

Annual Report of the First-Year Seminar Committee  
2022-2023 academic year  
May 12, 2023

Much of our work centers on recruiting for the following academic year. We actively recruited faculty for the fall '23 program and provided support getting new courses on the books. At the time of writing, the College will offer 35 seminars for next fall's incoming class. 32 are needed to guarantee an enrollment cap of 15 for all seminars, so we will be able to meet that target with some room to spare.

In the wake of the pandemic, the Committee decided to experiment with a new model to offer support to colleagues teaching first-year seminars, involving multiple short presentations and workshops on specific topics. We organized three such in-person events during the end of the spring semester, with much help from our colleagues: A presentation on the transformation of the Intensive Writing Program by Kristina Reardon; suggestions for making use of the Amherst College Archives and Special Collections by Mike Kelly and Rachel Jirka; and a writing pedagogy workshop run by Emily Merriman and Lydia Peterson. Modest in scale for now, we were unable to offer more than one time for each event, but for those unable to attend, we sent resources via email.

Last year, the Committee was charged with implementing the new Sophomore Seminar program. Those inaugural courses were offered this academic year, thirteen all together, with two of them co-taught. Those courses will remain in the curriculum, to be offered in cycles that make sense for each colleague (yearly, every other year, etc). Three will be offered in fall '23 and at least three more in spring '24, including two new ones. We anticipate slightly higher numbers for the 2024-25 academic year. The Committee hosted a working lunch about the experience teaching them after spring break and will host a second working lunch during finals week to make more specific the goals and expectations of seminars during finals week.

Respectfully submitted,

The First-Year Seminar Committee  
Lawrence Douglas, Katrina Karkazis, Tim Van Compernelle

Annual Report of the First-Year Seminar Committee  
2021-2022 academic year

The traditional role of the Committee is overseeing the First-Year Seminar Program. This academic year, the Committee took over additional responsibilities, as well. We actively recruited faculty for the program and provided support getting courses on the books. At the time of writing, the College will offer 39 seminars for next fall's incoming class.

The Committee served as an information hub in fall '21 for the anti-racist co-curricular events for the FYS program. Having been charged with assessing those events, we surveyed faculty who taught a seminar in fall '21 about their experience with the three events and received valuable feedback. The Committee was also involved in planning conversations about next fall's events.

Working with the Writing Center, the Committee helped organize two writing pedagogy workshops for faculty who will teach in fall '22. Given the late start of the semester and the uptick in COVID cases, we followed last year's model and held them on Zoom rather than in person after the end of the semester. The workshops were held on May 17 and 19.

The Committee was charged with implementing the new Sophomore Seminar program for next academic year. Working with the Registrar, Jesse Barba, the CEP, and Associate Dean Pawan Dhingra, the committee recruited and provided support getting the courses on the books for next year. At the time of writing, the College will offer 14 sophomore seminars next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Yael Rice, Tim Van Compernelle, and Tom Zanker

**First Year Seminar (FYS) Committee 2020-21 Summary**  
**May 26, 2020**

Members of the First-Year Seminar Committee:

Ron Bashford, Theater and Dance, Chair

Yael Rice, Art and the History of Art, Asian Languages and Civilizations, Architectural Studies

Tom Zanker, Classics

In 2019/20, the FYS Committee began to re-imagine what support for FYS faculty would look like following the departure of *ex officio* member Jyl Genzler from the Writing Center and the committee. The committee planned to convene more conversations among FYS faculty to plan a “May Workshop” for the spring of 2020. In the middle of a planned series of lunches with FYS faculty in March of last year, the pandemic struck and the committee abandoned its plans. The focus of all faculty then turned to the summer courses intended to prepare us for teaching remotely.

In 2020/21, the work of the FYS Committee took a different direction, resulting in a busy spring semester. The Faculty Leadership Committee for the Anti-Racism Plan reached out to us to request our support for a curricular proposal to be incorporated in all FYS courses. Beginning in late January, the two committees worked together regularly to fashion a proposal for FYS faculty that could be doable and flexible for FYS faculty. The process of revising the proposal included multiple consultations with FYS faculty, and the designing of end-of-the-semester workshops in support of implementing the proposal, along with support for FYS pedagogy more generally. Both the curricular proposal and a description of the workshops is appended.

Many staff participated in the anti-racism curricular proposal effort, including staff from the Writing Center, Frost Library, and the Center for Teaching and Learning. Additional faculty and staff helped facilitate the workshops. We are grateful to everyone who generously gave of their time and expertise.

Early in June, the committee will finalize plans to support the anti-racism curricular component of the FYS program, as well as plan for additional workshops around writing pedagogy in the fall, in collaboration with the Writing Center.

As part of the larger anti-racism effort, the leadership committee on anti-racism has also proposed a pilot program for *sophomore* seminars, which may also help address a lack of social connection associated with the sophomore experience. The FYS committee has agreed to oversee the implementation of the pilot, with new sophomore seminar courses being offered beginning in 2022/23. Given this addition to the work of the committee -- along with other

recent changes to the landscape of its work -- we plan to put forward a revision to the committee's charge sometime next year.

The FYS Committee also expects its work next year to include: designing a more straightforward and efficient process for recruiting faculty and vetting FYS course proposals, assessing the effectiveness of the anti-racism curricular component of the FYS program, resolving questions around -- and recruiting faculty for -- the sophomore seminar pilot program, and continuing to explore ways of encouraging more interaction among FYS faculty, alongside planning workshops for the spring of 2022.

Please also see the appended material.

Dear First-Year Seminar Instructors,

Thanks so much for meeting with us and providing us with feedback on our proposal. We've made some revisions and provided more details about the proposed sessions.

We will be sending you additional information about tentative dates for the point-counterpoint series, the CHI round-table, and lectures by visiting scholars as well as details about how we plan to assess this initiative.

We'll also be reaching out to you individually to find out what support you'll need in integrating some of these ideas into your syllabi. The FYS Committee plans to offer three workshops in late April and early May where First Year instructors can share ideas or get help with facilitating discussions, planning writing assignments, and/or analyzing the suggested readings. If you tell us what support you think you'll need, we'll be happy to facilitate additional group meetings and arrange workshop topics that make the most sense. The Provost's office has agreed to offer a stipend of \$500 to any First-Year Seminar faculty who participate in workshops or group discussions. We will send information about those plans soon.

With all best wishes,

The First Year Seminar Committee, and  
Amherst's Faculty Leadership Committee for the Anti-Racism Plan

Ron Bashford  
Yael Rice  
Tom Zanker

Amrita Basu  
Brittney Bailey  
Rhonda Cobham-Sander  
Khary Polk

## **REVISED FIRST YEAR SEMINAR PROPOSAL**

The proposal uses the First Year seminar to address the first step in a multi-stage anti-racist curriculum. It is not meant to provide students with a detailed history of race or racism, although we know that some individual seminars may cover such material.

This first step has three learning goals:

- To encourage students to view engagement with issues related to race and anti-racism as integral to their academic experience across the curriculum
- To introduce students to the social, and particularly the racial history of Amherst College
- To encourage students to think and act in solidarity with others across racial, ethnic and other differences, as they pursue an Amherst education.

We've organized our curricular proposals for the FYS around three sessions. The sessions will be scheduled in weeks three and seven of the semester and at a point near the end of the semester to be determined. Each includes a presentation or panel that will be recorded. We've included suggestions for short readings, assignments and in-class activities to accompany each presentation. However, how you use any of these suggestions is up to you.

In order to facilitate a common intellectual experience for the class we think it's important that you require your students to attend the three presentations and to reflect as a group in discussion and writing on what they learn. You may choose to devote part of a class to a session topic or to combine your discussion with other topics on your syllabus. We imagine that the equivalent of four hours of contact time over the course of the semester would be devoted to these materials.

The sessions would cover the following topics:

- An introductory session in which students learn how and why a variety of scholars have chosen to address racism in their scholarship. This year's panel will be made up of current CHI fellows
- A second session that introduces students to the racial history of Amherst College
- A final session that invites students to imagine ways to forge community with students from different backgrounds or to consider additional ways of exploring an antiracist agenda within and beyond the curriculum.

We think this combination of informational, contextual and imaginative exercises will fit well with traditional FYS goals around writing and critical thinking. We hope that it will prime students to continue to explore anti-racist ideas and action during their time at Amherst.

We know some of you already have deep experience teaching and researching these topics; for others, it may be your first time addressing them in the classroom. With this in mind, we've offered a variety of ideas below of ways to integrate the sessions into your syllabi. We also want to ensure that you have adequate support to facilitate student engagement with these topics. The Writing Center, Library, DEI, college museums, Student Affairs, and CTL are working with us to make your experience, as well as that of the students, as rewarding as possible.

## SESSION 1:

*The goal of this first session is to help students understand how scholars probe the sources and consequences of racism, and to reflect on how they might deepen their understanding of the relationship between their intellectual curiosities and their social identities.*

### Reading Possibilities:

- Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy*
- Imani Perry, "[Racism is Terrible, Blackness is Not](#)" *The Atlantic*
- One or more of the readings from Jen Manion's Provost's lecture series at [this link](#).
- Kendi and Blain ed., *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America*.

**Recorded Presentation:** We propose that a panel made up of CHI scholars address their scholarship on race from the perspective of their various disciplines and differing identities. We plan to send them the questions we'd like them to address and we'll also share these in advance with first year seminar instructors. You can find out more about the scholars and their work on the CHI website.

### Optional Activities:

Discussion: Faculty could combine their seminars to discuss the presentations, or they could invite one of the CHI fellows to continue the discussion on the panel in a more intimate setting.

**Writing:** There are a wide variety of short-form reflective assignments instructors could use. Possibilities include:

- Think-pair-share exercises or in-class one-minute responses.
- Short reflective essays.
- Moodle posts, listicles, sound files etc.
- Having students record two-minute videos on Zoom

Possible (broad) topics could include:

- How do authors (such as the writer of the text students have read) and informed scholars engage with race and anti-racism in their work?
- What further questions would you like to pose to one of the authors or panelists?
- Have the presentations / readings introduced you to anything new? What else would you be interested in learning about racism and related forms of bias in the United States?
- What is particularly evocative for you (a song, a street, an institution, etc.) of racial inequality in the USA?



Students would be under no pressure to provide a “correct” answer. The point is to establish a baseline to which students could return at the end of the semester. The FYS committee, CTL, and Writing Center will offer robust support for writing and pedagogy.

## SESSION 2:

*The goal of this session would be to help students appreciate the complex racial history of Amherst College, as a site of explicit discrimination, betrayals, good intentions gone wrong, strenuous advocacy, and constructive engagement with anti-racism, and to encourage them to start thinking about how their presence here ultimately may contribute to that legacy.*

**Reading Possibilities:** The reading for this session will engage with racism in the academy generally and with Amherst's history, more specifically. The precise text could be streamlined to fit in with FYS topics, if instructors wish, but we put forward a range of suitable – and provocative! – options in a separate attachment drawn in part from the following sources of archival information the College already has compiled:

- The library's [virtual history bookshelf](#).
- The Amherst Archive's blog [The Consecrated Eminence](#).
- The new Kindle volume [Amherst in the World](#).
- Various Amherst publications on College building names, Black alumni, trustees, etc.

The College archivist Mike Kelly has offered to help prepare instructors by presenting a lecture this spring that provides an overview of archival holdings about the institution's racial past that he has been researching. We also plan to enlist the support of other archivists and the research librarians to assist instructors who need help brainstorming about specific holdings.

**Recorded Presentation:** We envision a lecture on some aspect of how racism has played out historically within the academy and how institutions have negotiated that legacy. Craig Wilder, an MIT historian who regularly teaches a class that asks these kinds of questions, would be our first choice as the invited speaker. He is the author of [Ebony and Ivy: Race Slavery and the Troubled History of American Universities](#). As always, we are open to other ideas.

**Optional Activity:** Instructors who want their students to delve further into this history could work with the Mead or the Library with a specific collection.

**Assignment:** Rather than writing formal essays, students across all FYS sections would share their thoughts about the archival information that interested them through short group or individual posts on a course-wide FYS blog. They could tag and and hyperlink their posts so that other users could search by topic, names, dates, or archival sources to follow a thread. Students then would then post brief responses to at least five posts from students in other seminar groups.

We would ask IT to add a link to a FYS blog to each instructor's moodle page and work with ATS and trained students, where necessary, to explain to first year students:

- how the College WordPress website works;
- how to protect their privacy on a public facing blog;

- how to use hyperlinks to develop thick descriptions of a topic in under 250 words.

### SESSION 3:

*The goal of this session would be to invite students to examine their relationship to the College's mission by exploring ways of thinking and acting in solidarity with each other, across their social, intellectual and ethical differences, within and beyond the classroom*

**Recorded Presentation:** We have approached Sonya Clark about the possibility of using [The Solidarity Book Project](#) as its centerpiece. Since the installation would have been launched by then, we thought of having Sonya and/or the students lead a discussion for first year students in the foyer of the library where the Amherst Uprising took place and where the installation will be on display (if COVID restrictions permit).

**Reading Possibilities:** Students could go through the [Mission of Amherst College](#) and reflect on extent to which the aims of an anti-racist curriculum and intersect with the goal of living “principled lives of consequence.” In addition, they could do one of the following:

- Invite one of the visiting senior scholars to describe their approach to engaging anti-racism in their own work. (Darryl Harper is selecting two senior scholars who would be prepared to engage with first year students during their visits to campus this fall).
- Watch the short video about how the course [Being Human in Stem](#) grew out of the Amherst Uprising.
- Watch the [Youtube video on Anti-Asian racism](#) to which Amherst faculty and staff contributed.
- Browse the website devoted to the [Belong Campaign](#), which includes interviews with the students whose portraits are displayed on the walls outside the president's office in Converse.
- Browse the digital record of [The Amherst Uprising](#) and other post-1960s student-led protests that have sparked major changes to the College's programs and curriculum e.g.:
  - The establishment of the Moss Quantitative Center.
  - The creation of the College's first Affirmative Action office and the current DEI office.
  - The founding of the Black Studies Department and the LLAS major.
  - Continuing initiatives around Asian American Studies.

But there are a host of other ways to go about framing this discussion. We encourage you to develop approaches that mesh well with your seminar topic.

**Optional Activity:** A wrap-up activity for the entire class might take the form of:

- A First Year dorm tour featuring poster presentations and/or performances.

- An online exhibition.

**Writing:** The final assignment would invite students to reflect briefly on some version of the following question:

- Which aspects of your experience during your first semester at Amherst (within or beyond your classes) have helped you think in new ways about how race and anti-racism may impact your educational choices at Amherst? What habits of thought and action will you take with you as a result of what you've learned?

The idea would be to provide students with a moment to consider how far they have come in their first semester at Amherst, and to think about what they would like to do next.

## SEPARATE ATTACHMENT

### TOPICS FROM THE ARCHIVES OF POTENTIAL INTEREST

The library already has published numerous essays and blog posts devoted to many of the issues listed below. Consequently, the depth of original research students would be required to complete could vary, depending on how much time individual instructors wanted to devote to this exercise – from merely checking out the original documents that were the sources for a particular library post, to contributing original research to the massive archival project on the college's racial history that Mike Kelly and his student interns are undertaking. The point would be to help students understand the function of an institutional archive and encourage them to begin to think about their eventual place within it.

Examples include:

The history behind the original settlement of the land on which the College sits, recorded in Chapter One of Lisa Brooks' book [\*The Common Pot\*](#) and the website version of [\*Our Beloved Kin\*](#), both of which draw extensively on work Lisa completed in Amherst special collections with the help of Amherst students.

The sometimes violent fervor of pro and anti-abolition factions among nineteenth-century Amherst students, fueled in part by a wave of religious revivalism that swept through the College and America in the nineteenth century (a neat counterpoint to the enthusiasms of today's evangelical right!).

The ways that the College during the Jim Crow era segregated black students, even as it allowed a select number to enroll, and how those early twentieth century Black students leveraged their Amherst educations to lead the fight to dismantle racial segregation in America.

Amherst alumni missionaries' outreach to Africa, Asia and the Middle East, where among other things they established important new academic institutions (The American University in Beirut; Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, etc.) and collected artifacts housed in the Archives and Special collections and in Mead Art Museum today. They also perpetuated stereotypes about backward peoples and myths about American manifest destiny. There is a wonderful collection of essays and oral histories about nine of these Amherst missionaries who worked in China, Persia, India, the Middle East, Indonesia and Hawaii called [The Transformation of this World Depends on You](#), created in collaboration with a First Year seminar taught in 2014 by Martha Saxton and Wendy Ewald.

The roles many Amherst fraternities played in excluding Blacks and Jews and the roles some played later in challenging those exclusions. (Amherst's extensive fraternity archives have

informed many scholars' research. See Wendy Bergoffen's essay on [Jewish Experience at Amherst College](#) in *Amherst in the World* for further archival leads.)

The careers of alumni of all races who have used their Amherst education to launch professional initiatives that have contested or contributed to racial injustices, Possible examples might include [Edward Jones](#), Amherst's first Black graduate in 1826; Doshisha University founder and 1870 Amherst graduate [Joseph Hardy Neesima](#) class of 1870; economist and statistician [Richmond Mayo-Smith](#), class of 1875, a leading proponent of the eugenics movement, [John J. McCloy](#) '16, [Jerry Cohen](#) '63, general counsel for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Union, who donated his papers to the College; Kenya's president, [Uhuru Kenyatta](#) '85, believed by some to have been implicated in the ethnic violence surrounding Kenya's 2007 elections; the many Amherst-educated health care professionals who have contributed to initiatives to address racial health disparities; Artists and Creative writers on the College's faculty and in the student body whose books on racial issues have made waves e.g. The African American poet Sonia Sanchez, [Tess Taylor](#) '99, whose poetry collection [The Forage House](#) explores her family ties to prominent slaveholding families, including Thomas Jefferson;

Black and white student activism around Civil Rights in the 1960s that led among other things to the creation of the Amherst Committee for a Better Chance, a residential program for high school students, in 1969, and the Black Studies Department, in 1971 and the hiring of the College's first Black faculty members.

[Ric Lopez's essay on Latinidad](#) in *Amherst in the World* describing the history of the progress and reversals around the enrollment of Latino students at the College during various administrations, starting in the 1970s and leading up to the creation of a LLAS major in 2018 for archival leads.

[Asian and Asian American student activism](#) at Amherst around curricular and co-curricular issues that preceded, among other things the present push to expand the number of Asian and Asian American faculty members at Amherst and the range of courses taught.

**FYS instructors whose seminar topics do not lend themselves to a direct connection to Amherst's history also might want to consider the following archival approaches:**

Exploring the history of their disciplines or departments, by having students look through course catalogues to chart how and when topics related to race and ethnicity start turning up in course offerings and/or descriptions.

Researching the facts of Jeffrey Amherst's career, the timing of the introduction and retirement of Lord Jeff as the college mascot as well as the story behind the [college china service](#) depicting

Amherst's attacks on the Norwottuck indigenous people, which was finally taken out of circulation in the 1970s.

Finding out more about the history of material objects in the Mead or of campus buildings named for alumni with complicated racial legacies, the naming of Newport dorm, the founding of Black, Asian, and Latino theme houses and the histories of the fraternity residences in which many of them are located.

Tracking how the racial composition of athletic teams and student groups at Amherst to which students in the FYS belong has changed over time, as well as the histories of racial and ethnic affinity groups like the BSU, ACSU, ASA and La Causa. There are extensive archival holdings about race and athletics at Amherst, including many senior theses all these topics. There are also some great essays written by former students about how the Amherst Christian fellowship shifted from being a predominantly white organization to becoming a welcoming space for Black and Asian students after the Rodney King Riots, collected in a volume called A Transforming Vision: Multiethnic Fellowship in College and the Church, edited by Paul Sorrentino, and some fascinating footage and information in a film the DEI office commissioned about the history of Amherst's LGBTQ+ community that discusses how the QRC became one of the only fully integrated such centers at a college or university from its inception.

Locating a senior thesis, about a case study, a scientific experiment, a performance, or a work of art of interest to a current FYS student that explores its subject through a racial lens or takes up an aspect of racial history or culture. Then writing a post that provides readers with information about the study *and* its author. E.g. Olivia Zheng, Manuel Rodriguez, [Emily Ratté](#), [Seoyeon Kim](#), [EveAngelista De Muheto](#).

Using institutional records to locate the dorm rooms of students who have gone on to make an impact in the world in matters of racial justice and to explore how the friendships they made in their residences contributed to their future careers. For example, there is an absolutely delightful essay by Rafael Campo called "The Fairiest College" about how he and his eventual husband Jorge met as First Year students in James and Stearns and how he came to embrace his multiple identities as Gay and Latino and a doctor and a poet under the influence of Eve Sedgwick's first course on Gender and Sexuality. The actor Jeffrey Wright also has spoken/written about how his dorm friendships and extra-curricular activities at Amherst continue to inform the roles he has taken on as a Black artist and activist. The Liberian child soldier activist Kimmie Weekes and his '05 classmate, varsity golfer Sarah Godwin, have described how, after a discussion with friends in South dormitory in their first year, they launched a non-profit in their sophomore year called Youth Action International that has since served over 100,000 young people in postwar nations.



## Possible Sessions at the Mead Art Museum

### Overview

This fall, faculty teaching first year seminars may opt into a common activity and assignment with contemporary art at the Mead, designed to deepen and integrate the anti-racism curriculum, with a focus on personal and peer-to-peer discussion and development

**Part 1:** Museum session (could be scheduled during normal class meeting times):

During a 50-minute interactive tour of an upcoming exhibition of artworks by Amherst faculty and alums, Mead educators Emily Potter-Ndiaye (head of education and curator academic programs) and Olivia Feal (museum educator) would use open-ended facilitation and Visual Thinking Strategies techniques to foster a wide-ranging and student-driven discussion around Jonathan Jackson's photographic series, "The House Servant's Directory." Jackson, class of 2020, developed the series through archival research into the life of his 5th great grandfather, Robert Roberts and especially *The House Servant's Directory* - the book Roberts authored in 1827. It was the first commercially published book written by a Black man in the US at its time of publishing. Jackson's evocative portfolio, which includes photographs staged at Gore Place, and copies of a re-interpreted volume of the book, is also the subject of an essay about Black visuality by CHI fellow, Ashlie Sandoval on the CHI digital exhibition, Hidden Drives. The goals of this experience would be to explore and perhaps draw inspiration from the ways in which Jackson, during his time as an Amherst College student engaged with the intersections of personal, community, and national histories and memory; unpack and identify practices that artists bring to issues of race, identity, and politics; and speak and listen carefully to new ideas, both from within, and from other students.

### Texts:

Ashlie Sandoval, "The Ancient Present Tense," *HiddenDrives* digital exhibition, 2021.  
<https://hiddendrives.wordpress.amherst.edu/2021/01/12/out-of-19000/>.

"The House Servants' Directory," interview with Jonathan Mark Jackson. NDR, 2018  
<http://ndrmag.org/artwork/2018/12/the-house-servants-directory/>.

**Part 2:** Pair Share and Reflection Paper/discussion

Organized in pairs, students could return during any museum open hours with a partner to connect more deeply to the artwork, themselves, and each other. Directions are to either revisit Jackson's series, or select another artwork on view (Torkwase Dyson could be very rich for this) and follow a discussion prompt in pairs. Student pairs may report back to the class, and their professor in a few different ways, such as writing a reflection paper, making a creative response, reporting back highlights from one another (ie, share what they learned from the other student),

etc. The professor could select one, or leave it open. The prompts for this exercise may be refined over the remainder of spring/summer planning time - here are a few drafts at this stage:

Consider Torkwase Dyson's work with Black liberation strategies and Ashlie Sandoval's discussion of Jackson's "Ancient Present Tense" and the ways Jackson incorporates his 5th great grandfather's personal history with his own as an artist and creator. What is coming up for you as it relates to the discussions around anti-racism and Amherst in your class so far? What new questions and possibilities present themselves to you?

## Notes

### Pedagogical Decisions

In the gallery tour, Mead educators would use VTS, Pair Share intentionally to decenter the authority from themselves, the museum, or the faculty member, for the purposes of the activity. This would open up more room for student to student learning, with the structure of a facilitator. This session would work well in the middle of the semester, possibly in close proximity to the archives work with Mike Kelly.

### Highlighted Art on View

**Jonathan Jackson**, [\*"The House Servants' Directory" Portfolio\*](#) - will be exhibited as part of a "Made at Amherst" (working title) exhibition, fall 2021

**Torkwase Dyson**, [\*Space as Form, Movement 8 \(Bird as Lava\)\*](#) - will be exhibited as part of a gallery with large scale works by women artists, fall 2021.

Dyson draws from the history of Black liberation strategies - in this case, from the US: a square (from Henry "box" Brown, who mailed himself out of enslavement in a wooden crate), a triangle (from Harriet Jacob's 7 years hiding in the garret of her grandmother's house before escaping to freedom) and a curve (from Anthony Burns, who stowed away along the hull of a ship). She then builds highly layered and abstract paintings from these geometric languages. She writes,

"Each human here manipulated and moved through infrastructures of state-sanctioned domination by converting enslavement into a system of self-imposed displacement, structural confinement, and clandestine geographic movement. I've culled a geometric shape language from histories of Black liberation strategies to develop a system/structure/scaffolding of self-expression."

## **2021 FYS Workshop Descriptions**

**Tuesday May 4 @ 4pm & Friday May 7 @ 12:30 pm**

**Mike Kelly, Head of Archives and Special Collections, Frost Library**

### **Notes for a Racial History of Amherst College**

In this talk, Mike Kelly (Head, Archives & Special Collections) will give a quick overview of the ways that race has shaped the history of Amherst College and the ways Amherst has contributed to the history of race in America. He will touch on everything from the presence of slavery among the college founders to scientific racism to changing student demographics and the role of student protests in college history. There will be ample time for Q&A and plenty of suggestions for further reading and research.

**Tuesday May 11 @ 4pm & Friday May 14 @ 12:30 pm**

**Writing Center Staff and Faculty Guests: Kristen Brookes & Tim Van Comprenolle, and Cassie Sanchez & Buffy Aries**

### **Writing in the First Year Seminar, Fall 2021**

These sessions explore writing assignments as a means to integrate the shared anti-racist curriculum into new or existing first-year seminars. Each session will feature a conversation between a writing associate and a faculty member, modeling an inquisitive process. Participants will be encouraged to generate questions and processes that will guide you towards creating coherence in your course. Our hope is that you will leave the session with some new ideas about how a range of writing assignments can bridge the common and individual parts of your course to support student learning.

**Tuesday May 18 @ 4pm & Friday May 21 @ 12:30 pm**

**Yael Rice, facilitator, with Nishi Shah, Amrita Basu and Rhonda Cobham-Sander**

### **First-Year Seminar Faculty Forum**

This forum is designed to facilitate discussion about teaching strategies--both for First Year Seminars more broadly and for the new anti-racist curricular components in particular--and to foster connection and community among instructors from different disciplines and levels of experience. Conversations will ideally take place in small groups composed of instructors of varying backgrounds.

## First Year Seminar Committee — 2019-2020 Summary — May 19, 2020

### Members of the First-Year Seminar Committee:

Ron Bashford (Theater and Dance), Chair

Yael Rice, Art and the History of Art, Asian Languages and Civilizations, Architectural Studies

Tom Zanker, Classics

Jyl Genzler, Philosophy, Ex Officio Faculty Representative from the Writing Center

In 2019/20, Profs. Rice and Zanker joined the First Year Seminar Committee, replacing Profs. Purdy and Shah. At the end of this year, Prof. Genzler will leave the Committee. As Director of the Writing Center for many years, she has served on the Committee in an Ex Officio capacity, but soon she will be leaving that post.

The FYS Committee notes, with interest, this year's offering of new "cluster-taught" First Year Seminar courses: *Progress?* and *Beginnings*. The new courses were created in response—at least in part—to the Ad Hoc Curriculum Committee's desire for students to have more common intellectual experiences. Together, the courses accommodated 135 first-year students. Participating faculty collaborated on approaches to writing instruction, and the teaching a common syllabus. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students in the cluster courses discussed material with students from other sections, and that they enjoyed doing so, particularly when it brought them closer to students in their own living spaces. Some students also appreciated being introduced to more faculty during group lectures. Again, anecdotally, faculty involved felt they benefitted from sharing teaching strategies with one another, and enjoyed learning from colleagues in different disciplines. Profs. Shah, Ringer, and Bashford are following up with Jesse Barba to gather more information about the experience of the students. The Committee sees these collaborations as a welcome development in the FYS program.

This year, in addition to reviewing course proposals and supporting the Provost's office to ensure adequate faculty participation, the Committee decided to focus on the centrality of writing instruction to the first-year seminar program's mission. Prior to the pandemic, the Committee planned—and hosted some—lunches with faculty to facilitate the sharing of teaching experiences and help acclimate faculty new to the program. Participants generally found the discussions informative and useful. The Committee had planned on organizing this year's "May Workshop" around pedagogical approaches culled from themes developed at the lunches, and from a faculty survey that was subsequently postponed. Instead, the Committee is currently conferring with the Jessica Kem, the Director of the Writing Center, about offering a suite of Zoom conversations about new resources that the Writing Center has developed to support writing instruction, alongside new resources aimed to help faculty teach effectively in a remote learning situation. The first of these conversations may happen as soon as next month.

The First-Year Seminar Committee also intends to foster more conversation among faculty about the consistency of learning goals across the offered courses, new ways to follow-up with students who need more intensive writing instruction following their first semester, and potential strategies to encourage faculty (pre- and post-tenure) to participate in the program.

## First Year Seminar Committee — 2019-2020 Summary — May 19, 2020

### Members of the First-Year Seminar Committee:

Ron Bashford (Theater and Dance), Chair

Yael Rice, Art and the History of Art, Asian Languages and Civilizations, Architectural Studies

Tom Zanker, Classics

Jyl Genzler, Philosophy, Ex Officio Faculty Representative from the Writing Center

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**AMHERST COLLEGE**  
Department of American Studies

May 15, 2016

**Report of the First-Year Seminar Committee**

In the late summer and early fall, the committee coordinated a third round of the Direct Learning Assessment process first implemented in Fall 2013. This work was completed in coordination with Hanna Spinosa, then Director of the Office of Institutional Research. A training session for participating faculty was held in Fall 2015, and each of the six participating faculty completed an assessment of their freshman seminar students.

Last year, the committee approved a proposal by Austin Sarat to establish teams of staff members to be assigned to freshman seminars. The teams were intended to provide an extra level of support to students in their adjustment to Amherst. Each FYSE team met with its seminar informally, out of class, four to five times during the Fall semester. Over half of the First Year Seminar instructors opted to participate in this program during 2015-16. The program will continue in 2016-17, but faculty members will not be required to participate in these meetings in order for their sections to be assigned a team. In Fall 2016, roughly half of all first year seminars will have a team.

In response to a request from the Dean's Office, the committee asked faculty members to consider designing freshman seminars with particular emphasis on issues of diversity and this request was communicated to the faculty. In early 2016, the Dean's Office also passed on to the committee a request from the Committee of Six that the committee find additional means of reminding seminar instructors to identify students requiring intensive writing instruction. The committee plans to discuss this issue in further detail in the upcoming year.

The chair of the committee also met with the Curriculum Committee in Spring 2016 as the committee's conversations about curriculum reform have focused on the freshman seminar in particular.

Jyl Gentzler has organized the Writing Center's May workshop for FYSE instructors to be held May 24, 2016, and it will be focused on student engagement.

Next year, the committee plans to meet with the Office of Institutional Research to discuss student assessment of the freshman seminar program such an assessment has not been conducted for several years and the committee is curious to learn more about how well the program is serving students. In addition, we will discuss ways to involve more faculty in teaching the seminar, especially junior faculty and those in STEM fields. The overall response to the committee's solicitation for proposals to teach a freshman seminar was consistent with past years and, to date, thirty-one faculty will be teaching freshman seminars in Fall 2016. As in the past, faculty in the program are predominately senior faculty.

Sincerely,

First Year Seminar Committee

Robert T. Hayashi, Chair  
Carrie Palmquist  
Leah Schmalzbauer  
Jyl Gentzler, *ex officio*



# AMHERST COLLEGE

Department of Religion

May 19, 2014

## REPORT OF THE FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COMMITTEE

Academic year 2013-14

The First Year Seminar (FYS) Committee began the academic year with discussion of the issue of balance among FYS instructors. A review of the available data suggested to us that it would be wise to improve our recruitment from faculty who have not previously taught in the FYS program and faculty from the sciences. During the Fall semester we solicited comments from science department chairs regarding participation by science faculty in the FYS program. We learned that a major obstacle to participation in the FYS program by colleagues in the sciences is the fact that several departments simply cannot spare faculty colleagues to teach outside the department. We also learned that for some colleagues there is some pedagogical distance between their areas of teaching expertise and their understanding of what a FYS requires. The FYS Committee responded in two ways to these contributions. First, the Committee recommended a practice that has been employed successfully in the past: the creation of FYS sections that draw on discipline-specific resources and are designed such that different colleagues within a department might rotate through them in different years, thus lowering the bar to participation in the FYS program for first-time FYS instructors and providing representation within the FYS program of a variety of methods of study from the sciences. And second, the Committee requested that the CEP include the FYS program in its list of 'college-wide needs' relative to which it evaluates requests for new FTEs, with the aim of motivating departments to commit to devoting teaching resources to the FYS program part of their strategy for requesting new faculty positions.

During the Fall semester, the FYS Committee oversaw the first execution of the Direct Learning Assessment (DLA) project developed during the 2012-13 academic year. The purpose of the project is to gauge the effectiveness of the FYS program in the development of important academic skills. It attempts to do this by assessing student work relative to a set of rubrics developed by the FYS Committee, in a manner not connected to normal procedures for assigning grades. At three points during the semester, six volunteer FYS instructors rated different aspects of their students' contributions to their classes (including writing, participation in class discussion, and overall evidence of understanding and engagement) on a scale of 1 to 5; these ratings were collected by the Office of Institutional Research, collated, anonymized, and provided to the FYS Committee at the end of the semester. The Committee found that the results show consistent improvement on most rubrics over the course of the semester, with meaningful variation among both students and FYS sections, and decided to repeat the same procedure in the Fall of 2014. The Committee also requested that the Dean of the Faculty establish a formal policy prohibiting the use of data gathered by the DLA project in evaluating faculty colleagues for reappointment, tenure, or promotion.

The recruitment of FYS instructors for the Fall of 2014 went more smoothly than usual. Response to the Committee's initial solicitation was sufficiently robust that no subsequent appeals were necessary. As of the time of this writing the course catalog lists 33 FYS sections to be offered next Fall, one more than are necessary to accommodate all first-year students. Seven of these sections will be taught by instructors who have not previously participated in the program.

The Committee also assisted Jyl Gentzler in organizing the Writing Center's annual Spring workshop for FYS instructors, to be held May 27-8 at the Lord Jeffery Inn. This year the decision was made to offer a limited number of seats at the Workshop to faculty colleagues not currently participating in the FYS program, but who might be interested in doing so in the future. Response to this invitation was quite good, with some interested faculty turned away due to limitations of space. This year's workshop is generously funded by the office of the Dean of the Faculty, subsequent to the expiration of the Davis Foundation grant that had previously provided funding for this event; in view of this circumstance the Committee requested that funding for this event be made part of the annual budget of the Dean of the Faculty's office.



The Committee began discussion of several items to be revisited in the fall of 2014. One such item is a request from the Provost that transfer students be allowed to enroll in First Year Seminars if they wish. Another is the prospect of repeating a student survey regarding the FYS program last administered in 2012, with the aim of tracking students' self-reported levels of engagement and satisfaction with their First Year Seminars.

Sincerely,

The First Year Seminar Committee  
Andrew Dole, chair  
Anthony Bishop  
Martha Umphrey  
Jyl Gentzler, *ex officio*