



Middlebury

Middlebury College, a highly select residential liberal arts college in the mountains of northern Vermont, has a student population of 2,350 and a student/faculty ratio of 9 to 1. Approximately 15% of the student body is composed of international students and approximately 10% of US students of color.

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury

Legislated Features:

All entering Middlebury students are required to take a first-year seminar during their first semester on campus. These seminars are writing intensive courses, limited to 15 students each, and taught by regular, full-time faculty who also serve as the students' academic advisers for their first three semesters at Middlebury. Seminar topics, which change from year to year, are selected by the individual professor and generally reflect that faculty member's research interests or an area of expertise not directly addressed in departmental courses. These are not survey courses. Rather they are designed to prick students' intellectual curiosity in a particular subject, and to encourage them to pursue a focused interest in depth. Many of the seminars offer interdisciplinary perspectives; most include activities outside the classroom; all seminars help students develop their thinking, writing, and speaking skills. After two years of planning and piloting, required seminars began in 1988-89.

Evolving Features:

Each year all seminars are approved or re-approved by the Curriculum Committee
All departments are required to contribute seminars every year
Faculty do not teach a seminar two years in a row; the average is every 3.5 years
Seminars have become a locus for pedagogical discussion and experimentation
Faculty development events are scheduled throughout the year
There is no system of extrinsic reward (monetary or teaching load compensation)
Course enrichment budget is \$350 per seminar
Most courses include some event outside class time
Each seminar is eligible for a resource team including a peer mentor for academics and writing and a professional staff person (either a reference librarian or an educational technologist)
Students register for their seminars over the summer
Nearly 80% of the students get their first choice seminar
Seminars meet for a class during Orientation Week
Seminar instructors advise during Orientation Week
Students are housed in Commons (dorm clusters) by seminar
All students in a seminar have the same residential Dean
Additional \$300 Commons enrichment funds per seminar
Seminar students and their instructors are invited to Commons events
Students are instructed about the "Middlebury Honor Code" in their seminar class



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Recent Changes:

Since 2004, the director of the First-Year Seminar Program and the Writing Program has also directed the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research. The Center supports both faculty and students in learning and teaching. The CTLR supports students with writing, math, and study skills professionals, and with peer mentors and tutors. CTLR supports faculty with development opportunities and consultations. The FYS Program's move to the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research in a new campus library placed the program proximate to research librarians, educational technologists, and a digital media lab. This move has enhanced connections with librarians and technologists and has facilitated changes and experimentation in pedagogy.

Keeping Faculty Engaged:

- Administrative Support—Teaching a FYS is a mandated part of service to the college.
- Flexibility & Opportunity—Faculty choose topics and receive support for experimentation.
- Information and Development—Numerous opportunities (See Harvest Cycle.)
- Follow Up—Surveys, Evaluations, Check-ins, Ward Prize for Best First-Year Paper, Longitudinal Study (TEAGLE Grant).

For more information:

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