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Course Pedagogy for the First-Year Seminar:

Research-Based Strategies for Classroom Instruction, Course Assignments, and Student Grading

Purpose and Organization of this Manuscript

The effectiveness of a first-year seminar (FYS) depends not only on its content, but also on its pedagogy—the instructional methods used to deliver the course. As much thought should be given to *how* the course will be taught as to what material will be covered; in other words, *process* is as important as content.

It is the intent of this manuscript to provide a coherent and comprehensive plan for FYS instructors that "covers all the bases" of effective teaching, ranging from constructing the course syllabus to evaluating course outcomes. The manuscript's plan is deeply grounded in research on effective college teaching and learning. This research base is especially important for FYS instructors because the seminar's student-centered teaching methods can be easily misjudged and dismissed as lightweight "activities." One goal of this manuscript is to combat this misperception by documenting the solid scholarship underlies FYS teaching practices, demonstrating that they are not fun or engaging activities, but bona fide instructional strategies intentionally designed to promote deep learning.

The manuscript is intended to do provide instructors with more than a series of superficial teaching "tips," which focus exclusively on the how of it—teaching mechanics; it also includes examination of the *why* of it—research-based reasons for the effectiveness of the strategies that are recommended. Including discussion of the research and theory that support recommended instructional practices serves to highlight teaching as a form of scholarship, elevates the academic credibility of the FYS, and validates the efforts of the student-centered instructors who teach the course. Moreover, if instructors share the rationale for their teaching strategies with their students, they will gain a better understanding of the educational purpose behind the practices, which should increase the likelihood that students will respond with greater effort and enthusiasm.

The instructional strategies cited in this manuscript have been drawn primarily from three sources: (a) research on instructional improvement conducted by scholars in the field of faculty development, (b) research on human learning, cognition, and motivation, and (c) research on the characteristics and behaviors of college instructors that have been empirically associated with student perceptions of effective teaching and self-reported learning.

Unlike traditional college courses, where it is assumed that faculty with advanced degrees in their disciplines already know what and how to teach the subject matter, *instructor training and development* is a critical component of an effective FYS program because none of its instructors have received graduate training in how to teach an FYS

course, nor have they earned an advanced educational degree in subject of the first-year experience or the field of student success. Thus, instructor development for a FYS takes on greater significance than it does for discipline-based courses taught by discipline-trained faculty. FYS instructor training has the potential to be much more than an ancillary activity; instead, it has the capacity to fill an instructor-preparation void and can serve as the centerpiece of an effective training-and-development program for all course instructors.

The instructional strategies in this manuscript are organized around three key student-centered "connections" that should be made in the FYS: (1) the student-*instructor* connection, (2) the student-*course* (subject) connection, and (3) the student-*student* (peer) connection. The strategies cited have the flexibility to be applied to any unit of the course, thus supplying instructors with a well-stocked arsenal of versatile strategies from which they may choose to deploy where and when they see fit.

The sizable number of transferable teaching strategies cited also have applicability to effective instruction of courses other than the FYS. In one of his early reports on the first-year seminar at the University of South Carolina ("University 101"), John Gardner noted that the course's instructor training-and-development program enabled "faculty to generalize and expand their University 101 teaching innovations beyond the confines of the course and into their regular teaching and work at the university" (1980, p. 7). Gardner's early anecdotal observations have been confirmed by University 101 instructor surveys and interviews, which indicate that a substantial number of faculty who participate in the seminar's instructional development workshop, and then teach the seminar, often transfer teaching strategies acquired in University 101 to their discipline-based courses (Fidler, Neururer-Rotholz, & Richardson, 1999). These findings highlight a potentially powerful feature of the FYS: its capacity to promote effective teaching *across the curriculum*.

The strategies in this manuscript may serve as a multi-faceted resource that may be used for such purposes as: (a) personal course preparation, (b) instructor training-and-development programming, (c) building campus-wide support for the course, (d) and stimulating departmental or college-wide dialogue about effective teaching and learning. As the size of this manuscript suggests, effective teaching is a multidimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon comprised of many specific actions and "little acts" that collectively, add up to make a big difference in student learning. By selecting a manageable number of new effective strategies to implement each time the course is taught, they will gradually accumulate and begin to exert a cumulative and multiplicative effect on the overall quality of course instruction. Such an incremental pedagogical-improvement process should provide instructors with a steady source of continuous professional growth and a growing sense personal gratification by knowing that each successive cohort of first-year students instructed will experience a "new and improved" version of the FYS.

Principles of Effective Teaching and Learning

In the mid-1990s, clarion calls were sounded for a "paradigm shift" to a "new learning paradigm" that moves the focus of attention from the teacher and the content being taught to the *learner* and the process of *learning* (American College Personnel Association, 1994; Angelo, 1997; Barr & Tagg, 1995). The new learning paradigm shifts the starting

point for improving undergraduate education, which *centers on the learner* and *what the learner is doing*, rather than focusing on what the instructor is doing (and covering) in the class. In this learner-centered paradigm, the definition and goal of effective teaching is to *facilitate student learning* and, ultimately, to achieve positive *student-learning outcomes*.

Naturally, implementation of a learning-based approach to instruction begs the question: What are the principles or processes that mediate and promote positive student-learning outcomes? The following five learning processes are well-supported, research-based principles that have been empirically and consistently associated with student learning, student motivation, and student retention (Cuseo, 2007b).

1. Active Involvement: student success increases commensurately with the degree or depth of student *engagement* in the learning process, i.e., the amount of *time* and *energy* that students invest in the college experience—both *inside* and *outside* the classroom (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2005; McKeachie et al., 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

2. Social Integration: student success is augmented by *human interaction, collaboration,* and formation of *interpersonal connections* between the student and other members of the college community—peers, faculty, staff, and administrators (Astin, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Slavin, 1996; Tinto, 1993).

3. Personal Reflection: student success is strengthened when students engage in reflective thinking about what they're learning and *elaborate* on it, *transforming* it into a form that relates it to what they already know or have previously experienced (Ewell, 1997; Flavell, 1985; Mezirow, 2000;Vygotsky, 1978).

4. Personal Meaning: student success is more likely to take place when students find *meaning or purpose* in their college experience—i.e., when students perceive *relevant connections* between what they're learning in college and their current life or future goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wlodkowski, 1998).

5. Personal Validation: student success is more likely to be achieved when students feel personally *significant*—i.e., when students feel recognized as *individuals* and that they *matter* to the institution (Rendón, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

For an instructional strategy to be deemed effective or a "best practice," it should implement one or more of the foregoing five principles. If the practice implements more than one of these principles simultaneously, it can be expected to exert synergistic effects on student learning, student motivation, and student retention. One way to transform the five learner-centered theoretical principles into a practical and manageable action plan for teaching the FYS is to implement them in terms of three key, learner-centered connections:

(1) the student-*instructor* connection,
(2) the student-*course* connection,

(3) the student-*student* (peer) connection, and
(4) the student-*campus* connection.

These key connection points will be used as an organization framework for guiding effective instruction of the FYS. Organizing instructional strategies around this triad of connections is consistent with the framework adopted by the architects of the national surveys of student engagement, which is "grounded in a large body of research about what works in strengthening student learning and persistence. Research shows that the more actively engaged students are—with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study—the more likely they are to learn, to stick with studies, and to attain their academic goals" (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008, p. 7).

What follows are practical strategies for infusing the aforementioned five principles of effective learning into each of the three key "connection" points throughout the FYS.

The *First* Class Sessions

The first few class sessions represent a critical period that can shape students' first impression of the course, which, in turn, can shape their subsequent course perceptions and behavior in class. As the old saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." One way to differentiate the FYS course from other courses in the curriculum is to move away from the common teaching practice of using the first class session to deliver a perfunctory review of the syllabus, which include a laundry list of course requirements, policies, and expectations (that can immediately instill "syllabus anxiety" among new students). Adding insult to injury, this common first-day practice of syllabus review is sometimes followed by early class dismissal, which sends students the tacit message that the first day of class is not important or, worse yet, that class time is not important and can be readily sacrificed. This traditional opening-class practice is often followed by the instructor launching into full-blown coverage of course content during the next class session. Instead of replicating this uninspiring routine during the first days of class, FYS instructors should take the approach that building *class community* and *course enthusiasm* are the most important "topics" to address first in class. Allowing students early opportunity to get to know their instructor, to know the purpose and value of the course, and to know their classmates serve to lay the foundational cornerstones for a successful learning experience in any course, particularly the FYS. Said in another way, before beginning to dive into coverage of course content, instructors should establish the student-*instructor* connection.

Initiating the Student-*Instructor* Connection: Building Early Rapport with the Class

Instructor-student rapport may be viewed as a precondition or prerequisite for student engagement in the learning process and for meaningful student-instructor interaction. If students feel comfortable relating to their instructor, they will be more responsive to the instructor's attempts to interact with them and to actively involve them in the learning process. Unfortunately, despite the documented importance of student-faculty interaction

(Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), national surveys of student engagement, interaction between students an faculty ranks the lowest of all assessment benchmarks (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2000). Angelo (1993) succinctly states how developing rapport with students is a necessary precondition for student-faculty interaction: "Most students have to believe teachers know and care about them before they can benefit from interactions—or even interact" (p. 13).

An extensive body of research reviewed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicates that instructors' concern for students, and their availability to students, have positive, have statistically significant effects on student persistence. Furthermore, as Kuh, et al. (2005) note: "Faculty members who forge authentic relationships with students often are able to connect with student at deeper level and challenge them to previously unrealized levels of achievement and personal performance" (p. 281). Described below are some strategies for connecting with students and establishing early rapport with your class.

On the *first day* of class, make an intentional effort to *learn students' names* and *something personal about them*. Taking time to get to know your students, and allowing them time to get them to know you should precede a detailed review of the syllabus. (People are more important than paper.) Terenzini, et al. (1996) contend that college instructors can "humanize" their relationships with students by learning and using their names. College research indicates that "addressing students by name" is a classroom teaching behavior that correlates positively and significantly with students' overall evaluation of the instructor (Murray, 1985). In contrast, research on "uncomfortable courses," i.e., courses most likely to cause "classroom communication apprehension" among students, reveals that they are more likely to be taught by instructors who are perceived by their students as being unfriendly and who do not address students by name (Bowers, 1986). It has been my personal experience that learning the names of students as quickly as possible is the most effective way to create a positive first impression of the course and establish early rapport with your class. This can lay the foundation for a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable interacting with their instructor and begin to become actively involved in the course. As Forsyth and McMillan point out: "High expectations are communicated as instructors learn students' names and call on them by name" (1991, p. 58).

Learn and remember *personal information about your students.* It is the author's experience that the most effective way to learn relevant personal information about students, as well as to help learn students' names, is by means of a *student-information sheet*. In short, this practice involves having students respond to questions about themselves on a sheet of paper in class while the instructor responds to the same questions by recording information about herself on the board.

In addition to learning students' names and personal information, additional strategies for establishing early rapport with your class include the following practices.

If you can access the e-mail addresses of student who have registered for your class, send them a *personal welcome note* before the course begins. One FYS instructor sends personal letters to all his students before the course begins, welcoming

them to his class and sharing some of the exciting things they will be experiencing in the course (Paul Lorton, University of San Francisco, personal communication).

When previewing the course, *expressly emphasize your availability* outside of class and *encourage* students make office visits.

Student-faculty contact outside the classroom has been strongly linked to such positive outcomes as student retention, academic achievement, and educational aspirations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). One strategy for promoting such contact is to make specific mention of your office hours and make it clear that individual appointments can be arranged if listed office hours conflict with a student's out-of-class responsibilities (e.g., work or child care). Taking time early in the term to clearly state that you welcome interaction with students outside of class may send an explicit signal to them that you genuinely value these interactions. This sends a much stronger and more sincere message than simply listing office hours on the syllabus, which students may interpret merely as a perfunctory fulfillment of departmental or institutional requirements. Furthermore, it makes it clear to new students that interacting with instructors outside the classroom is a desirable practice in college, perhaps unlike high school, where this contact might have only occurred if students had to stay after school because they were in dire need of help (or were in trouble).

During the early stages of the course*, make appointments with* students for an *office visit or personal conference*. Inviting students to make an office visit is one thing, but formally scheduling office an office visit with them is a more intrusive form of outreach to promote out-of-class contact with students. Scheduling such office visits or personal conferences can serve as an early icebreaker that "warms up" students to you and allows them to feel more comfortable about interacting with you outside of class. (It is also an effective way to learn student names.) At the very minimum, requiring this initial conference ensures that each student in class will discover where your office is located, and guarantees that all students—not only the most socially assertive ones—will make at least one office visit during the term.

John Gardner has noted that new students may need to be given a reason to make office visits and explicitly learn how to use faculty office hours because, in high school, teachers usually do not have office hours, if they are available to students outside of class time, they generally have less time and privacy to confer with students on a one-to-one basis. Moreover, in high school, visits to an "office" are often associated with disciplinary action, rather than as an opportunity for positive out-of-class interaction with faculty (Gardner, 1994). This observation suggests that college instructors may need to implement highly intrusive strategies that are intentionally designed to bring students to their offices. (Rather than waiting and hoping that new students will initiate these important out-of-class contacts on their own.)

Extending the Student-*Instructor* Connection: Sustaining Rapport Throughout the Term

Once the student-instructor connection has been initiated during the formative stage of the course, the next challenge is to sustain these connections throughout subsequent stages of the academic term. The following strategies are designed to extend and maintain these early connections throughout the course term.

Student perceptions of instructional effectiveness depend not only on technical teaching skills, such as organization and communication, but also on personal characteristics of the instructor that serve to humanize the classroom environment and promote student feelings of self-worth (Jones, 1989). Instructors are more likely to become role models whose thinking, attitudes and motivation are emulated by students when students perceive them as a "persons" rather than just a subject matter "experts" (McKeachie, et al., 1978). Although organization and communication skills are the two teacher qualities most highly correlated with overall ratings of teaching effectiveness, instructor rapport is also positively associated with student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, and it is the most frequently-cited characteristic of instructors whom students describe as their "ideal" or "best" teacher (Feldman, 1976, 1988).

Said in another way, effective instructors are not only well organized and effective communicators, they also provide students with personal validation. When students feel personally validated, they feel valued as a human being, are recognized as a unique individual, and sense their instructor cares about them and their success (Rendón, 1994). Students feel validated when the instructor knows them by name and remembers personal information about them, such as their educational plans or personal interests. When students feel validated, they relate more easily and openly to the instructor, feel more comfortable about asking questions, and are more likely to seek advice or assistance from the instructor on personal issues relating to the college experience.

The following practices are suggested as teaching practices for validating your students and promoting rapport with them inside and outside the classroom.

Once you have learned your students' names, *continue to refer to them by name*. It is important to learn your students' names, but it may be even more important to show them that you know them by regularly using their names. In a comprehensive review of the research literature on active learning, Bonwell and Eison (1991) reached the following conclusion: "Perhaps the single most important act that faculty can do to improve the climate in the classroom is to learn students' names. Among many other benefits, doing so acknowledges the decentralization of authority in the classroom and recognizes the increased responsibility of students for their learning and the learning of others" (pp. 22-23).

***Personalize* the classroom experience by learning and remembering *information about your individual students*.** Instructors who make a genuine effort to know their students by name and learn something about each of them as individuals, demonstrates that they care about students as unique human beings. Carl Rogers, renowned humanistic psychologist, artfully expresses the value of knowing your students: "I think of it as prizing the learner, prizing his [her] feelings, his opinions, his person. It is a caring for the learner. It is an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, a respect for him as having worth in his own right" (Rogers, 1975, p. 107).

Create *in-class* opportunities to interact personally with students *before* and *after* class. These are times at which students may be most likely to seek you out for professional and personal advice because these are the times they are most likely to be on campus and not in class. This is particularly true for commuter students who are more likely to be on campus only at times when their classes are scheduled. One instructor we know consistently comes to class early, stands by the classroom door, and greets all of his students individually as they enter class (Michael Semenoff, personal communication, 2006). Another professor reports, he goes to class early "to chat with a few individuals about basketball, their weekend etc. It allows me to make contact with a few individuals and as the other students come into the classroom, they see that I am human and interested in them" (Shea, 1988, p. 9). Empirical support for this recommendation is provided by a case study involving classroom observations of five faculty who had histories of high student-retention rates in their courses. It was found that one common characteristic shared by all of these instructors was that "they talked to students before, during, and after class" (Coad, 1995, p. 8). Student-faculty interaction after class may be especially valuable because it is at this time that students are likely to seek clarification on concepts covered in class, or want to engage in extended discussion of some provocative issue raised during class. To take advantage of this "teachable moment" instructors should attempt to make themselves available to students immediately after class and regularly remind students of their after-class availability at the end of class sessions (e.g., by saying: "If you have any question or if you would like more information on what was discussed in class today, I would be happy to meet with you right after class.").

Research indicates that instructors who have frequent out-of-class contact with students often give signals about their out-of-class accessibility and approachability through their in-class behaviors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Thus, being open to student interaction with you before and after class may lead to greater student willingness to seek additional contact with you outside the classroom (e.g., office visits).

Provide students with personal *recognition and reinforcement* for their efforts. Be on the lookout for opportunities to recognize or compliment students' efforts, achievements, or improvements (e.g., thank students for their questions and participation in class, Such recognition and reinforcement serves to provide students, particularly underrepresented students, with a strong sense of personal validation (Rendón & Garza, 1996).

Provide *personalized* feedback to students. Feedback is more likely to be attended to and responded to in a non-defensive manner if it is delivered in a personalized fashion. Personalized feedback may be delivered by such practices as (a) addressing the student by name in your written remarks, (b) comparing students' present performance with their previous work and noting areas of personal improvement, and (c) signing your name at the end of your comments so your feedback approximates the form of a personal letter.

Though it may be may be too time-consuming to write a personal note to all students on every returned assignment or exam, personal notes may be written to a smaller subset of students (e.g., students with last names A-M in your grade book). On the next assignment or exam, a different subgroup of students may be selected to receive personal notes.

For students who are struggling in class, write a *personal note on returned assignments or exams* that invites, requests, or requires them to see you outside of class. This written note could be reinforced by a private verbal comment before or after class. The importance of taking an intrusive (assertive outreach) approach to promoting out-of-lass interaction with low-achieving students is underscored by research indicating that students who are in most need of learning assistance are often the least likely to seek it out on their own (Knapp & Karabenick, 1988).

Consider *refraining* from the ritualistic use of *red ink* to correct student errors on exams and assignments. No empirical support can be provided for this suggestion; it is based on the intuitive feeling that that students may associate this color with fear and apprehension ("red flag" or "red alert"), or embarrassment and humiliation ("red-faced"). These are the very feelings that FYS instructor do not want new students to experience while they process performance evaluation because it may cause them to react emotionally and defensively to feedback, rather than rationally and constructively. Perhaps delivering written feedback to students in a color that has a less inflammatory history than the corrective color, red, may partially reduce the risk that feedback will be perceived as self-threatening.

Communicate personally with students via *e-mail*. Electronic communication may provide an outlet for students who lack the confidence to speak up during classroom discussions (where they are in full view of a large number of people), or students who lack the assertiveness to walk into your office for a face-to-face conversation. Furthermore, students who experience positive "virtual" interactions with their instructor may then feel more comfortable seeking actual (in-person) interaction.

Invite students to *help you research answers* to questions they have raised in class or after class. This practice not only provides an opportunity for student-faculty contact outside the classroom, it also enhances the quality of such contact because it involves interaction that is focused on course-related issues and contributes to the development of an important student skill—learning how to locate and evaluate information.

Engage in some *self-disclosure* by sharing your personal experiences. Sharing *personal anecdotes* to illustrate a course concept is an instructional practice that demonstrates that their instructor is human, and a person with whom they can identify. Concepts covered in the FYS lend themselves naturally to sharing of our college personal experiences, both as former first-year students and as current professionals working with first-year students. Strong empirical support for this assertion is provided by Wilson (1975) who conducted a four-year longitudinal study involving eight different types of higher educational institutions, 4815 students, and 1472 faculty. One classroom behavior typical of "outstanding" teachers (as nominated by both students and faculty colleagues) was that they were more likely to *share examples from their own experience* than teachers who were not so highly rated.

Furthermore, by sharing our experiences, we are modeling the very behavior that we hope students will engage in during class. This should serve to increase the likelihood that students will emulate and reciprocate by engaging in the same honest self-disclosure that the instructor has modeled. Lastly, personal anecdotes effectively promote student *learning* because they provide students with real, "human" examples that concretely illustrate course concepts and bring them to life (literally). The late Kenneth Eble (1976), a highly-regarded faculty development scholar, eloquently captures the educational value of the anecdote:

> The personal anecdote that illuminates an idea or clarifies a concept is neither ego-indulgence nor more wandering from truth. The personal is a way of gaining the kind of interest absolutely necessary to learning. Moreover, an anecdotal account of how some aspect of the subject matter itself came to have value for the teacher exerts a powerful force upon the student to grant that subject matter personal worth (p. 13).

Another element of self-disclosure is being honest and forthright in sharing our instructional self-doubts, shortcomings and mistakes. For instance, do not hold back sharing your enthusiasm and your uncertainties about any new teaching techniques you may be implementing for the first time in the seminar, and admit to any errors you may make in the teaching process. Peter Elbow (1986) eloquently articulates the advantages of such practices, "We should reveal our own position, particularly our doubts, ambivalences, and biases. We should show we are still learning, still willing to look at things in new ways, still sometimes uncertain or even stuck . . . We can increase the chances of our students being willing to undergo the necessary anxiety involved in change if they see we are willing to undergo it" (p. 150).

Maintain and share your *sense of humor*. Fear of being perceived as "unprofessional" or "losing control" of the class may inhibit some instructors from incorporating content-relevant and socially-appropriate humor in the classroom. Something funny is not necessarily something frivolous. If the instructors have a humorous *personal anecdote* that relates to, or is illustrative of, the concept under discussion, they should not hesitate to share it. Since humor is so rarely found in the "serious" realm of academic textbooks and lectures, the sheer element of incongruity or surprise alone is often enough to ensure at least a modicum of student laughter. In a study that found student-instructor interaction in the FYS to be higher than it was in other first-year and upper-level classes, students were asked to identify specific instructor behaviors that contributed to the higher level of interaction in the seminar. Students identified "use of humor" as one instructor characteristic that contributed to the higher level of interaction (Reynolds & Nunn, 1998)..

Using concept-relevant *cartoons* is an effective way to command immediate student attention to the concept being taught, as well as provide students with an effective (and affective) visual illustration of the concept that serves to enhance its retention. Numerous cartoons about the college experience in general and the first-year experience, in particular, can be found in the text. They can be easily transformed into visible, overhead projections or Power-point slides. Projected cartoons may be an effective way to:
(a) "punctuate" lectures or class presentations with concept-relevant humor that

maintains or regains student attention, and
(b) provide an attention-grabbing prompt as students enter the classroom, which can create a positive first impression of the class session, inducing a pleasant mood and anticipatory interest.

Instructors should be ready to use their favorite cartoons in class to reinforce course concepts and to reduce student anxiety on tests or exams. These small gestures serve to build rapport with the class, promote retention of course concepts illustrated by the cartoons and, most importantly, show students that the instructor is human. Adorning an office door with educationally relevant cartoons and witty saying may also reduce student trepidation about seeking instructor-student contact with outside the classroom.

Interact with students in a *personable* and *empathic* manner. Specific recommendations for behaving personably toward students include the following practices:

- *Greet* students when you enter class and when you see them on campus.
- *Welcome back* students back after a weekend or semester break.
- *Acknowledge the return* of an absent student (e.g., "Glad to see you're back, we missed you last class").
- Wish students *good luck* on a *forthcoming exam*.
- *Express concern* to students who are not doing well or to those students who have been excessively absent (e.g., "Everything okay?" "Anything I can do to help?").
- *Acknowledge emotions* expressed by students in class (e.g., "You seem excited about this topic." "I sense that you're feeling tired, so let's take a short break.").

These practices are supported by an observational study of 25 professors who were identified as "superb" classroom instructors. These instructors were found to: (a) express interest in students as individuals, (b) be highly sensitive to subtle messages from students about the way they feel, (c) acknowledge student feelings about matters relating to class assignments or course policies, and (d) encourage students to express their feelings about the course (Lowman, 1984).

Reserve some class time for *open forums*—class sessions devoted to free and open discussion of any college life or college-adjustment issue that students would like to discuss. This practice allows students an opportunity to set their own agenda by raising any questions or concerns they have about their first experiences in college. Allowing students the opportunity to do so in the FYS may be the only time a representative of the institution will ever encourages new students to openly express their feelings about the college experience and the college the college they chosen to attend. Naturally, parameters or ground rules should be established for such sessions (e.g., focusing on issues that involve college processes, practices, or policies rather than citing and criticizing particular individuals; complaints cited must be followed by suggested solutions or remedies before another complaint is raised). Student anonymity may be

secured by having students anonymously use a *suggestion box* to submit college-adjustment issues for subsequent, open-forum discussion.

Reserving at least one class period for an open forum not only serves to validate students by showing respect for their viewpoints by allowing them the rare opportunity to set the own agenda for a class session, it can also serve as an assessment tool for identifying recurrent patterns or pockets of student dissatisfaction. When students are encouraged to openly express a source of dissatisfaction, discuss it and suggest potential strategies for dealing with them, this may be used as feedback and qualitative data that may be used to diagnose institutional weaknesses and promote institutional improvement. For example, if numerous students cite a particular experience as dissatisfying, this might be viewed as a "critical incident" and used as a focal point to stimulate institution-wide discussion and intervention. Also, the issues that students raise in open-forum discussions may be used to design relevant questions for inclusion on student-satisfaction surveys administered by the college.

Lastly, if the open forum is conducted in a fashion akin to a "town meeting," whereby student "citizens" come together to discuss collective concerns and ideas for community improvement, it creates a context in which students can practice skills that will prepare them for active citizenship in a democratic society—an oft-cited the goal of liberal education (Miller, 1988).

Occasionally, visit with students *on their "turf" or territory* (e.g., student cafeteria, union, or lounge). Instructors' willingness to go where students go sends a message that it is not below their professorial dignity to associate with first-year students. In fact, it may suggest to students that instructors genuinely enjoy spending time with them, above and beyond the time they have to must spend with them in class.

***Participate* in *co-curricular* experiences with students (e.g., campus workshops, intramural sports, student elections, campus pep rallies), and if you intend to attend an event, announce to your class that you will be there.** This practice should serve to stimulate student participation in co-curricular experiences, and it enables students to see you in a different light. Participating with students in such informal, non-threatening activities allows them so see you as a "regular person." Seeing you in this light may make students feel less intimidated about interacting with you outside of class on issues that are course-related or personal in nature.

Consider inviting students to *your home* (e.g., for a class session or group conferences). This is an effective strategy for promoting instructor-student contact with students outside the classroom, and perhaps more importantly, it can be a powerful way in which to provide new students with a sense of personal importance and validation. As a first-year student, the noted author, E. B. White, was once invited to an instructor's home and eloquently recalls the powerful impact it had on him: "When I was an undergraduate, there were a few professors who went out of their way to befriend students. At the house of one of these men I felt more at home than I did in my own home with my own father and mother. I felt excited, instructed, accepted, [and] influential" (quoted in Bailey, 1994, p. 72).

Making the Student-*Course (Subject)* Connection: Igniting Student Interest and Involvement in the FYS

The first week of class may also be the time to motivate students by providing them with a preview of some of the more exciting and interesting issues to be covered in the course. This preview can create a *positive first impression* that can generate motivational momentum and build a foundation of enthusiasm for the course. Listed below is a series of specific strategies for initiating student interest in the subject matter of the FYS.

On the first day of class, create a positive motivational "first impression" of the course by providing a *sneak previe*w of the course's most relevant and stimulating topics. It is likely that students' initial interest in the course will be piqued when they hear that they will be learning about such topics as majors, careers, interpersonal relationships, and stress management (more so than study skills and time management).

Highlight the fact that the course has emerged from an *international movement* (the "first-year experience") that has been intentionally designed to promote the success of first-year students *around the world*. Point out the fact that there are many *research* studies supporting the value of first-year seminars or student-success courses. Mention that there is empirical evidence indicates that the course has a positive impact on *student retention* (persistence to college graduation) and *academic performance* (college GPA). In particular, note that this is *not* a "remedial" course; students attending selective colleges also take courses similar to like this, and research shows that the seminar benefits students all students, regardless of their level of academic success prior to college (Cuseo, Fecas, & Thompson, 2007).

Remind students that the seminar is much more than a student-success course: it is a *life-success* course.

Point out that virtually all of the topics covered in the course are relevant to life after college. To confirm this argument, suggest to them that if they browse through the self-improvement section of any popular bookstore they will find best-selling books (e.g., *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People)* that deal with the very same topics as those in the FYS. Also, point out that the course focuses on the development of *skills, strategies, habits, and attitudes*, which are: (a) *transferable*—that have the versatility and flexibility to be applied to different academic subjects and professional careers, and (b) *durable*—that are likely to be relevant and retained long after the course ends—unlike courses that emphasize memorization of factual information.

Inform students that the seminar is unique because it is likely to be the only course they will ever take whose subject matter focuses directly on the very *persons* sitting in class—them. Other college courses draw their ideas from an external body of knowledge that reflects the academic interests and priorities of researcher scholars in a particular field of study. In contrast, the FYS is based on the student experience and research on the student experience. As one former student anonymously wrote in an evaluation of the seminar, "This is the only course that I've ever taken that was about me" (Cuseo, 1991).

Share *comments* that former students made on their *course evaluations in previous classes*, which serve as testimony to the course's value. Or better yet, invite former students to class who you know enjoyed the seminar and profited from the course experience (e.g., a course alumni panel).

Extending the Student-*Course* Connection: Sustaining Student Interest & Involvement in the FYS Throughout the Term

Promoting Students' *Active Involvement* in the Course

Optimal learning occurs when learners become psychologically *involved* or *engaged* in the learning process, i.e., when students invest time, energy, and effort in their learning experiences (Astin, 1984; 1993). Active involvement probably qualifies as the most fundamental and powerful principle of human learning. The bottom line is this: For deep learning to occur, the learner needs to be an *active agent* in the learning process, not a passive sponge or spectator.

The lecture method still remains the dominant pedagogical strategy used in higher education, and there has been remarkably little change in the frequency of its use over several decades (Bligh, 2000; Bowles, 1982; Costin, 1972; Marris, 1964; Nance & Nance, 1990). Arguably, the major force propelling the movement toward learner-centered pedagogy in higher education is the well-documented ineffectiveness of the lecture method for promoting higher learning outcomes. Bligh (2000) concluded his extensive research review with this recommendation: *"Use lectures to teach information. Do not rely on them to promote thought, change attitudes, or develop behavioral skills if you can help it"* (p. 20).

In studies of student behavior during lectures, it has been found that students spend about half of their class time thinking about things unrelated to the lecture content, with up to 15% of their class time is spent "fantasizing" (Milton, Polio, & Eison, 1986). Student *attention and concentration* tend to drop off dramatically after 10-15 minutes of continuous instructor discourse (McKeachie, 2002; Penner, 1984; Verner and Dickinson, 1967). It is important to note that this attention "drift" during lectures also occurs among students in graduate and professional school (Stuart and Rutheford, 1978) and among learning-oriented (vs. grade-oriented) undergraduate students (Milton, Pollio, & Eison, 1986). Thus, attention loss during lectures cannot be simply dismissed as a student problem, such as lack of motivation, lack of effort, or a recent outbreak of attention deficit disorder among today's youth; instead, the problem seems to lie with the lecture method itself.

The purpose of citing this research is not to suggest that lecturing (instructor-delivered information) should be totally or completely abandoned. There will always be a place in higher education for knowledgeable, learned professionals to share their knowledge and to model thinking processes that their students can emulate, including the FYS. However, research strongly indicates that lectures need to be alternated with and augmented by learner-centered strategies that empower students to take a more active and responsible role in the learning process.

The need for instructors to make greater use of pedagogical practices that are more engaging than the straight lecture is reinforced further by findings that students are

entering college with substantially higher self-reported levels of *academic disengagement* in high school—for example, they more frequently report "feeling bored" in class, missing class, and spending less time on their studies outside of class (Sax, Astin, Korn & Mahoney, 2007; Sax, et al., 2005). Indeed, research indicates that boredom with courses is a major reason why students miss classes (Van Blerkom, 1990) and withdraw from college (Astin, 1975).

A national survey of nearly 25,000 first-year students at 110 institutions conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute, pedagogical practices that were found to be most strongly associated with first-year students' satisfaction with the overall quality of college instruction were those that emphasized student involvement with peers, faculty, and the course itself (Keup & Sax, 2002). These results are consistent with data collected by the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Based on a national survey of over 30,000 students attending more than 60 postsecondary institutions and over 30,000 students, it was found that use of "engaging pedagogy" in FYS courses (e.g., class discussions and group work) was strongly associated with student satisfaction and positive student-learning outcomes (Swing, 2002).

When selecting instructional methods for the FYS, it may be useful to conceive of classroom teaching options as ranging along a continuum from *instructor*-centered to *learner*-centered. Extreme, instructor-centered teaching is best illustrated by the uninterrupted, formal lecture whereby the instructor does all the talking and is in complete control of the class agenda. In contrast, student-centered or learner-centered instruction involves less instructor domination and shifts more communication, control, and responsibility to the students. "Learner-centered" education means instructional practices that place students at the *center* of the learning process (as opposed to content-driven, teacher-centered lecturing).

As the foregoing research results suggest, probably the best general rule to follow when planning the teaching process for the FYS is to maximize the use of *student-centered* learning strategies as much as possible. This type of pedagogy is consistent with the student-centered goals of the FYS. It is also a pedagogy that is most consistent with goals of liberal learning and general education. Gary Miller (1988) makes this point in his book, *The Meaning of General Education*: "General education is intimately concerned with democratic processes and with the needs of a democratic society and always has been . . . . [It] is designed to enable individuals to perform the basic democratic function within their communities. An education for and by democracy is, by definition, student-centered" (1988, pp. 188, 189). *Student-centered* pedagogy takes the instructor (the authority figure) off "center stage," liberating the students (the people) to "share the stage" and share the power. We must keep in mind that general education is more than just exposing students to a liberal arts curriculum (a collection of courses covering particular content), it is also involves a process (pedagogy) of liberal learning (AAC&U, 2002, 2007).

Listed below is a series of instructional alternatives to the lecture method, which are designed to increase students' level of active involvement (engagement) in the FYS.

"Modified Lecture" Formats

When you need to lecture or make instructional presentations to students, you can modify them in ways that transform them from "straight" lectures into more active, student-centered learning experiences by using the following instructional strategies.

* The "*Interactive* Lecture": embedding periodic questions into class presentations that elicit student reaction to the information presented and student interaction with the instructor.

Effective questions serve to create temporary states of doubt that can motivate interest to resolve the doubt and obtain closure. Infusing thought-provoking questions into instructional presentations also serves to create a climate of intellectual inquiry that models and encourages students to ask their own questions in class. However, research shows that college instructors do not create all questions equally and not all are equally effective in eliciting student involvement. Careful forethought should be given to the process of posing questions because how a question is framed or phrased affects whether it will successfully stimulate student involvement. As one instructional development specialist suggests: "You must highlight them [questions] in your outline. You should know *exactly* what questions, word for word, you are going to ask" (Welty, 1989, p. 42).

Research indicates that the types of questions that are most likely to elicit student involvement are *open-ended* questions, which call for more than one correct or acceptable answer. Such questions invite multiple responses welcomes a diversity of perspectives and encourage *divergent* thinking, i.e., expansive thinking that does not "converge" on one (and only one) correct answer (Cuseo, 2005). Other features of instructor-posed questions that are more likely to trigger student involvement include the following:

- *Higher-Order* questions that ask for thinking at a level that is higher than rote recall of factual information (e.g., questions that call for application or evaluation)

- *Focused* questions that are tied to, or focus on, a specific concept or issue. For example, "What do you think might account for these male-female differences in communication style?" is a focused question. In contrast to an unfocused query, such as: "Does anybody have any questions or comments?").

- *Personalized* questions that situate students in a relevant, real-life context and ask them how they would respond in this situation, thereby inviting them to *apply* the concept under discussion to their personal lives. Such questions implement the effective principle of "situated learning," i.e., learning that situates or places in a relevant and meaningful context (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). For instance, in an FYS course, if the topic under discussion is test-taking skills, students could be asked the following question: "Suppose you were just about to take a major exam and you started to experience symptoms of test anxiety. What could you do right then and there to reduce your tension and regain self-control?"

- *Conditionally- phrased* questions (e.g., "What *might* be . . . ." "What *could* be . . . ?" "What *may* be . . . ?"). Such conditional phrasing sends students a clear verbal signal that a diversity of answers is possible and acceptable, which encourages creativity

and reduces fear or embarrassment about failing to provide "the" correct answer that the instructor (authority figure) is "looking for." This is a very reasonable student fear because the odds are clearly against the student responding with an acceptable answer; there is an almost limitless number of unacceptable responses, but one (and only one) correct answer.

- Questions that invite *all* students in class by posing questions that call for a *nonverbal response.*

All students can have an equal and simultaneous opportunity to become actively involved by occasionally asking questions that call for a nonverbal responses, such as a simple show of hands; for example: "How many of you agree with the following statement . . . ?" or "How many of you had an experience similar to . . . ?"

Other ways in which students can become involved nonverbally in class are by (a) having students *vote with their feet* by taking a position represented by one *of four corners* in the room—with each corner representing one of four choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree; or (b) asking students to *move to either side of the room*, depending on their position with respect to an issue or debate, using the center aisle as a dividing line—for example: Where do you stand (literally) on the issue of whether or not colleges should abolishing student grades?

Such nonverbal exercises serve to involve all students in class at the same time; not just the most verbally assertive or impulsive thinkers who raise their hand first out an answer faster than any of their classmates. Nonverbal exercises can also serve as a prelude to provoke subsequent verbal discussion. For instance, students could be asked *why* they ended up occupying a particular place or space, or students could be allowed to change their places after a class discussion, then asked why they decided to change.

* The "*Punctuated* Lecture" (Angelo & Cross, 1993): interspersing active learning exercises before, during, and after lectures. Straight lectures can be punctuated or infused with short bursts of student involvement at three key times during a lecture: before, during, and after the presentation of information.

Pre-Lecture Strategies: students become actively involved *before* a lecture by *activating their pre-existing knowledge, feelings, and/or misconceptions* about the to-be-presented information. Any of the following practices may be used for this purpose.

Pre-Tests: giving students a short, non-graded assessment of their knowledge or skills with respect to the upcoming topic (e.g., a short series of true-false questions).

Verbal "Whips": in rapid succession, students take turns verbalizing the first thought that comes to mind in response to the topic to be covered in class.

"Flashbacks": students are asked how they think the upcoming topic relates to, or connects with, previous unit(s) of instruction.

Background Interest Probes: students are asked what they would like to know, or what questions they would like answered, about the upcoming topic (Cross & Angelo, 1989).

Background Knowledge Probes: students jot down what they already know—or think they know—about an upcoming topic, and how they got to know it (i.e., the source of their knowledge).

"*Shared* Lecture": students first share what they think they know about the day's topic and record their ideas on the board. After students have shared their ideas, share your ideas by first noting those that your students have already mentioned—e.g., by underlining (and validating) them on the board; then add any unmentioned ideas from your lecture notes to create a jointly-produced composite or "master list," which represents the *shared* efforts of both students and their instructor. This practice may be particularly effective in the FYS because students often do have some familiarity or prior experience with many of the topics covered in the course. This familiarity can be capitalized on by drawing on students' prior experiences to draw them into the learning process by drawing out their prior knowledge and misconceptions about the topic to be covered (e.g., their knowledge and misconceptions about learning, remembering, managing time or managing money).

Within-Lecture Strategies: during a lecture, the instructor pauses and students engage in an active-learning exercise with respect to the information that has been presented thus far. This strategy serves to punctuate and attenuate the mounting "attention drift," which normally occurs among learners after listening to a lecture for about 10 consecutive minutes (Bligh, 2000). Research indicates that if there are periodic pauses in lectures during which students are given a minute or two to discuss and rework their notes, their performance on recall quizzes and comprehension tests is significantly enhanced—to the degree that their test performance would be improved by one or two letter grades, depending on the grading scale used (Ruhl, Hughes, & Schloss, 1987).

Any of the following strategies may be used to punctuate a lecture with active learning experiences.

Pause for Reflection: students write a short, reflective response to a focused question intended to promote higher-level thinking about the material presented.

"*Writing-to-Discuss" Exercises*: students engage in a short, thought-provoking writing exercise, and use their responses as a springboard for class discussion. This strategy not only punctuates the lecture, it can also enhance the quality of class discussions because asking students to write before they discuss serves to slow down and focus their thinking, allowing them time to formulate and organize their heir ideas prior to expressing them orally. Writing before discussing in especially effective for promoting the involvement of verbally reticent or shy students because research indicates that students who are

apprehensive about speaking in class prefer to know what they are going to say in advance of group discussion (Neer, 1987).

Problem-Solving "Lecturettes": students listen to a series of short lecture presentations (e.g., 5-10 minutes) that them to a succession of focused problems, each of which is followed by student discussion of possible solutions to the problem presented (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This strategy can be repeated throughout the entire class period, alternating between instructor delivery of "mini-lectures" that present a though-provoking problem or issue, followed by class discussion on how best to solve or resolve them.

* *Post-Lecture* Strategies: following the completion of a lecture, students engage in activities designed to involve them in *retrospection (reflective review)* and *consolidation* ("locking in") of information received during the lecture.

The *one-minute paper* is, by far, the most popular post-lecture strategy for promoting student reflection. The one-minute paper may be defined as a short, writing activity (taking one minute or less to complete) designed to encourage students to reflect on the meaning or personal significance of the day's lesson. For example, any of the following questions may serve as prompts of a one-minute paper at the end of a lecture.

- What do you think was the major *purpose or objective* of today's presentation?
- What do you think was the most *important* point or *central* concept communicated in today's presentation?
- Without looking at your highlighting or notes, what *stands out in your mind* or what do you *recall most vividly* about today's class?
- Looking back at your notes, what would you say was the *most interesting* idea or *most useful* strategy discussed in today's class?
- Have you *personally experienced* any of the events that were discussed in today's class?
- Did you see any *connections* between what was discussed in today's class and what is being covered in any of your *other course(s)*?
- What was the most *surprising* and/or *unexpected* idea expressed in this class session?
- What do you think was the most *puzzling, confusing, or disturbing* idea that surfaced in today's class?
- What *helped* and/or *hindered* your understanding of today's presentation?
- What *questions remain unanswered* about the content of covered in today's class?
- What was the most *enlightening example* or most *powerful image* used in today's class?
- What was the most *convincing argument* (or counterargument) that you heard in today's class?
- During today's class, what idea(s) struck you as things you could or should immediately *put into practice*?

If students are awarded points for completing a one-minute paper, it may serve as an incentive for students to attend class. Furthermore, students are rewarded for actually

doing something in class, rather than merely "showing up." Thus, students are rewarded for their participation, and since attendance is a precondition or prerequisite for this participation, they are also indirectly rewarded for attending class. In contrast, most class-attendance policies do not positively reinforce student attendance; instead, they use negative reinforcement by penalizing students for missing class—i.e., points are taken away (subtracted) from their grade (Cuseo, 2005).

In sum, whenever a lecture is used in class, it may be best to divide it into a *learning sequence* that has an identifiable *beginning, middle, and end*. This sequence may be created by intentionally planning to actively involve students at three key junctures:
(1) *prior* to the lecture—to *activate* their pre-existing ideas about the topic;
(2) *during* the lecture—to *punctuate* it with activities that intercepts attention drift; and
(3) *after* the lecture—to *consolidate* the information presented and promote closure.

Using Reality-Based **Learning Tasks to Promote Active Student Involvement.**

Reality-based learning tasks involve "real-life" or life-like problems that actively engage students in decision-making with respect to their solution or resolution. These learning tasks include realistic (a) *problems* with a variety of possible solutions, (b) *issues or dilemmas* that are not easily resolved, and (c) *decisions* to be made among a number of equally appealing alternatives. What all types of reality-based learning tasks also have in common is that they contain some degree of *ambiguity or uncertainty*, which requires *divergent thinking and diverse perspectives*.

Listed below are four key reality-based learning tasks for increasing active student involvement in the FYS.

Cases **(*Case Method*)**: stories, actual events, or fictitious events approximating reality that require decision-making and encourage critical thinking with respect to an ambiguous situation or problem, for which there is no single correct answer or solution (Christensen & Hansen, 1987). Cases demonstrate to students that real-life problems and problem-solving is often ambiguous, and one right answer or correct solution is rarely apparent. The case method is an active-learning strategy because it requires students to take action—to make a decision with respect to a real-life dilemma. Cases are typically presented in narrative form, whereby students read them individually and typically join teams to react to, and work through, the dilemma that comprises the case. Or, if class size is small enough, cases may be discussed in a seminar-like fashion. Cases relevant to the FYS can be drawn from a wide variety of sources, including the following:

* real-life incidents experienced by yourself or your professional colleagues—for example, a student submitting a paper after its due date, but asking the instructor to accept it because of extenuating circumstances.);
* experiences solicited from students in class—for example, roommate conflicts, ethical issues involved in sexual relations, or substance use/abuse;
* incidents drawn from popular media—for example, TV, movies, or newspaper articles);
* case histories relating to controversial events that have taken place on campus in the past—for example, drawn from current or past issue of the campus newspaper; and
* educational videos that poignantly capture the personal experience of first-year students.

Student involvement with cases can be stimulated by posing open-ended questions to them about the case that focus on:
* possible cause(s) of the incident,
* if and how the incident could have been prevented,
* whether students can identify with the characters in the incident, or
* whether students have had personal experiences similar to those being depicted in the case.

As Erickson and Strommer (2005) note: "Good case studies promote empathy with the central characters; students can see themselves in the situation or story" (p. 252) Meyers & Jones (1993) suggest that the following types of questions, based on approaches taken by prominent case-study teachers, can be used to promote higher-level thinking in response to problem-based or issue-centered tasks.
* *Discussion Starters* (e.g., "What dilemma does the situation pose?")
* *Implication* Questions (e.g., "What does the problem in this situation imply for the career you are considering?")
* *Predictive/Hypothetical* Questions (e.g., "If the roles of the main characters were switched, what would have happened?")
* *Analytical/Evaluative* Questions (e.g., "What particular action is at the root of this problem? Which action played the most pivotal role?")
* *Summary/Synthesis* Questions (e.g., "What are the main points that have emerged in our discussion of the case?").

Role Plays: promoting active involvement by use of *dramatic enactments* of scenarios involving characters with whom students can identify. Role plays relevant to the first-year experience may involve roommate conflicts, peer pressure at a college party, student behavior or misbehavior in the classroom (active, passive, and "rude"), or student-faculty scenarios outside the classroom (e.g., student-faculty interaction during an office visit). Drama can be used as a stimulus to provoke active student involvement in class by having students serve as actors in the skit, or as reactors to the skit. Students can play the role of themselves, or they can assumer the role of other people to gain an alternative perspective (e.g., student plays the role of professor or parent, or a majority student plays the role of an under-represented student). Student actors could also reverse roles during the skit.

One strategy for getting the entire class involved in the role play is to have all students assume the same role—that of an advisory committee or group of experts who interact with the instructor—who adopts the role of novice (Erickson & Strommer, 1991). For example, the instructor could play the role of a shy first-year student who has just arrived on campus and the class serves as a social advisory committee whose role is to suggest specific strategies for meeting new people and getting involved in campus life. In many ways, the classroom and classroom teaching approximate a dramatic performance. The instructor is writer of the script (lesson plan), a performer (on center stage, which can be shared with students), and director (orchestrating the performance of other actors—students). Also, the classroom environment itself can be modified to simulate a theatrical set by arranging the seating and by adding props that relate to the particular topic under

study (e.g., posters, artifacts, background music). Caine and Caine (1991) articulate the power of learning through and from drama:

> Effective learning always involves the alternation of several states of arousal. The comparative importance of states of arousal can be seen in the power of entertainment and the arts. The power of great theater lies to a large extent in the way in which it uses this tension. Intelligent orchestration in teaching includes an understanding of these states of arousal and borrows from the theater such elements as timing and the ability to create anticipation, drama, and excitement (Caine & Caine, 1991, pp. 31-32).

Research clearly supports the fact that role plays are more effective than lectures for promoting attitudinal change, particularly with respect to diversity-related issues. As Bligh (2000) notes, "Sermons rarely convince agnostics, but they give solidarity to the faithful. Similarly, lectures are ineffective in changing people's values, but they may reinforce those that are already accepted" (p. 12).

Scripts: similar to role plays, with the only difference being that characters' read their parts, rather than enact them from memory. Students take on different characters in a script, or they may be asked to improvise and complete an unfinished script as if they were one of characters.

Simulations: reality-based learning exercises that immerse students in an environment that simulates or approximates the reality a real-life experience. For instance, *BaFa'-BaFa'* is a popular intercultural simulation, whereby students assume membership in either the Alpha or Beta culture, each which has its own set of cultural values, expectations, customs and language). Members of each "culture" visit, observe, and interact with the other "foreign" culture, thereby simulating the experience of what it is like to function effectively in a culture that differs radically from one's own. The key intended learning outcomes of the simulation is to reduce ethnocentrism and increase empathy for those who must adapt to, and become assimilated into, an unfamiliar culture.

Strategies for Promoting Active Involvement by Stimulating Students Intrinsic *Motivation & Interest* in the Subject Matter

Effective teachers strive to make their classes interesting because they realize that student attention is a necessary pre-condition for learning. As Ericksen states in *The Essence of Good Teaching*, "In whatever instructional setting, the first charge of the teacher is to get and to hold the attention of students because interest (motivation) is a prerequisite condition for effective learning" (1984, p. 39). Research also indicates that lack of student interest and boredom with courses are key reasons why students miss classes (Van Blerkom, 1990) and withdraw from college (Astin, 1975).

Studies first-year students in particular indicate show that and that the percentage of high school graduates students entering college reporting that were frequently "bored in class" has reached an all-time high (Sax, et al., 1997), and after college entry, a large majority of them report that they wish their classes were more interesting (Aldridge & DeLucia, 1989). In a national survey of first-year educators who were asked to rank 18

different factors in terms of their "level of impact" on first-year students' academic performance. These educators ranked "lack of [student] motivation" as the most influential factor (Policy Center on the First Year of College, 2003).

An in-depth study of effective college instructors teaching different academic disciplines at all types of postsecondary multiple institutions revealed that their students claimed they had "reached them" and "left them wanting more" (Bain, 2004, p. 7).

Taken together, these findings point strongly to the conclusion that stimulating student interest and motivation is an essential element of effective college teaching. The following practices are offered as instructional strategies for generating student interest in the FYS.

Maintain instructional *flexibility* and a willingness to "go with the flow" when students appear to be captured by or excited about a course issue. For instance, if an animated class discussion happens to emerge on an unplanned topic that still relates to the goals of the course, capitalize on this motivational moment rather than short-circuiting it to cover everything that was formally scheduled for that day.

Whenever possible, allow students the opportunity to make *personal choices* about what they will learn. The following strategies may be used to implement this recommendation:

* During the first week of class, ask students to *rank topics* in terms of personal interest or relevance, and attempt to spend more class time on students' highly-ranked topics.
* When course topics are about to be covered during the term, ask students rate or rank their interest in different *subtopics* and attempt to accommodate their preferences.
* When assigning projects or papers, try to provide students with a *topic "menu"* from which they may choose a topic that most interests or excites them. Students who opt for the same topic could be grouped together to complete a team project on their topic of common interest.

At the start of class sessions, intentionally present a *prompt* that grabs student attention and stimulates their anticipatory interest in the day's topic. An in-depth study of effective college instructors teaching multiple disciplines at multiple institutions reveal that one of their common characteristic is that they "consciously try to get students' attention with some provocative act, question, or statement" (Bain, 2004, p. 109). Student retention of course material is contingent on student attention to the course material.

An evocative visual stimulus may be particularly effective for "setting the stage," sparking student motivation, and engaging student attention. Visual prompts may be especially effective if used at the *start* of class or a new unit of instruction to create a sense *of positive anticipation* or a positive "anticipatory set"—a state of heightened curiosity or favorable expectation about an upcoming learning experience. The following prompts may be used for this purpose:

* a thought-provoking *quote* (e.g., a "classic quote" chosen from the text)
* a provocative *passage* (e.g., paragraph, short poem)

* a poignant *picture* or *image* (e.g., successful people)
* an engaging *video vignette* (e.g., from a popular movie)
* an intriguing *artifact* (e.g., relevant historical, cultural, or biological object—such as a model of the human brain when discussing learning strategies)
* a topic-relevant *cartoon* (e.g., one that visually depicts an element of college life that relates to the topic being covered).

There is strong research support for the memory-promoting power of a visual image (Paivio, 1990). This may be due to the fact that is older form of memory that predated the evolution of human language verbal memory, and was more critical role to the early survival of the human species—e.g., visually recalling where food and shelter were located (Mildner and Goodale, 1998). Thus, the human brain may be naturally wired for visual memory.

The *student perspectives* and the authors' *personal stories* cited throughout the text may also serve as effective prompts for stimulating student interest and involvement because they are the voices of "real" people whose words are profound or provocative.

Build student anticipation with respect to upcoming class sessions by *ending* class with an *unresolved issue, dilemma, or unanswered* question that will be addressed in the next class session. This strategy may serve to whet student interest in the same way that a TV sequel ends an episode with an uncertain outcome that viewers will see resolved only if they witness the next episode.

When conducting a class session before a reading assignment is due, *remind* students of the assignment, *reinforce* its importance, and *preview its highlights* to pique student interest and curiosity. Studies suggest that students do not understand why college instructors place such great emphasis on independent reading, so they are likely to be curious about learning why instructors have assigned a particular reading, or why it is important or pertinent to the goals of the course (Hobson, 2004). While the traditional practice of having all reading assignments laid out in advance in the course syllabus may be a good way to provide students with an advanced overview of the reading workload for the entire term, research indicates that if these assignments are merely listed in the syllabus and not expressly articulated (or reiterated) near the date when they are to be completed, students are less likely to do the assigned reading (Davis, 1993; Lowman, 1995; Marshall, 1974).

Make intentional attempts to increase the personal and practical *relevance* of course material. Perceived irrelevance of the college curriculum is one major source of student attrition (Noel, 1985; Levitz & Noel, 1989). In contrast, positive associations have been found between students' perceived usefulness of the subject and their academic achievement in that subject (Jones, cited in Jones & Watson, 1990). It has also been found that the more relevant the academic content is to students, the more likely they are to engage in higher-level thinking with respect to it (Roueche & Comstock, 1981).

The following practices are suggested for enhancing the personal and practical relevance of information presented and discussed in the FYS.

* Refer to your *course syllabus throughout the term*. Bring it to class and show students that what they are doing in individual class sessions relates to your overall course plan and is relevant to the positive learning outcomes that you have identified in the syllabus.

* When introducing a topic, share with students *why* you thought they would find it interesting and relevant to their lives.

* Use examples from your own *life experiences* or *personal research*. In a large-scale study of faculty rated as "outstanding" by both students and colleagues, these faculty received significantly higher ratings on items referring to whether the instructor makes connections with events and realities outside the classroom, such as: "using examples from their own experience or research" (Wilson, et al., 1975).

* To help guide your selection of course examples and illustrations, use ideas, comments, and questions that *students bring up in class* or elect to *write about* in papers and journals. Consider keeping a "teaching journal" and review it to identify trends or patterns in course topics that trigger the most student interest. For example, if instructors find there are certain questions that students frequently ask, incorporated these questions into their class notes, and use them in future class presentations or as focal points for future class discussions.

* Ask students to *provide their own examples* of course concepts, based on experiences drawn from their lives.

* Have students *apply* course concepts by placing them in a situation or context that is relevant to their life (e.g., "How would you apply these stress-management strategies to a stressful college situation that you are currently experiencing?").

* Seek student *feedback* from students on how relevant or useful they find particular course topics and experiences (e.g., by asking for a one-minute paper at the end of class).

Highlight the contemporary relevance of course concepts by relating them to *current events*. The following practices are offered strategies for implementing this recommendation.

* Illustrate course concepts and principles by using examples from *popular media* (TV, movies, etc.). Students might be asked at the beginning of the course about what they read regularly, and what programs or movies are their favorites. This can provide the instructor with insight into students' particular interests and provide additional ideas for illustrating course concepts in ways that are relevant to students' current experiences.

Also, a quick tour of any major bookstore in your geographical area should reveal many best-selling books dealing with the same life-adjustment issues that are being covered in the FYS. These popular books may be referred to in class to build student interest in course topics.

* Be alert to newsworthy events occurring *on campus* and in the *local community* (e.g. events reported in the college and local newspaper).Using late-breaking, news-making information in class not only serves to highlight the contemporary relevance of course material, it also models for students the value of keeping up with current events and relating classroom learning to "real life."

* Use *recent research developments in your academic or professional field* that may relate to or illustrate course concepts. Many of the ideas and concepts discussed in the FYS are truly cross-disciplinary in nature, so there may be times when something you are talking about in the seminar connects closely with concepts in the instructor's academic discipline or area of professional expertise.

Accompany all exercises and assignments with a clear *rationale* indicating *why* students are being required to complete them. By taking just a little time to justify assignments and articulate their value, students will be less likely to perceive them as mere "busy work." Relevant to this recommendation is research indicating that writer's block is more likely to occur on tasks that writers perceive to be trivial or insignificant (Rennie & Brewer, 1987).

Attempt to induce *surprise or incredulity* among your students by confronting them with paradoxes, incongruities, counterintuitive findings, or controversial ideas. Class may be started with a statement that contradicts logic or common belief; for example:: (a) Women have lower average SAT scores than men, but higher college grades. (b) Women are the "stronger sex." (c) Memorizing information is not the best way to remember it. (d) Humans don't work better under pressure! As Erickson and Strommer (1991) point out: "More interesting lectures open with a problem, question, quandary, or dilemma. Or they start with something students take for granted and confront them with information or observations indicating things are not so obvious or certain as they initially appear. Or they present a list of incongruous facts or statistics and ask, 'How can this be'?" (p. 98).

Expose students to a variety of instructional methods and classroom learning experiences. Instructional delivery may be varied using:

(a) different instructional *formats* (e.g., lectures, large-group discussions, small-group discussions, paired peer interactions, self-reflection exercises, cases, role plays, simulations, panels, guest speakers); and
(b) different instructional *media* (e.g., overhead projections, slide presentations, DVDs, CDs).

The changes in routine produced by such variations in learning formats serve to sustain attention and maintain interest by providing novel sources of sensory and psychomotor stimulation. Such variations in stimuli and movements generate novelty and a heightened states of arousal, which can combat the attention loss that normally occurs when humans experience repeated exposure to the same stimulus (McGuinness & Pribram, 1980). Furthermore, in addition to increasing student attention and motivation, diversifying instructional methods helps the instructor accommodate the diverse learning styles that

are likely to exist among students in class. It may be an impossible task to accommodate all students' learning styles simultaneously, but employing diverse instructional formats and a variety of learning activities gives students with different learning styles periodic opportunities to learn in ways that best matches their learning preferences (Erickson & Strommer, 2005).

Vary the *social environment* in the classroom by periodically bringing in new faces as *guest speakers*. Guest speakers may be brought to class individually or as members of a guest panels. This strategy serves to bring social and instructional variety to the class, allows students to meet other members of the college community, and takes some of the teaching load off you—particularly on topics that may not be your strong suit or your area of expertise. Academic-support professionals could also be invited to class to prepare students for assignments that require them to use certain academic skills. For example, a library-science professional may be invited to class to conduct a micro-session on information search-and-retrieval strategies, or a speech professor may be invited to help students prepare for upcoming oral presentations they will be making in class.

To actively involve and prepare students for guest speakers, ask each student in class to construct at least one question in advance of the speaker's presentation. For instance, students could construct questions on interpersonal relationships to be addressed by the college counselor, health-related questions for the student nurse, or questions about student rights and restrictions for the Dean of Student Affairs. These questions could be submitted to the guest speaker before the visit and used by the speaker to make the presentation more relevant to students' needs and interests. Speakers might also construct their presentations around the students' questions, or students may be given class time at the end of the presentation to pose their questions.

To ensure that the speaker's presentation is interactive, students could ask their questions during the visit, either individually or in groups—for example, a panel of students could collate and prioritize the interview questions and pose them to the guest speaker. Also, to encourage subsequent interaction between students and invited speakers from key campus-support services, have an appointment sign-up sheet available in case the support professional touches on an issue that relates to students' current need for support.

Consider having guest speakers videotaped by an audio-visual specialist or a student in your class. This may enable students in other sections of the seminar to "see" and hear the guest speaker without burdening that person with the redundant task of making multiple visits to different class sections.

Use popular *games* to stimulate student interest and motivation for learning factual material.

Games can be an engaging method for delivering factual information to students in a way that is more engaging and exciting than stand-and-deliver presentations (lectures). Students could learn course-related information via formats similar to those used in TV game shows—such as "Jeopardy"; or board games—such as "Trivial Pursuits" or "Scrupples." Learning teams could be created to add further excitement through inter-group competition and intra-group collaboration.

The "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" game format is ideal for delivering factual information in a way that involves the entire class. Students may volunteer to be a contestant, or they may compete by being the first to respond accurately a "toss up" question. Incentives to be a contestant can be created by awarding a prize to participating students that vary in value, depending on the number or nature of the questions they answer correctly (gift certificates of varying value for the campus bookstore). The participating student can use the game's "lifeline" supports to involve other members of the class, such as "poll the audience" (show of hands) or "phone a friend" (ask another student in class). As game-show moderator, the instructor can play an educational role by quickly adding a few informative comments after a contestant provides a correct or incorrect answer, thus enabling some collateral learning to take place as the game proceeds.

Questions for the game show may deal with knowledge of *academic* issues, such as:
(a) classroom expectations (e.g., questions about what professors really like and dislike);
(b) academic strategies (e.g., questions relating to note-taking and test-taking strategies);
(c) academic planning (e.g., questions about majors, minors, and the relationship between majors and careers); or
(d) academic awards and honors (e.g., questions about what it takes to get on the Dean's List).

Game-show questions may also be created that ask for knowledge of (a) *campus life*, including co-curricular opportunities on campus, college clubs and organizations, student support services, and leadership opportunities; (b) the college curriculum, or (c) college history and traditions). Questions might be obtained by polling key offices on campus for information they think every new student should know. Similarly, college faculty and student support professionals may be solicited for information they think new students should know early in their first term of college in order to be successful.

Making Student-*Student* (*Peer*) Connections: Igniting a Sense of Community among Classmates

Erickson and Strommer (1991) point out that students come to the first sessions of a class with a "hidden agenda," which includes determining "what the professor is like, who the other students are, how instructors and students will behave, and what climate will prevail" (p. 87). Creating a warm social climate in the FYS can foster the formation of interpersonal bonds that promote student retention by enhancing students' social integration. A socially supportive class can also help meet a basic student need at start of their first term—a time when new students are most concerned about "fitting in" and establishing social ties (Simpson, Baker & Mellinger, 1980; Brower, 1997).

Icebreaker activities that may be used to "warm up" students to each other and foster an early sense of class *community*. One such activity is the "*Classmate Scavenger Hunt,"* which involves using information gathered from a student-information sheet (completed on the first day of class) to construct a list of statements, each of which relates to a particular student in class. Students are asked to mill around the room and find the person in class who "matches" (is associated with) each statement. A key advantage of this

exercise it that it enables *each student to meet and interact with every other student* in class, and it does so in a non-threatening fashion.

The following strategies may be used to promote early connections among classmates in the FYS.

Schedule students to make an office-hour visit in *small groups*. Scheduling office visits with students is a way to interact with them on a more personal basis. Scheduling office visits by small groups (e.g., 3-4 students) is more time efficient than scheduling individual appointments, while simultaneously creating an opportunity for students to interact with some of their classmates outside of class time. This strategy may also increase the likelihood that individual students will become comfortable coming to you in the future for personal advice or assistance, because they have broken the ice and made the first visit to the authority figure's office with the "safety of numbers"—a small group of peers.

Intentionally *facilitate* the *formation* of student-learning teams. This recommendation may be implemented by the following practices:

* Construct a "class directory" consisting of the e-mail addresses of students who are interested in working with other students, or in forming learning groups outside of class. To implement this strategy, circulate a sign-up sheet early in the term, asking for any students who are willing to be contacted by other classmates to work together on course assignments or projects.

* Ask students for their class schedule and group students enrolled in the same course(s) in the same groups when creating discussion groups in class or when assigning group projects. This practice should increase the comfort level among students in class, which, in turn, should increase the likelihood that these same students will collaborate outside of class to work on the FYS and other courses they have in common.

Extending the Student-*Student* Connection: Sustaining Peer Interaction Throughout the Term

Although first-year seminars may vary with regard to what specific content is covered, "they share the common goal of creating close interactions between students and faculty and between students themselves during the critical freshman year" (Barefoot & Fidler 1992, p. 54). As one instructional development specialist puts it: "In terms of content, there is little a lecturer can say [that] she or he cannot write more concisely. What makes a course more than the sum of the readings on which it is based is the social experience: the sets of relationships between teacher and students and students with one another" (Eisenberg, 1987, p. 18).

Allowing opportunities for student-student interaction in the FYS serves to foster peer networking, bonding, and social integration, which are known to play a potent role in promoting student retention and academic achievement (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Opportunities for regular peer interaction *in class* may be especially critical to the retention of commuter and re-entry students who often have little time or

opportunity for social interaction and integration outside the classroom. In fact, the term "PCPs" (*P*arking lot-*C*lassroom-*P*arking lot) has been coined to characterize commuter students' lack of campus involvement outside the classroom (Gardner, 1993). Consequently, instructors may need to intentionally offset this lack of campus involvement among commuters with instructional practices that promote peer interaction and social integration *inside the classroom*. Such "intra-curricular" experiences may serve as an antidote to commuter and part-time students' lack of involvement in "extra-curricular" involvement outside the classroom. Intra-curricular experiences may now also be necessary for today's first-year residential students who have become accustomed to using the Internet and cellular technology to communicate and stay in close contact with friends from high school. The availability to this communication technology enables them to maintain or create connections with others outside of campus and can militate against socially integration into the college community (Junco, 2005).

Keep in mind that student-student interaction is a process that can take place at the same time course content is covered that is not necessarily social in nature. For example, note-taking strategies, textbook-reading strategies, and time management are academically related topics that can be covered through small-group work in class and through interactive or collaborative assignments completed outside of class. Thus, instructors should not feel that there is an inevitable trade-off between covering academic content and promoting peer interaction. As Seidman (2005) notes: "Social activities that contain academic and intellectual components can simultaneously promote academic and social integration" (p. 229).

Engaging Students in *Small-Group* Work

Students can become actively involved in the learning process by working either individually or collaboratively with peers. Group work may be viewed as a natural, "brain compatible" form of learning; the human brain is because social interaction and collaboration have played a key evolutionary role in the survival of the human species (Jensen, 1998). In fact, brain-imaging studies reveal that more activity occurs in thinking parts of the brain when people learn through social interaction than when they learn alone (Carter, 1998). Thus, the human brain may be biologically wired for interpersonal interaction and collaboration.

Peer interaction can occur in large groups (e.g., class discussions) or in groups (e.g., 2-4 students). Strategies for promoting class discussions have been previously covered in the section on active involvement. This section will focus on small-group work.

The importance of augmenting class discussions with small-group discussion is strongly supported by research indicating that typically less than 10% of students in class account for more than 75% of all class discussions. Students themselves are acutely aware of this phenomenon because when they are surveyed, 94% of them agreed with the statement: "In most of my classes, there are a small number of students who do most of the talking" (Karp and Yoels (1976). These findings are consistent with those obtained from a survey of more than 1,000 students in over 50 classes from a wide range of disciplines, which revealed that students perceive themselves as less involved in the classroom than faculty perceive them to be (Fassinger, 1996).

Small-group interaction may provide an antidote to these disturbing findings by enabling all students—not just the most assertive or most verbal—to become more

involved with the course material, and with each other, as they actively work together in small groups. Small discussion groups also provide opportunities for the development of oral communication skills which are rarely developed in introductory, general education courses taken by first-year students (Gardner, 1993).

Small group work may be most effectively implemented in the FYS by introducing it at the following key times during a class period.

At the *start* of class to activate students' interest and prior knowledge. For example, a class session can begin by using a group activity known as "*active knowledge sharing."* This involves providing students with a *list of questions* relating to the subject matter to be covered (e.g., words to define, people to identify, or a pretest). Students then pair-up to answer the questions as best as they can, after which they dialogue with other pairs who may have answers to questions they were unable to answer.

Small-group group may also be introduced *before* beginning a class discussion. For example, students may formulate questions in small groups that they would like to see addressed in the upcoming class discussion

At points *during* class to intercept attention drift and interject active involvement. For example, small-group work may be introduced at some point during a class session, such as stopping at a critical point during a lecture to ask small groups to compare notes or generate specific examples of concepts that have been covered in class.
Group work may also take place *after* a class discussion—for example, group members identify positions or issue that they think were overlooked in the discussion, or to discuss whether their viewpoints were changed or strengthened as a result of the class discussion.

At the *end* of class, to create closure and consolidate retention of key information covered in the day's lesson. For example, a class can be ended by having students work in pairs to "share and compare" their class notes to check for completeness and create a sense of class closure.

The quality of small-group work may be strengthened by use of the following strategies.

Allow students some time to gather their thoughts individually, *prior to* discussing them in small groups. For example, *think-pair-share* groups may be formed, whereby each student pairs up with a partner to share their initial ideas on the topic for 2-3 minutes before discussion in 4-member groups.

Providing students with personal reflection time prior to interpersonal interaction can enrich the quality and depth of the ideas exchanged. It may also increase the likelihood that shy or verbally apprehensive students contribute their ideas because research suggests that such students are more likely to participate in class discussion if they have thought about the topic in advance (Neer, 1987).

Have groups keep a *visible record* of the ideas they generate. If possible, provide each group with a flip chart or transparency on which their ideas can be recorded and displayed. This serves to help keep group members "on task" by holding them accountable for creating a concrete, final product.

Notify students that *any member* of the group may be called on to *report* their group's ideas. This serves as an incentive for all members to listen actively to the ideas shared by their teammates.

Have small groups to come to the *front of class* to report their work (e.g., as a student panel). This practice holds students more accountable for the quality of their group work because they may be asked to present it to the entire class. It may also reduce students' fear of public speaking by allowing them to speak within the context of a small, supportive group. This may serve as a baby step or "scaffold" to help desensitize their fear of speaking on their own.

At an early point in the course, take a moment to emphasize the value of *peer learning*, and remind students of the many ways they can form *learning teams*. Many students are not aware of the power of peer learning and may think that it consists only of forming late-night study groups before major exams. Point out to your class how they may collaborate with their peers more consistently by working on academic tasks other than test-review sessions

***Facilitate* the *formation* of student learning teams that work together *outside the classroom*.** This recommendation may be implemented by assigning *group projects/reports* that require students to work together *outside of class*. The group's final project may be a written report, oral report (e.g., panel presentation), or some combination thereof. Allow students some time in-class time to work together on their report. This can serve as a "warm up" for out-of-class collaboration; at the same time, it provides the instructor with an opportunity to observe how well they work together and to provide them with constructive feedback.

Occasionally structure small-group work so that it moves beyond discussion to *collaboration*. The key feature that differentiates a discussion group from a collaborative group is that the latter does not simply generate ideas; instead, they attempt to reach *consensus* or a *unified group decision* with respect to the ideas that they generate. The key to converting a discussion group into a collaborative group is to choose an action verb for the group task that signals to students that they are to make a *group decision* with respect the ideas they generated, rather than just list them. For example, rather than simply listing or aggregating their ideas, a collaborative group will take it further by attempting to reach agreement on how best to *categorize or prioritize* their ideas.

Implement the key features of *cooperative learning* to transform group work into *teamwork*. *Cooperative learning* (*CL*) may be defined as a structured form of collaborative learning that consists of specific, well-defined procedures for converting group work into teamwork. Succinctly described, CL is a collaborative learning process in which small, *intentionally selected* groups of students work *interdependently* on a focused well-defined learning task, and are held *individually accountable* for their own performance; during the learning process, the instructor typically serves as an in obtrusive *facilitator*, *coach*, or *consultant* to the learning groups (Cuseo, 1992).

More specifically, CL attempts to strengthen the effectiveness of small-group work by means of the following seven procedural features, which when implemented together, distinguish it from other forms of group work:

1) Positive Interdependence *among Group Members* (Collective Responsibility)
2) *Individual Accountability* (Personal Responsibility)
3) *Intentional* Group Formation
4) Intentional *Team Building*
5) Explicit Attention Paid to the Development of Students' Social Skills
6) Instructor Assumes the Role as *Facilitator and Consultant during the Group Learning Process*
7) Attention to *Inter-Group* Interaction and the Integration of Work Generated by Separate Groups.

When small-group work is conducted with the majority of these seven procedural elements in place, there is substantial empirical evidence that CL has significant cognitive, social, and affective benefits for students (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1990) at the pre-college level. There is less research on CL in higher education than at the pre-college level, but college-level results are consistent with those found in pre-college settings (Cooper & Mueck, 1990; Cuseo, 1996; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1992; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999). For example, a meta-analysis of the effects of CL on college students' academic performance in science, math, engineering and technology conducted by the National Institute for Science Education revealed that CL had a "robust" positive effect on multiple educational outcomes, such as: (a) academic achievement, (b) student retention, and (c) attitude (liking) of the subject matter (Cooper, 1997). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that application of the key features of CL to small-group work in the FYS should promote multiple, positive outcomes.

One particular outcome that CL has great potential to realize is appreciation of diversity. Higher education efforts with respect to diversity have focused heavily on *access*, i.e., effective *recruitment* of underrepresented students to college. A tacit assumption of this recruitment strategy is that the mere presence of underrepresented students on campus will result in positive interaction between minority- and majority-group members and promote positive inter-group relationships. However, research strongly suggests that simply increasing minority students' access to college and increasing their exposure to majority students is not a sufficient condition for promoting interracial interaction and intercultural education. Something more than mere exposure to minority-group members must occur in order to stimulate intercultural contact and multicultural appreciation. As Hill (1991) puts it, "Meaningful multi-culturalism transforms the curriculum. While the presence of persons of other cultures and subcultures is a virtual prerequisite to that transformation, their 'mere presence' is primarily a political achievement, not an intellectual or educational achievement. Real educational progress will be made when multi-culturalism becomes *interculturalism*" (p. 41) (italics added). This type of "*inter*-culturalism" may be realized in the FYS through learning experiences inside and outside the classroom that promote meaningful collaboration via interdependent roles and culminate in the creation of a unified work product (e.g., collaborative teamwork). There is evidence that students of color, in particular, benefit from cooperative learning methods (Posner & Markstein, 1994).

To facilitate student-student connections in the FYS, intentionally choose a *classroom space* and a class *timeframe* that are logistically conducive to peer interaction and sustained group work. Two key logistical factor to consider when conducting group work are classroom space and class time. The physical layout of the *classroom* itself is a contextual factor that may either stimulate or sabotage peer interaction. A classroom setting that approximates a large lecture hall, with riveted seats arranged in rigid rows, will make group work difficult or impossible to implement, no matter how well the instructor defines and designs the learning task. "Such rooms have been designed for the pronouncements of experts, not for the conversations of learners. They discourage students from looking at one another, let alone learning from one another. In fact, they pressure professors to deliver lectures, because they clearly signal who is to do all the talking" (McCauley, 1984, p. 58).

Another contextual factor to consider when planning group work in the FYS is the *length of time* per class session. If the instructor has any choice with respect to this scheduling issue, it may be advantageous to select a class period that is longer than the typical 50-minute session. A longer class period may allow you more time and greater flexibility for accommodating the logistical demands of small-group work, such as preparing students for group tasks, rearranging seats and students to form groups, and reconvening the whole class following completion of small-group tasks. Naturally, selecting longer class periods carries with it the disadvantages of less frequent class meetings per week and longer time gaps between successive class sessions. However, if you are planning to devote a significant amount of class time to small-group learning, then the benefits of a longer session may outweigh its costs.

MAKING THE STUDENT-*CAMPUS* CONNECTION: The First-Year Seminar as the *Connecting Hub* for a Comprehensive First-Year Experience

The first-year seminar has the potential for promoting partnerships with other first-year student programs to create a more integrated first-year experience with the capacity to exert synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success. When the seminar is intentionally connected to other first-year initiatives, it can serve as serve as an "anchor" to stabilize and sustain a comprehensive first-year experience program (Natalicio & Smith, 2005). As Barefoot (2000) notes: "First-year seminar effects can be multiplied through connection with other structures and programs" (p. 1).

Bringing Campus Services to Class with *Guest Speakers*

Guest speakers may be brought to class individually or as members of a guest panels. This strategy serves to bring social and instructional variety to the class, allows students to meet other members of the college community, and takes some of the teaching load off you—particularly on topics that may not be your strong suit or your area of expertise. Academic-support professionals could also be invited to class to prepare students for assignments that require them to use certain academic skills. For example, a library-

science professional may be invited to class to conduct a micro-session on information search-and-retrieval strategies, or a speech professor may be invited to help students prepare for upcoming oral presentations they will be making in class.

To actively involve and prepare students for guest speakers, ask each student in class to construct at least one question in advance of the speaker's presentation. For instance, students could construct questions on interpersonal relationships to be addressed by the college counselor, health-related questions for the student nurse, or questions about student rights and restrictions for the Dean of Student Affairs. These questions could be submitted to the guest speaker before the visit and used by the speaker to make the presentation more relevant to students' needs and interests. Speakers might also construct their presentations around the students' questions, or students may be given class time at the end of the presentation to pose their questions.

To ensure that the speaker's presentation is interactive, students could ask their questions during the visit, either individually or in groups—for example, a panel of students could collate and prioritize the interview questions and pose them to the guest speaker. Also, to encourage subsequent interaction between students and invited speakers from key campus-support services, have an appointment sign-up sheet available in case the support professional touches on an issue that relates to students' current need for support.

Consider having guest speakers videotaped by an audio-visual specialist or a student in your class. This may enable students in other sections of the seminar to "see" and hear the guest speaker without burdening that person with the redundant task of making multiple visits to different class sections.

Bringing Students to Campus Services via *Course Assignments*

An old rule of thumb for college students is that they should spend 2-3 hours working on the course outside of class for every one hour they spend in class. If this rule is followed, in the first-year seminar, it means instructors actually have at least twice as much time to promote student learning outside of class than in class. It is noteworthy that research comparing new students' expectations about how much time they will spend engaged in the college experience falls short of the actual time they spend engaged during their first year (Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005). This suggests that more can be expected of new students than is currently being asked of them. Some of this extra engagement time might be spent on out-of class assignments related to the FYS. The remainder of this section is devoted to identifying and planning out-of-class assignments that may particularly powerful for promoting the success of first-term students.

Assignments for Connecting Students with *Student-Support Services*

The first-year seminar has the capacity to serve as a linchpin for linking new students with key campus-support agents, thereby promoting students' social integration into the college community. Traditionally, this is done by inviting professional and paraprofessional support agents to class as guest speakers. An alternative strategy for promoting these important connections is to bring students to the support agents via course assignments. Requiring this contact as a course assignment provides students with a strong incentive to connect with key student-support agents on campus who can play a pivotal and proactive role in promoting their success.

One characteristic of effective student-support programs is intrusive delivery—i.e., the college initiates supportive action by *reaching out* to students and bringing support *to* them, rather than passively waiting and hoping that students take advantages of these services on their own. Research shows that college students *under-utilize* academic support services (Friedlander, 1980; Walter & Smith, 1990). The vast majority of students entering college report that they will at least "occasionally" use campus academic-support services, but by the end of at their first year, less than half of them have actually done so (Kuh, 2005). At community colleges, 62% of students identify academic advising as being a "very important" service, yet 35% of them report that they "rarely" or "never" use this service (Community College of Student Engagement, 2008). These findings are also particularly disturbing when viewed in light of meta-analysis research, which reveals that academic-support programs designed for underprepared students exert a statistically significant effect on their retention and grades when they are utilized, particularly if these programs are experienced by students during their first year (Kulik, Kulik, & Shwalb, 1983). Subsequent research findings support the findings of this meta-analysis (Pascarella & Terenzinin, 1991; 2005)

Ender, Winston, & Miller (1984) capture the gist of the principle of intrusive program delivery: "It is totally unrealistic to expect students to take full advantage of the intellectual and personal development opportunities [on campus] without some assistance from the institution" (p. 12). Their words are even more relevant today because of the growing number of under-prepared, under-represented, and first-generation students attending college. Research indicates that the retention and academic success of underrepresented and first-generation students, in particular, is seriously undercut by institutional over-reliance on student-initiated involvement in campus-support programs (Rendón & Garza, 1996).

Schuh (2005) argues that the challenge to getting first-year students to make more effective use of support services is to have them view these services as a normal component of their college education and integral to their success, rather than as a something supplemental to their college experience and an admission of weakness. "Colleges can address this challenge by making engagement strategies and support services inescapable, either by integrating them into the classroom experience, making them mandatory, or otherwise bringing them to students" (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2008). One way to accomplish this is by integrating student use of campus support services into the FYS as a credit-earning course assignment. Thought should be given to what particular campus support services or student support professionals would be most important for new students to connect with, and assignments should be intentionally designed to ensure that that these connections are made. Assignments may connect all students in class to the same services, or assignments might be individualized so that particular students are connected with particular services that best meet their personal needs.

A menu of support services that students could be connected to via course assignments in the FYS would include the following:

* Academic *Advisement*— to develop a tentative, long-range educational plan;
* *Learning Assistance* (learning resource) professionals—to assess learning styles;
* *Career* Counseling—to explore career interests;
* *Personal* Counseling—to gain self-insight or develop personal adjustment strategies;

* *Financial Aid* Counseling—for long-range financial planning and money management;
* *Technology Services*—for orientation to campus-technology tools and programs;
* *Student Activities*—to explore campus-involvement and student-leadership options;
* *Health Services*—to develop a personal wellness plan;
* Campus *Ministry*—to explore spiritual issues and social justice opportunities;
* *Service-Learning* & *Volunteer Experiences*—to identify opportunities in the local community for civic engagement and experiential learning.

Assignments Designed to Stimulate Student *Involvement in the Co-Curriculum*.

Higher education research indicates that the connection between co-curricular experiences and classroom learning is very weak (Heller, 1988). This is a particularly disturbing finding when viewed in light of the wealth of research indicating that student involvement in campus life has a powerful impact on student retention, interpersonal skills, and leadership development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). e Reporting on the first national survey of first-year seminars, Barefoot and Fidler (1992) note the role that first-year seminars play in reducing the schism between in-class and out-of-class learning: "Many freshman seminars exist to bridge the gap between the curriculum and co-curriculum and to facilitate student involvement in all aspects of campus life" (Barefoot & Fidler, 1992, p. 8). One way that first-year seminars can bridge this gap is by engaging students in co-curricular experiences via course assignments. For example, students may be given the assignment of participating in a designated number of co-curricular events during their first term on campus (e.g., two per month) and be provided with a monthly calendar of co-curricular activities for planning and choosing what particular events they would like to attend. To ensure that co-curricular experiences are deeply processed, students can complete written assignments (e.g., reaction or reflection papers in response to the events they attend).

Such writing assignments also serve to enhance the academic credibility of co-curricular experiences. When students are asked to write about their co-curricular experiences, they are more likely to reflect upon and internalize them, serving to transform them from "extra-curricular" activities into bona fide co-curricular learning experiences

Assignments Designed to Encourage Students' Off-Campus Involvement and Service in the *Local Community*

Provide students with a menu of possible volunteer opportunities, and encourage their participation via extra credit, or require participation as a course assignment. Students should be especially encouraged to engage in service experiences that relate to careers they are considering. This would enable new students can gain career-relevant experience or engage in an "exploratory internship" while simultaneously contributing to the local community.

If students reflect deeply about their service via reflection papers and focused discussions, their volunteer experience can be transformed into a bona fide service-learning experience. Research strongly supports the positive impact of service learning on multiple outcomes, including leadership skills, diversity appreciation, achievement motivation and deep learning (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang, Ikeda, Gilmartin, & Keup, 2002).

Future-Planning **Assignments**

Students can be given assignments in the FYS that engage them in the process of designing *tentative log-range plans*, which connect their current college experience with their future educational and life goals. National surveys of first-year seminars indicate "that academic planning and goal setting" is one of the seminar's major course objectives (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). One way to realize this objective is to craft assignments that actively involve first-year students in planning their future, such as those listed below.

Educational Planning Assignments

Students may be assigned to create a tentative *undergraduate* plan that includes courses in general education and the student's major, or exploration of a potential major. Two-year students could be assigned to create a tentative *transfer* plan. Norwich University (Vermont) uses its FYS to engage students in long-range educational planning and promote student dialogue with their academic advisors about their educational plans. The first-year seminar syllabus at Norwich calls for students to meet with their advisor on three occasions during the first term, in addition to their meeting for course scheduling. The second meeting occurs at about the midpoint in the term, at which time students bring a self-assessment report that they have completed as a first-year seminar assignment. Advisors use this report to focus discussion with students about their present academic progress and future educational plans (Catone, 1996).

Career-Planning Assignments

Students may be asked to develop a tentative *career* plan that encourages them students to identify potential careers and to construct a model (or skeletal) resume that would prepare them for entry into these careers. Students could also be asked to initiate the development of a professional *portfolio*—a collection of materials that would best illustrate their skills or achievements, and demonstrate their educational or personal development (e.g., best written work, art work, research projects, letters of recommendation, co-curricular accomplishments, personal awards, or certificates of achievement). This may be particularly a particularly relevant assignment for today's first-year students because they frequently cite career success as their major reason for attending college (Sax, 1998). If contemporary students begin to see the relationship between their current college experience and their future career plans, they are more likely to persist to degree completion. may see no reason to stay in college. One strategy for enabling first-year students to see this relationship is to connect them with college alumni in the field they intend to pursue or explore. At DePaul University (Chicago), all first-year students are assigned an alum with whom they conduct informational interviews that include questions such as the relevance of the alum's academic major to their eventual career, career development, and advancement (Schroeder, 2005).

Research also suggests that the college persistence of under-represented students, in particular, is strengthened by institutional efforts to connect their current academic experience with future career goals. Richardson (1989) conducted on-site investigations of predominantly white institutions with impressive minority graduation rates. He found that one common element present in all these institutions was early provision of "career guidance to translate nonspecific educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked" (p. A48).

Life-Planning Assignments

Students can devise long-range plans that move beyond educational and vocational goals to include goals involving *personal development*, which embrace social, emotional, ethical, physical, and/or spiritual dimensions of the self. For example, students can use self-assessment exercises they complete in the seminar to develop a long-range "personal growth plan" or a future "life-success portfolio." Or, they can explore potential future careers by reading the newspaper, as is done at Kutztown University (PA) (Hartman, 2007). Although these assignments may appear to be a bit premature for first-term students to undertake, they still serve the important purpose of getting students to think ahead and to look for connections between their present academic experiences with their future life plans. This serves to increase their goal awareness and promotes goal-orientated behavior, which is important for promoting student persistence to program and degree completion (Noel & Levitz, 1989).

Conclusion

Connecting the first-year seminar with other student-support programs has the potential to promote cross-campus communication, collaboration, and community-building. As John Gardner noted in one of his earliest reports on the University 101 program at South Carolina: "The program integrates faculty and professional staff at the university in a joint undertaking [which] tends to reduce the barriers between the faculty and staff camps, reduces stereotyping, and has promoted better relationships between faculty and especially student affairs staff" (Gardner, 1980, pp. 6 & 7). The research and practice reviewed here strongly suggest that the first-year seminar has the potential to serve as the integrative for in a comprehensive, coordinated first-year experience program whose connected parts can work together to exert a systemic and synergistic effect on student success.

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