

# Learning in transition:



## The First-Year Experience

On initial glance, today's first-year students at The University of Findlay look a lot like those who began their collegiate careers at Findlay College in the 1970s: They are wearing jeans and T-shirts, laughing with their friends in residence halls and eating way too much pasta in the cafeteria.

Look closer and you will see some differences: a cell phone on every ear, a laptop in every backpack, and hour-crunching class/team practice/work schedules clutched in every hand. Students are "teched to the teeth" and over-committed the minute they arrive on campus.

Most of our first-year students in the 1970s were first-generation college students, majoring in liberal arts fields. They came to campus with less than a station wagon-full of

belongings, lived in dorms and came to college for "college life" — classes, studying and socializing (OK, not necessarily in that order).

Today, our number of first-year students has more than tripled, and most students have college-educated parents. The majority of our first-year students major in the natural sciences and health sciences, which sharpens their career focus and tightens course scheduling.

Just over half of the current first-year students live in the residence halls; the rest commute from their parents' homes in the area. Those who do live on campus arrive in August with caravans of parent-driven U-Hauls and SUVs, filled with televisions, refrigerators, computers and enough clothing to avoid the laundry room for a

semester. (I have yet to see a kitchen sink arrive, but I have learned to "never say never.")

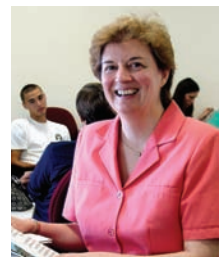
And once those students get settled in, add to their "college life" activities a huge time vacuum: part-time and sometimes full-time jobs, needed to cover tuition, car payments, cell phone bills and midnight pizza deliveries.

Indeed, college life has changed (except the pizza deliveries).

But while cultural shifts and logistics have altered the fabric of the first-year class, there are still some common needs for first-year students regardless of their generation: the need to develop critical thinking, the need to learn life skills, the need to understand that all choices have consequences. Findlay College designed a Freshman Seminar program in the

**"I have taught first-year students since 1987, and I have to say working with them has been the most rewarding (frustrating, encouraging, heart-wrenching, joyous) experience of my teaching career."**

Diana Montague, Ph. D.  
First-Year Experience Director  
Professor of English



# Today's UF freshman:

## Laptop Computer with Wireless Card

- Great for taking notes in class, collaborating on projects in the Union and accessing our wireless campus network.

## Cell Phone

- Once used primarily for phone calls, now a must for sending and receiving instant text messages.

## Oiler "Hoodie"

- Black and Orange are everywhere — often bearing the emblem of an extracurricular activity.

## MP3 Player

- Most students don't leave the dorm without their downloaded music libraries.

## UF Lanyard

- Keeps keys and the all-important student I.D. card close at hand.

## Blue Jeans

- Because some things never change!

## Flip Flops

- Once reserved for the beach, now standard-issue footwear in every season.

**Amanda Lee**  
Pharmacy Major  
Findlay, Ohio

Students from Ohio: 78.4%, Out-of-State 28.1%

Top quarter of their HS Class - 49.6%

High School GPA of 3.5 or greater - 49.82%



1970s to address such academic and social transitions. Interdisciplinary and team-taught, these courses — later titled First-Year Seminars — provided a transition to college life within an academic context.

Restructured in 2005, the First-Year Experience still addresses transitional and academic issues with a slightly different approach. Now the FYE is a full-year program, designed to keep the same cohorts together through a three-credit General Education class in the fall and a one-credit elective in the spring. Each FYE section has 18 students, one professor and one upper-class peer mentor. FYE classes begin bonding even before classes start, as all new first-year students participate in an Orientation Weekend service project in the Findlay community.

FYE topics include contemporary issues that give first-year students an initial common ground as they explore approaches to critical thinking and academic study. While each class still has academic autonomy, all FYE classes have a common core of presentations designed to bolster success in college and throughout adulthood. These include lessons in time management, study skills, personal health, alcohol education, basic personal finance, diversity issues and civic engagement.

While I have been the FYE director for only six years, I have taught first-year students since 1987, and I have to say working with them has been the most rewarding (frustrating, encouraging, heart-wrenching, joyous) experience of my teaching career. I team-taught first-year seminars with Don Collins for 12 years, and we still refer to our students as "our kids" as they advance in class years, take on campus leadership roles, walk through the Griffith Arch with diploma in hand, and enter "adult" life with the cognitive tools they need to make good choices.

That's why I teach first-year students. I get to see them grow.

- Diana Montague, Ph.D.