First-Year Seminars at Middlebury

Legislated Features:

All entering Middlebury students are required to take a first-year seminar during their first semester on campus. These seminars are writing intensive courses, limited to 15 students each, and they are taught by regular, full-time faculty who also serve as the students’ academic advisers for their first three semesters at Middlebury. Seminar topics, which change from year to year, are selected by the individual professor and generally reflect that faculty member’s research interests or an area of expertise not directly addressed in departmental courses. These are not survey courses. Rather they are designed to prick students’ intellectual curiosity in a particular subject, and to encourage them to pursue a focused interest in depth. Many of the seminars offer interdisciplinary perspectives; most include activities outside the classroom; all seminars help students develop their thinking, writing, and speaking skills.

After two years of planning and piloting, required seminars began in 1988-89.

Evolving Features:

Each year all seminars are approved or re-approved by the Curriculum Committee
All departments are required to contribute seminars every year
Faculty do not teach a seminar two years in a row; the average is every 3.5 years
Seminars have become a locus for pedagogical discussion and experimentation
Faculty development events are scheduled throughout the year
There is no system of extrinsic reward (monetary or teaching load compensation)
Course enrichment budget is $350 per seminar
Most courses include some event outside class time
Each seminar is eligible for a resource team including a peer writing tutor, a reference librarian, an educational technologist, and a peer mentor (ACE)
Students register for their seminars over the summer
Nearly 80% of the students get their first choice seminar
Seminars meet for a class during Orientation Week
Seminars meet for a class during Orientation Week
Students are housed in Commons (dorm clusters) by seminar
All students in a seminar have the same residential Dean
Additional $300 Commons enrichment funds per seminar
Seminar students and their instructors are invited to Commons events
Students are instructed about the “Middlebury Honor Code” in their seminar class

Institutional Assessment

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The Commons System at Middlebury College

Middlebury's five residential Commons form the backbone of student life at the College. Middlebury's unique residential system exemplifies the college's conviction that an excellent liberal arts education takes place around the clock—as easily over dinner as in the classroom. The residence halls are grouped into "living-learning communities," called Commons. The Commons combine the academic, social, and residential components of college and foster close and abiding relationships, not only among the student residents, but also among the faculty and staff who are part of their Commons.

There are five Commons on campus: Atwater, Brainerd, Cook, Ross, and Wonnacott. More than 400 students, representing all four classes, live in each Commons, and each is led by a team—including a Commons Head or Co-Heads (tenured members of the faculty), a Dean (a student affairs professional), a Commons coordinator (a staff member) and a Commons Residential Adviser, or CRA (recent Middlebury graduates who live in the residence halls)—that advises and supports student residents and guides the cultural and intellectual life of the community.

The faculty head is responsible for setting the academic and social tone of the Commons and for programming activities (lectures, field trips, parties, and other events) that involve students, faculty, and staff. The dean administers the daily operations of the Commons and handles all residential issues, as well as academic and personal advising.

A substantial proportion of the first-year seminars offered are Commons-based, which means that the students enrolled in a particular seminar are assigned to live in the same Commons, with supplementary programming for the course also sponsored by the Commons.

The success of these programs and the College's commitment to enhancing the facilities that support the Commons—residence halls, dining halls, and program space—mean that in the future more social and academic activities will be centered in the Commons.

Moving to a 4/2 Model

Beginning in the fall of 2008, the Commons system began to follow what is termed a 4/2 model. Students who enter a particular Commons in their first year will remain in residence in that Commons through their sophomore year, and will retain an affiliation with the Commons through their senior year. This approach addresses a number of emerging concerns at the college, including a commitment to addressing the particular needs of sophomores, as well as first-year students, and the desire among juniors and seniors to have “open draw” (theoretical access to all upper-class housing on campus). In the past, as students moved from one Commons to another throughout their 4 years at Middlebury, their files would follow them. In the new model, students will forge an even stronger bond with the Commons Heads and Deans throughout the first two years, and will return to work with those individuals in their junior and senior years, whether or not they are living in their original “neighborhood.”
Ross Commons

**Housing about 475 student members** across five interconnected halls, Ross benefits from being one of two Commons with finished completed infrastructure integrating academic and social life. Cutting across all classes, interests, talents, and demographics, Ross students seem to be involved in a bit of everything and play prominent roles in the leadership of the commons and the college as a whole. Approximately one fifth of the faculty is associated with the Commons and can often be seen (frequently with their kids...and dogs!) at Ross events. The Ross support staff includes the Ross members of the Dining Services and a dedicated custodial team who helps us keep the Commons in top shape. Rocky (the Rhino) exemplifies all that is Ross in his role as a Commons' mascot and often makes the appearance at celebratory Ross events.

**History of Ross Commons**

Ross Commons traces its roots to the early 1990s, when it was created to further student-faculty relationships. It took its current form as one of the five Commons at Middlebury in 1998, under the vision of President John M. McCardell, Jr. The *Enchanced Residential Life Plan*, approved by the Board of Trustees, centered on three tenets for the future of residential life at Middlebury: decentralized dining, proximate housing for faculty heads, and continuing residence in a Commons. Completed in the fall of 2002, Ross Commons became the first fully articulated Commons with newly built dining, social and dormitory facilities.

The namesake of Ross Commons, **Eleanor Sybil Ross**, Middlebury Class of 1895, served the college as Dean of Women for nearly 30 years (29, to be exact). She was legendary on campus for her irreplaceable role in doubling the size of the Women's College of Middlebury and for the strict discipline that she insisted upon. Dean Ross set for the College and for her role in it an ideal of Victorian gentility, standards of the highest morality, of proper and exemplary conduct, but above all, high academic achievement. Retiring in 1944, Dean Ross continued to live in Middlebury until her marriage to former President John Thomas. She died in 1953.

**The Ross Team**

The integration of academics and social life at Middlebury has led to a team approach to supervise the Commons, with the **Dean** as a Commons' student affairs professional (Janine Clookey) and the **Commons Heads** overseeing the Commons' academic and social programming (Katy and Steve Abbott). One Commons Residential Advisor (**CRA**) is a recently graduated student who has moved into a staff position to advise and administer many day-to-day aspects of student life and is generally a fun person to hang out with (2007-08: Rebecca Guillet '06). The Commons **coordinator** is the amazing staff member whomorphs everyone else's madness into method (Sue Harris).
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research
RHETORICAL CONCERNS IN A FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR
By the end of the first semester, students should be able to:
1. Identify, summarize, and analyze the arguments of others; and summarize, paraphrase, and quote the ideas of others in support of their own arguments
2. Formulate topics appropriate to writing assignments
3. Find and cite appropriate sources for an assignment
4. Shape unified paragraphs and connect them to achieve flow
5. Control a five-page critical/analytical essay using more than one source
6. Use informal writing techniques (freewrites, responses, field notes, postings): writing to learn.
7. Use editing/revising techniques, including responding to advice from peer review and conferences with the instructor
8. Follow and contribute to in-class and online discussions
9. Lead a discussion or present work orally

Additional goals for FYSE 1144 (Jane Austen & Film)
1. Demonstrate understanding of film and novel genres
2. Able to handle complex topics
3. Able to compare and contrast

And they learned a little about . . .
* Creating a digital media project
* Regency dancing

Contact Information:
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Twitter: mebertolini

Fall 08 FYSE1144 class site:
https://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/fyse1144a-f08

Other class sites:
https://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/wrpr0202a-s09
https://segue1.middlebury.edu/sites/wrpr0100a-f07
So—given these goals, what did you learn (if anything) from the list above? How did you learn that?

FYS 1144a Jane Austen & Film online discussion, December, 2006

Can Celebi: I want to begin with the most recent one, finding and citing appropriate sources for an assignment. After this research project I am so confident on the other unknown researches that are waiting for me in my next 3.5 years. I thought I had a weird topic and I was not expecting to find a lot of sources, but I learned by trying and trying again. Now I can research in any given subject! I mean the writing knowledge I've learned from this class is priceless. Yes I admit the workload was way too much, and I had many sleepless nights but when I look back it was worth it because I learned how to write an organized satisfactory paper. Moreover, until now I've never understood why we had to upload our papers and everything else before midnight. But now when I think a little, I realized that it helped us organize our time and do the job not in a limited time interval. After this class, I feel like I can handle every other class. Besides the workload, we had some great moment. I really enjoyed my media project. Yes, it took a lot of time and energy and everything, but... we have our own little movies now. And the dance night was fabulous, what can I say. And... now Jane Austen is an unexpected part of me. I do all this alpha male stuff: Water polo, work out, next term crew, and I can throw random quotes from Jane Austen

Tamara Leigh Hilmes: Wow, looking at this list has really made me realize how much we have learned and accomplished in this seminar. I really feel that we have achieved every single goal that is on this list over the course of the semester. Aside from learning how to write deep, well-thought out, analytical papers, I think that the most valuable thing that I have learned is how to present orally in front of the class. Before this class, I really didn't feel comfortable speaking in front of a class or group of people. After presenting several times in this class, however, I really do not mind giving oral presentations. In fact, I have found that I really enjoy crafting my words just so, and seeing the audience's reaction to what I have written. I like anticipating their reactions and playing off of them. My confidence in public speaking is at an all time high thanks to Jane Austen!

Amer Daстgir: It's actually true that we did learn every single one of those items in that list (plus a lot more in way of personal development). I definitely learned to write papers in a new way in this class... It not only relates to item 1 on the list but also item 4 in that the topic sentences were definitely important in unifying the paragraphs of the essay and achieving flow. Through writing so many papers and rewrites of the papers, we were definitely able to achieve most of those goals related to the writing. I daresay, we accomplished being able to control a 5-page analytical paper using multiple sources through the Emma and Persuasion papers where we were talking about so many things, it often felt unmanageable! This again links with finding and citing appropriate sources for assignments because we definitely had to do that for our latter papers. The digital media project also contributed hugely to these goals as it forced us to research those appropriate sources and also put them together in such a complex way, which I never thought I myself would ever be able to do, but somehow I managed... The meetings with the peer writing tutors were infinitely helpful because they gave us the direction we needed to go in, in order to develop the paper beyond the first draft. Then when we met with Mrs. B, obviously those meetings were wonderful... because of the meticulous attention our papers were given. so that I truly felt that once I made those changes... I had actually written a decent paper, and I never used to think that way about my writing before... And the regency dancing, well that was fantastic! Our FYSE class was doing it at the Holly Ball last night, just so you know! :)

DaWeon Ryu: We achieved all these goals! Wow, we did learn a lot in this class, didn't we? In retrospect, I am so glad I got into this seminar and wrote/revised papers every week because they really shaped me as a writer. We achieved Goals #1, 2, 6, and 8 through posting online discussions, Goals #2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 through writing papers, and Goal #9 through participating in class discussions and giving oral presentations. I definitely learned how to compare and contrast between the novel and the film and to compare three different things in a paper. We all did an awesome job in our digital media projects, and of course, after Jane Austen dance dinner, we can call ourselves dance masters :)}
FYSE1144 (F06)  
Can Celebi: "Cry"

My media project, entitled “Cry,” is based on the passage in Mansfield Park in which Fanny returns home to Portsmouth but cannot find what she expected and wants to go back to Mansfield Park. I used pictures that symbolize Fanny’s sadness and Fanny’s longing for Mansfield Park, and I used "Halitus" from Mercan Dede to emphasize the sadness of Fanny. Can’s voiceover comes from Chapters 38 and 39 of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park:

Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house and thinness of the walls brought everything so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it . . . She was at home. But, alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome . . . It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends! . . . . . There was nothing to raise her spirits in the confined and scantily furnished chamber that she was to share with Susan . . . William was gone: and the home he had left her in was, Fanny could not conceal it from herself, in almost every respect the very reverse of what she could have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be . . . she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways. Everything where she now was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquility of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here.

**Why Digital Storytelling?**

By compressing the key elements of a piece of writing into a script for your digital story, you learn to pare words down to their essentials. By setting Austen’s words to music and visual media, you better understand not only her words, but also, the art of making films. By choosing, manipulating, and juxtaposing various media, you will make better-informed choices in your writing.

**What do I need to start?**

- Text from *Mansfield Park* (150-300 words may be continuous in the novel in one place or scattered through the novel from many places). These words should be worth getting inside of and thinking about for two weeks.
- 10-15 photographs or (1-2 minutes of video)
- Music on CD or in digital form

More information about this assignment here: [https://segue.middlebury.edu/view/html/site/fyse1144a-f08/node/1183215](https://segue.middlebury.edu/view/html/site/fyse1144a-f08/node/1183215)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Objectives</th>
<th>Scoring Scale 4 highest</th>
<th>Scoring Scale 3 middle high</th>
<th>Scoring Scale 2 middle low</th>
<th>Scoring Scale 1 lowest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title and Introduction</td>
<td>Awakens and focuses interest on the writer’s agenda. Compelling.</td>
<td>Clear and focused. Establishes its subject. May be compelling, but may miss opportunities.</td>
<td>Problems with clarity or focus.</td>
<td>Does not attempt to generate interest. Serious problems with clarity or focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis or Research Question</td>
<td>The writer formulates an elegant, ambitious argument or question which governs the evidence and analysis throughout.</td>
<td>The thesis / question is clear and arguable, even interesting, and governs the evidence throughout.</td>
<td>The thesis/question is not entirely clear or is not arguable or does not govern the evidence throughout.</td>
<td>The thesis/question is difficult or impossible to identify, and the purpose of the essay is unclear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Key Terms</td>
<td>The writer establishes, and defines where necessary, the key terms of the argument. Key terms are used with confidence and sophistication.</td>
<td>Key terms are established and defined. Use of key terms lacks either confidence or sophistication.</td>
<td>Key terms are established but not consistently used or not clearly defined.</td>
<td>Key terms are not established, or they are unclear or inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Evidence</td>
<td>The writer selects persuasive, interesting, and insightful information to contextualize and inform the argument. Sources are cited appropriately. When necessary, evidence counter to the argument is effectively addressed.</td>
<td>Sufficient and appropriate persuasive information informs and contextualizes the argument. Sources are appropriately cited. Ineffective counter argument.</td>
<td>Information informing and contextualizing the argument is sometimes insufficient or unpersuasive for the argument. Sources are sometimes inappropriately cited. No counter argument.</td>
<td>Information informing and contextualizing the argument is rarely sufficient or persuasive for the argument. Sources are generally inappropriately cited or not cited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and Interpretation</td>
<td>The writer always analyzes the evidence in support of the argument. Interpretation is insightful and persuasive, and displays extraordinary depth of thought. May pose original ideas.</td>
<td>The writer usually analyzes the evidence in support of the argument. Interpretation is persuasive and occasionally insightful.</td>
<td>The writer sometimes analyzes the evidence in support of the argument. Interpretation is sometimes persuasive but rarely insightful.</td>
<td>The writer rarely analyzes the evidence in support of the argument. Interpretation may be implausible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Elegantly organized with respect to both the whole essay and the continuity of paragraphs. Accommodates the complexity of the argument imaginatively.</td>
<td>Well organized throughout but without either elegance or complexity. It accommodates the argument satisfactorily.</td>
<td>Well organized on the whole but occasionally needing work on individual paragraphs or continuity. It accommodates the argument.</td>
<td>Organization is haphazard, and the argument is difficult to follow. Paragraphs and continuity need work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>The writer demonstrates a wide range of vocabulary and sentence structures. Few or no errors.</td>
<td>The writer demonstrates some range of vocabulary and sentence structures. Some errors.</td>
<td>The writer demonstrates a limited range of vocabulary and sentence structures. Frequent errors when attempting complexity.</td>
<td>Persistent errors with simple vocabulary and sentence structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Awareness</td>
<td>The writer is fully aware of an audience and accommodates readers’ needs throughout.</td>
<td>The writer is aware of an audience and sometimes accommodates readers’ needs.</td>
<td>The writer is aware of, but not clear about, audience. The essay is occasionally confusing.</td>
<td>The writer is not aware of audience needs. The essay is frequently confusing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice and Style</td>
<td>The writer sustains an appropriate and interesting voice. The essay is complex and handled with sophistication throughout.</td>
<td>The writer sustains an appropriate voice and is occasionally interesting. The essay is handled with clarity and purpose, and occasional sophistication.</td>
<td>The writer’s voice is occasionally inappropriate or lacking confidence. The essay is handled without sophistication.</td>
<td>The writer is unable to sustain an appropriate voice. The essay may be potentially interesting but handled without clarity or purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>The conclusion answers all questions with insight. It continues to stimulate the reader’s thinking and may suggest questions for further research.</td>
<td>The conclusion answers all questions satisfactorily and may suggest questions for further research.</td>
<td>The conclusion answers most questions, but may be unclear or incomplete.</td>
<td>The essay ends without concluding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>