

**From:** [Campus Climate Proposal form](#)  
**To:** [Libby Peterek](#); [Carrie Olson](#)  
**Subject:** New submission from Campus Climate Proposals  
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Center for the First-Year Experience

**What is your affiliation with UW-Madison? For group submissions, please respond for main contact.**

- Academic Staff

**Describe the concept. If already in use here or elsewhere, please indicate this.**

The University should implement a first-year seminar requirement for new students (freshman and transfer) to support their transition to academic, co-curricular, and community life at UW-Madison. These small, community-oriented, discussion-based classes can support student's sense of belonging at the institution and engage them in meaningful, introductory conversations about diversity, inclusion, social justice, and cultural competency in a respectful, supportive, and academic environment.

First-year seminars are in-use at approximately 90% of colleges and universities in the United States (Young & Hopp, 2014), and are considered to be the premier high impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008) because they often include all of the quality dimensions required of high impact practices (see list below). UW-Madison currently offers at least 30 different first-year seminars which serve approximately 51% of the first-year class (freshman and transfer). Freshmen in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, College of Engineering, School of Business, and College of Letters & Science Academic Advancement Program, and students who participate in varsity athletics, Undergraduate Research Scholars, Posse program, and PEOPLE program are currently required to participate in some type of first-year seminar. UW-Madison can implement this new requirement by expanding and utilizing existing course structures (e.g.: First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs), residential learning community seminars, and Counseling Psychology 125: A Wisconsin Experience Seminar) to meet demand.

\*Quality Dimensions of High-Impact Practices (Kuh and O'Donnell, 2013):

- Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels
- Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time
- Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Experiences with diversity
- Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
- Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning
- Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications
- Public demonstration of competence

**How would this affect cultural change on campus?**

Hunter and Linder (2005) describe the first-year seminar as, "a small discussion-based course in which

students and their instructors exchange ideas and information. In most cases, there is a strong emphasis on creating community in the classroom.” At a large, decentralized institution like UW-Madison, a significant number of first-year students are not enrolled in a small, engaging course where they know the names of their classmates, the instructor knows their names, and they can engage in conversations about substantive matters like values, identity, diversity, and campus climate. The first-year seminar can help connect new students to each other and to their instructor, and create a space to have difficult conversations across difference. By requiring students to participate in a first-year seminar in their first semester on campus, we can ensure that new students have meaningful conversations with their peers about campus climate and culture in a safe, moderated, and engaging learning environment, and that they have the opportunity to connect with students they may not otherwise meet. The first-year seminar model can adapt over time to meet the needs of future new students and respond to emerging institutional issues.

Additionally, those who teach these courses should be required to participate in training, which will prepare them to successfully teach the course by utilizing inclusive and engaging pedagogy. This training can pay dividends by impacting these instructors’ success in the first-year seminar, but also in the other courses they teach or programs with which they work. Through training, first-year seminar instructors will be better prepared to facilitate and participate in conversations about campus climate, and they will be able to develop positive relationships with colleagues they may not otherwise encounter (which will further positively impact campus culture). Finally, by implementing a peer educator component in these courses, a large group of student leaders will better understand campus climate issues and how to address them, and be prepared to facilitate meaningful conversations with their peers. This can significantly shape incoming students’ perceptions of what it means to be a UW-Madison student in addition to positively impacting the overall undergraduate student experience.

**For new ideas, how would you propose piloting this idea to see if it would work? If the idea is already in use at UW-Madison, how would you propose expanding or altering this program for greater impact?**

The first step would be to determine how the institution would like to approach this requirement and which courses would count toward it. There may be a need to create new courses, prioritize growth in certain courses, explore the availability of courses/sections tailored to the transfer student experience, and develop new content for some course to address campus climate. The second step would be to develop resources and instructor development opportunities to ensure the courses achieve institutional goals. The third step would be to educate advisors about the options available to students to help students make informed choices. The final step would be to assess the courses to determine successful practices and areas for improvement. Each unit would be responsible for adding more sections to meet student demand, and the Center for the First-Year Experience could provide administrative support (including resource and faculty development and assessment support). Implementation of a module on cultural competency and civil discourse can be piloted in some of the existing first-year seminars this fall.

**What resources would be needed to implement your suggestion?**

For example, if every new freshman and transfer student entering in fall 2015 was required to enroll in a 1-credit first-year seminar consisting of 20 students, at least 377 sections would need to be offered to accommodate the 7,539 new students (205 sections of varying type, size, and credits were actually offered in fall 2015). This would require 377 discussion-oriented classrooms, and up to 377 instructors and 377 peer educators. If instructors were paid \$1,000 and peer educators were paid \$750, this initiative would cost approximately \$659,750 to staff; and more to train, resource, and equip each instructor, plus administrative staffing costs. While this is a significant investment in time, money, and human resources, it can be divided amongst the many units currently offering first-year seminars, and the Center for the First-Year Experience can provide centralized support, resources, and training similar to what is offered by the Office of Undergraduate Advising for advisors. Additionally, the costs highlighted above are not entirely new monies since at least 30 different first-year seminars were offered through 205 sections in fall 2015.

**If this proposal was developed in partnership with any other organizations, please list them below.**

While this proposal was developed solely by the Center for the First-Year Experience, the following schools, colleges, and offices have been engaged in discussions about improving first-year seminars at

UW since December and would be likely partners in rolling out this proposal: Athletic Department, CAE, CeO, FIGs, OUA, Posse Program, School of Business, SoHE, University Housing, CALS, and WISCIENCE.