First-Year Course Program Guidebook

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FYC Program Description
(motion approved 5/7/13; Catalogue copy approved 10/1/13)

*The First-Year Course Program*: First-Year Courses are a special set of small courses or sections of courses open only to first-year students. These courses are designed to address students’ academic transition to college and to provide an introduction to a liberal arts education. They also offer an opportunity for close interaction and development of strong relationships among first-year students and instructors. Each First-Year Course will be a Writing-Intensive (WI), Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning (QSR), or Oral Presentation (OP) course.

- The focus of the proposed program is on facilitating students’ adjustment to new standards of work, including learning how to access the many resources that the College provides and encouraging students to seek out these resources and faculty assistance with learning. New college students may be hesitant to pursue these opportunities if they are viewed as remedial rather than as valuable learning resources that are integral to the curriculum and the success of all students.

- The courses may include first-year-only sections of courses also available to other students.

- The experimental program will run for a three-year pilot period beginning Fall 2014. In spring 2017 CAP will report on the impact and effectiveness of the program with recommendations for its continuance.

*Faculty members interested in participating in the FYC program should contact their department chair. The department chair requests the FYC designation from the CAP through the usual course request process.*
FYCs in Context
Information that is available on Hamilton’s website about FYCs
(From website: https://my.hamilton.edu/firstyear/courses#undefined)

Transitioning to College Level Work: Consider Taking a Course Designed With First-Year College Students in Mind

Because one size does not fit all with respect to education, Hamilton offers a range of courses dedicated to first-year students to help them transition to college-level work. While all these courses devote attention to the academic acculturation of new college students, they vary in approach and type of engagement. Hamilton offers four types of courses exclusively for first-year students.

INTRODUCTORY COURSES EXCLUSIVE TO FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Introductory courses within a discipline are often restricted to first-year students. These classes vary in size, and the curriculum is specifically targeted to beginning college students.

FIRST-YEAR COURSE (FYC) PROGRAM

For students who are interested in a course with a more intentional approach to college transition, Hamilton offers a First-Year Course Program. FYCs are a set of courses that provide an opportunity for close interaction around a disciplinary topic or question and support students’ transitions to and immersion in college academic life. Low enrollments (a maximum of 16–20 students) support the development of strong relationships among students and instructors. Courses with the FYC designation focus on one of the College’s basic competencies: writing, quantitative and symbolic reasoning (QSR) and oral presentation.

FYCS WITH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The Leadership Experience and Preparation (LEAP) First-Year Course incorporates a weekly out-of-class experiential learning component of approximately 2–3 hours for the students in addition to class meeting times. The experiential component will focus on developing leadership skills with Levitt Center student mentors.

FYCS WITH A RESIDENTIAL COMPONENT

There are also FYCs that extend academic life beyond the classroom by having students in these courses housed in the same residence hall. Students who participate in the Residential Engagement in Academic Life (REAL) program live and learn in the same residence halls and courses. In addition, the faculty member teaching their FYC will be their academic advisor. This residential program blurs the line of where learning traditionally takes place and provides a natural support system of peers outside the classroom as students navigate their first year together.
FYC Program Goals & Expectations

1. To engage students around an academic discipline or topic
   a. Courses are discipline-based, not generic “Intro to College” courses
   b. Courses introduce students to being a scholar within a discipline
   c. A goal of the overall program is to have each academic division represented

2. To develop students’ critical thinking skills by preparing them to read and communicate ideas at the collegiate level, FYC faculty are expected to
   a. Highlight the expectations for the WI, QSR, or OP components of the FYC by being explicit about learning goals, rubrics, and feedback
   b. Incorporate an introduction to college-level academics along with strategies for success. For instance, faculty might devote time in the course to foster the ability to
      i. construct arguments based on evidence,
      ii. adopt different perspectives
      iii. evaluate and understand evidence supporting an argument
      iv. use research tools and indicators of authority to determine the credibility of sources
      v. give credit to the original ideas of others through proper attribution and citation

3. To support students’ transition to and immersion in college academic life, FYC faculty are expected to assist students as they
   a. Consider the motivations for their choice of study in the absence of the tighter pedagogical strictures of high school
   b. Recognize that they are producers, and not just consumers of knowledge, and cite the contributing work of others in their own work
   c. Identify their strengths and potential, recognize their challenges and limits, and seek out resources to help them succeed (faculty, academic advisor, resource centers, & peers)
   d. Learn about support services available at the academic resource centers and the library
   e. Learn to work collaboratively with peers

4. To provide an introduction to a liberal arts education, FYC faculty are expected to
   a. Serve as formal and informal academic advisors for their students. (If a faculty member’s advising load permits, some number of students enrolled in an FYC will be assigned as academic advisees. Faculty teaching a REAL course will have all of the students in the course as academic advisees.)
      i. FYC faculty should provide an introduction to the advising system and the college’s educational goals
      ii. Faculty should also provide guideposts to put their disciplinary practice and course activities into the broader liberal arts context
   b. Raise meta-cognitive awareness about the work in the class
      i. In addition to practicing the discipline, faculty might lay out what makes their disciplinary perspective unique. For example, clarify how the course activities relate to the College’s educational goals and the liberal arts

5. To encourage students’ close interactions and develop strong relationships among faculty and other students, FYC faculty are encouraged to
   a. implement innovative pedagogies to promote engaged learning and quality interactions. For example,
i. experiential learning opportunities such as field trips or service learning activities, research collaborations;

ii. cross-course collaborations such as meetings around a common book, topic, or campus speaker
Support for FYC Development

FYC Development Awards

In 2015-16 faculty will be eligible for stipends to develop courses that will significantly and creatively promote the mission of the FYC program. Proposals for new courses and for revision of existing courses will be considered. Stipends will be $1500 for new courses and $800 for revisions of current courses. Approximately 15 awards are available this year depending on the types of proposals received. Requests for additional funds to support course materials or other needs of these new courses will also be considered in the budget request. Faculty receiving funds are expected to offer the FYC at least two times in the succeeding three academic years.

Faculty submitting proposals are expected to commit to attending two workshop sessions (see descriptions below): one during January break (tentatively January 14, 2016) and another in May during Senior Week (tentatively May 19, 2016). In the proposal faculty should identify the targeted course, describe the initial goals for development, and explain how the changes address the mission of the FYC program. Proposals will also need the endorsement of the faculty member’s department/program chair.

Proposals should be submitted online by **November 15**. The DOF Office and CAP will review proposals, and decisions will be made by December 15.

Workshop Goals
The goals of the workshops are to foster collaboration among faculty and to encourage attention to FYC goals. For instance, the workshops can provide a time for faculty to

- Pursue cross-course collaborations
- Develop syllabi
  - Share tips on organization and content of a syllabus for an FYC
  - Use the syllabus to instruct students on the ways in which the course serves FYC goals
- Develop collaborations with our academic resource centers, the library, and co-curricular centers (Days-Massolo Center, DHi, Levitt Center, Wellin Museum,)

**January.** The January meeting will provide an opportunity to identify and develop further any shared interests among faculty and to strategize about how to achieve those goals. For instance, are there topics or pedagogies that would be useful to highlight in the FYCs (e.g., diversity, collaborative learning, or experiential learning)? Are there fruitful and creative collaborations that could be explored with the academic resource centers or co-curricular centers. This initial meeting will also provide an opportunity for faculty to identify resource needs for further course development. Completing this phase in January will allow time to coordinate necessary components before the May session. (Tentative date: Friday afternoon, **January 14, 2016**)

**May.** Faculty will use this time to further strategize and formalize ideas around course designing, planning, and syllabus writing. (Tentative date: Thursday afternoon, **May 19, 2016**
Resources to Support the FYC Program

In addition to the specific resources listed here, FYC faculty may also request funding in support of relevant curricular development or enhancement. These funds could be used for field trips, collaborative meetings across FYC courses, collaborative faculty development groups, or participation in a course development workshop.

FYC Peer Mentors

Many FYC faculty (about half in 2014-15) made use of student mentors in their courses. On average mentors assisted six hours/week for 15 weeks. Requests for additional hours are considered with appropriate justification.

A successful course often depends on developing healthy relationships among all participants. Having a student mentor for your FYC may facilitate this process. A student mentor can serve as a knowledgeable guide for new college students who can help contextualize the work in a course. The mentor can also serve as a role model, advocate, and facilitator in directing students to appropriate resources on campus. Student mentors may also serve as an informal resource for academic advising. You might even have your mentor reach out to students in your class over the summer to establish an early point of contact and sense of belonging to the institution.

Other possible uses for the FYC mentor’s time: helping with writing, providing supplemental office hours, modeling effective class discussion, facilitating research lab activities, serving as an informal advising resource.

Requesting and hiring an FYC Mentor

• Submit a request to the ADOF indicating the name and course number of the FYC you are teaching and the number of hours/week you will use your student mentor.
• Once approved, you can hire a student making clear your expectations and their responsibilities in the course.
• If your student mentor has not been employed on campus before, all employment paperwork and the Employment Authorization Form will need to be completed. If your student has been employed on campus before, only the authorization form is needed. The Employment Authorization form should be forwarded to Carol Kentile in the DOF office with a note that specifies the FYC you are teaching. Carol will approve, assign a budget number, and forward to Human Resources. For forms and other information see Student Employment Guidelines.
• You (or an assigned alternate) will need to approve the student's hours on Webadvisor for each pay period.
• For the 2015-16 academic year, the hourly pay rate will be $9.50/hour for student mentors.

Tips from an FYC faculty member on using student mentors

• Begin by selecting a student who has demonstrated a love of learning. Having good grades is neither necessary nor sufficient for students to serve effectively as a good mentor.
• Allow the student mentor to help select the material and take part in structuring the class so she feels some ownership over it.
The student should have the kind of self-confidence and attunement to others, the kind of presence that makes one a good teacher. It usually involves an unconscious mindfulness about what is going on in the class as well as a compassionate attitude towards the students.

If possible, give the student the freedom to engage the material and the class as she finds fit, then back-and-fill around her to make it work. This strategy can be challenging and fun.

Allow the student mentor to work with the students on their class presentations and papers if appropriate.

**FYC Blackboard**

The FYC Blackboard site is a shared space with archived documents that FYC instructors can make use of in developing their courses. The site also provides a forum to create a dialog and post materials of potential interest to each other.

- Under the INFORMATION tab are web sources relevant to teaching and the first-year experience
- Under the CONTENT tab are readings for faculty and students
- Under the TOOLS tab are opportunities in the DISCUSSION BOARD for sharing ideas on matters related to teaching first-year students

**Feel free to offer suggestions for other materials or topics of discussion to add!!**

**Talk About Teaching (TAT) Lunch Series**

The lunch series provides weekly opportunities for informal conversation & inspiration around teaching from colleagues around campus. The series is a collaboration among various groups on campus that are committed to supporting and strengthening teaching at Hamilton (Dean of Faculty/Academic Affairs, Division of Student Life, Library Information Technology Services, Network for Teaching and Learning).

**Book Group Discussions**

Opportunities to reflect on teaching and to learn from other faculty are available around annual book group discussions

**Entertainment and Materials**

- Up to $75 for entertainment or materials for your FYC class in the semester it is offered
  - Submit receipts for entertainment or materials expenses associated with your FYC to Linda Michels with a completed [Request for Check Form](https://my.hamilton.edu/dof/handbooks-and-forms/forms). Please include your faculty ID number and **specify that the reimbursement is for FYC expenses** on the form.
- FYC faculty wishing to host a “reunion” meeting of their FYC in the immediately following semester may contact the ADOF to make a request for support.
**Academic Resources to Support First-Year Students**

https://my.hamilton.edu/arc

Some academic resource centers offer services or resources that are particularly relevant for first-year students. To help orient students to support services available on campus, FYC faculty might reach out to the academic resource center directors for suggestions.

Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center (Sharon Williams, Director, swilliam@hamilton.edu):
The WC supports the writing program by offering peer tutoring in writing for all students, consultation for faculty, on-going tutoring for students needing substantive help in writing, a website with instructional materials for faculty and students, and a computer facility. Here are tips specifically geared to first-year students: [http://my.hamilton.edu/writing/first-years](http://my.hamilton.edu/writing/first-years)

Oral Communication Center (James Helmer, Director, jhelmer@hamilton.edu):
The OCC supports students and faculty in achieving Hamilton’s standard for effective oral communication. Tips and Guides: [https://www.hamilton.edu/oralcommunication/oral-communication-lab-guides-and-tips](https://www.hamilton.edu/oralcommunication/oral-communication-lab-guides-and-tips)

Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning Center (Ben Smith, Director, bsmith@hamilton.edu):
The QSR Center offers drop-in peer tutoring in introductory level courses containing a mathematics/quantitative component in addition to one-on-one peer tutoring by appointment. [https://www.hamilton.edu/qsr](https://www.hamilton.edu/qsr)

Language Center (Mary Beth Helderle, Director, mhelderl@hamilton.edu):
The Language Center supports innovative pedagogy and the use of technology in language instruction. One-on-one peer tutoring is available at the Center. [https://www.hamilton.edu/languagecenter](https://www.hamilton.edu/languagecenter)

English for Speakers of Other Languages (Barbara Britt-Hysell, Director, bbritthy@hamilton.edu):
The ESOL program offers individual and small-group tutoring, independent study, and informal conversation tables. [https://www.hamilton.edu/esol](https://www.hamilton.edu/esol)

LITS: Promoting information literacy (Alexandra Rihm, FYE Librarian, arihm@hamilton.edu)
The [First-Year Experience Librarian, Alexandra Rihm](https://my.hamilton.edu/arc), is available to provide research assistance to first year students, and support their understanding of information resources, skills, and concepts. To provide Hamilton students with a solid base of research and information skills that will serve them in both academic and professional settings, librarians at Hamilton have established [First-Year Information Literacy Learning Outcomes](https://my.hamilton.edu/arc). To help achieve these outcomes, faculty teaching first-year courses are encouraged to contact Alex to discuss the integration of information literacy concepts into the curricula or request a library instruction session via their convenient instruction menu.

**Other campus resources to assist with transition to college:**

Opportunity Programs (Phyllis Breland, Director, pbreland@hamilton.edu)
Opportunity Programs offers a broad range of services to support students in their transition to college and beyond. Explore their website ([http://www.hamilton.edu/opportunity/opportunity-programs-home](http://www.hamilton.edu/opportunity/opportunity-programs-home)) or contact the office to see how they can help support the success of your students.
Multicultural Peer Mentoring Project (Allen Harrison, Associate Dean of Students for Multicultural Affairs and Accessibility, aharriso@hamilton.edu)

The multicultural peer-mentoring project supports first-year students as they navigate their Hamilton education. While open to any new student, the program is designed with the knowledge that international, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students face special challenges in transitioning to college life. This program facilitates relationships between first-year students and experienced student mentors, who provide assistance and support throughout the initial year at Hamilton.

https://my.hamilton.edu/dos/peer-mentoring-project

Counseling Center (David Walden, Director, dwalden@hamilton.edu)

The Counseling Center strives to enhance and support the intellectual and personal growth of the Hamilton College Community.

https://www.hamilton.edu/counselingcenter
Advising in the FYC Program

As an FYC instructor you will become an important informal academic advisor to the students in your course. If your advising load permits, you are likely to have some students in your FYC as formal academic advisees. If you are teaching a REAL course, all of the students in your FYC will be your academic advisees.

As mentioned in #4 of the FYC Goals and Expectations above, assisting students’ transitions to college involves introducing them to Hamilton’s academic advising system. This might include

- an introduction to the College’s educational goals and how the current course might address them (https://my.hamilton.edu/educational-goals-and-curriculum),
- a discussion of each participant’s responsibilities in the advising process (https://my.hamilton.edu/advising-resources/advising-at-hamilton)
- a conversation about initial steps in forming a student’s educational plan.

Conversations on these topics usually progress more smoothly and follow more naturally after taking some time to learn about your students’ interests, backgrounds, and goals.

Advising Web Site

Hamilton’s advising website maintains a faculty section to highlight helpful resources to support faculty in their advising responsibilities (https://my.hamilton.edu/advising-resources/faculty). Faculty are encouraged to explore the entire site to become familiar with the various stages in students’ educational careers as well as the opportunities and resources available to support them along the way.

Developing an Educational Plan

As students begin to make decisions about their education, advisors might find it helpful to refer students to our centralized advising web site that pulls together in one place the many resources and opportunities that help build a Hamilton education.

Centralized advising web site:  
https://my.hamilton.edu/advising-resources

Academic planning pages are available for all class years. The link for first-year students is here:  
https://my.hamilton.edu/advising-resources/first-year-students

A guide on how to get started in a concentration:  
https://my.hamilton.edu/advising-resources/so-you-want-to-major-in
FYC Assessment

In compliance with the approved FYC motion, CAP will report on the impact and effectiveness of the program with recommendations for its continuance in spring 2017. Here are possible paths that can be explored for evaluation.

Faculty feedback
- Feedback from faculty can be solicited over informal conversation – what worked, what didn’t, what support would be helpful? (e.g., spring 2015 dinner meeting, TAT panel discussions)

Student outcomes and feedback
- Your First College Year (YFCY) survey results
  - Survey was administered to all first-year students through Institutional Research prior to the start of the FYC and will be administered each year of the pilot
- Course evaluations
  - Evaluations for FYCs can be compared with other introductory courses, and other seminar/small-enrollment courses
- Focus groups
  - Student focus groups can be formed to collect information on the successes and challenges of the FYC program
- Enrollment data