First-Year Seminars:  
Education Goals & Learning Outcomes  
December 2012

First-Year Seminars invite every entering student to explore in some depth a topic of interest in the context of a small discussion-based class. As opposed to upper-division seminars on specific topics, First-Year Seminars aim to illuminate methods of inquiry rather than emphasize mastery of content, while helping students improve their critical thinking as well as their speaking and writing skills. Each seminar also provides students the opportunities to practice oral presentations, and initial preparation in techniques of college-level research.

In more general terms, First-Year Seminars provide students with an intellectual orientation to college learning. They seek to foster intellectual excitement and intellectual engagement with the world; an appreciation of interdisciplinary study; a recognition that learning involves assessing and interpreting and not the mere accumulation of facts and data; an ability to make judgments and defend them reasonably; an awareness of the social dimensions and implications of ideas and their applications.

Certain fundamental intellectual skills are central to First-Year Seminars: reading (an active and engaged approach to texts, broadly defined); writing (a central priority understood broadly as an aid to thinking and practiced in a variety of forms through varied assignments); and speaking (a skill encompassing not only presentations and other formal formats but also informal class discussions that develop capacities to engage in meaningful and intelligent dialogue).

Emerging from these core goals and commitments are specific learning outcomes. Each First-Year Seminar is designed to help students improve their ability to:

1. Summarize and explain the main ideas of a written text, a speech, a doctrine, principle or belief
2. Analyze and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an argument
3. Compare and judge the strengths and weaknesses of two or more sources that address the same topic or argument
4. Develop, focus and organize ideas around a central topic
5. Create, revise and present ideas in both written and spoken forms, and support ideas/claims with appropriate evidence
6. Identify a research question and locate, summarize and evaluate sources to develop a greater understanding or some formal product or performance.
7. Demonstrate the ability to make connections between theory and practice, ideas and applications
Course description

With literature as a context, this course engages students in critical inquiry through reading, discussion, oral presentations, and writing, emphasizing an in-depth exploration of the writing process from generating ideas to polishing the final draft. Students will learn to analyze texts; develop a significant and focused controlling idea; construct well-organized paragraphs to advance the argument or narrative; use sources effectively; and write and speak with clarity, creativity, and eloquence. They will write and revise frequently and will receive regular commentary on their writing.

Student Learning Objectives—at the end of English 110, students will be able to:

1. Explain ideas, themes or patterns in literary texts.
2. Articulate important critical questions regarding literary texts.
3. Analyze societal and cultural questions represented in literary texts.
4. Formulate analyses and interpretations of literary texts that use textual evidence to support claims.
5. Develop, focus and organize interpretations into fully developed, unified essays.
6. Identify a research question concerning one or more literary texts and secondary sources pertaining to this question.
7. Accurately summarize and evaluate secondary sources (including print and electronic sources).
8. Present the results of original research or original critical analysis and interpretations to fellow students.
9. Appropriately incorporate and acknowledge the use of others’ words and ideas in written work and oral presentation.
10. Revise written work for improved clarity, coherence and effectiveness in response to peer review and professor’s commentary.
11. Develop and demonstrate competence in standard English grammar, diction, and usage.
Guidelines for Teaching English 110: The Craft of Writing

1. English 110 is a writing course taught using literature (including film and broadly defined) as the context. Emphasizing critical thinking, analysis, argument, and evidence, the thesis-driven essay, and the use of sources to support arguments, the course focuses on teaching students how to write college-level essays to prepare them for coursework in all disciplines.

2. Instructors may select the texts and structure the course according to a theme, but the emphasis of the course is on writing instruction. Some past themes include obsession, honor, hauntings, unsettling America, fairy tales, second chances, narratives of disorientation, sympathy for the devil, inheritance, and the first-person narrative.

3. The department strongly recommends using no more than four to six literary works (including films) in this course so that there is ample time for work on writing. A significant portion of class time should be spent on teaching and discussing writing.

4. English 110 teaches writing for the academic setting and emphasizes in-depth analysis and the thesis-driven essay. Instructors should plan to cover a variety of college writing assignment types, such as the analytical paper, the think piece or response paper, the research paper, the personal essay, the timed essay, the book review, and creative writing.

5. The teaching of the writing process—especially revision—should play a significant role in the writing instruction the course.

6. Individual and small group conferences with students that focus on writing are an important component of the course. Instructors may substitute office hours for some class sessions.

7. The course assigns approximately 25 pages (7000 words) of writing; most of us assign four to five short papers, with revisions. In-class writing exercises, journals or writing notebooks, and other short writing assignments are also common to the course. Many instructors use portfolios in the course.

8. At least one and preferably several of the writing assignments should include the use of sources and instruction on quoting from and citing these sources.

9. Instructors should plan to spend at least one class session or the equivalent on the use of sources in formal writing, including help with avoiding plagiarism. This instruction is extremely important and may be the only instruction students receive on the topic at Agnes Scott. If a student misses this instruction, the instructor should arrange a make it session.
10. Texts for the course represent **different genres**: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, dramatic writing, film. The department encourages instructors to use works by Writers’ Festival writers or works related to other scheduled guests or performances. Readings for the course should include works by writers of diverse origins, experiences, and perspectives.

11. The course includes an **introduction to library research**; instructors may schedule one or more class sessions the instructional librarian at McCain Library. Casey Long is our instructional librarian.

12. **The Center for Writing and Speaking** (McCain Library ground floor) offers peer tutoring on all kinds of writing assignments. Course tutors—qualified CWS tutors—are assigned to each course and instructor. These tutors attend classes, do the reading, and act as the dedicated tutor and academic role model for the course. Instructors should confer frequently with their course tutors regarding the students’ progress in writing and speaking. Course tutors can also give presentations on many aspects of the writing, speaking, research, or tutoring process (see Christine Cozzens, director of the Center for Writing and Speaking).

13. Oral presentation skills (in-class discussion, interpretive reading, short and long formal presentations, etc.) are an important component of the course.

14. **The St. Martin’s Handbook by Andrea Lunsford (7th ed.)** is the style guide for the college and a required text for every English 110 section.