First Year Seminar Course Development Guide

The First Year Seminar (FYS) was one of the exciting new developments in the curriculum revision at Otterbein University. The course is a culmination of several years of planning and an intentional focus on beginning a student’s academic experience in a rich and fulfilling way. These courses seek to introduce students to the Integrative Studies program, assist in the development of academic skills and behaviors, and connect them to campus resources to ensure their future success. The courses are grounded in a disciplinary framework, but use that content as a vehicle for the academic transition to college.

The First Year Seminar serves as the signature component in a comprehensive First Year Experience program that addresses many aspects of a student’s transition to the campus community. Therefore the course includes both curricular and co-curricular expectations.

This course development guide is a starting point for understanding the conceptual framework and expectations of the First Year Seminar. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of expectations, but more of a tool to help those thinking of developing a course to begin the development process. Individual consultation is available at all times for your course development process.

**Disciplinary Focus**

One of the hallmark elements of our First Year Seminars is the diversity of seminar topics. All seminars should be grounded in a disciplinary lens, however, not being so foregrounded in content to serve as a gateway course into a specific major or minor program. The courses should be focused on areas of interest that will encourage students’ intellectual curiosity and their interest in exploring topics with instructors. Students will choose the seminar based on their own choice and interest (there is no required seminar for any major or minor).

When thinking about the disciplinary focus to ground your course, the following questions could be helpful to guide your thought process and development:

- What is the central issue or problem that the course will focus on or explore?
- What is the “anchor” of content that the course is developed around or that is used to develop the learning activities?
- If a student were to be asked what the course was about 10 years after taking the class, what would be their answer?

**Relationship to Integrative Studies**

The First Year Seminar is the first requirement for students in the Integrative Studies Program. It sits in a unique curricular position in that it is part of an independent program, but in partnership with IS, it serves as the introductory INST course. This is important to consider when developing a course; it must contribute to the goals of INST even as it serves the academic goals of the larger FYE Program.

Given the relationship to Integrative Studies, it is expected that First Year Seminar Courses:

- Introduce students to the mission and five overall learning goals of the Integrative Studies Program (FYE Goal 2: Outcome 2).
- Emphasize one of the five INST goals in its theme, content, or objectives (one that compliments its focus and aims).
- Introduce the concept of integrative learning and knowledge. (FYE Goal 2: Outcome 3)
Require students to complete a common assignment that will serve as the beginning Integrative Studies assessment activity. This prompt is provided by the IS Program and will be posted for all students in their ePortfolios. Instructors are asked to build the expectation of completing that assessment into the course (either through time to complete it, points assigned to its completion, or other methods).

More information about the common assignment and how it fits into IS assessment will be available on the IS website, but the FYS common prompt will direct students: 1) To the best of your ability, explain what you think it means to use an integrative approach to examine an issue and how that differs from using a disciplinary approach and 2) Identify an issue or topic that you believe is of global significance. Explain how you think an integrative approach to this issue enhances your understanding of it.

**Learning Goals, Outcomes and Activities**

The distinction between the First Year Seminar and a course in your discipline is the focus on transition and the use of the disciplinary content to achieve goals of academic skill building and refinement. The courses should be intentional in providing learning activities that contribute to the overall First Year Experience program goals.

**First Year Seminar courses have the following expectations:**

- Meet the academic goals of the FYE program (goals two and three).

**Co-Curricular and Functional elements of the FYE Program**

The FYS is a signature component of the overall First Year Experience program. Therefore, the course has practical components integrated as an expectation of the function of the course to contribute to the larger program. These functions will be supported through the Center for Student Success and Center for Student Involvement. Instructors are asked to integrate these elements into their courses with the support from the aforementioned offices.

**First Year Seminar courses should meet the following expectations:**

- Introduce students to the ePortfolio. Use a course portfolio to manage the class – including submission of the Common Book Assignment.
- Devote one quarter of the course (can include both in and out of class time) to co-curricular programming (examples include, but are not limited to, information literacy sessions, ePortfolio development, Common Book programming, information and planning sessions for 5 Cardinal Experiences)
- Integrate a peer mentor into the course. See Peer Mentor guide for specific information on the role and strategies for incorporation.
- Support the Common Book Program. This includes, but is not limited to, the instructor having read the book, facilitating a discussion on the book, acknowledging the summer writing assignment, attending the convocation with their FYS course and supporting student involvement in Common Book related programming.

Finally, teaching within the First Year Seminar program is a commitment to the success of entering students. FYS faculty instructors are expected to connect to resources on campus and support the transition of students to Otterbein. Faculty can demonstrate this commitment through engagement with transition activities such as New Student Week and orientation, participation in co-curricular programming and generally being available to the students in their seminar for guidance in their individual transition to Otterbein.

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