About First Year Seminars at Drake

A First Year Seminar:

· Aims to establish a sense of community among members.
· Encourages active participation by students in class.
· Helps integrate first-year students into an academic culture.
· Sharpens students’ writing skills, critical thinking, and verbal communication skills.
· Focuses on a topic, approach or theme.
· Focuses on ways of knowing as well as content.
· Invites connections among several areas of study or disciplines.

First Year Seminar Writing:

The First Year Seminar should offer a writing-intensive experience for students. Typically, this will involve a series of short writing assignments beginning early in the term and totaling at least 20 pages in length. The instructor should provide substantive feedback and students should be allowed an opportunity for correction and revision on at least some assignments.

First Year Critical Thinking:

The FYS should engage critical thinking. The Drake Curriculum revisions adopted by the Faculty Senate clarified the goal of developing critical thinking skills. Quoting portions of the accepted revisions:

*The Drake Curriculum makes a particular intentional effort to guide students to acquire the skills for rational analysis and argumentation that is purposeful, rigorous, self-reflective, and based on a careful consideration of evidence. Students will learn to*

· *Clearly define a question or a problem.*
· *Gather information that is relevant to that problem.*
· *Rigorously identify assumptions and preconceptions, including their own, that influence analysis of that problem.*
· *Organize and prioritize the information to develop a rational argument that states a clear claim or thesis, provides reasons for holding that claim, provides relevant evidence to support each reason, and considers alternative explanations in reaching a conclusion.*
· *Communicate that reasoned argument effectively in speech, writing, or other medium as appropriate.*
Realize that results are tentative and open to revision.

A workshop focused on developing student critical thinking skills is being planned for May, and a workshop focused on creating effective assignments is being planned for August. More information about these workshops will be forthcoming.

First Year Information Literacy:

The First Year Seminar should also introduce students to issues of how we can effectively and ethically obtain and process information. In order to move beyond descriptions of “how to use the library and library resources,” for the past two years we piloted a faculty-developed rubric for information literacy and, for some faculty, co-ordination with the University’s Coordinator of Information Literacy Instruction.