



Dean of the College Office | Call for Proposals First-year Seminars

Program Overview

Brown University offers several curricular programs that encourage students to sample widely from the major disciplinary areas of the College. One such initiative is the First-Year Seminar Program (FYS), which aims to promote close interaction between faculty and students in a setting that encourages curricular innovation and pedagogical experimentation. Since its inception in 2002, Brown's FYS Program has provided an entrée for students into Brown's open academic culture. With enrollment capped at 19 students, these seminars offer first-year students a welcoming environment to learn about a new field, and to develop a bond with a Brown faculty member. Many students have used their FYS as a springboard to independent, interdisciplinary work on the seminar theme, or with the seminar professor. Whether students discover their future academic path, or simply find their academic voice amid the small discussion groups, first-year seminars emphasize active participation and discovery—what we call the Brown way. By allowing faculty to create new courses and to share their evolving interests with students, the FYS Program itself models for our students the kinds of freedom made possible by the open curriculum and the work required for each learner to meet his or her own learning goals.

Faculty members are encouraged to develop seminars around their current research agendas, thereby allowing them to create courses around topics of special interest that may not fall within standard departmental course offerings.

Key Features and Best Practices for Designing and Teaching a FYS:¹

- Focus in depth on a question or topic in a disciplinary or interdisciplinary context;
- Enable incoming students and faculty to exchange ideas and information in a small, discussion-based setting;
- Introduce students to Brown as an academic community, and to the many resources that will support their study (including Library resources, etc.);
- Aid in the transition to Brown by developing students' understanding of college-level work: the types of assignments they might encounter in courses, the need to prepare for seminar discussions, faculty's expectations about written communication, and the necessity of being able to work independently;
- Engage students through appropriate academic challenges and faculty support;
- Provide structured opportunities for students to develop confidence and key skills for success beyond the course, including critical inquiry, the ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing, and the ability to collaborate effectively with peers;
- Provide frequent and significant feedback regarding academic performance;

¹ Adapted from "Best Practices for Teaching First-Year Undergraduates," Carnegie Mellon University's Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence (2002) and David Krause and Robert C. Lagueux, "Beyond Writing: Integrative Learning and Teaching in First-Year Seminars," *Essays on Teaching Excellence Toward the Best in the Academy* 19:3 (2007-08)..



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- Offer an introduction to the ways in which faculty pursue scholarship in their respective disciplines, including fieldwork, laboratory work, and other applied or hands-on projects;
- Develop a sense of community among students with similar interests

Proposing a Course and Requesting Course Development Funds

As is the case for all new courses, proposed first-year seminars are reviewed through the standard process under the College Curriculum Council. Course proposals must be submitted through Brown's online course proposal system and must be for courses offered in a fall or spring term. Given the specific nature of the program, faculty will need to provide a draft syllabus that includes course objectives, required assignments, and a working list of assigned readings and related activities.

Course development funds are available for new or modified courses that promote strategic initiatives; currently, these are in the following areas: a) social justice, identity, and difference; b) science, technology, engineering and math fields; and c) seminars that promote data literacy across the curriculum. Faculty may receive up to \$4,000 based on a submitted budget. Funds may be used for material expenses related to course development (including travel); for guest speakers, fields trips, and other course-based events during the semester a seminar is offered; and for supporting students who collaborate with faculty in designing and delivering the courses.

Features of a Strong Grant Proposal

- Impact: well-articulated explanation of how the new or revised course fits within or enhances the curriculum
- Pedagogical innovation: discussion of the ways the development project will advance teaching to improve student learning and engagement
- Clear alignment between course objectives and curricular expenses
- A clear and feasible implementation timeline

Please note: a) Letters of support are optional; b) Requests for partial summary salary supplements will be coordinated with the Dean of the Faculty's office before approval. Summer Salary requests must account for the additional fringe benefit costs. The current rate is 30.5%.

Regular faculty, including emeritus faculty, may apply online using [UFUNDS](#).

Contact

For more information about the First-Year Seminar Program, please contact curriculum@brown.edu.