

## **First Year Seminar Proposal (Fall 2013)**

Please provide a detailed course proposal including the following:

1. Name and Department/Unit:  
Rhonda Sprague - Communication

2. Course Title:  
Navigating Personal Relationships in College

3. Course description tailored to prospective first-year students (150-200 words).

You will encounter many different types of relationships during college. Your experiences will force you to develop and maintain relationships with friends, family, roommates, professors, advisors, co-workers and significant others, to name only a few. Which types of relationships do you prefer? Why? What does it mean to have a relationship with someone? Which characteristics distinguish one type of relationship from another? What are the rules of relationships and how do you learn them? This class will explore some of the more common elements of personal relationships – such as power, language and intimacy – and how learning to understand these can help you navigate the many different relationships you will encounter. We will consider different types of relationships as they are portrayed in popular culture (television, movies, magazines, etc.) and compare them to the relationships you have experienced. Ultimately, this seminar will help you learn to use your relationships to help structure your future in college and beyond.

4. Briefly summarize your approach to teaching a First Year Seminar, including your teaching philosophy specific to freshmen students.

I love working with freshmen. As the undergraduate advisor in my department, I meet with all our new majors during freshman orientation sessions during the summer and throughout the school year. I love how “shiny” they are: Everything is new and exciting to them. My goal for an FYS course would be to help them maintain that excitement and reward them for being curious and exploring new ways of thinking and learning. I am used to teaching freshmen because I teach our orientation to the major course. During the fall semesters, that course contains mostly first-year students. Generally speaking, that means I spend more time covering basic information such as how to read a DPR and how to get ready for an advising appointment. It also means I spend more time being repetitive and redundant. Not only do I tell students what I want them to know, but I also include it in the syllabus and steer them toward other sources where they can find the same information.

My FYS course probably would use a combination of lecture, discussion, and group work, combined with reading, reflective writing and practical assignments done outside of class. Because the course topic is universal – everyone has had and will have relationships – I anticipate assigning a different relationship type each week and starting with student examples to drive discussion on the first day. After discussion, I will use lecture – accompanied by video/audio clips, magazine articles, advertisements, etc. – to present key ideas about concepts and introduce any relevant campus resources. For example, I might spend one week discussing relationships with professors. I would assign one or more articles for students to read before coming to class. Then, I would ask students to discuss good and bad relationships they have had with teachers. After each student had an opportunity to participate in the discussion, I would lecture about the nature of teacher-student relationships, incorporating examples where appropriate. The lesson would be wrapped up with a critical writing assignment, which students would bring to the next class meeting for review and critique.

5. Explain how the course will advance the First Year Seminar learning outcomes listed below. For each outcome, provide clear examples of teaching practices, course materials, or assignments that you will utilize in teaching the course. Preference will be given to proposals that promote student engagement and critical thinking through High Impact Practices such as co-curricular learning within the course; team-based learning; service learning; interdisciplinary approaches; and frequent writing/frequent feedback.

***Describe the importance of a liberal education and the ways in which academic study is structured at UWSP.***

Relationships can really only be understood from within a broader social, historical, philosophical and otherwise normative context. Examining the relational element of attraction, for example, is infinitely more interesting when norms about attractiveness are presented from within a historical context. Photos, advertisements, and writings can be used to demonstrate differences in what has been seen as attractive over the decades and centuries. Explanations about why these differences occurred need to be rooted in sociological, psychological or economic contexts. Formal bonds also are more interesting when students understand the role that religion or practical economics has had upon reasons for marriage. In short, a study of personal and professional relationships is ideal for helping students understand how one area of study can inform others.

***Describe the importance of critical thinking and information literacy and apply the associated skills.***

The study of relationships is inherently interesting to freshman students, but also to most of the rest of the population. I can take advantage of this fact to help students understand what it means to find and evaluate information. One way I might help students understand and use information and critical thinking would be to design a team-based research project. I can envision a significant exploration into family relationships, for example, since family relationships are nearly universal. After arranging for a tour of the library, I might require students to do library research on different types of families, then conduct interviews with their own and others' family members, collecting stories about family rituals and traditions. We might read a full-length novel, such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and compare traditions found in the story with ones collected from students' interviews. I might bring in or assign students to explore depictions of different types of family relationships seen in popular media, focusing upon television, movies, or song. After spending a good chunk of the semester collecting ideas and information about family relationships, students would need to formulate a group theory about what constitutes a "great" family relationship. They would need to support their ideas with evidence from their own and others' research, of course, and then be prepared to make a formal group presentation of their ideas. Altogether, an assignment such as this would offer students ample opportunity to think critically and demonstrate good research skills.

***Identify and apply appropriate note-taking, test-taking, and time-management strategies to their academic studies.***

This theme would weave throughout the seminar. At the beginning of the course, I would probably have students take some formal assessments of their skills and abilities with regard to study skills such as these. I might have students follow up these formal assessments with regular journaling about their use of time during a given time period. When do they take notes? Why? What do they do with them? How do they study for tests? Which type of environment is best for studying? Are they worried about managing their time? The current generation is used to juggling multiple responsibilities, but they also are used to having their parents manage their actual schedules. That isn't going to be possible in college, so they will need to find their own tools. I can use class activities to help. For example, I'd like to find an interesting article about how smart phones can help students stay on top of their own lives. Ultimately, my goal will be to reinforce the idea that students are responsible for their own academic successes and failures, and then to help them find resources and tools to enable them to accept that responsibility.

***Describe the importance of co-curricular involvement and how it enhances their academic study at UWSP.***

This is something I already do in my orientation to the Comm major course. The first thing I would do is introduce students to the scope of co-curricular activities available for them here at UWSP: everything from study abroad to volunteer experiences, intramurals and beyond. I might invite someone or several someones who have studied abroad to come talk about their experiences. I will discover class members who are in student organizations, on varsity athletic teams, in intramurals, etc. and ask them to talk about what their involvement adds to their academic lives. If students are not currently active, I could ask them to start by reflecting upon what their co-curricular involvement did to add to their high school experiences. Ultimately, my goal would be to have students consider several different options and determine how these might be added to their curricular experiences.

***Identify and utilize UWSP programs, resources, and services that will support their academic studies and co-curricular involvement.***

I'd love to have students go on a virtual or actual scavenger hunt for information about support services on campus. I definitely would want to introduce them to the library, TLC, and the IT help desk. I would want them to know where to find Career Services and the counseling/health center. I might make them attend the Involvement Fair and interview at least two people representing organizations they might find interesting. By presenting and reinforcing multiple options for finding resources for success, I hope students will feel less awkward about actually doing it.

***Develop a plan that demonstrates their responsibility for their own education, specifically how it relates to their interests, abilities, career choices, and personal development.***

I would use a system similar to the one I use in my orientation course to do this. I have begun making students create electronic portfolios to do just this. In them, students need to 1) identify a job they might like to take right after college; 2) create a curricular plan that will enable them to gain the knowledge and skills they would need to be eligible for that job; and 3) develop a co-curricular plan that will enhance their classroom knowledge. They also include a reflection about where they are and what they still need to do.

6. Do you anticipate that this proposed FYS course could also meet the learning outcomes for one of the following GEP categories: U.S. Diversity, Global Awareness, Environmental Responsibility, or Experiential Learning? If so, which one? (Please note: suitability for other GEP categories will not be used to determine FYS selection.)

Not at this time. Once the course is developed, I might see about suitability for one of these other categories.

7. Please ask your department chair to provide a statement of approval. (Use the attached form, which chairs can email separately.)

### Submission of Proposals

**By submitting this application, the instructor agrees to teach his/her First Year Seminar during the Fall 2013 semester and to participate in the FYS Workshop in late August 2012.**

**Please send course proposals electronically to James Sage at [jsage@uwsp.edu](mailto:jsage@uwsp.edu).**

Seminar proposals will be reviewed and selected by members of the First Year Seminar Planning Committee. The 2011-2012 committee includes: Valerie Barske (History), Christopher Cirimo (College of Letters & Science), Mary Duckworth (Residential Living), Nisha Fernando (Interior Architecture), Timothy Halkowski (Communication), Rob Harper (History), David Hastings (Music), Kathe Julin (Interior Architecture), Sue Kissinger (College of Natural Resources), Tim Krause (Computing and New Media Technologies), Toni Sage (Tutoring-Learning Center), Kelly Schoonaert (Health Promotion and Human Development), James Sage (Academic Affairs), and Kami Weis (Student Academic Advising Center).

**Proposals are due on or before March 2, 2012 for Fall 2013.**