



HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

**FIRST YEAR FRESHMAN
EXPERIENCE Fall 2011**



Photo Courtesy of John Filce

Office of Institutional Research and Planning

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Introduction

First Year Freshman Learning Communities are a high impact practice designed to retain first year students and give them a common experience upon which to build their educational career. HSU implemented a high impact practice - Freshman Interest Group (FIG) experiences from Fall 2000-Fall 2009. The data show that this program helped retain two of the most at-risk groups at HSU, males and underrepresented minority students (URM). Due to the success of the FIGs, HSU decided to implement a First Year Freshman Experience for all remedial students beginning in Fall 2011. Twenty-six percent of the freshman class, or 333 students needed remedial English and 475 or 37% of the freshman class needed remedial math. 235, or 18% of the class needed both remedial English and remedial math. The First Year Freshman Learning Experience enrolled 378 students.

All remedial English and math students were enrolled in their respective remedial classes and an SP120, the First Year Freshman Seminar class. Students who only needed one remedial class were also placed in an area C or D GE class or a college level math course, if they did not need remedial math. Although students were enrolled in the SP120 course, many figured out how to unenroll before the semester began, and therefore there was some attrition. Approximately 20% of the remedial students unenrolled, yet only 13 of these students were retained to the end of the semester. In the future, the registrar will prevent students from unenrolling themselves.

Twenty-one sections of the course were offered with approximately 15-25 students in each section. Although a common syllabus was created, there was considerable leeway for each instructor to implement the course as they wished. Therefore, each student's experience may have been quite different. A First Year Faculty Learning Community was set up so that instructors teaching the course could meet periodically to provide input and give support to each other. Many of the instructors were graduate students with little prior teaching experience at the higher education level, and there were several administrators and department chairs who also taught the class. They filled out a survey after the course was finished to determine how successful it was from their perspective. A discussion of the survey data will begin on page 7.

Students were asked to attend a culminating colloquium, where they were asked to respond to a survey that asked them about their experience in the seminar. The results of that survey will be discussed in this paper, with recommendations about how the course could be more beneficial to students.

Overview

The ethnic breakdown of students in the SP120 classes was as follows:

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		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	30	7.9	7.9	7.9
	American Indian	4	1.1	1.1	9.0
	Asian American	21	5.6	5.6	14.6
	Hispanic/Latino	118	31.2	31.2	45.8
	Non Resident Alien	1	.3	.3	46.0
	Two or More Races	28	7.4	7.4	53.4
	Unknown	10	2.6	2.6	56.1
	White	166	43.9	43.9	100.0
	Total	378	100.0	100.0	

Students of color are overrepresented in requiring remediation. Of the Fall 2011 freshman class, 54% of students that needed remediation were underrepresented minorities (URM). Latinos, the largest URM group, was overrepresented at 31%. The mean HSGPA for remedial students was 3.01, with over 50 students having a HSGPA below a 2.5. Sixty-one students were exceptional admits, 45% were low income, and 63% were first generation. Sixty-three percent were female.

The survey deployed to students can be found in appendix 1. There were 259 surveys respondents, which was nearly 70% of the first year freshman experience cohort. Following are the results of the survey.

Goals of the Seminar

We asked students if the course helped them make a connection with the University and/or with the community, provided a support network during their first semester and/or taught them skills to increase academic success. Most students either agreed or were neutral in their responses to the connection questions, academic success, and support network, but the course overwhelmingly succeeded in providing students the opportunity to learn about the University and its resources.

The SP 120 seminar helped me establish a connection with the University		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree/Agree	106	42%
Neutral	102	41%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	43	17%
Total	251	100%

The SP 120 seminar helped me establish a connection with the community		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	86	34%
Neutral	96	38%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	69	27%
Total	251	100%

My seminar provided me with a support network during my first semester		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree/Agree	113	45%
Neutral	87	35%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	49	20%
Total	249	100%

My seminar provided me with opportunities to enhance my academic success (e.g., note taking, test taking, time management, etc.)		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree/Agree	96	39%
Neutral	94	38%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	59	24%
Total	249	100%

My seminar provided me with opportunities to learn about University offices and resources		
	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree/Agree	174	70%
Neutral	47	19%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	28	11%
Total	249	100%

Going forward, it will be important to establish the priorities and outcomes for this course so that students will clearly feel that they accomplished the goals and acquired the skills set forth.

Why Students Attend Humboldt

We asked students why they chose to come to HSU, and the results are as follows (categories are not mutually exclusive). Thirty-three percent responded because of a particular major, 47% said because it was far away from home, 43% said the small campus size, 37% said because of the geographic location and another 37% said because they were admitted.

Retention

We asked students about their intention to stay at HSU, as the FYFE is a retention strategy. 15% (38) of students said they were thinking about leaving HSU in the spring, another 31% (80) said they might leave and 47% said they planned on returning.

URM students were more likely to say that “the HSU campus community is not a good fit for me,” that the “student body lacks diversity” and that they want “to be closer to family.”

Students stated the following reasons why they would leave (categories are not mutually exclusive):

Arcata and the surrounding community is not a good fit for me	32%
To be closer to family	32%
The HSU campus community is not a good fit for me	21%
Only if tuition increases	16%
Can't afford college anymore	14%
There are no jobs in the area	13%
Student body lacks diversity	8%
Academic issues	6%
I have an employment opportunity somewhere else	6%

47% of students who indicated they would or might leave said they had trouble paying for their education. Of those, 25% indicated they didn't get enough financial aid, 28% stated their parents can't contribute very much to their educational costs, and 25% said they couldn't find a job.

Study Skills and Advising

In terms of studying, 20% of students studied less than five hours a week, and 30% studied less than ten hours a week, 26% of students reported studying between ten and fourteen hours a week and 25% percent of students reported studying more than fifteen hours a week.

	Frequency	Percent
<5	43	20%
5-9	65	30%
10-14	56	26%
15-19	15	7%
20-24	23	11%
>25	16	7%
Total	218	100%

63% of students experienced academic difficulty, but 58% felt that they could overcome it next semester. 60% of students felt that they would benefit from time management and budget training and 67% said they would benefit from study skills training.

Seventy-one percent of students met with their academic advisor and felt it was helpful, while 16% of students who met with their academic advisor did not find it helpful. When students were asked “Which of the following resources have you used to improve your study skills? Mark all that apply.” The answers were as follows:

	Frequency	Percent
Library	141	54%
Writing Center	75	29%
TA or professor office hours	65	25%
Learning Center / LC Tutor	57	22%
Math Lab	48	19%
Have not used any of these resources.	20	8%
Supplemental Instruction	19	7%

Academic Progress and Retention

67% of the SP120 students were in good standing at the end of Fall 2011, and 32% were on academic probation. This compares to 29% of freshman as a whole. 90% of the students in the first year

freshman experience cohort are enrolled in the Spring 2012 semester compared to 93% of all freshman. Comparing this cohort to the Fall 2010 cohort, 24% of freshman ended the semester on academic probation compared to 26% of remedial students. Ninety-two percent of all freshman persisted to the next semester, versus 93% of remedial students.

Faculty Survey

Twenty-one faculty (including graduate students, department chairs and administrators) taught the course, and eleven responded to a survey about the experience. Eight have expressed interest in teaching again next fall (no full time faculty). The faculty had many recommendations for improving the course, such as offering it as a 3 unit course, offering it twice a week for the first eight weeks, and establishing a consistent syllabus across all courses. In general, the faculty enjoyed working with first time freshman and felt the course was meaningful and helpful. Sixty-four percent felt the academic planning, reflective abstracts and culminating assignment were the most meaningful assignments. The biggest concerns were letting the students know why they would be taking the course ahead of time, more faculty support and compensation, expanding beyond remedial students so they don't feel marginalized, and allowing more time so that the course would be more beneficial to students. This data will certainly inform the planning for next fall.

Qualitative Student Data Responses

Qualitative Data was also collected on the students, but a full analysis has not yet been conducted. Here are some of the responses from students and their opinions about the class:

“The class has helped me to connect with people in the university. I have met my friend in the class, have visited different place on campus and have found out ways to gather resources, such as for careers job or classes on campus.”

“To me the class and the Colloquium was missing a purpose, I didn't walk away with anything beneficial. It could be a great thing.”

“I have established an understanding with the school's system and now I know what kind of seriousness to engage school with”

“I feel the teachers from SP 120 should have been more helpful on ensuring well research on the project was conducted as thorough as possible. Some freshman students are still having trouble on ways to conduct research.”

“The remedial kids did not like being forced into the class, it seemed to make everyone upset. However, I think it could work for some kids eventually.”

“It was pretty unorganized. It didn't actually help the community at all.”

“Just make it as a higher units class, and actually teach something.”

“It was a nice class to be in once I got comfortable with it, but I wouldn't have chosen to be in this class. Definitely make this class optional and provide more fun activities in this class for new students to get connected with HSU and the surrounding areas.”

“I think if each day the advisor had a plan instead of offering answers to any random question, would be more beneficial to the class by really focusing on truly helping students academically.”

“The class could have gone into more depth about the career opportunities that are offered out in the world, as well as discussing the possible careers that you can obtain through your major.”

“Some sort of study hall, with tutors along with some workshops on study habits, jobs, class arrangements, and community events.”

“Focus more on study skills and things that have to do with school more, such as receiving financial aid and how to do all of that as well as registering for classes and GE requirements. It gives freshmen the ability to become familiar with Humboldt's academics and it teaches students to become proactive for the future.”

“I loved the class. It was great to get to know campus better and the strengths finder was amazing!! Thanks for a great class.”

“I really think this course could be very helpful to all freshman. We could build a support system and learn how to navigate through our first semester.”

Appendix 1.

General Directions: The following questions ask you to reflect on your experiences related to SP120. Your honest opinions and experiences are greatly appreciated.

Please rate how much you agree with the following statements:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The SP 120 seminar helped me establish a connection with the University	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃	☐ ₄	☐ ₅
The SP 120 seminar helped me establish a connection with the community	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃	☐ ₄	☐ ₅
My seminar provided me with a support network during my first semester	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃	☐ ₄	☐ ₅
My seminar provided me with opportunities to enhance my academic success (e.g., note taking, test taking, time management, etc.)	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃	☐ ₄	☐ ₅
My seminar provided me with opportunities to learn about University offices and resources	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃	☐ ₄	☐ ₅

Following questions: The following questions ask you about your opinions and experiences at HSU. For any question that you have an answer for, please **fully explain** in the space provided.

How or in what ways have you made an academic connection with the University?

Explain: _____

What aspects of the SP 120 seminar did you like best?

Explain: _____

What assignment was most meaningful to you?

Explain: _____

Did this course help prepare you for registering for Spring classes?

Explain: _____

Did this course help you with academic planning?

Explain: _____

Did this course help you with career planning?

Explain: _____

Did this course help you to develop your identity/personal goals as a student?

Explain: _____

Did this course help you to understand your personal and learning strengths?

Explain: _____

Did this course help you to develop your research methods and access to librarians?

Explain: _____

What changes would you recommend for the SP 120 seminar?

Explain: _____

Please rate the degree to which you would have liked to have learned about the following college skills	Not at all	Somewhat	A lot
Note taking skills	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃
Test taking skills	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃
Time management Skills	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃
Budgeting Skills	☐ ₁	☐ ₂	☐ ₃

Is there a topic or area you wish that this seminar covered but did not?

Explain: _____

Do you have any other comments or feedback?

Explain: _____

Directions to participants: Most of the following questions ask you to reflect on your past semester here at HSU. Keep in mind that this survey is anonymous and your answer cannot be traced back to you. Your honest opinions and experiences are greatly appreciated.

Group Characteristics* (Mark only one in each box):

1. Age	2. Race	3. Remediation Level
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<input type="checkbox"/> 18 or older <input type="checkbox"/> Not yet 18 – <i>If you are not at least 18 years of age, you cannot continue this survey. Leave the rest blank and turn it in as is.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> African American <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian <input type="checkbox"/> Asian American <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Non Resident Alien <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or More Races <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to State <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> No remediation needed <input type="checkbox"/> English only <input type="checkbox"/> Math only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Math and English
4. Living Status		5. Gender
<input type="checkbox"/> On Campus <input type="checkbox"/> Off Campus		<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female

Why did you apply to college?

Explain: _____

Why did you choose to come to Humboldt State University? *Mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of a particular major (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> HSU's reputation as a University <input type="checkbox"/> HSU is close to home <input type="checkbox"/> HSU is far away from home <input type="checkbox"/> Small campus size	<input type="checkbox"/> Geographic setting of the campus <input type="checkbox"/> I was admitted <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation from family, friends or peers <input type="checkbox"/> Perception of pot culture was appealing <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____
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Are you thinking about leaving HSU?

Yes Maybe No

If you answered yes or maybe above - *Mark all that apply to you.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Can't afford college anymore <input type="checkbox"/> Only if tuition increases <input type="checkbox"/> The HSU campus community is not a good fit for me <input type="checkbox"/> Arcata and the surrounding community is not a good fit for me <input type="checkbox"/> Student body lacks diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty lacks diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Academic issues	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no jobs in the area <input type="checkbox"/> I have an employment opportunity somewhere else <input type="checkbox"/> Be closer to family <input type="checkbox"/> Family illness – need to take care of a relative <input type="checkbox"/> My own health issues <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ _____ _____
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If you answered **yes or maybe** above to the question about leaving - Where would you go and what

would you do if you leave HSU?

Explain: _____

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—

Have you had trouble paying for your education (Tuition, books, housing, meals, etc.)?

Yes No

If you answered yes above - What issues have you had in financing your education? *Mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Did not qualify for financial aid	<input type="checkbox"/> Can't find a job
<input type="checkbox"/> Did not get enough from financial aid	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor budgeting skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents cannot contribute very much to my education costs	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial situation changed since I got here
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

Are you currently employed?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes – On Campus	<input type="checkbox"/> No – But I haven't tried to find a job
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes – Off Campus – In Humboldt	<input type="checkbox"/> No – I've been looking, but can't find one
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes – Off Campus – Outside of Humboldt	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____

If you tried looking for a job, did you have any of the following difficulties while looking for a job? *Mark all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Not qualified for available jobs	<input type="checkbox"/> Jobs are too far away from my house
<input type="checkbox"/> Class schedule conflicts with job hours	<input type="checkbox"/> Available jobs have limited hours
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation difficulties (e.g. no car, bus schedules, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of jobs	_____

Please rate the following items in regards to your expectations before coming to HSU.	Worse than I expected	About what I expected	Better than I expected	No expectations
Emphasis on a college party culture	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Emphasis on studying and academics	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Course difficulty	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Freedom	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Green focused culture (sustainability)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
School organized activities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

Weather	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Marijuana culture (pot only)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Drug culture (all unlawful drugs except pot)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Drinking culture (Only)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

On average, how many hours total do you spend **each week** outside of class studying, reading, and doing homework for classes?

of hours: _____

How many **graded units** are you taking this semester?

of units: _____

Have you experienced academic difficulties while attending HSU?

Yes – And I will not be able to overcome them

No – I’m doing fine

Yes – But I will do better and overcome them

Other (please specify) _____

Would you benefit from a workshop or more information on:

Time management?

Yes – a packet of information would be enough

No

Yes – an interactive workshop would be better

Budgeting your money

Yes – a packet of information would be enough

No

Yes – an interactive workshop would be better

Study skills

Yes – a packet of information would be enough

No

Yes – an interactive workshop would be better

Have you met with your academic advisor?

Yes – And it was helpful

No – Not yet, and I don’t plan to

Yes – But it was not helpful

No – But I plan to

If you have not yet met with your academic advisor, why? *Mark all that apply.*

Do not know who to meet with

My advisor has not been available when I was

I contacted them, but they will not respond to me

I didn't think it was necessary

Other (please specify) _____

Which of the following resources have you used to improve your study skills?
Mark all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Center / LC Tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> TA or professor office hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental Instruction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math Lab | <input type="checkbox"/> Have not used any of these resources. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Library | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

How would you describe your study skills/habits?

- Excellent Good Fair Poor Very Poor

When you're not in class, studying, reading, or doing homework - what kinds of activities, sports, or recreation do you do and who are you doing them with?

Explain: _____

Where are your favorite places to study, read, and/or do homework? *Mark all that apply.*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> HSU Library | <input type="checkbox"/> The Depot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My dorm room | <input type="checkbox"/> UC Center – other than the Depot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In my dorm building, other than my room | <input type="checkbox"/> The “J” dining room |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Off campus coffee shop | <input type="checkbox"/> The Jolly Giant Commons – other than the “J” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> UC or Art Quad | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend’s dorm/apartment/house |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community forest | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____ |

In what ways, if any have you had to adjust your study, homework, or reading habits since high school?

Explain: _____

On average, how many times per week do you **use alcohol** (beer, wine, hard alcohol)?

of times: _____ Estimate average # of drinks per time of use: _____

On average, how many times per week do you **use pot** (marijuana)?

of times: _____ Estimate average # of hours per week you are high: _____

On average, how many times per week do you use **illicit drugs other than pot**? *Illicit drugs are defined as substances which your particular use of is unlawful (i.e. using prescription drugs not prescribed to you,*

use of any illegal drugs, etc).

of times: _____

What illicit drugs do you use? _____

Use the space below to share any general comments you have about your experience at HSU
