

Oakton's Great Books Program

The Great Books program at Oakton includes new approaches to existing courses from a variety of disciplines. These courses encourage faculty and student exploration of cultural themes through discussion of classic literary, historical, philosophical and political texts. At least half of the readings in these courses are texts that have substantially influenced the development of Western society. Each course focuses on a significant theme common to all of the readings. An important goal of the Great Books program is to foster an appreciation for the intellectual foundations of various cultures and sub-cultures through the readings and ensuing discussions.

Oakton is one of five members of the Community College Great Books Consortium. Great Books courses have been offered since Spring 2005. Seventeen Great Books courses will be offered this Fall in English, History, Humanities, and Philosophy. Faculty from all disciplines are welcome to attend Great Books meetings each semester to discuss program components and course design.

This month, we summarize data gathered from two surveys of students enrolled in Great Books courses in Fall 2005 and/or Spring 2006. These surveys asked for students to report basic demographic information, as well as evaluations of the courses. A total of 178 students (90 enrolled in Fall 2005, 88 enrolled in Spring 2006) completed these surveys. The combined findings are presented below.

What type of student enrolls in a Great Books course?

Many of the students who enrolled in the Great Books courses were traditional-aged, full-time, and transfer students.

- Eighty-one percent of the students enrolled in these courses were younger than 25 years old
- The median age for all students was 20 years old.
- Sixty percent of the students were enrolled in 4 or more courses during the term in which they enrolled in a Great Books course.
- Seventy-five percent of the students reported that their main objective in attending Oakton was to prepare to transfer to a 4-year institution.
- Fifty-two percent of the respondents planned to obtain an Associates degree before leaving Oakton.

Did the Great Books courses achieve their objectives?

Students were asked to state how well they agreed with statements regarding the influence that the Great Books course had on them.

- Ninety-four percent of the students surveyed agreed that they were encouraged to express their opinions about the course readings.
- Ninety-four percent of students agreed that discussions with other students helped them to understand the course readings.
- Ninety-four percent of students agreed that the course helped them to learn about the perspectives of other people who see the world differently than they do. Additionally, 88% of students agreed that the course helped them see how events and ideas in the past have shaped today's world.
- Ninety percent of students agreed that the course helped increase their ability to read and understand difficult writings on their own.

The Office of Research would like to thank Professor Helen (Lyn) Ward Page, coordinator of the Great Books program, for her contributions to this month's "In the Abstract." If you would like any additional information about the Great Books program or are interested in designing a Great Books course, please contact Lyn at lpag@oakton.edu or ext. 7669.