

# Introduction

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We have heard it said time and again, that first-year seminar programs are only as strong the instructors who teach in them and the instructor development initiatives that undergird them. Yet, 20.8% of respondents to the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars reported that instructor training was not offered on their campuses (Padgett & Keup, 2011). Of those offering training, only half required it. Because the first-year seminar is a relatively new discipline in higher education, many, if not most, of the instructors teaching these courses today did not take the seminar during their own collegiate experience and therefore lack personal experience with the goals, methods, and management of such courses. For that reason among many others, preparing instructors for teaching first-year seminars can be a challenging but necessary undertaking.

This book is the second in a multi-volume series focusing on designing, implementing, and assessing first-year seminars. Each volume looks at a different aspect of seminar design or administration and offers suggestions for practice grounded in the literature on teaching and learning, research on first-year seminars, and campus-based examples. As an outgrowth of the University 101 course at the University of South Carolina, the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is firmly grounded in faculty development initiatives, having sponsored workshops and published resources on the topic throughout its 30-year history. In fact, this is the third publication from the National Resource Center on instructor development for first-year seminar programs. The first publication was a short 18-page booklet, *Freshman Seminar Instructor Training: Guidelines for Design and Implementation* by John N. Gardner, published by the Center in 1992. The booklet, now out of print, was written in the form of questions and answers, addressing such basics as the rationale for instructor training; the scheduling and frequency of training events; identification and selection of facilitators; and organizational, conceptual, and content considerations. Then in 1999, Mary Stuart Hunter and Tracy L. Skipper edited *Solid Foundations: Building Success for First-Year Seminars Through Instructor Training and Development*. This monograph,

also out of print, offered a research-based rationale for implementing an instructor training program and described potential content and organization of instructor training programs. Thus, this third publication on first-year seminar instructor development from the National Resource Center revisits the topics in the earlier publications, while also for the first time in book format, providing attention to evaluation as a critical element in instructor development. The theoretical foundations of faculty development and teaching and learning initiatives that inform first-year seminar instructor preparation and ongoing support are also central topics. The treatment of faculty development in this publication focuses on instruction in first-year seminars. As such, the reader will see many parallels between aspects of faculty development and the content and pedagogy of the first-year seminar.

The volume opens by making a case for an ongoing commitment to instructor development in chapter 1. We begin with a broad treatment of the current educational context and the critical student learning outcomes for the 21st century. Higher education, beginning with first-year courses, will play a central role in meeting this century's economic, political, and social realities for both students and the larger global society. Obviously, college teaching is a primary factor in achieving these goals, and this chapter makes the case for an ongoing commitment to faculty development programs. We also describe the connection between teaching, engagement, and student persistence and how faculty development initiatives can help campuses achieve institutional retention goals. After providing the history and context of faculty development as an important undertaking in the academy, we define it and offer a learning cycle as a model for planning and implementing initiatives.

Chapter 2 provides a basic overview of planning and organizing faculty development programs. It addresses a strategic approach to developing first-year seminar instructor training efforts and offers suggestions for continuous faculty development training and shorter term, even one-shot, programs. Elements of successful instructor training programs are offered and potential formats are described. The chapter concludes with an important discussion of evaluating training initiatives.

Designing successful training and development programs is dependent on many variables including institutional context and traditions, trainer expertise and experience, goals of the training program, level of teaching preparation and experience of the seminar instructors, and availability of resources. The fact that there is no single *right* way to design and deliver training for first-year

seminar instructors is both challenging and freeing. Yet, understanding how people learn is a common and foundational aspect of designing and delivering quality instructor development initiatives. Chapter 3 addresses assumptions related to adult learning and delves into a summary of important findings that can help designers better understand the dynamics of learning. Thus, the process of learning is central to this chapter.

Chapter 4 opens with a framework for determining training content by considering learning outcomes, instructor variables, learner variables, learning processes, learning context, course content, and instructional processes. The chapter also addresses some specific topics important for instructor training related to the first-year seminar, including student development theory, learning goals for first-year students, institutional context, and content sequencing. In the first-year seminar, the learning process is frequently as, if not more, important as the content of the course. In this way, the *process* of teaching the seminar becomes important content for instructor development events. To this end, the chapter describes a variety of teaching strategies that can be used in professional development events to serve as models for the seminar classroom.

Chapter 5 addresses evaluation as a critical, yet often untapped resource, for instructor development. Encouraging reflection and providing feedback to individual instructors is a valuable way to enhance their teaching abilities. This chapter offers a detailed description for using instructor evaluation as a developmental tool to promote faculty growth.

The first five chapters offer guidance on designing instructor development initiatives, and in chapter 6, we move in a slightly different direction, exploring approaches for building and maintaining a dedicated instructional corps for the first-year seminar. The first part of the chapter focuses on recruiting new instructors to teach first-year seminars, outlining desired instructor characteristics and ideas for identifying pools of, and strategies for recruiting, potential instructors. Yet, first-year seminar directors also understand that successful recruitment is not sufficient to sustain a quality program. Faculty development does not end when the semester begins. As such, the chapter explores factors that motivate instructors to begin (and continue) teaching in the seminar and addresses strategies for cultivating ongoing relationships with seminar instructors through community building, communication, and involvement in program evaluation and improvement efforts.