1. Definition and Overview

First Year Seminars (FYSs) are courses intended to enhance the academic and social integration of first-year students by introducing them to essential skills for college success and a supportive campus community comprised of collaborating faculty, staff, and peers.

FYSs emphasize the learning and demonstration of skills and strategies for academic success. These include transition-to-college skills, such as navigation of academic degree structure and requirements, time management, utilization of appropriate campus resources, and participation in co-curricular engagement activities.

Secondly, FYSs prepare students in broad academic skills and dispositions essential to success in any discipline, such as critical inquiry, writing proficiency, information literacy, quantitative literacy, creative problem-solving, and/or collaborative learning.

Finally, some FYSs also feature rigorous discipline-based knowledge and skills.

CU Denver has an established FYS program overseen by the Office of Undergraduate Experiences (http://www.ucdenver.edu/fye). That program currently offers two types of FYSs:

a. First-Year Seminar: The CU Denver FYS program offers special-topic, faculty-designed, CU Denver Core Curriculum-approved courses that feature both rigorous academic content (using a department/program course prefix) and transition-to-college skills and engagement opportunities. These courses are open to all freshman-level students.

b. College Success (UNIV 1110/1111): This extended-orientation model of FYS focuses on key college-success strategies, such as academic skills, university engagement, personal strengths and goals, and diversity awareness. Both 1- and 3-credit course options are available. Sections of this course may be restricted to particular student cohorts.

These two FYS models are designed in reference to national best practices and exhibit all of the defining characteristics of this HIP. Therefore, the remainder of this document will focus upon a third type of FYS course:
c. **Discipline-specific FYSs**: Discipline-specific FYSs are intentionally designed to serve particular cohorts of incoming students, such as majors of a particular department, field, or school/college. Like other FYS courses, discipline-specific FYS courses work to enhance the academic and social integration of first-year students. What distinguishes this type of FYS is its focus on the content, methodology, skills, and/or application of a particular field of study. The total credit hours and whether offered as an FYS or a UNIV are determined by the academic unit.

2. **Best-Practices Guidelines**

The minimum standard features of a *discipline-specific* FYS, according to national best practices, are as follows:

- **Targeted Population**: designed for, marketed to, and serving specific populations of first-year students, such as majors in specific departments or schools/colleges, or pre-majors to particular schools/colleges, etc.

- **Orientation to Field/Discipline/Profession/Methodology**: offer an orientation to a particular field, including content, methodology, application, and/or professional training.

- **Academic Skills**: develop and improve essential skills for college success and for success in the range of careers in which students are projected to work.

- **Co-curricular programming**: at least one co-curricular activity during class time and one outside class time are built into the course schedule, and learning outside the classroom is integrated with learning in the classroom. Co-curricular pieces may include office visits to field sites, panel discussions with professionals, job shadowing experiences, etc., as well as presentations and workshops led by campus-based resource offices.

- **Community-building and Collaboration**: provide opportunities for community-building, social integration on the campus and, if appropriate to the discipline, in the wider community, and collaborative learning.

3. **Learning Outcomes for First-Year Seminars**

National best practices recommend that discipline-specific FYSs will deliver the learning of two types of academic learning outcomes: 1) those representing the discipline’s own content, skills, and dispositions; 2) those representing broad essential skills and dispositions, namely the AAC&U **Essential Learning Outcomes** (ELOs).

The latter will be integrated into the former, such that the ELOs serve as a vehicle for delivering disciplinary learning, and also vice versa. The list of learning outcomes that appears in the course syllabus should reflect these goals and the integration of them, and the course’s learning outcomes should be clearly identifiable both in assignments/activities and in grading.
Ideally, all discipline-specific FYS syllabi will reference and use the ELO VALUE rubric for this ELO: Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, all purposeful learning that is undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence. This type of learning includes the development of dispositions necessary for engaged inquiry (curiosity, initiative, independence, transfer of knowledge and skills, and reflection) and the skills to build competencies that are essential to all disciplines and professions, such as Critical Thinking, Written Communication, and Information Literacy. A certain ELO, for example Quantitative Literacy, may be a definitive skill in some disciplines, for example Engineering or Economics, while Creative Thinking and Civic Knowledge and Engagement may be more specific to Arts and Public Affairs disciplines, respectively (but in fact useful in both). Instructors are encouraged to select and teach essential learning outcomes that are most appropriate to the discipline in which the FYS is offered.

This concludes the abbreviated FYS best-practices guidelines document. The complete version additionally includes a Suggested Resources or references section and a Sample Courses section.
4. Suggested Resources

The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina (www.sc.edu/fye) serves as the internationally recognized leader and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.

Examples of recent articles from the Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition include:


5. Sample First Year Seminars at CU Denver

a. First-Year Seminar (Core):

PHIL 1111: The Ethics of Global Poverty (Humanities)
What are the ethical issues and questions that pertain to global poverty? Who is responsible (or not) for addressing this pressing moral issue? This course will explore our ethical responsibilities to one another, both near and far, and lead us to an evaluation of our own daily and long-term choices.

PSYC 1111: Behaving and Misbehaving Brains (Behavioral Science)
This course introduces students to how the brain functions in normal and abnormal behavior through discussion of exciting advances in neuroscience research. Learn how the brain works, what happens to the brain in disorders like addiction and PTSD, and how advances like the brain-machine interface let thoughts control robots.

b. College Success (UNIV 1110/1111):

UNIV 1110/1111: College Success
This first-year course supports students by fostering academic skills and strategies, university engagement, personal strengths and goals, and diversity awareness and inclusion.

c. **Discipline-specific First-Year Seminars:**

ENGR 1000: Intro to Engineering
This course introduces students to the various fields within engineering and engages students in hands-on and collaborative learning.