Dear Colleague:

Would you like to offer a First-Year Seminar? Approximately 90% of all students participated in the program this past fall and in doing so have had experiences in their first semester of college that otherwise would not happen until later in their time at Gettysburg. First-Year Seminars rank among the most rewarding courses for faculty to teach because they provide an opportunity to interact meaningfully with students and help them explore a topic of interest as they begin their time at Gettysburg College. At the same time, many of our students report that their FYS courses are some of the most formative parts of their educational experience.

First-Year Seminars vary quite widely in their academic content. Many seminars are interdisciplinary, while others go deep into a single topic. In some seminars, faculty choose to explore areas close to their own expertise while other faculty use the seminar to explore a new area of interest alongside their students. What all seminars have in common is the goal of introducing students to the academic skills that our institution values, such as critical inquiry and collaborative interaction while also introducing them to a variety of communication and research skills. 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 First-Year Seminar Committee has adopted a set of learning goals for the FYS Program which you will find attached to this memo; beginning in the Fall of 2017, we will expect seminars to work towards these goals. If you are interested in the variety of seminars offered in Fall 2016, you can find descriptions online at https://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/firstyear_seminars

Individual faculty and whole departments or programs find many advantages in offering First-Year Seminars. Faculty in the program get to design a course that focuses on a special topic of deep intellectual interest, and all FYS courses are capped at sixteen students, which is small enough to permit the professor to offer individualized attention to students and to introduce active-learning, collaborative learning, and special group projects. In addition, the professor will have the benefit of special funding for meals, speakers, and field trips.

We are always seeking proposals for new First-Year Seminars, and as the director of the FYS program, I would like to encourage all faculty to think about topics that they might be interested in teaching as an FYS. During the 2017-2018 academic year, the Gettysburg Cycle will continue with many members of the Gettysburg College community having a shared focus on the ‘Year of Health’ at both the curricular and co-curricular level. We would be particularly interested in proposals for new seminars dealing with issues related to physical, mental and social well-being both at the level of individuals and as it relates to the environment, societies, and organizations. No matter what your topic idea is, the faculty on the FYS Committee (Kathy Cain, Chris Fee, Julia Hendon, Dave Powell, Jack Ryan, and myself) are available to help you develop it into a full seminar and I invite you to bring your ideas to me or the other members of the group.

Those of us who have taught in the program know that FYS courses provide a great way of developing a close bond with a small group of first-year students. Most FYS instructors will have some of their FYS students as first-year advisees. Additionally, many seminars participate in the Burg Program, in which faculty are paired with administrative partners across campus in order to work together to help students
with the transition to college and encourage participation in high impact educational opportunities. 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 recent years, approximately twenty seminars participated in the Burg program, and we hope to continue this level of participation. Participating in this program involves committing to meet with your students for a fourth hour during the common hour on some Thursdays in the fall semester and to participating in some campus wide events such as the First-Year Common Reading.

I would particularly like to encourage faculty to offer seminars that 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; in particular, you do not need to be a member of the English Department to offer a course satisfying the First-Year Writing requirement. Many of you have substantial writing assignments in your courses that involve writing in stages and revision. These courses are probably already eligible to satisfy the First-Year Writing requirement, and we would like to make sure they are recognized as such. If you are interested in offering a writing-based First-Year Seminar, please contact Will Lane to learn more.

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

If you wish to teach a First-Year Seminar next fall, please first check with your department chair or program director to discuss the staffing implications, and once you have gained their endorsement, please fill out the form available online at [http://tinyurl.com/gburgfys](http://tinyurl.com/gburgfys). If it is a new seminar then you will also need to fill out the proposal form available on the Provost’s website.

**FYS Proposals for Fall 2017** are due in the Provost’s Office no later than **Friday, November 18th**.

If you have an idea for a new FYS that you would like to teach in the future, but you do not think it is feasible for you to teach it in Fall 2017 due to staffing issues or a leave, please drop me an email telling me that as well, so I can help keep it in mind for future years. More generally, if you have any questions or concerns about the First-Year Seminar program, please do not hesitate to contact me at [dglass@gettysburg.edu](mailto:dglass@gettysburg.edu)

Sincerely,

Darren Glass  
Professor of Mathematics  
Director of the First-Year Seminar Program
While First-Year Seminars cover a wide variety of topics, we expect the following goals to be common for all seminars:

- First-Year Seminars should take a particular topic or question that is of interest to the instructor and students and engage with this topic by considering it through a diverse range of viewpoints or disciplinary frameworks.
- FYS courses should be designed to cultivate intellectual curiosity and introduce students to the academic expectations at Gettysburg College while providing them with a framework to help them make the transition to collegiate-level work.
- Seminars should incorporate significant amounts of class discussion and interaction.
- Seminars should have one or more substantive projects, asking students to apply skills and ideas learned in the course, and culminating in either a paper or other significant form of assessment.
- Seminars often contain components designed to introduce students to the many ways they can engage with the Gettysburg community both on and off campus, as well as the many academic and social resources available across campus to help them thrive.

Moreover, while different seminars will have different learning outcomes for their students, we expect all seminars to include the following among their objectives:

- Students will read, interpret, and critically analyze texts (broadly construed) as well as formulate questions independently as they encounter complex subjects and issues.
- Students will understand issues of academic integrity and possess information literacy skills in order to discover and use information critically and ethically.
- Students will formulate arguments that are based on evidence and present these arguments both in speaking and in writing.