Freshmen and Academic Challenge: Can the New Gen Ed Help?

Beginnings Subgroup
June 2010 Forum

Beginnings Subgroup Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Department</th>
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<tr>
<td>Joann Prosser, Chair</td>
<td>Resident Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corbin Campbell</td>
<td>IRPA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara Goldberg</td>
<td>Counseling Center</td>
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<td>Beverly Greenfeig</td>
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<td>Erin Iverson</td>
<td>Resident Life</td>
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<td>Claire Jacobson</td>
<td>EDHI</td>
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<td>Sharon La Voy</td>
<td>IRPA</td>
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<td>Mike Passarella George</td>
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<td>Britt Reynolds</td>
<td>Admissions</td>
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<td>Laila Shisheneh</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
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<td>Renee Baird Snyder</td>
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<td>Dian Squire</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
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<td>Tom Steen</td>
<td>Undergraduate Studies</td>
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<td>Joseph Williams</td>
<td>Admissions</td>
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Special thanks to ACES sub-group members, Martha Wilmes and Charles Bagley
Today’s Presenters

- Sharon La Voy, IRPA
- Corbin Campbell, IRPA
- Kathy McAdams, Undergraduate Studies

Forum Agenda

- Academic challenge results from BSS 2008 and UMSS 2009
- Academic challenge and the new General Education curriculum

CAWG Snapshot available at www.umd.edu/cawg
Beginnings Student Survey (BSS)

- Annual survey since 1996, administered within the 8-10th week of the fall semester in typical freshmen courses
- Gathers data on first-year undergraduates’ experiences at and perceptions of UM
- BSS 2008: 1,551 FTFT survey respondents (out of about 3,902)

University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS)

- Annual survey administered in the spring semester to juniors and seniors in Professional Writing classes.
- Gathers data on junior/senior experiences at and perceptions of UM
- UMSS 2009; 1407 survey respondents (out of about 2,150)
Limitations

- BSS and UMSS cannot be generalized
  - Convenience sample

- Data are self-reported

Academic Challenge

- Attitudes
  - Are students as challenged as they would like?
  - Are students as challenged as they expected?
  - Do students want more challenge?

- Behaviors
  - How much challenge do students experience in terms of *quantity* of work?
  - How much challenge do students experience in terms of *academic engagement*?
Is UM Challenging Enough?

- **Is UM as challenging as respondents expected?**
  - Less than expected: Freshmen 10, Juniors/Seniors 6
  - About the same as expected: Freshmen 65, Juniors/Seniors 61
  - More than expected: Freshmen 26, Juniors/Seniors 33

- **Is UM as challenging as respondents would like?**
  - Less challenging than I would like: Freshmen 5, Juniors/Seniors 9
  - As challenging as I would like: Freshmen 80, Juniors/Seniors 76
  - More challenging than I would like: Freshmen 15, Juniors/Seniors 15

Source: BSS 2008

Do Freshmen with High SATs Feel Challenged?

- **Is UM as challenging as respondents expected?**
  - Less than expected: Non-High SAT 8, High SAT 15
  - About the same as expected: Non-High SAT 65, High SAT 64
  - More than expected: Non-High SAT 28, High SAT 21

- **Is UM as challenging as respondents would like?**
  - Less challenging than I would like: Non-High SAT 3, High SAT 10
  - As challenging as I would like: Non-High SAT 80, High SAT 82
  - More challenging than I would like: Non-High SAT 17, High SAT 6

Source: BSS 2008

* = Significant difference
How much are freshmen working?

- Freshmen respondents perceive high workload in reading and studying (BSS 2008)

### Instructor Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% &quot;None/A Little&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;Some&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;A Lot&quot;</th>
<th>For Freshmen...</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Studying for a test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Writing papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Completing problem sets</td>
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</table>

### Student Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% &quot;Less than what is currently expected&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;About the same&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;More than what is currently expected&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
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Do freshmen want more academic engagement?

### Classroom Engagement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>% &quot;None/A Little&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;Some&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;A Lot&quot;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Articulate and support my own opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Participate in in-depth discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rethink something I believed to be true based on new information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Work harder than I thought I could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Seek additional information above and beyond what is expected for the course</td>
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### Preferred Engagement

<table>
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<tr>
<th>% &quot;Less than what is currently expected&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;About the same&quot;</th>
<th>% &quot;More than what is currently expected&quot;</th>
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Source: BSS 2008
Where are students most engaged?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Engagement</th>
<th>Life Beyond Coursework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% “None/A Little”</td>
<td>% “Some”</td>
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<td>% Articulate and support my own opinion</td>
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<td>% Seek additional information above and beyond what is expected for the course</td>
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Questions for end of presentation

- What is “academic challenge” for students: More work or different work?
- What does it mean that students feel appropriately challenged?
- Should UM want students to be more challenged than they would like?
- Students feel challenged in the amount of work, but perhaps seek a different quality of academic engagement. How can UM accomplish this in the current resource environment?

Source: BSS 2008
The New Plan for General Education

Adding greater engagement to courses for undergraduates.

Revisions to General Education

- Simplified distribution requirements
- New Analytic Reasoning and Oral Communication requirements for all students
- Permits use of experiential learning to satisfy GenEd requirements
- Each student must take two I-Series Courses that are designed to add “Imagination, Innovation, Impact, Inspiration…”
Student Expectations

- Most are in living-learning settings where engagement is standard, so traditional classrooms may seem stilted and strange.
- Many have contacts at other universities where courses already have been transformed.
- Students see little value in learning facts while knowledge is changing daily.

I-Series Courses:
Signature of General Education

- Imagine. Investigate. Innovate.
- Unique to the Maryland undergraduate experience
- Fulfill requirements in a creative & contemporary way
- Challenge students to apply diverse intellectual traditions to today’s big issues:
  - Is the rise of artificial intelligence a good thing?
  - How do ideas spread through social networks like Facebook or Twitter?
  - Is it always wrong to kill another human being?
I-Series=Higher Engagement

- [http://www.iseries.umd.edu/about/](http://www.iseries.umd.edu/about/)
- Some exemplary I-Series Courses -Spring 2010
  - Information 3.0: Exploring Technological Tools
  - Playing the Market: Managing Risk by Using Technical Analysis
  - Recognizing Homophobia in the New Millenium
  - The Sustainable City: Opportunities and Challenges
  - What is Religion

Student I-Course Survey

- More than 80 percent of respondents said they would recommend their I-Series course to a friend.
- More than 60 percent said the course was unlike other general education courses.
- Student comments supported the themes of innovation, inspiration, impact.
I-Course Student Comments

Survey says that students want more in-depth discussions…

- “This course involved a lot more thinking (out loud) and discussion in lecture than my other classes.”
- “I liked working in groups. It allowed me to gain knowledge from others.”
- “This I-course experience was extremely different from any other course experience I have had on campus. This course was a lot more interactive, with both the professor and fellow classmates. The use of various technologies was also a very different yet rewarding experience.”

I-Course Student Comments

Survey says that students want to rethink old ideas….

- “It made me think about my future life choices as far as trying to live a more sustainable life and trying to help the USA become more sustainable.”
I-Course Student Comments

Applying knowledge…..

➢ “Instead of just spitting back facts on an exam, we utilized our knowledge in the course...”
➢ “More emphasis was on developing skills than on brute force memorization.”
➢ “It felt a lot more like a real experience. I feel that it not only taught me the materials but showed me how to use that information.”
➢ “This course was much more in tune with what is happening right now with the topics we discussed.”
➢ “I felt this class was more engaging and was more about current issues.”

I-Course Student Comments

New Classroom techniques…..

➢ “The approach to learning was innovative and exciting. I learned when I didn't realize I was learning.”
➢ “I believe these courses are a great way to engage students in a different kind of classroom. The concepts covered were interactive and made use of various mediums of teaching.”

➢ Thank you for these classes! So glad I took one before graduating :-)

Presentation - 12
Discussion

- How do the I-Courses and other aspects of the new Gen Ed reflect the academic challenge data?
- What is “academic challenge” for students: More work or different work?
- What does it mean that students feel appropriately challenged?
- Should UM want students to be more challenged than they would like?
- Students feel challenged in the amount of work, but perhaps seek a different quality of academic engagement. How can UM accomplish this in the current resource environment?

The CAWG Snapshot on Academic Challenge is available at:

www.umd.edu/cawg