

First-Year Odyssey Seminar 10-year Impact Report

Fall 2011 through Spring 2022

The First-Year Odyssey (FYO) Seminar program at the University of Georgia (UGA) provides all first-year students an opportunity to explore, engage, and experience the breadth and depth of the academic culture at a major land-grant university. The FYO program was developed as the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as a part of the reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in 2011. The FYO signaled a change in how UGA introduced its first-year students to the academic life and culture of the University.

The FYOS program has three overarching goals with subsequent, related learning outcomes:

Goal 1. Introduce first-year students to the importance of learning and academics to engage them in the academic culture of the University.

- SLO 1: Students will be able to describe and reflect on the topic of the seminar through class discussion and written communication.
- SLO 2: Students will develop self-awareness about the reason for study and the importance of self-directed learning (intentional learning).

Goal 2. Give first-year students an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with a faculty member to encourage positive, sustained student-faculty interactions.

- SLO 3: Students will demonstrate interaction with the professor through oral and written communication.
- SLO 4: Students will communicate with faculty regarding an area of scholarship.
- SLO 5: Students will have positive perceptions of student-faculty interactions.
- SLO 6: Students will be able to describe the scholarly path of the faculty member and his/her role in the mission of the University.

Goal 3. Introduce first-year students to the instruction, research, public service, and international missions of the University and how they relate to teaching and learning in and outside the classroom to increase student understanding of and participation in the full mission of the University.

- SLO 7: Students will be able to articulate the opportunities for engagement in the University community, including opportunities to participate in research, public service, and varied forms of instruction, such as study abroad and internships, at the University of Georgia.

Growth

The FYO program requiring every first-year student to take a 1-credit course was an ambitious effort involving tenured and tenure-track faculty, a variety of administrative offices, and a significant leadership and financial commitment from senior administration. There were major changes in senior administration over the first five years, yet the commitment to the FYO program has never wavered. In fact, the stipend given to faculty members for teaching a course has increased from the original amount of \$2500 in AY2011-12 to the current amount of \$3500.

There were understandable concerns in spring 2011 that such an ambitious plan could be successfully implemented given that nearly 400 faculty would need to be recruited and prepared for a new teaching assignment, students would need to be advised about how this course would fit into their already full schedules, classrooms had to be secured, and administrative systems had to be developed to support the program. Nevertheless, these concerns were significantly reduced with the successful launch of the program in fall 2011. In AY11-12, 386 seminars were taught, enrolling all 5,780 first-year students. Ever since, 397 seminars were offered annually on average, reaching the **largest number of seminars (424) in AY21-22**. A critical element of the plan was for tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach the seminars in their areas of scholarship; in the first year of the program close to 95% of the seminars were taught by tenure-stream faculty on topics related to their research.

Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Student Survey

We administered an 18-item end-of-course student survey to measure how well the program achieved the three goals and seven SLOs. Goal 1 was assessed by 10 items, Goal 2 by 5 items, and Goal 3 by 3 items. Each item has a 5-point rating scale from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5), with a midpoint of “Neither Agree nor Disagree.” Table 2 presents the summary of student assessment of learning outcomes based on the pooled sample throughout ten years, and the annual results are displayed graphically in Figure 1.

★ **Goal 1: Introduce first-year students to the importance of learning and academics so that we engage them in the academic culture of the University.**

- Over 80% of the students surveyed indicated they participated in class discussions and group discussions led them to reflect on and engage with the seminar topic. A similar percentage felt that discussions increased their understanding of the topic.
- A lower percentage of students felt that their FYO seminar helped them to make plans for future learning (64.9%) or understand their personal goals for learning (65.4%). This is not surprising since SLO1 dealt with in-class engagement and SLO2 with potential outcomes after the seminar was completed. SLO1 remained the highest learning outcome, and SLO2 showed the highest increase rate for ten years.

★ **Goal 2: Give first-year students an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with a faculty member to encourage positive, sustained student-faculty interactions.**

- Students indicated that the FYO seminars provided them an opportunity to learn about faculty members’ roles at the University (SLO4, 82% affirmed) and the experiences that lead faculty to the University (SLO6, 79% affirmed).
- A smaller percentage of students, but still a majority of those responding, indicated that they interacted with faculty outside of class through written communication (SLO3; 69%).
- The FYO seminars were not as successful in facilitating student-faculty interactions outside of class (SLO5; 48% affirmative for in-class interactions, 44% affirmative for out-of-class interactions).
- While SLO3 and 5 tend to be lower than other outcomes, SLO 4 and 6 maintained high levels of learning gains with a growing tendency.

★ **Goal 3: Introduce first-year students to the instruction, research, public service, and international missions of the University and how they relate to teaching and learning in and outside the classroom so that we increase student understanding of and participation in the full mission of the University.**

- Seventy-three percent of FYO seminar students indicated they learned about opportunities to participate in learning outside of the classroom.
- A majority of FYO seminar students indicated they were more aware of research opportunities (66%) and service-learning (58%) outside the classroom.
- Students reported a higher level of learning gains than in previous years throughout the ten years.

Figure 1. Graphic Display of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

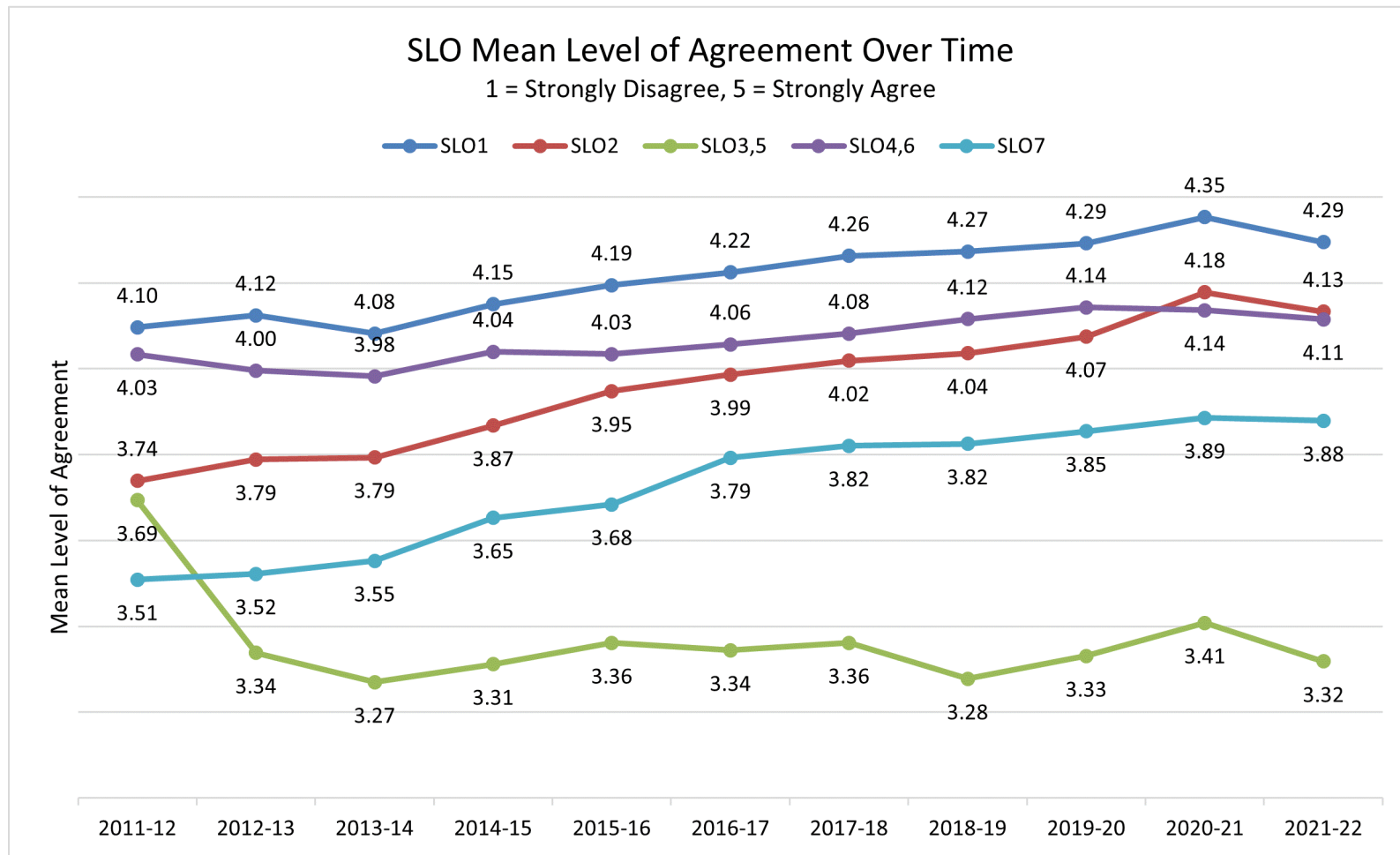


Table 2. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes through End-of-Course Student Surveys

Goal	Statement	2011-2022 (N=44,123)				
		Mean	SD	% Agree	% Disagree	% Neutral
1	I participated in class discussions. (SLO 1)	4.18	0.84	85.0	4.1	11.0
	Class discussions increased my understanding of the seminar topic. (SLO 1)	4.31	0.83	88.9	3.8	7.3
	Assignments increased my understanding of the seminar topic. (SLO 1)	4.19	0.87	84.9	4.8	10.2
	I reflected on the topic of the seminar through class discussions. (SLO 1)	4.22	0.83	86.5	4.0	9.5
	I reflected on the topic of the seminar through written communication. (SLO 1)	4.08	0.92	79.8	6.5	13.7
	Discussions encouraged reflection on the topic of the seminar. (SLO 1)	4.29	0.80	89.1	3.4	7.5
	Assignments encouraged reflection on the topic of the seminar. (SLO 2)	4.27	0.81	88.6	3.5	7.9
	My experience in this seminar helped me understand the importance of taking responsibility for my learning. (SLO 2)	3.97	0.99	73.6	8.0	18.4
	My experience in this seminar helped me make plans for future learning. (SLO 2)	3.79	1.08	64.9	12.5	22.6
	My experience in this seminar helped me understand my personal goals for learning. (SLO 2)	3.80	1.07	65.4	11.8	22.9
2	I had interactions with the instructor in class. (SLO 3,5)	3.24	1.22	48.1	31.9	20.1
	I had interactions with the instructor outside of class. (SLO 3,5)	3.15	1.20	44.3	34.3	21.5
	I interacted with the faculty through written communication. (SLO 3,5)	3.70	1.02	69.4	14.8	15.7
	I was introduced to the faculty member's role at the University (instruction, research, service). (SLO 4, 6)	4.09	0.91	82.1	6.5	11.4
	The faculty member described the experiences that led them to their work at the University. (SLO 4, 6)	4.04	0.97	79.0	8.5	12.5
3	I learned about opportunities to participate in research at UGA (e.g., Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities, summer research programs). (SLO 7)	3.73	1.11	66.4	16.7	17.0

Goal	Statement	2011-2022 (N=44,123)				
		Mean	SD	% Agree	% Disagree	% Neutral
	I learned about opportunities to participate in public service at UGA (e.g., Archway partnerships, student scholars program). (SLO 7)	3.57	1.14	58.4	20.3	21.3
	I learned about opportunities to participate in learning outside of the classroom (e.g., study abroad, internships, practicum, service learning). (SLO 7)	3.88	1.05	73.5	12.7	13.8

Faculty Survey

A similar protocol was used for the faculty survey. At the end of each semester, faculty were asked to complete a survey aligned with the FYO goals. The survey has six five-point Likert scale items from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). Three items measured Goal 1, two items measured Goal 2, and Goal 3 was measured by a single item. Table 3 shows the pooled summary of faculty responses for ten years.

- ★ In support of meeting Goal 1, faculty reported that they had frequent in-class discussions with students (89.5% affirmed), a majority of students participated in discussions (72.0% affirmed), and their students took responsibility for their own learning (71.6%). **The mean level showed a growing trajectory, followed by a slight decrease in the recent few years.**
- ★ Upon the questions regarding Goal 2, 89.2% of faculty indicated that students understood their role as a faculty member, while a lower percentage, but still more than half of the faculty (52.2%) reported that they had out-of-class interactions with their students. **Faculty reported growing learning gains of students before the notable decrease since 2019-20, attributable to the shift in the learning environment due to the pandemic.**
- ★ In support of Goal 3, a majority of the faculty (79.0%) agreed that their students learned about campus culture and academic opportunities in the seminars. **While there are ups and downs from year to year, the overall trend suggests a growth over the ten years.**

Figure 2. Graphic Display of Faculty Responses on Student Learning Outcomes Over Time

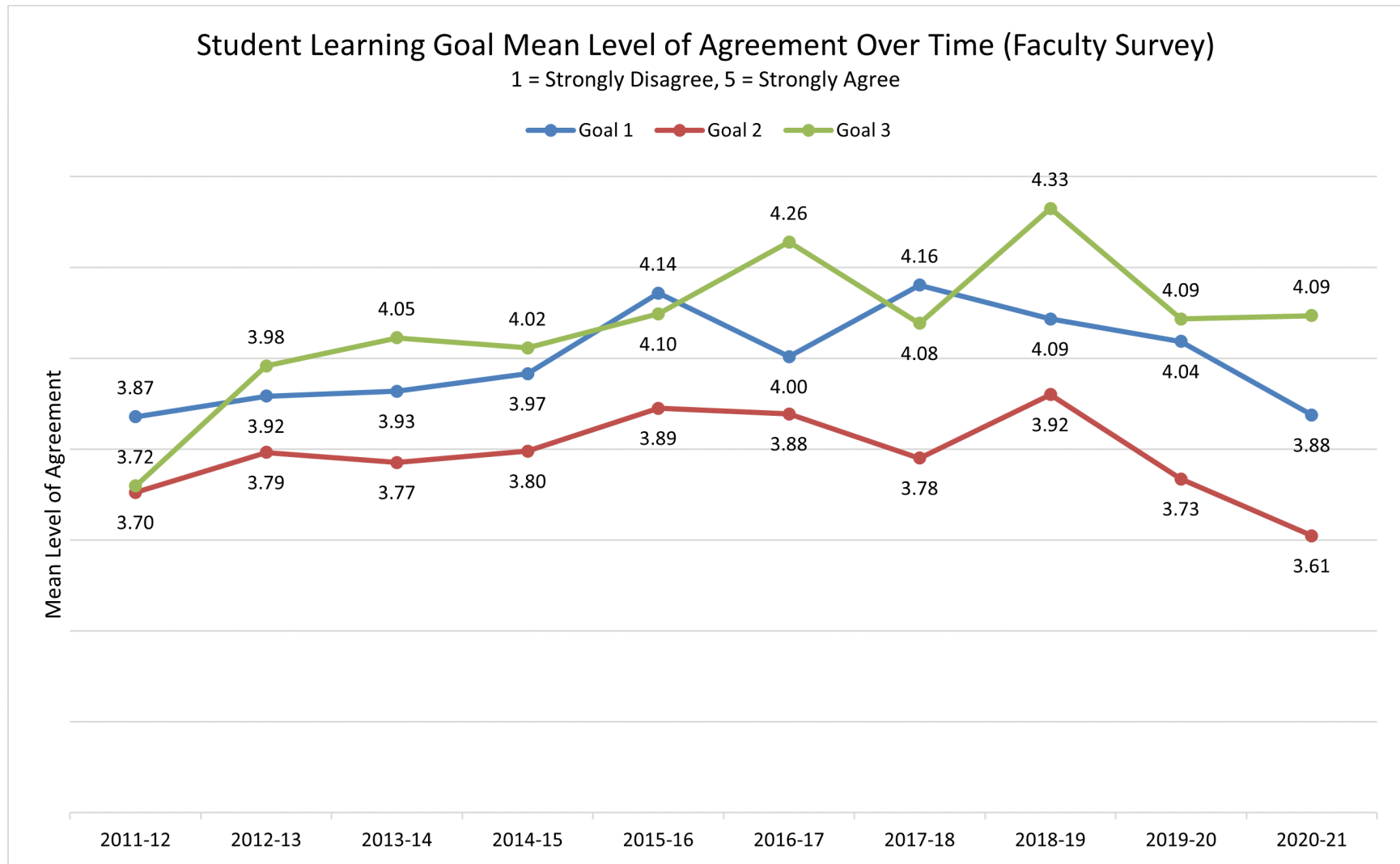


Table 3. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes through End-of-Course Faculty Surveys

Goal	Statement	2011-2022 (N=1,263)				
		Mean	SD	% Agree	% Disagree	% Neutral
1	I had frequent discussions with students in my seminar.	4.36	0.88	89.5	4.4	6.1
	A majority of students participated in seminar discussions.	3.78	1.08	72.0	16.9	11.1
	Students took responsibility for their own learning.	3.83	0.92	71.6	8.9	19.5
2	I had interactions with students outside of the seminar.	3.33	1.16	52.2	30.1	17.6
	Students understood my role as a faculty member at the University.	4.22	0.76	89.2	2.9	7.8
3	Students learned about campus culture and academic opportunities.	4.04	0.88	79.0	6.3	14.6

Reflection

After ten years, we have observed the successful implementation of our First-Year Odyssey Seminars for incoming students. Reported learning outcomes have shown a continuous improvement over time. The FYO program has certainly become a signature pedagogical approach for the University and has produced demonstrable outcomes in terms of the proposed goals. Even though we notice a slight recession at AY20-21 or AY21-22, the general trajectory is still encouraging. In particular, SLO1, addressing students' ability to independently describe and reflect on what they learned in class, is not only improving but maintaining the highest reported learning throughout the ten years. Students' reflection on their attitude as intentional learners shows a continuous and most salient advancement for ten years (SLO2). We should also note that the second largest growth was found in SLO7 - students' consciousness about various learning opportunities provided by UGA through research, public service, or instructions - which would guide our students to actively engage in their learning throughout their time at UGA.