



LET'S TALK DATA: RESULTS FROM 10- YEAR LITERATURE REVIEW ON FIRST- YEAR SEMINARS

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Based on research conducted within the past decade, what impact, if any, does the first-year seminar have on student success outcomes such as grades, persistence, and graduation?

2. Based on research conducted within the past decade, what type of course, modality, or approach in the first-year seminar yields the greatest benefits?

2



WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

3

SEARCH PROCESS

Terms

"first-year seminar"

or

"student success course"

1399 Articles

Databases

- Academic Search Ultimate
- APA PsycArticles
- APA PsycInfo
- Business Source Complete
- Education Source
- ERIC

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PARAMETERS

2014-
2024

Peer-
reviewed

597 Articles; After Removing Duplicates, 422

5

CRITERIA

Inclusion

- Data on overall effectiveness of first-year seminar
- Evidence related to impact of different types of first-year seminar courses
- Findings on effects of course methods or techniques

Exclusion

- Descriptive data only
- First-year experience or high-impact practice overall vs. course
- Investigations of specific modules or targeted populations

72 Articles Included in Review

6

LITERATURE SEARCH PROCEDURE

Step	Action	Number of Articles
1	Used search terms “first-year seminar” or “student success course” in Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, Business Source Complete, Education Source, and ERIC	1,399
2	Set date parameters 2014–present (January 2024) and peer-reviewed journals only	597
3	Removed duplicates	424
4	Title scan applying <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion criteria (contain data on the effectiveness of first-year seminar overall, provide evidence related to the impact of different types of first-year seminar courses, or share findings on the effects of course methods or techniques) • Exclusion criteria (descriptive data only and not on effectiveness of the course, focused on first-year experience or high-impact practices overall versus the seminar specifically, investigated specific modules such as library session, related explicitly to COVID-19 pandemic or targeted populations such as international students, transfer students, students with disabilities or veterans) criteria 	134
5	Full article review applying the same inclusion and exclusion criteria	72

7



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STUDENT SUCCESS OUTCOMES



Higher Grades



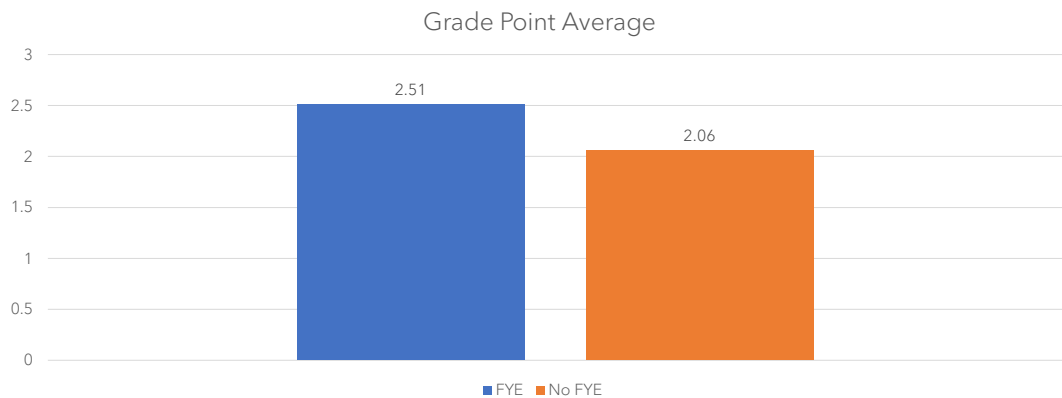
Higher Persistence Rates



Higher Graduation Rates

9

AN EXAMPLE: INCREASED GRADES (LANE & SAXON, 2024)



10

IMPROVED GRADES AND STUDENT POPULATIONS

Women

First-generation

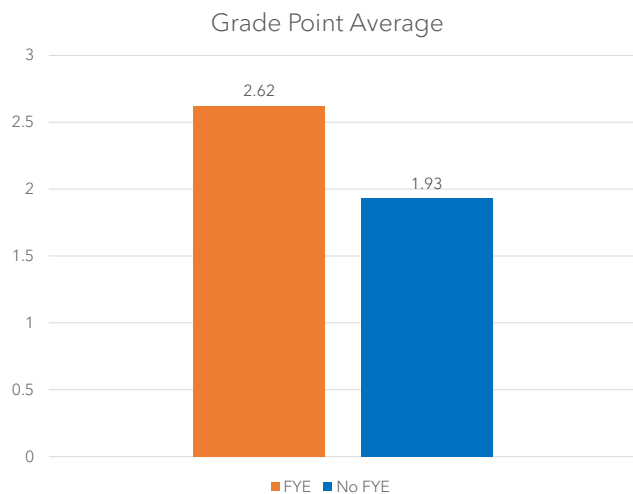
Men of color

Undeclared
students

Students with
low expected
family
contribution

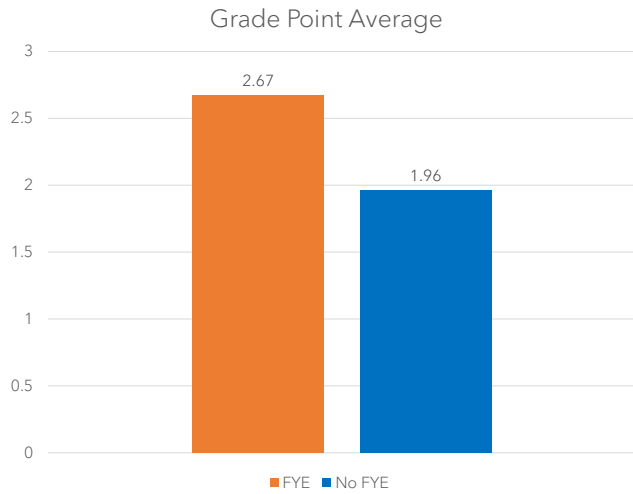
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AN EXAMPLE: MEN OF COLOR SWANSON ET AL. (2017)



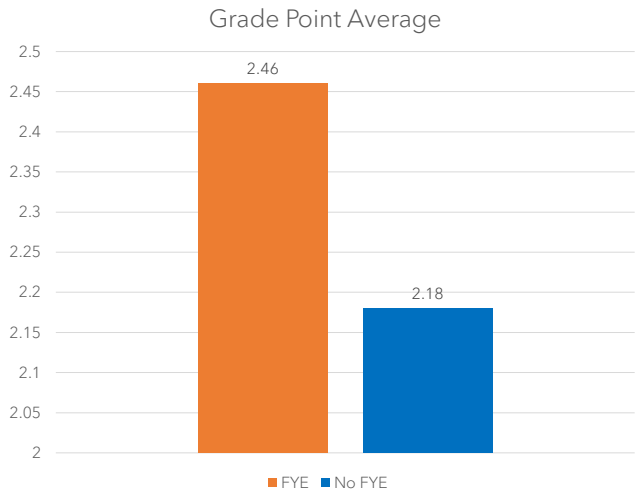
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**AN EXAMPLE:
FIRST
GENERATION
VAUGHAN ET AL.
(2014)**



13

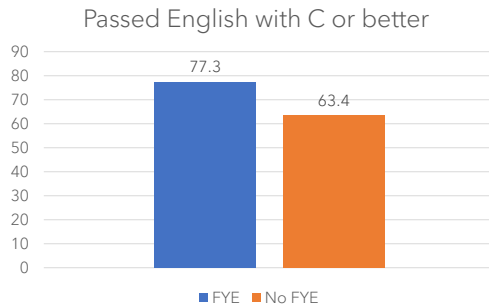
**AN EXAMPLE:
UNDECLARED
STUDENTS
PICKENPAUGH ET
AL. (2021)**



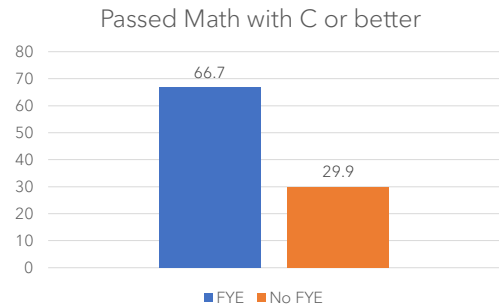
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IMPROVED COURSE GRADES (KIMBARK ET AL., 2017)

English

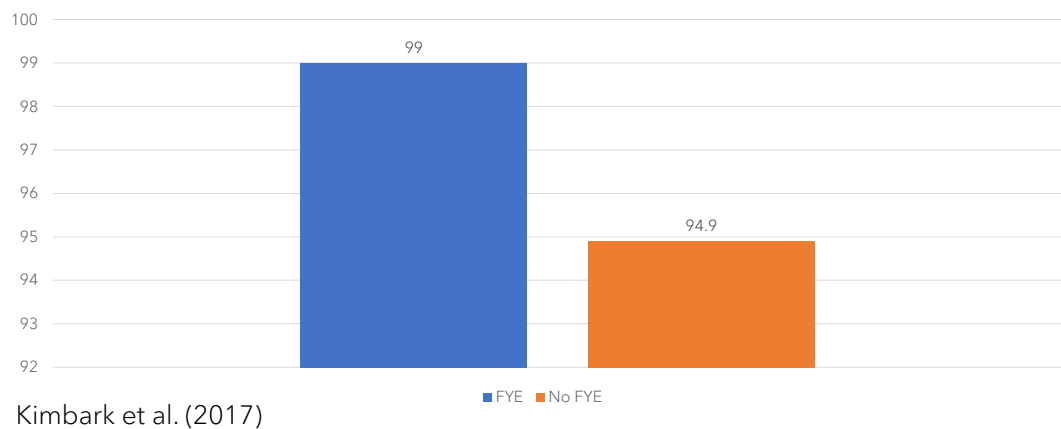


Math



15

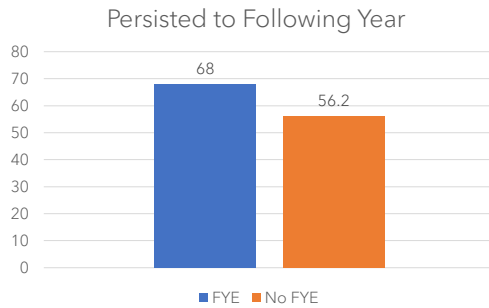
HIGHER FALL TO SPRING PERSISTENCE RATES



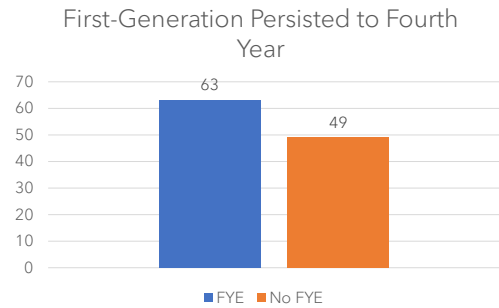
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HIGHER LONG-TERM PERSISTENCE RATES

Kimbark et al. (2017)



Graham et al. (2023)



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IMPROVED PERSISTENCE AND STUDENT POPULATIONS

Women

First-generation

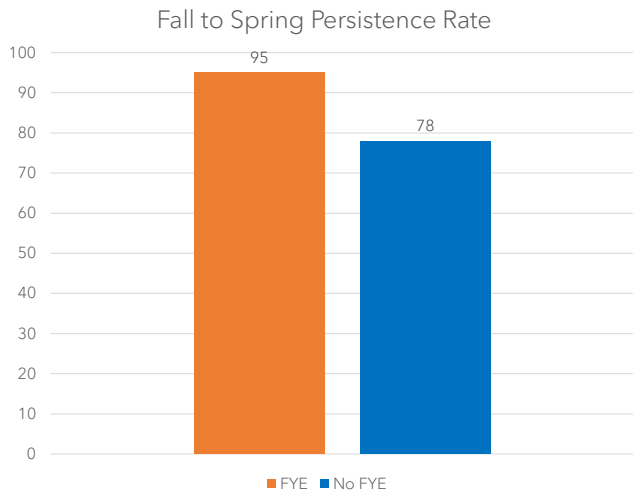
Men of color

Undeclared students

Students with low expected family contribution

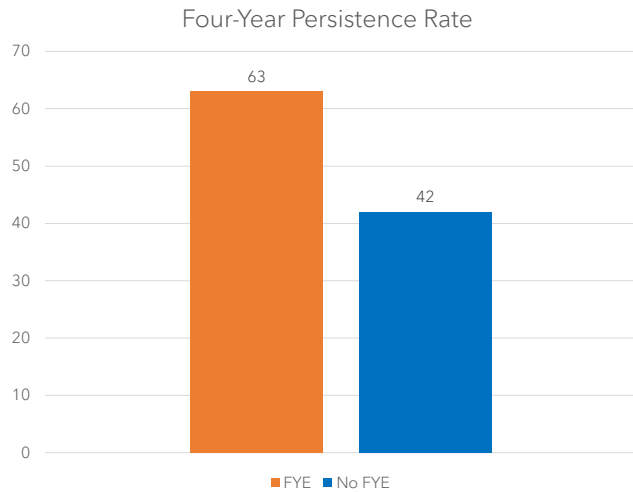
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**AN EXAMPLE:
FIRST
GENERATION
STUDENTS
VAUGHAN ET AL.
(2014)**



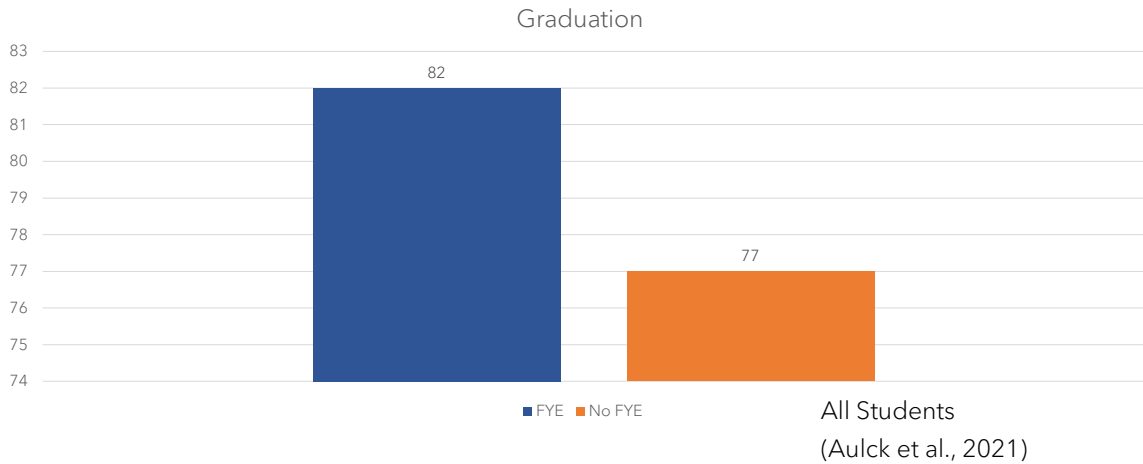
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**AN EXAMPLE:
MEN OF
COLOR
SWANSON ET AL.
(2017)**



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HIGHER GRADUATION RATES



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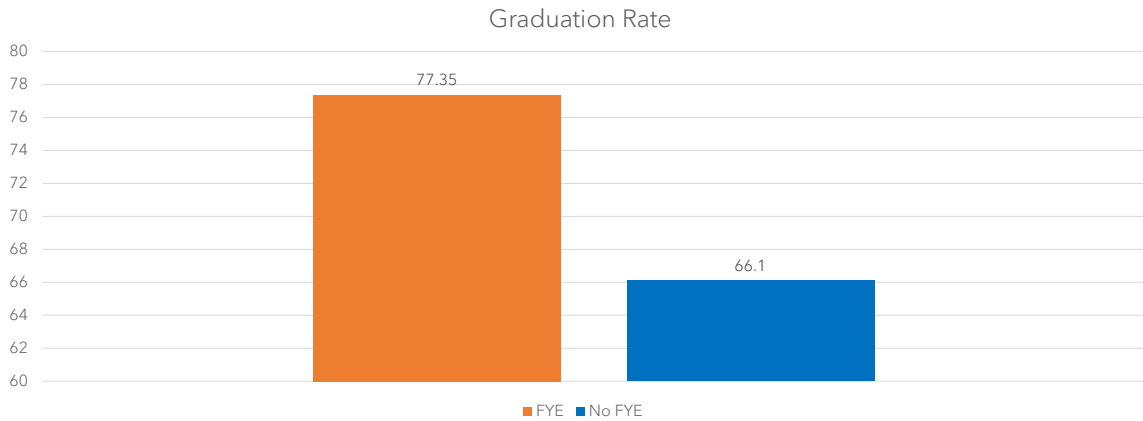
IMPROVED GRADUATION AND STUDENT POPULATIONS

First-generation

Underrepresented
Minority Groups

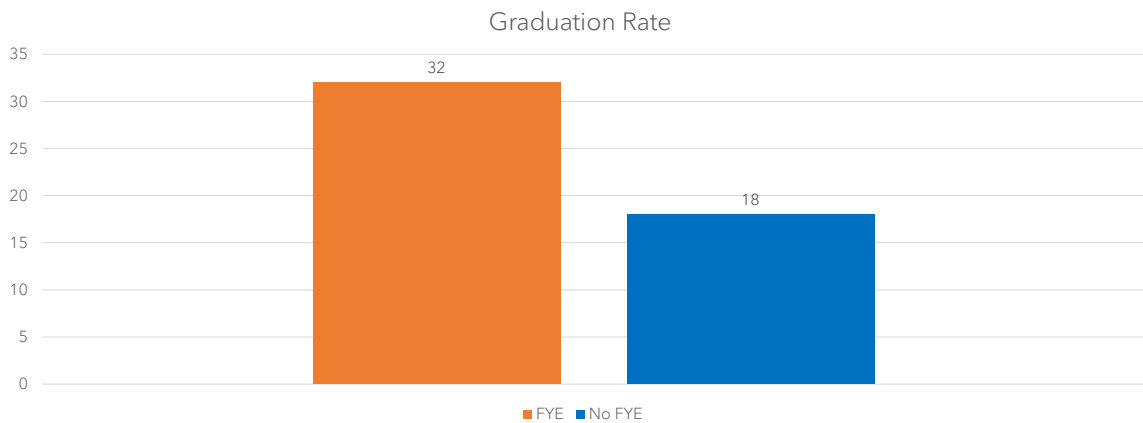
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AN EXAMPLE: UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY GROUP AULCK ET AL. (2021)



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AN EXAMPLE: FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS GRAHAM ET AL. (2023)



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BELIEFS, SKILLS, AND BEHAVIORS

Academic Self-Efficacy	Confidence	Growth Mindset	Study and Academic Skills	Test-Taking Skills
Critical Reading Skills	Research and Literacy Skills	Intellectual Curiosity	Self-Regulation	Study Group Participation
Motivation	Decision-Making	Time Management	Social Impact	Sense of Community

25

NOT ALL RESEARCHERS FOUND DIFFERENCES



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HOW CAN YOU LEVERAGE THIS DATA ON YOUR CAMPUS?

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NUMBER OF CREDITS

No differences (Folk, 2019;
Zerr & Bjerke, 2016)

First-generation students,
students of color, males, and
students conditionally
admitted to the university
benefitted from higher credit
FYS courses (Vaughan et al.,
2019)

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TYPE OF COURSE

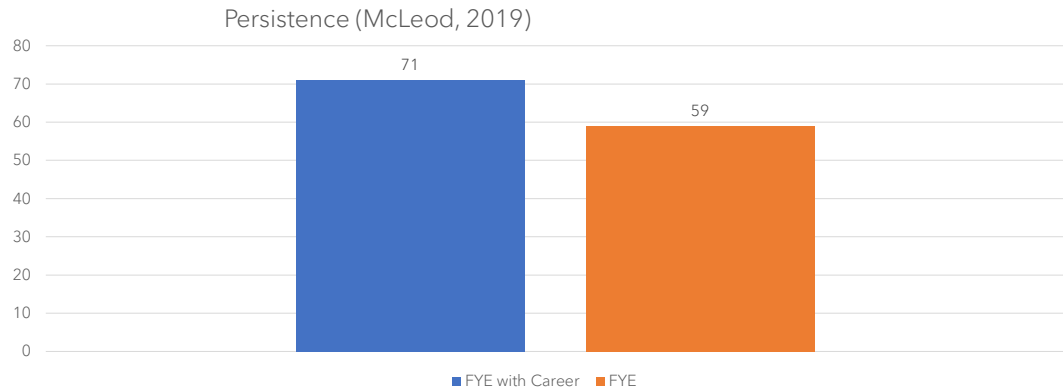
Some did not find differences in persistence, grades or type of course (Boettler et al, 2022; Culver & Bowman, 2020)

Academic courses (vs. transition focused courses) had higher persistence, grade point averages, and engagement in academic (Zerr & Bjerke, 2016; Young, 2020)

Career focused course had higher student persistence (McLeod, 2019)

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AN EXAMPLE: CAREER FOCUS



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MODALITY

No differences in online vs. in-person (Dilling et al., 2020)

Some evidence for positive outcomes such as self-regulation and self-efficacy in online courses (Stephen & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2021)

Only one study did not find positive benefits associated with online (Metzger et al., 2022)

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COMBINING FYE WITH OTHER CAMPUS PROGRAMS

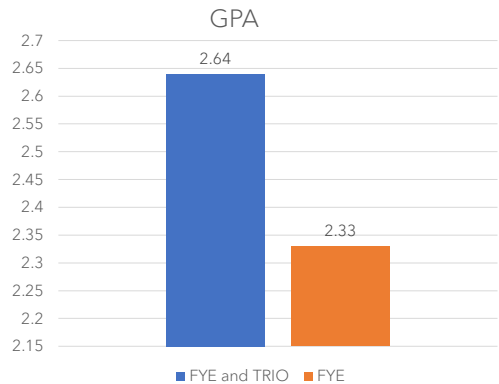
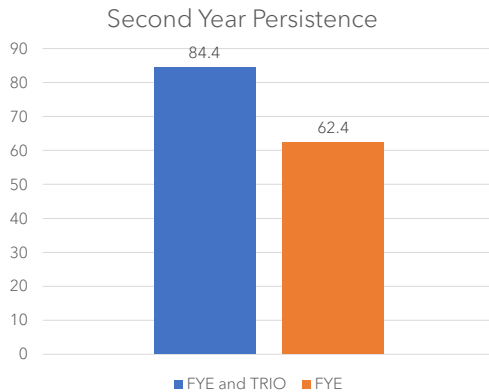
TRIO

Summer Bridge



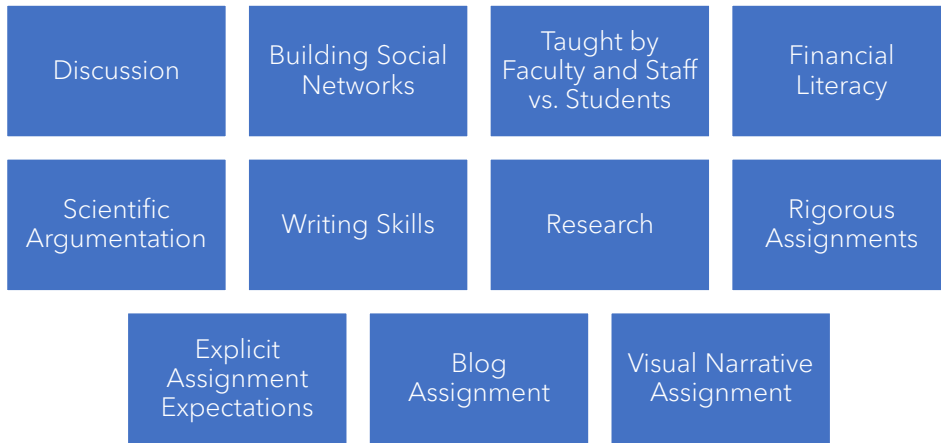
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TRIO (VAUGHAN ET AL, 2020)



34

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND TOPICS



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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

- Higher grades when faculty were trained
- Training helps faculty develop teaching skills, understand the student body, and form stronger commitments to the institution
- Desire for more training and support

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**WHAT
QUESTIONS
DO WE STILL
NEED TO
EXPLORE?**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Leverage the extensive national data to make the case for a first-year seminar course as part of student success and equity reform efforts at your college or university

Enroll all students rather than a targeted group, such as underprepared students, in the first-year seminar course

Pair the first-year seminar with other high-impact and success efforts such as TRIO and summer bridge to maximize the impact

Assign higher credit hours for the first-year seminar course

Consider offering a two-semester version of the course

Include online first-year seminar options

Explore living-learning communities that incorporate the first-year seminar course

Emphasize academic and career skills in the first-year seminar

Use the first-year seminar to help students build social and professional networks

Target skills such as financial literacy, scientific argumentation, writing, and research

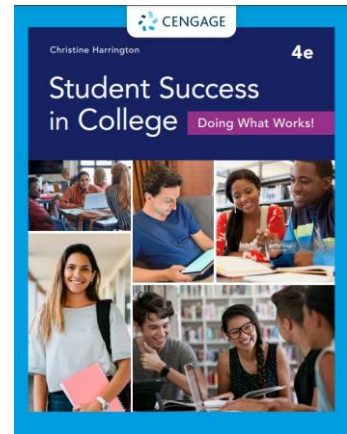
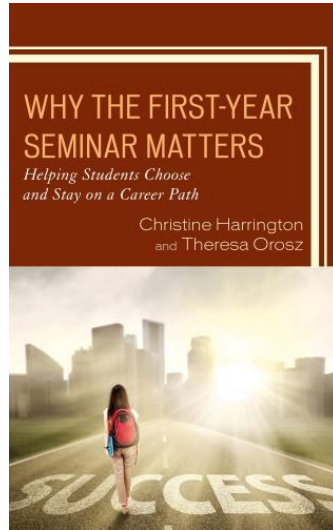
Design assignments that are rigorous, authentic, and collaborative

Incorporate discussions into the first-year seminar

Provide ongoing faculty development and resources to part and full-time faculty teaching first-year seminars

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RESOURCES



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