



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

Survey of Faculty Activities and Perceptions

More Institutional Commitment and Teaching Emphasis Needed to Increase Interaction between Faculty and First Year Students

Prepared by the Office of Institutional Research

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In the late spring of 2007, the Survey of Faculty Activities and Perceptions (SFAP) was administered to all Loyola Lakeside faculty and instructional staff. The survey was part of a larger project in which Loyola is participating, the Parsing the First Year project (PFY), administered by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the Pennsylvania State University. The purpose of the PFY is to investigate the nature of students' first year of college and the factors that affect that experience. The SFAP is intended to measure faculty activities and perceptions that are related to first year students.

This report focuses on the SFAP results for respondents, representing 25% of the tenure stream faculty. Of the faculty that responded, almost 90% were tenured, which approximates the actual proportion at Loyola. Because the actual number of untenured faculty respondents was so small (11), it was not feasible to look at tenured and untenured faculty separately. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the survey results. There was some evidence that untenured faculty are less engaged with first year students and spend more time on research than do tenured faculty. Another caveat is that it is probable that it was the more engaged faculty who responded to the survey, so that engagement and concern about the first year experience are probably overstated relative to the faculty as a whole.

Key Findings

- Seven percent of faculty typically teach a first year seminar. 44% teach other courses serving primarily first year students (see Table 1).
- The average number of courses a faculty member taught serving primarily first year students was .7, and faculty thought that .3 courses (in other words, almost half of those they taught) were too large to allow engagement between faculty and individual students.
- The rate of participation in pedagogical training within the last two years was fairly high: fully 72% had participated in a teaching/learning-focused conference, and 11% in a conference that focused on first year students. About two fifths had read literature related to first year students.
- Faculty reported an average of at least 11 hours per week teaching and interacting with first year students, compared to 16.3 hours on their own research (see Table 2). (For junior faculty, the ratio was more skewed toward research; result not shown.)
- The average number of interactions faculty had with first year students outside of class in a typical week was fairly low. They reported greeting first year students briefly less than seven times and having casual conversations with them only 2.5 times. Interactions related to academics or students' career interests were even rarer.
- When asked which classroom activities they employed moderately frequently or a great deal, the most reported was lecturing: 88% of faculty said they lectured a moderate amount or a great deal (see Table 3, Figure 1). Eighty percent reported frequent in-class discussions.
- Almost 9 in 10 faculty members reported that they gave students frequent feedback on their progress, but only two thirds reported giving detailed feedback.
- Almost two thirds of faculty reported that they often or very often gave their first year students assignments requiring them to examine other perspectives or asked them to think about ideas that differed from their own (see Figure 2).
- Only about a third of faculty members changed their course content or teaching in response to student feedback.
- Faculty were also asked about institutional support for first year students. A great majority, 88%, agreed or strongly agreed that Loyola does a good job in informing first year students about institutional values (see Table 4). Only half, however, agreed that Loyola does a good job in getting first year students off to a good start academically.
- Faculty thought that Loyola does a good job in enrolling students who can benefit from the Loyola experience (80%), communicating to students what Loyola offers academically (70%), and placing first year students in academically appropriate classes (77%).
- Faculty were much less likely to report that faculty and student affairs staff work together to promote first

year success (27%) and to orient first year students (33%), or that results from first year assessments are used to strengthen the first year experience (31%).

- Only 35% of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that Loyola administration provides clear leadership for faculty and staff in promoting first year success. Just 69% said that Loyola does a good job informing faculty of academic support services available to students.
- Three quarters of faculty said that Loyola's first year experience (courses, programs, and services) provide a foundation upon which later years build (see Table 5). Most faculty also saw the first year experience as having stated goals and objectives, and as actively pursuing those goals and objectives (71% and 70%, respectively).
- Only 42% of faculty said that the first year experience was, at least to a moderate degree, coordinated horizontally, with all units communicating and working together in an organized way.
- Few faculty thought that teaching was valued as much as research at Loyola, in hiring (13%) or in general (21%; see Table 6).
- Fewer than 30% said that faculty were rewarded for teaching first year students and that faculty were supported in learning how to help first year students succeed, while less than half said that faculty are encouraged to interact with first year students outside the classroom (43%).
- Most faculty did see the institution as encouraging use of instructional support (71%), and most (70%) thought that their colleagues considered the first year as an important foundation of a college education.

Implications

- Of the first year courses that faculty teach, almost half are considered by those faculty to be too big to allow them to engage individually with students. The courses taught include seminars, which implies that faculty considered most non-seminar classes to be too big for individual interactions with students. This is particularly problematic because Loyola considers faculty-student contact to be very important, especially in the first year.

- Frequencies of out of class interactions with first year students are low, and less than half of the faculty felt encouraged by the administration to have such interactions.
- The combination of large classes with little opportunity for individual engagement with students and the low rates of out of classroom contact imply very low overall rates of faculty/student contact during students' first year.
- Rates of general pedagogical training were high, with more than 70% of faculty having participated in a teaching/learning conference in the last two years. Pedagogical training specifically on the first year experience was less reported, of course. This may be an area with room for improvement. Most faculty already feel encouraged by the administration to take advantage of Loyola's instructional support center, so if Loyola were to offer and publicize more training specific to the first year experience, it is likely that many faculty would respond positively.
- Another relatively easy initiative would be to make sure that faculty are better informed of academic support services, and encouraged to provide referrals to students who are having academic difficulties.
- The great majority of faculty see teaching as less important than research at Loyola. This is not necessarily a bad thing, however, as long as they also see teaching as important. However, few faculty members feel supported or encouraged by Loyola's administration in working with first year students.
- The results of this survey suggest that, in the context of Loyola's emphasis on faculty/student contact, faculty have little interaction with individual first year students, and they do not feel encouraged or supported by the administration to do so. The bad news is that those who responded are probably the more engaged among the faculty as a whole. The good news is that there is room for the administration to increase levels of support in this area of the first year experience, both logistically and organizationally, and that at least some faculty will respond well to such efforts. For this to be meaningful and effective, however, it will require commitment in order gain faculty trust and cooperation.

Figure 1
Percentage of Time in Typical Week
 (Total time=49 hours)

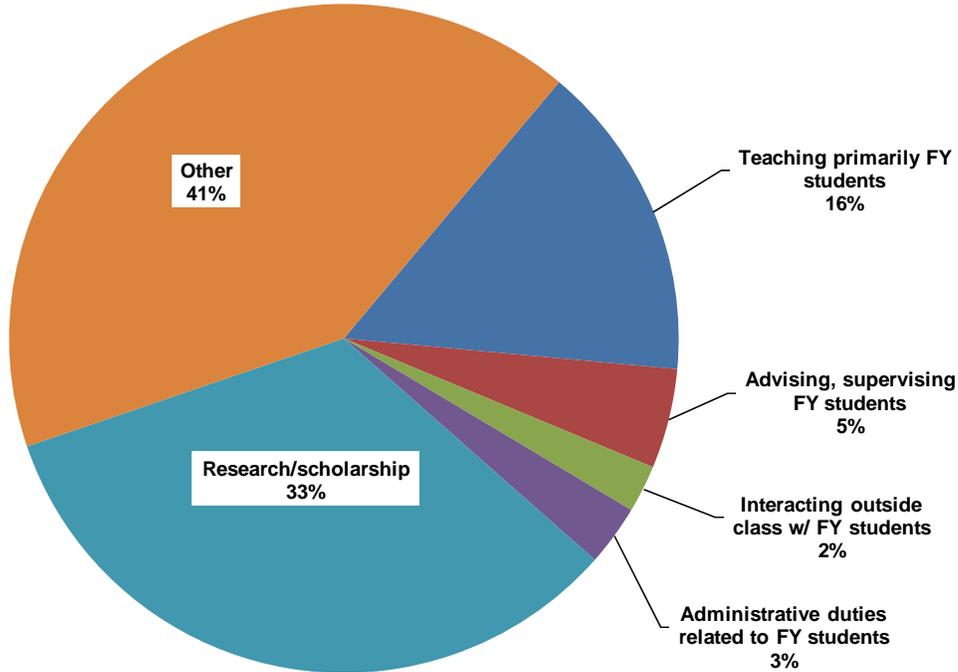


Figure 2
Frequent Use of Classroom Activities/Approaches

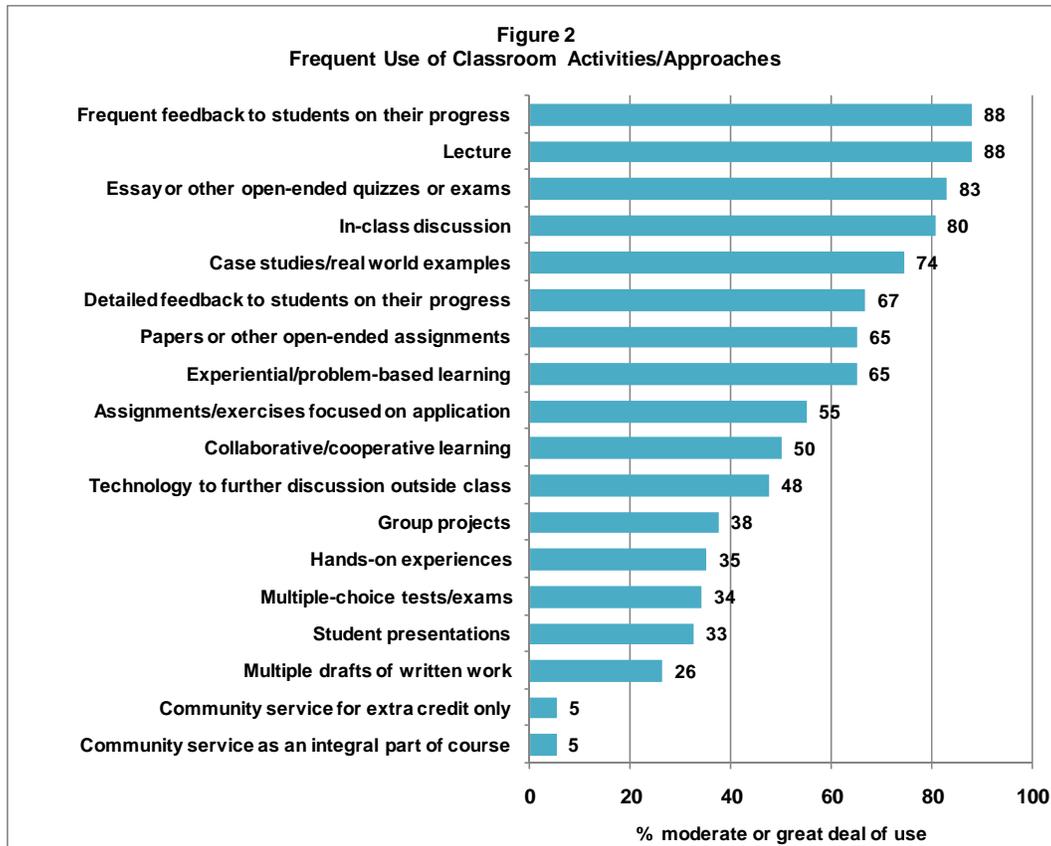


Figure 3
Frequent Use of Teaching Approaches

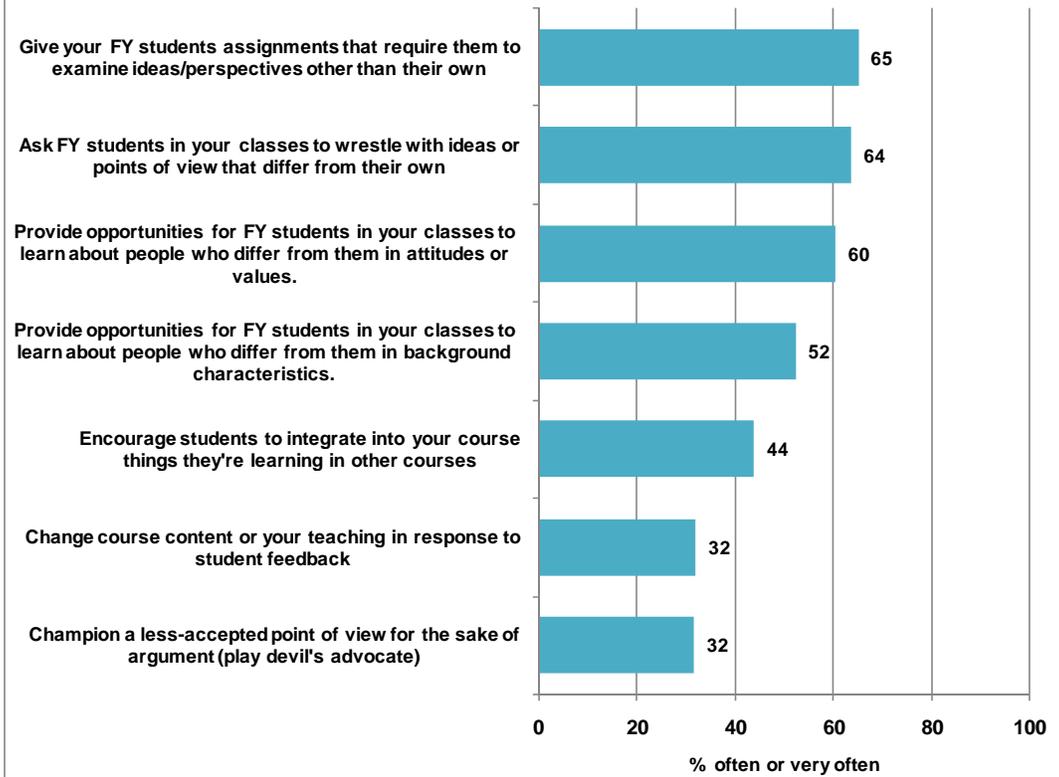


Table 1	
Teaching and Involvement with First Year Students	
	%
Average years teaching in higher education	25
Average years teaching at Loyola	19
Typically teach a first-year seminar	7
Typically teach other courses serving primarily FY students	44
Average number of courses taught that primarily serve FY students	.7
Average number of those courses too large to allow you to engage students individually	.3
Participated in pedagogical training within in past two years (<i>% at least once</i>)	
Participated in a conference that focused on teaching and learning	72
Participated in a conference on FY students	11
Read literature related to FY students	39
N	96

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

Table 2	
Time Spent on and Interaction with First Year Students in Typical Term	
Average hours per week devoted to Loyola in typical week	48.9
Average hours per week spent on specific activities	
Teaching FY students	7.5
Advising, supervising, or otherwise helping FY students	2.4
Interacting with FY students outside of class	1.1
Administrative duties related to FY students	1.4
Research/scholarship in your field	16.3
Total	28.8
Average number of interactions with FY students per week	
Exchange brief greetings	6.6
Have casual conversations	2.5
Discuss intellectual or academic-related matters	2.2
Discuss matters related to the student's future career	1.4
Discuss non-academic topics of mutual interest	1.3
Work together on an institutional or professional activity	.5
Discuss a student's personal matters	.5

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

Table 3	
Teaching Approaches/Activities Used in Courses Serving Primarily First Year Students	
	%
<i>Activities¹ (% who used moderately or a great deal)</i>	
Lecture	88
Frequent feedback to students on their progress	88
Essay or other open-ended quizzes or exams	83
In-class discussion	80
Case studies/real world examples	74
Detailed feedback to students on their progress	67
Papers or other open-ended assignments	65
Experiential/problem-based learning	65
Assignments or exercises focusing on application	55
Collaborative/cooperative learning	50
Technology to further discussion outside of class	48
Group projects	38
Hands-on experiences	35
Multiple-choice tests/exams	34
Student presentations	33
Multiple drafts of written work	26
Community service for extra credit only	5
Community service as an integral part of the course	5
<i>Teaching approaches (% who used often or very often)</i>	
Give your FY students assignments that require them to examine ideas/perspectives other than their own	65
Ask FY students in your classes to wrestle with ideas or points of view that differ from their own	64
Provide opportunities for FY students in your classes to learn about people who differ from them in attitudes or values.	60
Provide opportunities for FY students in your classes to learn about people who differ from them in background characteristics.	52
Encourage students to integrate into your course things they're learning in other courses	44
Change course content or your teaching in response to student feedback	32
Champion a less-accepted point of view for the sake of argument (play devil's advocate)	32

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

¹ Excludes first year seminars; excludes "Not applicable" responses.

Table 4	
Perceptions of Institutional Support for First Year Students	
	%
<i>Institutional support^{1,2} (% agree or strongly agree)</i>	
Loyola does a good job	
Informing FY students about the values this institution considers important	88
Enrolling FY students who can benefit from what this institution has to offer	80
Communicating to FY students what it has to offer academically	79
Placing FY students in courses appropriate to their academic preparation	77
Providing adequate support for all of the kinds of FY students admitted	70
Informing faculty about academic support services	69
Conveying to FY students the sense that they 'belong' here	69
Conveying to FY students the sense that, if they make the effort, they can succeed here	67
Informing FY students about the institution's history and traditions	64
Helping FY students get off to a good start academically	52
Informing faculty about personal support services	49
Facilitating FY students' early involvement academic life	47
Facilitating FY students' early involvement in non-academic life	41
FY student success is a priority for Loyola	70
Loyola has a clear curricular plan for FY students	68
FY students know academic expectations at Loyola	60
Student Affairs staff have the support of faculty	51
Loyola has a comprehensive approach to helping FY students succeed	46
Loyola systematically assesses students' FY experience	46
Loyola has a coherent approach to helping FY students succeed	43
Loyola's admissions professionals know my department's academic options and strengths	37
Administration provides clear leadership to faculty and staff in promoting FY students' success	35
FY students know out-of-class expectations at Loyola	34
Faculty and Student Affairs staff work closely together in orienting FY students	33
Results from FY assessments used to strengthen FY courses, programs, services	31
Faculty and Student Affairs staff work closely together in ways that promote FY students' success	27
Loyola emphasizes 'doing even better,' regardless of how good it is at educating students <i>(% moderate or great emphasis)</i>	78
<i>Loyola supports instructors in working with students²...</i>	
<i>(% agree or strongly agree)</i>	
with disabilities	80
who are athletes	80
who are from a variety of cultural backgrounds	71
who are older or returning	64
who are gifted	60
with family or work obligations	48
who are underprepared for college work	43

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

¹ Excludes "Not applicable" responses.

² Excludes "Don't know" responses.

Table 5	
Perceptions of Loyola's First Year Courses, Programs, and Services	
	%
Perceptions ¹ (<i>% moderately or a great deal</i>)	
Integrated 'vertically' (treated as foundational year upon which later years build)	75
Coordinated 'horizontally' (all units dealing with FY students communicate and work together in organized way)	42
Intentional (stated goals and objectives)	71
Active (actively pursues goals and objectives)	70

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

1 Excludes "Don't know" responses.

Table 6	
Perceptions of Loyola's Emphasis on Teaching	
	%
Institutional emphasis on teaching ¹ (<i>% agree or strongly agree</i>)	
Faculty are encouraged to use the services of the on-campus instructional support center	71
Faculty colleagues consider the first year as an important time to help students lay the foundation for the rest of their college education	70
Faculty are encouraged to interact with FY students outside the classroom	43
Faculty are assisted to learn about FY students are how to help them succeed	29
Faculty are rewarded for teaching FY students	28
Teaching is more important than research	21
When hiring new faculty members, candidates' teaching abilities are more important than their research abilities	13

Source: Parsing the First Year Project Faculty Survey, 2007

1 Excludes "Not applicable" responses.