

# ***The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success, Volume II: Instructor Training and Development***

by By James E. Groccia and Mary Stuart Hunter

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Volume II in *The First-Year Seminar* series focuses on instructor training and development. The authors begin by making a strong case for instructor training and development in higher education as a whole; they point to increased assessment and accountability efforts nationwide and the new skills needed for 21st century learners as reasons for renewed focus on teaching development on college campuses (p. 2). Ultimately, the authors argue that this attention to training and development is essential for the unique and emerging genre of first-year seminar courses, which are often smaller and more discussion based than traditional first-year classes.

Groccia and Hunter spend the first part of the volume providing background for the concept of faculty training in general. They note, like many other recent authors (Altbach, 2011; Brew, Boud & Namgung, 2011; Healey, 2000; among others), that most faculty are not trained in pedagogy during their time in graduate school; furthermore, within this section, the authors also outline the history and context of faculty professional development back to the 1960s and ultimately propose a new model for fitting it into the value structure of the academy. Instead of the traditional tripartite teaching, research, and service model, Groccia and Hunter present a five-tier model that adds both outreach and faculty development (p. 9) as areas in which faculty should focus their time and by which they should be evaluated.

In the second chapter, the authors begin outlining strategies for successful design and development of instructor training programs. Tables and figures, such as the eleven steps for planning training programs (p. 14) and the annual professional development cycle (p. 19), are extremely useful in dividing the

authors' suggestions into easily digestible segments. These charts also make the volume more useful as a reference for anyone involved in planning faculty professional development.

The third chapter focuses on the application of theory and research to both the training for faculty and the first-year seminars themselves. The use of adult learning theories is too often neglected in discussions of faculty development; it was satisfying to see them presented in this volume, especially important theories by Kolb and Chickering. Most notably, the authors highlight the fact that adult learners, meaning the instructors of the seminars who are being trained, bring a greater array of prior experiences to the classroom than do the students they will be teaching. Adults will have a greater sense of self-responsibility than most of their younger students, and intrinsic motivators are more potent in adults than in traditional college-aged students. The authors, therefore, believe trainers must engage these adults in self-directed activities where they have greater personal responsibility (p. 28), use rewards more judiciously than they might with students, and be especially attentive in explaining the rationale and evidence in support of new teaching techniques so that adults become willing to try something new (p. 29).

After noting some differences between adult and student learners, the authors provide theories and research on learning that apply to both the training sessions and the classroom. Groccia and Hunter are proponents of active learning, preferring trainers and instructors to use a variety of teaching techniques to attract and hold attention (p. 31). They spend the rest of Chapter 3 presenting strategies for trainers to develop efficient faculty training programs, such as establishing learning communities, promoting mentoring programs, providing detailed agendas during sessions, and continually soliciting feedback.

In Chapter 4, the authors discuss the suggested content of the seminar training. They begin by acknowledging that training will often depend on the content of the first-year seminars, as well as the backgrounds of the individual instructors, which can sometimes make it difficult for trainers to provide sessions that meet everyone's needs equally well. Most beneficially, the authors once again provide models, charts, and outlined points that make this manual user friendly. Their presentation of a model (p. 47) for developing seminar instructor training visually depicts the role of learning outcomes in understanding teaching and learning; the authors suggest that instructors should begin by considering the intended outcomes of the course and then work backwards to factor in the course content, learning context, the learning process, and both teacher and learner variables. The authors assert that the bridge linking course outcomes and inputs is comprised of the instructional processes the teacher intends to use. This model would be quite helpful in beginning a faculty development training session, as it directs instructors to think about teaching in new and unique ways. The authors then provide a list of possible topics that can be covered in a training session, all of which relate to the factors and processes in their model. They also give a brief overview of different types of learning goals specific to first-year students, as well as some of the major cognitive and psychological developmental stages of this age group. This is crucial

information for instructors to know, but it is often overlooked on campuses.

In Chapter 5, Groccia and Hunter outline the role of evaluation in instructor training and development, providing suggested methods by which first-year seminar instructors can be evaluated over the course of the semester. As a means to supplement the typical end of course evaluations and peer observations, they suggest some first-year seminar specific ideas, like national assessment instruments such as the CIRP Freshman Survey, Your First College Year survey, and the First Year Initiative (p. 70). Most notably, they propose the idea of a customized course evaluation form for first-year seminars focusing on the specific learning outcomes these types of courses aim to achieve; this suggestion seems to be the simplest to implement and the one that could produce the best results.

The last chapter focuses on how to build and sustain a successful teaching corps for first-year seminars. Here, the authors present some statistics illustrating who teaches these courses nationwide; most notably, the 2009 National Survey of First-Year Seminars (Padgett & Keup, 2011) showed that about 48% of respondents use student affairs professionals to teach some courses. Though most respondents (61%) indicate that tenure-track faculty teach most of the first-year seminars, it is evident that instructors are being drawn from all areas of an institution (p. 73). In this section, the authors include desired characteristics of first-year seminar instructors and then propose ways in which faculty can be invited and motivated to teach these courses. Groccia and Hunter place a great deal of emphasis on cultivating and maintaining relationships with faculty, especially those new to an institution, in the hopes that they will be interested in taking on a first-year seminar. As they did in other sections of the book, the authors urge trainers and those coordinating the seminar program to recognize and reward instructors for superior teaching. They also suggest ways in which professional development for this cadre of instructors can continue throughout their involvement in the course.

The style of the writing is clear and concise, inclusive of figures and lists that help to divide and organize the content into digestible pieces. The authors are demonstrably well versed in this subject and bring many new ideas to the discussion of how faculty development programs can be structured. Their argument for the importance of teaching training in higher education at the beginning of the volume is incredibly timely and effective; it provides a solid foundation for advocates of faculty development to use in future research or to begin a conversation about this topic on their campuses.

At times, however, the intended audience is unclear. The introduction states that it can be a “cookbook for first-year seminar program directors” (xiv), or it can simply be read by those interested in first-year experiences or faculty development. The work appears largely useful to people who coordinate first-year seminars, but these people would also have to be well versed in educational pedagogy and effective teaching strategies. If they are not experts in these fields, it could be difficult to gain the respect of the faculty or instructors they are hoping to train. If they are already experts in these fields, users might find the book a little elementary. For example, in the discussion of adult learning theory, the authors propose that the trainers write outlines on the board to help instructors take

notes or stop every 15 minutes to conduct activities (p. 33). While faculty may appreciate movement, they might not appreciate being told how to take notes from someone who is not an expert in their field. In the chapter on evaluation, the authors also suggest a pre-term syllabus review, where instructors pass the syllabus to the trainers before the semester starts. Once again, it is likely that faculty might be opposed to this idea, especially if the topic of the seminar is discipline-based. The usefulness of the book ultimately depends upon the way the first-year seminar program is coordinated on each campus; orientation, retention, and transition professionals who are not involved in the seminar might find the book less useful than professionals directly involved in planning the first-year seminar or those working in teaching centers.

In addition, some critical pieces of information about first-year seminars did not appear until rather late in the book. For example, the authors reference the fact that student affairs professionals and librarians may serve as instructors in these courses; however, in many institutions, this is not the case, so it was a bit confusing to learn this fact only in passing later in the volume when it would have been a pertinent discussion earlier in the book. The potential content of these seminars also could have been expanded upon, which would have helped clarify the variety in instructors; the Foreword mentions such first-year seminar topics as substance abuse, sexuality, and health and wellness (viii), but traditional seminars with which readers might be familiar are usually discipline-based. One way of clearing up this confusion would have been to move Chapter 6, which describes how to build an instructor corps, to the very beginning of the volume. In this way, the authors could have better explained the audience of the training sessions and the reasons why it is often not solely faculty members.

Though the scope and size of this volume makes it difficult to address other issues, it would have been useful for the authors to discuss the idea of peer effects in first-year seminars. In the first chapter, they outline a helpful model of student engagement, specifically noting that it leads to satisfaction and retention (p. 5). This would be a perfect place to present evidence on peer effects in the classroom, which would help strengthen their argument in support of first-year seminar teaching training. In fact, peer effects could also be discussed in the later chapter on the content of the training session, since these theories and facts may be useful to instructors of first-year seminars.

It also would have been helpful to include more about teaching strategies. The authors do touch upon these on pages 55-60, but in a volume devoted to teaching training, one might expect to see more content on what effective teaching looks like. There are a few good ideas here, both for leading training sessions and for teaching the seminar itself, yet this could have been a more central part of the volume. Many trainers might select the book for this section alone, and they might be disappointed at the lack of strategies and scholarship on these strategies presented here.

Lastly, while the authors present the novel five-tier model as an alternative to the traditional three-tier model of faculty duties, they could have expanded upon this further. As they often point out in other sections of the volume, it is crucial to

have administrative investment and support to ensure the success of any endeavor on campus. How can we convince academia as a whole that outreach and faculty development are important enough to be added to the traditional three categories?

It is important to note that this series of volumes is published by the University of South Carolina, where there is a highly developed first-year seminar program in place. The authors of this volume are clearly very familiar with this program and use it as an example many times throughout the book. In most cases, this is effective, especially with the inclusion of "Appendix A: Syllabus for the Teaching Experience Workshop at the University of South Carolina." The second appendix lists online resources for instructor training and development, and the third is comprised of rubrics for instructor peer evaluations, which may be helpful to both faculty and administrators, not just those involved in first-year seminars.

Overall, the authors do an excellent job of highlighting the importance of instructor training and development in academia, specifically in first-year seminars. They are quick to note, however, that the campus culture plays a substantial role in just how far this development can go; therefore, they urge trainers to involve the administration in cultivating and expressing a culture that values professional development (p. 91). They also devote much of their time to discussing the importance of reflective teaching practices, which surfaces in much of the other literature currently addressing professional development, teaching training, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. *The First Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success, Volume II: Instructor Training and Development* complements the existing literature on this topic, yet it also adds another dimension by focusing on the niche classroom experience of first-year seminars. Though there can be some confusion about the intended audience and use of this book, it is a valuable resource for anyone involved in first-year seminars and a useful, if slightly elementary, handbook for those involved in teaching training.

## Reference

Padgett, R. D., & Keup, J. R. (2011). *2009 National survey of first-year seminars: Ongoing efforts to support students in transition*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.