

## **Embedding Diversity in a New Model of First-Year Programming**

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### **Summary**

This presentation describes how a new program model for our first-year General Education curriculum addresses diversity learning through thematic seminars with service learning opportunities embedded in a living-learning community. The First Seminar/Learning Community initiative is the cornerstone of a plan to revamp Millersville's General Education program. Students are assigned to one of a series of new three-credit, content-based thematic seminars linked to a fundamentals course (Composition or Speech). The initiative also includes special Student Affairs programming, a service learning requirement, the use of peer mentors, and, in some cases, problem-based learning. This session focuses on selected seminars that most explicitly target diversity concerns through the study of homelessness, equity and justice in American schooling, and the question of why we hate.

In addition to a general description and explanation of the first-year seminar/learning community initiative, the presentation examines several strategies to address diversity learning – service learning, problem-based learning, student affairs programming, and interdisciplinarity – in the contexts of several exemplary seminars. It concludes by summarizing both successful strategies and potential pitfalls in getting students to engage issues of diversity based upon our early experience with this new model of programming as well as our longer experience with its UNIV 101 predecessor.

## Profile of Millersville University

- Undergrad enrollment of just under 7000
  - 91% fulltime
  - 96% Instate
- Entering fall 2005 class of 1320 students (new freshman) –
  - mean SATs = 1061;
  - Mean Percentile Rank = 69%
  - 9.2% African American
  - 3.3% Hispanic
- 7th Ranked Public in US News & World Report's Master's Universities in the North
- Top Majors:
  - Undecided (852)
  - Buad (815)
  - EIEd (772)
  - Biol (482)
  - ITech (443)
  - Comm (422)
  - Psyc (351)

Students will grow in their engagement with peoples of diverse histories and communities, both inside and outside the United States.



## **Components of the First-Year Seminar/Learning Community (FYS/LC) Initiative**

- FYS thematic content course (“passion course”) paired with first-year fundamental course (Composition or Speech)
- Living-learning connection (Students live together in Freshman dorms)
- Service Learning (15 hour requirement)
- Attentive advising by seminar instructors with support from Resident Life and Exploratory programs
- Peer mentors (live in dorms; assigned to each seminar)

### **First-Year Seminar (Passion Course) Topics**

- Homes and Homelessness
- The Dream of America
- Facing Fear
- Why We Hate
- The Amish and the Media
- Witchcraft in 17th Century England and New England
- Our Bodies/Ourselves: Sexuality and Gender in the Global Village
- A Different View: How Can We Change the World?
- Scientific Revolutions: An Exploration of Method
- Culture, Science and Mathematics in the Pre-Columbian Americas
- Food or Free Speech? Human Rights and You
- The Deindustrialization of America: Jobs Today, Gone Tomorrow
- The Monsters Under Our Beds
- Liberty and Justice for All: The Promise of American Education
- “Why Don’t They Speak English?”

See brochure for descriptions and binder for syllabi and course materials.

## **Liberty and Justice for All: The Promise of an American Education (McDowell)**

### **Description:**

This first year seminar invites students to explore questions of fairness, justice, and equity in our current education system. Should education be considered a civil right? What is your responsibility as a citizen for students in your own community? What is your responsibility to all students, especially in communities where schools have failed to provide students with equal opportunity for success in society? We will seek answers to these questions by examining the familiar (i.e., schools) from different and often challenging perspectives.

### **Goals/Issues Addressed:**

- No Child Left Behind: Who does this legislation help? Hurt?
- Educational rights and equity for poor and underrepresented students
- Shifts in student demographics across the United States and their implications
- Educational rights for children of immigrants

### **Course Components:**

- Texts:
  1. *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, Jonathan Kozol.
  2. *Many Children Left Behind: How the No Child Left Behind Act is Damaging our Children and Our Schools*, Deborah Meier.
- Videos:
  1. *Crisis in America's Schools*, Oprah Winfrey in conjunction with Bill & Melinda Gates
  2. *Children in America's Schools with Bill Moyers* (Jonathan Kozol)
  3. *I Am A Promise, The Children of Stanton Elementary School* (Documentary)

## Homes & Homelessness (O'Neill)

### Description:

A 3-credit seminar for freshman that explores the meaning of home and the psychological and social impact of homelessness. Students review key historical periods in the development of concepts related to the experience of home. In the second half of the semester students investigate the causes of homelessness in the United States in general and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in particular. Service learning experiences bridge the gap between classroom reading and discussion and the subjective realities of homeless people.

### Goals/Issues Addressed:

1. Develop a personal response to homelessness and stimulate growth and change in attitudes toward homeless people.
2. Promote social justice activism through an understanding of the impact of social policy. Students explore issues such as minimum wage/living wage legislation, and the obstacles to affordable housing and the effects on low income families.
3. Investigate the meaning of home and homelessness using literature, art history, psychology and social policy.

### Course Components:

#### Reading

*Impact 2004: The State of Housing and Homelessness in Lancaster County*  
(United Way Report)

Hueck, Douglas (1988) *I am Homeless* (Pittsburgh Press)

Rybczysinski, Witold (1986) *Home: A Short History of an Idea*

#### Service Learning

Students have 15 hours of Service Learning during the semester, serving at homeless shelters, breakfast and dinner programs, church based winter emergency shelters as well as policy group meetings in the community (e.g., United Way Homeless Outreach Committee). Students identified this as one of the course elements they most appreciated. One student commented "I enjoyed going out in the community and seeing first hand the problem of homelessness." Another student wrote "the thing I liked most about the class was the feeling that I really helped people...it made me feel like I made a difference."

#### Proposal Assignment

In collaboration with the English Composition class students in the Seminar worked on developing a written proposal to a funding source for a program aimed at meeting some need of the homeless population in Lancaster, Pa. Students presented the proposals to the class who represented the funding group. Students were graded on the content of both the written and oral presentation. Students used creative media to promote their program and

support the need and rationale. Sample projects included a Winter Coat Collection, an After School Tutoring Program, and a Matching System for Single homeless men for roommate compatibility. (Single men are Lancaster's largest group of homeless individuals.)

### **Research Paper**

In collaboration with the English Composition course students identify a topic in Homelessness they want to investigate further. Topics have included Runaway Teens, Homelessness and Children; The Impact of Minimum Wage on Homelessness, and Rural Homelessness.

## Why We Hate (Foster-Clark)

### Description:

This seminar investigates the darker side of human emotions and behavior by examining hatred: its causes, its manifestations in contemporary society and historically, and what can be done to lessen its incidence and impact. A recent book, *Why We Hate* by Rush Dozier, forms the backbone of this seminar and presents a psychological and neurological perspective on the issue. Other perspectives will be gained through additional reading, guest lectures, discussion, and service learning.

### Goals/Issues Addressed:

At the end of this course, students should have gained ...

- a) an understanding of different approaches to explaining the incidence and prevalence of hate.
- b) an appreciation for how different fields of study approach the problem of hate and how they interrelate.
- c) an understanding of societal responses and an exploration of personal responses to lessen the presence of hate in our world.
- d) broad exposure to different manifestations of hate in the U.S. and around the globe.
- e) opportunities for reflective service learning.

### Course Components:

- Problem-based Learning:

Students work in small groups to discuss, research, and then compile information related to a scenario depicting real-life encounters with hatred and prejudice. The information gathered about the scenario, including possible means to resolve these encounters, is then shared with the rest of the class through group oral presentations.

- Service Learning:

Students are expected to complete 15-20 hours of service learning over the course of the semester. The first segment is done as a class during the United Way Day of Caring. Additionally, during the semester small groups of students are placed in one of several community organizations connected to the themes of this course to complete the remaining 10-15 hours of service. Service learning activities may include assisting with the YWCA Anti-Bias programs in elementary or middle schools, planning tolerance programs for high schools operated by the Lancaster County Human Relations Commission, researching hate group activity in south central Pennsylvania, helping to plan and conduct diversity workshops and activities on campus, or contributing to Lancaster's Underground Railroad conference.

## Univ 179 First Seminar: Why We Hate

### *Problem Solving Scenarios*

#### **General Guidelines**

For the scenario you are assigned, you are to research, as a group, how the situation can or should be addressed here at Millersville. You are to investigate the policies, programs, and personnel that might be resources in confronting and resolving your scenario. Your purpose is to learn how to deal with situations such as these and to convey that knowledge to your classmates. Your primary audience is the members of the seminar. Each scenario is accompanied by some questions and perspectives that you'll want to consider as you plan and conduct your research. To the extent possible, your research should inform us about how common or frequent situations like these might be at MU or at other college campuses. After completing your research, you should evaluate how well things are set up at Millersville to address the situation and suggest other resources MU might consider adding to be more effective in handling situations like these. What you've learned in response to your scenario and in the related research you've conducted should be shared with the class in an engaging and informative presentation. The overall workload should be shared equitably among the group members.

#### **Assessment**

On the day your group is to present your findings to the class, you will be allotted 15 minutes to share your research and 5 minutes for questions. The group should also have prepared a one- to two-page fact sheet consisting of the key points and/or main ideas that your research revealed. The fact sheet will be handed out to each member of the class. A listing of all the people (and the role they serve), programs, places, and other resources you've consulted in the course of doing your research should be handed in separately to the Instructor. The work will be evaluated using the Problem Based Learning Assignment Rubric.

#### **Scenario 2: Racial Incident**

You are an incoming freshman living away from home for the first time. You were so excited about having a black roommate because you never had one before. As you and your roommate walk to class, walk around campus, or eat in dining halls you notice other whites staring at you "funny." They make comments like "why are you hanging with them?" and they start calling you a "traitor." When you'll walk back to your room later on that evening you stumble across a piece of paper taped to the door. The piece of paper says, "No blacks allowed in college, Go back to the cage you crawled out of!" You are so embarrassed and your roommate is hysterical. What should you do in a case like this?

#### Questions to be considered and answered during your research:

1. How do you deal with your roommate?
2. What do you do in response to the comments scrawled on your door?
3. How do you deal with the comments you are getting?
4. Why are you embarrassed? What other feelings might you be experiencing?
5. Are there campus policies that are violated by the events in this scenario?
6. Are there mediation programs or other services available for students who are having trouble getting along?
7. What is MU doing to address issues of racism and acceptance of diversity on campus?

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#### **Scenario 5: Sexual Orientation Issues**

Greg has known for a while that he is gay. He does not have a problem letting others know either. Susanne is scared to let people know that she is a lesbian because she is afraid people will stereotype and stigmatize her. People often harass Greg because of his sexual preference and Susanne does not think she is strong enough to handle that. This is why she is hesitant in telling people about her homosexuality. At times you've been worried that the harassment that Greg experiences will turn violent. As a friend of both Greg and Susanne what should you do in a case like this?

#### Questions to be considered and answered during your research:

1. What can be done if a student is being harassed?
2. Does it matter that the harassment is about one's sexual preference?
3. What can you say or do if you are around when Greg is being harassed?
4. What resources are available to help students who are struggling to come out as gay or lesbian?
5. Are there campus policies that protect the civil rights of GLBT students? How about the rights of faculty or campus staff?
6. What are programs or organizations on campus doing to create a more accepting environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals?

## **Resident Life/Student Affairs Diversity Activities**

1. All Peer Mentors, Graduate Assistants, and Resident Assistants participate in day-long diversity training, called Building a High Performance Community: An Inclusion and Diversity Education Program, offered by the University's Department of Social Equity.
2. Each Resident Assistant is responsible for one program each semester promoting Cultural Identity Awareness.
3. Resident Assistants and Peer Mentors accompany students to Diversity events on campus such as a lecture series on the Japanese Internment, the Celebration of Latino Culture or the Immigration debate.
4. Resident Hall "Movie and Discussion" evenings featuring films such as *American History X*, *Crash*, and *The Boondock Saints*.
5. Students signed a giant tolerance pledge hanging in the lobby of their hall.
6. MU Allies members (GLBT advocacy group on campus) conducted "Speak Outs" in the residence halls to discuss the experience of discrimination and the coming out process.

## Service Learning

### FYE Faculty Survey (Fall 2005) Summary of Findings

The survey was sent to 16 faculty members; 13 responded.

#### Day of Caring:

Nine of the thirteen respondents indicated that they did have their class participate in the Day of Caring. Three indicated that they did not, and one did not answer the question.

Of those that did participate:

- 77.8% said that the experience was *definitely* valuable for their students, and 22.2% said that it was *somewhat* valuable. No one responded that it was *not really* or *not at all* valuable.
- Everyone (100%) indicated that they did use time during class for guided reflection on the event.

#### Additional Service-Learning:

Eight faculty members indicated that they incorporated additional service-learning experiences in their FYE classes.

- Four of those respondents replied to a question about the value of those experiences, with 75% indicating they were *definitely* valuable, and 25% indicating they were *somewhat* valuable.

#### Across the University:

Under the leadership of the Office of Community and Academic Partnerships, 54 faculty members from across the University offered courses that included a **service-learning component** plus 16 supervised service-learning internships. 2,732 students (down from 3,504 students in 2004-05) contributed 114,897 hours of service (up from 109,061 hours in 2004-05, a 5% increase) to the community which amounts to the equivalent of a \$2,072,741 contribution to the community according to figures from [independentsector.org](http://independentsector.org).

### Pilot-test Evaluation Methods – Fall 2005

- In 2005, 110 of the 284 Exploratory (Undecided) students were randomly assigned to the FYS/LC pilot-test program
- Students are assigned to one of FYS/LC topics based on their stated preferences
- Students completed mid-semester and end-of-semester Web-based surveys
- Focus group of pilot-test students held at end of semester by assessment staff
- Passion course instructors completed opened-ended surveys
- Students are followed to check academic progress and persistence

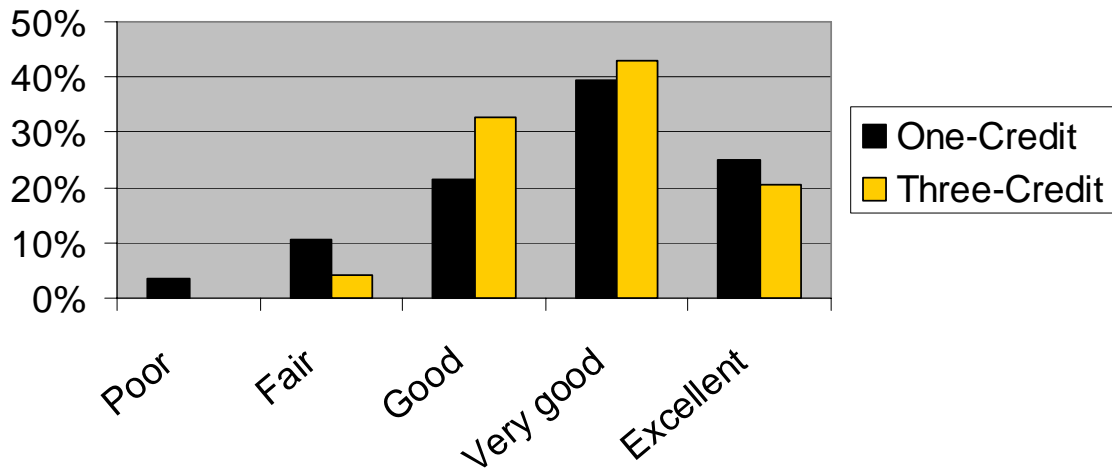
### Pilot-test Results – Fall 2005

- Students in the freshman seminar had more serious conversations with different students, worked more with classmates outside of class, researched for a paper more, contributed more to class, and came to class more prepared than students who were not in a freshman seminar.

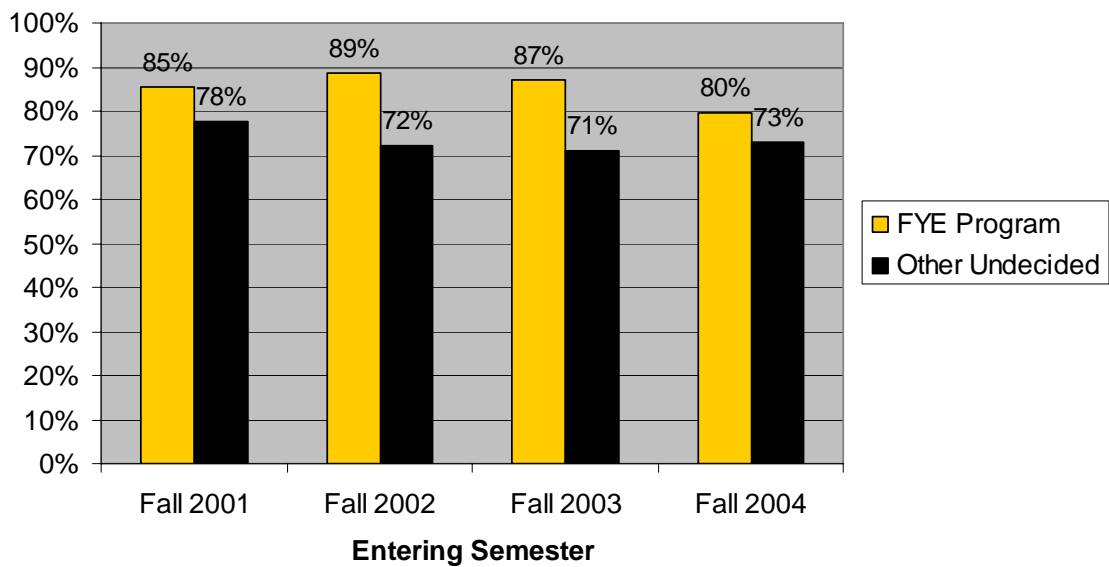
<b>Students who were involved in a freshman seminar . . .</b>	<b>Means (all differences <math>p &lt; .05</math>)</b> [Based on scale of 1 (Never) to 4 (Very Often)]
Had more serious conversations with students who were very different in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values than students who were not involved in a freshman seminar.	Seminar = 2.28 No Seminar = 2.02

Student comments during Focus Groups after the semester noted service learning as the most important element of their experience.

**Chart 1. How do you rate your freshman seminar experience?**



**Chart 2. Persistence into Sophomore Year for Exploratory Students at Millersville University**



## **Pilot-test Evaluation Methods – Fall 2006**

- In 2006, all 270 Exploratory (Undecided) students were included in the 15 seminar sections
- Students are assigned to one of FYS/LC topics based on their stated preferences
- Students complete pre-tests (in first two weeks) and post-tests (end-of-semester) including:
  - Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale
  - Higher Education Values Inventory
  - Conceptions of Liberal Arts and Civic Responsibility
- Focus group of students and instructors held at end of semester
- NSSE data will be collected from all first-year students in spring 2007 and will allow comparisons between program participants and non-participants
- Students will be followed to check academic progress and persistence

## **Diversity Assessment within the NSSE Framework**

- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) offers a series of questions suitable for assessing learning outcomes related to diversity.
- These questions include:
  - During the current school year, how often have you done ...
    - Item 1d: Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments.
    - Item 1k: Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service learning) as part of a regular course.
    - Item 1u: Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own.
    - Item 1v: Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values.
  - Item 7e: Foreign language coursework done or planned before graduation.
  - Item 10c: Institution emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.
  - Item 11l: How much has experience at institution contributed to understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- Students in the FYS/LC pilot-test will be compared to non-participants on the above measures in spring 2007.

## Summary: Promising Practices & Pitfalls

- **Promising Practices (What has made things work better?)**
  - Adapting and expanding innovative pedagogy already being used elsewhere at Millersville and other institutions
    - Living/learning communities
    - Problem-based learning
    - Service learning
    - Multidisciplinary approaches
  - Utilizing a content-based, thematic approach to first-year programming with a three-credit (not one-credit) seminar
    - Embedding diversity concerns with other substantive and engaging course content
    - Seminar provides bridge to Student Affairs diversity initiatives
  - Bringing together academic and student affairs
    - Dedicated freshman dorms built on living/learning model
    - Co-curricular programming, often based in dorms
    - Peer mentors provide bridge between dorm/campus life and FYS classroom
  - Starting small, making it voluntary, and then building up
    - Innovative programming (like the FYS/LC initiative) started as small pilot-test with assessment opportunities, expanded in second year (from 5 to 15 sections), with full adoption expected in Year 4 or 5.

## Summary: Promising Practices & Pitfalls

- **Pitfalls (What obstacles have made things difficult?)**
  - Service Learning
    - Providing a Service Learning component often the “most difficult part of the course to administer”. Identifying service opportunities, arranging transportation and other logistics etc. requires considerable advance planning and coordination with other campus offices.
  - Mismatch between students and context
    - Need to recognize that first-year students require a different type of engagement so that they can successfully meet faculty expectations.
      - They need help reflecting on community-based learning opportunities and appreciating the larger contexts of their experiences.
      - They need help seeing connections among various disciplines and perspectives.
      - Not all faculty are ready to work with such student needs.
    - Developmental disconnect – high school experiences don’t always prepare students for what will be expected of them when they reach college.
  - Getting innovations to fit established curricular structures
    - How/where do the First-Year Seminars count?
    - Can major-based FYS sections count toward Gen Ed?

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Go to <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~gened/> for information about our Gen Ed program and reform efforts and about our First-Year Experience.