

Expectations for UNIV 179

To: Faculty teaching Univ 179 First Seminars & Collaborating Engl 110/Comm 100 instructors

From: Fred Foster-Clark, Gen Ed Coordinator
Linda McDowell, FYE Coordinator

Re: Expectations for First Seminar Learning Communities

Date: June 15, 2006

Congratulations to those who were successful in getting their Univ 179 proposals approved. We are glad to have you as part of the First Seminar team. While some of you participated in the faculty workshop on May 4th and/or in the Exploratory Advisor training last week where some of the expectations for the First Seminar (“passion courses”) were discussed, we wanted to make sure that everyone was on the same page regarding general expectations for the First Seminar/Learning Community initiative. While all the issues you may have questions about might not be answered here, we will at least broach some of the probable areas of concern. If you haven’t recently looked over the original generic course proposal for Univ 179, we’ve included selected parts of the proposal, which lay out the course philosophy and objectives, at the end of this memo. We’ve also enclosed a copy of the descriptions of all the seminars that was sent to students and the current list of Seminar sections, companion courses, instructors, and meeting times and places.

First, all incoming Exploratory students have had the opportunity to indicate their top interests among the 14 Seminars being offered in fall 2006 and have now been placed into a Seminar based upon their interests. Those who will be attending the orientations sessions on June 20th and 23rd will have a chance to meet many of their students. Your plans to attend should be confirmed through Ralph Anttonen.

Advising:

The *ideal* for Univ 179 is to have the seminar instructors also serve as the initial academic advisors for their students until they have selected a major field of study. Given the varied responsibilities of seminar instructors as program coordinators, department chairs, advisors to majors in their own departments, etc., the *reality* is that seminar instructors will carry different advising loads (from none to everybody) for their seminar students. Instructors who are not advising the entirety of their class have been paired with other Exploratory advisors by Ralph Anttonen. It is hoped that seminar instructors will help these other advisors by providing access to their students at the beginning or end of class meetings, by communicating about academic and/or adjustment issues their students may be experiencing, and by being responsive to other needs or concerns the advisors might express. Regardless of whether you are the official advisor to your students, your role as seminar instructor includes being a mentor to these students and helping them to find an appropriate field of study to pursue.

Conducting the Seminar:

Teaching in a seminar format provides a wonderful opportunity for student engagement, critical thinking and problem solving; several of the stated goals for the first year experience. Being a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage” often requires a new perspective in the way we construct knowledge. Group work, Socratic seminars, team teaching, field trips, problem based learning and question posing are all viable strategies for the seminar format. Freshmen come to us from the K-12 environment. They may be accustomed to worksheets and study guides, extra credit and rote memorization. It is our goal to introduce them into an academically rigorous environment and show them how to be successful while adjusting to this new environment. High expectations should not be compromised. We are helping to establish a standard for their future university career. The seminar should include an opportunity for some liberal arts education conversations. It is important to help them understand and begin to appreciate the curriculum they are being asked to follow.

Working in a Living-Learning Community:

Teaching in a living-learning community is a new experience for most of us. Our goal is to help provide some sense of continuity/community for the incoming first-year student. Sharing assignments, syllabi, service-learning activities, readings, and collaborating with your peer mentor etc. are all ways that you can help to foster this spirit. Creating community is something that can't be accomplished by a single professor. We (FYE, Gen Ed and the Center for Academic Excellence) will provide opportunities for your community to come together during August and throughout the fall semester to share and learn from one another.

Peer Mentors:

Peer Mentors are upper-class students working for the Department of Housing and Residential Programs, who have been assigned to seminars, and will live in the same residence halls as their assigned students. They are an effective link between the FYE faculty, Housing and Residential Programs' staff, and the existing support services at Millersville University. The focus of this position is on students' successful transition within the college environment and encouraging students to integrate in-class instruction with out-of-class experiences.

Peer Mentor responsibilities include providing an environment that encourages active involvement in the academic and co-curricular life of the campus. Peer Mentors will strive to achieve this by periodic interaction with their paired faculty member, coordinating educational programming series within the residence halls with emphasis on transitional issues and service learning, creating an environment within the residence halls that fosters the development of a positive community, confronting and challenging student behaviors that are counter-productive to academic success, and interacting outside of the class with the seminar students. Peer Mentors can assist students in connecting with and utilizing learning support services, including the tutoring programs that operate in the first-year dorms. Peer Mentors will encourage students to sample and become actively involved in the variety of co-curricular and extracurricular events and activities that Millersville offers. Peer Mentors are also encouraged to communicate students' issues to their assigned FYE faculty member. It is the goal of the Peer Mentor program

that students understand the value of academic engagement and success while being provided the support for achieving them.

Service-Learning:

Service-Learning is a strongly encouraged part of the First Seminar intentions; however, it is recognized that certain topics lend themselves better than others to linking appropriately with service-learning. The guideline that has evolved for service-learning for the three credit First Seminars is 15 hours over the course of the semester. Whether service-learning is integrated into the course or not, exactly how much is required or recommended, and how it gets factored into the evaluation of students are all decisions left to the instructor. Any service-learning should be coordinated through the CAP (Community and Academic Partnerships) office [contact Kathy Naegele-Delgado at x2072]. CAP's involvement can be minimal if you have things already set up yourselves, or they can handle much of the logistics if you need that level of support. Please get in touch with Kathy ASAP to discuss your needs. She can help find relevant placements, make the necessary contacts, help orient your students, assist with transportation issues, and the like BUT she needs lead time to do all this so please get working with her as early as possible this summer! Even if service learning cannot be fully integrated into your course design, all instructors are urged to have their classes involved with the Day of Caring on September 9th. It is an excellent way to have the class (including the instructors and peer mentors) bond together at an early point in the semester.

Link to General Ed/ Liberal Arts:

One of the less overt goals of the First Seminar is to help students understand the purposes of General Education and the liberal arts. The whole issue of academic disciplines and academic divisions of various sorts is a foreign concept to many entering students. Many of the First Seminar topics are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary by intent; all contain the possibility of reaching beyond their central organizing discipline. You are encouraged to make various disciplines and disciplinary ways of knowing as explicit to students as possible so they begin to understand the organization of the academy and the variety of its intellectual life. It is always astounding to find out how many students don't know what anthropology is or what the difference is between geology and geography! In order both to navigate their academic careers and to find appropriate majors, these incoming Exploratory students need your help. Some seminars even devote part of one or more classes just to the topic of liberal arts/general education. I (Fred) do this on both a conceptual level and later on a more practical level (what is a "G1" course, what disciplines are involved, why should they be required to take four such courses, etc.) in my seminar.

Assessment:

As this initiative is a pilot-test being evaluated by the University, a valid assessment of the program is vital. Last year seminar participants were asked to respond to too many surveys and consequently their level of completion of the key end-of-semester First Year Survey was inadequate. This year we are asking two things of seminar instructors and their partners in Engl 110 and Comm 100. First, we are asking that you build the completion of the end-of-semester

survey in to your course, either as a required assignment or by allowing its completion during one of your last class sessions. Second, we ask that you do not honor any outside requests for access to your students for research purposes. Any requests to survey the First Seminar students should be directed to one of us and we will attempt to incorporate any reasonable and appropriate questions into the survey packet we develop for the end-of-semester assessment. By consolidating the surveying of students and building it into the conduct of the seminar, we hope to maximize the completion of the survey and its validity. Your help in this effort is much appreciated.

Ongoing Support:

Both of us, together with many others in both the Academic and Student Affairs offices, are committed to the success of this program and will try our best to offer you whatever support and guidance you need. We are also very interested in hearing about your successes and challenges. A series of brown bag lunches will be held in conjunction with the Center for Academic Excellence to address issues that may be of special concern to those involved in these learning communities and to provide an informal forum to raise questions and concerns from your day-to-day and week-to-week work with the seminars. We hope you will take part in these programs and let us know if there are other ways we can help the seminars and learning communities run smoothly and successfully. (If you were unable to attend the May 4th Workshop on Teaching in a Freshman Seminar/ Learning Community, you should have received a copy of the handbook distributed there. If not, please contact Linda.)

Limited funding is also available to help support appropriate activities (e.g., field trips, social gatherings, speaker fees) of each living-learning community. The seminar instructor should submit a request to the Associate Provost through one of us.

Please keep in touch with us and let us know how we can be helpful as you prepare for and conduct your seminar as part of this first seminar/living-learning communities initiative.

CC: Vilas Prabhu
Carol Phillips
Marjorie Warmkessel
John Ward
Ralph Anttonen
Diane Fleishman
Kathy Naegele-Delgado
Phil Riordan
Tom Richardson

UNIV 179: 3 credits
First Seminar

Catalog Description:

Each Seminar section focuses on a different topic of strong interest to faculty and students. Seminars are designed to jump start the process of intellectual inquiry; students participate in a free exchange of ideas through discussion and oral presentations. Each Seminar should reflect the goal of an intellectually rich course both in terms of expectations for active critical thinking and in terms of appropriate yet challenging expectations for reading, writing, student research, and student-led discussion. Professors teaching First Seminars have a strong mentoring role as they assist students in developing a meaningful and purposeful approach to General Education that will prepare them for life.

An important part of the First Seminar is that most sections will be part of a learning community. Learning communities may be arranged as living-learning communities and Seminar sections may team with either the freshman writing or speech course. Whatever the design of the learning community, the goal is always to promote a richer experience that extends learning and relationship beyond the classroom. Seminars are limited to 20 students.

Course Rationale:

The First Seminar is designed to meet three critical needs: 1) to imbue an appreciation in students of critical thought as it is developed in a variety of disciplines, 2) to create a culture of intellectual richness at the beginning of a student's experience with Millersville general education, and 3) to improve student faculty interactions in the freshman or transfer year.

Course Objectives:

By completion of this course, the students will

- Investigate a specific topic or question in-depth.
- Understand comparisons and connections within and between various fields of study and the role of critical thinking in a liberal arts education.
- Recognize the need to explore assumptions, including assumptions from readings, peers, and faculty.
- Demonstrate strengthened inquiry, research and information literacy skills.
- Understand and demonstrate tolerance for the relativity and plurality of human values and beliefs, especially the multicultural values represented in society.
- Reflect upon the importance of civic responsibility and academic integrity.
- Develop skills in oral discussion and written communication