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# FIGS: Summary Report

Western Washington University. Office of Survey Research

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## Selected Excerpts from Focus Group Conducted with FIGS Faculty and Seminar Instructors in Spring '06 by The Office of Survey Research

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### Why Faculty Are Involved in FIGS

Faculty want to be involved in a FIG because it offers a small group setting where faculty and students can get to know each other, and topics can be explored in more depth.

*When I first taught a FIG I was fairly new to the university, and I thought this would be a good way to get to know some of the students, especially the incoming students.*

*I work with a lot of freshmen, and so it's a good way to see what's going on in the class room with them and hear about things like Facebook and Myspace and be able to relate that to the other students that I'm working with so that's been really nice.*

*I teach a large class— usually 160 to 180 students. Part of the reason I was attracted to the idea of working with FIGS is to have opportunities to meet with students in a smaller setting where there would be only 19 or 20 other students. I saw this as one more opportunity to break the students out of that big lecture class and be able for them to explore ideas in more depth, and to get to know each other because I think that is part of the difficulty in these big lecture classes.*

Instructors enjoy participating in FIGS because of the opportunity to link with other disciplines.

*I teach a fairly large GUR...I've always taught this course interdisciplinary, so part of what really excited me was to link it with another discipline and for this particular FIGS module I was really pleased. I mean I couldn't have actually planned a better pair for this FIGS seminar. I think it worked out really great especially the way I teach environmental studies from this interdisciplinary and over-consumption perspective and it was paired with another course, a course in mass communication internationalism, which really dovetailed nicely. I think it was a really positive experience, and I for one really got a lot out of the two seminar classes that I went to in meeting the students. I also noticed more of those students approaching me after class to ask questions.*

*I concur with a lot of what's said. I enjoy the program for both selfish reasons. It's one of the few places that I have found people really talking intensely about teaching freshmen, besides my department, outside of my department. And I constantly get wonderful ideas talking with my colleagues.*

Professional development is another reason why GUR faculty and seminar instructors have become involved in the FIGS program. They want to improve teaching and learning.

*I was involved in the faculty development portion of FIGS the very first year it was taught. I saw some of the interesting things that the GUR faculty working together, were able to bring into that small seminar. So for me, it was always professional development the first time I taught it. I thought I could really learn a lot making connections with faculty, and I thought it would bring another dimension to my own work.*

*I think the FIGS program has a great deal of potential, in creating those small opportunities, and I think a lot of the people who design the FIGS have thought more about how students learn, and student learning, than anybody on campus. And that the people I've worked with have improved my teaching 100% personally. And so I feel personally- professionally I have grown, and I hope my students have benefited.*

## **Goals and Objectives**

One of the goals of FIGS is to help students learn to think critically. This goal is most successful when specific projects are involved, and when students can relate the subject matter to their own lives.

*When I first started I was teamed with someone doing cultural anthropology, and we called it Culture Wars. And what we wanted them to do was to learn to think critically about culture and to learn what happens when different cultures, however you want to say it, collide, and that was our focus -both our focuses in our class. We hoped the seminar would enable students to think critically about text and to read better and to write better. And in fact I assigned my FIGS students a very difficult text called "In the Name of War." They actually could tackle it; because I was able to go in that day and kind of go through it with them. Now that turns out to be kind of a mistake, because we don't want them to see the seminars as a study hall...I hoped they'd just have more opportunity to learn critical thinking skills. And my frustration sometimes with the seminars has been that a lot of times there isn't that— there's more of the introduction to college, the busy work rather than that intense kind of critical thinking that I think they really need. So I think it's been successful when we've had projects. I think when you have a project and you work with a FIGS seminar leader to find a specific project to do that. I think that's the challenge.*

I see several heads nodding in agreement with you.

*And you'll be pleased to know, that after five times that focus on critical thinking—which is so important to our students being successful in college—they are going back to it next time. So, dropping some of the things that students may believe is busy work, but which some of them really*

*value and making them optional... making break out groups of students but not requiring the entire class -even though it's only 25 students. Actually I think it would be even better if it were 12 to 15. But I think that's paramount of importance.*

*They did do a paper and a group project that were not connected enough, and that's to do the reading and writing. Next time I would like to have a theme and have each one of them do a little paper that turns into either a group presentation or a poster session. I really like the poster session things I've seen out there.*

*I just had three learning goals this year, articulating their educational mission, and part of that is actually to have that short little reading and the faculty actually came in and gave their own definitions of what an educated person is, because I think from the get go students are thinking about first of all the privilege they have, but also the decisions that they make quarterly/weekly/daily about their education is going to play out for them over the next 4, 5, or 6 years depending on how long they're in school. So that was great. It really did start the big picture, but within I think the second week the students were wanting to get into the nitty gritty of connecting the dots between environmental studies and journalism... demonstrating understanding of how disciplines approach the making of knowledge, and the presentations that they did and also just some papers that they wrote throughout...we did some activities in class that got them thinking. I didn't actually have them write a research paper, but they did a lot of critical analysis of their own learning and what that means to them in their lives, and again the decisions that they're making every day.*

*To follow up on that, I took a really different critical thinking approach than you did. They didn't have to read a particularly academic text book or anything, but especially the way I presented it in my GUR was being very critical consumers. And being very critical buyers of stuff, and that's probably what depressed them. You know, we're talking about the land of iPods and Shuffles and DVD's, and I really encouraged them to think of that in an environmental context, and it was paired actually really quite well with advertising, which is such a big impetus for that. So for me I think it was more the students, particularly because we had talked about in a couple of different sessions. I don't know if they were more or less affected than the other class, but they were certainly getting it from two different directions. But they were critical thinkers on their consumer choices, so not so much academically, but hopefully that helped.*

Another primary goal is to enhance writing skills.

*One of the goals is to enhance writing skills, and maybe that's something that is so concrete that I actually can't say that I saw an improvement in some students. Some students came in being very good writers and most of them probably. But I had at least a couple and one in particular where the difference between his first reflection and his final one was remarkable. And I hope he went to the Writing Center, that's one of the resources that we used. And, but at least he knew to check spelling and grammar and make sure all his words were words. And that's something he didn't do in his first one. So that's you know, it's concrete and it's maybe minor and it shouldn't be needed, but um at least - and even my seniors need that. And he might have gotten that from his other classes. I mean it could be the things he got back from econ and anthro taught him that as well as whatever he got out of the FIGS. But I'd say from his first quarter - and I think he*

*identified that he needed to be more careful, this one in particular- and others I think at least they knew that they needed to, and I just encouraged them to read out loud whatever it was before they turned it in. And anyway so.*

*I've talked to students who depending on what GUR's they take and what their major is actually don't get any critical feedback on their writing till they're juniors. And um, and that's just unacceptable. And I think even if all that students are getting from the FIGS is more critical feedback on their writing, you know, then they have the opportunity to improve, and if they improve their writing in their first year that in it of its self is going to increase their college success. Because you know, we all at least - in teaching history one of the things I think I can really help students with is that critical thinking and writing is very important, that communication aspect. I'm not sure how you measure that as much as - you need that sort of long term measurement. I do think that the FIGS program ... what you all said has been we've been assessed to death? That you've done probably more assessment in the FIGS program than any other program on campus?*

FIGS instructors say it is a challenge to accomplish all of the goals and objectives.

*I thought it was more work than what I thought it was going to be last fall trying to keep all the balls in the air. I would like to both simplify and get more depth and try to figure out how to do that really well. But I did it probably more for me than for the students, and tried to learn what it was about and how it would, how the experience would be.*

*I had a lot of activities that met goals I thought, but it seemed like a lot of little things happening that weren't as related as they should have been.*

It is also a challenge to teach first-quarter freshmen when they are in the process of transitioning to college.

*Over the course the five times that I've taught, my most successful FIGS seminar was winter quarter, and it was a course I had taught before. But freshmen, wow, first quarter, amazing all the things that are going on. Trying to meet that expectation thing that they come in and trying to help them turn themselves in the direction they need to be going. I think this is the biggest challenge, and that's probably why I did great in the winter— because they'd already turned themselves.*

### **The Interdisciplinary Aspect**

One of the goals is to give students the opportunity to see connections across disciplines.

*One of the goals is to deepen students' appreciation that different disciplines come at questions from different perspectives, but these perspectives are all complementary...I try to get them to think like an economist in terms of trade offs and unintended consequences and so on. And I think the FIGS students get that more so than others, just because of that increased one on one interaction that the FIGS opportunity provides.*

*I think of FIGS as deepening a student's opportunities for learning about the content and— if there are two courses that are linked through the seminar—as a way to begin to help them see those interconnections. Because I know that students can get so excited about understanding those connections. That's one of the things I really love you hear is, oh you know Professor X was talking about that and that made me think about what you said about this. And so I want to really emphasize that aspect of it being the deepening of the content and learning how to learn, yes, that's important, but I don't think of it as remedial and I don't know that I would support it if I thought that it was just remedial.*

(Everyone in the focus group is nodding their heads to this.)

*Yeah I agree as well. Students don't get enough of those opportunities to see connections across disciplines. And it becomes very easy for them to think of different disciplines as being separate and unrelated and compartmentalized. And the more they can see those connections the more tools (for lack of a better word) they have for viewing the world.*

*I think that FIGS are one of the few opportunities they get to be able to integrate different disciplines. I think that is probably one of the most valuable aspects.*

There is some confusion among GUR faculty and seminar instructors as to whether the interdisciplinary aspect should be built into seminars. Currently there may be a de-emphasis on the interdisciplinary aspect.

*I was on the committee that wrote a very critical report about the FIGS. When we were doing that report we were consistently told by the leaders of the FIGS program the purpose of this seminar was not interdisciplinary over and over and over again. That they have moved away from that model and that we can't expect seminar leaders to do that. And I was like what? Because that was the model I was sold on. If FIGS is to continue, they need to move back to that model. That was the original intent—that and the critical reading and writing. And so I think if our students are not doing that, it's in part because there has been in this struggle to find out what the seminar's about..There's somewhat of a de-emphasis on that. Or at least that's what the people who designed the FIGS are saying now to the ACC, and were saying to us while we were writing the report. Now I think the onus is actually on the faculty- and I learned this lesson— to create those kinds of opportunities through projects or through other ways to help do that. I think that if that is the purpose of the seminar- the purpose they described, then I think we should absolutely keep the FIGS program. If it's moving away from that, then I would say maybe we should go to the freshmen seminars—stay in the discipline and that's where they're going to have the biggest opportunity to look at a topic in depth. And do that critical thinking.*

Part of the issue may be that it is too difficult to provide an interdisciplinary emphasis without having expertise in different disciplines, and most seminar instructors can't be expected to do it.

*When I first joined the program I was under- what I think was the goal of the early FIGS, but now has been kind of not dropped, but deemphasized because it's just too hard to do. I was under the impression that the seminar really would be an interdisciplinary experience, and there are some*

*seminar leaders who have expertise in topics and are able to do that, but since most faculty probably can't do that it's a bit much to expect seminar leaders to also be able to do that. And I apologize that sounded really condescending, I didn't mean it to be. But it's something that's very hard to do unless you're trained in a number of different disciplines.*

On the other hand, when the interdisciplinary aspect is built into the FIG, it seems to be more successful.

*Well having been involved in the FIGS twice I had two very different experiences. When students had their final poster presentations they seemed to integrate different aspects of the two classes that were involved in the FIG. And the previous year there were three classes involved, and they were much more disconnected. It seemed that they were much more focused on visits to the VU and that kind of thing, and that didn't seem as successful. So I would say it seems that the more content focused...And that was the previous year of the program and that was new model where there was only one connection, one GUR one- it went back to the two GURs as a result of learning that that was not as successful.*

Faculty and seminar instructors prefer to include the interdisciplinary aspect as a focus.

*I think certainly as a faculty member, if it seemed usefully to seminar instructors to get together and develop interdisciplinary projects with the other faculty member, I would be all for it. There has to be a negotiation with the seminar instructor, which is something that has taken me a while to learn... So I guess my point is for the people who are doing the FIGS just to reiterate to them the importance of that interdisciplinary in a seminar to keep that the focus. It's not so much a criticism of the current seminars or whatever, but if they are thinking of moving away, to discourage them.*

*I vote to learn from the disciplines as well. I'm not sure how much I did that. I tended to read both the text books before we started so that I would really have my vocabulary up to speed, I was not able to do that, so it was challenging. I did really try to bring both parts together. I think we did a fair job of focusing at least some on the intersection of the two disciplines, but I don't know that I achieved the depth of discussion that I would hope to be able to do in the future.*

*I teach a fairly large GUR. I've only taught this as a FIGS course once though and then I'll be teaching it again in the fall for my second time, and I've always taught this course interdisciplinary. So part of what really excited me was to link it with another discipline and for this particular FIGS module I was really pleased. I mean I couldn't have actually planned a better pair for this FIGS seminar, and I think it worked out really great especially the way I teach environmental studies ... I noticed more of those students approaching me after class to ask questions.*

*We came up with a general theme of values. It is values that determine what people are going to spend their resources on, whether its time or the things they care about. Another thing was to collaborate successfully on a group project...also acquire and enhance skills essential for academic success...take responsibility for their own education...to be able to situate themselves and their culture in a global context... We wanted them to be working on skills such as writing, speaking, presenting, thinking, researching...and here's the interdisciplinary part...some*

*advantages and disadvantages of various institutional arrangements, and that has something specifically to do with Anthropology. In economics, awareness that individuals process input through filters—they have questions...and then knowledge of campus resources...So at least it was organized to a purpose...*

One goal is to help students to discover connections themselves.

*Part of it is the connections that we want students to draw, and when we were explicitly trying to draw those connections I think we were less successful than when we let students discover those connections for themselves. If we asked at the end of the seminar and in an artful way, what connections did you make? We were amazed. But if they said at the end, the connections you said existed don't exist, then we were unsuccessful. And I think part of the being less explicit about what we thought the connections were would lead to more student discovery of the connections themselves. So, that's what we're hoping. I think what we're now hoping for them to do is to make those connections themselves, which of course is all part of what you want to do.*

*Within the second week the students were wanting to get into the nitty gritty of connecting the dots between environmental studies and journalism...demonstrating understanding of how disciplines approach the making of knowledge, and the presentations that they did and also just some papers that they wrote throughout...So we did some activities in class that got them thinking.*

*The students' final projects, I think they integrated the two GURs really nicely. They were creative... it was funny. It really seemed to have worked. It really seemed to have integrated it a lot.*

### ***The Small Group Setting***

The small group setting is ideal for building relationships with students, and leads to more personal connection with the subject as well.

*Probably the biggest thing I've noticed is just more connectedness to students. I tend to give those students coming into my office more during the quarter. And another thing that's kind of hard to quantify, but I think that I get the sense talking with them that because of that personal connection they're also a little more personally connected with the subject as well.*

*It seems that also a benefit that comes from this is that maybe freshmen think of professors—not necessarily on pedestal—but unapproachable or especially in GUR class where my smallest GUR is 180, and as many as 300. And to come into a classroom and for them to see you as a person and not just a talking head on a stage. So I appreciated that. I think when you meet many of these FIGS students in a smaller arena, I think from the student's perspective they're like, wow, she's not just a professor she's a person.*

*I for one really got a lot out of the two seminar classes that I went to in meeting the students. I had noticed more of those students approaching me after class to ask questions.*

*For one thing a series of students I have taught over the course of many years continue to visit my office, and update me and ask for letters of recommendation. And the most interesting discussion I had was last winter when a student came back and said it was because of my having a little talk in the office with you that I was able to feel like I could go in and talk to my Physics instructor, and now I've changed my major, and now my life is going a whole different way. And so you see those big changes, but I think it's the continuing visits and connections we still have with our students quarter after quarter that tells us. I have one student who was in my very first FIG who now works in my office and she's graduating now. So I mean it's these continuing relationships that tell you.*

*I don't think that there have been a lot of long term relationships, but during the quarter that the students are in the FIGS I think they do feel much freer to approach me. And some of them have interviewed me for some of their projects that they've done. So they come and ask me questions on a particular topic that they're working on. I think that there is a rapport that's built up with those students that allows them to feel maybe a little more free to come up and talk to me after class... Sometimes I have felt as if the rest of the students in the class, I've worried about them feeling like they're missing out. Because in fact I've even held myself back sometimes during a class lecture to not say, well you know you FIGS students - we talked about this in the seminar the other week- and here I want you to make these connections, because I don't want the rest of the group to feel that oh well they've got an advantage that we don't have. Of course they do in some ways. But I always think that those other students are going to feel that somehow that I'm playing to that group more.*

Students also build valuable connections with each other.

*I think the cohort experience is particularly valuable. My college as a junior-senior program we've been I guess for years- although I've only been here for four years- trying to develop you know coming in at the junior level also that cohort experience for these students. And um, it would seem to me that FIGS is particularly valuable in that sense. And in the fall, like the FIGS students would all sit together in my class, and I would see them on campus either studying together or eating lunch or hanging out. So in that sense I think a cohort thing is valuable.*

*I think that that familiarity with resources and being comfortable talking with their instructors, hopefully they will get wired in a little bit more quickly.*

*But one of the things that I've noticed is they do form social groups. Whether they last or not is not clear. And so of course the other students know them. And I've been told by freshmen in particular that I'm somewhat inapproachable, so sometimes they'll approach me as a FIG group.*

## **Engagement**

FIGS offer a small group setting where students can become academically engaged and topics can be explored in depth.

*I would think that anytime students have more of an opportunity to really be involved in experiential learning where they get to talk and they get to write and they get to do activities*

*rather than just sit back and hear what some instructor has to say that they're going to learn better. Maybe it's not going to show up in their grades, but I think that they're going to be more involved. They're going to be more committed to their own educations. So I think any setting where students are in a small enough groups that there is room for discussion, I mean just that alone is so important. That multi-dimensional aspect of all the different channels through which we learn. I think that's really important.*

*I just don't enough data of my own to say that they're much more successful students, they're better writers or better analysts or even more engaged readers. I would hope that they're more engaged citizens because of the FIGS, and that really one of the things I've been thinking about.*

*I think any setting where students are in a small enough group that there is room for discussion, I mean just that alone is so important.*

*Some of the interesting things that our students have done outside of class and some of my successful out of class experiences have been field trips we have taken that related to academic content. So for example when I did messages from the jungle, which was a psychology biology class we studied primates and we went both to Ellensburg and down to the Seattle zoo. Those kinds of experiences I think have real opportunities for students to become engaged in the content you're trying to study. Unfortunately you can't logically come up with an experience like that every time. One time I took my students in Radical Equations to a conference where Robert Moses, the man who had written the book "Radical Equations", was the key note and he came to our class section. So we actually presented, FIGS students presented for the person who had written the book that their seminar was named after, and that also was a wonderful thing.*

*I think the FIGS program has a great deal of potential in creating those small opportunities, and I think a lot of the people who design the FIGS have thought a lot more about how students learn, and student learning, than anybody on campus.*

*I think of FIGS as deepening a student's opportunities for learning about the content and if there are two courses that are linked through the seminar, as a way to begin to help them see those interconnections. Because I know that students can get so excited about understanding those connections. That's one of the things I really love you hear is, oh you know Professor X was talking about that and that made me think about what you said about this. And so I want to really emphasize that aspect of it being the deepening of the content.*

An additional possibility for FIGS is a service learning component.

*One of the things I've been thinking about - and I'm not sure how to implement it- is that I'd like to inject a service learning element into maybe just FIGS in particular because I'm not sure service learning can work in a GUR with the types of service learning activities that I'd want to do. So I've been working with the Center for Service Learning this year and trying to develop some modules for that, and it just seems like FIGS is a great opportunity for that. But then that really puts the onus on the FIGS instructor as well to facilitate the FIGS as well as a service learning component. I'm generally very supportive of the first year experience in FIGS, but more so for the cohort and social experience than what they're getting exactly academically.*

## FIGS vs Large Lecture Classes

Instructors try not to mention the FIGS in large lecture classes, because they don't want the rest of the group to feel that FIGS students are given an advantage. However, instructors believe FIGS students do have an advantage in some ways.

*I know the one time I did use a FIGS seminar as a review session. We were in a large room and I invited anyone who wanted to attend. And one time I did have the FIGS students do a particularly effective reading of Roots, and I asked them - because we were doing slavery that next week- to go ahead in front of the class and do that. In that case it kind worked for both groups because they got to see these programs. But I think that is an issue if the other students feel that you're giving the FIGS students a leg up on the exam in some ways. So I'm trying to now be very careful not to do that and to emphasize to the other students - I'll sometimes mention the FIGS- but I say if you didn't know what it means you're not in them, so don't panic. I really try and emphasize that its not a study group, that there's not an advantage being given here, that any one of you are free to come into my office. But I also do echo that I've found the FIGS can give the students that confidence to occasionally answer a question in class, and to also come see me.*

*I don't see an improvement in grades. But FIGS students were by and large, I felt, better students when they came in. One of the reasons I liked having the FIGS cohort, and that's when you actually have two FIGS sections was that they elevated the class. Now I have no evidence for this, but I suspect that there's more of a cross section among the FIGS.*

*I have felt as if the rest of the students in the class, I've worried about them feeling like they're missing out. Because in fact I've even held myself back sometimes during a class lecture to not say, well you know you FIGS students - we talked about this in the seminar the other week— and here I want you to make these connections— because I don't want the rest of the group to feel that oh well they've got an advantage that we don't have. Of course they do in some ways. But I always think that those other students are going to feel that somehow that I'm playing to that group more.*

*Yeah I don't mention the FIGS in the larger lecture. At all. It's hard, but I agree with you.*

*Some do, and other instructors that I usually work with always mentions them has a special project for them, and has not reported that there's been that feeling. But I know from the very beginning GUR instructors were worried that other students would feel that FIGS had an advantage. I think the students recognize the fact that these are first quarter students... because they can relate to it, they can still remember it. I don't think they resent it so much.*

*But there are a lot of other freshmen in there that aren't in the FIGS seminar...But they've all had the opportunity to sign up for one, and that may be part of the fairness thing.*

## Grades

Instructors find that grades for FIGS students are the same as for others. There is no significant difference.

*I was very surprised in a negative way that the grades for the FIGS students- I mean I didn't know if they would be all A's or if they would be higher or lower- but they were exactly the same. I mean they were exactly the same, and I thought oh they're going to meet with the GUR instructors and its somehow going to inspire them to be really fantastic students and they'll all ace the final and they'll all get A's, but they were all over the board. It just really surprised me. I guess I somehow thought that the FIGS seminar would give them a leg up even though that's not what it's designed for, it's not designed as a study group, but I just thought -*

*But and we're trying to talk about the material they have to do better right? But they don't. You're absolutely right. That blows my mind.*

*It really surprised me, like wow.*

*Well I would think that anytime students have more of an opportunity to really be involved in experiential learning where they get to talk and they get to write and they get to do activities rather than just sit back and hear what some instructor has to say that they're going to learn better. Maybe it's not going to show up in their grades, but I think that they're going to be more involved. They're going to be more committed to their own educations.*

*I do tend to agree that even if the GPA aren't showing the benefits that the students, pretty much those that aren't benefiting from it are probably those who need the- are just the ones who are sitting and are just disinterested. Cuz I hear some of these great things that you all do in these seminars, and come on what more can you do to invest these students? You know? At some point it's their responsibility.*

## Challenges for Seminar Instructors and GUR Faculty

A number of challenges are involved in teaching a seminar, and the biggest challenge is working with freshmen as they are transitioning to college life.

*I taught seminar five times now, but only once did I repeat a seminar, and if I were going to talk about problems that would be one of the problems that would be one of the problems I could see in teaching this course is if you have to reinvent that course almost every time you teach it. It's very difficult. If I were going to look at one of the problems it would be the problem of continuing and then the problem of matching and then the logistical problem of getting everybody together makes it difficult...My most successful FIGS seminar was actually taught winter quarter...But freshmen, wow, first quarter, amazing all the things that are going on. Trying to meet that expectation thing that they come in and trying to help them turn themselves in the direction they need to be going in, I think this is the biggest challenge. And that's probably why I did great in the winter, because they'd already turned themselves.*

Seminar instructors say they would like professional development as part of their seminar training, so they would be better prepared.

*Something I can say that as a first time FIGS facilitator is that I didn't feel tremendously well prepared to be teaching and assessing writing, because that's not my field either. So if there's something that might help it could be a little bit of focus on that as we prepare...*

*Maybe professional development as part of our seminar training. More of that, because at one time we did get a bit more of that I believe in the beginning.*

GUR faculty are not clear as to what the seminar should do, or what their relationship should be with seminar instructors, and how they should work together.

*I've struggled with the relationship with seminar leaders. And that's been my fault. The seminar leaders I've had have been great- I've had no problem with them, and I think part of it is my expectations of this seminar are I think a little bit different than I think than sometimes the programs are. I'd like to see the seminar be more academically based than sometimes it is. And the concerns I hear from students about the program is the amount of busy work they sometimes do in the seminars. And I was under the impression that the seminar really would be an interdisciplinary experience, and there are some seminar leaders who have expertise in topics and are able to do that, but since most faculty probably can't do that it's a bit much to expect seminar leaders to also be able to do that. And I apologize that sounded really condescending, I didn't mean it to be... I think coming up in fall will be either my fifth or sixth and what I've found is most successful is when I behave myself a little better. In the past I was very, liaise fair and out of respect for the seminar leader, but I think perhaps I didn't give the students as much of an integrated experience. I know, you had another seminar leader who voiced a lot of frustration with me because of that. He thought that I had basically ignored him and things like that. So I think that relationship between faculty and seminar leader is really important. And I don't think all faculty have the same sense of what that should be. I've heard some faculty refer to seminar leaders as TA's, and I've heard other refer to them as partners, and some were in between. So I'm not sure always that - and I'll use myself as a prime example—that we always had a real sense of what that seminar should do.*

*At one point there was a concerted effort to bring graduate students in as seminar leaders or teachers. I think that program has moved away from that, and I think that some of that TA stuff might have been that when you are a seminar leader who's also a student- especially in your department- there might be a tendency to think of that person as TA rather than a seminar leader.*

*I think there is a perception among some faculty teaching the program, and lately I've had that perception when we were teaching together, was that the seminar leader really is supposed to adjust things to what the faculty wants done in his or her courses rather than the seminar as really something that has another identity that we have to work to make work within the framework of our courses. And I think that's something the seminars are struggling with as well because it has changed every year. So, but I think that the onus really goes both ways.*

One of the issues is whether seminars are doing just “busy work” rather than the hard work of academic subjects.

*Last year my FIG's partner spent a lot of time collecting their calendars and reading through their calendars. You know tours of the student union. I, my feeling of this- and this is my opinion- is that um those kinds of things, I don't know quite how to put it, I think sometimes when there are not high expectations on students, and they get credit for those kinds of things and their grades get inflated because of that, that it actually detracts because then they have the expectation that college is not about essentially the hard work of academic subjects. And um any frustration I have with the FIGS program- and I am a strong supporter of the FIGS program- has to do with what I've seen the seminar not because I think the seminar instructors are not qualified or anything like that, but has been ways in which their performances have been inflated through that kind of what I think is, ya know should be happening if its happening at all in student life. And the students I've heard you have expressed frustration or kind of laughed at the FIGS seminar have been laughing at those assignments. Not- they generally like their seminar instructors etcetera, but they want to do the hard work in it. And um that's, that's really the only significant issue I have with the FIGS seminar why I don't support making the FIGS seminar itself a GUR course.*

*We hoped the seminar would enable them to think critically about text and to read better and to write better. And in fact I assigned my FIGS students a very difficult text called “In the Name of War”. This was the one I did before the one with you. They actually could tackle it, because I was able to go in that day and go through it with them. Now that turns out to be kind of a mistake, because we don't want them to see the seminars as a study hall, which I think with you I did once or something like that. That's what I hoped because they just have more opportunity to learn critical thinking skills. And my sort of frustration sometimes with the seminars has been that a lot of times there's more of the introduction to college, the busy work rather than that intense kind of critical thinking that I think they really need. So I think it's been successful when we've had projects. I think when you have a project and you work with a FIGS seminar leader to find a specific project to do that. And I think that's the challenge.*

A shorter time-frame may help for “busy work” assignments.

*I had students do what some of them thought was busy work, but they kept a learning journal for just two weeks. It was just about after the first midterm. They had to have an entry for every day about how much time they studied, and where they did it and how it worked for them. And for some of them, their reflection at the end of that, I heard things like “I learned I have to go to the library”. And one young man said, “I learned I study best when my music is playing. I liked that, and that's something I would repeat. And the time frame I think was appropriate. And they got what I wanted them to get. Something that I did that I also think turned into busy work that was too much -a little bit would have been better, and I would do a little bit again, but I had an online posting called Connections where they were supposed to connect something from their lives that had to do with- it started out being just the anthropology and economics together, but then I saw through that and saw that it could be either one. And I wanted them to do ten for the quarter, and I was thinking one per week. Well there were a number of them that were posting them all during the last week. But if I were to do it again I would do it for maybe three weeks and have it targeted a little bit more.*

GUR faculty believe it is important to work with the seminar instructors to develop assignments and interdisciplinary projects.

*One of the things I have learned as I've progressed in the program is the importance of really working hard with that seminar leader to come up with some sort of assignment that can happen in the seminar that really draws everything together. And when we did that last year I think that was more successful.*

*I think certainly as a faculty member if it seemed useful to seminar instructors to get together and develop interdisciplinary projects with the other faculty member, I would be all for it... There has to be a negotiation with the seminar instructor, which is something that has taken me a while to learn, and as I said, for the people who are doing the FIGS just to reiterate to them the importance of that interdisciplinary in a seminar— to keep that the focus.*

Some seminar leaders may be hesitant to involve GUR faculty during seminar sessions. However assignments may have better connections if GUR faculty are more involved and they work as a team.

*I think I was maybe hesitant to use the faculty. I think that they were in the classroom at least four times, which I was hoping was not excessive. I you know we don't know or if it wasn't enough that I really would have I think in approaching next year would want to work more with the faculty very much is a lot of residence and other things I'm hearing to get a particular assignment that would maybe carry through a theme for the entire quarter that really marries both disciplines. Because I had a lot of activities that met goals I thought, but it seemed like a lot of little things happening that weren't as related as they should have been. And I think that um I'm a little dismayed to hear that someone who's taught five times maybe hasn't done it repeatedly, because I was really looking forward to getting good at it maybe, (laughs). And I will be consciously capable of learning. I don't that's the case and I also think that um and I'll be working with a different-one of the other GUR faculty will be different next year one will be the same, but trying to really work as a team*

Seminar sessions are particularly helpful when GUR instructors are involved in discussions and activities.

*Having the GUR faculty visit I think was terrific. The first assignment was an introductory reflection. So the students summarized their introductions as a group. The faculty members gave some very nice personal information about themselves in that meeting. And that I think really set it up very well. And I think for the students that made the GUR faculty more approachable as people through out the quarter. That's something I would certainly repeat. Each of the faculty came in later and talked about their own particular background and research. And I think that again was really terrific. And then something that I thought worked great was that each one of them did an experiential exercise with the students in their disciplines that they typically don't get to do in their large classes. So with 25 people we did a one hour role play—something to do both with anthropology and economics. And that I thought was really neat. There was a bride price setting, talking about how you have divided people up into family groups and we had brides and*

*grooms and mothers and fathers, and I had so much fun. The bargaining actually went quite differently from what I anticipated.*

*We did a couple movie nights based off another seminar. And I would say the presence of one of the GUR instructors...her discussion was awesome. I won't do that again I think unless I make sure that I get input from the GUR instructors about what movies would be appropriate to choose, and to have them there for discussion, because just watching the movie was not the same. It really needs the discussion to be valuable. So that's something that I learned.*

## **Funding issues**

GUR instructors believe the FIGS program should be better funded, particularly in terms of fair compensation for seminar leaders, as well as faculty development time and support for field trips. Otherwise faculty and seminar leaders take on extra burdens.

*I think for the FIGS program to really do what it wants to do it has to be much better funded...to allow for release time for staff, who are teaching seminars and even faculty development time for faculty to really participate. And I think that my sense of the FIGS program, and there's a lot of evidence to support this, is done through the willingness of a lot of the instructors to give, to work voluntarily for the university. And I don't think that they university should ever ask people to work for free. And I think they essentially ask the seminar leaders to work for free. Paying somebody like \$750 to \$850 to essentially teach a college level course is not compensating them appropriately. Now I'll be silent.*

*It's really tough. How do we do the logistics of a field trip? Who pays for the car? For example because we do faculty development through my office I was able to rent a car through my office to take my students to that. How, does it come out of our stipend- the money that they pay us to do the class? I know there's a limited amount of money available, but these kinds of experiences I think are hugely enriching.*

*I have hard time with the ability for me to teach was giving up my lunch hours and grading at home and working on Black Board from home. It's definitely an additional work load in teaching everyone and finding texts and preparing...It's definitely a burden to add that on.*

*My opinion as a faculty GUR person was that I just considered it part of my job duty. I mean a GUR is so time consuming anyway, for me to attend the seminars, I mean I really enjoyed it and I just didn't really think about it as anything above and beyond the call of duty. I really just thought it was part of it. So at least as a faculty person it was fine. I'm in a department as we all are with like, no travel money whatsoever and so this past year it, you know, this stipend is funding me to go to a conference which otherwise I would have to pay out of pocket. So for me the stipend has been really great for me financially. I mean I don't want to take in a pay check I really want to take it for travel, so that's been a really great opportunity. And I feel like it's the elephant in the room, but it's certainly not the motivation for me to continue doing FIGS in the fall, but it sure is a really nice bonus.*

*You got some summer money, and I did spend some of the summer conceptualizing- and I do agree with you, for faculty I think I'm perfectly compensated. It's the seminar leaders I'm concerned about. Because again, it sets up an exploitative labor practice that also closes off for some people who can't get that release time or they are just so overburdened, and so many seminar leaders put their heart and soul into this, and then you know, can't do it again for whatever reason or something like that. So if you're going to ask people to spend lunch hours... you better give them what we give lecturers is my feeling.*

*I've been asked to continue teaching despite the fact that I've sometimes been critical of the FIGS program. I'm a big supporter of it, though I do think the university does need to make some difficult decisions about what it's going to fund and what it's not going to fund. And if it continues to fund the FIGS half assed- pardon my language- then maybe it needs to think about whether we really want to put more emphasis on the freshmen seminars within the disciplines, or think of other ways. I think the FIGS program has a great deal of potential in creating those small opportunities, and I think a lot of the people who design the FIGS have thought a lot more about how students learn, and student learning, than anybody on campus. And that the people I've worked with have improved my teaching 100% personally. So I feel personally, professionally I have grown, and I hope my students have benefited. But I am concerned that again it's a way of dealing with some issues that— you know by only partially funding stuff— and I'll go back to that relying on free labor- and I think that the administration needs to decide if its committed, and it needs to get the faculty behind it.*

## **Enrollment/Registration**

Which types of students sign up for FIGS?

*I know that the FIGS program has done a very good job marketing. One of the suspicions is that parents are actually enrolling their kids for the FIG.*

*I think the reduced amount of GUR that the students have to take starting fall may have made enrollment and registration easier...I don't know, that's just speculation.*

*I think it may be a function of personality in terms of the type of students who might need FIGS and my guess— it could be a function of the type of student or the type of high school they came from. Are they rural? Are they urban? And I guess I'm the type of student who wouldn't have benefited from FIGS for whatever reason. And I guess I'm not sure how you can target students who we know need FIGS. It's like some kids don't think they need something until they crash and burn their first quarter. So I think there could be a fundamental recruiting issue here of trying to identify what students might need FIGS, and which ones might benefit, and which ones might really be a waste of time. Because I could see myself in a FIGS 20 years ago thinking, well I don't need to know how to study, I do it ok. You know what I mean? So, that seems to be- not really unspoken here- but a pretty underlying issue.*

One recommendation is that FIGS should be offered all year, as students may seek out small group experiences.

*At least the majority of the FIGS are always in the fall is that right? And why is that? Why was it set up that way? Why not have it available all year? Because it seems to me that a lot of students once they get here and have one quarter of being here might really want to be seeking out those kinds of small group experiences. So that might be a recommendation that we have them throughout the year.*

## **Assessment**

GUR faculty and seminar instructors believe the FIGS program has been assessed systematically, and that there is a lot of it, from beginning to end. In fact, this program has probably been assessed more than any other program on campus.

*It has been very systematic. There's been a lot of it. I know in the beginning these survey instruments were given to GUR faculty as well. But they tended to pull back because they weren't getting valuable information from the larger courses, so they focused mainly on the seminar. And yes we have our own separate feed back system. Many of us do mid quarter assessment, we're all encouraged to do that as well as beginning and ending assessment. And so, there's a lot of it. And sometimes it makes it difficult. You have so much you say what's the main reason we're here, and can we from this mass of information tell us that we've been successful in doing that. That's tougher.*

*I do think that the FIGS program - haven... what you all said has been we've been assessed to death? That you've done probably more assessment in the FIGS program than any other program on campus?*

## **MSLQ**

The MSLQ was used in one FIGS seminar, however the students did not like it and the instructor will not use it again.

*We did the MSLQ, that had to do with their learning. We had fairly good discussion on that. I had assignments in the workbooks for some of the college success, and I found the book to be really hard to work with. The students did not like it. They really thought they knew it all. If I use the book again I will do a better job at approaching it so that I will say, I know you heard all this before, but this is about applying it to where you are right now. I really need to look at the book in detail, because we had some assignments that I actually abandoned part of the way though because I got such negative feedback. It's the book that was written by the people that developed the MSLQ. I tried several times because I knew that expectation thing was bad. And part of it was it had a silly cover, honestly it looks like child's crayon. And frankly I'm going to abandon it this time, even though I tried to focus on the scholarship.*