**2011 FYE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**Step 1: Department/Program Mission**

The First-Year Experience Program (FYE) provides several strategic and varied learning environments for all incoming first-year students, especially the following components: First-Year Seminars; co-curricular associations; the Common Reading Experience (CRE). This longstanding program (in place since 2000) is designed to provide opportunities and challenges for first-year students at Albion College, in order to help them develop and grow academically, personally, and socially throughout their first year of college.

The cornerstone of the FYE program is the First-Year Seminar (LA 101): seminars are writing-intensive, discussion-based interdisciplinary courses designed to introduce students to the academic expectations of Albion College and to help students make a smooth and positive transition to college both in and out of the classroom. The small, interdisciplinary first-year courses have been one of the most effective and popular curricular components of the general education curriculum*.* These courses provide an introduction to the liberal arts and to the nature of college-level study.

The FYE associations constitute a co-curricular program, now integrated with the *Albion Advantage,* which is a four-year developmental model that links a student’s academic program to career development, experiential learning, intentional advising, and goals of “life work” after college; indeed, the FYE program is the *de facto* delivery model for the Albion Advantage (which has both complicated FYE and provided opportunities for developing FYE student programming). As with the overall FYE program, the associations are designed to help FY students develop academically, personally, and socially throughout their first year of college.

The CRE exposes FY students to original scholarship and academic expectations, beginning the summer prior to matriculation and continuing during fall semester, when campus-wide discussions of the CRE text are paired with a convocation presentation on the CRE topics (with lectures often given by the author of the CRE text). As with other components of FYE, the CRE introduces FY students to the liberal arts approach of learning as intellectual and practical engagement, and challenges students to recognize and adapt to the expectations for college-level learning.

**Step 2: Student Learning Outcomes/Goals**

During fall 2010, student learning outcomes (SLOs) were developed/revised for the First-Year Seminar component of the FYE program, as detailed just below.

LA 101 Learning Objectives: students in First-Year Seminars will learn

1. to find and use knowledge effectively, ethically, and responsibly;
2. to approach knowledge analytically, critically, creatively, and discursively;
3. to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing;
4. to approach and understand knowledge and information from multiple perspectives;
5. to reflect critically on their own learning and learning processes.

**Step 3: Identify program components (required courses, elective courses, out-of-classroom or other experiences) that are designed to achieve each educational objective.**

NOTE: Every class will not achieve all outcomes, nor is it expected to; the program goal is to develop a distribution of student learning experiences that achieve the outcomes.

As noted in Step 2 above, recent FYE assessment has focused on the FY seminars, and specifically on the following two areas:

A) evaluation of student writing using an assessment rubric in seminars;

B) development of student learning outcomes for seminars, followed by collection of faculty feedback about how SLOs are integrated in their seminars.

**Step 4: Select methods/data sources and instruments that you will use to gather information about whether expected outcomes and learning objective are being achieved.**

NOTE: Data from the same sources need not be collected every year. Rather, some kind of assessment rotation would be sufficient (e.g., Years 1 & 3, collect data from graduating seniors, Years 2 & 4 collect data from employers and alumni, etc.).

A) Evaluation of FYE student writing using assessment rubric

During the 2005-06 academic year, members of the college Assessment Committee became interested in student learning in the context of writing effectiveness within general education, and developed a rubric to begin assessing writing in the FYE seminars. It should be noted that the first-year seminars are, *by design*, writing intensive courses; seminar course proposals are reviewed by the FYE Seminar Subcommittee (which reports to C&RC), and one major factor of course review is the writing-intensive nature of the proposed seminar (along with interdisciplinarity, discussion-based pedagogy, etc.). The committee provides feedback and guidance about developing and teaching writing-intensive FYE seminars to faculty proposing courses, and offers periodic workshops as well as individual faculty consultation on teaching writing in first-year seminars.

The writing assessment rubric was piloted in spring semester 2006 in a limited number of courses. Following feedback from faculty during the fall 2006 Faculty Retreat (with the theme of “How Students Learn”), a revised writing assessment rubric was used in fall semester 2006 with nearly all First-Year Seminars participating. Refinement of the rubric continued in 2007 with a fall Faculty Retreat on “Student Motivation for Learning.” The Retreat included a breakout session on metacognition and motivation featuring the writing rubric. The response from the faculty and students was again very positive. As of fall 2010, the revised assessment rubric was used in most First-Year Seminar courses. (In addition, the rubric has been adopted or adapted for use by several departments for assessing student writing in their major courses, as well as by individual faculty members in additional departments.)

B) Development of SLOs for FYE seminars; collection of faculty feedback about SLOs

During the August 2010 FYE faculty workshop, faculty generated a tentative list of student learning outcomes (SLOs) for FYE seminars. These SLOs were revised and updated early in fall semester 2010, then revised again following a faculty workshop in mid-semester.

Early in spring semester 2011, the FYE committee requested FYE faculty feedback on the draft SLOs via a GoogleDocs form (requesting this feedback from faculty who had taught FYE in the past three years). Details about the request for FYE faculty feedback regarding SLOs are included below.

**LA 101 Learning Outcomes Survey** (*text copied from GoogleDocs form*)

As part of the college’s ongoing efforts to assess student learning within the CORE/General Education, we ask that all faculty who have taught first-year seminars in the past three years provide information about how the following learning objectives have been integrated into their courses (include details about specific assignments, exercises, and student learning experiences, as feasible). For each of the five LA 101 student learning outcomes listed below, please provide a brief discussion (2-3 sentences) for how the outcome has been integrated into your seminar; please include information about sample assignments, exercises, etc. that help students move toward achieving each learning outcome.

**Learning outcomes:** Students in the First-Year Seminar will be able to find and use knowledge effectively, ethically, and responsibly; to approach knowledge analytically, critically, creatively, and discursively; to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing; to approach and understand knowledge and information from multiple perspectives; and to reflect critically on their own learning and learning processes

**Typical methods of assessment:** Required library research assignments, creative assignments (self-designed), pre- and post-discussion exams, presentations.

**Step 5: Analyze and Interpret the Data**

A) The FYE writing assessment rubric has primarily been used by individual faculty to evaluate writing in the seminar and provide consistent feedback to students about their writing. Although initial plans for using the writing rubric targeted general collection and analysis of student writing across the FYE program—as the student entry for general education—changes to the college Assessment Committee (both staffing and committee personnel, as well as administrative priorities and leadership transitions that influenced committee work) combined with reductions in FYE staffing and program funding have delayed these efforts. *Thus, systematic and program-wide collection of FYE student writing data has not yet taken place—so we do not have aggregate data about student writing to analyze or interpret*.

However, we do have anecdotal reports that many FYE faculty use the assessment rubric in seminars, and for multiple purposes, especially the following:

 ●to help students understand and recognize the writing criteria and goals for seminar

 assignments (i.e., used at beginning of writing assignment);

 ●to provide feedback to students on in-progress drafts (i.e., used in middle of writing assignment);

 ●to provide feedback to students about completed papers (i.e., used as evaluative tool, upon completion of writing assignment.

B) FYE faculty feedback regarding student learning outcomes (SLOs) provides a rich source of data and details about student learning activities in FYE seminars. The request for SLO feedback was sent to 42 faculty who have taught FYE seminars in the past three years (fall 2008, 2009, and 2010); 1/3 of these faculty responded by completing the SLO form, providing details about how the SLOs were integrated into their seminars, as well as discussion about how students achieved specific learning outcomes (as understood from the faculty member perspective).

The faculty responses provide a foundation of substantial and significant information about teaching and learning in FYE seminars (providing *indirect* data on student learning): see selected details following, based on faculty responses to the GoogleDocs feedback form.

**NOTE**: Table below lists specific aspects of SLO followed by % of seminars that include these learning outcomes (based on faculty feedback received [N = 14], rather than all FYE seminars taught during past three years).

**TABLE 1: Faculty Responses for LA 101 Student Learning Objectives**

LA 101 Learning Objectives: students in First-Year Seminars will learn

**1. to find and use knowledge effectively, ethically, and responsibly** %

Students introduced to effective research strategies, tools, and/or guidelines 42.8

Students introduced to academic honesty guidelines, citation and attribution, etc. 28.6

Students work with library staff (group or individual) on research process 35.7

Students engage in discussion and/or exercises concerning ethics and knowledge 35.7

Students introduced to and/or complete IRB approval process 7.1

**2. to approach knowledge analytically, critically, creatively, and discursively** %

Students engage in multiple assignments that require and foster analysis 50.0

Students engage in multiple assignments that require and foster critical thinking 57.1

Students engage in assignments that require and foster creative thinking 21.4

Students engage in assignments that highlight discursive nature of knowledge making 35.7

**3. to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing**  %

Students practice, demonstrate oral communication (discussion, presentation, etc.) 64.3

Students engage in frequent and significant writing assignments 64.3

Students complete at least three writing assignments during semester 57.1

Students complete at least one major writing assignment (8+ pages) 21.4

**4. to approach and understand knowledge and information from multiple perspectives** %

Students introduced to at least three disciplinary perspectives 57.1

Students engage with at least three kinds of learning resources (text, film, art, people, etc.) 57.1

Students required to create at least three kinds of texts (written, oral, visual, creative, etc.) 14.3

**5. to reflect critically on their own learning and learning processes** %

Students reflect on own learning as component of overall seminar 50.0

Students reflect on own learning as component of specific assignment(s) 57.1

Students reflect on own learning as class exercise or discussion 42.8

The faculty responses summarized here indicate a range of student learning activities and experiences in the FYE seminars, although no one seminar incorporates ALL of the proposed SLOs. The specific faculty responses—in fuller detail as reported via the GoogleDocs form—reveal an even greater range of remarkable learning activities for FYE students.

**It is important to note the following key points about this particular assessment project**:

1) The draft SLOs were not revised and presented to FYE faculty until after fall semester 2010 had already begun, long after faculty had planned and designed and were teaching their FYE seminars (or had already taught their seminars, for those faculty reporting on fall 2008 or 2009 student learning).

2) This is a first attempt at collecting faculty feedback about the student learning they intend to foster in their FYE seminars. As such, it is clear—and expected—that there are differing interpretations about the student learning that specific SLOs are designed to capture (we know this from faculty written responses, and from the October 2010 faculty SLO workshop). In addition, faculty will need some coaching and coaxing as we move forward with the SLOs (whether as is or revised/updated), both in reporting on their teaching in ways that more accurately reflect student learning outcomes and in determining how to incorporate SLOs into their seminars more fully and effectively. (These concerns suggest the need for FYE faculty development, as briefly discussed in Step 6).

Nevertheless, the limited data set does seem to provide valuable and helpful information as we move forward with assessment of the FYE seminars (and the overall FYE program). We can see some elements of the SLOs that appear solidly represented in the seminars (e.g., SLO #3: effective communication, both oral and written), others that seem well established but not as widespread as optimal (e.g., SLO #5: critical reflection), and others that appear mixed in how and why teachers incorporate these into seminars (e.g., SLO #1). *Taken as a whole, the data here provide a starting point for discussions with FYE faculty and the FY Seminar Committee, as we plan for faculty development workshops, and as we work collectively on revising and developing new SLOs for the program*.

As noted at the start of data table, the above SLO information is drawn from faculty reporting and discussion about student learning in FYE seminars: as such, this is *indirect* data about student learning. We would also like to collect student responses about what they think and have to say about their own learning and doing in the FYE seminars (another *indirect* data set), in order to pair this information with faculty perceptions of their students’ learning. And finally, we need to begin collecting and analyzing *direct* SLO evidence and data for the FYE seminars (see further discussion of this need in Step 6).

**Step 6: How will the data collected be used for decision-making, strategic planning, etc.**

A) FYE Seminar Writing Assessment

The fact that we have not collected and analyzed actual student writing is a clear lack that we need to begin correcting. Thus, during fall 2011, the program will make a concerted effort to collect and analyze at least some student writing from FYE seminars… Most likely target a few seminars to begin—based on faculty volunteers, recruited during the August faculty workshop. The details of this pilot assessment plan still needs to be worked out—very tentative and nebulous at this point.

In addition, the FYE seminars will also include an *indirect* measure of student writing during fall 2011: a student survey early and late during the semester, focused on student perceptions of their college writing (e.g., what students think they are learning about writing, what writing challenges the seminar has revealed, what kinds of writing the students are doing in the seminars, and where students perceive their own strengths in writing to be, etc.).

B) FYE Student Learning Outcomes

Faculty responses regarding SLOs—the aggregate data/feedback—will be shared with the full FYE committee, which will review and analyze the data in order to plan for at least the following:

●FYE faculty development workshops and/or other teaching/learning initiatives (based on faculty feedback);

●faculty workshops to review/revise the seminar SLOs;

●fall 2011 follow-up requests for FYE faculty feedback and teaching/learning artifacts for similar SLOs and/or for other elements of FYE seminars (e.g., discussion-based learning, etc.)

In addition, all FYE faculty will be required to include the seminar SLOs on fall 2011 syllabi, and we will encourage faculty to spend some class time discussing these learning goals with students; increasing student awareness of the learning outcomes and goals for the seminars is an important step toward helping students recognize, reflect on, and articulate their own learning processes (strengths, weaknesses, preferred modes and styles of learning, etc.).

As mentioned in Step 5 above, we plan to collect student responses about what they think and have to say about their own learning and doing in the FYE seminars (another *indirect* data set—part of the student survey noted above), in order to pair this information with faculty perceptions of their students’ learning.

And finally, we need to begin collecting and analyzing *direct* SLO evidence and data for the FYE seminars. At this point, specific plans and processes have not been finalized, though the most likely learning areas would be for SLO #3 and #5, since these are the student learning outcomes that appear most fully integrated with the seminars; collecting and analyzing samples of student communication (writing and presentations, etc.) and evidence of student reflections from the FYE seminars would provide us with data to understand student learning in the seminars, more fully and accurately, and with much greater confidence.