

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL**  
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or** any **other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>	<b>FSEM 100/HONR 100</b>		
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>			
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Steve Greenlaw & Bob Rycroft	<b>DATE:</b>	January 15, 2014
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<b>X</b>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one to two sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner, and will also be used in other publications about the first year seminar program (such as the "Eagle Essentials" booklet).

This seminar will explore the state of economic inequality today, by examining the distributions of income and wealth in the United States, and by analyzing policy proposals to change the distributions. Differing visions of what constitutes economic justice will also be debated.
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**RATIONALE.** Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM's basic components and new student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and why this course should be approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement.

Inequality is a subject of increasing public interest. We propose to team-teach course to explore this issue. The instructors will be two economists with (somewhat) different perspectives. The hidden agenda for the course will be critical thinking. For each topic, students will be presented with a range of readings and other resources from conservative to liberal perspectives. Participants will discuss all sides of the issues but students will be asked to decide for themselves what they believe. We will push back on whatever position the students take. Each student will have numerous opportunities to express themselves, in class discussion, in a formal debate, in blog posts, and in more formal writing, both short papers and a research paper. Early papers will be more scaffolded than later ones, though the research paper will be written in parts with required revisions.

How our course addresses the four basic components of the first-year seminar:

1. *It should be based on active, discussion-based, participatory learning.* While economics cannot be taught without students having some background in basic economic methodology, we think that sort of material can be kept at a minimum. We envision the bulk of the course being devoted the classes in which students debate the issues, present the results of research they have done, and participate in various educational exercises.
2. *It should be exploratory in nature rather than just presenting established conclusions.* There are virtually no “established conclusions” in this field. Every policy recommendation reflects the values of the individual who makes the recommendation, the methodology used in reaching the conclusion, and the types of evidence used to support the conclusion. The significance of these considerations will be emphasized.
3. *Students should read from primary sources, not simply textbooks.* There is no good textbook in this field, but there are many accessible primary sources, in print and other media.
4. *Students should synthesize material from multiple sources to develop their own views on the topic.* Students will be asked to draw conclusions from a variety of sources, as well as class discussion.

How our course addresses the new student learning outcomes:

1. *Utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments.* We plan to build this into the research project. We also plan to incorporate instruction from the reference librarian, as well as the QEP module.
2. *Improve development and organization of written arguments.* The course will require a variety of informal and formal writing, including regular blog posts for reflection, short essays (with early scaffolding) leading up to a multistage research paper.
3. *Demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process.* Students will be encouraged to draft their papers (or parts of their papers) as blog posts. We will allow students to revise their short papers based on our formative comments. We will require two formal drafts of the research paper; these drafts will build on earlier stages of the project.
4. *Apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication.* Instruction will be provided on the different oral communications formats.

5. *Communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.* The seminar will emphasize class discussion. Students will also prepare individual presentations for a formal debate.

## Tentative Syllabus

1. Introduction: What is the American Dream?
2. What are the fundamental data on income and wealth distribution in the U.S. and the World?
  - Gini Coefficient
  - The “Gatsby Curve”
3. Philosophical Approaches to Economic Inequality
4. How is income (and income distribution) determined in a market economy?

Example Short Paper: Is the system of income distribution in the U.S. based on merit?

Ben Bernanke on “Meritocracy” Speech text & Video:

<http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/bernanke20130602a.htm>

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2013/06/03/ben\\_bernanke\\_on\\_meritocracy.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2013/06/03/ben_bernanke_on_meritocracy.html)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/06/03/wonkbook-ben-bernanke-surprisingly-excellent-radical-speech/>

Critics:

<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/finance/andrewlilico/100024795/meritocracy-is-an-appalling-idea-that-no-one-believes-in-even-though-everyone-claims-to/>

[http://krugman-blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/03/ben-bernanke-endorses-a-73-percent-tax-rate/?\\_r=0](http://krugman-blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/03/ben-bernanke-endorses-a-73-percent-tax-rate/?_r=0)

Gregory Mankiw on the 1%

[http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mankiw/files/defending\\_the\\_one\\_percent.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mankiw/files/defending_the_one_percent.pdf)

Stiglitz on how government/law & institutions enhance inequality in the U.S.

[http://www.amazon.com/Price-Inequality-Divided-Society-Endangers/dp/0393345068/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1373908167&sr=1-1&keywords=price+of+inequality](http://www.amazon.com/Price-Inequality-Divided-Society-Endangers/dp/0393345068/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1373908167&sr=1-1&keywords=price+of+inequality)

Stiglitz short version from Vanity Fair

<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/05/joseph-stiglitz-the-price-on-inequality>

5. Static Models of Wage Inequality
  - Efficiency Wage Theory and Reciprocity
  - The Minimum Wage
  - The Living Wage Movement
  - The Health Insurance Crisis
6. Intragenerational Mobility
7. Intergenerational Mobility
  - Wealth Transfer Across Generations
  - Inheritance and Inequality
  - The “Death” Tax
8. Poverty & the Welfare System

## Assignments

- 3 Short Papers
- 1 Research Paper on a Policy Position
- Class discussion
- Class Debate
- Blog reflections

## Examples of Assignments

**Short Papers** - Students will write 3 short papers (2-3 pages) on the following (sample) topics:

1. Resolved: The correct minimum wage is \$0.00
2. Resolved: Upward mobility is alive and well in the United States.
3. Resolved: Society ought to do more for Camellia Woodruff.

Generally these papers will not require research beyond the required reading.

**Research Paper** - Everybody will write a pro or con paper on one of the following (e.g.) topics:

- Resolved: The Market for Women's Labor Needs Fixing by Comparable Worth
- Resolved: The United States Needs Tighter Curbs on Immigration
- Resolved: CEOs in the United States Are Overcompensated

Each paper should consist of two parts. In the first part you explain the issue in detail. In the case of Comparable Worth, you would explain what Comparable Worth attempts to achieve and how it works in practice. In the case of Immigration, you would discuss the rules regulating immigration into the US and why immigration policy is controversial. In the case of CEOs, you would explain how compensation levels are determined for CEOs and why CEO compensation is controversial. In the second part you argue pro or con the resolution and refute opposing arguments.

We will attempt to assign students to the topic they are most interested in and the side they think they

believe, but cannot guarantee everyone will get their first choice.

You will write the paper in three parts. Due dates are as follows:

- Draft of Part 1 - TBD
- Draft of Part 2 – TBD
- Completed Paper (Parts 1 & 2) - TBD

**Class Debate-** Students writing a term paper on the same side of the issue will form a team to debate the opposing side. The format of the debate is the one used by William F. Buckley's *Firing Line* and will be explained at length in class. Student teams can divide up debate roles any way they choose with the constraint that everyone must make a statement and answer questions.

Your debate grade will primarily be based on your individual performance as a speaker and questioner. However, since you are part of a team, you will be expected to cooperate with your teammates. Failure to cooperate or excessive free-riding will be penalized.

**Blog Reflections** – Each student will obtain a blog as part of the University's Domain of One's Own initiative. Students will be asked to write weekly posts reflecting on what they are reading, writing and thinking about the seminar. The instructors will follow the blog post and leave comments where appropriate. At the end of the semester, each student will put together a portfolio of 10 posts to submit for a grade. The portfolio be chosen should reflect their intellectual growth over the semester.