

## 60-Second SoTL

Episode 50 – Significant Benefits of the First-Year Experience

(Piano Music)

0:03

### **Jessie L. Moore:**

Welcome to 60-Second SoTL! This week's episode is part of a short series by students in Elon University's Masters of Higher Education program. The students are exploring first-year experiences as meaningful or high-impact learning experiences. Listen for the other podcast episodes in their series wherever you subscribe to 60-Second SoTL.

0:23

(Piano Music)

0:26

### **Emma Calhoun:**

Is there a statistically significant association between first-year seminar participation and positive academic and social well-being? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Emma Calhoun.

0:43

In "A Quasiexperimental Analysis of First-Year Seminar Outcomes at a Large University", published as an open access article in the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice* Rajeeb Das, Erika Schmitt and Michael T. Stephenson challenge existing studies related to the measurable effectiveness of first year seminars.

1:05

With common research designs being single sample pretests and cross-sectional studies, the authors highlight possible limitations including selection bias and maturation effects. Aware of the all-too-common fate of Higher Education practices bearing mixed outcomes and lack of rigorous research methods, the authors set out to statistically support the high-impact imprimatur of first-year seminar programs in efforts to show research-proven data points.

1:37

Using a sample group of first-year participants, the authors gathered student data from a large university in the southern United States where entering classes regularly approach 10,000. Given the large population, Das and colleagues were able to collect survey and GPA data from 2,450 students, half being first-year seminar participants and the other representing a control group, using *propensity score matching*.

2:04

In hopes of offering evidence to support differential outcomes, the authors present an analysis of 2 types of indicators.

Quantitatively, through longitudinal GPA data, the authors found statistical difference between the 2 groups' GPAs. Starting in their sophomore year, seminar participants held, on average, .10 grade points more. The number of cumulative hours attempted and completed during this period were significant as well.

Regarding retention, more first year seminar participants were retained in the subsequent spring and following fall term than non-seminar participants.

2:45

Qualitatively, significant differences were found using the "freshman survey", a Likert scale questionnaire examining students' sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Notably, non-participants displayed strong favor with statements like "I am very capable of succeeding at university" and "I know how to study and perform well on tests" whereas seminar participants only favored the statement "I will ask for help when needed", suggesting participants may have gained notable social skills rather than academic ones throughout their enrollment.

3:21

With study findings supporting the existing literature regarding first year seminars, the authors suggest that the implementation of quasi-experimental methods provide plain confirmation in a field saturated with weak causal evidence. This sentiment is hammered home in the article's conclusion, where the authors encourage educational researchers to employ experimental study designs in hopes of not diluting the high impact practice field with inconclusive correlations.

3:51

To learn more about the effectiveness of first-year seminars and their positionality as High Impact practices, follow the link in our show notes to read this article and review our supplemental episodes on this topic.

4:03

(piano music)

4:06

Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at [www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org](http://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org).

(piano music)