

**SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY  
ONE WASHINGTON SQUARE  
SAN JOSE, CA 95192**

**S09-4, Policy Recommendation, First-Year Experience (FYE)  
Courses**

**Legislative History: Rescinds S04-2**

At its meeting of May 11, 2009, the Academic Senate approved the following policy recommendation presented by Senator Von Till for the Curriculum and Research Committee.

**Action by University President:** Approved by President Jon Whitmore on May 27, 2009.

**Policy Recommendation  
First-Year Experience (FYE)**

**Resolved:** That processes for approving first-year experience (FYE) courses, including Metropolitan University Scholars Experience (MUSE) seminars and all others, be consistent with other curricular processes, within a timeframe to be approved by the Curriculum and Research Committee; and be it further

**Resolved:** That S04-2 be rescinded; and be it further

**Resolved:** That the attached guidelines for approving FYE courses be implemented; and be it further

**Resolved:** That the Undergraduate Studies Committee, in consultation with the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies responsible for first-year experience programs, collect data from courses using the new guidelines, and report to the Curriculum and Research Committee annually and recommend any revisions to the guidelines, if necessary, beginning in the 2011-2012 Academic Year.

Approved: April 6, 2009

Vote: 11-0-0

Present: Buzanski, Campbell, Cooper, D'Alarcao, Morelos-Zaragoza, Roldan, Romo, Schultz-Krohn, Stacks, Van Hooff, Von Till

Absent: Nance, Semerjian, Hypes

**Financial Impact:**

The cost will depend on course models implemented. This policy does not require campus units to offer FYE courses.

**Workload:**

The initial development of new courses will increase faculty workload. The guidelines also increase workload for members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee. However, the new approval processes for FYE courses will decrease workload on an ongoing basis, compared to the current separate MUSE process.

**Rationale:**

Institutional data indicates that our retention and graduation rates are lower than average for comparable universities. In particular, we have significantly low success rates for African-American and Latino students. It is important that we offer courses and co-curricular activities for first-year students to make a successful transition to university-level work. FYE programs are linked with higher retention and graduation rates, better academic performance, more student involvement with campus activities, more frequent and meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, and positive student attitudes and perceptions of higher education<sup>[1]</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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## **GUIDELINES FOR FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE) COURSES**

### **PURPOSE**

These guidelines define goals, student learning outcomes, and other criteria for First-Year Experience (FYE) courses for new freshmen and establish processes for approval and assessment. They encourage the development and assessment of a variety of models for such courses in addition to the current Metropolitan University Scholars Experience (MUSE) seminar model.

### **HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

The Metropolitan University Scholars Experience (MUSE) new student seminar program was implemented in fall 2002, under Academic Senate policy S01-11, superseded by policy S04-2. It has been an elective course since its inception, most recently reaching 35% of students who entered San José State University (SJSU) in fall 2008. There are other existing and proposed course models intended to help new freshmen make a successful transition to the university.

### **RATIONALE**

The most well-studied and widely adopted academic intervention for first-year students is a course with limited enrollment (usually 20 or fewer), close interaction with faculty and peers, and a focus on the development of transferable academic skills. There is strong and consistent empirical evidence that such courses are positively linked with retention, academic performance, graduation rates, student involvement with campus activities, and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education.

MUSE seminars have demonstrated a significant positive impact on retention rates at SJSU. For the fall 2007 entering cohort, the one-year retention rate for students completing a MUSE course was 6.5% higher than for those who did not take any FYE course (83.8% vs. 77.3%). For the fall 2006 cohort, the 1-year retention rate was 5.3% higher for MUSE students (82.2% vs. 76.9%) and the 2-year retention rate was 4.8% higher (71.4% vs. 66.6%). Enrollment in a MUSE course is associated with higher 1- and 2-year retention rates across remediation status and ethnicity. There is also evidence indicating a positive impact on graduation rates and time to graduation, though the data are limited to cohorts entering SJSU prior to 2005. On average, students who complete a MUSE course have higher GPAs and are more likely to be in good standing in their first four semesters.

The need for the FYE course at SJSU is readily apparent from institutional data that indicate our retention and graduation rates are lower than average for comparable universities. In particular, the success rates of African-American and Latino students are low. To fulfill our commitment to “inclusive excellence,” SJSU must increase its efforts to foster the academic success of new students.

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## **FYE GOALS AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The overall goals of the FYE course are to help students to:

- make a successful academic & personal transition to the university;
- become engaged in the curricular and co-curricular life of the university; and
- clarify their educational, professional, and personal goals.

The FYE course is intended to introduce students to academic and co-curricular opportunities and expectations at SJSU, combining intellectual challenge with support. It is one component of a broader FYE program designed to help students make a successful academic and personal transition to the university. It complements other strategies for success, such as orientation, advising, tutoring, and co-curricular programs.

Building on national experience, including institutions that serve students with backgrounds like those who enter SJSU, many faculty and staff have collaborated to develop the following student learning outcomes (SLOs), which are responsive to our unique context:

By the end of the FYE course, students will be able to:

- 1) discuss the value of higher education to individuals and society;
- 2) locate academic and co-curricular experiences and resources at SJSU that will help them achieve their educational goals;
- 3) identify the skills and attitudes that contribute to academic success as a university-level scholar and assess their own strengths and limitations in those areas; and
- 4) demonstrate an ability to participate actively and respectfully in class discussions and dialogues, recognizing how their own and others' identities influence their interactions and how to bridge differences.

## **COURSE CRITERIA**

To encourage experimentation and innovation, only a few criteria that have strong empirical support are required:

- The course should begin by the first semester. While some models may include activities before the semester begins (e.g. Summer Bridge, extended orientation, and/or an immersion experience) or extend throughout the first college year, research indicates that the first weeks are critical.

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- Students should meet with a faculty member (not a teaching assistant or peer mentor) in groups no larger than 20 for at least 15 contact hours. Studies have found consistent evidence that faculty-student interaction in small group settings is associated with many indicators of success for first-year students.
  - It should provide an appropriate transition to the university for students from multiple majors (3 or more) in a context that allows practice of academic skills with appropriate academic content. There is evidence from national surveys that FYE courses that focus on a single discipline are less effective than courses which focus on interdisciplinary themes or academic success themes.
  - It should involve learning activities outside the classroom, such as co-curricular programs, supplemental instruction, tutoring, advising, field visits, academic student organizations, and/or service-learning. These experiences increase student engagement and familiarity with campus and community resources. They also help students understand that their education extends beyond formal classroom settings.

## **SAMPLE COURSE MODELS**

Below are some models for FYE courses, but diverse and experimental approaches are encouraged. Some models may be designed for specific student populations (e.g., honors students, former foster youth, students with disabilities, first generation college students).

**FYE seminar** – This is a seminar (at least 3 units) of not more than 20 students meeting for one semester (usually twice a week for 75 minutes). The current MUSE classes fit this model.

**FYE course with large lecture/small sections** – This is a course that combines a weekly large lecture and weekly small sections of not more than 20 students. The current Science 2 “Success in Science” classes have one lecture (100 minutes) plus one activity section (100 minutes). Alternate combinations might include a 75-minute lecture plus a 75-minute seminar section or 100 minutes of lecture (one or two times a week) and 50 minutes of a seminar section.

**Combination FYE/lower division course with large lecture and an FYE co-requisite section** – This is a course that includes both first-time freshmen (FTF) and other lower division students in the large lecture, but has separate small sections required for FTF only. It might involve a lecture (1 to 2 contact hours) plus one seminar or activity section (1 to 2 contact hours) for **all** students. Sections for non-FTF could be larger than 20. Alternately, it might involve 3 contact hours of lecture for all students but a required FYE seminar section linked to the course for FTF only (probably with an additional 1 unit credit).

**FYE extended courses** – This is a course that extends over two semesters. It could be for 1, 1 ½, or 2 units in the first semester, with the remaining unit(s) in the

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second semester. Class size for the first semester would be no more than 20 students, using a seminar format. It could be larger in the second semester, combining several sections. Students would earn an “in progress” grade for the first semester.

**FYE learning communities** – Learning communities are defined by the Learning Communities National Resource Center as “classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students ([www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcFaq.htm#21](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/lcFaq.htm#21)).” Some learning communities extend beyond the classroom, for example, involving “living/learning communities” in residential halls and/or interest group activities for students which are centered around a common theme, career interest, or major.

## INITIAL COURSE DESIGNATION

Proposals to designate new FYE courses shall address:

- how the course will meet the student learning outcomes;
- how those outcomes will be assessed; and
- how the course meets the course criteria.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee will review the proposal. The committee can designate the course or seek clarifications or discuss concerns with the department. If the committee does not recommend designation, the department can request review by the Curriculum and Research Committee.

If the department is also requesting initial GE certification for a new course, the proposal can be submitted to the Board of General Studies while it is also under review for FYE designation. It is possible that a course may be designated for FYE, but not certified for GE, or vice versa.

**Special procedures for current MUSE courses for fall 2010:** MUSE courses that have been offered in fall 2008 and/or fall 2009 and which have been offered three or more times shall go through regular curriculum approval procedures to become permanent during the 2009-2010 Academic Year (AY), including required approvals by the Board of General Studies (BOGS) and the Undergraduate Studies Committee. Other MUSE courses (experimental courses or sections of “regular” GE courses) which have not yet been offered three times may be approved for fall 2010 by peer review groups according to the procedures described in the next paragraph or may go through regular curriculum approval procedures. All MUSE courses shall go through regular curriculum approval procedures prior to being offered in fall 2011.

Peer review procedures for current MUSE courses for fall 2010: For GE areas in which there are a sufficient number of MUSE sections to support two or more peer review groups (a peer review group consists of two to five instructors in the same GE area to assist in the development of courses) for course development, course proposals shall be exchanged among peer review groups for the initial GE review, with a member of the

MUSE peer group, all courses be sent to the appropriate GEAP for initial review. Final review of changes recommended in the initial review process should be approved by the Coordinator of MUSE and the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies responsible for FYE programs.

## **COURSE ASSESSMENT AND CONTINUING COURSE DESIGNATION**

FYE courses shall be assessed according to the plan submitted as part of the designation process. The continuing FYE course designation process will occur at the same time, but separate from, program planning. A summary of the assessment results, lessons learned from the assessment, any changes to the course, and a current greensheet shall be submitted for continuing designation.

## **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

The Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies for FYRST (First Year Resources for Success in Transition) Programs, in consultation with the Office of Institutional Research and the Undergraduate Studies Committee, will have primary responsibility for the development and implementation of a program assessment plan to monitor the overall effectiveness of FYE courses. At a minimum, the assessment plan will cover the impact of the FYE course on student retention, progress toward degree, academic standing, and graduation rates overall and by remediation status and ethnicity. It will also evaluate the comparative effectiveness of various course models.

## **MODIFICATIONS**

Proposed changes to these guidelines shall be reviewed by the Undergraduate Studies Committee, which will forward its recommendations to the Curriculum and Research Committee for a decision.

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appropriate General Education Advisory Panel (GEAP) augmenting each peer review group to ensure expertise in GE evaluation. For GE areas in which there is only a single

This policy is intended to address several issues related to FYE courses:

- It will make approval and assessment processes for FYE courses consistent with curriculum processes for other courses. The MUSE course approval process established in S04-2 was different from other curriculum approval processes. The new processes will assure that FYE courses meet the same standards of rigor and academic content as other courses.
- It will provide data to help the Academic Senate make decisions about FYE courses in the future.
- It encourages the development of flexible, effective, and cost-efficient FYE models.
- It charges the Undergraduate Studies Committee with oversight of FYE courses.