A Template for First-Year Seminars at IUPUI

INDIANA UNIVERSITY
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University College

This guide, developed by the Curriculum Committee of University College, defines and describes the common curricular pedagogical elements to be incorporated in all sections of UCOL 110 and equivalent first-year seminars offered by other academic units.

Revised May 2002

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OVERVIEW

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Faculty at campuses nationwide have become increasingly aware of the need to provide entering students with a wide range of services supporting their transition to the university environment. A first-year seminar that provides a comprehensive introduction to collegiate level expectations and resources available to support student learning and that establishes connections to peers and faculty has been widely proven to be an effective mechanism for facilitating this transition. National data show that even students who appear to be academically well prepared for college benefit from a course that offers those skills and qualities needed to successfully do college level work. For first generation, non-residential, and academically less prepared students, comprehensive interventions aimed at helping students make the necessary adjustments as they enter the university are truly critical to their persistence and academic success.

Based on the findings of a persuasive body of national research and the experience of institutions that serve students with similar backgrounds, a group of IUPUI faculty representing several schools has worked collaboratively to develop a model for a first-year seminar uniquely responsive to the needs of IUPUI students.

IUPUI SEMINARS

All undergraduate units at IUPUI have been encouraged to develop their own version of the first-year seminar for entering students directly admitted to their school or department or for students who have indicated an intention to seek admission to their school or department. These seminars, while teaching all the critical elements needed for success in college, can also include content that is school or department specific. Schools can either use their own course numbers to teach first-year seminars, or use the UCOL U110 designation. The following are general characteristics of the IUPUI first-year seminars:

- Linked to form learning community: In order to emphasize these connections, most first-year seminars are linked with a specific course in another department or unit on campus. This linkage is designed to facilitate students' introduction into the discipline, provide opportunities to augment the content of the discipline-specific course, and build interpersonal relationships among students with similar academic and professional interests. The linked course and first-year seminar should be carefully coordinated so that they complement each other's content, activities, and efforts.

- Variation among individual seminars is expected and encouraged: Following the adage that "one size fits none," individual seminar sections will develop the pedagogical and curricular components in ways that reflect the unique nature of each instructional team and the specific disciplines or schools represented, as well as the unique needs of the students that the course is offered to serve. University College offers UCOL U110 to serve first-year students who are undecided about their major, exploring several options, or who cannot be scheduled into or do not meet the criteria for admission to a school-specific seminar.
- Common Learning Outcomes: Faculty representing the various schools have agreed upon a common set of learning outcomes for all IUPUI first semester learning communities. These are described in detail in a subsequent section of the template.
- Instructional Team: Each section is planned and presented by an instructional team, anchored by a faculty member, but which includes a librarian, an academic advisor, and a student mentor. Other university staff may be included as appropriate. The instructional team is by purpose and design a fully collaborative effort in which all members make significant contributions to the content and execution of the course. The nature of the role of each member of the instructional team is elaborated on later in this document.
- Academic Emphasis. Faculty at IUPUI have determined that first-year seminars, whether taught under the UCOL U110 course number or under school specific designations, will clearly provide fundamental support for the *academic* enterprise. Content that is not commonly found in discipline-based courses, such as a survey of campus resources, use of technology, and time management skills, will be included in the first-year seminar with the focus always being on using these skills to enhance academic learning in the university context.
- Critical Thinking. A central responsibility of all first-year seminars is to introduce students to this fundamental process of the academic community. Instructional teams introduce students to multiple facets of critical thinking that they will be expected to demonstrate as they progress in their academic work, including finding solutions to challenging problems; analyzing complex issues and making informed decisions; synthesizing information; evaluating the logic, relevance, and validity of data; and using knowledge and understanding to raise new questions.

- Communication. Success in the academic environment requires a variety of communication skills including writing, speaking in small and large group settings, communicating with faculty/librarians/advisors, seeking information via questions, and collaborating in peer groups. Teaching/learning strategies in the First-Year Seminar include opportunities for students to practice these skills. Academic writing includes an introduction to the variety of writing assignments and expectations at the university level, writing style requirements, and plagiarism. Students can effectively use reflective writing, i.e., journals and one-minute papers, to process their learning experience in the first-year Seminar. Campus resources for gaining additional or advanced communication skills are identified, e.g., university courses, the Writing Center, and the Learning Center.
- IUPUI Principles of Undergraduate Learning. The IUPUI Principles of Undergraduate Learning form a foundation for the first-year Seminar; therefore, the Principles are evident in the pedagogy and curriculum. Principles (1) Core Communication and Quantitative Skills and (2) Critical Thinking are emphasized. This discussion helps to clarify for students what is valued at IUPUI and to better understand academic policies and expectations of the faculty.

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

National and local experience with first-year seminars indicates that the learning outcomes are best fostered if particular classroom environments are developed. The use of the term “seminar” is quite intentional, for although these are students at the very beginning of their academic careers, the classroom climate of the first-year course should be modeled upon the intimate, interactive, and collegial atmosphere of the traditional upper division seminar.

Collaborative and Active Learning: first-year seminars, as part of campus learning communities, will maintain classroom climates of cooperation and collaboration in an effort to foster an environment of active learning. Significant portions of class time should be allocated to group discussion and other activities that encourage students to develop peer relationships, collaborate on academic activities, and practice oral communication. Each seminar should require a student project that uses library or other information resources and addresses multiple learning outcomes. The collaboration of the instructional team in planning and implementing the course should be made obvious to students to serve as a model for effective collaborative work.

Civility and Conduct: Each seminar should provide students the opportunity to understand and practice behaviors which support their learning and that of others within an atmosphere of mutual respect. This should include expectations such as those specified in the *IUPUI Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*, related to respect for the rights of others, acceptance of one’s responsibilities as a member of a community of learners, and the practice of academic integrity.

Campus Connection: Each seminar will develop activities and assignments designed to establish positive connections between the student and elements of the campus community crucial to their academic success. These should include advising, the library, career counseling, co-curricular activities, honors, student learning center, the major department, and financial aid. Students should be given the opportunity to learn about specific resources at IUPUI available to support their personal growth and needs. Options for honors study, service learning, recreation, and participation in student life organizations can be introduced. Opportunities for self-assessment and/or reflective thinking about non-academic obstacles to success at the university are to be provided, e.g., stress and time management skills and identification of campus resources to assist in these areas. Other student services and organizations can be introduced depending upon student interest.

Small Class Size: Section size is limited to a maximum of 25 students to insure that students have the opportunity to be known individually by instructional team members, work collaboratively, and have opportunities to develop learning community peer relationships.

Attendance: The instructional team should make it clear to students that prompt, consistent attendance in all courses, including the first-year seminar, is expected and absolutely necessary to academic success at IUPUI. Procedures should be put into place in the first-year seminar to ensure that students understand the importance of attendance and are held accountable for it.

Syllabus: Each instructional team will provide students with a detailed syllabus which introduces the course; specifies the requirements including due dates, provides name, campus location, phone, and e-mail of instructional team members, and important dates on the academic calendar.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Similar to campus-wide faculty agreement on the Principles of Undergraduate Learning, specific learning and student transition outcomes have been identified for the first-year Seminar. Individual sections of the seminars develop, emphasize, and assess these differently, but do address each of them. Pursuit of these learning outcomes is expected to enhance the likelihood of academic success for all IUPUI students, regardless of level of academic preparation as they enter IUPUI or intended major.

1. Students will begin to develop a comprehensive perspective on higher education. The student is able to:
   - understand the foundational values and expectations of the academic community, including the open exchange of ideas and knowledge and a respect for diversity among individuals, communities, and disciplines;
   - demonstrate an ability to see relationships among academic disciplines;
   - demonstrate an understanding that scholarship is part of a dialog with cultural, religious, economic, and societal interests;
   - demonstrate a knowledge of policies and practices of academic integrity;
   - demonstrate the practice of appropriate academic behavior in various campus contexts.
2. Students will have the opportunity to experience a safe, supportive, and positive university learning experience, which includes the establishment of a network of staff, faculty and other students. The student is able to:
   - make appropriate use of the student learning center;
   - connect with student organizations and co-curricular activities;
   - locate and take advantage of facilities, resources, and organizations that value and support diversity among communities, cultures, and worldviews at IUPUI;
   - establish a working relationship with a University College advisor and/or a school-based advisor;

- communicate freely with faculty on matters related to their course work and academic plans;
- communicate and interact with library staff.

3. Students will understand and begin to practice basic communication skills appropriate to the academic setting. The student is able to:
   - complete satisfactorily written class assignments;
   - participate in small and large group discussions;
   - communicate using e-mail;
   - communicate with faculty, advisors, and peer mentors on issues related to their own academic progress;
   - demonstrate civility in all interpersonal interactions in the academic setting;
   - communicate with peers from diverse backgrounds.
4. Students will begin the process of understanding critical thinking in the university context. The student is able to:
   - approach academic problems and issues from multiple perspectives, including international, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious;
   - apply analytic strategies to analyzing issues in specific fields or disciplines;
   - apply critical thinking strategies to their own life situation;
   - apply evaluation criteria to determine the credibility of information.
5. Students should understand and apply information technology in support of their academic work. The student is able to:
   - locate and use appropriate campus computer facilities;
   - identify resources for acquiring specific software skills (word processing, data bases, multi-media, statistical analysis) required by their course work and majors;
   - use features of Oncourse required by course instructors.

6. Students should begin to develop a knowledge of their own abilities, skills, and life demands so that they can develop these more effectively in pursuit of their academic goals. The student is able to:
   - understand and make use of multiple ways of seeing and knowing about the world;
   - be reflective about their learning styles;
   - analyze and use strategies for preparing for examinations, completing assignments, taking notes, and classroom participation;
   - develop effective strategies for time management related to their academic work;
   - identify requirements for their proposed plan of study.
7. Students should understand the role and make full use of IUPUI resources and services which support their learning and campus connections. The student is able to:
   - use IUPUI documents including the Schedule of Classes, School Bulletins, the University College *Student Manual*, the IUPUI Website, and Oncourse;
   - meet with appropriate academic advisors to develop a plan of study;
   - distinguish between the open and invisible web (which includes library resources) and be able to use both in support of their academic work;
   - demonstrate the ability to find a book and an article pertaining to a specific information need or research assignment, using the library resources;
   - identify the major services provided by University Library and use the Reference Desk for further guidance.

INSTRUCTIONAL TEAMS

Each section will be planned and presented by an instructional team, anchored by a faculty member, but which includes a librarian, an academic advisor, a student mentor whose roles differ, but complement each other, in addressing the transitional needs of first-year students.

1. Faculty Role: Faculty shape the learning environment and the human, academic bond to the university. Resident faculty can model the scholarly enterprise and can best convey to students the calling, expectations, and commitment of academic learning in general, and their discipline in particular. The central participation of such faculty in the design, presentation, and assessment of each seminar is essential. Faculty are expected to take the lead in organizing, planning, and teaching the first-year seminar, working collaboratively with the team to ensure that the course is well planned and well executed. Ideally, a resident faculty member meets in a 25 student section for all contact hours and serves as faculty mentor.

   Recognizing that in some situations this model of resident faculty-student contact may not be possible, alternative models which provide student engagement with faculty may be developed. Such alternative models should demonstrate the following elements:

   - Provide students with opportunities for face-to-face and interaction with faculty.
   - Provide mechanisms that make faculty accessible to students.
   - Have resident faculty continually involved with all curriculum development and assessment with other members of the instructional team and at least some participation in collaboration with other members of the instructional team.

2. Advisor Role: The integration of an academic advisor as a member of the instructional team provides students with the opportunity to learn more about and begin to value the role of the University College and discipline specific academic advisors. Students are directed to information about advising, registration, schedule adjustment, admission to the major, and academic policies via online resources, University College *Student Manual*, *Schedule of Classes*, and school Bulletins. Students are required to meet with their advisor to develop a program plan and schedule for the following semester and for assistance in defining and setting goals.

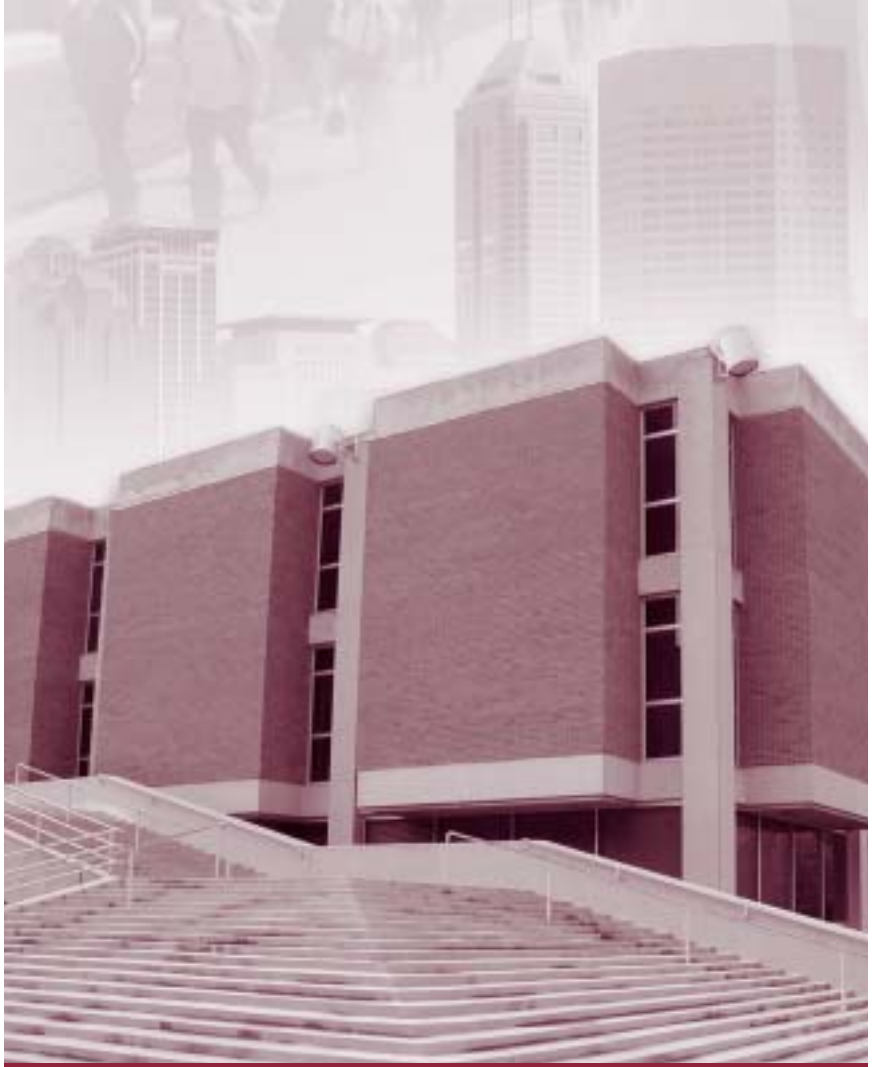
3. Librarian Role: The role of the librarian as a member of the instructional team is to provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the facilities and resources available to them in University Library and to instruct them about basic information literacy and credibility issues on the college level. Librarians expect to work with faculty members in the curriculum planning and syllabus drafting phase to plan effective library instruction. Librarians orient students to University Library through holding at least one class session in University Library. In addition to touring University Library's facilities, librarians introduce students to the information landscape both at University Library and on the Internet.

4. Mentor Role: Student mentors are an integral component of the instructional team structure. They serve as academic role models for new students, sharing their own successes and setbacks in developing study habits, taking advantage of campus resources, managing their time, and navigating the campus. Student mentors also assist the team by acting as an information channel between new students and the other instructional team members. Student mentors work to develop good rapport with new students, and they are often the first member of the instructional team to whom new students confide their fears and uncertainties. In addition, they frequently lead classroom discussions on a variety of topics including campus resources and student activities.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be regarded as a fundamental and consistently implemented feature of the first-year seminar. It should include formal as well as informal instruments measuring student achievement of learning outcomes, student satisfaction, instructional team performance, and program effectiveness.

- Student Achievement. The quality of student achievement can be assessed in a wide variety of ways: through traditional testing, oral presentations, group presentations or projects, model portfolio development, essays and other formal and informal writing assignments, or other assessment procedures appropriate to the nature of the seminar (for example, “reality checks”). In particular, formal rubrics designed to facilitate evaluation of student work and enhance student understanding of the critique of their work should be employed wherever appropriate.
- Student Satisfaction. Students can indicate their level of satisfaction through informal means such as quickwrites, chat rooms or discussion forums on Oncourse, focused surveys developed by the instructional team, or more formal or summative surveys developed by University College or other outside agencies.
- Instructional Team Performance. This can be measured by such instruments as student evaluations, peer evaluations, and self-reports from the teams.
- Program Effectiveness. The impact of first-year seminar effectiveness should be assessed using a combination of these approaches as well as formal evaluations by various accrediting or overseeing agencies and by institutional analysis of aggregate data reflecting such issues as student achievement and retention. Whatever the approach, instructional teams and students should recognize the need to assess the content, activity, effectiveness, and outcomes of first-year seminars frequently and honestly.



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