

# Curricular Interventions for the First-Year Residential Student

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## Practical Tips for Instructing a Contemporary First-Year Seminar Course

Below are some ways to have a successful teaching experience with today's traditional-aged first-year students in a course that blends an academic and developmental approach. If you would like the syllabus from UAS' first-year seminar, "*A Sense of Place, Alaska and Beyond*," please email me.

1. Find a legitimate title and home for the course. Making the course sound remedial or related to survival or orientation skills will not help to legitimize it as a truly academic-focused course. As the course should be heavy in composition, reading, and presentation skill-building, it may be necessary to offer the course at one or more level for those with differing academic abilities when they enter college. The course should hold a typical time block, offered 2 or 3 times per week. Try to teach it in student housing.
2. Use texts that are not just for academic skill-building. By selecting significant readings in the humanities, or focused on social and personal philosophy issues, the skill-building will come inherently in the assignments and readings to design. Try having students read non-fiction texts about personal struggles, adventures, etc. so they can relate it to their own life journey. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, and Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" are two good examples. These readings should facilitate meaningful discussion about social justice issues, diversity topics, belief systems, civic responsibility, and personal growth.
3. Make service learning and co-curricular activities significant portions of the class, making them relevant to course themes and readings. Attend and participate with your students outside of the classroom.
4. Journals and reaction papers may be good to help students reflect on personal thoughts and feelings about the readings.
5. Always arrange the tables in a circle so that students can see one another; you are less of a lecturer and more of a discussion facilitator. Have them speak to one another, and set ground rules for expression, support, mockery, interruptions, etc.
6. Make use of an undergraduate Teaching Assistant. Give him/her significant roles as the course's peer mentor.
7. Push for regular teaching meeting between all section instructors of the course to develop some consistency and common goals for instruction and learning outcomes. Combine classes for co-curricular activities once in a while.
8. Hold class off-campus, in lounges, or in your home once in a while.
9. Come with discussion topics prepared, but make students come up with them as well.
10. A Master's degree does not qualify someone to teach. Seek out help in instruction methods, innovative teaching styles, etc.