

A Proposal for The First Year and Beyond

We (CEPP subcommittee on FYE) developed this proposal with the belief that the college's historic identification with liberal studies and commitment to education of "the mind and the hand" could become modernized, integrated, and actualized in the near future. Mindful of the 4 C's of VISTA (Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration), the commitment to Liberal Studies (interdisciplinary studies), and the need to retain and engage our students within the first 2 years through active and coordinated learning, we submit the following proposal.

Liberal Studies Seminar

1. The Liberal Studies Seminar will:

- be a 4-credit course called Liberal Studies (LS) with a small class size (12)
- be taken by an incoming student during her or his first semester on campus
- be interdisciplinary in nature
- be designed and titled by an individual faculty member (as is currently the case in LS2)
- fit within a theme, with from 3-5 themes available in any given semester. At the outset, three of the themes might be Identity, Justice, and Ecology (drawing on the experience of LS1 faculty).
- provide students with several writing assignments, with opportunities for feedback and revision
- guide students collectively and individually through refinement of the RAP (see below) so as to provide a clear set of goals for acquiring a meaningful education in their future semesters at Skidmore

2. We propose that we change the current requirement from LS1/LS2 to the single LS Seminar.

Reflection and Projection (RAP) and Mentoring/Advising

1. Prior to their arrival at Skidmore (and potentially informed by some reading materials sent to them over the summer), students will articulate a *Reflection and Projection* (RAP) of their educational experiences and expectations. We fully expect that the RAP produced by an incoming student will be somewhat primitive, but it will provide the Dean of Studies office and faculty mentors with useful background about each student. The RAP will be the first addition to the student's portfolio. The RAP would then become the focal point of discussions between the student and his or her advisor throughout the first semester, in the context of the Liberal Studies seminar.

2. Students in the LS course will have as their mentor/advisor the person

teaching the course, but there will be a team of support staff (e.g., from Dean of Studies staff, Dean of Student Affairs staff) who will serve a variety of mentoring roles for the students.

3. Students will begin a portfolio of their work at the outset of their college experience. They will maintain the portfolio and contribute to the portfolio throughout their career at Skidmore. The student's evolving RAP will always be a part of the portfolio and the contents of the portfolio will be informed by the RAP.

Building Community

1. Faculty within each theme would assemble for frequent meetings, ideally weekly, to discuss and evaluate delivery of their courses.

2. Floors within residence halls will house students who are taking Liberal Studies seminars with common themes. Present on those floors will be upper-class students who also serve mentorship roles in the LS classes.

3. Co-curricular activities would be offered throughout the semester/year (e.g., lectures, exhibitions in the Tang) that would provide opportunities for students and faculty to gather in theme-based groups or in larger groups that transcend themes.

Coherence & Leadership

1. As should be clear, this proposal is not intended as a menu of options from which one might choose to implement some subset. Instead, we were attempting to create an integrated educational experience that:

- stresses the importance of a students' engagement in — and ownership of — the development of their educational vision (as often happens with our self-determined majors);
- blurs traditional boundaries (e.g., between teaching and mentoring/advising, between the classroom and the residence hall);
- works to build a sense of community and collaboration among students, faculty, and staff;
- while maintaining many of the best elements of our current LS program (e.g., an interdisciplinary perspective, an emphasis on writing and critical thinking).

2. Implementation of these changes (and maintenance of coherence) will require strong leadership from the Dean of Faculty's Office. In addition, the LS program will need leadership (a director and a steering committee). We hope that this group works to ensure that new interdisciplinary courses are offered beyond the LS seminar. We also see the need for someone to take charge of the First Year Experience. We suggest that this person have faculty credentials, but will have a primarily administrative role (i.e., teach only one or two courses a year).

Subcommittee members: Phil Boshoff, Dan Curley, Terry Diggory, Hugh Foley,
Kate Leavitt, Ruth Andrea Levinson, Bill Lewis, Pat Oles, Ben Porter
Advisors to the Subcommittee: Tina Levith, Michael Marx, Anita Steigerwald