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Expanding the Role of Required Out-of-Class Experiences in FYE: Lessons from Personal Development and Student Development Projects

Phame Camarena
Andrew Saltarelli
Central Michigan University
Janice Lung
Western State College of Colorado

Abstract. Assessment data from both an FYE-infused general education course (N = 153) and a first-year seminar (N = 392) were analyzed to identify students' perceptions about projects that required significant participation in out-of-class activities as an integral part of the course. The results from this analysis revealed that, in addition to increasing knowledge and campus engagement, these projects also promoted student development more broadly by encouraging students to "try new things" and "step out of the box." Although these projects represented additional work on the part of students, they overwhelmingly endorsed the value of the projects, with more than 97% of students in the FYE-infused class reporting support for the project. Similarly, 38% of students in the first-year seminar spontaneously identified the project as the most important part of the class. Specific categories of students' coded responses are presented and a model of key elements essential for the success of the project is described.

Experiential learning involves engaging students in activities and asking them to reflect on their experiences. This teaching method dates back to the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1938/1997), who argued that actual life experience is the source for all meaningful learning. Dewey's philosophy became the foundation of contemporary models of learning that place concrete experience, a learner's personal involvement in a specific activity or experience, at the beginning of the learning process (Jarvis, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). However, experience alone does not lead to learning; equally important is a reflection component through which students make meaning of their experiences so that their perspectives on the topic or issue at hand can be transformed (Marienau & Fiddler, 2002; Mezirow, 1991; Washbourn, 1996).

Recognizing its value as a pedagogical tool, efforts have been made to integrate experiential learning into various introductory college courses including education (Montgomery, Deery, & Brown, 1996), business (O'Hara & Stephens, 2000), science (Peters & Stearns, 2003), and psychology (Marienau & Fiddler, 2002). The documented outcomes of experiential learning in these studies include gains in knowledge and improved attitudes toward the material of the course. Further research on outdoor and humanistic education models suggests that when students are challenged to participate in meaningful activities and are provided with an opportunity for reflection and processing, learning transcends specific content and can be a tool for enhanced self-awareness and empowerment (e.g., Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). As suggested by Mezirow (1991), this kind of meaningful experiential learning process can be transformative for the student.

Because of the transformative potential of this process, experiential education methods may have special application and significance for promoting student development in first-year seminars. Many first-year students are already in a period of tremendous disorientation and are confronted with numerous new activities outside the classroom as part of their normal

student development experiences—a process that first-year seminars seek to facilitate in healthy ways (e.g., Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates, 1989). In addition to providing discussions and readings about college that help students make meaning of their out-of-class experiences, some first-year experience (FYE) programs intentionally seek to connect seminar courses to campus activities in an effort to help students engage with the institution and increase their awareness of campus resources. A perusal of first-year seminar syllabi from various institutions across the country (National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2004) reveals a range of experiential out-of-class requirements including attending campus cultural events, participating in extracurricular activities, visiting student organizations, meeting with a faculty member or staff advisor, visiting the library, and attending class sessions at the career center.

Such learning activities and strategies are valuable and consistent with the traditional goals of most FYE programs, yet they barely tap the potential of experiential-education models. These efforts can be extended by expanding the range and nature of activities that students are challenged to experience and helping students to process the significance of their experiences in terms of their total student development. The purpose of this article, therefore, is (a) to introduce a model of an out-of-class activity project used in different FYE-related courses in one institution and (b) to document the broader developmental and educational value of incorporating this kind of intensive experiential learning project into FYE curriculum.

The Activity Model

Although the specific activity assignments described here come from two different FYE-related courses offered at a large, comprehensive university, both assignments were developed to be consistent with essential principles of effective learning supported by the Association for Experiential Education (2002) and should be applicable across a range of institutions and first-year

courses. At the most basic level, both of these projects simply required students to complete a set of out-of-class activities linked to course objectives and to write about their experiences. However, because both projects put an emphasis on meaningful student choices, healthy risk taking, and the value of processing and reflection, the outcomes had significant potential to extend beyond traditional classroom expectations.

Both activity projects included a listing of categories consistent with the goals of the course and provided multiple options from which students could choose. Although students were required to complete project activities, the choice of activities was theirs to make. Student choice is important as it encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and increases the odds that students will have a personally meaningful experience regardless of their background, current living situation, or personal needs.

Although students were free to make choices, activity project guidelines specified that students were required to stretch their comfort levels and to try activities outside the range of past or present experiences. Instructors actively promoted risk taking and allowed students wide latitude in trying new things, as long as activities were negotiated in advance; clearly connected to the categories of the project; represented a potential learning experience; and were healthy, legal, and safe. With this emphasis, whether students perceived this challenge to stretch as permission to try something that they have always wanted to do but never could before (e.g., participate in a new sport, attend a church or religious service that is different from what they know) or as an opportunity to do something they had never previously considered (e.g., have coffee with a professor, attend a yoga class), the element of risk created an affective or emotional component that made the assignment something more than just another project to be completed for a grade.

The final essential element of the project model was reflection. Across all classes, students were required to write brief reports and personal reflections about their experience with

each activity answering the following questions: What did you do? Why did you choose the activity? What did you experience during the activity? and How did you feel about the experience afterwards? Combined with in-class discussions of student activities and essays that required students to connect their out-of-class activities to in-class concepts, students were provided with a processing structure that encouraged them to reflect critically and make personal meaning of their experiences—both in terms of specific learning objectives for the course and in terms of personal growth as students in a new environment.

Method

To assess the effectiveness of this activity model, data were collected from two separate courses using two independent assessment strategies. The specific nature of the courses, activity assignments, assessment strategies, and student samples are described below.

FYE-Infused Course

The first course to use the activity model was an Introduction to Human Development course that was infused with traditional first-year experience curriculum (i.e., the FYE-infused course). This three-credit general education course combined standard learning objectives with objectives designed to enhance student success and development more practically, including: understanding typical developmental changes in the transition from high school to college, analyzing how college as a context changes development, and designing strategies for maximizing developmental outcomes across the college years. The class met three times a week. Twice a week the whole class (80-90 students) met for a lecture, and once a week smaller discussion sessions met with a student mentor.

The assignment was introduced to students as a "Personal Development Project" (PDP) and required students to complete four activities related to exploring the college environment and

four activities related to understanding human development. The specific categories and a short sample of activities are included in Appendix A. In actual practice, additional choices were routinely announced in class, and students were encouraged to seek instructor permission, in advance, for other activities they believed fit the guidelines of the project. In addition to writing reports about each activity, students were required to complete a final reflection essay connecting their total experience to course concepts and objectives. This major assignment was a significant addition to the course for students who were already expected to complete a more traditional research paper as part of course requirements.

As part of the regular, anonymous, end-of-course evaluations, all students in the class were asked to complete an additional one-page survey focused on their perceptions about the PDP. The form explained that "because the PDP requires so much time and energy on the part of the instructor, student mentors, and students, it is important to assess how valuable an activity this is and how it might be improved." Students were then asked to address the following questions:

1. Drawing from your own experience doing the PDP, would you say that the PDP was worth the time and effort?
2. Which of the activities that you completed was the most valuable to you? Explain.
3. What major lessons have you taken from the PDP? What did you really learn from doing this?

Data for the current study are drawn from two consecutive years in which a total of 153 students completed the assessment. Because this assessment was completed as part of the regular end-of-course evaluation, no demographic data were collected; however, both sections of the class participating in this study were reserved for traditional-aged (17 to 20 years old) first-semester students. The proportion of students identified as members of ethnic-minority groups (about 5%) is similar to the proportion found in the general campus population. A review of the class

roll for each section reveals a higher percentage of females (79%) than males (21%).

First-Year Seminar

The second course to formalize this activity model was a one-credit elective First-Year Experience Seminar (FYE 101) offered during the first half of the fall semester for new students. These smaller classes (approximately 20 students per section) were taught by either a faculty or experienced professional staff member. A student mentor was also assigned to each section to assist the instructor and students in meeting course objectives. The goals of this course include increasing student knowledge about the college experience, encouraging student engagement within the college environment, and empowering students to take responsibility for their own college experience.

The activity project was first presented to all instructors as part of instructor training. This "Student Development Project" (SDP) was shared as a model assignment with all the instructions and activities included. Instructors were encouraged, but not required, to use some form of this activity in each of their sections. Most instructors complied but made minor modifications in the activities assigned, the number of activities to be completed, or the format of reports and essays. Only one instructor chose not to include some form of the assignment as part of the course requirements. A composite list of categories with sample activities used by instructors is included in Appendix B. Additional approved activities were routinely announced in classes with some specifically coordinated for students in FYE sections (e.g., FYE wall climb night, FYE library detective/scavenger hunt). Similar to the requirements for the Personal Development Projects, students were typically required to complete both individual reports about each activity and a final essay integrating lessons from the overall project with the concepts and principles of the class.

The data for this analysis were drawn from special FYE program end-of-course evaluations of 392 students spread across 19 sections of the course over a two-year period. Unlike typical

course evaluations, additional questions (including those collecting demographic data) were included for program review purposes. No special effort was made to formally assess this activity in these evaluations; however, students regularly mentioned the SDP in their open-ended responses to an item that asked them to describe what they thought "the most valuable thing about this class was." Additional analyses were completed to more accurately test the degree to which the SDP was mentioned and what about it was most valuable.

Consistent with the general distribution of the student body, 5% of students enrolled in these classes identified themselves as members of ethnic minority groups with a higher percentage of females (61%) than males (39%). Students' ages ranged from 17 to 20 years with a mean of 18.14 years and a standard deviation of .47 years.

Analysis Strategies

For both sets of data, content analyses were used to group and classify student responses on end-of-semester evaluations. Two independent coders were given copies of the student responses and used both the manifest content available (i.e., actual words used) and the latent concepts indicated (i.e., ideas implied but not stated explicitly) to generate a tentative list of major categories reflecting student responses. These coders then met with other members of the research team to compare codes, refine the list, and develop the final categories to be used in the analysis. After the categories and coding rules were established and coding practice yielded consistent results, the two original coders completed all data coding with periodic checks to ensure that inter-rater reliability and coding consistency were maintained. Inter-rater reliability for the coding ranged from 90% ("most valuable thing") to 99% ("Was the PDP worth the effort?").

Data from the FYE-infused class were further analyzed using methods derived from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where an attempt was made to examine the broader latent construct structure behind specific categories and codes. This

"constant comparative" method required the data coders to create tentative memos about the intent behind each student's responses and to examine the connections between the different categories created for the content analysis. Memos about major themes and issues beyond the narrow content analysis were compared by the coders and presented to the larger research group for discussion and refinement. This work required that the coders examine how responses across questions were connected and to draw lines between the multiple categories that might be reflected in any one person's response (e.g., Students who say "X" also typically say "Y," but students who say "Z" rarely acknowledge "Y."). From this more interpretive work, it was possible to identify the broader significance of the PDP from the perspective of the students' reports.

Results

FYE-Infused Course and the Personal Development Project

Content analysis of responses to the question, "Was the project worth the time and effort?" revealed that an overwhelming majority (88.8%) of students clearly indicated "yes," with another 8.5% reporting that it was "somewhat" worth the effort. Only 2.61% of the sample, or a total of 4 out of 153 students, offered statements that could be categorized as a clear "no." The significance of this pattern is underscored by the fact that before the assessments were completed all of the students were reminded that the PDP was an "extra" assignment that no other section of the general education class was required to complete.

Because the PDP was designed to facilitate important learning objectives for both the general education Human Development content and the FYE goals of the course, the activity categories were evenly divided between options for exploring the college context and options for exploring the forces that shape personal development. To assess which of these sets of activities proved to be the most meaningful, students were asked to identify what "one activity" they believed "was the most valuable."

The frequency of responses for each category of the project assignment is presented in Table 1. Although students' responses included all of the categories offered, there was a clear preference for activities in the "personal development" section with a solid majority (69.57%) identifying an activity from these four categories as most valuable. The top category across both sections included activities that promoted self-awareness (28.57%), while the top category within the "college context" section was activities that helped students build connections (11.18%).

Finally, to assess the educational value of the overall project, students were asked "What major lesson have you taken from the PDP?" Beginning with the identification of major responses found in the data, the content analysis revealed two dominant categories: "Gained Self Awareness" and "To Try New Things." Self-awareness came in many forms but generally included either new insights about personality and abilities or the realization that individuals really could shape the course of their own development. As one student who combined these themes reported: "This was great!! I learned a bunch about myself and what I can accomplish. My idea of what I can accomplish is drastically different." "Trying new things" or "to try new things" were direct phrases found across multiple responses. Students consistently elaborated that being "forced" to try new things for the project made them realize that there is value in new experiences and that this was a lesson they hoped to internalize after the completion of the course. One student summarized this lesson by saying: "What I really learned from doing this was that everyone should push themselves to do things they wouldn't normally do. It helps you live your life and maybe enjoy something you never thought you would enjoy."

Two additional minor categories were also identified in the content analysis: "Learned about College/Campus" and "To Overcome Fear." The first of these categories included both a general appreciation for the college experience (e.g., "college is a place to explore") and a more specific recognition of the resources available on the college campus (e.g., "[campus] has a

Table 1

Frequency of "Favorite Activity" Reported by Students in FYE-infused Course (*N* = 153)

Activities	% Frequency
College Context	
Build connections	11.18
Embrace diversity	8.70
Meet the faculty	7.45
Explore the arts	2.48
Personal Development	
Increase self-awareness	28.57
Alter the habitual self	21.74
Change contexts	10.56
Stretch physical/cognitive boundaries	8.70

Note. The numbers represent percentages of responses for each category and do not necessarily equal 100%.

whole lot more going on than you hear about and people should take advantage of it"). Similarly, overcoming fear was stated in both general terms (e.g., "not to be scared") as well as linked to specific activities or personal concerns (e.g., "not to be afraid of the reactions of others"). The frequencies for both the major and minor categories are presented in Table 2.

Taken as a whole, each of these categories is related to the general education or FYE goals of the course. When the relationships between the categories are examined, a more meaningful picture of the value of the project emerges. During the original coding process, it quickly became obvious that, while categories of responses could be coded independently within each

Table 2

Frequency of "Major Lessons Learned" from Project in FYE-Infused Course (*N* = 153)

Category	% Frequency
Self-awareness	42.48
Value of trying new things	41.18
Learning about College/Campus	11.76
Overcoming fear	5.88

Note. The numbers represent percentages of codes for each category with multiple codes permitted for each student response.

answer, students were typically combining different categories into broader lessons within their answers. Similarly, regardless of which category the primary lesson fit, the majority of responses grouped around a common theme—the power of the activity to help students "step out of the box." Thus, stepping outside the box became the foundation for self-development and empowerment.

Although stepping outside the box was not a phrase used by the instructor or included explicitly on the project assignment, many students used the phrase themselves to explain how the project shaped their learning and life. As one student explained, "I learned that for me to grow and change as person I have to step out of [my] box and do some things that make me a bit uncomfortable and that they aren't always a bad thing." Even when the phrase was not explicitly stated, this theme was associated with each of the major and minor categories identified in the content analysis, and was most frequently the process identified as connecting the major lessons of the project. The importance of the required element of the project for facilitating stepping outside

the box is best illustrated by a student who describes the value of the project by explaining,

> The one major lesson that I learned from doing the PDP was that I don't have to be afraid to try something different that I wouldn't normally do. A lot of the activities were things I would never have accomplished unless I was in this class.

Perhaps most significantly for the FYE-related goals, students also consistently acknowledged how this process specifically applied to their perceptions about college. This is summarized nicely by a student who concluded,

> College is a place to come and work and leave with a degree, but people also need to understand that it is a place to grow as a person. And my PDP showed me that, by having me experience new things.

FYE 101 Seminar and the Student Development Project

To test the degree to which the SDP was reflected in students' reports of the "most valuable thing about this class" in end-of-course evaluations for FYE 101, a formal content analysis was conducted examining students' responses across a two-year period ($N = 392$). Although not all sections of the FYE 101 course used the SDP as formally as others, the SDP was the single most common response from students commenting on the "most valuable thing" about the class. More than one third of students (38.01%) mentioned some aspect of SDP in responding to this question. In specific sections of FYE 101 where the SDP was featured more centrally within the class by the instructor, this percentage was over 50%. Coding indicators for this category included specific identification of the project by name (e.g., "The most valuable thing was the Student Development Projects") and more general statements about requirements to complete activities (e.g., "making me go out and participate in new things").

Because this assessment was not as targeted as the evaluations conducted for the FYE-infused course, there were no follow-

up questions or probes to examine what about the project was most valuable. However, because students were responding to an open-ended question, many of them provided an additional explanation with their replies. A content analysis of these explanations found that the most common response was, "Experienced new things/Got involved," with students describing how the project requirements "forced" them into action or "made them" get involved with things they never would have otherwise. In the words of students themselves, the project made class members "get off their butts and do something," especially things they otherwise "normally wouldn't [do] on [their] own."

The project was also seen as valuable because it offered an introduction to "campus and university life" (e.g., "getting us involved in activities outside the classroom…helps students become familiar with campus, meet new people, and see what [campus] provides"). Although to a lesser degree than in the FYE-infused course, a number of students also explained how the project provided "motivation" for growth and increased "self-awareness." The frequencies for all of the categories identified are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Most Frequently Reported Reasons for Valuing Activity Project in FYE 101 ($N = 149$)

Categories	% Frequency
Experienced new things / Got involved	47.27
Learned about campus and university life	27.28
It was helpful (general response)	8.18
Gave motivation	7.27
Learned about self	5.45
It was fun and enjoyable	4.54

Note. The numbers represent percentages of responses for each category from all answers where a response was provided.

Discussion

The goals of this project were to provide a model for effectively integrating out-of-class experiences into the first-year-experience curriculum and to document the nature of outcomes associated with this kind of project. Combining the lessons from the assessment data with the principles behind the development of the project strategy, there is compelling evidence that, in addition to providing valuable opportunities for students to learn about what the campus offers, a well-structured out-of-class activity project can also promote development more holistically and empower students to more proactively shape the course of their own college experiences.

Although the value of extracurricular experiences are touted in student development literature (Skipper & Argo, 2003), there has been an inconsistent effort to structure connections between academic coursework and students' lived experiences outside the classroom, especially in activities not directly linked to the content of courses. First-year seminars may be an ideal context for making these connections explicit, and the activity models described here demonstrate how this might be done in different types of first-year courses.

Although the students in the general education FYE-infused class realized that the PDP was a time-consuming extra assignment not required of other sections, the overwhelming endorsement of the project suggests that students could easily see the value of the project. Students were not merely satisfied with the project; rather, they were able to articulate outcomes linked to both specific course objectives and broader student development goals. Similarly, although it is a methodological weakness that the FYE 101 assessments did not specifically ask for student feedback about the Student Development Project, the fact that so many students in the FYE 101 end-of-class evaluations *spontaneously* identified the SDP as the single most valuable part of the course confirms the power and potential of the project. Where explanations were given for why the SDP was chosen,

similar themes and issues emerged confirming that it is not just any one class or specific form of the assignment that makes the project successful. In both the PDP and SDP formats, students acknowledged that the project facilitated trying new things and provided an opportunity to learn about themselves, campus, and their potential to take proactive control of their total college experience.

Application and Implementation Issues

The success of this activity project was not surprising given its close adherence to the principles spelled out in the literature on experiential education and student development (e.g., Association for Experiential Education, 2002; Kraft & Kielsmeier, 1995; Mezirow, 1991). That is not to suggest, however, that there were not significant challenges in implementing this model across courses or instructors. Both the problems and the potentials identified in this project have significance for FYE programs considering a similar strategy.

As identified in end-of-course feedback provided by both instructors and student mentors assigned to sections of all courses, the PDP and SDP were significant additions to the courses and created both special challenges and opportunities. Instructors using the model for the first time were especially likely to note challenges. For many faculty members, the use of a "non-academic" strategy initially went against traditions more typical in their discipline-based teaching. Because instructors were free to modify the assignment to meet their needs, this hesitation was minimized as they tentatively explored how the project might complement course content. Not surprisingly, once instructors saw how discussions of activities could enhance the classroom atmosphere and read student reports and evaluations, almost all agreed that the project should be expanded and refined. Chief among their recommendations for improvement were efforts to structure more effective processing activities (both written and in-class discussion) and a willingness to "push students" a little harder to try activities that might stretch their personal comfort zones.

Because the FYE courses described in this paper all used a "student mentor" as part of the overall program design, the significance of mentor experiences is also important to note and has implications for the transferability of this strategy to other programs. From the perspective of the mentors, the activity project was an invaluable way to connect to students in the classroom as it provided them with another meaningful role and strategy for building relationships. Although strategies varied across classes, most instructors encouraged mentors to take a lead role in educating FYE students about available activities on campus and structuring specific activities for groups of students in their sections to match some of the categories on the assignment sheet. Mentors also worked with their instructors, the director of FYE programs, and other mentors to coordinate activities specifically for students enrolled in FYE classes (e.g., FYE wall climb night, FYE Greek-Life tour, FYE library hunt). As suggested by this description, student mentors eased much of the planning and coordination burden that might fall on the shoulders of an instructor who did not have as much direct support in the classroom.

Although different FYE programs might find other challenges in incorporating this kind of extensive out-of-class experiential project into their curriculums, one benefit of the activity model described here is that it does not presume a fit with only one FYE model. As was the case in the two sets of FYE-related courses described in this paper, different courses can make different requirements for activity categories to match the needs and objectives of the courses. While the FYE-infused general education course had several categories of activity that overlapped with the more traditional FYE 101 orientation seminar, it also had specific categories identified to match its specific learning objectives. Similarly, courses built around different FYE models (e.g., extended orientation, content seminar, academic skills) could take the basic principles and modify the structure of the activity project to meet their specific course objectives. In any case, the combination of a carefully planned activity project with

an emphasis on making conscious choices, stretching personal boundaries, and carefully reflecting on experience should help facilitate student growth that extends beyond the narrow objectives of the course.

The choice of which activities to allow and how much boundary stretching to encourage remains one of the central challenges for this kind of experiential education strategy. While some programs require all students to attend specific events or activities, the idea that students can choose for themselves is an important change in strategy, as it increases the potential for meaningful experiences and forces students to take more personal responsibility for their actions. Similarly, broadening the options from which students can choose to include activities that more explicitly promote personal exploration and autonomy (e.g., completing a physical make-over, going vegetarian for a month, attending different religious ceremonies) involves more risk for both the instructor and student; however, the potential gains for self development are enhanced. As indicated in the assessment results presented from the FYE-infused course, students judged activities that focused on self-exploration to be significantly more "valuable" than activities focused more narrowly on campus exploration.

Regardless of the activities included, an effective processing strategy that encourages students to reflect more broadly on their out-of-class experiences can pay important dividends. As indicated in the assessment results from this project, some outcomes from out-of-class experiential activities are independent of the specific activity or project goal. Unless students are encouraged to reflect and comment on these outcomes, neither the student nor instructor may be able to make the most effective meaning of the experience (Marienau & Fiddler, 2002). For example, as one student explained in his reflection about attending a campus play for meeting his required "arts" activity, the big issues were not his appreciation for the arts or his engagement with campus activities (the specific project activity objectives); rather, it was a new realization about "how dependent on others"

he really was when he could not find anyone to attend the play with him. The final outcome for him was increased self-awareness and a stronger sense of self-efficacy as he concluded, "I felt stronger for going on my own after all"—a broader goal not specific to attending an arts activity on campus.

Conclusion

The Personal Development Project and Student Development Project represent models of a larger idea and concept—the structured integration of in-class learning with out-of-class experiences. This is neither new nor radical for professionals working with first-year experience programs (Skipper & Argo, 2003) and is entirely consistent with the scholarship that identifies why and how college changes student lives (e.g., Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, what is proposed here is that educators more consciously extend the traditional models of out-of-class experience in first-year programs to include a wider array of activities and choices, encourage opportunities that provide students a more significant and meaningful opportunity for risk taking, and conceptualize the goals of out-of-class activities more broadly to include transformative learning (Merizow, 1991). With this approach, the potential to design a student activity project around the goals of the class that also leads to personal growth and self-exploration is enhanced, even for FYE programs more focused on basic academic skills or general academic orientations. For the smaller number of FYE-related programs that already have personal growth and more holistic student development as a primary goal (Tobolowsky, Mamrick, & Cox, 2005), this strategy is an effective method that is supported by a body of previous work and can easily be adapted to a range of institutions and teaching situations.

For many campuses and classes, this type of out-of-class activity model represents a risk, not only for the students, but also for the instructors and the administrators responsible for the program. It is important to remember, however, that whether FYE courses facilitate students' taking new risks and trying new

things outside of the class or not, students are already doing some of this as part of the natural transition to the college environment. The potential to shape how students try new things, where they take risks, and how to make these experiences more meaningful represents a special opportunity that fits with the mission of most first-year-experience programs. Beyond engaging with campus and learning about resources, these types of projects represent a major learning experience with the potential to change students' long-term perceptions of themselves and the college environment. This lesson is eloquently summarized by a student who explained, "I have learned that life is a Personal Development Project, and I should really experience everything I can at [college]."

Authors' Note

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Reader may respond:
Phame Camarena
Central Michigan University
Human Development and Family Studies
Wightman 205
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859
Phone: (989) 774-5600
E-mail: camar1pm@cmich.edu

Appendix A

FYE-Infused Personal Development Project (PDP) Activity Categories

College as a Context for Development

Explore the arts (e.g., attend campus-sponsored concert, play, dance, or artist exhibition)
Embrace diversity (e.g., attend diversity-sponsored film, presentation, or campus pow-wow)
Build connections (e.g., participate in Greek tour, visit extracurricular club, audition for performing group, run for hall council)
Meet the faculty (e.g., visit faculty during office hours, invite professor to lunch, attend a department outing sponsored by faculty member)

Forces That Shape Personal Development

Stretch physical/cognitive boundaries (e.g. attend wall climb event, participate in introduction to yoga workshop)
Increase-self knowledge (e.g., interview parents about childhood, e-mail 10 people to get honest feedback on personal strengths and weaknesses)
Alter habitual self and patterns (e.g., complete a physical makeover, go vegetarian for a month, give up cell-phone use for a week)
Change contexts (e.g., visit different churches or faith based groups, give up TV/Video games for a month)

Appendix B

Sample FYE 101 Seminar Student Development Project (SDP) Activity Categories

Meet the faculty (e.g., visit professor in office, have lunch with instructor)

Affirm diversity (e.g., attend campus pow-wow or multicultural workshops)
Build connections (e.g., attend campus club, run for hall council, audition for troupe or play)
Celebrate the arts (e.g., attend campus play, concert, or opening artist exhibition)
Plan for academic success (e.g., visit writing center, complete time management activity, participate in FYE scavenger hunt)
Create a bright future (e.g., meet with career counselor, attend major advising night)
Serve the community (e.g., register with volunteer center, participate in service days or alternative weekend)
Engage intellectually (e.g., attend speaker series or faculty presentation)
Build physical/mental health (e.g., attend FYE wall climb, complete introduction to yoga class)
Embrace moratorium (e.g., change physical appearance, try new churches/religious service, go vegetarian for a month)