We know that the first year of college is a big deal for our incoming students. A positive transition to university-level learning and the college experience in general can set students on the path to academic success, degree attainment, and satisfaction and achievement in their careers and personal lives. The first year is also the place where students are most likely to encounter obstacles that could deter them from the learning and degree they seek.

**Core Programs**

K-State First has four core programs for first-year students:

- Connecting Across Topics (CAT) Communities
- First-Year Seminars (FYS)
- Guide to Personal Success (GPS)
- K-State Book Network (KSBN)

K-State First is also an advocate for first-year students and an important source for connection and communication among the various programs and opportunities for incoming students.

**CAT Communities**

Designed around students’ academic interests, these learning communities allow first-year students to meet friends and work with experienced faculty in a specialized area of study. The same 22 students are enrolled in two general education classes together and a one-hour connections class.

**FYS**

A small group of 22 students fulfill a general education requirement while making the academic and social transition to college life.

**GPS**

A mentoring program, that matches a student with a faculty, staff member or graduate student to serve as a professional point of reference throughout the student’s first year.

**KSBN**

An all-university reading program that selects a common book for the academic year, KSBN connects all first-year students at K-State. It provides incoming students with a shared academic experience that helps open the conversation with professors, staff, administrators and other students.

**History**

In 2008, we piloted a first-year experience model by offering First-Year Seminars, small classes designed to help first-year students adjust to university life and expectations. In 2009, we introduced our mentoring program, GPS, by pairing incoming students with faculty and staff. We officially launched K-State First in 2010, adding KSBN and CAT Communities to our programs.

In fall 2014, more than 1,900 students took K-State First classes. In addition, 4,000+ students were given a copy of the common reading selection, and more than 300 students participated in the GPS mentoring program.
Chapter 2: Purpose of First-Year Seminars

First-Year Seminar Philosophy
All First-Year Seminar (FYS) courses at K-State have common elements and goals within the classroom. We ask you to help us meet these aims. The purpose of the FYS program is to help students make the transition to university courses and college-level learning. As part of this effort, FYS classes focus attention on the intellectual and social skills students need to flourish at the university. As a place to ask questions about the university and practice the skills needed to succeed as a first-year student, these courses provide support for the transition into college life and the K-State community.

Emphasis on first-year students
Only first-year students can enroll in these small, 22-person classes. We want these courses to be a place for first-year students to connect with each other and with a faculty member during their first semester of college.

Academic content
Each seminar is a special section of a regular, academic, general education class. Although the academic content varies among the seminars, each seminar focuses on a distinctive, college-level academic subject. The most important goal of these seminars is to provide fundamental support to K-State's academic mission and its focus on student learning.

Common elements
The FYS classes are connected to each other as part of a larger FYS program. All seminars are designed to introduce students to the academic standards of college-level work and K-State's undergraduate student learning outcomes. They emphasize critical thinking, communication, community building and the application of learning. First-Year Seminars also provide students with the opportunity to attend at least three co-curricular activities.

High-quality instruction
The FYS program has a strong, skilled and dedicated faculty. These faculty members are part of a team of instructors who are coordinated at the university-level and work with each other to plan, design, teach and assess the FYS program. These instructors, drawn from all over campus, are pedagogically excellent, experienced and interested in undergraduate education at K-State. They are among the best instructors at the university.

Active learning
With their small size and community focus, the First-Year Seminars invite and encourage an active learning environment. The seminars devote significant portions of class time to hands-on learning, group discussions, problem solving, inquiry-based learning, and activities that provide students with opportunities to develop their critical thinking and communication skills. The FYSs are also academic spaces that encourage students to collaborate, interact and develop relationships with their peers and professors.

Common Components for All FYS

1. Syllabus including common Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).
2. An attendance policy.
3. Regular use of active learning pedagogy.
4. Participation in common reading program (KSBN).
5. Attendance at least one program-wide event, one course-specific event, and one other event.

Student Learning Outcomes
All FYS share four basic Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): critical thinking, communication, community building and application of learning. Our program-wide SLOs (listed below) should appear on your FYS syllabus. You may tailor them to fit your particular academic content or goals for the course.

Upon successful completion of a first-year seminar, students will be able to:

Think critically
Explain the implications and/or significance of material learned in the course.

Communicate effectively
Express their own understanding of course content in respectful dialogue with others and with engagement, imagination and self-reflection.

Build community
Interact effectively with faculty and peers to learn and to help others to learn.

Apply learning
Use the skills and knowledge learned in the class to solve new problems, answer questions or identify areas for further investigation.

Assessing SLOs
All K-State First faculty are encouraged to participate in K-State First's SLO assessment plan. Assessment methods may vary between courses and further information can be found on K-State First's website on the Faculty Resources page.

Sample Course Description
Here is a sample course description.

"Welcome to Great Books! In most respects, this section of ENGL 287 will be similar to the other sections offered at K-State. In a few, hopefully exciting ways, however, our class will be a little different. It’s smaller (22 students), and it’s a class designed for first-year students only. The smaller class size should encourage an active learning environment throughout the semester. The focus on first-year students means that we should be able to use this class to talk about the transition to college-level learning and college life."
Chapter 3: Thinking About the Classroom

Best Practices
As no two First-Year Seminars are alike, we cannot provide a step-by-step guide that delineates exactly how you should plan your course. However, we can offer a list of practices that have worked well.

In general, a FYS classroom should invite first-year students into the university community while engaging them academically and socially. To accomplish these goals, suggest the following strategies:

- **Encourage active learning.**
  - Host lively discussions.
  - Arrange field trips.
  - Engage students in research.

- **Challenge students, but offer support.**
  - Hold high expectations.
  - Help students reach realistic learning goals.
  - Encourage risk-taking but offer clear feedback.

- **Have a holistic approach to student success.**
  - Understand that students have lives apart from the classroom.
  - Develop opportunities for both cognitive and social development.
  - Create an environment for students to mutually support one another.

In addition to these components, FYS classes also should promote student development through college success strategies. Examples of such strategies are:

- Time-management skills.
- Study skills.
- Note-taking skills.
- Professional demeanor.
- Email etiquette.

Activities and lesson plans that address these types of success strategies can be found in the online student success textbook, The K-State Guide to Student Success, and in the additional resources listed on page 12.

### Ideas for Your FYS Class

1. Connect your class with real-world situations or design activities around the pre-professional interests of your students.
2. Infuse your class with the student success ideas, lessons and practices that will help your students to learn the skills and the knowledge they need to succeed in your course and your discipline.
3. Use your access to MAPWorks: Take a look to share information about how your students are adjusting.
4. Do something with your students early in the semester. Get course work from them early and give some feedback right away. The first three weeks can be crucial for success.
Planning a Field Trip
Field trips are a great way to get students engaged in their community and practice their skills. Consider taking them to the Beach Museum of Art or an off-campus site within the state. Funding is available to help pay for the cost of your field trip. Funding request forms are available from Greg Eiselein (eiselei@k-state.edu), and hard copies of the form will be distributed at August Orientation and the professional development workshops.

Field Trip and Co-Curricular Event Awards
K-State First has a fund to support field trips and other out-of-class co-curricular events for students in the CAT Communities and First-Year Seminars.

Faculty members may request these funds by completing a short application that provides information about the event and its purpose, date, number of students involved and anticipated expenses. The kinds of expenses that may be covered include a motor pool vehicle, museum tickets or certain student research expenses. We will not be able to pay for food or items that might be borrowed without cost, such as video equipment available for checkout from iTAC. Application forms are available from Greg Eiselein (eiselei@k-state.edu).

Each KSF event award will cover costs up to $10 per student per section. Thus, a section of 22 students might receive as much as $220 for an event. Event awards will be distributed until the fund is exhausted. For any monies that have not been allocated by Nov. 1, a faculty member may apply once for a second award.

Using the KSBN Book
The KSBN book is a great way to open the conversation with your students because most of them read it during the summer. You might consider emailing them before the semester begins, asking them to read the book prior to the first day of class.

The 2015-2016 KSBN common book is The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore, who will be speaking at McCain Auditorium on the evening of Wednesday, October 14th. K-State First students may receive a free ticket to attend this exciting and important campus event.

For specific ideas about using the book, please check out the “Guide to Using The Other Wes Moore” on the K-State First Faculty Resource page: k-state.edu/first/faculty.

Past KSBN books include:

- The Ghost Map, 2014
- Ready Player One, 2013
- The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, 2012
- Zeitoun, 2011
- The Hunger Games, 2010

Creating Community and Engaging Students
Research demonstrates that students learn best in an environment where they feel connected with those around them and are asked to become co-constructors of their learning through active classroom engagement. Here are some ideas for creating classroom engagement. Here are some ideas for creating classroom community and designing active learning experiences.

- Journal or reflective writing: Give students a question or writing prompt related to the day’s topic, and ask them to write down their initial thoughts in one or two minutes. This can be used to kick off a class discussion, or as time for students to review something they have learned.

- Think-pair-share: This is a simple, easy way of inviting discussion. Present a question or discussion topic. Give students a few seconds to formulate their own answer, then have them turn to a partner and discuss their thoughts. You can then have students share their ideas with the rest of the class or use their pair-share discussion as the foundation for your next activity or large group discussion.

- Scenario-based learning: Present students with a difficult real-world challenge, and ask them to apply theory or concepts learned in the course to determine a solution.

- Minute speeches: Distribute slips of paper to students. Each slip should contain one topic, such as a concept from an article they have read or a term they should review for an exam. Give students five minutes to prepare a one-minute speech on that topic. They can use their books or notes, or even work in partners if you choose. Then, have students share their ideas with the rest of the class or use their pair-share discussion as the foundation for your next activity or large group discussion.

- Illustrative quotes: Bring in copies of an article (or any text) you would like students to discuss. Have students spend the first 10 minutes or so reading through the article and highlighting/underlining quotes that they especially agree with, disagree with, find interesting or find particularly difficult to understand. Whether you discuss in groups or the whole class, students now have something to contribute. They can discuss/question/affirm the points they’ve underlined.

- Inside-outside circles: Divide students into two even groups. Have one group stand in a circle facing the outside of the classroom, and the other group stand in a circle facing the inside of the classroom. Everyone should have one person standing directly in front of them. Provide students with a discussion topic, either verbally or through notes. They should discuss the topic with the person across from them for 30-60 seconds. Then ask the members of one circle to rotate one person to the left. Students can repeat the same activity, only with a different partner or topic. Looking for more great ideas? Visit the Faculty Resources page on K-State First’s web site, request a copy of a student success book from the K-State First team or visit sc.edu/fye/toolbox/index.html.

- Note: Some information and activities included in this section have been adapted from the University of South Carolina’s University 101 handbook, from the chapter titled “Teaching and Learning.”
Chapter 4: Additional Resources

Student Success Textbook

The K-State Guide to Student Success: The Essentials for First-Year Students at Kansas State University contains information on topics such as K-State history and traditions, time management, diversity, and financial literacy. It even has down-to-earth advice about what to wear to class and how to write a professional email. You can also find great ideas to help you use the common read with your students.

The K-State Guide to Student Success: k-state.edu/first/faculty

Campus Events and Activities

To help get your students involved in campus events, here is a list of places to find out about what’s going on at K-State.

Campus calendar: k-state.edu/calendar
Week of Welcome: www.k-state.edu
Landon Lecture Series: k-state.edu/lectures/landon
Lou Douglas Lectures: k-state.edu/ufm/LouDouglas.htm

Campus Support Offices

Here is a list of offices on campus where you can direct students if they require additional support.

One Stop Shop for Student Success, Division of Student Life: k-state.edu/onestop
Student Access Center: k-state.edu/accesscenter
Counseling Services: k-state.edu/counseling
Office of Student Activities and Services: k-state.edu/osas
Office of Student Life: k-state.edu/studentlife

Additional Reading


Optional Textbook Suggestions for your Course

K-State First has committed itself to an ongoing study to assess the effects of first-year seminar courses and learning communities on student learning. The seminars and learning communities will be unique in that the maximum enrollment will be 22 students each and limited to first-year students. An emphasis will be placed on communication, critical thinking, and community building.

Your participation in this pilot study will give us the opportunity to utilize end-of-semester student ratings collected via the IDEA System. We intend to use IDEA Reports as part of the endeavor to observe what effects these first-year seminars have on student learning. We will look at individual sections as well as a group report for all sections. No individual faculty member’s IDEA Report will be shared with the public. Aggregate findings will be shared with K-State First faculty members, the university community, the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association and others (as applicable).

The following person may be contacted with any questions regarding one’s rights regarding research protocol: Rick Scheidt, Committee Chair, Institutional Review Board, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, 785-532-3224, or you may email the Committee Chair at rscheidt@k-state.edu

I, ______________________________, agree to release a copy of my Fall 2015-16 IDEA Report for the following course, ______________________________________, to the Office of Assessment at Kansas State University. I understand that the Fall 2015-16 IDEA Report will be used for the purposes designated above for the ongoing study of student learning in K-State First seminars and learning communities. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

___________________________________
Participant’s signature

___________________
Date

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