This guide provides advice and guidelines for teaching a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) Seminar. FIG seminars anchor each of the FIG clusters, providing an academic first experience designed to help freshmen:

- understand the intellectual, moral, civic, and personal purposes of their liberal arts education;
- negotiate successfully the academic and personal opportunities and challenges of their first year; and
- connect to Western faculty and the larger campus community.

One premise of the FIG program is that integration into university life is never more crucial than in a students’ first quarter. In order to facilitate this integration, the FIG program offers best first-year practices, including:

- a small group experience;
- an opportunity for more interaction with instructors;
- an emphasis on high academic expectations; and
- guidance on recognizing and utilizing various campus resources.

All FIG seminars include academic content related to the cluster theme that you select and teach. To ensure the academic nature of the program, we ask that each seminar include a culminating paper, academic project, or presentation. However, FIG Seminars also include “engagement” requirements that must be integrated into the course. Required engagement activities include:

1. helping students understand the value and purposes of their liberal arts and sciences education;
2. hosting visits from FIG GUR faculty;
3. assisting students make the transition to college work; and
4. participating in Western Reads.

Typically, FIG seminar faculty report that teaching academic content related to the FIG theme comprises about 60% of their use of class time, with 40% devoted to the four engagement activities described above. Specific advice for each of these areas appears below.

Helping students understand the value and purposes of their liberal arts and sciences education

Western is distinguished by its emphasis upon the liberal arts, and by the strength of its General University Requirements. Unfortunately, the value and purpose of the liberal arts are not widely understood or appreciated by our students. We hope to help correct this by underscoring this value and purpose. This can be done in the GUR faculty visit, in a class discussion or lecture, or via a comment in the course syllabus. The Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE) recommends the following statement:

“The General University Requirements (GURS) embody Western’s belief that liberal education—education in breadth—is as important for informed and effective participation in contemporary life as specialized education. We believe that liberal education enables people to lead fuller and more interesting lives, to perceive and to understand more of the world around and within themselves, and to participate more intelligently, sensitively and deliberately in shaping that world. This belief reflects a long tradition in American higher education. In this tradition, the bachelor’s degree includes specialized study, the
major, together with study over a range of human inquiry, expression and accomplishment. Broadly, the liberal education component of a bachelor’s degree deals with issues of truth and falsity, with expressions of what is possible for humans to do and be, with topics and traditions that bear on choices that we make about what in life we consider important. This broader study helps people gain perspective on who they are and what they do in the world.”

Copies of an AACU pamphlet, What is a Liberal Education and Why is it Important to My Future, can also be distributed and read by your students. Should you want a class set of this pamphlet, please contact Wendy.Knight@wwu.edu.

Hosting visits from FIG GUR faculty
A crucial aspect of the FIGs program is the connection between you and your students. We want all FIGs students to know one instructor well enough to be able to ask for a recommendation and ideally that person should be you. Secondarily, the seminar provides additional contact with the lecture course faculty via the hosted visits. All FIG GUR faculty are required to have three points of contact with their FIG students. Typically, FIG GUR faculty visit the seminar twice and meet with FIG students in their offices or for an extra curricular event—a concert, field trip, etc. Alternatively, some faculty visit the seminar on three occasions.

Helping students make the transition to college work
One aspect of engagement is helping freshmen make the transition to college work. Typically, freshmen don’t know how to study when no assignments are due, or how to review lecture notes, etc., and need guidance regarding time management, study methods and preparing for multiple choice tests. For these issues, you can arrange visits with appropriate service offices, or you cover them yourself. In addition, The A Game: Nine Steps to Better Grades, a short book/pamphlet hybrid on study skills, can also be provided for your students. Please contact Wendy if you would like a class set.

Participating in Western Reads
FIG seminar faculty are asked to do something that is tied to the Western Reads text, Early Warming. All freshman are provided a copy of this book at Summerstart and asked to read it. Hence, it does not need to be ordered for the class. Possible activities include studying the text as part of the seminar curriculum, discussing the text, excerpting a portion of the text for study, or attending an extra-curricular event related to the text.

The most popular visit is to the Tutoring Center, where time management is discussed. This can be combined with a visit to the Learning Commons and Writing Center, all conveniently located on the second floor of Wilson Library.

Early Warming: Resources to Facilitate Discussions
Here is the link to the Western Reads web site where local and national articles, Western Reads calendar (including author visit), and discussion topics can be found:
Western Reads Website.
FOR STUDENTS
The VPUE’s office has two excellent college resource books for student success. They are available to check out in OM 480.
*The A Game: Nine Steps to Better Grades*
*Making the Most of College*

FOR INSTRUCTORS
The Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment has downloadable resources, a lending library, and links to superb teaching tools. If the subject is teaching excellence, the source is here: 
*CIIA.*