# First-year Seminar Program

First-Year Seminar Program

The First-Year Seminar Program offers courses across a wide range of disciplines and topics. Enrollment is limited to a small number of first-year students. The seminars emphasize active, collaborative, and creative learning. Courses may fulfill specific distribution and/or major requirements.

Goals for the First-Year Seminar Program

1. Shape student expectations of the values, rigor, aspirations, and rewards of the intellectual enterprise practiced in a vibrant and supportive academic community.

2. Foster skills and habits of mind essential for intellectual inquiry.

3. Build a sense of intellectual and social community among students from diverse backgrounds in a cooperative and collaborative learning environment.

4. Create opportunities early in a student’s college career for close interaction with faculty and for the individualized instruction typical of a liberal arts education.

5. Demonstrate how knowledge is constructed in a particular field.

ANTH 107 - First-Year Seminar: The Science and Culture of Blood (1.0)

This course will use the central topic of blood as an introduction to biological chemistry and cultural anthropology and as a mechanism for making interdisciplinary connections between the natural and social sciences. We will touch on such scientific aspects as mechanics of fluid movement, solubility, intermolecular forces, immunity, blood typing, sickle cell disease, AIDS, and hemophilia. The social science aspects will include discussions of family and kinship, vampires and other mythologies, menstruation, taboos or rituals around blood as food, blood in art, human/animal sacrifice, and the culture of AIDS. Case studies will introduce students to scientific thinking and integrative skills.

Instructor: Armstrong (Anthropology, Writing), Wolfson (Chemistry)

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Cross-Listed as: CHEM 107

Distribution: SBA; NPS

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

ASTR 110 - First-Year Seminar: Einstein and the Dark Universe (1.0)

This seminar explores Einstein's theory of relativity and two fundamental puzzles in physics: dark matter and dark energy. Taught in a hands-on/workshop format, students will carry out an experimental test of relativity, as well as computational analyses which reveal that the Universe's expansion is accelerating and that 80% of the matter in the Universe is fundamentally different from all known particles in the Standard Model of particle physics. We will also discuss the ongoing experimental search for the elusive dark matter particle, as well as efforts to understand the nature of dark energy. No prior physics background is assumed. We will make use of high school algebra and geometry in our work. Not to be counted toward the minimum physics major or to fulfill the physics entrance requirement for medical school.

Instructor: Battat (Physics)

Prerequisite: Open to first-year students only. Fulfillment of the basic skills component of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement.

Cross-Listed as: PHYS 100

Distribution: NPS; MM

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

BISC 112 - Exploration of Cellular and Molecular Biology with Laboratory (1.0)

Seminar-style introduction to life at the cellular and molecular level, designed as an alternative to BISC 110 for students with strong high school preparation (such as AP, IB, or other). The course will include eukaryotic and prokaryotic cell structure, function of biological macromolecules, cellular metabolism, molecular genetics, and mechanisms of growth and differentiation, with an emphasis on experimental approaches to investigating these topics. This course will aim to develop students' skills in data analysis and scientific writing along with building foundational knowledge in the field. Lab sections are shared with BISC 110. This course differs from BISC 110 in its small class size and discussion-based format; it meets for one discussion and one lab session per week. Either BISC 110/BISC 112 or BISC 111/BISC 111T/BISC 113 may be taken first.

Instructor: Staff

Prerequisite: A score of 4 or 5 on the Biology AP exam or equivalent experience or permission of the instructor. Fulfillment of the basic skills component of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement. Not open to students who have taken BISC 110.

Distribution: NPS

Term(s): Fall; Spring

One Fall & Spring section of this course is a First-Year Seminar, reserved for first-year students only. The Fall section will be shadow graded.

BISC 113 - Exploration of Organismal Biology with Laboratory (1.0)

An exploration of the central questions, concepts, and methods of experimental analysis in selected areas of organismal biology, designed as an alternative to BISC 111 for students with strong high school preparation (such as AP, IB, or other). Topics include: the evolution and diversification of life, the form and function of plants and animals, and ecological interactions among organisms, with an emphasis on laboratory methods, data analysis, and science writing. Lab sections are shared with BISC 111. This course differs from BISC 111 in its smaller class size, a seminar-style format, and a focus on discussion of landmark scientific studies that shape this field; it meets for one discussion and one lab session per week. Either BISC 110/BISC 112 or BISC 111/BISC 111T/BISC 113 may be taken first.

Instructor: Staff

Prerequisite: A score of 4 or 5 on the Biology AP exam or equivalent experience or permission of the instructor. Fulfillment of the basic skills component of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement. Not open to students who have taken BISC 111/BISC 111T.

Distribution: NPS; QRF

Term(s): Fall; Spring

Ann M. Maurer '51 Speaking Intensive Course

One Fall & Spring section of this course is a First-Year Seminar, reserved for first-year students only. The Fall section will be shadow graded.

CAMS 105 - First-Year Seminar: Twenty-first Century Cinema: An Introduction to the Cinematic Experience (1.0)

An introduction to the art of film designed for first year students, this course explores the excitement of contemporary global filmmaking. Through selected films and readings, the course focuses on the basic elements of filmic language including mise-en-scène, editing, cinematography, the relation of sound to image, and narrative structure. Students learn to view the art of film not only as a medium for personal expression, but also as a complex interplay between aesthetic, ideological, economic, and technological concerns. Discussions will examine in detail how today's filmmakers are utilizing both traditional cinematic forms and emerging new media technologies and the ways they are changing the cinema experience in the twenty-first century.

Instructor: Viano

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: ARS

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

CHEM 107 - First-Year Seminar: The Science and Culture of Blood (1.0)

This course will use the central topic of blood as an introduction to biological chemistry and cultural anthropology and as a mechanism for making interdisciplinary connections between the natural and social sciences. We will touch on such scientific aspects as mechanics of fluid movement, solubility, intermolecular forces, immunity, blood typing, sickle cell disease, AIDS, and hemophilia. The social science aspects will include discussions of family and kinship, vampires and other mythologies, menstruation, taboos or rituals around blood as food, blood in art, human/animal sacrifice, and the culture of AIDS. Case studies will introduce students to scientific thinking and integrative skills.

Instructor: Armstrong (Anthropology, Writing), Wolfson (Chemistry)

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Cross-Listed as: ANTH 107

Distribution: SBA; NPS

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

CHEM 108 - First-Year Seminar: Cutting-Edge Developments in the Sciences: Progress and Controversy (1.0)

Science in the twenty-first century continues to be a wellspring of innovation, and every day the scientific literature and the popular press provide numerous articles describing cutting-edge work in areas of intense interest to the public, including drug discovery, nanotechnology, energy, nuclear science and the environment. This discussion-based seminar is designed to foster critical reading skills in the current topical scientific literature and to provide students with a sense of ways in which scientists approach research problems and the kinds of questions they ask.

Instructor: Hearn

Prerequisite: One year of high school chemistry. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: NPS

Term(s): Spring

Mandatory credit/noncredit.

ECON 100 - First-Year Seminar: The American Labor Market and the American Woman (1.0)

The popular press is replete with observations about women and work. Women earn less than men for the same work. Women are confronted with a "glass ceiling." Women "entered" the labor force at the end of the 20th century. Women are stuck in "female" occupations. Women worry about "having it all." This course will use some basic economic reasoning and both quantitative and qualitative information to explore how women's participation has shaped the American labor market, and how participation in the labor market has shaped American women. We will pay particular attention to the role of race, ethnicity, immigrant status and education in determining labor market choices and outcomes. Course work will include presentations, papers and multi-media projects. This course does not count toward the major in Economics.

Instructor: Velenchik

Prerequisite: This course is open only to students enrolled in Wellesley PLUS. This course does not count toward the major in Economics.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

EDUC 110 - First-Year Seminar: Play, Literacy, and Democracy (1.0)

Play and literacy are central to academic achievement, socialization, citizenship, and social mobility. With mandated testing under the federal No Child Left Behind Act and proposals for national education standards, longstanding tensions between play and early literacy have intensified. We will examine the origins of and modern trade-offs between play and literacy, paying attention to the influence of social class, race, and gender on the construction of changing societal norms for young children. What is driving panics about the disappearance of play? Has kindergarten become the new first grade? What are some of the conflicts in parents', teachers', and experts' expectations about what children should do in preschool and the early grades? How do children react to adult prescriptions and create their own performance scripts? What roles have play and early literacy played in how American children are taught and learn to participate in a democratic society? Includes some field observations**.**

Instructor: Beatty

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Spring

Mandatory credit/noncredit.

ENG 150 - First-Year Seminar: Translation in Theory and Practice (1.0)

A study of translation in theory and in practice, in its literal and metaphorical senses alike, mostly but not exclusively in the West. Topics: translation of literary texts, translation of sacred texts, the history of the translator, translation and politics, translation and gender, human and machine translation, adaptation as translation (text to music, novel to film, verbal narrative to comics, etc.). Guest lectures by practicing translators. No foreign language prerequisite. Opportunity for both critical and creative work, for commenting on translations and adaptations, and for producing them.

Instructor: Rosenwald

Prerequisite: Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: LL

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

ENGR 111 - First-Year Seminar: Product Creation for All (1.0)

This hands-on first-year seminar will explore how products are created, including an exploration of ideation and brainstorming, reverse engineering, and the product development process. An emphasis will be placed on the role of human factors engineering, including usability successes and failures of specific products. Students will learn about these topics through two approaches: disassembly and study of existing products and creation of simple product prototypes for specific, local nonprofit organizations serving populations such as those with developmental or physical limitations. By the end of the semester, students will be able to comprehend and independently apply both the product development process and specific human factors engineering approaches used in the design of many everyday objects; they will also have developed their own creativity and better understand how to further develop and apply that skill.

Instructor: Banzaert

Prerequisite: Open to first-year students only. Fulfillment of the basic skills component of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement.

Distribution: MM

Term(s): Spring

ES 103 - First-Year Seminar: Environment and Society: Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability (1.0)

Where does our food come from? Is the way we grow, distribute, and consume it sustainable? What is the difference between organic and conventional agriculture? Are technologies, such as genetic modification, ethically defensible? How does our assessment change if we consider agriculture in a developing country in Africa? To answer these questions, students will take an interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies that draws on economics, politics, history, ethics, and the sciences. Students will actively investigate these questions through activities such as hands-on research on a long-term agricultural research plot on campus, fieldtrips to investigate practices at nearby farms, and policy-relevant debates in class. This course fulfills the 100-level interdisciplinary course requirement for the Environmental Studies major; it does not fulfill any college-wide distribution requirements.

Instructor: Turner

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: None

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded. Ann M. Maurer '51 Speaking Intensive Course

FREN 151 - First-Year Seminar: Shipwrecks, Outlaws, and Wonderlands: Reading and Writing the Adventure Story (in English) (1.0)

This first-year seminar plunges us into tales of jailbreak, shipwreck and time-travel—that is, into the many worlds of the adventure novel. Unlike pulp fiction, to which it is too often compared, the adventure novel raises compelling questions about the nature and limits of heroism. (If “adventure” means “what must happen,” how can you be a hero when your heroism is contingent on circumstances?) We’ll consider this and other issues in adventure novels from the French and English traditions, concentrating on tales of castaways (Robinson Crusoe and his French counterparts), yarns of the sea, stories of solitary heroes who escape the law (Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*) and fantastic fictions *(Alice in Wonderland*). Participants will write adventure stories of their own modeled on our readings.

Instructor: de Tholozany

Prerequisite: None. Open only to first-year students.

Distribution: LL

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

HIST 115 - First-Year Seminar: Routes of Exile: Jews and Muslims (1.0)

This course will examine exile—both internal and geographic—through contemporary memoirs, let­ters, novels, and films. Our primary focus will be on Jews and Muslims living in North Africa and the Middle East. Questions to be asked include, How was community defined? What provided the author with a sense of belonging? What prompts his/her exile? Is the homeland portable? If so, how, and on what terms? Each week we shall explore a different expression of exile. Discussion will include comparisons and contrasts with previous readings.

Instructor: Malino

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: HS

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

ITAS 104 - First-Year Seminar: The Cities of Italy: An Introduction to Italian Culture (in English) (1.0)

This seminar is dedicated to the representation of Italian cities in Italian literature, art, and cinema from the Middle Ages to the twenty-first century. By presenting cities as spatial narratives, we will introduce students to some of the most important moments in Italian history and will invite them to examine the representation of urban landscape as a privileged vantage point to understand Italian culture. The seminar is designed to introduce students to the field of Italian Studies and to provide them with a solid background in Italian history and culture.

Instructor: Parussa

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: LL

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

MATH 202 - First-Year Seminar: Cryptography and Privacy (1.0)

This course will be an exploration of various aspects of modern cryptography and secrecy. One part will be concerned with the mathematics behind the virtually unbreakable public-key ciphers such as RSA; we will start with simple concepts like prime numbers and divisibility and quickly develop powerful number-theoretic machinery, with mathematical rigor and proof as the underlying theme. In the second part of the course, we will think about the consequences of the fact that cryptography gives everyone the ability to transmit information in a way that nobody except the intended audience can read it. In particular, we will discuss the moral and ethical implications of the regulation of cryptography and the ramifications this has on privacy.

Instructor: Volic

Prerequisite: MATH 115 or equivalent. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: MM

Term(s): Spring

PHIL 108 - First-Year Seminar: Friendship (1.0)

This seminar undertakes a philosophical examination of the nature and value of friendship. Two questions will animate the course: What is a friend? And, why are friends valuable? Drawing examples from literature and films, we will examine different types of friendships and the features that characterize and sustain them. Many philosophers have argued that the best kind of friendship is one in which the friend is loved for her own sake; we will consider whether this is truly possible or whether all friendships are ultimately instrumental. We'll also examine how the partiality inherent in friendship conflicts with the demands of standard moral theories. Finally, we will compare the love that characterizes friendship with the feelings that sustain relationships with parents, children, and lovers.

Instructor: Wearing

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: REP

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

PHYS 100 - First-Year Seminar: Einstein and the Dark Universe (1.0)

This seminar explores Einstein's theory of relativity and two fundamental puzzles in physics: dark matter and dark energy. Taught in a hands-on/workshop format, students will carry out an experimental test of relativity, as well as computational analyses which reveal that the Universe expansion is accelerating and that 80% of the matter in the Universe is fundamentally different from all known particles in the Standard Model of particle physics. We will also discuss the ongoing experimental search for the elusive dark matter particle, as well as efforts to understand the nature of dark energy. No prior physics background is assumed. We will make use of high school algebra and geometry in our work. Not to be counted toward the minimum physics major or to fulfill the physics entrance requirement for medical school.

Instructor: Battat

Prerequisite: Open to first-year students only. Fulfillment of the basic skills component of the Quantitative Reasoning requirement.

Cross-Listed as: ASTR 110

Distribution: NPS; MM

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

POL 103 - First-Year Seminar: Mexico: Revolution, Democracy, and Drugs (1.0)

Mexico is a country of remarkable contradictions. Unleashing one of the great revolutions of the twentieth century in 1910, the revolutionaries and their heirs then ruled Mexico for 71 years. Developing a genuine multiparty political system only since 2000, Mexico's democracy now faces an array of daunting challenges, including the increasing power of drug cartels whose tactics of violence and intimidation threaten the entire nation. Our seminar will aim to make sense out of the fascinating puzzle that is Mexico. We will focus on its twentieth-century Revolution, its distinctive political system (including the return to power of the PRI in 2013), and its current social, economic, and political challenges. We will examine its complex relationship with the United States, emphasizing the dual issues of immigration and drugs.

Instructor: Wasserspring

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Fall

Mandatory credit/noncredit.

POL 112 - First-Year Seminar: Wars of Ideas in International Relations (1.0)

This first-year seminar examines "wars of ideas" in international politics.  How do changes in ideas shape international conflict?  To what extent do ideas and identities motivate foreign policies?  Has international relations moved beyond states and their security interests, and is now driven by a "clash of civilizations"?  Historically, we will explore the role of religion in shaping the modern state system in the 17th century, nationalism and imperialism in the 19th century, and fascism, liberalism, and communism in the 20th century.  Contemporary case studies will look at ethnic conflict, the "resurgence" of religion in international politics, and the role of American national identity in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Instructor: Goddard

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Spring

Ann M. Maurer '51 Speaking Intensive Course

POL 115 - First-Year Seminar: Politics and Ethics (1.0)

Can politics be a moral enterprise or is it a realm where violence, deception and cruelty are and must be routine? Students will explore works of political, social and feminist theory as well as case studies, plays, novels and film to critically engage with questions such as: how do we judge whether a political act is moral or immoral? Does the context of war negate the moral precepts that hold in peacetime? Do national borders mark the place where our moral commitments to others end? And last but not least: who’s the “we” that determines the content of moral judgments and the reach of our ethical obligations?

Instructor: Euben

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: REP

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

SOC 114 - First-Year Seminar: So, You Want to Be a Doctor? (1.0)

This course is not intended to persuade you to choose, or dissuade you from choosing, a career in medicine. It will introduce you to medical sociology, focusing on who becomes a doctor, the doctor’s socialization in medical school, and the life of medical practice in a changing health care system. It will also consider whether a life in medicine is a spiritual vocation and the implications that such a “calling” has for the relationship between doctor and patient. Attention will be given to thinking and writing about the meaning of work in other than financially remunerative ways.

Instructor: Imber

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade.

SOC 123 - First-Year Seminar: Growing Up Unequal (1.0)

A key aspect of the classic "coming of age" story is a dawning recognition that we live in a system of social inequalities. Drawing on sociological study of childhood, emerging adulthood, and the social construction and intersection of race/class/gender, students in this first year seminar will critically examine both factual and fictional narratives of growing up in order to understand the role of structured social inequalities in shaping life chances.

Instructor: Rutherford

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Spring

Mandatory credit/noncredit.

SOC 137 - First-Year Seminar: Reading Sociology: What Literature and the Media Teach Us About Social Life (1.0)

What do we learn about class, race, and gender by reading novels? What difference does it make when we read about these ideas rather than watching programs about them on TV? This course treats novels, short stories, poems, films, and radio and television programs as sociological texts. We will read and analyze them together to learn new concepts, methods, and analytical approaches. Class projects include debates, "author" interviews, and a creative writing project.

Instructor: Levitt

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Fall

Registration in this section is restricted to students selected for the Wellesley Plus Program. Mandatory credit/noncredit.

SPAN 110 - First-Year Seminar: Learning Language through Culture, Learning Culture through Language (1.0)

This course is for students who have learned Spanish primarily through an immersion experience abroad or at home. Participants in the course will have the opportunity to improve their written and oral Spanish language through the examination of cultural assumptions and values. Content is based on a variety of topics such as legends, differing historical perspectives, religious traditions, family values, and others. The review of language structures and grammar will emerge from students’ language levels, needs, and interests. Participants will read novels, short stories, plays, essays, and articles. They will listen to music and examine videos illustrating experiences of Spanish language learners in the United States and abroad. By the end of the semester, students will gain an understanding of how their culture influences their language learning and how their language learning affects their perspective of Latino/Hispanic culture. The course will be conducted exclusively in Spanish. At the end of the course, students will be advised about placement into further Spanish courses, based on their level of fluency.

Instructor: Darer

Prerequisite: For first-year students only who have learned Spanish primarily through an immersion experience abroad or at home.

Distribution: None

Term(s): Fall

Shadow graded.

WGST 100 - First-Year Seminar: The Body: From Reproduction to Fashion (1.0)

This course explores the ways in which the body, as a reflection and construction of the self, is tied to social and political relations. The body is also a surface upon which we inscribe cultural norms. Through this examination of the role that our bodies play in daily life we will delve into the study of gender, sexuality and power. We focus on three major areas: (1) the medicalization of bodies (such as abortion and infertility); (2) the discipline of bodies (cosmetic surgery, fitness); and (3) the use of the body as a vehicle for performance, self-expression, and identity (drag queens, fashion, sports). Throughout the course we will look at how ideas about bodies are transported across national borders and social, sexual, and class hierarchies.

Instructor: Hertz

Prerequisite: None. Open to first-year students only.

Distribution: SBA

Term(s): Fall

No letter grade. Ann M. Maurer '51 Speaking Intensive Course