

# Freshman Seminar Program

HARVARD  COLLEGE

## Tips for Freshman Seminar Instructors

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### Creating the atmosphere

Harvard freshmen are extremely eager to meet and work closely with faculty. The atmosphere of the seminar is nearly as important as its content, and your passion for the subject will inspire them. Many students say that freshman seminars are among their most significant academic experiences.

Of course freshmen can be shy about participating in discussion and talking to an “august” faculty member. It is important to create an atmosphere in which their comments are welcome. Experience-based learning and joint explorations outside the classroom have been highly successful in breaking down barriers and getting them involved. To help create a welcoming and dynamic atmosphere, you can:

- Ask engaging questions about your topic that relate to their experience (and give them time to answer).
- Learn their names and their interests.
- Encourage them to meet with you individually (one seminar leader reminds his students that while they have a freshman adviser, they may consider him one too).
- Show them your lab or take a trip together to a museum (one seminar leader takes students to Woods Hole, another to a whaling museum to hear a reading of *Moby Dick*). The Freshman Seminar Office has limited funding for local field trips..

### Dealing with students' varied academic preparation

Harvard freshmen in some ways are different from upper classmen. They are bright but may lack the academic preparation that you expect, and may not yet be good writers. The deans often say that Harvard accepts the best students from the best schools and the best students from the worst schools, so their backgrounds are uneven. To accommodate this, you can:

- Reveal more of your agenda than you might to upperclassmen.
- Design clear assignments and give a few early in the term.
- Design staged assignments so that each step leads to the next or reflects a sequence in a research process.

## **Student complaints about their Freshman Seminar:**

Students usually give their seminar instructors positive feedback, but some concerns surface repeatedly. Be aware of these pitfalls:

- Some students say they never had a chance to talk.
- Some find it difficult to produce a large final project without substantial faculty feedback during the semester.
- Some faculty seem rushed and unwilling to talk informally outside of class.

## **More questions?**

For assistance with additional questions or for further guidance, please contact us at the Freshman Seminars office:

For questions related to finances or policies:  
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For questions related to payroll or teaching assistants:  
Toni Trainor, Department Administrator  
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For questions related to classrooms, reimbursements, field trips, and general procedures:  
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