

A Program Evaluation of the Efficacy of Pacific University's First Year Seminar Experience

Jessi Derby, Nina Nova, Darby Bowers, and Eileen Myers

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BACKGROUND

College students' interactions with peers on campus, and how they perceive stress will determine their decision remain at the university (Johnson et al., 2014). Thus, attrition rates are highest between freshman and sophomore years. Assimilation within the college community can be difficult, but are often especially challenging for underrepresented students, who may experience overt or institutional discrimination, and consequently see the school more negatively (Johnson et al., 2014). Universities create freshman orientation programs to minimize these challenges and improve retention between freshman and sophomore years. First Year Experience (FYE) is designed for incoming Fall freshman to adapt to Pacific. FYE consists of Voyages, Freshman Orientation, First Year Seminar, and the Global Scholars Program. This study investigates the efficacy of the FYE at Pacific University focusing on new students and how their interaction on the campus contributes to their success or retention at the university. We anticipate the results will show a significant positive, correlation between completion of FYE and student ratings of Belonging, Critical Thinking, Argument construction, Writing Proficiency, Professional Development, and Engagement. Results from this study offer outcome assessment for FYE, as well as provide support for the cultural assimilation of freshmen into college life. It is our hope that this work may provide meaningful, concrete recommendations for FYE at Pacific in the delivery of their FYE program.

Empirical Question

We predict that students who complete FYE will report higher levels of Belonging, Critical Thinking, Argument Construction, Writing Proficiency, Professional Development, and Engagement on the self-reported surveys?

PROPOSED METHOD

Participants

Pacific University undergraduate students will be convenience and snowball sampled using list serves, social media, emails, and announcements in classes. Eligibility requirements are limited to those students who are 18 years of age and who have been enrolled at Pacific since their freshman year. We anticipate an equal number of males (n=50) and females (n=50), with a mean age of 19.5 years.

Materials

The materials used to evaluate the efficacy of the First Year Experience, include: 1.) the PUO Vision Statement from the Pacific University website (Board of Trustees, 2012), 2.) the outcome goals for the First Year Experience website, as well as a survey developed to specifically assess student perceptions of FYE efficacy

FYE Student Outcomes – Operationalized the first-year student outcomes that are listed on Pacific University website.

FYE Efficacy Survey – is a six-domain survey with 35 questions. Each question asks student perceptions of FYE efficacy on each of the six outcome domains: Critical Thinking, Argument Construction, Writing Proficiency, Engagement, Professional Development, and Belonging. The survey provides operationalized FYS Learning Outcomes as well as the FYE Vision Statement for comparison.

Demographic Questionnaire – questions relating to age, current year in college (at the time of the survey), sex, gender identification, cultural identification, GPA, academic success, social satisfactions, resident, or off campus living.

Design and Procedure

This study is a program evaluation using the outcome goals from the Pacific University First Year Experience articulated on the FYE website. Additionally, a Perceived Efficacy Survey will be administered at the onset of student's sophomore year, following the completion of their First Year Experience. Participants will answer the demographic and Student Perception of FYE Efficacy through the online survey platform Qualtrics. The data will be interpreted using the IBM-software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

PROPOSED RESULTS

We will compare FYE students who started at Pacific in the Fall as a freshman, to freshman students who start in the spring semester. These analyses include correlations between the interval and ratio level data and an independent-samples t-test between the two freshmen groups (fall-admission, spring-admission). The descriptive data will also be visualized through a table with a graphical representation, of a box-whiskers plot of the independent samples t-test data, scores by freshmen admission group, with the effect size estimates visualized through the whiskers.

CONCLUSION

It is anticipated that the results will support the prediction that Pacific University's FYE does achieve the student learning outcomes. Students experience a multitude of stressors during their first year on a university campus, the way they manage stress coupled with the resources they receive from the school decides if they stay or transfer out (Johnson et al., 2014). Completion of this study will allow Pacific University to gain insight into the factors of FYE that help students be successful while also determining the aspects of the freshman experience that needs improvement. Ultimately, student success at Pacific is correlated with the success of Pacific.

SELECT REFERENCES

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