

First Year Seminar at Rhode Island College

This innovative and important program is designed to introduce first year students to the challenge of academic engagement and to the pleasures of belonging to the community of scholars that composes Rhode Island College.

Design Goals of First Year Seminar: Ideally, students will remember their First Year Seminar course as one of the most important classes in their College careers.

FYS 100 is an opportunity for faculty to pursue a personal interest or passion that may or may not be directly connected to their usual areas of academic expertise or pedagogy. Professors are encouraged to think creatively to construct projects and experiences such that students will not merely be the recipients of knowledge, but will be actively engaged in the learning process. Because the course is open only to first or second semester students, the instruction should be targeted at that level, and cannot assume prerequisite skills or knowledge.

First Year Seminars should be designed to:

- Actively introduce and engage students in academic conversation
- Guide students in:
 - constructing academic questions
 - identifying authoritative resources to help address them,
 - discovering potential answers
 - communicating those conclusions effectively to others
- Provide incoming students with academic role models
- Establish standards of academic behavior and collegiate expectations
- Teach skills and introduce Rhode Island College resources organically throughout the class as they become relevant
- Provide support for the transition from high school to college
- Encourage connections among the students, with faculty, with the College, and with the broader community

Teaching First Year Students: While developing the course, professors should remind themselves that these students are inexperienced with the academic world, but that they are very excited about being a part of it, and are willing to work hard to succeed. Some may see the College as a place for a fresh start, where they can develop skills with which they may have struggled in high school. FYS is designed to channel that excitement into an active and informed participation in academic discourse. At the end of the First Year Seminar, students should feel a sense of pride and accomplishment for tackling a rigorous class, and expanding their horizons.

One of the most challenging aspects of teaching this course will probably be finding the appropriate balance between setting high academic standards and achieving realistic goals for first year students. Slightly more than half of RIC's incoming students are first-generation college students, who may have only a vague idea about the purpose of a liberal

arts education, or how to succeed at the College. For more information about RIC's incoming student population, please consult the RIC FYS program website.

Course Format and Assignments: Creative assignments, including field experiences and assignments that make imaginative use of technology or ask students to engage in service, are welcomed. Professors should be aware of their own pedagogical strengths, and play up those strengths for this class. Similarly, if aspects of this class are challenging pedagogically, professors should not hesitate to ask for help or advice from the FYS coordinator or the team at the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning.

FYS should NOT be:

- Courses dominated almost entirely by lecture
- Online or hybrid courses. (Blackboard, however, may certainly be used as a tool for student engagement)
- Introductions to a discipline or a survey of a field
- Test-based or assessed based on a few high-stakes assignments
- Assignments (papers, projects, oral presentations) undertaken without the careful and systematic guidance of the professor
- Designed specifically to assessment outcomes

Teaching Written and Oral Communication: Written and oral communication is fundamental to the General Education program. Students are not expected to emerge from FYS as polished writers or accomplished speakers. However, FYS courses will include a variety of formal and informal oral and written assignments, and professors are expected to provide regular feedback on those assignments. Students should become accustomed in FYS to using writing and thoughtful speech as an academic tool for reflection, learning and persuasion. Courses will also emphasize the significance of purpose, clarity, development and organization in written and oral work. Professors should highlight revision as significant for success in academic work at all levels.

Assessment of General Education Outcomes Associated with FYS: *The goal of FYS assessment is not to evaluate individual students, professors or courses, but to provide a programmatic assessment of the success of the First Year Seminars as part of the General Education program. A course carefully designed to fulfill the FYS-specific goals will naturally address the COGE outcomes as well. For example, at the heart of the FYS experience is the College's desire that students should learn to think for themselves in an academic environment, and feel confidence in their ability to participate in the creative aspects of academia. Assignments created to foster academic thought will also address the Critical and Creative Thinking General Education outcome.*

General Education outcomes associated with FYS are:

- Collaborative Work
- Critical and Creative thinking
- Oral Communication
- Research Fluency

- Written Communication

Other, more practical, skills you may want to incorporate into your FYS curriculum—especially if you teach FYS during the fall semester—are:

Introduction to RIC computer skills, such as:

- OASIS (finding it online)
- L4L (finding it online)
- MyRIC
- Registration
- Email
- How to find information on RIC website
- Blackboard

Introduction to campus resources, such as:

- Career Center
- Financial Aid
- L4L/Foodbank
- OASIS
- Unity Center
- Women's Center
- User Support
- Health Services
- Disability Services
- Student Success
- Math Success
- Security Services

Introduction to academic skills, such as:

- Critical reading
- Writing to learn
- Staying organized
- Taking notes
- Planning assignments
- Study skills

College expectations, such as:

- Academic honesty, especially plagiarism
- Classroom etiquette
- Personal responsibility
- Freedom of expression (what it means and does not)
- Ground rules and peer evaluations (when working in groups)
- Being respectful of others and their time
- Academic calendar awareness