**Instructors Manual for**

**LEP100: First Year Seminar (FYS)**

Compiled by the Southwest Minnesota State University Liberal Education Committee and Instructors of First Year Seminar

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**Overview:**

• Part I contains introductory information for faculty who are interested in teaching First

Year Seminar.

• Part II is a syllabus template for First Year Seminar

• Part III contains forms and assessment tools, including the form needed to submit proposals for First Year Seminar.

**Part I. Introduction**

The purpose of First Year Seminar (FYS) is to introduce critical thinking andinformation literacy skills that will be continuously practiced and strengthened throughout our liberal education curriculum. FYS should also help students develop an understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts and encourage them to become involved in the campus community. Ideally, we want our students to be *thinking* about the material, *interested* in learning, and actively *participating* in class discussion and activities.

Instructors who are interested in teaching a section of First Year Seminar (FYS):

1. Choose a theme for the proposed section**. The theme should have a clear connection to critical thinking for the instructor as well as for students** (see below).
2. Complete the First Year Seminar Proposal form and prepare a draft syllabus for approval by department of the instructor.
3. Submit an Electronic copy and 1 hard copy of the proposal form to the Dean's office in BA 268 along with a copy of the syllabus and “proposal of less than major significance” form. The proposal form is located in Part III of this manual and on the website. The less than major significance form is located on the curriculum website.

Proposals will be reviewed by the LEC and the Curriculum Committee. Questions should be directed to either of the Co-Chairs of the LEC.

***Learning Objectives***

The following core objectives should be included in the syllabus. Class topics and assessments will correspond to these objectives.

1. An introduction to university education, and also the social and intellectual community of Southwest Minnesota State University.
2. **An introduction to** critical thinking. This includes the ability to construct arguments, evaluate claims and evidence, and consider multiple points of view.
3. **An introduction to** research skills and informational literacy, including use of our library's collection of books, periodicals, and online resources.
4. A greater understanding of (insert your theme here).

**Course Content**

Each section of FYS emphasizes the basic skills of critical thinking, information literacy, the meaning of a liberal arts education, and the importance of campus involvement. Use of the course theme is secondary to this objective but may be a means to deliver this content. Below is a suggestion as to how much time should be spent to adequately cover these core learning objectives. Keep in mind that this is not a prescriptive time line or order in which to cover these parts of the course (ie do this on day 1, then do this on day 2). In fact, these pieces can be woven together such that part of class time is spent in building connections activities, and part is spent on the LEP or critical thinking.

**Topic Area** **Approximate time on task**

Building connections activities FYS LO1 5-10% (equivalent to 2-4 classes)

Liberal Arts education/SMSU LEP FYS LO1 5% (equivalent to 1-3 class periods)

Basics of critical thinking FYS LO2 40% (equivalent to 6 weeks of class)

Information literacy FYS LO3 10% (equivalent to 3-4 class periods)

Critical thinking within the theme FYS LO4 35% (equivalent to 5 weeks of class)

***Building Connections Activities***

It is important that students become comfortable with each other, with the instructor, and SMSU. We want to encourage students to become involved with clubs and organizations on campus and take part in campus events. Some Building Connections activities should be front-loaded into the first week of the semester to help students adjust to university life, but the remainder can be dispersed throughout the semester—for example class attendance at campus events.

***Liberal Arts Education/SMSU LEP***

We encourage faculty to help students discover the meaning of this statement “SMSU is a comprehensive university with a liberal arts tradition.” Classes can explore the purpose/role of a liberal arts education using questions such as “What does it provide for you? Why are you here? What are employers looking for?” Faculty are also encouraged to discuss the design of the SMSU liberal arts curriculum and its importance. Finally, the FYS class is a great opportunity to enforce the importance of advising and how to understand the DARs report; emphasizing that the LEP is more than a bunch of boxes to be checked off but instead foundational to students becoming engaged citizens in their local and global communities.

***Critical Thinking***

Critical thinking is defined as the ability to evaluate information wisely and examine how assumptions and positions are shaped.

This definition includes the following additional objectives for our students:

• Demonstrate information literacy by accessing, utilizing, formatting, citing, and documenting relevant material accurately and correctly.

• Interpret arguments by correctly identifying relevant premises, conclusions, and key assumptions.

• Evaluate the extent to which evidence is reasonable, relevant, accurate, and sufficient to support intended claims.

• Formulate clear, well-supported arguments.

• Engage in civil discourse, self-reflection, and consideration of other points of view.

Much of our students' previous education focused on memorizing material and taking tests. At best, they might have been asked to write essays in which they found evidence to support a previously held position. This is only the first step toward the development of critical thinking.

As Anthony Weston suggests in his book, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, an argument should be presented, not as a means of persuasion, but as a method of inquiry. Students should be encouraged to think carefully about the available evidence before taking a side. Thus, rather than seeking premises that support conclusions, students should consider the premises first, and only then decide on a conclusion.

How basic critical thinking skills and the theme are presented may depend on the theme or preference of the instructor. However, since this course counts for MnTC Goal 2, syllabi and course content should reflect that critical thinking is emphasized.

1) Some instructors may find it beneficial to teach all general critical thinking exercises prior to discussing the theme. They then can use the last part of the semester to show how critical thinking fits within the theme—"Remember when we discussed X earlier, we can see how that is used here."

2) Other instructors may find it beneficial to intermingle the two together.

a. Basic critical thinking topics 1-2

Related theme topic A

b. Basic critical thinking topics 3-4

Related theme topic B

It is important for students to realize that critical thinking skills of one class can be applied across disciplines. While we all teach critical thinking within our disciplines, some may emphasize certain content areas over others based either on personal preference, theme subject matter, or even a lack of experience in certain areas. It is important for students to be introduced to a breadth of content using examples from across disciplines. We highly recommend using the text *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking* by Anthony Weston as a guidebook as to what types of content should be covered. This book can provide instructors with examples outside their normal disciplines and can help create assignments for students to practice their critical thinking skills on content other than the course theme. This will better enable students to transfer their critical thinking skills between courses.

We recommend paying attention to the following chapters/content areas in the Weston text when designing your course as these are easily adaptable across disciplines:

1. What is an argument? The difference between arguments and assertions

2. Short Arguments (Ch. 1)

Identifying premises and conclusions

Identifying reliable/unreliable premises

Building on substance, not loaded language

The importance of consistent terminology and defining terms (see appendix II in text as well)

3. Generalizations (Ch. 2)

Finding relevant examples

Avoiding biased sample

Checking background rates /use of controls

Understanding the use/misuse of numbers and statistics

4. Arguments by Analogy (Ch. 3)- when is it appropriate

5. Sources (Ch. 4 see information literacy section as well. Good time to include this component!)

Identifying informed, impartial sources

Identifying independent sources

Use of WWW

6. Arguments about Causes (Ch. 5)

Correlation vs causation

Proposing alternative explanations

7. Identifying common logical fallacies (Appendix 1)

\*note that the ability to recognize a statement as fallacious is the priority more than being able to name the type of fallacy

8. Some instructors may find Ch. 7, 8, and 9 useful if students will be writing essays for giving presentations.

***Information Literacy***

Often, students have a limited understanding of the difference between strong sources and weak sources, and they often have difficulty conducting research, relying too much on Google and Wikipedia. These are components of critical thinking and should be covered during First-Year Seminar.

All LEP100 sections will help begin the incremental development of information literacy skills during a student's first two years. Each FYS section may request library instruction which can be tailored toward the section’s theme as much as possible. These skills will be developed further in ENG 151 and ENG 251. Much of the information literacy instruction will take place at the library with the aid of our library faculty. However, additional information literacy instruction materials may be provided by the library and can be led by instructors in their regular classrooms.

Please fill out the “request for instruction” form on the library website at the beginning of the semester!

<http://www.smsu.edu/library/form442.cfm>

**LEP100 Course structure**

***Theme***

Each instructor should choose a theme that is related to his or her discipline, or some other area of interest or expertise. Themes should involve controversies and issues about which students can think critically. They should also be as intrinsically interesting as possible in order to spark student interest and get them involved in their educational experience.

Every theme should include questions and problems which can be answered with a "moderate degree" of certainty by the examination of arguments and evidence. Too much certainty leads to easy answers, whereas too little certainty encourages students to give up. A moderate level of certainty promotes an understanding of multiple perspectives. It also provides a good opportunity for students to take an informed stand and defend a position.

No matter what the theme, every effort should be taken to encourage active learning through class activities, discussion, and problem solving. Lectures, rote memorization, and "reaction papers" that do not require use of critical thinking should be kept to a minimum.

***Course Title***

The theme should be described in the course title in the top two lines of the syllabus. The first line should be "LEP 100: First Year Seminar." The second line should be the title of the particular section, reflecting the theme. Titles should clearly describe the theme, but they should also be short enough to fit the space constraints of the online class schedule. Beware that excessively long titles may become truncated on the online class schedule.

***Course Description***

In addition to its place on the syllabus, your course description may be used in the online course schedule and on a list of FYS sections that will be available for incoming students to browse while registering for their courses. The catalog description (provided below) should be adapted to describe the particular theme chosen for your section of the seminar.

"First Year Seminar (FYS) is a small, discussion-oriented course that introduces students to

SMSU's liberal education program, with a special emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills. Students will choose from a set of different topics that have been selected by the instructors. They will have the opportunity to think, discuss, and write about issues related to that topic. First Year Seminar is taught by faculty from across the University."

***Textbooks***

The following critical thinking textbooks are recommended for First-Year Seminar. Other readings should be selected to fit the theme of the particular section.

*A Rulebook for Arguments* by Anthony Weston

*A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking* by Anthony Weston

***Academic Resources***

Students should be provided with information about the various academic support resources located on campus. These include Academic and Diversity Resources, Academic Commons, the Registration and Advising Center, Counseling and Testing Services, the Writing Center, and the Speech Center. Students should be encouraged to use these services at relevant times during the course. For example, the Writing Center can be recommended when students are given feedback on drafts of their written work.

The following line should be included somewhere in the syllabus: "If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please contact Pam Ekstrom,

Director of Disability Resources, in BA 246."

***Academic Honesty***

Students should be introduced to the Academic Honesty Policy contained in the SMSU Student

Handbook. This includes a discussion of plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, tampering, and assisting in the dishonesty of others. This conversation can take place at various points during the semester, including the first few weeks of class and also in the context of writing papers with proper citations.

If students are allowed to choose their own topics for an essay, they may attempt to submit the same written work in both FYS and their ENG 151 class. Students should be informed that "self- plagiarism," or submitting the same work for different classes is not acceptable conduct.

Instructors are encouraged to discuss this in class and also include an explicit policy about this on their syllabi.

***Recommendations***

Class attendance and participation is recommended as a requirement of FYS. There should be an emphasis on class discussions, group work, and active learning techniques in order to promote student involvement and the development of critical thinking skills.

Written work should be a component of the students' grades. This may consist of various assignments in critical thinking (see text *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking* by David R. Morrow & Anthony Weston for examples); composition and/or evaluation of short argumentative essays, research papers, or letter-to-the-editor activities.

Instructors are encouraged to incorporate campus and community events into their classes whenever possible to assist in meeting objective one. Activities that involve collaboration or interaction with other sections of FYS are also desirable.

***Course Evaluations***

A common course evaluation instrument is used to assess student perceptions of progress on learning outcomes. This instrument consists of ratings of the course, not the instructor. Data collected from this instrument are aggregated across sections and used for the assessment of the First -Year Seminar, not for the purposes of tenure and promotion. Course evaluations are given on D2L using the survey feature. The current evaluation form can be found in Part III at the end of this document.

***Program Assessment***

The First Year Seminar is a key component of SMSU's Liberal Education Program. FYS instructors will be asked to assist with assessment of the LEP by administering a common critical thinking assessment tool and other assessment measures. Instructors must give and grade the Modified Ennis-Weir assessment using “The Moorburg Letter” as a pre-test and post-test. The pre-test should occur in the first 1-2 weeks of the course and the post-test in the last 1-2 weeks of the course. Although students may receive their scores on “The Moorburg Letter” pre-test, instructors *cannot* go over the letter with their students after the pre-test as that would corrupt data from the post-test. After the post-test, however, instructors may go over “The Moorburg Letter” with their students. At the end of each semester pre-test and post-test scores for each student must be forwarded to the Liberal Education Committee for assessment purposes. Per Article 22 of the IFO/MnSCU Master Agreement, any course assessment or instrument used to survey students as part of an LEP 100 class shall not be used as a method of evaluation unless submitted by the affected faculty member as part of his/her Professional Development Report (PDR).

**LEP 100: First Year Seminar**

Southwest Minnesota State University

Class meeting time

**Professor:**

Office Location:

Office Hours:

Office Phone:

email:

**Course Description**

The First Year Seminar (FYS) is a small, discussion oriented course that introduces students to the University’s liberal arts curriculum and the purpose of higher education, with a special emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills. The theme of this section of FYS is (insert your theme here).

**FYS Learning Objectives**

1. An introduction to university education, and also the social and intellectual community of Southwest Minnesota State University.
2. Progress in critical thinking. This includes the ability to construct arguments, evaluate claims and evidence, and consider multiple points of view.
3. Progress in research skills and informational literacy, including use of our library’s collection of books, periodicals, and online resources.
4. A greater understanding of (insert your theme here).

**Required Texts** (available at the SMSU Bookstore)

* *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking* by David R. Morrow & Anthony Weston
* (Insert text/s on your theme here)

**General Information**

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, please contact Pam Ekstrom, Director of Disability Resources. Also, please see me after class or during my office hours so that the appropriate arrangements may be made.

**Course Requirements (instructors may weight these accordingly)**

1. **Attendance and participation**

Instructors should require attendance and have a means of assessing participation.

1. **Campus events journal/papers\* (FYS LO 1)**

Instructors could require attendance at X number of university events such as (1) fine arts, (2) academic, (3) athletic, and (4) club. Students will then write reflective papers or journal entries about the events attended. One approach is to have students explain how a certain type of event illustrates a specific LEP learning outcome.

1. **Short argumentative essay/letter to editor\* (FYS LO 2, 3, and 4)**

Instructors could require students to display their critical thinking skills by having them write a short argumentative essay/letter to the editor.

1. **Assignments/quizzes\* (FYS LO 2 and 4)**

Instructors could give frequent assignments/quizzes related to basic critical thinking skills studied in the Weston and to the theme.

1. **Common critical thinking assessment Pre/Post-test (FYS LO 2)**

Instructors must give and grade the Modified Ennis-Weir assessment using “The Moorburg Letter” as a pre-test *prior* to studying anything from the Weston and post-test *after* studying the Weston. The pre-test should occur in the first 1-2 weeks of the course and the post-test in the last 1-2 weeks of the course. Although students may receive their scores on “The Moorburg Letter” pre-test, instructors *cannot* go over the letter with their students after the pre-test as that would corrupt data from the post-test. After the post-test, however, instructors may go over “The Moorburg Letter” with their students. At the end of each semester pre-test and post-test scores for each student must be forwarded to the Liberal Education Committee for assessment purposes.

***\*A group of faculty along with Liberal Education Committee will write instructions and provide examples for the activities listed above. Other suggestions are welcome!***

**Schedule:**

**LEP100: First-Year Seminar Proposal**

*Part I: Click and type in the gray area to respond. The space will expand as needed.*

1. Name: Click here to enter text.

2. Phone: Click here to enter text.

3. Email: Click here to enter text.

4. What is the title for this section of First-Year Seminar?

Click here to enter text.

5. Describe the theme you are proposing in a brief paragraph:

Click here to enter text.

6. How will this theme be used to teach critical thinking skills?

Click here to enter text.

7. How will this theme be used to encourage class discussion?

Click here to enter text.

*Part II: Indicate your agreement with the following statements by checking the boxes.*

This class will focus on the LEP outcome of critical thinking as its primary goal.

This class will emphasize active learning techniques over lectures.

This class will introduce students to the SMSU library and build information literacy.

This class will explicitly introduce students to all LEP outcomes.

This class will introduce students to academic and social resources available at SMSU.

This class will build connections among students, the university, and/or the community.

This class will foster an understanding of academic honesty and integrity.

This class will build an awareness of the values and habits of study in higher education.

This class will participate in the FYS assessment process.

*Part III: Print this form and sign below.* Submit an electronic copy and 1 hard copy to the Dean's office in *BA 268.*

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**First-Year Seminar: Course Evaluation**

Student feedback is extremely valuable for the continued improvement of courses at Southwest Minnesota State University. Please rate your experience in LEP 100: First-Year Seminar on the

following survey. Respond to each statement according to the five-point scale given, from

*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Your answers will be completely **anonymous**. Thank you

for participating!

Note: this survey is administered online via D2L.

1. This course helped me develop my critical thinking skills.

2. This course helped my understanding of sources and evidence.

3. This course helped make me more aware of different points of view.

4. This course helped me become a better consumer of information.

5. This course helped me use the library more effectively.

6. This course helped me develop my writing.

7. This course helped me feel comfortable participating in class discussions.

8. This course helped me become aware of campus resources and activities.

9. This course helped me understand the Liberal Education Program at SMSU.

10. This course helped me understand the importance of academic honesty.

11. This course emphasized active learning over lecture.

12. The information presented in this course was clear and well organized.

13. The topics covered in this course were interesting.

14. The books and readings assigned in this course were helpful.

15. This course made a positive contribution to my education.

16. I plan to continue my education and complete my degree at SMSU