

**IN 140/IN 183: University Seminar
2006-2007 Assessment Report
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Goals

Based on feedback from University Seminar faculty and the University Studies Advisory Committee, the learning outcome goals changed during the 2006-2007 academic year. Prior to 2006-2007, the learning outcome goals for University Seminar were as follows:

1. Students in University Seminar will *develop and utilize critical and moral reasoning skills*.
2. Students in University Seminar will *effectively adjust to college life both academically and socially*.
3. Students in University Seminar will *understand the significance of contributions to community through service learning*.
4. Students in University Seminar will *develop effective communication skills that can be applied in academic and social contexts*.

Through committee discussion, USAC members determined that Goal #2 (effectively adjust to college life both academically and socially) was not a measurable learning outcome but rather a program goal of the course. Therefore, this goal was removed from Learning Outcome Goal section.

Through a series of faculty meetings, University Seminar faculty questioned the use of the word "moral" in Goal #1 (*utilize critical and moral reasoning skills*). Faculty argued that the word "moral" may carry a negative connotation, suggesting that faculty were instructing students on *what* is right as opposed to teaching them *how* to determine what is right. Rather, University Seminar faculty agreed that the word "ethical" was more reflective of the learning objective of the course.

Finally, USAC members suggested that all University Seminar learning outcome goals be re-worded to reflect best practices in learning outcome terminology. As a result of all of these revisions, the University Seminar learning outcomes goals as of June 2007 are:

Through University Seminar, students will be able to:

1. illustrate the use of *critical and ethical reasoning skills*;
2. explain the *significance of contributions to community through service learning*; and
3. demonstrate *effective communication skills that can be applied in academic and social contexts*.

Conversations regarding the "effective communication" learning outcome continue to unfold. University Seminar faculty acknowledge that they do not possess the knowledge or resources necessary for formal instruction within public speaking. However, University Seminar faculty appreciate the importance of developing communication skills among first-year students, and the majority use presentations, speeches, debates, etc. as pedagogical tools within their courses. In addition, there has been conversation among the Millikin faculty as a whole regarding the place of communication within the general education curriculum. While effective

communication remains a learning outcome goal for University Seminar, this goal will likely evolve in the future.

Snapshot

During Fall 2006 semester, 26 sections of University Seminar were offered. This included four honors sections and two "enhanced" sections for students who were co-enrolled in an enhanced Critical Writing, Reading and Researching section. Regular and honors sections averaged 20 students. The two enhanced sections averaged 15 students.

During the Fall 2006 semester, instructors for University Seminar included 15 full-time faculty members, 3 adjunct faculty members, and 3 full-time administrators. Although most instructors taught only one section, 4 instructors taught two sections.

One section of University Seminar was offered during the Spring 2007 semester. Of the 16 students enrolled in this section, 11 did not pass during the fall semester and 5 were new students. A full-time administrator taught this section of University Seminar.

The seminar topics for University Seminar were varied and were selected by individual instructors. However, all sections incorporated a service learning component, addressed orientation issues pertaining to the first-year student, and provided opportunities for students to enhance their critical thinking and communication skills.

All students enrolled in a fall University Seminar participated in First Week orientation. First Week provided students the opportunity to acclimate to campus life and to meet with their University Seminar classmates. Each section of University Seminar was linked with a Critical Writing, Reading, and Research course. These linked courses provided students the sense of a learning community for their first semester.

Methods

During 2006-2007, learning outcomes goals for University Seminar were assessed through (1) The Your First College Year student survey and (2) instructor survey.

Your First College Year Survey

Students' experience with University Seminar was assessed through the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey instrument administered by the Office of Institutional Research. The ten survey items relating specifically to University Seminar included:

1. The Orientation Topics that were covered helped me to adapt to college life.
2. The University Seminar class helped me to become more comfortable speaking in front of my classmates.
3. The University Seminar class helped me to become a more effective communicator.
4. I could see direct connection from our course content to our class service learning project.
5. Our section's service learning project was a purposeful experience.
6. The academic content of my University Seminar course was challenging.

7. I feel that the content of the course caused me to engage in a great deal of critical thinking.
8. I feel that the University Seminar course was worth taking.
9. There was a strong connection between the instructors of my IN140 and IN150 course.
10. The University Seminar course helped me feel more equipped to succeed in college.

Instructor Survey

During the 2006-2007 academic year, all instructors were invited to complete a survey of open-ended question pertaining to best practices in teaching University Seminar as well as instructional challenges. The questions posed were:

1. What are the best aspects of teaching University Seminar?
2. What are the challenges involved in teaching University Seminar?
3. In addition to helping students adjust to college life, University Seminar is meant to address the following learning outcome goals:
 - a. Illustrate use of critical/moral reasoning skills.
 - b. Explain the significance of contribution to community through service learning.
 - c. Demonstrate effective communication skills that can be applied in academic and social contexts.

Analyses

Your First College Year Survey

During the Spring 2007 semester, 228 of 422 first-year students completed the YFCY survey, representing a 54% response rate (response rate for the Spring 2006 administration was 69%). For each positive statement relating to University Seminar, respondents rated their agreement on a 4-point, likert-style scale (4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree).

The overall index score of 2.85 for the ten items relating to University Seminar increased over the Spring 2006 administration. This indicates that, overall, there were a higher percentage of students who either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the positive statements during the Spring 2007 administration compared to the Spring 2006 administration. Within three areas (orientation topics helped with adaptation, course content was challenging, course helped students feel more equipped for success), the increase in mean score was statistically significant.

Overall, the YFCY instrument indicates that freshmen find the University Seminar experience valuable. 60% either agreed or strongly agreed that University Seminar equipped them for success in college, compared to 48% in 2006. In addition, over two-thirds of respondents (68%) indicated that they thought University Seminar was a worthwhile class to take, compared to 56% in 2006.

YFCY results demonstrate support for the notion that University Seminar course content engages students in the process of academic inquiry. Nearly two-thirds (65%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the course content caused them to expand their critical thinking. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (64%) agreed or strongly agreed that course content was challenging.

As a whole, University Seminar students felt that they benefited from the inclusion of first-year orientation topics within their course. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that class orientation topics (Citizenship, Academic Strategies, Diversity, Healthy Relationships, and Wellness) helped them adapt to college life.

Overall, survey respondents felt that service learning was a valuable component of their University Seminar Experience. About two-thirds (66%) felt that their class service learning project was a purposeful experience. In addition, 62% saw a connection between their service learning project and course content.

As a whole, first-year students felt University Seminar helped them to develop effective communication skills. 62% of survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that University Seminar helped them feel more comfortable speaking in front of their classmates. In addition, 70% of respondents indicated that University Seminar made them a better communicator.

Although improved over the Spring 2006 administration, survey respondents still perceived a weak connection between their IN 140 and IN 150 instructors. Only one-half of respondents (50%) either agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong connection between their University Seminar and CWRR I instructors (compared to 38% during Spring 2006). In fact, 40% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Instructor Survey

Three University Seminar instructors completed the faculty survey during 2006-2007 (two honors instructors, one regular instructor). The following table summarizes their responses by course learning outcome goal:

Learning Goal	Faculty Best Practices	Instructional Challenges
Develop and utilize critical and moral reasoning skills.	Discuss and evaluate class text. Assign critical essays and other written assignments.	Engaging all students in a topic for the duration of the semester. Shifting student focus from grades to learning.
Effectively adjust to college life both academically and socially.	Interact with students outside of discipline. Build sense of community during First Week through shared experiences (meals, field trips). Introduce seminar topic during First Week. Introduce orientation topics during First Week.	Having enough time to cover all orientation topics adequately. Getting students to connect orientation topics beyond a single class period.

	Introduce students to campus community and Decatur community.	
Understand the significance of contributions to community through service learning.	<p>Introduce service learning early in first year.</p> <p>Reflect on service learning experience regularly throughout semester.</p> <p>Connect service learning project to class curriculum.</p>	<p>Selecting an appropriate service learning project.</p> <p>Selecting an appropriate service learning site.</p> <p>Coordinating service learning transportation.</p> <p>Managing student conflicts and special needs.</p>
Develop effective communication skills that can be applied in academic and social contexts.	<p>Encourage large group discussion.</p> <p>Assign group projects.</p> <p>Assign individual speeches.</p> <p>Assign BlackBoard postings.</p> <p>Develop web communication skills.</p>	Limited instructional experience in public speaking.