

Quality Enhancement Plan Impact Report: First-Year Odyssey Seminar Program Fall 2011 through Spring 2016

Title and Brief Description of QEP as Initially Presented

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.

Designing a QEP to transform student learning at a large research university presented a myriad of challenges. To meet these challenges, the University's QEP Team of almost three dozen faculty, administrators, staff, students, and alumni took advantage of campus interest and engagement in proposing possible topics for our QEP. Through an inclusive, grass-roots process spanning three years, the QEP Team examined the history of student learning at the University, reviewed the literature and best practices, listened carefully to input from students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and debated the resulting ideas. Emerging from this collective effort to improve teaching and learning were three overarching goals:

1. Introduce first-year students to the importance of learning and academics to engage them in the academic culture of the University;
2. Give first-year students an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with a faculty member to encourage positive, sustained student-faculty interactions; and,
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.

The University faculty, taking up these goals and working through the faculty governance process, developed and approved the FYO seminar requirement. FYO seminars are 1-credit academic classes taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty, tied to faculty scholarship, graded A-F, and counted as credit towards degrees. Typically, FYO seminars meet one hour a week for a semester. In addition, the FYO program requires students to participate in campus events. Also, the FYO plan encourages mentoring relationships and provides students with a gateway to critical intellectual programs and resources at the University, including undergraduate research, service-learning, study abroad, and the libraries.

Succinct List of Initial Goals and Intended 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 related 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.

Changes and Rationale

The FYO program that required 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. As seen in Table 1, 386 seminars were taught in AY11-12, enrolling all 5,780 first-year students. 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.

Given the success in the program's first year, there was no evidence that major changes were needed; thus, the program's key elements have remained in place through all five years covered in this Impact Report. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of seminars taught by research faculty has remained extremely high, with the past three years ranging from 98% to 100% each semester. A second major element is to maintain a small class size to optimize the opportunities for student-faculty interaction in and outside of the classroom. Seminars are capped at 15 students, with a few exceptions to allow faculty to add students on a case-by-case basis up to a cap of 18. A few seminars linked to our Learning Community program are capped at 20. Faculty have enjoyed the opportunity to teach in the program, and thus we benefit by having many faculty teach over several years, and are able to recruit new faculty to teach each year. Finally, we have had an extensive range of faculty teaching the seminars, as between 80 to 100 departments and all schools and colleges are represented each year.

Table 1. Summary of Student and Faculty Participation in FYO Seminars, 2011-2016

Semester	Seminars Offered	Students Enrolled	% Incoming Class Enrolled	% Tenure Track Instructors	Departments Represented
Fall 2011	331	4986	86.3	92.7	84
Spring 2012	55	794	13.7	96.4	41
Fall 2012	353	4328	84.0	93.3	86
Spring 2013	57	823	16.0	93.3	40
Fall 2013	312	4707	85.7	99.1	79

Spring 2014	56	787	14.3	100.0	37
Fall 2014	311	4852	86.5	98.7	79
Spring 2015	54	755	13.5	98.2	34
Fall 2015	323	4745	85.4	98.5	77
Spring 2016	55	814	14.6	100.0	37
Fall 2016	355	5110	90.4	97.8	84

Although the key elements of the FYO program have remained constant over five years, we have engaged in a continuous quality improvement process to improve the program. We have collected end-of-course student and faculty surveys, surveyed our faculty on their writing-to-learn strategies, and appointed a Faculty Advisory Committee to guide the program. The data from these inputs and recommendations of the Faculty Advisory Committee have resulted in the following improvements to the program:

Changes Made to Further the Goals of the FYO Program

(year initiated in parentheses)

- Improved collaboration with Office of Admissions and Orientation Leaders to ensure communication of the goals of the program to students (2012).
- Created a fall Welcome Back event to introduce new faculty, and remind returning faculty, of the goals of the program (2013).
- Updated FAQs to clarify student and faculty questions regarding the goals of the program (2013).
- Created a video highlighting faculty teaching in the program (2014), and subsequently revised the video to include student testimonials (2015), to emphasize the goals of the program to students during Orientation.
- Presented to students during Orientation “Arch” sessions in order to highlight the goals of the program and emphasize the academic rigor of the program (2013).
- Attended New Faculty Orientation to recruit faculty members who have not taught in the program and to promote the goals of the program (2014).
- Co-sponsored workshops and a speaker series with the Center for Teaching and Learning to further program goals of student/faculty interaction and attending events on campus (2015).
- Attended Advising Resources Fair to reiterate the goals of the program to advisors across campus (2015).
- Created Faculty Guidelines in collaboration with the FYO Faculty Advisory Committee to increase consistency in the implementation of the goals of the program across all seminars (2016).

Changes Made in Support of Faculty and Teaching

- Increased faculty compensation from \$2500 to \$3000 (2012).
- Increased faculty compensation from \$3000 to \$3500 (2015).
- Created the FYO Faculty Teaching Award to highlight faculty members who exceeded the goals of the program in teaching an FYO seminar (2014).
- Partnered with the Center for Teaching and Learning to organize faculty luncheons to provide additional faculty development opportunities (2012).
- Encouraged faculty to utilize out-of-class activity funding to further increase student/faculty interaction (2014).
- Hosted an End-of-Year Celebration in support of faculty and the success of the program (2014).

Changes Made as a Result of Assessment

- Revised website based on Faculty Advisory Committee suggestions (2016).
- Conducted writing surveys to assess how faculty incorporate writing in their FYO seminars (2015 and 2016).
- Encouraged an increase in fall enrollment by approving additional seminars and promoting the benefits of fall enrollment to students and advisors (2016).
- Utilized retrospective interviews (2014/2015) and retrospective survey (2016) to assess long-term impacts of the program.
- Eliminated the use of BCSSE/NSSE as long-term impact assessment tools.
- Discontinued focus groups with students (2012).

Changes Made to Enhance Program Processes

- Developed an online room scheduling process (2012).
- Revised seminar proposal submission process to allow faculty to resubmit a previously taught seminar (2013).
- Created student attributes to limit registration to first-year students in new Banner registration system (2014).
- Created an FYO grade appeals process (2016).

Direct Impact on Student Outcomes

The FYO program constituted a major change in how we introduced first-year students to the academic life and culture of the University. As a large research-intensive university, with an entering class of about 5500 students, we wanted to provide an intimate educational experience that would enable students to become successful in their academic careers. In short, we wanted to “shrink the University” by allowing the students to establish a relationship in a small class with our tenured and tenure-track faculty members.

To determine whether the program achieved its goals, we examined the impact of the FYO program on student outcomes in three ways. First, we conducted end-of-course student surveys to assess the extent to which the seven student learning outcomes were achieved. Second, we surveyed students one and two years after their completion of the FYO seminar regarding the ongoing relationships with the faculty members. We expected this would provide a measure of the sustainability of the FYO program’s impact. Finally, we examined the one-year retention and first-year grade point averages of students who took the FYO seminar in the fall versus the spring. We expected that the seminar might provide a greater benefit for those students who enrolled in the fall semester compared to the spring, given that this is the time they make the transition to the University.

Student Assessment of Learning Outcomes

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.” The student response rate was very high across the five years, with a range of 69.1% to 77.4%. Table 2 presents the summary of student assessment of learning outcomes, and the 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.

The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed with all of the items pertaining to Goal 1 (SLO 1 and 2) across the five years. Student assessment of SLO 1 was very high, with over 80% of students indicating that they participated in class discussions, believed that discussions encouraged reflection on the seminar topic, and that discussions increased their understanding of the topic. There was a somewhat lower assessment of achievement for SLO 2, with about 60% of students indicating that the FYO seminar helped them understand personal goals

for learning and make plans for future learning. This is not surprising since SLO 1 deals with the extent of students' engagement in the seminar, whereas SLO 2 addresses the potential outcomes from the seminar. Overall, relatively few students disagreed with any of the items, ranging from 4% to 14%.

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

Students assessed SLO 4 and 6 very positively, indicating that they were introduced to the faculty member's role at the University (82%) and that faculty members described the experiences that led them to the University (77%). Students had a less positive assessment of SLO 3 and 5. Although 68% indicated that they interacted with faculty through written communication, only 45% of students had interactions with faculty outside of class. In general, then, we found that the small class size helped students engage with faculty in a more intimate course setting, although extending that outside the classroom was not as successful.

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.

The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed with all 3 of the items pertaining to Goal 3. Students reported the highest level of agreement on learning about opportunities to participate in learning outside the classroom (70%). About 61% of students agreed or strongly agreed they learned about opportunities to participate in research, and more than half (52%) said they learned about opportunities for public service.

Figure 1. Graphic Display of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

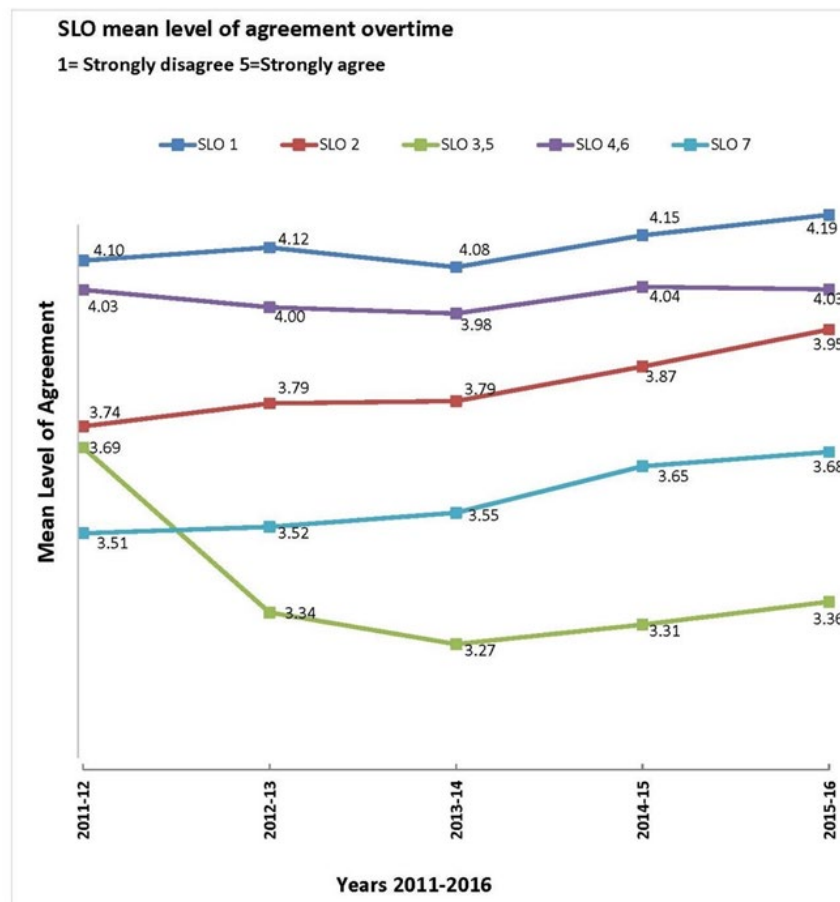


Table 2. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes through End-of-Course Student Surveys

Goal	Statement	2011-2016 (N=19,937)				
		Mean	(SD)	% Agree	% Disagree	% Neutral
1	I participated in class discussions. (SLO 1)	4.10	(0.85)	82.8	4.8	12.4
	Class discussions increased my understanding of the seminar topic. (SLO 1)	4.24	(0.84)	87.7	4.2	8.0
	Assignments increased my understanding of the seminar topic. (SLO 1)	4.10	(0.88)	82.6	5.5	11.9
	I reflected on the topic of the seminar through class discussions. (SLO 1)	4.14	(0.84)	84.5	4.6	10.9
	I reflected on the topic of the seminar through written communication. (SLO 1)	3.99	(0.93)	77.1	7.5	15.4
	Discussions encouraged reflection on the topic of the seminar. (SLO 1)	4.22	(0.81)	87.8	3.7	8.5
	Assignments encouraged reflection on the topic of the seminar. (SLO 2)	4.19	(0.82)	87.1	3.9	9.1
	My experience in this seminar helped me understand the importance of taking responsibility for my learning. (SLO 2)	3.81	(1.01)	67.7	9.9	22.4
	My experience in this seminar helped me make plans for future learning. (SLO 2)	3.66	(1.09)	59.9	14.3	25.7
	My experience in this seminar helped me understand my personal goals for learning. (SLO 2)	3.65	(1.08)	59.4	14.1	26.5
2	I had interactions with the instructor in class. (SLO 3,5)	3.36	(1.19)	52.8	27.5	19.7
	I had interactions with the instructor outside of class. (SLO 3,5)	3.17	(1.17)	44.8	32.6	22.6
	I interacted with the faculty through written communication. (SLO 3,5)	3.66	(0.99)	68.2	14.9	16.9
	I was introduced to the faculty member's role at the University (instruction, research, service). (SLO 4, 6)	4.06	(0.89)	81.6	6.4	12.0
	The faculty member described the experiences that led them to their work at the University. (SLO 4, 6)	3.98	(0.97)	77.0	9.4	13.6
3	I learned about opportunities to participate in research at UGA (e.g., Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities, summer research programs). (SLO 7)	3.59	(1.11)	61.3	19.3	19.5

I learned about opportunities to participate in public service at UGA (e.g., Archway partnerships, student scholars program). (SLO 7)	3.41	(1.12)	52.3	23.3	24.4
I learned about opportunities to participate in learning outside of the classroom (e.g., study abroad, internships, practicum, service learning). (SLO 7)	3.75	(1.06)	69.5	14.6	15.9

Impact of FYO Seminar Program on Ongoing Relationships with Faculty

Our hope for the FYO program was that the students' engagement with faculty would allow them to foster faculty-student bonds that might extend beyond the classroom and the semester. We examined the program's impact on ongoing relationships with faculty by surveying students in May 2016 who took the FYO seminar in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years. Of the 11,101 students in the sample, the response rate was 13.2% (N = 1,464).

As shown below in Table 3, slightly less than one in five respondents (18%) reported that they have been in contact with their FYO faculty since completing the seminar. Students in the 2014-15 year (21%) were more likely to have been in contact than students in the previous year (16%). Of those students who reported having contact with their faculty, the majority (59%) said they had been in contact only one or two times. On the other hand, one in six (17%) said they had interacted with the instructor 10 or more times. Students from the two cohorts reported similar percentages in each of the frequency categories.

Those students who reported not having contact with their FYO faculty were asked if they would be comfortable contacting the faculty member if they had a need to do so. As shown in Table 4, about six in ten students (61%) said they would feel comfortable contacting their FYO faculty if they needed to do so. Students from the 2014-15 academic year (65%) were more likely to say they were comfortable doing so than students from 2013-14 (57%), and that difference was significant ($t = 2.7, p < .01$). These ongoing relationships are likely to contribute to students' success during their undergraduate careers. With nearly 20% of the entire student body having some, and often frequent, contact with their faculty, we would expect that the FYO program will have had a sustainable impact. The 60% of the student body that would be comfortable contacting their FYO faculty is encouraging because the students surveyed are either second-years or third-years who may have a need to contact these faculty in the future.

Table 3. Frequency of Contact With the FYO Faculty Member

Academic Year	N	1-2 times	3-6 times	7-9 times	10 or more times
2013-14	120	60.8%	17.5%	4.2%	17.5%
2014-15	144	57.3%	21.0%	5.6%	16.8%
Total	264	58.7%	19.3%	4.9%	17.0%

Table 4. Students Who Would Be Comfortable Contacting Their FYOS Faculty

Academic Year	Total N	N	Percent
2013-14	644	367	57.0%
2014-15	553	357	64.6%
Total	1,197	724	60.5%

Comparison of First-Year Retention and GPA by FYO Participation in the Fall and Spring Semesters

As our leadership team attended conferences and engaged in national conversations about first-year experiences, our interest grew in better understanding the full scope of the impact our FYO seminars were having on our students; therefore, we extended our assessment activities to examine how our program might affect first-year retention and GPA. As noted above, the requirement for the first-time full-time students is that they must enroll in an FYO course in fall or spring semester of their first year. Students meet with advisors regarding registration during the two-day orientation sessions in the summer prior to matriculation. Although about 90% of students choose to enroll in fall semester, the remaining students enroll in spring semester for a variety of reasons.

Tables 5 and 6 show the results for students who took the FYO seminars in fall and spring semesters in each of the first five years of the program. Comparison of students in the two groups showed no significant differences on academic, social, and demographic variables, including workload (credits attempted), entering academic ability (academic index), socio-economic factors (first-semester Pell amount, first-generation status, median household income), and other demographic variables (gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, distance from home, Greek participation, and other first-semester course attempts like MATH 1101, MATH 1113, and CHEM 1211). Although there may be other unmeasured variables that distinguish the two groups, there is no evidence of selection bias other than the term of their participation in the FYO program.

Table 5 shows a consistent pattern of higher first-year retention for students who took the FYO seminar in the fall semester, ranging from a low of 1.36% for the fall 2012 cohort to a high of 5.16% for the fall 2011 cohort. The other three cohorts were much closer to the 2011 cohort, with the average showing a 3.51 higher retention for students enrolled in the fall semester. Based on a cohort of 5500 students, we can infer that taking the FYO seminar in fall semester led to 193 more students being retained for the beginning of the second year. The study included the first-time, full-time cohort of students. Transfer students and first-year students who began spring semester were not included.

Table 5-Comparison of First-Year Retention Rates by Fall FYOS Participation and Cohort

Cohort	Participated in FYOS Fall Year One				Did Not Participate in FYOS Fall Year One			
	# Total Cohort	% Total Cohort	# Retained	% Retained	# Total Cohort	% Total Cohort	# Retained	% Retained
Fall 2011	4,794	87.64	4,538	94.66	676	12.36	605	89.50
Fall 2012	4,266	86.67	4,025	94.35	656	13.33	610	92.99
Fall 2013	4,638	88.88	4,380	94.44	580	11.12	533	91.90
Fall 2014	4,674	89.20	4,465	95.53	566	10.80	518	91.52
Fall 2015	4,648	88.57	4,437	95.46	600	11.43	546	91.00

Note: Cohort definition is first-time full-time students first matriculated in summer / fall of the Cohort Year

Retained is defined as the number of students enrolled the following fall

Table 6 likewise shows a consistent pattern of higher academic achievement for students who took the FYO seminar in fall semester. Students are assigned a predicted GPA based on their entering academic ability, and the fall FYOS students showed no significant difference between their predicted and actual GPA for fall and spring grades. In contrast, the students who took the FYO seminar during spring semester significantly

underperformed their predicted GPA in fall semester, ranging from .09 to .19 with an average of .13 lower. It is worth noting that the spring semester grades for the fall FYO students were the same or lower than their fall semester grades. In contrast, the spring semester grades for the spring FYO students were higher in the spring (when they were enrolled in the FYOS) than in the fall for all five years.

Table 6-Comparison of Predicted / Actual Semester GPA by Fall FYOS Participation and Cohort

	Participated in FYOS Fall Year One						Did Not Participate in FYOS Fall Year One					
	Academic Index		Actual Fall GPA		Actual Spring GPA ¹		Academic Index		Actual Fall Term GPA		Actual Spring GPA ¹	
Cohort	#	Avg	#	Avg	#	Avg	#	Avg	#	Avg	#	Avg
Fall 2011	4,792	3.29	4,786	3.26	4,696	3.26	676	3.23	674	3.10	649	3.13
Fall 2012	4,265	3.34	4,251	3.35	4,168	3.34	656	3.31	654	3.20	635	3.26
Fall 2013	4,637	3.36	4,611	3.35	4,539	3.36	578	3.30	574	3.11	559	3.19
Fall 2014	4,669	3.40	4,659	3.37	4,588	3.35	562	3.35	562	3.20	548	3.28
Fall 2015	4,642	3.42	4,629	3.43	4,561	3.38	599	3.37	597	3.26	581	3.30

Note: Spring semester statistics only include those students who were enrolled in that semester.

The results in Table 6 compare the results for the population of students, and we conducted a stronger test of our hypothesis by performing the same comparison using the student as the unit of analysis. We conducted a “pre-post” analysis for each student comparing their entering academic index (predicted GPA) and their actual first semester GPA. In essence, this paired difference approach would more effectively control for unobserved characteristics by using each student as their own control. Table 7 shows the same significant pattern of spring FYO students significantly underperforming their predicted GPA, while fall FYO students show no significant difference, except for a slight .03 difference for the 2014 cohort. Although these findings are supportive of a positive impact between participation in the FYO seminar and student outcomes, we cannot establish a causal link at this time and will continue to study this.

Table 7-Paired t-test Results by Fall FYOS Participation and Cohort

Cohort	Participated in FYOS Fall Year One		Did Not Participate in FYOS Fall Year One	
	#	Avg Diff (Actual – Predicted)	#	Avg Diff (Actual - Predicted)
Fall 2011	4,785	-0.02	674	-0.13***
Fall 2012	4,250	0.01	654	-0.11***
Fall 2013	4,610	-0.01	572	-0.19***
Fall 2014	4,654	-0.03***	558	-0.15***
Fall 2015	4,623	0.02	597	-0.11***

Note: A difference score (actual Fall GPA and predicted GPA) was determined for each student
 Sample size reflects pairs where a predicted GPA (academic index) and actual term GPA were available
 *** denotes significant at < 0.0001 level

Reflections and Moving Forward

We believe that the University of Georgia has made significant progress toward our goal of enhancing student engagement in the academic culture of the University. We are particularly gratified that our tenured and tenure-track faculty have collaborated with the administration to provide every single first-year student enrolled at UGA for the past five years with an academically challenging course in their research area. The FYO program has certainly become a signature pedagogical approach for the University and has produced demonstrable outcomes in terms of the proposed student learning outcomes, students' continuing engagement with their FYO faculty, and clear improvements in student success as measured by first-year retention and first-year academic performance.

Our overall sense of accomplishment is paired with our desire to engage in an evidence-based continuous improvement process. As outlined in this report, we have used results of student and faculty surveys and educational research studies to improve the program each year. We have used the evidence to further the program's three goals, better support faculty and teaching, create better assessment strategies, and enhance the program's logistical processes. The program continues to thrive. In fall 2016, most faculty who had previously taught an FYO seminar applied to teach one again, and 46 faculty taught an FYO seminar for the first time. As in past years, 98% of the faculty for fall semester are tenured or tenure-track.

An ambitious change was made to the FYO program in spring 2016 and was informed by the improved retention and academic performance results reported in the previous section. We believed that these results compelled us to advise students to take the FYO seminar in the fall semester. Thus, we added 32 more seminars in fall 2016 compared to fall 2015 and worked closely with advisors to encourage students to take the FYO seminar in fall. So far, our efforts have been successful, as 90.4% of the first-year students enrolled in an FYO seminar in fall 2016 compared to an average of 85.6% in the program's first five years.

As we look ahead, we plan to examine the retention rates and academic performance for these students in fall 2017 and beyond to determine if these cohorts of students have the same academic success as those in the first five years. We also are looking at ways to expand our core student learning outcomes assessment methodologies to include some direct measures to assess student achievement of some learning outcomes.