

PENNSTATE



Center for the Study of Higher Education

# First-Year Seminars

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# Research Findings

In short, the weight of evidence indicates that FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student's

- successful transition to college
- likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on
- academic performance while in college and on a
- considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor's degree completion.

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 403).

# Specific Findings

- Estimated 5 to 15% increase in likelihood of persistence to graduation based on a review of well over 40 empirical reports.
- 7 to 13% advantage in persistence to the 2nd year for FYS participants
- University of South Carolina: statistically significantly greater persistence of FYS students in 15 of 23 years (1973 to 1996).

# Experiences related to persistence

- More frequent and meaningful contact with faculty
- Academic achievement as measured by GPA
- Greater sense of “academic challenge”
- More active involvement in cocurricular activities
- Improved perceptions of self-as-learner
- Greater self-reported gains (NSSE)
- Increased satisfaction with the college experience

# Conditional Effects

- FYS has some positive effects for all students
- Emerging research shows African American students may receive greater indirect effect on persistence (through increased engagement)
- Type of seminars affect different students differently
  - Study skills formats affect “weaker” students to greater degree

# Types of Formats

- College Transition 73%
  - Extended Orientation
- Study Skills 8%
- Academic Theme 14%
  - interdisciplinary
- Discipline-based 5%
  - Intro to major;
  - socialization to profession

# Research specific to formats

- College Transition
  - Effective in many/most areas
  - Most effective in “college success skills”
    - Study strategies, faculty-student interactions
- Discipline-specific
  - **Least** effective in promoting learning outcomes
  - Most effective in knowledge of campus policies

# Research specific to formats

- Academic Themes
  - Effective in many/most areas
  - Most effective in outcomes academic skills & critical thinking
  - Related to “engaging pedagogies”
- All formats increase “sense of belonging”

# Engaging Pedagogies

- Engaging Pedagogies
  - Variety of approaches
  - Meaningful discussions and homework
  - Challenging assignments
  - Productive use of class time
  - Encouragement to engage in class

# Engaging Pedagogies

- Biggest effects on
  - Critical Thinking Skills
  - Overall Course Effectiveness (student rating)
- Improved
  - Study strategies
  - Time management skills
  - Connections with faculty

# So What?

- Connect goals to format
- Encourage “engaging pedagogies”
- More contact hours is better
- FYS is only one (very important) component of a larger first-year experience