

First-Year Seminar Handbook

Wichita State University

www.wichita.edu/FYS

FYS IN THEORY

We Start From The Beginning: Introduction and Purpose

First-Year Seminar (FYS) is a three-credit hour course designed specifically for new students and part of our General Education program. The purpose of the program is to help new students make a successful academic and social transition to campus. As part of the first-year experience, an FYS course should help foster a sense of belonging and engagement in campus life at WSU. FYS instructors engage students in meaningful relationships with peers, faculty, and the campus community, all while teaching something interesting or unique for new students. Seminars are meant to engage students in intellectual discourse in small classes taught by faculty, who have a deep subject matter knowledge and a passion for a topic. Seminar topics cover a broad range of issues and include elements that engage students in our community of learners and teach successful student and life skills.

Where We Came From: History of First-Year Seminar at WSU

In the 2014-15 academic year, the General Education committee proposed to create a required FYS for all incoming new students at WSU. The Faculty Senate accepted the proposal and instituted a pilot project in December 2015. A total of 19 different courses were developed by 22 different instructors during the pilot, with 45 sections being offered between Fall 2016 and Spring 2019. Assessment of the pilot indicated some success with retention as well as positive qualitative evaluations. Fall to Fall persistence rates for students in the 2016 FYS cohort were 5% higher than non-FYS students, and were 7% higher in comparison from their 2nd to 3rd year at the university. The pilot lasted four years, with continued success, particularly in student retention. The General Faculty voted to require FYS for all first-time-in-college students starting in the Fall 2021.

Why We Do This: Transitions in the First Year

One of the central purposes to requiring an FYS for all incoming new-to university students is to help them transition from high school to university life, culture, and academic expectations. A student's entire first year is a transition to college and the First-Year Seminar courses are designed to assist them in this process. Within their first year, students should have had the opportunity to experience the following:

- Gain perspective and sense of purpose between the demands and opportunities of college life
- Develop cognitive, behavioral, and communication skills to assimilate to campus
- Opportunities for interaction with faculty
- Foster development of a peer group, creating an atmosphere of comfortableness and reduced anxiety
- Acclimate students to the facilities, services, and members of the campus community

How We Do This: High-Impact Educational Practices

“High-Impact” has become a popular buzzword in academic programs and teaching at the university level. For the purposes of teaching an FYS, it is helpful to think about what practices George D. Kuh and Ken O’Donnell consider key to “high impact” courses:

- Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels
- Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time
- Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those which students are familiar
- Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
- Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning
- Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications
- Public demonstration of competence

(George D. Kuh and Ken O’Donnell, *Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*, Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2013)

The role of the First-Year Seminar is to expose students to interesting and challenging concepts, to introduce them to university expectations, and to prepare them for a successful undergraduate career. An FYS course does not have to excel at each of the elements listed by Kuh and O’Donnell above, but it should focus on many. Consider including these practices into your teaching of an FYS, given your course and student needs.

- Large thematic questions addressed and explored over the course of a semester
- Asking students to apply what they are learning to their personal lives, or vice versa (e.g. a project that asks students to interview family members)
- Application of concepts from class in an out-of-class setting

FYS IN PRACTICE

Core Planning: Course Objectives

As part of the course design, an FYS must meet general education and student success outcomes, which are defined by the university. Instructors of an FYS also design course-level disciplinary outcomes for the students in the course. An FYS should expose students to the goals of general education and introduce students to means by which to be a successful learner at Wichita State. This section outlines the overarching, general education, and student success outcomes.

Overarching Goals:

1. Exploration of engaging academic, interdisciplinary content.
2. Exposure to and development of student success and professional skills.
3. Development of positive relationships with peers, faculty and staff members.

General Education Basic Skills Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. *Employ* higher-order thinking that moves beyond rote memorization and factual acquisition to more advanced higher levels of thinking (e.g., thinking critically and creatively).
2. *Articulate* and *defend* their positions through dialogue, discussion, or presentations, and writing.
3. *Employ* analytical reasoning and problem solving techniques
4. *Identify* appropriate library and other resources to facilitate research and *accurately provide* citations.

If a course is to be designated as containing diversity content, an additional outcome should be added to reflect learning in this area.

5. *Illustrate/Demonstrate* an appreciation for diversity as it applies to the course content

Student Success Learning Outcomes included in FYS

1. *Understand* the expectations of higher education and how they differ from secondary education
2. *Learn strategically* by developing skills and habits that promote deep learning and long-term retention of knowledge.
3. *Develop* more effective life and study skills in areas including time management, note taking, test taking and personal finance.
4. *Capitalize* on university resources and extracurricular experiences designed to promote their success.

Disciplinary Learning Outcomes

These outcomes are developed by the faculty based on the unique disciplinary content of the course.

To ensure relevant, sustainable and dynamic course design, the learning outcomes and common course requirements provide a degree of consistency across sections while also allowing instructors to customize their section. The broad nature of these outcomes signifies that no one approach may be appropriate for all sections or all students. The content, topics and methods used to achieve the outcomes should be tailored to the needs of the students in a given section and to the strengths and expertise of the instructor.

All instructors who created an FYS course were required to demonstrate how the course and its assignments/assessments fulfilled general education, student success, and disciplinary outcomes. A sample chart follows:

Example Matrix illustrating how coursework is aligned with the Learning Outcomes:

	Gen Ed Outcome 1	Gen Ed Outcome 2	Gen Ed Outcome 3	Gen Ed Outcome 4	Student Success Outcome 1	Student Success Outcome 2	Student Success Outcome 3	Student Success Outcome 4	Disciplinary outcome 1	Disciplinary outcome 2
Journal entries	x				x					x
Quizzes	x								x	
Homework	x			x			x			x
Group activities			x			x				
Class presentation		x		x					x	
Small group discussions		x							x	
Out of class activity			x	x				x		
Attendance and participation						x				

Components for FYS

Course content should be divided as follows: 70% on interdisciplinary content, 25% on Student Success content, and 5% on the Common Read. Student success content can often be thematically presented to align with interdisciplinary content.

Required Components:

1. Disciplinary / interdisciplinary content
2. Information Literacy Module
 - For example: face-to-face sessions, online tutorials, videos, and/or resource guides.
3. *At least three* of the following student success components:¹
 - financial literacy
 - goal setting
 - degree planning
 - career planning
 - time management
 - stress management/mental health tips
 - study skills / test taking tips / note taking tips.
4. Participation in the Common Read and Convocation
 - All FYS students will participate in the Common Read. This may tie directly to the course disciplinary content, or may serve as a supplemental reading. FYS students should participate in Academic Convocation. The event will be streamed online and available for students who cannot attend the event due to their class schedule.
5. A beyond-the-classroom learning opportunity
 - As part of WSU's commitment to applied and experiential learning, all courses should include a beyond-the-classroom experience. Examples include but are not limited to: campus lecture/speaker's series, cultural performances, service learning, community service, leadership programs or workshops, a diversity event, a campus club/organization event, a residence hall program, an Outdoor Recreation program. Inviting students to write a reflection paper or journal entry on their experience(s) or engage in small group discussion based on their beyond-the-classroom opportunity can further develop their writing and speaking skills.
6. Writing Assessment
 - All FYS courses must include a writing component with multiple opportunities for students to write and receive feedback on their writing. However, instructors have latitude for what student writing will look like. You will provide a copy of one writing assignment from your students for a program that will assess WSU students'

¹Instructors can readily draw on expert resources across campus to provide content in these student success topics. Resources include: Library personnel, the Office of Student Success, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Counseling and Prevention Center, the Career Development Center, and the Office of Student Money Management.

writing, with one sample from the beginning of their college career (that is us!) and one at the end.

Optional Components:

1. Peer Coach

- A Peer Coach is an undergraduate student who is hired, trained and paid by Student Success and assigned to your course.
- Each instructor who has a Peer Coach is required to meet with their coach at the beginning of the semester and monthly or as needed or requested by either the instructor or the coach. The expectation for both parties is to schedule a meeting at a specific time, outside of office/student hours.
- Consult the section on Peer Coaches for information on what they are trained and expected to do in your course.

2. Diversity Content

- Include in your assignments or activities ways for students to consider different viewpoints other than their own.
- Consult the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to learn about resources and events that could enhance classroom content or experiences.
- Explain this component clearly in your syllabus and send it to review to be tagged as a course with diversity content.

3. Service-Learning

- Consider including a service-learning opportunity in your course. This will look very different for every course and allows the possibility of applied learning opportunities early.
- Service-Learning is different from community service. Consult Student Involvement to learn about options that may fit your course content and enhance the students' experience.

Assignments

Assignments need to allow students to demonstrate evidence of achieving the learning outcomes for the course. This will be accomplished through a mix of homework assignments, papers, projects and presentations.

Recommended Assignments/Sample Assignment Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation - can include beyond-the-classroom learning opportunity	10-15%
Homework (e.g., projects, quizzes, daily assignments)	10-20%
Papers/Essays — formal and/or informal writing	15%-25%
Dialogue /Group Discussions/Presentation(s)	10%-20%
Final/Culminating Project — The final should challenge students to reflect upon and synthesize the major course goals. Methodologies could include portfolios, take-home projects or papers, presentations, videos, etc.	10-20%

Note: students should complete assignments and receive grades regularly throughout the semester so that they can track their success in the course.

Library Support for the First-Year Seminar

The University Libraries (UL) contribute to the success of the First Year Seminar Program in a variety of ways. Subject librarians consult with students and faculty, create instructional materials and deliver information literacy instruction, and collaborate with faculty in the selection of course materials and the design of assignments and activities. In recent years, librarians have increased the number and variety of e-learning resources tailored to FYS courses, including tutorials, research guides, and other digital learning objects (DLO) that include information literacy concepts, guidance on conducting scholarly research, and accurate information about citation practices. Librarians have also engaged in fruitful collaborations with faculty that have created a variety of learning opportunities for students. Below are some suggestions for how to incorporate the University Libraries into your FYS.

- Before the semester begins, faculty will be notified of their FYS librarian by either the Coordinator of Library Instructional Services or the librarian matched with their course. If you are not sure who the librarian is for your course, please contact the Coordinator of Library Instructional Services (maria.sclafani@wichita.edu).
- Librarians are happy to collaborate with faculty to design assignments and activities related to research and/or library services and resources for their classes.

- Consult your FYS librarian about having the library acquire materials you want to use in your course, such as e-books, audio, video, and other multimedia (keep in mind not all materials are available for libraries to purchase). Your librarian can also help you find open access or open educational resources (OER) to use.
- Have your students complete some of the FYS library tutorials. Your FYS librarian can give you a report showing which students completed which tutorials.
- With adequate advance notice, librarians can create customized tutorials, videos, research guides with relevant resources and information, and other digital learning objects (DLO) for your course.
- Adding the librarian to your Blackboard shell as an embedded librarian allows them to support you and your students in a variety of ways, including providing links to library resources or directly embedding audio or video, and communicating directly with students. Find directions for embedding a librarian here:
<https://libraries.wichita.edu/facultyguide/blackboard/embeddinglibrarians>
- Faculty can also arrange for one or more library instruction sessions, which can be conducted virtually, to introduce students to library resources and services and support their research and information needs.
- We ask faculty to encourage students to seek out librarians through our virtual reference services and/or one-on-one consultations, which can be conducted virtually.

Student Success Content

One of the benefits for students enrolled in First-Year Seminars is the opportunity to develop study skills early in their university career. The intent of including student success content in an FYS course is to expose students to various strategies and resources to achieve academic success in college. WSU's Office of Student Success has many resources and tools for faculty to incorporate study skill development into their curricula. Most of these resources can be accessed online by going to www.wichita.edu/StudySkills.

For faculty and staff wishing to bring in guest speakers to cover study skills the following options are available:

- **Presentations by a Success Coach or other staff member from Student Success** are available on time management, note taking, test taking, textbook reading, general study skills, etc. by request.
- **Presentations by your Peer Coach** (or a Peer Coach assigned to another FYS course) who are also trained to present on the same topics or work one-on-one with student as needed.
- **Existing class assignments or activities provided by Student Success** to include in your course.

We strongly recommend incorporating these skills into the delivery of your course content. Be sure to be clear about the purpose behind each activity when introducing the assignment to students. For example, explain to students the focus for the day's class will be on note taking. Next, give a brief presentation on how to take notes and have students practice taking notes during a

lecture/presentation/video that is related back to your class theme. At the conclusion of the lecture, review the activity and have students reflect on what note taking style works best for them.

If you need any assistance incorporating study skills with your class theme please consult Student Success and we would be happy to help. You can visit the [Student Success Workshops](#) page to request that somebody from Student Success visit your class to present on various student success topics. (They also offer to have somebody teach student success materials to your class in the event you are not able to teach on a certain day—this is a great resource.)

Common Read

WSU Reads is Wichita State’s common read program since 2013. Every year, the WSU Reads committee selects a book that distributed to all new students during orientation over the summer and is used across campus in a variety of ways. Most recently, we have brought the authors to campus to address students during the Academic Convocation in the fall, who also take part in small meetings, meals, and book signings. All First-Year Seminars will use the common read as well as all English composition courses. For more information on the WSU Reads program, the book selection process, or the book selected for upcoming years visit www.wichita.edu/WSUreads.

Some Were Paupers, Some Were Kings: Dispatches from Kansas, by Mark McCormick is the book for the 2020-21 academic year. Our WSU copy contains a letter in the beginning from Provost Rick Muma, as well as discussion questions at the end.

Opportunities to incorporate the WSU Reads book into the classroom

- Tied into course content where relevant
- Writing sample – if the topic is really a stretch to relate it back to the theme of your course, have students write a paper about a theme or chapter of the book and use that as either their pre- or post-writing sample for the course
- Note taking and test taking skills – have students practice taking notes about the book or create a test on a specific chapter of the book to give students practice preparing for a test
- Group work and discussion – simply have students work together to develop a presentation on a section or theme within the book to develop their group work and public speaking skills

In addition, there will be many opportunities outside of class for students to engage with the book. Instructors can choose to assign students extra credit for attending events related to the book such as: Academic Convocation, Dine & Dialogue, and Coffee & Conversation.

Fall 2020 Events:

Academic Convocation: Thurs, Sept. 10, 9:30 a.m. in Wilner Auditorium, but broadcast online and will be an online only event. Go to wichita.edu/convocation

Coffee and Conversation: Per COVID-19, this event is indefinitely postponed

Dine and Dialogue: Per COVID-19, this event is indefinitely postponed

Spring 2021 Events:

Academic Convocation (available online) – search “Academic Convocation Wichita State University” on WSU’s YouTube channel.

Dine and Dialogue: TBA

Coffee and Conversation, TBA

Written Assessment

Previously, the FYS program included submitting early and late writing samples for program assessment. We are shifting to a new assessment model, but still ask for a writing sample from your students. Additionally, it is **strongly encouraged** that you include multiple writing assignments in your course and give some instruction and guidance on how to write at the college level. A common method in many courses of including writing is to have a pre/post writing assignment, which has had success with students and instructors.

One suggestion for a pre/post writing assignment is a self-reflective journal entry on students' personal goals and why they have decided to come to college, wrapping up with reflections on what they have learned throughout the semester. This could also serve as a qualitative course evaluation and provide you with useful feedback for future modifications.

Peer Coaches

First-Year Seminar Instructors have the option to be paired up with an undergraduate Peer Coach.² The role of a Peer Coach is to help students develop into independent learners by supporting them in their transition to college, developing time management and study skills, and connecting them with campus resources. Peer Success Coaches are responsible for the following:

- Facilitating workshops on study skills, time management, test-preparation, etc.
- Preparing handouts, learning aids, etc. for classes and workshops
- Helping students strengthen academic background, understand class materials, comprehend the textbook, organize assignments and notes, and improve general learning and study skills
- Being knowledgeable of campus resources and referring students when appropriate
- Having an awareness of relevant campus events and important deadlines (last day to withdraw with “W”, etc.)
- Meeting one-on-one with students to determine any underlying issues and developing a plan for success

Similar to TAs, Peer Success Coaches can lead classroom activities and discussions and should be seen as leaders in the classroom. They **should not** have access to grades or be used for grading assignments as this will interfere with the trust and relationships they are building with the students outside of the classroom.

Campus Engagement

Student Success outcomes #1 and #3 relate to building connections across campus. We want to ensure that students are connecting and engaging with other students, faculty and staff around campus, as well as developing an affinity for Wichita State University. The best opportunity for students to become engaged on campus is by getting involved with student organizations and attending events. Between Student Involvement, Student Activities Council, Student Success: First-Year Programs and many more departments, there is always something happening on campus for students to get involved in. We suggest that you attend events together as a class and talk about what that experience was like for them the next time you meet. Incentivize students to attend campus

² Currently, there are a limited number of Peer Coaches available—preference will be given to newer FYS instructors.

events by giving out extra credit points for those who attend and write a reflection about their experience.

There are numerous benefits to involvement on campus:

- More likely to stay at WSU and graduate
- Build network of friends and professionals
- Attend conferences/workshops
- Gain new skills

Events to consider:

Back to School Bash: August 17, 2-4 pm, RSC East Courtyard

Shocker Resource Fair: August 21, RSC

Virtual Clash of the Colleges: August 21-Sept 14. [Link here](#)

Syllabus Party: August 27, 11-1 pm (online event, [link here](#))

Involvement Fair: TBA

Wellness Expo: March 3, 2021; 11am-1pm; Heskett Center Gymnasium

Academic Convocation: Thurs, Sept. 10, 9:30 a.m., Wilner Auditorium (online event, [link here](#))

Family Weekend: October 4-6, Multiple buildings on campus, [link here](#)

Wu's Big Event: October 3, 8:30am-1:30 pm, [link here](#)

Shocktoberfest: TBA

Check the following websites and departments for more events:

- www.wichita.edu/involvement
- www.wichita.edu/odi
- www.wichita.edu/firstyear
- www.wichita.edu/calendar
- www.wichita.edu/student_life

Diversity Content

Some options for how to incorporate diversity content into the classroom include:

- Bringing a representative from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion into the classroom to facilitate a discussion on a specific topic
- Encourage students to participate in one of the trainings hosted by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion such as Safe Zone, Gender Diversity, etc.
- Incentivize student's participation with in events focused on diversity, especially discussion based programs such as the Brown Bag Series hosted by ODI, by giving extra credit points

Service Learning

Community Engagement is the “application of institutional resources to address and solve challenges facing communities, through collaboration with these communities.”

Community Engaged Pedagogy is a method of experiential learning that emphasizes action, reflection, & real world engagement that supports students in their development of real-world skills.

Service-Learning at Wichita State University is an experiential learning method that integrates community service with instruction and reflection to increase student civic-mindedness and build community capacity.

Benefits of Service Learning for Faculty

- Student centered
- Measurable outcomes
- Identification with the community
- Scholarship support
- Engagement with multiple systems
- Faculty development
- Grant opportunities
- Curriculum improvement

Benefits of Service Learning for Students

- Building relational and communication skills with multiple systems
- Identify development: awareness of self and diverse individuals and populations
- Developing research skills: inquiry/interviewing, listening, storytelling, empathy, recognition of impact
- Cognition benefits: lessen resistance to change, build tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity, experience with project management, moved to action, critical and creative thinking
- Empowerment interest in Higher Ed

Benefits of Service Learning for the community

- Engagement with University and students
- Experiencing re-energizing
- Support for goals
- Shared leadership
- Strengths-based approach
- Processing and experiencing challenge and growth
- Reflection and feedback opportunities
- Teaching through experiences
- Outreach and appreciation for special knowledge

Community-Based Partnerships

- United Way 211 Website (<http://www.unitedwayplains.org/> & www.211kansas.org)
- Lord's Diner, Food Bank, Boys & Girls Club
- Community Service Board (www.wichita.edu/csb) transportation issues, campus events, info & help
- Community Engagement Institute (www.communityengagementinstitute.org)
- IMPACT Center application for opportunities
- Campus Connect (Galaxy Digital)

What do I grade?

- Grade the reflections
- Grade the principles related to your class
- Adding points for increased depth in reflection
- Assignments in and out of class
- You can utilize community partner feedback for portion of grading
- Rubrics
- Student Individual &/or Group Presentations (related to content, style, use of technology)
- Self and Peer Assessment
- Portfolios
- Project newsletter
- Social Media activity/documentation
- Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram

Questions regarding Service Learning can be directed to:

Student Involvement at 978-3022 or getinvolved@wichita.edu.

Financial Literacy

Students who drop out after their first year of college often cite financial issues as their primary reason for leaving (Inceptia, 2012). There are many campus and community resources available to help educate students about financial literacy. Below is a list of partners to utilize for classroom presentations or for handouts and additional information.

Office of Student Money Management:

115 Neff Hall, 316-978-3254

OSMM@wichita.edu

www.wichita.edu/OSMM

My College Money Plan

www.mycollegemoneyplan.org

Office of Financial Aid

203 Jardine Hall, 316-978-3430 or 855-978-1787

finaid@wichita.edu

www.wichita.edu/financialaid

Commerce Bank

RSC 1st floor, 316-978-3850

<https://commercebank.com/shockercard>

Meritrust Credit Union

316-683-1199

www.meritrustcu.org

Tips from FYS Instructors to new instructors:

Some of these are obviously good practices for all classes, but the impact is high when carrying out these strategies for a class full of first semester students.

- Explain the learning value of each activity. Take a few minutes to regularly communicate to the class why the course includes the modules that it does: student success components, extracurricular components, service learning, etc. It can be obvious to us (who designed the course) why these elements are included and how they advance the FYS goals, but it may be less obvious to the students. A few quick sentences when introducing a class visitor from OSMM or the Career Center regarding the goal of helping students succeed outside the classroom and beyond college is likely all that is needed.
- Explain concepts and norms that we might assume that they already know. Its ok for those who know to get a reminder, but it might be the first time a student hears about key concepts or norms as a college student. [Ex: if you skip class, your professor is likely to assume it is a deliberate choice, not that you were sick. Communicate with your professor.]
- Work collaboratively with the Peer Coaches. They are in the course to build connections with the students. They can help serve as a liaison between the faculty member and students. They provide insights for faculty into what students might be struggling with or thinking about with regard to the content and structure of the course. They can serve as an additional voice to drive home the key points the faculty member wants to convey (additional ‘words of wisdom’, and from a peer sometimes have more impact). Keep the success coach in the loop and find ways they can enhance the students’ experiences in the course.
- Carefully consider the level of knowledge the students might bring to the class. If your course is designed to appeal broadly, you may not have any majors in the course, and in fact might be teaching to students from multiple colleges. This requires a different approach than courses that are designed to draw in students from more specific majors.
- Have them create some evaluation materials like a quiz and use it. It may help them read the materials in a different way.

- Do several activities so the students team up or mingle. Building community contributes to the goal of retaining these students at WSU.
- Work on peer-review activities. This can provide opportunities for mentoring and well as learning from each other.
- Encourage discussion outside the class (Blackboard forum, Facebook group, etc.)
- Encourage them to get out of their comfort zone as a learning tool and give them support in doing this. This might take many forms (role playing, giving a speech, interviewing someone on/off campus, discussing controversial topics, attending talks or performances, etc.).
- Invite a guest to talk about x topic.
- Have some kind of personal meeting(s) with them. They have met with advisors, but likely have not had any personal meetings with a faculty member on campus. Help them recognize that faculty members are people who want to see them succeed.
- Send reminders a couple days before each deadline and encourage them to learn how to keep calendars and take responsibility for their assignments because not all faculty will provide reminders.
- Put everything on Blackboard for easy and timely location. Explain the format you want for each assignment and put it on Blackboard.
- Give them all the good feedback you can. You are helping them transition effectively to the college environment and they need to know what they expectations are and how they can improve their work.
- Submit mid semester evaluations and use SEAS (Student Early Alert System). They need to be told explicitly if they are performing well or if adjustments are needed to achieve the grade they want in the class.