

Executive Summary

Quality Enhancement Plan: First Year Writing Seminars

Furman University

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RATIONALE. Freshmen rarely fully understand that stimulating the mind for the continuing pursuit of knowledge is the real heart of liberal education. Furman University believes that students should be exposed to a way of teaching and learning that significantly differs from a typical high school education—and that this exposure should occur as soon as possible. To achieve this objective, Furman has instituted a requirement that all freshmen take two First Year Seminars, one of which has a focus on student writing and information fluency. These seminars should not only provide students with greater responsibility for their own learning, but they should also cultivate within students an excitement about the learning process.

SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS.

General Seminars will emphasize the fostering of careful analysis and intense discussion of specific subject matter. Writing assignments will constitute a part of such seminars, but a variety of other instructional strategies will be implemented by the instructor. Most seminars will assume little prior knowledge about a given academic discipline, though a few might require special skills, such as fluency in a language or the ability to read music. Enrollment will be limited to fifteen students per seminar.

W-Seminars will have all the goals and expectations of the General Seminars, but in addition these will explicitly devote significant pedagogical attention to the improvement of student writing and the development of information fluency. Each student must take at least one W-Seminar. These seminars will include, at a minimum, one short research paper or research exercise. W-Seminars will enroll no more than twelve students.

ASSESSMENT. The assessment system for First Year Seminar Program has a two-fold purpose. First, it will serve as a measure of the improvement in student writing that occurs as a result of successful completion of two First Year Seminars. This component of the assessment system will include evaluations of student writing samples produced at the beginning and end of the W-Seminars. A group of professors will score sampled initial and final work products using a standard rubric. A second component of the assessment system will be the creation of a feedback loop that allows for program revision and improvement. Both components of the assessment system will be used to enhance the students' educational experiences at Furman University.

IMPLEMENTATION. Student writing samples will be stored using Moodle and appropriately labeled so as to preserve anonymity. Faculty teaching First Year Seminars will be aware of the rubric to be used for scoring. An outside facilitator familiar with the use of rubrics for scoring student writing will come to campus to provide training to the evaluators who will score the student writing samples. Following the conclusion of the assessment of the writing samples, the First Year Seminar Oversight Committee will be convened to determine what improvements are suggested for the program by the results of the assessment. Once approved by appropriate faculty committees and/or the faculty as a whole, changes in the program will be implemented in the Fall Term of the coming academic year.