



COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

# THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINARS 2011/2012



**ABOUT THE COVER:** First-Year Writing Seminars offer a variety of intellectually enriching learning environments and instructional modes.

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY  College of Arts and Science

FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINARS  
2011/2012

*A core component of the First-Year Common Experience  
in the College of Arts and Science undergraduate curriculum*

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN LIBERAL EDUCATION  
AXLE

# THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINAR PROGRAM

~ the axis of the First-Year Common Experience under AXLE ~

## LEARNING TO LEARN

The goal of your undergraduate education should be something more and better than just acquiring information; it should be learning how to learn. One of the unique aspects of a Vanderbilt undergraduate education in the College of Arts and Science is the opportunity to take a small-group, freshmen-only seminar during your first year on campus. These seminars are called First-Year Writing Seminars (FYWS). Some of you may have had the opportunity to take seminar-style classes in high school; others of you may have spent your time in regular lecture-style classrooms. Here at Vanderbilt, over time, you will encounter various approaches to instruction: lecture, laboratory, art studio, writing workshop, field work, independent reading, tutorial, service learning, internship, and seminar.

## WHY SHOULD I TAKE A FYWS?

In the College of Arts and Science, your FYWS is probably the most important learning experience you will undertake during your first year. Success in your four-year program of study will rest, to a large extent, on the methodologies, research skills, and academic self-discipline you master during your first year. Your FYWS will be the primary model for developing a tool kit of different methodological approaches to acquiring and analyzing information, and for beginning to understand how the faculty scholars, researchers, and artists who lead the FYWS perform the intellectual tasks of approaching the unknown, challenging the accepted, and, ultimately, contributing to the ongoing history of human ideas. The First-Year Writing Seminar program is specifically designed to encourage you to develop these intel-

lectual qualities in order to learn how to learn. In your FYWS, you will be expected to examine all ideas critically, to develop a mind free of preconceptions, to encounter opinions and attitudes different from your own, in an open, nondefensive manner, and to provide intellectual support for your newly evolving ideas and evaluations by engaging in challenging levels of dialogue, research, and writing.

## WHAT IS A SEMINAR?

A seminar is a small class led by one (occasionally, two) faculty members. There will be no more than fifteen students in your FYWS. It will meet two or three times a week, and everyone enrolled will be a freshman. You will meet in seminar rooms: specially designated, small classrooms, located all across campus, that encourage intimate, face-to-face learning, and allow everyone in the group to participate easily in discussion.

Although the common element in the FYWS program is the seminar venue, you will find that professors conduct classes in different manners. Some will deliver prepared comments as a lead-in to group discussion. Others will never lecture from notes, and will appear to be allowing the class to determine the course of the discussion. Some will use PowerPoint presentations or overhead projection. Some will show videos in class or assign films to be viewed out of class. Some seminars will feature small-group work that may take place in or out of the classroom. Some will generate lively, parallel dialogues online. Whatever pedagogical approach your professor favors, he or she will encourage you to be an active learner, rather than a passive receiver of information. In a seminar,

students and professors co-create the learning experience not only to optimize the acquisition of new information, but to provide a working model for how to evaluate, analyze, and articulate the new ideas that inevitably arise from the close encounter with the subject matter.

The precise nature of your participation will vary from one seminar to another, but it will generally take the form of discussion of ideas emanating from assigned reading, research on special projects leading to oral and written reports (which themselves become subjects of discussion), field work, library work, experimentation, and other means of becoming involved in your own education. You will gain experience in formulating questions, finding the sources of information to answer those questions, gathering, organizing, and analyzing the data you acquire, and communicating your conclusions to others, both orally and in writing.

## WHAT IS A FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINAR?

Successful learning depends on the successful communication of ideas to self and others. While the pedagogical model of the seminar encourages the lively exchange of ideas and information through its dynamic, interactive format, the process of learning extends into the ability to make a convincing and intellectually supportable argument for the consideration of new ideas. A new idea or insight that you are unable to communicate persuasively to others is of questionable value in your college experience. In the College of Arts and Science, you will have to write. And writing begins in the FYWS.

AXLE, the undergraduate curriculum of the College of Arts and Science, places a particular emphasis on training

in academic writing, and on the research and information literacy skills associated with writing. To that end, AXLE requires every Arts and Science student to take at least three writing classes during his or her four years at Vanderbilt. The first of these classes for most students will be the FYWS. In your FYWS, at least one class session will be dedicated to a library research tutorial, conducted on site at the relevant location of one of the nine Vanderbilt University libraries. In this tutorial, a librarian will teach you how to most effectively search the library book and periodicals collection, and will also instruct you in database research for your specific course. Prior to this tutorial, your professor will have worked with the librarian to prepare an assignment that is specifically related to the course content. The writing designation of your FYWS means that your instructor will ask you to write a total of fifteen to twenty pages throughout the semester. These assignments will be reasonably spaced over the course of the academic term, and you will have the opportunity to revise, discuss your writing with your professor one on one, and to address issues related to writing in class.

Coupling the seminar method of instruction with relevant writing assignments provides the best and most effective way of ensuring that students not only gain experience in encountering new knowledge and ways of thinking, but—by being required to articulate in apprehensible, logical, and academically standardized written forms of expression—that they are able to make use of these intellectual gains by sharing them with others through the communal medium of written language.

Writing assignments in FYWS will vary, according to discipline and pro-

fessor. Some professors will focus on research-style papers; others will ask for writing more tailored to the social or natural sciences, or they may interest themselves in the processes of writing. Every professor, however, will require you to write and will hold you accountable for the words you ultimately commit to paper. In your FYWS, you will learn the skills necessary for generating new ideas; doing the research to support those ideas; and authorizing them by their organized, apprehensible presentation in writing. These skills will help equip you for success at Vanderbilt and for life after Vanderbilt—wherever it may take you: graduate or professional school, the business world, the general job market, individual entrepreneurship, nonprofit work, arts administration, or volunteer programs at home and abroad. Learning to think by reading, talking, and writing is what you will be asked to do in your FYWS.

### SUPPORT FOR WRITING

Vanderbilt's Writing Studio offers a variety of programs and services designed to encourage conversation about the writing process and to enhance student writing and writing instruction. At the Writing Studio, students can meet with trained consultants to discuss all aspects of writing. In addition, the Writing Studio sponsors regular workshops for undergraduates on topics like proof-reading strategies, plagiarism, writing for specific fields, getting started, and tackling challenging writing projects. Writers' Nights, and student-organized Writers' Groups are also part of the support that is offered for undergraduate writing. The Writing Studio is located in 117 Alumni Hall, on the central campus close to most class locations, and there

is a satellite location in 217 Commons Center convenient to the first-year residence halls. The Writing Studio is open Sunday through Friday. For a complete listing of programs and services, see the website at [www.vanderbilt.edu/writing](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing).

### HELPFUL INFORMATION

Choose the FYWS you would most like to take, along with six alternates.

Note that more FYWS are offered in the fall than in the spring.

All first-year students are required to take a FYWS. Permission from the dean's office is required to enroll in a second.

All FYWS satisfy two AXLE requirements: the FYWS requirement, itself, and one distribution area requirement. Distribution area requirements are noted at the end of each course description:

HCA = Humanities and the Creative Arts

INT = International Cultures

US = History and Culture of the United States

MNS = Mathematics and Natural Sciences

SBS = Social and Behavioral Sciences

P = Perspectives

For more information on AXLE requirements, consult the program's guidelines in *On the Road with AXLE*, or online at [www.vanderbilt.edu/cas/overview/undergraduates](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cas/overview/undergraduates).

**Please see the following link for the latest list  
of seminars for Spring 2012**

[http://as.vanderbilt.edu/academics/axle/writing\\_seminars.php](http://as.vanderbilt.edu/academics/axle/writing_seminars.php)

