

Texas A&M University
First-Year Seminar Course
2009 Program Guidelines

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) Course, UPAS 181, applies "seminar-style" teaching to a learning community setting that is focused around an academic topic. The FYS Course provides an intellectual and social transition into the university under the guidance of faculty/staff instructors in a small classroom environment of 15 or fewer students. In this small class environment, the FYS Course encourages motivated students to actively participate in their learning through critical inquiry; by listening and contributing to class discussion; in reading broadly from research sources and writing original works. The specific topic of each seminar course is based on research or outside interests of the particular instructor, current events, or popular culture. While each course addresses a different topic, all FYS Courses focus on several common student learning outcomes. These one-credit courses are open only to first-year freshmen from all majors and colleges.

❖ Framework

- Intended to provide an intellectual and social transition into the university under the guidance of faculty/staff instructors in a small classroom environment of around 15 students.
- Will address different topics, but they will focus on several common student learning outcomes.
- Seminar topics will be selected by the teachers, but they must be academic and must be approved in advance by the Dean of Undergraduate Programs and Associate Provost for Academic Services. Typical seminars are based on research or outside interests of the instructors, current events, or popular culture.
- Course curriculum will be developed around *Integrative Learning* where integrative learning opportunities are those that are developed intentionally to encourage students to:
1) connect skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; 2) apply theory to practice in various settings; 3) utilize diverse and even contradictory points of view; and 4) understand issues and positions contextually. One model that is recommended to achieve this is the "Learning Partnerships Model," which interweaves cognitive, identity, and relationship dimensions of learning.

Categories of out-of-classroom experiences that support integrative learning include: community involvement; leadership; participation in programs that promote awareness of international and cultural diversity; professional development; visual and performance art experiences; and class field trips and field work. Contact with Student Affairs staff is available for FYS instructors who are unsure or who would like to explore co-curricular opportunities to support integrative learning.

- Courses will be open only to first-year freshmen from all majors and colleges.

❖ Objectives

- To provide freshmen the opportunity to have contact with faculty in a small group or class
- To give freshmen a small class of fewer than 19 students during their first-year
- To engage first-year students through reasonable academic challenge and appropriate faculty/staff support
- To establish through an enriching learning environment setting a foundation upon which first-year students can begin to build the life-long learning skills necessary to be successful as students.

- To foster first-year students' abilities to integrate learning across curricular and co-curricular activities
 - To support the development of skills first-year students need to manage every day life
 - To provide freshmen with contact to faculty/staff as a resource on university processes, such as Q-drop, FYGE, Academic Advising
- ❖ Common Student Learning Outcomes include:
- Student will identify and articulate her/his educational goals
 - Student will be able to identify facts
 - Student will be able to identify unanswered questions
 - Student will be able to articulate own opinion
 - Student will be able to articulate the principles of reflective writing
- Note: additional course specific student learning outcomes may be developed by the instructor
- ❖ Course Teaching Matters
- Faculty, Professional Staff, and Administrators may teach a First-Year Seminar.
 - Teaching a seminar is in addition to the faculty teaching load. It may or may not be part of a professional staff member's position description, depending on how the department chooses to classify it.
 - FYS courses will be taught in "seminar-style" academic instruction that is focused around a research topic. Course assignments will be designed to prompt students to actively participate in their learning through critical inquiry; by listening and contributing to class discussion; in reading broadly from research sources and writing original works.
 - Contact with Student Affairs staff will be available for FYS instructors who are unsure or who would like to explore co-curricular opportunities to support integrative learning.
 - First-Year Seminars are meant to be more experimental than typical classes and may be run as a learning community. To support experimentation with teaching methods and course content, course evaluations will be suspended.
 - All FYS courses are listed as UPAS 181 for 1SCH.
 - Course may be taught as Pass/Fail – instructor's decision.
 - Course day and time assignment will be based on availability of instructors and rooms. An ideal time for students and for rooms is late afternoon so we suggest you consider a 3 or 4pm time slot.
- ❖ Course Proposal Process
- An individual who is interested in teaching a FYS Course must submit a paper copy of the course proposal form by Friday, March 6, 2009 to the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Programs and Academic Services for first review.
 - The course proposal form is attached with accompanying instructions. This proposal form can also be found electronically at <http://upas.tamu.edu/>.
 - Selected courses will be announced by March 13, 2009
 - A copy of the course syllabus is to be submitted with the course proposal form on Friday, March 6, 2009. The course syllabus should contain the minimum syllabus requirements as listed at <http://ucc.tamu.edu/syllabus.html>. Instructors are encouraged to use the syllabus template also found at this Web site.
 - Course proposals will be evaluated on the alignment to the FYS program objectives and the strength of out-of-classroom experience.

❖ Compensation

- If a course is approved as an FYS Course, the instructors (faculty and staff) may receive \$2,000 in professional development funds the first time the course is taught. Instructors may receive \$1,000 in professional development funds for the second offering of the same course
- If the seminar is taught by two instructors, each receives half of the funding provided in professional development funds.
- If the staff member's department has approved the teaching of an FYS Course as 'above and beyond' the individual's job responsibilities, the staff member is eligible for a stipend.

❖ Preparation

- Faculty/Staff who are teaching a seminar section will be asked to attend a workshop on April 17, 2009 on integrative learning and teaching first-year students.
- Faculty/Staff who are teaching a seminar section will be provided a review of university processes, such as Q-drop, FYGE, Academic Advising
- Team teaching is acceptable and encouraged.

❖ Benefits

- Addresses two of the "big ideas" of the Murano Report:
 - *Build faculty/student engagement through small classes.* Provide all entering freshmen at Texas A&M University with the opportunity to enroll in one small section of an academic class during their first semester, preferably in the student's declared major or the core curriculum.
 - *Create an academic culture of communities of learners available to all students.* Provide all entering freshmen at Texas A&M University with the opportunity to be part of a learning community to aid in their successful transition to university academic expectations and to enhance their connections with a diverse group of individuals.
- Contributes to first-year students' early development of the University's core competencies, such as critical thinking, effective communication, and inquiry-based learning.
- Positively contributes to a student's persistence in achieving her/his educational goals.
- Student learning outcomes contribute towards the development of overall Texas A&M University undergraduate core competencies
- Fosters the early engagement of first-year students
- Promotes integrative learning and inquiry/research based education
- Introduces students to unfamiliar academic majors
- Eases transition from high school to college under the guidance of faculty

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Submit paper copy course proposals to: FYS Course Proposal Review
 TAMU 1125

Deadline for proposal submissions is Friday, March 6, 2009