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

- Student (including undergraduate, graduate, professional)

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

The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences have already implemented first year seminars. The University of Minnesota requires all new students to participate within a program titled, "The First Year Experience". The First Year Experience gives students the resources to be successful on campus. The seminar covers university resources, time managements skills, budgeting and more. I propose the University borrow from our neighbor, and implement a seminar similar the University of Minnesota.

The seminar is to be taken within the first year at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and will include similar topics, but with emphasis given to cultural competency. The class can be taken for pass/fail, but grades should be based on attendance to small discussion groups, and lecture. The class should also have small journal assignments which facilitate self reflection. Ultimately, this class should be designed as an introduction to the University as a whole and an introduction to living in a diverse climate.

How would this affect cultural change on campus?

I ultimately believe this program will improve the campus climate by demonstrating an institutionalized consideration for the struggles of minority groups. A mandatory first year seminar will force students to confront race, and clearly understand what is and what is not acceptable on campus. Diversity discussions have been left outside the classroom for far too long, and we are now seeing the negative effects. A controlled, classroom oriented discussion on diversity shows initiative and increases campus fluidity. Cultural competency is no longer an assumed quality of entering freshman, and this seminar confronts that.

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?

While this idea is new, I believe most of the groundwork has already been laid. CALS already implements a first year seminar program, which has seen great results. CALS has proved to be an unknowing test group for the greater University. SOAR also serves a similar purpose, giving students a brief overview of life at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The SOAR program, while successful, is not efficient. I suggest shortening SOAR to 1 day, and using saved resources to implement a first year experience seminar.

What resources would be needed to implement your suggestion?

The University enrolls anywhere from 6,000 to 6,500 students yearly. Half of these students would complete their requirements each semester. Assuming a lecture hall can fit 300 students, there would need to be approximately 11 lecture halls devoted to this program for 50 minutes, once a week. Small discussion groups would facilitate this program. A group of third and fourth year undergraduate student leaders would facilitate discussions weekly, with student groups alternating biweekly. There would need to be 80-90 student leaders per each semester. With proper marketing, these positions could be filled by students seeking credit, or these could be paid positions. Emphasis should be put on having a diverse (racially and otherwise) group of student leaders. Administration will also need to design a first year seminar, which will take time and resources. However, I believe that Learn@UW and iClicker would serve in aiding the administrative costs of a high enrollment class, and coursework can be borrowed from the University of Minnesota.