The FSEM Experience – A Faculty Perspective

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This handbook was developed by FSEM faculty for FSEM faculty. Whether you’re a seasoned FSEM instructor or new to the game and looking to develop an FSEM, this handbook provides a faculty perspective on different aspects of UMW’s first-year seminars. It is intended to be a helpful guide for anyone looking to develop or enhance their FSEM.

In this handbook you will find an overview of important information organized as follows:

**Part 1:** The History of the FSEM and the QEP
**Part 2:** Developing an Engaging First-Year Seminar
**Part 3:** Developing a Successful Student
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**Appendix A:** The QEP Research Outcome—How the UMW Libraries Can Help
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The History of the FSEM and the QEP

In 2007, the faculty of UMW voted to adopt a new general education curriculum, which included the First-Year Seminar (FSEM) as a new requirement. Previously, freshmen were required to take English 101: Writing Workshop, but a task force comprised of mostly faculty decided to substitute this freshmen requirement with a seminar that focused on broader skill development, rather than just on writing. This model for a first-year seminar was already piloted for several semesters prior to 2008.

After several years of successful seminars, the reaffirmation of UMW’s accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) was upon us, and the senior administration selected the First-Year Experience as the focus of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a required piece of our reaccreditation. After many rounds of revision and focus efforts, this plan was narrowed to a concentration on the First-Year Seminar. Our goal was to create better-defined learning outcomes for the seminars and to provide a variety of support services for first-year students and for faculty who teach the seminars. One important part of the support services involved the creation of a series of online learning modules to instruct students on fundamental skills in research, writing, and oral communication necessary for academic success. Part of the motivation for these efforts was to address the needs of a changing student demographic.

The QEP implementation began in a pilot stage in the fall of 2013, the QEP Director was appointed in the spring of 2014, and the full implementation of the QEP began in the fall of 2014. Starting in the fall of 2015, all students entering UMW will be placed in a first-year seminar prior to their arrival at orientation. This plan will ensure that they reap the benefits of one of these seminars in their initial semester.

In the following pages, you will find a wealth of insider knowledge about how to go about successfully developing and delivering your own first-year seminar. Written by a team of experienced faculty, this document highlights what works and what doesn't. While primarily written with the new FSEM instructor in mind, our hope is that all FSEM instructors will benefit from what this booklet has to offer.

Developing an Engaging First-Year Seminar

Understanding Today’s First-Year Student

Students coming out of high school are not necessarily ready to do the kind of work we want to see: they probably don’t read as well as we’d like because they haven’t been required to read primary sources or extensive texts; they probably don’t take notes well, if at all; and they probably don’t know
how to write a paper based on sources (formulate a thesis, document source material properly, etc.). Part of the focus of the FSEM program is to address these deficiencies by providing an intimate learning environment that emphasizes acquiring core academic competencies. On the other hand, they come into the seminar with some excitement because it’s likely a novel experience for them: they probably are used to larger class sizes, not a small group; they probably have never been taught by a “real professor” who is an expert in a field (and has a PhD!); and they probably attach some cachet to the word “seminar” that goes beyond what they envision for their other first-semester courses.

The first few weeks of their FSEM therefore are extremely important—you can alienate students or you can intrigue them and win them to the cause (of wanting to make the most of what a higher ed opportunity offers). Perhaps they’ll come down somewhere in between. Whether they have thought of it in these terms or not, you might suggest to them that they should aspire to be scholars or intellectuals—an opportunity that all those who don’t go to college will never have. Often too, students come out of orientation having heard a lot of warnings, precautions, rules, etc., from Residence Life staff and others, so many students will appreciate a classroom environment where they are not lectured at but invited to participate in a collaborative learning process—where they can feel inspired rather than intimidated.

Students coming out of high school are, for better or worse, typically absorbed in social media. Their mode of interacting with ideas/images/objects likely will have been influenced by the brevity, ephemerality, immediacy, and informality of Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Vine. Getting and holding their attention can therefore be a major difficulty. As scholars, we tend to value careful consideration and studious concentration, so the casual and spontaneous approach to interactions of all sorts by many of today’s students (interactions with their objects of study, but also with their professors and their peers) may seem an insuperable barrier to the work of real learning. Your FSEM represents an important opportunity to introduce your students to both the joys and challenges of serious critical thinking, but it also represents a truly wonderful chance to meet your students on their own terms or somewhere in between and to learn from them as well about this ever-changing world we live in. If you can dedicate yourself to meeting and matching their energy and enthusiasm with creativity, flexibility, and even fun where both course design and course delivery are concerned, your FSEM potentially will be one of the most formative and memorable experiences of their whole college career.

What makes FSEMs different from other courses?

FSEMs are a unique hybrid of a course: they are designed to replicate the environment and pedagogical style of an upper-level course for majors, while being targeted at the skill level and content interests of undecided incoming first-year students. These courses allow our freshmen to experience the best of what higher education has to offer in their very first semester on campus. However, this combination requires a very careful and specific course design.
Choosing a Topic

FSEMs are usually organized around a topic that your discipline can speak to, but that also has some popular appeal and perhaps a little bit of a twist. Many faculty members choose a topic that directly relates to their research agenda, often a small piece of which is easily accessible to nonspecialists, although many FSEMs also reflect faculty members’ broader personal interests. Topics that link your discipline’s research findings to contemporary political and cultural controversies can be especially successful. Above all, the topic should be one that lends itself to exploratory discussions rather than established conclusions.

FSEM topics should also be amenable to interdisciplinary inquiry. First-year students rarely understand the idea of disciplinarity, or that academic life is organized around different disciplinary approaches to knowledge. FSEMs that approach their topic from different perspectives offer an invaluable opportunity to expose incoming students to the interdisciplinary nature of higher education, as well as the liberal arts with a focus on different specific themes that might capture their interest.

Skills over Content

One critical way in which FSEMs are different from other courses is their explicit and continued emphasis on skills development. Unlike other intro-level courses intended for first-year students, the primary goal of the FSEM is not to give students a thorough grounding in the content knowledge of the discipline. Instead, the goal is to help students build research, writing, and speaking skills that will serve them throughout their college career and beyond. This is not to say that content is unimportant, but rather that it must be balanced against the FSEM’s goal of providing incoming students with the development of broad academic skills at the college level. This is one area where the online learning modules, developed as part of our QEP, come in handy.

Every FSEM syllabus must include the universal FSEM learning outcomes (see appendix), which specifically lay out the skills-development goals of the FSEM program. When designing your FSEM syllabus, you should build these goals into the assignment structure of the course. Every FSEM should include significant writing assignments, with opportunities for editing, faculty feedback, and student revision. Seminars should include formal and informal speaking, also with a mechanism for constructive feedback. Finally, each seminar should include at least one research project that uses primary sources, defined in whatever way makes sense for the topic at hand.

Many FSEMs set aside significant class time for teaching and discussing skills rather than content. In other words, many faculty devote entire class sessions to teaching research techniques, writing and editing skills, and oral presentation techniques—either on their own or using the resources of Simpson
Library, the Writing Center, and the Speaking Center. Most experienced FSEM instructors report that as their courses have evolved over the years, they have reduced their expectations for content coverage and have chosen instead to emphasize explicit skill development.

Make it a Seminar

As their name indicates, FSEMs are supposed to be seminars. Most importantly, that designation means that they should not replicate the classroom experience of most introductory courses. They should be built around a syllabus of primary sources, defined according to the disciplines involved, and not a textbook. The classroom environment should resemble as closely as possible that of an upper-division course in your department, so that first-year students know what they have to look forward to. Seminars are capped at 15 students because they should be driven largely by class discussion and active student engagement in the learning process. All FSEMs should emphasize scholarly self-initiative and should comprise students’ first steps toward the intellectual independence that UMW expects of its graduates.

Developing a Successful Student

Creating Assignments – Requirements of the QEP/Research, Write, Speak!

UMW’s Quality Enhancement Plan revolves around a tripartite emphasis upon research, writing, and speaking within the FSEM. Accordingly, FSEM instructors should keep all three of these skill areas in mind as they create their course assignments. The QEP website contains a host of helpful materials to ensure your assignments support the learning objectives of the QEP: Research, Write, Speak. There, on the left-hand side, you will find a series of links under each heading that provide you with listings of sample projects, access to current learning modules, and information about academic support centers.

As these links suggest, it is a good idea to approach creating assignments with an eye to how incorporating learning modules and campus resources can augment your students’ success at meeting the learning objectives. For example, experienced FSEM instructors can testify that scheduling an Introduction to Research and Information Literacy session with the library’s FSEM Coordinator Peter Catlin (who will individually design a presentation specifically catered to your course focus) is a truly effective means of providing students with important knowledge and techniques for conducting college-level research. Also, if you review The Writing Process learning module, you can see the value of requiring your students to complete this task before their first major written assignment. Above all, take the time to survey the wide variety of sample options available to you for each area; it is incredibly useful, for instance, to understand that oral communication objectives can be realized not only through
traditional speeches, but also through group presentations and interview projects, as well as through classroom discussion.

Building Class Community

Especially for first-year students, your classroom community is just as important as your course content. You are providing a space (both physical and academic) that promotes positive social skills and academic achievement. Remember, they are freshmen and are new to the culture of college. You are teaching them, and modeling for them, our expectations for academic work, conduct, and etiquette. They are being socialized in their residence halls with Orientation Leaders and Resident Assistants; it’s your place to provide a safe space for them to socialize academically in the seminar. Your course is fundamentally important to their first-year experience and their success at UMW.

Students (individually and as a group) learn best when they feel supported and part of a community where they are accepted and where their academic curiosity is encouraged. This is your role and you need to model this engagement with the content and with each other. You are creating an experience for them in which they can express themselves, work collaboratively, be productive, think creatively, develop original work, and problem-solve. Provide opportunities for fostering these skills. Moreover, these students come to us from various secondary school systems that have emphasized data, grades, mistakes, and product over process. They have been ‘doing school’ for many years. Your expectations, assignments, and assessments will be new to them. It’s your responsibility to create a classroom in which they can make mistakes and learn through the process of developing academic products. We need to break their practice of ‘doing school’ and help them take charge of their own learning.

For the first time in school history, most students will be placed into residence halls based on their chosen FSEM course, thus building a social and academic community on two fronts: where they live and where they learn. Because they come to us from different backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints, it is our task to create an environment in which all feel comfortable and are welcomed. That said, their ‘dorm life’ may surface in your classroom. Use these occasions as ‘teachable moments’ to build relationships and to develop communication and conflict resolution skills. Be aware of and attentive to these opportunities and challenges. Your mindfulness will be beneficial to their academic and social success during their freshmen year.

Working with and Advising First-Year Students

The FSEM Model for Advising
Serving as a first-year advisor to your FSEM students has several advantages, both inside and outside of the classroom. First, because of your weekly contact with them, you get to know your advisees much more thoroughly, which is helpful as you guide them through the intricacies of their FSEM experience and academic life at UMW and as you assist them in their academic planning. You observe them socializing with their peers and interacting with you as a faculty member, and you learn their academic strengths and weaknesses. Second, you converse with them on multiple relevant subjects—not only about the content of the course, but also about their daily challenges as college students away from home for the first time. Because you see them frequently, you can touch base with them about their other classes, study habits, organizational behavior, time management, and perceived academic difficulties. Third, they come to know and trust you because of your frequent contact during the FSEM. This factor encourages them to seek you out when problems arise, and it also persuades them to request help earlier rather than later. Having this personal connection with you can help them avoid many potential obstacles in their education at UMW.

Likewise, these students are much more likely to seek your assistance outside the classroom because they have developed a relationship with you during the FSEM. Effective academic advising consists of far more than simply helping students create a schedule of classes for the following semester. They need assistance with the transition from high school to college, and individual meetings with them early on in the semester are critical. They may seek your guidance during the first year, and later in their college careers, regarding issues with other faculty, problems with class work, recommendations for jobs and internships, as well as counseling for personal problems, in which case they may need to be referred to the Talley Center. In all these cases, you can advise them where to seek help, how to find tutors, and how to locate administrative personnel who can offer more professional assistance.

At the beginning of particular class meetings, dedicating a few minutes to cover some relevant information for that week will be valuable to your students. For example, during the first week, new students need to be aware that the last day to add a class is Friday of that week. Other deadlines, such as dropping a class without a “W”, switching to P/F, and applying for a tutor at Academic and Career Services, should be announced. Remind them that UMW e-mail is the main form of contact with faculty and other students and must be checked frequently. Throughout the semester, you will receive e-mails containing important information that will be relevant to share with your FSEM students. If messages are transmitted to students early in the semester, possible problems that arise when students miss key deadlines can be avoided. In the early weeks, you should review students’ schedules with them and verify that all of the classes they are taking appear on their transcripts. Similarly, if students have AP/IB credits that haven’t yet appeared, encourage them to contact the Office of the Registrar.

_Incorporating Academic and Career Services_
The Student Success Coordinators in the Office of Academic and Career Services are professional advisors who have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum and university policy and procedure. When unique circumstances require resolution, Student Success Coordinators can be very helpful in suggesting creative solutions. FSEM instructors should schedule two visits to their classes by staff from the Academic and Career Services. They will review important information relevant to students’ academic progress such as how to perform and understand a degree evaluation and how to prepare for advising sessions with their professors. These sessions help guide students early in their time here at UMW. Faculty are advised to schedule the first session around weeks 5 or 6, just before course registration advising and preregistration for the second semester is underway. The second session, focused more on major selection as well as connecting majors to careers, should be scheduled after preregistration is over.

Monitoring Their Progress

When in doubt about academic policy, Academic and Career Services is available to clarify and provide assistance to faculty advisors as they guide students through their first year at UMW. Faculty advisors are asked to post notes on advising sessions with students in Starfish. These notes provide valuable advising histories for future advisors to follow, and they help advisors and Academic and Career Services staff track students’ progress as their academic careers evolve. Another useful tool on Starfish is the notification feature for identifying students in jeopardy. Faculty advisors are notified if one of their advisee’s instructors indicates that the student is having academic difficulties. The faculty advisor is then encouraged to meet with the student and advise him or her on how best to move forward in that class and improve overall academic performance. If advisors have questions or are in need of support, they can contact staff in Academic and Career Services to determine how best to meet the student’s needs.

After the first semester, FSEM professors are strongly advised to check students’ transcripts to see how they performed academically. If their GPAs fell below 2.0, they are placed on academic probation and are required to meet with someone in Academic and Career Services for a probation advising session. It is essential that those advising sessions occur as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester so that sufficient time remains to make key adjustments to students’ schedules. Students on probation are strongly advised to take no more than 12-13 credit hours, but individual circumstances may call for varying credit hour recommendations. These situations require a meeting with a professional advisor in Academic and Career Services. Meetings with these students during the first week of the second semester are key, as they may mean the difference between adding or dropping a class. Sometimes, the academic improvement plan developed in consultation with a Student Success Coordinator may primarily focus on how to simply raise the student’s GPA enough for them to avoid suspension.

Pulling it All Together
There is no doubt that this model of including year-long advising and broader skill development with the fall-semester FSEM will require instructors to conceptualize the class experience a bit differently than they do with other courses. In particular, visits from Academic and Career Services, trips to the library, and visits to or from the Speaking and Writing Centers will take away from class time (all or part of approximately 5 classes!) but will ensure that our incoming students are made aware of the valuable resources available to help them succeed. While the content and skills are important, it will be necessary to cut back some on content in order to devote the necessary time (and class periods) to ensuring that these students receive the guidance and the tools to succeed during their first semester here at UMW, commonly the semester during which students struggle the most academically.

Appendices

Appendix A: The QEP Research Outcome – How the UMW Libraries Can Help

A class visit to Simpson Library will cover several topics important to research:

- Gathering background information
- Right and wrong ways to use Wikipedia
- Finding the right search terms
- Journals—what are they?
- Choosing the best databases
- Using bibliographies to find related sources
- Evaluating and citing sources

Additionally, the Library’s Coordinator of First-Year Programs, Peter Catlin, can work with you to create assignments for your FSEM and to create an online guide to library resources pertinent to your FSEM. Peter can also come to your class and do an in-class presentation specifically tailored to the needs of your course.

For more information, contact Peter Catlin at pcatlin@umw.edu or x. 2438.

Appendix B: The QEP Writing Outcome – How the Writing Center Can Help
The Writing Center’s student tutors can help your FSEM students with a wide variety of topics: brainstorming, introductions, conclusions, thesis statements, research questions, incorporating and citing sources, different citation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago/Turabian), grammar and punctuation, ESL and ELL issues, and constructing an argument.

A visit to or from the Writing Center can familiarize students with its services. The Writing Center also offers monthly workshops for students.

Gwen Hale, the Writing Center’s director, offers in-class workshops tailored to the specific needs of your course. Additionally, Gwen conducts highly effective in-class editing and revision workshops—a favorite go-to resource for many FSEM instructors.

For more information, contact Gwen Hale at ghale@umw.edu or x. 1036.

Appendix C: The QEP Oral Communication Outcomes – How the Speaking Center Can Help

The Speaking Center’s student tutors can help your FSEM students with topic brainstorming, speech writing and organization, practicing presentations, interviewing, class discussion, and communication apprehension.

A visit to or from the Speaking Center can familiarize students with its services. The Speaking Center also offers monthly workshops for students. Additionally, the Speaking Center’s director, Anand Rao, offers workshops specifically tailored to your course.

For more information, contact Anand Rao at arao@umw.edu or x. 1546.

Appendix D: Multi-section FSEMs

There are several examples of team-developed FSEMs that offer multiple sections in a given semester. The first example of this was Race and Revolution, a course focused on the work of James Farmer. The course was developed by a group of seven faculty (Philosophy, English, Mathematics, Geography, History, Political Science, Sociology). They met during the summer for four 4-hour work sessions (every two weeks) in which they discussed and debated the idea of an FSEM built around James Farmer, a name unknown to most students. Faculty all recommended articles, books, dvds, etc. for the group to read; they all recommended in-class and out-of-class assignments, research projects, possible
guest speakers, ways to connect the various sections to one another, ways to use blogging, etc. It quickly became clear that the lack of knowledge most people have of the Civil Rights Movement (of anything other than the Rosa Parks tale and the “I have a Dream” speech), and the lack of understanding of “race” on the part of most people, were the targets of the course. We wanted the students who take it to learn about Farmer, but also to learn to understand critically the way that the history and understanding of race in the 20th century had been whitewashed, and the ways that this is still playing out in American life today. A common syllabus emerged from all this interaction: week by week we use the same readings and assignments, and we share a common grading scale; each summer we meet at least a few times to review the course, what we think worked best and what we think should be changed. Of the original seven faculty who created the course, two are still teaching it in fall 2015 (a total of four teaching five sections); a total of 14 faculty have worked on this (been part of the planning meetings) and/or taught it. Fall 2015 will be the fifth year of the course; we have usually had 8 sections each year, but will be down to 5 this fall since the position of the James Farmer Post Doctoral Fellow will be unfilled in 2015-16.

Appendix E: Advising Resources

Online resources
First-Year Advising Guide
Undergraduate Academic Catalog
Requirements for Graduation

On-campus Offices
Talley Center (previously Counseling and Psychological Services)
1st Floor of Lee Hall, x. 2424

Academic and Career Services
2nd Floor of Lee Hall, x. 1010

Office of Financial Aid
2nd Floor of Lee Hall, x. 2468
finaid@umw.edu

Student Accounts
2nd Floor of Lee Hall, x. 1250 or x. 1289
umwbills@umw.edu
Appendix F: How do students get in to FSEM? What if students fail FSEM?
Starting in Fall 2015, every entering student will be guaranteed a seat their first semester in a course satisfying the FSEM requirement. Deposited students will be asked to complete a First-Year Student Questionnaire in which they will indicate preferred FSEMs and then will be pre-enrolled into one of their choices prior to their arrival at summer orientation in June.

Although the sections of FSEM have suffixes (e.g., FSEM 100 H3), all sections of courses satisfying the FSEM requirement are linked in Banner. This means that students who fail FSEM can retake any other course satisfying the FSEM requirement and have it replace their previous grade.

In the event that a student fails or withdraws from an FSEM their first semester, that student will be required to take the FSEM his or her second semester, and faculty should advise such students accordingly. In the unlikely event that a student fails FSEM twice, he or she would necessarily require an exception to the general education requirement (since students cannot repeat a course more than once).

Appendix G: Preparing a Proposal for the FSEM Committee

If you are considering preparing a new FSEM course proposal, you must prepare a proposal and sample syllabus, get it approved by your department chair, and then submit the proposal to the FSEM Committee chair. The Chair typically sends out a call for proposals toward the beginning of the fall semester.

As was pointed out above, FSEMs are focused heavily on the development of skills over content, and the FSEM committee looks for proposals that reflect this focus. All FSEM syllabi must include the officially-adopted FSEM Learning Outcomes on its first page:

Upon successful completion of an FSEM course, students will:

- Utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- Improve development and organization of written arguments;
- Demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- Apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; and
- Communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.
Then, the FSEM committee reads the syllabus carefully to see if the course is designed to fulfill those outcomes. The committee looks for evidence that the students will be conducting original research, doing substantial writing, editing, and revision, and speaking regularly in a variety of settings, both formal and informal. In particular, the committee looks to ensure that course assignments are designed so that students have opportunities to receive instruction and feedback from faculty members on researching, writing, and speaking, as well as opportunities to revise their work based on that feedback. Beyond the learning outcomes, the committee determines whether or not the topic is exploratory in nature, whether or not the course is driven by discussion rather than lecture, and whether or not it is based on primary sources, defined according to the discipline.

Proposals to the FSEM Committee must come with a cover sheet, which includes an opportunity for the proposing faculty member to offer a rationale for their course. This rationale is the ideal moment to explain precisely how your course design achieves the learning outcomes, if it isn’t clear from the syllabus itself. If by reading the syllabus and the rationale the committee can see that the course fulfills the learning outcomes, then it is generally approved with no problem. A proposal may also be returned for revision and generally approved after the recommended changes are introduced. Faculty are encouraged to seek assistance from the QEP office when it comes to preparing or revising their proposals. The QEP director can recommend other faculty willing to serve as mentors.

Appendix H: Little Things with Big Impact

I always make the first assignment something that asks/allows them to draw upon their own personal experience, which oftentimes helps with their anxiety. My first major assignment is a Personal Testimony speech, which not only offers students the aforementioned relief as they do not find themselves facing rigorous research/writing for their first grade, but further is a truly wonderful means of helping everybody get to know each other better and building a sense of community sooner rather than later.
—Chris Foss, Representations of Autism

What’s going on in the life of a first-year student? At least once a week I try to have a series of announcements and brief messages about the usual churn of the semester and the things that are on the horizon. Whether its reminding students of a key date on the calendar, showing them how to run a “what if” analysis, or pointing them to a campus service or event—I try to work through a list of all the little pieces of advice, suggestions, and key reminders that get lost, forgot, or ignored along the way.
—Tim O’Donnell, ted.com
I try to combine scholarly writing with autobiographical writing to help them develop a writerly voice of their own. The goal is to give them practice writing academically while still remaining rooted in the comfort of their own experience.

—Will Mackintosh, *Good Bad and Ugly American Tourists*

Share relevant events going on here on campus related to topic: Talks, forums, volunteer possibilities. I also try to incorporate an out of class activity early on in the semester to build community (a hike or paddling trip, for example.)

—Jeremy Larochelle, *Writing for a Wounded Planet*

What do you know? That’s the way I break the silence during the sometimes uncomfortable moments when many of us are in the room but class hasn’t yet begun. The purpose is to try to introduce students to the value of having a few talking points for the every day’s random conversations and to address the virtues of paying attention to and being informed by the news.

—Tim O’Donnell, *ted.com*

After the first presentation, I spend a good deal of the next class period critiquing the presentations as a group. After a few minutes of awkwardness, the students tend to open up and really offer constructive criticisms of each other. You have to set the parameters early so that they understand that this is the *safest place* to screw up on a presentation, and that there will be opportunities to fix your mistakes. It is very hard at first, but many students have told me that it’s one of the most valuable experiences they had all semester.

—Keith Mellinger, *Cryptology*

Part of my course incorporates Pizza Movie Nights—I show course-related films and we enjoy pizza and soda as we watch. The students really bond during these evenings. We also go to DC to see a professional theatre production, usually Shakespeare. As a result, we have, as a group, several shared experiences outside of class that enhance our sense of community in class.

—Helen Housley, *Cold Case: Theatre Mysteries*

Instead of requiring students to submit their research papers to you, require them to create a umwblog and post them there. They can exercise their creativity by incorporating links, photos, and videos, and other students can comment. Also, since a umwblog is accessible to the world, they have *real* reason to avoid plagiarism and cite their sources correctly!

—Andrew Dolby, *The Human Animal*

I always teach two sections of the FSEM and by incorporating blog assignments, I create a way for students in both sections to interact, read, and comment on the work of their peers. This is also a feature that allows students to be more creative with the visual aspects of Hitchcock’s films and his
legacy through the creation of gifs and videos that students post on the blog: hitchcock.umwblogs.
—JeanAnn Dabb, *Alfred Hitchcock, the Master of Suspense*

As an alternative to meeting with students after their first essay, consider setting up conferences to skim their drafts of that first essay instead. It’s a nice way to ensure they are making enough progress in advance of the due date and to catch ahead of time if somebody is completely misunderstanding the assignment.
—Chris Foss, *Representations of Autism*

In class, I try to demystify what professors do as much as possible, by explaining the process behind developing my syllabus, structuring my assignments, and leading class discussion. The goal is for them to understand the logic behind a college course, rather than just treating it as a set of instructions to be followed.
—Will Mackintosh, *Good Bad and Ugly American Tourists*

Don’t ask them to do anything that you have not also done or are not doing. In the *Race & Revolution* class, we ask for an essay on how they came to be aware of race/to realize that race mattered. (We’ve had them read such accounts in James Farmer, Lillian Smith, Freud, and Obama, as samples.) This is autobiographical. Each year I have written myself a new essay on this when I ask them to write theirs. It helps me appreciate the reflective work I’m asking of them.
—Craig Vasey, *Race and Revolution*

At the end of every FSEM I’ve taught for the past couple of years, I have written students an end of semester letter (delivered via email). The goal is to offer a summative perspective on my experience working with them over the preceding fifteen weeks. In it, I offer concrete feedback on their final assignments as well as an assessment of my perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses as well as my perception of their challenges and opportunities going forward. For me, it serves as a way to tie together all of the feedback I’ve offered along the way while also offering a strong sense of encouragement and excitement about the work ahead.
—Tim O’Donnell, *ted.com*