

First Year Connect (1YC) Program at SUNY Potsdam



Program

Incoming students at SUNY Potsdam participate in the First Year Connect (1YC) program before they arrive on campus. 1YC builds on one of our assets -- our diversity -- and tries to promote a more inclusive community. To help our incoming first years with becoming a member of a diverse and inclusive community, students meet virtually in groups representative of our campus diversity and are introduced to facilitated dialog as a form of communication. During the 4-week program students meet for 2-hour sessions where they can get to know each other as individuals with multidimensional social identities and engage constructively with difference. 1YC is integrated into the orientation activities of SUNY Potsdam and the Potsdam Pathways general education program where students have the opportunity to practice, reflect, and build on their skills in their WAYS 103 Talking About Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion classes. Our facilitators go through a 3-part training program that is centered on teaching skills that focus on trauma-informed harm reduction for BIPOC students. The program completed Phase 1 and 2 of the 2-year pilot in July/August 2020 and January 2021. Starting in July/August 2021, all first-year students will participate in the program.

Goals

Awareness	Allow students to experience each other as individuals with multidimensional social identities. Increase emotional awareness and examine personal and societal underlying assumptions, values, biases, social norms, and experiences that shape perspectives and positions.
Attitude	Enable students to exercise empathy and respect, acknowledging each other's humanity through an exploration of shared and diverse experiences and feelings.
Skills	Students acquire and practice skills such as asking good questions, active listening, teamwork, critical thinking, social awareness, and empathy.
Activation	Motivate students to actively practice their skills in WAYS 103 and to promote an inclusive and equitable learning and social environment on campus.

Pilot Phase 1

During our pilot phase 1, 28 students participated in a 2-week version (2 x 2 hrs/week) of the program in groups that reflected our campus diversity on dimensions of race/ethnicity, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geographic location, sexual orientation, and political attitudes. Students engaged in a curriculum that utilizes both small group activities and facilitated real-time dialogue, to which they responded very positively. After crucial revisions during spring 2020, aspects of the curriculum such as the identity wheel activity were improved further. Student feedback:

Rating of Sessions	
Very High	39%
High	44%
Average	18%
Low	0%
Very Low	0%

"I feel really positive about the program thus far. I feel like it is a great opportunity for students to get to know each other before entering a new experience like college. I have enjoyed the open dialogue, the grounding activity and being able to listen to each person speak."
Student – Aug 2020

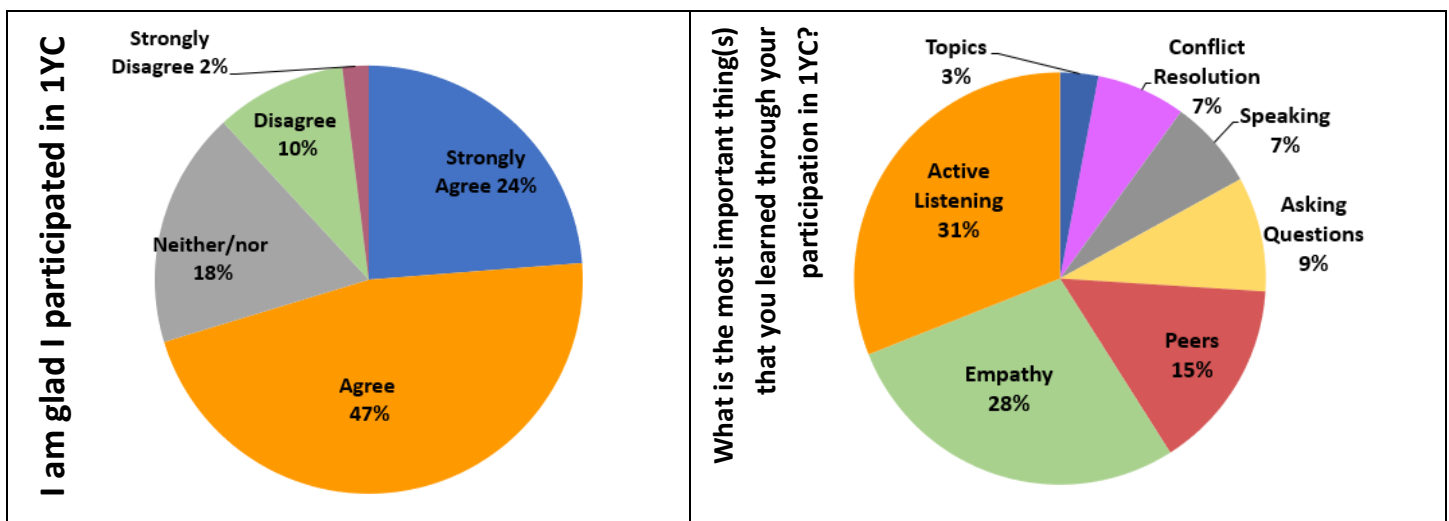
"I think this is great way to meet new people before starting the semester. Without this program, I would be arriving to Potsdam knowing absolutely nobody."
Student – Aug 2020

Pilot Phase 2

In January 2021, 133 students participated in a 3-week (1 x 2.5 hrs/week) version of the program. The groups were representative of the overall class regarding race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and geographic location; however, men and conservatives were underrepresented in the sample. The program was very well received by students and the core learning outcomes were achieved. 72% of students said that the best thing about 1YC was the ability to meet people and 61% of students who attended all three sessions said that “1YC helped me begin to build meaningful relationships with my peers at SUNY Potsdam”. Covid, gender, race, identity, stereotypes, and SUNY Potsdam were the most commonly chosen topics for dialogues. A majority (52%) of students said that the real-time dialogue was their favorite component while 39% liked the small group activities the best.

“I think the most important thing I learned was how to actively listen to others and how that can lead to building upon your own knowledge. I think that the current state of society we are very separated, and dialogue can lead to respectful conversation. At the end of the day, we are all humans and most of the time we have more in common than we realize. Dialogue helps find that common ground so that you can build upon what you know and see things from a different perspective.”
Student – Jan 2021

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			1YC helped me improve my	
Connecting Across Difference	How often do you interact with people who have a different race/ethnicity?	64.5% (+14.5)*	active listening skills.	77%
	Frequency of interaction w/ people from a different socioeconomic background?	78.5% (+22.1)*	ability to ask questions.	61%
	I understand someone else’s views by imagining an issue from their perspective.	80.6% (+6.1)*	communication skills across difference	69%
Personal/Societal Assumptions	I have more similarities than differences with my peers	63.8% (+17.5)*	teamwork skills.	62%
	I have spoken out/acted to promote awareness about discrimination.	72.1% (+15.5)**	critical thinking skills.	71%
Communication Across Difference	Confidence level about communicating in a culturally and racially diverse setting.	71.3% (+14.9)**	collaboration problem solving skills.	62%
	I am confident about sharing feelings with others.	53.7% (+20.1)**	awareness skills.	71%
% of students who answered often/very often or agree/strongly agree. *statistically significant ** strong effect				

Pilot Phase 3

From July 26 to August 20, 2021 the entire first year class will participate in 1YC. Students will meet for 1 x 2 hrs/week.