

Reports on FYS-type courses at other institutions
FYS Study Group, November 16, 2006

The following reports have been submitted by FYS Study Group members in response to the following request:

Every member of the committee is asked to make appropriate web investigations and to contact an appropriate person or persons at the university named to gather information on the FYS-type course taught there.

Suggested questions (so far):

- What is the model for the course? (Common theme and readings? Completely separate seminars with some common goals? Somewhere in between? The more detail here the better.)
- Is the course required of all freshmen? If not, who decides who takes it?
- How is the course staffed?
- How are students assigned to sections/classes?
- What assessment procedures are in place?
- How long has the course been offered in this format?
- How successful is the course in the eyes of the faculty? Students? (Yes, this is a tough question... Do the best you can. Please don't email me 500 pages of questionnaire data.)
- What does your contact person think of our FYS, given a short description? (I think the answer to this question could be very informative. If many institutional representatives reply "I wish we could do that!" that tells us something. If many say "we decided against that model because of, " that tells us something else entirely.)

Here are the reports:

REPORT ON DARTMOUTH FIRST YEAR SEMINARS

The mandatory first year seminars at Dartmouth resemble our "W" courses more than anything else. There are no firm requirements, but the faculty guidelines state that students should write about 6000 words, not all of which need be graded. These are "ordinary" courses for which the student can receive distributional credit, but not major credit. The guidelines for the course also suggest a lot of small group discussion of student writing. The course instructor can request a writing assistant from the writing center.

Dartmouth is on the quarter system, and the faculty load is 4 courses per year. There are 26 courses offered this coming winter quarter. Some examples: A course on Pompei from Art History, Colonial Literature from African American Studies, The Solar System from Earth Science, Dreams, Symbols and Memory from Film Studies, The Cold War from History, The History, Design, and Use of Rockets from Physics, and Theater for Social Change from Theater (I have copies of the course descriptions if anyone is interested). I did notice that an introduction to university life, taught by residence life, has been offered in the past.

Typically, each department is represented each year (Chemistry was the only exception), and the department receives FTE credit. Classes are capped at 16. There is no financial incentive to teach the course, but there are multiple institutional development resources available from the writing center, the center for teaching and learning, and the library. There are also 'brown bag lunches' on a regular basis. And apparently a rich alum donated a lodge in a fantastic setting, and each year a weekend retreat is held to discuss writing instruction. There has not been any trouble staffing the seminars. My contact speculated that a combination of small class size and the ability to teach something different (but still in the general area) made the seminars attractive, but she thought it was the multiple opportunities to mix with faculty outside of their home discipline that was the major drawing card.

I didn't receive much feedback about our model, just some sympathy about getting faculty to feel comfortable outside of their discipline, and getting tenure committees to let junior faculty teach the course.

The Mt. Union College First Year Experience

The Mt. Union College First Year Experience is not an academically based course. It is a transition to college life. So, as it stands, it does not fit the academic model to which we have agreed it is very important to adhere. However, I had a very lengthy conversation with the director of the program, a professor of theater arts, who was very forthcoming. I would like to present a brief summary of the discussion because Mt. Union is planning to move to a more academic model in the next two years.

First, here is a quick overview of their present model. The FYE has two parts: 1) the Liberal Studies Course (LS 100), which has been in place for over 20 years, and 2) a learning community for 112 students, which is in its 2nd year. 1) LS 100 is a 1 credit class that meets twice a week for 10 weeks and whose sole purpose is transition to college life, i.e.: time management, study skills, the Mt. Union community, etc. There are 42 sections (all freshmen take it), course size is 16 students, taught by volunteers (½ faculty, ½ professional staff) who get paid \$1,000 each to teach the course (though it does take some encouragement by the director every year to get enough instructors). There is one common book read over the summer, which is not a scholarly book, and is changed yearly. There is a common syllabus and manual of activities. Students are put "somewhat randomly" into each section, but with an eye towards each group being diverse and gender balanced. The students' instructors become their academic advisors until a major is declared (Yes, even if the instructor is not a faculty member- they all go through some training). The course is assessed annually through an on-line survey and student course specific evaluations. 2) The learning community is composed of students who apply at time of admissions and besides taking the LS 100 course together, live in the same dorm and take their five other freshman classes together: writing, religion, public speaking, group communication, and a wellness course. It has the same benefits of other types of learning communities and students' satisfaction with the learning community is high.

However, in the opinion of the director, new dean, and many LS 100 faculty, a first year course focused on the transition to college life is no longer needed. Students are coming better prepared to college. Students themselves have questioned the value of the course (though at the end of their college experience will say it was helpful). Thus, the College is planning to move to a more academic model in the next two years. The model that is being discussed is the model that has 40 different topics. Faculty will be asked to submit proposals for a FYS course on a topic of interest to them. It will need to meet certain guidelines, such as being discussion based (other guidelines are still being considered). The director wants faculty to have the opportunity to teach topics about which they "are passionate and my have always wanted to teach, but never had an opportunity". It can be disciplined based or not. Incoming freshmen will submit their top 3 choices over the summer, and "hopefully" it will be accommodated. Again, this course is in the discussion and planning phase.

So in conclusion Mt. Union College is also going through a re-thinking of their FY offerings, moving from a non-academic model, which they believe has out served its time, to an academic model with multiple choices. The director believed such a model would be of more interest to the faculty than JCU FYS "common reading" model.

Grinnell First Year Tutorial

At the center of a Grinnell education is intensive mentoring of students by the faculty. This mentoring begins in the First-Year Tutorial, the only required course at Grinnell College. While faculty members from all academic departments teach the tutorial and their topics vary widely, every tutorial emphasizes writing, critical thinking and analysis, oral discussion skills, and information literacy. Each tutor also serves as adviser to this group of students until they declare a major field of study. Thus, students receive guidance from an instructor with personal knowledge of their academic interests, aptitudes, and needs. The tutorial is usually limited to 12 students, making it somewhat smaller than the average class, though similar in intensity to the rest of the curriculum. Grinnell classes generally are small, with an average enrollment of 16 and fewer than 9 percent of classes above 30 students. Many academic programs offer a Mentored Advanced Project (MAP), either as independent study or in the context of a seminar. The MAP, closely guided by a faculty director, gives upper-level students the opportunity to culminate a sequence of academic work by completing a highly advanced project in research or creative arts.

Tutorial

All entering first-year students are required to take the tutorial. Students select a tutorial from the list of those to be offered each year (see Tutorials). The tutorial is graded on an "A" through "F" basis, with no S/D/F option (a designated replacement course for the tutorial also has no S/D/F option).

A student must complete the tutorial with a grade of "C" or higher to meet the tutorial graduation requirement and to be eligible to enroll in a "Plus-2" or independent project (297, 299, 387, 397, 399 and 499). Any student earning a grade of "D" or "F" in the tutorial will be placed on academic probation. A student earning a grade of "D" or "F" in the tutorial will be required to complete an appropriate course determined by the associate dean of the College and the director of academic advising in order to fulfill the tutorial requirement. This course must be completed with a grade of "C" or higher during his or her next semester at Grinnell. After the successful completion of this course and removal from academic probation, the student will be eligible for a "Plus-2" or independent study project. The previous work of transfer students is evaluated for possible exemption from this requirement, third-year transfers are automatically exempted.

In the Grinnell College curriculum, the only requirements for graduation are completion of a First-Year Tutorial, 124 credits, and the academic major. This flexibility places significant responsibility on each student to design a coherent and compelling course of study, in conversation with a faculty adviser. Each student declares an academic major at some point during the first four semesters of enrollment. In consultation with an adviser, the student plans a comprehensive program that can incorporate options such as mentored research, off-campus study, teaching certification, an internship, or an interdisciplinary concentration.

Informal assessment from Grinnell faculty member:

Yes, I do think our Tutorial works ... usually! Each faculty member chooses his/her own topic and that topic is expected to be NOT some a topic that is part of the "regular" curriculum. interdisciplinarity is encouraged, but it's an overused and under-defined word ... if I teach a novel in a "history" class, is that interdisciplinary? My biggest gripe with the tutorial is not the interdisciplinary quality but the fact that Physics professors decide to teach "The Sixties" and have really no idea how to do that. So I think the goal of Tutorial - to teach students how to think rigorously, how to write and speak clearly, and how to do the sort of research and analysis suitable at the collegiate level -- can be compromised when faculty are not teaching materials with which they are familiar or supervising papers/analyses whose pitfalls are new to the professor.

That said, I think we all enjoy Tutorial insofar as we do get to teach a fun/different topic I do a 15-week tutorial in the Pullman Strike of 1894, which allows me to really teach about how to use primary sources. A colleague has done Vietnam thru Film.

The key thing is SKILL development, not content. But I believe we develop students' skills best when we are confident of the content. I'll do one on Watergate in a couple of years and that will use film and popular culture and a novel and a memoir to come at it different ways ... is that interdisciplinary? Hmmm.

Students love tutorial when the professor is good and hate it when they feel they are not in a "good" one with good discussions, direction, and skill development. I'd say it's popular at Grinnell, but some faculty grouse about it.

Yes, there is an assessment, well, a couple of them. There are student evaluations. We do a writing assessment, looking at students' writings in Tutorial and then four years later. Is it enough? Probably not but, as you, assessment is difficult and time-consuming so we do what we can.

Boston College

I contacted Dr. Paula Mathieu, director of the writing program at Boston College. Below, I have responded as best I could to each question. I've also included Paula's comments for each question.

-What is the model for the course? (Common theme and readings? Completely separate seminars with some common goals? Somewhere in between? The more detail here the better.)

Boston College has an office called The Office of First-Year Experience, founded in 1990. The First Year Experience concept at Boston College has dual focus. First, to introduce new students to the resources of the University. Second, to assist in the enculturation process, both academically and socially.

PM: Our FYE is a bit of an eccentric program. As you'll see by the program's website, it contains retreats, orientation, a first-year convocation and advising courses. I've heard good things about the retreats from students, but don't know much about it. The convocation is new, three years old. We've had prominent speakers and it's a nice albeit somewhat hastily organized event.

A major part of Boston College's FYE is what is called the Cornerstone program, a collection of 5 individual courses that are designed as special opportunities for first-year students to enrich their college experience. As far as I can tell, first-year students take 1 of the 5 courses during their first

year at BC. Here are the 5 courses:

- **Courage to Know:** An introduction to college life
- **Cornerstone Advisement Seminar:** a twelve-week, one-credit elective which offers first-year students in the College of Arts and Sciences the opportunity to participate in a small class (limited to 14) providing academic advising in the broadest sense. One credit hour, 12 weeks, pass/fail.
- **Perspectives in Western Culture:** This is a two-semester, twelve-credit course that fulfills all the Core requirements in Philosophy and Theology.
- **First-Year Writing:** a fifteen-student course designed to engage students with writing as a source of learning and a form of communication. Designed as a workshop in which each student develops a portfolio of personal and academic writing, the seminar follows a semester-long process. Students write and rewrite essays continuously, discuss their works-in-progress in class, and receive feedback during individual and small group conferences with the instructor.
- **Freshman Topic Seminar:** the newest component of the Cornerstone program. the Freshman Topic Seminars focus discussions on a particular topic of research and intellectual interest to the academic advisor who teaches the seminar. The courses are one credit, pass/fail and last 12 weeks (ending before Thanksgiving).
Some sample topics: The Politics of Evil; America's War in Vietnam; War in the Western World; Discussing Politics; Life Sciences in the 21st century; Odysseus/Ulysses in Time and Space; Exploring Financial Markets Through the Pages of the *Wall Street Journal*;

-Is the course required of all freshmen? If not, who decides who takes it?

As far as I can tell, first-year students have the option of taking one of four Cornerstone courses, and that the fifth course, the Freshman Topic Seminar, is a requirement of all first-year and transfer students. Under BC's Core, students are required to taking 1 course in Writing, which the First-Year Writing course can fulfill.

PM: All the courses are different. First-Year Writing is not really a Cornerstone course, but the website lists it as such. All students who don't get a 4 or 5 on the AP writing exam must take first-year writing (see FWS website for full description) Perspectives is one way first-year students can fulfill the core theology/philosophy requirement, but isn't required. Courage to Know, Cornerstone Advisement Seminar and Freshman Topics Seminar are entirely optional.

-How is the course staffed?

PM: Cornerstone Advisement Seminar is a one-credit, pass/fail course, dependent on attendance and participation, taught by interested faculty in A&S. FWS is a semester-long core course taught by full-time faculty, grad students, and adjuncts. see our program website at www.bc.edu/fws. Perspectives fulfills 12 credits and is a year long course.

-How are students assigned to sections/classes?

Students are placed in the section that is taught by their academic advisor.

-What assessment procedures are in place?

Paula had no information about assessment.

-How long has the course been offered in this format?

The Office of FYE has been in existence since 1990. The Freshman Topics Seminar is the newest component of the Cornerstone program and has been around for only a few years.

- How successful is the course among faculty, students?

Paula told me that “It’s pretty disconnected with little coordination among the parts. The convocation is a great idea but rather hastily organized. I teach a Cornerstone Advisement seminar, which I enjoy, but only a small number of students take it. FWS is a big program that works well, but as all writing programs, we don’t get the funding or salary support to compensate faculty adequately. Perspectives is a year-long rather rigorous course in philosophy and theology that students seem to love or hate, but what little I know about that course comes mainly from students.”

**Lewis and Clark State College
Exploration & Discovery
Their FYS**

Structure:

This is a two course 4-credit per course FYS in a normal 16 hour load semester based course system).

1. Model:

Fall-term. They have an academic model, and there are no student service components. This past fall they are having eight common readings from Plato, Sophocles, the Iliad, and from a three page Galileo letter to Frankenstein. The eight components are taught in the order and form decided by the instructor. There is a required 20 page written component with four to five papers and a non-common mid-term and final exam required in all sections. They meet at a common time to enable speakers or full group meetings. The objective is an interdisciplinary experience

Spring-term. Varied and separate seminars are offered often times expanding on one or more of the Fall-term readings. There is a required 20 page written component covered by two papers and a research project. The research project is required to start early in the term and be continued and expanded over the term. A ten minute presentation is required on the research project near the end of the term. For information on the seminars go to: <http://www.lclark.edu/~explore/> To see the range and diversity of these Spring term offerings go to: <http://www.lclark.edu/~explore/spring07regform.htm>

2. The two-course sequence is required of all freshman.
3. Staffing is about 60-percent assistant through full professors with the remainder visiting professors, adjuncts and lecturers. They abandoned as unusable their prior requirement of tenured faculty staffing due primarily to department needs and much less due to sufficient interest by faculty. I failed to ask, but I suspect that it was considered as part of the regular load at four credits or as a reasonably compensated overload. I can confirm this if the committee wishes.
4. Students are provided information about the sections and they submit their four preferences, where they are place in one of their desired sections if section sizes are not oversubscribed. My contact’s impression was that the students liked

having the ability to indicate their preferences rather than be randomly or otherwise assigned to a section. Counseling was also available for students that were uncertain of how to choose outside of their area of primary interest. Gender balancing across the sections was also sought. The student preference lists were also used for assignment to the Spring-term seminars.

5. Did you want student or program assessment? Student assessment is through the assignments listed above and classroom participation. There is a five member elected faculty steering committee over the seminars that evaluates draft syllabi prior to the course offering. It sounded similar to UCC's evaluation for division or letter designations. I did not obtain other program assessment information; although I am certain my contact would gladly provide information on this if asked.
6. One year.
7. The contact's impression is that the faculty is very satisfied so far with the new program, although with only one-year of experience more time is likely needed before an adequate assessment can be performed.
8. Our program structure seems to be more like their prior seminar approach that they believed was flawed and needed to be changed. From talking with her the following changes improved their model and if adopted by us in a similar form may enhance our current model:
 - a. The change away from full staffing by regular tenure track faculty,
 - b. Careful oversight in advance of the course through the syllabus review and provision of recommendations for changes where weaknesses were found by the steering committee,
 - c. The common requirements of 20 pages of writing assignments with a similar structure, like four to five papers, a required mid-term exam and final,
 - d. And student involvement in the section selections.

My impression is that the set of above adjustments with the addition of an oversight or an assessment committee's post course assessment would remove many of the impediments currently causing our large variation in the quality of our offerings. In retrospect, a question that we all should have also asked was on how the FYS instructors are compensated, especially the tenure track faculty. I very much doubt that the compensation was as limited as currently found on our campus.

Freshman Seminars Program: UNC-Greensboro

This program has existed for 18 years, with some annual "tweaking" but mostly in the same format.

Course Model

Each seminar is unique (no common readings), designed by the instructor, and largely disciplinary in nature; they are designated by such categories as Reasoning and Discourse; Literature;

Fine Arts; Philosophical, Religious, and Ethical Principles; Historical Perspectives; Social and Behavioral Studies; Natural Sciences; and Mathematics. Each department is strongly encouraged (but not forced) to offer seminars—the departments and the faculty teaching the courses are self-selected. Generally about 20 seminars are offered each semester (fall and spring); usually more offerings come from the humanities (especially English) than the sciences.

Three main goals govern the course: 1) to foster enthusiasm for intellectual inquiry; 2) to begin the process of developing the academic habits of mind students need in order to engage in such inquiry; and 3) to introduce students to some of the areas of academic life in which that inquiry takes place.

The course helps students fulfill their core requirements (general ed.)—for example, a seminar on literature will fulfill a university literature requirement.

Some recent course titles:

- “Strange Music, Hidden Americas: Visions of America in Popular Music”
- “Multicultural Perspectives on Contemporary Postmodern Writers”
- “Race, Gender and Social Equality”
- “Science in the Media”
- “Introduction to Mathematical Modeling”

Required of all freshman?

No. About 50% of freshmen take it (either fall or spring: they can take up to two courses during their freshman year). I was told classes fill quickly, however. The advantage for students is that classes are limited to 22 students and provide more opportunity for individual attention from professors (most freshman classes are large lectures). Even though they are discipline based, students don’t necessarily sign up for the field in which they expect to major. Advisors recommend that students take a seminar in what they believe to be their weakest field so that they can get more individual assistance.

Staffing

Full-time faculty teach the course; only those who want to teach it do, though they may be strongly encouraged by their department chairs. From the looks of the course offerings, some of the same faculty members teach the course year to year.

How are students assigned?

Students chose whether or not to take the course—it is not required, but strongly recommended by the advising staff. They have the choice of all classes; that is, they are not restricted by discipline. Because classes fill quickly, all may not get their first choice. They register for freshman seminars during their regular scheduling.

Assessment procedures

Both students and faculty assess courses in surveys (online for students; online and paper for faculty). I was told that these evaluations are examined often and small changes may therefore be made to the program (and program offerings) from year to year.

Success of course?

An unqualified “yes” to this question. The reason given is that for students, the course is perceived to offer an effective way to acclimate to college life; for teachers, it offers the chance to teach a class they want to teach (they have control over design, though they must meet general criteria for the seminars).

Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship (SAGES) at CWRU

These notes are from a phone interview with SAGES Director, Peter Whiting, and materials found on the SAGES web site.

Case's SAGES program includes a sequence of seminars beginning in the first semester of freshman year with "First Seminar." It concludes with a capstone project in senior year. Participation in SAGES is required of all Case students. The program began as a pilot in Fall, 2002, involving 15% to 20% of the incoming students. In Fall, 2005 it became a program common to the entire incoming class.

The students are involved in four seminars that move from general to ever more specific themes. A majority of students take First Seminar in its "common track" theme of The Life of the Mind. First Seminar is also offered on one of three broad "thematic domains." These are Thinking about the Symbolic World, Thinking about the Natural/Technical World, and Thinking about the Social World. By the end of sophomore year, students need to have followed up on First Seminar with two "University Seminars," which examine in detail a topic coming under one of the thematic domains, such as Laughter or Learning to See: Architecture. Junior year provides a discipline-related seminar, usually in the student's major. The capstone can take the form of a group or individual research project. SAGES offers around 200 seminars per year.

Freshmen are assigned to sections on a first come first serve. However, there is an attempt to have the student make-up of each section reflect the variety of students and interests found in the student body. In its pilot phase, First Seminar relied on a number of common readings (2 common, 1 teacher-selected). Now seminar leaders have complete latitude in selecting books for their sections. The closest thing to a common reading is that seminar instructors might discuss the book selected by the orientation program for student summer reading.

Students spend three hours in seminar per week, with a fourth "activities hour" exploring the cultural/scientific institutions in University Circle.

First Seminar is staffed by the faculty of all Case schools that offer undergraduate degrees. Because each school needs to meet certain expectations based on the size of their programs, seminar leaders are volunteered or sometimes conscripted by a department chair. While not everyone is happy about teaching First Seminar, the general consensus among teachers is that they are offering something the students need. At first the students might not see it in this way, but an advantage of offering seminars in sequence seems to be that the students eventually do "get it."

Training to teach First Seminar sounds minimal. Seminar leaders are assumed to have the necessary background to handle developmental issues, either personally or by referral, through their training received as advisors. Seminar leaders serve as the first-year advisor for the students in their sections.

Although a separate composition course is required of some students, First Seminar serves as the primary introduction to college-level writing for most students. Writing instruction for freshmen seminars is "co-instructed" by graduate students and university writing fellows. Voluntary workshops for seminar leaders cover topics such as modes of writing and grading writing. I did not ask how this is going.

Attention is given to the library's role in helping students "to discover" various perspectives in order to write stronger papers.

Evaluation of SAGES sounds rigorous. The standard teaching evaluation form required in all Case courses is used for the seminars. A general SAGES evaluation and the National Student Engagement survey are also used. On a whole, seminar teaching evaluations come out stronger on the average than the evaluations for Case's traditional course offerings.

Information about the First Year Program at Denison University

The First-Year Program coordinates academic and co-curricular programs and services for first-year students, including First-Year Seminar courses, academic advising, academic and adjustment counseling, and the summer orientation programs, among others. The office maintains a close and collaborative relationship with the [Academic Support & Enrichment Center](#) and faculty advisors of first-year students. During the year the Dean of First-Year Students is available to meet with students on a wide range of issues, including academic performance, housing issues, personal adjustment problems, and other matters of concern.

First-Year Seminars

First-year seminars introduce entering students to the rigors and rewards of college courses in the liberal arts. Limited to a maximum of eighteen students, each seminar offers students the opportunity to explore a particular issue, interest or problem in depth and to develop or refine critical academic skills and the habits of mind necessary for success in college. These smaller classes allow for substantial dialogue between teacher and students, student-to-student interaction, and experimentation with teaching/learning methods.

The First-Year Program is designed to achieve a number of goals:

providing courses exclusively for first-year students in an environment that encourages active participation in the learning process; enhancing student writing skills by making writing a significant element in every seminar; strengthening abilities of students to read and think critically, to express themselves cogently, and to use library resources effectively; generating intellectual excitement through sustained engagement with a chosen topic.

Each student is required to take two seminars during the first year. These courses can be taken in any order or simultaneously. One must be **First-Year Seminar 101** which has the teaching of writing as its primary focus. While faculty organize these courses around particular themes, they require numerous writing assignments and revisions along with instruction in the process of writing. The second requirement is met by **First-Year Seminar 102**, one of the topical seminars in which frequent writing assignments are evaluated for style as well as content. Most of the FYS 102 seminars fulfill a General

Education requirement.

First-Year Seminar 101-WORDS AND IDEAS. Each seminar addresses an engaging subject and has, as a primary goal, developing the reading and writing abilities of entering students. Attention is given to the coherent process of careful reading, critical reasoning, and effective writing. FYS 101 fulfills the writing requirement. Some recent FYS 101 seminars have had the following topical emphases: *Defining the World, Defining Ourselves; Popular Words and Cultural Ideas; Education in the Community: Theory and Practice; Reading Popular Culture; Classic Women Authors.* **4 credits.**

First-Year Seminar 102. Topical seminars offered on a variety of subjects by faculty from all divisions of the college. Examples of recent seminars are: *Faith in a Secular Age; Moral Quandaries at the Beginning of Life; Different Voices: Outsiders in Pre-Industrial Europe; Moons, Madness, and Methodology; The Sociocultural Study of Popular Music, Second-hand Lives: Images and Realities of Poverty and Hunger in American Life; The Slavery Controversy in America, 1830-1860; Borders of the Human: Animals, Technology, and other Incursions; South Africa: the Long Walk to Freedom; Aesthetic Inquiry and Imagination: Performance and Theories of the Beautiful.* **4 credits.**

Source: [Student Handbook](#), 1997

Duke University
"First-Year Seminar Program"

Model

Separate seminars, with minimal common goals. The following is a statement of purpose for the seminars: "Designed to engage first-year students in a small-group learning experience that will serve to integrate them into the academic life of this institution. . . . seminars enable new students to work closely with a distinguished member of the Duke faculty and a small group of their classmates to explore a special topic of interest."

Examples: Afro-Atlantic Religions; Lemur Behavior and Ecology; Fullness of Being; Inside CSI: Chemistry and Forensics; The Social Psychology of Music; Google: The Science Within and Its Impact on Society; Water and

Conflict; The autobiography of Childhood; Film and Visual Culture; and Comparative Study of Disasters

Required

Seminars are required of all first-year students

Staffing

Courses are staffed by faculty

Selection

Students select from a variety of options

Assessment**

Length of offering

Courses change each semester. Faculty must petition to dean and committee for acceptance of course in seminar program.

Successful?**

FYS Comments**

**Contact person at Duke has yet to respond to my request for information.

Freshman Seminar at Dickinson

I spoke with Lee Ann Kunkel, Assistant, on November 10, and Dr. Joyce Bylander, Vice Provost for Campus and Academic Life, on November 15.

Dickinson is an almost 100% residential institution of 2300 students.

Dickinson offers about 40 seminars on topics of the faculty's choice in the fall semester and one in the spring semester. All freshmen in college for the first time are required to take a seminar. If a student flunks the seminar, they do not have to retake it!

The Freshmen Seminar is the first course in their Writing Across the Curriculum program. They continue with several writing intensive courses and then a Senior Capstone, given through the departments. Some Senior Capstones are one semester; some, two. Senior Capstones are on a specific topic. The students write a research paper (or maybe do a research project). Not all departments have Senior Capstones; in the future, departments may be required to have a Senior Capstone. The seminars take the place of freshmen composition. Normal course load for undergraduates is four courses; five courses are allowed by petition.

At about this time every year, Dr. Bylander sends out a call for seminar proposals to department chairs. There are common guidelines for writing and research. Faculty choose the topics. For next year, only, they are encouraging proposals that go along with the UN millennium goals. This is part of the AACU shared futures project. Relating one's proposal to the UN goals is not required, however.

Each department has to contribute one seminar for each four faculty. If the department has only three faculty, they are expected to contribute one seminar. Departments ordinarily figure out who will do the seminar when, several years in advance. First year faculty are not allowed to do a seminar. If a person comes up for tenure without having done a seminar, it is a problem. Participation is taken into consideration on all annual reviews for both tenured and non-tenured faculty. They do not like to use adjuncts as seminar faculty, because seminar faculty also serve as the students' advisor, until the student declares a major.

Incoming freshmen are sent a list of the topics, the time each seminar meets, and the name of the faculty member. They fill in an online form, indicating six non-ranked choices. Students also indicate if they would like to live in a learning community. The computer then assigns the sections. The learning communities are two or three seminar sections on related topics; the students live together in the dorm. Each section has 14 or 15 students. The number had crept up to 17 and faculty complained. There are no other learning communities for freshmen.

The purpose of the seminar is to introduce students to learning at the college level. The five major concepts are honesty, academic integrity, research, critical thinking, and writing.

They do yearly survey assessments and they have done faculty focus groups the last two years. Each seminar is assessed every year. There is a special assessment for the learning communities. They are assessing the research, writing, and information literacy skills components for their Middle States visit.

They have spring and summer workshops in which ways to carry out the goals are suggested. Each section has a librarian. Information literacy is carried out in one of three ways: embedded librarian who attends all class sessions; the student do a consultation with a librarian; or they have a one shot library instruction session.

I asked her what she considered to be the relative merits of a common theme, like ours, versus many topics. She said they want to create opportunities for students to talk across disciplines. Having a common theme is one way to do that. They are attempting to create a common experience through their learning communities.

Faculty, for the most part, are committed, and they feel the seminars are important. Some merely tolerate doing a seminar, and a few really dislike it.

The seminars started in 1981. The goals were redone three years ago.

College of Wooster FYS

The model for the course is independent seminars, designed by individual faculty, who also serve as the academic advisor of the students for the semester. All students take it their first semester, and are assigned a section based on their expressed preferences. Most are taught by full-time faculty, but 3 of the 35 sections are taught by "FYS staff." The seminars are described as writing-intensive, limited to 15 students, and exclusively academic in purpose: each is designed to "designed to strengthen the intellectual skills essential for liberal learning and for success in the College's academic program." Specific learning goals encompass enhancing skills in reading, understanding and using evidence, understanding perspectives of others, formulating questions, synthesis, forming arguments, and writing. The FYS at Wooster has been formulated this way since the early '90s.

Interdisciplinarity does not seem to be a goal--at least half of the offerings could be offered within a department. There is no common theme, and there seems to be a recognition that this is a shortcoming, as incoming freshmen are required to read a book in common (Reading Lolita in Tehran this year) and discuss it in orientation, but it is not connected to the individual seminars. There is also a newly designed First

Year Living Learning Program which links students in four of the FYS classes together in a common living situation. The four sections are quite different in curriculum, however.

Faculty are drawn predominately from the Humanities and Social Sciences; from English, Modern Languages, and History each have 3, Art, Communications & Theatre, Political Science, and Psychology each have 2. Only one represents a business discipline (Economics) and the natural sciences and math have a total of 5 faculty in the program.

It should be noted that Wooster is quite a different institution than JCU--not only that it is a liberal arts college, but that its chief distinguishing characteristic is that every student must complete an independent project for graduation. Thus, the very specific nature of their FYS classes may be well suited to their particular mission and identity.

Report on FYS program at St. Lawrence University

St. Lawrence has a two semester First Year Program. The fall semester involves a four credit hour course team-taught by two faculty from different disciplines, usually enrolling 30-35 students. First year students state their preferences for which of the 19 different courses they prefer (listing top four choices) and are then assigned to one of 19 residential colleges. All students in a particular residential college take the same course and are advised by the faculty teaching that FYP section. Here is a list of the required common elements of the fall semester FYP courses:

First Year Program Statement of Course Commonality

Students in all FYP courses:

- a) are given diverse and repeated opportunities to write and speak, including the opportunity to write and speak in response to readings, discussions, lectures, films, etc. These responses may occur in class or out, and they may take many forms: freewriting, open or directed journals, graded or ungraded exploratory essays, essay exams, small group discussion, impromptu discussion, oral exams
- b) are required to engage in at least three formal, graded writing projects. A "project" requires that students develop a piece of writing over time on the basis of appropriate feedback at a number of stages in the process
- c) are required to engage in at least two oral communication projects, one of which undergoes a process of revision. A "project" requires that students develop a speech over time on the basis of appropriate feedback at a number of stages in the process. At least one speech must be extemporaneous, by which we mean that students should deliver a prepared speech from an outline or minimal notes
- d) are required to conduct library research and use the sources as an integral part of at least one written and/or oral project
- e) are instructed in and held responsible for the ethical use of sources
- f) are required to keep all of their written work in a course portfolio, to reflect in writing upon their work, and to submit the completed portfolio to their faculty for review

In the spring semester, students sign up for one of 38 First Year Seminar courses, taught by individual faculty from across the university. These courses are not residentially based, have small enrollments (16 or so students) and may or may not be

multidisciplinary in nature. Many appear to be courses that could be offered within a single department. Here's a list of the goals for these FYS courses:

The FYS strives to continue the communication skills, critical thinking, ethical reflection, and liberal learning goals of the FYP, but with a specific focus on critical inquiry and research. Each of you will engage in a research project of significant depth over the course of the semester. Our learning goals for that research project include that you:

- Be introduced to ways of conducting productive and imaginative inquiry and research in order to become a part of the various conversations surrounding issues.
- Learn to differentiate among the various ways that information is produced and presented, between popular and scholarly journals and books, between mainstream and alternative publications, between primary and secondary sources.
- Learn how to evaluate and synthesize information, whether gathered from traditional sources, such as books and journals, or from websites or electronic media.
- Begin to develop the skills of critical analysis in the interpretation and use of information gathered from any source.
- Be introduced to the ethical obligations that scholars have to both responsibly represent their sources and inform their readers of the sources of their information, as well as learning, and being held responsible for the proper use of, the conventions of scholarly citation and attribution.
- Present the results of your research through writing, speaking, visual elements, or other multimedia forms in such a way that you demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively using the rhetorical conventions of the chosen form.

Perhaps the most interesting point about the St. Lawrence FYP/FYS program is that they began (in 1988) with a common reading model, changing about 4 years later to their current model. The associate dean in charge of the program, Steve Horwitz, reports that one of the main motivations for the switch was resistance on the part of many faculty to teaching outside their area of expertise. (The 1992 NY Times article on the St. Lawrence FYP reported that a biologist offered a proposal to abolish the FYP, which was defeated 60-40%.) Changing to the current model, according to Horwitz, greatly diminished such faculty discontent, but the FYP and the faculty lost something in the process. The FYP is still the centerpiece of their core, although the character has changed somewhat.

(Horwitz wishes us luck in attempting to come to some sort of consensus with a committee of 20 faculty!)