

## SAGES Update – February 2011

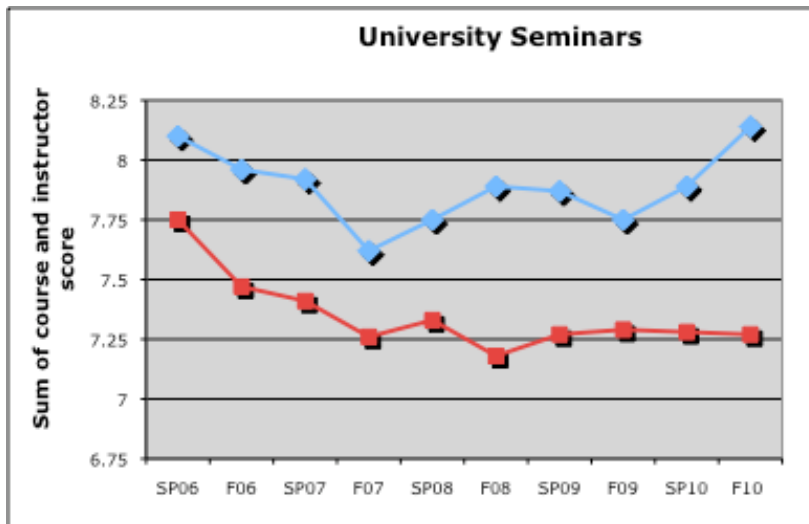
This is one in a series of occasional updates about the SAGES program’s activities and achievements.

### ***First Seminars***

In Fall 2010, 65 First Seminars enrolled approximately 1050 students. Student evaluations of the experience have continued to improve, and First Seminars are now rated as highly as the average 100- and 200-level courses. Six seminars were reserved for students (mostly international students) for whom English is a second language.

### ***University Seminars***

In Fall 2010, 540 students were enrolled in 36 University Seminars on a great variety of topics – “Assessing Climate Change and Wind Energy,” “Peacebuilding in the 21st Century,” “Popular Music on Film,” among many others. Student evaluations of University Seminars continue to improve, both in absolute terms and in comparison with other groups of courses, such as 100- and 200-level courses (see below).



Average University Seminar evaluations (blue diamonds) compared to the average of all evaluations for 100- and 200-level courses at CWRU (red squares). The Course and Instructor scores each range from 1-5 with 1=Poor and 5= Excellent.

This Spring, about 1400 students are enrolled in 87 University Seminars on such topics as “Epidemics in Human History,” “The Economics of Global Poverty,” and “What is Art For?”

### ***Departmental Seminars and Capstones***

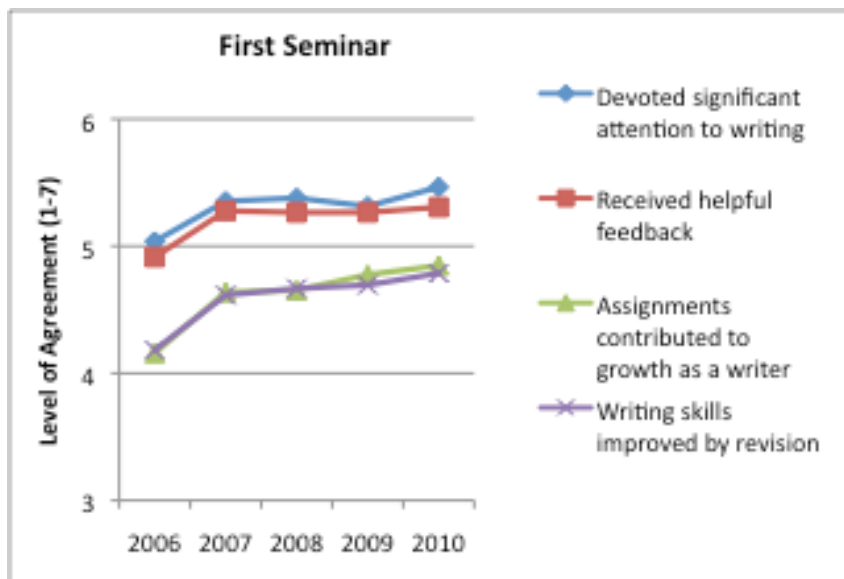
In December, various schools and offices, including SAGES, partnered to offer the first Fall capstone fair. Like its much larger Spring counterpart, this event allowed students to present their capstone projects to other students and to faculty.

### **University Circle Visits**

SAGES students' exposure to the educational and cultural institutions that surround the campus continues to enhance what they learn in their seminars. When a First Seminar on the American automobile visited the Crawford Auto Museum, their guide met them out front with a WWII jeep and offered rides around the block. The jeep promptly broke down, so the students pushed it back to and into the museum. SAGES facilitated well over 100 class experiences such as concerts, plays, behind-the-scene tours, and talks in University Circle. One student, referring to a visit to the Cleveland Museum of Art, wrote, *"It broadens the experience, widening the perspective of understanding. There's a big difference between seeing a picture on a computer screen, and seeing a live piece of art in a museum."* Another wrote to the professor, *"Thank you for continuing to suggest that we go investigate all of Cleveland's cultural offerings. It is amazing to have such a treasure a few minutes' walk away from where we now live."*

### **Writing**

Improving students' writing is one of the primary goals of the SAGES seminars. We carefully monitor students' perceptions of their learning and continue to see stronger and stronger appraisals of their progress in writing from the students themselves (see below).



In these assessments of writing in First Seminar, students indicate their level of agreement with the associated statement. Responses can range from 1-7 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.

Faculty members evaluate student writing in each seminar and with each assignment. In addition, a faculty committee reviews students' writing portfolios each summer. (An approved writing portfolio – including a paper from First Seminar, a paper from each University Seminar, and a reflective essay about the student's writing performance in SAGES – is a graduation requirement.) After completing their review, the faculty committee makes recommendations on how to improve writing instruction in future seminars.

In Summer 2010, the committee judged that most of the research papers in the portfolios were strong in terms of clarity of expression, attention to secondary source material, and organization. The committee was gratified that 95% of students indicated that they

experienced gains in their writing ability in First and University Seminars. Twenty students were recognized for their outstanding portfolios, and their names were published in the *Observer*.

### **First-Year Advising**

This fall, for the first time, deans from Undergraduate Studies visited nearly each First Seminar. These visits replaced a large plenary session in which the deans explained the SAGES advising model. The smaller setting of the seminar allowed for rich discussion and helped establish connections between the students and the deans. Student evaluations of the advising in First Seminar have improved again this year (see below), presumably in part due to the continued enhancements such as the classroom visits.



In these assessments of advising in First Seminar, students indicate their level of agreement with the associated statement. Responses can range from 1-7 with 1=Strongly Disagree and 7= Strongly Agree.

### **SAGES in the News**

SAGES seminars and seminar leaders were mentioned in various local and national media stories. NPR's "Talk of the Nation" interviewed jimi izrael about Harvey Pekar, author of *American Splendor*; izrael leads a University Seminar on Pekar and his work. WCPN interviewed Mukoma Wa Ngugi about his first novel. The sports pages of the *Plain Dealer* featured an article about CWRU's team at the first International Varsity Fly Fishing competition in Ireland. The team was led by John Orlock, who taught a First Seminar on the literature of fly fishing, and included a student from the previous year's class. *The Christian Science Monitor* quoted Brad Ricca in two articles about comics. And finally, Bernie Jim's seminar "Puzzled" was ranked number 1 on a list of "the most unique college courses" on the *Metro* website.

### **Awards and Honors**

The Richard A. Bloom Award for Distinguished Teaching in SAGES in 2009-10 went to Bernie Jim. Quotes from the students' nominations included, "I see my classes with Bernie as the highlight of my day" and "Words truly fail at describing the best professor I've ever had."