



The Burgs:

First-Year Seminars
& Charting Your Course—
a Co-Curricular Experience.

Gettysburg College’s interdisciplinary residential clusters—Burgs—which blend First-Year Seminars (FYS) with Charting Your Course (CYC), the College’s new student orientation

program, is a faculty/administration team approach to an enhanced First-Year Learning/Living Experience. The Burg program challenges students to develop a socially and intellectually stimulating community, and it has transformed faculty and administrator relationships.

The College’s First-Year Seminar program provides a critical foundational learning experience for students. The First-Year Experience program, Charting Your Course, is the College’s extended orientation program, which focuses on supporting students through the transition to a liberal arts college, while introducing them to high-impact educational opportunities available to them during the four years that they are on campus.

In Fall 2010, the College began a pilot program that merged the FYS and CYC programs by adding a fourth hour to the seminar and pairing faculty members and student affairs administrators to co-facilitate the fourth-hour session, which focused on College Life related topics. The initial pilot included 6 seminars and has grown to 20 seminars in 2014 (nearly half the seminars offered). During the last three years, we further enhanced the program by placing the 20 seminars into three interdisciplinary clusters—the Burgs. Each cluster is in its own building, with the three buildings forming a residential quad and sharing an “intellectual hub” space. Moreover, each cluster has its own theme, designed to connect the seminars and provide the faculty and staff members direction when planning gatherings for their Burg. These clusters help to foster greater intellectual engagement and psychosocial development.

When the College initiated the FYS/CYC program, we began assessing students' experiences in both the pilot program and the traditional FYS program. We used pre- and post-tests, focus groups, and direct observation methods. Early data on the program indicated that participation in the FYS/CYC program demonstrated a statistically significant positive impact on students' self-reported levels of understanding of and achievement on a Gettysburg curricular goal—Integrative Thinking. The positive evidence suggested that the faculty and staff involved in the program achieved success in connecting academic and out-of-class discussions and in enhancing student understanding of our Integrative Thinking goal. The majority of students in the FYS/CYC program reported that the experience enhanced their ability to learn, their understanding of the connection between academic experiences and experiences outside the classroom, and their ability to develop an effective plan for getting the most out of their College careers.

During the 2011-2012 academic year the Task Force on the Intellectual Life of First-Year Students and the Student Life Committee (faculty, administrators, students) reviewed the connection between the student social experience and the intellectual life of the campus. The FYS/CYC program was a pivotal component of these reviews and—with the Burg component—is now a key initiative leading the institution in the complex process of enhancing our campus-wide intellectual climate.

In Fall 2012 and Fall 2014, we conducted a survey using a new instrument designed to measure the impact of our FYS/CYC learning goals, among other living and learning questions. We have used these data to develop a revised set of learning outcomes for FYS/CYC and the Burg learning communities. Beginning in Academic Year 2015-2016, surveys will now include assessment of the FYS/CYC learning outcomes.

Our goal is to transform the way the College introduces students to the aims of a liberal arts education. By highlighting high-impact educational opportunities we can empower students to make decisions that connect their intellectual and social lives. Ultimately, the College is challenging students to develop a first-year residential community that is both a socially and intellectually stimulating place to live and motivates them to pursue that type of experience in their subsequent years on campus.

