

University of Mary Washington
QEP IMPACT REPORT
March 2019

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Mary Washington (UMW) engaged in a three-year process to select and develop its QEP, “UMW’s First-Year Seminar: Research, Write, Speak.” Once accepted, UMW spent several months in testing and development and then five years and \$455,000 implementing the QEP. We have concluded that the QEP was very successful at providing a uniform first-year experience and the assessment results indicate that the plan has supported students in developing the foundational skills that are critical to their academic success.

In the last five years, 107 faculty, representing all three colleges, 18 of our 19 academic departments, and five administrative offices, have taught 98 different First-Year Seminar (FSEM) courses a total of 339 times. As a result of QEP faculty development workshops, FSEM offerings are more diverse and varied, with 73 new FSEMs developed in the last five years. Faculty prepared for these courses with 33 faculty development events, attended by a total of 933 participants. The FSEMs were taken by 5,114 students (an average of 1,023 per year) who completed a total of 30,073 online learning module quizzes and self-assessments. Student work was randomly selected and assessed through 78 faculty ratings of class discussions, 656 faculty ratings of student presentations, 1,271 faculty ratings of student papers, and librarian ratings of 2,513 research sources. The overall impact resulting from the combination of these initiatives is that our students are better prepared for their undergraduate experience.

**SECTION 1: A Succinct List of the Initial Goals and Intended Outcomes
of the Quality Enhancement Plan**

“Development of effective writing and speaking, bolstered by a strong foundation in research and information literacy, are cornerstone elements of our first-year seminar courses and provide valuable grounding content and experiences that will help guide our students successfully through an academic program.” – UMW QEP Director, December 2013

UMW identified four goals with measurable outcomes in its QEP:

Goal 1: FSEM Learning Outcomes: Establish revised, measurable learning outcomes for the First-Year Seminar (FSEM) based on the common skill sets necessary to enhance learning in information literacy, writing and speaking. **Outcome:** First-Year Seminars will incorporate support for student development of research, writing, and speaking skills.

Goal 2: Online Learning Modules: Implement a set of online learning modules to support independent student learning that can directly connect to the topic foci of the FSEM courses. **Outcome:** Online modules will be developed and shown to support FSEM Learning Outcomes.

Goal 3: Assessment: Develop and employ a comprehensive assessment plan to gather evidence about the achievement of the revised student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the new online learning modules that support those learning outcomes. **Outcome:** Assessment plan will be implemented and used to direct FSEM course and QEP program development.

Goal 4: Faculty Development and Support: Assist faculty with the efficient use of modules and rubrics used to evaluate student work that may be outside the faculty member's area of expertise or familiarity with new technologies. **Outcome:** Faculty will have the faculty development opportunities necessary to aid in meeting the FSEM learning outcomes.

SECTION 2: A Discussion of Changes Made to the QEP and the Reasons for Making Those Changes

*"I feel very cared about by many of my professors and my academic advisor."
- FSEM student, Fall 2017*

UMW executed the QEP largely as originally proposed and incorporated only three changes to the way that the QEP was implemented.

First, UMW began offering enough sections of the FSEM course so that all incoming first-year students could complete the FSEM requirement in their first semester. Prior to Fall 2015, roughly half of the FSEM sections were offered in the fall semester, which meant that half of the first-year class did not have the benefit of the FSEM experience until their second semester. Given the QEP's focus on fundamental skills necessary for academic success, the commitment to offering approximately 65 sections (15:1 student to faculty ratio) each fall semester for an incoming cohort of approximately 950 first-year students was both appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the QEP.

Second, starting with the Fall 2015 semester, FSEM instructors began to serve as academic advisors to the first-year students in their FSEM. Previously, first-year advising had been dispersed between faculty and professional advisors and was backed with little developmental support. The ineffectiveness of this approach was made clear by student satisfaction ratings on the National Survey of Student engagement (NSSE). Those results indicated that the University was performing poorly relative to its peers with respect to first-year advising. The commitment to schedule all FSEMs in the fall, as well as the QEP's enhanced support for faculty development focused on supporting first-year students, made it possible to think differently about first-year advising and implement a more uniform and effective advising model.

Finally, the third change involved the process for developing the online learning modules. The original proposal called for outside consultants to build the modules. However, early in the implementation process, we found that we were able to utilize in-house expertise and on-campus resources for the design, production, and hosting of the media content. By not employing an outside production team and integrating the modules with our Learning Management System (Canvas) we were able to more closely align the development of the modules to the FSEM courses, resulting in module content that was unique to UMW, and, we believe, better received

by our students. This change also resulted in substantial cost savings, which allowed the QEP program to fund other activities to enhance the FSEM, such as class trips and guest speakers.

SECTION 3: QEP Impact on Student Learning and the Environment Supporting Student Learning

Goal 1: FSEM Learning Outcomes

“I found the incorporation of a First Year Seminar class to be extremely beneficial in preparing me for my college career at UMW.” – FSEM student, Fall 2018

As noted in the QEP proposal, UMW’s adoption of the FSEM requirement in 2008 had general goals rather than well-defined student learning outcomes. Consequently, the QEP set forth and implemented five student learning outcomes (SLOs) for all first-year seminars. The first goal of the QEP was for FSEMs to incorporate support for student development of research, writing, and speaking skills consistent with those learning outcomes. Faculty surveys conducted over the last four years show that 77% to 98% of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that their FSEM has “provided some level of instruction to meet the. . . learning outcomes, whether by [the instructor] directly, or by another individual [representatives from the academic support centers]” for each of the five learning outcomes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Faculty Survey - FSEM Provided Instruction to Meet Learning Outcomes				
(% that Agreed or Strongly Agreed)	2015	2016	2017	2018
SLO 1: Utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments.	94%	98%	95%	98%
SLO 2: Improve development and organization of written arguments.	92%	95%	93%	92%
SLO 3: Demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process.	90%	93%	88%	85%
SLO 4: Apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication.	87%	93%	88%	77%
SLO 5: Communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.	92%	98%	93%	92%

The change in agreement from faculty for SLO 4 can be attributed to the inclusion of a new online learning module dedicated to communication theory in Fall 2017. Once implemented, faculty reported through workshops and the survey that they previously had not fully understood what support for SLO 4 would entail. Thus, the lower level of agreement with that item (77%) is a result of greater awareness of the learning outcome and what is ultimately required to support it in the FSEM.

Direct assessments of student learning have also been used to determine the degree to which the five SLOs are being met in the FSEM. Assessments involved both quizzes embedded in the online learning modules (see Goal 2 below) as well as student papers and oral communication assignments (presentations and class discussion).

SLO 1 (information literacy): Assessment of information literacy was conducted by library staff through evaluation of sources utilized in student writing. Library staff reviewed student

papers from the FSEM and evaluated the credibility of sources using what was referenced in the first online learning module as the *CRAAP* test, an acronym for the measure of Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. We found that the reviewed sources scored highest on relevance, currency, and accuracy, and scored lower on authority and purpose. Figure 2 shows the results for each of the rounds of assessment. Aggregate scores show that 77% of students met the threshold benchmark score, providing evidence that students are meeting SLO 1.

Figure 2. SLO 1 - Information Literacy Assessment - % of Students Who Met the Benchmarks				
	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
SLO 1 - Information Literacy (papers) (70% QEP Benchmark)	76%	75%	79%	80%

SLO 2 and 3 (writing): These outcomes were assessed through a direct assessment of student writing and module-embedded quizzes. Papers from the FSEM were collected and then reviewed and assessed by faculty evaluators under the guidance of the Director of the UMW Writing Intensive Program. Figure 3 shows the results for each of the rounds of assessment completed between fall 2015 and fall 2018. Papers were scored in four categories (ideas, organization, voice, process), and an overall rating was determined by the sum of the four category scores. FSEM papers scored the highest in the ideas and voice categories but were rated lower in the categories of organization and process (adherence to conventions of punctuation, spelling, formatting, fair use of sources, documentation, and writing style).

In our QEP proposal, we set a 70% target score as the threshold for proficiency. Since aggregate total scores show that only 65% of students met the overall threshold score, we have identified the decline in percentage of students meeting the threshold as an area of concern. While a majority of students are meeting the second and third learning outcomes as demonstrated by quiz scores, the Writing Center and FSEM faculty will continue to explore opportunities to support and improve student writing in the FSEM with regard to organization of written arguments.

Figure 3. SLO 2 & 3 – Writing - % of Students Who Met the Benchmarks				
	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
SLO 2 - Organization of Written Arguments (papers) (70% QEP Benchmark)	71%	65%	60%	58%
SLO 2 - Organization of Written Arguments (quiz) (80% QEP Benchmark)	85%	86%	88%	86%
SLO 3 - Editing and Revision (quiz) (80% QEP Benchmark)	n/a	n/a	84%	92%

SLO 4 & 5 (oral communication): These outcomes were assessed through a direct assessment of student oral communication and module embedded quizzes. Quiz scores on the communication theory module exceeded the benchmark for SLO 4. Assessment of SLO 5 was conducted in two parts: student presentations and class discussions. Since 2015, student presentations in the FSEM have been randomly selected, recorded, and then reviewed and assessed by faculty evaluators under the guidance of the Director of the UMW Speaking Intensive Program. Figure 4 shows the results for each of the rounds of assessment that were completed between fall 2015 and fall 2018. Presentations were evaluated in five categories (delivery, word choice, organization, purpose, support), and must have been rated as proficient or

strong in all five categories to be rated as proficient overall. Presentations were rated the highest in the word choice, organization, and purpose categories and were more likely to be found not proficient in delivery and support.

The percent of students who met the benchmark for SLO 5 for presentations was at, near, or above the target of 70% in all years but one. In the QEP pre-testing in 2013, only 47% of evaluated speeches met the target. The results of the presentation assessments, therefore, show a substantial improvement over the student outcome results obtained before the QEP was initiated. The fall 2017 score is the noticeable outlier in results obtained and several factors could account for that result. Variance in raters selected from year to year to evaluate the presentations could account for the lower results in that year, as could a skew in the quality of the random sample of presentations selected for review. Additionally, the standards for the presentation assessment were, by design, set high in order to facilitate comparisons of student presentations done in the first year with those in the student’s last the semester. Going forward, the SI Director will continue to monitor presentations skills for students in their first year and will establish clear expectations for proficiency at the beginning of the college experience as well as at the end.

Since 2016, class discussions in the FSEM have been randomly selected, recorded, and then reviewed and assessed by communication faculty evaluators under the guidance of the Director of the UMW Speaking Intensive Program. Assessment of class discussions was phased-in with the development of the class discussion online learning module. Figure 4 shows the results for each of the rounds of assessment that were completed between fall 2016 to fall 2018. Each class discussion was evaluated to provide an assessment of both the collective class rating, and a rating of how many of the students present met expectations for proficiency. Aggregate total scores show that 95% of class discussions met or exceeded the threshold score of proficient or strong in each of the five categories, and 79% of individual students in those discussions met the threshold of proficient in each of the five categories.

Figure 4. SLO 4 & 5 – Effective Oral Communication - % of Students Who Met the Benchmarks				
	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
SLO 4 - Theory and Principles (module) (80% QEP Benchmark)	n/a	n/a	92%	94%
SLO 5 – Presentations (70% QEP Benchmark)	67%	70%	54%	80%
SLO 5 – Class Discussions by Class (70% QEP Benchmark)	n/a	93%	94%	99%
SLO 5 – Class Discussions by % of Students (70% QEP Benchmark)	n/a	75%	80%	82%

Goal 2: Online Learning Modules

“I thought the modules were well produced and did a good job.”
– FSEM instructor, Fall 2017

Exactly as stated in the QEP proposal, a total of 12 online learning modules were developed to support student skill and knowledge development in the three target areas of the QEP (i.e. four

each in research, writing, and speaking). While UMW initially proposed hiring a company to produce the module content, the QEP Director, in consultation with the FSEM Committee, decided to create these modules in-house so that they could be delivered through UMW’s Learning Management System (Canvas). Three new modules were developed each year (one in each area) and faculty were asked to include a majority of modules from each area in their FSEM. Figure 5 provides the title of each module, when they were first introduced to the FSEM, the number of students who completed the module as part of this assessment, and the percentage of those students who scored 8+ out of ten on the quiz in each module. The QEP’s target threshold was that 80% of students would score 8+ out of ten on the quiz. Quiz scores provide evidence that students have developed knowledge in each of the targeted areas.

Figure 5. Online Learning Modules - % of Students Meeting Threshold on Quizzes			
Online Learning Modules	Fall Semester First Available	# of Students Who Completed the Module as of 12/2018	% of Students Meeting Thresholds on Quizzes
The CRAAP Test	2014	3801	86.98%
Writing Process	2014	3536	85.63%
Communication Apprehension	2014	3608	78.10%
Deconstructing Citations	2015	2772	58.87%
Commas and Semicolons	2015	2566	72.33%
Effective Visual Aides	2015	2772	90.12%
Finding a Topic	2016	2101	94.62%
Introductions and Conclusions	2016	2163	89.64%
Class Discussion	2016	2369	99.62%
Search Boxes	2017	1301	79.86%
Editing and Revision	2017	1504	86.04%
Communication Theory	2017	1630	92.88%

As shown above in Figure 5, more than 80% of students met the quiz thresholds in eight of the twelve modules. Only four modules had aggregate quiz scores below the 80% target, and only one (“Deconstructing Citations”) fell significantly below. Our analysis reveals several contributing factors including the fact that three of the four modules with low scores were some of the earliest introduced. We have found that later modules benefited from improved design and content development.

In addition, we have observed that some of the early modules with low aggregate scores have shown improvement year over year. For example, “Communication Apprehension,” has had higher quiz scores that have exceeded the benchmark in the two most recent years. This is likely explained by greater faculty understanding of the modules and the topic area as well as a willingness to invite in-class workshops from the Speaking Center on the topic. An important task going forward will be to review and evaluate all of the modules developed for the QEP, especially “Deconstructing Citations” which misses the target by a significant margin. Given

UMW's substantial Writing Intensive requirement (four additional courses beyond the FSEM) there may well be additional opportunities for enhancing student proficiency in this area.

Goal 3: Assessment

“Part of me has really enjoyed getting to know and work with first year students over the years, but also year after year, I wonder if the efforts and resources poured into this program is really producing valuable results. I guess that is what assessment is for.” – FSEM Instructor, Fall 2017

UMW proposed to develop and employ a comprehensive assessment plan to gather evidence about the achievement of the revised student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the new online learning modules that support those learning outcomes. This assessment plan has been developed and implemented over the last five years with direct and indirect measures for each of the learning outcomes for the FSEM. We were able to employ multiple complementary measures to assess each learning outcome. Starting in 2014-15, we assessed information literacy (SLO 1), student writing (SLOs 2 and 3), student presentations (SLOs 4 and 5), and relevant module quiz scores (SLOs 1, 2, and 5). In 2015-16 we included student and faculty surveys at the end of the fall semester (SLOs 1-5), and in 2016-17 we included assessment of class discussions (SLO 4 and 5). Finally, in 2017-18 we included the quiz scores from a new module on communication theory (SLO 4). The efficacy of this assessment plan is evidenced throughout this report as it has provided the assessment data used to support analysis of the goal outcomes.

Goal 4: Faculty Development and Support

“The workshops were very useful. Thank you! I hope they continue. The weekly emails were essential and so very helpful. Thank you! I hope they continue. Great support from the FYE/FSEM office, faculty, and staff. Thank you!” – FSEM instructor, Fall 2018

A series of comprehensive and topic-specific faculty development events have been offered over the last five years to support faculty as they integrated the learning outcomes into their FSEMs, deployed the modules to support those learning outcomes, and made use of the academic support centers (Library, Writing Center, Speaking Center) to enrich the classroom experience. An annual FSEM instructor workshop is offered in August, before the start of the fall semester, to discuss new modules and advising, expectations for the FSEM, and upcoming events for first-year students. Faculty participation in the August workshop has averaged 93% of all FSEM instructors in the upcoming semester. Supplementary faculty development events have also been held during the semester, including open labs to train faculty in the use of advising tools for first-year students, luncheons for discussion of managing the FSEM class, and spring workshops for faculty new to the FSEM to help them prepare to teach the FSEM in the following fall semester. An average of seven events were held per year, with more than 930 faculty and staff attending those events over the last five years.

End-of-semester surveys have asked faculty about faculty development and support. In the four years we have conducted this survey, 97% of faculty have agreed or strongly agreed that they have had access to the appropriate resources needed to deliver a course that meets the FSEM learning outcomes, providing evidence that the faculty believe that this QEP goal has been met.

SECTION 4: A Reflection on What the Institution Has Learned as a Result of the QEP

“We are coming the end of the implementation and assessment of UMW’s QEP and thus will transition from a faculty member serving as Director of the QEP to a faculty member taking the lead as Director of the First Year Experience.” – email to all faculty from the Provost announcing the call for an FYE Director, January 2019

Implementation of the QEP has provided UMW with the opportunity to reflect on and enhance the experience of our first-year students while building a set of online resources to support foundational skills necessary for college success.

All aspects of the First Year Experience Should Align. Early in the QEP implementation process, we found that much of what we intended to provide to first-year students through the FSEM would be limited by the fact that incoming students were not all given access to the FSEM in their first semester. The decision to offer enough FSEM sections in the fall semester for all incoming first-year students was not easy to implement, but it proved to be important for what we sought to achieve through the QEP. Additionally, the decision for FSEM instructors to serve as their students’ primary academic advisor was met with resistance by some faculty, but it has proven to be an unanticipated benefit for students as their advisor/instructor works more closely with them and gets to know them as they navigate their first semester. In our survey of first-year students at the end of their first semester we ask if students had a positive experience with their faculty academic advisor, and 78% and 83% have consistently reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

This is further evidenced in National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results (see Figure 6). Prior to the implementation of the QEP, only 36% of UMW’s first-year students rated the quality of their academic advising as excellent in the 2014 NSSE. Two years later, following QEP implementation, 57% rated the quality of their academic advising as excellent. 2018 results further supported this conclusion, when 53% rated the quality of their advising as excellent. This is a noteworthy increase in student evaluation of academic advising which moved UMW from trailing aspirant, COPLAC and Carnegie peer groups on this indicator, to well ahead. It is also directly reflected in written commentary as students reflect on their experience with their advisor. One student commented that “my FSEM professor/advisor encouraged me to reach my goals and look into interests that I wouldn’t have thought of.”

Figure 6. Quality of Interactions with Advisor NSSE 2014, 2016, 2017: Percentage rating their interactions a 6 or 7 (on a scale from 1 = “Poor” to 7 = “Excellent”)				
	UMW	Aspirational Peers	COPLAC Institutions	Master’s
First Year F2013 cohort <i>QEP Year 1</i>	36%	49%	48%	48%
First Year F2015 cohort <i>QEP Year 3</i>	57%	54%	50%	50%
First Year F2017 cohort <i>QEP Year 5</i>	53%	48%	49%	52%

Faculty have also benefited from having students as their advisees, allowing them to develop better relationships with their students and making it easier to identify their needs. Our survey of FSEM faculty includes three questions about advising and teaching the FSEM, all of which have received overwhelmingly positive responses. In 2015, 75% of faculty agreed or strongly agreed that advising their FSEM students was a positive experience, with that number rising to 96% in 2018. Additionally, 85% of FSEM faculty in 2015 agreed or strongly agreed that their personal experience advising first-year students was successful, with that number rising to 94% in 2018. Finally, 76% of faculty in 2015 agreed or strongly agreed that linking advising to the FSEM is a valuable asset to the First-Year Experience. This number rose to 90% in 2018. As one faculty member remarked in the Fall 2017 survey, “by far, coordinating advising with FSEM is the best model.” Another wrote: “this is a model that truly works. Serving as the first-year advisor of these students is quite effective in that it promotes meaningful relationships from day 1.” In short, the QEP created an opportunity to align several aspects of its first-year experience and provide training and faculty development opportunities, both as part of recurring FSEM workshops, and through separate sessions covering such topics as quality advising, use of online advising and degree planning tools, and how to support students who have not declared a major.

Academic support center growth. A broad set of faculty constituents collaborated to implement the QEP in accordance with the organizational plan outlined in our initial proposal and in response to the visiting team’s recommendations. Collaboration between a variety of offices and academic support centers prompted discussions across divisions about curriculum, advising and academic support, resulting in better support for the First-Year Experience. It also resulted in developing curricular support for the FSEM. Academic support centers, including the Speaking Center, the Writing Center, the Digital Knowledge Center, and the library, have offered afternoon workshops and in-class FSEM presentations in support of the FSEM learning outcomes. A total of 653 in-class workshops were offered in FSEMs between fall 2015 and fall 2018. These workshops not only supported faculty, but also introduced students to many of the academic support resources available. Moreover, academic support center utilization increased significantly. Over a five-year period, student visits increased 150% in the Writing Center and 101% in the Speaking Center. As one FSEM student noted, “something that really appealed to me was the abundance of help outside of classes (office hours, writing center, speaking center). I think UMW does a really good job of keeping that promise to incoming students.”

Extra-FSEM module use. The online learning modules have provided important support for FSEM faculty and students. An unanticipated result of our decision to develop the content of the modules on-campus is that some students and faculty requested access to the modules for use after the FSEM so that they can go back and refresh their skills set or introduce it to their other courses. We intend to explore how to update the existing modules and develop new modules to support identified student need.

Implementing new interventions to meet student needs. While the QEP focused on the development of research, writing, and speaking skills, implementation created opportunities for UMW to address other first-year student needs. For example, we are using a growth mindset module aimed at first year students (developed by the PERTS research team at Stanford University). The knowledge, skill and capacity developed through the QEP by UMW staff will make implementations such this feasible.

Faculty development outside of silos. Faculty development opportunities started with workshops and sessions that were explicitly linked to the teaching of the FSEM. We learned, however, that incorporating farther-reaching faculty development opportunities provided broader understanding and support for the First-Year Experience. For instance, by inviting faculty and staff who were not currently teaching the FSEM to listen to guest speakers specializing in student development and discussions of coordinating student support between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, we were able to recruit new FSEM instructors and prompt broader support between university divisions. For example, Jim Lang’s (author of *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* and director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Assumption College) August 2016 visit to campus to work with FSEM instructors provided an opportunity to identify and recruit new FSEM instructors.

Appreciation of long-term change processes. As noted by the Reaffirmation Committee, one of the strengths of our QEP was the broad set of faculty constituents who engaged in the process of developing the QEP. But, as the Committee also noted, this was one of the plan’s primary implementation challenges. Fortunately, the experience has deepened our understanding of the rewards, and challenges, present in a long-term change process. The experience has not only proven beneficial for our first-year students, but has also provided the University with a model for collaboration of support and services that can now be offered to other student populations.

Institutionalizing the FSEM Experience. As we have approached the end of the 5th year of the QEP, we have engaged in discussions across campus about the future of the FSEM and have launched the search for a long-term faculty director of the First Year Experience. We have institutionalized a number of elements of the QEP, including providing students with an FSEM in their first semester, assigning the FSEM instructor as the student’s academic advisor, and using online learning modules to support research, writing, and speaking skill development. Among the first tasks for the faculty director will be the evaluation and refresh of existing modules, as well as the development of new modules.

CONCLUSION

UMW made use of the QEP experience to redefine our FSEM program, develop a faculty-directed academic advising program for first-year students, and refine our first-year experience. The anticipated outcomes for each of the QEP’s goals have been met. All FSEMS now have consistent learning outcomes and incorporate support for student development of research, writing and speaking skills. Twelve online learning modules have been created related to those outcomes and those modules now directly support instruction on critical skills necessary for success in college. An assessment plan for the FSEM has been developed and implemented. And, finally, faculty have had numerous development opportunities related to the provision of instruction in the FSEM in general and research, writing and speaking in particular. We not only successfully executed the QEP as designed, we were also fortunate to realize unanticipated beneficial results through key implementation decisions. Most importantly, our students benefit from this programmatic effort to further develop their research, writing, and speaking skills – skills that are critical to their success in college.