

### **Appendix iii: Notes on phone conversations with program administrators**

Questions about the description of the program:

- How old is the program?
- What, if anything, preceded it?
- How has it changed over the years (and why)?
- Can the "seminar" (some call it something else) count toward a Gen Ed distribution requirement or a major requirement?
- How do students respond to the program? (E.g., does it get high evals? is it a reason students choose your college?)
- What do you consider its major strengths and weaknesses?

Questions about administration:

- How do you administer the program?
- Does the program require extra funding? Source?
- How do you ensure that a wide range of seminars (or at least instructors) are all accomplishing the same overarching goals? (e.g., writing, critical thinking, close reading, discussion, etc.)
- How do you recruit faculty to teach in this program (rewards? quotas, etc.)? Do all departments participate?
- How do you place students in the program?

Questions about faculty:

- What kind of faculty development program is involved with the seminar?
- How are faculty rewarded for participation?
- About what percentage of your faculty participate (not in one year, but over time-- Are there, say, 50 faculty who each participate every other year, that sort of thing)
- If faculty are first-year advisors, don't they find that their advisees accumulate over a two year period?
- Do faculty work with peer tutors/preceptors? How? How are the peer tutors selected, trained, rewarded?

Questions about a residential component:

- If there's a residential component, ask how that works.
- How are the seminars that have a residential component different from those without?
- How does the faculty workload vary?

## Bryn Mawr: Phone interview

Hour and 15 minute interview (July 12, 2004) with Jane Hedley, English dept when made director of program she was made associate provost (3-4 years ago) where half her load was the program as well as some other minor activities (like new faculty orientation)

### *Program History*

Is six years old

Preceded by a year long writing requirement staffed by Writing Center. Relied on many, many adjuncts. Course load reduction from 3-3 to 3-2 (10-15 years ago) contributed to feeling on part of English dept that they were being squeezed. Meanwhile science departments were hungry for small seminar and looking for place to have common ground with rest of faculty. Began then as a Sciences and English venture.

The new college seminar was two semester sequence, but 2<sup>nd</sup> semester is being dropped starting next year.

Seminar program competes with grad programs, which mean that depts often take precedence over freshman ed. Also squeezed by more generous sabbatical program that took effect two years ago (1 semester full pay after three years; previously was 1 semester full pay after 6 or 7 years).

Newly installed provost is less friendly toward seminar program. Has taken director's position out of provost's office. Is now directed by a faculty member and writing center director, each of whom get one course release.

### *Program goals*

Primary aim is teaching of writing. To some extent still seen as the college writing course.

### *Clusters*

Program was designed to work with clusters. Currently have some six or seven clusters. Some are as small as two or three, others as large as 6 or 7

Began as a twice a week class with one class a week being a common cluster lecture. Students didn't like the lectures, but liked the small class experience. So subsequently dumped the common lecture and kept class sessions small and separate. Still have some common program activities, like a movie or two. Main common element is for faculty. Some clusters meet once a week to discuss readings, writing assignments, etc. Some much less frequently.

Considered common "great books" program but decided to sacrifice some syllabus oversight and commonality to promote faculty buy in.

Still have needed to rely on some adjuncts—sometimes more than just some. Sounds not unlike Willamette in proportion of adjuncts.

Advantage of cluster over single seminars is that clusters bring university's stamp of approval in a way that individual courses might not.

Began with clusters only but starting next year will allow stand-alone courses not in clusters.

Most clusters operate with common syllabus, but some use 5 or 6 common texts and the rest of the class is customized by individual. Tenured faculty tend to operate with common syllabus. It's clearly Hedley's preference.

#### *Common Guidelines*

Each courses **must**:

1. Have students write 500 words a week
2. Have faculty meet individually for 20 minutes 6 times a semester to go over writing.

Staff workshops in May and August (but it was in context of clusters that people learned most)

Course proposals come to director(s) and steering committee

tend not to reject proposals but to work early on to let people know what such a course should look like

have archive of past syllabi

Does not go through regular curricular committee

“If you needed an expert to teach the text it probably wasn't a good text to assign”

#### *Faculty inducements/participation*

Counted seminar as 1 ½ course credits for faculty. But new provost has said they can't afford it, and starting next year this extra credit will cease. Was left over from writing course days when English dept got 1 ½ credit for the course in recognition of increased number of contact hours.

Problem is that now some depts are opting out.

Least participation from social sciences and languages

#### *Seminar*

Cap is 18. Trying to get to cap of 15. Most are at 16-17

#### *Advising*

No advising connection to seminar

#### *Mentor*

No mentors

#### *Misc administration*

Director did not have gatekeeper function because

1. did not have more people wanting to do it than they needed to do it.
2. was seen as chance to improve teaching by tenured professors

*Grades*

Problem of grade inflation, of lots of classes giving As and A-s exclusively  
Sends misleading message if one is trying to teach college expectations  
Adjuncts tended to be more stringent than tenured faculty members  
line of least resistance was not to fight it  
Thinks she should have done more to monitor grade equity across sections

*Faculty Evaluations*

Faculty are told to expect evals that are not as high as their evals in their regular courses  
Course evals go into personnel file, but are hopefully handled with understanding by personnel committee

*Overall assessment*

Believes cluster approach is a good one but has been watered down  
At one point described experience as “discouraging”—seems to have in mind direction of less sympathetic new provost  
Student reactions to this course doesn’t sound wildly different or better than student reactions to World Views—many similar problems (equity, for instance)  
80% said I liked it but my friends didn’t!  
Number of adjuncts is on the rise  
Hedley was interested in our study and seemed to suggest that they might be in the market for a new first year program soon.

## Colorado College: Phone interview

Julie Stockenberg, Director  
The First-Year and Sophomore Studies and Advising Office

Colorado College teaches in the “block plan”:

- The Plan divides the academic year into eight three-and-a-half week segments or blocks. Students take one principal course at a time and professors teach one. Some courses may last for one block, others for two or three blocks, depending on the nature of the material.
- Most classes will go until noon; science classes often will have labs in the afternoon
- Each block ends at noon on the fourth Wednesday, giving students four-and-a-half day mini-vacations called "block breaks."
- This provides flexibility for field study, study abroad, ...
- <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/welcome/blockplan/>
- First course is a two-block course
  - Students must take their first course in their first blocks, unless they are “winter-start students”
- Faculty members teach 6/8

FYE courses

- Just completed its fourth year and went through a three-year assessment, after which it went to a faculty vote, and was accepted as a fundamental part of the curriculum
- From all disciplines (see handout)
- Must designate the course as such when the course is proposed, and therefore like courses that meet Gen. Ed. requirements, this course has specific requirements for faculty members and expectations for students
- However, it’s felt that faculty members who want to work with first-year students deserve the flexibility in their course construction to excite students about their experience
- Every course has a writing, library, research component
- Caps at 16 (unless team-taught – then 25)

The program

- How old is the program? **In the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the program**
- What, if anything, preceded it? **Nothing**
- How has it changed over the years (and why)? **No real changes – will send three-year review report**
- Can the "first course" (some call it something else) count toward a Gen Ed distribution requirement or a major requirement? **Yes**
  - **This depends, though, on how the faculty member designs the course.**

- **This may be important for some programs that want to hook students with a sort of gateway/fye course that will expose those students to the discipline**
  - **Thus, in order to get buy-in from some programs (or across the disciplines) it is important to permit them the leeway to allow their courses to meet certain Gen. Ed. requirements OR to permit them the leeway to teach what they feel is necessary**
- How do students respond to the program? (eg., does it get high evaluations? Is it a reason students choose your college?) **There are no course evaluations.**
  - **However, FYE serves as a selling point for students and parents – the full, detailed course descriptions are encouraged to explain and excite students and parents about the courses.**
  - **Complaint: no exposure to upper classmen, BUT this is what the first-year program wants**
  - **The program provides the largest retention and attrition**

#### Administering the program

- How do you administer the program?
  - **Julie just finished her first year. Much falls on her desk, but an Associate Dean, who is well-respected by the faculty, is helping her greatly.**
    - **In “encouraging” or bargaining for faculty support**
    - **In helping to determine what works for their faculty members**
    - **In providing faculty leadership in the program**
  - **There is a university committee which administers the program, too.**
    - **4-5 faculty members, including a faculty member chair**
    - **someone from student life**
    - **someone from admissions**
    - **Julie ex officio**
    - **Associate Dean ex officio (necessary presence)**
- Does the program require extra funding? Source?
  - **It’s supposed to be budget neutral, but it’s not**
  - **Julie hosts 4 luncheons during the first blocks for faculty to discuss what’s working, what’s not**
  - **FYE mentors (upper classmen) do other activities with students, and this expense works out to \$5-\$8 per student**

- **Buy for all first-year students a common reading, which they discuss at their first session (this fall it will be a work by Jamaica Kincaid, who will give the opening convo address)**
- How do you ensure that a wide range of seminars (or at least instructors) are all accomplishing the same overarching goals? (eg., writing, critical thinking, close reading, discussion, etc.)
  - **No evaluations, but try to foster discussion and a clear understanding of the expectations of FYE courses**
    - **There's an end-of-year FYE retreat at which they re-emphasize goals and offer some "how to" presentations (how to get students writing in the second class)**
- How do you recruit faculty to teach in this program (rewards? quotas, etc.)? Do all departments participate?
  - **No quotas on departments -- a department has never been forced to contribute**
  - **Now that it's passed, departments realize that they should take part – they might miss out if they don't take part**
- Do you have to do anything to insure that there will be a broad range of courses?
  - **No, there's nothing to insure a broad range of courses**
  - **More teachers in the arts, humanities, and social sciences**
    - **There are return people in the natural sciences, and they often use the course as an intro to the major**
- How do you place students in the program?
  - **Students submit a priority list of 8 choices and use a 20-point wagering system (two lists in case there is a tie and only one place left in a class)**

#### Questions about faculty

- What kind of faculty development program is involved with the seminar?
  - **See above: end of year retreat**
- About what percentage of your faculty members participate (not in one year, but over time – Are there, say, 50 faculty members who each participate regularly – that is, 25 one year, and the other 25 the next?)
  - **This year there will be 65 faculty members (many of the courses have one faculty member teaching in the first block and another faculty member teaching in the 2<sup>nd</sup> block.**
  - **Usually they are the same faculty members (some emeriti)**
- If faculty members are first-year advisors, don't they find that their advisees accumulate over a two year period?

- **Faculty members receive only 7 new advisees per year, and, if the faculty member teaches a first course, then she receives her 7 from that class**
  - **Next the students are assigned to a faculty member who is in the department of the first course or, if the student has indicated a possible major, assigned to the department that might be the student’s major**
  - **Faculty members receive advisees until they “max out” – for instance one faculty member has 35 advisees, and he will receive no more**
- Do faculty members work with peer tutors/preceptors? How? Are the peer tutors selected, trained, rewarded?
  - **Cannot take part in the courses, but advise on a different level outside class**
  - **There are *paraprofs*, too. These recent graduates (year before) work on campus in departments and programs (off-campus studies, first-year and sophomore studies, etc.) for 9 months for 18-19 K (perhaps as they prepare for MCAT/LSAT), and they function as tutors, advisors, RAs, departmental gophers. Competitive positions.**

#### Residential component

- If there's a residential component, ask how that works. How are the seminars that have a residential component different from those without? How does the faculty workload vary?
  - **Students are already in intensive contact with other freshmen. They don’t want a residential component. Because of the block plan, the students already spend intensive time with classmates, and the administration does not want to push this any harder.**

Does your program incorporate the co-learner model? If so, how effective have you been in attracting faculty from disciplines outside the humanities? What has proved especially effective in attracting those faculty members?

The value of having a “First-year and sophomore studies and advising office”

## Gettysburg College: Phone interview

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### “First-Year Seminars” (FYS)

- smorgasbord of topics in many disciplines;
- includes residential component;
- program is voluntary, and there are not enough seminars for all incoming freshmen to participate;
- advisement divided equally among all faculty members across the college.

### Questions about the description of the program:

\* **How old is the program?** 7 years old.

\* **What, if anything, preceded it?** Something they called “colloquy,” a 1<sup>st</sup> year seminar with common texts. I didn’t ask if that was required of all incoming freshmen.

\* **How has it changed over the years (and why)?** The big change, seven years ago, was to switch from the “common-text” model to the “smorgasbord” model. The program will be reviewed this year. The big question: Will the college require the FYS of all incoming freshmen? Presently, they enroll 75-80 % of the incoming class.

\* **Can the “seminar” (some call it something else) count toward a Gen Ed distribution requirement or a major requirement?** Yes. Some count toward a Gen. Ed. or some other requirement: i.e. writing intensive, distribution requirement such as social sciences, humanities, or intro. level course for a major.

\* **How do students respond to the program? (E.g., does it get high evals? is it a reason students choose your college?)** According to Amott, “students love the seminars.” The average class size at Gettysburg is 20; the FYSs are capped at 16. Students like the size of the class and the residential component (more on that later). Gettysburg has been clever about using the FYSs as a recruiting tool. At the “spring preview day” they have ready a nicely produced detailing the seminar topics from which students may select for the fall (admissions pays for this brochure). In addition, their merit-based aid recipients, what they call presidential scholars, get first choice for seminars.

\* **What do you consider its major strengths and weaknesses?** Amott sees the major strength of the FYS as a means to help students transition to college-level work. She sees the

major weakness as one of too much faculty autonomy. Two main problems here: faculty propose seminars for which no 17 year-old will sign up (mismatch between student interest and faculty interest); there are no explicit themes connecting the wide-ranging topics. Amott referred frequently to her experience at Bucknell, where she worked before coming to Gettysburg. At Bucknell, FYS are grouped thematically i.e. arts, the environment, and students are grouped in residence halls according to these thematic categories. Two other weaknesses: first, the seminar is NOT linked to advising. Amott regrets this, but cannot overturn faculty legislation that requires all faculty to participate in freshman advising; second, the seminar is not required of all freshmen.

### **Questions about administration:**

**\* How do you administer the program?** Amott, the vice provost and professor of economics, is in charge. She issues a call for proposals and goes over them cursorily. Technically, she has the authority to reject a seminar but the faculty culture doesn't really permit this. She may work with faculty members to refine the course description and title. After reviewing the proposals, she takes them as a package to the curriculum committee who "acknowledges" them. (If the seminar is intended to meet a gen. ed. requirement, then the curriculum committee must "approve" the seminar, a slightly more formal process, it seems.)

**\* Does the program require extra funding? Source?** As vice provost, Amott has a budget of about \$18,000 for co-curricular activities relating to the FYSs (total of 32-35 seminars per year). In addition, the university has about \$100,000 per year tied up in adjunct pay for the FYSs alone. N.B. This does not pay for adjuncts to teach FYSs, but rather covers adjunct replacements for departments that release faculty members to teach a FYS. Funding for these adjuncts comes out of the part-time budget. According to Amott, adjuncts are well paid at Gettysburg, receiving some \$4,500 per course, with an additional travel allowance of up to \$1,600.

**\* How do you ensure that a wide range of seminars (or at least instructors) are all accomplishing the same overarching goals? (e.g., writing, critical thinking, close reading, discussion, etc.)** In her call for proposals for First Year Seminars, Amott summarizes the common goals of the seminars. When faculty submit proposals, they must demonstrate in their proposals the ways in which their seminar will meet those goals. Additionally, the entire program will be undergoing a review this fall.

**\* How do you recruit faculty to teach in this program (rewards? quotas, etc.)? Do all departments participate?** Amott sends out the call for proposals. That's it. Because teaching these seminars is viewed as a tremendously valuable experience, Amott's biggest challenge is enabling departments to juggle its resources so that they can release a person. In my perusal of the brochure, I noticed a selection of topics from many departments. Notably, the sciences were well represented.

**\* How do you place students in the program?** The registrar places students in the seminars. At Gettysburg, "presidential scholars" (those incoming freshmen awarded merit-

based aid) get first choice in seminar topics. This has proven to be a good recruiting tool for academically strong students.

### **Questions about faculty:**

**\* What kind of faculty development program is involved with the seminar?** The assistant provost, who works with Amott, sets up a series of workshops through the year. Sometimes one is tailored to the teaching of first year seminars. No faculty development is *required* of faculty.

**\* How are faculty rewarded for participation?** Faculty receive no rewards apart from the satisfaction of teaching the seminar. Amott reported that at Bucknell, faculty were typically given a \$1,000 faculty development account for travel or resources the first time they taught a freshman seminar.

**\* About what percentage of your faculty participate (not in one year, but over time-- Are there, say, 50 faculty who each participate every other year, that sort of thing)** Gettysburg offers 30-35 seminars per year. They have 180 full-time faculty. In every given year, 2/3 of the seminars are repeats.

**\* If faculty are first-year advisors, don't they find that their advisees accumulate over a two-year period?** N/A. At Gettysburg, advising is freshman advising is divided among all full-time faculty.

**\* Do faculty work with peer tutors/preceptors? How? How are the peer tutors selected, trained, rewarded?** Gettysburg has what they call a "student associate program." Students are paid \$500 per semester. They help with logistics: discussion, service learning, and other activities related to the course. They do NO grading. In the fall they receive a 2 hour training session that teaches them, among other things, discussion techniques, the psychology of 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

**If there's a residential component, ask how that works. How are the seminars that have a residential component different from those without? How does the faculty workload vary?** There is a residential component for each seminar. Amott has made some effort to get some teaching into the residence halls. Mostly, however, she tries to ensure that the residence facility has a space amenable to group gatherings. She tries to "cluster" the seminars within the residences i.e. science topics, American history topics.

## Grinnell College: Phone interview

Contact: Helen Scott, Assoc. Dean—just finishing her term

Grinnell's FYS is called "Tutorial"

This is the only required course at Grinnell. There is no general education requirement. Advising means everything in an open curriculum.

Tutorials are held to 12 (occasionally some will go to 13). For fall, 33 tutorials (class is smaller than ours).

Every department must participate and almost all faculty will; occasionally there are staffing issues (so and so is on leave), but it's so ingrained in the Grinnell culture, that faculty don't object to teaching in the program.

Try to rotate faculty to avoid having advisees pile up.

Emphasis is on discussion, writing, oral presentation, information literacy/academic honesty. Everyone does an exercise on plagiarism. Not everyone DOES include a "research" component, and the research component might not end up in a "research paper." Faculty, she says, do really different things.

Students' requests for placements are matched by the Director of Academic Advising. Their experience is that students' satisfaction (which is high) is not related to getting their first choice.

There are three mandatory workshops each spring for faculty teaching the next fall. You go every time you're going to teach. They last from 4:15 – 5:30 and are led by faculty with experience.

- 1) Choosing a topic
- 2) Teaching the skills—writing, reading, oral presentation, information literacy
- 3) Advising

Grinnell has a terrific website: <http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/tutorial/>

Big take home lesson from Prof. Scott I think is the importance of campus/faculty culture. The role of the tutorial is huge in an "open curriculum" and new faculty are mentored in to that understanding and expectation.

## Hobart and William Smith Colleges: Phone interview

Contacts: Sabrina McGinty, Assoc. Director of Residential Education  
Marie-France Etienne, Assoc. Provost

Vital statistics: 510-530 first-year students on average; 150 tenure line faculty  
This fall: 43 seminars at 12 students each.  
Program is 10 years old (replaced Western Civ) and in an exciting period of reinvigoration

### From Sabrina:

Students are housed by first-year seminar assignment: all first-year students from seminar will be on the same floor, but intermingled with upper-division students. (HWS is a residential college; approximately 100 seniors each year get permission to leave campus, but 1550 are housed on campus in 48 separate buildings)

Pilot this fall is to have some “conversation labs”—extended out of class discussions of seminar topics in the dorms with resident advisors (students). Goal was to have faculty participate in dorms perhaps 1-2 hours per week, but faculty have been resisting this. Otherwise, Res. Educ. tries to coordinate programming with what faculty are teaching.

She sees strengths of the program as 1) FYS lends itself to academic side, 2) easy to program around, 3) bridges academic and co-curricular education, 4) students love the seminar topics  
She sees weaknesses of the program as 1) haven’t really exploited the connections possible, 2) practicing what they propose.

### From Marie-France:

I was told to contact her because, as the new Associate Provost, she has just been a stellar success at recruiting faculty. Their seminars have usually been at 15 students, but her success this year in recruiting means that they’ll be 12, which HWS views as highly desirable. I asked about the cost: not an issue really. They just made it attractive for departments to offer seminars and they did. She said that the Provost had funded at most 5 replacement sections to sweeten the deal—and these were cases where there was already a 2-course replacement in the department for a sabbatical and he sweetened it by saying they could have three courses replaced if somebody else offered a FYS.

The faculty have “total freedom” in choice of topics (although a curriculum committee does have to approve them). Faculty teach things they love but which don’t fit into the regular departmental curriculum. (Her example was the chemistry teacher who offers “souls of scientists” that looks at how art, music, literature, etc. work in the lives of chemists. Something like that) This she believes is a huge factor but has not been enough until this year to get them to 12-student seminars. Things she did this year to recruit:

- Kept FYS in front of faculty all year; talked about it a lot.

- Eased the advising commitment. Previously faculty were committing to advising for two years; now they understand that they will be able to “re-evaluate” the relationship after the first semester and, if a student already has a strong interest or commitment in another department, they may encourage them to move on. Again she stresses faculty freedom here.
- Offered several afternoon wine & cheese discussions on FYS beginning last Fall to think about this Fall. Discussions brought up problems that she could work on (like the advising issue).

Faculty preparation so far has required only a workshop on advising.

- This year she will sponsor many more on a voluntary basis and expects, based on the good response to advising workshop, that participation & motivation will be high.
- Another new development this year is a pilot project of 7 “writing colleagues”—like the writing consultants idea we tried once a couple of years ago—except much more thorough going. Like peer tutors, the Colleagues will come to every class meeting and then meet with students individually on two drafts of each assignment before the assignment goes to the Prof. (Colleagues get one credit for attending class and some amount of work study money for their individual consulting. Didn’t ask how many hours, etc.)
- Also new this year, working to develop guidelines on the “norm” for writing. There’s lots of variation, including one professor who only required a daily journal from his students.
- A group of faculty & acad. admin. who just returned from an AAC&U summer institute on greater expectations got all charged up about designing an on-campus “first-year conference” highlighting the exemplary work FY students have done. She expects that some of that work might be developed as continuations/oral presentations from especially strong papers.

Placement: She does it. Students list six seminars they’re interested in and six first-courses they’d like to take. She assigns them one seminar and one course (actually more later, but they won’t find out about those until they get to campus and their parents leave). She was able to match every student with a seminar from the list of six and a first course from the list of six.

Her assessment of strengths: 1) small class size (their normal class size sounds like ours—some classes get very big, lots in the c. 20 range, some smaller, some c. 25) because students can take intellectual risks; 2) potential for residence connection to further that sense of intellectual community

- This year she also clustered the seminars and residence floors by 5 or 6 loose themes (I think she’s sending them to me)—very loose she says, but at least allow for potential that speakers or films might be worth hosting in the residence halls so that other seminars in the theme would show up.

Her assessment of weaknesses: 1) variability is too extreme, especially in writing instruction, 2) some seminars of course get too caught up on content and lose focus on process.

## Lawrence University: Phone interview

(PETER PEREGRINE, FRESHMAN STUDIES DIRECTOR, AND PROF.)

For extensive web materials, including the philosophy, regulations, and a very honest history of the course, see: [www.lawrence.edu/dept/freshman\\_studies](http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/freshman_studies)

### \*\*\*DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES:

--Each division first nominates 15-25 texts for the next year

--At least one book from each division must eventually end up in the syllabus (but not worried about course coherence, because they focus on comparison/contrast assignments)

--A faculty committee creates two possible syllabi (based on all the text nominations). The faculty who are teaching the course the next year then vote on which syllabus they want to teach.

--Every year, 20-30% of the texts must change from the previous year. The text eliminations are based on student and prof evaluations—as interpreted by the faculty committee.

--Every 5 years or so, the whole course is up for debate—whether to have it, what to change, etc. They keep coming back to this same format, but the debates are helpful in giving everyone a chance to weigh (and “buy”) in.

### RECRUITMENT (WHY NOT A PROBLEM):

--Profs have been hired with this course in mind for 50 years.

--Teaching FS is part of every prof’s contract

--FS Director sets a quota every year for each Dept

--Generally, there is buy-in because of democratic processes (see above)

### THE COURSE ITSELF:

--Writing-intensive. But the general premise is that the students can already write (at some level); they need to learn how to think.

--But also includes a midterm and final (mainly for faculty in the sciences, who prefer this format)

--two-semester course.

### ADMINISTRATION:

--A full-time director (from the faculty), 3 years. (Possible because they got NIH \$.) S/he works together with a small faculty committee.

### FACULTY CONVOS:

--Most are provided by on-campus faculty, who know the student body and course better, in many cases, than outside lecturers.

### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

MAIN STRENGTH: Close communal experience, for faculty and students.

WEAKNESS: Takes hard work. Not everyone likes everyone else’s book choices.

## Sewanee: Phone interview

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### “First-Year Program” (FYP)

- smorgasbord of topics in many disciplines;
- advisement by seminar teacher;
- includes residential component;
- program is voluntary, but extremely popular!

### **Questions about the description of the program:**

\* **How old is the program?** Sewanee’s program is a pilot program approved by the faculty for 4 years. This fall will be the beginning of the third year.

\* **What, if anything, preceded it?** No program preceded it. The common experience of all students at Sewanee was and is “English 101.” The consensus was that English 101 did not address the issue of freshmen transitioning from the academic culture of high school to that of college. One other common experience is a summer reading assignment for which students are required to submit a short essay by August 1. This text and their responses to it form the basis of discussion during “Opening Days.” In addition, a speaker (sometimes the text’s author) is invited to campus to give a lecture during the fall semester. Faculty may also incorporate the text into their FY seminars if they choose.

\* **How has it changed over the years (and why)?** The pilot program was developed and implemented in response to an institutional review that called for a more immediate inculcation of students into a discourse or discussion-based learning model. This model would include collaborative learning and a co-curricular experience.

\* **Can the “seminar” (some call it something else) count toward a Gen Ed distribution requirement or a major requirement?** Yes. This is an especially important feature of the program at Sewanee since faculty did not want to add yet another Gen. Ed. requirement. 99% of the seminars are writing intensive. Almost all of them meet an “area” requirement i.e. philosophy, science with a lab.

\* **How do students respond to the program? (E.g., does it get high evals? is it a reason students choose your college?)** Phillips reports that student evaluations are “glowing.” As a case in point, 92% would recommend the program to a friend, for one of four reasons: the seminar itself; advisement by faculty teaching the seminar; the co-curricular component; the housing of students in a common residence hall. Though evidence is only anecdotal, Phillips

believes that the program serves a valuable role as a retention tool. One of the primary reasons that students choose Sewanee is for access to faculty. The FYP accelerates and ensures this process.

\* **What do you consider its major strengths and weaknesses?** The major strength of the program is accelerating the adaptation and inculcation of students into university life. This happens in a variety of ways:

first, students are immediately engaged in a small class (cap is 14) where discussion, collaboration, and writing are central (Phillips reports that students would get this anyway, but would likely have to wait until later in their academic careers, possibly until the junior year);

second, students develop a close relationship with their advisor through regular classroom and co-curricular interactions;

third, through the assistant proctors assigned to the residence halls, freshmen develop a mentoring relationship with the sophomores or juniors with whom they are living.

Other strengths include:

first, FYP students so far demonstrate a greater sense of responsibility to the campus, to working with professors in the seminars of which they are a part, and to building bridges between freshmen and sophomores;

second, the seminar in the FYP can serve as an effective recruiting tool for individual departments. Phillips reports netting 15 majors in the religion department from 3 seminars with religion topics;

third, faculty have the opportunity to develop a course they wouldn't normally get to teach within their department. Phillips has two things to say about this: first, the payoff is freedom; second, the program serves as an enormously resourceful tool for faculty development, a kind of innovation machine.

The major weaknesses, after two years of the program:

first, determining a better working relationship between assistant proctors and faculty who are running the seminars;

second, the difficulty for faculty to define what exactly is the common experience they want students to have in the FYP.

### **Questions about administration:**

\* **How do you administer the program?** Phillips is the administrator. He describes the program as operating under a “loose framework.” The Dean agreed to replace him in his department for the pilot period. He was initially given a 2-course per semester release, but found that he could do the work of the program with just 1 course release. He has previous experience with a first-year program at Holy Cross. I asked Phillips if he would continue to run the program. He enjoys doing it, and has found it be a useful way to accrue majors in the religion department. One negative: it affects his sabbatical structure, permitting him 2 spring semesters but not one whole year.

\* **Does the program require extra funding? Source?** The program does require extra funding. Phillips didn’t tell me its source, but reported that the university sets aside a total of \$113,000 for the program. \$25,000 is for the co-curricular budget (\$1250 per seminar to be spend on co-curricular activities: field trips to the opera or a museum; collaborative work; dinner out for the class). \$45,000 is for adjunct replacement costs to individual departments (8 to 10 replacements across the college); \$15,000 for faculty stipend (\$750 per faculty member for summer prep). Whatever is left: replacement costs, full-time person in religion, stipend for coordinating.

\* **How do you ensure that a wide range of seminars (or at least instructors) are all accomplishing the same overarching goals? (e.g., writing, critical thinking, close reading, discussion, etc.)**

Several ways:

- 1) monthly meetings set up as a luncheon or Friday afternoon wine and beer get-together; designed primarily as an opportunity for casual conversation;
- 2) end-of-semester debriefing lunch where faculty members exchange information and experiences;
- 3) “summer workshop” at the end of the spring semester that helps faculty prepare for the fall;
- 4) formal evaluation by students at the end of each semester;
- 5) focus-group interviews in the fall with students (both inside and outside of the FYP) and faculty.

\* **How do you recruit faculty to teach in this program (rewards? quotas, etc.)? Do all departments participate?** So far, recruiting has not been an issue. In the planning period, Phillips included as many people as possible. His group had about 20 people, which seems ungainly. The point, however, was to develop buy-in. He had people from all divisions in the planning group (15 departments), and he included administrators and support staff. In the two years that the program has been up and running, he has had to turn people away. All departments but English participate (they are already teaching English 101!).

\* **How do you place students in the program?** Students submit a list of six choices, in order of priority. Placement is largely first come, first served. Phillips tries to honor their

highest preference; most recently he was able to put 90 % of students in their 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> choices. One over-riding concern is gender distribution. He had one problem—an educational psychology course in which only young women expressed interest. This year, he had a wait list of 50, last year 30. The program can accommodate 280 students, with an incoming class of about 400.

### **Questions about faculty:**

**\* What kind of faculty development program is involved with the seminar?** The faculty development program has several components (see above under “common goals”). The “summer workshop,” held at the end of the spring semester, lasts for a 1 1/2 days. Phillips presents nuts-and-bolts issues: evaluations, principles of collaboration and engagement. He invites colleagues continuing in the program to present their courses to the group. He also brings in staff persons doing collaborative work in the chaplains office and the “leaning office” to discuss ways that faculty can collaborate i.e. having a common co-curricular experience in seminars with different topics. Another aspect of faculty development: when faculty members propose a seminar they meet with Phillips to discuss its title and description, and ways in which the materials may need to be adapted to serve the goals of the FYP.

**\* How are faculty rewarded for participation?** Faculty are paid \$750 for participating in the “summer workshop.” In addition, they are given a budget for co-curricular activities. Finally, they may see rising numbers in their departmental majors, thus giving them leverage to apply for new faculty lines.

**\* About what percentage of your faculty participate (not in one year, but over time-- Are there, say, 50 faculty who each participate every other year, that sort of thing.)** In the first year of the pilot program, Phillips had 20 faculty participating. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 6 new faculty and 14 continuing. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, 10 new faculty, 10 continuing. In the three years of the program, about 25 % of faculty will have participated. Phillips’s goal is to broaden the base of experience widely enough that when it comes time to evaluate the program, many people have experience and can speak intelligently about it.

**\* If faculty are first-year advisors, don’t they find that their advisees accumulate over a two-year period?** Yes. Phillips had two responses. First, if one member of the geology department was offering a seminar in the FYP, then other members of the geology/earth sciences department would assist with the advising of the students in that seminar. Second, the fear of being over-burdened with freshman advising seems to be evaporating since the seminar leader is kind of casually advising them all along. “Official” advising is thus much easier.

**\* Do faculty work with peer tutors/preceptors? How? How are the peer tutors selected, trained, rewarded?** Phillips cites the peer tutors/preceptors as one of the areas that needs work. He has done some one-on-one work with faculty in their seminars, but he feels that this component of the program needs to be tackled more formally. He advocates some “programmatically training”—sexual harassment, drugs/alcohol—as well as issues more specific

to course content. Presently, the institution seems unclear about whose job it is to do the training: the dean of students, the coordinator for the program? Peer tutors are selected by faculty members. They may be rewarded in various ways: using the course as a springboard for an independent study; using the course as a way to gain research experience; the faculty member may offer to buy the seminar texts for the peer tutor.

**If there's a residential component, ask how that works. How are the seminars that have a residential component different from those without? How does the faculty workload vary?** All seminars have a residential component. Students from each seminar are clustered in an area of the dorm. In the case of single-sex dorms, the gender groups from each seminar are placed in dorms in close proximity to one another. The dynamics that develop in the dorm differ from student-to-student and seminar-to-seminar. The assistant proctor generally lives in the same area and may initiate various co-curricular activities.

## **Skidmore College: Phone interview**

Joanna Zangrando, Director of LS (518) 580-5020, ext. 5022. [jzangran@skidmore.edu](mailto:jzangran@skidmore.edu)

The freshman seminar at Skidmore is in two parts. The first is a general course centered on the theme “Human Dilemmas” and is taken by all first-year students. There is a common topic and a common set of texts. “LS1” (Liberal Studies 1) may not be used to satisfy any other graduation requirement. The course contains a significant writing component; in addition, there is a separate writing course. There is also an honors course available for students to take to make them eligible to be tutors for LS1.

The second, LS2, is less general and there are many options that satisfy it.

From the Catalog:

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY REQUIREMENTS: LIBERAL STUDIES**

Liberal Studies courses provide an integrative educational experiences for all students at the beginning of their college years. LS1: Human Experience, a single, team-taught course taken by all first-year students, introduces the ways in which different academic disciplines raise questions and seek answers concerning human experience. LS2 course options extend and focus the inquiries begun in LS1. All students are required to complete successfully LS1 during the fall semester of the first year. Also, all students are required to complete successfully one LS2 course by the end of the sophomore year.

More:

A distinctive feature of intellectual activity at Skidmore is the college’s attention to interdisciplinary learning. The ability to integrate ideas from several different disciplines lends coherence to a student’s entire college education and may be applied to many areas of life. Liberal Studies courses of a unique nature constitute the interdisciplinary component of the curriculum. (See course descriptions for LS2 course options.)

### **Academic Environment**

Liberal Studies 1: Titled “Human Dilemmas,” Liberal Studies 1 introduces all first-year students to contemporary problems shaping our human experience and initiates students into thinking critically about complex topics such as human identities, justice, and human ecologies. Faculty from the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, arts, and preprofessional programs lead students in seminar discussions in a challenging analysis of common texts and lectures.

In addition to LS1 in the first year, students must complete one LS2 course by the end of the sophomore year.

Liberal Studies 2: These courses make explicit connections to LS1 and are interdisciplinary in nature. Topics vary, but all courses emphasize the continued development of cognitive skills.

More:

With departmental and Curriculum Committee approval, designated Liberal Studies courses may be counted toward a minor or major. The Catalog will reflect these designations. In no case, however, may LS1 count toward any other requirement at the College.

More:

### **Liberal Studies**

*Director:* Joanna Schneider Zangrando

*LS1 Coordinator:* Michael Marx

All Liberal Studies courses are interdisciplinary in perspective. Faculty participate not only as specialists in particular fields of knowledge, but as models of people who have themselves been liberally educated, and are thus able to apply basic patterns of thought and sensibility to a variety of new as well as familiar experiences. Readings in major primary texts play a significant role in Liberal Studies courses.

### **LS1: HUMAN DILEMMAS**

An introduction to critical, interdisciplinary thinking and a foundation and context for future college studies, including LS2 courses. Weekly presentations (lectures, panels, performances, or films) for the entire course and small group discussion sections explore how we understand and respond to complex contemporary problems shaping our human experience as biological, socially-constituted beings and as creators of culture. Written assignments include personal response papers, critical analyses, and formal argumentation. Required of all first-year students in their first semester. This course must be taken for a letter grade.

### **LS2: INTEGRATIVE TOPICS**

These courses make explicit connections to LS1 by applying the key questions and the interdisciplinary skills learned in LS1 to a more closely focused topic or problem. Every student must take one LS2 course. In addition to the LS courses described below, these courses fulfill the LS2 requirement:

CC 200 The Classical World

ED 216 History of Education in the United States

ED 217 Alternative Education in the United States: Political and Social Perspectives

FL 263 Special Topics in Foreign Literature and Culture:

A. “The Fantastic in Fiction”  
D. “The Fate of Forbidden Knowledge in Literature and Science”  
FL 266 Images of Revolution and Social Upheaval: France 1789–1939  
FL 267 Modern Japanese Culture and Society  
GO 209 The Latin American Puzzle  
GO 219 Political Economy of European Integration  
GO 224 American Indian Politics and Policy  
GO 227 Russia: A Century of Change  
IA 101 Introduction to International Affairs  
RE 205 Women, Religion, and Spirituality  
RE 220 Encountering the Goddess in India  
SW 214 Death and Dying  
SW 217 Obsessions and Addictions  
SW 218 Prisons in America  
WS 101 Introduction to Women’s Studies  
WS 210 Ecofeminism, Women, and the Environment

More:

Expository Writing:

Students are required to develop their proficiency as writers by successfully completing one designated writing course. This requirement must be fulfilled by the end of the sophomore year. Those students who need to take EN103 Writing Seminar I as preparation for meeting this requirement must do so by the end of their first year.

## Trinity College: Phone interview

580 freshman class (usually 550); FTE = ??

Hour and a half interview (July 10) with Margaret Lindsay, full time program administrator of first-year seminar

has been in position for 3 years (previously at Wesleyan)

has academic background, orientation. Teaches in seminar

Assisted by administrative assistant who is on 9 month contract (soon to be 11 months)

Up to last year had a Dean of First Year program who was a faculty member. Got \$5000 stipend and course release each semester. This year the Dean of First Year program has been subsumed in the portfolio of an associate dean (who is a faculty member). The Dean's office, and dept chairs, does whatever arm-twisting or hard ball that might be necessary to get faculty members to teach. Lindsay's position is the supportive one. She "seeds" the idea of teaching in seminar program.

Lindsay reports to VP of Student Services (Dean of Students) and also to Dean of Faculty. So has two masters. She clearly identifies most with academic piece. She works closely with faculty as well as with other administrative units (housing, registrar, financial aid, etc)

Lindsay believes for first year seminar to thrive must have a full time program administrator. Such a person needs an academic background, academic vision, and needs to be faculty-oriented. Also needs good people skills because has to deal with so many administrative constituencies

### *Program dates from 1986*

Sounds like Trinity perhaps began more with focus on teaching "college skills" and helping students adjust to college life and has slowly evolved a program where the academic is more front and center and the other pieces are there still there but are subordinate to academic

Seminar program implemented in several stages. Started as introductory seminars/small-group activities/advisers.

Full time administrative position came about a decade ago

Never was made mandatory for students. But in fact all but three students enrolled in program last year. De facto mandatory.

### *Program goals*

Aim to promote independent work and study

Aims of seminar are many (writing, cr thinking, oral , researching, college workload, intro to city of Hartford), but priority is placed on writing and critical thinking

Has developmental philosophy: solve academic problems and behavior issues will come along

### *Faculty*

Faculty get \$800 for the seminar and \$300 for anything. Is a spending account, not a stipend  
Lindsay admits \$ have not kept up with need

Depts are expected to contribute equally. 6% FTE tax

Junior faculty tend to be protected

No adjuncts or part-timers. However there are some administrators or long term adjuncts  
Advising component is the reason

A lot of the seminars are done on a one off basis. Some repeat but not a lot

### *Seminar*

Aim is to have size of seminar at about 12

There is a summer assignment that every seminar sends out—can be almost anything—but each assignment is designed by the instructor and is particular to the class.

Students are allowed to switch sections but only in exceptional circumstances

### *Residential component*

Seminars are linked to dorms. So one dorm might contain 4 different seminars. Not joined to halls, however.

### *Common elements*

Some effort is made to make sure workloads in these courses are not wildly unequal

Also issue some guidelines: don't use final exam, for instance. Use more frequent shorter papers rather than few longer ones

Have training sessions in Writing Center. 3 times a semester

Also a May training session and August training session

Proposals for course must be approved by program administrator and Dean of program. Usually aren't rejected but sometimes do work with faculty to rework course.

### *Advising*

First year seminar teacher is adviser. Avoid advising overload by not having people teach back to back, though some do it. Max is 2 years in a row, though there are a few who do more. Usually people who do not have major advising loads for one reason or another

70% of students show up for advising session in June

*Mentor*

In place since 1996  
“Highly qualified” junior or senior  
writing assistants—drafts  
reports on stuff in dorms  
gets students to class; reports back on problems  
is preceptor and peer tutor  
bridge between curricular and co-curricular  
Meet in August, together with faculty  
does the library gig

*Clusters*

The program allows for clusters. For instance, there is a 7 course ‘mega cluster’ on Human Rights  
Other clusters are just two courses.  
Usually clusters share some reading, some common programming, and maybe some shared classes.  
Also involve faculty meeting with each other  
Clusters do not involve a common living experience

*Extension of program*

Have ½ credit colloquia that are sometimes connected to seminars/clusters

Currently pursuing idea of a 2<sup>nd</sup> semester—2nd semester would focus on research  
2<sup>nd</sup> semester idea is spearheaded by associate dean

*Misc.*

First year program became clearing house for information sent to first year students.  
Responsibility for getting info out to first year students

Some fulfill first year experience through Gateway program, which I still don’t fully understand

*Bottom line*

Program seems to work very well and students seem to respond very positively toward it.

## College of Wooster: Phone interview

Dean Shila [Shy-la] Garg, Dean of Faculty and Professor of Physics

The program

- **Some 35 sessions of courses that are only first-years seminars – thus the courses must be passed as first-year seminars. They cannot be narrowly defined. They must be broad, but can be anything.**
- How old is the program?
  - **Been in place since 1996**
- What, if anything, preceded it?
  - **Since the 70s there had been a required freshman seminar**
    - **From the mid-80s they worked with a common theme and with common texts every three years, then every year, until dissatisfaction erupted**
- How has it changed over the years (and why)?
  - **With the change in 1996 some missed a common experience, and thus a fall forum (series) was incorporated, during which the students & faculty shared in readings, sessions, showings, trips. This seemed to add quite a bit, so it is no longer required, but many still take part in it**
  - **Past five years have added a common summer reading (this year Jane Goodall's *Reason for Hope*). Goodall will talk at opening convo this year**
    - **During orientation week take 90 minutes as a “becoming a student” session in a huge hall (seats 1500). Approximately 500 students in incoming class.**
      - **First half hour – three faculty members on a panel provide different perspectives on the text.**
      - **Next 15 minutes discuss in class groups (within the hall) a set of questions, which in the summer the Dean and faculty put together and which the students in the summer have considered as they read.**
      - **Last 45 minutes consider the questions more broadly as a group, led by a Powerpoint presentation**
      - **Then, in first class might or might not follow up on some of the issues/questions.**
    - **This has been a success**
- Can the "seminar" (some call it something else) count toward a Gen Ed distribution requirement or a major requirement? **NO**

- How do students respond to the program? (eg., does it get high evaluations? Is it a reason students choose your college?) **Good responses, excited by topics**
- What do you consider its major strengths and weaknesses? **One of the challenges: consciously build writing into the programs – esp. adding drafts/re-writes (this is demanding – takes time from doing other things – so Wooster faculty have made other adjustments – drop the library component) [this becomes a weakness – but how much can you expect from a program?]**
  - **Nonetheless, note that Wooster and Colorado have a library requirement**

#### Administering the program

- How do you administer the program?
  - **All done by Dean Garg. She runs it. There is a writing program at Wooster, but everything else is up to her and her assistant(s), even down to assigning students to courses (make sure there is gender balance, diversity), which in the past used to take 2-3 weeks, but now which takes only a couple of hours, thanks to a computer program that receives electronic submissions from the university web page. She still looks individually at applications of students with special needs in order to make sure they have a compatible class/advisor situation.**
- Does the program require extra funding? Source?
- How do you ensure that a wide range of seminars (or at least instructors) are all accomplishing the same overarching goals? (eg., writing, critical thinking, close reading, discussion, etc.)
  - **Since 1996 the new program has required that every department of 4 provides one faculty member (thus a dept. of 8 would provide 2) for the first-year seminar. The dean sends a message to each chair, explaining that “your department will be expected to provide \* faculty members for the first-year seminar.” There can be legitimate excuses (leaves), but she tries hard not to hire adjuncts. Next year there will be only 2 adjuncts for 35 sessions.**
- How do you recruit faculty to teach in this program (rewards? quotas, etc.)? Do all departments participate?
- How do you place students in the program? **Send in 6 preferences**

#### Questions about faculty

- What kind of faculty development program is involved with the seminar?
  - **Workshops in February (the year before) to introduce first-timers to veterans and get introduced & talk about issues.**
  - **Meet at end of semester (year before) in May for 2-3 day workshop and do such things as discuss interaction with students, talk about how to employ film or Blackboard discussion tools, share ideas on incorporating writing assignments in the class.**
  - **During semester there are a couple of get-togethers to talk about anything that’s come up**

- **In the past there were drop-in lunches once per week, which faculty members could attend and get advice or share impressions, but these have faded.**
- **Will be trying a writing peer group which will discuss assignments, evaluation, expectations.**
- About what percentage of your faculty members participate (not in one year, but over time – Are there, say, 50 faculty members who each participate regularly – that is, 25 one year, and the other 25 the next?)
- If faculty members are first-year advisors, don't they find that their advisees accumulate over a two year period?
  - **Yes, first-year seminar instructors advise 100% of the students in their seminars (there is no splitting up of advisees, no paired advising). But some faculty members love teaching these courses, so deal with the extra advising**
- Do faculty members work with peer tutors/preceptors? How? Are the peer tutors selected, trained, rewarded?
  - **There are Teaching Apprentices who receive credit for their work with faculty members (can be sophomores, juniors, or seniors). They do workshops with faculty members, help them with students' writing, gather information on a topic/presentation/text; they meet with faculty members once a week and may – at the discretion of the instructor – have to submit a paper for their credit.**

#### Residential component

- If there's a residential component, ask how that works. How are the seminars that have a residential component different from those without? How does the faculty workload vary?
  - **Right now is voluntary. Faculty members worried that a residential component implicitly would involve faculty members (who necessarily would be part of the “freshman group”) and thus make extra demands on them to be working with the students outside of class and advising times.**
  - **Have found that there is positive peer pressure in such a housing system**

Does your program incorporate the co-learner model? If so, how effective have you been in attracting faculty from disciplines outside the humanities? What has proved especially effective in attracting those faculty members? **NO**

