

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO REVIEW
THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR PROGRAM

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December 2008

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The Committee wishes to express its profound gratitude to Nancy Ratner, whose invaluable assistance with all aspects of our research and writing made this report take shape in its most persuasive form.

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the First-Year Seminar (FYS) Program

I. Problems and Opportunities

Twelve years ago, on a motion by the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP), the Faculty voted overwhelmingly (74 to 9, with 4 abstentions) to replace the Introduction to Liberal Studies “core” courses with the current College-wide requirement: “each First-Year Student must complete one First-Year Seminar during his or her fall semester.” At the time, neither the student body nor the collective Faculty was sufficiently persuaded that a variety of thematic courses were in any way more “introductory” to the life of the College than other courses in the catalogue designed primarily for entering students. Virtually everyone, however, was persuaded that it served the College and its undergraduates well to provide students in their first semester with close contact with a faculty member in a limited enrollment course; especially in an open curriculum, entering students deserved to have exposure to faculty instruction and guidance that was not primarily departmental in focus.

The non-directive nature of the legislation that established the required First-Year Seminar (FYS) program was appealing in its looseness, at least initially. Faculty members had legitimate leave from departmental duties to pursue individual paths of inquiry that responded to their own research and intellectual curiosity. Students enjoyed a wide array of topics and disciplinary “portals” by which they could enter a liberal arts classroom devoted to critical inquiry in the company of their peers. Yet, after ten years in operation, it has become clear that the degree of faculty commitment is insufficient to sustain on a continuing basis the number of individual courses needed, let alone to accommodate any expansion in entering classes. Moreover, the absence of any explicit rationale for the College’s sole requirement has contributed to the erosion of both faculty and undergraduate belief in the *educational* necessity of the various FYS as uniquely foundational to liberal arts learning. The burden properly rests with the Faculty to explain why FYS are so important for meeting the curricular needs of entering students that no one should be indifferent to their omission.

As requested, our Committee has collected and collated information from a wide range of sources in order to arrive at a comprehensive reconsideration of the current College-wide requirement. In the narrative section of our report, we make reference to in-depth surveys of student responses to the FYS program, both at its inception (1998) and more recently (2006), as well as a survey of graduating seniors in 2005 to measure the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for successful performance at the College. On our own initiative, we solicited from the faculty at large a critical evaluation of the goals and mission of the FYS program, and we conducted detailed interviews with the program’s most recent cohort of instructors. We also investigated the structure of first-year seminars

and the types of administrative support for them at twelve peer institutions. In order to test and refine preliminary conclusions from our study of all these sources, we held two open forum meetings with faculty colleagues and have met and consulted with the CEP. As a result, we now are well positioned to understand what the faculty expects and hopes of an effective first semester requirement for all entering students. And we know in considerable depth what satisfactions and disappointments enrolled students have experienced over time in their individual seminars.

Our own research leads us to concur with the self-study of the FYS Committee and the recent report of the Reaccreditation Report of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) team that the program is not sustainable as presently constituted and lacks sufficient rationale to motivate faculty and to justify its anomalous status as the single College-wide curricular requirement. It would be a profound disservice to Amherst's entering classes, especially now as the College commits itself to a more broadly diversified student body, *not* to provide the special attention and faculty guidance offered by limited enrollment seminars in the first semester. But in our estimation it is also imperative that the Faculty legislate a reform in the current program that will enable the seminars to enjoy broad support and curricular coherence.

Fortunately, the necessary reform and revitalization of the FYS program can be built on the framework of a wide consensus that already exists. Our surveys reveal an encouraging coincidence of faculty and student opinion regarding what *ought* to be given priority in preparing first-year students for success in a liberal arts curriculum. Not coincidentally, these same desiderata are corroborated by actual practice at peer institutions that have launched their own first-year seminar programs. What has been lacking at Amherst, despite a general degree of satisfaction with individual courses, is a sense of curricular coherence shared by the entire faculty. There has been no attempt until the present moment to reach a common understanding of what a First-Year Seminar course *must be* in order to meet adequately the needs of a student body and a faculty which are *both* undergoing rapid demographic changes. We believe that the demonstrable faculty and student dissatisfaction with the present system, in particular with the lack of sufficient attention to the requisite skills for conducting critical inquiry and independent learning, provides the *opportunity* for achieving a more viable, necessary, and educationally coherent FYS program. At the same time, we believe it is not necessary to sacrifice the strongest features of the current program – namely, its hospitality to individual faculty initiatives and its encouragement of Amherst's strong commitment to interdisciplinary and cross-cultural teaching collaborations.

What, then, do we envisage? Individual seminars should remain inquiry-centered and intellectually pluralistic, but each seminar instructor would be a member of the Faculty, and together they would compose a staff which observes a *common pedagogy* in response to the pressing need for early attention to the acquisition of college-level proficiencies. Over and over again, students and faculty have identified four educational goals which ought to be addressed in the first semester of college: writing-attentive instruction; discussion-based classes; close reading of written text and other course materials; critical attention to the development and analysis of argument, in speech and writing. Many of these educational principles are already observed in the individual seminars currently offered;

the aim should be, however, to make these pedagogical emphases consistent and consciously applied across all the seminars. For such a program to be viable, there must be an adequate number of instructors to accommodate the entire entering class. We recognize that success will depend ultimately upon factors that cannot be legislated. There must be administrative resources available to provide sufficient professional support for writing instruction. Pedagogical strategies should be shared and developed in a series of workshops and staff conversations open both to current and potential instructors. And, most important, there will have to be a change in the larger faculty culture, with support for special incentives to recruit junior faculty into non-departmental liberal arts instruction as a means of reaffirming in the next generation the College's historic commitment to interdisciplinary collaborative teaching in required first semester courses.

II. Historical Review of the FYS Program

As voted by the Faculty, FYS were to be reserved for first-year students in the fall semester. Seminars were to be small courses or sections, with approximately 15 students per faculty member. The seminars were meant to give entering students an opportunity to engage in discussion without the intimidating presence of upperclassmen. The content and structure of the seminars were left to the discretion of individual faculty; they were meant to deal with "an engaging subject, on a modest scale, with close reading," and to be "shaped to the competencies of students in their first year." They could be taught by a single faculty member or by a group of faculty teaching from a common syllabus. They could be interdisciplinary, or based within a discipline. It was hoped that the courses might be "foundational" or "introductory," but what that meant was not clearly specified – except to the extent that the courses were not to be introductions to departments.

Student Surveys of the FYS Program

A number of student surveys of the FYS program have been conducted since its inception. The FYS Committee assessed the experiences of students who were in the program in the fall of 1997. The core components of the program – small, discussion-based sections restricted to entering students-- were mentioned by many students as the most important aspects of the FYS experience, along with the emphasis on writing assignments. Many students reported the seminars helped improve their writing and in-class participation. About half the students reported the FYS program "helped them to adjust to life at Amherst."

A different picture emerged of the FYS program from a survey of graduating seniors in 2005. Only a third of seniors agreed that their FYS had helped them address problems in their writing, and only a third agreed that their seminars helped prepare them for study at Amherst in ways distinctive from their other first-year courses. However, two-thirds of the students agreed that they would encourage other students to enroll in a First-Year Seminar course even if it were not required.

In 2006, the FYS Committee conducted the most recent student evaluation of the FYS program. Students clearly favored seminar meetings in which discussion predominated and rated seminars more highly where class time was spent in discussion. Students who reported they received helpful feedback on their writing also rated their seminars more highly than those who did not. Many students had entered the seminars with expectations that the FYS would improve their writing and were disappointed when their seminars did not focus on writing skills. As a result of the survey, faculty members were asked to write more detailed introductions to their courses for the FYS brochure, clarifying expectations and goals for their courses, indicating whether a course would focus, for example, on writing, scientific reasoning, oral presentation, argumentation, performing, or contemplative learning.

FYS Committee 2008 Report on the FYS Program

In January of 2008 the FYS Committee sent a report to the CEP and to the Committee of Six detailing problems in the FYS program that had become severe:

Staffing. Despite a few years of surplus volunteers, the program in recent years has suffered from a lack of faculty support, as the FYS Committee has engaged in an annual struggle to staff the program. An analysis of staffing of the program indicates that a core group of volunteers had staffed almost a quarter of the sections. Many members of this core group are approaching retirement or are already on phased retirement. Participation in the program beyond this senior group has grown weak. Fewer than one-tenth of the sections have been taught by untenured faculty. Newcomers to the program are at best sporadic participants. Some of the regular instructors in the FYS program have moved on to teaching in new curricular initiatives, e.g., newly created writing intensive and attentive courses, newly created intensive sections in the sciences, and new interdisciplinary programs like Environmental Studies.

Objectives. The objectives of the FYS program are in desperate need of clarification. The 2008 NEASC Reaccreditation Report specifically drew attention to this problem, noting that our FYS program has “no coherent rationale”; the report further commented that as the only required course at the College, these seminars need a “shared intuitional mission.”

FYS Committee. The FYS Committee has no charge. It lacks authority to set standards for seminars, to establish policy, or to select among proposed courses. The Committee has turned into primarily a tool for recruiting thirty volunteers.

Changing Composition of the Student Body

The composition of the student body at Amherst has changed considerably since the inception of the FYS program. The need for more instruction in writing has grown. From annual discussions among FYS teachers it appears that at least 10% of entering students have serious writing problems. Many faculty members who teach the seminars have voiced the belief that all FYS should be writing-attentive; a small group has said that it would leave the program if writing instruction were mandated. Despite

changes to the FYS brochure, complaints persist, particularly among first-year students placed in seminars that did not attend to the improvement of their writing.

Faculty Interviews and Surveys

In the fall semester of 2007, the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the FYS program was asked by President Marx to conduct a comprehensive examination of the sole College-wide requirement and to develop proposals for non-departmental FYS. As part of that examination, the Committee conducted (i) luncheons and interviews with instructors of FYS (December 2007; May, June 2008), (ii) a computer-based survey of all faculty instructors (summer 2008), and (iii) open meetings with faculty to discuss the Committee's preliminary recommendations (October 2008).

On December 4 and 6, 2007, the FYS Committee held open luncheons with current FYS instructors to solicit their feedback on their FYS teaching experiences. Subsequently, members of the FYS Committee interviewed FYS instructors in May and June, 2008. Instructors were generally pleased with the program and their students, although some commented on difficulties with students for whom English was a second language. More than half the faculty commented that they incorporated frequent, short writing assignments into their courses, although two said that these assignments were intended to help students engage with the reading and course content, and not to improve their writing style. Some science faculty expressed concern that they had neither the training nor the interest in technical writing instruction and would choose not to participate in the program if intensive writing instruction were required. A consensus among instructors was that the seminars were critical for introducing students to discussion-based learning at Amherst and, given the large enrollments in many courses for first-year students (i.e., courses with 30 or more students), offered incoming students the best opportunity for the "small class" experience that is a major benefit of an Amherst education.

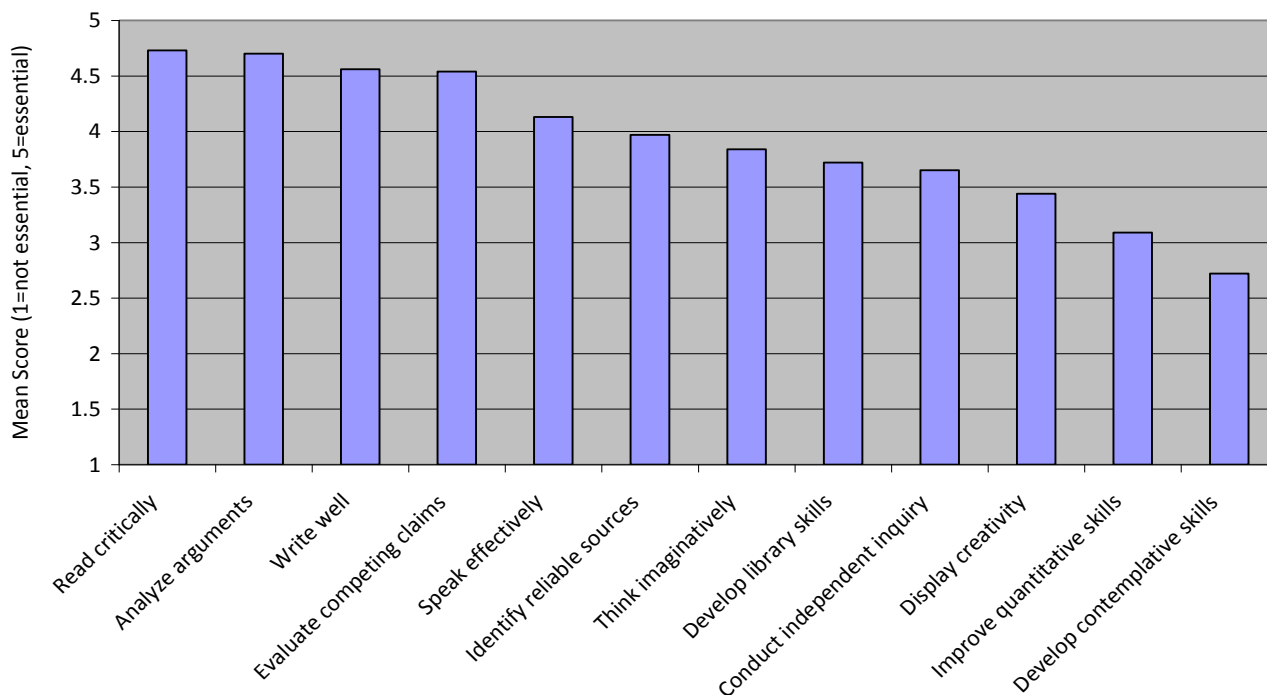
The FYS Committee next conducted a faculty-wide survey of opinions about the FYS program at Amherst. Part of the rationale for this survey was to obtain unbiased feedback from the entire faculty about the program, including those who did not participate in it. The survey was conducted online from 30 May to 25 June, 2008. Seventy-six of 172 (44%) tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, senior lecturers, resident artists, and senior resident artists responded to the survey. Forty percent of the respondents had never taught in the FYS program, and 41% were from the Humanities, 21% from the Natural Sciences and Mathematics, 24% from the Social Sciences, and the remainder from other disciplines.

The survey consisted of three questions. The first two questions were open-ended and solicited thoughts about the kind of FYS program faculty members imagined at Amherst: "*What should be the goals of the FYS program?*" and "*Are there certain skills or competencies that you think students should develop in the FYS to prepare them to take full advantage of the liberal arts education and intellectual life in Amherst?*" The third asked faculty to rate a list of skills and competencies in terms of their importance to the program. In response to the first two questions, faculty were remarkably consistent in their opinion that the program should teach students how to read critically, formulate and present arguments both in speech and writing, enable them to present arguments in small discussion groups,

and show them how to listen to, analyze, and critique the work of others as well as their own. Faculty consistently commented that such seminars should provide first-year students with a relatively anxiety-free environment at Amherst College and encourage them to express their views in a non-judgmental setting. A number of faculty remarked that a teaching pedagogy structured around reading and writing skills would allow faculty to identify and address students with deficiencies early in their career at Amherst, better preparing them for upper division courses.

The degree of consensus about the goals of the FYS program and its role in the development of students' skills became more explicit when faculty were asked to rank those competencies that they felt were most essential for students to learn and develop in the first semester. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not essential, 5 = essential), *reading critically*, *analyzing arguments*, and *writing well* were regarded as skills necessary for all students, with 62% to 78% of faculty respondents listing them as absolutely essential for students to learn and develop in the first semester (Fig. 1). Speaking effectively and library skills also were regarded as desirable goals of the FYS program.

Faculty Ranking of Desirable Student Skills from FYS



Based upon the summer survey, the FYS Committee identified a campus-wide consensus on the importance of the following features in the FYS program: (1) *Discussion-based classes*; (2) *Writing-attentive instruction*; (3) *Close reading of written text and other materials*; (4) *Attention to the development and analysis of argument in speech and writing*. These four principles were articulated as the foundation for a revitalized FYS program in a 25 September, 2008 letter to all teaching faculty. The Committee also recommended additional support in the form of writing and library consultants, as well as funding for special workshops to cover all issues common to faculty teaching in the FYS program. In this letter, the Committee also broached the following ideas: (a) a culminating intellectual experience in all FYS or alternatively, an annual FYS organized around a single broad theme; (2) a strengthening of oversight by the FYS Committee; (3) a requirement that all faculty participate in the FYS program.

The Committee held open meetings on 1 and 2 October to discuss its recommendations with the faculty. Twenty-two faculty members attended the two meetings. Participants were virtually unanimous in their support of the four pedagogical principles that the Committee had identified as the basis of a revitalized FYS program. Other proposals received far less support. Few showed any interest in a seminar program that mandated a common theme or shared subject matter. Many commented that a common theme was too contrived and would stretch faculty from their expertise. Others worried that a common theme would decrease faculty participation and worked against the freedom of inquiry that defined Amherst culture. Many noted that if the College desired a commonality to the seminars, then such a commonality could be achieved by requiring the seminars to address the four pedagogical principles. Several discussants observed that given the large enrollments of many classes at the College, the small enrollment of the FYS provided faculty with the opportunity to address student reading, writing, and speaking skills to a degree that couldn't be addressed in courses with larger enrollments.

Faculty opinion on mandatory participation in the FYS—the idea that all junior faculty members be required to teach at least once in the program prior to coming up for tenure—was mixed. Those opposed expressed concerns about the impact of such a requirement on junior faculty development as well as on departmental staffing. Some argued quite vociferously that mandatory participation would put increased stress on junior faculty and perhaps decrease a department's ability to recruit new faculty. Others worried that some departments were already over-extended due to service courses (e.g., pre-med requirements) and new, interdisciplinary majors (e.g., Environmental Studies). Those in support pointed to the opportunity to integrate faculty across the campus in interdisciplinary teaching, as well as to embrace new faculty members into the college community. Teaching workshops were suggested as a way of lessening the burden of new course development for junior faculty.

Practices of Peer Institutions

Early in this process we investigated the practices of our peer institutions.¹ Although we found great variation among these schools' offerings, two commonalities emerged:

- Every institution paid significant attention to students' writing, *either* by incorporating a writing component in a required first-year seminar *or* by requiring students to fulfill a writing requirement.
- All programs had faculty or administrative oversight.

Attention to Writing

Amherst is unusual in its inattention to students' writing skills. Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, Dartmouth, Grinnell, Middlebury, Pomona, and Princeton require all students to take a writing-attentive first-year seminar, and Dartmouth and Middlebury both require completion of an additional writing-attentive course. Although Williams has no first-year seminar program, students must successfully complete two writing courses. Yale has the same requirement. Bates and Swarthmore recommend, but do not require enrollment in their seminar program; however they each require successful completion of three writing-attentive courses.

In addition to requiring a writing-intensive seminar, several schools require evidence that students have obtained acceptable writing skills as a requirement for graduation. Grinnell requires a minimum grade in the first-year tutorial. Carleton requires a minimum grade in a writing-rich course as well as a portfolio submission of multiple examples of writing. Dartmouth and Harvard require students to pass an exam and then complete additional coursework. Brown requires students to demonstrate writing competency, although this requirement is dependent on faculty identifying students with weak skills.

Program Administration

Virtually every program we examined involved faculty or administrative oversight. At some schools (Grinnell, Middlebury, Pomona), the administrator organized regular workshops to help prepare faculty to teach the seminars. Grinnell and Middlebury both locate their advising program for first-year students in the first-year seminar program; at those schools the workshops also cover advising issues.

The program at Pomona merits special attention for several reasons. All seminars meet at the same time each week (a time reserved every day for public lectures and first-year seminars). Recruitment is managed through a formula which ensures that every department, adjusted for size, contributes to the program. Faculty members teaching in the program gather in May for a multi-day workshop, including new faculty members who are thought to benefit from the early orientation and

¹Bates, Bowdoin, Brown, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Grinnell, Hamilton, Harvard, Middlebury, Pomona, Princeton, Smith, Swarthmore, Williams, and Yale.

informal introduction to colleagues outside their discipline. A second workshop in late January is offered for faculty who wish to work on course development and course descriptions. Additional meetings occur throughout the fall term.

Common Themes

We found no schools attempting to link the topic of all their seminars for first-year students through a common theme. In fact, the only school where we found any sort of linkage was Carleton College, where a subset of first-year students may enroll in a set of linked courses and participate in a colloquium as part of the course grouping.

Open Curriculum Schools

We also examined the requirements at other schools with an open curriculum. Again, we found Amherst's approach to fall outside the norms in its expectations. Brown has an "English Requirement," which specifies that students "are expected to pursue a high level of performance in their writing." Students who fail to maintain an appropriate level of competence are referred to the Dean to develop a plan for addressing those needs. If students do not complete those requirements or are subsequently judged to be deficient, they may be refused registration until they have met their responsibilities regarding the writing requirement. At Grinnell, the First-Year Tutorial is the only required course, as at Amherst, but it features highly specific expectations for what the courses will accomplish, including independent research and significant attention to writing. The tutorials are the basis of the advising system and of incorporating new faculty into the college; nobody is awarded tenure without teaching one, and all departments participate. Hamilton College requires completion of three writing-intensive courses, each taken in a different semester and all completed by the end of the junior year. Smith College requires successful completion of a writing-attentive course during the first year as its only requirement outside of the major.

III. The Proposal

MOTION 1:

Effective with the class of 2014, the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree will include the completion by each first-year student of a First-Year Seminar during his or her fall semester. Each seminar shall constitute an inquiry-based introduction to critical thinking and active learning at the college level. To achieve this goal, all courses will have an enrollment limit of 15 and will provide discussion-based classes, writing-attentive instruction with frequent and varied assignments, close reading and critical interpretation of written texts, and careful attention to the development and analysis of argument in speech and writing. In addition, each seminar will supplement the advisory system by early identification of students whose performance could benefit from the services of a professional writing counselor or a second semester writing-intensive course.

MOTION 2:

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) Committee shall include three faculty members, one of whom will serve as the Director of the FYS program; the Head of the Writing Center; the Dean of First-Year Students (ex officio) and an Associate Dean of the Faculty (ex officio). This Committee will be vested with the authority to identify and approve appropriate course proposals, to organize pedagogical workshops for faculty, and to encourage innovative interdisciplinary and cross-cultural forms of inquiry. In addition, the Committee shall exercise an ongoing mandate to assess the pedagogical effectiveness of the program and propose additional features, as warranted.

IV. Rationale

These motions hope to achieve two goals. The first aims to provide the program with a coherent and common intellectual purpose, one that justifies the program's unusual status as Amherst's sole requirement. The second motion seeks to revitalize the culture of faculty participation in the program, and, in so doing, solve the chronic staffing problem that the program has faced in recent years.

The question that the Committee considered at length is whether motion one, which calls for a common pedagogy, supplies a sufficient rationale for the extraordinary dedication of resources that the FYS program represents. After months of study and vigorous debate, we concluded that it does. As mentioned in our 28 September letter to the Faculty, we entertained and solicited comment on proposals to expand the commitment beyond a common pedagogy to an FYS program organized around common themes or subject matter. These proposals took a variety of forms; some, for example, imagined all thirty seminars using an identical syllabus; others contemplated a common concluding colloquium to be held in the last weeks of the term; still others imagined a core of shared readings that would work their way into all the seminars. Although the common theme approach enjoyed some support on the Committee, in the end none of us were convinced of the wisdom of such a system. We were surprised by the level of opposition that the proposal aroused among members of the Faculty. The more interventionist proposal—the single syllabus approach—threatened to drive faculty from the program, and thus frustrate our second goal: to address the persistent staffing problems by encouraging greater faculty participation in the program. The less restrictive proposal—a concluding colloquium—threatened to achieve a superficial commonality at the expense of intellectual coherence. While the potential costs of the common-theme approach were all too tangible, the benefits—all first-year students exposed to the same texts or materials—remained largely speculative. At the very least, it seemed that many of these benefits could be achieved by encouraging—but not mandating—the creation of common seminars through voluntary collaboration among faculty.

We believe, then, that a common pedagogy, as outlined in motion one, supplies the necessary and sufficient rationale for a revitalized FYS program. This pedagogical consistency will supply all first-year students with a common intellectual experience that will help them acquire a set of tools to help them succeed within their majors, while also preparing and encouraging them to take full advantage of

the open curriculum. It is our hope that such a coherent rationale, if supported by the proper commitment of institutional resources described below, will occasion a shift in the culture at Amherst to a more robust support of, and participation in, the seminar program.

Motion one thus contemplates the following elements:

Discussion based – the seminars should not be lecture driven. Students in particular have voiced criticism of FYS that have lecture formats.

Writing attentive – Students should typically compile a portfolio of 25-30 pages of writing in the course of the term. Emphasis should be on shorter assignments over longer assignments. Students should have the opportunity to work on multiple drafts.

Close reading of written texts – While we of course encourage the use of other kinds of pedagogical materials, we believe the seminar should in the first instance be organized around critical engagement with written texts. In addition, the goal of fostering close reading counsels in favor of a syllabus with a manageable amount of reading.

Speech and Writing – As a discussion-based course, the seminar should aim to develop students' verbal skills. Students should be exposed to a setting that encourages them to consider, defend, and critically assess the views they express.

Motion two seeks to revitalize the culture of participation in the program. It does so by contemplating an expansion of the responsibilities of the FYS committee, making it into a more forceful vehicle for facilitating faculty collaboration in the creation of courses. As detailed below, it also mandates that the Committee sponsor and organize yearly workshops that will instruct colleagues in the program's distinctive pedagogy as well as provide an attractive venue for introducing recent hires and other junior faculty into the life of the College. Finally, it asks the Committee to engage in periodic assessments of the program, to make sure that it is realizing its pedagogic goals, and to propose changes, as necessary, to keep the program dynamic and to avoid the kind of ossification of methods that can lead to an erosion of faculty morale.

V. Recommendations for Academic Support and Implementation

If the FYS program that we propose is to succeed, it will need broad support from colleagues across the curriculum, the interest of newly hired faculty members, a director of the program, and an FYS Committee with a charge that enables it to assist with the program's implementation. Faculty who teach in the program may need additional assistance from the Writing Center.

Staffing

The FYS Committee recommends an equitable and flexible system for staffing the seminars.

Each department should provide faculty members to teach in the FYS program on a regular basis, to the extent feasible within a given year. The Dean of the Faculty, in consultation with the CEP, will determine how many and how often each department should provide faculty members to teach FYS. We recognize that there are various forms of College-wide service; for example, there are intensive sections for underprepared students in math and science. We expect that the Dean will take these departmental contributions into account when devising a fair staffing system.

Participation of New Colleagues

The FYS committee recommends that the Dean create opportunities for newly hired colleagues to teach in the FYS Program. This may take the form of course release and/or consultation with departments to make it possible for untenured colleagues to participate. The College should enable junior faculty to teach at least one FYS prior to coming up for tenure.

Pedagogical Workshops for Faculty

We believe that it is crucial to the long-term success of the FYS program for the College to support pedagogical workshops that are designed especially for faculty teaching in the FYS program. We see these FYS workshops as serving two main functions. First, while we expect that faculty will be eager to participate in a First-Year Seminar program that aims at educational goals that we all recognize and value, we are mindful of the fact that some members of the faculty, especially junior faculty, may be reluctant to teach in a program that requires them to teach in ways that are unfamiliar. Few of us have been trained specifically in strategies for developing our students' skills in discussion, formulating and evaluating arguments, close and critical reading, and academic writing. While faculty members teaching in the humanities and social sciences often emphasize the development of these skills in their courses, faculty who teach in other fields may never have been asked to help their students to develop these skills. Consequently, faculty who participate in the program must be given the opportunity and incentives to attend pedagogical workshops that will help them design and teach courses that will serve the mission of the new FYS program. Second, these workshops should serve a purpose that extends beyond the FYS program. They should be tools for integrating new faculty into the life of the College, for establishing bridges between faculty members in different domains of inquiry; they should give faculty from all disciplines at the College the opportunity to share ideas about teaching at Amherst. For this reason, we would recommend that all these pedagogical workshops be open to all faculty members.

Writing-attentive Workshops for Students

In addition to pedagogical support for faculty, we recommend that the Writing Associates at the Writing Center be available to support faculty teaching in the FYS program by coming into their classrooms to run writing workshops. These workshops would be designed by the Writing Associates in collaboration with the faculty teaching the course to meet the specific needs of their students in

particular FYS seminars. The Writing Associates at the Writing Center are available to consult individually with faculty about various aspects of writing pedagogy.

Intensive Writing Instruction at the Writing Center

Faculty who teach in the FYS program should refer directly to the writing specialists at the Writing Center students whose instructional needs in academic writing far exceed their own resources. Students come to the College from a wide range of backgrounds, and their writing skills reflect this diversity of academic preparation. To help students whose academic writing skills are significantly under-developed requires additional training and a commitment to offering many hours of one-on-one instruction. Through a diagnostic examination of students' papers, the Writing Associates at the Writing Center can design an instructional plan designed to meet students' specific educational needs. Students then meet weekly or bi-weekly with Writing Associates over the course of the semester in individualized tutorials that supplement whatever writing instruction that they receive from their professors.

Administrative Appointments

The Director of the FYS program will guide and help implement its pedagogical goals. We recommend that the colleague who holds this position be a regular member of the Faculty. We recommend that the Writing Center be funded to have sufficient professional staffing to help support the pedagogical goals of the FYS program.

Charge for the FYS Committee

The Committee will oversee the FYS program. The Committee will consult with the Dean about the composition of the teaching faculty for the following year. The Committee will help faculty members who wish to come together to identify common themes and interdisciplinary forms of inquiry. The program Director, an Associate Dean of the Faculty, and the Director of the Writing Center will work closely to help shape course proposals with faculty members who wish to discuss the development of their courses. In consultation with the CEP, the FYS Committee will formally approve the course proposals in light of established common goals. The Committee will periodically assess the pedagogical effectiveness of the program and report its findings to the Faculty.

VI. Conclusion

Amherst College is not unusual in requiring that all first-year students participate with their peers in a limited enrollment course under the instruction and close guidance of a faculty member. It is unusual, however, in not taking that requirement as an opportunity to address the fundamental competencies requisite to success in academic work. This anomaly has obviously puzzled observers outside and inside Amherst's flourishing open curriculum. The faculty members who teach in the

College's one mandatory introductory course are not obligated to monitor carefully their students' performance in writing, critical reading, or the structure of persuasive argument. At the same time, however, the Faculty *does* expect the instructors engaged in the FYS program to invent non-departmental courses which are inquiry-centered and responsive to a faculty member's own intellectual interests. The College has a long history of encouraging a faculty culture that is open to a curriculum that ventures outside departmental or divisional interests. Frankly, the strong point of Amherst's FYS program has been its focus on serious topics of inquiry addressed by a staff of motivated instructors. That strength, however, no longer sufficiently addresses the *pedagogical* needs of a rapidly changing, increasingly diverse undergraduate population. Meanwhile, an increasingly diversified and interdisciplinary faculty is attracted to a wide range of non-departmental or College-wide service courses, thus reducing the constituency needed to staff the FYS program. Hence, the urgent need to review, revise, and reinvigorate the College's faltering foundational seminars for matriculating students.

We believe the motions we have framed and the recommendations we have formulated provide a much-needed rationale to sustain a *necessary* single requirement for liberal arts undergraduates. Our revision of the FYS program responds to the lack of attention to fundamental competencies *without* reducing the intellectual content of the courses to a skills-based minimalism. Rather, we seek to retain and reinvigorate the attractiveness of a broad array of inquiry-centered seminars that are representative of Amherst's own intellectual energy. There is no reason that these courses cannot share a common pedagogy while pursuing serious topics of inquiry. Indeed, students and faculty alike have instructed us that the one thing necessary to encourage successful performance in Amherst's open curriculum is early and adequate attention to the standards of reading and writing on which critical inquiry rests. Thus, our revision integrates the various seminars into a *staff* committed to common pedagogical aims and ongoing conversation about the best practices for achieving those goals. If our recommendations are followed, instructors in the FYS program will be assured of adequate administrative and professional supports to assist the staff in the development of classroom strategies that promote discussion, good writing, critical reading, and effective argument. The pleasure that many faculty experience as the "most advanced learner" in the company of fifteen eager and malleable young minds pursuing a chosen topic of interest need not be sacrificed in order to more effectively meet the basic pedagogical needs of those same students. A healthy, vital liberal arts curriculum in a time of major demographic and disciplinary change depends upon a self-conscious attention *in the first semester* to the basics of lifelong learning and critical inquiry. But it also depends upon a cohort of motivated faculty *across all ranks and disciplines* eager and willing to engage in non-departmental innovative courses that inspire students at the introductory level. Amherst's traditional reliance on the faculty's intellectual autonomy *can* be combined with an urgently needed common pedagogy. In our judgment, a viable, intellectually responsible FYS program requires nothing less.