

STOCKTON
FIRST-YEAR

SEMINAR

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS:
A HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY**

STOCKTON UNIVERSITY
REVISED SPRING 2021

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook was first created in 2014 by GT Lenard and updated by her in 2016. GT served as Coordinator of the Freshman Seminars for more than a decade. She demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the faculty who teach these courses and the students who take them. GT helped the program become the defining academic feature of the first-year experience. Revisions and changes will be made through the years, but we'll always have started this Handbook with GT's ideas, enthusiasm and commitment to the success of all new students.

The Handbook includes Acknowledgments, a description of the Essential Elements of a First-year Seminar and a brief history of the First-year Seminars at Stockton by Bob Helsabeck. I've added a list of past Common Readings and Convocation Speakers to maintain a record of these important components of the program. The syllabi from First-year Seminars remain the most important and useful part of the handbook for faculty interested in teaching a First-year Seminar. These syllabi represent the wide diversity and creativity that instructors bring to their First-year Seminars. Our seminars are academic courses; they introduce students to intellectual life at Stockton and carry credit towards graduation. The courses are varied in subject matter and approach, but are united in the coverage of the Essential Elements and the enthusiasm of the teachers.

If you have questions or concerns about the content of this Handbook, please get in touch. I'm always happy to chat about First-year Seminars.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & GRATITUDE

The School of General Studies houses the First-year Seminars, but it's more accurately described as our home. Dean Rob Gregg is so committed to the First-year Seminar program that he even teaches a course. This hands-on experience helps him advocate for both professors and students in a way that ensures success for all of us. Dean Gregg has supported Summer Institutes in 2014, 2016, 2018 and now a bonus Summer Institute in 2019 to help address the need for more seminars in this period of sustain growth in new students. Our Assistant Dean Claire Lopatto is both the brains and the muscle behind this entire operation. She knows everything and everyone and can make excellent seminars appear out of nowhere if that's what our students need. She's cool and she's calm, and makes sure everything gets done. The GENS staff are always friendly and kind as they help with the many tasks of coordinating a program with more than 60 courses and dozens of professors. Thank you especially to Kirsten DiPatri, Dale Howell and Shawn Manuloa for solving every problem that's brought to them. Everyone working behind the scenes in GENS keeps things both pleasant and productive.

Assistant Provost Tom Grites is the Director of the First-Year Experience Council and was always our biggest supporter in the Provost's Office. Lucky for us, he does anything and everything that's needed to give Stockton students a meaningful first-year experience, especially the Common Reading and Freshman Convocation. From ordering books and negotiating contracts, to hosting our Convocation speakers, Tom does it all. He's a tireless advocate for students in transition, and we're fortunate that he supports and believes in the First-year Seminars as much as he does. His retirement in June 2020 is going to impact us for a long time.

The First-year Seminar Advisory Board meets to generate ideas, solve problems and ensure that our program is a success. The current members are: Tom Grites, Elizabeth Pollock, Shelly Meyers, Kerri Sowers, Josh Duntley, Aleksandra Hultquist, John Bulevich and Peter Baratta.

The Summer Reading Group "Book Club" includes First-year Seminar professors who volunteer their time each summer to read dozens of potential books for the Common Reading and meet over the summer to determine the finalists. This job is almost thankless, and often the target of a fair amount of criticism, but these hard workers keep at it. Thank you to 2020 members - Aleksandra Hultquist, Emma Kluesner, Shelly Meyers, Jess Bonnan-White, Nancy Reddy, Kerri Sowers, Lauren Fonseca, Rodger Jackson, David Lechner, Donni Allison and Ann Walker - your perspective is invaluable and your work is greatly appreciated. Please consider this an open invitation to all First-year Seminar teachers to join this important committee – especially if you are one prone to complain about our selections.

Of course, the success of any program depends on its members, and the faculty and professional staff who teach the First-year Seminars are the shining stars of this important endeavor. The greatest gift of the Convener position is the opportunity to bear witness to the dedication, diligence and creativity of these outstanding teachers. My sincere thanks to all of you for leading Stockton students down a path of success.

COMMON ELEMENTS FOR ALL FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

First-year Seminars are an indispensable part of a student's first-year experience at Stockton; all freshmen are required to take a seminar in their first semester. A seminar should introduce them to the skills necessary for success in college and connect them with a skilled and compassionate educator. Taking a seminar should ensure that each student become an analytical thinker, competent reader, careful speaker and listener and capable researcher. The student will know and be known by a full-time faculty or staff member.

Required Components for All First-year Seminar Classes

1. READING

Each seminar must require engaged, active reading of each student. Students should be introduced to the mechanics of reading academic prose: annotation, underlining, note-taking on the required reading, etc. Instructors must occupy students in the process of becoming curious readers, involved and challenged by the text.

2. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A. Writing: each seminar must require routine writing from each student. Although First-year Seminars may not carry the "W" designation, each must use writing that gets read and responded to as a component of the course.

B. Speaking and Listening: Instructors should encourage class participation in all forms, including asking questions, and understand that active listening is also a form of class participation. Instructors should encourage students' and instructors' active listening to each other and respect for the speaker by not interrupting or otherwise discouraging the free exchange of information, point of view and instruction. Certainly more formal presentations (by individual students or groups of students) are encouraged in each seminar.

3. INFORMATION LITERACY (RESEARCH/LIBRARY)

Each seminar must provide some kind of research project. That project should include oral presentation or written work by individuals or groups; evaluating and using print and/or electronic resources; and instruction in understanding/avoiding plagiarism, as well as instruction in all areas of academic honesty. Seminars must also include instruction in the use of Library resources.

Suggested Components for First-year Seminars

1. Common Reading: Instructors should make room in the syllabus for students to read, think about, discuss and/or write about the Common Reading selection. Attendance at Freshman Convocation should also be encouraged or required of all students (and instructors). The Common Reading, whether linked to the course content or not, provides a shared academic experience for all first-year students.
2. Engagement: Instructors should encourage (and model) involvement in the intellectual and cultural life of the college.
3. Diversity: Instructors should encourage respect for diversity in people, cultures, and points-of-view.

THE COMMON READING AND THE FRESHMAN CONVOCATION

We introduced the Common Reading program for first-year students in 2006. The Common Reading is meant to introduce students to college-level critical reading and to ensure at least one academic commonality for all freshmen. As a way to accommodate professors with different types of courses, we currently switch between fiction and non-fiction each year. The Freshman Convocation is typically held on the last Thursday of September, and whenever it's logistically and financially possible, we invite the author of the Common Reading to campus for this special event.

We ask First-year Seminar faculty to include the selected book as a required text for the class. Because the First-year Seminar faculty teach such diverse topics in the liberal arts, it can be difficult to select a book that fits into the course topics of dozens of different courses. We always do our best, and far more often than not, the instructors figure out how to incorporate the book and the Freshman Convocation into their course.

Year	Common Reading	Author(s)	Convocation Speaker(s)
2021	<i>Between the World and Me</i>	Ta-Nehisi Coates	Ta-Nehisi Coates (Pappas Lecture)
2020	<i>Binti</i>	Nnedi Okorafor	Nnedi Okorafor
2019	<i>Factfulness</i>	Hans Rosling, Ola Rosling & Anna Rosling Rönnlund	Sister Deirdre Mullan
2018	<i>Station Eleven</i>	Emily St. John Mandel	Emily St. John Mandel
2017	<i>Trust Me I'm Lying</i>	Ryan Holiday	Ryan Holiday
2016	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i>	Sherman Alexie	Ellen Forney (book's illustrator)
2015	<i>Whistling Vivaldi</i>	Claude Steele	Valerie Purdie-Vaughns
2014	<i>Orphan Train</i>	Christina Baker Kline	Christina Baker Kline
2013	<i>Spook: Science Tackles The Afterlife</i>	Mary Roach	Mary Roach
2012	<i>This I Believe II</i>	Jay Allison & Dan Gediman	Dan Gediman
2011	<i>Shoeless Joe</i>	W. P. Kinsella	John Thorn (MLB Historian)
2010	<i>Outcasts United</i>	Warren St. John	Luma Mufleh (main character) Warren St. John (also spoke in October)
2009	<i>The Reluctant Fundamentalist</i>	Moshin Hamid	Sehar Tariq
2008	<i>Unbowed</i>	Wangari Maathai	Charlie Savage
2007	<i>A Long Way Gone</i>	Ishmael Beah	Ishmael Beah
2006	<i>Bayou Farewell</i>	Mike Tidwell	Mike Tidwell

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FRESHMAN SEMINARS

By

Bob Helsabeck

In the mid-1980's several faculty and administrators at the College wished to provide a freshman seminar in some form to give our students a significant beginning to their experience at Stockton. At that time, the prevailing model of the freshman seminar was "University 101." It was typically a one or two credit course in which students were "oriented" to college life. These courses – however – lacked academic credibility – neither the students nor the faculty seemed to take them very seriously.

While exploring the literature, we learned of a very modest approach taken by the University of Puget Sound – a college, like Stockton, that was trying some alternative approaches to undergraduate education. In their effort to better serve their first-year students, they placed the letters “FA” (freshman advisor) next to courses in which the faculty member stood ready to give extra advice and counsel to freshmen. These professors, in effect, were agreeing to provide some of the services generally offered in “University 101” as a bonus to their regularly offered courses.

We thought we could “go one better” by attaching still broader freshman seminar functions into regular courses (not just the advising function). We would try to create seminars which would have the credibility of bona fide courses, not like University 101. In addition, Stockton, unlike most colleges, had the advantage of a separate General Studies curriculum made up of courses that had more malleability for first year students than the standard disciplinary “Intro.” courses. We thought this use of good, existing G-courses would be attractive to faculty and would minimize the faculty recruitment problems for the seminar program.

The College received a substantial grant to be administered over a three-year period, giving us resources for paid faculty workshops held in the summer. In essence we sought the best faculty we could find, asked them to tailor one of their best courses to first-year students, and teach it in a seminar mode for about 20-25 students. In addition to teaching the content of the course, we expected the faculty to give the students a genuine seminar experience in which they would gain the intellectual skills of good speaking and critical listening. (We preferred to leave the intensive writing instruction to the writing courses offered specifically for freshmen.) Furthermore, the participating faculty would encourage students to engage in the broader intellectual life of the college and learn to make optimal use of the library. That was about it. Good things would happen because we had good people and a good structure to facilitate such.

Most recently, we have expanded the expectations for the seminars and now expect faculty to include some portion of the both forms of language skills – oral and written. We also adopted a full year focus on the first-year experience. This broader focus is consonant with Ernest Boyer’s classic study of College.¹ We continue to involve strong faculty in serving this important program and are pleased with the quality of the experiences available to our first-year students.

¹ “The foundation for a successful undergraduate experience is proficiency in the written and the spoken word. Students need language to grasp and express effectively feelings and ideas. To succeed in college, undergraduates should be able to write and speak with clarity, and to read and listen with comprehension. Language and thought are inextricably connected and as undergraduates develop their linguistic skills, they hone the quality of their thinking and become intellectually and socially empowered.” From Chapter 5, Language: The First Requirement, in Ernest Boyer. College, Harper and Row, 1987.

FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS TODAY January 2021

In June 2020, the faculty teaching these important seminars voted to change the name to First-year Seminars. This change is in sync with the national programs focused on students transitioning to college and the linguistic trends toward gender neutral language. In the most recent Leadership agreement, the position of First-year Seminar convener was generally preserved, ensuring that this program and leadership by faculty is entrenched in this institution.

HELPFUL LINKS

[LINK TO SYLLABI FOR FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS](#)

[LINK TO 5-YEAR SELF STUDY FROM 2019-2020](#)

[LINK TO EXTERNAL CONSULTANT REPORT FROM NOVEMBER 2020](#)