



Sustaining High Stakes Change

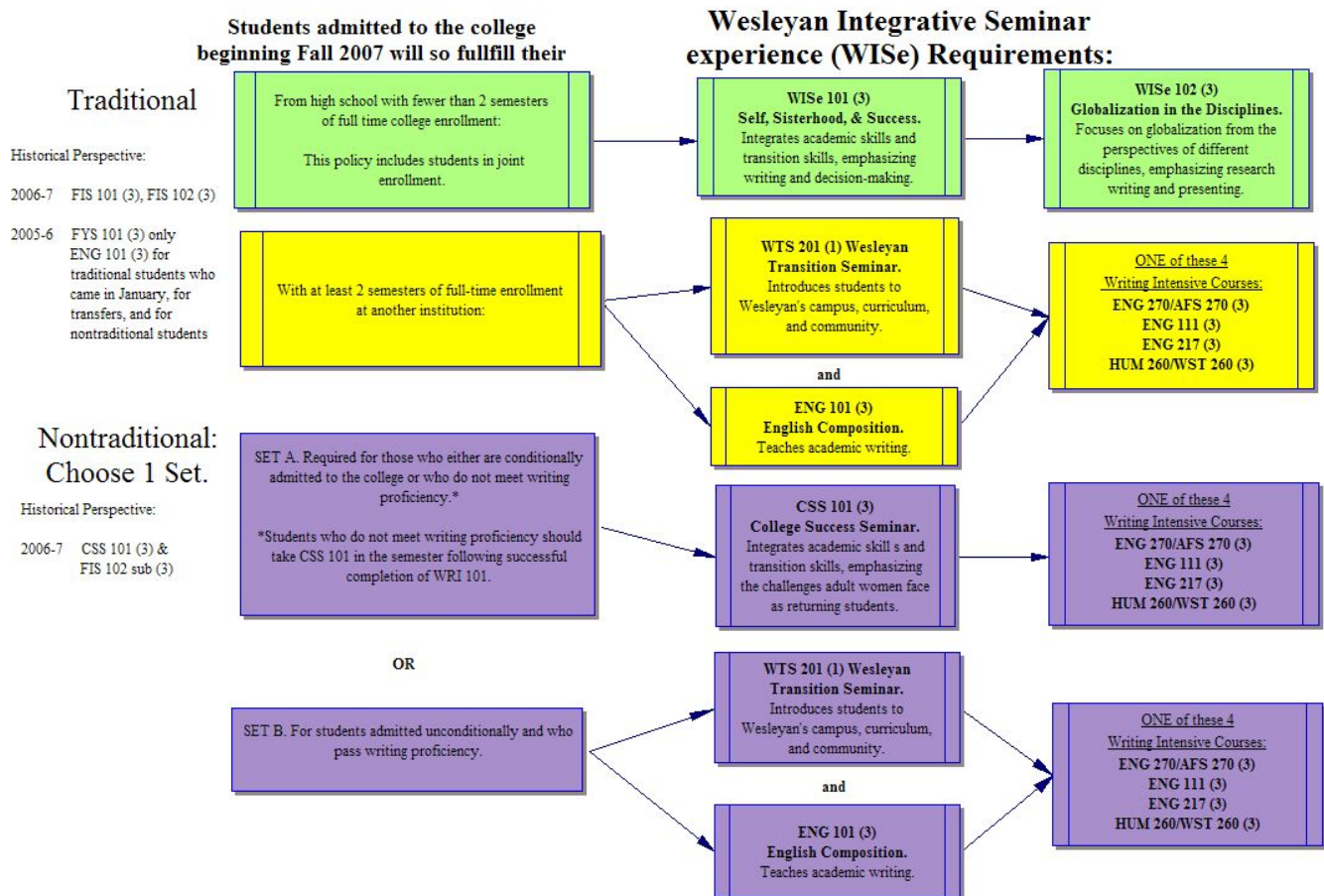
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Curricular Changes: FYS to FIS to WISE



How can we help faculty, staff, and students find intellectual and emotional satisfaction in the daily grinds of no longer new program?

First-Year Experience Assessment Highlights, 2006-2007

Goal: Critical Thinking

Better Than Our Peers—As Good As Usual. The composite scores on all NSSE items related to critical thinking were essentially the same in all three years, thus showing little effect on a new first-year curriculum in 2006-2007. Note that Wesleyan scores significantly higher than our peer institutions. It may be that, since we have relatively high standards for comparison, there is little room for improvement in our scores.

Goal: Improve Writing

More steps in the writing process. The clearest trend relates to the emphasis on the writing process in FIS 101 and 102 as compared to FYS. Wesleyan's NSSE mean for the item "prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in" showed a significant increase ($p < 0.01$) from 2.74 in FYS 2006 to 3.16 in FIS 101 & 102. Wesleyan's mean was also significantly higher than our peers.

More synthetic, research-based writing. YFCY data indicate that 16.2% of FYS 2006 students and 21.7% of FIS 2007 students report much stronger skills in their ability to conduct research as compared with college entry, which suggests that FIS is more effectively addressing research. FIS addressed research better than FYS but also better than all comparison institutions. Further, Wesleyan's emphasis on integration is significantly higher than our peers.

Less satisfaction. Only half the students reported being satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or very satisfied with the writing instruction in FIS 101 or FIS 102. It is important to acknowledge that very little about the writing process is satisfying, especially for novice academic writers who are in the midst of a significant life transition. Nationally most writing program courses and FYE courses struggle with the issue of student satisfaction; student perceptions of the courses generally improve over time. The curricular changes made in 2007-2008 reflect students' recommendations and should lead to increased satisfaction.

Goal: Improve Personal and Social Competence

Stronger Connections to Campus. The Wesleyan NSSE means on items related to satisfaction with educational experience and on selecting this college remained consistent over the three years of data. In comparison to other institutions, we look much better than we did in 2003. Although Wesleyan first-years expressed significantly lower satisfaction than other first-years at liberal arts colleges in 2007, they responded positively at a rate on par with the mean scores at all the other comparison schools. It seems that our first-year seminar programs may have become more effective in helping students see their Wesleyan experience as a more positive and integrated experience. FIS as compared to FYS was particularly effective at conveying Wesleyan history, mission, and purpose as a liberal arts women's college.

Better but still not enough academic support. Neither FYS nor FIS adequately addressed transition topics like study skills and time management strategies; the WISE 101 labs in 2007-08 should show improvements in these areas. Yet, YFCY data show that in 2006 only 48.2% of students were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with tutoring and other academic assistance, which was well below our peers' percentages; in 2007, the percentage jumped to 62.9%, which is comparable to our peers' percentages.

Goal: Improve Academic Decision-Making

Better performance in the Fall. FIS 2006 students showed greater academic success than FYS 2006 students at the end of fall semester. In fact, 56 of 103 students in FIS 101 earned a B or better for their first semester at Wesleyan. Only 8 true first-year students were on Academic Probation, which compares to 17 during the previous year.

UPDATE: After WISE 101, 67 of 103 earned a B or better. Only 8 are on AP; 1 was excluded.

About the same performance in Spring. At the end of spring semester, most students improved or maintained their relative level of academic success.

More Satisfaction with Advising. NSSE data from 2007 show a statistically significant improvement in FY students' overall evaluation of the quality of academic advising they received as compared to FYS 2005 and FYS 2006. In fact, 71% of the students ranked advising as good or excellent in 2005; this percentage increased to 87% in 2007. Similarly, longitudinal data from YFCY show improvement in the percentage of students who were "very satisfied" with academic advising: in 2004, 64.4%; (no data 2005); in 2006, 66.67; and in 2007, 77.1%.

Goal: Improve Career Planning

Better than ever, and better than most. In the area of career development, the program exceeded its goals for 2006-2007 on course evaluation data and all national surveys. On all items in course evaluations related to career planning and academic decision making, the means exceeded 4 (agree), suggesting that students recognized the impetus to connect their academic and professional careers by making short- and long-range plans. Advisors' attention to career concerns was also significantly higher in 2007 than in 2006 in terms of Wesleyan's NSSE means and significantly higher in 2007 compared to our women's college peers and Carnegie peers.