

GUIDELINES FOR PROPOSALS FOR FIRST YEAR SEMINAR (FYS) COURSES

Version: November 2019

Committee on First Year Seminars: Ben Coates (Div 1), Melissa Jenkins (Div II), Christina Soriano (Div III), Neil Devotta (Div IV), Sarah Mason (Div V, 2019-2020 Chair), Ashley Hairston (Dean of the College designate), and Doug Beets (School of Business faculty representative).

The Committee on First Year Seminars solicits, evaluates, and makes approval decisions regarding proposals for new First Year Seminars. Any regular faculty member who has successfully completed one semester of teaching and has an appointment in a department/program at Wake Forest University is eligible to submit a First Year Seminar course proposal. Departments/programs are encouraged to promote FYS opportunities among faculty and to include FYS sections in their regular course-schedule planning. The “Motivations for First Year Seminar Structure and Content” can be found at the end of this document.

FYS PROPOSAL SUBMISSION: Proposals should be prepared by instructors using the official form (downloadable from URL: <http://college.wfu.edu/academics/first-year-seminars/>) then the relevant Department Chair/Program Director should review and submit the proposal via email to the Administrative Assistant, Tatiana Ostwalt (ostwalt@wfu.edu). The following endorsement should be included in the body of the email:

To the First Year Seminar Proposal Review Committee –

I have reviewed this proposal for a First Year Seminar titled “TITLE” to be taught by INSTRUCTOR NAME through the DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM NAME of which I am the CHAIR/DIRECTOR. I endorse it as a plan for an effective course to be taught by the instructor as described.

Yours sincerely,
NAME

DUE DATE: Proposals for new FYS sections are due at noon on the first Friday following the start of a semester (e.g. Friday, January 17, 2020 for new proposals to be taught in Fall 2020). Note that proposals should be submitted at least one semester in advance of when they will be first offered.

FYS PROPOSAL PREPARATION GUIDELINES:

Proposals should be no more than three pages in length, must include the instructor’s name, department, and rank, and the following eight elements.

1. Title and Description: Provide the title and a brief description of the topic and general goals of the proposed course.
2. Format: Describe how the course will be conducted and what pedagogical methods will be employed.

3. Content: Provide a list of proposed readings, films, art, other objects, performance pieces, and any other content to be used in the course (with full citations). Briefly describe how they, as a whole, connect to the topic and goals of the course.

4. Assignments and Evaluation of Students: Provide and describe brief examples of the assignments and activities (e.g. written papers, oral presentations, performances, class discussion, etc.) by which students will be evaluated and their contribution to the overall course grade. Note that a significant amount of written work and oral presentation is expected, though the precise amount can vary based on course characteristics. Similarly, it is important to provide early and regular feedback to first year students.

5. Outcomes and Assessment: Briefly describe how combinations of the proposed course structure, content, assignments, and other activities will successfully meet the four Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) of the First Year Seminar Program (see list provided below).

6. Schedule: State the semester(s) in which you plan to offer your seminar, how many sections you plan to teach, and any timing constraints that may apply. Please note that classes that meet two or three times per week are preferable to (and may be required over) those that meet just once a week. The once-per-week option is extremely rare and if it is requested, please provide a short justification. Please note that proposals may be submitted for approval without a precise plan for the semester in which it will be offered (e.g. approval for a future semester, yet-to-be determined semester offering is allowed).

3. Internal or External Support: If relevant, describe any internal or external funding support being received for this course. Note: If there are out-of-class events and associated expenses that would enhance the overall academic content of the FYS, faculty are encouraged to review the College Course Enhancement Fund (http://faculty.college.wfu.edu/fundingP_awards/) as a potential resource. Once the seminar has been approved by the FYS Committee, development of the seminar may be supported through additional internal or external support as desired or necessary. Please inform the FYS committee if this transpires.

4. Synopsis for Dissemination: Please provide a brief (approximately 50 word) summary describing the course for dissemination to prospective students and academic advisors. This should clearly state the structure and content of the course and should be written to gain the attention and interest of first year students.

Motivations for First Year Seminar Structure and Content

In 2012, Dean Jacque Fetrow requested a comprehensive evaluation of the First Year Seminar program. In response, the Committee on First Year Seminars conducted an in-depth assessment and produced a set of findings, pedagogical recommendations, and specific Student Learning Outcomes (see below and 2014-15 Annual Report of the Committee on FYS) to be used to guide future FYS courses.

Findings

First Year Seminars should be designed to: i) spark the intellectual curiosity of students; ii) introduce them to a thought-provoking topic across the arts, humanities, and sciences; iii) foster alternative forms of conceptual and creative expression; iv) create a welcoming and open learning environment that emphasizes forging good relationships among the students and with

the faculty member; v) foster lifelong learning and academic excellence in a small classroom setting.

The following are important points of pedagogy to create First Year Seminars as sites of student-centered learning (rather than content-oriented) and to distinguish FYS classes from Writing Seminars:

1. A central focus of the FYS should be attention to the processes involved in learning, in addition to the coverage of content and mastery of topic. For example, students might learn different ways to investigate or think about the topic by the faculty member framing questions, providing methods of investigation, demonstrating ways of testing evidence, framing alternative questions and responses, etc., in addition to training students in knowledge and research skills practiced in a specific discipline.
2. The pace of work should be deliberate so that students are afforded the time to develop increasingly sophisticated or nuanced ways of thinking, reading, listening and writing/creating.
3. Students should be given opportunities to reflect on their development as learners and thinkers, as well as on specific skills, such as reading, writing, oral proficiency, and development of the whole person.
4. The priority of the class is on student participation; therefore, faculty members are encouraged to act as listener, guide, or mentor.
5. Though writing is an important component of the FYS course, faculty should consider it in the context of writing to learn, rather than learning to write, since the Writing 111 course is focused on building specific writing skills.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

So that students understand rigorous academic expectations and develop the intellectual skills needed to practice or meet these expectations, the following are SLO for each FYS. By the end of an FYS, students will have practiced the following:

i) Read increasingly sophisticated texts critically

As one of WFU's Core Competencies, critical reading is defined as: "the process of understanding, extracting, and questioning written text that allows for the comprehensive explanation of issues, ideas, artefacts, and events before accepting or challenging an opinion or conclusion or constructing new meaning."

ii) Pose and respond to complex ideas

This may occur in a variety of formats such as written or oral form, or in class discussion. This maps onto the WFU Core Competency of Inquiry and Analysis defined as: "the systematic process of exploring issues, objects, or works by collecting evidence, deconstructing that which is complex, and developing informed conclusions or judgments."

iii) Identify, analyze, interpret and evaluate different points of view

Again, this may occur in a variety of formats. This corresponds to the WFU Core Competency of Critical Thinking defined as: “the ability to explore ideas comprehensively, to ask relevant questions, to evaluate evidence, to imagine and test alternative points of view before accepting or formulating a conclusion.”

iv) Construct cogent arguments in both written and oral form

This supports the WFU Core Competency of Communication defined as, “The ability to express ideas clearly, exchange knowledge, foster understanding, and/or persuade one’s audience in written and oral form.”

While all FYS should be designed so that students develop the above learning outcomes, faculty may focus on, or emphasize additional competencies, such as creative thinking, quantitative literacy, social relevance and intercultural learning.

Concluding Notes

When reviewing and editing proposals prior to submission, please reflect on the both the letter and intent of the First Year Seminar program. Note that requests for clarification and revision to submitters from the Committee have often resulted from lack of prior departmental/program approval; omission or inadequate specificity with respect to reading and writing assignments; insufficient information regarding pedagogical method (particularly the opportunities for discussion anticipated for the course and how these will be evaluated); or uncertainty regarding possible overlap with other courses, especially existing upper-division sections and divisional requirements.

The evaluation survey completed by students at the end of their First Year Seminar course asks them to assess how the course helped them meet the FYS student learning outcomes. The current version of this instrument is available for preview upon request, and faculty may prepare their own survey if additional feedback from students is desired.

We encourage First Year Seminar instructors to consider scheduling a library instructional session for their students. First Year Seminars can serve as an excellent arena within which to introduce library research and classroom tools to first year students. Please contact your departmental library liaison to schedule a session.

If you have any questions regarding the development of First Year Seminar proposals, please contact the Chair of the Committee.