

Academic Odyssey *of* New Freshmen: Building a First Year Program

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THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Quality Enhancement Plan for the
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

**FIRST-YEAR
ODYSSEY
SEMINARS**

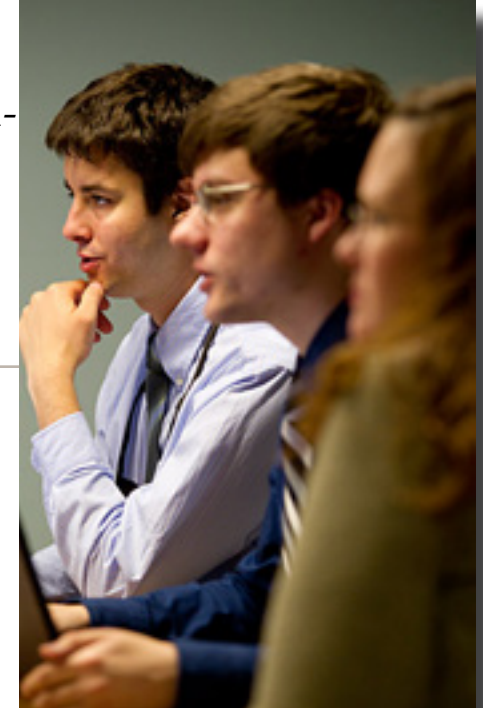


The University of Georgia QEP is designed to transform student learning by providing all first-year students an academically challenging seminar during their first year of residence.

These new “First-Year Odyssey Seminars” (FYOS) will engage all first-year students in the University’s academic culture.

Each seminar will:

- Be taught by faculty members
- Have a small enrollment, ideally a maximum of fifteen students
- Be one credit hour
- Have an academic focus, tied to a faculty member's own scholarship
- Expose students to the University's mission, including research, public service and varied forms of instruction
- Require attendance at three campus events
- Include writing to document the intellectual dialogue and the student's learning
- Be graded on an A-F scale





In addition, the seminars try to create faculty-student bonds that might extend outside of the classroom where durable mentorship can develop. The program will encourage faculty to include at least one “social” experience with the students each semester.

Also, the seminars provide students with a gateway to critical intellectual programs and resources at the University, including undergraduate research, service-learning, study abroad, and the libraries.

Goals of the FYOS

The FYOS program has three overarching goals:

- Introduce first-year students to the importance of learning and academics to engage them in the academic culture of the University.
- Give first-year students an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with a faculty member to encourage positive, sustained student -faculty interactions.
- Introduce first-year students to the instruction, research, public service and international missions of the University and how they relate to teaching and learning in and outside the classroom to increase student understanding of and participation in the full mission of the University.

The first implementation of University of Georgia's First-Year Odyssey Program was in Fall 2011. More than 300 course sessions were offered and generated about 5,000 credit hours.

These academically challenging seminars taught by tenure-track faculty engaged more than 5,000 first-year students in the academic culture of the University.



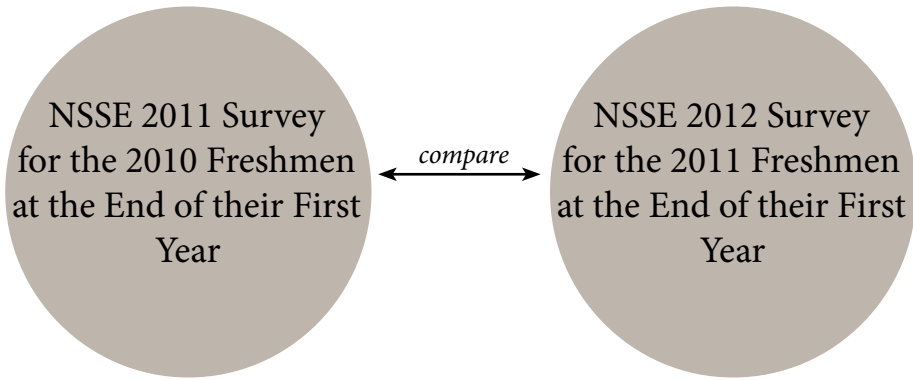


Assessing FYOS

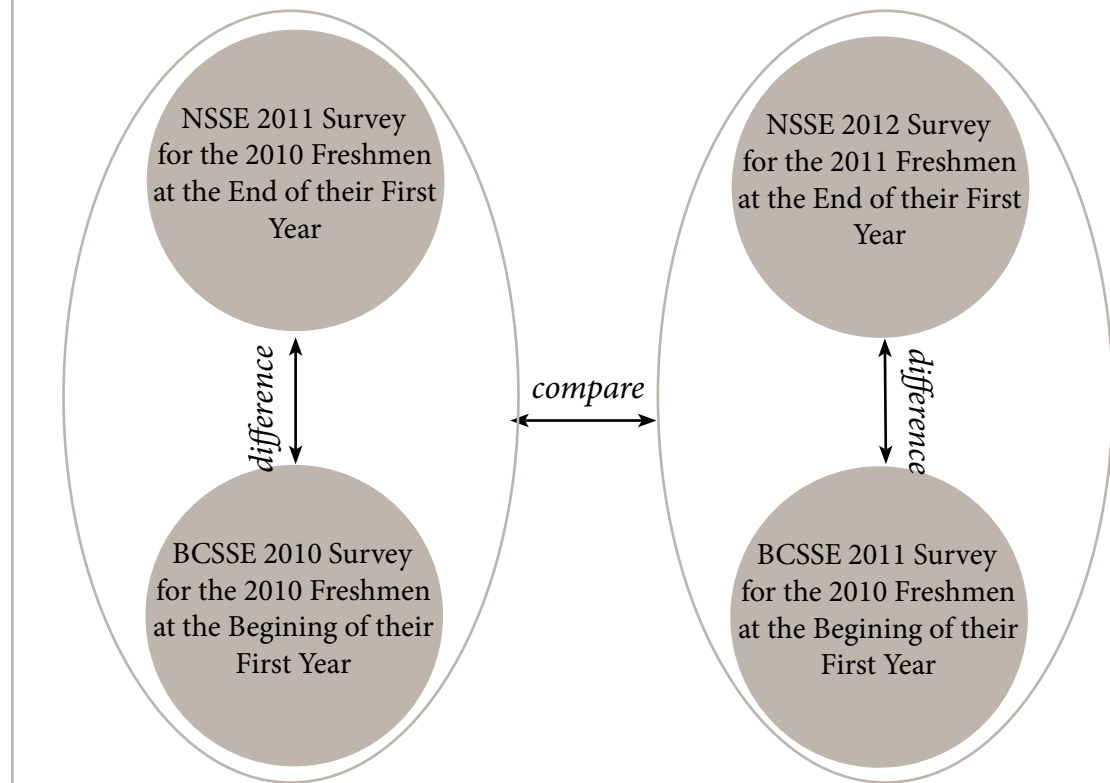
The University will use a range of assessment methods and measures to implement the overall assessment plan. These methods include direct and indirect measures, as well as quantitative and qualitative methods.

- The Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)
- Direct evaluation of student work
- Student course evaluations
- Student focus groups following the seminar
- Faculty course evaluations
- The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Tracking of Institutional indicators

Assessment I



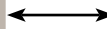
Assessment II



Assessment III

Survey Items were grouped to form index around the three FYOS program goals and assessed individually.

Goal1. Introduce first-year students to the importance of learning and academic culture of the University



- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages
- Preparing for class
- Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work
- Writing clearly and effectively
- Learning effectively on your own
- etc.

Goal2. Encourage positive, sustained student-faculty interactions



- Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor
- Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- Talked about career plans with a faculty member
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes
- Received prompt written or oral feedback from faculty on your academic performance
- Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework
- etc.

Goal3. Increase student understanding of and participation in the full mission of the University



- Community service or volunteer work
- Attending campus events and activities
- Attended an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater, or other performance
- Participating in co-curricular activities
- How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
- etc.

Assessment IV

IR also compiled the seminar courses' syllabus to group them by topic:

- Specialized research topics;
- General introductory topics,

and by way of delivery:

- Mainly lecture;
- Use campus resources, such as museum exhibits, dramatic productions, etc.;
- Experiential learning, such as an experiment that students complete by the end of class;
- Take students into the community, such as class having service learning element;
- Use internet platform for a variety of assignments and communication.

Course evaluation and student grades were also looked at.

Limitations of Early Assessment

The assessment was done after the first year of the program. Very limited positive changes were found significant in student satisfaction and engagement between 2011 cohort and 2010 cohort.

- Student overall satisfaction was higher for the 2011 group.
- Bigger gains in satisfaction seemed to have achieved by students attending seminars more focused on faculty's research interest and experience.

The limitation of findings could be due to:

- Faculty were still exploring and building effective course content and delivery methods.
- Supporting services haven't been fully implemented.
- Ineffectiveness of the instrument of BCSSE and NSSE for this particular assessment.



Amplifying the Impact of the Seminars with Assessment Results

Allow faculty considerable flexibility in designing their seminars, to try different strategies to amplify the impact of their first-year seminars.

Linking seminars to one another or to other classes or designing seminars around a common event or book.



Linking follow-up courses, such that to amplify the effect of the first-year seminar as an attractive entry point into more extensive study.

Extending the effects of the program beyond the first-year students to create a common campus experience that would link the first-year seminar program to the entire campus.

Design the seminars as an intellectual complement to existing programs the University currently has to ease the transition of high school students to the first year of University life. Linking the two together will greatly supplement the efforts on both sides.

O n-going assessment with improvement in
assessment strategies and communication
of assessment results



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