

Chapter 1

Faculty Pilot First– Year Experience for Incoming Freshmen Interested in Pursuing a Degree in Education

ABSTRACT

In this opening chapter, the researchers, three full-time college faculty members, discuss the initial focus of their collaborative work and research. Driven by the concerns regarding the reading and writing abilities of students entering their programs and across their campus, they responded to this issue by establishing and co-teaching yearlong linked courses to incoming first-year students interested in education, a pilot that eventually became known as the First-Year Reading, Thinking, and Writing Initiative. The data collected from the first few years of the Initiative indicate the benefits of having a year-long linked course structure for this population of students to promote academic achievement, social adjustment, and, as the researchers learned through this experience, civic engagement.

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Before all of this (class and portfolio), I was never really involved in civic engagement and why it was so important to be involved in the community that you are in. After, I now realize all of the benefits of getting involved and playing a role in the actions and decisions made by everyone in the community, both at Keene, and my hometown. – First-year student...

INTRODUCTION

In considering the fostering of millennials' civic engagement, one of the key issues that must be at the forefront of planning to support their development in this area is the enrichment of their literacy skills. Students need to be able to read deeply, think critically, and write effectively in order to engage in, communicate with, and advocate for change within their campus communities and to help them develop the skills they need to effect change in wider communities: local, state, national, and international. To address this issue within the Education department at our institution, we created a first-year linked-course program (one course in the fall and one course in the spring) that prepares incoming students with college-level reading, research, and writing strategies that they can draw on in their college courses, including ours. The program engages students in semester-long research and writing projects, emphasizes the importance of both process and product, and creates a support system, both peer and faculty, to address student achievement and retention (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011).

READING, THINKING, AND WRITING INITIATIVE

Because the literature on the first-year experience highlights the challenges of replicating programs across institutions due to the unique characteristics of each college or university, we took the characteristics of our institution and students into consideration when creating the Reading, Thinking, and Writing Initiative (Jamelske, 2009). First-year programs vary greatly due to a variety of factors, including whether the institution is public or private, the size of the institution, the institution's location and proximity to a town or city, and the institution's emphasis on teaching and research. In addition to the aforementioned differences across colleges, the diversity of the student

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