

# Responses to Questions and Topics Addressed in the Core Curriculum Townhall Meeting

Compiled 12/6/2023

## Signature Assignments

Signature Assignments are assignments that engage students in authentic, real-world application of the knowledge and techniques of the course, and that prompt students to reflect on the assignment and the course. The goal of signature assignments is to help students make meaning of their work by connecting individual, course, and core curricular learning goals. It helps them see the value of what they have learned and prompts them to reflect on the competencies they have developed.

The precise form a signature assignment takes is up to the faculty, based on their course context. The core requirements are that it be an authentic assignment, rather than something like an exam. It could take the form of an essay, website, poster, lab report, journal, or many other creative products. Additionally, the signature assignment will be required to speak to the requisite core competency learning outcomes for the course.

## 3 credit hour First Year Experience

The idea of the course is to be a 'hybrid' between two different types of First-Year Experience: The "academic" first year experience and the "extended orientation" first year experience. Our current system is purely an "extended orientation" model. An "academic" model incorporates academic content, and so has a disciplinary or topical focus, and puts emphasis on the development of academic skills (such as critical thinking, reading comprehension, and communication). A hybrid course has far less academic content than a standard academic course might (common rule of thumb is about 50% of the content found in a standard introductory course), but by incorporating academic content and having students engage in college while learning how to succeed in college, their learning is immediately put into action and is experienced as more meaningful. A meta-analysis of first year experience courses found that 3 credit hour hybrid courses were the most efficacious.<sup>1</sup> 1-credit-hour seminars, no matter the type, showed little to no benefit;<sup>2</sup> and purely extended orientation courses, regardless of credit hours, had no statistically significant effect on student success.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vahe Permezadian and Marcus Credé, "Do First-Year Seminars Improve College Grades and Retention? A Quantitative Review of Their Overall Effectiveness and an Examination of Moderators of Effectiveness," *Review of Educational Research* 86, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 277–316, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315584955>; Dallin George Young, "Is First-Year Seminar Type Predictive of Institutional Retention Rates?," *Journal of College Student Development* 61, no. 3 (2020): 379–90.

<sup>2</sup> Angela L. Vaughan, Stephanie I. Pergantis, and Susannah M. Moore, "Assessing the Difference Between 1-, 2-, and 3-Credit First-Year Seminars on College Student Achievement," *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* 31, no. 2 (November 15, 2019): 9–28.

<sup>3</sup> Dharmananda Jairam, "First-Year Seminar Focused on Study Skills: An Ill-Suited Attempt to Improve Student Retention," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 44, no. 4 (April 20, 2020): 513–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1582757>.

The general idea is that faculty would design these courses just like any other but would be required to

