

**First Year Seminar Faculty Survey  
Fall Semester 2002**

**1. What did you find most beneficial about the FYS?**

- **The writing part**
- **Working with the freshman students and working with our fine faculty**
- **The students were wonderful – bright, energetic, responsive**
- **Class discussions and the FYS Anthology**
- **Interacting with students in a discussion based format**
- **Having the opportunity to introduce students to college level work in a rigorous interdisciplinary course. Sharing both pedagogy and philosophy with faculty colleagues.**
- **The opportunity to interact with first semester freshman**
- **Books, speakers**
- **Outside speakers were generally quite good, especially Phil Gourevitch. In class, I came to know students better than most students because of the regular discussions in class.**
- **The course was at a high intellectual level for a freshman course. Also it included significant topics and issues.**
- **The opportunity to teach outside of my discipline**
  - **Work closely with first year students**
  - **Discuss pedagogy**
- **If I had to find something beneficial about it would be interacting with the students.**
- **I was gifted with a wonderful group of students. They were very active in class, willing to express their ideas on the topics at hand. They had good insights and ideas, and were very willing to engage in aggressive, but polite sharing of ideas and viewpoints.**
- **Nice group of students.**

**2. What did you find least beneficial?**

- **Too many readings in the Anthology. It is enormously time consuming to teach these well; the alternative leaves students and faculty feeling abused by the system.**
- **Too much reading**
- **Those potluck dinners – take up too much time. We should just have meetings and go home. No one socializes anyhow.**
- **The books are too long and go into needless detail on irrelevant matters. Pick shorter books that are more oriented to college freshman. And don't insist that faculty cover so many**

pages; this defeats the purposes of the seminar (Of course, most of us ignore such unreasonable demands).

- The Spring Workshop
- The amount of reading material doesn't leave a lot of room to really discuss it and properly tie it to speakers and movies and the like.
- Colleagues who resisted what we were doing. Colleagues who were very little involved in the planning phase – contributing almost nothing – but complaining about the topic, book selection, etc.
- The overkill in the workshops
- Films, some Anthology readings, the last two Blues in Schools (although they were a very pleasant change of pace)
- First book Galileo's Daughter was difficult to teach. Students had a very difficult time with this book.
  - Students tend not to read the books; a few do and many do not.
  - Getting discussion going is like “pulling teeth.”
- The course was too broad. It was difficult relating the three topics.
- Too many activities to take advantage of.
- This was truly the semester from Hell for me. I was not able to read even one journal article in my field, let alone a book, due to all the time demanded by this course. My research for the semester was a great big ZERO. I got nothing read not (sic) written. I love to read and write. This was probably the most frustrating semester I have spent at John Carroll.
- Students did not read the assigned material in a serious, critical manner. I believe they put the FYS reading material at the end of their lists. They came to class, they went to the speaker presentations, they were active in class, but the reading material was not an important part of their agenda. Given that the reading only apply for two years, students view it as relatively unimportant.
- Extraordinary demands on my time; demands that are not justified by what we are trying to do.

### 3. To what extent did FYS attain its goals?

- (Critical reading, writing, listening, spoken and active discussion) If 100% is ideal I would say about 60-70%.
- I feel they accomplished everything above.
- My section did pretty well.
- Successful in all the above.

- I can only speak for my section, but I feel I met these over all goals of the course quite well. Expressed as a percentage I'd say I was about 70% toward meeting the goals.
- In my section, quite well judging from both my own estimation and the students evaluation on our history department form.
- Reasonably well, it creates plenty of opportunities through speakers, etc. to augment campus life.
- Very well, probably as well as any course of this type could!
- Critical writing was somewhat achieved through papers and feedback. Discussion was poor to fair.
- I would rate the course as good-to-excellent in attaining most of the goals.
- In my section, I believe we met the goals to some degree. We had a blend of activities designed to meet these goals. Overall, I think the seminar was structured to meet these goals.
- Perhaps just a small (very small) step forward. At the end of the semester they wrote somewhat better than they did at the beginning. Their critical still left much to be desired. A fundamental problem is that they have been entertained for four years in high school. They expect to be entertained when they come to college. They are not appreciative of the rude confrontation with reality. They think that stating facts is what passes for an explanation or reason. For them an argument is constructed by stating facts. It is very hard to disabuse them of this looney idea.
- It did foster critical thinking, and spoken and active discussion. To some extent, it also fostered making connections between academic disciplines, and augmenting the intellectual life of the campus. Nevertheless, because the students did not really take the reading material all that seriously, it certainly did NOT foster critical reading. Also, I was disappointed with student papers and critical writing. I found the papers to be generally superficial and poorly researched.
- Writing turned to be less of a problem than I expected. Many students actively participated in discussions early on. Near the end of the semester, fewer participated.

#### 4. Did you encounter any difficulties in teaching the FYS?

- The particular problem I found with this topic is its tendency to "preachiness". After a certain amount of that kind of material, the students just turn off. This carried into the additional lectures. Some students <learned?> to detect an anti-US bias in them and didn't get out of them what I hoped.
- About halfway through the semester most students were almost on line. The differences in background were substantial in the beginning.
- Too many readings for students to do – overwhelmed them
- It's very complicated to teach and demands lots of preparation. It would be better to simplify the FYS structure.

- **Could not put together a field trip.**
- **Not really. But I would like to see a little less reading material so that I could focus more on discussing some of all those great issues.**
- **No. A minor problem was the immaturity of a couple of the students, but we managed to deal with it.**
- **No.**
- **No.**
- **Yes, coordinating speakers and films with readings. Leading discussion. I usually do well with this, but not in this class. Maybe quizzes preceding discussion are necessary.**
- **As I stated in number 2, the course was too broad. It was difficult trying to bring these three huge topics together.**
- **not really**
- **No difficulties. Frustration, but no difficulty.**
- **Students did not take the assigned readings all that seriously. To the extent that they read the material, and I have reservations about this extent. They read to get the general idea, but they did not read critically. Also, the readings were a real burden for me. They took an enormous amount of my time. Also, I found the anthology readings largely unrelated, splintered, and poorly fitted to the themes of the course.**
- **Not really. Most students attended all classes - I was surprised.**

**5. Did teaching FYS affect your teaching in other courses and in general**

- **You became more aware of the contexts.**
- **A little.**
- **Yes, it has helped with discussion in some courses.**
- **Yes. I have incorporated more discussion into my courses than before I started to teach FYS.**
- **I think it improved it (?) to know the students – the kind of students – we are bringing in on first year students.**
- **I am always looking for more effective approaches.**
- **Yes, I found myself taking more time to discuss issues in other classes but covered less material.**
- **No**

- It did not affect the way I approached other courses. However, I did have less time available to prepare for my other classes because of the large amount of work I put into developing the FYS course.
- Not much
- Damn right it did! Since I taught FYS it meant that I had three course preparations. From past experience I know full well that I can adequately prepare two courses. I cannot do a satisfactory preparation with three courses. This is why the semester was so frustrating! How would you like to walk into a classroom two to three times a week knowing that you were shortchanging the students? It was so depressing, but there was nothing I could do about it.
  - I truly hated teaching this course. But, and if this is paradoxical then so be it, the course is necessary. If they are expecting entertainment and think that giving facts is reasoning then they need this course.
- To a certain extent I was able to empathize more with my first year students in the major courses I taught.
- Negative – took too much time and effort.
  - Positive- I may end up incorporating some issues such as code of ethics in physics and engineering and pseudoscience vs. science issues <?> major courses.

#### 6. Suggestions for improving the FYS?

- less reading material, either drop a book or select thinner books.
  - The students found Galileo's work and struggle by far more interesting than the relationship of father and son. Also, the time of Galileo, pestilence, living conditions, the control of the church were of more interest.
- Less readings
- Simplify the readings and orient more to the needs of the beginning freshman.
- Make the Spring Workshop more relevant to the teaching issues of FYS. i.e. less 'content' from 'experts' in specific news who give us a whole lot more stuff to read when we (and the students) already have plenty of readings to do. Ideas on class discussion, writing assignments, field trips, web material, class experiments/demonstrations.
- Less required reading
- Somehow to get more faculty involvement in the early stages. Of course, all are very busy.
- Don't insist that all Anthology articles be covered. Revise readings to accompany Gourevitch.
- Drop Galileo's Daughter and many of the essays. I and some of my FYS colleagues felt that the essays were beyond the reach of most freshmen. Replace G's Daughter with another book.

- For FYS in the future - Focus on one topic. Do not try to relate three broad topics.
  - For this FYS – provide more attention to other human rights violations besides Rwanda. Samantha Power, for example, could have discussed Bosnia.
- Cut down the anthology, too much to cover.
- The *Reader* is a disaster. The points made in the student’s letter to the *Carroll News* were well taken. *The Reader* is biased and loaded with political correctness. For example the Zack and Diamond articles are one-sided. I suggest material from the *New York Times* on December 24 on “The Palette of Humankind” as well as the earlier article on the study behind this. It seems that there is something to the concept of race, but what is it? I have absolutely no idea at all how the Deitcher article is related to anything germane to the course.
  - The contribution of various departments to faculty of the FYS is quite uneven. Some departments contribute far more people (either in raw numbers or a percentage of the department) than others. This leads to a feeling of exploitation on the part of those of us who are teaching FYS. Very few faculty want to teach this course so it seems only fair that it be apportioned equally across departments.
  - There are too many extra-curricular events- movies, lectures, etc. It would be possible to never have a single class meeting but to substitute an event in place of a class. Lest you think I exaggerate, there was more than one faculty person who met only 50% of the classes. This is a real abuse.
- Pick readings and topics having a substantial shelf life. 10 years or even more. For example, an analysis of Western European, Islamic, East Asian concepts of social justice, democracy, appeal to me as lasting questions where students would find permanent value.

7. Would you be willing to teach the FYS again?

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|-------|-------|
| • Yes | • Yes |
| • Yes | • Yes |
| • Yes | • Yes |
| • Yes | • Yes |
| • Yes | • Yes |
- Maybe, depends on topic
  - Let’s put it this way. I will take my turn and teach the course again when everyone else in my department has taken their two year hitch teaching FYS. Only then will I do so and that only out of a sense of fairness that each of us has to take their turn doing something that very few of us want to do.
  - After second round, probably not.
  - I am scheduled to teach FYS in Fall 2003, I am not enthusiastic about this but intend to do a good job. It really has little to do with willingness.

**8. Other comments.**

- **I chose two different movies**
  - to see someone change from a killing machine to a responsible adult I chose soldier
  - to see how civilized people can be stripped of their civilization and become savages I chose Lord of the Flies
  - Most of the students liked the selections and wrote good papers about: individual-knowledge-responsibility.
  
- **Excellent job organizing.**
  
- **My section enjoyed the 'Blues in the School' presentation very much. They did not get so much out of listening to the required (and some of the optional) outside speakers.**
  - FYS has been accused of having a 'political slant' that reflects the ideologies of some faculty, and does not present (in the required readings) a balance of news. This criticism is something that needs to be taken seriously and discussed candidly.
  
- **Thanks for all the hard work you and the committees have put in to make this work out.**
  
- **Overall a very positive experience. The speakers were very impressive and useful to the course objectives. Books were good choices. Everything was well organized. Students were motivated and interested. The coordinators and all the committees did an excellent job!**
  
- **I believe the FYS is a good idea, but the theme is ambiguous and the readings in general are not the best.**
  
- **I enjoyed the relationship with the students**
  - Most of the speakers were excellent.
  
- **I meant what I said in stating that the course is necessary even though I hate it. I guess it is a necessary evil. Also: my students told me that there is a great deal of disparity between the amount of work (reading and writing) required in the different sections. They felt this was an injustice. I agreed with them.**
  
- **Many of my students found FYS a good opportunity to engage in B.S., little more. They would be better served if the readings were more permanent and their instructors better versed in the material at hand.**
  - Lastly, I found slogging through their papers a very difficult chore. English is not my field, and these students made English grammar mistakes, punctuation mistakes, and logic mistakes all over the place. I am not well qualified to correct such mistakes. It is an inefficient, wasteful use of my time. This is what EN111-112 instructors should be doing, and I resent doing their job for them.
  
- **My major complaint is that we are doing something with relatively little benefit at a major cost. I felt that I had to spend an inordinate amount of time preparing for every meeting. I don't think that the outcome justified this amount of effort. It also means that I had a <?> time to devote to the major courses and my research.**