27th Annual Conference on the First Year Experience
February 18, 2008
San Francisco

FYS as a Locus for Faculty Development:
Creating Mini Learning Communities
Kathleen Skubikowski
Mary Ellen Bertolini
Katy Smith Abbott

Middlebury College

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury
Original Program Goals

- Introduce First-Year Students to Small Courses
- Require a Second Writing Course
- Improve General Education Advising
- Encourage First-Year Students to Make Intellectual Connections within and between Disciplines

Within a First-Year Seminar framework, what might characterize an intellectual community?

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury
Legislated Features

Seminars are:
- Required in the First Semester
- Writing Intensive
- Limited to 15 Students
- Taught by Regular, Full-time Faculty

Faculty:
- Are Students’ Academic Advisers
- Select Individual Seminar Topics
- Develop their Students’ Thinking, Writing, and Speaking Skills

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury
Evolving Features

- Locus for Pedagogical Discussion and Experimentation
- Students Housed in Commons (dorm clusters) by Seminar
- Seminars Eligible for Resource Team: Peer Writing Tutor, Reference Librarian, Educational Technologist, and Peer Mentor (ACE)

THE TEACHABLE MOMENT
STUDENTS and FACULTY

- encounter the new, the different, the unfamiliar
- anxiety and consciousness
- seeing/experiencing oneself differently
- feeling/being unprepared
- not entirely sure what ‘s expected
- retention is important
- variety of learning styles
- learning from peers
- addressing the whole person
- changing demographics

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury
Evolving Features

- Locus for Pedagogical Discussion and Experimentation
- Students Housed in Commons (dorm clusters) by Seminar

FYS FACULTY DEVELOPMENT VENUES
“The Harvest Cycle”

Key
- Faculty Teaching
- Team Teaching
- student research
- student projects

SUMMER
June Workshop Series
“Exploring Pedagogies and Tools”

August Overnight Retreat
- in-service writing
- in-service reading
- in-service advising
- in-service teaching

JANUARY
Half-day Workshop for New Faculty
- goals review
- resource review
- advising advice
- Orientation preparation

SEPTEMBER to APRIL
- Weekly Lunch Table
- Occasional Workshops
- “Talking About Teaching”
- CTLA & FYS Websites
- Ward Prize

SMALL GROUPS
- Faculty Peer Mentors
- Faculty Study Groups
- Faculty Discussion Groups

SUMMER
July Workshop Series
- Exploring Pedagogies and Tools
- Faculty Research Workshops
- Faculty Reading Workshops

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER
Half-day Workshop
- goals review
- resource review
- advising advice
- Orientation preparation

The Commons System at Middlebury

- 5 Residential Communities
- First-years and sophomores continue in Commons
- Administrative structure
  -- Commons Heads
  -- Dean
  -- Coordinator
  -- CRA (Commons Residential Advisor)
- FYCs (First-Year Counselors)
First-Year Seminars and Commons

- What does it mean to affiliate?
- Benefits for Faculty
  -- Relationship with Commons Head
  -- Course Support
- Benefits for Students
  -- Close-knit intellectual community
  -- “Seamlessness”

First-Year Seminars at Middlebury
Evolving Features

- Locus for Pedagogical Discussion and Experimentation
- Students Housed in Commons (dorm clusters) by Seminar
- Seminars Eligible for Resource Team: Peer Writing Tutor, Reference Librarian, Educational Technologist, and Peer Mentor (ACE)

First-Year Seminar Resource Team
Innovation--Staff and Peers Attached to Individual FYSE

- Reference Librarian—the research contact person for students and faculty
  - helps with research, supports research assignments
  - teaches workshops on research fundamentals
- Educational Technologist—provides, coordinates, facilitates technologies
  - provides essential familiarity with the College’s servers
  - supports sophisticated multimedia projects and websites
- Peer ACE—Academic Consultant for Excellence
  - helps students enhance academic planning skills
  - works with students on: optimal performance, study skills, stress management.
- Peer Writing Tutor—works with students on writing assignments
  - facilitates peer critiquing groups either in class or outside
  - provides one-on-one presentation support

A Librarian

- Consults with Faculty Preparing for Seminars
- Offers Seminar-specific Workshops
- Creates Online or Print Resource Guides
- Holds Follow-up Sessions with Students
- Can Help Design Independent Student Assignments
- Provides Instruction in Copyright Compliance

What Do We Want Students to Know about Research?

- How to use Library formats—collections, ILL, reserves, digital projects
- How to read citations, locate material
- How to recognize scholarly & popular publications—primary & secondary resources
- How to ask good questions
- How to evaluate and synthesize information
- How and why to cite materials
- How to avoid plagiarism and copyright infringements

Basic Assignments

- Known Item and New Item
- Search Proper Citation
- Learn Scope of Library Resources
- Critical Thinking & Analysis
- Learning About Audience
- Comparison & Response
- Students locate online articles from citations provided by professor.
- Students find scholarly articles by searching subject index.
- Students analyze topic by investigating popular & scholarly sources, and write about differences.
- Students find reviews of a work, then compare them, or write a response.

Intermediate Assignments

- Students locate online articles from citations provided by professor.
- Students find scholarly articles by searching subject index.
- Students analyze topic by investigating popular & scholarly sources, and write about differences.
- Students find reviews of a work, then compare them, or write a response.

Comprehensive Assignment Ideas:
Utilizes Broad Range of Research and Writing Skills

Prepare for an Interview
Gather and write summary as background for interview
List sources, annotating validity/usefulness and identify missing information

Write Articles for Newspaper or News Magazine
After reading results of a study, find existing news articles about same study
Write comparison, discussing decisions and assumptions of each article

Range of Tech Possibilities

- Class Email
- Course Folders
- Announcements
- Peer Feedback
- Audio Projects
- Podcasts
- Digital Stories
- Video-based Projects
- Games
- Remix Videos
- Virtual Reality
- Electronic Discussion
- Wikis
- Blogs

Brief Technology Orientation

- Saving Work to Servers
- Overview of Technology at Middlebury
- Avoiding Lost Work
- Preventing Viruses, Spyware
- Accessing Segue

Available for Every Class

- can e-mail class (including self)
- can add support team to email list
- can attach documents—syllabus, readings, problem sets—handouts
Custom Course Sites

Course Management & Web-based Discussion

High-end Use of Technology

• Wikis—quintessentially Web 2.0
• Digital Media Projects
• Video Conferences
• Audio & Podcasting
  – Web sites for publishing audio
  – RSS feeds for subscribing to podcasts

CTRL Summer Workshops—Pedagogy & Tools
http://www.middlebury.edu/administration/ctlr

Student Team Members

ACEs & PWTs attached to FYSE

FYSE 1146: The World of the Italian Renaissance Artist

Instructor’s Goals:
• New approach to familiar material
• Emphasis on context over chronology
• Reliance on a single, new text as the source for many of the questions raised in the course
• Possible model for an upper-level seminar?

Achieving Goals:
• Solid Introduction to Content: help students to understand the production of Italian Renaissance art as the result of a series of collaborations.
• Writing: challenge students to think of themselves as "writers in progress," and commit themselves to writing as a process.
• Oral Communication: establish active discussions within a community of scholars, with high expectation of a polished presentation at the end of the term.
• Strong research skills that go well beyond informational websites.

Outcomes

• Case-Studies (a modest goal)
• Apprenticeship
• Research
• Writing
• Intellectual Community

Challenges

• Managing "the team"
• Ensuring effective use of institutional, peer, and Commons resources
• Motivating students to make use of resources
FYS1144: Jane Austen & Film
Mini-Learning Community and Commons

Seminar Goals: How to Achieve?

Professionals and Trained Students
- Available to assist with goals throughout the semester
- Provide on-going support for assignments & projects

Commons Support--
- On-site and proximate housing create community
- Financial and logistical support for special events

Professionals and Trained Students
- Peer Writing Tutors
- ACEs
- Papers
- Special projects

Professional Staff:
- Librarian & Educational Technologist
- Special Assignments
- Research-based Oral Presentation
- I-Movie

Commons
- Money, space, resources make events possible.

Professional Development
- How did I develop professionally?
- Helped me let go of control (a little bit).
- Gave me a safety net to risk new things.
- Made my pedagogy transparent to my students.

“So we achieved all these goals! Wow, we did learn a lot in this class, didn’t we?”

1. Flexibility
2. Serve Two Constituencies
3. Self-Reflective

So what might a learning community look like in which both students and faculty grow?
FYB as a Locus for Faculty Development: Creating Mini Learning Communities

Kathleen Skubikowski, Katy Smith Abbott, Mary Ellen Berholz
Middlebury College

Some materials contributed by Yonna McShane, Sheldon Sax, Jean Brannerson, Jessica Holmes.