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Campus Assessment Working Group

Freshmen and Academic Challenge: Can the New Gen Ed Help?

Beginnings Subgroup
June 2010 Forum

Beginnings Subgroup Members



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Joann Prosser, Chair	Resident Life
Corbin Campbell	IRPA
Barbara Goldberg	Counseling Center
Beverly Greenfeig	Counseling Center
Erin Iverson	Resident Life
Claire Jacobson	EDHI
Sharon La Voy	IRPA
Mike Passarella George	IRPA
Britt Reynolds	Admissions
Laila Shisheneh	Orientation
Renee Baird Snyder	IRPA
Dian Squire	Orientation
Tom Steen	Undergraduate Studies
Joseph Williams	Admissions

Special thanks to ACES sub-group members, Martha Wilmes and Charles Bagley

Today's Presenters



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- Sharon La Voy, IRPA
- Corbin Campbell, IRPA
- Kathy McAdams, Undergraduate Studies

Forum Agenda



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- Academic challenge results from BSS 2008 and UMSS 2009
- Academic challenge and the new General Education curriculum

CAWG Snapshot available at www.umd.edu/cawg

Beginnings Student Survey (BSS)



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- Annual survey since 1996, administered within the 8-10th week of the fall semester in typical freshmen courses
- Gathers data on first-year undergraduates' experiences at and perceptions of UM
- BSS 2008: 1,551 FTFT survey respondents (out of about 3,902)

University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS)



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- Annual survey administered in the spring semester to juniors and seniors in Professional Writing classes.
- Gathers data on junior/senior experiences at and perceptions of UM
- UMSS 2009; 1407 survey respondents (out of about 2,150)

Limitations



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- BSS and UMSS cannot be generalized
 - Convenience sample

- Data are self-reported

Academic Challenge



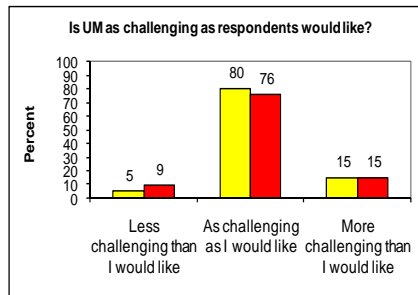
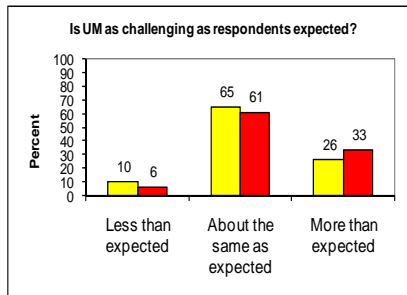
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- Attitudes
 - Are students as challenged as they would like?
 - Are students as challenged as they expected?
 - Do students want more challenge?

- Behaviors
 - How much challenge do students experience in terms of *quantity* of work?
 - How much challenge do students experience in terms of *academic engagement*?



Is UM Challenging Enough?

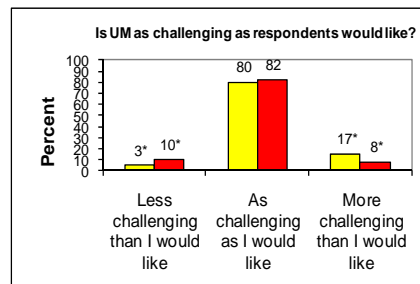
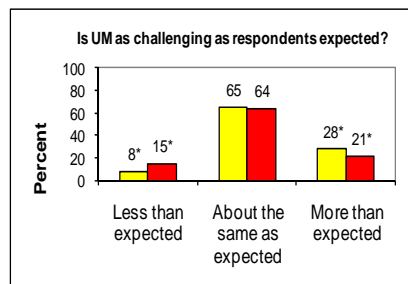


Source: BSS 2008

Freshmen Juniors/Seniors



Do Freshmen with High SATs Feel Challenged?



Source: BSS 2008

* = Significant difference

Non-High SAT High SAT



How much are freshmen working?

- Freshmen respondents perceive high workload in reading and studying (BSS 2008)

Instructor Expectations			For Freshmen...	Student Preferences		
% "None/A Little"	% "Some"	% "A Lot"		% "Less than what is currently expected"	% "About the same"	% "More than what is currently expected"
5	29	66	Studying for a test	18	68	13
10	27	63	Reading	33	56	11
17	41	42	Writing papers	29	61	10
27	39	34	Completing problem sets	16	67	17



Do freshmen want more academic engagement?

Classroom Engagement			For Freshmen...	Preferred Engagement		
% "None/A Little"	% "Some"	% "A Lot"		% "Less than what is currently expected"	% "About the same"	% "More than what is currently expected"
19	53	28	Articulate and support my own opinion	6	60	34
34	47	20	Participate in in-depth discussions	13	48	39
34	52	14	Rethink something I believed to be true based on new information	8	64	28
38	40	21	Work harder than I thought I could			
50	38	12	Seek additional information above and beyond what is expected for the course			

Source: BSS 2008



Where are students most engaged?

Classroom Engagement			For Freshmen...	Life Beyond Coursework		
% "None/ A Little"	% "Some"	% "A Lot"		% "None/ A Little"	% "Some"	% "A Lot"
19	53	28	Articulate and support my own opinion	16	43	41
34	47	20	Participate in in-depth discussions	28	41	31
34	52	14	Rethink something I believed to be true based on new information	32	47	22
38	40	21	Work harder than I thought I could			
50	38	12	Seek additional information above and beyond what is expected for the course			

Source: BSS 2008



Questions for end of presentation

- What is “academic challenge” for students: More work or different work?
- What does it mean that students feel appropriately challenged?
- Should UM want students to be more challenged than they would like?
- Students feel challenged in the amount of work, but perhaps seek a different quality of academic engagement. How can UM accomplish this in the current resource environment?



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The New Plan for General Education

Adding greater engagement to courses
for undergraduates.



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Revisions to General Education

- Simplified distribution requirements
- New Analytic Reasoning and Oral Communication requirements for all students
- Permits use of experiential learning to satisfy GenEd requirements
- Each student must take two I-Series Courses that are designed to add “Imagination, Innovation, Impact, Inspiration...”

Student Expectations



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- Most are in living-learning settings where engagement is standard, so traditional classrooms may seem stilted and strange.
- Many have contacts at other universities where courses already have been transformed.
- Students see little value in learning facts while knowledge is changing daily.

I-Series Courses: Signature of General Education



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- **Imagine. Investigate. Innovate.**
- Unique to the Maryland undergraduate experience
- Fulfill requirements in a creative & contemporary way
- Challenge students to apply diverse intellectual traditions to today's big issues:
 - Is the rise of artificial intelligence a good thing?
 - How do ideas spread through social networks like Facebook or Twitter?
 - Is it always wrong to kill another human being?

I-Series=Higher Engagement



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- <http://www.iseries.umd.edu/about/>
- Some exemplary I-Series Courses -Spring 2010
 - Information 3.0: Exploring Technological Tools
 - Playing the Market: Managing Risk by Using Technical Analysis
 - Recognizing Homophobia in the New Millenium
 - The Sustainable City: Opportunities and Challenges
 - What is Religion

Student I-Course Survey



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- More than 80 percent of respondents said they would recommend their I-Series course to a friend.
- More than 60 percent said the course was unlike other general education courses.
- Student comments supported the themes of innovation, inspiration, impact.

I-Course Student Comments



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Survey says that students want more in-depth discussions...

- “This course involved a lot more thinking (out loud) and discussion in lecture than my other classes.”
- “I liked working in groups. It allowed me to gain knowledge from others.”
- “This I-course experience was extremely different from any other course experience I have had on campus. This course was a lot more interactive, with both the professor and fellow classmates. The use of various technologies was also a very different yet rewarding experience.”

I-Course Student Comments



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Survey says that students want to rethink old ideas....

- “It made me think about my future life choices as far as trying to live a more sustainable life and trying to help the USA become more sustainable.”

I-Course Student Comments



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Applying knowledge.....

- “Instead of just spitting back facts on an exam, we utilized our knowledge in the course...”
- “More emphasis was on developing skills than on brute force memorization.”
- “It felt a lot more like a real experience. I feel that it not only taught me the materials but showed me how to use that information.”
- “This course was much more in tune with what is happening right now with the topics we discussed.”
- “I felt this class was more engaging and was more about current issues.”

I-Course Student Comments



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New Classroom techniques....

- “The approach to learning was innovative and exciting. I learned when I didn't realize I was learning.”
- “I believe these courses are a great way to engage students in a different kind of classroom. The concepts covered were interactive and made use of various mediums of teaching.”
- Thank you for these classes! So glad I took one before graduating :-)

Discussion



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- How do the I-Courses and other aspects of the new Gen Ed reflect the academic challenge data?
- What is “academic challenge” for students: More work or different work?
- What does it mean that students feel appropriately challenged?
- Should UM want students to be more challenged than they would like?
- Students feel challenged in the amount of work, but perhaps seek a different quality of academic engagement. How can UM accomplish this in the current resource environment?



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The CAWG Snapshot on Academic Challenge is
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