

First Year Seminar AY 23/24 Pause Recommendation

Overview

In 2015 UW instituted the current University Studies Program (USP 2015). The USP 2015 requirements total 30 credit hours. As part of USP 2015, a First Year Seminar (FYS) is required for all true first-year college students who have earned fewer than 30 credit hours post-high school graduation. Typically, approximately 82 sections of FYS are required per academic year. Ongoing faculty staffing challenges have necessitated a partial pause of the FYS program for AY 23/24. University programs will use an USP elective to meet Higher Learning Commission general study requirements. The USP elective may be used for FYS staffed and delivered by a program. The FYS and FIG programs have recommended substituting a different course in place of the FYS during the pause.

Background

The FYS Program. In 2015 UW instituted the current University Studies Program (USP 2015). The USP 2015 requirements total 30 credit hours. As part of USP 2015 a First Year Seminar (FYS) is required for all true first-year college students who have earned fewer than 30 credit hours post-high school graduation.

The purpose of the FYS is to develop critical and creative thinking skills with freshmen students. The student learning outcomes for the FYS are:

- Critical and Creative Thinking (FYS) (3 Credits) Students will critically examine and evaluate evidence, claims, beliefs, or points of view about meaningful, relevant issues. Students will be introduced to active learning, ethical reasoning, and individual and collaborative processing of ideas through the First-Year Seminar curriculum. These skills will be reinforced throughout the baccalaureate experience. In First-Year Seminar courses, students will:
 - Access diverse information through focused research, active discussion, and collaboration with peers.
 - Separate facts from inferences and relevant from irrelevant information and explain the limitations of information.
 - Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of conclusions drawn from information.
 - Recognize and synthesize multiple perspectives to develop innovative viewpoints.
 - Analyze one's own and others' assumptions and evaluate the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.
 - Communicate ideas in writing using appropriate documentation.
- Following FYS best practices, FYS section enrollments are limited to 24 students or less.
- USP 2015 policy for FYS course instruction: "FYS courses are to be taught by highly motivated and experienced academic personnel. Academic personnel may be faculty or staff. Faculty/staff who teach an FYS course should have experience teaching lower division undergraduate courses and have a minimum of a master's degree. "

FYS section requirements. For AY 22/23 a total of 82 FYS sections were required to support a projected incoming class of approximately 1500 students. As shown in **Table 1**, some academic units receive a fixed FYS allocation while the remaining sections are apportioned based on historical declared freshmen enrollment within a given college.

Table 1. FYS section allocation for AY 22/23.

AY 22-23 FYS Allocation

EMC estimate for freshmen enrollment:

1,625

UW Entity	1101 sections*	Students/section	Total Students
Fixed Allocation:			
UW Bridge Program (23 + ACES (1))	24	18	432
Environmental and Natural Resources	1	18	18
School of Energy Resources	1	18	18
Honors	2	18	36
Veterans Service Center	1	18	18
		Total Fixed Allocation:	522
Variable Allocation:			
Ag and Natural Resources	6	18	108
Arts & Sciences	18	18	324
Business - 6 + Viking Economics (Alexander)	7	18	126
Education	3	18	54
Engineering & Applied Science	10	18	180
Health Sciences	9	18	162
Totals	82	sections	1476

Students Served

Notes:

Freshmen enrollment projections provided by VP Moore, Enrollment Management.

The following agencies have fixed allocations: UW Bridge, ENR, SER, Honors, Veteran Services Center.

The remaining sections are apportioned based on historic percentages related to proportion of declared majors.

Staffing Challenges.

- UW deans have reported to the Provost ongoing challenges in meeting their program teaching schedules. The challenges are partially due to budget cuts and faculty departures. The UW President and Provost have proactively attempted to mitigate this situation with Central Position Management (CPM) allocations.
- The FYS course sections are not always taught by “highly motivated and experienced academic personnel” as stipulated in USP 2015 policies.
- UW Regulation 2-105, University Studies Program, paragraph IV. Procedures. D. indicates: “The University Studies Committee or University Studies Coordinator (Vice Provost for Undergraduate

Education) may recommend to the President suspension or delay of the general application of the USP requirements whenever it appears that the availability of such classes is insufficient to accommodate the timely degree completion of a substantial number of students. Any such recommended action will be promptly reported to the Faculty Senate, the Provost, the President, and the Board of Trustees accompanied by an explanation. The President shall make the final decision on the recommendation.

Higher Learning Commission. The University of Wyoming is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), which requires a clearly articulated general studies program. HLC is one of six regional U.S. organizations that accredit degree-granting, post-secondary educational institutions in the United States. Background information on the HLC can be found at www.hlcommission.org. The HLC provides general studies requirements in their policy statement Assumed Practices (Number: CRRT.B.10.020)

- The institution maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or other accepted models that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model. Any variation is explained and justified.

Response to this Challenge

In response to these challenges the Provost has sought input from the Deans and Directors, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the full Faculty Senate, and Bridge Program and First Year Seminar representatives.

- Representatives from the Bridge Program and the First Year Seminar met with the Faculty Senate on September 26, 2022. The Provost also provided his perspective on the challenge. The Faculty Senate conducted a straw poll on September 26, 2022 and voted 25 to 12 in favor of keeping the FYS for AY 23/24.

In response to this challenge, I recommend an optional pause to the FYS for AY 23/24. I further recommend the Provost establish a committee to review and explore the relationship and benefits of different elements of the first year experience including Saddle Up, the First Year Seminar, Freshmen Interest Groups, the Bridge Program, and alternate staffing and funding models for the FYS.

USP Elective Course. During the AY 23/24 FYS pause, each academic program will have a three-credit hour USP elective in place of the FYS. This will allow UW to meet HLC general studies requirements and total hour graduation requirements.

- The pause is optional. Programs may elect to provide and staff a program specific FYS; however, a student changing majors will not be required to repeat a program specific FYS.
- Each program will develop a plan on how to best use the USP elective.
- If a program elects to not provide an FYS, they are encouraged to include the current FYS student learning critical and creative thinking outcomes into other coursework.
- As required by HLC, programs are required to contain a minimum of 120 semester hours of coursework.

- Programs with external professional accreditation must follow program change procedures for the accreditation body.

Fall 2023 Bridge Program

First-year learning communities at UW that are “anchored” by First-Year Seminar include First-Year Interest Groups (200-300 students), Fall Bridge (400 students), and Summer Bridge (40-60 students). All three learning communities offer USP credit; engaged, trained faculty; and course-based, peer mentor support.

Our aims for these learning communities (LCs) in the last years of USP 2015 are to continue strong student enrollment in the LCs; maintain support from the campus community (faculty, advisors, and deans and department heads); and protect the critical thinking and interdisciplinary goals of the LCs. Many studies across the U.S. demonstrate the student success and retention power of anchoring learning communities with a three-credit, First-Year Seminar-like course (Padgett & Keup, 2011; Permezadian & Crede 2016).

Factors critical to Fall Bridge.

- **USP anchor course.** Students admitted with support enroll in LeaRN’s FYS (in addition, half take ENGL 1010 in the program) as a requirement of their admission status. Featuring USP courses is essential to gaining underrepresented students’ trust, investment in Bridge courses, and positive self-concept as incoming UW students. There is substantial research on the importance of choice and opportunities that support core curriculum (rather than “punishing” with remediation) to students’ persistence and success (Cho, Kopko, Jenkins, & Jaggars, 2012; Stewart & Heaney, 2012).
- **Timeline (4 weeks) to make change.** Fall Bridge students are currently receiving information about Fall Bridge FYS and the learning community as they apply to or consider UW. Enrollment for Fall Bridge FYS will begin in late October 2022. and continue through July. As part of their admission process, admitted with support students choose their Bridge FYS and make a COM1 choice. Replacing the anchor course for Fall 2023 must be streamlined/simple and allow for rapid changes to all communication to students, as well as the online directed self-placement tool for choosing students’ FYS. **This year, we must find one USP course to replace the FYS; we can explore more choices in the coming years if appropriate.**
- **Proposed Anchor Course for Fall Bridge. For 2023, replacing FYS with the H (Human Culture) USP course is the best option.** H already includes two of the six FYS learning outcomes, and the remaining learning outcomes are well represented in our LeaRN FYS courses. The USP 2015 program includes 6 credits of H; these credits are taken outside of students’ major department. LeaRN’s courses will not conflict with any major department; additionally, students will take another H course outside of Fall Bridge as they continue in their college career to reach 6 H credits. Richard Miller, ACES Director, and ACES advisors approved this proposal for Fall Bridge in 2023.
- **Reassignment of teaching duties:** LeaRN associated instructors currently teaching FYS courses will be assigned the H courses for 2023. There will be no new requirement for H course seats.

- **Needs:** Admitted with support students will begin choosing their Fall Bridge course before the necessary USP approvals are completed. We request approval to move forward with changing FYS to H in our materials and online selection tool immediately, and we will subsequently move through the CARF and approval process.

First-Year Interest Group Proposal

First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs). Students enrolled in a FIG take up to four sections of linked courses for a semester. The FYS has served as the anchor course for the FIGs. Students live on a designated floor in the UW residence halls with other FIG students enrolled in the same course sections. FIGs are sponsored by a faculty member throughout the semester. The faculty member receives a \$500 stipend from LeaRN. The following FIGs are offered in Fall 2022:

FIG	Faculty Sponsor	College	FIG FYS Anchor Course
Surviving the Apocalypse (and College)	Jessica Rardin (with anchor Prof. Jacqueline Shinker)	A&S	GEOG 1101
WyoGlobal	Abby Lozano (with anchor Prof. Eric Nigh)	A&S	INST 1101
Geology & Environment	Ken Sims	A&S	GEOL 1101
Exploring Veterinary Medicine and One Health	Myrna Miller	Agriculture	PATB 1101
Exploring Teaching Careers	Joseph Schroer	Education	ELEM 1101
Building Cultural Bridges	Amy Roberts	Education	EDST 1101
Construction Management	Jacob Francois	Engineering	ES 1101
Kinesiology and Health	Marci Smith	Health Science	KIN 1101
Outdoor Recreation	Elise D'alessandro	LeaRN, Half Acre	UWYO 1101
Energy and Environment	Kris Koski	School of Energy Resources	ERS 1101

Factors critical to First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs)

- **Institutional initiative for expanding LLCs:** In the past year, a committee comprised of LeaRN and Student Affairs leaders has developed a plan and a current pilot for expanding living-learning communities in the residence halls by 2025.
- **Risk of diminished retention:** Decreasing FIGs may negatively impact first-year retention, as FIGs are among the most impactful retention initiatives for incoming students.

- **Timeline (6 weeks) to make change.** FIG departments are preparing FIG courses in September and October 2022. FIG applications will be sent to incoming students beginning in November 2022. Enrollment is ongoing from November 2022 to July 2023.
- **Proposed Anchor Course for FIGS.** Mollie Hand, FIGs manager, will work with each department to try to retain the FIG for 2023 by discussing as many possible anchor courses as appropriate to the FIG. Alternative courses may include Human Culture, Physical and Natural World, or First-Year Experience (an elective course under LeaRN). Some departments may need to suspend the FIG in 2023 to work on developing (or approving) a new anchor course.
- **Reassignment of teaching duties:** Depending on the anchor course selected, LeaRN associated instructors currently teaching FYS courses may be able to assist in teaching the anchor course. However, for the most part the topic of the anchor course is specialized to the major or theme.

Summary

In response to the identified challenges, I recommend an optional pause to the FYS for AY 23/24. I further recommend the Provost establish a committee to review and explore the relationship and benefits of different elements of the first year experience including Saddle Up, the First Year Seminar, Freshmen Interest Groups, the Bridge Program, and alternate staffing and funding models for the FYS.

In closing, do not take this recommendation lightly. I served as chair for the USP 2015 Stage 3 Implementation Committee. I helped to develop the Engineering Science FYS for the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences and have taught the course multiple times. Also, as Associate Dean I coordinated the staffing of the FYS course for the college from 2009 – 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

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