

First-Year Seminars & Experiences

The AAC&U discusses the structure and purpose of first-year seminars as follows:

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research. (<http://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>)

The CU Denver operational definition of a first-year seminar is:

FIRST YEAR SEMINARS (FYS) 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 faculty, staff, and peers. FYSs often place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other crucial competencies. Some FYSs also feature rigorous discipline-based content.

Rationales for First-Year Seminars

- Assists with academic and social integration
- Encourages and demands active student involvement in learning
- Provides a setting for examining and discussing student-institutional fit
- Helps students transition to a new learning environment and community
- Transmits culture and expectations of the institution
- Increases academic performance and eventual degree attainment
- Enhances student persistence from first to second year

Seven Characteristics of "Successful First-Year Seminars"*

The 1994 National Survey of Freshman Seminar Programs: Continuing Innovations in the Collegiate Curriculum
B. Barefoot & P. Fidler (1996)

* A successful seminar is defined as one that enjoys strong, broad-based institutional support and long life.

1. Offered for academic credit
2. Centered in the first-year curriculum
3. Involve both faculty and student affairs in program design and instruction
4. Include instructor training and development as an integral part of the program
5. Compensate or otherwise reward instructors for teaching the course
6. Involve upper-level students in seminar delivery
7. Include ways of assessing their effectiveness and disseminate results to the campus community

Potential Commonalities Across Seminar Types

- Small class size
- Discussion intensive
- Peer connections
- Frequent and significant faculty/student and student/student interaction
- Active teaching and learning experiences
- Early and frequent feedback

- Out-of-class engagement
- Intentional development of community
- Reflection of and support of institutional mission and goals

Snapshot of National Statistics

2009 National Survey of First-year Seminars: Ongoing Efforts to Support Students in Transition
R.D. Padgett & J.R. Keup (2011)

Seminar Models

Extended Orientation model: 62%
Academic- with uniform content: 26%
Academic - with various topics: 23%
Basic student skills: 22%
Pre-professional or discipline-linked: 14%
Hybrid (of the above): 22%

Top 5 Course Topics

Campus resources: 42%
Study skills: 40%
Academic planning/advising: 36%
Critical thinking: 35%
Time management: 28%

Top 5 Seminar Goals

Develop academic skills: 55%
Develop a connection with institution: 50%
Orient to campus resources: 48%
Encourage self-exploration and personal development: 29%
Create a common first-year experience: 23%

Course Practices

Online component: 53%
Service learning: 40%
Learning community: 36%
Common reader: 31%

First-Year Experiences at CU Denver (www.ucdenver.edu/fye)

Current Model: First Year Seminars at CU Denver are rigorous academic Core courses that feature unique, thematic, faculty-designed content as well as transition-to-college skills, workshops, and activities. The current FYS program launched in 2006 and is directed through the Office of Undergraduate Experiences. Twenty-two First-Year Seminars are being offered in Fall 2015. (*See First Year Seminar and Learning Communities brochure.*)

New Additional Model: For students in most need of extra support, UNIV 101 is a form of First Year Seminar that features an extended orientation model that helps ease the transition to university and acclimation to college life and expectations. UNIV 101 will pilot in 2016. The current design features a 1-credit, faculty- or staff-taught seminar that will have common learning outcomes across all sections (below):

As a result of this course, students will:

1. Demonstrate skills and strategies related to academic success, including writing proficiency, critical thinking, study skills, academic integrity, and analysis and application of academic content.
2. Develop a holistic understanding of the university, including navigation of the academic structure and requirements, utilization of appropriate campus resources, and participation in comprehensive co-curricular engagement activities.
3. Evaluate strengths, abilities, values, and motivations and apply this self-knowledge to personal and academic goal-setting and the exercise of strategic skills (values clarification, identity formation, wellness, moral development, and leadership).
4. Engage in and contribute to campus life by practicing diversity awareness, inclusive behaviors and attitudes, and appropriate written, verbal, and interpersonal communication, and shared responsibility for the growth and wellbeing of our campus community.

If you are interested in developing a First-Year Seminar or teaching a UNIV 101 section, please contact the Director of First Year Experiences, Ashby Butnor (abutnor@ucdenver.edu), in the Office of Undergraduate Experiences.