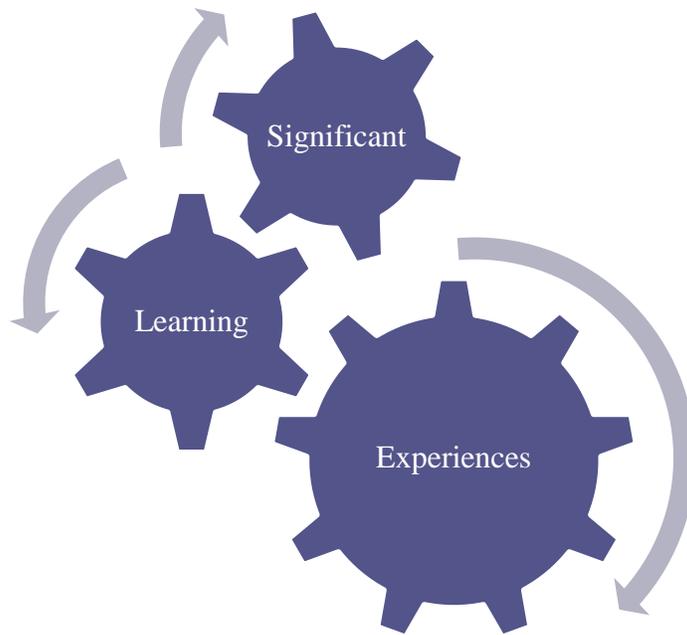


# The First-Year Seminar at WCU

## Liberal Studies Program



## A Faculty Resource

Updated for 2015-2016

First Year Experience  
Division of Student Success  
Western Carolina University

## The First-year Seminar at WCU: A faculty resource

2015 --- Edition

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Content for Support Networks in chapter 11 was provided by unit directors and associates.

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*(Special thanks for the original “First-year Seminar Faculty Resource Guide” from which this resource guide was originally adapted in 2010)*

## Intent: Your work matters.....

I am pleased to welcome you to the 2015 first-year seminar faculty cohort! Teaching a first-year seminar is not like teaching any other course. You will have opportunities to teach outside of the confines of traditional course and programmatic structures and to form immediate, lasting bonds with entering students. It is a teaching experience that is fun and challenging to even the most seasoned faculty member. You will discover the impact you make on our new students and just how much your work matters!

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) identified ten [High Impact Practices](#) that contribute to successful student outcomes. One of those is a strong First Year Experience that delivers transitional knowledge and skills, embedded in a dynamic learning experience. WCU's approach to students in transition is multi-faceted, beginning with *a course designed to spark intellectual curiosity – your seminar*. The first-year seminar provides a unique opportunity to transcend disciplinary boundaries and empower students to expand their horizons. Students also enroll in a “Transition Pathways” course during their first semester, where they are introduced to the procedural, academic, co-curricular, and social aspects of their new environment.

The primary intent of this guide is to provide easy access to the resources that may facilitate your process as you design, teach, and assess your first-year seminar. You have a rich and dynamic network ready to support your work - committed colleagues as eager as you are to guarantee all first-year students enjoy a successful transition to college life and learning. We invite you to carefully review the information provided and prepare for a memorable and exciting year ahead!

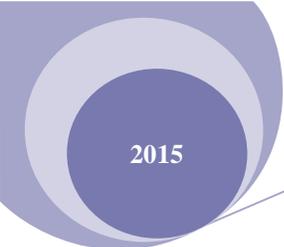
My role is to serve our students and to serve you. I am eager to collaborate with you to create “the world as it may be” in an environment that promotes partnerships among disciplines and units across our campus! I hope you will find this guide and its web-links useful, and as with all aspects of FYE, I welcome your feedback. Please let me know if you need additional resources or assistance.

Thank you for agreeing to teach this important course!

*Glenda Hensley, Director – First Year Experience*

<http://fye.wcu.edu>

*Western Carolina University*



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*If you wish to have any resources in this guide as word documents, please ask!*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Chapter 1

### 1. What is a first-year seminar (FYS)?

- First-year seminars are core courses in the liberal studies program that are taught in a variety of disciplines. These courses are designed specifically for first-year students.
- First-year seminars are smaller than most classes, with the enrollment capped at 27, and are always numbered 190-199, e.g., PAR 190.
- The primary goal of the first year seminar is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level. The first-year seminar's focus is the development of academic rigor and intellectual dispositions.
- The use of a common text or theme provides students with an opportunity to see faculty modeling intellectual learning habits by considering a topic that might be outside of the faculty member's area of specialization.

### 2. What are the University guidelines for first-year seminars?

- The first-year seminar objectives are to:
  - Teach students the importance of liberal studies in a university education.
  - Discuss how reasoning and communication skills are the foundation for life-long intellectual and professional growth.
  - Demonstrate that cultural, social, economic, and political issues of a global society are not limited to one academic discipline or profession.
  - Discuss serious ideas and develop rigorous intellectual habits.
- The [liberal studies program](#) has its own learning goals.

### 3. What is the grading schema for a first-year seminar?

- Grading for all first year seminars is required to be on the following scale: A, B, C, I (incomplete), W (withdrawal) or U (unsatisfactory).
- Students who receive a 'U' do not need to make up the 3 unearned FYS credits. However, they must earn sufficient liberal studies credit hours for their degree program.

### 4. Who is required to take the first-year seminar?

- Students entering WCU with 0 - 15 credit hours are required to take this course during their first or second semester;
- Students entering with 15.1 - 29.9 credit hours are eligible to enroll, but it is not required;
- Students with 30 or more credit hours are not eligible to take a first-year seminar.
- Transfer students with greater than 15 credit hours are not required to take the seminar.
- When a student is not required or eligible to take the first-year seminar, it is considered waived, and the liberal studies hour requirement will be reduced from 42 to 39 (total hours for the degree are not reduced). The first-year seminar cannot be repeated and, therefore, it is not possible to replace a grade received in this course.

**5. What kind of students can I expect?**

- Traditional first-year students today are *Digital Natives* referred to by a variety of generational identities including: *Millennial* or *Generation Y* and *Generation iY* or *Generation Z* – the last two referring to those born in 2004 and beyond. Confident and optimistic, they tend to be technologically savvy, socially oriented, and interested in community service. They have also been defined with dualistic characteristics that present challenges *and* opportunities in the educational setting. See [Chapter 2](#) for more.
- **First-generation** college students, (students who are the first in the family to go to college) comprise about 30% of the incoming class. For more information about WCU's commitment to serve the particular needs of this group of students, you may [reference the website for more!](#)
- More than 90% graduated from a high school in *North Carolina*. Reference the [\\*Freshman profile](#)
- **Early College Student** enrollment is projected to be 2 %. Early college / high-school students, once enrolled, are eligible to participate in first-year programs and are classified (by federal, state and WCU regulations) as first-year students. Developmentally, these students are different from a traditional transfer student and thus, a transition course is especially important for their success, regardless of the number of hours they bring in as advance credit. You may [learn more here](#)

**6. How do students select their first-year seminars?**

- Students prioritize three seminars from a list of topics distributed in Catwalk, our online orientation. The advising center builds all new student fall schedules based on availability of preferred selections. Spring registration for the FYS follows the traditional process of students meeting with their advisor, followed by the scheduled on-line registration.
- The [FYE web-site](#) offers rich [seminar descriptions](#), provided by the faculty members.

**7. When are first-year seminars offered?**

- The FYS may be taken in the fall or spring of the students' first year. In an effort to balance faculty loads, students now register for either a FYS or English 101 during their first semester, with the reverse during their second semester.
- This structure also provides students with at least one course each of their first semesters that is capped with a lower enrollment (generally 24-28).

**8. Why teach a first-year seminar and why is the first-year seminar important?**

- Your course will impart habits that encourage students to be life-long learners.
- Your course will establish the foundation for your students to succeed and to excel.
- You will impact a life and as such, the very future of the global community.

## *Transition Courses*

### **9. What is a first-year transition course?**

- Transition courses are designed to introduce students to the academic, procedural, and social elements of their new community, to maximize opportunities for a successful transition to college. They are credit-bearing with a standard grading scale.
- Although Transition courses vary in focus and instructional approach, all share the Core Elements as the primary learning outcomes. These elements are integrated in all courses.
- Transition courses are not discipline specific, but may integrate elements of degree paths such as Leadership, within their overall curricular design.
- WCU offers four Transition Pathways:
  - USI 130 – The University Experience
  - USI 101 – Honors Forum
  - COUN 140 – Skills for College Life
  - LEAD LLCs (140, 141 & 150-158) - Living learning communities
- Transition courses are smaller than most classes, with the enrollment capped at 22-25, and are always numbered as above.
- The use of a common text or theme provides students with an opportunity to see instructors modeling intellectual learning and collaborative practice.
- Transition courses are 1-hour credit courses, except for LEAD LLCs, which are 2-hour credit courses to allow the additional focus on leadership principles and thematic topics.

### **10. What is the difference between a first-year seminar and a transition course?**

#### Who teaches the course?

- The first-year seminar is a course with content drawn from an instructor's expertise, and are core courses in the liberal studies program that are taught in a variety of disciplines.
- Transition courses are taught by qualified faculty and professional staff who have demonstrated their commitment to professional excellence and to student success.

#### What is the goal of the course?

- The primary goal of the first-year seminar is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level, focused on the development of academic rigor and intellectual dispositions.
- Transition courses are designed to introduce students to the academic, procedural, and social elements of their new community, and are offered primarily in the fall semester.

#### Who takes the course?

- Although highly encouraged, not all students take a transition course, while the first-year seminar is a requirement for completion of the Liberal Studies Program.

## ***Western Carolina University Liberal Studies Program***

### **Purpose** (*from the Liberal Studies document*)

- The purpose of the WCU Liberal Studies Program is to prepare students to become contributing and informed citizens in a global community. The university's bachelor's degree programs include courses in Liberal Studies designed to help each student attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of an educated person, including: the ability to think critically; communicate effectively; identify and solve problems reflectively; use information and technology responsibly; develop an appreciation for the creative and performing arts; form a basis for continued personal development and lifelong learning.
- Additionally, some aspects of the program foster the development of citizenship characteristics such as behavior characterized by honesty, integrity, and responsibility; service to others; awareness of and sensitivity to the concerns of diverse people and cultures; and commitment to stewardship of the natural and cultural environment.

### **Liberal Studies Objectives** (for the entire program) (*from the Liberal Studies document*)

- Demonstrate the ability to locate, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information;
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret and use numerical, written, oral, and visual data;
- Demonstrate the ability to read with comprehension, and to write and speak clearly, coherently, and effectively as well as to adapt modes of communication appropriate to an audience;
- Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze arguments; demonstrate the ability to recognize behaviors and define choices that affect lifelong well-being;
- Demonstrate an understanding of
  - Past human experiences and ability to relate them to the present;
  - Different contemporary cultures and their interrelationships;
  - Issues involving social institutions, interpersonal and group dynamics, human development and behavior, and cultural diversity; scientific concepts and methods as well as contemporary issues in science and technology;
  - Cultural heritage through its expressions of wisdom, literature and art and their roles in the process of self and social understanding.
- For more information, [please visit online.](#)

### **V. The First-Year Seminar** (*from the Liberal Studies document*)

The primary goal of the First-Year Seminar is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level. The First-Year Seminar component addresses the Student Sense of Place, Liberal Arts and Sciences Emphasis, Fundamental Skills, Integration of Knowledge, Moral Reflection, and Faculty Commitment components of the Fundamental Principles.

**The First-Year Seminar, cont.**

The First-Year Seminar will introduce students to the importance of Liberal Studies in a university education. It will help students to see the necessity for reasoning and communication proficiencies as foundations for life-long intellectual and professional growth. The type of exploration of ideas characteristic of a seminar will help students begin to see that important cultural, social, economic and political issues of a global society are not limited to the traditional boundaries of the academic disciplines specializations of the professions.

The First-Year Seminar should encourage students to discuss serious ideas and develop rigorous intellectual habits.

First-Year Seminar courses will be in a stand-alone category and will not fulfill a Perspectives category requirement. The First-Year Seminar must be taken by all new freshmen in their first semester. A First-Year Seminar may be a special course motivated by faculty interest. These special courses can be proposed in any discipline, and they need not be from traditional Liberal Studies disciplines.

First-Year Seminar sections will be limited to no more than 27 students. Seminars must have a significant writing component based on rigorous reading and seminar-format discussions. The First-Year Seminar course will perform a balancing act between a required common learning experience for all students who take the course and the freedom for individual faculty to pursue disciplinary interests.

The First-Year Seminar course may incorporate common themes, such as examining general modes of inquiry as distinct from discipline-specific studies. The First-Year Seminar could be a home for a common theme for the academic year and the use of a common reading, including participation by the text's author in campus-wide intellectual activities. However, such themes would be of limited importance compared to the instructor's disciplinary interests.

The First-Year Seminar requirement is based on a desire to set a high standard for the academic habits and intellectual dispositions of entering freshmen. It will introduce students immediately and dramatically to the intellectual environment that comprises a university.

First-Year Seminar courses that attempt to incorporate non-academic transition issues tend to flounder because faculty feel uncomfortable teaching non-academic issues and thus faculty commitment to such courses is difficult to build and maintain. This program leaves transition issues to those better trained to deal with them (Student and Academic Affairs staff and trained, interested faculty), and instead limits the First-Year Seminar's focus to the development of academic rigor and intellectual dispositions.

The use of a common text or theme will provide students an opportunity to see faculty modeling intellectual learning habits by considering a topic that might be outside of their area of specialization.

Freshmen who enter in the spring semester will be placed in a section of First-Year Seminar that is offered in the spring. In cases where a student entering in the spring cannot take First-Year Seminar during the spring semester, the student will take it during the next Fall semester.

**The guidelines are:**

- a. Students with 0 - 15 credit hours are required to take this course;
- b. Students with 15.1 – 29.9 credit hours are eligible to take a First-Year Seminar, but it is not required;
- c. Students with 30 or more credit hours are not eligible to take First-Year Seminar;
- d. When a student is not required to take the First-Year Seminar, it is considered waived, and the Liberal Studies hour requirement will be reduced from 42 to 39 (total hours for the degree are not reduced).

The First-Year Seminar cannot be repeated and, therefore, it is not possible to replace a grade received in this course.

Grading for all First Year Seminars shall be A, B, C, I (“incomplete”), or U (“unsatisfactory”). Those students receiving a “U” grade must take three credits of liberal studies electives to make up for the unearned credits from the First-Year seminar.

## THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AND YOU

## Chapter 2

### *What is FYE?*

#### **Mission**

The Office of First Year Experience aims to foster opportunities that will empower students to not only succeed with their transition to college life, but to also discover a passion for learning as they become the co-creators of their collegiate experience. We will collaborate with the WCU community and with the regional community to enhance our students' pride of place, civic responsibility, and sense of connectivity as they discover the intersections along their educational pathway. We aim to facilitate conversations and partnerships among faculty, staff, and students that engage productive conversations and challenge us to action with intentionality and purpose.

#### **Goals**

- Foster opportunities and environments for a successful and holistic college experience for our students.
- Facilitate collaboration and partnerships among faculty and staff that is inclusive of diverse perspectives.
- Focus students towards intentionality – in the classroom and beyond.
- Facilitate integrated and engaged initiatives aimed to enhance students' ability to synthesize learning experiences.

#### **Who we are**

Our role is to offer guidance and support as students learn to navigate the wealth of resources and opportunities WCU has to offer. As students begin to chart their academic pathways, we will help them discover the interrelated nature of life and learning – that learning is entwined with co-curricular, social, and personal events – that when they add intentionality to the mix, they will begin to clarify values and synthesize understandings – they will determine their future.

#### **Overview of FYE**

As students transition into college life, the office of First Year Experience (FYE) provides a holistic approach to support the total student experience through intentional collaborations with divisions across campus and particularly within Academic and Student Affairs. The Academic Success Program (ASP) is a unit of FYE and vital to WCU's mission of access and success. Here to serve ASP, Honor's, and traditionally enrolled students, the FYE office is committed to inclusion and diversity.

Learning does not stop at the classroom door; therefore the FYE office models the power of engagement and collaboration to enrich learning and experience. Partnerships fostered by FYE help students discover the connections between academic and co-curricular experiences. These types of partnerships extend to co-curricular programming for students and professional development for faculty and staff working with first-year students.

Examples include:

- One Book – a common reading program for new freshmen entering each fall,
- FYE Summer – a summer entry program for newly admitted freshmen,
- Interdisciplinary opportunities and initiatives such as the Campus Theme each year,
- Service learning initiatives designed specifically for first-year students,
- Week of Welcome activities and events in the fall and spring semesters,
- Special-topics guest speakers and scholars,
- WHEE Call You - a program to individually welcome new students to WCU,
- Retreats designed to facilitate faculty, staff and student partnerships,
- EYE on FYE student celebration of excellence, and
- A First-year Advocate award, selected by students.

The FYE office maintains oversight and provides administrative, curricular, and professional development support for three first-year course categories, each described on the FYE website.

- *Transition Pathways Courses* are one or two credit-hour courses that introduce students to college life, the academic and procedural elements of the university, and to the academy and community. WCU offers four transition course-type options.
- *Summer Learning Communities* at WCU offer students the option to begin their academic career early with a 5-week intensive program offered in July.
- *First-year seminars* at WCU are three credit-hour disciplinary courses required in the general education curriculum. These courses introduce students to the academic rigor of college learning.

In order to address the many facets involved to maintain a quality curricular program for students in transition, the FYE office serves as an organizing resource and campus partner to:

- Coordinate detailed marketing and course information via web-pages and print materials that will help students make well-informed decisions;
- Liaison with the department heads and instructors connected with each of the courses;
- Communicate with the Advising Center and the Registrar to facilitate consistent messaging;
- Collaborate with support units in academic and student affairs;
- Foster interdisciplinary and co-curricular opportunities in to enhance learning experiences;
- Design and facilitate professional development opportunities for faculty and staff;
- Foster relationships that empower students to engage with the community – campus and beyond;
- Maintain a rigorous assessment model developed to provide a continuous feedback loop.

### ***Academic Success Program***

*(Courtesy of Janina DeHart, Assistant Director of Academic Transition & Success in FYE)*

#### **Purpose of the Program**

The Academic Success Program (ASP) provides an opportunity for students who meet the criteria for conditional admission to WCU to begin their college experience early and to prepare them for success in college and beyond. This program is designed to provide a full year of support to facilitate a successful first-year experience and to help students develop skills to excel in their college career. It helps motivate students to set higher goals in school and in life and helps hold students accountable for demonstrating attitudes and behaviors that coincide with reaching their goals.

#### **Summer Program Components**

The program begins with a mandatory six-week summer session, in which students are enrolled in three classes for a total of seven hours of academic credit. The focus of the program is on developing the students' reading and writing skills in order to enhance and support their successful transition to the rigors of college-level requirements and expectations. Three classes are paired together to form a *Summer Academic Theme*, allowing the instructors to work as teams to provide a collaborative learning experience. Each *Summer Academic Theme* includes a field trip and a service learning component. Students meet with their academic advisor and begin to explore academic and life goals. Faculty and staff meet weekly to discuss individual student issues and concerns and if interventions are warranted. Successful participation in and completion of the Academic Success Program (earning at least a C in each course and having at least a 2.5 GPA) allows students to continue at WCU in the fall with improved skills and confidence.

#### **First-Year Program Components**

ASP students are also supported and monitored throughout their first year of enrollment:

- Academic advisors continue to serve as students' primary resource and support person.
- Students continue to be co-located as part of Western Carolina PEAKS.
- Students are enrolled in *LEAD 141: Student Development and Leadership*.
- Peer Mentors serve as a role model and a peer educator and are assigned to each student.
- Academic progress is monitored through the use of a progress reporting system.

#### **Administration**

ASP is part of the Office of First Year Experience and coordinated by the FYE assistant director in collaboration with other FYE Summer opportunities.

### ***Many Pathways to Intention***

Transition courses introduce students to the goals of the university [Intentional Learning Plan](#), which aims to help students learn how to integrate a variety of university opportunities. The "FYE Learning Goals and Outcomes" (provided in the syllabus template), emerge from these university goals and vision plan, and establish foundational outcomes for first-year students.

[What is a transition course?](#) A transition course will help students make a seamless and holistic transition to their new community at WCU. This subject of this course is student-centered. It is intentionally designed to promote their self-awareness and personal success—in college and in life after college—by empowering them with flexible skills and strategies that are applicable across subjects (transferable, cross-disciplinary skills) and across time (durable, life-long, learning skills).

Students will:

- Learn about campus resources, procedures and policies.
- Learn to negotiate college life successfully.
- Discover opportunities for extra-curricular activities.
- Learn to be intentional in their educational and personal goals.
- Explore the scope of the world around them and their place in, and impact on, that world.

### **FYE COLLEGE TRANSITIONS**

- UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE - USI 130
- SKILLS FOR COLLEGE LIFE - COUN 140

These courses introduce students to the academic, procedural, and social elements of their new community (one credit hour). Class sessions are interactive and focused on personal and academic growth, helping students to integrate classroom learning with extra-curricular activities and residence hall programming.

### **LEAD (140, 150-158) LEADERSHIP THEMES**

Each themed living-learning community (LLC) is grounded in the principles of Leadership development (two credit hours). Residential programming will complement academic, co-curricular, and thematic learning outcomes over the full year through partnerships among faculty and staff professionals. Students will examine the principles of leadership through the thematic lens as they master the transition. For first-year students only, these also serve as an elective in the Leadership minor.

### **USI 101 HONORS FORUM**

The Honors Forum focuses on the Honors Path, The Honors College, and WCU. The Path encourages Honors students to seek out and *connect activities to their post-graduation plans*—to make the most of all the educational opportunities WCU offers. The point of The Honors Path is for students to graduate from WCU with the best academic profile possible to enhance placement in great careers or graduate schools. *Prerequisite – acceptance to the Honors College.*

### ***FYE Cabinet***

#### **Vision:**

The First Year Cabinet aspires to assist first-year students in their transition into college life by encouraging their involvement, both on-campus and off-campus, in activities and experiences that will enrich personal growth and development and be sustained throughout a student's academic career. Learn more about the [FYE Cabinet](#) here.

#### **Mission:**

Drawing from the experience and expertise of representatives from both Academic and Student Affairs and our FYE Student Council, the First Year Cabinet supports the mission of the Office of First Year Experiences by providing a framework of university collaborations for learning inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **Expectations:**

Our values and expectations for students are expressed through our Community Creed:

- I will practice personal and academic integrity.
- I will respect the dignity and rights of all persons.
- I will demonstrate concern for others and live up to my community responsibilities.
- I will engage myself in the arts, culture, and intellectual life of my University.
- I will celebrate and take pride in Western Carolina University.

\*\*Please reference the FYE website to learn about the [members of the FYE Cabinet](#).

### ***Faculty Qualifications, Characteristics, and Expectations***

Whether you have lots of experience in teaching first-year (FY) courses or you are new to the ranks, you are about to enter an exciting phase in FY programs at WCU. Teaching our FY students is a rewarding experience, filled with all the challenges and opportunities inherent in the transition process. Our incoming FY students are a different breed than those of earlier generations, having grown up as true 'digital natives'. In higher education, we are about to experience our own transition as we migrate from the Millennial generation (or generation Y), and prepare to welcome Generation Z (or Generation I or Next) to our campus fall 2012!

Of course, transitions are tough for anyone; new environments, new people, new expectations, new experiences. Transitions are also exciting, filled with opportunity and promise. It is our job, as FY educators, to offer guidance, support, and instruction. It is our job to know the liberal studies goals and learning objectives, and to understand what helps students adjust and persist with college. It is our job to be there for our students. At the end of the day, the job isn't all that different – students need to trust in our expertise and to know they are safe, cared for, and accepted. These characteristics are the reasons why you are special and why our students are fortunate that you have chosen to teach a first-year seminar this year!

### **FYE Course Instructor Qualifications & Characteristics**

*(Adapted from the writings of Joe Cuseo, Professor Emeritus from Marymount College; FYE author and professional development scholar)*

- *Student-centered* educational philosophy
- Demonstrated desire to achieve excellence in teaching *first-year* students and courses
- Commitment to professional development opportunities for teaching a *transition course* and/or *first-year experience* initiatives
- Use of *engaging pedagogy* that *involves* students in the learning process
- Capable of relating to and developing classroom *rappor*t with students
- Genuine interest in *advising and mentoring* new students.
- Evidence of commitment to *out-of-class contact* with students
- Commitment to *general education*, the *liberal arts*, and development of the student as a *whole person*.
- Willingness to work with faculty and staff across *different academic disciplines* and *student-support services*
- Appreciation of the educational role of *student development* professionals and *the co-curriculum*.

### **FYS Faculty Expectations**

All FYS faculty are expected to address the following expectations:

1. First-year seminar goals and learning outcomes:
  - Address the goals and learning outcomes for the FYS and the Liberal studies program.
  - Be familiar with the FYE learning outcomes, which are tailored to address the WCU Intentional Learning Plan. (please see chapter 4).
  - Use your own creative and innovative approach to design course strategy and teaching techniques – your individuality will be the spark that makes your seminar work!
2. Information sharing:
  - Submit your course syllabus and calendar during the first week of class via email to the FYE director [ghensley@email.wcu.edu](mailto:ghensley@email.wcu.edu) .
  - Please have your students participate in the FYE course pre-post survey that will be provided to you in advance.
  - Share examples of student works (with the assignment) by the end of the semester via email to the FYE director [ghensley@email.wcu.edu](mailto:ghensley@email.wcu.edu)

## DESIGNING YOUR FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

## Chapter 3

### *Finding Purpose*

The first-year seminar is designed to introduce students to the differences between college and high school-level work. As the instructor, you are their mentor, teacher, coach, and their referee. Experienced instructors suggest that when you design the course you keep in mind these multiple roles and plan time to work on skill-building and confidence activities and to be explicit about what you are doing and why.

First-year students who understand the purpose of this course and see its relationship to their education are more motivated to participate at a high level in your class. Further, *when students engage fully in your course, the positive outcomes transfer to other classes, leading to persistence, student satisfaction, and retention.*

The first step in designing a first-year seminar is choosing a topic. Although you should certainly choose an area of your own expertise, some instructors are asked to teach a first-year seminar that has already been developed. In this case, you should place your own stamp on the course and identify strategies that are a good fit for your pedagogical approach and communication style. First-year seminar instructors who have a choice in developing a seminar are encouraged to think of non-traditional topics, especially those that may cross disciplinary divides. You are also encouraged to be creative and think of titles for your topics that are catchy and appealing.

A successful topic for a first year seminar:

- Clearly identifies what the course will be about.
- Does not duplicate courses being taught at other times/in the discipline.
- Gives the instructor room to be innovative and interactive.
- Engages students from other intended majors.
- Encourages critical thinking, debate, and/or discussion.

### *Campus Themes – [WCU Intentional Learning]*

#### **Campus Themes --- help students connect the dots.....**

You may choose to connect your course goals to this year's campus-wide interdisciplinary focus: "**North Carolina: Our State, Our Time**". The connection will enable you to connect course goals with a campus-wide conversation – expanding the notion of ‘seminar’ – as your students begin to recognize the synthesis of their learning experiences from their first semester forward. Interdisciplinary themes span courses and experiences to help students make sense of their world and can help you introduce topics in a way that makes them relevant and authentic. Themes empower active learning designs and provide a teaching story that is fully connected. You may learn more about the [Intentional Learning Plan](#) here.

### ***WCU Intentional Learning Plan*** (content from the *Intentional Learning website*)

#### **Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning**

The Western Carolina experience is built on a foundation of engaged, intentional learning. Life goals are like climbing mountains. Working as partners in learning, students, faculty, and staff will choose the mountains to climb and the best pathway to get there.

The overarching goal of the Intentional Learning Plan is to empower students to *integrate* knowledge and skills from their academic and co-curricular experiences to become *intentional* participants in their own learning. To that end, WCU hopes to impact students' *understanding of self, intellectual flexibility and versatility, and capacity for integrated learning*.

As a result, WCU expects students to:

1. identify their aptitudes, abilities, and interests and articulate their future goals and aspirations;
2. modify their behaviors and values in response to knowledge and skills gained from their academic and co-curricular experiences; and
3. recognize the synthesis of their university experiences relative to their future education and career plans.

To achieve the expected learning goals, WCU has identified a set of core skills and behaviors (outcomes) that are central to a student's development as an *integrated, intentional learner*.

These core expectations include the ability to:

- ***Integrate information from a variety of contexts*** – Students will make connections between personal interest and abilities, Liberal Studies, programs of study, general electives, and experiential learning opportunities, and other co-curricular activities; and relate the implications/value of these connections to 'real world' scenarios.
- ***Solve complex problems*** – Students will identify the dimensions of complex issues or problems; analyze and evaluate multiple sources of information/data; apply knowledge and decision-making processes to new questions or issues; and reflect on the implications of their solution/decision.
- ***Communicate effectively and responsibly*** – Students will convey complex information in a variety of formats and contexts; identify intended audience and communicate appropriately and respectfully.
- ***Practice civic engagement*** – Students will identify their roles and responsibilities as engaged citizens by considering the public policies that affect their choices and actions; by recognizing commonalities and interdependence of diverse views/values; and by acting responsibly to positively affect public policy.
- ***Clarify and act on purpose and values*** – Students will examine the values that influence their own decision making processes; take responsibility for their own learning and development in a manner consistent with academic integrity and their own goals and aspirations; intentionally use knowledge gained from learning experiences to make informed judgments about their future plans; and bring those plans into action.

## *Intentional Learning for First-year Goals and Outcomes*

### **Discover College**

Students will adapt successfully to new environments and responsibilities, and will discover and utilize the resources available to them which include academic gateways, social networks, and co-curricular and personal development opportunities.

- Outcome 1: Students will identify the purpose and function of the campus resources that serve as tools for success (i.e., the Core Elements).
- Outcome 2: Students will engage with the campus community.

### **Be Involved**

*[Practice civic engagement]*

Students will identify their roles and responsibilities as engaged citizens by considering the public policies that affect their choices and actions; by recognizing commonalities and interdependence of diverse views/ values; and by acting responsibly to positively affect public policy.

- Outcome 1: Students will practice the Community Creed.

### **Connect the Dots**

*[Integrate information from a variety of contexts]*

Students will make connections between personal interest and abilities, general education, programs of study, general electives, experiential learning opportunities, and other co-curricular activities; and relate the implications/value of these connections to “real world” scenarios.

- Outcome: Students will identify connections between personal experiences and closely related academic knowledge (i.e., facts, ideas, concepts, experiences).
- Outcome 2: Students will articulate their own strengths and challenges as learners in dealing with a specific task, performance, event, etc.

### **Think First**

*[Solving complex problems]*

Students will identify the dimensions of complex issues or problems; analyze and evaluate multiple sources of information/data; apply knowledge and decision-making processes to new questions or issues; and reflect on the implications of their solution/decision.

- Outcome 1: Students will select from available information and resources to solve issues in their collegiate lives and campus communities.
- Outcome 2: Students will construct a plan to achieve an intended solution.

### **Exchange Ideas.**

*[Communicate effectively and responsibly]*

Students will convey complex information in a variety of formats and contexts; identify intended audience and communicate appropriately and respectfully.

- Outcome 1: Students will communicate as appropriate to the context and audience in order to articulate needs or share information.

### **Calibrate Your Compass**

*[Clarify and act on purpose and values]*

Students will examine the values that influence their own decision- making processes; take responsibility for their own learning and development in a manner consistent with academic integrity and their own goals and aspirations; intentionally use knowledge gained from learning experiences to make informed judgments about their future plans; and bring those plans into action.

- Outcome 1: Students will choose learning experiences consistent with their own values and goals.
- Outcome 2: Students will prioritize values that influence decision making.

## DEVELOPING YOUR SYLLABUS

### Chapter 4

After you have selected your topic and it has been approved by your department head, you can begin to design the syllabus for your course. Most first-year seminars are captured under a general category for your department/program, so it is not necessary to develop an entirely new course, just create a theme that fits with your department's first-year seminar goals.

#### **Learning Objectives:**

Your syllabus must contain your course objectives, as well as the Liberal Studies Objectives. *Course objectives should incorporate the stated objectives for first-year seminars in some way.* You may choose to state these verbatim or adapted to suit the flavor of your discipline.

Learning objectives/outcomes should be:

- Clear to your audiences, including faculty and students.
- Process oriented and/or should specify an end.
- Measurable.
- Linked to other elements in the course (assignments, assessment, etc.).
- Realistic, given the time frame of the course.

#### **First-year Seminar** (*From the Liberal Studies Program Guide*)

This course is a **First-Year Seminar**, one of the Core courses in the Liberal Studies program. The primary goal of the *First-Year Seminar* is to introduce students to intellectual life at the university level. In this course students will:

- learn about the importance of Liberal Studies in a university education;
- consider how reasoning skills and communication skills are the foundations for life-long intellectual and professional growth;
- see that cultural, social, economic and political issues of a global society are not limited to one academic discipline or one profession;
- discuss serious ideas and develop rigorous intellectual habits.

**Liberal Studies:** Please see page 8 of this guide for the Liberal Studies learning objectives and visit the [Liberal Studies Web site for more information.](#)

**Reminder:** There is a difference between learning outcomes and learning goals. Goals are broader, intangible, or abstract. For example, it might be important to you that your first-year seminar students become comfortable with university life. This goal is great, but it is not an easily measurable outcome, so it remains a goal, not an outcome.

#### **Syllabus Resources**

Visit the Coulter Faculty Commons website or schedule a consultation with their team of instructional developers. Find more information, as well as other helpful hints, tips, and templates at this link: [Syllabus Resources:](#)

Course Learning Objectives – Examples

## 1. GEOL 191 – Geology, Landscapes and the Human Psyche

By the end of this course, students will

- Explain the geologic origin and geologist processes of mountain belts, deserts and rivers.
- Analyze how landscapes affect the practical aspects of how we live, the things that Ralph Waldo Emerson calls commodity.
- Identify how people connect with the land. What inspires them? Is there an inherent difference between writers and artists from the desert southwest and those from the Southern Appalachians? How do culture and landscape intersect (if they do)?
- Define a landscape. What is real about a landscape and what is constructed? In other words, what aspects of a landscape are consistent with its physical properties and what is inherited from a writer?
- Explain the kind of myths and metaphors. Are these natural features? Do they reflect the processes that created them?
- Assess how geologists, artists, and writers all examine a landscape. Are there inherent differences in how we all see the same phenomenon? Is one more accurate or less accurate? Do writers over focus on biota and not concentrate on geology?

*Courtesy, Dr. Dave Kinner, Geosciences*

## 2. ENGL 199 – Southern Appalachia Through Words and Pictures

Course Goals

- Improve reading and analytical skills with a variety of materials including film, music, and more traditional texts.
- Write informally about what you read in a variety of contexts—journals, discussion lists, etc.
- Write a more formal academic paper in which you develop an area of interest into a research project including a paper and oral presentation.
- Develop an appreciation of the culture and diversity of art from the region.
- Develop a more informed historical perspective of this area and the major contributors to Appalachian literature and art.
- Develop informed concern about contemporary social issues.
- Consider how place intersects with identity
- Build a sense of identity as a student in an academic setting—e.g., what am I doing here? What do I hope to accomplish in this class? In my time as an undergraduate?

*Courtesy, Dr. Mae Claxton, English*

## 3. HIST 190 – Crime and Criminals

Course Goals

- To become proficient in the use of historical evidence.
- To create and present original and compelling arguments.
- To critically apply criminological theory.
- To understand how crime has changed over time.
- To relate historical cases to present day issues.
- To synthesize history, theory, and changing perceptions of law.
- To gain the ability to use literature as an historical source

*Courtesy, Dr. Laura Cruz, History*

## REASONING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### Chapter 5

One of the goals of the first-year seminar is to reinforce reasoning and communication skills. Keep these skills in mind when designing your course and choosing assignments. Successful courses incorporate both written and oral communication skills. Writing is an essential skill for future success and is a cornerstone of the higher education experience.

Students in your seminar may not yet be enrolled in freshman composition, and so writing skills might vary widely. (Remember: some will not have freshman composition until their second semester.) You may choose to include lots of informal writing or journaling as a way to point out the need for development. This will facilitate efforts to encourage written communication, without having to penalize undeveloped writing skills. Class discussions provide opportunities to make observations about oral communication skills. One-on-one conversations and small group work require development of interpersonal communication skills, as well. Students will have opportunities to take formal courses on these skills in future semesters, but the seminar will also help students to become conscious about their communication skills and encourage them to utilize resources such as the Writing and Learning Commons (WaLC).

Bear in mind that your students will come to the course with a wide range of experiences and comfort with writing. For assistance in incorporating writing into your course, please contact the WaLC, located in Belk Building.

Reasoning skills are a bit trickier. In education theory, according to the Perry Model of Intellectual Development students begin their college education thinking that there are right answers to every question, i.e., that the world is very black and white. As they progress through their education, students pass through three more stages. After the black/white stage, they then begin to understand that there may not be right answers for every question—yet. In the sophomore stage, they are confident that right answers will eventually be found, such as a cure for cancer. The third stage is where they come to realize that for many questions there are no right answers, only shades of interpretation or reasoned opinion. This stage can be one of the most difficult for students to work through, and many find that they miss seeing the world in terms of dichotomies and right answers. In the final stage, students learn to navigate these choices, to select one interpretation, and to defend it against competitors. This last stage, according to Perry, is ultimately the goal of a liberal studies education. Many first-year seminar instructors incorporate this model into the structure of their classes and try to help students move from the first stage toward the second, third, and final stages of their intellectual development.

First-year seminar instructors have become increasingly creative in how they incorporate writing into their courses; an example follows below:

PAR (Philosophy and Religion) 190 - Freedom, Culture, and Utopia

Critical Analysis Paper: Each student will turn in a critical review of Huxley's *Brave New World*. In this review, I expect to see signs of critical engagement with the text, some awareness of other utopian visions that we have read throughout the semester, and

your own alternative utopian vision that you offer. Do not merely download an Internet review of Huxley's work – plagiarism will earn you an F for the course, and will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs. To help you avoid plagiarism and cite sources correctly, I also have required a supplemental textbook, *Writing with Sources* by Gordon Harvey. This project is an opportunity for you to be creative in your thinking and writing about what we have read and to offer your own reflections on what constitutes an ideal society. *Courtesy, Dr. Daryl Hale, Philosophy and Religion*

The Perry Model Of Intellectual And Ethical Development		
	<i>Stages of Cognitive Development</i>	<i>Transitions in Cognitive Development</i>
#1: Dualistic Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students generally believe knowledge is certain and unambiguous: black/white, right/wrong.</li> <li>▪ Questions have immutable, objective answers.</li> <li>▪ Students generally believe authorities possess valuable wisdom that contains eternal truths.</li> </ul>	Certainty yields to uncertainty and ambiguity.
#2: Multiplicity	Students come to believe that where uncertainty exists, knowledge and truth are essentially subjective and personal.	Students come to recognize that mere opinion is insufficient because specific criteria help evaluate the usefulness and validity of knowledge claims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• methodology • empirical evidence • explanatory power • predictive power • logical consistency • positive vs. normative conclusions</li> </ul>
#3: Contextual-Relativism	Students come to believe that even where uncertainty exists, people must make choices about premises, frameworks, hypotheses, and theories to apply; policy conclusions are not self-evident.	Students may come to recognize that even in a world of uncertainty, they must make choices (whether about ideas, hypotheses, theories, or policies). These choices require methods of critical thinking.
#4: Context-Appropriate Decisions	Students may come to acknowledge that choices require analysis and values. Knowledge, theories, and methods are imperfect and uncertain, thus personal choices require acknowledging personal responsibility that follows from personal values.	
Source: model modifications by Nelson (1989), with additional comments by Thoma (1993)		
Thoma, George A. (1993). "The Perry Framework and Tactics for Teaching Critical Thinking in Economics." <i>Journal of Economic Education</i> , Spring: 128-136.		

An example of incorporating reasoning skills into the first-year seminar follows:

***PAR 190 (Philosophy and Religion) – Freedom, Culture, and Utopia***

Utopias are generally understood as ideally perfect places, ones where the social and political conditions work to the advantage of most members of society. Thomas More invented the word, punning on the Greek words, **ou** [English: ‘no’ or ‘not’] and **topos** [English: ‘place’]. More also played on the Greek adjective **eu** [English: ‘excellent’ or ‘good’] to speak of his **eutopia** as a good place. Since that time, many have taken More to be critiquing his own society, and thus providing us with a description of a **dystopia**, a bad place. So from this brief etymology, we should pay close attention to 3 things connected with utopian thought: a. utopias are ideal societies, i.e. they don’t actually exist, though b. they are always combined with a **topos**, some location in time and space other than the present; so, c. utopian schemes are always visions that criticize current socio-political conditions. The earliest utopias are described for us in terms of religio-poetic myths – a Golden Age, an Arcadia, an Eden, or an Isle of the Blest; more recent ones envision constructive (or, destructive) changes brought about by current science and technology.

This course will examine, from a historical-philosophical perspective, several utopian visions in Western thought – one from the classical Greek, one from medieval Christianity, and one from the early modern Enlightenment period, along with some more recent versions of the scientific utopian experiment. As we study each utopian scheme, we will also read a critique or satire of each of these visions. We will begin with Plato’s philosophical vision in the Republic, and then will examine Aristophanes’ comic representations of Platonic ideas. Then, we will read the late Roman Stoic philosopher, Epictetus. Next, we will read St. Augustine’s Christian utopian vision of a City of God, as presented in his *Of True Religion*, along with a contemporary critique of Augustinian thought. In our concluding utopian vision, we will read Rene Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* as representative of a modern scientific utopian vision, along with some critics of Enlightenment thought. Finally, we will conclude with Aldous Huxley’s well-known *Brave New World*.

Some of the questions that will arise as we read these sources are: How does human freedom get impacted by utopian idealism? What roles are permitted historically disadvantaged groups or minorities in such utopias? Are such idealistic schemes feasible? What sorts of restrictions must occur to some people in society so as to insure unity or community in such ideal societies?

*Courtesy, Dr. Daryl Hale, Philosophy and Religion*

## TEACHING YOUR FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

## Chapter 6

**A DIFFERENT DYNAMIC**

With your course and syllabus developed, you are now ready to meet the students! Students will be aggressive, passive, petulant, excited, dismissive, challenging, creative, verbose, and quiet; in short, this is never a dull class to teach and it will be one of your most rewarding.

***Digital Natives***

You may see the full article on-line for the following summary of trends (retrieved from:

<http://www.bestcollegesonline.com/blog/2011/08/16/8-important-education-trends-in-generation-z>

**8 Important Education Trends in Generation Z**

Generation Z, also known as the Internet Generation and Digital Natives, represent the first one to grow up in a world where Internet access has always been available and plentiful. These hyper-connected and tech-savvy youngsters are changing how educators formulate lessons and interact with students. Many predict they could forever change how kids are taught at all levels by making technology an integral part of all classroom study. *Following are the 8 trends referenced in the article above.*

1. **Interactive devices as classroom learning tools**

Interactive textbooks, educational games, and collaborative projects are just a few of the ways educators are using tech to get the digital generation better involved.....

2. **More homeschooling**3. **Collaborative online projects**

The tech-savvy Gen Z has helped push a wide variety of technologies into the classroom.....

4. **Focus on visual learning**

Studies have shown the brains of Generation Z kids are actually structurally different....

5. **Treating learning as a game**

Treating learning as a game is not only more fun for Gen Z kids, it's also more effective....

6. **Focus on critical thinking and problem solving rather than information memorization**

Memorization hasn't completely evaporated from the classroom, but .....

7. **A return to occupation-based training rather than college**

Let us be clear.....

8. **Learning in smaller bites**

One of the downfalls of Generation Z, like their predecessors in Gen Y, their constant multitasking has saddled them with a short attention span.....

***The Mindset Lists***

The Mindset Lists began in 2002 and reveal the generational divide we sometimes face in communicating with students. <http://themindsetlist.com/lists/> You may enjoy taking a peak.

[The mindset of the class of 2017](#) (Copyright© 2011 Beloit College Mindset List is a registered trademark)

- Eminem and LL Cool J could show up at parent's weekend.
- GM means food that is Genetically Modified.....

Some suggested tactics/principles from experienced instructors include:

For help with these tactics and more, contact the Coulter Faculty Commons.

- 1. Icebreakers:** Your class may very well be the first college classroom your students have ever entered, and for many, this event can be a bit disconcerting, and even intimidating. The tone you set on the first day of class can go a long way towards alleviating anxiety. Experienced instructors use a variety of icebreaker activities to encourage students to become comfortable with each other, with the college classroom environment, and with the instructor. It is likely that you will have students, for example, who are not even really sure what a syllabus IS so just going over it on the first day may not be enough. A variety of icebreakers are available at the Curriculum Resource Laboratory in Hunter Library.
- 2. Availability:** Make yourself available to your students as much as is reasonably possible by phone, e-mail, or office hours. A caveat: this generation is also called the ‘one-click’ generation, though, because they often want instant service, so do set limits on your availability or it is likely that you will spend all of your time with them. Some instructors have had luck with other forms of availability, including Black Board discussion boards, Facebook and other social networking software, and instant messaging. You could also form a cell phone network and communicate with your students by text-messaging, the preferred mode of communication for the generation.
- 3. Transparency:** Many of these students are very unfamiliar with the college setting. They want college to be different from high school, but without help in understanding the differences, they can revert to high school tactics and behavior. You can help them adjust to their new environment. Most experienced instructors report that it helps a great deal to be explicit about assignment goals and expectations. If you give an assignment, for example, put all information on a handout and be very clear about what you expect, why you expect it, how students will be graded, and when it is due. When you give a lecture or introduce a class exercise, explain to your students the reason you have chosen to do this and why you chose this method. The more students see implicit ideas become explicit, the more they become comfortable with and committed to participating in the process of a meaningful education.
- 4. Interactivity:** The transition course provides an environment that supports the development of students’ confidence in their application of skills. Studies show that confidence in learning is derived more from active rather than passive learning. Active learning can be as basic as peppering lecture delivery with pertinent questions and as expert as incorporating interactive exercises that remove the instructor from the center of the classroom. Interactivity can reinforce the relationship between the student and the instructor and can also contribute to the development of reasoning skills.
- 5. Variety:** Bear in mind that you are acting as a gateway to a wide array of knowledge, skills, and orientations that are not distinctive to your own discipline. A variety of approaches and assignments can suit this function very well and allow students to discover skills they may not have known they had or to develop new ones. Many instructors emphasize variety in their methods of delivery, choice of assignments/readings, and in the skills they look for in their students.

## THE LEARNING-CENTERED CLASSROOM

## Chapter 7

Higher education is undergoing what some have called a shift to a learning-centered paradigm. This term is fancy education-speak that alludes to a move towards trying to understand how students learn and figuring out what we as instructors can do to make their learning more permanent, meaningful, or authentic/deep. This shift is not occurring without controversy, but if you have been considering trying some of the new strategies and techniques that have resulted from it, the first-year seminar is a great place to experiment and to work with alternatives to traditional lectures and assignments.

The use of learning-centered strategies is strongly encouraged and is often an essential element in the success of the first-year seminar experience. Of course, it is highly successful with your other courses as well. There are a number of fascinating and intriguing methods and projects available to sample. Which would you like to see in your classroom?

### A. *Service learning:*

Service learning is a term used to describe the incorporation of projects that emphasize community engagement. The Cullowhee and Sylva area offers many opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom and to benefit the region. Are you teaching a class on nutrition? Perhaps a trip to the Community Table would be beneficial. Are you teaching a class on historic preservation? A field trip to an historical site might be instructive.

### B. *Multimedia Projects:*

WCU offers a host of opportunities for multi-media, from a dedicated media server for blogs, wikis, and web-pages (students can use and/or create these), to a center for support of digital media such as videos. WCU also participates in iTunesU, a service provided by Apple that supports the use and/or creation of podcasts. Are you teaching a class in which students have to write as a group? You could use a wiki to help with scheduling issues. Are you teaching a class where students need to critique each other's oral communication? You could have them make movies or podcasts of their assignments.

### C. *Experiential learning:*

Experiential learning is about having students experience what they are learning. It can include service learning, undergraduate research, study abroad, internships/co-ops, and more. Are you teaching students a foreign language? They can experience that by working with bilingual communities or by traveling to a foreign country. Are you teaching a course on construction design? You can have students work with a local builder or designer and experience how the designs translate to real building projects.

### D. *Role-Playing Exercises:*

Role-playing is becoming increasingly popular in higher education as a means for students to apply abstract or theoretical ideas to real-life situations. Are you teaching a course on nursing? You can have students role-play diagnostic techniques. Are you teaching a course about business communication? You could have students apply what they learn in a mock business setting.

- E. **Case Studies:** The use of real-life case studies can add relevancy to your subject matter while allowing students to apply what they are learning in the classroom. Are you teaching a course on using GIS? You can give your students examples drawn from actual uses of GIS by researchers. Are you teaching a course that teaches students game theory? You can provide examples drawn from today's headlines.
- F. **Interdisciplinary Initiatives:** Interdisciplinary approaches help students to authenticate learning through experience, relevance, and critical reflection as they examine from the lens of multiple perspectives. Interdisciplinary learning designs can provide the foundation for a campus-wide exploration designed to foster our students' sense of civic responsibility and to engage teaching and learning across disciplines - a wonderful opportunity to connect the dots for new students!

### ***“The Case and Context for Learner-Centered Pedagogy”***

The following excerpt is from an article written by Dr. Joe Cuseo, who has written extensively on first-year courses, both academic and transitional focused. In this nine-page article, Dr. Cuseo discusses the paradigm shift toward a learning-centered pedagogy. The focus is on research and strategies and with an exhaustive reference list that may be of interest to your own research. You may want to learn more about his work and if so, just ask!

#### **The Case and Context for Learner-Centered Pedagogy**

*Joe Cuseo*

##### ***Introduction (a sneak preview)***

In the mid-1990s, clarion calls were sounded for improving the quality of undergraduate education that solicited a paradigm shift—away from the traditional focus on the teacher and the teaching process—to a “new learning paradigm” that focuses on the *learner* and the *learning* process (American College Personnel Association, 1994; Angelo, 1997; Barr & Tagg, 1995). The shift suggests a new starting point for improving the teaching-learning process—one that centers on what the learner is doing, rather than what the teacher is doing (and covering) in class. In the new learner-centered paradigm, the defining features and goals of effective college teaching are facilitating the learning *process* and assessing learning *outcomes*.

## ASSESSING YOUR FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

## Chapter 8

Good assessment of learning is essential to any successful course. Like all courses at WCU, your syllabus will include learning objectives, a grading scale, and a list of assignments and their relative weight, but the creativity and innovation fostered by the seminar format often leads to assessment challenges.

### **Some tips from seasoned faculty:**

1. High school typically gives many graded assignments. Students are often unaccustomed to having so much weight on single assignments. You can break your larger assignments down into many smaller assignments and/or use your course to teach them about the importance of single assignments in college assessment.
2. It is often helpful to do a pre-test in which you assess what students know when they enter your course. This strategy gives you a sense of where your baseline lies. If you also do a post-test, you can get a sense of the contributions of your course. There are multiple tools available for designing and administering these tests (contact the Coulter Faculty Commons).
3. Constructive comments are particularly important at this stage. Rather than simply assigning a grade, explain to students what they need to do to perform at a higher level and why. Much of the seminar approach is formative, i.e., designed to help the students improve along the way, rather than summative, i.e., designed to be a final evaluation of their work. It is not uncommon in first-year seminars, for example, for instructors to allow students to submit papers multiple times.
4. Grading non-traditional and/or oral projects can be very tricky, particularly when some of these can be tied to self-image, not just academic performance. Students at this level haven't always figured out the difference, so remember your own emotional vulnerability as a first-year student when you design your assessments.
5. Grading group projects continues to pose problems for some faculty. While this issue is beyond the scope of this document, there are numerous tried and true techniques available for evaluating group projects. Do not try to reinvent the wheel; avail yourself of the experience of others, including other instructors of first-year seminars! Contact Carol Burton for help identifying other faculty who might assist you.
6. There has been some movement towards using rewards (the carrot) rather than penalties (the stick) in first-year seminars. This practice is not for everyone, but some have found it very useful. For example, instead of penalizing students for absences, some faculty provide bonuses for students who have exemplary attendance. Pick what works for you.
7. The objectives for the first-year seminar include introducing students to the rigor of college academic life. While the seminar is intended to be formative and constructive, it is not an easy course, nor should it be assessed as such. Students need to know where their work stands in relation to the criteria of college-level work. On the other hand, the course should not be inappropriately difficult for a typical entering first year student.

The preceding examples are intended to serve as suggestions. As the Perry Model reminds us, there is no dualistic choice between the right way and the wrong way! Go for context-appropriate choices based on your temperament and preferred teaching style. Let us know if you have suggestions you would like us to include in this resource.

## SUPPORT NETWORKS

## Chapter 9

We are most fortunate at WCU to have a wealth of resources at our disposal for faculty and staff. Following are a few that will help you as you get started!

### **Advising Center:**

Provides academic advising support for undergraduate students at WCU.

*214 Killian Annex*

828.227.7753

<http://advising.wcu.edu>

### **Campus Recreation and Wellness:**

Where there is something for everyone!

828.227.7069

<http://www.wcu.edu/student-life/division-of-student-affairs/campus-recreation-wellness/>

### **Center for Career and Professional Development**

Assists WCU students with finding non-work study student employment, choosing a major and career path, identifying internships, creating job search documents, and securing employment after graduation.

*205 Killian Annex*

828.227.7133

<http://careers.wcu.edu>

### **Center for Service Learning:**

Connects students, faculty, and staff with service opportunities in the region and supports the University's commitment to civic engagement. Explore your community, while making a difference in it!

*273 Belk Building*

828.227.7184

<http://servicelearning.wcu.edu>

### **Counseling and Psychological Services:**

Student privacy, urgency of assistance, and confidentiality are top priority.

*225 Bird Building*

828.227.7469

<http://www.wcu.edu/experience/health-and-wellness/counseling-psychological-services-cps/>

**Disability Services:**

Collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to determine and employ appropriate methods to create equal access for people with medical diagnoses.

*144 Killian Annex*

828.227.3886

<http://disability.wcu.edu>

**Financial Aid Office:**

*118 Killian Annex*

828.227.7290

<http://www.wcu.edu/current-students/financial-aid-office/>

**First Year Experience (FYE):**

Empowers students to succeed as they transition to college life and discover a passion for learning.

*137 Killian Annex*

828.227.3017

<http://fye.wcu.edu>

**FYE One Book**

A common reading experience for all new first-year students! To learn more:

<http://onebook.wcu.edu>

**FYE Summer Learning Communities:**

Summer programs designed to foster a successful transition to college life and enhance the first-year experience.

*137 Killian Annex*

828.227.3017

<http://fyesummer.wcu.edu>

**Finish in Four**

WCU's pledge to provide students with the resources and guidance necessary to successfully complete their undergraduate degree in four years.

*550 HFR Administration Building*

828.227.3331

<http://finishinfour.wcu.edu>

**Hunter Library:**

*176 Central Drive*

828.227.7485

<http://www.wcu.edu/hunter-library/index.asp>

**Intercultural Affairs:**

Provides an inclusive environment that examines, recognizes, accepts and affirms human differences and similarities.

*330 A.K. Hinds University Center*  
828.227.2276

<http://www.wcu.edu/experience/connect-and-join/welcome-to-intercultural-affairs/>

**Mathematics Tutoring Center:**

Provides tutoring support in mathematics and related courses.

*455 Stillwell Building*  
828.227.3830

<http://mathlab.wcu.edu>

**New Student Orientation**

You will receive quality academic advising and become familiar with your new home-away-from-home.

*Killian Annex – second floor*  
828.227.7735

<http://www.wcu.edu/apply/undergraduate-admissions/new-student-orientation/index.asp>

**Office of Leadership & Student Involvement:**

Catamount life is ongoing and full of opportunities for students to become involved and make an impact on campus and within the surrounding community!

*3<sup>rd</sup> floor A.K. Hinds University Center*  
828.227.7450

<http://westerncarolinauniversity.orgsync.com/home>

**OneStop**

A centrally-located service center that makes it quick and convenient for students and parents to conduct university-related business involving financial aid, Cat Card activity, Registrar, cashiering, and general student services.

*132 Killian Annex*  
828.227.7170

<http://www.wcu.edu/current-students/index.asp>

**Police:**

*114 East University Way*  
828.227.7301

<http://www.wcu.edu/discover/campus-services-and-operations/university-police/>

**Residential Living:**

Creates a community where ALL students feel valued and celebrated.

*1<sup>st</sup> West Scott Hall*

828.227.7303

<https://www.wcu.edu/experience/life-on-campus/residential-living/>

**Student Employment:**

*205 Killian Annex Building*

828.227.3888

<http://www.wcu.edu/academics/campus-academic-resources/career-services-and-cooperative-education/student-employment/>

**Student Health Services:**

Meet student healthcare needs.

*Bird Building*

828.227.7640

<http://www.wcu.edu/experience/health-and-wellness/>

**Student Support Services:**

Provides services, resources, and academic support for all eligible program participants.

*138 Killian Annex*

828.227.7127

<http://sss.wcu.edu>

**Student Success**

Facilitates a college experience that links student success with academic quality.

*550 HFR Administration Building*

828.227.3331

<http://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-success/index.asp>

**Undergraduate and Transfer Admission:**

*102 Camp Building*

828.227.7317

<http://www.wcu.edu/apply/undergraduate-admissions/apply.aspx>

**Writing and Learning Commons:**

Provides tutoring, academic skills consultations, and online learning resources.

*207 Belk Building*

828.227.2274

<http://walc.wcu.edu>

## FYE Student Learning Goals

### **Discover College:**

Adapt, explore, discover, and engage: Campus & Resources

### **Be Involved:**

Identify and act upon your role as an engaged citizen.

### **Connect the Dots:**

To make sense of the world: Personal, academic, co-curricular opportunities.

### **Think First:**

Identify, evaluate, and reflect to address complex issues or problems.

### **Exchange Ideas:**

Communicate in context and with respect

### **Calibrate Your Compass:**

Know where you stand with values, goals, responsibility, and integrity.

# Synthesis: The pathway to intentional learning



Their journey begins here.....

Western Carolina University