

# USF101 — “EXPEDITION USF” *(provisional title)*

Justification & Overview

Prepared by Marilyn DeLaure and Greg Wolcott

03 February 2015

## PROGRAM GOALS

- Embrace and embody *cura personalis* (care of the whole person) through integrating academic, social, personal, and vocational facets of students’ lives
- Establish a more unified and universal experience for new students
- Enhance students’ commitment to the institution by deepening student identification with USF and strengthening a sense of USF community
- Underscore the value of a USF education
- Improve the student experience at USF by familiarizing students early on with resources and policies, connecting students to peers, and forging a strong bond with the faculty/staff instructor
- Empower students to take ownership of their college experience: helping them plumb their interests and passions, pose questions driven by curiosity, explore a range of available opportunities, make informed choices, and advocate for themselves
- Extend orientation and transition efforts into the fall semester, providing critical information to students at pivotal points in their first semester
- Improve retention and four-year graduation rates

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

USF101 is a 1-unit course designed for first-semester undergraduate students new to the University of San Francisco’s Hilltop Campus. This class helps students learn about USF’s Jesuit mission, acclimate to the campus community, navigate the university’s academic requirements and resources, explore personal and professional goals, and map their individual pathways to graduation. Students will learn about these topics through reading, reflecting, discussing, and engaging in activities with classmates and other members of the USF community.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Articulate the values of a Jesuit, liberal arts education
- 2) Navigate USF’s academic structure, requirements, and opportunities (Core curriculum, major fields of study, co-curricular activities)
- 3) Identify campus resources available for specific types of support
- 4) Examine how their backgrounds and experiences impact their values and assumptions
- 5) Describe and demonstrate principles of responsible citizenship within and beyond the campus community
- 6) Articulate personal, academic, and career goals
- 7) Describe and practice various habits that contribute to overall wellness
- 8) Develop and apply skills that contribute to building positive relationships with diverse peers, staff, and faculty

**USF101 is a data-driven initiative.**

1. USF101 course development has been informed by the last three years' worth of data from the USFAchieve/Mapworks survey. (USF's first-to-second year retention rate has hovered around 82-88% for the past five years, which is lower than our peer Jesuit Institutions. Our four-year graduation rates are similar to the national average of 60%, which puts us into the same success rate with large, public institutions.
2. At USF, the First Year Seminar Program addresses the first year experience. However, fewer than half of first year students enroll in FYS courses, due to limited course offerings. Scaling up the FYSeminars to cover all incoming students would be quite resource-intensive, as the classes are capped at 16 students, require a faculty instructor teaching 4 units, and carry an additional budget of \$50/student for enrichment activities.

Looking at USF data starting with the 2008 entering cohort and ending with the 2013 entering cohort, **students who took an FYS course were generally retained to sophomore year at a higher rate** (with some variability from year to year). Furthermore, for the 2008, 2009, and 2010 cohorts, those students who did take a FYS course consistently had better four-year and six-year graduation rates as compared to those who did not take a seminar. (Granted, this is correlation, not proven causation ...)

Cohort Year	Did NOT take FYS	DID take FYS
2008: Four-Year Grad Rate	60%	64%
Six-Year Grad Rate	69%	73%
2009: Four-Year Grad Rate	59%	61%
Six-Year Grad Rate	69%	69%
2010: Four-Year Grad Rate	58%	65%
Six-Year Grad Rate	58%	66%

3. Similar programs at other universities show positive impact on student success, retention, and persistence.
  - A. The University of South Carolina—a national leader in the “first-year experience” area—has been offering a UNIV101 course since 1972. They report higher first-year GPAs (3.28 versus 3.16 in 2011), better five-year graduation rates (71.1% versus 64.9% for the Fall 2007 cohort), and higher first-year persistence rates (88% versus 84.4% in 2011) for students who take UNIV101 compared to those who do not.
  - B. In his white paper titled “The *Empirical* Case for the First-Year Seminar: Evidence of Course Impact on Student Retention, Persistence to Graduation, and Academic Achievement,” national FYE expert Joe Cuseo reports:

“Multi-institutional evidence for the positive impact of first-year seminars on student behavior and campus perceptions is provided by the National Survey of Student Engagement (2005), which included students’ survey responses from more than 80,000 first-year students. Results of this Web-based survey revealed that relative to students who did not participate in the course, first-year seminar participants reported that they: (a) were more challenged academically, (b) were more likely to engage in active and

collaborative learning activities, (c) interacted more frequently with faculty, (d) perceived the campus environment to be more supportive, (e) made greater gains in learning during their first year of college, and (f) were more satisfied with their first-year experience. Compared to students who only participated in orientation but not a first-year seminar, course participants reported greater engagement, higher levels of satisfaction, and greater developmental gains in the following areas: (a) academic advising and planning, (b) career advising and planning, (c) financial aid advising, (d) academic assistance, (e) academic challenge, (f), active and collaborative learning, and (g) student-faculty interaction (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2005).”

C. Excerpts from Greg Wolcott's (2006) research on first year college student retention, *Critical Reflections of College Sophomores about Preparation and Persistence During the Freshman Year, University of San Francisco*:

Upcraft and Gardner (1989b) define freshman success as developing competence, establishing interpersonal relationships, developing identity, deciding on a career and life-style, maintaining personal health, and developing an integrated philosophy of life. Levitz and Noel (1989) explain that because the first two to six weeks are critical for freshmen, the quality and responsiveness of faculty and staff may be the most powerful resources available for improving student success and persistence.

Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of student departure is like other college impact theories of student change in that it views persistence as primarily a function of the student's fit with the college environment. These types of theories also contend that student background characteristics before entering the institution, the institutional environment, and student involvement all have an impact on the college experience (Lewallen, 1993).

Universities provide numerous programs and services to incoming freshmen to help them prepare and persist. Some examples are pre-enrollment communication and events, orientation programs, and freshman seminars. Students who participate in these activities have proven to be more successful than those who do not participate (Devlin, 1996; Gardner & Hansen, 1993; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; Hunter, Skipper, & Linder, 2003; Jewler, 1989; Strumpf & Sharer, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft, 1989b, 1993; Young, Backer, & Rogers, 1989).

Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, and Hengstler report that positive experiences reinforce persistence through their impact upon intentions and commitments to the goal of college completion and to the institution (as cited in Tinto, 1993). Negative experiences weaken intentions and commitments, especially commitment to the institution, and thereby enhance the likelihood of withdrawal.

This generation is less ethnocentric, more social, more open to cultural differences, more tolerant of ambiguity, and more results-oriented with a focus on career and success (Cawthon and Miller, 2003).

Rendon claims the use of “validating experiences” supports the success of college freshmen, particularly first-generation college students (as cited in Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 17). These experiences include encounters with administrators, faculty, and students who can indicate that these students have what it takes to succeed. This contact promotes confidence in first-generation college students, an element that is critical to their success. In addition, nurturing confidence in this

population fits well with their psychological orientation. First-generation students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are known to have higher expectations for success and place a greater value on college attendance (Ethington, 1990).

Boyer contends that programs and services during the transition process are necessary because “this is a time when friendships are formed and attitudes about collegiate life take shape” (as cited in Magolda, 1997, p. 84).

Twale (1989) concludes that professionals have realized it is impossible to meet all of the goals of orientation in a brief one-day or two-day format. Many institutions have now moved to extended orientation efforts including summer or precollege programs, freshman week activities, short-term seminars, semester courses, and year long programs. “Progressive orientation programs are comprehensive, extended transitional programs that set a serious academic tone [and] often have student success sessions on issues of wellness, safety, civility, diversity, student responsibilities, expectations, and role of family” (Gardner & Hansen, 1993, p. 183). Comprehensive orientation programs include a variety of activities and allow institutions to better meet the needs of new students.

The freshman seminar model has grown considerably since its inception at the University of South Carolina in the early 1970s. University 101 is the title of the freshman seminar course at USC and has served as the model for other seminar courses across the country. Today, goals of freshman seminars include promoting a warm and caring environment, personal interaction with faculty and peers, interaction with critical student services, assessment and referral components, and support for retention (Fidler & Hunter, 1989). Fidler and Hunter (1989) provide the most comprehensive account of empirical evidence for the support of freshman seminars. In addition to the goals listed above, the authors found that freshman seminar courses also improve academic performance, increase knowledge of student services, influence personality development, and support student satisfaction. Given these effects, it is clear why over 2000 institutions now offer freshman seminar courses (Gardner, 1989).

Numerous components can be included in a freshman seminar course (Hunter, Skipper, & Linder, 2003; Jewler, 1989). These components include a visit to the academic skills center, an interview with a professor, a structured research assignment, writing experiences designed to instill confidence, and discussions about critical issues that freshmen face. They might also include developing academic and critical thinking skills, problem solving, introduction to the major, time management, and adjustment to social pressures. Hunter, Skipper, and Linder (2003) contend that freshman seminars are student success courses because, at their core, they strive to enhance student growth and development.

“All students should be linked to some systematic, structured support network when they enter college. Students should have clearly identified institutional resources that will intervene when they are confronted with an academic or personal crisis that may impact on their decision to reenroll” (Grosset, 1991, p. 176). Grosset explains that in defining integration measures, it is important not to overlook the day-to-day nuances of the college experience that affect student engagement. The quality of integration experiences were of importance to the participants, as were out-of-classroom experiences.

Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora, and Terenzini (1996) studied how first-year students' academic success was affected by internal locus of control. Internal locus of control is defined as "the extent to which an individual is self-directed or believes that one determines one's own fate" (p. 732). As cited in Pascarella et al. (1996, p. 732), "people with a strong sense of internal locus of control tend to believe that they are responsible for what happens to them, while more externally directed individuals tend to think that their destiny in a particular context is determined more by luck, fate, or other people (Lefcourt, 1982; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966, 1975; Weiner, 1986)."