

First-Year Experience: A Proposal

MOTION

The Committee on Educational Policy and Planning moves that the faculty endorse this revised Liberal Studies curriculum, consisting of first-year seminars and colloquia, in place of the current LS1 and LS2.

RATIONALE

Goals of the First-Year Experience (FYE)

Our students' first year at the College serves as their formative Skidmore experience, for it is the time when they begin to build communities, identify intellectual interests and passions, explore ideas, challenge assumptions, and first encounter faculty expectations of academic rigor and excellence. The proposed First-Year Experience (FYE) program addresses all aspects of a student's first year at Skidmore, with curricular, co-curricular and residential components. The faculty play a central role in the FYE, serving as instructors and advisor-mentors to groups of first-year students. The courses that the faculty will deliver in the FYE – First-Year Seminars (FYS) in the fall and First-Year Colloquia (FYC) in the spring – are not isolated educational opportunities but are part of the larger continuum of curricular, mentoring, co-curricular, and residential experiences that will help shape our students' four years at Skidmore. These courses will introduce students to ways of thinking and knowing, to working independently and collaboratively, to crafting arguments and articulating positions, and to living within an intellectual community committed to the life of the mind. The FYE will thus guide new Skidmore students as they bring into focus their academic aspirations and goals and strive for academic distinction.

The First-Year Seminar (FYS)

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) will consist of approximately 43-44 3-credit courses of 15 students each offered during the fall semester and taught by the students' advisor-mentor. Students in the London program will enroll in one of two 3-credit FYS in the fall, and spring transfer students will enroll in a 3-credit FYS during their first semester at the College. The limit of 15 students per course will enable students and faculty to work within a seminar format – one of the hallmarks of the Liberal Studies program. The First-Year Seminars will be grouped into three clusters: inve

This course will introduce students to disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on [the course topic]. Besides being a course about [the course topic], this is a course about knowing, particularly about ways to identify problems, formulate productive questions, and go about answering those questions. Students in this course will demonstrate the ability to

- 1. distinguish among the types of questions asked by different disciplines*
- 2. gather and interpret evidence*
- 3. distinguish among the evidence and methodologies appropriate to different disciplines*
- 4. consider and address complexities and ambiguities*
- 5. formulate conclusions based upon evidence*
- 6. communicate those ideas to others both orally and in writing*
- 7. relate the results to each student's educational goals.*

Mentoring

The instructors of the FYS will serve as the students' advisor-mentors, a powerful mechanism for strengthening first-year students' connections to the intellectual life of the College. Faculty not only will work closely with these advisees on the practical aspects of registration for the next semester's classes, but also will serve as interrogators of and resources for students as they fashion their academic lives – articulated in the evolving Reflection and Projection plan (RAP, see below) that students will construct before they enter the College and routinely revise until they graduate. Faculty will also integrate, when relevant, the rich array of co-curricular events into their courses and their advising of the students. During the spring semester, FYE mentors will advise students about the possibility of choosing a new mentor for the second year. Although the student may continue with the FYE advisor, by choosing a new mentor students will establish another close relationship with a faculty member. This new mentor need not be a student's advisor for the major, but most likely the student and mentor will share interests that may enrich the mentoring relationship. Faculty who have taught in the FYE in one year thus will be able, if they so choose, to participate in the program in consecutive years. Staff from the office of the Dean of Student Affairs will also support the students in their academic lives and co-curricular interests.

Reflection and Projection (RAP), Portfolios and Assessment

Over the course of four years, each student will develop over his or her Skidmore career an academic plan articulating intellectual aspirations and achievements, and demonstrating the student's engagement in and ownership of a personal educational vision. The students will refine the RAP, which will

- help the student identify key questions and interests to be explored and revised throughout the four years of college
- introduce the student to the various academic disciplines as different ways of formulating questions and pursuing interests
- provide practice in the productive use of resources for educational support such as the Library, the Writing Center, the Internet, etc.
- explore the interaction of coursework and co-curricular events as mutually reinforcing an educational experience
- foster an understanding of liberal education as a whole that will encourage the student to seek out and recognize interactions among courses selected in future semesters.

Oral and Written Communication

The FYS and FYC will help students understand the conventions of academic writing and oral presentations. Students will respond to assignments that generate discovery through writing, reading critically and analytically, and communicating orally. Drafting and revising will help students strengthen their writing skills. During the FYE, students will demonstrate the ability to

- analyze ideas and formulate questions
- focus an essay or presentation with a thesis or main idea
- organize ideas logically and with appropriate transitions
- support assertions with evidence
- revise their own work with attention to clarity and correctness.

Students will be introduced to conventions of documentation and understand the purposes of using sources and the need to uphold standards of academic integrity.

Liberal Studies

Some of the finest features of the

Staffing

Participation by the tenure-line faculty in the FYE is an essential aspect of the first-year experience. CEPP recognizes the delicate balance departments and programs face in offering a full spectrum of courses, and the need to provide up to 600 additional enrollments with the elimination of the LS2 requirement. Departments and programs will need to address this issue by offering more courses at the 100- and 200-levels, and such participation in the

the FYE but will not require additional approval from the Curriculum Committee. New seminars that do not