

First Year Initiative Survey Results, Fall, 2002

Drake University

Summary Prepared by

David Skidmore, First Year Seminar Coordinator

February 13, 2003

Background on the First Year Initiative Survey:

The First Year Initiative survey is administered by Educational Benchmarking, Inc. and was designed in cooperation with the Policy Center on the First College Year at Brevard College. Its purpose is to help institutions to gather assessment data related to their first year seminar programs as well as data relevant to evaluating the overall first year experience.

The survey was completed by students in their First Year Seminar classes during the last two weeks of the Fall, 2002 term. At Drake, 683 students completed the survey, a response rate of 88% based upon an estimated first year class of 780 students.

The Two Types of First Year Seminars:

The FYI Survey included 84 schools and 41,294 total survey responses. The FYS programs at these schools fall into two major types:

1. The first type are “transition-to-college” seminars that stress study skills, personal growth, wellness, knowledge of campus policies, etc. These seminars do not revolve around an academic theme and are often taught by student services staff.
2. The second type includes topical seminars that focus on an academic theme. These seminars usually are taught by faculty members. Some topical seminars do give secondary attention to “transition-to-college” issues.

Drake’s FYS program falls into the second category: topical seminars taught by faculty and focusing on an academic theme that varies from section to section.

Most of the 84 schools that participated in the FYI survey have transition-to-college type FYS programs. Many of the questions included in the survey were designed with this type of program in mind. Such questions are less relevant to evaluating Drake’s program as a whole (though particular FYS sections at Drake may address some of these issues). The stated mission of Drake’s FYS program stresses four main elements: reading and writing, oral communication, critical thinking and community building. In the summary below, I have singled out and grouped survey questions that seem most directly related to these goals, as well as those that relate more generally to academic quality and challenge (also included in the summary is a group of questions relating to student perceptions of the institution as a whole). I believe that our performance in these areas offers the most useful measure of the program’s success. However, a full list of results on all survey items is also included following my summary and commentary. Also following the FYS summary is data on student activities and attitudes (e.g., study hours, work hours, alcohol consumption, etc.).

Comparing Drake's Results with Those of Other Schools:

The FYI survey report allows for three sorts of comparisons:

1. to a list of six pre-selected comparison schools (1,575 total survey responses),
2. to the 26 participating schools (11,331 total survey responses) that fall into the Masters I Carnegie classification (where Drake is located), and
3. to the entire group of 84 schools (41,294 total survey responses) that participated in the survey.

The most relevant comparison is with the six pre-selected schools. These schools were selected for comparison because they also offer topical, academic-type first year seminars that are similar to our program. The broader groups mix schools that offer both topical and transition-type seminars. Focusing on the pre-selected schools allows us to compare apples with apples.

The list of pre-selected comparison schools includes:

Rollins College
Loras College
Marymount College
Greensboro College
Guilford College
Barton College

Format of Summary:

In the summary below, I give three types of information for each item:

1. Drake's mean score on a seven-point scale,
2. Drake's ranking among the group of comparison schools (ranked one through seven with one high; note that Drake's inclusion brings the total number in this group to seven schools), and
3. asterisks or plus signs following the rankings show cases where Drake falls into the top 20% or bottom 20% among Masters I schools, all schools or both (see explanatory note below).

Summary of Items Grouped According to the Major Goals of Drake’s FYS Program:

Reading and Writing:

Item	Drake Mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Improved:		
Writing Skills.	5.49	1***
Reading Skills.	4.92	1***
Course Included:		
Course readings were relevant.	5.37	2***
Course readings were interesting.	4.89	5***
Course readings were helpful.	4.69	5

- * top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- *** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

- + bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- +++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

(Drake-only question) Did your FYS instructor provide useful feedback on your written assignments? (seven is very useful; one is not useful)

Overall mean: 5.67

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
38%	29%	14%	9%	6%	3%	2%

Comments:

Students appear to consider writing a strong point of Drake’s FYS program. Drake ranks number one among comparison schools in the degree to which students feel that their FYS has contributed to improved writing skills. Also, an overwhelming majority of Drake students report that they received useful feedback on their writing from their FYS instructor (this question was not included for other schools, but was inserted in the Drake survey at our request). From a separate survey of FYS instructors, we know that 94% report that they required students to do multiple drafts of at least one writing assignment. These are encouraging indicators.

Drake also ranked number one among comparison schools in the degree to which students felt that their FYS contributed to improvement in their reading skills and number 2 in the degree to which students considered course readings relevant. Drake ranked lower (number 5) on questions about whether students considered the readings for their class to be “interesting” and “helpful.” Overall, Drake’s FYS program appears to offer students relatively good opportunities for improving their reading and writing skills.

Oral Communication:

Item	Drake Mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Improved: Oral presentation skills.	4.27	4
Course Included: Meaningful class discussions.	5.60	1***
Encouragement to speak in class.	5.66	1***
Course Increased: Participation in class discussions.	4.58	4

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)

*** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)

+++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Comments:

With respect to oral communication, it seems clear that Drake’s seminar-style FYS format is successful at encouraging class discussion – Drake ranked number one among the comparison schools on two measures of class discussion. However, Drake ranked fourth among seven schools in the degree to which students felt that their FYS encouraged them to participate in class discussions more generally – i.e., in all of their classes (not just the FYS). So it appears that vigorous discussion in the FYS does not necessarily translate into increased student participation in other classes. Also, Drake ranks fourth among comparison schools when students rate the degree to which their FYS enhanced “oral presentation skills.” Students likely interpreted this question to refer to formal presentations rather than informal class discussion. Even though the faculty survey revealed that 77% in FYS instructors require some form of oral presentation, it is clear that students consider our FYS program to be stronger on informal discussion than on formal speaking (this is, however, neither surprising nor inconsistent with the program’s priorities).

Critical Thinking:

Item	Drake Mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Improved:		
Ability to see multiple sides of issues.	5.52	1***
Evaluating quality of opinions and facts.	5.30	1***
Identifying solutions for complex problems.	4.51	3

- * top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- *** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

- + bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- +++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Comments:

Drake ranked number one among the comparison group when students were asked whether their FYS improved their “ability to see multiple sides of issues” and to evaluate the “quality of opinions and facts.” Drake’s rank dropped to number three when it came to “identifying solutions to complex problems.” It is unclear whether the word “problems” in the latter questions refers to personal issues in a student’s life (e.g., how to deal with an unruly roommate) or to academic issues (e.g., how to apply logic to questions in philosophy). In any case, the limited measurements available suggest that students consider Drake’s FYS program relatively strong in the area of critical thinking skills.

Community-Building:

Item	Drake Mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Improved:		
Efforts to get to know students in class.	5.23	3
The ability to meet new people with common interests.	4.67	6
The ability to establish close friendships with peers.	4.56	6
Studying with other students.	3.68	6 +

The degree that:		
Student is accepted by other students.	5.64	1
Student is able to identify other students with similar interests.	5.44	3
It is easy to make new friends at this university.	5.44	4

- * top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- *** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

- + bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
- ++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)
- +++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

(Drake-only question) Did the clustering of First Year Seminar students together in the residence halls have a positive or negative effect on your first year semester experience at Drake? (seven is positive; one is negative)

Overall mean: 5.23

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
26%	23%	16%	24%	5%	3%	3%

Comments:

The evidence is mixed with respect to the success of the FYS program in building a sense of community among first year students at Drake. Among the comparison schools, Drake ranks rather poorly when students rate the contribution of their FYS course to meeting new people and establishing friendships, although we do a bit better when the question refers specifically to getting to know other students in class. It is disappointing that we rank next to last in the degree to which FYS classes encourage students to study together. On the other hand, a clear majority of students appear to consider the clustering of first year students in the dorms by FYS section as a positive influence on their first semester experience. Also, it must be remembered that the other schools in the comparison group are smaller than Drake. Overall, it appears that there remains room for improvement in this area.

Overall academic quality and level of challenge:

Item	Drake Mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course included:		
Challenging assignments.	5.12	3***
Meaningful homework.	4.65	4***
A variety of teaching methods.	4.49	6
Productive use of class time.	4.93	6
Overall satisfaction with course:		
Included interesting subject matter.	5.22	3***
Level of effort in this course.	5.48	3**
Covered topics important to student.	4.61	5
Student would recommend this course to other first year students.	4.84	5
Contributed to the ability to succeed academically.	4.58	6

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
 ** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)
 *** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)
 ++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)
 +++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

(Drake-only question) Would you characterize your FYS as academically challenging? (seven is highly challenging; one is not challenging)

Overall mean: 4.83

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
12%	22%	31%	18%	8%	6%	3%

Comments:

This cluster of indicators addresses a variety of issues. There appears to be a considerable spread in the degree to which Drake students considered their FYS course to be academically challenging. The overall means on questions related to both level of challenge and level of effort are moderately high, but do not place us at the top of the comparison group. Coupling these results with anecdotal information, my own interpretation is that our FYS program includes a rather wide range of

standards and expectations when it comes to academic rigor. Students in some sections feel quite challenged while those in other sections do not feel so challenged.

Drake ranks disappointingly low when students rate the variety of teaching methods and the productive use of class time. Among the comparison group, moreover, Drake ranks only fifth in whether students would recommend their FYS to a friend and in the degree to which students felt that their FYS contributed to their ability to succeed academically. The latter result is a bit puzzling considering the strong ratings on reading, writing, critical thinking and class discussion (all important elements of academic success). One way to interpret this response (admittedly speculative) is that many students found that their FYS was so dissimilar to their other first semester courses (many of which were likely larger with less emphasis on writing and discussion), that the skills taken from the former could not easily be applied to the latter.

**Questions Relating to the University Experience as a Whole
(rather than to the FYS specifically):**

Rank among pre-selected comparison group:

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
The Degree that:		
Student is accepted by other students.	5.64	1
Student wants to return to this university.	5.73	1
Student would recommend this university to a friend.	5.62	1
Student’s college experience was a high-quality learning experience.	5.60	1
Value of investment made in education at this school.	4.53	1
Student is able to identify other students with similar interests.	5.44	3
It is easy to make new friends at this university.	5.44	4

Rank among Masters I schools and all schools surveyed:

Item	Rank among 26 Masters I schools	Rank among all 84 schools surveyed
Student is accepted by other students.	11	24
Student wants to return to this university.	13	38
Student would recommend this university to a friend.	17	45
Student's college experience was a high-quality learning experience.	13	32
Value of investment made in education at this school.	21	53
Student is able to identify other students with similar interests.	16	36
It is easy to make new friends at this university.	14	32

Comments:

This group of questions pertains not to the FYS alone, but to the student's overall evaluation of his or her first semester university experience. At first glance, Drake appears to do rather well on these measures, ranking at the top of the comparison group on five of the seven measures shown. Yet when we examine Drake's ranking among Master I schools and among all schools participating in the survey, the results appear less impressive (such comparisons are valid when the question refers to the overall university experience rather than the FYS program alone; in the former case the dissimilarity of FYS programs is not a major issue).

Among the 26 Masters I institutions, Drake's ranking on six of the seven questions ranges from 11 to 16 – i.e., we generally fall into the middle of the pack. The exception is the question relating to the value of a Drake education, where our ranking is much lower at 21. The latter result is perhaps not surprising since this group (as well as the group including all schools) includes less expensive public schools.

Among the entire survey group of 84 schools, Drake ranks in the second quartile on five of the seven indicators. We fall slightly below the mid-point on the questions of whether students would recommend Drake to a friend and on the value of a Drake education.

Data on Student Academic and Social Life:

The following data compares Drake first year students and those at other schools on a series of questions related to various aspects of student academic and social life. To simplify the presentation, some data has been combined or omitted (which is why the numbers do not always add to 100%).

	Drake	Percentage of Respondents		
		Comparison Group	Masters I	All Schools
Current academic performance:				
Mostly As	14%	9%	9%	9%
Mostly Cs or lower	14%	11%	11%	12%
# of Extracurricular Activities:				
No activities	15%	17%	23%	23%
3 or more activities	39%	45%	37%	37%
Avg. # of Study Hours per Week:				
0 to 5 hours	15%	27%	33%	32%
21 or more hours	15%	8%	6%	6%
Avg. Hours Paid Employment per Week:				
Do not work	50%	57%	61%	59%
1 to 10 hours	31%	24%	15%	15%
21 or more hours	6%	7%	11%	12%
Current Residence				
Campus residence hall	92%	89%	73%	
	71%			
Frequency of Alcohol Consumption:				
Do not consume alcohol	31%	32%	37%	35%
Once or twice per week	53%	44%	45%	45%
Three or more times per week	13%	20%	16%	
	16%			
# of Acoholic Drinks Consumed per Event				
1 to 4 drinks	32%	29%	28%	28%
5 to 8 drinks	24%	26%	22%	23%
More than 8 drinks	12%	12%	13%	13%

Likelihood of Transfer to Another Institution

Definitely will transfer	7%	14%	9%
9%			
Will not transfer	40%	28%	36%
			37%

Comprehensive List of Items:

Below is the full list of questions included on the survey pertaining to student evaluations of the FYS course and the institution.

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Improved:		
Writing Skills.	5.49	1***
Reading Skills.	4.92	1***
Ability to see multiple sides of issues.	5.52	1***
Evaluating quality of opinions and facts.	5.30	1***
Efforts to get to know students in class.	5.23	3
Identifying solutions for complex problems.	4.51	3
Understanding of academic strengths.	4.66	4
The ability to find items through the library.	4.44	4
Oral presentation skills.	4.27	4
Completing homework assignments on time.	4.55	5
Understanding faculty expectations of students.	4.92	5
Decision-making skills.	4.26	6
The ability to meet new people with common interests.	4.67	6
The ability to establish close friendships with peers.	4.56	6
Reviewing class notes before the next class meeting.	3.19	6+++
Studying with other students.	3.68	6 +
Taking effective notes in class.	3.84	6+++
Feedback sought from instructors.	4.49	6
Communications with instructors outside of class.	4.44	6
Understanding of policies on academic honesty.	4.26	6+++
Understanding of the grading system.	4.19	6+++
Understanding of how to obtain academic assistance.	3.93	6+++
Understanding of available library resources.	4.71	6+
Test preparation skills.	4.66	7+++
Computer skills.	3.11	7+++
The ability to deal with stress.	3.67	7+++
Coping with test anxiety.	2.99	7+++

Understanding of academic probation policies.	3.09	7+++
Understanding of registration procedures.	3.32	7+++
Understanding of financial aid procedures.	2.33	7+++
Understanding of how to obtain a tutor.	2.74	7+++
Understanding of college student's sexual issues.	2.80	7+++
Understanding of the impact of alcohol consumption.	2.67	7+++
Understanding of the impact of drug use.	2.45	7+++
Understanding of the impact of exercising regularly.	2.43	7+++
Understanding of the impact of establishing personal goals.	4.14	7+++

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)

*** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)

+++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Included:		
Meaningful class discussions.	5.60	1***
Encouragement to speak in class.	5.66	1***
Course readings were relevant.	5.37	2***
Challenging assignments.	5.12	3***
Encouragement for students to work together.	5.15	4
Meaningful homework.	4.65	4***
Course readings were interesting.	4.89	5***
Course readings were helpful.	4.69	5
A variety of teaching methods.	4.49	6
Productive use of class time.	4.93	6

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)

*** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)

+++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Course Increased:		
Participation in class discussions.	4.58	4
Setting priorities to accomplish what is most important.	4.25	6+
Organizing time to meet responsibilities.	4.29	6+
Preparation for tests well in advance.	3.18	7+++
Establishing an effective study schedule.	3.68	7+++
Participation in campus-sponsored organizations.	2.75	7+++
Contributing to success of campus organizations.	2.47	7+++
Volunteering time for worthwhile causes.	2.57	7+++
Attending campus cultural events.	2.68	7+++

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)

*** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)

+++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
Overall Satisfaction with Course:		
Included interesting subject matter.	5.22	3***
Level of effort in this course.	5.48	3**
Covered topics important to student.	4.61	5
Student would recommend this course to other first year students.	4.84	5
Contributed to the ability to succeed academically.	4.58	6
Contributed to the ability to adjust to the college social environment.	4.53	6

* top 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

** top 20% among all schools (84 schools)

*** top 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

+ bottom 20% among Masters I schools (26 schools)

++ bottom 20% among all schools (84 schools)
 +++ bottom 20% in both Masters I and all schools categories

Item	Drake mean (seven point scale; 7 – high; 1 – low)	Rank among seven schools in comparison group (1 – top ranked; 7 – bottom ranked)
The Degree that (questions refer to university experience as a whole, rather than to FYS experience specifically):		
Student is accepted by other students.	5.64	1
Student wants to return to this university.	5.73	1
Student would recommend this university to a friend.	5.62	1
Student’s college experience was a high-quality learning experience.	5.60	1
Value of investment made in education at this school.	4.53	1
Student is able to identify other students with similar interests.	5.44	3
It is easy to make new friends at this university.	5.44	4

Item	Rank among 26 Masters I schools	Rank among all 84 schools surveyed
Student is accepted by other students.	11	24
Student wants to return to this university.	13	38
Student would recommend this university to a friend.	17	45
Student’s college experience was a high-quality learning experience.	13	32
Value of investment made in education at this school.	21	53
Student is able to identify other students with similar interests.	16	36
It is easy to make new friends at this university.	14	32

Drake specific questions (not given at other schools):

Would you characterize your FYS as academically challenging? (seven is highly challenging; one is not challenging)

Overall mean: 4.83

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
12%	22%	31%	18%	8%	6%	3%

Did the clustering of First Year Seminar students together in the residence halls have a positive or negative effect on your first year semester experience at Drake? (seven is positive; one is negative)

Overall mean: 5.23

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
26%	23%	16%	24%	5%	3%	3%

Did your FYS instructor provide useful feedback on your written assignments? (seven is very useful; one is not useful)

Overall mean: 5.67

Frequency distribution:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
38%	29%	14%	9%	6%	3%	2%