

First Year Seminars

F.A.Q.s - Enrollments

1. May I let more than 16 students into my class?

Ordinarily, no. The seminars are intended to provide first year students with a seminar experience; allowing additional students to enroll undermines that experience. It can be difficult, as there is always some shifting among students and faculty may be inclined to over enroll with the expectation that there will be some melt. In addition, there may at times be a compelling reason for allowing more than 16 students into a class: some of the role-playing classes require more than sixteen students to fill roles; another class may benefit by adding a student or even two whose life experiences will add depth to topic being explored. A good reason should not be that students are begging. Smith students are adept at making faculty members believe that their lives will be irrevocably harmed by not getting into a particular class. Please observe the sixteen person limit to the extent humanly possible.

2. May transfer students, upperclass student or high school students join the course if there is room?

No. Part of the purpose behind a first year seminar is to acclimate students to college life and to provide them with a solid cohort in the first year class. Allowing transfers, upperclass Smith students and high school students undermines that objective.

3. How do I know what seminars are still open so that I can refer students?

If a student panics and you want to tell her what other courses are open, you can look at enrollments on BannerWeb by simply clicking on Class Search and scrolling down to First Year Seminars. Those figures sometimes take a couple of days to settle down, as students may be switching in and out and faculty may have waiting lists that they have created that differ from BannerWeb's waitlist. Feel free to refer students to the FYS Director (Alice Hearst, ahearst@smith.edu) if a student is having difficulty finding a course.

4. How do we prevent students from signing up for more than one FYS and holding up enrollments as a result?

BannerWeb does not allow us to limit students to signing up for single FYS class. However, during the Fall of 2013, the Registrar conducted a search to determine how many students had signed up for more than one FYS or other WI class. Three students had signed up for two seminars and two others had signed up for three. In other words, given the number of students registering, it does not seem to be an overwhelming problem.

5. May I drop a student from my FYS if she has signed up for the class, but doesn't come to the first class because she is "shopping" another class?

As noted in the course catalog on p. 48, "[i]nstructors are not required to hold spaces for students who do not attend the first class meeting and may refuse admittance to students seeking to add courses who have not attended the first class meetings." However, be aware that first year students in particular may encounter unusual constraints--"I got lost" can really happen--so you may want to check in with a student who does not appear before dropping her from your roster.

6. How do I know whether a student belongs in an FYS or an English 118 course?

There is considerable similarity between Eng. 118 and FYS courses, in that Eng. 118 courses, like First Year Seminars, try to introduce students to a new topic and to college learning through a variety of

approaches and materials. The difference lies primarily in the degree to which the different courses expressly scaffold the writing process. While all WI courses must focus on writing, Eng. 118 is designed for students coming in with some indication in their record that they may need additional help in writing. Many students, however, can benefit from Eng. 118, which is offered in both semesters; for students completing 118 who want additional work on writing, Eng. 119 is offered in the spring. While this information may be more appropriate for advisers than faculty members teaching a seminar, you may want to refer a student to a 118 course in the spring if you see she is having difficulty. In addition, if students press you to enroll them in your class and wrinkle their noses at a 118 class, believing it to be 'remedial', you should let them know that the topics are just as diverse and they are likely to learn as much as in an FYS. In fact, recently students have been approaching the Writing Center asking for permission to enroll in Eng. 118 during the first week or so of classes and expressing their concerns about being overwhelmed by the workload in FYS classes (see discussion of workload in FYS classes, below).

F.A.Q.s - Events, Budgets, Administrative Assistance

1. Whom should I ask for assistance with copying, scanning and other course preparation tasks?

Please bring materials to be copied or scanned and other requests to Sherry Wingfield, the FYS administrative assistant, whose office is located at 225 Wright Hall. Her email is swingfie@smith.edu, and her extension is x3503.

2. Who can help me with planning for field trips or other events?

Once again, Sherry should be the point person in reserving vans for field trips and other tasks associated with special events. In fact, Sherry's experience should help you when you are deciding what size van you might need, etc. At Sherry's request, please contact her as soon as you begin planning the event; she is more likely to be able to assist if she is in on the planning from the outset than if she is asked to assist only with bits and pieces or late in the process.

3. Do I have access to funds for course related activities?

The Provost's Office budgets \$300 per class to enable faculty members to take students to lunch or engage in other activities. Just keep your receipts and submit them to Sherry for reimbursement.

4. Can I get more than \$300 for an activity or activities?

Yes. If you anticipate that your costs over the course of the semester will exceed \$300, please fill out the funding request form, above. The Provost's Office encourages you to look afield for special events--performances, visits to museums or other sites of interest, off-campus lectures, etc. If you anticipate needing more than \$300 over the course of the semester, please submit the form as soon as possible. Given that some economies of scale might be realized if you are planning a field trip, for example, the Director will work with you and other faculty members to coordinate trips if possible. You should also plumb other sources. For example, some departments and programs have special funds that can be tapped for trips and the Lecture Committee may make small sums available for defraying costs of bringing in outside speakers, subject to the Lecture Committee's rules.

5. May I use the \$300 allocated for the course to assist students with the costs of copying, for those who have limited financial resources?

No. This is a difficult issue and needs to be addressed college-wide. You may have students who have limited financial means and lack the funds to print articles to bring with them to class to be marked up, bring multiple copies of drafts to class, etc. You may certainly assist students by printing copies of articles or other materials for those who raise the issue; Sherry can assist you with printing such

materials. In addition, you may ask them to email papers to you or give you a jump drive from which you can print a paper. The problem is that other students may object or ask for the same favor, and the program cannot shoulder the costs of copying all materials for all students, so be somewhat politic in responding to such requests.

7. May I get a list of my students' advisers?

You may get a list of the advisers assigned to your students from Carie Congleton in Jane Stangl's office, although it is best to wait until registration has settled down, both for accuracy and preserving the sanity of the first year dean's office during the first days of classes.

F.A.Q.s - Course Design/Teaching

1. Must a First Year Seminar be Inter- or Multi-Disciplinary?

The FYS program explicitly tells students that the courses are inter- and/or multi-disciplinary, and courses that adopt such an approach are favored. That said, it is sometimes difficult to define what such a course might entail. A course that introduces students to numerous approaches to studying a given topic might not technically be interdisciplinary. All First Year Seminars, however, should strive to expose students to a multiplicity of ways of engaging in academic study, in line with promoting a culture of research, inquiry and discovery.

2. Must a First Year Seminar engage all of the aspects of learning listed in the SmithCapacities?

Not every course can develop all the skills listed in the "Capacities" document, a link to which is included above. But FYS courses should facilitate a student's entry into college life by helping her to learn to write clearly, to become comfortable speaking in class, whether on a daily basis or when giving a more formal presentation, and to develop a level of ease when working with materials particular to that class, whether those be scientific databases or materials in the Art Museum.

3. Must a First Year Seminar expose students to special collections, museums or other materials/spaces on or off campus?

One of the objectives of setting up the First Year Seminar program has been to introduce incoming students to materials and spaces on campus that they might easily overlook, whether those be the archives or Capen Garden or the Field Station. Some courses expose students to diverse experiences off-campus to familiarize them with the area and its history and culture: musical performances in Northampton or the Berkshires, museums in New York City or Boston, or field trips to the site of the old Northampton State Hospital. There is no requirement that your course use out of the way places or materials, but feel free to think broadly about class activities.

4. Must all WI courses be writing intensive?

Yes. Several years ago, CAP determined that all FYSs be WI, for three reasons. First, introducing a student to college level work typically entails introducing her to the rigors of academic writing, which makes a WI format dovetail nicely into the seminar. Second, these courses should introduce students to new materials and new forms of texts, and most faculty find that having students write in response to those materials is helpful. Finally, since our only requirement at Smith is the WI requirement, most first year students are anxious to take a WI course and fulfill that requirement immediately; in the past, non-WI First Year Seminars have not filled.

That said, there may be a topic at some point that does not lend itself to intensive writing. An FYS may be designed, for example, around quantitative skills. Should you be interested in offering such a course, please be in contact with the director and we can explore obtaining an exception to the rule.

5. May I send my students to the Jacobson Center for writing counseling?

Yes and no. You should encourage students to avail themselves of all academic support services, including those supporting writing. You may not, however, require all students to bring their drafts to the Jacobson Center for review for two reasons. First, the Writing Committee has been explicit in its expectation that students work closely with faculty members on their writing in WI courses, so their first contact for review should be the faculty member teaching the course. Second, the Writing Center simply cannot handle the volume if faculty members send entire classes to the Center. If you have specific students, however, who seem to need more assistance with writing than you can provide, please refer them to Julio Alves, jalves@smith.edu, who can connect them with appropriate individualized assistance.

6. How much of the grade in a WI course should be allocated to writing?

In a WI course, written work (not writing per se) must account for at least 50% of a student's grade.

7. How can I teach writing if I am not an English or composition professor?

Not all of us can remember what a gerund or a dangling participle is. That said, there is much that you can teach about writing in your field that doesn't require you to be a grammar maven. Of course, obvious errors should be corrected, but stay in your comfort zone when you correct for "writing"; you can help a student learn how to present material clearly without necessarily knowing what a comma splice is.

8. What should the workload in a First Year Seminar be?

Ideally, a first year seminar should strive to explore a fairly limited theme in depth, rather than presenting students with the kind of broad overview that an intro course in a department or program is likely to do. If you look at several sample syllabi, you will notice that the workload varies, but in general, LESS IS MORE. The courses should be designed to *introduce* students to college reading, writing and learning. As a practical matter--and depending on the nature of the materials you are covering--it may be difficult for students to cover large amounts of text; you should not, for example, expect that students will be able to do a close reading of 600 pages of text per week. How much you assign depends upon the difficulty of the material assigned and your own estimation of what a student just out of high school is likely to be able to cover--while preparing for her three other courses at the same time. If you are assigning a piece from a newspaper or a blog, you may be able to assign more than if you have students reading an academic article. Similarly, you may (or may not) be able to assign more pages from a literary work than a scientific treatise.

Be aware that many incoming students may not have been asked to do close reading during high school. Many faculty take some time to explain to students what close reading entails, and design at least one assignment that teaches students how to do that, while others take time to teach students how to strategically skim readings. Likewise, in more quantitative courses, you should expect that students may be new to working with charts and numbers, and plan to spend time introducing them to those tasks.

9. Do I have to teach students how to study?

No, but the first year seminars are an ideal place to learn about how to study. Many faculty take the opportunity to talk to students about study habits, or refer students to workshops and other materials that will help them develop skills to be successful in college. Information about study skills workshops, etc., is located on both the Wurtele Center website and the Jacobson Center website.

10. What should I be teaching about the Honor Code?

You can expect that students will be aware of the Smith Honor Code, but you may still find it valuable to take some time to talk about research skills, plagiarism and associated issues. As all of us know, the digital age has ushered in a host of questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how broad access to information might shift the ways in which knowledge is developed, consumed and disseminated. Students may not know how and when they should cite sources and in what contexts. The Jacobson Center's *Guide to College Writing* outlines the basic rules; all students are given a copy of that document when they arrive. If you need a copy, please let the Director know.

In addition, first year students may be unclear about when they may talk to classmates about assignments, ask for editing help, and other tasks that involve group work. Providing guidelines from the outset can avoid problems later. Many, many students, particularly first year students, routinely ask parents to read their papers. You should specify in the syllabus whether you will allow such assistance and to what degree. Some faculty allow students to do so, as long as they disclose that fact.

11. Can I get money for developing a first year seminar?

There is currently no stipend offered for designing a first year seminar. There are, however, a few funds available for curricular initiatives which might be used to help design a course. The Rappaport Fund and the Conway Fund, for example, are both available to assist with design of new courses, offering both a stipend and funds for materials. The Provost's Office web page maintains a list of those funds. In addition, some faculty have used student assistants to develop courses; developing materials for a course can be an ideal way to engage, for example, a STRIDE student.

12. What is the specific procedure for proposing a first year seminar?

Your first step should be to consult with your department to determine whether you can offer such a course, given departmental needs. Some departments and programs allow a first year seminar to count toward the major requirements, while others do not, which may affect your department's willingness to allow you to offer a seminar. There is a specific form for first year seminar proposals, to which you can link on this Moodle site, listed above. Please contact the Director of the FYS program to briefly discuss the design of the course, and then send a copy of the proposal form to both the Director (Alice Hearst) and the Associate Dean of the Faculty, Danielle Ramdath. CAP's guidelines for curricular development and the WI guidelines are also noted above. The course proposal is then sent to CAP for approval. CAP may ask you to be specific about the workload and the WI requirements.

13. Will my department get funds for course replacement if I teach a first year seminar?

Not ordinarily, which is why you should check with your department before you develop the course proposal. If you will be unable to offer an FYS unless the department or program gets funds for a course replacement, please talk to the Director to see if the need can be met.

14. Do first year seminars count toward major, minor or concentration requirements?

The extent to which particular seminars will count toward a major, minor or concentration is dependent upon that particular department or program. Be sure to check with your department to determine whether the seminar will count as an elective within a major, minor or concentration.
