



# FYE: Key to Retention and State funding

## Urgency:

- UALR ranks at the bottom of retention and graduation rates in Arkansas for the 2000-2006 cohort, retaining 29.8 of its students in their first year. The average rate is 46.3 percent, with a high of 59.5.
- Ualr also ranks 2nd to last out of 15 similar insitutions across the nation, including University of New Orleans, University of Memphis, Universality of Missouri-St. Louis, with a retention rate of 56 percent for first year students and a graduation rate of 23.92 percent.
- State funding formulas for the new bienium beginning July 1, 2009, target those institutions with higher graduation and retention rates for funding increases. Funding will be based on graduation and retention rates.

## The Way Forward

- National statistics show that FYE courses help students persist in their college education.
  - Colleges with 3 hour FYE courses average a retention rate of 46% (ours is 29.8%) per Noel-Levitz survey
  - Students who have taken a three hour FYE course say it was the single course that had the great impact, and that kept them in school. (Habley & McClanahan)
  - College students who take a 3 hour first year experience course graduate at a higher rate than a mtched group of students who were not enrolled in the course (Schnell, Seashore, Louis and Doetkoff (2003)



- No matter what the initial ACT scores or high school GPA a student might possess, six constructs taught in FYE courses were found to be predictive of college persistence: goal setting, personal knowledge and development, and community support, among others (Lotkowski, 2004)
- At UALR, the PEAW 1300 course shows a student persistence rate for first year students from 60 to 80 percent (instead of our average which is again, 29%)
- One department based course in Systems Engineering at UALR indicates the persistence rate for students rose from 40 to 81 percent during its initial offering.
- 6 intensive study reports completed on campus from 1994 until the present consistently have recommended an FYE course as one way to help students persist in their academic careers

Because the benefits to students (and the university) are proven, we recommend that all entering students be required to take some version of an FYE course.

## Our Proposal

Every entering first year student is required to take a first year experience course. These courses assist the student with the transition from high school to college and focus on study skills and community building. The student may find these courses in every college including University College where the designation is PEAW 1300-FYE. All FYE will be identified in the schedule with an FYE after the listing.

- Beginning in the fall of 2008, every entering student would be required to take an FYE course of some type in the first year. Courses already in place through University College, or UC, PEAW 1300, PEAW 1124, or PEAW 1190, for example, would fulfill this requirement.
- Students who are unsure of their major or what direction of study they want to pursue would be directed to the FYE course through UC.



- Students who have an idea about where they want to major would be directed to an FYE type course, if available, that would incorporate the learning objectives in the UC course (see modified list below), but would be offered through either a department or a College.
- In programs that already require over 124 hours for graduation, one of the required entry-level courses in these programs could be modified to incorporate the learning objectives (again, see modified list below) borrowed from the UC FYE course.
- Instructors could opt to teach the course already in place through University College but add the academic component based in his or her discipline. For example, the course could include all of the learning objectives from the current FYE course; students would learn the material through examining a basic theme of the course. Thus, a political science instructor might decide on a theme “Conservative and Liberal Voices in the American Political System.” Students would read and take notes on material related to this theme; they would learn about test taking through this theme; they could perform their service learning through political events taking place in this election year. Betsy Hart in the Office of Campus and Community Affairs has offered help students locate service learning opportunities.
- A department could design its own FYE course and thus gain the benefit of early contact with the student and student semester credit hours. Two examples from departments on campus:
  - Course in Systems Engineering includes similar objectives (below) and includes speakers, field trips, group projects and other components designed to build community (persistence rate rose from 40 percent continuation in the program, to 81 percent continuation)
  - Course from the sciences including biology, chemistry, and earth sciences. This course, still in development, is the result of a national Science Foundation grant and will target talented and needy students, at least initially, but if successful, the course could include other science students.
- A course could be developed through a college such as Arts Humanities and Social Sciences. It could be team taught, or taught by individual instructors.



- Instructors would teach these courses as a part of their load, or as an overload if replacement instructors cannot be found to teach upper level courses.
- All FYE type courses could be listed in the schedule under FYE with a brief description about the course. There a student could find the courses UC offers as well as courses offered through a department or a college that meet the FYE requirement containing similar learning objectives.

Each of the courses that qualify as an FYE course would have a designation after the number similar to what one would find after an online course, which lists the course SPCH 3300-999. The FYE course could be listed as say, PEAW-1300-FYE. In this way advisors could easily recognize which courses fulfill the FYE component of the core no matter what the actual number or prefix.

A committee will be formed to review applications each semester for FYE status. While the actual form of the course could vary, most important will be adherence to the learning objectives of the current FYE courses, emphasis on community building and the inclusion of a service project.

## Benefits Of the FYE Approach for Faculty and Students

Students would tend to persist in their college careers, affording them knowledge and skill for further success

FYE courses tend to build community among faculty and students

Students taking FYE courses feed into Learning Community Designed courses that also enhance student persistence.

Departments would meet students early in their academic careers and could promote their own disciplines thus possibly obtaining additional majors.

More students would remain departments or colleges with FYE based offerings, thus increasing SSCHs for those departments or colleges.



In colleges where the persistence rate is low, students would be better prepared to begin college work within particular disciplines, develop speaking and writing skills, and would tend to persist through to graduation.

## Current Learning Objectives for FYE:

- **Awareness of the University, college life, organizational structure of the university, student responsibilities, university responsibilities**
- **Active Involvement in the community through understanding the purpose and goals of service learning, and participating actively, recognizing the learning expectations**
- **Emphasis on holistic wellness applied to every part of a student's life, personal and academic**
- **Sense of academic community and a sense of belonging because of an awareness of and how to use all academic, personal, community and UALR publications including, but not limited to Career Links, the Writing center, financial aid, testing services, bookstore, cashier, Office of Campus Life, Bailey Center and many more**
- **Awareness of a learning partnership using critical thinking skills in a reflective essay, developing memory techniques using textbooks, developing sophistication in test taking**
- **Preparation for the future looking at interests, skills and aptitudes, and thinking about career possibilities**
- **Strategic planning for personal development and growth setting personal professional and time management goals, learning about personal finance management, recognizing personal value systems, and the appropriate use of passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior; developing inclusive relationships, recognizing stress management techniques and working on a plan for holistic wellness.**

