

FIRST YEAR SUCCESS SERIES

Impact on Retention and Academic Performance
Fall 2007 and 2008 Cohorts

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Introduction

In 2007, Student Life designed the First Year Success Series (FYSS) program which is aimed at assisting new first-year students in successfully matriculating and adjusting to the University of California, Riverside campus. The FYSS program offers a variety of workshops that help guide entering first-year students through the challenges and expectations they may encounter as first year college students. Workshops cover topics such as time management, study skills, conflict resolution, and overall health and mental wellness. Additionally, in 2008 Student Life added the Success Series Scholar recognition program to acknowledge and reward students who attended at least four FYSS workshops. Student who meet this criteria are presented with a certificate and a gift certificate to the Campus Store.

Sample

Participation in the FYSS was voluntary. The program staff sends targeted communications to first year students. On average, over 90% of FYSS participants were new entering freshmen. While some transfer students participated in the program, the sample size was small. As a result, this evaluation focuses understanding the impact of participating in the FYSS for new entering freshmen. Nearly 8% of all entering freshmen participated in the FYSS program in fall 2007 and 3% in fall 2008. Although the average number of workshops attended by each participant increased from

1.53 in 2007 to 2.15 in 2008, the total number of program contact hours dropped from 445 in 2007 to 337 in 2008 (Table 1).

The sample size is as follows:

- Fall 2007 new freshmen: 290 participants and 3,729 non-participants
- Fall 2008 new freshmen: 157 participants and 4,423 non-participants

Methodology

This study analyzes the impact of the FYSS on retention and academic performance for FYSS participants compared to non-participants for the fall 2007 and 2008 cohorts. This study uses a multiple regression model and controls for a series of background characteristics and entering high school profile (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, first generation status, low-income status, SAT scores, and high school GPA).

Retention

The average retention rate for FYSS participants was roughly 87% in 2007 and 2008. Non-participants were retained at a lower rate (84%) fall 2007 cohort, but had an equal retention rate (87%) compared to students who participated in fall 2008. The analysis of the fall 2007 FYSS participants showed a statistically and quantitatively significant impact on retention, while the analysis of the 2008 cohort did not detect a statistically or quantitatively significant impact on first to second year retention (Table 2).

Academic Performance

The FYSS participants in both cohorts had a positive and statistically significantly higher rate of academic performance as measured by first year cumulative GPA than non-participants. Fall 2007 participants' average cumulative GPA was 2.84 in comparison to 2.67 for non-participant and the fall 2008 participants earned a GPA of 2.86 in comparison to 2.73 for non-participants (Table 3).

Conclusion

Participation in the FYSS program had a positive and statistically significant impact on academic performance in both years of the study. In addition, participation in the program had a positive and statistically significant effect on retention for students who participated in 2007 only. Because student participation in the FYSS program is voluntary, it is not possible to establish with absolute confidence a causal relationship between the program and these outcomes; participants might be more highly motivated to do well, and so possess good outcomes independent of the program.



Facilitating Connections to a Campus Community

The First Year Success Series is aimed at helping students transition to a large university setting.

First Year Success Series

Table 1: Sample

	Fall 2007 Cohort	Fall 2008 Cohort
Sample		
Entering Freshman Population	3,729	4,423
FYSS Entering Freshman Participants	290	157
<i>Average Participation Rate</i>	7.8%	2.9%
<i>Average Workshop Attended</i>	1.53	2.15
<i>Contact Hours</i>	445	337

Table 2: Impact on First Year Retention

	Fall 2007 Cohort	Fall 2008 Cohort
First Year Retention		
FYSS Participants	87.2%	87.3%
Non-Participants	83.8%	86.6%
	0.031	0.002
Impact on First Year Retention (First to Second Year)	t = 1.367 sig = 0.172*	t = 0.071 sig = 0.943

Table 3: Impact on Academic Performance

	Fall 2007 Cohort	Fall 2008 Cohort
Average First Year Cumulative GPA		
FYSS Participants	2.84	2.86
Non-Participants	2.67	2.73
	0.099	0.138
Impact on Academic Performance (First Year Cumulative GPA)	t = 2.749 sig = 0.006**	t = 2.926 sig = 0.003**

* Statistically significant at the 0.20 level

** Statistically significant at the 0.05 level