Abstract

This study examined academic performance, retention, and commitment differences between a group of first term students that completed a subject-based First Year Experience (FYE) course and a group of first term students that did not complete such a course. An additional focus of this study utilized nontraditional characteristics to categorize student sub-groups. Academic performance, retention, and commitment differences were examined between comparable sub-groups of students that did or did not complete an FYE course. The study analyzed academic performance and retention from fall 1999 through fall 2000 and self-reported commitment at the beginning and end of the fall 1999 semester.

For the students in this study, the analysis found that differences in academic performance, retention, and commitment were unrelated to completion of an FYE course. Between similar nontraditional sub-groups, differences were also unrelated to completion of a subject-based FYE course. The study did determine that students with four or more nontraditional characteristics also entered the university with lower mean high school GPAs and entrance exam scores and these students earned lower college GPAs and had higher attrition rates. In addition, part-time, over 23 years old, certain ethnic groups, and students employed off campus over 20 hours earned lower GPAs. Part-time, over 23 years old, commuting, and students employed off campus over 20 hours had higher attrition rates. For all students in this study, reported commitment increased from the beginning to the end of the semester, but was unrelated to FYE or nontraditional status.

This study recommended that longitudinal studies examine additional outcomes and the study of this sample be extended through anticipated degree completion. It was
also suggested that further analysis at the program level could mediate treatment
differences between instructors and subjects. Further, it was recommended that an
assessment of students’ academic resources (Adelman, 1999) via in-depth evaluation of
high school transcripts and inquiries that identify students’ nontraditional status could
provide early identification of students that could benefit from proactive interventions
such as subject-based First Year Experience courses.