

# **RIT First Year Seminar Report**

**May 10, 2011**

## **First Year Seminar Subcommittee (of the Institute General Education Committee)**

Subcommittee Members:

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

RIT is gaining a deserved international reputation as a unique, challenging, experientially oriented technological university. As an institution of excellence, we must demonstrate that we value first-year students. Our campus is home to a blend of artists, scientists, technologists and humanists, many of whom come to recognize that creative thought, scholarly inquiry and technical-proficiency are mutually reinforcing traits. Our goal is to provide experiences where an increasingly diverse and gifted body of students can and will be successful. What must we do to ensure our first-year students receive the curricular and developmental support they need to become part of the intellectual life of RIT?

As we continue to grow, the challenge of developing and maintaining a cohesive, university-wide identity will require continual attention and care. The newly revised General Education Framework provides curricular flexibility that supports Institute-wide initiatives aimed at bridging the strong traditions within Programs and Colleges. We are developing new areas of teaching and research, and expanding upon existing ones. Our students have unprecedented opportunities to extend their intellectual curiosity, and to pursue disciplinary training in interdisciplinary ways. New and forthcoming spaces, such as the Student Innovation Center, Vignelli Design Center, Sustainability Institute and Health Science Institute (amongst others) address these growing dimensions of RIT, where our experiences draw upon the Institute as a whole, greater than the sum of its parts.

The newly adopted General Education Framework includes a two-course "Foundation," half of which is a three-credit course satisfying the "First-Year Seminar" requirement. As a community, it is important to shape this course to anchor the long-term intellectual and social development of our citizen-students. Faculty will have new curricular opportunities to immediately engage students in interesting academic topics and challenges, that may be research- and/or project-based, and that will provide valuable foundational knowledge. The goal is to develop a comprehensive first year experience that establishes our student's enthusiasm for and engagement with higher learning, traits that will ideally last a lifetime.

## **II. TIMELINE AND CHARGE**

In early June of 2010, a group of RIT faculty and staff attended the AACU Institute on General Education and Assessment, building upon work done by an earlier contingent that had attended the Greater Expectations Institute the previous year. A few weeks later, the General Education Committee (GEC) held a retreat to discuss the General Education Framework. At this time, members drew up a charge to address key questions about the development of a First Year Seminar. In September of 2010, the GEC constituted the First Year Seminar Subcommittee. At the time of their formation, the subcommittee met with the Provost, who suggested a number of issues for the committee's

consideration. The GEC discussed these suggestions and integrated them into a revised charge.

**Charges to First-year Seminar Subcommittee:**

1. Integrate the following Student Learning Outcomes based on the Institute General Education Committee's guidelines:
  - Comprehend information accessed through reading and discussion
  - Express themselves effectively in presentations, either in spoken standard American English or sign language (American Sign Language or English-based Signing)
  - Describe the potential and the limitations of technology
2. Develop additional relevant Student Learning Outcomes.
3. Coordinate with the Institute Writing Committee and the English Department to develop and integrate student learning outcomes between the proposed First Year Seminar and a First Year Writing Seminar.
4. Consider roles of faculty, student affairs "coach", and junior/senior peer mentors.
5. Investigate other models of First-Year Seminar (IUPUI and University of Southern Maine in particular) and consider emulating best practice
6. Communicate with constituent groups (faculty from all colleges, administrators, student affairs personnel, and students) to get input and feedback about the structure and content of FYS
7. Using information gathered from constituent groups, propose guidelines for First-Year Seminar at RIT

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At the end of October, a preliminary proposal for FYS was circulated and discussed by the GEC. Based upon their recommendations, the subcommittee embarked upon charge number four. In January of 2011, GEC Chair Elizabeth Hane joined the group following the approval of the new General Education Framework. Later that month, the Provost provided the subcommittee with a memorandum detailing that the course "must be accomplished using, for the most part, existing resources" and suggesting several possible configurations of the course. The memo was discussed with the GEC, whose input helped the subcommittee devise a document that served as a mechanism for outreach to and feedback from the Institute's College Curriculum Committees.

In February, four RIT faculty and staff (including two subcommittee members) attended the 30th Annual Conference on the First Year Experience in Atlanta, later sharing their findings with both the FYC and GEC.

Over the months of March and April, the subcommittee met with all College Curriculum Committees save one (CIAS). Our findings are reflected in later sections of this report.

### III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

No matter which model or models are ultimately selected for FYS, they must share a minimum common set of student learning outcomes. Additional guidelines should be developed, as appropriate.

FYS courses must possess, at a minimum, the following student learning outcomes as stipulated in RIT's General Education Framework:

- *Express themselves effectively in presentations, either in spoken standard American English or sign language (American Sign Language or English-based Signing)*
- *Comprehend information accessed through reading and discussion*
- *Describe the potential and the limitations of technology*

If FYS is to integrate general education academic content with student success/transitional content, courses must also possess student learning outcomes associated with student success/transition, such as:

- *Utilize RIT resources and processes*
- *Comprehend RIT expectations with regard to university life (e.g. community ethics, personal responsibility, communication, and self advocacy)*
- *Comprehend RIT expectations in regard to academic success (e.g. time management, goal setting, working in teams, project management and study skills)*
- *Develop a relationship with at least one RIT professional*

### IV. TIMING OF OFFERINGS:

There are several issues related to the timing of when FYS is offered, particularly if the course includes the transitional elements currently delivered by Student Affairs professionals in the Discovery and Pathways courses. These elements include important information students require in order to make a successful transition to college life as well as the establishment of an individual relationship between the student and a member of the RIT community. Delaying the delivery of these elements until spring semester is not ideal.

If, then, all the FYS sections are offered in the fall, this timing creates two resource issues.

1. Student Affairs professional staff would be required to teach in all the sections of the course in the fall and none in the spring, which leads to an imbalanced workload throughout the year. This is not unlike what existed prior to AY2010 when FYE1 and FYE2 were required in the fall and winter, but not the spring. The current model of Discovery and Pathways requires all students to take the course in the fall, but then splits students into

winter and spring, distributing the workload more evenly throughout the year. It is possible that optional programming could be available in the spring.

2. The timing of FYS impacts when First Year Writing (FYW) would be offered. Requiring FYS in the fall would mean that most sections of FYW would be taught in the spring. Indeed, most approved converted undergraduate programs list FYS in the fall and FYW in the spring. While this configuration simply represents a placeholder for these courses, the relationship between the two courses is still under consideration. Currently under quarters, adjunct faculty teach about 50% of the sections of FYW, and the course is offered throughout the academic year, providing opportunities for slightly more stable employment for adjunct faculty throughout the year. This means hiring is more consistent and we are more likely to be able to hire instructors that are more experienced. Requiring that most sections of the course be taught in the spring could impact the quality of instruction, since a large number of the instructors would need to be hired in the same term. It also could lead to imbalanced workloads for lecturers, and tenured/tenure-track faculty who are involved in the FYW course.

One alternative to the second issue would be to require students to take either FYS or FYW in the fall, and offer an alternative form of delivery of essential transitional elements for students in FYW in the fall.

#### **V. COURSE CONSTRAINTS:**

As the FYS subcommittee considered models for a robust FYS model at RIT a number of resource related constraints were outlined and remained in the forefront of the conversations internally as well as with college and other representative groups. Some of the most significant constraints include:

•**Sections Required:** Based on an estimated incoming class size of 2500-2600 first year students a large number of sections would be required each year. Given an average class size of 25, 100 sections would be needed annually. Classes with a larger enrollment could be offered but are limited by classroom space, pedagogical concerns and limited faculty/student interaction (But see below in "Models: Class size").

•**Instructional Resources:** Currently a significant portion of general education courses, particularly introductory courses, have a large percentage of instruction carried out by adjunct faculty. Ideally in the FYS courses, permanent faculty (lecturers, tenure/tenure-track) would be delivering this course to maximize the benefits of introducing students to the RIT campus community and linking them with faculty who are fully engaged in the institution. This shift from adjunct to permanent faculty has significant implications for salary dollars and availability of instructors. Additionally, the undefined nature of teaching loads for faculty under

the semester model leaves open the possibility of further challenge in this areas as permanent faculty may not have "room" in their load for an FYS course.

•**Faculty Development/Support:** Although many of RIT's talented faculty would be excellent instructors of an FYS course, the experience of other leading institutions indicates a strong need to identify passionate and interested faculty, provide robust faculty development and training related to the teaching of a FYS course and appropriate levels of support to assist with meeting the needs of first year students (via Student Affairs professionals, academic advisors, and others).

•**Budgetary Constraints:** The Provost in a mid-year memo gave an underlying assumption of no significant additional resource allocations for the FYS course. This suggests that existing resources may be redistributed, repurposed, or redesigned to meet the needs of this new initiative. However, such shifts may be very challenging for the colleges to address and underscore existing structural deficits: the large number of adjunct instructors currently used to deliver general education courses; current class size for general education (pending data from Registrar); existing faculty contract constraints (a faculty member with degree in History may not be easily reassigned to Engineering to teach FYS); previously mentioned challenges of class size, teaching load, and classroom availability.

## **VI. COURSE OPPORTUNITIES:**

**Student Need:** As a campus community, it is important that FYS be shaped to meet the needs of our incoming students. The course should be designed to introduce students to the rich academic atmosphere RIT offers, through a combination of faculty, staff and peer interactions and rigorous academic discourse, in an intimate, supportive, mentoring environment. Through a meaningful balance between academic and extra-curricular experiences, this course will lay the foundation for students to develop the creativity, ingenuity, persistence and problem-solving excellence expected of our students and graduates.

**Faculty Opportunities:** The faculty has a particularly unique opportunity to immediately engage students in interesting academic topics and challenges, providing valuable foundational knowledge, and inspiring them to continue to be enthusiastically engaged in higher learning. The delivery might include research-and/or project-based activities that are discipline- or theme-specific, dependent upon the composition of the students in a particular section. Faculty members will have the opportunity to explore a variety of academic areas and foster enthusiasm for their academic disciplines and research.

**Student Opportunities:** The course should afford the opportunity for students to spread their wings intellectually while providing guidance and encouragement during this transformational period in their lives. By supporting a variety of models, First Year Seminar offerings could be developed to actively engage

students in their chosen discipline, or broaden students' backgrounds by providing inter-disciplinary theme-based opportunities such as sustainability, design innovation, or service learning. Regardless of the specific focus, FYS will challenge students academically, instilling a sense of teamwork, community, and work ethic while introducing them to the unique culture of RIT. FYS will provide foundational learning in the areas of inquiry and critical analysis, social development, and communication skills, preparing students for success in future coursework and life-long learning.

## **VII. CONTINUED ACADEMIC AFFAIRS/STUDENT AFFAIRS COLLABORATION**

Collaboration between professionals and faculty within academic affairs and professionals within student affairs has a long history of success within the Academy as well as the specific context of RIT. While collaboration has taken a myriad of forms including the relatively simple delivery of tutorial services, the promotion of departmental speakers, hosting social luncheons, or classroom guest speakers, it has also taken more rigorous forms including the development of learning communities, student casing meetings of faculty, advisors, and Student Affairs professionals, the incorporation of non-content based course work into accreditation standards, and broader collaborations between such programs as the First-Year Enrichment Program, University Success Program, the Multicultural Center for Academic Support (formerly NorthStar), and individual academic departments.

These collaborations encompass more than just the first year of any student's career at RIT, but it is (justifiably) in this transitional first year that much attention is focused. Through RIT's current First-Year Enrichment program, which delivers Discovery & Pathways, students have benefited from leadership opportunities (both as peer mentors and through referrals to additional opportunities), collaborative instruction with the Center for Student Innovation, the University Success Program, as well as individual departments' one-credit Freshman Seminars. On a smaller scale, students have also benefited from classroom-based interactions with RIT's satellite campuses as well as various student service learning opportunities.

However, the single most important benefit remains the development of an informed one-to-one relationship between first-year students and an RIT professional. This relationship, referred to as coaching, has systematically led to innumerable successful interventions in what are often very difficult situations. The sense that someone cares about students individually, as well as the presence of informed professionals supporting individual student needs, lead to higher student satisfaction and contribute systematically to student success and overall retention. Finally, it is important to note that these benefits are not achieved in isolation from other institute resources such as academic advisors, the counseling center, faculty mentors, or tutoring services; rather, effective

transitional support involves the collaboration of many elements of the RIT community.

## **VIII. FEEDBACK FROM COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEES AND STUDENT AFFAIRS**

Different members of the subcommittee met with each of the College Curriculum Committees (except CIAS) and a key group of FYE instructors during March and April. We sent out a memo (see appendix) in advance of the meetings, and then spent an hour listening to the groups discuss the needs and concerns surrounding FYS.

### **Commonalities:**

1. This course should be taught by permanent faculty (lecturers, tenured or tenure-track faculty).
2. The class size should be structured to facilitate relationships between faculty and students and to allow for meaningful class discussion (one of the outcomes associated with this course). Class sizes suggested were 18-25 students.
3. The course needs to be taught by faculty who want to teach it, and have received training/development to be successful at teaching it. There will need to be incentives and support.
4. There is deep and widespread concern about resources and how this course will be delivered.

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### **Common outcomes/themes suggested:**

1. Students should feel a sense of community/belonging with RIT
2. Teamwork/working in groups/conflict resolution
3. Project/time management, study skills
4. Peer mentors could be utilized more broadly than they are currently

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### **Areas of disagreement:**

1. Interestingly, there was disagreement within nearly every group about whether this course should be college- or department-based or institute-wide. Most could see that there were advantages and disadvantages to both models.
2. Some colleges felt it was possible to integrate Student Affairs professionals and outcomes into a faculty-led course, but others felt that a model that separated the Student Affairs component into a separate course would be preferable. There was disagreement both within and among colleges on this issue.

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**Areas of concern:**

1. An important piece of feedback was that there are widespread misconceptions within the faculty in most colleges about what Discovery and Pathways are about, why they are taught, and the importance of the transitional elements in preparing students for college life.
2. While many faculty see the benefit of teaching interdisciplinary courses, there is a widespread belief that the organizational and administrative structure of the University makes this very difficult to achieve between colleges.

**The Resource Issue:**

The resource issue loomed large in all of these discussions. Colleges that have not participated in delivery of the General Education curriculum in the past were quick to point out that they do not currently have the resources to deliver this course, and they would need incremental resources if the expectation is that the department or college will deliver the course for their own students. For some colleges, it was difficult to move the conversation away from this fundamental resource issue. Many are feeling strapped already, particularly given the enormous workload this year related to conversion, and also due to the escalating expectations of scholarship, particularly for tenure-track faculty. Many voiced concerns that this course would represent an added burden.

The argument has been made that RIT currently delivers instruction of 90 General Education quarter credits for every student, and the new semester calendar requires 60 General Education semester credits, which translates into the same overall number of credits delivered. Therefore, the resources currently exist at RIT to deliver this course, which is part of those 60 total credits. Currently, the General Education curriculum is largely delivered by CLA and COS, so the resources for General Education delivery are held within those colleges. However, the FYS course does present two challenges to how General Education is normally delivered. Best practice suggests that the class sizes should be small and that permanent faculty should deliver the course. Much of the current General Education curriculum is delivered in larger classes and a large proportion of sections, particularly of First Year Writing and Arts of Expression, are taught by adjunct faculty.

**Conclusions about resources from the colleges:**

1. If all colleges participate in delivering FYS, some redistribution of resources will be necessary.
2. Those resources, as they currently exist, may not be sufficient to allow for use of (a) permanent faculty and (b) small class sizes. A comprehensive accounting of the nature and scope of the resources available should be done as the General Education curriculum is developed and the teaching loads of faculty are determined for the semester calendar.

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## **IX. MODELS: INSTITUTE, COLLEGE OR DEPARTMENT?**

As noted previously, many of the college curriculum committees were mixed in their opinions about whether an institute-wide mixing of students was preferable, versus a department or college-based course. Many faculty and staff felt that students are often pigeonholed into their departments and majors from early in their careers at RIT, and that this course might be one of the few chances for students to interact with students in other colleges. Many other colleges and universities utilize this model, though it appears to be more common at small liberal arts colleges. An exception is DePaul University, which is similar to RIT in size, and uses such a model. At DePaul, the students take a required course in their first term that introduces them both to the university and to the city of Chicago.

### **Depaul's Discover Chicago Course:**

*Depaul's Discover Chicago courses acquaint first-year students with the metropolitan community, its neighborhoods, cultures, people, institutions, organizations, and issues. Students also learn about university life, resources, and how to be a successful student. Learning is accomplished through a variety of means, but particularly through first-hand observation, participation, personal discovery, and reflection. Discover Chicago begins with Immersion Week one week prior to the official start of the Autumn Quarter and classes continue to meet throughout the quarter. Explore Chicago students meet during the traditional Autumn Quarter. Students select a particular Chicago Quarter course focusing on a Chicago-related topic. (<http://liberalstudies.depaul.edu/FirstYearProgram/index.asp>)*

The course sets the stage for the students to continue liberal learning throughout their time at DePaul and beyond. The issue of student choice is worth mentioning here, as many programs have found that students are happier if they have choices about how to fulfill this requirement. For example, one of the Penn State campuses had low student satisfaction in their first-year common reading program until they offered the students three books to choose from, so students could more closely match their interests. Once the new program with choices was implemented, the program faculty found that the students were more engaged and happier with the course.

### **Departmental and College-based Courses:**

Alternatively, there are also benefits to having students take the course within their college or department. This structure would allow the course to be more targeted towards the interests of specific groups of students (e.g. a common book that was selected for a specific college). This structure also allows for, and strongly supports, an ability for programs to effectively track and monitor student

progress through the development of relationships and associated student advising processes between program faculty and Student Affairs professionals (e.g., casing meetings). Additionally, faculty who are reluctant to take on teaching responsibilities for this course may see additional value and be more willing to be engaged in the course if they can teach their own students. This customization is also common at other colleges and universities (e.g. the Penn State University system, Bowling Green, University of Alabama system). At Bowling Green University, for example, all students must participate in the first year “BGeXperience,” but individual programs can develop and deliver courses that meet a set of guidelines, which include elements that support student transition into college. One option is a centrally offered course, University Seminar, which is open to all students, but required by some programs that choose not to offer their own course. The multiple-model option is worth consideration at RIT.

### **Models - Disciplinary or Interdisciplinary?:**

Ideally, discipline-based courses should explore how that discipline interacts with and impacts other areas of inquiry. For example, a FYS course that explored the topic of cryptography could examine methods of creating and breaking codes, but also could address the use of cryptographic methods for understanding lost languages (e.g. the Mayan Code) and what the role of codes and ciphers has been in world history (e.g. the German’s use of Enigma in WWII). Thus, the course supports a variety of learning outcomes and places the discipline in a larger context. Courses such as this one could be taught by an individual faculty member, or could be co-taught by faculty members from two or more disciplines.

Interdisciplinary courses also should be encouraged, though there are significant barriers currently to the development of these courses across colleges. Many faculty reported having been part of cross-college courses in the past, but that over time there have been increasing barriers to offering these courses, mostly related to resources. Rotating in two or more faculty to teach modules in a course could reduce the overall impact on individual faculty members’ teaching loads, and could support an interdisciplinary approach. However, this may lead to a more fragmented experience between student and faculty, so this idea should be explored with caution.

### **Models: Class size:**

The vast majority of first-year seminar programs have relatively small class sizes; generally 18-30 students per section. This small class size supports one of the main goals of these programs, which is to foster the development of a relationship between the student and a faculty or staff member. At RIT, one of the General Education student learning outcomes associated with this course is to “comprehend information accessed through reading and discussion.” Thus, the course needs to be small enough to foster discussion and allow the instructor to assess student participation in discussion.

Given the limited resources currently available for this course, an additional model worth exploring is a mix of larger lectures with breakout discussions. Thus, the class would meet one hour per week in a larger lecture format (60 or more students) and then the other two hours would meet in smaller discussion sections (20 students per section). The course could be organized around a common theme or readings, with background information delivered in a lecture format and then discussion in smaller sections. This would reduce the overall impact on faculty workload and would allow groups of faculty to work together to develop common course goals. As an example, at Marian University students meet once a week in a class of 120 students, and then two days a week in sections of 20. The course is focused on developing critical thinking skills, and the students all read a common book that is discussed in their sections. This year's selection was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and thus the larger lecture topics explored biology, ethics, human rights, the treatment of minorities and women in society, etc. The smaller sections then allowed students to discuss these issues with a faculty member. Two potential drawbacks of this model at RIT are the lack of larger classrooms and the increased coordination needed between multiple instructors within the course.

**Potential Models**

In the memo that was shared with the College Curriculum Committees and Student Affairs (see appendix), several possible models were presented:

Title	Description	Implications/Issues
Plan A	Some combination of larger lecture with smaller discussion/recitation sections. Larger lectures could be focused on a common book, theme, or inter-disciplinary area.  Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	Would the experience be too fragmented for students?
Plan B	Traditional seminar lecture/discussion with smaller class size. Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	Resource intensive.
Plan C	Interdisciplinary teams of students working to solve a specific problem.  Examples: Imaging Science First-Year Project; Greening of RIT  Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	Frequently a very powerful experience for students.  Must be General Education, so some kinds of problems aren't appropriate  Time intensive for faculty – may not be feasible on a large scale.

Plan D	Specific courses developed for needs of students in specific programs.  Examples: Technical Writing, Reading Scientific Literature, etc.  Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	Would need to avoid having the course become a professional course instead of GenEd.
Plan E	Other ideas/models?	
Plan F	Decouple FYE and FYS. Provide a focused FYE course/experience to address student success/transitional issues which students would take in the fall. Provide FYS course following one of plans above, which students could take in the fall or spring.	Would not require that all FYS sections are taught in the fall.  Students could possibly choose among different FYE alternatives.

## X. FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Along with the new instructional possibilities, the FYS course presents new opportunities for faculty and staff to develop communities of practice surrounding the teaching of first-year students. Although the FYS Subcommittee did not spend a lot of time discussing this aspect of the implementation of First-Year Seminar, it is clear from the reports from the First-Year Experience conference that the activities, resources, and processes that would facilitate the development of these types of communities of practice require deliberate attention.

## XI. CONCLUSION: MOVING TOWARDS AND BEYOND 2013 WITH A PROTOTYPE/PILOT PROCESS

As the committee came to better understand the budgetary, infrastructural (e.g., scheduling, scalability, faculty development, etc.), human resource (i.e., who would teach the course), and pedagogical constraints, we recognized the need to think in terms beyond the calendar conversion. Given the growing size of the Institute, the changing profile of our students and the sizable modifications/transformations in calendar, general education, advising, registration and teaching loads, the Institute will look very different over the course of the next decade. In the context of an expanded timeframe, we can begin to better appreciate the coming changes to RIT's curriculum and culture. Taking a long-term view, FYS presents an unparalleled opportunity to impact *ALL* of our students. As Joe Cuseo notes in his exhaustive review of FYS in higher education, "it is probably safe to say that there has been more carefully conducted research on the FYS, and more compelling empirical evidence

gathered in support of its effectiveness, than for any other course offered in the history of higher education" (Cuseo 2). Citing numerous studies, he argues that the positive impact of FYS on retention and student achievement is not only "well documented," but "formidable".

We propose proceeding in a spirit of inquiry and pragmatism with regard to the question of how First-Year Seminar might be delivered at RIT, and what range of options might be available for how students satisfy this one of two required first-year foundations courses.

There are a number of exciting opportunities for exploring and assessing the value of alternative approaches to First-Year Seminar. As discussed earlier, a course could be conceived that represents a single discipline and is offered to any first-year student by a faculty member from that discipline's departmental home, or it could be conceived as multidisciplinary, offered by a number of faculty members from a number of departments. Additional elements of possible course design and configuration are laid out in the preceding section. FYS can be an opportunity for students from a specific, designated college, or number of colleges, or it can be designed as not affiliated with any specific college or department, but oriented toward the mission and values of the institute writ large.

The Institute must give careful consideration to the question of where, when and how administration of the First Year Seminar, a First Year Curriculum and a broadly-conceived First Year Experience should take place. Many institutions dedicate a centralized administrative structure to such endeavors, often combining key personnel (and their attendant areas of expertise) from Student and Academic Affairs. In addition, the question of developing buy-in and incentivizing participation will have to be addressed. First Year Seminars, regardless of their content and scope, require coordination and planning across different sectors of any given student's experiences. We currently have programs dedicated towards curricular and faculty/staff development, such as PLIG and FITL that could be utilized to support the development of FYS. Other areas of cross-institutional spaces are beginning to emerge, such as the Wallace Center. Giving First Year Seminar a 'home' would increase the likelihood that our First Year Initiatives would exist as both a vibrant and sustainable foundation in every student's RIT experience.

We propose a designated "pilot" or "prototype" period, which could conceivably begin as early as Fall 2012 and extend into the post-conversion period. Testing multiple models would allow for one or two promising designs to be assessed. Prior to implementation, the criteria and procedure for the assessment of the pilots will need to be carefully and deliberately established. The immediate criteria should be student achievement of articulated learning outcomes, but other criteria may include, scalability (i.e., that the model can be delivered to large numbers of students), faculty success and engagement, utilization of human resources, student persistence into second year, etc.

During 2012, one possibility would be to utilize some sections of the Arts of Expression courses as a “testing ground” for the new FYS model. Many students take this course in their first year, and the course could be repurposed to test models for FYS. After 2013, programs could decide to become part of the pilot process, and the students in those programs would all take the FYS course. Students in programs that are not part of the pilot process would need to: 1) be exposed to transitional elements in an alternative form (perhaps by taking a semester version of Discovery/Pathways), and 2) take three credits of General Education (an elective or some other course). In order to avoid an unequal requirement of credits among students within programs, whole programs would need to either “opt-in” or “opt-out” of these pilot programs.

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## XII. APPENDIX

### FYS Charge from GEC, September 2010:

#### First Year Seminar Subcommittee Charges

##### General Education Committee

October 1, 2010

The General Education Committee has endorsed the development of a First-Year Seminar, to be taken by all first-year students in their first semester at RIT. Ideally, the role of this course will be to introduce students to the intellectual life of the university, and will include input and perspectives from both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

#### Revised Charges to First-year Seminar Subcommittee:

1. Integrate the following Student Learning Outcomes based on the Institute General Education Committee's guidelines:
  - Comprehend information accessed through reading and discussion
  - Express themselves effectively in presentations, either in spoken standard American English or sign language (American Sign Language or English-based Signing)
  - Describe the potential and the limitations of technology
2. Develop additional relevant Student Learning Outcomes.
3. Coordinate with the Institute Writing Committee and the English Department to develop and integrate student learning outcomes between the proposed First Year Seminar and a First Year Writing Seminar.
4. Consider roles of faculty, student affairs "coach", and junior/senior peer mentors.
5. Investigate other models of First-Year Seminar (IUPUI and University of
6. Southern Maine in particular) and consider emulating best practice
7. Communicate with constituent groups (faculty from all colleges, administrators, student affairs personnel, and students) to get input and feedback about the structure and content of FYS
8. Using information gathered from constituent groups, propose guidelines for First-Year Seminar at RIT

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**FYS Memo to CCC's and FYE, February 2011:**

To: College Curriculum Committees

From: First-Year Seminar Subcommittee

Re: First-Year Seminar Course

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RIT values first-year students. Our goal should be to provide experiences where an increasingly diverse body of students can and will be successful. What can we do to ensure our first-year students are supported and introduced into the intellectual life of RIT? Educational research shows that first-year students who participate in high-impact practices, such as a First Year Seminar (FYS), are more likely to persist in their education and be academically successful in their transition to the rigors of college-level expectations. A wide variety of models of programs are offered by institutions around the world; we need to identify which model(s) will work best for RIT students.

The newly adopted General Education curriculum includes a two-course "Foundation," one of which is a three-credit course that satisfies the "First-Year Seminar" requirement. As a campus community, we now have the opportunity to shape this course to meet the needs of our students.

Members of the General Education, First-Year Seminar Subcommittee would like to request a brief meeting (20-30 minutes) with each college's curriculum committee to discuss your thoughts on the new FYS course. This time may be during one of your regularly scheduled meetings or at an alternative time. In the interest of efficiency, we are distributing some key questions for you to consider in advance. The information provided will be used to develop a small number of potential models which might then be utilized in a "prototype" assessment to determine the range of courses and experiences that could satisfy the requirement.

**Possible Models:**

Title	Description	Implications/Issues
Plan A	Some combination of larger lecture with smaller discussion/recitation sections. Larger lectures could be focused on a common book, theme, or inter-disciplinary area.  Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	Should be affordable.  Would the experience be too fragmented for students?
Plan B	Traditional seminar lecture/discussion with smaller class size. Instructional team,	Probably not affordable on large scale. If the course was

	including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.	disciplinary, could some departments offer?
Plan C	<p>Interdisciplinary teams of students working to solve a specific problem.</p> <p>Examples: Imaging Science First-Year Project; Greening of RIT</p> <p>Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.</p>	<p>Frequently a very powerful experience for students.</p> <p>Must be General Education, so some kinds of problems aren't appropriate</p> <p>Time intensive for faculty – probably not feasible on a large scale.</p>
Plan D	<p>Specific courses developed for needs of students in specific programs.</p> <p>Examples: Technical Writing, Reading Scientific Literature, etc.</p> <p>Instructional team, including faculty and SA professionals responsible for delivering outcomes.</p>	<p>Would need to avoid having the course become a professional course instead of GenEd.</p>
Plan E	Other ideas/models?	
Plan G	<p>Decouple FYE and FYS. Provide a focused FYE course/experience to address student success/transitional issues which students would take in the fall. Provide FYS course following one of plans above, which students could take in the fall or spring.</p>	<p>Would not require that all FYS sections are taught in the fall.</p> <p>Students could possibly choose among different FYE alternatives.</p>

Keep the following in mind, as alternative models are considered:

1. The delivery of FYS as part of general education must be accomplished using, for the most part, existing resources.
2. If the FYS course integrates general education academic content with student success/transitional content, both faculty and student affairs professionals will be responsible for curriculum delivery (e.g., Models such as A through D).
3. If the FYS course integrates general education academic content with student success/transitional content, the course should be offered in the fall semester in order to connect with all first-year students.

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4. The FYS course is part of the General Education Curriculum and thus must meet NYSED and RIT's definitions of General Education.
5. The FYS course must possess the following general education student learning outcomes:
  - *Express themselves effectively in presentations, either in spoken standard American English or sign language (American Sign Language or English-based Signing)*
  - *Comprehend information accessed through reading and discussion*
  - *Describe the potential and the limitations of technology*
6. If the FYS course integrates general education academic content with student success/transitional content, the course must also possess student learning outcomes associated with student success/transition, such as:
  - *Effectively utilize RIT resources and processes*
  - *Comprehend RIT expectations in regard to university life (e.g. community ethics, personal responsibility, communication, and self advocacy)*
  - *Comprehend RIT expectations in regard to academic success (e.g. time management, goal setting, working in teams, project management and study skills)*
  - *Develop a meaningful connection with at least one RIT professional*
7. In models that decouple FYS and FYE, the general education and student success/transition learning outcomes must be addressed by the independent FYS and FYE courses/experiences, respectively.

**Key Questions about the First-Year Seminar/Experience for the Colleges:**

- What outcomes do you want students to achieve from this first year foundation experience? What should the students know and/or be able to do when they complete this first-year foundation and make the full transition into college life? We encourage you to suggest additional outcomes both for general education and for student development and transition.
- Do you think the course/experience should be developed and offered on an institute-wide or college-centric (or even department-centric) basis? Or should it be a mix of both? Should development and implementation involve clusters of colleges and/or interdisciplinary/diverse faculty teams?
- Who should be involved in the delivery of this first-year content? How do we incentivize faculty involvement? What support is needed? What support is available?
- What is the optimal student mix? What is a reasonable student mix?
- What is the ideal class size? Acceptable class size?