

An International Student's Perspective on First-Year Seminars

Nolan Schultheis (00:04):

Welcome to the Center for Engaged Learning special series on first-year seminars featuring guest hosts from the Elon University Masters of Higher Education Program.

Sara Chilton (00:19):

In this episode from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning, I'll be interviewing Mary, an international student who engaged in a first-year seminar. Hi, I'm your host, Sara Chilton. In the last episode, we discussed how international students are influenced by first year seminars. Today I'd like to introduce Mary, an international student who attended a private four year university and engaged in a first-year seminar. Mary, welcome.

Mary (00:46):

Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

Sara Chilton (00:48):

Of course. I have a few questions I'd like to ask you today about your experience with a first-year seminar being an international student. Let's get started. How does the international student experience differ from the traditional student experience that could make a first-year seminar valuable for them?

Mary (01:06):

I think everyone struggles with the transition to college. It's not exactly an easy transition, but with international students, not only are you transitioning to a new experience with your educational system, but also you're in a new culture and you have to learn all of these different terms, how people speak, what's acceptable, all these things. So I think the main thing is really just a place where you can learn about the culture, I think is really important.

Sara Chilton (01:33):

What did your overall experience of a first-year seminar look like at your university?

Mary (01:38):

I loved my first-year seminar. I think it was really helpful for me to understand what it's expected in a class, in a college setting. I think the main thing for me was our first-year seminar was about the global experience, so we were looking at different places around the world, depending on who your professor was. And for me, I think it would've been more beneficial if I was learning more about the US just because I was doing a seminar on an area where I lived in for six years. So I think I was not only at an advantage in this class, but then I was at a disadvantage outside of this class because I didn't have that time to learn about the US like students did about other places around the world that they might have experience in the future.

Sara Chilton (02:26):

How has your experience in the first-year seminar influenced your overall transition to college life?

Mary (02:32):

I had a really good experience. I think it helped me because I didn't really know what was expected, and I was honestly really nervous going into classes, not knowing how they were expecting us to write papers, do our research. So I think for me, what influenced me most for the transition was having that constructive feedback given to me regularly when submitting assignments and having our professor say, this is great, but here are some ways that you could get better in your writing or in how you're studying, things like that. So I think that was the main thing for me.

Sara Chilton (03:07):

And did you feel that the seminar provided ongoing support throughout the class, or did you feel it was more of a one-time orientation sort of thing?

Mary (03:15):

I think it was more of a one-time thing. I will say I do think it definitely helped me in the long run because I was more better equipped for classes, but I don't think it really kept going. After that seminar was over, we just kind of stopped. I didn't talk to that professor again. I didn't really see those students again because it wasn't based on your major. So I think it would've been better to have that ongoing support, but it was more of a one-time thing.

Sara Chilton (03:41):

Were there any specific topics or activities in the seminar that you found particularly helpful for navigating challenges, maybe of a university or college?

Mary (03:51):

I think the variety of assignments was really helpful for me because every major is different with how you submit things and what form you're submitting things in. So it was really helpful for me to have a mix of papers, blog posts, watching movies and analyzing them. I think it was really helpful to have that, and it definitely benefited me in the future. When I was writing my first paper for a class in my major, I wasn't as nervous as I was when I was writing one for my first-year seminar.

Sara Chilton (04:19):

And then my last question is, is there anything that you would have changed or think would have been more beneficial to add to the first-year seminar specifically to make that more of a better transition?

Mary (04:31):

Yeah, I think it was great. I just wish there was a first-year seminar for international students. I didn't really meet many international students, so my group was mainly American students. That had a very different background for me, and I didn't really feel a lot. There was a lot I could connect on, especially when I was not only transitioning to college, but a new country. So I think it would've been really beneficial to have one for international students to gather, but also learn more about the US as a culture, because I think that was definitely a gap that was missing for me.

Sara Chilton (05:02):

Thanks for the insight, Mary.

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Nolan Schultheis (05:08):

This series is produced by Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. Learn more about first year seminars and other engaged learning topics at www.centerforengagedlearning.org.

Sara Chilton (05:21):

Make sure you come back to the final episode in our series on first year seminars.