus

Introduction: Definitions

Service-Learning

- Course-based activities
- Increase understanding of applications of course content
- Enhance student's sense of civic engagement and responsibility towards the community

Introduction

Individuals who engage in all three of these curricular interventions as first-year students report:

1. More positive experiences with academic engagements
2. More interaction with peers
3. More involvement in the campus community

(Keup, 2005)

Background Info

The 20th century brought changes to the focus of the new profession of student affairs:

- To recognize individual differences
- To concentrate on holistic development of the student

Until recent decades student personnel acted as service providers, providing remedial and reactionary assistance

The 1970's student development movement involved a philosophical shift from remediation to environmental and developmental approaches

Background Info

Key Proponent:

Student development is neither complementary or supplementary to the core purpose of institutions, rather a central function of higher education.

Developmental approaches in SA should be designed to modify environment to ensure students are equipped with skills to fully utilize opportunities and resources to maximize personal growth and learning (Hurst et al., 1973).

Student Development efforts by SA professionals:

Influence the curriculum, legitimize the extra-curriculum, and involve faculty in SA programs and activities (Blackhurst, 1995)

Background Info

ACPA's 1994 challenge: To create new SA divisions that specialize in development and learning

- New campus departments
- Developmental-style elective courses (Higbee et al., 2002)
- First-Year Experience programs

There is still much room for growth within the profession!

Goals and Considerations for CIs

King & Anderson (2004) stipulate three primary objectives for any co-curricular FY program to include:

- Identity development that provides students with sense of place and sense of self
- Understanding of an integration of wellness and personality to form social, emotional, physical, intellectual, academic, occupational, and spiritual well-being
- Understanding of the university or college community and the meaning of being a student

Goals and Considerations for CIs

Braxton & Mundy (2001) suggest practical considerations for all staff, faculty, advisors, and administrators to promote holistic development inside and outside of the classroom:

- Academic programs should require active learning curriculum such as LCs, FIGs, and SL- to facilitate psychosocial growth
- Programs should provide students with advocates and promote awareness of appropriate co-curricular activities to promote campus involvement
- Ample opportunities for first-years to interact with peers

Student Development Theory and FYCIs

3 Primary classes of student development theory that apply to external influencers that can be shaped into an environment:

1. Psychosocial Development Theory

Pertain not to the process of development, but to the content of development

2. Cognitive Development Theory

Examine how individuals think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences

3. Environment/Interactionist Theory

Address stimuli that instigate development and modes by which students engage in developmental experiences

Psychosocial Development Theory

Chickering's revised psychosocial development vectors (1993)

1. Developing competence
2. Managing emotions
3. Moving through autonomy towards interdependence
4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships
5. Establishing identity
6. Developing purpose
7. Developing integrity

Build upon one another to build a more complex self-concept (Evans et al., 1998)

Curriculum and learning experiences potentially catalyze this growth towards individuation.

Psychosocial Development Theory

Brower (1990) compiled a list of 7 life tasks for first-year students that might be treated as mediators in the FYE.

1. Making friends
2. Getting good grades
3. Establishing future goals
4. Managing time
5. Being on one's own without family and friends
6. Establishing an identity
7. Maintaining physical self

Most focus on physical and skill-based needs of Chickering's first and second vectors.

FYICs to be designed around more holistic & mature development

Cognitive Development Theory

Extremely relevant to curriculum for first-year students

Faculty and student personnel alike cite goals of promoting critical thinking skills in & out of class

Rulan (1999) studied measurable cognitive development in students participating in a variety of curricular constructs:

Though objectives for cognitive development are cited abundantly, critical thinking is not a common environmental or teaching construct in first-year courses, regardless of discipline.

However, courses with a developmental approach tended to achieve these results more effectively than standard first-year courses.

Cognitive Development Theory

Rulan (1999), continued.

First-Year Seminars proved to offer best critical-thinking potential, and science courses rated the lowest

Current literature suggests that composition or writing-intensive courses in the first semester of undergraduate study may dramatically affect growth in critical thinking:

68% of humanities-related faculty saw writing and analytical reading as essential skills in teaching

Only 13% of science & math faculty rated it equally as important

Cognitive Development Theory

Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (1981)

1. Dualism
2. Multiplicity
3. Relativism

Most first-year seminars and programs have a developmental approach; most students, after completing them, demonstrate signs of moving from *Dualism to Multiplicity* (Stalling, 2005).

- Detaching from self
- Exhibiting awareness of others and acknowledging ideas and viewpoints as credible sources of knowledge
- Demonstrating that experience must be understood and explained.

Cognitive gains should lead to psychosocial growth with the willingness to examine more diverse sources of information

Environmental/Interactionist Theory

Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984)

The amount of energy a student invests into an experience will largely determine the overall college impact on the individual

First-year programs should promote involvement as suggested by Astin early in a student's academic career (Schnell & Doetkott, 2003)

Shorter-term findings show that:

- a) integration into the college community,
- b) engagement in curricular & co-curricular programs, &
- c) the establishment of new relationships

all support personal growth and risk-taking (Godin, 1998)

Environmental/Interactionist Theory

Social and mentoring relationships with peers, staff, and faculty established in the first year aid in growth.

(Mangold et al., 2002; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Gamble & Canipe, 2000; Lamb et al., 1997; Leonard, 1996; Blackhurst, 1994; Murphy, 1989).

- Peer cohorts in learning communities
- Freshman interest groups
- Clustered classes
- Peer advocate or peer mentor programs
- More significant student-faculty and student-staff interaction

Benefits of strong faculty relationships, which have been linked to student persistence and academic performance, are dramatically increased when extended outside the classroom (Godin, 1998).

Environmental/Interactionist Theory

Designing first-year programs that engender personal contact with peers, staff, and faculty should be considered good retention practice (Tinto, 1993).

Frequent and intense interaction with peer group yields cognitive results in student's openness to diversity (Pascarella et al., 1996)

Potency of a peer cohort on development and integration within the institutional community is increased tremendously in residential settings (Braxton & Murphy, 2001; Godin, 1998; Leonard, 1996; Pascarella et al., 1996).

Environmental/Interactionist Theory

Campus environment and climate, and a student's sense of belonging, can influence cognitive gains and persistence (Whitt et al., 1999)

Degree of perceived fit, or "ecological congruence," between a student and the institution can affect satisfaction, growth, and academic achievement . . . as well as to the degree learning is facilitated inside and outside of the classroom (Ruland, 1999)

So, integrating social and academic environments on campus adds to learning . . .

Several evaluators of first-year curriculums suggest holding classes and group discussion in campus residences, coffee shops, and even the instructor's home (Ralph, 2002; Godin, 1998; Lam et al., 1997)

Environmental/Interactionist Theory

Interactive learning experiences linked to academic courses constitute *experiential learning*

- May include service learning, co-curricular participation, etc.
- Provide experiences that require processing and evaluation to enhance meaning of concepts taught in class
- Can link content to context of their experiences.

Kolb's (1984) Theory of Experiential Learning

Defines the process of knowledge as one being "created through the transformation of experiences" (Evans et al., 1998).

First-Year Seminars

Measurable Outcomes of First-Year Seminars:

- Higher retention over the first semester and after 4 years (Schnell & Doekott, 2003)
- Correlation between FYS final grade and subsequent academic achievement in college, especially the 1st semester (Blackhurst, 1995)
- FYS grade and a positive correlation with psychosocial development (Blackhurst, 1995)
- Proven beneficial with those entering with lower academic performance or lower ACT/SAT scores (Horstman, 2004; Blackhurst, 1995)
- Over 50% gain in their critical thinking abilities over the semester—exemplary during this time of transition (Ruland, 1999)

First-Year Seminars

Additional advantages of the FYS:

Introduce students to new viewpoints and ideas in a safe setting that allows instructors to pace cognitive development

Small stimuli can be presented to classes, challenging cognitive processing at a level just above current capacity to help them recognize self and peers as sources of knowledge (Stallings, 2005)

It is possible to theme courses to create added interest or to tailor them to the institution

First-Year Seminars

FYS courses have made a shift from original remedial nature--

Four common assumptions of any FYS: (Murphy, 1989)

1. Students need to identify with the college and peer group
2. The seminar creates bonding
3. There are certain skills and knowledge associated with success in college
4. Faculty training is necessary for those instructing the course

Core qualities have altered little over the past several years, but contention between design and construction of the course exists between institutions and even departments

First-Year Seminars

5 Common Structures:

- Survival/Orientation
- Academic
- Professional, Discipline-specific
- Developmental (Curricular)
- Ecclectic (Synthesis of more than one)



Academic FYS Design

Need not be discipline-specific, though high standards in discipline-themed courses are argued to:

- Allow students to delve into their area of interest
- Develop a stronger interest and commitment to the discipline
- Demonstrate higher performance and critical thinking as a result of rigorous expectations (Basu & Middendorf, 2004)

Others argue that discipline-specific FYS courses are worst at developing critical thinking skills and do not allow for exploration at such an early point (Brent, 2005)

Academic FYS Design

Many recommend strong basis in research and composition for academic design

Consider making FYS required for all first-year students in residence, immediately establishing a learning community

FYS instructor as the first-year student's Academic Advisor (Ralph, 2002; Godin, 1998)

- Fosters an even stronger student-faculty relationship
- Allows advisor to observe student's academic behavior

Developmental FYS Design

Exploratory and developmental pedagogy is a growing underpinning of the FYS; environment and curriculum are flexible enough to accommodate development theory

Four elements of developmental course instruction to ensure the FYS encourages cognitive development:

1. Diversity
2. Structure
3. Experiential Learning
4. Personalism

(Knefelkamp, 1999)



Student Affairs Professionals & FYS

Proclivity of SA staff to construct curriculum and classroom environments to be more developmental

Blackhurst (1995) assessed qualitative outcomes of several FYS courses at a single institution taught in 3 different instructor variables

- SA staff influenced course to make it more developmental
- SA staff increased student-instructor interaction
- No significant differences in student performance or persistence between variables, suggesting that co-op teaching is likely a waste of resources

However . . .

Student Affairs Professionals & FYS

- Students reported a higher level of satisfaction with courses taught by a SA professional
- Students who completed the course taught by a SA professional perceived the instructors to more strongly emphasize cognitive and affective goals
- Students report courses taught by SA professionals were overall more helpful

Let us ponder . . .

The implications for ACPA's challenge

The institutional relationships when SA professionals are involved in curriculum design and evaluation

First-Year Seminar

Structures found to be effective in any design:

Seminar-based, discussion-rich

Small class size – 20 or less

Teaching Assistant or upperclass peer mentor

Close contact with instructor

Included in learning community or residential community

Relaxed, safe, and social setting that extends beyond the traditional classroom

(Hunter, 2003; Godin, 1998; Lamb et al., 1997)

First-Year Seminar

- Varied class activities and experiential learning
- Link to co-curricular activities and campus life
- Informal activities as a group



Learning Communities

Coordinated peer cohort groups for increased peer interaction for academic and social support and integration of in-class and out-of-class learning

- Clustered classes
- Links to residential communities
- Coordinated interest groups in/out of classroom

Learning Communities

Frequency and quality of peer interactions determines degree of development, sense of belonging, and perceived support

- Strong sense of community with peers, instructors, peer mentors
- Better perception of faculty and campus climate



Learning Communities: Clustered Classes

Challenges to belief systems, exploration of new perspectives and idea, and openness to diversity

Increased attendance, grades, and instances of out-of-class cohort discussion and integration of in-class materials (Leonard, 1996)

Cohort class clustering, combined with peer mentoring, has been found to show positive impact on likelihood for graduation and persistence (Mangold et al., 2002; Weber, 2000; Leonard, 1999)

Most beneficial for at-risk students

Learning Communities: Clustered Classes

What to cluster the FYS with?

- Often clustered with other introductory English & math courses
- Clustering with composition courses produced no significant relationship between learning outcomes or retention (Crissman, 2001)

Learning Communities: Interest Groups

Linking courses to co-curricular activities, residential living communities, or themed interest groups effectively links students to classmates and integrates the in-class & out-of-class experiences (Gamble & Canipe, 2000)

Benefits, when linked to residential groups, is remarkably intensified

FIGs in residence halls are very effective . . . Systematic connection of their academic and social life creates holistic learning across a "seamless" campus-wide environment (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Leonard, 1999; Terenzini, 1991)

Learning Communities: Residential FIGs

Successful Freshman Interest Groups:

- Have strong faculty buy-in and presence in the halls
- Are linked to classroom experiences and are most effective when a specific course fits the theme
 - Leadership
 - Language
 - Arts
 - Cultural studies
 - Gender studies
 - Service



Learning Communities: Residential FIGs

Successful Freshman Interest Groups:

- Have involved faculty Residence Life staff cooperatively designing, facilitating, and assessing the curriculum
- Include organized out-of-class activities related to the FIG
- Utilize returning FIG residents as peer mentors or in leadership capacities
- Can attract students to on-campus housing and increase student commitment to in a chosen field of study or interest
- Physically bring class to the residential environment. Taught in residence halls, advisor offices in residence halls, etc.

Service Learning (course-linked)

- Application of course content, perceived practical experience
- Experiential learning in an authentic environment from diverse people
- Empathy, confidence, and global awareness
- Connection to the community
- Sense of civic responsibility



Service Learning (course-linked)

- Involves a high degree of student-instructor contact, therefore increasing student performance and persistence
- Ability to work with student service groups and volunteerism projects on campus



Service Learning (course-linked)

For service learning to be successful:

1. The service and the learning portions must augment one another
2. Project must be a substantial experience validated with academic credit to be seen as a credible part of learning
3. Experience should result in speaking and listening, discussion, reading, and oral and written projects to allow learner to fully process the experience (Gamble & Canipe, 2002)

Conclusions

Professionals in Student Affairs should consider specialization in first-year curriculum design and facilitation

First-Year classroom curriculum has been found to be presented in a more beneficial or well-received manner by Student Affairs professionals than by tenured faculty

Co-curricula is validated to millennial generation with a home in the classroom – is it worth credit? Link existing FIGs and residential learning communities academic courses!

Comprehensive first-year experience curriculum planning may help to integrate First-Year Seminars, Learning Communities, and Service Learning (*Participants of all 3 show best results*)

Implications for Practice

FYS courses should balance academic and developmental approaches for maximum results . . .

Examples of structures:

- Academic assignments but developmental focus
- . . . Course theme can be both! UAS' seminar is entitled: "A Sense of Place—Alaska and Beyond"
- Significant composition, research, and analytical reading
- Non-traditional settings, contact with instructor, links to co-curriculum . . . *Who better than Residence Life Staff?*
- Use of peer mentoring and service learning

Implications for Practice

Student Affairs professionals should work to have more of a presence in the undergraduate classroom.

Some course listings find a home in Student Affairs departments (Developmental Studies, Health and Human Services, Guidance, etc.)

Appropriate courses might include:

- First-Year Seminar
- Health and Wellness, Substance Use Education
- Leadership
- Helping skills and paraprofessional training courses
- Practicum in Higher Education?

Implications for Practice

Considerations for residence hall design– classrooms & offices

Presence of Student Affairs professionals on curriculum committees and adjunct faculty boards

Planning to provide Student Affairs staff with training and experience in instruction and classroom management

Graduate studies in Higher Education might include practicums in first-year seminar instruction or curriculum design

Assessment for first-year persistence, performance, and satisfaction should encompass the entire “seamless” learning environment of in-class and out-of-class experiences rather than separate course and living environment surveys

Discussion



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