

UConn Honors First-Year Seminar Program

Paula Wilmot, Ph.D., Assistant Director for Honors Learning Communities and Programs

Kaitlin Heenehan, M.A.Ed., Honors Program STEM Scholar Advisor

Honors Education at Research Universities 2015

UConn

Overview

- Snapshot of UConn Honors
- Purpose and Goals of Honors First-Year Seminar
- Structure of Program
- Faculty and Facilitator Recruitment
- Curriculum and Leadership opportunities
 - Sample syllabi and assignment
- Faculty Meetings
- Challenges and Successes
- Questions and Discussion



Snapshot of UConn Honors

- ~1980 students overall
- ~520 first-year students in incoming class
- First-year students live in Honors First-Year Residential Learning Community
- ~1100 students live in all 4 of the Honors Learning Communities
- In state/Out of state: 71%:29% (14-15 incoming class)
- Male/Female: 52%:48% (14-15 incoming class)
- ~95% first-year students take UNIV 1784 First-year seminar



Purpose and Goals of Honors First-Year Seminar

- Engage students immediately in their college experience
- Create enthusiasm for Honors courses
- Provide direct contact with a faculty member in a small classroom environment
- Orient freshmen to UConn and the Honors community with peer facilitators
- Communication of expectations in Honors
- Creating a “neighborhood” within the Honors academic community
- Provide developmental leadership opportunities for facilitators
- Support first-year students in their transition to UConn and to Honors



Structure of Program

- 29 sections of UNIV 1784 with <19 students in each section
- 1 faculty member and 2-3 sophomore/junior facilitators
- Meets twice a week for 50 minutes
 - Faculty member teaches on topic of interest one day a week
 - Example topics include: Developing Personal Creativity for STEM majors; Race, Gender, Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film; The Art of College; Trending; Survey of the History of Jazz, etc.
 - Facilitators teach and coordinate discussions, activities, and campus excursions the other day

Faculty and Facilitator Recruitment

- Faculty:
 - Previous instructors
 - Recommended faculty from current facilitators
 - Process spans December – May to prepare for 29 sections to be enrolled in at Orientation in May – June
 - \$1000 Professional Development/Course Enhancement funds; teaching is “add-on” to departmental teaching
- Facilitators:
 - Current facilitators share their experiences in UNIV 1784 and encourage students to apply
 - 3 Recruitment Events to share purpose, goals, expectations, course training structure
 - Students apply by early December (application, recommendation from current facilitator, checks of grades/conduct)

Faculty Meetings

- May Meeting:
 - Purpose, Goals, Expectations, “tips and tricks” from veteran first-year seminar instructors to new instructors, Summer “to-do” items
 - Recommendations for how to work with student facilitators
- August Meeting:
 - Answer questions, share rosters and final logistics
 - Connect them with facilitators for working meeting over lunch



Curriculum and Leadership Opportunities

- Course to train prospective facilitators
- Practicum course to support during facilitation experience
- Opportunity to apply for a paid position (Student Instructional Specialist) to train next generation of facilitators
- Example syllabi and assignment: EGEN 3200, 3092, 5 Year Road Map
- Developmental outcomes:
 - Confidence and jumping off point for other leadership roles
 - Ability to see the “bigger picture” of Honors and UConn
 - Appreciation for college experience and Honors experience
 - Ability of students to see “grey” areas and move beyond dualistic thinking



Challenges and Successes

- Challenges:
 - Recruitment of faculty & facilitators to accommodate growing first-year class
 - Building relationships with facilitators in a larger classroom environment
 - Helping facilitators and faculty navigate their partnership
 - Helping facilitators articulate the importance of this class to their students and balancing the roles of peer, advisor, and teacher
- Successes:
 - Development of facilitators from January – May
 - Reach 95% of Honors first-year students in these smaller communities
 - Strong pool of student leaders we know well and can recommend for other opportunities

Successes (...in their own words)

- *“The UNIV 1784 program is not simply a resume-filler, but more accurately, an experience that promotes your own development as a college student, personally and professionally. Through taking the two EGEN classes and leading a class of my own, I helped to pave my own path within college, make supportive connections with other faculty and staff in the Honors Program (and greater UConn), and verify my interest in education as an intended career. My experiences in the program have allowed me greater opportunities for leadership during my upperclassman years here and lasting friendships with my fellow facilitators.” -Daniel Arndt, '15*
- *“Through the EGEN 3200 course, I was able to discover my leadership potential, strengths, and weaknesses. As a freshman, I wasn't particularly very involved on campus, and was unsure about what I was capable of. EGEN served as a launching point from which I gained the confidence to get involved in various other groups and develop my leadership skills. Plus: it's fun! You gain friends throughout the experience--your Ube group, your UNIV students and co-facilitator, and of course, Kaitlin and Paula!” – Rofina Johnkennedy, '16*



Questions and Discussion

- How does your first-year seminar program structure differ from ours?
- Any strategies you have for working with increasing numbers?
- How do you recruit for peer leaders if you have them?

