

Evaluation of the WWW as a source of information on students' first year of tertiary studies

Introduction

This evaluation indicates the scope and nature of material that is available on the World Wide Web (WWW) regarding students' first year of study at a tertiary institution. It suggests strategies for accessing information on a range of relevant topics, recommends sites for specific purposes and notes sites that exemplify what is available regarding selected themes. Whilst the author regards many of the sites mentioned to be valuable, because of the plethora of what can be accessed, the frequency with which change occurs in the medium, and the wide range of contexts and interests that readers will have, the review does not attempt, and indeed could not, to provide a comprehensive overview nor definitive evaluations of what constitutes the 'best' resources available.

Scope of available material

In keeping with the general trend that web site entries on any topic emanate largely from the United States (US), *first year experience* information on the web is heavily dominated by US submissions. For example, a survey of the first 50 relevant entries in *Lycos* found 80 per cent were from the US, 14 per cent from Australia, four per cent from the UK and two per cent from Kenya. Similarly, of the first 50 relevant sites listed in *AltaVista*, 90 per cent were from the US, four per cent from Australia, four per cent from Canada and two per cent from the UK. This trend seems consistent for other commonly used search engines.

For readers with an interest in exploring the US scene, the prospect of dealing with the thousands of listed entries will be daunting. A useful place to start is <http://www.sc.edu/fye/>, the site of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. This site is maintained by the University of South Carolina, and the Center's mission is to collect and disseminate information about the first year and other significant student transitions for use by educators world wide. Amongst other themes, the site contains: references to national and international conferences; links to professional associations, information on procedures for manuscript submission to *The Journal of the First-Year Experience*; journal subscriptions; and instructions for submitting a faxed or mailed research request, which the Center will strive to fulfil within three weeks of receipt.

To ascertain what is happening at a state-wide level within the US across a range of possible interventions, readers could visit the University of Texas' <http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/> site which provides links to accredited universities and community colleges throughout the country.

Whilst material developed for US entry students could provide a rich source of information for academics from other regions, some may find the contextual mismatch between the US environment and their own institution or area of interest to be too great. For those who do, perhaps the best use that the US-based sites can serve is to provide a catalyst for reflecting on how local contexts differ, and what alternative approaches could be used in response to local conditions. Readers who have a specific

interest in exploring on-line what may be the current level and focus of activity regarding the first year experience within a particular country or institution outside the US will find that <http://www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/geog.html> provides a list of 88 countries' higher education institutions and access to their homepages.

Target audiences and themes

Several key themes regarding the first year experience are evident when a range of sites is considered. The potential audiences include a number of subgroups within the academic community such as mainstream educators; administrators; academic skills advisers; staff developers; student service counsellors; prospective and current students; and parents and partners of students. The coverage of:

- pre-entry and in-semester orientation programs;
- academic skills;
- peer support;
- student assessment;
- professional development;
- text publications and
- research into and scholarly reflection on the first year experience

by material on the www will now be discussed with reference to particular audiences.

Orientation programs

Across institutions the nature and scope of the aims of orientation programs varies considerably, with some being quite narrow and others relatively comprehensive. By visiting a number of sites one quickly becomes aware of the range of ways that orientation to tertiary studies can be approached, as well as the topics that can be covered in a program.

Some institutions' orientation programs are conducted prior to the commencement of the academic year (for example, see Duke University's <http://osddev.stuaff.duke.edu/orientation.html>); others are held during semester (see for example <http://www.hiram.edu/acad/firstYear.asp> for information on Hiram College's two 12-week programs titled the Freshman Colloquium and the First-Year Seminar which students enrol in sequentially). Typically, pre-entry programs last one day to a week. Student participation in both pre-entry programs and in-semester programs may be compulsory or voluntary. In some institutions in-semester programs attract credit (for example, see the University of Dayton's <http://www.udayton.edu/~geology/courses/ASI150.AJM/ASI150-50.html>). In some they are components of the core studies; in others orientation programs may be selected as an elective (for example, see McGill's <http://www.mcgill.ca/StuServ/1stYear/fdseminr.htm> for details of its transition studies program, and <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~seminars/fs/index.html> which gives details of Harvard University's Freshman Seminar Program which was instigated in 1959 and has been offered each year since 1963). In some the emphasis is on peer group interaction; in others it is on students meeting with a member of staff who has been designated as a study adviser (for example see Colorado College's <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/FYE/advising.htm>). Among the themes pursued are: awareness of academic culture in general, awareness of a discipline-specific academic culture; introduction to course curricula; campus orientation (see for example McGill

University's <http://www.mcgill.ca/stuserv/1stYear/orient.htm> ; curricula and extra-curricula resources; social interaction with other students; introduction to academic staff; personal development; development of a sense of a collegiate community (for example, see Colarado College's <http://www.colaradocollege.edu/FYE>) and development of links with the local community.

Some sites are tailored to students taking up college residence, whilst others are targeted at or assume that students are commuting. Some encourage parent involvement. <http://unhinfo.unh.edu/student/firstyear/parents.htm> for example, offers a question and answer facility for parents. Parents who visit the site can make email contact, through a site link, with a parent volunteer from the University of New Hampshire's Parents' Association. Most sites are aimed at students making the transition from school, although some are concerned with issues facing mature entry students. There are some sites that are designed to impart practical information to students beginning studies at their institutions. These sites provide information such as orientation program timetables and locations; other sites such as Babson College's <http://www2.babson.edu/babson/babsonhpp.nsf/public/communityCurrentstudentsFY>, the University of Dayton's <http://www.udayton.edu/~geology/courses/ASI150.AJM/ASI150-50.html> and Harvard's <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~seminars/fs/history.html> include reference to the background, aims and objectives of a program.

A useful site for readers who wish to gain quick access to information on a range of North American institutions' first year seminar programs is <http://www.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyl/fslinks.htm>. The site provides links to www pages devoted to first year seminars at 46 colleges and universities in the US and Canada.

Orienting specific cohorts

Those who are interested in orientation programs aimed at specific cohorts of students may find sites that are relevant. As an illustration, a search for orientation programs developed especially for Australia's indigenous students led to <http://www.aep.unsw.edu.au/future.htm> which provides information about several intensive pre-entry programs that are offered by the University of New South Wales. For example, among other offerings, the University conducts a Pre-Law Program and a Pre-Med Program prior to the commencement of the academic year for indigenous students who have been offered a place in an Australian Law School or Medical School or who wish to apply to study law or medicine in the future. Enrolees in these and other programs are introduced to relevant subject content and academic skills so as to get a feeling for the discipline area and to get a head start in their studies. In addition, at <http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/centre/aeap.html> information can be found on the University of Sydney's Indigenous Education Unit's one year Tertiary Preparation Course. This is a one year program designed to offer the skills required for entrance to a range of University programs including, Aboriginal Studies, Computing, Health, Welfare and Education. A search for information on orientation programs developed to address the needs of other specific groups may be similarly productive.

Critical comment on 'orientation ideology'

Despite the overwhelming amount of material on the web that attests to the benefits of institutions offering orientation programs to first year students, there are academics and students who are critical of the 'orientation ideology' (Moreno 2000, p.3) that they have observed and experienced in the US. Moreno's contribution to the debate can be found at http://globalvgw12.global.epnet.com/ehost1.asp?Global=1&key=204.179.122.141_8000_505306517&return=n&site=ehost , and a student's perspective (Teschner 2000), at <http://www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2000/03/03-17-00tdc/03-17-00dops-letter-2asp>. Regardless of the specific regional context that readers may be interested in, both of these articles raise important issues for reflection.

Online orientation

While most of the US web sites dealing with students' initial transition are based on the premiss that staff and students will meet face-to-face in a forthcoming campus-based orientation program, the University of Queensland's <http://www.sss.uq.edu.au/isweb/> offers 'stand-alone' information, in a question-and-answer format, to international students in their initial weeks of adjustment to the academic culture. Although the site is not dedicated to undergraduate students, many of the concerns raised in the 34 questions that are listed, are those of international students embarking on a first degree. They include international students' uncertainties about matters such as: the advisability of taping lectures; their preparedness for writing extended essays and reports that will meet the standards required; the level of tolerance lecturers will have of non-native speakers' struggles with formal written English; and what constitutes plagiarism and how it can be avoided. International students visiting the site will benefit from having some of their concerns addressed and from realising that their uncertainties are shared by others; staff visiting the site will benefit by gaining insight into some of the transition issues that are relevant to first year international students. To access the answers to the questions that are listed, visitors to the site should click on the petalled icon that precedes each question; the site does not advise visitors of this.

Highly recommended is Monash University's <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/transition/> which also functions as a stand-alone source of orientation information. This site, winner of the *Australian Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing* in 2000 in the category of *Tertiary Education Web Site*, includes pages which address information to a range of audiences including: prospective students, current students, secondary teachers, first year university teachers, researchers, and parents and partners. The site contains a wealth of information of a generic nature as well as that which is specific to Monash's 10 faculties, seven campuses and distance education program. The introduction to the site, which in its present form is very comprehensive, indicates the institution's commitment to regularly updating the information presented to maintain the relevance and currency of the content in a global context. For readers who would like to draw together a number of valuable threads regarding orientation to first year studies in one 'hit' which is reasonably easy to navigate, this site is an excellent resource.

Academic Skills

Bourner and Barlow eloquently express the institutional perspective that in part, explains why so many have devoted web pages to topics dealing with academic skills; they write:

... transitions into higher education [have] critically important consequences for the quality of their entire experience of learning at this level. Students are at the *change fulcrum* when they arrive. It will not be easier to introduce new expectations at any other time. (1991, p6)

Sites designed for student use and which aim to develop their academic skills fall into two broad categories: study skills and academic writing skills.

Study skills

Typical topics covered in study skills deal with both cognitive and affective development and cover concerns such as reading academic texts, note taking in lectures and from texts, participating in tutorials, preparing for exams and tests, dealing with procrastination and time management. Some of these materials are presented in a generic way, for example, Griffith University's <http://www.gu.edu.au/ins/lils/lau/frameset4.html> and the University of California at Berkeley's <http://128.32.89.153/CalRENHP.html>; some are presented within the context of specific disciplines, for example, the Saint Louis University's <http://euler.slu.edu/Dept/SuccessinMath.html> which focuses on study skills, problem solving, test preparation and test taking in mathematics; and others cover both generic and discipline specific strategies, for example <http://www.utexas.edu/student/lsc/handouts/stutips.html> at the University of Texas. To access information on study skills for a particular subject or discipline a useful strategy is to type the title of the study area and 'study skills', for example 'Microeconomics study skills' leads to a listing of several sites dealing with study within the field.

Two study skills sites of special interest, because of their focus on students with disabilities, are the University of Melbourne's <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/towardssuccess/> and the University of Guelph's <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/tahb/tah2b.html>. The Melbourne site describes a collaborative project involving the University of Melbourne and the Australian Catholic University wherein a series of study guides was developed for tertiary students with a range of disabilities. The site lists a number of conditions which may interfere with students' progress including: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, acquired brain injury, Asperger's Syndrome, deafness, learning disabilities, psychiatric conditions and vision impairment. Resource booklets have been developed which cover many topics including: ideas for getting started and keeping going, tips for reading Braille, making the most of 'uptime', dealing with stress, boosting one's self-esteem, and managing gaps in attendance. Contact details for those who wish to obtain copies of the booklets are given on the site. The Guelph site provides six pages of practical suggestions for teaching staff around topics such as: Recognising a Student with a Learning Disability, A Course of Action if One Suspects that a Student may have an Undiagnosed Learning Disability and Suggestions and Tips for Accommodating Students with Special Needs in a Learning Program .

While the sites do not explicitly focus on transition factors, clearly the information is of vital interest to students with disabilities and staff teaching students with disabilities and early exposure to the information could mean the difference between a successful and enjoyable first year experience and one that is fraught with difficulties.

Academic writing skills

Whilst there are numerous sites that deal with the development of students' writing at both the macro (whole document) and micro (sentence and paragraph) levels, two draw attention because they are accessible to all and because they make use of some of the technological possibilities that are available with electronic delivery. In addition to providing students with a tutorial page on a topic related to conventions of academic writing at the sentence, paragraph and essay levels, Capital Community College's <http://ccc.comnet.edu/grammar/> provides interactive diagnostic and practice exercises. Although the examples are not in general based on tertiary level content, the materials because of the interactive element, are more engaging than those designed to be simply read from a screen. Examples of interactive materials that do draw on discipline content can be found on the www, but they are typically secured with access limited to staff and enrolled students who enter using pass words and codes. The second site worthy of note is Purdue University's <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> which provides materials for use by students and writing skills advisers in the form of handouts and PowerPoint presentation slides for use in workshops. The PowerPoint presentations are accompanied by facilitator notes that advisers are encouraged to use as a guide rather than a 'script'. Topics covered include: well-organised writing; arguments and counterarguments; documenting sources; research and the internet; misused modifiers; active and passive voice; and achieving clarity and coherence in writing. Once again, the examples are based on general content rather than academic topics, however the concept of presenting writing workshops supported by PowerPoint technology is interesting and its application, which incorporates overlays on this site is innovative.

Peer support

Locating relevant information on the www regarding peer support and the first year experience can be confusing because of variations in the way certain terms are used in different contexts. Such variations are not geographically determined, as is often the case with other terminology, but can vary from institution to institution regardless of location. For example, different definitions of 'orientation leaders', 'mentors', 'peer tutors' and 'study coaches' can serve to highlight subtle or significant differences between the categories or to indicate that the terms may be use synonymously. Furthermore, a site may apply the terms such as 'peer helping', 'mentoring' and 'coaching' to a range of context outside higher education. In consequence, readers are advised to determine early in their search how discrete sites define the terms that they employ. Many sites facilitate this by providing click options to pages with titles such as 'definition of terms', 'what we're about' or 'about us'.

Generalist information on peer support

For generalist information on peer support two sites worth visiting are <http://www.peer.ca/peer.html> and <http://www.mentoringgroup.com/>. The first address

is Canadian-based and is useful because it provides access to contemporary generalist literature on peer tutoring and mentoring, research reports, project summaries, annotated bibliographies and background papers. The frequency with which the site is updated is impressive. However, some documents are only available to paying members of the Peer Resources Network. Categories of membership are student, individual and institutional. None of the fee levels are prohibitive (\$A40.40, \$A100.95 and \$A201.90 respectively) and registration can be organised on-line. Membership not only enables access to the largest database on peer helping, mentoring and coaching in the world, but also entitles members to an immediate-response consultation service via e-mail and toll-free telephone. The second address is for The Mentoring Group, a world-wide mentoring service based in California that also provides generalist rather than university-specific information. However, as with the Canadian-based site, selected themes may be useful when applied to a university setting. Three such examples are: ideas for establishing a program, ideas for improving an existing program, and ethical considerations in adult-to-adult mentoring situations.

Peer support in tertiary institutions

Of specific interest because they provide lists of many universities and colleges that have formalised peer support programs are <http://www.peer.ca/peerprograms.html#collegepeer> and <http://www.mentors.ca/mentorprograms.html>. Although both lists are dominated by US entries, Australian, Canadian and UK institutions are included. The first address provides direct access to further details about programs at 37 institutions through links that all visitors can operate. The second site is of interest because its list is more comprehensive, with 58 universities and colleges' programs being noted. However in this case, linked access is restricted. Despite this, the list in itself is a useful resource for those who are prepared to seek contact via other means.

At Colorado College's <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/FYE/studentmentoring.htm> details are given of a peer support or student mentor program that complements a staff mentor or academic adviser program. The information is addressed to first year students and informs them that mentors will, among other tasks, provide assistance with review of course assignments, discuss course readings, participate in course-related group projects and accompany students on course-related excursions and events. While the Colorado site emphasises the benefits to first year students of being involved in a peer support program, Duke University's <http://osddev.stuaff.duke.edu/FAC.html> encourages more senior students to become involved in their First-Year Advisory Counsellor (FAC) Program. Recruitment of senior students focuses on the opportunities that involvement provides for more experienced students to develop their leadership and communication skills. Duke's program is a sophisticated, entirely student-run organization.

Student Assessment

Some sites dealing with the topic of assessment of student learning in their first year of university are intended primarily for a student audience, while others have been prepared for teaching staff.

Pre-entry assessment

Several sites in the US are concerned with the administration of diagnostic tests that students sit prior to the commencement of the academic year. Typically students' abilities in literacy and numeracy are assessed by written tests. One example of such a site is <http://www.delta.edu/~assess/>. It presents Delta Community College's compulsory pre-entry assessment and follow-up program as a positive initiative that serves as a catalyst to under-prepared students accessing academic support services from the early weeks of their enrolment. Addressing students directly, the text notes: "... you'll be able to identify your skills and see how they match up with the 'starting point' requirements of the first courses that will be important in your program of study. [The] information will help you to identify areas in which you may wish to build your skills and will help you to learn about resources at Delta College (people and learning aids) that can help you to reach your goals." The site also notes that students are not required to pay to participate in the assessments. Another such site is that of Babson College in New England at <http://www.babson.edu/ugrad/fap/form.html>. This site enables first year students to register online for the College's pre-entry assessment program.

Explicating Assessment Policies and Procedures

In keeping with a long-standing policy practised by many institutions that students should be well informed about assessment procedures at the commencement of their studies, some institutions have posted information relevant to first year in-semester assessment online. Three such UK institutions are the University of Wales Aberystwyth, the University of Birmingham and the University of St Andrews in Scotland. http://www.aber.ac.uk/~drawww/general_guidelines_for_first_year.htm advises first year Film and Television Studies students, in 37 points, of Aberystwyth's examination and assessment conventions within this field of study and across the disciplines. Included in the list, which conveys the notion of mutual obligation, is information on policies regarding late submissions, timeframes for feedback, and availability of supplementary examinations. In less detail, and with more of a subject focus,

<http://for.mat.bham.ac.uk/studentinfo/1stnotes.htm#assessment> explicates for students studying in the School of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Birmingham the year's assessment tasks and weightings and the School's policies regarding the timely distribution to students of specific assignment task details. Similarly, http://www.st-and.ac.uk/~www_pa/pandaweb/handbook/1st2nd/1_monit.htm gives students in the School of Physics and Astronomy at St Andrews' an overview of their assessment tasks and the weightings assigned to each.

Preparing students for their first assessment

Intended for audiences of teaching staff are the University of Calgary's http://www.ucalgary.ca/~lidsttf/cafe/Lessons/Case_12.htm and the University of New South Wales'

http://oldwww.phys.unsw.edu.au/DEPARTMENTS/FIRST_YEAR/assessment.html

Both are concerned with strategies that staff can employ to prepare students for assessment tasks during their first semester as the students adjust to, what is for them,

an unfamiliar learning environment. Calgary's site describes strategies that staff in the Faculty of Education at Calgary use to prepare students for their first assessment task, which is a multiple-choice test. The site also gives the reference details for a guide for multiple-choice item construction. The New South Wales' site gives information on a semester long program devised to prepare first year Physics students for their end of semester exam.

Computer-based assessment

At <http://www.physics.usyd.edu.au/uniserve/cooper1.html> teaching staff and administrators interested in computer-based assessment (CBA) of first year students can find information on how the School of Physics at the University of Sydney has replaced traditional paper tests with computer-based laboratory tests that have been devised in-house using *Microsoft Excel*. As well as a text description of the program's versatility, the site provides examples of the screen displays and response modes, for example multiple-choice, numerical and multiple inputs, that can be incorporated into the assessment tasks. The focus of the site is on practical issues related to devising CBA materials. There is no in-depth discussion of its pedagogical advantages or limitations aside from a brief comment on it facilitating timely feedback to large numbers of first year students.

Institutional-wide project

A site with a unique focus regarding assessment of student learning is Victoria University's (VU) <http://ceds.vu.edu.au/alts/> which reports on an Australian Government funded project in-progress at a dual-sector institution (TAFE and Higher Education). The project involves the examination and documentation of both pre-course (during recruitment/selection) and in-course student assessment practices used by VU staff in the University's 12 fields of study. A central aim of the project is the publication of Assessment Booklets that will address key questions and themes concerning student assessment across the University. Details of contacts to make to obtain copies of these booklets, due for completion in early 2001, are given on the site. Readers who would like immediate access to information regarding some aspects of the project may be interested in descriptions of pre-course interview strategies that are used to determine students' learning needs at the point of entry to ensure student placement in appropriate courses where students are seeking entry by direct application. This interview approach contrasts with the pre-entry written tests described above that dominate US sites dealing with pre-entry assessment. Visitors to the site will find guidelines for assessing the literacy skills of students during interviews and examples of case studies that encapsulate challenges that may arise for staff who are responsible for student assessment.

Readers wishing to explore the topic of student assessment by doing a search of the www are advised to use Boolean logic in the form of (evaluation OR assessment) when searching for information because of geographical variations in the use of the terms. For example, in US education contexts 'assess' and 'evaluate' may be used interchangeably in reference to the grading of students' work, while in Australian education contexts typically 'assess' is used with respect to students' gradings, and 'evaluate' is used for situations where the aim is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an education intervention.

Staff development

Several sites present useful information on the role that staff can play in assisting students to make a successful transition to first year studies. Some sites are oriented for use by academic staff who wish to further develop their skills as teachers of first year students through self-access materials. Others have been prepared as a resource for those in staff development units who are responsible for conducting programs to assist others to develop their skills.

Most of the sites that have been prepared for staff to self-access have an institutional and specific program focus. Nevertheless, they could provide a useful resource for adaptation to others' programs. Oregon State University's site, <http://osu.orst.edu/fye/resources/notebook/section2.htm> is one such example. It provides suggestions for first contact with students enrolled in its First Year Experience program, first class activities, and syllabus design. The intended audience for the site is teaching staff at Oregon, but it contains examples of materials that are addressed to students. Staff are informed that they are welcome to use the materials as presented on the site or to adapt them. The section on syllabus design provides four examples for staff to consider and draw upon. <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/tahb/tah2b.html> is a site prepared by the University of Guelph, with the title *First-Year Students: Recognising and Supporting Their Needs*. It describes the learning and writing challenges faced by many first year students at Guelph, as identified by students and staff, and suggests five strategies that staff can use to foster self-reliant learning.

The Wadsworth Publishing company site at http://www.success.wadsworth.com/instructors/workshops/workshops_03.html is a commercial site that promotes workshop resources for staff develop programs in tertiary institutions. By visiting the site one can preview selected components of *Teaching College Success: The Complete Resource Guide*. Available for visitors are comprehensive sample PowerPoint slides and commentary, workshop exercises and supplemental readings. The site also provides a link to text publications that focus on student success at college. Those interested in purchasing materials may do so online.

Readers interested in accessing detailed information on staff development activities across a range of institutions worldwide will find Dalhousie University's <http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/ids.html> has links to university centres for professional development in Australia, Canada, US, New Zealand, UK, Hong Kong and Singapore. Many of the centres listed have information pertaining to students' first year experience.

Text publications

Several commercial publishers have pages on their web sites that are devoted to texts which deal with first year transition issues. These sites are updated regularly. They highlight latest releases and typically one is able to order and pay for purchases via the internet. Anticipated audiences include researchers, teaching staff and students.

For example the Prentice Hall Publishing Company's site at <http://vig.prenhall.com/> enables visitors to key in search terms to locate material of interest. Visitors to this site who are interested in the first year experience will find that the terms *study skills* and *college survival skills* generate lists of recently published relevant titles.

Of interest amongst the sites that list current titles relevant to the first year experience are the Ron Jon Publishing Company's site at <http://www.ronjonpublishing.com/studyframe.html> and the Kendall Hunt Publishing Company's site at <http://www.kendallhunt.com/> both of which describe innovative programs, which they publish, that provide staff with the resources to prepare their own customised text for orienting their first year students. The materials enable staff authors to efficiently prepare a professional quality text designed to meet the specific needs of the first year students who attend a particular institution.

The University of Waterloo's site at <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infotrac/liblst5.html> has been prepared for teaching staff at Waterloo. The site lists books that are recommended as resources for enhancing the First-Year experience at the University of Waterloo.

Scholarly research and publications

For those interested in scholarly research into, and reflections on the topic, it is recommended that a two-pronged approach be used to seek sources. One is a general www search using search engines such as *Lycos*, *Alta Vista* and *Google*; subject directories such as *BUBL* and *Yahoo*; *Listservs* or discussion groups; newsgroups; and subject gateways; and the other is a search using subject-specific database services which may be free or subscribed to by libraries. While both approaches will generate useful articles, in a www search information is extremely variable and pinpointing relevant information can be a matter of chance. In comparison, a search of appropriate subject-specific databases is more focussed and hence such a search is likely to be both more productive and more efficient.

Highly recommended databases are:

- Academic Search Elite - EBSCOHOST,
- Expanded Academic Index - EAI,
- Australian Education Index, and
- Education Resources Information Center - ERIC.

All are worth visiting. They all list titles, publication details and abstracts of articles relevant to the first year experience. Of the four noted here, EBSCOHOST and EAI are particularly recommended because full texts are available and easily retrievable online for many entries. Although these sites can boast that a large percentage of the journals that they publish are peer reviewed, one problem that arises with electronic delivery is that readers are given no indication of whether the process has been applied to a particular article. A final suggestion regarding electronic access to the full version of an article of interest is that if it is not available directly from a particular site where it has been discovered, and if it has been published within the last two years, it may be available on the 'Dow Jones Interactive' site which has full-text articles from the Fairfax Press, or through CARL UnCover which enables users to order articles electronically.

Readers could also access the activities of institutions' research centres through the Dalhousie University's <http://www.dal.ca/~oidt/ids.html> mentioned above. Using this strategy will lead to sites such as the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) site at <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/> which provides a large collection of scholarly publications in executive summary and full report form, including the Centre's 1999 study into the first year experience of Australian higher education students titled *Trends in First Year Experience*.

Final comments

To conclude, it appears that on the web there is much information available that is either directly or indirectly relevant to the first year experience of study at a tertiary institution. To obtain a general overview of materials on the topic, three search terms of many that were tried by the author in several search engines, were by far the most productive in that they generated a large number of relevant sites. These terms are therefore recommended as useful starting points for those interested in the topic in general or in specific aspects. The terms are *first year experience*, *freshman seminar* and *freshman year experience*.

While most sites that are listed on the web lead to useful discoveries, there are numerous instances of out of date links, sites that have restricted entry and sites that have been established with the aid of a grant but have not been maintained for some time. Although such occurrences are frustrating and inefficient, persistence in seeking information is likely to be rewarded.

References

- Bourner, T., & Barlow, J. (1991). *The Student Induction Handbook: Practical activities for use with new student groups*. London: Kogan Page.
- Moreno, P. (1998). College 101: A dubious remedy for dropouts. *Academic Questions*, 11(1), 48-56.
- Teschner, K. (2000, Friday, March 17). Freshman Seminar Wastes Valuable Time for Students: Letter to the Editor. *The Digital Collegian*.

REFERENCES

(Tillman, 2000)

Hints for searching

To conclude this review it is perhaps appropriate to reflect on productive strategies for pinpointing information when readers are conducting their own searches

Although numerous search phrases will lead to a great number of useful sites. Those who wish to conduct a general sweep initially will find one or more of the terms 'first year experiences', 'freshman year experience' and 'freshman seminar' applicable to most search engines. To these key terms limiters can be applied for an advanced search.

Although the quality could be judged to be varying there is information which is targeted at a range of interest groups available including

...

Responding to the growing awareness of the notion described by that students may be physically mature but may still not be intellectually and emotionally that parental support is important

for some sources it is clear that the assumption is that programs are targeted at 17-24 year olds but this is not the case in all instances (Monsah)

What's missing?
student assessment

Footnote:

While the focus of this article is to provide an overview of what is available on the world wide web regarding the first year experience, given the vast number of total web site listings, Neilson (2000) estimates that there are currently 16 million sites in all, it seems apposite to provide a brief account of the strategies used for accessing information for this review. It is hoped that with insight into these strategies that readers who are interested in conducting their own searches will be assisted in efficiently devising productive approaches.

Three key phrases: 'first year experiences', 'freshman year experience' and 'freshman seminar' when keyed into several search engines yielded a large number of relevant sites. A primary factor that was taken into consideration when deciding whether to use a particular search engine was if its resource base is overseen by editors who review submitted web sites and assign them to appropriate categories. Lycos is an example of one search engine that meets this criterion. Once the most appropriate search phrases and search engines had been determined, surveys were conducted of up to thirty sample sites of the thousands generated by each search engine. These surveys were done to identify i) the main sub-themes relevant to students' first year of study in Higher Education and ii) any variations in spelling and terms that may arise from different geographic locations. For example, in US contexts 'assess' and 'evaluate' may be used in reference to the grading of students' work, while in Australian contexts 'assess' is used with respect to students' gradings, and 'evaluate' is reserved for situations where the aim is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of an education intervention.

Once the sub-themes had been noted, the logical Boolean operator **and** was used in conjunction with the key phrases noted above to refine the search. This procedure resulted in the generation of a more manageable number of sites related to each sub-theme emerging and hence the

task of surveying and commenting upon the usefulness of the web as a resource base for academics interested in the first year experience became more manageable. For example, in Lycos 'first year experience' AND evaluation, produced 184 addresses while "first year experience" alone had generated more than 8,000 addresses.

While there may still be some who question the ideology underpinning governmental and institutional policies of more open access to higher education (e.g. Moreno, 1998) and some who are sceptical about the supposed benefits to students of participation in study preparation programs (e.g. Keeffe, 1990; Moreno, 1998), the proliferation of web sites dealing with issues of transition into undergraduate studies attests to there being a large number of institutions that are proactive in attempts to assist neophyte students meet the challenges faced in tertiary studies.

IDEAS

While there may still be some proponents of the 'sink or swim' approach to students' adaptation to higher education culture (e.g. Moreno, 1998) and others who are sceptical about the supposed benefits derived from participation in study preparation programs (e.g. Keeffe, 1990), the proliferation of web sites dealing with issues of transition into undergraduate studies attests to there being a large number of institutions that are proactive in attempts to assist neophyte students meet the challenges faced in tertiary studies.

often learning materials are placed on secured sites
eg V <http://www.af.ecel.uwa.edu.au/oldaccfin/materials/Default.htm> depart of accounting and finance in Uof WA
<http://fybio.bio.usyd.edu.au/vle/L1/> biological sciences at uni of Sydney good review and then try o get in but can't see lycos 'fye + Australia # 16

study skills advice ; generic is mostly avail , discipline specific often not

This strategy seems to be the most efficient for accessing information on a particular country given that most sites mention their institution's title, sometimes mention their state and seldom mention their county of origin.

academics who fulfil a number of roles academic skills advisers, student services, staff developers, administrators, researchers, mainstream educators, students (current , prospective), **secondary teachers** parents and partners.

<http://ecr.mu.oz.au/courses/current/dfys/index.html> gives students and into to the uni as a whole Melb uni no print out

uni of Georgia <http://www.admissions.uga.edu/first.html>. have printout of click to orientation directed especially at first years and their parents adr

and the University of Sydney's <http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/>.
aboriginal students <http://redgum.bendigo.latrobe.edu.au/~pola/> last update 96 ????

This very useful page could be improved by including specific instructions for what visitors to the site need to do to access the answers to the questions that are listed.

many many sites eg <http://www.canberra.edu.au> underconstruction lots of links not working

Mentoring

embedded in the general coverage are articles that focus specifically on peer tutoring or mentoring and transition.

<http://www.peer.ca/peerprograms.html#collegepeer>
<http://www.mentoringgroup.com/home.html> 37 sits listed

the page ... see print out and my notes

public access search the peer resources annotated bibliography

links to

Mentor Services and Organizations that Specialize in Mentoring

We have personally visited all these sites or they have [requested a listing](#) in this Directory. All sites must meet specific listing [conditions](#) and there is no fee required. If you encounter technical or service concerns with any of these sites, please send mail to: info@mentors.ca.

If you are searching for specific examples of mentoring programs in various settings and with different client groups, visit our [Mentor Program Listings](#).

The [Links Table](#) lists alphabetically all the organizations or services detailed here. Selecting the name will take you to a more complete description. Sites that specialize in e-mentoring are identified by a mail slot icon.

<http://www.mentoringgroup.com/> world-wide mentoring service read site for more info printout see info on eval of mentor program need to revisit dipping into the site could be useful

<http://www.unomaha.edu/~fyc/links.html> has links to other mentoring sites

<http://128.226.37.29/mentor/mentorhome.html>

Binghamton uni mentoroing program

To support the General Education Program, Binghamton has devised an extensive **General Education Mentoring Program**, which is run under the auspices of the Faculty Masters in the four residential colleges. This volunteer program pairs members of th e Binghamton faculty and professional staff with up to 10 first-year students. The program has two principal goals. The first is academic, in which mentors assist their students in selecting courses to fulfill their General Education requirements. They also help students to plan their first two years of study, or to refer them to appropriate advisers in pre-professional areas of study. The second goal is interpersonal - to assist students in making the transition to college life and in encouraging them to make the most of the co-curricular opportunities Binghamton offers.

Entering freshmen and transfer students with fewer than 57 credits are eligible for the Mentoring Program. Students receive applications early in the summer, after confirming their decision to attend Binghamton University. Anyone who has not yet re ceived an application and wishes to do so can request one from **Libby Tucker**

<http://www.koori.usyd.edu.au/register.html> lists education centre Aust wide many of which make reference to study skills programs for indigenous Australians

think about adding <http://www.sss.uq.edu.au/ugweb/> uni of queensland study skills

HAVE BEEN WRITTEN INTO ASSESSMENT

pre entry testing <http://www.delta.edu/~assess/> US note that students don't have to pay

register online for preentry testing <http://www.babson.edu/ugrad/fap/form.html> US

http://www.aber.ac.uk/~drawww/general_guidlines_for_first_year.htm advises first year students in 37 points of expectations rules and regulations re assessment

<http://for.mat.bham.ac.uk/studentinfo/1stnotes.htm#assessment> sets out for students tasks and weightings Uni of Birmingham

Students assessment (part 2)

It is evident that the developers of some sites ascribe to the notion that careful consideration should be given to clarifying for students the nature of assessment tasks that they will face, the standard that they will be expected to reach and the nature of feedback that is appropriate as students adjust to the unfamiliar learning environment.

...

<http://www.hiram.edu/acad/firstYear.asp>. Hiram college- Liberal Arts and Science since 1850 1 week program and 12 week in semester program eg of program which links orientation programs to Christian ideologies (Newman) students study Christianity How it began and others

<http://www.hiram.edu/>

<http://www.hiram.edu/>

http://cea.curtin.edu.au/goodpractice/case_sketches/mckenna_k.html curtain uni describes a case study approach as an other native to the two above read again printout May be not afterall last entry 1997

Utah State University's <http://www.ext.usu.edu/conted/success/success.htm>

I didn't include this information because I ran out of time but there are some good things in here worth looking at.

Curriculum development

<http://www.nd.edu/~isla/ISLA/guidelines/linked.htm> interdisciplinary studies

<http://searchpdf.adobe.com/proxies/0/7/30/9.html> no print out – too long Ballaret joy nunn

<http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/orientation/fye/syllabus.htm> no print out

<http://www.doc.ic.ac.uk/teaching/under/comp/comput.html#lectures> indicates curric and how it is linked to other years no pedagogical information

<http://www.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/CompSci/Teaching/Mod/CS1003.html> info for students

<http://mindquest.net/biology/index.html> specifically for content information for students studying in a range of life subjects including anatomy, physiology, cell biology, microbiology histology and radiography

<http://www.nd.edu/~isla/ISLA/guidelines/linked.htm> interdisciplinary

<http://orion.earth.monash.edu.au/firstyear/notes22.htm> all notes and details form lectures Monash

often learning materials are placed on secured sites as with interactive d-s wrting

first year experience in an electronic classroom ??? <http://www.library.yale.edu/>

Administrators -

<http://auxiliary.unco.edu/residencelife/fye/html> uni of collarado sets out its mission statement included in it is student participation in cultural, social, educational and spiritual programs

http://www.uc.edu/success_challenge/first_year_grant_rfp.html eg re grants -printout

<http://www.csu.edu.au/division/oli/pubs/occpap/no21/celt/1styear/index.htm> print out eg re action plans (???)

<http://osu.orst.edu/fye/resources/notebook/section1a.htm> no print out

<http://www.d.umn.edu/student/fye> uni of Minnesota Duluter –gives clear articulation of misson, vision and goals of the first year program. Eg of a university that takes seriously the ideathat unis are about personal growth and development as much as intellectual development and vocational training idea that uni is a place of socialization that prepares students for a positive role in the wider community. this sites a good eg of this they say .. see hand written notes

<http://www.adu.latrobe.edu.au/FirstYear/Plan.rtf> eg of plan for institution

Program Evaluation

The reflective practitioner who is interested in systematic and formal evaluations of interventions designed to enhance the first year experience will find (little of value on the web ... focus is on satisfaction with a program rather than longer term outcomes, summative rather than formative eval)

For those interested in evaluation of programs targeted at first year experience there is little available. However, url n describes a number of 'kits' that are commercially available from the US.

reflective practitioner will want to tap into the concerns raised by critics eg student pages and scholarly research evalns

Perhaps the most useful materials to seek in relation to evaluation is that found in scholarly publications

http://www.bloomu.edu/departments/middle/first_yr.htm revisit no printout

<http://www.enmu.edu/users/smithl/Assess/welcome.html> assessment resource unit uses assement for assessment and evaluation

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/departments/VPA/usri/instrument.html> eg of student course eval form -has other info connected to this on the site

[http:// www.d.umn.edu/student/fye](http://www.d.umn.edu/student/fye) uni of minnesota duluter eg of asite with an evaluation questionnaire which seeks students' and parents' responses online to questions designed to evaluate ... Asks a seies of question on a 5 point Likert scale (disagree, somewhat disagree, neither(?), somewhat, agree) were activities helpful staff friendly helpful – doesn't explore responses in a qualitative way – no open questions attached to specific questions. Is a fial box inviting further/ additional comments.

<http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/> see printout policy centre on the fy of college

<http://www.acada.ksu.edu/profres/pubindex.html#> on evaluation of academic skills programs –you have to order everything

(? sites devoted to instits' research units eg CSHE ??)

uni of melb and

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/> accounts of recent research into first year experience in Aust nation wide perspectives –is this true for detya??

<http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/dec97/beder1.htm> reflections faculty wide Arts perspective <http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/dec97/greenlath1.html> fac of education, lang and community services

reflections at a statewide level

http://info.utas.edu.au/docs/student_services/colloquium/panel_reco.html have another look

<http://www.ems.uwa.edu.au/Review/mcfeat.html> reflections on a subject Mathematics for engineering students

The site <http://www.cchs.usyd.edu.au/fyerg/> was established in March 2000 and is an initiative of the University of Sydney I have more handwritten notes on this - read these again.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000453.htm> describes research into attrition

<http://www.engineering.auckland.ac.nz/liz/FirstYrfin.html> embeede in this paper on adaptation to to engineering culture is section on assessment paper looks at the process of learning the culture of engineering education

We have compiled nearly 100 articles from over a dozen Kendall/Hunt First-Year Experience titles. You can select from over 1300 pages of intellectual property to create a customized FYE book in a minimum amount of time. In addition, we encourage you to add your own materials and transform your ideas into a professionally published book.

Please email questions and comments regarding our FYE program to [Paul Carty](#).

<http://www.abacon.com/firstyearfocus/index.html> in amongst other topics site by allan and bacon 9are they publishers does give hints other publishers just list books – is this correct?