BREAKOUT SESSION MINUTES

Session: First Year Experiences

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Think back to your freshman year – what connected you to your University?
- Living on campus without a car (unplanned experience – no residency requirement)
- Series of books and reflection papers – common experience for all majors – connection to faculty and academic culture (planned experience)
- Group of friends from high school
- Freshman courses in major; later graduated with same people
- Free body diagrams – difficult time – freshman course taught by department head

Objectives:
- Describe the history of first-year experiences including the evolution of the first-year seminar
- Summarize first-year experience opportunities at Mississippi State
- Compare and contrast what is being done with FYE at other school
- Propose what else could be done at your school

History:
- University of South Carolina – students took over the President’s Office
- University 101 offered 1972 (recognized as first freshman seminar offered across the University)
- John Gardner – first conference in 1982 – phenomenal speaker; great knowledge about the first year experience; last year 4500+ participants
- National Center for the Study of the Freshmen Year Experience formed in 1986
- 1998 NRC for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

University 101
- Designed to help students adjust to college life
- Understand the learning process – preferences for studying, processing information – audience participants completed the VARK inventory (available online at www.varklearn.com)
- Acquire academic success skills
- General orientation
- 15-20 students – small class sizes are key; large sections make it hard to get students connected – limited by resources, funding, class orientation
- Peer and/or graduate leaders
- 3-credit course for a grade
- Each section is unique
- Six required presentations
- Sex and the college student
- It’s Not a Game
- Financial Responsibility
- Alcohol and Drug
- Library/Information Literacy
- Career Planning
- Additional seminar courses have developed

VARK
- Learning preference questionnaire
- Preference for taking in and putting out information in a learning context
  - Visual
  - Aural
  - Read/Write
  - Kinesthetic

Case Study
- Break into groups of 4 and read the case study on Katie Alexander
- Record your responses to the questions at the end of the case study

1. How would you characterize Katie as a student? Identify five specific problems described in this case study that could interfere with her college success.
   - Procrastinator; didn’t develop skills; doesn’t know how to study; needs to learn how to prioritize; doesn’t have a direction; lack of goal; labeled at a very young age – may be a product of the system; learning; social; may have a learning disability (not mentioned); funding way through college

4. Identify three specific things Katie should do to get her college career on track.
   - Get tested for potential learning disabilities; be open to seeking help; need to know where to start – how to ask for help – where to go – what questions should be asked; connect with friends and study groups to share information; books on tape; seek a major that is more in tune with likes and strengths; explore strengths and interests – what is it she wants.

Conversations about students feeling like they have to stay in school so they don’t have to pay back loans; sometimes students need an internship or co-op so they can connect real world and academia – purpose; teaching is easy; motivating and igniting the spark of why the information is needed is important.

FYE at MSU
- First-Year programs date back to 1988
- Have been impacted by changes in administration
- Lack of “recognized” leadership
- Lack of institutionalized home
- Learning communities
- First-Year seminars
- Service Learning
- Day One
- Pathfinders
- Learning Center
- Summer Development Programs
- Relevant Resources & Services

First-Year Seminars
- Seminars are one tool to help ease that transition (not required for students; open to all first year students)
- Designed to engage students – get them connected
  - With a discipline they are interested in
  - With faculty
  - With university
- Course you always wanted to teach - $500 stipend for supplies – accepted 39 proposals in the first year
- One for Fun!
- Topic Examples:
  - It’s the Economy Stupid; It’s All Greek to Me; Scientific Football Analysis; Iron Chef Bully; Death from Above; Money, Math and Magic; Biology of Middle Earth; Mississippi Mud Pie; Mathematics of Origami; Can 2+2=5? The Math of Accounting Fraud; Reel Music: Century of Music Movies

Learning Communities
- Classes that are linked or clustered around an academic term
- Interdisciplinary theme
- Common cohort of students
- Variety of techniques
- Build a community among students, between students and teachers, among faculty and disciplines
- Need to capture data to show the return on investment; how do learning communities impact retention
- Linked, Special Interest, Research Learning, Residential Learning

Service Learning isn’t
- Volunteering
- A one time service project
- An “add on” to other assignment
- Internship or practicum

Four Guiding Principles
- Engagement
- Reflection
- Reciprocity
- Public Dissemination

Day One
- Leadership Community
- 230 Freshmen Alpha Class – pods of 24 – 36 action teams of 6-7 with a mentor (met with them twice a week)
- Incorporates
  - Learning Community
    - Linked and residential
  - First-Year Seminar
  - Service Learning
- Collaborative effort between Student Affairs & Academic Affairs
- Action Team Members
- Community Partners
- Heavy IT components
- Bravo Class – 300 students