March 2, 2016

To:    Muskingum University Faculty

From: James Callaghan, Vice-President for Academic Affairs

Re:    Teaching First-Year Seminar

It is time again to kindly ask you to consider participating in the First Year Seminar (FYS) program for the coming academic year. According to the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, around 87% of all colleges and universities now offer some form of first-year seminar. Various sorts of research appear to show positive outcomes for all types of students, but especially profound results for low-income, first-generation students such as many of our own. For this at-risk group, indications are that a positive early experience in the first year of college is particularly important not only for needed skills-building or acquisition, but also for less-tangible (but no-less-significant) issues such as confidence (“Hey, I can do this!”), self-esteem, and network-building of various sorts, plus a greater sense of community involvement, engagement and attachment; of, in short, “belonging.”

I kindly ask each of you to consider teaching a section of First-Year Seminar during the upcoming Fall Semester. Applicants invited to teach FYS will receive a stipend of $1,200, provided that they are teaching in overload. Each section will receive the customary discretionary budget of $100.

As in previous years, planning for the Fall First-Year Seminars will be guided by the FYS program mission statement, as well as by goals that are common to FYS programs and courses elsewhere in the United States. That is to say that we shall seek:

- Campus-wide collaboration that is cross-disciplinary academically, and which also unites organizational units or programs that support and serve our students' administrative needs and general well-being.
- Successful student transition to not only the academic challenges, expectations and structure and organization that differentiate post-secondary from secondary institutions, but also the unique social/campus life of our university.
- Development of our students as “whole” persons as called for in the mission statement of Muskingum University.
- The goal of continuous FYS program improvement through the evaluation of data related to established FYS outcomes, and the ever-changing needs and demographics of our incoming students.

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As noted in previous FYS calls, these commitments are consistent with the common goals of FYS programs found in George D. Kuh et al, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (Washington: AAHE, 2005), and those on other campuses. These goals include:

- Introducing first-year students to college-level expectations
- Introducing first-year students to campus life
- Introducing first-year students to campus resources
- Initiating (or raising) the level of intellectual discourse on campus
- Supporting the academic progress of first-year students.

In order to achieve these goals, first-year seminar instructors should be open to the following:

- Regular class meetings throughout the Fall semester.
- Providing academic advising to your students throughout the Fall semester.
- The inclusion of activities that will enhance curricular objectives, strengthen student understanding and/or skill acquisition, permit opportunities for socialization and networking, and the development of community or communities.
- Giving special attention to students whose early performances and (especially) early grades might indicate academic or other adjustment difficulties.  
- Integrating any FYS common readings into the class syllabus.
- Establishing and maintaining occasional contacts with any first-year students in your class during the spring semester, and
- Attending meetings and workshops designed for First-Year Seminar faculty.

Few things in academic life are as satisfying and impactful as assisting a student in succeeding in something that was difficult for them. National studies confirm that students arriving these days upon university doorsteps are not as prepared for university life as they could be, or even (as many discover) that they thought they were. I hope that you will decide that teaching a First-Year Seminar is something to which you are willing to invest some of your (precious) time and energy.

Kindly complete the response form below and return it to the Academic Affairs office (Tricia Saft) no later than **Monday, April 4**.

In advance, thank you for your consideration of this great opportunity to positively impact the futures of our incoming students.

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2 In “Understanding How First-Year Seminars Affect Persistence” (2006, pages 105-106), Porter and Swing note that two measures – Study skills/academic engagement and (curiously) health education – had significant impacts upon retention. They surmise that “when faculty spend classroom time on wellness issues, they are de facto expressing caring about students.” Available from: www.stephenporter.org/papers/fyspersist.pdf
FIRST YEAR SEMINAR RESPONSE FORM

To apply to lead a First Year Seminar class in the coming academic year, kindly provide the following information and return this form to Tricia Saft in the Academic Affairs office. Deadline: Friday, April 10.

Name:

Department:

Will this be your first time teaching First Year Seminar?

No [ ]

• If no, did you teach FYS last year? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Yes [ ]

What kinds of assistance or training (etc.) might be helpful to you?

Are you available to attend an FYS workshop/organizational meeting in May?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

FYS Class Preferences For This Coming Fall Semester

Days:

Times:

Student Mentor: