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 interact meaningfully with students and help them explore a topic of interest as they begin their Gettysburg College experience. 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. For some seminars, faculty explore areas close to their own expertise and others have a faculty member exploring a new area of interest alongside their students. What they have in common is that First-Year Seminars all aim to introduce 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. If you are interested in the variety of seminars offered in Fall 2015, you can find descriptions online at https://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/firstyear_seminars

We are always seeking proposals for new First-Year Seminars, and as the new 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 2016-2017 academic year, many members of the Gettysburg College community hope to have a shared focus on a themed ‘Year of Food’ at both the curricular and co-curricular level, and I would be particularly interested in proposals for new seminars dealing with issues related to food. No matter what your topic idea is, I am available to help you develop it into a full seminar and I invite you to bring your ideas to me. Whether or not you have a fully-formed idea for a new seminar, I encourage you to attend a luncheon held by the Johnson Center for Creative Teaching and Learning on Wednesday, October 21st where a faculty panel will discuss some of the benefits of teaching in this program, as well as offer some advice about developing new seminars.

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.

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 considering offering a writing-based First-Year Seminar, please contact Will Lane.
To submit a First-Year Seminar, please follow the following instructions:

- **You taught the Seminar in Fall 2015:**
  If you wish to teach a Seminar that you are currently teaching, first check with your department chair or program director, and then let Kara Flythe know of your willingness to offer a FYS next Fall. Also, please work with your departmental administrative assistant to make sure that the syllabus from this semester is in the COLA drive FYS folder.

- **You have taught the Seminar in the past but not in Fall 2015:**
  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. If they approve, please send a copy of the syllabus from the most recent time you taught the course to Kara Flythe and let her know of your interest in teaching a seminar.

- **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 send a message containing a brief description to Kara Flythe. Darren Glass, the Director of the FYS Program, will then work with you to design a Seminar that meets programmatic guidelines and to secure the necessary APPC approval(s). You may also complete the FYS form located on the faculty-landing page under Teaching and Advising/Course Proposal forms for the APPC.

Please send your proposal to Kara Flythe via email (kflythe@gettysburg.edu). If you are interested in participating in the Burg Program, please include this information as well. **FYS Proposals for Fall 2016 are due in the Provost’s Office no later than Friday, November 20.**

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 2016 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.

Sincerely,

Darren Glass
Associate Professor of Mathematics
Director of the First-Year Seminar Program
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 an advanced seminar to students at the beginning of their college career.

The First-Year Seminar is not required for students, but most first-year students participate in the program (approximately 85%). 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. While a particular Seminar will have specific, desired outcomes, FYSs 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. Faculty in the program get to design 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 2016 will be eligible for $500 to support social and academic activities). 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. 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 FYS courses useful as alternatives to existing courses that meet the curricular multiple-inquiries goal. Indeed, in the long run, it is likely that a successful FYS will recruit majors by confirming some students’ inherent interests and converting others.

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 a message containing a brief description to Kara Flythe. Darren Glass, the Director of the FYS Program, will then work with you 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 that provide an introduction to a major;
- 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, Natural Sciences, and Quantitative, Inductive, and Deductive Reasoning)
  - 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
- 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.