

UCA Core Council

FYS Sub-Committee Report and Recommendation

I. The Problem Defined

Since their inception in (roughly) 2014, FYS courses have failed to develop a clear identity. These courses, originally designed to be small, seminar style courses that incidentally informed students about the UCA Core as a coherent general education curriculum, to date still lack cohesion. There is no clear set of learning outcomes and no uniform curriculum or shared set of expectations or goals between sections. Although the problem originated with the expedited manner in which the UCA Core was adopted and implemented, FYS courses thus being poorly planned and administered in an ad hoc manner, the problem has persisted. Various efforts have been adopted to try and resolve this problem, but to date none has proven effective. Thus, the UCA Core Council decided to authorize the FYS sub-committee to revisit FYS courses and recommend a course of action.

The FYS sub-committee was charged with the following:

To reevaluate FYS courses at UCA and determine if UCA should continue to require FYS Courses of first year students and if so how ought these courses be designed and delivered. Points to be addressed/resolved over AY 18-19:

1: Review data from institutional research and:

- a. Make the effective case for the continuation of the FYS program or
- b. Determine FYS courses are of limited to no value.
- c. If A see 2. If B, stop: recommend discontinuation of FYS program

2: Construct/Compile outcomes for FYS courses

3: Determine structure of FYS courses

4: Determine Delivery of FYS courses including:

- a. Distribution: Where will the courses be delivered and by whom?
- b. Training: What training/certification should FYS instructors have?

5: Make recommendation to Core Council by Spring 2019 with fully articulated plan regarding FYS redesign.

The sub-committee is comprised of: Jacob Held (Chair), Ron Novy (DST), Rose McGarrity (SGA), Steve Nelson (CoB), Jennifer Parrack (CLA), Zach Smith (CLA), Stephen O'Connell (CNSM)

As noted above, the purpose of the sub-committee was to determine the value of FYS courses, whether as a practice they are worth sustaining, and if so in what form. What follows is a summary report of the sub-committee's deliberations, conclusions, and recommendations regarding FYS courses at UCA.

II. FYS at UCA – A Brief History

First Year Seminar (FYS) course were first recommended by the General Education Task Force in Fall of 2012. The task force recommended:

The First-Year Seminar

TF members agreed that a first year seminar (FYS) course would help students acquire skills for success in college along with a connection to UCA. Further, students would be introduced to the intended outcomes of the GE program, how they will be assessed, and the expectations of their performance as they progress through the university. A variety of courses could be used for the first year seminar. Preferably each College and potentially each major could offer one or more sections of a required general education course that would receive a special designation as a first year seminar course. Faculty members teaching FYS would be chosen by their department chairs on the basis of teaching effectiveness and willingness to adapt their course and approach to fit the FYS guidelines. Since allowing a FYS to count in place of a lower division communication course would run counter to the TF's recommendation that we increase student requirements in written and oral communication, a FYS could be offered in any area

used to fulfill one of the lower division Core requirements except communication. Further details of the required content and organization of the FYS appear in Appendix L.

While the recommendation would be that FYS be taken in a student's first semester, it is expected that some students will need to take it the second semester (particularly in the early phase of implementing the UCA Core). Transfer students with more than 30 hours of transfer credit would not be required to take a FYS.¹

Of note are the recommendation that these courses introduce students to expectations of students at UCA, while providing opportunities to develop skills necessary to succeed. In addition, these courses were to provide a connection to UCA. In terms of delivery professors would be hand selected based on their ability to teach first year students effectively and the course would be tailored to this end.

The General Education Council, upon review of the Task Force recommendation further recommended:

The GETF and GEC members agreed that a first-year seminar (FYS) course will provide an intimate educational experience, integrating knowledge and skills within an academic discipline and connecting students to UCA. Further, students would be introduced to the intended outcomes of the UCA Core, the way those outcomes will be assessed, and the expectations of their performance as they progress through the university. A variety of courses could be used for the first year seminar. *However, no department is required to put forth a course as a first-year seminar. Any course proposed as a first-year seminar must address the goals and outcomes of the appropriate academic area in the lower-division core (e.g. Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Responsible Living, etc.) The intent of the first-year seminar is to emphasize academic knowledge and skills, not to teach study skills as content.*

¹ **Redesigning General Education at the University of Central Arkansas**, Report prepared by the General Education Task Force September 4, 2012 (13)

The FYS courses would be specially designed and would address Communications outcomes, including written communication and collaboration, and either the Critical Inquiry, Diversity, or Responsible Living outcomes. Faculty members would be chosen by their department chairs on the basis of teaching effectiveness and willingness to adapt their course and approach to fit the FYS guidelines (listed below). Since allowing a FYS to count in place of a lower-division communication course would run counter to the GETF's recommendation that we increase student requirements in communication, a FYS could be offered in any area used to fulfill one of the lower-division Core requirements except communication requirements.

Required content of the FYS should include the following:

1. Written discourse, which will be assessed using the writing rubric;
2. Collaboration, which will be assessed using the teamwork rubric;
3. An orientation to the UCA Core mission, purpose, and general learning outcomes, which will be integrated into the course and assessed;
4. A focus on the basic principles of the discipline, which will allow the course to fulfill one of the lower-division Core requirements other than communications.

Assessments in these areas will be required for a course section to receive the FYS designation. Obviously, not all sections of a particular course will be offered as a FYS. Only sections which meet the specific requirements would be included in this category. As a 3-credit academic course, the FYS would not use class time to address the aspects of the university typically associated with orientation (e.g. health services, the counseling center, etc.); however, instructors would be informed about these resources so they could recommend them as needed to students. A list of all university services would be given to FYS instructors (with appropriate training regarding what to look for, etc.). The expectation is that FYS instructors would be aware of and able to refer students to special services (e.g., the Academic Success Center, the Writing Center, the

Counseling Center, etc.) and have an understanding of how to weave basic academic success skills into the course without diluting academic content. The list of resources could also be made available via Blackboard or some other venue for the students in the class.

Additional considerations for first-year seminars include the following:

1. Class size must be small (25 students or fewer);
2. Faculty must be selected by the department chair and have demonstrated an aptitude for high impact teaching;
3. FYS faculty will agree to participate in more thorough assessment and additional training as needed (e.g. in teaching writing skills, developing collaborative assignments, etc.)

While the recommendation would be that FYS be taken in a student's first semester, it is expected that some students will need to take it the second semester. Transfer students with more than 30 hours of transfer credit would not be required to take a FYS.²

This revision of the FYS mission emphasizes the academic aspect of the FYS experience. Note the language: *“The intent of the first-year seminar is to emphasize academic knowledge and skills, not to teach study skills as content.”* as well as *“the FYS would not use class time to address the aspects of the university typically associated with orientation (e.g. health services, the counseling center, etc.); however, instructors would be informed about these resources so they could recommend them as needed to students.”* In addition, it was emphasized that there was an *“understanding of how to weave basic academic success skills into the course without diluting academic content.”* Thus, the General Education Recommendation, which would later be adopted, emphasized that although student success and connection to the university were laudable goals of the FYS course, the course was first and foremost academic in nature, with connection and success being a positive result of offering a particular kind of academic

² **UCA Core: Recommendation to the Faculty Senate and the Council of Deans**, from the General Education Council (2012). Pp. 5-6.

experience once rooted in a recognized academic discipline and not focused fundamentally on orientation or success style initiatives.

FYS courses were thus defined as small academic seminars, taught by selected professors with proven records or commitments to the needs of first year students, that would incidentally provide access to resources to facilitate student success and guidance as needed in this regard. Retention and persistence were thus conceived as a beneficial result of offering these academic seminars but not their *raison d'être*.

Although this was the stated mission of FYS courses, how to implement such a program across campus was not forthcoming. Thus, in implementation these courses followed a more ad hoc basis where we more built the ship at sea than steered a well-constructed vessel on a recognized course. Thus in application FYS courses were inconsistent in how they were offered, the experienced they afforded students, and guidance was lacking. Yet research, both external and internal, demonstrate the value of FYS courses in general, and our offerings in particular.³ (Appendix A) In short, students in FYS style courses have a statistically significant higher success rate than their counterparts who do not take such courses. Clearly, FYS courses are of value to UCA. We should continue to offer them. However, we need to do so in a more intentional manner, with a clear mission, defining what FYS courses are, their essential attributes, and implementing them consistently across campus consistent with this definition and these standards.

III. FYS at UCA – Reconsidered

The FYS sub-committee has, after considerable review, determined that a re-envisioning of FYS course at UCA is necessary. This new vision of FYS at UCA will respect the history of the practice

³ See Joe Cuseo, "The Empirical Case for the First-Year Seminar;" Goodman and Pascarella, "First-Year Seminars Increase Persistence and Retention: A Summary of the Evidence from How College Affects Students" (Peer Review, Summer 2006, Vol. 8, No. 3) and selection from Summer 2018 report from Institutional Research at UCA (Appendix A)

at UCA, while adopting best practices across the academy to redefine what an optimal FYS experience at UCA would look like, and how best to implement this vision in a way that assures consistent practice across campus and affords students the best possible FYS experience UCA can offer. The purpose in proceeding to is bring coherence and consistency to the FYS program through the definition and adoption of a shared curriculum (of goals and best practices to be integrated into disciplinarily distinct courses) providing students with an engaging, unique, and beneficial experience that prepares them for college while providing a quintessential collegiate seminar experience. In order to implement this revision of the FYS program, we will have to redefine what an FYS course is in terms of its purpose, articulate this purpose by means of goals consistent with both Core competency goals and the FYS best practices, and provide methods to achieve these. The sub-committee envisions First-Year Seminars (FYS) at UCA as:

Purpose: The purpose of an FYS course at UCA is *to provide students with an exemplary academic experience as an introduction to collegiate life at UCA.*

An exemplary academic experience is one rooted in the intellectual life of the university. As an introduction to collegiate life, this experience should help connect first year students to the university, namely, their peers, faculty, departments, and resources. In addition, as part of the introduction to the university students will be provide with resources and guidance with respect to these resources for success as a college student at UCA. The foundational goal of the FYS is the seminar experience rooted is the academic experience. Connection to the university and success is predicated on this academic experience. Students provided with an intimate, dedicated learning environment will succeed. Any course proposed as a first-year seminar must address the goals and outcomes of the appropriate academic area in the lower-division core. FYS courses are specially designed to address Communications outcomes, including written communication and collaboration, and either the Critical Inquiry, Diversity, or Responsible Living outcomes.

To this end, the sub-committee offers the following list of goals to further define and articulate the purpose of an FYS course:

1) Promote academic writing skills:

Suggested Activities

- Completing assignments connected to the writing process, for example, brainstorming, outlining, and/or drafting.
- Following the scholarly conventions of the field in which they are writing, including standards for citations.
- Revising at least one paper after peer or instructor review.

2) Promote collaboration skills (interpersonal communication and human relations skills):

Suggested Activities

- Engaging in at least one group assignment that requires them to present ideas effectively in order to enhance communication and collaboration with peers
- Developing appropriate verbal and non-verbal strategies to promote collaboration.
- Assessing the contributions of their peers with respect to shared project goals.

3) Promote the Core outcomes in Critical Inquiry, Responsible Living, or Diversity by means of disciplinary content:

Suggested Activities

- Engaging works within a specific discipline *on a focused topic*
- Discussing material in a seminar-style format that places priority on meaningful student contributions

4) Promote a connection/relationship with the University:

Suggested Activities

- Familiarizing themselves with the goals of the UCA Core and the university mission statement, as well as degree plan requirements.

- Completing assignments that require use of university services.
- Developing peer networks for both personal well-being and academic success.

5) Introduce students to college level expectations, as well as strategies for meeting those expectations:

Suggested Activities

- Attending periodic workshops on specific academic skills such as note-taking, reading, studying, writing, and time-management.
- Building basic research skills and developing informational literacy.
- Maintaining one's health and well-being.

Below are recommendations for FYS courses in order to assure success in achieving goals 1-5 listed above and to maintain the highest and consistent quality across all FYS sections.

- 1) Section size limited to 20 students.
- 2) All faculty who teach FYS courses to be certified as FYS instructors through completion of the Excellence in Teaching First Year students recognition track through the Center for Teaching Excellence. (Appendix B)
- 3) All FYS sections taught by full-time faculty in the discipline in which they received their most advanced degree.

IV. Recommendation

Given that FYS courses at UCA were implemented to provide students with a seminar style college experience with the intention of developing foundational academic skills while fomenting a connection to the university; given that to date they are offered erratically with little to no curricular coherence across discipline and college; given that FYS courses are a best practice, promote student success, and thereby are a positive value to students; and given that UCA should continue offering them, the FYS sub-committee recommends that the UCA Core Council endorse this brief restatement of mission, vision, and purpose of FYS courses at UCA

and charge the FYS sub-committee with making specific recommendations for improving FYS courses at UCA, and implementing such improvements once endorsed by the UCA Core Council.

Appendix A

University of Central Arkansas										
SAP of Freshman in FYS and non-FYS courses										
Fall 2014 to Spring 2018										
	FYS Participants					Non-FYS				
	Total Students	SAP		Not SAP		Total Students	SAP		Not SAP	
Fall 2014	1,118	840	75.1%	278	24.9%	1,381	840	60.8%	541	39.2%
Spring 2015	704	505	71.7%	199	28.3%	873	533	61.1%	340	38.9%
Fall 2015	974	766	78.6%	208	21.4%	1,185	754	63.6%	431	36.4%
Spring 2016	712	505	70.9%	207	29.1%	648	390	60.2%	258	39.8%
Fall 2016	913	747	81.8%	166	18.2%	901	604	67.0%	297	33.0%
Spring 2017	553	420	75.9%	133	24.1%	424	263	62.0%	161	38.0%
Fall 2017	1,501	1167	77.7%	334	22.3%	543	391	72.0%	152	28.0%
Spring 2018	538	401	74.5%	137	25.5%	493	344	69.8%	149	30.2%
Fall 2017*	856	686	80.1%	170	19.9%	761	561	73.7%	200	26.3%
Spring 2018*	503	388	77.1%	115	22.9%	511	351	68.7%	160	31.3%
*This data does not count ACAD 1300 as a FYS.										
SAP Definition: A student earns 67% of hours attempted with minimum undergraduate cumulative GPA of a 2.0 or earns an undergraduate degree.										
Source: Office of Institutional Research										

Appendix B



A first-year seminar (FYS) course will provide an intimate educational experience, integrating knowledge and skills within an academic discipline and connecting students to UCA.

-First-Year Seminar: The UCA Core

Recognition in Teaching First-Year Students

Recognition Goals

- Encourage growth in teaching effectiveness & address the unique needs of first-year students
- Guide faculty members through a systematic professional development process
- Provide a campus-wide distinction of commitment to teaching first-year students

Guidelines for Achievement

- Declaration of their recognition track intention using the [CTE event registration form](#)
- Completion of all recognition requirements must be done within one academic year.
- Participation in any event can only count toward one required activity.
- Only one recognition track may be pursued at any given time.

Excellence in Teaching First-Year Students Checklist (12+ Credits)

Participate in the required components:

- Introduction Session: FYS/Core/The Track Itself (1 credit)
- Transitional Student Needs Workshop (1 credit)
- CTE Lunch & Learn – Group Work that Doesn’t Make Everyone Miserable (1 credit)

Select from the following to earn the remaining credits:

- UCA Core Workshop/Training (for the area in which you teach: C, I, D, R, Z) (1 credit)
- Do You See What I See?: Identifying & Addressing Student Difficulties (1 credit)
- CTE Lunch & Learn – Learning Mindsets: Setting Your Students Up for Success (1 credit)
- CTE Lunch & Learn – TILting Your Class: Transparent Teaching can Transform Learning (1 credit)
- CTE Workshop – Better Questions = Better Outcomes (1 credit)
- CTE Workshop – Get to the Why: Communicating Course Expectations from the Inside Out (1 credit)
- FYS Peer Observation (3 credits)
- Blog post for Teaching Matters @ UCA (1 credit)
- First-generation College Students (1 credit)
- Mindset vs. Grit Instructional Workshop (1 credit)
- Writing Workshop Series (4 credits)
- Best Practices Share Day (1 credit)