

Innovation Approaches to Improving First-Year Retention

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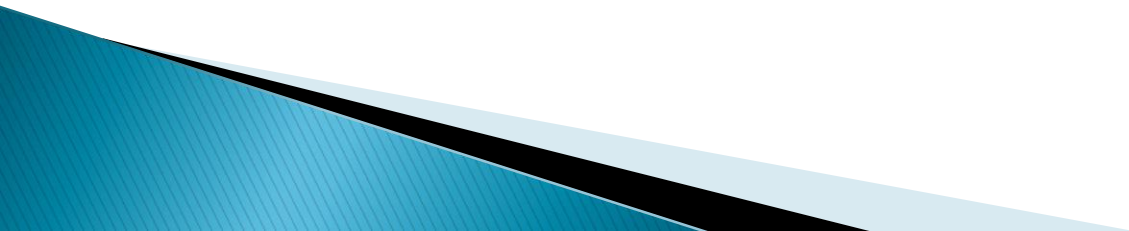
Why does retention matter?

- ▶ The financial imperative
- ▶ The ethical imperative

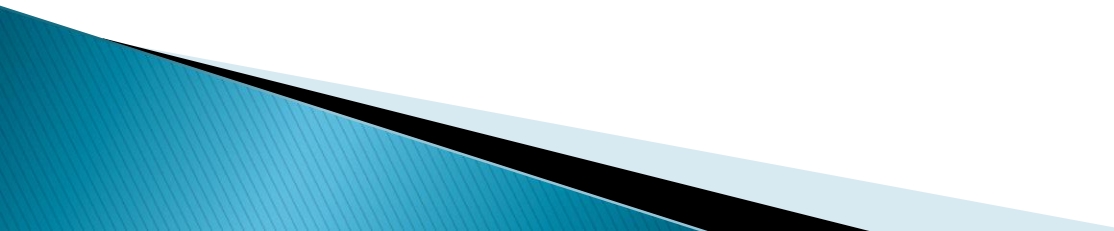
Why do students leave?

- ▶ Changed financial circumstances
- ▶ Interest in a field of study we don't offer
- ▶ Challenging life circumstances
- ▶ Not feeling like our campus climate is the right fit for them

BUT: Students in all of these categories DO stay, so this isn't the whole story




George Fox University

- ▶ Private, independent, faith-based, largely regional
 - ▶ 2400 UGs, 4100 total
 - ▶ Quaker heritage, “Be Known” promise: At George Fox, each student will be known – personally, academically and spiritually.
 - ▶ 25% growth in UG population in the past 4 years
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General Education revision

- ▶ March 2013 BoT resolution:

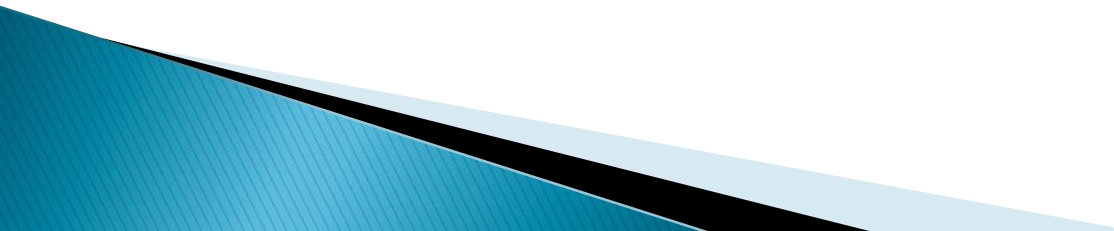
The undergraduate program will develop a core curricular experience (as outlined below) that is shared by the undergraduate community.

- ▶ This academic core experience will require fewer credit hours and will focus on the development of a learning community.
 - ▶ The university's promise to "Be Known" will be made real in this new program.
 - ▶ The smaller core will enhance the common curricular experience of the undergraduate students at George Fox University.
 - ▶ The faith-based component of the core curriculum will be revised and will seek to fulfill elements noted above (including a focus on "vocation").
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LIBA 100 Knowing and Being Known

- ▶ A new 3-credit course required for all incoming first-year students (except honors students) as part of a revised GE package we implemented this fall
- ▶ Taught primarily by full-time faculty from across all six colleges in sections capped at 20 students
- ▶ Two peer advisors assigned to each section (focus on community building and individual student support)
- ▶ A (mostly) common syllabus
 - Shared learning outcomes
 - All sections read *The Odyssey* as a common core text
 - Common assignments (designed around specific learning outcomes)
 - Linked to a one-hour/per week “writing studio” (new model for teaching college writing)
 - Last four weeks leaves room for “professor’s choice” text or activity
- ▶ Use of Gallup Strengths Finder
- ▶ Not discipline-specific, but one dedicated bilingual (Spanish/English) section (self-selected enrollment)
- ▶ One explicit goal is to contribute to institutional efforts to improve retention.
- ▶ “Fun to take, fun to teach!”

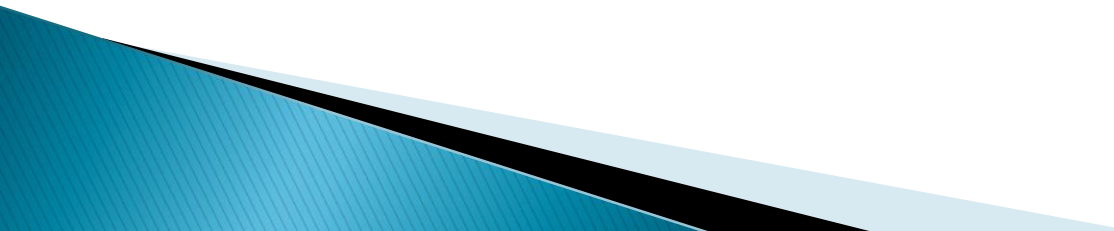
Design features

- ▶ Growth mindset
 - ▶ Academically challenging, but supportive
 - ▶ Meta-cognitive awareness (why are we doing what we are doing?)
 - ▶ Focus on transition to college issues as normal/typical
 - ▶ Learning community as safe space
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Mid-semester survey

- ▶ As you participate in the socratic discussions, what is one thing you are learning about yourself as a student/scholar that you had not recognized before?

Awareness of strengths and/or learning styles

- ▶ “I did not realize before this class and before taking the strengths test, how comfortable I am with a leadership role. The facilitator role was the easiest, and most natural role for me. After taking the strengths test I found out that my number one strength is command, which explains why I enjoyed being the facilitator. Hopefully this will transfer to my other classes, and maybe someday my occupation.”
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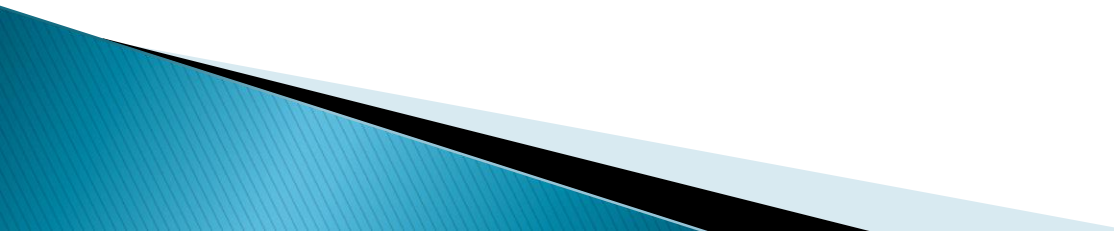
Development of self-confidence

- ▶ “I'm actually pretty smart and I never really thought I was.”

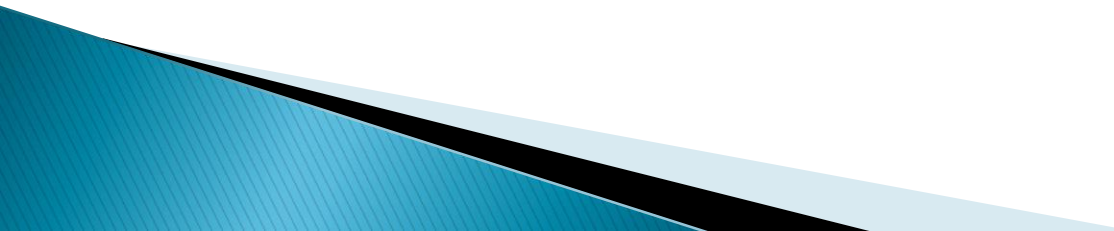
Development of skills/value of hard work

- ▶ “Sparknoting the answers is not going to work, it's much more worth it to actually read and know the text. And it is obvious when someone just looked at sparknotes.”

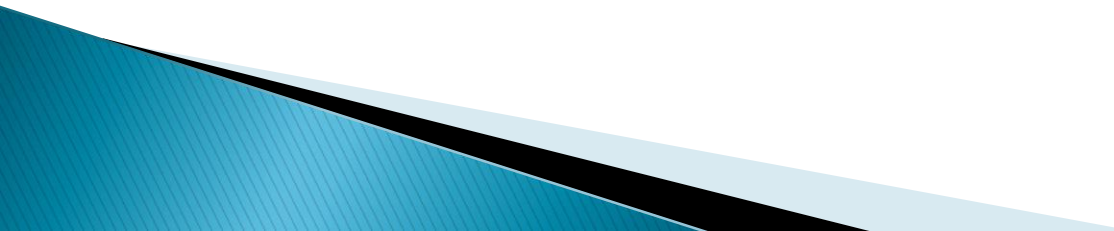
Awareness of weakness / areas for improvement

- ▶ “I am...learning that one of my weaknesses is in not being able think and respond quickly in discussions. It takes me longer to contemplate and wrestle with deep thoughts, even though I enjoy doing it. This is an area in which I would like to grow throughout my time at college.”
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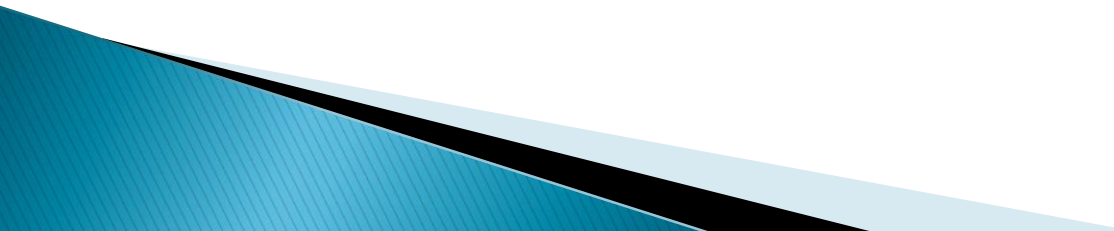
Value of community/collaborative learning

- ▶ “I really enjoy discussing with others issues and insights that relate directly to our lives and can help us grow in ourselves. I found out that by discussing some of my personal ideas with others, they can add feedback to my claims, and we can keep adding on to our ideas from there. This ping-ponging of ideas helps me to broaden my understanding and think of better insights than I usually come up with on my own.”
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Value of others' perspectives

- ▶ “I am learning how important hearing other's opinions and voices is, and I didn't recognize that before because I wasn't as active of a listener. Hearing other's views develops my learning and my points better and helps create new ideas”
 - ▶ “I can learn just as well from other students as I can from a Teacher.”
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FYE myths we are busting

- ▶ Faculty will not teach a course that is largely designed for them because it violates their academic autonomy
 - ▶ Socratic seminars are good for honors students, but they won't work with the general student population. Students don't do the reading and can't be counted on to carry the weight of classroom discussion.
 - ▶ Faculty in professional programs will not be interested/willing to teach this.
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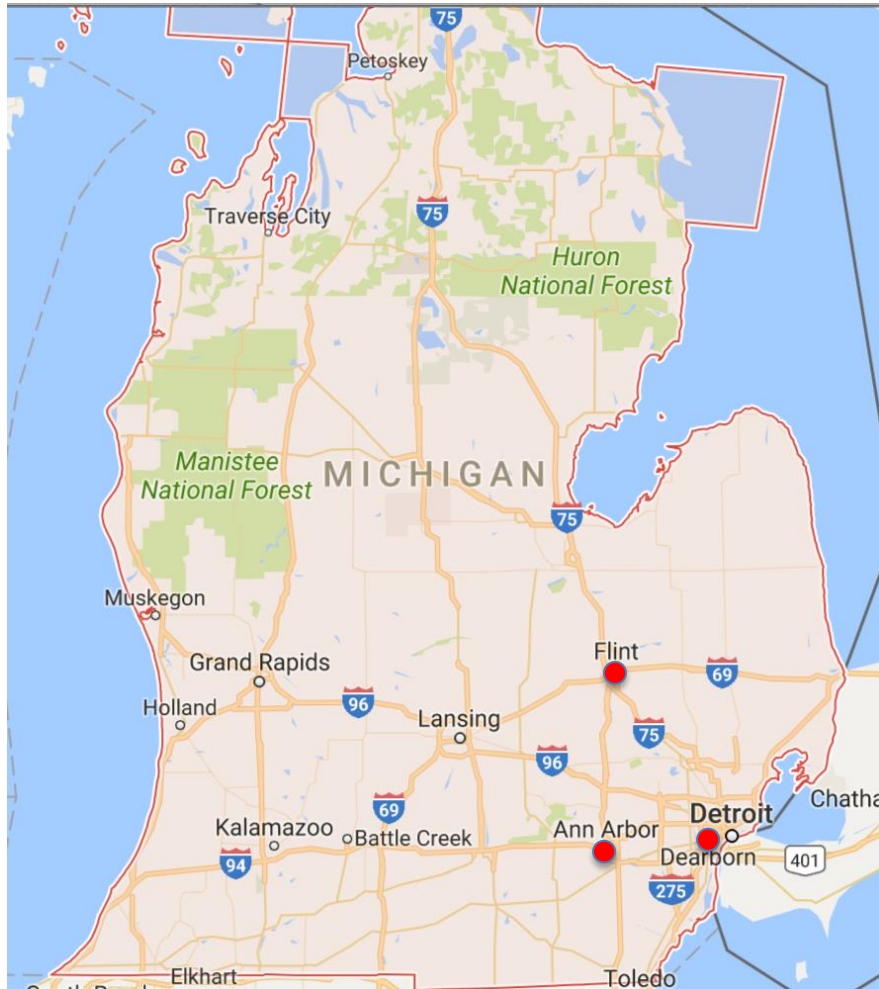
The Big Question

- ▶ Will this improve our retention numbers?
- ▶ Answer: we don't know yet, but early signs are encouraging. Stay tuned...



First Year Seminars @UM-Dearborn

Michael Lachance, Associate Dean
College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters



University of Michigan

Ann Arbor: 43,600

Dearborn: 9,200

Flint: 8,600

First Year Seminar Construct

Features:

- **Cool topic** linked with **COMP105**
 - COMP readings & assignments **coordinated** with topic
 - Adjacent time-block scheduling creates **cohorts**
 - Linked courses fulfill **TWO Gen Ed** requirements
- Restricted
 - **Freshmen** only
 - Capped at **25**
 - **University 101**
- **Optional**, not required

Cool Topics

To infinity
and
beyond



Nano-
Fiction:
Close
Encounters with
Extremely Short
Stories



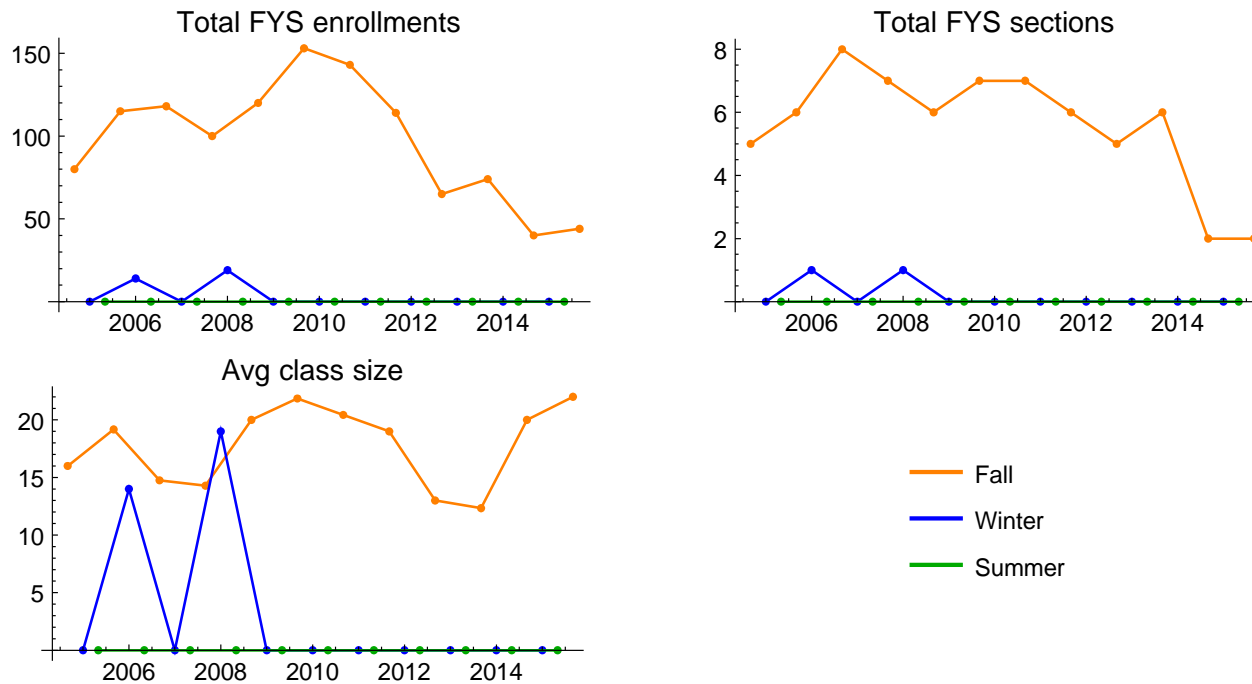
Bad
Decisions
and Why
We Love
Them



Wild
Thing:
Attitudes to
Being Animal,
Being Human



Enrollment history



67 sections of 29 100-level courses have served 1166 freshmen over a 12 year period

Challenges

- **Linked courses** means **linked instructors**
- **COMP099 & COMP106** students unable to participate
- **Dual enrollment** means COMP105 often complete
- **Transfer students** ineligible (presently 41% of UGs)
- Adjacent time-blocks creates **scheduling obstacles**
- Marketed at student **orientation**
- **Not required**, not shared experience

Pivot from Seminar to Experience

- Make **mandatory**, freshmen and transfers alike
 - Need 300-level topic courses
 - Must somehow count toward Gen Ed
- **Maintain linkages**, but broaden
 - Other COMP classes, maybe languages
 - Preserves scheduling difficulties
- Time to **rearticulate goal**
 - Shared experience among diverse student body

CCAS 2016 Panel: Innovative Approaches to Improving First-Year Retention: 1

Dr. Laura Hartley
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LIBA (Liberal Arts) 100: Knowing and Being Known

- A new 3-credit course required for all incoming first-year students (except honors students) as part of a revised GE package we implemented this fall
- Taught primarily by full-time faculty from across all six colleges in sections capped at 20 students
- Two peer advisors assigned to each section (focus on community building and individual student support)
- A (mostly) common syllabus
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 - All sections read *The Odyssey* as a common core text
 - Common assignments (designed around specific learning outcomes)
 - Linked to a one-hour/per week “writing studio” (new model for teaching college writing)
 - Last four weeks leaves room for “professor’s choice” text or activity
- Use of Gallup Strengths Finder
- One dedicated bilingual (Spanish/English) section (self-selected enrollment)
- One explicit goal is to contribute to institutional efforts to improve retention.
- “Fun to take, fun to teach!”

2-year pilot

- Fall 2014: 9 sections; Fall 2015: 13 sections
- Fall 2016: 30 sections (full implementation)

Some operating assumptions (developed over the course of the pilot period):

- Cultivating a growth mindset (as opposed to a fixed mindset) in students will help them learn from failures, rather than be defeated by them.
- Metacognitive awareness regarding the purpose of assignments and activities improves student learning.
- Metacognitive awareness regarding one’s own strengths and ways of learning increases student confidence.
- Students will respond to academic challenges if they feel supported in their efforts to build their skills.
- Giving students time within the space of a classroom to discuss the challenges of their transition acknowledges and validates feelings, while also giving them resources to deal with those challenges.
- Students who feel connected to their peers and faculty are more likely to persist.

Persistence data from the first two pilot years

Fall 2014 Cohort Persistence

- Year 1 Fall to Spring: 91.5%
- Year 1 to Year 2: 83% (v. 80.7% overall)

Fall 2015 Cohort Persistence

- Year 1, Fall to Spring: 94.8%
- Year 1 to Year 2: 84.1% (v. 79.3% for students not enrolled in LIBA 100)

Improvements for Fall 2016

- Started the semester with a discussion of growth mindset
- Have included more metacognitive discussion of why we are doing what we are doing
- Refinement of reading roles (5 discrete elements for critical reading and discussion), with opportunities for each student to prepare and use each role once in a group conversation
- Socratic-style discussion, completely student-led, using “fishbowl” format
- Professional Learning Teams of faculty established for support and troubleshooting

Mid-semester survey (355 responses of ~500 students)

Q: Have you embraced a growth mindset this semester?

Yes. However, I feel like I always had a growth mindset so stretching myself was not that hard.	27.3%
Yes. I feel I have stretched myself and gained new skills this semester.	42.8%
Maybe. I may have stretched myself in some areas, but I am not sure.	25.1%
I don't know. I am not sure I fully understand the idea of a growth mindset.	0.6%
I don't really think about it. The idea of a growth mindset is not that intriguing to me.	3.1%
It doesn't feel like it. I still get stuck thinking I can't do any better than I have done in the past.	1.1%

Q: As you participate in the socratic discussions, what is one thing you are learning about yourself as a student/scholar that you had not recognized before?

Awareness of strengths and/or learning styles (30.7%)

“That I'm a good listener.”

“I can come up with good follow-up questions. Most people seem to struggle with that. I am good on the spot at trying to keep the conversation going and to improvise new questions and places that the conversation can go.”

“I have learned a lot about my strength as a deliberate person. I never thought of myself as being so logical when it came to decision making, but it made me see a more thoughtful side of myself in general.”

“That I'm a leader.”

“I have an opinion on more things than I was previously aware of. I am also a decent leader of discussions.”

“I did not realize before this class and before taking the strengths test, how comfortable I am with a leadership role. The facilitator role was the easiest, and most natural role for me. After taking the strengths test I found out that my number one strength is command, which explains why I enjoyed being the facilitator. Hopefully this will transfer to my other classes, and maybe someday my occupation.”

Development of self-confidence (26.5%)

"I learned that I actually do have a lot of ideas and things to say in class, but I usually don't say them because I'm afraid that I won't be able to convey my message properly because I process through my thoughts externally. Though I am also learning to gain more confidence in myself and my ideas and to put them out there anyway because some of them are really good thoughts and ideas."

"That I have good insights and I shouldn't be afraid to speak up."

"I am smarter than I thought especially when I read"

"I'm actually pretty smart and I never really thought I was."

"I have realized that I like leading discussions more than I thought I did. Also, I notice details that others do not. I need to trust my instinct, input, and interest because I actually do have good ideas."

"I deserve to be heard"

Development of skills and/or the value and necessity of hard work (18.6%)

"I am learning how to communicate with others better than before and these discussions have also helped me to create better discussions for the class and I to have better conversations."

"That I need to come prepared and be engaged in every class even though I may not be in the middle of the socratic discussion."

"I learned that understanding material becomes a lot easier for when i connect it to other texts or things that I can relate to in my life."

"Sparknoting the answers is not going to work, it's much more worth it to actually read and know the text. And it is obvious when someone just looked at sparknotes."

"One thing that I have learned about myself is seeing how much the Odyssey applies to my life. Being able to read about what the characters and all that they go through I am able to make connections to my life. Doing the discussions and seeing how people relate the Odyssey to the Bible or to their personal life has been really cool to see. I have learned that you can apply books that you wouldn't normally think could, but in reality do."

"The Fishbowl really helped with my problem solving skills"

Awareness of weakness/areas for improvement (17.5%)

"I want to take over conversations. "contribute " too much"

"I am realizing that I occasionally contribute too much to the conversation that does not lead to further discussion but rather appears to just be musing to myself."

"I am learning that I enjoy learning for the sake of learning, and that by observing I can learn much more than simply facts about my major. I am also learning that one of my weaknesses is in not being able think and respond quickly in discussions. It takes me longer to contemplate and wrestle with deep thoughts, even though I enjoy doing it. This is an area in which I would like to grow throughout my time at college."

"I get really intimidated when other people are confident and can freely speak whatever they are thinking. I normally talk a lot and participate, but I realize I lose confidence in myself because I start to compare

myself to how other students are. However, I am slowly getting comfortable and no one here is going to judge me on something I say, so I might as well say it."

"It takes me a little while to clearly articulate a thought, and just because I know what I'm saying doesn't mean everyone else does."

Value of community/collaborative learning (13.0%)

"I am learning that I enjoy class discussions, especially when everyone is prepared. I always thought I would feel pressure in facilitated class discussions, but the discussions are organic and thought provoking. As a result, I feel as if I have gained an appreciation for meaningful discussion."

"I am learning that I am a thread in where I weave through over threads, where I meet a lot of people and each thread are working together to make a quilt or something. I know that I can't unweave myself out, I cannot undue myself."

"Even though I need to get better at this, I realized I understand the content of the book better when I'm asking questions or participating in the discussion. Asking questions, even if they seem dumb, will help you and others around you."

"I really enjoy discussing with others issues and insights that relate directly to our lives and can help us grow in ourselves. I found out that by discussing some of my personal ideas with others, they can add feedback to my claims, and we can keep adding on to our ideas from there. This ping-ponging of ideas helps me to broaden my understanding and think of better insights than I usually come up with on my own."

"I am learning that it is important to share, speak up, and connect with others throughout the class. More relationships can be formed this way and new information/ life tips can be learned! I am usually shy when it comes to group discussion so this class has helped me come out of my comfort zone."

Importance/value of listening to other perspectives (10.7%)

"I think that over the last year I have become less averse to conflict, and during this class noticed that I am learning to embrace a clash of ideas and recognize different points of view in order to develop a broader perspective."

"I really like listening to others ideas and then taking time to think about what their thoughts are and try to understand why they would have thought that."

"Other people see things in completely different ways than I do. They may connect to the text like I never have or communicate information in ways I've never considered."

"I realized that I learn very well by listening to others discuss ideas. Sometimes I can have the personality that dominates discussions, but with the Socratic discussions I learned to listen to others more than myself"

"I am learning how important hearing other's opinions and voices is, and I didn't recognize that before because I wasn't as active of a listener. Hearing other's views develops my learning and my points better and helps create new ideas"

"I can learn just as well from other students as I can from a Teacher."