

# The First-Year Experience at LIU Post

This report describes the progress of the first-year experience initiative at LIU Post and its success in improving student learning, engagement, academic performance and retention. It also outlines the kinds of faculty development and interdisciplinary collaboration that have been central to this effort. The first-year experience initiative has grown out of the work begun by the first-year experience committee, a group formed in Fall 2011 with the aim of developing a greater understanding of the identity and needs of first-year students. The work has been based on the assumption that student success must be built upon close collaboration between faculty in the classroom and the offices of student life and has taken collaboration, experimentation and innovation as its three fundamental organizing principles. This close collaboration has led to the development of several initiatives that have improved the quality of the student experience at LIU Post. These initiatives are described below.

"This year as a peer mentor has been amazing. It has shaped me into a better person, a better role model, and a better leader."

--Michael Licata, Peer Mentor

## First-Year Seminars and Post 101

Working in tandem with an initiative to revise the core Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum, first-year seminars were designated as a requirement for all incoming students in Fall 2016. First-year seminars are unique thematic courses with topics designed to capture student interest and are paired in learning communities with our extended one-credit orientation class Post 101. Through close collaboration with LIU Promise, we were able to register five hundred first-year students in these seminars this past fall. Inheriting an existing system of peer mentors who each participated in sections of Post Foundations, the first-year experience team

"This class has taught me how to be a leader, how to teach in a classroom setting, to be a team player, and a good and honest person. The people in this class, including my professors, have inspired me to do the best that I can in my profession, and to go on and not be afraid of being a leader."

--Samantha Fanning, Peer Mentor

has moved in the direction of having the peer mentors teach alongside Post 101 professors and create a service learning project for students in their assigned section of Post 101. The service learning project is designed to help students connect with the campus community and develop a sense of belongingness to LIU. In Fall 2015, peer mentors enrolled in a new three-credit course called Post Foundations Leadership, a course designed to enable the peer mentors to design their service learning projects, learn about the values and principles of leadership and hone their public speaking and oral communication skills in preparation for being in the classroom. This course was team-taught by the Director of Learning Communities John Lutz, the Dean of Students Abby Van Vlerah and the Director of the Center for Healthy Living Lynne Schwartz.

The work in this area provides an example of the benefits of collaboration between academic programs and student life. Not only has it solved potential problems with students' progress to completion, but it also has had the unexpected result of fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among various programs including most departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Nursing, Health Sciences, Theatre, Art, Music and Graphic Design. There were thirty-five first-year seminars in fall 2016, and enrollment has been very successful with most sections meeting the minimum cap and many filled to capacity.

Fall First-Year  
Seminars

Medieval Monsters  
How to be a Nurse  
Breaking Bad  
The Drama of College  
Life

The Common Read

The overall purpose of a common read is to provide a common experience for first-year students that encourages students to make connections with each other and engage with the campus community. Students are provided with a copy of the common read in the academic sessions at orientation and discuss the book in Post 101. For the past four years, the common read has been chosen by a committee of administrators, staff, faculty and students. The common read is work of fiction or non-fiction that...

- Addresses aspects of the human condition or experience in a way that encourages intellectual and emotional growth

- Raises intercultural knowledge and tolerance by presenting diverse cultural perspectives or contemporary social issues
- Contains content and/or themes that encourage critical thinking
- Appeals to both males and females
- Captures the imagination of first-year students and draws them into reading and self-reflection
- Provides an accessible and readable engagement with an issue or issues relevant to the contemporary world
- Introduces students to academic expectations and provides a model of serious intellectual engagement

Reflections on Service Learning in  
Post 101

“I learned that helping others is one of the best ways to feel a sense of accomplishment. I learned that not everyone is so fortunate as I am and sometimes all people need is a helping hand in order to get their life back on track.”—First-Year Student

Program for Academic Success

The LIU Post Program for Academic Success (PAS) assists students in their pursuit of academic success. Students are admitted to the PAS program when their application demonstrates some academic potential. The goal of this one-year academic program is to equip students with the educational tools and resources needed in order to prepare them for successful transition to a rigorous academic schedule. PAS provides a monitored course load, smaller class sizes, additional support services, and continuous evaluation throughout the first year. The Program also provides PAS students with the opportunity to take credit-bearing courses within a one-year academic curriculum designed to introduce college level coursework, build academic skills, and establish a foundation for future success.

“I don’t think I could have asked for a better college experience thus far. I enjoy attending LIU Post and creating memories to last with the people who are part of it.”

--First-Year Student

Work on improving this program is underway this spring in preparation for the coming academic year. Evidence from Complete College America suggests that students are more likely to be retained and complete their degree in four years if they have a declared area of interest from the start. To bring the PAS program more into alignment with best practices, tracks in each school or college have been created and called “PAS Pathways to Success.” In each semester of the first year, courses in the school or college in which a student has declared interest will be identified. Students will enroll in these “gateway” courses to particular programs in an effort to engage them with their interests and with a cohort. Students will also be provided with additional supports outside the classroom in order to help them succeed.

### Collaboration, Experimentation and Innovation

The first-year experience initiative has continued to evolve from the efforts of a group of faculty, administrators and staff working closely together to meet the needs of incoming students both inside and outside the classroom. Recognizing that intellectual, emotional and psychological factors all play an important and inseparable role in student achievement, this group has aimed to surmount the differences and overcome the tensions that sometimes separate faculty and administrators with the conviction that such collaboration is the only way to promote student success and the success of LIU. The business of education is the business of transformation, and the first-year experience initiative has been guided by an experimental sensibility that combines academic and student life efforts in order to help students find the kind of liberation that comes from knowledge of the world and themselves. In the words of the philosopher, Paulo Freire, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” The faculty at Post campus affirm their desire to work with the administration, the Board of Trustees and students to promote just such hopeful inquiry and find common solutions to the challenges facing our University.

“I learned that I am capable of doing anything I set my mind to, I can work hard, and that I can make an impact on people.”

--Victoria Onorato, Peer Mentor