

# FRESHMAN SEMINAR (US 1150)

## COURSE CONTENT GUIDELINES

(2006)

### Introduction

Freshman Seminar offers first semester students a carefully structured orientation to college, an introduction to academic and personal success strategies, and an opportunity for self-discovery and self-realization. It draws on national models and extensive research for much of its conceptual framework, but is tailored to fit the unique needs and challenges faced by Appalachian State University freshmen. In addition, US 1150 remains committed to the University's Mission Statement, especially the goals of maintaining a "strong sense of community," "excellence in teaching," and our tradition of "faculty commitment to students both inside and outside the classroom." Freshman Seminar supports Appalachian's Undergraduate Educational Goals by providing a variety of learning experiences that permit personal growth and development, encouraging interaction among faculty and students, and demonstrating the interrelatedness of knowledge and the importance of life-long learning.

Freshman Seminar helps students make a successful transition to college, discover the resources and opportunities offered by Appalachian, strengthen learning skills, develop critical thinking skills, broaden horizons, and move toward intellectual and individual independence. These goals are supported and advanced by well-prepared and caring faculty working together with Peer Leaders, Academic Advisors, Learning Community faculty, and the Freshman Seminar staff in academic learning communities. The course content requirements listed below should be included in each Freshman Seminar class. They reflect University mandates, instructor agreements, and advisory committee recommendations over the past eighteen years.

## I. Course Management

**A. Syllabus** – Your course syllabus sets a tone for class. It shows your planning and commitment, your expectations and concerns, your goals and enthusiasm for the semester. The syllabus is your public statement of purpose which students will rely on throughout the semester. University policy requires that every student in your class receive a syllabus on the first day of class. You are also required to keep a copy of your syllabus on file in the Freshman Seminar office. Please submit a copy of your syllabus by the opening of the term. University regulations and standard practice also specify a number of required components to your syllabus. These include:

1. **The title**, course number, meeting place and time, and semester.
2. **Your Contact Info**, campus address, phone number, and e-mail address.
3. **Statement of your purposes/goals/objectives** in teaching the course.

**4. Enumeration of course requirements and goals.** Our central purpose in Freshman Seminar is to help entering freshmen be successful. This involves support in a wide range of areas from establishing new relationships and building academic and life skills to providing opportunities for personal growth and broadening of personal perspectives. A more complete statement of program goals is contained in the training manual. Be certain to keep these goals in mind as you work out your course requirements.

**5. Required Readings** -- Give a complete bibliographic citation and tell students that the book can be obtained as a "rental text" at the University Bookstore. Reference any additional required readings and associated costs. See section D below for more information about readings in Freshman Seminar.

**6. Office Hours** -- regular hours and other times available for student conferences. We recommend that you be available on campus for Freshman Seminar students from 2-3 hours per week.

**7. Attendance Policy** – Attendance policies should be designed to encourage participation rather than penalize students. Freshman Seminar usually requires out-of-class attendance at events such as the Group Interaction Course (GIC), cultural events, and dinner at the faculty member's home. Freshman Seminar encourages instructors to be flexible with students who have schedule conflicts and to reassign seat time for out of class events where appropriate. The University requires that you spell out your attendance policy in your syllabus.

**8. Your Grading Policy -- US 1150 is a letter graded course.**

You must make qualitative assessments of all submitted student work. We do not expect that all our students will receive A's. Please do not grade Freshman Seminar as a pass/fail course. We do not wish to focus or reward mere quantitative completion of assignment/attendance/and/participation. It is very important that you make **qualitative** assessments with appropriate feedback on each student's work. It is also very important that this course have high academic standards comparable to other first year Appalachian courses. You should clearly spell out your grading. Students expect to know how they will be graded and the University requires that we explain our grading policy in our syllabus.

**9. Class Outline.**

You do not need to have all class activities predetermined and listed in the syllabus. In fact, it is probably better not to do so. Stay flexible so that you may respond to the needs of your students. Student and class personas vary. List assignments in whatever detail you deem appropriate. However, we urge you to include University calendar dates that will affect your course, such as the last date to drop a course, Convocation, holidays, last day of classes, etc. Remember to specify examination dates, GIC date if available, Open House, and other special dates in your course.

We advise you to look at sample syllabi, which are on file in the Freshman Seminar office (30 Whitener Hall).

**B. Class Budget** One unique advantage we enjoy when teaching Freshman Seminar is our class budget. Academic Affairs supplies each class with \$15 per student to pay for the GIC (\$5), cultural activities (\$5), and feeding students at your home or in the class setting (\$5). The purpose of this money is to support community building within your class, stronger faculty-student connections, and a friendlier atmosphere in your class. The Freshman Seminar office will assist you in scheduling and paying for the GIC, and we will also purchase and deliver cultural events tickets to you. Itemized receipts for food purchases or other expenditures within your \$15/student limit must be turned in to the Freshman Seminar office for reimbursement.

**C. Course Evaluation** University policy requires that all classes be evaluated once a year. Freshman Seminar students participate in a standard course and instructor evaluation at the end of the semester. Evaluation forms are provided by the Freshman Seminar office. Student evaluation results are returned to instructors early the following semester. A copy of the current evaluation form is in the Faculty Training Manual. In addition to the end of course evaluations, students may be asked to complete the online version of the First-Year Initiative Survey (FYI) sponsored by the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Furthermore, we encourage you to conduct a **midterm evaluation** and seek regular student feedback throughout the semester.

## **D. Required Readings**

**1. Textbook** Freshman Seminar has always utilized a textbook to achieve a common course content. In the spring of 2005, the textbook selection committee designed a custom edition of Bob Feldman's *P.O.W.E.R. Learning*, coupled with numerous articles, as our common text. This textbook and its supporting materials provide a valuable framework for Freshman Seminar classes. It is available through the rental system at the bookstore.

**2. *New Connections: A Freshman Seminar Handbook*** In its fourth edition, this ASU specific handbook provides a compendium of information used in Freshman Seminar classes. Segments on computing, Appalachian history, Myers-Briggs, campus resources, money management, wellness, and other topics provide a convenient and essential resource for students. All Freshman Seminar classes use *New Connections*, which is available for purchase through the Bookstore (for \$22.95).

**3. Supplementary Reading** Freshman Seminar is a college class. We believe that there is not enough required reading during the undergraduate years at Appalachian, especially in the first year. With this in mind, Freshman Seminar students should read at least one, but no more than two, supplementary books or novels. We think that the assignment of major collateral reading relevant to the freshman experience is essential for better reading habits and to demonstrate more effective reading strategies. You may want to consider

using *Freakonomics* by Mark Stephen Levitt and Stephen Dubner, the summer reading book for 2006 freshmen. It will be distributed to all freshmen during Phase I orientation. Instructors may pick up a free desk copy from the bookstore. Numerous additional possibilities are listed in the training manual and on our Freshman Seminar Home Page (<http://www.freshmanseminar.appstate.edu>). Readings should be discussed thoroughly and incorporated into class discourse. They can be the subjects for writing assignments and class examinations. Encouraging reading for pleasure and information, for self-fulfillment and personal development can be one of the most powerful contributions we can make in Freshman Seminar.

## II. Course Designators

Freshman Seminar (US 1150) carries three course designators: Writing (W), Computing (C), and Cross-Disciplinary (CD).

### Writing

A course must require a “substantial amount” of writing to be considered for a writing designator. Different kinds of writing may be practiced. The instructor will evaluate writing and students will be given the opportunity to demonstrate improvement based on instructor feedback. For a three-hour course, at least 15% of the grade should be based on writing. Students in US 1150 write frequently throughout the semester, receive meaningful faculty feedback, and are given the opportunity to either revise papers or complete additional writing assignments in order to demonstrate improvement. Types of writing that would qualify might include: a series of short reaction papers, weekly journals or reaction cards, regular letters/memos, essays or reports, term papers, individual written projects, book reports, cultural events reviews, etc

Students must have multiple opportunities to engage in formal writing, receive feedback, and be given a chance to improve their writing on subsequent assignments. The objective is to have students write frequently and **receive regular written feedback**. Required writing should be turned in, evaluated carefully, and returned promptly with appropriate comments from you. Students must write the equivalent of 3-4 formal papers during the course of the semester. These can range from short reaction papers (1-2 pages) to longer (4-5 pages) analytical papers.

### Computing

Our Computing (C) designation requires that we help students learn to use specific software applications and to develop skills in using computers as learning tools. Freshman Seminar is a gateway to the University. As such, we help students learn baseline software applications and computer skills necessary to succeed in college. These include, but are not limited to: using a word processor to write and format papers, proper use of electronic mail, Internet research, spreadsheets, and powerpoint. Development of these skills and applications is infused with other course content. Below are examples of how computing can be infused with other Freshman Seminar goals:

- ❑ Reflective e-mail journals
- ❑ Creating a spreadsheet as part of a budgeting, time management, or GPA calculating assignment.
- ❑ Creating a PowerPoint presentation on Appalachian history, wellness, or career options.

Discussing the implications of technology on our lives, especially the impact on interpersonal relationships, is also an effective way to address computing.

### **Cross-Disciplinary**

The goal of cross-disciplinary courses is to integrate knowledge acquired and analytical methods applied from two or more disciplines. Cross-disciplinary courses will explore topics from the perspective of two or more disciplines and incorporate readings, analyses, and evaluation measures that ensure a cross-disciplinary perspective. US 1150 incorporates content, readings, and perspectives from many disciplines, including Psychology, History, Education, English/Literature, Health, Theatre/Dance/Art/Music, and Business. The units that meet the spirit of this designator are marked throughout this document with a CD.

## **III. Building Community**

**A. Group Interaction Course (GIC)** One of the most popular required activities in Freshman Seminar is the Group Interaction Course. Students report that it is a powerful experience. They tell us that its impact reaches far beyond the group challenges, class fun, and individual self-discovery that occurs during the activity. It raises them to a new level of understanding about what college means. All of this happens outside the classroom, away from campus, in the quiet beauty of the University Woods. The GIC becomes a metaphor for building community, valuing difference, seeking instruction, planning, dealing with criticism and failure, focusing attention, managing time, and many other things related to college success. Because it has proven to be such a valuable student experience, we have agreed that **all classes will participate in the GIC** early in the semester, preferably in September. Contact the Freshman Seminar office to sign up for a time. (Consult the faculty training manual for additional information about preparation, participation, and follow-up class assignments.)

**B. Service Project** Last year almost half of all Freshman Seminar classes engaged in some form of service project. A service project can advance class goals, especially community building and discovering Appalachian. Furthermore, service projects can strengthen helping, communication, and coping skills. They can broaden perspectives, develop human interaction skills, and teach freshmen how to handle new kinds of responsibility. Service learning can help students identify and define future student and life roles. If you decide to undertake a service project, our experience shows that these work best when performed as a whole class. Appalachian's ACT office can also help you organize a meaningful project. We encourage you to consider a service project.

## **IV. Achieving Academic Success**

**A. Learning Skills** Freshmen regularly report that they need to improve their learning skills to succeed in college. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many freshmen continue to use the same approaches (“tools”) that worked in high school—even though they do not always work in college. With this in mind, we must address learning skills more directly in Freshman Seminar if we are to prepare students to be successful in their majors and beyond. Consequently, each class must introduce academic success strategies, such as note taking skills, test taking strategies, and college reading strategies. Our new textbook, faculty resource manual, and resource room offer numerous useable approaches.

Learning skills activities should be woven together throughout the semester with other course objectives. Practicing note taking during a lecture on ASU History offers one possibility. Introducing new reading strategies while studying collateral reading (perhaps the text from the linked course) provides another avenue. Strengthening learning skills equips freshmen with more and better “tools” for success at Appalachian.

**B. Use of the Library** Students must learn how to use Belk Library if they want to succeed at Appalachian. Students will benefit throughout their college and professional lives from this initial introduction. It can best be accomplished by integrating a library research component into at least one class assignment. The educational staff and faculty in Belk Library support our efforts and have developed several components to further our efforts. First, they have developed a tutorial and quiz on basic library research skills that must be completed before the class visits Belk Library. Every student will complete this on-line library tutorial quiz. Second, library staff will work with instructors to develop relevant assignments requiring use of library resources. Finally, library personnel will introduce students to resources available in the Electronic Library Classroom and then support their individual research efforts. The goal is to show freshmen how to make use of modern library resources for both general information and discipline specific purposes. At a minimum, students will learn how to locate books, journal articles, reference materials, and use electronic databases. Every class must participate in a library visit that includes a session in the Electronic Library Classroom. To prepare for this assignment, schedule a class visit, or find out more about this component call Anne Viles at 262-4972.

**C. Academic Integrity** Professional ethics and integrity are becoming more and more important in today's complex world. Expectations are rising with each revelation of poor judgment, illegal behavior, or questionable practice. As the first step toward preparing young professionals, each Freshman Seminar class will discuss Appalachian's Academic Integrity Code, including its implications for today and tomorrow. Students should be made aware of what constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

## V. Exploring & Managing Life Beyond the Classroom

**A. Time Management** Up to this point, the lives of our freshmen have been determined overwhelmingly by school, family, and work. Now we ask them to manage 168 hours each college week in a largely unstructured environment. This can be challenging for freshmen. Accordingly, each Freshman Seminar class must address effective time management strategies.

**B. Wellness** (*CD - Health*) Freshmen often overlook the importance of wellness in their success strategies. Experience shows that students who do not employ proper wellness strategies often get derailed during their first semester. Freshman Seminar must confront wellness issues beyond Open House visits to the Infirmary. Stress, personal health, STD's, and responsible alcohol and drug decision making must be addressed. This can be accomplished by developing individual approaches drawn from faculty training, utilizing suggestions in the Faculty Resource Manual, or calling on professionals in the Health Center or Counseling Center.

**C. Money Management** (*CD - Business*) Learning to manage money is one of the most difficult challenges new college students face. Even though our students may be receiving money from home, they may never have had to manage their finances before. Living on a limited budget, avoiding the lure of credit cards, and establishing a good credit history are new challenges for freshmen. Decisions made now may strongly affect their financial future. This is the time in their life to start learning smart money management. Freshman Seminar should address the important issues of budgeting and establishing good credit.

**D. Liberal Arts Education** (*CD - Education*) From our experience, freshmen know very little about what it means to be a liberally educated person. They enter college without clearly understanding the goals of higher education. Freshman Seminar helps students understand the goals of a liberal arts education, the importance of academic integrity, the rituals and celebrations of the academic world (Convocation), and the personal process of goal setting. It can be helpful to connect this conversation with career planning so students can see how their general education will prepare them for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work. We urge you to assign the article in *New Connections* on the liberal arts and to discuss this concept with your students.

**E. Myers-Briggs** (*CD – Psychology*) The Myers-Briggs Type Inventory is the most widely used personality assessment instrument in the world. It is not a diagnostic tool for psychological problems or a scale of positive or negative behaviors. It helps us understand human differences and our preferred styles of learning and behavior. We employ the MBTI to help students meet the challenges of the classroom and campus. It can be a very powerful teaching and motivational tool with freshmen and can be connected with learning skills, diversity issues, understanding professors, roommate problems, relationship issues, career exploration, and a host of other Freshman Seminar topics. Resource persons will be available fall semester to present this concept to your

class. In order to maximize time, we ask that classes pair up for the presentations. A minimum of one full class is needed to explain and demonstrate the concepts. Assignments utilizing MBTI can be integrated into other topics throughout the semester.

**F. Cultural Events** (*CD- Humanities*) ASU's Astronomy Professor Daniel Caton once wrote that "going to college and only attending the popular music events would be like flying to France for vacation and eating only at McDonald's." Cultural experiences are an important part of a liberal arts education. They broaden horizons, open new worlds, and offer opportunities for self-discovery and expression. Freshman Seminar students are expected to attend at least one University-sponsored cultural event. A portion of our class budget supports ticket purchases for cultural events. Integrate the event you or your class chooses into your class themes. Explain to students that we value cultural events because they build community, broaden horizons, expand our appreciation of diversity, help us discover more about Appalachian, and enhance our understanding of what a liberal arts education means. Attending a cultural event is also an opportune time to organize a meal with your class.

**G. Majors and Career Planning** Retention research has clearly demonstrated a correlation between career development and graduation. A clearly thought out career path can provide the focus, motivation, and determination needed to persevere to graduation. Therefore, it is important that each class of Freshman Seminar address major and career development issues, probably in the second half of the semester. This can be done with textbook or web-based assignments, by visiting the Peer-Career office, or by inviting individuals from the Career Development Center to your class. Academic advisors are also equipped to facilitate this component in connection with developing a four-year plan and choosing a major. The career component of your course should result in three activities:

1. Introduction to on-line career resources, including the Career Development Center's Web Site and the on-line *Occupation Outlook Handbook*
2. A visit to the Peer Career Office to explore majors and careers
3. Discussion of or development of a professional resume

**H. International Programs** (*CD – Social Sciences; Humanities*) Understanding our world is more important today than ever before. Global events and trends shape our work, votes, and future more than ever seemed possible a generation ago. We can learn about our global society in the classroom, but a more powerful and increasingly viable way of discovering our world is to study abroad. Representatives from International Programs (Bob White, Nancy Wells, & Denise Goetz) can arrange group presentations to explain study abroad opportunities to our students. Other ideas for incorporating this component into your class can be found in the Resource Manual.

## **VI. Connecting with Appalachian**

**A. Walk for Awareness** Freshman Seminar classes are encouraged to attend the Walk for Awareness. This annual event, held on the Tuesday evening (9 p.m.) after Labor Day, provides a powerful forum to discuss campus and personal safety.

**B. Convocation** Freshman Seminar classes participate in fall convocation. Experience has shown that we need to prepare students ahead of time with information about the speaker and the topic. A writing assignment connected to Convocation and the summer reading book can add interest and enthusiasm to the event. Attending as a class can help to build community outside the classroom. Follow up discussions can address important common issues confronting our entire academic community.

**C. Open House** Each fall the Freshman Seminar Office organizes an Open House designed to introduce students to support services and personnel that may be critical to their success. Classes visit the Learning Assistance Program, Health Services, Peer Career Office, and Counseling Center. Visits are scheduled in the late afternoon or early evening and usually last about one hour and twenty minutes. Instructors are expected to attend with their classes. Many instructors substitute Open House for one class period. Most connect an assignment or quiz to this activity to ensure student accountability. Dates for this year's Open House are being finalized. More information will be forthcoming shortly. Each class is expected to participate in this informational program.

**D. Campus Involvement** National studies show that students succeed at higher rates when they are actively involved in campus life. Involvement can, of course, be carried too far, leaving no time for academic or personal life. But modest involvement can make an important difference. As a result, Freshman Seminar instructors have long felt that each freshman must become involved in one campus organization of their choice during their first semester at Appalachian. There is a wide range of options, including official clubs, intramural sports, religious activities, or perhaps even employment. Selection should be preceded by a discussion of what constitutes a campus organization, criteria for involvement, pros and cons of involvement, and the overall benefits of membership or participation.

**E. Appalachian History** (*CD - History*) Freshman Seminar offers the only class that introduces freshmen to Appalachian's past. Our history presents a unique vehicle for "discovering" identity and understanding our purpose. Suggestions for introducing Appalachian history are contained in the Faculty Training Manual. Resources available include an on-line PowerPoint presentation, course document kit with instructions, a 20-minute video overview, and a list of resource persons willing to talk about Appalachian's history to your class. A minimum of one class must be spent on ASU History. Talking about history usually comes later in the semester, after other more basic things like community building, transitions, and learning skills have been introduced. Some instructors have scheduled Appalachian history around homecoming to add substance,

flavor, and context to a freshman's early college experience. A trip the graveyard behind the student union makes a dramatic conclusion to any history discussion.

**VII. Learning Communities Involvement** (*CD - Varies*) The most important new academic initiative of the past decade is the Academic Learning Community. These link each Freshman Seminar class with one other academic class, sometimes English or History. Students are co-enrolled in both classes, class activities are coordinated, and instructors meet periodically to talk about the students with an Academic Advisor. The results have been remarkable. Students are more successful and feel more connected, supported, and engaged. Faculty learn to share and interact in new academic ways. And students have the benefit of a three-person support team (Freshman Seminar instructor, instructor in the other academic class, and an Academic Advisor) working to support their success. We urge you to participate fully and enthusiastically in your Learning Community. They expand our Freshman Seminar community in valuable ways.