Dear Colleague:

Would you like to offer a First-Year Seminar? First-Year Seminars rank among the most rewarding courses to teach because they provide an opportunity to explore a topic in depth. They also provide an opportunity to interact meaningfully with students as they begin their Gettysburg College experience. Some of your FYS students will be your first-year advisees. Many of our students report that their First-Year Seminars are formative, indeed pivotal, to their educational experience. They appreciate engaging unique texts, experiences, and events that force them to think and to discuss complex issues with their peers—and being challenged by their instructors. First-Year Seminars typify the liberal arts experience, emphasizing critical inquiry, communication, and collaborative interaction.

**FYS Proposals for Fall 2015** are due in the Provost’s Office no later than **Wednesday, November 12**.

Please consider offering a seminar that would count toward one of Gettysburg’s curricular learning goals, especially Effective Communication or Science, Technology, and Society. Faculty in all disciplines can offer these courses; you do not need to be a member of the English Department to offer a writing-based course. Many of you have substantial assignments in your courses, assignments that involve writing in stages and revising. These courses are probably already eligible to satisfy the first-year Effective Communication requirement, and it would be helpful to our colleagues in English, and to the students, if they were recognized as such. If you are considering offering a writing-intensive First-Year Seminar, please contact Will Lane.

To submit a First-Year Seminar, please consider these two possibilities:

**You have taught the Seminar in the past:**
If you wish to teach a Seminar that has been reviewed and approved by the APPC, first check with your department chair or program director, and then let Kara Flythe know of your willingness to offer a FYS next Fall.

**You want to teach a new Seminar:**
If you wish to propose a new course as a First-Year Seminar, or transform an old course into a First-Year Seminar, please complete the FYS form located on the faculty landing page under Teaching and Advising/Course Proposal forms for the APPC. Seminars that are not designed to satisfy any of the formal curricular goals must be acknowledged by the APPC. Additional information about First-Year Seminars, including guidelines and proposal formatting, is available on the faculty landing page.

In addition, please consider joining our Burg Program. There are two key components to the Burg experience. First, on Thursdays from 11:30 to 12:30 faculty/administrator pairs co-facilitate discussions on the transition to college and introduce high impact...
educational opportunities. Second, the participating seminars are clustered into three Burgs, which are interdisciplinary groups of seminars with students in the Burg living in the same building. Burg faculty and administrators work together to develop opportunities for the students to gather to pursue sustained discussion and exploration of the interdisciplinary theme that represents their Burg. This approach to the first-year experience is a key strategic initiative that emerged from the Task Force on the Intellectual Life of First-Year Students. In 2012, 2013, and 2014, twenty seminars participated in the Burg program, and we hope to continue this level of participation. Please contact me via email (jryan@gettysburg.edu) if you are interested in participating in the Burg Program.

I hope you will consider proposing a Seminar or offering an existing Seminar again.

Please send your proposal to Kara Flythe via email (kflythe@gettysburg.edu).

Sincerely,

Jack Ryan
Vice Provost
First-Year Seminars

What are First-Year Seminars?

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) is a hallmark of Gettysburg College’s curriculum. The FYS brings the benefits of a seminar to students beginning their college career.

The First-Year Seminar is not required, but most first-year students participate in the program (85-87%). The Seminars are designed to help entering students make the transition to college-level learning by stressing critical inquiry, information literacy, collaborative learning, and effective communication. Seminars may permit students to satisfy a curricular objective, they may serve as an alternative introduction to the methods and problems of a discipline, or they may be interdisciplinary in scope.

The Opportunity for Students

Entering students will be invited to choose from a collection of First-Year Seminars described in a FYS brochure. (Presidential Scholars are given first choice of Seminars; other students are enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis.) While a particular Seminar will have specific, desired outcomes, FYSSs generally demonstrate the value of the liberal arts by demonstrating how the liberated mind focuses on an area of intellectual interest. And because the participants in each Seminar are likely to be housed together, first-year students will naturally find a means of blending their academic and social realms.

The Opportunity for Faculty

Individual faculty and whole departments or programs find certain advantages in offering First-Year Seminars. For a faculty member, her or his teaching situation should be nearly optimal: the professor designs a course that focuses on a special topic of deep intellectual interest; the course’s enrollment will be small enough (a maximum of sixteen students) to permit the professor to offer individualized attention to students and to introduce active-learning, collaborative learning, and special group projects; and, as the students who enroll are self-selected by their interest in the topic, the professor can assume her or his students have a curiosity about the topic. In addition, the professor will have the benefit of special funding for meals, speakers, and field trips (each instructor of a Seminar in Fall 2015 will be eligible for $500 to support social and academic activities). Further, the professor may request a Student Associate for the Seminar if the Associate’s assignments meet established guidelines. Finally, the Seminars allow for creative cross-course linkages, such as joint meetings and events, the “cluster” concept, and links between First-Year Seminars and service-learning experiences or other courses.

Those faculty members who teach a Seminar will have specialized services available to them in the planning and execution of their courses. Those Seminars where writing is emphasized will have special support from the Writing Center, including the opportunity for workshop training and assistance. Some Seminars may allow a student to fulfill the first-year writing requirement (contact the Vice Provost to discuss this possibility). Instructional Technology will provide assistance to those professors who have ideas about special uses of technology—such as web projects or bibliographic-search education. Professors may also work with reference librarians to design assignments that introduce students to library resources in ways that are directly linked to the course content and assignments.
Departments and programs may find the FYSs useful as alternatives to existing courses that meet the curricular multiple-inquiries goal. Or FYSs may provide an alternative course toward the major or even an innovative introduction to the major. Indeed, in the long run, it is likely that the successful FYS will recruit majors by confirming or converting students.

The Office of the Provost is committed to providing staffing assistance for these courses. This means that a priority will be given in the assignment of adjunct sections to departments that need replacements for full-time faculty teaching an FYS.

How to Propose a First-Year Seminar

Draft your FYS proposal in accordance with the Guidelines and Format instructions below. Once you have gained the endorsement of your department chair or program director, send the proposal to the Vice Provost. He will work with you from that point to design a Seminar that meets programmatic guidelines and to secure the necessary APPC approval(s).

Guidelines for a First-Year Seminar

The proposed Seminar must:

- serve the needs of first-year students by exercising teaching skills—particularly writing, quantitative reasoning, speech, research methods, etc.—and by serving as a gateway to college-level academic work;
- be designed for a seminar format with twelve to sixteen students;
- be focused on a relatively narrow topic—First-Year Seminars are not designed to replace traditional survey courses;
- have an appealing title and a provocative description;
- have established learning goals coupled with assessment tools; and
- actively involve students in the learning process.

In addition, the proposed Seminar may:

- be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or provide an introduction to disciplinary study;
- enable students to achieve a curricular goal—that is,
  - the Multiple Inquiry distribution requirement (arts, humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences)
  - first-year writing requirement for the Effective Communication goal
  - the Informed Citizenship goal as a course addressing cultural diversity, or science, technology, and society
  - the Integrative Thinking goal, as a quantitative, inductive, or deductive reasoning course, half of a cluster, or as an interdisciplinary course
- count toward a major or minor course of study; and
- be connected to other courses with related subject matter, sharing guest speakers, field trips, and other activities.

Format for First-Year Seminar Proposals
Your proposal must contain:

- the Seminar title and a one-paragraph description of the proposed course’s content—for the FYS brochure and College Catalogue listing;
- a brief explanation of course content;
- an indication of which goals and competencies for student learning the course is designed to develop;
- a list of resource needs;
- an explanation of departmental or program requirements the course will satisfy; and
- the addition of the proper supplementary document if you propose the seminar should fulfill any requirement(s) of the Gettysburg Curriculum.

JER/kf
10/2/14