

Recommendations of the First Year Seminar Review Committee:

The First Year Seminar Review Committee (John F. Schwaller, Vicki Graham, David Roberts, and Andrea Martin-Way) conducted a comprehensive study of the First Year Seminar, as currently constituted. The investigation included interviewing the former and current directors of the First Year Seminar, and a general survey of all faculty regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

We received twenty-two responses from faculty and staff in response to our survey, a letter on the strengths and weaknesses of the current First Year Seminar from the coordinators of the First Year Seminar, and a letter from the committee that put together the third edition of the First Year Seminar Reader. Of these, seventeen respondents said yes, definitely continue the First Year Seminar. Two were definitely opposed, and the others expressed doubts. Many of these responses were accompanied by detailed discussions of strengths and weaknesses of the program, and many offered suggestions for modifications. Suggestions and comments fall into a few broad categories:

- Eight of the responses directly mention the problem of faculty support and the difficulties of recruiting. Others suggest that workshops be organized to help prepare faculty to teach the course.
- Eleven of the responses address directly questions and concerns about the current theme of the course, Human Diversity. Some suggest changing the theme, others that it should be broadened. Still others suggest that we abandon the idea of a common theme all-together.
- Four of the responses address the question of the First Year Seminar Reader. Three of these recommend further discussion of whether or not to retain the reader and in what form. One suggests that we abandon it.
- Five of the responses focused on problems with grading standards, equal workload for students across the different sections, and rigor of the course in general.
- Two responses focused on the objectives of the course and the problem of trying to cover too many in a two credit course.

Based upon all this information, and based on discussions among themselves, the committee is now ready to make its recommendations to the Curriculum Committee. The Review Committee recognizes that there will be additional campus debate on all these topics but wished to provide a framework for those discussions and as such presents these recommendations.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that the First Year Seminar continue.
2. The seminar objectives and implementation should be revised to address problems that have emerged over the three years of its current history. The Committee proposes the following, to initiate a further discussion of the objectives and implementation.

Objectives - A common experience for First-Year Students:

- Small class (approximately 15 students)
- Close interaction with faculty
- Incorporate students into the University experience
- Provide active participation to all students (oral and written)

Implementation:

- Retain as 2 credit offering
- Retain the Jamboree for a class project
- Retain the use of selected all-campus lectures / performances by outside professionals
- Expect appropriate academic rigor for a 2 credit course, such that the student workload should be roughly similar from section to section
- Grade students appropriately for their participation, using A – F, only
- Have new students choose a seminar section prior to all other registration
- Faculty participation should be considered part of their regular teaching load

The following questions require further exploration, and the committee recommends that a larger committee be formed for this purpose:

- What other aspects of the experience should be common to all sections?
- Should we retain a common umbrella topic for all First-Year Seminars sections and, if so, what should the topic be?
- If we retain a common umbrella topic, should faculty be allowed to develop specialized topics within it?
- If we retain the common umbrella topic, should we also use a common reader?
- Taking into account the 2 credit nature of the course, should all students be required to attend certain on-campus lectures and performances, or should attendance be voluntary?