Course Content for a Comprehensive & Holistic First-Year Seminar:
Topic Identification and Justification

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Unit 1.
INTRODUCTION TO HIGHER EDUCATION:
The Power of College, the First-Year Experience, and the Most Powerful Principles of College Success

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

In this introductory unit, strong evidence should be supplied to students about why the college experience has the potential to be the most enriching experience of their life and one that will provide them with multiple benefits throughout life. The first year of college, in particular, is a critical stage of development during which students undergo the greatest amount of learning and personal growth. It's also the time when students experience the greatest challenges, the most stress, the most academic difficulties, and the highest dropout rate. This highlights the importance of the first-year experience, the importance of first-year courses designed to promote college success. This unit should point out the fact that there are numerous studies showing that new students who participate in first-year seminars (college-success courses) are more likely to continue their enrollment in college, complete their college degree, and get the most of their college experience.

This first unit should also provide an overview and preview of the most powerful principles of college success. Its major goals are to equip students with "big picture" principles they can use on their own to promote success in college and raise their awareness of the wide range of campus resources they can use to support their quest for success. The unit should describe the services provided by various campus resources, why they are worth using, and how students can most effectively capitalize on them during their first year of college and throughout their college experience.

Thus, the introductory unit of the FYS should serve two key functions: (1) a *motivational* function that creates a *favorable first impression* of the seminar, *ignites initial interest* in the course by making powerful arguments for its value; and (2) an *organizational* function that provides new students with a meaningful *overview* of the college experience, equipping them with an overarching map and set of strategies to guide their trip. The unit should help new students to find personal meaning in the college experience, enabling them to better understand *why* they are in college.

The introduction should educate new students about how the college experience has the potential to be the most powerful experience of their life, and how it can provide multiple, lifelong benefits that go beyond intellectual and economic gains to include improved physical health, emotional health, social development, civic engagement, and a better quality of life for their children (Bowen, 1977, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

This unit should also underscore the importance the *first year* of college, pointing out that is the time when students experience the greatest academic and personal challenges (Cuseo, 1991; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005), but also experience the greatest gains in learning and personal development (MacGregor, 1991; Light, 2001), perhaps because of the mental "disequilibrium" generated by these challenges (Cuseo, 2009). The importance of the first year of college segues smoothly into a discussion of the value of the *FYS* as a vehicle for: (a) facilitating students' transition to college, (b) reducing their risk for first-year attrition, and (c) maximizing the positive impact of the college experience. This is the time to highlight research demonstrating that

new students who participate in first-year seminars are more likely to persist in college, complete their degree, and make the most of their college experience.

In addition to helping students understand why college is worth doing, this unit should give them an overview of *how* they can do college in a manner that maximizes its positive impact on their current and future success. As Schilling and Schilling (2005) argue, "Currently many students are seemingly on the job without a job description. We have a choice: help provide this job description or continue to let students write their own job descriptions as they go along, while we sit back smugly observing heir struggles or choosing to look the other way when they fail" (p. 111). Empirical support for the Schillings' exhortation comes from research conducted by Kuh, et al. (2005), who identified campuses that had substantially higher-than-predicted rates of student engagement and graduation than expected, given the nature of their student body and their institutional characteristics (e.g., admissions selectivity; percentage of commuting students). Based on multiple site visits to these campuses for the purpose of identifying common practices that could account for these institutions' unusually high rates of student success, the visiting research teams noted that one such practice they had in common was the offering seminars and other programming that attempt to demonstrate to new students how to "do" college.

Moreover, it is important that first-year students learn how to do college *early* and achieve early success so that new students' develop an initial sense of academic self-efficacy—the belief that academic success is within their control and influenced strongly by their personal efforts (Bandura, 1994). Research suggests that if student do not experience early academic success, they can easily begin to develop negative beliefs about their ability to learn, particularly if their poor performance takes place in a new academic and social environment (Christie & Dinham, 1991). In general, students are at risk for withdrawal from college after their first year if their first-year GPA is below a 2.0 (Seidman, 2005). Underrepresented students, in particular, are at risk for attrition if their early grades are low because it can induce a sense of self-doubt about whether they belong in college. Research on underrepresented students indicates that this sense of sense of self-doubt can take place even if their grades are not low enough to put them on academic probation (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Thus, this unit should provide students with an introduction to the most powerful principles of college success, namely: (1) active involvement—the amount of time, energy, and effort they devote to learning (Astin, 1993) (2) social integration—the quantity and quality of their out-of-class interaction with faculty, advisors, and peers (Tinto, 1993), and (3) personal reflection—taking the time to reflect and think deeply about what they are learning (Fink, 2003) and how they are learning (Weinstein, 1994). These core principles can serve as across-the-course themes that underlie success strategies discussed in subsequent units of the course, and can provide students with a common language for success that they can carry with them throughout their college experience and beyond.

Students should be introduced to high-priority strategies for implementing these college-success principles and for capitalizing on key campus resources designed to promote their success. Research indicates that the impact of college on students depends heavily on the degree to which they capitalize on the resources that their college makes available to them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Despite the multiple advantages associated with student use of support services outside the classroom, these services are typically *under-utilized* by college students, especially by at-risk students who would profit most from their use (Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Walter & Smith, 1990). In-depth interviews with low-income college students reveals that many of these students are not aware of the full range of support programs and services available on their campus, nor do they understand what services these programs provide. As one student said, "I know what offices there are, but I don't know what they do" (Engle & O'Brien, 2007, p. 44). Thus, promoting early student awareness of the purposes and potential benefits of campus support programs should be a major objective of this unit.

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Unit 2.
LIBERAL ARTS:
The Meaning, Purpose and Value of General Education

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Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

This unit will help students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts--the core component of the college experience that embodies the essence of a college education and provides the foundational, transferable skills needed for success in all college majors, careers, and life roles. Students will acquire strategies for making the most of general education to gain a perspective on the whole world, to develop themselves as a whole person, and to enrich the quality (and marketability) of their college experience.

The unit's primary objective should be to enable students to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning, purpose, and value of the liberal arts, and greater appreciation of how this component of higher learning provides the essential foundation of a college education because it equips students with a broad range of flexible skills that promote students' success in all majors, in any career, and in life beyond college. Upcraft, Gardner, and (2005) emphasize that "*successful first-year students must not only get off to a good start academically and learn how to learn, but they must begin to appreciate what it means to become an educated person*" (p. 8).

Early discussion of the liberal arts curriculum may help students gain greater understanding and appreciation of general education requirements, the brunt of which is likely to be encountered during their early years in college. This may also provide new students with an "advance organizer" (Ausubel, 1968)—i.e., a cognitive schema for organizing and making meaning or sense of the specific, separate courses and co-curricular programs they will subsequently experience. As Schroeder (2005) notes, "The high fragmented nature of the undergraduate experience is akin to expect first-year students to assemble the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle without showing them a picture of the finished product" (p. 206)

National surveys show that college students (and their parents) are preoccupied with decisions about what major and what career to specialize in; however, they are largely oblivious to, and underestimate the importance of, general education and the value of study in breadth provided by the liberal arts (Hersh, 1994, 1997). As a result, liberal arts courses are often viewed as unnecessary requirements or impediments that students need to "get out of the way" before they can get into what is really important—their specialized major. This negative view of general education likely stems from lack of understanding about what the "liberal arts" stand for, or what they are designed to do (AAC&U, 2002, 2007) and, perhaps, a misinterpretation of "general" education to mean something "non-specific"—and lacking any particular purpose or practical value (Cuseo, 2009). However, to the contrary, research indicates that as an individual's career progresses, specific skills learned in a specialized major tend to decline in importance and are replaced by more general (liberal learning) skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The types of skills that employers desire and seek in new employees are striking similar to the skills developed by a liberal arts education. National surveys and in-depth interviews with employers and executives in both industry and government consistently report that they seek employees with: (a) *communication* skills, including listening, speaking, writing, and reading (National Association of Colleges & Employers, 2003; The Conference Board of Canada, 2000), (b) *higher-level thinking* skills, including problem solving and critical thinking (Hersh, 1994, 1997; Van Horn, 1995), (c) *lifelong learning* skills, including learning *how to learn* and the capacity to *continue learning* (National Association of Colleges & Employers, 2003; The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992).

Furthermore, the current era of rapid technological change, explosion of new knowledge, and economic globalization are creating a greater demand for general, flexible lifelong-learning skills and for workers with broad knowledge and the mental versatility needed to adapt to changing job responsibilities and different professional roles (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002; Herman, 2000). Students should be reminded that liberal learning skills that are durable across time and transportable across different careers may be more important today than at any other time in our nation's history because we are in the midst of an informational and technological revolution that makes factual and technical knowledge become quickly obsolete and vocation-specific skills become quickly outmoded (Herman, 2000).

Another important function of this unit is to make students aware that a liberal arts education embraces both the formal curriculum and the *co-curriculum* (holistic development). Research demonstrates that the college experience affects students in multiple ways and contributes to the development of all key elements of the self (Bowen, 1997; Feldman & Newcomb, 1994;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). For the college experience to have maximum positive impact on all key areas of self-development, students need to take advantage of the "total" college environment. This includes not only courses in the curriculum, but also co-curricular learning experiences *outside the classroom*. Students should be informed that co-curricular experiences are more than "extra"-curricular activities; instead, they are bona fide out-of-class learning experiences that play an equally important role in promoting student learning and personal development as the formal academic curriculum (Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1994)—hence the term "*co*-curriculum". This inclusive definition of liberal learning that embraces the co-curriculum unit and the development of the student as a "whole person" enables this unit to function as an effective gateway to subsequent units of the FYS because its focus on holistic (whole-person) development can provide an integrative overview of the key elements of personal development that a college education is designed to promote, each of which is addressed later and more intensively in subsequent, stand-alone units.

   This unit on the liberal arts may be time to remind students that their future occupation represents just a single slice of their future self, and it represents just one of the multiple roles and responsibilities that human beings perform in life, which include being a responsible citizen, community member, son or daughter, and often a spouse and parent. A liberal arts education prepares students for all these roles; it prepares them for *life*. Although there has been a slight upturn in the percentage of incoming college students agree that an important reason for going to college is to develop a "meaningful philosophy of life," a substantially higher percentage of them agree that an important for being in college is to "prepare for a career" or "get a better job" (Sax, et al., 2004), and "do well financially" (Pryor, et al., 2009). While acknowledging that financial security is an important benefit of a college education, students should not lose sight of the fact that the purpose of college experience is not just about earning a better living; it is also about learning to live a better life.

   Lastly, this unit should articulate how a liberal arts education promotes *self-awareness* ("know thyself"), is an important precondition and foundation for effective educational and career decisions, and other important life choices. Thus, this unit segues logically into the following unit on educational planning and major/career decision-making. Also, by establishing the importance of intellectual breadth and general (foundation) education, this unit lends itself readily to the subsequent unit's focus on study in depth (majors) and professional specialization (careers).

Unit 3.
Goal Setting, Motivation, & Character

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit
   The road to success starts with identifying a desired outcome—an end goal, and then finding the means (succession of steps) to reach that goal. Studies show that setting specific goals is a more effective way to achieve success than simply telling ourselves that we're going to "try hard" or "do your best." This unit should identify the key steps involved in setting and reaching personal goals, self-motivational strategies for staying on track and moving toward your goals, and the inner qualities (virtues) associated with not only being a successful person, but also a person of character.

   This unit's primary objective would be to assist students in identifying life goals and developing concrete strategies for reaching them. Goal setting is the starting point for promoting self-motivation. Studies show that people who neglect to set and pursue life goals are prone to feelings of "life boredom" and a belief that one's life is meaningless (Bargdill, 2000). Research also demonstrates that setting specific goals is a more effective self-motivational strategy than simply to tell ourselves that we should "try hard" or "do our best" (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Locke & Latham, 1990). When students set specific goals, they show *initiative*—they initiate the process of gaining control of their future and taking charge of their life. Taking initiative is a concrete way to demonstrate an *internal locus of control*—the belief that the locus (location or source) of control for events in one's life is *internal*—inside of the self and within self-control,

rather than *external*—outside of the self and beyond self-control (e.g., controlled by factors as luck, chance, or fate) (Rotter, 1966).

Research reveals that individuals with a strong internal locus of control display the following characteristics:

* Greater independence and self-direction (Van Overwalle, Mervielde, & De Schuyer, 1995),
* More accurate self-assessment (Hashaw, Hammond, & Rogers, 1990; Lefcourt, 1982),
* Higher levels of learning and achievement (Wilhite, 1990), and
* Better physical health (Maddi, 2002; Seligman, 1991).

An internal locus of control also contributes to the development of another positive trait: *self-efficacy*—the belief that one has the power to produce a positive effect on the outcomes of his or her life (Bandura, 1994). If students develop a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to initiate action, put forth effort, and sustain that effort until they reach their goals. If they encounter setbacks and bad breaks along the way, they are less likely to give up or give in; instead, they are more likely to persevere and push on (Bandura, 1997; 1986). Students with a strong sense of *academic* self-efficacy have been found to:

* Put forth great effort in their studies
* Use active-learning strategies
* Capitalize on campus resources, and
* Persist in the face of obstacles (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995).

The word motivation derives from the Latin "movere," meaning "to move." Success comes to those who exert effort to move toward their goal. Having knowledge of all kinds of success-promoting strategies provides only the potential for success; turning this potential into reality requires motivation, which converts knowledge into action. If students have all the knowledge, strategies and skills for being successful, but don't have the will to succeed, there's no way they will succeed. Studies show that unless there is a strong personal commitment to attain a goal, it will not be reached--no matter how well designed is the goal and the plan to reach it (Locke & Latham, 1990). Studies also show that individuals with dedication--who are deeply committed to what their goals and what they need to do to achievement--are more likely to report that they are healthy and happy (Maddi, 2002; Myers, 1993).

The following research-based strategies for maintaining motivation could be covered in this unit.

* Keeping a record of goal-directed progress. Research indicates that the act of monitoring and recording our progress toward goals can increase human motivation to continue pursuing them (Matsui, Okada, & Inoshita, 1983). The act of keeping records of progress probably increases motivation by: (a) supplying frequent feedback on personal progress and (b) providing positive reinforcement for staying on track and progressing toward the target (long-range goal) (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Schunk, 1995).

* Using social resources. The power of social support groups for helping people achieve personal goals is well documented by research in variety of fields (Ewell, 1997; Moeller, 1999). Studies show that making a public commitment to a goal increases human commitment to it, probably because it becomes a matter of personal pride and integrity that's seen not only through the eyes of the individual, but also through the eyes of others (Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989).

* Using positive self-talk to offset setbacks and maintain momentum. Research shows that learning and practicing positive self-talk increases feelings of personal *hope*—the belief in one's ability to reach goals and the ability to actually reach them (Snyder, 1994).

Lastly, discussion of personal *character* can also be built into this unit because the habits of self-discipline required to maintain motivation, if practiced consistently, can morph into *virtues*. If one develops a stable set of virtues, that person may be said to be a person of *character* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Unit 4.
MANAGING TIME & PREVENTING PROCRASTINATION

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

First-year students need to know *what* to do to be successful and *why* to do it; they also need to know *how* to get it done. One major objective of this unit is to help students *actually* get done what they learned *should* be done in the previous units. New college students will encounter an academic calendar and class schedule in college that differs radically from their previous years of schooling. They may be surprised by how much "free time" they seem to have because they'll be spending less time sitting in class; however, they'll be expected to spend more time outside of class on work related to class. Learning to use their out-of-class work time strategically and productively is critical to ensuring academic success in college, and empowering students to learn how to do so should be a key objective of this unit. Furthermore, time is a valuable personal resource; if students gain greater control of it, they can greater control of their life. Managing time well should not only enable students to get work done in a timely manner; it also enables them to attain and maintain balance in their life. This unit should offer a comprehensive set of strategies for managing time, combating procrastination, and ensuring that students' time-spending habits are aligned with their educational goals and personal values.

It is not surprising to find research indicating that among the life-task demands that new students report experiencing during their first college year is "managing time" (Brower, 1990). The ability of new students to manage time effectively is essential to achieve their early success (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2005), even for students who enter college academically well-prepared (Stephens & Eison, 1986-1987). The issue of time management is growing in importance for college students because increasing numbers of them are working while in college and working more hours per week (Levine, 1998). Four of every five college students work part-time while attending college full-time (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), and in the fall of 2008, a record-high percentage (more than 49%) of entering college students reported that they will need a job during their first year of college to help pay expenses (Pryor, et al., 2009).

Interestingly, at the start of their first term, new students report that they will spend more time engaged in academic and educational activities in college than they report actually doing at the end of their first year (Kuh, 1999). In fact, first-year students do not even come close to approximating the recommend two hours of work outside of class for every hour in class: almost two-thirds report spending 15 or fewer hours per week on course work and 40% report spending 10 hours or less (Kuh, 2005).

Simply stated, beginning college students who do not put in the time or cannot manage their time will have more difficulty managing college. In one study, sophomores who had an outstanding first year in college (both academically and socially) were compared with sophomores who struggled during their first year. Interviews with these two groups of students revealed that there was one key difference between them: Sophomores who experienced a successful first year repeatedly brought up the topic of "time" during the interviews; these successful students said they had to think carefully about how they spent their time and that they needed to budget time because it was a scarce resource. In contrast, the sophomores who experienced difficulty during their first college year hardly talked about the topic of time at all during their interviews, even when they were specifically asked about it (Light, 2001). In a more recent campus-specific study of reasons why students were referred for early-alert intervention, difficulties with time management ranked as the number-one reason for referral (Lynch, 2008).

The following research on procrastination also suggests that time management is a major problem among college students: (a) 75% identify themselves as "procrastinators" (Potts, 1987), (b) over 80% of procrastinate at least occasionally (Ellis & Knaus, 1977), and (c) almost half do so consistently (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Furthermore, procrastination among college students appears to be increasing (Kachgal, Hansen, & Nutter, 2001). Procrastination is such a serious issue for college students that some colleges and universities have opened "procrastination centers" that cater exclusively to students who are experiencing problems relating to time management (Burka & Yuen, 1983).

Studies of working adults also indicate that managing time plays a pivotal role in their professional and personal success. Setting priorities and balancing multiple responsibilities (work, family, school) that compete for limited time and energy can be a stressful juggling act and is often a major source of stress for people of all ages (Harriott & Ferrari, 1996). Studies indicate that people who report that they manage their time well also report being more "in control" of their lives and feeling "happier" (Myers, 1993). In short, when students learn to gain greater control of their time, they gain greater control of, and satisfaction with, their life. Thus, time management should not be presented to students merely as a college-success strategy, but as a life-management strategy and a life-success skill.

Unit 5.
STRATEGIC LEARNING:
Brain-Based Strategies for Learning, Studying, and Test-Taking

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

This unit is intended to help students apply research on human learning and the human brain to become a more effective and efficient learner. It takes them through three key stages of the learning process—from the first stage of acquiring information through lectures and readings, through the second stage of studying and retaining the information acquired, to the final stage of retrieving (recalling) the information that has been studied. The ultimate goal of this unit is to supply students with a set of powerful strategies which can be used to promote learning that's deep (not surface-level memorizing), durable (not short-term, but long-lasting), and retrievable (accessible to them when they need it).

The primary purpose of this unit is to help students learn *how* to learn. Among the life-task demands that students identify experiencing during their first college year is "getting good grades" (Brower, 1990). Learning habits that enabled students to earn "As" and "Bs" prior to college are unlikely to yield similar grades in college. Studies show that the percentage of students earning "As" and "Bs" drops from about 50% in high school to about 33% in college (Astin, 1993; Sax et al., 2004). To maintain or elevate the grades they received in high school, new college students will need to elevate the effectiveness of their learning habits and strategies. This will likely require that new students work harder—to put in more work time and effort, and to work smarter—to learn more strategically and productively. Research suggests that some students who experience academic difficulty often spend as many or more hours studying as their more successful peers (Boyer Commission, 1998).

New students should be exposed to research on how humans learn most effectively and how the human brain acquires and retains knowledge so that they may use strategies that are most likely to result in learning that is *deep* (beyond surface memorization) and *durable* (long-lasting). Learning becomes more deep and durable when it is "brain-based" or "brain-compatible" (Hart, 1983), i.e., when it capitalizes on the brain's natural tendencies (Caine & Caine, 1994) to function as the "learning organ" of the body (Zull, 1998). After learning about brain-based learning principles, student can use them to learn effectively in multiple subject areas, thereby promote "success across the curriculum" (Weinstein, 1982).

By grounding academic-success strategies in brain-based research and learning principles, students should also see that there is solid evidence supporting the recommended strategies that are recommended and the underlying reason why these strategies are effective, which should strengthen student motivation to use them. Since motivation precedes and drives action, students should know why they should bother to implement the strategies that are recommended to them. This unit should not take a basic "study skills" approach to promoting academic success because students are more likely to perceive this approach as boring ("been there, done that") or insulting ("below" them). Instead, by approaching the topic of academic success from the perspective of human learning theory and brain-based (brain-compatible) research, student interest in the topic should be stimulated and the topic will more likely be perceived as challenging rather than remedial.

Moving from theory to practice, the brain-based learning principles can be used to drive and guide specific strategies recommended to that students for enhance their performance on the

day-to-day academic tasks they are expected to perform in college—for example:(a) listening and note-taking in class, (b) completing reading assignments outside of class, (c) studying and retaining information, and (d) retrieving information and demonstrating acquired knowledge on exams or other performance measures. Thus, all key stages of the learning process should be addressed—from the first stage of receiving information through lectures and readings, to studying and storing information in the brain, to the final stage of retrieving what has been studied and communicating that knowledge on exams. Thus, this unit would not only equip students with strategies for acquiring knowledge, but also with learning strategies that result long-term retention of knowledge acquired and the retrieval of that knowledge from long-term memory. If students are to build on information for later use in critical thinking and problem solving, they must retain that information and retrieve it when they need it (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2005).

Lastly, this unit should highlight the versatility and transferability of effective learning strategies, showing how these strategies are portable skills that can be "carried" and applied to a wide variety of learning situations—inside and outside the classroom, in college and in life beyond college. Students should remain aware that becoming a strategic learner involves more than accumulating effective study tips or strategies. It is about developing *lifelong learning* skills that can be used throughout life to promote personal and professional success. Acquiring these lifelong-learning skills is probably more important today than at any other time in history because life today is characterized by rapid technological change and explosive growth of knowledge, which creates a high demand for people who have learned how to learn and who can learn continually throughout life (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2002; Herman, 2000). Thus, students should be made aware that becoming a strategic learner will promote both their academic success in college and their career success after college.

Unit 6.
RESEARCH, WRITING, and SPEAKING:
Three Key Academic-Performance & Lifelong-Learning Skills

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit
This unit is designed to prepare students for the three key tasks that are most commonly used to evaluate students' academic performance in college: tests, papers, and presentations. The unit should supply a systematic set of test-taking strategies that can be used before, during, and after exams to improve test performance by helping students become more "test wise" and less "test anxious." Strategies for writing papers and reports, and how to use writing as a learning tool, should also be discussed. Finally, strategies are shared for making effective oral presentations and for overcoming speech anxiety. Both writing and speaking are transferable skills that can be applied to improve academic performance in all majors and careers; and they're also portable skills that can be used throughout life. This unit is designed to "jump start" development of these powerful skills, enabling students to use them immediately to achieve early success in their first year of college and beyond.

The thee key skills discussed in this unit—research, writing, and speaking—represent powerful, portable skills that "travel well" across the curriculum. These three skills may be viewed as interrelated and complementary life-success tools: *research* skills enable students to locate, evaluate, and integrate information, while *writing* and *speaking* skills enable them to comprehend, communicate, and demonstrate their mastery of that information to others. Information literacy and communication competency are essential in an age in which information is being generated and communicated in larger volumes than at any other time in history (Breivik, 1998; Thornburg, 1994). Students should be reminded in this unit that efforts taken to improve their research, writing, and speaking skills are likely to improve both their academic performance in college and their occupational performance after college.

What follows is a short, research-based rationale for the importance of addressing research, writing, and speaking.

Research Skills

One key goal of a college education is to promote self-reliant, lifelong learning, and one hallmark of a self-reliant, lifelong learner is "information literacy"—the ability to find, evaluate, and use information. The Worldwide Web has made the information-evaluation process more challenging because most of its posted information is "self-published" (Academic Integrity at Princeton, 2003). Thus, students need proactive and intentional instruction on how to critically evaluate the quality of the sources they locate.

Writing

What would differentiate the coverage of writing in the FYS from introductory composition courses is a focus on the multiple forms and purposes of writing (e.g., writing to *communicate*, to *learn*, and to promote *self-awareness*), with special emphasis on applying writing-to-learn strategies to the *college learning process*—for example, writing to learn from lectures, readings, and experiences outside the classroom.

Students should be made aware of the fact that writing is not only a communication tool, but also a powerful tool for promoting *learning* and *thinking*. Apparently, college students are not aware of the cognitive benefit of writing because interviews reveal that 20% of college students take notes on their readings, or wrote summaries of their assigned readings and class notes in their own words (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2005). This unit should raise students' consciousness that writing can be used as a strategy for strengthening their ability to learn more deeply and think at a higher level (Applebee, 1984; Bean, 2003; Langer & Applebee, 1987).

The term "writing to learn" has been coined to capture the idea that writing is a learning process that should not only take place in composition classes, but in all college courses. The first-year seminar may be the ideal gateway course that initiates for a writing-across-the-curriculum program.

Speaking

In addition to writing, the other major channel through which students will convey and demonstrate their knowledge is *oral* communication (public speaking). Research suggests that a significant number of college students have classroom communication apprehension, which interferes with their willingness and ability to communicate orally in the classroom (Richmond & McCloskey, 1997). This issue may be addressed proactively and intensively in a small, student-centered class like the FYS. In this unit of the seminar, new students should be supplied with strategies that they may immediately use to improve their ability to express their thoughts in class discussions, study groups, oral presentations, and formal speeches.

Lastly, new students should be reminded that speaking is not only a communication skill. Just as writing can be used as a tool to improve learning and thinking, so too, can speaking. Thus, reducing students' fear of speaking and increasing their level of oral participation in class may also be expected to improve the effectiveness of their learning and the quality of student thinking. Speaking also encourages actively learning by "forcing" students to formulate and articulate their ideas, and to "hear" what they are thinking, providing them with a sensory product that may be more readily critiqued than silent thoughts (Cuseo, Fecas, & Thompson, 2007). Research on problem solving indicates that if students verbalize their reasons for taking the steps they do while solving problems, their problem-solving performance improves, particularly if this verbalization occurs during the early stages of the learning process (Svinicki, 2004).

Unit 7.
HIGHER-LEVEL THINKING SKILLS:
Thinking Critically and Creatively

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

This unit takes students beyond learning to acquire and retain information to higher levels of critical and creative thinking. Surveys indicate that teaching students how to think is the primary goal of college faculty; this unit should help them understand the type of thinking that professors

expect from them and empower students to think in this way. Specific forms of higher-level thinking should be identified, self-questioning strategies that prompt the use of these forms of thinking should be suggested, and practical strategies for demonstrating higher-level thinking on exams and assignments should be provided.

National surveys reveal that the overwhelming majority of college faculty report "critical thinking" to be the most important goal of undergraduate education. In a national survey of 40,000 college professors who were teaching lower- and upper-division courses in a wide variety of fields, 97% of them reported that the most important goal of a college education was to develop students' ability to think critically (Milton, 1982). Similarly, college professors who teach introductory courses to first- and second-year students indicate that the primary educational purpose of their courses is to develop students' critical thinking skills (Stark et al., 1990).

The need for developing students' critical thinking skills is underscored further by the current "information explosion." Unless students are explicitly taught how to critically evaluate and prioritize the information they are being bombarded with, they may overwhelmed by it and make indiscriminate choices or decisions with respect to it. As futurologist, John Naisbitt (1982) predicted in *Megatrends*, "Running out of [information] is not a problem, but drowning in it is" (p. 24). The current tidal wave of information production and access requires use of critical thinking skills to evaluate and parse out the most credible information from the incredible amount of information that is at their finger tips.

Moreover, the majority of new workers in the information age will no longer work with their hands but with their heads (Miller, 2003) and employers will value college graduates with inquiring minds and higher-level thinking skills (Harvey, et al. 1997). National surveys of employers indicate that they are placing greater emphasis on college graduates' higher-level thinking skills to meet the challenges of the workplace (Business/Higher Education Round Table, 1991, 1992; Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992; Education Commission of the States (1995).

Scholars question the traditional assumption that thinking critically develops *naturally* as college students learn increasingly complex levels of discipline content and information (Kurfiss, 1988; Chaffee, 2004). Instead, they argue that general critical-thinking frameworks must be taught intentionally and proactively so that students acquire an early foundation upon which they can later add more subject-specific forms of critical thinking. The FYS may be an ideal place and time to provide students with a framework for defining and applying higher-level thinking skills, which can then be used to strengthen their performance throughout the first year of college and beyond. Also, because of the learner-centered focus of the FYS, students can apply the critical and creative thinking skills they learn in the seminar to their current college experiences, thus providing a meaningful context within which these skills can be "situated" for optimal learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000).

What would distinguish this unit's coverage of critical thinking from approaches taken in traditional critical thinking and logic courses is an emphasis on practical application of how critical thinking can be applied to college life to improve academic and personal success. This unit should delineate the similarities and differences between critical, creative, and other forms of "higher-level" thinking, and help new students acquire a "thinking vocabulary." Learning the language of higher-level thinking should enable new students to take an important first step toward developing the habits of mind needed to think at a higher level, because language shapes and influences thought (Carroll, 1964). Research indicates that students who are provided with questions stems to prompt higher-level thinking, they will eventually "internalize" these external prompts and habitually use them on their during class discussions on different academic subjects (King, 1990, 1995).

Although critical thinking has received the lion's share of attention in the higher education literature, creative thinking is also an essential higher-level thinking. Critical and creative complement one another; creative thinking is necessary to first generates new ideas, then critical thinking is necessary evaluate the new ideas that have been created (Paul & Ender, 2004). In a world that is rapidly changing due to advances in technology and faster production of new information, the ability to think creatively is a skill that may be more valuable today than at any other time in history (Pink, 2005). Surveys of employers indicate that they place high value on the ability to create (BCA, 2006) and on personal qualities related to creativity, such as "thinking on

your feet," "finding the right problems to solve," and "identifying new solutions" (Education Commission of the States, 1995).

Collectively, these findings point to the importance of including a unit on critical and creative thinking in the FYS.

Unit 8.
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

Communicating and relating effectively with others is an important life skill and an important form of human intelligence. Similarly, emotional intelligence—the ability to identify and manage our emotions when dealing with others and to be aware of how our emotions are influencing our thoughts and actions—is an important life skill that has been found to promote personal success and improve academic performance. This unit should identify effective ways to communicate, relate, and form meaningful relationships with others, as well as ways to understand and regulate key emotions—such as love, anger, stress and depression. The information included in this unit should not only improve the quality of students' performance in college; it should improve the overall quality of their life.

A major objective of this unit would be to equip students with a set of transferable interpersonal skills that may be used to enhance the depth and quality of their relationships throughout their college experience and beyond. This unit's coverage of social intelligence would differ from coverage elsewhere in the curriculum by situating it squarely on the college experience and college success (e.g., resolving roommate conflicts, learning collaboratively with peers, interacting productively with faculty, advisors, and support staff). Among the life-task demands that students identify experiencing during their first college year is" fitting in" socially (Bell & Williams, 2006), "being on [your] own without family and friends" and "making friends" (Brower, 1990). New college students are likely to find themselves surrounded by multiple social opportunities and social distractions. For some first-year students, leaving home for college and escaping the direct control of parents is akin to being released from a minimal security prison (Gardner, 1987); they may overcompensate and overdose on their newfound social freedom. New students need to strike a healthy balance between maintaining or loosening ties with family or former friends and developing new relationships, studying and socializing, and finding friends that support rather than sabotage their college success.

Students living on campus face the additional social challenge of sharing private living space for an extended period of time with roommates—people with whom they have never lived with or even met before—an imposed living arrangement they would experience in no other walk of life, "except the military or prison" (Gardner, 1987). Living with roommates can be a powerful learning opportunity and an intimate social experience that can result in roommates remaining "friends for life," or "enemies 'til death," depending on the quality of their relationship and how well they are prepared to deal with it.

The importance of promoting students' social development and interpersonal skills is supported by cross-institutional research indicating that students with higher levels of social self-confidence and interpersonal skills are more likely to engage in out-of-class contact with faculty and other member of the college community (Astin, 1977). Interpersonal contact with other members of the college community is a variable that is strongly and consistently associated with students' college satisfaction, retention, and academic achievement (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research on first-year students, in particular, suggests that when they have secure social attachments and support networks, they experience less stress (Perrine, 1998). Additional studies show that people who have stronger social support networks are healthier physically (Giles, et al., 2005), and report feeling happier (Myers, 1993).

The importance of honing interpersonal skills and developing a meaningful social-support network may be particularly critical for health and happiness in today's world because advances in communication technology have made it possible for today's generation to minimize the amount of direct contact they have with others, which renders them more susceptible to interpersonal isolation, loneliness, or social avoidance (Putman, 2000).

The term "interpersonal intelligence" has been coined to capture the fact that the ability to relate effectively to others is an aptitude or talent (Gardner, 1993). Explicit attention to the development of students' interpersonal communication skills, such as *listening* skills, is not only likely to benefit students socially, but academically as well. For example, active listening skills can facilitate lecture comprehension and note-taking in the college classroom, and may also facilitate the development of critical thinking skills. As Stephen Brookfield (1987) argues in *Developing Critical Thinkers*, "Listening well is as important to critical thinking as is contributing brilliantly." Alexander Astin (1991) argues further that listening, like reading and writing, should be considered a "basic skill":

> While we hear a lot these days about developing such things as critical thinking and communication skills, most of us focus on the improvement of writing and speaking, but few of us talk about the art of good listening. This neglected skills is not only of great practical importance in many career fields, but it also epitomizes for me the essence of the cooperative spirit. Being able to listen to and understand the thoughts and feelings of others is of vital importance in developing the trust and empathy which is so necessary for cooperative living.

Students should be reminded in this unit that the ability to communicate with and relate to others is also a high-ranking factor in employers' hiring decisions (Educational Research & Development Center, 1995); National Association of Colleges & Employers, 2003). "Emotional intelligence," a concept that includes interpersonal awareness and empathy, has been found to be more strongly associated with personal and professional success than intellectual ability (Goleman, 1995).

For these reasons, a unit on social intelligence would be a valuable component of a comprehensive FYS, which should promote student success in college and beyond.

Unit 9.
DIVERSITY:
Appreciating and Learning from Human Differences

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit
This unit should articulate the meaning of diversity and demonstrate how experiencing it can deepen learning, promote higher-level thinking, and contribute to personal and professional development. Included in this unit should be ideas for overcoming cultural barriers and biases that interfere with developing rewarding relationships with diverse people and for identifying ways to learn most effectively from people whose prior personal experiences and cultural backgrounds differ from our own—i.e., we learn more from people are differ from than from people similar to us.

A major objective of this unit should be to articulate for new students why diversity not only promotes social justice, but also promotes learning, personal development, and professional success. It should raise student consciousness about forms of ethnocentrism and prejudice and supply students with strategies for helping them create opportunities to learn from others whose prior experiences and cultural backgrounds differ from their own.

The opportunities for today's college students to learn from diversity are extraordinary is demographic diversity of the college student population is richer than at any other time in the history of American higher education. In 1960, Whites comprised almost 95% of the total college population; in 2005, the percentage decreased to 69%. At the same time, the percentage of Asian, Hispanic, Black, and Native American students attending college increased (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2003). Opportunities for today's college students to experience and profit from diversity are at an all-time high.

For new college students, in particular, the first-year experience may be the first time in their life that they are members of a pluralistic community. In fact, new students report more experience with diversity during their first year of college than do sophomores, junior, or seniors, probably because more first-year students live on campus and have more opportunity for interaction with other students (Kuh, 2005). Research indicates that independent of all other influences, student

interaction with diverse peers has positive effects on openness to diversity (Pascarella, et al., 1996; Pascarella, Palmer, Moye, & Pierson, 2001; Whitt, et al., 2001). Consequently, the first year may be a critical stage in the college experience, during which students can capitalize on the diversity that surrounds them and take full advantage of its educational and personal advantages.

The opportunity to gain access to and learn from the diverse perspectives of peers, rather than the instructor only, may be especially important for promoting the cognitive development of first-year students. Longitudinal research conducted by Perry (1970, 1999) on college students' developmental stages indicates that high school graduates enter college at an initial stage of cognitive development that is characterized by two general dispositions: (a) Seeing the world in polar terms (right or wrong), with right answers as being absolute and known by authorities (e.g., the professor—whose job is to teach students these absolute truths), and (b) seeing multiple viewpoints and diversity of opinion (e.g., differing theoretical perspectives) as bothersome and reflecting unnecessary confusion generated by inept or unqualified authorities. These limiting cognitive perspectives of first-year students may be minimized if they are intentionally exposed to, and directly experience a diversity of human perspectives.

What would distinguish coverage of diversity in the FYS from its coverage in discipline-based diversity courses is a stronger emphasis on articulating the educational benefits of experiencing diversity and a sharper focus on practical strategies for making the most of diversity while in college. Research on first-year college students shows that students who experience the highest level of exposure to different dimensions of diversity (e.g., interactions and friendships with peers of a different race, or participating in multicultural courses and events on campus) report the greatest gains in (a) thinking *complexity*—the ability to think about all parts and all sides of an issue (Gurin, 1999), (b) *reflective* thinking—the ability to think deeply (Kitchener et al., 2000), and (c) *critical* thinking—the ability to think logically (Pascarella et al., 2001). Research also indicates that students who have more diversity experiences in college report higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1993), perhaps because these experiences expand variety and vitality of their social life.

This unit's coverage of diversity could be made more distinctive if it articulates the interrelationships between learning from diversity and liberal learning. By learning about diversity (human differences) students can simultaneously learn more about what humans have in common (shared humanity). Experiencing diversity not only enhances students' appreciation of the unique features of different cultures, it can also provide students with a broader perspective on the universal aspects of the human experience that are shared by all people from all cultural backgrounds. Thus, this unit's focus on promoting student awareness of differences that exist among humans could and should be integrated with the unit on liberal education. The two topics complement each other by focusing on both the common theme (humanity) and the variations on the theme (diversity).

Diversity appreciation is also congruent with liberal education's emphasis on multiple perspective-taking and liberation from narrow, egocentric and ethnocentric thinking. Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences also serves to heighten students' *self-awareness* by providing them with reference points or comparative perspectives, which can sharpen self-assessment of their attitudes, values, and behaviors. When students around the country were interviewed about their diversity experiences in college, many of them reported that these experiences enabled them to learn more about themselves. Some said that their interactions with students from different races and ethnic groups produced "unexpected" or "jarring" self-insights (Light, 2001). Research consistently shows that students *learn more* from people who are *different* than them, than they do from people who are similar to them (Pascarella, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), probably because encountering the unfamiliar or uncertain forces students to stretch beyond their mental "comfort zone" to actively compare and contrast it to what they already know in order to understand it (Acredolo & O'Connor, 1991; Nagda, Gurin, & Johnson, 2005).

Lastly, successful career performance in today's diverse workforce requires sensitivity to human differences and the ability to relate to people from different cultural backgrounds working within the United States and across other nations (National Association of Colleges & Employers, 2003; Smith, 1997). "Multicultural competence"—the ability to understand cultural differences and

to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds—has become an important liberal-learning skill that is critical for success in today's work world (Pope et al., 2005).

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Unit 10.
EDUCATIONAL PLANNING & DECISION-MAKING:
Making Wise Choices about College Courses and a College Major

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Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

This unit is designed to help students make wise choices about their college courses and their college major. Whether students have undecided about a college major or think they have reached a final decision, they will need to be sure that they choose a path which is compatible with their personal interests, talents, and values. They should have a strategic plan in mind (and in hand) that enables them to strike a healthy balance between exploration and commitment. This unit should help students strike this balance and help them make educational decisions that put them in the best position to reach their long-term goals.

Student decisions about a college major should be built on the twin foundation of accurate self-awareness (know thyself) and knowledge of options (the curriculum), which are key focus points of discussion in the previous unit. Thus, this unit flows logically from the previous unit on the liberal arts because awareness of self and the overall curriculum should precede, and provide the foundation for, prudent selection of college courses and a college major.

The primary purpose of this unit is to helping students make a meaningful connection between their imminent educational choices and their long-range career plans. Studies show that students who see a connection between their current college experience in college and their life plans after college are more likely to persist to graduation (Willingham, 1985; Wyckoff, 1999). One key goal of this unit to help students see this connection, and see it early, before they conclude that college is not relevant to their personal goals and occupational plans.

The importance of having first-year students engage *early* in the process of long-term educational planning is underscored by the following findings: (a) three of every four beginning college students are uncertain or tentative about their career choice (Frost, 1991); (b) less than 10% of new students feel they know a great deal about their intended college major (Erickson & Strommer, 1991); (c) over half of all students who enter college with a declared major change their mind at least once before they graduate (Noel, 1985); and (d) only one of three college seniors end-up majoring in the same field that they preferred during their first year of college. These high levels of student uncertainty and propensity for changing educational plans have been reported at all institutional types, including selective private universities, large research universities, and small liberal arts colleges (Cuseo, 2005). These findings strongly suggest that students do not make final decisions about majors and careers *before* they enter college; instead, they make these decisions *during* their college experience. The reality is that the majority of its entering students are undecided, and that being undecided is not the exception, but the norm.

Whether new students are undecided or decided about a college major, they should still developed an early action plan that will allow them to continue exploring and testing their options, while continuing to make steady progress toward a final decision. This action plan should allow them to strike a balance between exploration and commitment. One of the primary goals of this unit would be to help new students strike this balance and devise a concrete plan for integrating general education with well-informed decisions about their college courses and their college major. This goal is consistent with a major recommendation made in a national report issued by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP): "Give students a compass. Each student can construct a plan of study that simultaneously addresses his or her own interests and assures achievement of essential [liberal] learning outcomes (AAC&U, 2007, p. 29).

Unit 11.
CAREER EXPLORATION & PREPARATION

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

It may seem unusual or premature to find a unit on career success in a course designed for beginning college students. However, career exploration and planning should begin in the first term of college because it gives students a practical, long-range goal to strive for; it also enables them to appreciate how the skills that they're using and developing in college are very similar to the skills sought by employers and promote career success after college. Since career planning is really a form of *life* planning, the sooner students start this process, the sooner they gain control of the future and start shaping a future life for themselves that has them doing what interests them, what they do well, and what matters most to them.

Thus, a primary goal of this unit is to equip students with career exploration-and-development strategies that they can begin to use during their first year of college. National surveys of first-year students indicate that "preparing for a career" and "getting a better job" are the most frequently cited reasons why new students enroll in college (Sax, et al., 2004). This unit should acknowledge that career goals are important for college students, and it should be designed to help students make meaningful connections between their current academic experiences in college experience and their future career. Research indicates that college students are more likely to persist to graduation when they see how their present academic experience relates to their future career goals (Levitz & Noel, 1989). This process should involve promoting student awareness of three key components of career choice: (1) awareness of *self*—their personal abilities, interests, needs, and values; (2) awareness of their *options*—the variety of choices (career fields) available to them; and (3) awareness of what particular options (careers) provide the *best "fit"*—i.e., the best "match" with personal abilities, interests, needs, and values.

Research also shows that the vast majority of new students are uncertain about what future careers they will pursue (Gordon & Steele, 2003). Vince Tinto (1993), a nationally known scholar on student success, points out this uncertainty is understandable and, perhaps, desirable:

> Among any population of young adults who are just beginning in earnest their search for adult identity, it would be surprising indeed if one found that most were very clear about their long-term goals. The college years are an important growing period in which new social and intellectual experiences are sought as a means of coming to grips with the issue of adult careers. Students enter college with the hope that they will be able to formulate for themselves a meaningful answer to that important question (p. 40).

This unit should emphasize to students that choosing a particular major does not mean that they are choosing a particular career to work in for the remainder of their working life. Typically, a major leads to a family of different careers (Cuseo, Fecas, & Thompson, 2007) and studies of college graduates indicate that they change careers numerous times. In fact, the further they continue along their career path, they more likely they are to find themselves working in a field that is not directly related to their college major (Millard, 2004).

Research suggests that career development interventions, such as career development courses, course modules, or co-curricular programs, have positive effects on clarifying and facilitating college students' career planning and decision making (Brown & Cane, 2000; Hildenbrand & Gore, 2005). This unit of the FYS can help new students begin to develop a strategic plan for "doing" college in a way that maximizes their career prospects for whatever career they may eventually pursue. This plan should involve (a) self-monitoring—reflecting on, identifying, and tracking career-relevant academic skills and personal traits or qualities they developing during their college experience; and (b) self-marketing—learning how they can begin to capture and package their acquired skills and qualities to "sell" to future employers (e.g., portfolio development, resume building, co-curricular transcript, and letters of recommendation).

While it may seem premature to find a unit on career success in a course designed for first-term college students, the process of investigating, planning, and preparing for career success should begin during the first year of college (Gore, 2005). Since career planning is an important

element of future-life planning, the sooner that students start this process, the more likely they are to start moving toward building a future life for themselves that will allow them to do what their personal interests, talents, and values tell them they should do.

Unit 12.
MANAGING MONEY & MINIMIZING DEBT

Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

   Research shows that accumulating high levels of debt while in college is associated with higher levels of stress, lower academic performance, and greater risk of withdrawing from college. However, the good news is that research also shows that students who learn how to use effective money-management strategies are able to minimize unnecessary spending, reduce accumulation of debt and stress, and improve the quality of their academic performance. This unit should identify effective strategies and habits for tracking personal income and expenses, minimizing and avoiding debt, balancing time spent on school and work, and making wise decisions about spending, saving, and investing .

   For new college students, greater personal independence often brings with it greater demands for economic self-sufficiency, critical thinking about consumerism, and effective management of personal finances. The main objective of this unit is to help students develop effective money-management strategies and minimize the risk that fiscal problems will interfere with their academic progress. Research on student persistence indicates that finances can play a major role in students' withdrawal decisions (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992).

   The importance of money management for college students is growing for two major reasons: (a) the rising cost of a college education and (b) unmet financial aid (King & Bannon, 2002), particularly for students from low-income families (The College Board, 2005). The rising cost of a college education is requiring students to make more complicated decisions from among a myriad of available options (or combination of options) for financing their college education (Spellings, 2006). Research indicates that many students today are not choosing financing strategies that contribute most effectively to their immediate educational success in college and their long-term financial success after college (King, 2005). Borrowing money in the form of a student loan and working part-time for 15 or fewer hours per week has been found to be the most effective financial strategy for students at *all income levels*, and it is *especially effective for students with low incomes*. Unfortunately, less than 6% of all first-year students use this strategy. Instead, almost 50% of first-year students choose a strategy that research shows to be least associated with college success: borrowing nothing and trying to work more than 15 hours per week. Because they have difficulty finding enough time to handle the amount academic work required by college on top of working outside of college for more than 15 hours per week, students who use this strategy increase their risk of lowering their grades significantly and withdrawing from college altogether (King, 2005).

   Other students try to finance their college education by working full-time and doing college part-time. These students believe it will be less expensive in the long run to attend college on a part-time basis because it will allow them to avoid any debt from student loans. However, studies show that when students go to college part-time so that they can work full-time, it sharply reduces the likelihood that they will complete a college degree (Orszag, Orszag, & Whitmore, 2001).

   The confluence of these findings suggest that students need to be reminded that when they spend more of their time on academics, they will complete more courses and earn higher grades, for which they will be "paid" a college degree in a shorter period of time and a full-time salary as a college graduate that pays about twice as much per hour than what they are paid for working without a college degree (not to mention "fringe benefits" such as medical insurance, dental insurance, and paid vacation time). Furthermore, the more time that students put into earning higher grades while in college is likely to pay off monetarily immediately after college graduation because research shows that college graduates with higher grades in the same major field are more likely to earn higher starting salaries than graduates with lower grades (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Thus, an important message to send students in this unit of the FYS is: Work for better grades now; work for better pay later.

Another reason why money management is growing in importance for college students is the availability and convenience of credit cards. For today's students, credit cards are easy to get, use, and abuse. The average credit card debt for undergraduates is more than $2,000 (Mae, 2005). In response to this growing problem, one campus has gone as far as to create a Student Money Management Center (Jacobs & Goebel, 2008).

College students can do everything right, such as getting solid grades, getting involved on campus, and getting work experience while in college, but a poor credit history due to irresponsible use of credit cards in college can reduce their eligibility for obtaining credit after college, as well as reduce their prospects for employment after graduation (Cuseo, Fecas, & Thompson, 2007). Research also indicates that accumulating high levels of debt while in college is also associated with: (a) higher levels of stress (Kiecolt, 1986), (b) lower academic performance (Susswein, 1995), and (c) greater risk of withdrawing from college (Ring, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Ironically, despite the clear advantages of student loans compared to credit-card loans, only about 25% of college students who use credit cards take out a student loan. Thus, most college students seem to be choosing a form of credit that is more expensive, causing them to work more hours for income, which in turn, slows down their progress to college graduation, lengthens the time it takes them to earn a college degree, and delays their entry into careers that will pay them higher salaries as college graduates (King, 2005). Students may need to be reminded that not all debt is bad. Debt can be "good" if it represents an investment in something that will *appreciate* with the passage of time. Purchasing a college education on credit is a good investment because it will appreciate over time and culminate in higher annual income for the remainder of the investor's life.

Collectively, these research findings make a strong and compelling case for inclusion of money-management unit in the FYS. The educational significance of the topic of money management can elevated to a higher level by examining the motives that underlie habits of consumerism and saving, and what these habits reveal about an individual's personal priorities, values, and character. Many times, effective money management boils down to a choice of deferring or delaying the satisfaction of immediate material desires. Ultimately, financing a college education may require that students critically examine their current lifestyle choices and establish priorities with respect to what they need to have now, as opposed to what they would like to have now and what they can wait to have later.

Educating students about financial priorities and strengthening their money-management skills should promote help student to persist to college graduation. Several studies show that when students learn to use effective money-management strategies, they can decrease unnecessary spending, prevent accumulation of significant debt, and reduce personal stress (Health & Soll, 1996; Walker, 1996). Moreover, if students learn to gain greater awareness and control over how they spend their money, they acquire a self-management skill that they will use throughout life to improve the quality of their life.

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Unit 12.
Health & Wellness

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Research-Based Rationale for this Unit

Students cannot reach their full potential and achieve peak levels of performance without attending to their physical self. Sustaining health and attaining optimal levels of performance depend on how well students treat their body—what they put into it (healthy food), what they keep out of it (unhealthy substances), what they do with it (exercise), and how well they rejuvenate it (sleep). This unit should supply research-grounded strategies for maintaining nutritional balance, attaining quality sleep, promoting total fitness, and avoiding risky behaviors that jeopardize and threaten students' health.

A major objective of this unit is to equip students with specific strategies for promoting personal wellness from the very start of their college experience, so that they can (a) immediately put these strategies into practice to promote success during their first term, and (b) build on these

initially acquired strategies to establish long-term habits that they will continue to use throughout the college years and beyond.

Students transitioning from high school to college are also transitioning to self-management with respect to personal wellness, particularly first-year college students who are transitioning from living at home to living on campus. Parents are not longer around to monitor their health habits, or to remind them about what and when to eat, what hours to keep, and when to go to sleep. In addition to receiving less guidance and supervision, new college students are making a major life transition, and stress tends to escalate during times of change or transition. Bad health habits, such as poor nutritional habits can lead to increased stress and moodiness (Knoshaba & Maddi, 1999-2004). Thus, if students are helped to establish good health habits during their first term in college, they may be equipped proactively to cope with college stressors that would otherwise interfere with their academic performance and college persistence. In a study of student use of campus health services that involved more than 5,000 first-year students, it was found that students who did not return for their sophomore year used campus health services at a rate that was significantly higher than returning students, averaging 2.9 visits per month for non-returning students versus 1.4 for returning students (Cavendish, 1996). This finding suggests that the frequent or chronic health problems experienced by students during their first year in college may play a role in their persistence to the sophomore year. Proactive, preventative interventions designed to anticipate and intercept new students' health problems, such as the FYS, may be expected to attenuate physical problems may otherwise eventuate in student retention.

Definitions of wellness vary, as do the specific components identified as comprising the "wellness wheel." To keep coverage of these dimensions at a manageable number, it is recommended that wellness be defined in terms three core components: (a) the *body*—what students put into it and keep out of it (nutrition and substances), what they do with it (exercise), and how well they rest it (sleep);
(b) the *mind*—how students manage their emotions (stress) and their thoughts (positive or negative thinking); and
(c) the *spirit*—how students go about finding meaning and purpose in life, and how they come to grips with the connection between the self and the larger world around and beyond them.

The Body: *Physical* Wellness

Among the life-task demands that students identify experiencing during their first college year is "maintaining physical self,' i.e., maintaining physical well being (Brower, 1990). Students cannot reach their full potential and function at their highest level if their basic physical needs are being shortchanged. The physical health component of a wellness unit should empower students with strategies for managing their nutrition, maintaining total fitness, sleeping well, and avoiding risky behaviors that can jeopardize their health (e.g., alcohol abuse and STIs).

While some students may be experiencing the "freshman 15," others may experience eating disorders relating to weight loss and weight control. Studies show that approximately one of every three college females indicate that they worry about their weight, body image, or eating habits (Douglas et al., 1997; Haberman & Luffey, 1998). Thus, some discussion of eating disorders should be included in this unit.

Humans, in general, do not get enough sleep to perform at peak levels (Mitler, Dinges, & Dement, 1994). College students, in particular, do not get sufficient amounts of sleep and engage in irregular or inconsistent sleep habits. On average, adults need 7-8 hours of sleep each day and teenagers need slightly more—about 9 hours (Roffwarg, Muzio, & Dement, 1966); research reveals that college students get an average of less than 7 hours of sleep per night (Hicks in Zimbardo et al., 2006), which suggests that they are not getting the amount of sleep needed for optimal mental performance. Studies show that adolescents with sleep deficits have more difficulty retaining new information (Horne, 1988, and students who get less sleep than their body requires earn lower grades than students who get sufficient sleep (Spinweber in Zimbardo, et al., 2006). Furthermore, getting quality sleep, especially dream sleep, is essential for maintaining a good mood and a positive frame of mind. Research reveals that people who sleep well are more likely to report feeling "happier" (Myers, 1993). For these reasons, some discussion of strategies for developing healthy sleep habits should be included in this unit.

With respect to alcohol use, the good news is that national surveys indicate that its rate is declining among high school students entering college (Pryor, et al., 2009); the bad news is that first-year college students consume considerably more alcohol than they did in high school (Astin, 2005). In surveys involving over 60,000 first-years students at more than 400 four-year and two-year institutions, almost half (45.6%) of first-year students report having consumed five or more drinks in a row during the two-week period prior to being surveyed. The survey also revealed that the most common reason why first-year students drink is to "fit in" socially (Meilman & Presley, 2005). Other research indicates that college students tend to overestimate the number of their peers who drink and the amount they drink. This misperception can lead students to believe that if they do not drink, or if they do not drink to the degree that they think their peers are drinking, they are not doing what is expected or "normal" (DeJong & Linkenback, 1999).

The adverse impact of excessive alcohol consumption on students' academic performance is supported by studies showing that there is a negative correlation (inverse relationship) between rate of alcohol consumption and grade point average (Meilman, Cashin, & Lyerla, 1996; Presley, Meilman, & Cashin, 1996). In addition to the direct impact that excessive alcohol consumption can have on students' health and wellness, it increases their willingness to engage in risky sexual behavior, such as unprotected sex, putting them at higher risk for sexually transmitted infections (Lewis, Malow, & Ireland, 1997).

Viewed collectively, these findings strongly suggest alcohol use and abuse is an issue that should be vigorously and proactively addressed in the FYS.

The Mind: *Emotional* Wellness (Mental Health)

Students entering college today are reporting record levels of stress (Astin, Parrot, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Sax et al., 2000) and mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicidal ideation (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Drum, 2008; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). Students' self-related level of emotional health at the time of college entry is positively related to degree completion (Choy, 2002), and there is evidence that students who experience psychological problems in college that remain untreated are more likely to withdraw from college (Schuh, 2005; Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997). Students who experience higher levels of academic stress or anxiety are more likely to use ineffective "surface" approaches to learning that rely merely on memorization (Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981)—as opposed to using "deep" learning strategies that seek meaning and understanding.

The first year of college, in particular, can be a very stressful stage of the college experience because it involves a major life transition, requiring not only academic adjustments, but also involves significant changes in social relationships, emotional experiences, and personal identity. Studies reveal that college students report higher levels of stress and lower levels of emotional health at the end of their first year of college than they did before beginning college (Bartlett, 2002; Sax, 2003; Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2004).

This collection of findings strongly suggests that a FYS that purports to promote new students' success must address the affective aspects of the first-year experience. Failure to do so may allow unresolved emotional issues to foment and subvert students' academic performance, as well as undermine their ability to persist to degree completion.

Viewing this topic from a more positive psychological perspective, students' level of students' optimism or hope for success during their first term on campus is a more accurate predictor of their college grades than are their SAT scores or high school grade-point average (Snyder, et al., 1991). "Emotional intelligence"—the ability to identify and monitor one's own emotions, and to be aware of how emotions influence one's thoughts and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1989/1990; Goleman, 1995)—has been found to be positively correlated with higher grade-point averages of the end of their first year of college (Schutte, et al., 1998). Additional research shows that new college students who take first-year seminars or college success courses, which include information on emotional control and emotional-skill development, are more likely to be successful during their first year of college (Schutte & Malouff, 2002).

Further connections between emotional intelligence and successful performance is demonstrated by research showing that people who are able to control their emotions and harness or direct them in a positive way tend to persist longer at challenging tasks (Simunek, et al., 2000) and are more likely to experience professional success (Goleman, 1995; Saarni, 1999).

In fact, studies of successful people indicate that social and emotional intelligence ("EQ") are often predictive of personal and professional success than intellectual ability (IQ) (Goleman, 1995).

These findings highlight the importance of emotional adjustment for academic and personal success, and suggest that addressing emotional development in the FYS may be an effective way to promote new-student persistence and performance in college.

The Spirit: *Spiritual* Wellness

Scholars in the field of higher education and student development are showing renewed interest in college students' spiritual needs and experiences (Astin, 2004; Jablonski, 2001; Love & Talbot, 1999), but they define spirituality in different ways. For example, the National Wellness Institute defines spirituality as, "Seeking meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of a deep appreciation of the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe" (National Wellness Institute, 2005). Astin (2004) defines spirituality as a search for the meaning and purpose in life; a spiritual focus turns one away from the exterior, material world and focuses on our interior life. Tisdell (2003) describes spirituality as an important component of students' quest for personal identity. Given the diverse descriptions of spirituality in the extant literature, a broad and inclusive definition of spirituality is adopted for use in this monograph.

The need for encouraging students to engage in introspection and reflection on non-material matters is suggested by national surveys of entering first-year students since the late 1960s. These surveys reveal that a substantially higher percentage of new student entering higher education for materialistic purposes (e.g., "getting a good job," "making more money"), and a lower percentage of new students agree that "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" is an important goal of the college experience (Astin, Osegueara, Sax, & Korn, 1997). The need for introspection and spiritual reflection may be especially important in today's multitasking, technology-driven world, which keeps students continually "plugged into" the outer world of information and communication, leaving them little time and opportunity to tune into the inner world of self-reflection and self-examination. Just as students are encouraged to develop their "technological literacy," so too should they be encouraged to develop their "spiritual intelligence" (Gardner, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

Spiritual questions have a place in the intellectual area of academia because they are among the most thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating questions, requiring use of higher-level thinking skills or spiritual intelligence to ponder complex issues relating to: (a) the meaning and purpose of life, (b) how an individual life fits into the big picture that goes beyond or supersedes the self, and (c) how to make long-range decisions about what personal life path is most meaningful to follow.

Raising such questions with first-year students, and engaging them in a quest to answer these questions, should serve as a meaningful closing or "capstone" unit for a comprehensive and holistic FYS.

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