

SUNY Oswego Faculty Assembly Resolution FA 202303-3
General Education requirement for FYS (XXX 198) and GST 104
(or its equivalent) for all entering non-transfer students
(Effective Fall 2024)
Submitted by the General Education Council

Rationale

The SUNY Oswego mission statement, the vision statement, and the message from the university Officer in Charge (all to be found in our undergraduate catalog) make clear that ours is an academic community that strives to be inclusive and is committed to providing an education that "transcends traditional higher education boundaries" (Vision Statement). Such an education is transformative and can help not just students but all members of our academic community live meaningful lives and contribute to society.

A required First-Year Signature course for all first-time undergraduate students will provide a critical element of the foundation for an Oswego undergraduate education and what it means to be a member of our academic community. Toward those ends, the requirement will comprise both a three-credit FYS and either a one-credit GST 104 or a one-credit major-prefixed course that meets the campus engagement learning outcome (LO) in concert with any department- or program-specific LOs. With notable, and rare, exceptions both the FYS and the one-credit course will be completed in the fall semester.

First-Year Signature courses must neither need a prerequisite nor be a prerequisite for subsequent courses in a major, minor, or general education. Each FYS will be an exploration of a topic grounded in a body of scholarship befitting an introductory-level course.

Each FYS course will address three of the four learning outcomes that have been a part of the FYS initiative since its inception in AY 2018-2019:

- Critical thinking and information literacy
- Oral and written communication [At least 50% of the written work and 50% of the oral communication shall be devoted to making a well-reasoned argument; while the writing and speaking prompts will vary across FYS sections, at least half of the written and oral student work will make a claim and substantiate it with sound evidence. As such, the oral and written components of the FYS will also address the critical thinking and information literacy LO.]
- Intercultural knowledge and competency

The fourth learning outcome, campus engagement, will be addressed in either GST 104 Experiential Learning in College, "designed to help new first-year students become productive and successful members of the Oswego college community" (undergraduate catalog), or a one-credit major/program-prefixed course that meets the campus engagement LO in concert with any department- or program-specific LOs.

The FYS requirement will address SUNY GE requirements in oral communication and contribute to our emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and intercultural understanding, while also maintaining our commitment to both breadth and student choice in General Education

Satisfying System Requirements

The SUNY General Education basic communication requirement includes both written and oral communication and allows for the required category to be met with completion of one course or a combination of a number of courses.

The current First-Year Signature course learning objectives include oral communication and thus could serve to help fulfill the SUNY basic communication requirement by making sure that all students in the course can "demonstrate coherent college-level" oral communication and "demonstrate the ability to revise and improve" it. The work on oral communication can also help provide the foundation for each major's specific specialized oral communication infusion plan.

Emphasizing Oswego's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Global Community

SUNY Oswego has long recognized and been committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our required Diversity, Identity, and Social Justice in the United States General Education category stems from that commitment. The requirement is but one step on the journey we ask our students to take in the name of "our collective pursuit of justice, equality, and peace." We also recognize that the world is marked by a web of connections and relationships. All courses in our required World Awareness category help to foster an awareness of the history and culture of peoples and places throughout the world and an understanding of common problems, issues, and concerns facing humankind. With its emphasis on intercultural knowledge and competency, the FYS will help to start our students on the journey to helping shape and being part of a more just, equitable, and inclusive world.

Maintaining Breadth and Student Choice

The total number of SUNY GE categories met in the above Oswego general education program is more than is required by the SUNY GE. Thus, we are able to continue to be true to our emphasis on breadth in general education. Student choice remains a critical part of the General Education program, as students continue to be able to choose from a number of categories in the Student Choice section of general education. Additionally, and as is true within all General Education categories, students will have a range of FYS choices to select from in order to meet the requirement.

Motion

WHEREAS, SUNY Oswego is committed to student success; and

WHEREAS, for students new to undergraduate education the first semester is critical to success; and

WHEREAS, forging a connection early on with a faculty member and other students increases the likelihood of student success; and

WHEREAS, seminar-style courses such as our First-Year Signature offerings that are driven by discussion and exploration will also increase the likelihood of such connections being made; and

WHEREAS, the learning outcomes for our First-Year Signature courses include oral and written communication and demonstrating proficiency in oral communication is also required by the SUNY GE;

THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that beginning with the fall 2024 semester all non-transfer students entering SUNY Oswego will be required to complete the three-credit First-Year Signature (XXX 198) requirement and to use XXX 198 to fulfill the oral communication portion of the required SUNY GE basic communication category; and that,

FURTHER RESOLVED that beginning with the fall 2024 semester all non-transfer students entering SUNY Oswego will be required to complete the one-credit GST 104 (or its equivalent).

Appendix: Frequently Asked Questions

Below are a number of questions that have come up in discussions and feedback.

Q: Why is this necessary?

A: There is ample scholarship indicating that a carefully constructed and delivered first-year seminar-style course for incoming first-time freshmen helps them better understand and acclimate to their undergraduate institution and thus improves retention rates and, critically, helps the student build a foundation for their undergraduate education, no matter the major they choose. Simply put, the requirement helps prepare entering first-time students for academic and personal success.

Q: Why not connect the FYS to a specific major or minor program?

A: Making each FYS a topics course not linked to the foundations of a specific major or minor enables the professor and its students to not concern themselves with covering a certain amount of material in order for the student to proceed in the major or minor. This provides faculty and students the freedom to linger, explore, and discover together and the opportunity to devote the time needed to best help position students to meet all three learning outcomes.

Q: Who can teach FYS courses?

A: While there may be rare exceptions, FYS courses will be taught by full-time faculty.

Q: Why include the one-credit GST 104 or one-credit major/program-prefixed course as part of the requirement for all first-time incoming students?

A: GST 104 is perfectly positioned to help students meet the campus engagement learning outcome and at the same time help new freshmen understand the wide array of human, physical, and virtual resources they can utilize to help with their academic, physical, mental, emotional, and interpersonal well-being. The same would hold for approved one-credit offerings in a major or program meeting the campus engagement LO as well as department- or program-specific LOs.

Q: Why locate the requirement in the General Education program?

A: The oral communication element that is required of all FYS will enable students to address the oral communication requirement in the SUNY General Education Requirement. Thus, when it comes to that requirement the FYS would function in a fashion similar to the way our ENG 102 functions in relation to our Writing Across the Curriculum writing plan requirement. That is, just as ENG 102 gives students the basic foundation of writing as an undergraduate student and the major writing plan focuses on writing in a particular subject and discipline, the oral competency component of FYS will provide the foundation for oral communication while the major oral communication infusion plan will help students develop those abilities in their major. Transfer students who arrive without having fulfilled the SUNY Basic Communication: Oral and Writing requirement will complete the former with the oral communication infusion requirement in their major and the latter with ENG 102 or the CLEP waiver exam.

Q: How many FYS offerings are needed?

A. With an enrollment cap of twenty per section, we would need eighty sections, the vast majority of which will be offered in the fall semester, in order to meet demand with an entering freshman class of 1600.

Twenty discrete FYS courses have already been created by faculty who remain with us. Assuming that some full-time faculty can teach more than one section a semester, we need to more than double the number currently created: with sixty (60) courses created, for example, a third of them would need to be offered as two sections in order arrive at the eighty sections we would need.

We would need a similar number of one-credit offerings: GST 104 sections and approved one-credit offerings in major programs.

Q. What about the FYS program foundation, guidance, and oversight?

A: Without a strong foundation, this Academic Affairs initiative crumbles. Because the FYS addresses the oral communication competency of the SUNY General Education requirement, the General Education Council would review and approve the master FYS Course Outline with an eye toward seeing that there is sufficient instruction and student work to position students to demonstrate foundational oral communication competency.

Faculty leadership is vital to help create the proper foundation for the program, provide guidance, and help to ensure oversight after the master FYS Course Outline has been approved by the General Education Council.

Q: What is the relationship between the FYS initiative and other first-year programs and efforts? Given that resources are dear, is there duplication?

A: The First-Year Signature course (XXX 198) replaces the First Choice courses/F sections initiative.

Q: What about transfer students?

A: Transfer students, defined by the university as students "who have taken more than 11 credit hours at another college or university following completion of their high school diploma or its equivalent" (undergraduate catalog) will be exempt from the requirement.

Q: Will the requirement result in an increase in the total number of credit hours a student needs to be graduated?

A: No. The minimum total credit hour requirement is unchanged.

Q: What will this mean to the overall requirements and credit hours needed to complete General Education?

A: The side-by-side of models crafted and presented by the General Education Council makes clear what the overall requirements and total credits for each of the four models.