

For: the General Education Task Force  
Ideas for a Common Freshman Year GE Experience (Sept. 7, 2006)

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*Possibilities We Discussed—With Potential for UND*

1. *Freshman Seminar: to be required of all frosh*
  - *Option A: thematic course addressing “big ideas,” perhaps one major book or issue*
  - *Option B: transition to college, with orientation to univ life, using library, study skills that work, etc.*
2. *Linked courses: helping students make connections between courses they are enrolled in.*
3. *Learning communities for frosh: We have one here in Johnson/Fulton Hall*
4. *Common campus reading and follow-up discussions: might be done as voluntary activity (not required), but idea is for the campus to identify a book and hold discussions/lectures on it throughout the semester/year.*

Our Idea—for something that we think might work (practically) and also raise the purposefulness of GE for frosh (and others).....

Use the current common frosh enrollment (see below) to provide a common GE learning experience via linked courses. I.e., Ask instructors in the top 10 frosh enrollment courses to address one big idea/issue each semester (e.g., evolution, progress, global warming, poverty, universal health care). These courses are “automatically” linked simply because they have a lot of frosh in them. If instructors addressed the in-common theme-of-the-semester, students would learn and think about the topic in as many different ways as they had courses. Since all the courses are GER courses, their instructors are also expected to address GE goals and assess student learning related to those goals—perhaps the big idea of the semester could be appropriately fit into the course work (not as add on, but as an issue/idea that might be used, e.g., topic of writing assignment in comp, discussion or lecture example in intro courses, etc)

The top 10 frosh enrollment courses (based on F05): Eng 110 (1102 frosh), EHD 250-Univ Life (616), Math 109 (497), Biol 150+L (450), Psych 111 (429), Chem 121+L (385/444), ATSC 110 (424), PolS 115 (423), Soc 110 (412). The percentage of frosh enrollment, based on about 1800 frosh/year, ranges from 61% for Eng 110 to 23% for Soc 110. Therefore, if we can find a way to link these courses with a topic/issue in common, we will be reaching most of the frosh at UND.

The features of this proposal:

- The theme planned by a special GE committee named for this purpose. Themes announced and publicized a year in advance and included in all frosh contact info
- Instructors attend a faculty/staff 1-day seminar in previous spring, to study and discuss together a) the issue itself, and b) how to teach it within the context of their course
- Faculty lecture series, with on and off campus speakers brought in to address the campus each semester (3 in fall, 1 spring when enrollment is lower in the top 10 courses).
- No special credit or sign-up for this common frosh experience. However, frosh cannot “escape” it as it becomes part of all the top 10 courses if the instructors buy in.
- The president and provost promote the issue each year in public forums
- Later? The issue/idea becomes basis for annual faculty/grad student/staff think tank: “UND on Evolution: Different Voices, Diverse Ideas”
- Although not a requirement as part of UND’s GER, the experience is one that many frosh would experience and learn about together. If successfully addressed in several of the top 10 frosh courses, we could help make GE more purposeful on campus.....at least that’s our hope.