A Four-Year Comparative Analysis of First-Year Experience Seminar (FYE 2100)

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The first year of college for most students can be fun while at the same time anxiety producing. Within the last 23 years colleges and universities have benefited from the work of Dr. John Gardner and others who have conducted extensive research on the first year of college and how it affects or contributes to student success.

Colleges and universities across the country have implemented some form of student success or transitional adjustment programs to support first-year students as they matriculate during the first year of college. In no uncertain terms retention is the driving force behind first-year programs.

In 2003 an ad hoc Hallmarks Advisory Task Force was created to review the first-year student’s experience at Western Michigan University. The Hallmarks Task Force found that that while there were numerous discrete programs and services across campus, “the lack of systematic integration and focus for first-year students [was] not sufficiently supportive of their [first-year students] education and development. Thus this information led the group to work on a re-designed first-year student program at WMU.

Therefore the plan to implement a re-designed experience began in 2005 when the University introduced a comprehensive First-Year Experience (FYE) Programs Department as a method for addressing the first-year experience for students on WMU’s campus. New Student Orientation and Fall Welcome (already a part of the WMU fabric) were and continue to be programs designed to assist students in becoming more knowledgeable and familiar with the campus, and the First-Year Seminar (FYE 2100) is a 16 week fall semester course specifically designed to further facilitate first-year students’ transition and engagement within the University. The Seminar was created in direct response to the Task Force review.

The overarching goal of FYE 2100 is to provide a comprehensive first year experience through the provision of information and access to support, assistance and resources to meet the needs of the first-year student.