

A brief history of the First-Year Seminar program

The First-Year Seminar Program began under the direction of President Karen Holbrook in 2003—with the first seminars offered winter quarter 2004—in order to provide unique learning experiences for first-year students. Seminars are capped at 18 first-year students to allow for significant student discussion and participation. On the quarter calendar, seminars were offered as one or two credit-hour courses; on semesters, all seminars are one semester-hour. Seminars are offered as decimals of Arts and Sciences 1137 (graded “A” through “E”) and 1138 (graded “S/U”).

Goals for the First-year Seminar program

- Provide first-year students opportunities for contact with faculty in small group-discussion settings.
- Offer an introduction to frontier areas of scholarly pursuit, allowing freshmen a glimpse of current topics of research and study.
- Introduce students to unfamiliar academic areas.
- Provide insight into how faculty pursue scholarship in their disciplines.

Instructional issues

Course Format: The course is intended to be taught in a seminar format and to involve significant student participation. All seminars are offered for one credit hour. Syllabi should reflect an appropriate amount of coursework outside of class for a one credit hour course—that is, approximately two hours of academic work outside of the classroom per week per credit hour.

Staffing: Models for staffing the courses are flexible and might include a single faculty member or two faculty members (team-teaching an interdisciplinary course, for example). It is expected that there will typically be no more than two faculty teaching any individual seminar. With more instructors, students might not benefit from a sufficiently intense relationship with any individual faculty member. Interdisciplinary offerings broaden student perspectives, and we encouraged such seminars. Note however that for team-taught seminars the stipend is divided between instructors.

Stipend: \$3,000.

Grading: Courses may be graded A–E or on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) basis. Courses using letter grades are offered under a decimalized section of Arts and Sciences 1137, whereas S/U courses are under Arts and Sciences 1138.

Content Focus: Seminars should introduce first-year students to areas of research, scholarship, and study within a specific discipline or across disciplines.

Faculty Administration of the First-Year Seminar Program

Proposals are reviewed by a panel of the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee. Membership of the panel reflects the Arts and Sciences and the professional colleges. Each course is approved with the understanding that approval is attached to the individual faculty member(s) teaching the course. If the course is to be offered in future semesters with a different instructor, it must be resubmitted. Once approved, faculty may offer a seminar more than once in an academic year and in subsequent academic years. A current syllabus must be resubmitted to the subcommittee after a period of five years.