

## Connecting with the Community College Students in First Year Seminar: An Appreciative Advising Approach

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### Abstract

At Quincy College -- a two-year open-access, community college -- the First Year Seminar (FYS) program is a required, three-credit course that incorporates an Appreciative Advising approach to working with new students. As part of the newly redesigned FYS model, all FYS instructors who are full-time faculty and staff, serve as their assigned FYS students' advisor after the FYS course is complete. All FYS instructors are trained to apply the Appreciative Advising theory to practice in their FYS classrooms. This article will provide readers with a detailed look at the ways this framework is applied to the community college classroom and the effectiveness on new students.

### First Year Seminar Overview

The First Year Seminar (FYS) is one of many student-centered programs that improve the likelihood of learning, success, and retention among students (Skipper, 2018). The first-year experience has also been documented to increase student retention which subsequently optimizes institutional financial fitness (Koch & Gardner, 2014). At Quincy College, FYS is designed to help make the transition to the institution's learning community a successful one. The College's collaborative, student-centered course also incorporates a common theme of social tolerance and approaches this theme through different academic lenses. This revised course is organized into five different topic areas, which include: humanities, business, social sciences, civic engagement, and natural sciences.

Like many other institutions, the FYS course aims to prepare students to be well-informed change agents and drivers of their education at Quincy College and beyond. Hutson (2010) advised, "To promote students' academic success, first-year experience programming should guide students toward becoming more self-regulated learners" (p. 5). At Quincy College, FYS provides students with both the skill set and connections to the community that help them to become self-advocates for their education and career goals. These goals are reflected in the FYS course outcomes:

1. Identify and access all support services/policies/resources available at Quincy College.
2. Use effective note taking methods to capture key points from lectures and texts.
3. Apply information literacy skills to college-level research.
4. Evaluate information/evidence from various sources using critical thinking.
5. Model effective social and interpersonal communication skills as they relate to the course's yearly theme.

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6. Show understanding of how to work in a dynamic, culturally diverse environment.
7. Identify academic programs/career options available to Quincy College students.
8. Develop an academic plan and select courses to achieve academic and career goals.
9. Identify and model ethical/moral behavior in academic and career-related work.
10. Evaluate the impact of the course's yearly theme within the student's specific FYS topic area.

This course is required for all students who are seeking an associate's degree and who have earned fewer than 12 credits from another accredited institution (First Year Seminar, 2018).

### **The Role of the FYS Instructor**

Since 2018, the FYS course at Quincy College has redefined the role of the FYS instructor. In prior years, both full-time and part-time faculty and staff would teach this course with minimal guidance and expectations. In an effort to improve the relationship-building and interpersonal development among first-year students and their instructors, all FYS instructors at Quincy College were required to be full-time faculty or full-time staff beginning in Fall 2019. This best practice was adopted to ensure that when students enrolled in the course they would also be able to meet with their FYS instructor outside of class. Not only would their FYS instructor be someone they saw on a regular basis, but also would be someone who was a full-time employee of the College, thus suggesting that they had a more well-rounded experience and overall knowledge of the institution.

In her article, "First-Year Seminar Faculty: Recruitment, Supports, Motivators, and Challenges," Sobel (2018) described the role of intrinsic motivation with FYS instructors, "Many institutions have found that appealing to potential instructors' intrinsic motivations and building a strong sense of community among instructors help to recruit and keep groups of high-quality instructors" (p. 67). Sobel also discussed the "new competencies" (p. 70) and "sense of community" (p. 70) that instructors experience as a result of teaching an FYS course. Similar to what has been found in recruiting and retaining FYS instructors at Quincy College, Sobel's article concluded:

First, keeping faculty members teaching in the program for two or more years is a key goal for keeping programs strong. Second, faculty members who teach in first-year seminars—and especially those who persist over two or more years—tend to focus on intrinsic motivations rather than on payment or other rewards. They value having a supportive, energetic community of instructors and continually updating their teaching strategies most of all. Third, communicating the value of a first-year seminar program, especially in terms of students' retention and success, helps "sell" the program to faculty as well as to other constituents. (p. 77)

Quincy College aims for the same FYS instructors to teach the course for a minimum of two consecutive semesters, depending on their course load. Additionally, the college data indicate that the more an instructor teaches the course, the more invested they become in the first-year experience and their teaching strategies with first-

year students. Not only is FYS an excellent opportunity for instructors to have a more influential role in a student's transition to the College, but they also become more knowledgeable about the different campus resources and policies. In addition to having all FYS instructors be full-time employees at the College, the redesigned FYS program ensures that all FYS instructors are assigned as their FYS students' faculty advisor. After a student has completed the FYS course, they continue to work with their FYS instructor for advising and student support purposes. In their study, "Validating Faculty Advising Through Assessment," Yonker et al. (2019) noted, "Academic advising offers a means of shaping a student's educational experience in preparation for a life of service and a life as an agent of renewal" (p. 45). Although Quincy College has an Office of Academic Advising that is staffed by three full-time professional advisors, the role of the faculty advisor is to guide and support the student specifically as it relates to their upper-level coursework and career development. The College has found that having the FYS instructor as an additional support and resource for first year students fosters the relationship that was built throughout the FYS course. This model also promotes retention because the more comfortable and connected a student feels to their institution, the more likely they are to return and continue their education (Renner, 2018).

### **The Appreciative Advising Framework in the Community College Setting**

The value and lasting impact of holistic, personalized academic advising cannot be underestimated at both two- and four-year institutions. More specifically, the 100% commuter population of Quincy College, as well as the non-traditional student that the College recruits (average student age is 28), suggests that college faculty and staff must be intentional about the ways in which they advise students (Quincy College, 2018, 2019). In her dissertation titled, "Community College Academic Advisor Experiences with the Appreciative Advising Model (AAM)," Christine Damrose-Mahlmann (2016) explored the role of an Appreciative Advising approach in the community college setting. More specifically, she described it as "...a strategy that promises to improve persistence and degree completion rates by engaging students in trusting relationships with academic advisors" (p. 4). FYS at Quincy College aims to promote the Appreciative Advising approach with students by initially establishing a relationship between the FYS students and instructor who will continue to serve as their faculty advisor.

Similar to other community colleges, the relationships that are formed between faculty, students, and staff are often built upon conversations during office hours, classroom activities, or even a cup of coffee between a student and their instructor. Most community college students do not have the luxury of being involved in multiple student groups, forming bonds with their Resident Assistants, or having groups of friends they can turn to in the campus dining hall. The majority of Quincy College students are on campus for a specific number of hours each week to attend class, meet with their instructors, and perhaps stop into the library or tutoring center. The landscape of their college experience is different from that of a traditional four-year, residential college experience. Therefore, the Appreciative Advising approach at a commuter school like Quincy College is crucial to how both faculty and staff work with the students. Through an Appreciative Advising approach, which encompasses engaging in intentional conversations with their students, the College's First Year Seminar

instructors aim to connect with their students on a deep, meaningful, and authentic level that fosters growth and a sense of belonging.

## **Appreciative Advising and FYS**

As opportunities for FYS instructor training and development continue to expand, all instructor programming is coordinated with an Appreciative Advising approach at Quincy College. More specifically, with the College's redesigned FYS program, all FYS instructors are brought together at the beginning and end of each semester to reflect on the semester and prepare for the semester ahead. Although there are many opportunities for training, feedback, and other personal and professional development throughout the year, the meetings at the beginning and end of the semester serve as collaborative opportunities for instructors to build trusting relationships with one another by asking open-ended questions and listening to the answers and ideas of others (Appreciative Advising, n.d.).

In order for FYS instructors to practice the Appreciate Advising approach that they will model in the classroom, the training for all instructors focuses on collaboration, asking open-ended questions, and brainstorming what is possible when it comes to working with FYS students. For example, this past year FYS instructors spent time really getting to know their colleagues as they shared information about their own backgrounds, areas in which they teach at the College, and their goals for teaching FYS. Additionally, we worked with all instructors to share their biography on the FYS website. Unlike other instructor bios, which typically list the instructor's credentials and courses that they teach at the institution, these snapshots served as sneak peeks into the life of each instructor with the intent of helping students humanize their FYS instructor from the start.

In addition to breaking down personal barriers, we broke FYS instructors into smaller FYS topic area groups to work with their colleagues. Part of instructor training is dedicated to having instructors meet with other faculty and staff who will be teaching in the same topic area, which includes humanities, business, or civic engagement for example. Along with the collaboration and idea exchange among topic areas, the instructors work as a group to select their common book that all FYS students in their section will read. From the common book selection to walking through each week of the curriculum and course topics, the FYS instructors begin to understand and appreciate the open-minded, positive approach that they will take while working with their students.

Furthermore, FYS instructors are supported throughout the year in various ways. This ongoing support reflects the support and guidance that the instructors, in turn, provide to their students. Although this support may look different for students and instructors, the Appreciative Advising approach emphasizes the importance of providing others with a reliable and consistent point of contact throughout an individuals' academic and professional journey. More specifically, the FYS instructors at Quincy College are provided with several opportunities for professional development and growth, such as:

- Online collaboration and discussion through Canvas, the College's Learning Management System. There is an FYS Instructor Group in Canvas to which all instructors have access. This group allows instructors to share ideas and review a robust collection of FYS materials and resources that they can choose to include in their course.

- *Lunch and Learn* series that invites FYS instructors to presentations about one of the College's departments that works closely with first-year students. Past *Lunch and Learn* speakers included the Director of Student Life, the Director of Career Services, and the Director of International Student Services.
- *Breakfast and Best Practices* is an informal opportunity for FYS instructors to drop into the Director of First Year Seminar's office and enjoy a baked good while checking in on their FYS course. Traditionally, FYS instructors will stop by with questions about an upcoming topic in the course or to collect some additional materials for their course.
- Weekly newsletters are sent out to all FYS instructors every Friday. The newsletter is created by the Director of First Year Seminar and includes important information and updates regarding the course and other opportunities on campus that may benefit FYS students. The newsletter is also a space where instructors can share current articles or trends that they are noticing in working with first-year students.
- The First Year Seminar Task Force is comprised of both faculty and staff who work with first-year students. This group meets at least once a month to examine the progress that is being made with FYS and to discuss the best ways to improve the program and move it forward. Currently, the Task Force includes members from various academic departments, International Student Services, Academic Advising, Student Development, and Online Learning.

The Director of FYS also conducts observations of the classes and provides students the opportunity to complete both a pre- and a post-course survey. In addition to these many opportunities for support and engagement, instructors can reach out to the Director of First Year Seminar for assistance at any time.

Next in importance to instructor buy-in and engagement is providing a syllabus explaining to the students a clear and concise path for the FYS course. In his article, "Effective Teaching Strategies for the First-Year Seminar & First-Year Courses," Joe Cuseo (2015) explained, "the need for a clear, well structured, comprehensive syllabus is even more imperative for the First-Year Seminar because it is a non-traditional course that is likely to undergo careful and continual scrutiny by the academic community..." (p. 1). More specifically, the FYS syllabus that is used by Quincy College instructors reflects the different phases of the Appreciative Advising framework. From getting to know students to goal setting and identifying career paths, the FYS curriculum reinforces an Appreciative approach to working with students. In the following sections, we will examine the ways in which the FYS course curriculum and the instructor's role reflects the six phases of Appreciative Advising.

### ***Phase One: Disarm***

As described in *The Appreciative Advising Revolution*, the Disarm phase is the "...initial creation of a safe, welcoming environment for students" (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 35). In the FYS course at Quincy College, instructors are instrumental in this phase. Not only do they serve as the faculty advisor for their FYS students, but also starting on the first day of class, they aim to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students. Bringing students into a space that is both comfortable and inviting is something that is also discussed during FYS instructor training. Introductory activities, low-risk icebreakers, and introducing the FYS theme are some of the ways in which FYS instructors help disarm their students. Additionally, all students are able to learn

more about their FYS instructor before starting the course. The revised FYS model at Quincy College has each instructor's biography available on the FYS website, along with a photo of the instructor. Before registering for their FYS section, a student can read more about their future FYS instructor and the topic area for their class section. This model encourages students to register for a section in which they are interested, while also learning more about their instructor before beginning the course.

Furthermore, the FYS instructor makes a positive first impression with their students by making themselves available to students not only during their office hours, but also through a variety of FYS programming. These programs are intended to help students build a stronger sense of community at a commuter campus, which can often feel isolated. This programming includes a Program Exploration Fair offered in the middle of the semester where students can learn more about the different academic programs and student support offices. Additionally, the FYS Symposium at the end of each semester gives students an opportunity to display their work from FYS and present their takeaways from the course to the rest of the college community. FYS instructors are actively involved in both of these programs. By encouraging the FYS instructors to take a more intentional and welcoming role in working with their FYS class, we have found that students feel more comfortable and empowered to learn throughout the semester, all while building on the relationships that are started in the FYS course.

### ***Phase Two: Discover***

The Discover phase is comprised of open-ended questioning, active listening, and strengths-based storytelling (Bloom et al., 2008). Much of the FYS curriculum encourages reflective thinking and writing on a regular basis. All reflective writing prompts are open-ended questions that allow students to share their own thoughts without fearing that there is a "right" or "wrong" answer to the questions being asked. In addition to the open-ended questioning, all instructors administer a series of self-assessments to their students throughout the year. These assessments cover a variety of topics such as learning preferences, resiliency, and wellness. Furthermore, we have embedded mini-assessments into each topic covered in the FYS curriculum for the 2020-2021 academic year. This strengths-based approach to working with students further promotes the Appreciative Advising framework.

FYS instructors engage in active listening throughout the semester, and are trained to focus on students' passions, strengths, and interests throughout the semester. More specifically, most FYS instructors have students complete an "All About Me" worksheet (see Appendix) at the beginning of the semester. This activity provides FYS instructors with appropriate personal information about the student, which helps the instructors establish relationships with their students. Activities like these also encourage students to share their expectations for the course and their college experience as a whole. Additionally, the students in each FYS section complete a pre-course survey. This survey asks each student about their expectations for FYS, as well as their level of familiarity with different topics that will be discussed during the semester, such as time management, goal setting, and reading comprehension. Accordingly, the FYS instructors spend the first few weeks of the semester getting to know their students and fostering a connected community within the classroom. With the Appreciative Advising approach in mind, most visits from other campus offices such as Financial Literacy, Career Services, and Academic Advising take place after the first few weeks of the semester. This strategic scheduling allows FYS instructors to develop a relationship and build rapport with their students before experiencing visits from other campus offices.

### *Phase Three: Dream*

Stemming from the rapport that is built during the Disarm and Discover phases, FYS instructors help their students through the Dream phase during this first-year course. FYS instructors aim to “[Create] a positive vision of the future is the first step in accomplishing dreams” (Bloom et al., 2008, pp. 55-56) with their students. More specifically, during the first few weeks of the semester, students explore the concept of goal-setting and how to set S.M.A.R.T. goals. S.M.A.R.T. goals, as developed by George T. Doran, are goals that are “**S**pecific,” “**M**easurable,” “**A**ttainable,” “**R**ealistic,” and “**T**imely” (as cited in Lawlor & Hornyak, 2012). With a heavy focus on goal setting and specific techniques that students can use to identify and work toward their goals, the FYS instructor helps students participate in the Dream phase. In setting their own goals, students begin to think beyond their comfort zones. Through reflective writing assignments, in-class activities, and completion of a S.M.A.R.T. Goals Worksheet (see Appendix), students share their passions and dreams (see Appendix A). FYS instructors are encouraged to push students to think outside of what has always been expected of them and to create goals that are individualized and S.M.A.R.T. Throughout the semester, students and instructors revisit their goals and make changes as needed.

The academic planning component of the course aligns with the Dream phase as well. Throughout the semester the FYS instructor continues “...to listen intently and purposefully because they are trying to make connections between the students’ strengths and passions” (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 57). They help students dream about their academic and career goals, particularly focusing on the program of study that a student chooses to pursue. During the second half of the semester, the Office of Academic Advising visits each FYS class to help familiarize students with the College’s program offerings, the students’ individualized degree audits, and the course requirements for their program(s) of study. Students complete an academic plan, which helps them visualize their dream of completing an associate’s degree.

### *Phase Four: Design*

As FYS students work through their academic plan, they enter the Design phase. Now that they have spent time articulating their S.M.A.R.T. goals and visualizing their dream of a degree, they are ready to design a plan to better understand the ways in which they will reach their dreams. The FYS instructor further supports their students both in and outside of the classroom given that all FYS instructors are assigned as their students’ faculty advisor.

In addition to the academic plan, FYS students create a Career Kit profile during the semester. Career Kit is a campus resource that resembles a robust LinkedIn profile or online portfolio of the student’s experience and goals. In conjunction with Career Services, all FYS students design a plan to work toward their career goals through the Career Kit profile and other career-oriented assignments in the FYS class. FYS instructors serve as a cheerleader for their students during the Design phase and help students create a plan to achieve their goals. In helping them to create this plan, instructors also refer students to campus, community, and other resources that can assist them along the way. Notably, FYS instructors work with their students to help them identify and strategize how they can best work through potential roadblocks and challenges. The small class size of all FYS sections, along with the course’s Appreciative curriculum gives students and instructors ample time to discuss and reflect upon the barriers that could prevent students from reaching their goals. Through campus referrals, support in and outside of the classroom, and creating a community of learners,

students understand that there are many resources to assist them through difficult times. These conversations and the instructors' ongoing support are essential components of the Design phase (Bloom et al., 2008).

#### ***Phase Five: Deliver***

Through this redesigned FYS course, the instructors are able to create a lasting relationship with their students. The dual role of FYS instructor and faculty advisor allows instructors to hold students accountable toward their goals, not only during the FYS semester, but afterward as well. Accountability is a key part of the Deliver phase as instructors help to assess their students' progress toward their goals and regularly remind students that they are available when students encounter roadblocks and other challenges (Bloom et al., 2008).

FYS instructors provide a mid-semester report to hold students accountable for their goals and to give them a better understanding of their status in the FYS class. As students navigate their way through the semester, FYS instructors energize their students by reminding them that they have the capabilities to reach their goals. Instructors also regularly remind their students that it is okay to change their goals or pursue a different path. For example, after completing their academic plan, a student may realize that they cannot take a full course load each semester, which will prevent them from graduating when they had initially planned. The instructor works with the student to help them redesign their plan with fewer courses each semester, yet still working toward the end goal of earning their associate's degree. FYS instructors also acknowledge that the Design phase often requires the student to revisit earlier phases of the Appreciative Advising framework (Bloom et al., 2008).

#### ***Phase Six: Don't Settle***

The redesigned FYS at Quincy College is grounded in the notion that, "...a student can achieve more with the guidance of a knowledgeable adult than she/he can achieve alone," (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 98) and the FYS instructor, "...carefully and artfully helps the student raise his/her own internal bar of expectations" (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 98). Once selected to serve as an FYS instructor, these academic leaders complete substantial training before the semester begins, as well as throughout the semester. Instructors engage in intentionally designed development opportunities to help their students "raise the bar" (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 98). Quincy College values student experiences and creative opportunities that stem from the FYS course. Perhaps even more importantly, the institution uses an Appreciative Advising approach in FYS to ensure students have a positive experience that energizes them for future semesters at the College. This strategy is one of the ways that the institution is working to improve the first-year student retention rate. FYS instructors create and drive the FYS experience, and their role may best be understood through the Don't Settle phase.

The focus of introductory courses is traditionally on the content and specific competencies, and they are often presented in sequence. For example, when a student completes English 101, they prepare for English 102. The same happens with courses such as History 101 and Anatomy & Physiology. However, with an Appreciative Advising approach to FYS, students complete this course with a network of support, more confidence in their own goals and abilities, and a powerful bond with their FYS instructor who continues to remind the student of their resiliency and ability to work through challenges and roadblocks (Bloom et al., 2008). FYS students typically complete their semester with a final group project in which they create a brochure or presentation for new students who will be taking FYS the following semester. In this

capstone assignment, students share their personal definition of college success, as well as specific, tangible advice for future first-year students. As described in *The Appreciative Advising Revolution*, a final project like this, "...achieves several goals that are appropriate for the Don't Settle phase" (Bloom et al., 2008, p. 104). For example, this project gives the FYS instructor a better idea of how students are thinking about their own achievements, expectations, and past successes. Furthermore, unlike passing their final biology exam, this project helps students understand the difference that they have made and the impact that they have had on their peers as well as future FYS students (Bloom et al., 2008). Additionally, these final projects are shared during the FYS Symposium at the end of the semester, which is an event for the entire college community. This event reinforces the support that all FYS students have, not just from their instructor, but also from the campus as a whole. As described by Bloom et al. (2008), "students sense that others on campus have similar experiences and are supporting them" (p. 104).

## Outcomes

The following section provides some of the outcomes of the FYS course as it relates to the student experience:

### *Pre- and Post-Course Survey Data*

In an ongoing effort to ensure more consistency among all FYS sections, we administer a pre- and post-course survey at the start and end of each semester. Through these surveys, the College is able to better understand the outcomes of students who take the FYS course designed with an Appreciative Advising approach. Here are some outcomes from the Fall 2019 pre- and post-course surveys:

- Over 93% of students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they know which classes they need for their program (or intended program) of study.
- Over 91% of students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they set goals often and have a clear idea of how to reach their goals.
- Over 89% of student "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they enjoyed the FYS course.
- Over 84% of students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they have an updated resume and are familiar with career exploration tools.
- Over 50% of students believe that FYS will help them succeed in other courses at QC.
- Over 56% of students "strongly agreed" that they are knowledgeable about the different support services and campus resources at QC, and plans to use them in the future.

(FYS post-course survey, December 2019)

Furthermore, students shared the following takeaways from their FYS course:

"I took away many things from the FYS course skills on how to be aware of biases I didn't realize I had, how to set goals properly, and much more we learned a lot of vital information that is not traditionally taught in school, but is very necessary."

"First Year Seminar has clarified what my path will be once I graduate here... I've been very anxious trying to figure out what career to go into and this class

has helped me sort through that and helped me make the decision and plan that I need and fits me.”

“One thing that I took out of FYS is a lot of helpful tips on being a good student. I also feel that FYS gave me a deep understanding of the resources at Quincy College and how to access them.”

“I learned to prioritize and manage my money and my time better in the First Year Seminar. As well as how to upload essays and audio books (our journals). It was great semester.”

“I was able to relearn how to do a lot of things that I forgot about after being out of school for a while. Learning how to cite in a research paper, looking sources up in the library, and learning how to outline a book.”

“Having conflicting and different opinions, doesn’t mean that’s necessarily bad. As long as you can accept others’ views, and still stand by yours with a tolerant point of view.”

“I took away how to be a successful student. I have not had to think like a student for quite some time and this class really helped me to do so.”

“I learned how to do a resume and upload it to career kit. I understood the meaning of social tolerance. Everything in this course was really clear and easy to understand.”

(FYS post-course survey, December, 2019)

### ***FYS Instructors***

Although the improvements to the First Year Seminar course began in 2018, the implementation of a common theme, topic areas, and clear framework for FYS instructors was fully introduced in Fall 2019. During that fall semester, only nine FYS instructors returned to teach the course. However, 20 instructors returned to teach during the Spring 2020 semester. We attribute this increased interest in returning to teach the course to the positive impact of the Appreciative Advising framework in the FYS course and the ongoing training and collaboration with instructors.

### **Implications for Practice**

Higher education and student affairs practitioners can integrate the Appreciative Advising framework into academic programs and other college initiatives. The results from the pre- and post-course surveys in the First Year Seminar course at Quincy College help the larger college community understand the effectiveness of this course. Aside from the pre- and post-course surveys, we found that in-person classroom observations and mid-semester reporting, among others, helped to educate faculty, staff, and administration on the impact of the FYS program. Furthermore, collecting feedback from students and regularly checking in with the FYS instructors helped to strengthen the rationale for having FYS instructors work closely with their FYS students, even after the semester ends. Applying the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework can help an institution demonstrate the importance of holistic support and advising for its new students.

Also, we have found that because most instructors are used to teaching in their specific areas of study, the role of FYS instructor challenges them to work with new students outside of their discipline. Although it is easy to reach out to the same people to teach a course like this one each semester, it is important to recognize that the

Appreciative Advising approach can help to engage all instructors in a more meaningful way. Consequently, we recommend that institutions consider broadening their scope of potential FYS instructors by promoting an Appreciative approach to teaching and advising, a well-organized curriculum, and clear course outcomes.

Institutions with a high commuter student population, as well as institutions that serve a large number of first-generation students, should be reminded of the powerful impact that instructors can have on their students. Quincy College recognizes that with a 100% commuter population, it is imperative to create a space in which students can recognize and build on their past successes, while receiving support in and outside of the classroom. Given that the majority of Quincy College students are first-generation students from low-income households, the FYS instructor may be the first, and possibly only, person who has taken an interest in the student's goals and college struggles prior to their enrollment in the class. The FYS course at Quincy College reinforces the institution's commitment to student success and FYS instructors remind students that there is at least one person in the college community who is personally invested in their academic journey and success.

## Conclusion

The First Year Seminar will continue to be a crucial tool for student success, academic preparedness, and retention. Although we remain committed to serving students, the Appreciative Advising framework illuminates the power of relationship building between students and their advisors, or as in this example at Quincy College, between students and their FYS instructor. The Appreciative Advising approach demonstrates the impact of investing in the student-advisor relationship, as opposed to solely investing in recruitment. Ultimately, the Appreciative Advising framework helps to create and sustain meaningful relationships, increased retention, and a student-centered experience.

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**Appendix A. Quincy College's First Year Seminar Course Activity Description**

**“All About Me” Worksheet:** This one-page worksheet is distributed on the first day of class and can be shared with students either in-person or electronically. Students are asked to complete the worksheet, so long as they are comfortable, and to return it to the instructor at the next class. Then, the FYS instructors are encouraged to record all information from the “All About Me” sheet so that they can begin to learn more about their students at the start of the semester. This worksheet also helps instructors anticipate any challenges that students may have when it comes to course materials, computer access, etc. Instructors are able to add or remove questions as they see fit. A link to the PDF of the worksheet can be found [here](#).

**First Year Seminar Topic Area Flyer:** In an effort to clarify the purpose of the First Year Seminar, and to equip the college community with the appropriate language to explain the First Year Seminar, an FYS flyer was created by the Director of First Year Seminar & Retention Strategies and the Marketing team at Quincy College. This one-page flyer outlines the different topic areas covered in the FYS program. This flyer clarified the function of the FYS at the institution, and was especially helpful for student-facing offices. A link to the flyer from Fall 2019 can be found [here](#).

**S.M.A.R.T. Goals Worksheet:** This worksheet helps students to understand the importance of goal-setting and familiarizes them with the process of setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal. It encourages students to identify goals that they can work toward and that are connected to their success as a student. In the FYS course, students are asked to identify goals from all aspects of their time. The S.M.A.R.T. goal that they choose does not necessarily have to be related to their coursework at Quincy College. This worksheet allows students to think through each component of the goal, and they are asked to update the class on their progress toward goal completion at the end of the semester.