

K-State First's 2008 and 2009 Pilot Studies and the Benefits of Learning Communities and First-Year Seminars

The research on learning communities and first-year seminars reveals that there are several benefits to be realized from the creation of learning communities and first-year seminar classes. The four most important of these demonstrated benefits include:

- improved retention
- improved academic success
- improved student satisfaction
- faster time to degree

K-State First, which launches officially in the fall of 2010 after two years of piloting and studying First-Year Seminars, is not yet ready to measure time to degree.

However, our pilot studies have seen real improvement in the other three areas.

Improved Retention

Enrollment by percentage of original cohort	Fall 2009
Fall 2008 Freshmen Cohort	78.79%
Fall 2008 FYS Cohort	81.50%

Enrollment by percentage of original cohort	Spring 2010
Fall 2009 Freshmen Cohort	92.21%
Fall 2009 FYS Cohort	93.80%

Improved Academic Success

Fall 2008	FYS Students (n=270)	All First-Time, First-Year KSU Students (n=3,714)
Cumulative Mean GPA	2.9258	2.756

Fall 2009	FYS Students (n=401)	All First-Time, First-Year KSU Students (n=3,686)
Cumulative Mean GPA	2.894	2.74

Improved Student Satisfaction

Students think these classes are excellent. In 2008, **73%** of the FYS classes had "excellent course" ratings at or above the national IDEA Database average. In 2009, **77%** of the FYS classes had "excellent course" ratings at or above the national IDEA Database average. As the IDEA Group Summary Report explains: "When this percentage exceeds 60%, the inference is the Group's overall instructional effectiveness was unusually high."

Students also think their instructors are excellent. In 2008, **73%** of the FYS classes had "excellent teacher" ratings at or above the national IDEA Database average. In 2009, the figure was **82%**.

The written comments that students make are also overwhelmingly positive, and they came from a range of classes:

"Freshman seminar classes ... are the greatest idea ever."

"I really enjoyed this course. The course materials were interesting and I remained dedicated throughout the semester. I would ask that there be a follow-up course to this one."

"[The instructor] promotes learning and personal progress and provides students with the tools and support they need to reach their goals."

"This class was incredible. [The instructor] was one of the best teachers I've ever had. I think the First Year Seminar program is an amazing idea. This is a program that should become the norm. The atmosphere and style of the class were very conducive to learning."

"[The instructor's] hands-on view of teaching really reaches out to us as students. [The instructor] treated us as though we were friends which made it much more enjoyable to listen and participate. I've learned so much in this class. Amazing teacher."

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