

INTERVIEWER: Coming from this background, why did you create the first College Success Course?

JOHN: I created this course because college was a riot. And by that I mean, at my university where I was a young professor, University of South Carolina, we just had a student riot with over 1,000 students participating. The National Guard was called out, they tear gassed the students, the students went and found the President in his building, they set the building on fire. Not a good day for the guy.

And he decided that we needed to restructure our university to make first year students happy campers so that they would not riot in the future. And he put together a think tank, a brain trust, to do that. He invited me to participate in this and ultimately to become the lead designer of a course to teach students how to do college, and to be successful, and literally to love the university. And I would argue that all students can be taught to love being in college and want to get the most out of it.

So the President made me the first faculty director of this course called University 101, and that's how that got started. Now why did I want to do that? I wanted to do that because the President asked me. It's hard to say no to a President. Number two, because I felt our students deserve better. Number three, because I wanted to see more students being successful in college, because it was the only key to advancing opportunity and civil rights in the deep South. It was really for the cause of social justice. I did it because I did not want to have other students have as measurable an experience as I had my first year. I didn't want them to nearly flunk out or flunk out. And I did it because it was fun. And it was really gratifying to see how successful we could make students, and so I made a life of it.

BETSY: My experience was totally different in terms of approaching the first year seminar and learning about the whole first year experience movement, in that I came to the University of South Carolina as a graduate student. I was an older graduate student. But I came from a graduate program, and when I arrived, I was pretty suspicious about all this first year stuff. I thought, nobody ever did this for me. Why are they doing this?

But I was a graduate assistant, they were paying me, and so I got into it. And as I spent longer and longer at the University of South Carolina, I realized the power of these courses, and this whole emphasis on the first year to really not only transform students and transform the faculty who work with students, but transform the whole institution. I found that the University was a

very different place from my prior experiences, and it was because people really cared about new students. They noticed them, they knew who they were, and they were very, very committed to them.

But I certainly didn't start off that way. I thought the whole thing was very strange. So I really empathize with any faculty or staff member who thinks, what is this all about? I know how you feel.

INTERVIEWER: How would have taking a college success course helped you as a student?

JOHN: I think I would have been transformed. I would have been totally different. For one thing, I would have had a caring instructor, which I didn't have. I would have been with other students who were also probably screwing up like me, and I would have known they were, and we could have, not help each other screw up, but we could help profit from each other's mistakes.

I would have been taught the study skills I had to learn on my own. I would have been made to get help. I would've been helped to get involved in many ways on the campus. I would have had a more optimistic beginning. The college would have better understood my needs and responded to those needs. It would have just been totally different. The odds of my becoming successful would've been infinitely greater, just as the odds of the students in any class using this book are infinitely greater than they would be if they weren't here now, taking this seriously.

BETSY: If I had had a first year seminar course when I was a beginning college student, I think it would have helped me feel that I really wasn't alone. When I was in college, I had come from a very small high school where I didn't have the advanced courses that many of my classmates had taken, and I really felt marginal. Some of your students may feel marginal. And I felt that way, and I felt that way, really, almost throughout my first year. And so I think having a better sense of community and knowing that there were other students who had the same experiences that I was having would have made my first year much more powerful than it ended up being.