

Overview of the First Year Experience Program

The following is a brief overview of the First Year Experience Program at UConn. A component of the Undergraduate Education and Instruction (UE&I) and the Institute for Student Success (ISS), the First Year Experience Program is more than just a series of courses designed primarily for first and second year students. In fact, within the past year the program's name was changed to the Office of First Year Programs and Learning Communities (FYLP) to more accurately reflect its broader mission. The focus of this report, however, is on the specific courses designed to assist incoming students with the transition to the University.

History

As early as 1996, in an effort to provide more support for students transitioning from high school to college, UConn developed an experimental course designed to provide students with access to faculty, staff and peers in their first semester and introduce them to the many resources and opportunities available on campus. This followed a national trend, especially at large public universities, to improve the undergraduate experience for students while also improving retention and graduation rates. In March 1997 the Courses and Curriculum Committee of the University Senate formally approved the creation of the three Interdepartmental (INTD) courses designed for new students (Appendix A). The courses are listed below. The list includes an additional INTD course that was established for Honors students after the original courses were approved.

1800. FYE University Learning Skills

One credit. One class period. Open to freshman and sophomore students only.

A component of the First Year Experience (FYE) program, this course is intended to acquaint students with the university and expand their learning experiences in order for them to adjust to the new expectations they will face. Involves assignments that will provide opportunities for students to enhance their academic and interpersonal skills.

1810. FYE Learning Community Seminar

(One credit. One class period. Open to freshman and sophomore students only.)

A component of the First Year Experience (FYE) program, this seminar course is intended to provide an opportunity to integrate the consideration of material from three courses through discussion, assignments, and projects. Students will have opportunities to enhance their academic and interpersonal skills.

1820. FYE Faculty/Student Seminar

(182) Either semester. One credit. One class period.

Open to freshman and sophomore students only. With a change in content, this course may be repeated for credit.

A component of the First Year Experience (FYE) program, this seminar course is intended to provide an opportunity for students to investigate topics of professional interest to the faculty instructor through guided research or reading, discussion, and some writing. The course will help students learn independently and engage actively in the academic life of the university.

1784. Freshman Honors Seminar

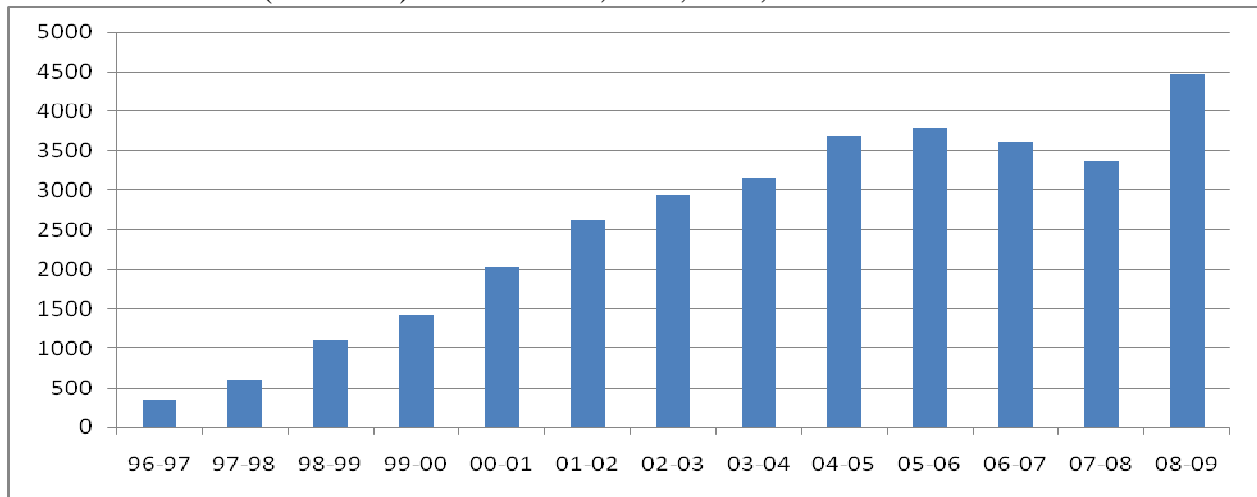
(198) First semester. One credit. Open only with consent of Honors Director.

An overview of some aspects of university education. Designed to help students set learning goals to be achieved during the baccalaureate experience.

Enrollment

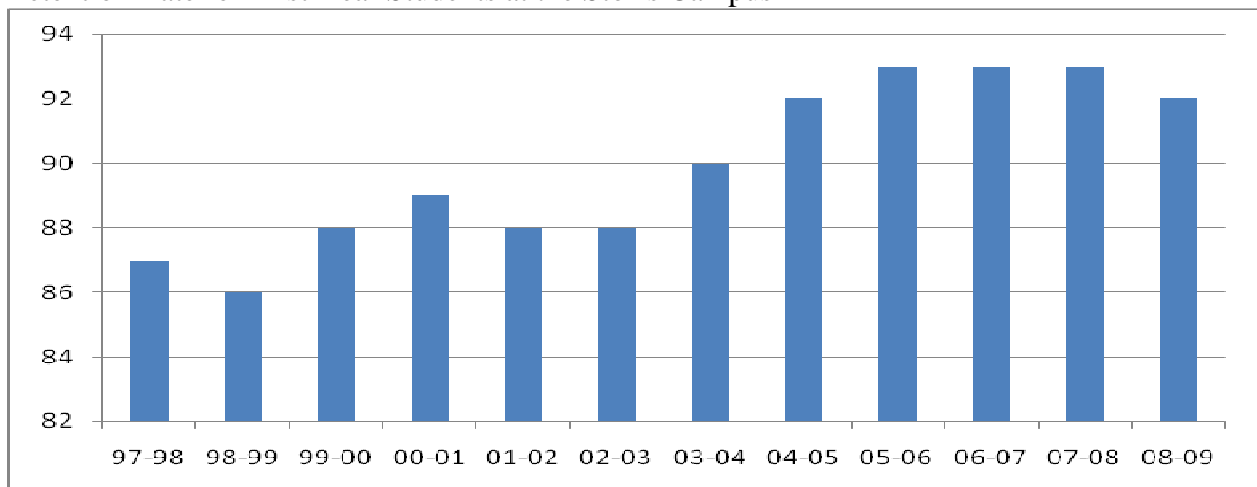
As the following graph illustrates enrollments in INTD 1784, 1800, 1810, and 1820 have grown significantly since the inception of the program. Except for honors students and students living in a learning community, incoming students are not required to take an INTD course.

Overall Enrollment (total seats) in INTD 1784, 1800, 1810, 1820 from 96-97 to 07-08



Although many factors impact retention it is interesting to note that the University's gain in retention at the Storrs campus mirrors the gains in enrollment in FYE courses. The four year and six year graduation rates reflect a similar relationship to FYE enrollments.

Retention Rate for First Year Students at the Storrs Campus



A closer examination of enrollments for fall 2009 provides an accurate picture of the current scope of the program. The following table indicates enrollments by school and college. Enrollments in the School of Engineering are low in comparison to other schools and colleges because they discourage their students from enrolling in INTD 1800. They have a course, ENGR 1000, that covers some of the topics covered in INTD 1800.

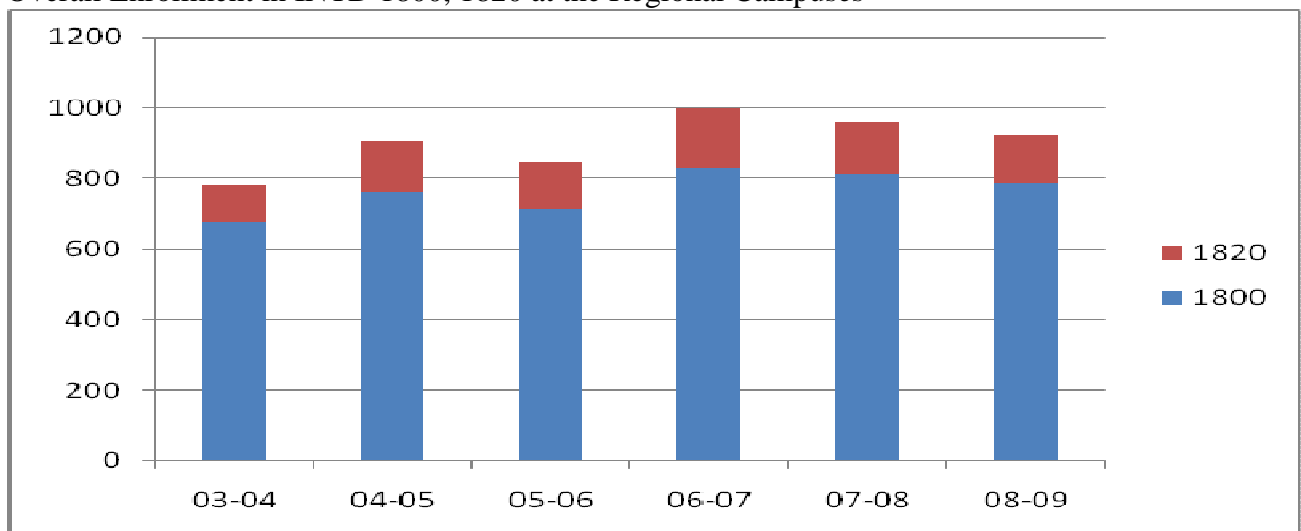
Overall Enrollment in INTD 1784, 1800, 1810, 1820 in Fall 2009 at the Storrs Campus

Program	1784	1800	1810	1820	Total
ACES	66	788	135	230	1219
Agri & NR	13	38	89	31	171
Arts & Sci	174	542	127	183	1026
Business	32	212	14	55	313
Eng/BusAdm	2				2
Engineer	79	10	19	4	112
Fine Arts	9	5	29	2	45
Nursing	3	34	21	5	63
Grand Total	378	1629	434	510	2951

- 75% of first time freshmen are enrolled in an INTD course
- Not including Engineering, 82% of first time freshmen are enrolled in an INTD course

The regional campuses have embraced the FYE concept and offer sections of INTD 1800 and 1820. The regional campuses do not have Honors students and they are just beginning to add learning communities.

Overall Enrollment in INTD 1800, 1820 at the Regional Campuses



- 61% of first time freshmen at the regional campuses in Fall 2008 were enrolled in an INTD course

Course Content

INTD 1800 (University Learning Skills) serves as the foundation of all of the INTD courses designed for first year students and has by far the largest enrollments. The course content for INTD 1800 has been established through the Office of First Year Programs and Learning Communities with guidance from the Advisory Board (Appendix B) and by following best practices from exemplary first year experience programs across the country. A course template has been created through HuskyCT and individual learning modules have been developed to address specific topics and themes. Instructors have significant input in determining how and when they will deliver the content. The result is that every INTD 1800 section is slightly different as individual instructors play to their strengths and backgrounds but an evaluation of course syllabi indicates that the majority of classes cover the same general topics. These topics often overlap and they include:

- Self Awareness and Transition Issues
- Academic Engagement
- Diversity and Multiculturalism
- Study Skills and Time Management
- Choosing Majors and Careers
- Campus Safety, Health and Wellness
- Student Involvement
- Institutional History and Culture

Instructors employ a variety of methods to address the topics including lectures, class discussions (on-line and in class), guest speakers, field trips, writing assignments, team projects and presentations. The vast majority of classes use formal writing assignments as a mechanism to engage students with course content. Often, students are required to attend campus events, usually defined as academic, cultural or artistic, and reflect on their experiences. Listed below are some of the most common examples of how topics may be addressed.

Transition Issues and Self Awareness

- Define self through class discussion and exercises including the Myers Brigs Type Indicator (MBTI)
- Practice conflict resolution and discuss roommate issues
- Examine relationships with family, friends (old and new) and significant others.

Academic Engagement

- Practice the writing process through assignments and the Writing Center
 - Approximately 91% of instructors surveyed in fall 2008 assigned at least one writing assignment.
- Explore Study Abroad opportunities
- Attend an academic presentation (i.e. Teale Lecture)
- Tour the Library

Diversity and Multiculturalism

- Define diversity and multiculturalism
- Examine the history and mission of the Cultural Centers.
 - In 2008 approximately 700 FYE students visited a cultural center with their class.

- Attend a cultural event
- Discuss and reflect on experience with multiculturalism

Study Skills and Time Management

- Define and develop study skills with assistance from the Academic Achievement Center
- Share study and time management techniques

Choosing Majors and Careers

- Write resumes and cover letters through presentations from Career Services
 - In fall 2008, approximately 475 FYE students worked directly with Career Services
- Explore decision making process on majors and careers through presentations from ACES advisors

Campus Safety, Health and Wellness

- Discuss campus safety with members of the Uconn police department
- Tour the Public Safety facility
 - In fall 2008 722 students toured the Public Safety facility
- Discuss alcohol and drug use, sexual health and proper nutrition with representatives from Wellness and Prevention Services.

Student Involvement

- Attend Involvement fair
- Discuss volunteer opportunities with the Community Outreach

Institutional History and Culture

- Tour the UConn Dairy Bar
- Discuss the history of the land grant/sea grant university
- Experience the exhibits at the Benton Museum and/or the Natural History Museum

Instructors

At the Storrs campus alone there are over 160 instructors teaching INTD 1800/1810/1820 in fall 2009. The tables below reflect their “official” roles with the University and educational levels.

University Role	#
Faculty	31
Grad Student	26
Community based	4
Staff	103
Total	163

Educational level	#
Bachelor	19
Master Candidate	21
Masters	70
Ph.D.	41
Ph.D. Candidate	8
Professional	4
Total	163

INTD instructors represent a variety of University constituencies (see list below). A few are members of the greater campus community (i.e. area houses of worship). They all share a sincere desire to work directly with students and help them make a successful transition to the University.

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
NEAG School of Education
School of Pharmacy
School of Business
School of Nursing
Academic Affairs

School of Engineering
School of Fine Arts
Student Affairs
Enrollment Management
Multicultural and Interactional Affairs
University Libraries
Undergraduate Education and Instruction

The diversity of the instructors is clearly a strength of the program but requires a coordinated effort to insure a level of consistency across all class sections. In addition to the course template outlined in the previous section, new instructors are required to go through training before teaching INTD 1800 and veteran instructors are invited to “refresher” training every semester. In addition, ongoing workshops are presented every semester. Listed below are examples of the workshops available for FYE instructors.

- Course Development for INTD 1800 and 1820
- Assigning and Grading Writing in FYE Courses
- Creating Classroom Culture
- Facilitating Discussion: A Balance of Voices
- Setting Learning Objectives in Your FYE Class
- The Effective Mentor
- Making the Grade: The Challenges of Evaluating Your FYE Students
- Creating Engaged Learning Environments for Today’s Students
- Managing Mid-Term Grade Reports and Assisting Struggling Students
- Effective Use of Technology in the Classroom
- HuskyCT Training Sessions

Mentors

A valuable component of the FYE program is the use of undergraduate mentors. This fall there are approximately 90 undergraduate students serving as mentors in INTD classes. Their roles can vary by section but they are all expected to be active participants in the class and apply their first hand experience to the course. The vast majority of mentors were students in an FYE class themselves and many were encouraged to be mentors by their instructors. Their training and supervision begins before the start of the class with a two day summer program and extends throughout the semester through their enrollment in an EPSY 3020 course (Peer Counseling) which is co-taught by the Director of the Office of First Year Programs and Learning Communities and the Assist Vice Provost for the Institute for Student Success.

Access & Partnerships

The INTD 1800 course provides access to a significant number of incoming students. The University uses the FYE program to communicate with students on a variety of issues. This can be as routine as informing students of upcoming events or as sensitive as following up on midterm warnings. A variety of constituencies directly deliver their messages to first year students through the program. The following table reflects the campus programs most extensively involved with FYE in fall 2008 and the number of students they connected with.

Health Education	1691
Alcohol and Other Drugs	1235
Writing Center	1026
Police	722
Benton Museum	570
University Libraries	532
Career Services	475
Study Abroad	361

The FYE courses have also served as a rich source of data for faculty. For example, Crystal Park from Psychology and Carolyn Lin from Communication Sciences have partnered with FYE on separate projects that used extensive amounts of data from FYE students and resulted in publications and successful grant applications.

University programs have used INTD 1800 to provide support for specific populations. Currently there are separate INTD 1800 sections for student athletes and students in the Student Support Services (SSS) program.

Assessment

Assessment of the INTD courses is an ongoing effort and certainly a challenge given the diversity of topics and instructors. The quality of the class is evaluated through the University's course assessment process and individual results are shared with individual instructors and the program. The FYE program also assesses individual courses by having the instructors evaluate the mentors and the mentors evaluate the instructors. The information from these various assessments is used to determine who should return as instructors.

The success of the FYE program in general can be measured in a number ways. First, as has already been mentioned, there appears to be a relationship between the FYE program and student success as measured by retention and graduation rates. Second, a recent comparison of grade point averages of students who entered Storrs in Fall 2008 revealed that those who enrolled in an INTD course earned a cumulative GPA at the end of the year of approximately 3.1 while those that did not earned a cumulative GPA of approximately 2.8. This evaluation controlled for the grade in the INTD course. Third, the feedback from the departments and offices that work closely with FYE has been overwhelmingly positive. They very much appreciate the opportunity to engage students early in their first year. Finally, this fall the INTD classes will provide 75% of the incoming first year students with a more "personal" experience. At a large University like UConn that alone could be considered a success.