1.2: First-Year Seminar (FYS)- The Value Added

Some students are surprised to learn that 80% of four-year universities and colleges offer some form of a freshman seminar for incoming students. The first freshman seminar was offered at Johns Hopkins University in 1877, when faculty recognized that first-year students needed assistance integrating into college life. Since then, the first-year seminar (FYS) has been offered in various forms: one- to three-credit hours, graded and non-graded, extended orientation to rigorous academic seminars. Overall, most universities report that the main goal for a FYS is to get students thinking—thinking about interesting world topics and how different disciplines view the world, as well as how they learn and manage their affairs (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

Evidence from institutions with freshman seminars indicates that first-year seminars are effective in increasing student persistence to the next year, positively impacting grade point averages, increasing the number of credit hours completed, as well as positively impacting student involvement and helping students better understand what college is all about (Upcraft, et al., 2005). The 2006 National Survey of First-Year Seminars conducted by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition also indicated in their findings that, frequently, institutions with first-year seminars also report increases in satisfaction with the institution and the faculty, more positive peer interactions, and an increase in the use of campus services that help support student success to varying degrees (Tobolowsky & Associates, 2008). Hansen, Williams, & Chism (2008) reported that students valued the first-year seminar at their institution for various reasons. Common themes included interacting with other new students, interacting regularly with faculty and advisors, learning how to meet the demands of college life, exploring their major choices, and finding out more about the campus resources available to them.

At UTA, you may experience a first-year learning community of various types based on the needs of students in a particular major department. However, no matter the format of the learning community, certain goals and objectives will be covered in an attempt to provide all incoming students with information that has shown to impact new students positively.
Goals and Objectives for a Learning Community at UTA

Goal 1: To enhance the essential academic skills of incoming students

  Objective 1.1: Students will examine and develop academic survival and success strategies (e.g., note taking, active reading, test preparation and taking, deep learning techniques, collaborative learning skills).

  Objective 1.2: Students will examine and develop self-management skills necessary for academic success (e.g., time-management and goal setting, motivation, self-responsibility, concentration, financial literacy).

Goal 2: To facilitate the transition of incoming students to the university environment

  Objective 2.1: Students will examine and understand the nature of a university and academic disciplines, faculty expectations, and academic integrity.

  Objective 2.2: Students will understand university policies and procedures that impact their ability to acquire a degree.

  Objective 2.3: Student will explore their strengths and learning styles and relate them to college tasks and major.

  Objective 2.4: Students will become aware of and use academic and student support resources.

  Objective 2.5: Students will explore and apply techniques that promote student wellness.

Goal 3: To develop and utilize critical thinking skills necessary for academic success

  Objective 3.1: Students will explore and engage in higher order thinking activities related to a topic from an academic area.

  Objective 3.2: Students will practice oral and written communication skills.

  Objective 3.3: Students will conduct library research that includes a critical analysis of sources.

Goal 4: To develop a connection with UTA and become a “Maverick”

  Objective 4.1: Students will develop a connection with faculty members and peer academic leaders.

  Objective 4.2: Students will explore and become involved on campus.

  Objective 4.3: Students will become aware of and use academic and student support resources.

  Objective 4.4: Students will develop an appreciation for the diversity of the student body.

Your challenge is to consider carefully with an open mind what this course might have to offer you, as this may be different for every student.
Thought Question

What do you hope to gain from participating in your first-year learning community? Share your thoughts with your professor and classmates.