

Recommendations made in 1995 by the Committee on Academic Planning suggest that First Year Seminars should include **“intense intellectual interchange, both written and oral, in a seminar setting** in which all participate...in critical thinking and analysis of arguments. [Seminars] should include **discussion and debate** on issues, examination of opposing viewpoints...and **written and oral assignments that force students to make explicit their ideas and thoughts...**” These recommendations further state that the First Year Seminar “should not be simply construed as a scaled-down lecture class.”

Please note that requests by the First Year Seminar Committee for clarification or revision of proposals have often resulted from lack of prior departmental/program approval; omission or inadequate specificity with respect to reading and writing assignments; insufficient information regarding pedagogical method (particularly the opportunities for discussion anticipated for the course and how these will be evaluated); or uncertainty regarding possible overlap with other courses, especially divisional requirements.

The evaluation survey completed by students at the end of their First Year Seminars asks them to assess how the course improved their skills in the following areas: reading, writing, critical thinking, the ability to discuss and debate, and the ability to do research. As a committee, we have learned and student evaluations confirm, that students learning to improve their writing benefit most from feedback that they get immediately following an assignment, coupled with advice and criticism at the draft stage. This helps students master a clear writing style, topic development, and critical thinking in manageable pieces, and we believe this leads to better outcomes in critical thinking and writing for the seminar. One way to do this is to assign several short papers; another is to assign a longer term paper but to design into the course structure several opportunities for students to obtain feedback over the course of the semester. **First Year Seminars should include at least twenty pages of finished written work during the semester. Informal writing assignments, like journals, free-writing, and responses to readings, while encouraged, do not count toward the twenty page recommendation.**

We strongly recommend that those teaching First Year Seminars schedule one or more library instructional sessions for their students. The First Year Seminars are an effective way of introducing library research and classroom tools to first year students. Please contact Bobbie Collins, Library Instruction Coordinator at collinsb@wfu.edu or ext. 4654 to schedule a session.

Copies of these guidelines, along with the student evaluation form and sample proposals are available on the Teaching and Learning Center’s web page at www.wfu.edu/TLC under Teaching at Wake Forest.

If you have any questions regarding the development of your proposal, please contact Jennifer Burg at burg@wfu.edu or ext. 4465.