

Proposal to Change the FYS

April 22, 2007

The First Year Seminar Study Group proposes that the Faculty Forum amend the John Carroll University Core Curriculum in the Liberal Arts (Fall 1996) document to replace the section on the First Year Seminar as follows. The rationale behind the proposal is presented in the full report of the FYS Study Group, which can be found at <http://www.jcu.edu/forum/reports/reports.htm>, along with other supporting materials.

The FYS model proposed here is intended as a pilot project, to be evaluated by the Faculty Council after its second year so that the Faculty may vote on whether to continue the FYS in this format.

If this proposal passes, the Faculty Forum Executive Committee will direct the Faculty Service Committee to solicit nominations and hold elections for the position of Director of the First Year Seminar and for three faculty positions on the FYS Committee. The newly formed FYS Committee will

- Solicit faculty input on ideas for the theme for the 2008 First Year Seminar.
- Issue an informal call for proposals for faculty learning communities for the 2008 First Year Seminar as soon as possible.
- Issue a formal call for proposals for faculty learning communities for the 2008 First Year Seminar early in Fall 2007.

At the request of Faculty Forum Committee on Academic Policies (CAP), the FYS Study Group has made some changes to the proposal to reflect concerns raised by faculty members at open hearings and to clarify the financial costs and administrative support. The changes from the March 14, 2007 version include

- The evaluation of the FYS during Spring 2010 will be conducted by the Faculty Council.
- Each section of FYS will be limited to at most 20 students.
- Each department in the University will commit instructors for at least one and ordinarily two sections of FYS.

At this point, it appears that the JCU administration will support the proposed FYS model by funding load reductions for the FYS Director and coordinators of the learning communities outlined below, and by offering faculty members who teach FYS a choice of a \$1000 stipend per year or a one course load reduction to be used at some point over the three year cycle of the course. We should have confirmation of this funding at the April 25th Forum meeting, perhaps with news of additional support.

An additional change to the proposal is:

The FYS Director will report to the Director of the Core and will not be a member of the University Core Committee. (Hence the revised proposal contains no mention of Appendix A of the Core document.)

Proposed Text of First Year Seminar portion of Core Document
April 19, 2007

Descriptions and Goals: The First Year Seminar offers an interdisciplinary introduction to academic investigation. This seminar focuses upon a common theme and common reading(s) and is taught by faculty from all areas of the University. A graded course characterized by disciplined investigation of topics and consistently rigorous academic standards, the seminar will feature the following:

- An environment that promotes the early development of academic skills in first year students and fosters a serious attitude toward academic activities and responsibilities
- A pedagogy that emphasizes active learning and develops students' skills in critical inquiry and problem solving
- A context that promotes collaboration and integrated learning
- A milieu in which students learn to question and clarify their values
- An emphasis on the development of written and oral skills

Curriculum: Coordination of curriculum and other issues relating to the First Year Seminar will be the responsibility of a First Year Seminar Committee (FYSC) comprised of the Director of the First Year Seminar (elected by the faculty to a three year term), the Director of the Core and three faculty members (elected by the faculty to staggered three year terms). The FYS Director will report regularly to the Director of the Core. The FYSC reports regularly to the University Core Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the budget for the First Year Seminar.

The FYSC will consult with the faculty in order to formulate a broad theme for all the sections of the course. The theme must be centered in the core values of JCU as expressed in the Mission Statement and be sufficiently broad so as to allow exploration from the perspectives of many disciplines from across the university. The FYSC will then announce the theme and send out a call for proposals for learning communities (and "mini-themes") within that theme.

It is expected that each faculty member submitting a proposal will agree to act as coordinator for his/her group, if the proposal is accepted. The FYSC will review the proposals submitted and choose 5 faculty learning communities for the next three years of FYS. The FYSC will then send out a call for faculty to participate in the learning communities and teach the FYS. Each department of the University will commit instructors for at least one and usually two sections of the First Year Seminar. Instructors in the seminars must be full-time faculty. Faculty will apply for acceptance in a particular learning community/mini-theme, specifying a ranked set of three choices. The FYSC and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences will then choose among the applicants to form the learning communities and staff the course, keeping in mind the need for appropriate disciplinary diversity in the composition of the learning communities. When appropriate, this selection process will involve interaction between the faculty member, his/her department and the Directors of the FYS and the Core, along

with the Dean. Once the faculty learning communities are formed, the FYSC will be expanded by adding the coordinator from each learning community, to ensure adequate communication between the groups and the oversight body. In general, the learning communities are expected to continue for all three years of the theme, and the groups may choose to rotate the coordinator position.

The expanded FYSC will choose, with input from all faculty teaching the course, one or more common reading(s) to be used in all sections. Each learning community will be assigned liaisons from Grasselli Library, from the university writing programs and from Student Affairs who will be available to support the faculty group in developing assignments as well as cocurricular activities.

The learning communities will begin to meet in the late Spring and early Fall of year before the FYS cycle is to start, to develop the content, academic requirements and assessment mechanisms for the course, eventually supplying more and more detailed course descriptions to the expanded FYSC. During this development process, the expanded FYSC will ensure that each mini-theme fits the common theme and the FYS course guidelines for student workload, interdisciplinarity and assessment, providing feedback as appropriate. Early in the Fall semester of the year before the FYS cycle commences, all the FYS faculty will meet in a workshop to learn more about the expectations for the course and students and to compare plans. Each learning community will continue to meet regularly in both the Fall and Spring semesters of the academic year immediately prior to the start of the course, with the goal of having each course well-planned by the beginning of the summer. During the course itself, each learning community will continue to meet so that the faculty may exchange ideas (in addition to any activities common those sections). The learning communities will meet at least once early in the semester immediately following the course, to assess what aspects of the class did or did not work well. The learning communities will continue to meet appropriately over the subsequent years of the theme.

Logistics: The First Year Seminar, a three-credit course, will be taken by all first year students during the fall semester. (Although not required for transfer students, they may choose it as an optional elective.) Each FYS section will contain no more than twenty students. When registering for first year courses, incoming students will indicate their choices for learning communities/mini-themes and will be randomly assigned to one of the sections in the appropriate learning community. The seminar will provide an opportunity for diverse learning opportunities, including exchanging professors, combining sections for special events or projects, and inviting guest speakers to address all the sections of a learning community.

Advisement: Teachers of the First Year Seminar may elect to have their advisees selected from the students assigned to their sections.

Evaluation: Every year, the expanded FYSC will work with the University Office of Planning and Assessment to evaluate the FYS. In the Spring of 2010, the Faculty

Council will evaluate the FYS and will present a formal assessment to the Faculty to help inform its decision on whether to continue the FYS in this format.