

First-Year Seminars
Seaver College
 December 2011
 Prepared by Constance M. Fulmer

I. Program Information

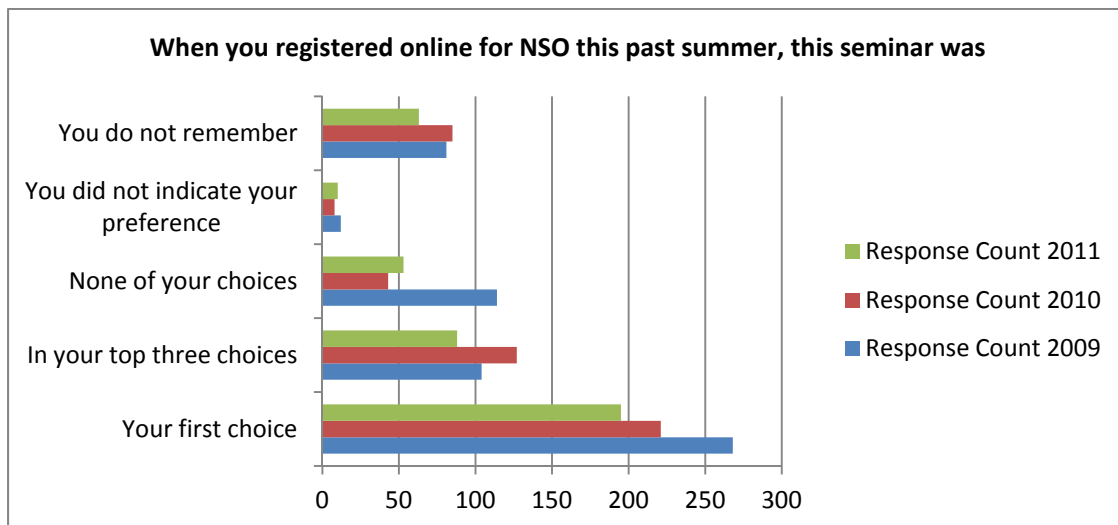
All incoming freshmen are enrolled in a first-year seminar as part of our General Education curriculum. In the fall semester of 2011 there are 38 seminars with 12 to 19 students in each; a total of 664 students. This very successful program has been in existence since the late 1980's. These seminars introduce the students to both the college experience and to academic inquiry. Topics vary from section to section, but all sections are designed to meet the Program Learning Outcomes. Students may not withdraw from this course unless they are withdrawing from the University.

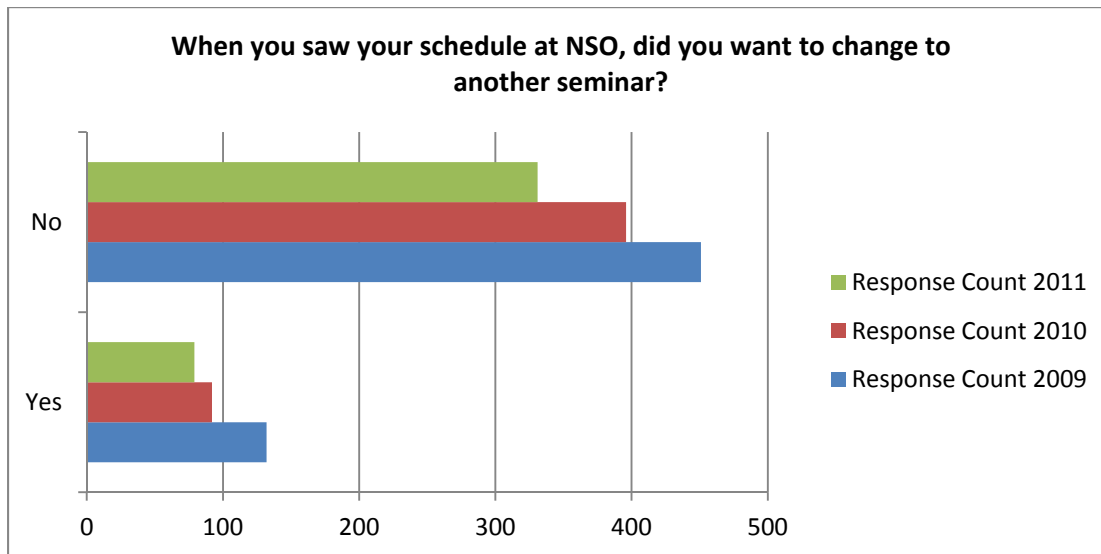
For the past three years each student who was enrolled in a first-year seminar was asked to complete an anonymous survey; data from that survey will be used throughout.

First Year Seminar Surveys

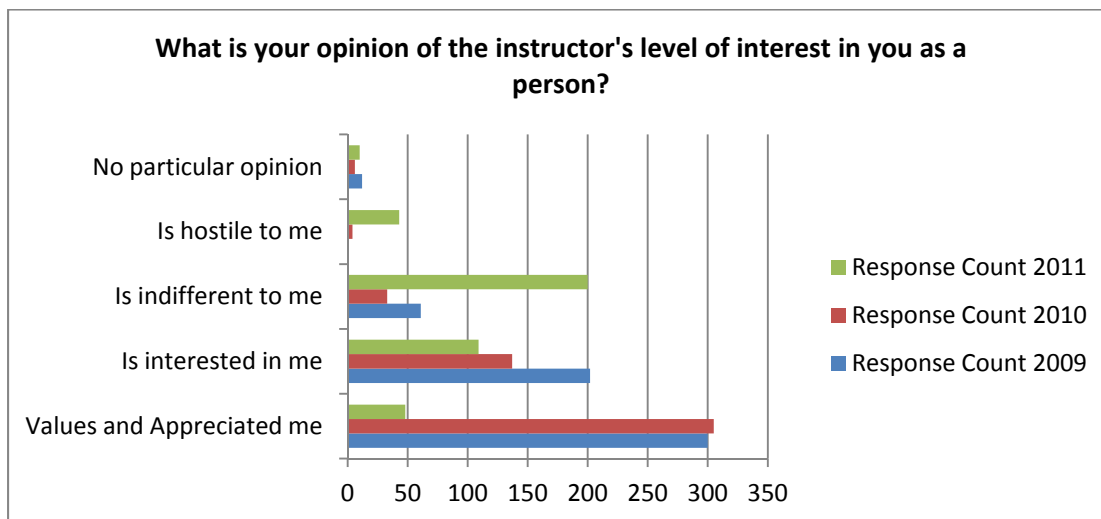
November 2009	580 of 759	76% response
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After new students successfully complete the application process, they may go online to a website describing the orientation process. After reading descriptions of the seminars, they indicate in order of preference their top five choices. A large percent of students are placed in one of their top three choices. (To see the ways students are introduced to the seminars, see <http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/nso/about/seminars.htm>.)





Instructors are selected from the eight Academic Divisions as well as from the Student Affairs staff; all are highly qualified in terms of their academic achievements, academic experience, and personal qualities including caring and concern for students as individuals.



II. Description of Program Design

Eleven of the thirty-eight are the first course in a four-semester sequence.

- **Seven are the first course in the Great Books Colloquium**, a four-course sequence focused on classic literary works of the Western tradition. The first course in the Colloquium introduces students to classic works of Ancient Greece and Rome. It aims to

enliven and enrich students' understanding through the practices of close reading, regular writing assignments, and communal inquiry and conversation.

- **Four are the first course in the Social Action and Justice Colloquium (SAAJ)**, a four-course, inter-disciplinary program focused on issues of social justice, such as human rights, poverty, the environment, the interplay of religion and culture, and the role of social activists in American and global societies. This series of courses requires 20 hours of community service outside of class each semester and participation in several social justice events on campus, as well as regular course readings, extensive writing, and discussion.

The other twenty-seven are one semester courses.

- **Nine of these are part of a special group of seminars sponsored by a Keck grant.** Each of these focuses on engaging the students in independent research. Students produce a team research proposal and an individual research proposal which can be submitted for funding to conduct original research while still a Pepperdine student. The topics are:

Talking through Technology: What Happens?
Biodiversity and Genomics
Discovering the Secret of Inspirational Teaching
Telling Lives: Biography and History
Communication Meltdown? Exploring the Challenges of Nuclear Discourse
Uncovering the Voice of the Marginalized Writer
Body Image and Disordered Eating
Spanish Cinema/Spanish Society

- **Three are "faith and reason" courses** in which the student read, discuss, and write essays on readings from some of the world's greatest writers who are asking life's biggest questions. The courses are entitled "Love, Happiness, Doubt, and Faith: What Does it Mean to be Human?"

- **Two are one-semester courses which deal with social issues:**

Leading an Extraordinary Life: Exploring the Call of Social Justice
Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger

- **Nine are on topics Related to Self-Understanding and Self-Development:**

What's Your Story? Discerning, Writing and Understanding Vocational Narrative
Discovering Your Strengths
Preparing for a Life of Purpose, Service and Leadership
Interpersonal Relationships and Communication
Becoming a Physician
"A Still, Small Voice": Perspectives on Silence

Spiritual Formation: Fashioning a Christ-Shaped Life
College Mental Health: Understanding Challenges and Developing Healthy Coping

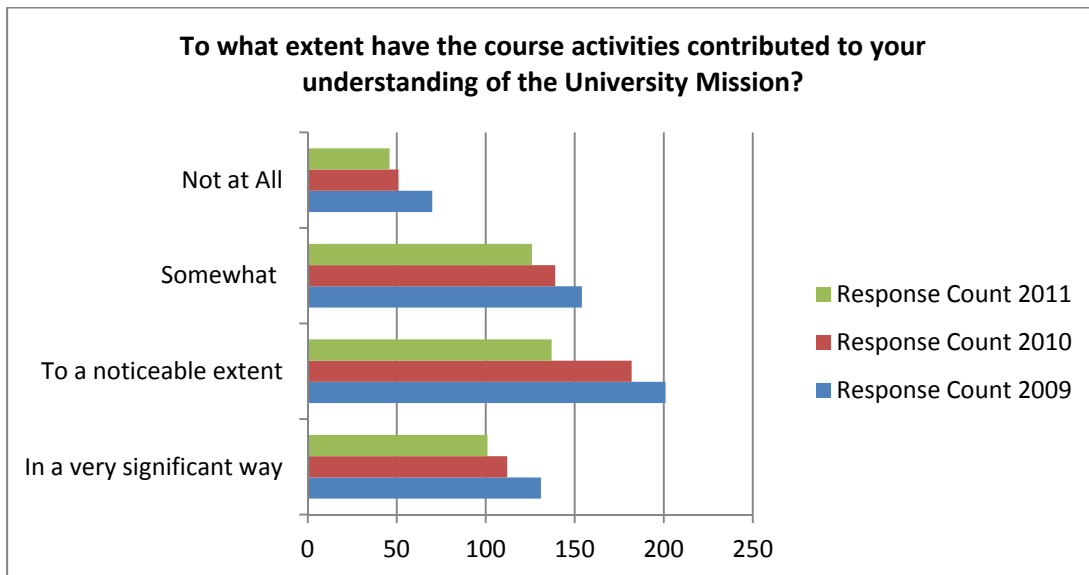
- **Five are on topics related to global understanding:**
 - Evil in Hitler's Germany
 - Jewish Cultures
 - The Crusades
- **Three are on topics of current interest:**
 - Why Sports? Understanding Its Impact on Society
 - Growing Up on TV: The TV Family in Primetime

III. Learning Outcomes

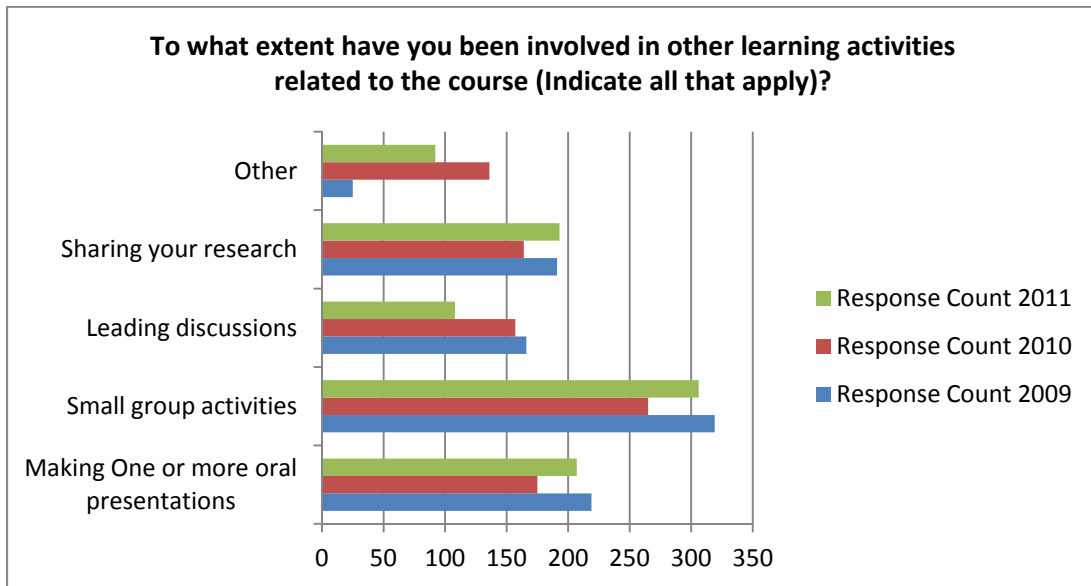
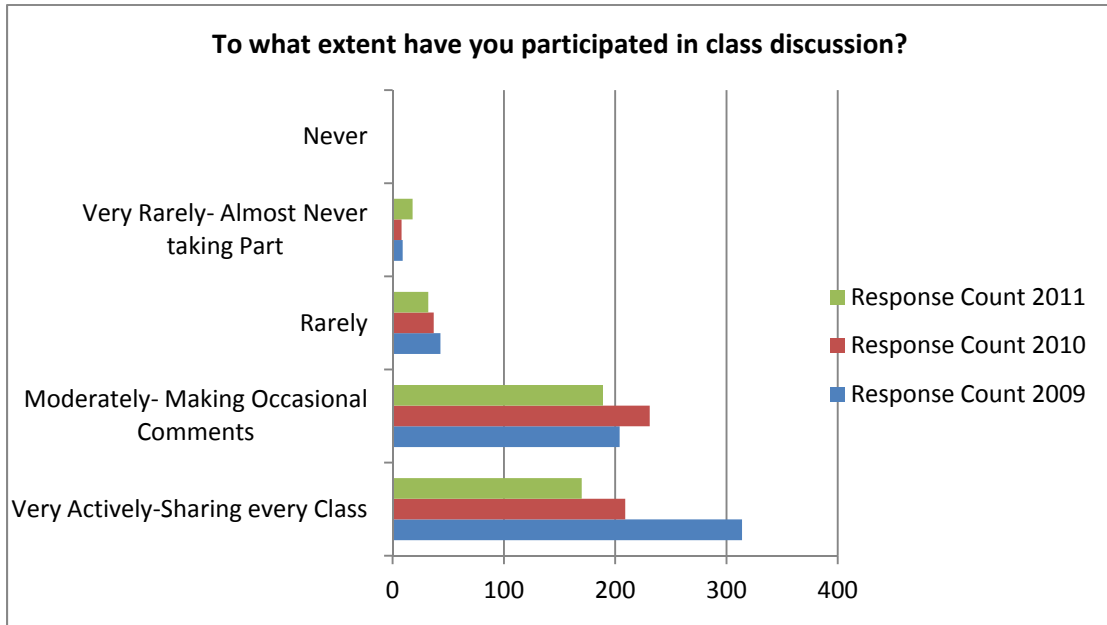
Program Learning Outcomes for First-Year Seminars

A student who completes a first-year seminar should be able to:

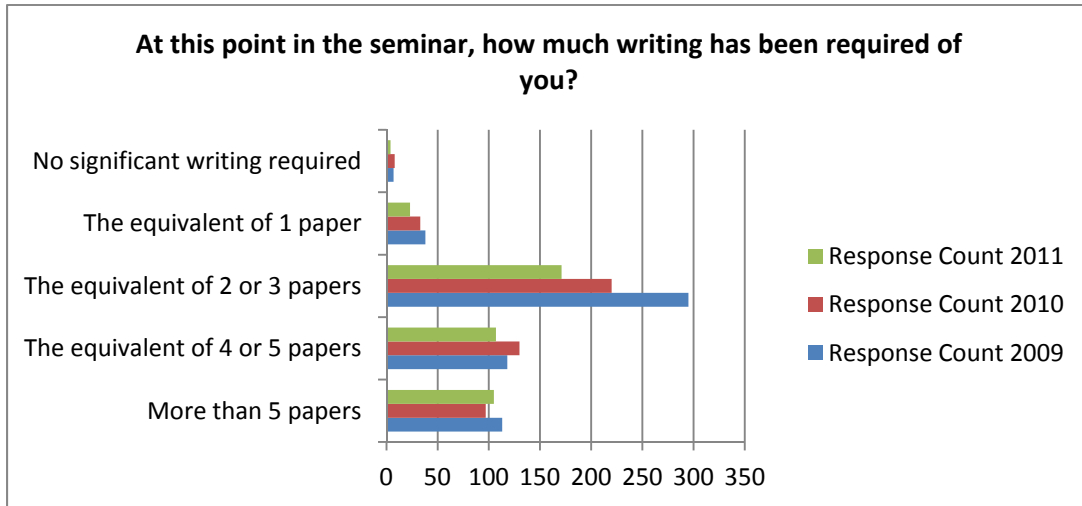
- **articulate an understanding of the Christian mission of the University**



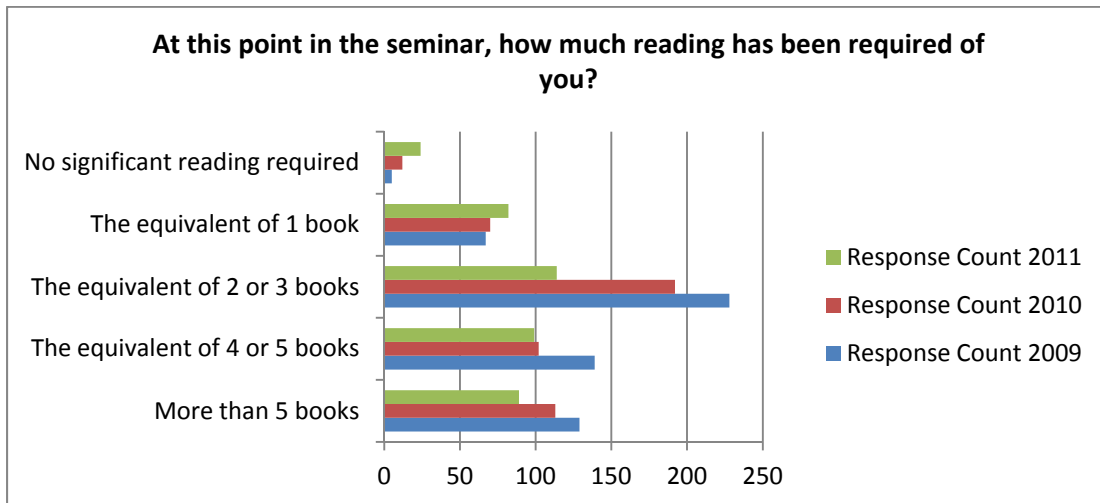
- **communicate clearly in well-organized and persuasive oral presentations**



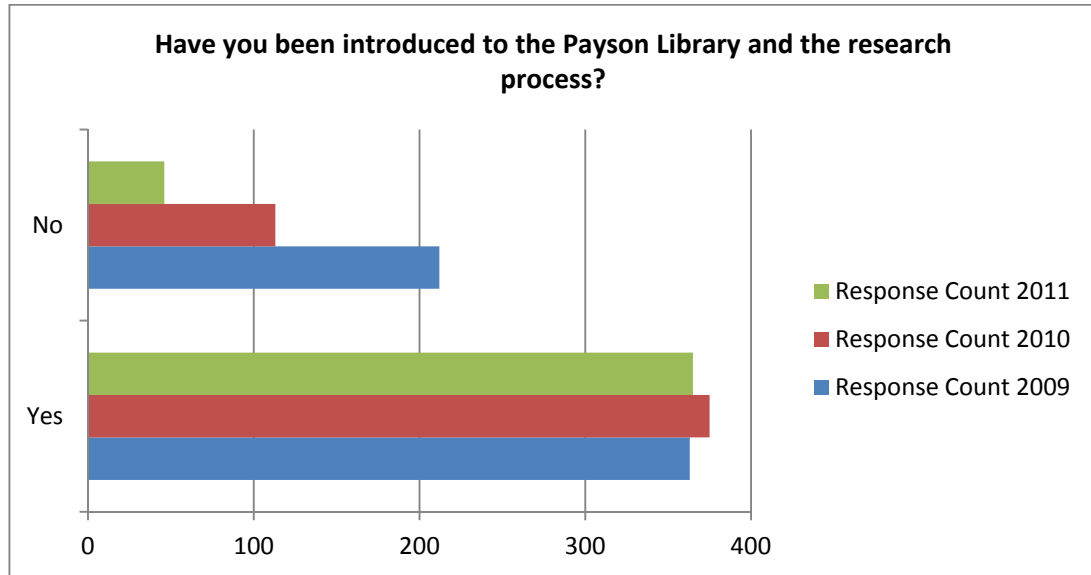
- **communicate effectively in well-organized and clear written discourse**



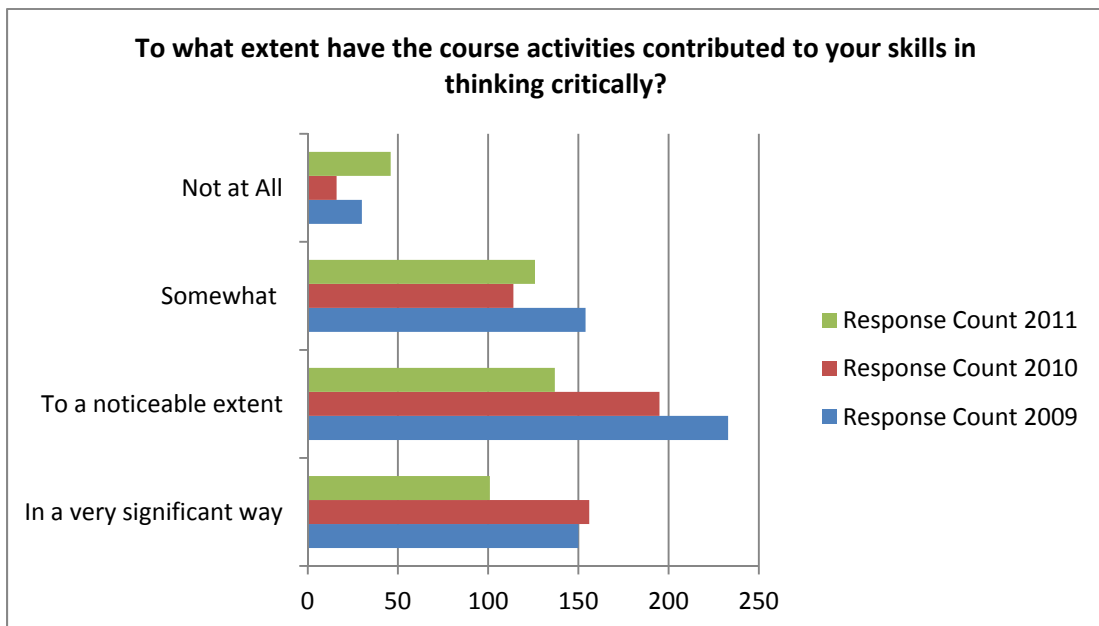
- **demonstrate the ability to interpret research findings appropriate to the subject matter covered in the seminar**



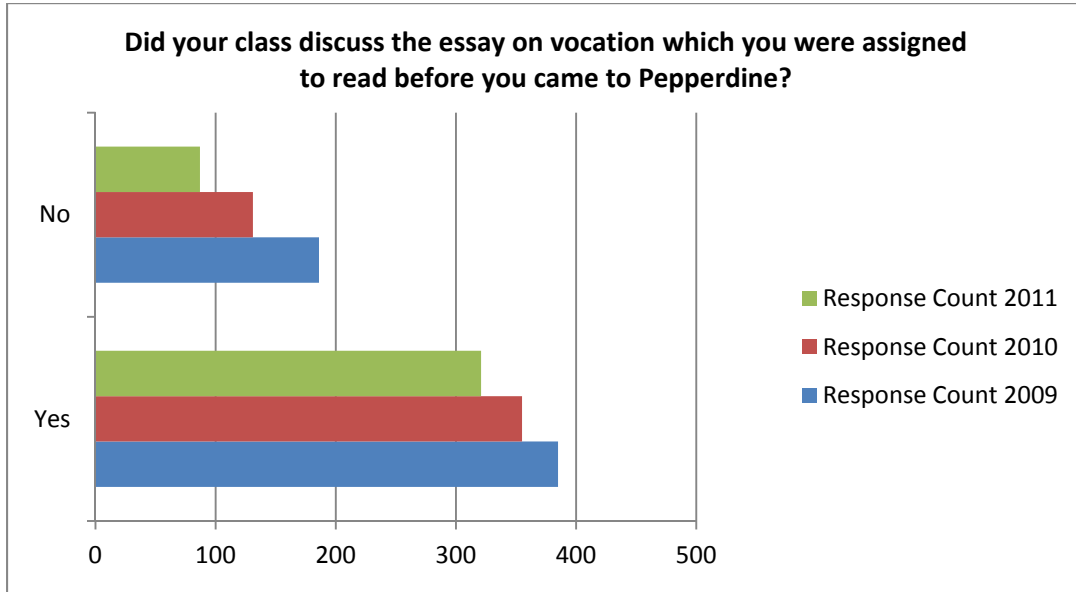
- demonstrate the ability to document sources using a format appropriate to the subject matter covered in the seminar



- demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills appropriate to the subject matter covered in the seminar



- **articulate an understanding of vocation in a Christian context**



The Program Learning Outcomes also align with the General Education Learning Outcomes which are:

Critical thinking

Students analyze issues, ideas, behaviors, and events to develop opinions, solutions, or conclusions.

Quantitative reasoning

Students reason and solve quantitative problems and explain mathematical concepts and data.

Scientific reasoning

Students use the scientific method to investigate the natural or physical world.

Oral communication

Students communicate effectively in oral form.

Written communication

Students communicate effectively in written form.

Human response to art

Students critically appraise and appreciate the arts and make connections to their moral, ethical, and spiritual values.

Human response to literature

Students critically appraise and appreciate literature and make connections to their moral, ethical, and spiritual values.

Christianity & culture

Students apply biblical lessons and principles to make ethical decisions.

American experience

Students explain the political and historical developments that have shaped American democracy and integrate that knowledge with their civic responsibility and views of diversity.

Foreign language

Students listen, speak, read, and write within the appropriate cultural context of a chosen language (list all languages).

Human institutions & behavior

Students describe the major concepts of economics, psychology, or sociology to explain institutional and human behavior.

Western heritage

Students express broad cultural perspectives informed by the history, literature, philosophy, or artistic achievements of western civilizations.

Nonwestern heritage

Students express broad cultural perspectives informed by the history, literature, philosophy, or artistic achievements of non-western civilizations.

Research & inquiry

Students apply the processes of inquiry and analysis appropriate to the discipline of their academic major.

IV. Program Participation/Access

Since all incoming first-year students take the seminars, the ethnicity data for total Freshman enrolled in Fall 2009, 2010 and 2011 (not including transfer students) reflects the enrollment in these classes.

	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011
Domestic students			
Hispanic or Latino	105	91	112
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	4	3
Asian	95	80	93
Black or African American	49	53	52
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	11	3	2
White	398	266	285
Two or more Races	0	53	54
Race/ethnicity unknown	56	42	30
International Students	46	36	45
Total Degree-seeking Freshman Enrolled (Not including Transfers)	766	628	676

V. Assessment of Program Effectiveness

Both direct and indirect assessment of program effectiveness are underway.

A. Direct Assessment

Fall 2011 was the first time direct assessment was used. Indirect assessment has been used since the program was begun in the late 1980s.

The direct assessment is of the Program Learning Outcome which is most distinctive from the General Education Learning Outcomes: it is "A student who completes a first-year seminar should be able to articulate an understanding of vocation in a Christian context."

Each first-year student who is admitted to Seaver College is asked to read an essay entitled "Finding Your Heart's True Calling" by Dr. Gary Selby, Director of the Center for Faith and Learning, and Professor in

Communication. Then he or she is asked to write a reflective response to be submitted to the first-year seminar professor at the beginning of the course. The professors then lead the students in further exploration both of Dr. Selby's article and of the students' own essays reflecting on the idea of vocation. Several professors provided additional opportunities throughout the semester for the students to consider the idea of vocation. These assignments, fieldtrips, discussions, and reflections encourage each student to pay close attention to his or her own gifts and interests and to listen to his or her own heart as he or she thinks seriously about the question of vocation.

On November 3, 2011, the professors who are currently teaching seminars were sent an email saying:

"Perhaps your students have done those or other writing assignments which have encouraged them to think about the idea of vocation and/or their own sense of vocation.

Perhaps you have assigned (or will assign before the end of the semester) other writing assignments based on a reading, fieldtrip, discussion, or some other experience in which they reflect on the idea of vocation. These could be papers written in class, out of class, or as part of the final exam or final experience. They may be as short as one page or less.

Or perhaps you would consider assigning a paper as an in-class or out-of-class assignment or as a question on the final exam. The papers can be a page or less and simply need to be reflections on their understanding of vocation (and how that has changed as a result of your seminar)."

Two essays were collected from each student who was enrolled in four first-year seminars. One of these was written in August before the students came to Seaver; the second was written in December near the end of the courses. These papers were used to assess student learning in the first-year seminars.

1) Nine professors who taught first-year seminars met on Wednesday, February 22, 2012. All nine professors, Valerie Skinner, and I read the same set of two essays written by the same student using a suggested rubric.

2) In order to establish inter-rater reliability we then compared our results and made some changes in the rubric.

3) Each of us then read a random sampling of the pairs of essays collected from the four courses. Seventy-six essays were read and rated.

**Rubric for Assessment of Essays on Vocation
First-Year Seminars
Fall 2011**

	0	1	2	3	4
	Not Evident	Evident but Superficial	Satisfactory	Emerging	Exemplary
Understanding of Vocation as a calling not just a career in	9	38	19	10	0

the August essay					
Understanding of Vocation as a calling not just a career in the December essay	14	28	13	17	4
Evidence of application of understanding of Vocation in the student's own plans in the August essay	13	34	20	9	0
Evidence of application of understanding of Vocation in the December essay	15	29	16	11	5
Evidence of taking into consideration the Christian context in the August essay	16	36	14	7	3
Evidence of taking into consideration the Christian context in December essay	18	27	16	9	6
Evidence that any change in understanding of Vocation in a Christian context actually resulted from the seminar	40	14	10	6	6

Conclusions and Suggestions for Closing the Loop

In the summer workshop which Associate Dean Fulmer offers annually, this data will be presented, and professors who are teaching first-year seminars in Fall 2012 will be urged to:

1. Make a more concerted effort not only to introduce their students to the concept of vocation in a Christian context but to make it a real part of the course so the learning outcome can be met in more specific ways.
2. Use a common assignment for the December essays. Part of the workshop time will be used to design a common prompt.

After completing the August reading assignment relating to vocation and the December essay written in response to the common prompt, a first-year student should be able to:

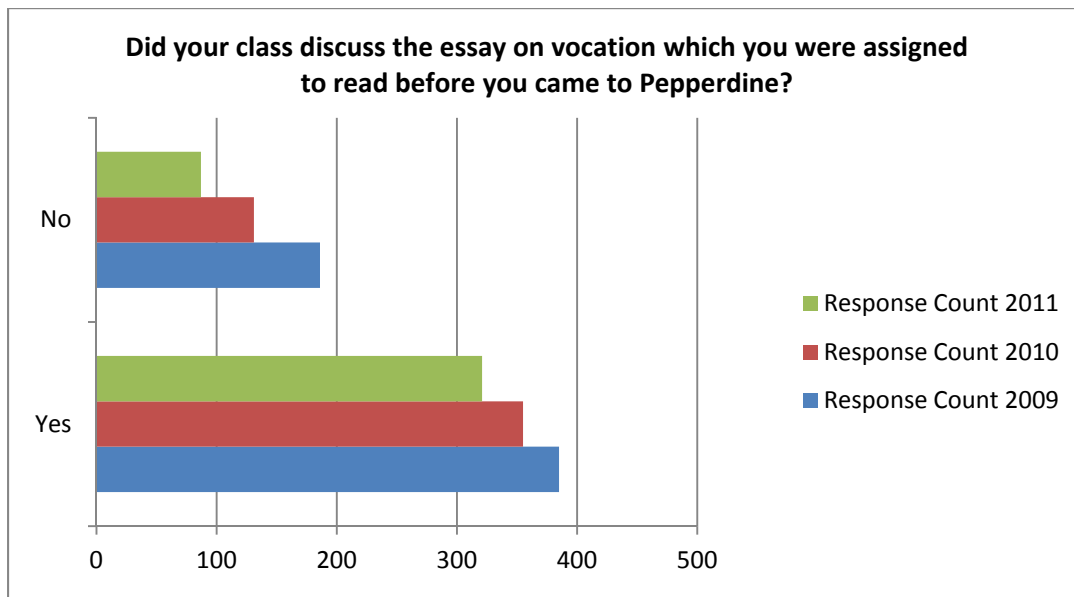
- recognize the difference between vocation as a career and vocation as a calling;
- reflect on his or her unique talents, attributes, or gifts;
- reflect on what God may have called him or her to do;
- consider what would make his or her own life meaningful in the deepest sense;
- consider the possibility of a vocation which also could make life more meaningful for others.

Indirect Assessment Relating to the Essay on Vocation

For the past three years each student who was enrolled in a first-year seminar was asked to complete an anonymous survey; one of the questions related directly to the vocation essay.

First Year Seminar Surveys

November 2009	580 of 759	76% response
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B. Indirect Assessment of First-Year Seminars

In Fall 2007 an assessment of first-year seminars was conducted by a faculty committee under the leadership of Christopher Heard, currently Associate Professor of Religion, who was Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee.

Seven Goals were Identified by the committee for the first-year seminars:

1. create a learning community
2. teach one shared reading assignment
3. sharpen critical thinking and problem-solving skills
4. improve written and oral communication skills
5. teach information literacy skills
6. connect topic to the Christian mission
7. focus on life-management skills

The following strengths were identified:

- variety and choice
- relationship to mission
- creation of a learning community

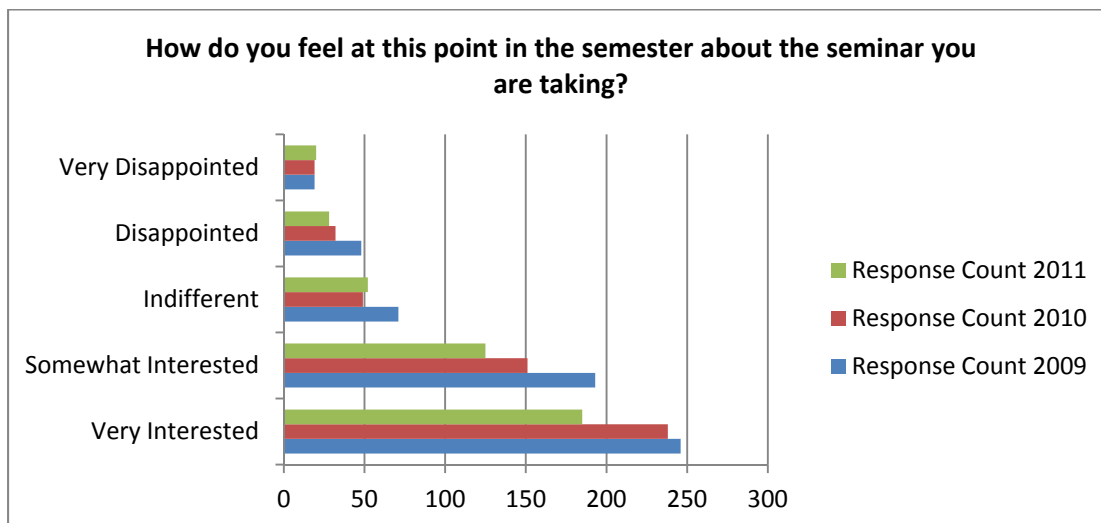
The following weaknesses were identified:

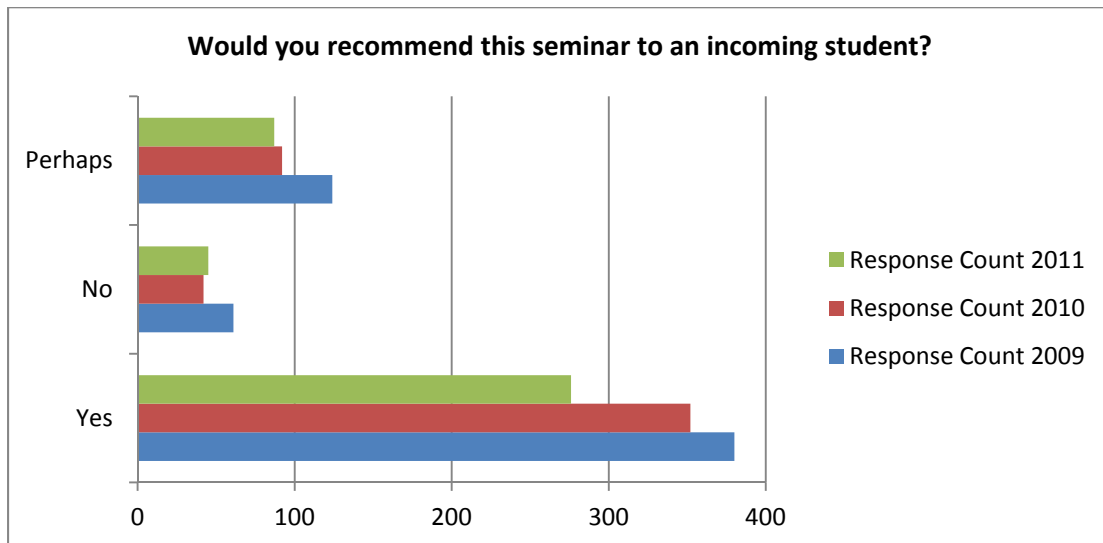
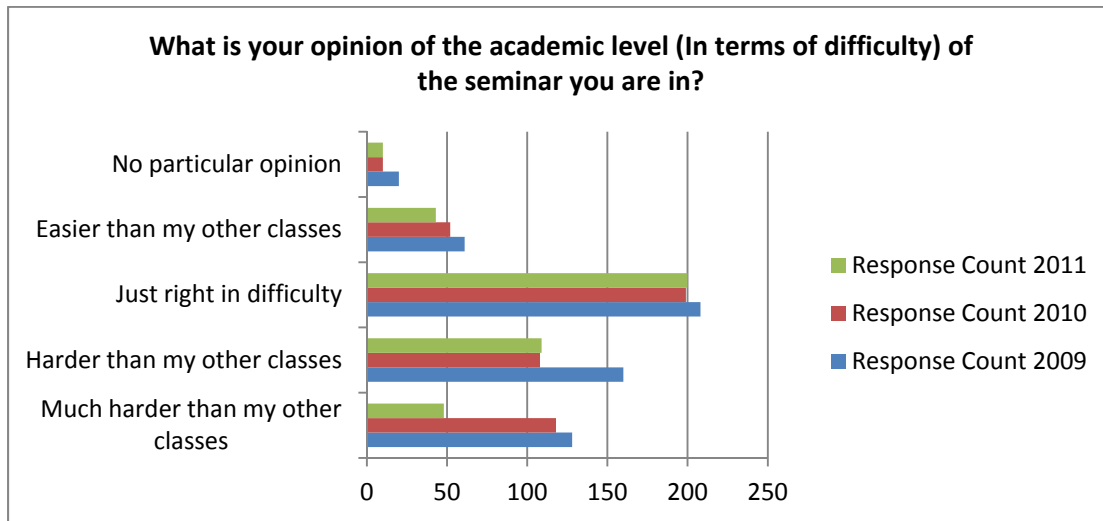
- workloads vary
- no standards for reading, writing, presentations, testing
- ambiguity about goals, objectives, parameters, best practices
- no training in pedagogy
- no ownership in an academic unit

Beginning in 2009 Constance M. Fulmer, then Assistant Dean for Teaching, began to work toward eliminating these weakness by offering a workshop during the summers of 2009, 2010, and 2011 for all of the faculty who were teaching the first-year seminars in the following fall. These were well-attended and addressed these specific areas--particularly the weaknesses. The topics which were addressed in the workshop were informed by information collected in a student survey which was sent in November of 2009 and 2010 to all of the students who were enrolled in the seminars.

Each seminar is administered through and "owned by" one of the eight academic divisions. The summer Workshops provided training in pedagogy and made a concerted effort to eliminate ambiguity about goals, objectives, parameters, and best practices. Standards for assignments were discussed using the data collected in the student survey which was provided to each faculty member so that he or she could compare his or her practices to those of others--and hopefully to adjust them accordingly.

For the most part the Student Surveys in 2009, 2010, and 2011 reflected student satisfaction with the first-year seminars. The surveys were administered in November each year.





VI. Conclusions

Comments regarding program access by diverse populations of students: since all incoming first-year students are enrolled in the seminars, having a more diverse population depends of the Admissions Office and the students who are recruited and admitted.

Comments regarding program assessment: more attention needs to be given to direct assessment of student learning in the individual classes.

Comments regarding current evidence of student learning -- recommendations for improvement: presently evidence is largely self-reported by students. Each faculty member should collect direct

evidence of student learning in his or her own class using a clearly defined and carefully administered assessment plan which is consistent in all of the first-year seminars.

VII. How is data affecting decisions?

The results of the Student Surveys administered over the past three years:

- provided the basis for material discussed in the workshops for faculty
- was useful in considering which faculty should be allowed to continue teaching first-year seminars
- provided information for the faculty to use in self-reflection and planning the seminar for the following year
- helped to indicate that the weaknesses which were listed in the 2007 Survey of First-year seminars were being addressed in a positive way

Data resulting from direct assessments would be even more useful in each of these areas.