

Experiential Projects FYE

We are excited to share with you an overview of the Project-Based FYE seminar option. This FYE is designed to help students transition successfully into college through deep engagement with a **central driving question** that encourages exploration, critical inquiry, and creative problem-solving within a shared learning community. We want to invite students to see how the knowledge and skills they gain in college are directly applicable to their everyday lives.

Each section of the course is built around a compelling central driving question that students will spend the semester exploring through diverse sources and perspectives, including texts, media, and interactive discussion. This will allow students to practice and strengthen essential academic skills: reading critically, writing effectively, oral communication, and artistic or other forms of expression. A key aspect of this course is the inclusion of several **experiential learning** opportunities connected to the central driving question culminating in a **final team-based assignment** that students will present during the ***First Year Experience Showcase***.

Our vision of this FYE seeks to capitalize on faculty creative and scholarly interests and talents. We aim to offer a variety of experiences and FYE topics, proposed by faculty, to reflect the **wide diversity of expertise** across campus and to appeal to the **varied interests** of our students. To illustrate the potential range of topics that could exist in a Project-based FYE, we developed sample courses for you to consider, out of our own interests. Examples of such questions include:

- Are You Sure About That? Examining Beliefs and Opinions Among The Mass Public
- How Can We Actually Colonize Mars?
- Can That Really Happen? The Science and Experience of Sci-Fi
- Can We Trust Machines To Make Moral Choices On The Road? Dive Into The Ethical Dilemmas Of Autonomous Vehicles!
- Is AI Going to Save Us All or Kill Us All?

Answering these questions will afford students opportunities to critically engage broader ethical, social, cultural, political, scientific, and technological issues with a focus on the relationship between learning and problem solving. We are providing some sample syllabi ideas for your perusal. These samples simply reflect ideas that some members of our committee found interesting, and are intended to spur faculty creative juices, as we are certain that faculty from across campus will come up with amazing and engaging topics.

In addition to a focus on a central driving question, this experiential FYE is characterized by includes some further key features:

- It includes the integration of at least **two experiential learning activities** that allow students to connect classroom content to real-world contexts. Examples of these experiences may include, but are not limited to, community-based projects, field observations, creative design activities, group work, attending a performance or speaker event, and hands-on experiences. The sample syllabi again list some examples to showcase the wide range of options available.
- The course culminates in a **team-based assignment**, designed to synthesize students' learning and showcase their ability to communicate ideas through multiple modes of expression. Final deliverables may take the form of posters, artistic creations, oral presentations, videos, performances, or other innovative formats.

- All sections of the experiential FYE will participate in a **First Year Experience Showcase**, held during their respective scheduled final exam time. At this event, students will present their projects publicly, review the work of their peers across other sections, and provide constructive feedback.
- As with the other FYE model. This course will incorporate activities and modules related to **student success** (this is the same across both FYE models).

The experiential FYE is grounded in pedagogical best practices proven to increase student engagement. Research shows that students are more invested in their own learning when they are working on a problem that they find meaningful and relevant. This approach is also helpful in improving understanding and retention because students take ownership of their own learning process. More importantly, a project-based FYE seminar will help promote equity by allowing students to contribute their own perspectives in the joint effort of solving a common challenge or creating a public facing project. By centering on an engaging driving question, offering experiential learning opportunities, and emphasizing collaboration and communication, the FYE course supports students in building the critical thinking, creativity, and academic skills they will need for success in college and beyond. Equally important, it helps cultivate a sense of belonging and community that will carry forward into their broader college experience.