

# First-Year Seminar Proposal

**Motion:** To require all incoming first time in college (FTIC) students to enroll in a First Year Seminar (FYS) during their first or second semester at WSU starting AY 2021-22, with the course to count toward a general education requirement in the arts, humanities, social sciences or natural sciences (as determined by the general education committee).

**Rationale:** FYS courses are designed to help new students make a successful transition to campus, both academically and personally. The courses aim to foster a sense of belonging, and promote engagement in the curricular and co-curricular life of the university. They provide a required common experience that engages students in meaningful relationships with their peers, faculty, and the campus community. Seminars of this type are meant to engage students in intellectual discourse in small classes taught by faculty, who have a deep subject matter knowledge and a passion for a topic. The pilot has yielded some successes: Fall to Fall persistence rates for students in the 2016 FYS cohort were 5% higher than non-FYS students, and were 7% higher in comparison from their 2nd to 3rd year at the university. (See Appendix for full documentation.)

The opportunity to pilot the FYS courses for three years has resulted in some proposed revisions to the original proposal, suggested by the instructors who have led this effort. These revisions include: a sharper focus on the overarching goals, more clearly articulated learning outcomes, as well as a revised syllabus that clarifies the required content/structure and the optional parameters to help faculty effectively design their courses. It should be noted, however, that some “pilot fatigue” is setting in. A number of faculty have expressed interest, but until the university makes a commitment to FYS, they do not want to work on developing new courses. A survey of faculty conducted in October 2015 indicated that 61% of faculty would be willing to teach a FYS course (134 of 217 respondents). Of those willing to offer a course, 88% indicated they would attend a workshop on course design and incorporation of student success content, and 92% would attend a workshop to link gen ed content to the course design. A half time faculty FYS Coordinator would strongly support faculty. By requiring a First Year Seminar and linking it with the general education curriculum, WSU will be providing a solid foundation for success for freshmen and supporting the strategic enrollment retention goals.

With 1600 FTIC students in sections of 25, we would need 64 sections per year. The goal would be for 45 unique sections and 19 repeated sections. At \$2500 per course, the cost would be approximately \$160,000. Retaining just 30 additional students would result in sufficient tuition revenue to cover this cost.

**Overarching Goals** (see FYS Structure and Learning outcomes below for specific details)

- Exploration of engaging academic content
- Exposure to and development of student success and professional skills
- Development of positive relationships with peers, faculty and staff members.

## **Course Components**

Course content will be roughly divided as follows: 70% on disciplinary content, 25% on Student Success content, and 5% on the Common Read. Student success content can often and should be thematically presented to align with academic content. Student Success content must include information literacy (for example face-to-face sessions, online tutorials, videos, and/or resource guides) and *at least three* of the following components: financial literacy, goal setting, degree planning, career planning, time management, stress management/mental health tips, study skills, test taking tips, note taking tips.<sup>1</sup> As part of WSU’s commitment to applied and experiential learning, all courses should require attendance at (or viewing of) Convocation, as well as including a beyond-the-classroom learning opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

**Endorsed unanimously by the General Education Committee with support from the First Year Seminar instructors:**

Shirlene Small, Chair  
Aaron Rife  
Steve Oare

Becky Nordyke  
Roy Myose  
Kathy Delker

Chris Broberg  
Rannfried Thelle  
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<sup>1</sup> Instructors can readily draw on expert resources across campus to provide content in these student success topics. Resources include: Library personnel, the Office of Student Success, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Counseling Center, the Career Development Center, and the Office of Student Money Management.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of beyond-the-class opportunities include, but are not limited to: campus lecture/speaker’s series, cultural performances, service learning, community service, leadership programs or workshops, a diversity event, a campus club/organization event, a residence hall program, an Outdoor Recreation program. Inviting students to write a reflection paper or journal entry on their experience(s) or engage in small group discussion can further develop their writing and speaking skills.

Supporting documents (provided below):

- FYS Structure and Learning Outcomes
- History of the Project
- Literature on First Year Seminars

Appendix (attached):

- FYS courses already approved by Gen Ed committee
- Qualtrics Student survey results
- FYS Student statements
- Office of Data Analysis reports on persistence rates
- Office of Data Analysis report on writing evaluation outcomes
- 2015 faculty survey on interest in FYS
- FYS Instructor Guide
- FYS course development checklist
- Cuseo, J. (2015) "The Empirical Case for the First Year Seminar: Evidence of Course Impact on Student Retention, Persistence to Graduation, and Academic Achievement"

## **FYS Structure and Learning Outcomes**

### ***General Education Basic Skills Learning Outcomes for FYS Courses<sup>3</sup>***

Upon completion of this course, based on the four “across-the-curriculum” skills components in the general education curriculum, students should be able to:

1. *Employ* higher-order thinking that moves beyond rote memorization and factual acquisition to more advanced higher levels of thinking (e.g., thinking critically and creatively).
2. *Articulate* and *defend* their positions through dialogue, discussion, or presentations, and writing.
3. *Employ* analytical reasoning and problem solving techniques
4. *Identify* appropriate library and other resources to facilitate research and *accurately provide* citations.

If a course is to be designated as containing diversity content, an additional outcome should be added to reflect learning in this area.

5. *Illustrate/Demonstrate* an appreciation for diversity as it applies to the course content

### ***Student Success Learning Outcomes:***

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. *Recognize* the expectations of higher education and how they differ from secondary education
2. *Learn strategically* by developing skills and habits that promote deep learning and long-term retention of knowledge.
3. *Develop* more effective life and study skills in areas such as time management, note taking, test taking, personal finance, and career planning.
4. *Capitalize* on university resources and extracurricular experiences designed to promote their success.

### ***Disciplinary Learning Outcomes***

- These outcomes are developed by faculty based on the unique disciplinary content of the course.

To ensure relevant, sustainable and dynamic course design, the learning outcomes and common course requirements provide a degree of consistency across sections while also allowing instructors to customize their section. The broad nature of these outcomes signifies that no one approach may be appropriate for all sections or all students. The content, topics and methods used to achieve the outcomes should be tailored to the needs of the students in a given section and to the strengths and expertise of the instructor.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the general education website, introductory general education courses should include four “across-the-curriculum” skill components (writing, speaking, numerical, and library skills). No single class, FYS or other general education course, however, is required to incorporate all four of these elements.

<https://www.wichita.edu/academics/generaleducation/Originals0808/learningOutcomes.php>

The outcomes below are the *program outcomes* for general education. These are the outcomes we want our *graduating students* to have acquired through the entire course of study. All general education courses, including FYS courses, will collectively contribute to the development of these skills.

<https://www.wichita.edu/academics/generaleducation/Originals0808/genEdRequirements.php>

Upon graduation the faculty expects you to:

- Have acquired knowledge in the arts, humanities, and natural and social sciences
- Think critically and independently
- Write and speak effectively
- Employ analytical reasoning and problem solving techniques

**Structure**

- Seminar style courses capped at 25 students.
- Peer Coach mentoring will be available as an option
- Academic content in the arts, humanities, and/or natural and social sciences

**Required Readings:** Common Read, and any additional thematic readings selected by the instructor

**Assignments**

Assignments need to allow students to demonstrate evidence of achieving the learning outcomes for the course. These should be aligned with the basic skills learning outcomes, the student success outcomes, and the disciplinary learning outcomes noted above. This will be accomplished through a mix of homework assignments, papers, projects and class dialogue/group discussions/presentations. At a minimum, each section will assess students on the following:

Attendance and Participation - can include beyond-the-classroom learning opportunity	10-20%
Homework (e.g., projects, quizzes, daily assignments)	10-20%
Papers/Essays — formal and/or informal writing	15%-25%
Dialogue /Group Discussions /Presentation(s)	10%-20%
Final/Culminating Project — The final should challenge students to reflect upon and synthesize the major course goals. Methodologies could include portfolios, take-home projects or papers, presentations, videos, etc.	10-20%

Note: students should complete assignments and receive grades regularly throughout the semester so that they can track their success in the course.

**Instructors**

One objective of the first-year seminar is to introduce first-year students to our faculty members from all colleges and the various majors they represent. Thus, faculty from all colleges are encouraged to offer a section. Professors emeriti are also eligible to participate. Seminar design may emphasize themes not covered in current General Education courses and should prioritize student contributions and peer-to-peer interactions. These could include, but are not limited to, topics with contemporary societal relevance.

**Assessment<sup>4</sup>**

All courses must be designed to include two writing samples (pre/post) that can be assessed through the AAC&U writing rubric. The assessment is managed through the Office for Student Success, with aggregate results provided to the Gen Ed committee in an annual report. In addition, the annual report will include data on the number of sections each semester, enrollment of each section, list of faculty offering courses, financial resources provided to support the first-year seminar program.

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<sup>4</sup> This requirement will be reviewed to determine if it is still essential as a convenient metric for HLC assessment moving forward. If not, it will be removed as a required component for FYS.

### ***Course Development***

Faculty will propose seminar courses in accordance with departmental procedures, including consultation with the department curriculum committee and the department chair before routing it through the regular curriculum change process, including final approval by the General Education committee. At any time, the proposed scheduling of seminar courses and reassignment of faculty to teach seminar courses, will defer to department program requirements and curriculum needs as determined by the department chair.

There are a number of reasons why faculty might be attracted to developing an FYS course:

- Opportunity to develop new curricular content
- Opportunity to mentor new students to the university
- Opportunity to teach a small, seminar-style class

Faculty will receive \$1,500 to develop a new FYS course, which will be paid upon submission of the curriculum change paperwork. An additional \$2,500 (or the minimum rate established in each college) is available to faculty each time the course is taught. Departments may use these funds for an adjunct instructor to teach a departmental course if a faculty member is offering the seminar as part of her/his regular teaching load. Or, the faculty member may receive the \$2,500 (or the minimum rate established in each college) if s/he is teaching the course as an overload. The stipend would be divided in the event of team-taught courses.

### **History of Pilot Project:**

WSU faculty have been developing FYS courses since the pilot program was approved by the Faculty Senate in December 2015, with the first courses approved in Spring 2016 by the general education committee, and taught in Fall 2016. A total of 19 different courses have been developed by 22 different instructors, with 45 sections being offered in the last three years. [See Appendix ] These courses have been assessed with a survey of the participating students, as well as with a rubric evaluating pre/post writing samples from each class. There are positive results in terms of persistence rates, as well as in qualitative data from the student surveys.

Fall to Fall persistence rates for students in the 2016 FYS cohort were 5% higher than non-FYS students, and were 7% higher in comparison from their 2nd to 3rd year at the university. The 2017 FYS cohort did not have a higher persistence rate compared with non-FYS students. The Fall 2018 FYS cohort had a 3% higher persistence rate than the non-FYS students from Fall to Spring. [See attached report]

The results of the qualitative survey of FYS participants are largely positive. Some of the less impressive results on the student success components stem in part from overly ambitious initial parameters. Our most recent modifications allow for faculty to incorporate selective success components that fit best with their academic content and will allow students a more meaningful engagement with the content. The responses to the questions about connecting with faculty and peers, as well as the open ended questions are particularly useful, indicating considerable success in helping students connect and become aware of the resources in place to help them when they encounter challenges in the future. [see attached results]

For the Fall 2016 cohort, pre and post test scores on the composite writing rubric and each of the individual sub scores showed statistically higher post-test scores relative to pre-test values but the magnitude of differences between pre and post scores were very small. For Fall 2017, bivariate post test score differences from pre-test scores were statistically significant showing an increase in ability/understanding. Sample size and fluctuations across class sections prohibited a class section analysis and overall sample size prohibited a multivariate analysis with controls (e.g., demographics, academic ability, performance). [see attached results]

If the proposal to make the FYS a required component is approved in the Spring 2019, it will allow faculty to submit course proposals in AY 2019-20 for approval by the Gen Ed committee. These can then be included in schedule building for Fall 2021 (which is due in the Spring of 2021).

Academic Affairs is exploring support for a half time faculty coordinator for FYS who could attend the national annual FYS Conference in the Spring 2020 in order to support faculty course development and a robust roll out the following year.

## **Literature on First Year Seminars**

First Year Seminars have been an integral part of college curricula for over two decades, with many studies documenting their effectiveness in promoting student success and retention for all types of students, and in different institutional types, sizes and locations (Barefoot, 1993; Barefoot et al., 1998; Boudreau and Kromrey, 1994; Fidler and Godwin, 1994; Glass and Garrett, 1995; Grunder and Hellmich, 1996; Shanley and Witten, 1990, Sidle and McReynolds, 1999; Starke, Harth and Sirianni, 2001; Swanson, Vaughn and Wilkinson, 2017; Tobolowsky, 2005). A comprehensive review of the literature indicates that, even controlling for academic ability and other precollege characteristics, FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial positive effects on a student's successful transition to college and likelihood of persistence into the second year, as well as on academic performance while in college (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Hunter and Linder (2005) draw similar conclusions based on their review of research on First Year Seminars, stating "the overwhelming majority of first-year seminar research has shown that these courses positively affect retention, grade point average, number of credit hours attempted and completed, graduation rates, student involvement in campus activities, and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education, as well as faculty development and methods of instruction" (p.288).

In addition to these multi-institutional studies, a large number of single institutional studies found that participation in First Year Seminars led to higher persistence rates and academic performance, even when controlling for demographic characteristics and prior levels of academic performance. Studies also showed correlations with the number of credits completed in the first year, persistence to degree completion, and shorter time taken to degree completion. Additional benefits included increased use of student support services, involvement in campus life, increased student satisfaction, enthusiasm and commitment to their home campus. For full details, see Cuseo, 2015.

The 2005 National Survey of Student Engagement surveyed over 80,000 first year students (NSSE 2005) and found that relative to those who did not participate in a first year seminar, FYS participants report that they were more challenged academically, more likely to engage in active and collaborative learning activities, interacted more frequently with faculty, perceived the campus environment to be more supportive, made greater gains in learning during their first year of learning, and were more satisfied with their first year experience. Course participants reported greater engagement, higher levels of satisfaction, and greater developmental gains in the following areas: academic advising and planning, career advising and planning, financial aid advising, academic assistance, academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student-faculty interaction (NSSE 2005).

First Year Seminars are often part of a larger effort by many colleges and universities to incorporate a series of best practices into a comprehensive First Year Experience (FYE). These frequently include Orientation, Convocation, a Common Read, academic and career advising, early warning systems on academic performance, and a First Year Seminar course. WSU already offers all of these FYE components, but has not yet established the First Year Seminar as a required part of the curriculum.

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