Proposal for FYS Pilot: FYS 101-102

A proposal to run a pilot of a two-semester sequence of FYS from Fall 2015 through Spring 2017

(Reviewed and approved by the FYS Committee April 20, 2015)

FYS Committee Proposal to UR Faculty

1) We, the members of the FYS Committee, propose that the university faculty conduct a two-year pilot (fall 2015 - spring 2017) of sequenced first-year seminars to run parallel to existing FYS 100 courses.

2) To conduct this study, we propose that the university faculty approve the creation of two new course numbers, FYS 101 and FYS 102, that will designate 3 to 6 existing sections each semester as part of this pilot.

3) We propose that sections designated FYS 101 and FYS 102 be based on approved FYS courses and fulfill the requirements of FYS 100 for General Education at UR.

4) For this pilot, we propose that FYS 101 be a fall course only, and be considered a pre-requisite for FYS 102, a spring course only, and that all students enrolled in FYS 101 would be expected to take FYS 102.

5) We propose that participants in the FYS 101-102 pilot, with the oversight of the FYS Committee, be given the power to develop and refine guidelines and assessment tools that align with learning objectives of the two-semester sequence.

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Description of proposal for FYS pilot
The FYS Committee proposes to pilot a two-semester sequence designated as FYS 101 and FYS 102. These two courses, taken in sequence, would fulfill the requirements for FYS 100 for all students at UR. The new course numbers would re-designate existing FYS courses, already approved by the FYS Committee and UR faculty, as part of a two-year study of a two-semester sequence.

The pilot would allow a small group of FYS faculty to develop and refine the learning objectives for FYS 101-102, and to scaffold teaching FYS from the fall through the spring
semesters, enabling faculty to focus on components of the common goals of FYS and build systematically on students’ progress in fall courses through spring courses.

The pilot would allow FYS Faculty to develop and refine ways of measuring student learning across the two semesters. The FYS Committee would oversee the design and implementation of a new assessment plan that would align with the developmental components and learning objectives of the two-semester sequence. The Committee would garner feedback from faculty and student participants in the pilot with the larger faculty, and share this feedback with the entire UR faculty.

Background
The FYS Committee Report of the 2013-14 FYS Program Review (submitted to the faculty on May 11, 2014) strongly recommended piloting a two-semester sequence for the FYS program. Additionally, the FYS Committee called for participants in a 2014-15 FYS Faculty Fellows program in which ten fellows were selected from four of the five schools (except Law), and all four of A&S quadripartite divisions. The FYS Faculty Fellows participated in a faculty learning community whose aim was to develop specific learning goals for reading, writing, speech and library research in an undergraduate’s first year. In response to this charge, the FYS Faculty Fellows have generated four working documents that propose a set of guidelines for the common FYS goals. These guidelines would serve as the basis for the FYS 101-102 pilot. Faculty participants in the pilot will use these guidelines to target specific goals beginning in the fall 2015 and spring 2016 semesters.

In September 2009, the university faculty voted to establish the following five common goals for the FYS program:

1) Expand and deepen students’ understanding of the world and of themselves
2) Enhance their ability to read and think critically
3) Enhance their ability to communicate effectively in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms
4) Develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research
5) Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor

Pedagogical rationale
As currently constituted, each FYS course is responsible for teaching all five goals in each semester. The 2013-14 FYS Program Review determined that many faculty were challenged to cover all five goals substantively within 14 weeks and suggested creating a two-semester sequence. The 2014-15 FYS Faculty Fellows have developed a set of guidelines for this pilot that outlines learning objectives for the two-semester sequence. This scaffolded set of learning objectives potentially allows faculty to address a narrower set of goals during each semester, giving students more time to develop these specific skills. As a result, faculty teaching in the spring semester can have greater confidence that certain goals have been met in a fall FYS and instead focus on expanding upon them. The rationale is to concentrate on particular goals with greater emphasis, developing assignments aimed at specific learning objectives for students from one semester to the next. These guidelines for the FYS 101-102 pilot focus on specific components of existing FYS goals listed below:
A. **Critical Reading and Thinking**

This goal builds upon the current FYS guidelines that aim “to improve skills in evaluation, interpretation and analysis of texts and other forms of expression” (FYS Guidelines 9/24/09). In the two-semester sequence, faculty teaching FYS 101 in the fall semester would prioritize this goal, teaching students to engage substantively with texts of various forms and genres – written materials, visual and aural works, both primary and secondary sources – developing further the goals of analytical reading and the interpretation of texts. The guidelines for this goal consist of three components:

1) **Investigation.** Students will learn to place the source in the context of its production and circulation.

2) **Interpretation.** Students will seek a clear understanding of what the source communicates first literally and then figuratively.

3) **Analysis.** Students will learn to read with an analytical lens to assess the strengths and weaknesses of an argument, elaborate on its implications or assumptions, test theories against data, compare alternative arguments, and/or pose questions that generate further analysis of the text.

B. **Effective Written Communication**

This goal builds upon one of the current goals of FYS to “enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively” by improving students’ skills in the “evaluation, interpretation and analysis of texts and other forms of expression” (FYS Guidelines 9/20/09). All FYS students are expected to produce 5,000 words (or 20 double-spaced pages) of academic writing each semester. In teaching effective written communication, students may engage in multiple kinds of writing, including reflective writing, descriptive writing, and narrative or creative writing. In the two-semester sequence, faculty would provide sustained exposure to *argumentative writing* beginning in FYS 101 with more focused assignments using a few sources, and continue through FYS 102 with more complex arguments which rely on multiple sources and source types. The guidelines for this goal focus on two components with specific components for fall and spring semester:

1) **Argumentative Writing.** Students will be exposed to and practice effective communication through sustained exposure to argumentative writing that exemplifies an informed, persuasive, and well-substantiated point of view.
   a. **Fall semester: Foundations of argumentative writing.** Students will learn to analyze primary and secondary sources, evaluate evidence, and formulate analytic arguments in focused assignments.
   b. **Spring semester: Argumentative writing with advanced research analysis.** Students will evaluate multiple sources, engage with critical arguments, integrate evidence and summary in support of an argument, and synthesize multiple source types in a single argument.

2) **Writing as a Process.** Students will learn about the writing process through attention to the various stages that produce a polished final project.
   a. **Fall semester: Pre-writing, Writing, and Revising.** Students will develop strategies to link thinking and writing (brainstorming, pre-writing etc.), learn to formulate arguments and analyze evidence, and learn to work with multiple drafts.
   b. **Spring semester: Staging More Complicated Assignments.** Students will learn to conceptualize and structure longer forms of written
communication through staged assignments that may emphasize comparative analysis, generating and/or refining research questions, synthesizing multiple sources and structuring longer written works.

C. Research and Information Literacy
This goal furthers the current guidelines to emphasize a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the components of research that inform reading and writing. In the two semester sequence, faculty will bring a greater awareness of research as an iterative process in ways that engage students to explore increasingly complex or new questions, whose answers in turn develop additional questions or lines of inquiry. The guidelines for this goal focus on several components developed in stages from the fall through the spring semesters.

1) **Explore a research question or topic.** Students will learn to identify the qualities of a question that can only be answered by research and analysis (Fall) and practice defining, focusing, and/or refining a research question, whether this means generating an independent research question or working within the parameters of a research question provided by a professor (Spring).

2) **Evaluate sources.** Students will learn to differentiate between types of sources (peer-reviewed scholarly works, popular media, etc.) and will explore methods for finding multiple kinds of sources (Fall). Students will filter and weigh sources with respect to their relevance to a research question (Spring).

3) **Select, organize, and contextualize sources for a specific purpose.** Students will learn to consider sources in light of one another, exploring how other researchers and thinkers have approached and analyzed a particular topic (Fall). Students will learn to use existing research and thinking as a platform for generating and/or refining questions that might themselves be the focus of a research project (Spring).

4) **Synthesize information to create a new point of view.** Students will come to see all that all representations have a point of view, whether it is an essay, a work of art, a documentary movie, or a research paper, and will consider the qualities that make a strong and credible thesis (Fall). Students will take a research-informed position in an oral or written communication (Spring).

5) **Document and reference sources.** Students across Fall and Spring semesters will be engaged in recognizing that research is a part of a broader informed conversation, and that the views of others should be carefully acknowledged and fairly represented. They will carefully review the expectations for source citation and referencing that are appropriate to the research assignment in a particular FYS.

D. Oral Communication
This goal emphasizes effective speaking skills through less structured and more structured oral assignments. In the two-semester sequence, faculty would scaffold the development of oral competencies from the fall through the spring semesters through assignments that establish a basis for regular classroom discussion and, later for more formal oral presentations. Faculty would focus on the dialogical aspects of oral
communication (i.e. speaking, listening, responding) and the ethical responsibilities to maintain a vibrant classroom community. The guidelines for this goal focus on several components developed from the fall through the spring semesters.

1) Build citizenship and maintain a classroom community through shared expectations and an ethos of responsibility, especially in the fall semester
2) Sustain substantive and interactive informal discussion, especially in the fall semester
3) Practice and reflect on the process of critical listening in both fall and spring semesters
4) Engage in and lead more structured discussions and oral responses to a critical reading of texts in all its forms, especially in the fall semester
5) Give presentations that adapt to different audiences in both fall and spring semesters
6) Students will build oral competencies with rehearsed presentations and feedback, especially in the spring semester
7) See the relationship between process and product, especially in the spring semester

The guidelines for FYS 101-102 are entirely competency-based and would not affect the topical focuses of existing FYS courses. FYS faculty who participate in the pilot may propose a new topic of study for FYS, but such a change would be considered as a new course proposal and must be approved by the FYS Committee and voted on by the UR faculty before it is offered as part of the pilot, either as FYS 101 or FYS 102.

**Seeking faculty and student participation**

The FYS Committee would seek faculty participation in the pilot through the FYS Faculty Fellows, a voluntary faculty learning community facilitated by the FYS Coordinator with support from the Provost. A call for participants in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 FYS Faculty Fellows, with a formal application circulated across campus, allows the FYS Committee to select experienced FYS Faculty for this faculty learning community. Past FYS Faculty Fellows are eligible to apply.

FYS faculty taking part in the pilot study would 1) adapt these guidelines to their own courses and 2) reflect and provide feedback on their experiences teaching the sequence among a small cohort of first year students participating in the pilot program. Participating faculty would meet regularly as a faculty learning community to collaborate as they refine and develop components of the guidelines across several courses, based upon the common goals of FYS.

The FYS Coordinator in partnership with the Director of the Academic Advising Resource Center would solicit student volunteers to participate in FYS 101-102. These students would be contacted during the month of June and July by FYS faculty and academic advisors. Students would sign on for the two-semester pilot through early registration. All students who enroll in FYS 101 in the fall would be expected to take FYS 102 in the spring. Any exceptions would be for those students whose academic program prohibits them from choosing a section of FYS 102. Student who opt-out of the study mid-year must seek permission of the FYS Coordinator.
Refining the sequence and revising teaching strategies
The 2015-16 FYS Faculty Fellows would meet with the FYS Coordinator at least once in the summer and then regularly throughout the year as a learning community invested in the common goal of refining a detailed set of student learning outcomes spread across a two-semester sequence of FYS courses. The FYS Faculty Fellows may recommend amendments to the guidelines based upon their teaching experiences and will consider potential methods of assessment. The Fellows would forward their findings to the FYS Coordinator who would, in turn, report these findings to the FYS Committee.

Members of the FYS Committee and FYS Coordinator, whose charge includes "overseeing and proposing changes to the FYS program," would be responsible for the development of an assessment model for FYS 101-102 with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The FYS Committee in partnership with the FYS Faculty Fellows will develop assessment rubrics in line with the learning objectives on writing, critical reading and thinking, oral communication, and library research and information literacy, explained in the guidelines for FYS 101-102. Assessment of student learning in FYS 101-102, conducted by an independent group of FYS faculty, would be based on anonymous student work from both the fall semester and from the spring semesters.

In addition, all FYS students, including those who are enrolled in FYS 101-102 would participate in pre-participation and post-participation questionnaire of FYS learning objectives. The FYS Committee would seek IRB approval for this questionnaire, generate questions directed toward the common goals of FYS, and review the findings.

The FYS Fellows, the Committee and the Coordinator may recommend additional tools to assess the learning objectives for FYS 101-102 over the two years. The FYS Committee may seek the permission of the university faculty to extend the pilot for one additional year to garner more evidence and/or make adjustments to the proposed two semester sequence before the completion of this pilot.

Moving from Pilot Study to a new FYS Program Proposal
The aims of the pilot are as follows:

1) to develop and refine a two-semester sequence for FYS based upon tiered learning objectives

2) to develop and refine a plan to assess the two-semester sequence in ways that align with the tiered learning objectives for FYS 101 and FYS 102

Over the course of the next two (possibly three) years, the FYS Coordinator would report results of the pilot at regular meetings of the FYS Faculty and the Faculty Senate. If, at the end of the pilot, the FYS Committee chooses to forward their recommendations to change existing FYS Guidelines or to propose new FYS course requirements for all UR students and faculty, such recommendations or new proposal would require the vote of the entire UR faculty.