First-Year Seminar Proposal 2015-2016

1. Course Department: Sociology and Anthropology

2. Faculty Member: Dr. Barbara E. Borg (Anthropology)

3. First Year Seminar Title: Getting to Know You?: Westerners meet the “Other”

4. Semester Offered: Fall '15 [X] Spring '16 [ ]

Signature of Faculty Member

Barbara E. Borg Date: 6/6/14

Signature of Department Chair/ Program Director

Date: 6/6/14
5. **Course Description** (Please limit to 120 words):

   **Note:** This description is for the review committee and will also be used in the online FYE course listings.

   Americans’ lack of cultural literacy is increasingly counterproductive in a global system where our interdependence with “Others” in “Third World” countries is increasing. Having tended to interpret the actions of other nations in terms of our own culture, we need to examine our unquestioned assumptions about “modern progress” and “Western superiority”. Using examples from different times and places this course examines the evolution of Western attitudes toward native peoples as different from each other as the Vikings of the Far North who first settled Iceland, Congo Africans under a brutal Belgian colonialism, the Maya of Central America who have survived centuries of repression, and the Himalayan Sherpas of Nepal who remain essential partners in all attempts to climb Mt. Everest. [120 words]

6. **Suggested Peer Facilitator(s)?**

   **Note:** Please nominate a student(s) you believe will be a good role model for students in your FYE course. Nominees must be undergraduates in good academic standing. Nominate at least two if your course will have greater than 25 first-year students, and please ask the students before nominating them.

   Is it possible to wait to choose a peer facilitator? There are many fine student anthropology majors, and I will have no problem finding one, especially since there is a stipend attached. I’d like to get a little closer to Fall 2015, by which time I will know which upperclassmen would be interested.

7. **Would you be willing to have REACH students in your Seminar?**

   **Note:** See reach.cofc.edu for a description of the program. Special training is provided to faculty who choose to have REACH students in their course

   I have already previously taught three REACH students in three different classes (ANTH 101, ANTH 202, and ANTH 320). I would welcome special training to work with them if it is different from what I have already had which included instruction from the program director, and in-person meetings with REACH students’ tutors.

8. **Please provide a list of possible books, readings, etc. that could be may in the course.**

   **Note:** A complete syllabus is not required for this proposal, but a list of suggested readings that are appropriate for First Year students will help the committee during the review process.

   OLD WORLD SOURCES (I will begin with these and work toward a New World “climax” to the course):

   I will probably use the sources in the order they are listed here:

   **Verne, Jules**
   
   *Around the World in Eighty Days* (students will read in its entirety because it is short)
   
   This easy-to-read classic combines Victorian travel technology, attitudes, adventure, mystery, and a thrilling race against time. I will use this work of fiction to introduce students to “travel literature” because it is an easy read, and it is closer to the students’ experience both geographically and historically than the other works they will read.

   **Ibn Fadlan**
   
   *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness* (students will read excerpts)
   
   In 922 A.D. this Muslim diplomat and missionary traveled to the cold regions north of the Caucasus Mountains where he met (and was the first to describe) the Vikings. It is a classic example of a civilized person of that time, from a part of the world students know little about, encountering “barbarians”. There is a connection to the New World here as Vikings settled for a time in Newfoundland, and archaeological sites remain. This is a first-person, eye-witness account.

   **Conrad, Joseph**
   
   *Heart of Darkness* (students will read in its entirety because it is quite short)
   
   One of the first critiques of European colonialism, this work of fiction highlights the highly inaccurate, shocking, and cynical attitudes of colonial Europeans toward Africans, as well as the depth of moral depravity into which one can fall in a “lawless” frontier zone like the colonial Congo.
Ortner, Sherry
Life and Death on Mount Everest (students will read excerpts)
Historical descriptions of Westerners toward Sherpa porters on various Mt. Everest expeditions
have ranged from “childlike and not interested in money” to a much more accurate
anthropological study of the lives and motivations of this ethnic group. From YouTube, modern
reactions to the recent cancelling of the Everest climbing season due to the death of 16 Sherpas
in an avalanche reveal that, for some, the lives of Sherpas are still not really very important.

NEW WORLD SOURCES: (In general, I will work from the Aztec conquest to the Maya conquest and region, and
conclude the course with the Maya “cultural immersion through film” project.)

Diaz del Castillo, Bernal
The True History of the Conquest of New Spain (students will read excerpts)
An eye-witness account of a 16th c. Spanish common soldier who participated in the Aztec
conquest and who lived most of his adult life in the Maya region of Guatemala.

Leon Portillo, Miguel
The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico (students will read most of this book)
From the few extant native writings about the conquest, this author has reconstructed the Aztec
conquest from the natives’ point of view.

Stephens, John Lloyd and Frederick Catherwood
Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan (students will read excerpts)
These intrepid jungle explorers were the first to discover and record “lost” Maya cities,
and inspired all succeeding archaeological and anthropological study of the Maya. (1841)

Las Casas, Bartolome de
A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies (students will read excerpts)
Las Casas was a 16th c. Dominican friar and bishop in the New World. Known as the “Protector
of the Indians” he advocated for their better treatment (while burning now “priceless” Maya books).

Patch, Robert
Maya Revolt and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century (students will read excerpts)
This volume (and there are others like it) shows how the Maya have resisted their colonial overlords in
many ways, and emphasizes that native peoples in general are neither passive nor helpless in the face
of domination, but instead engage in many types of resistance and demonstrations of human “agency”.
I will continue this theme as we take the Maya through a 19th revolution that they nearly won, and
discuss how they interact today with the Mexican government and the burgeoning tourist trade.

Lee, Dorothy
Valuing the Self: What we can learn from other cultures (students will read excerpts)
Anthropologist Dorothy Lee was intensely interested in how cultures produce healthy happy human
beings with a deeply ingrained sense of responsibility toward their own communities. She believed
some other societies have done this better than we have, and in a series of essays she explains why.

9. How will you address FYE Learning Outcomes in your seminar?

The Synthesis Seminar, taught by a Peer Facilitator, will address and assess the first
Learning Objective. First-Year Seminar courses are expected to incorporate aspects of
Learning Objectives 2 and 3 as they relate to the particular discipline(s) that the seminar
focuses on. Beneath each Learning Objective, please provide information that indicates
how these outcomes will specifically be addressed in the course, including the type of
assignments that may be used and how these assignments will be assessed. While a
syllabus is not required for the proposal, a detailed description will greatly assist the
Faculty review committee.

First-Year Experience Course form, modified 5/6/14
Learning Objective 1: Campus Resources
By the completion of their First-Year Experience course, a student will be able to...
- Identify and use the appropriate academic resources and student support services at College of Charleston. These would include the library, information technology, the Center for Student Learning, the Career Center, and other appropriate academic resources, student support services, and cultural resources;

Learning Objective 2: Information Literacy
By the completion of their First-Year Experience course, a student will be able to...
- use appropriate tools and search strategies for identifying particular types of information specific to the discipline
- evaluate the relevance, quality, and appropriateness of different sources of information
- recognize and classify the information contained within a bibliographic citation.
- access and use information ethically and legally

How will Learning Objective 2 be addressed in your course?

Several of my colleagues in the Spring 2014 FLASC seminar counseled that in an FYE we should spend less time on content, and more time on simply how to be a good student, incorporating exercises that train students in that direction. The consensus was that students tend to continue good study and writing habits formed during the FYE, especially if you teach your course during the Fall semester when freshmen are new to campus. By the following spring semester they have already begun to absorb “advice” from other students, and so are not quite so malleable! Mindful of these admonitions, in my FYE course I will spend considerable time on general learning strategies and how to get to know both professors and other students.

I will have at least one, and hopefully more than one, gathering of FYE students in my home, to emphasize getting to know your professors as people and not just as your teachers. A gathering early in the semester will also help the students get to know each other. Other faculty members have suggested engaging with the class in a “challenge opportunity”, a number of which are available in the Charleston area.

To help students get acquainted with other students and with the campus I will have the students pair up, visit each other’s dorm rooms or apartments, and interview each other.

Students can also pair up to discuss each other’s scheduling difficulties, such as too many roommates, disruptive roommates, no quiet study space, extra commuting time, family responsibilities, outside jobs, etc. to try to discover how to set priorities and find solutions that will work “always or for the most part” (allowing some enjoyable digression from a set schedule while still maintaining the benefits of one).

Because reading and writing well are central to academic success we will talk about different kinds of writing in anthropology (and writing in general), and how they need to read different types of writing differently for different purposes (for instance, reading for content in a scholarly journal article as opposed to reading a pleasant overview in a more popular Archaeology or National Geographic magazine article). We will discuss “short easy reads” versus “longer more challenging reads” (both of which students will do in this course), as well as expectations regarding how much time to spend per day on coursework. I will stress that what is “necessary” can also be “fun”, and that great satisfaction and relief can be attained by having your study schedule under control–working for you rather than against you.

After we have read several works and discussed what anthropology is and how anthropologists approach the study of humans we will tour the library with a librarian who will discuss and demonstrate how to distinguish “reliable” from “unreliable” sources, and how to find good sources both in the library and on the Internet. I will integrate how to “decode” a bibliography, and throughout the course we will discuss the different kinds of sources students are reading, the difference between primary and secondary sources, critiques of these sources, and how a source comes to be regarded as a “good” source.
We will read and discuss the College’s statement on plagiarism, and why it is harmful. I assume that most students do not set out to purposely plagiarize, so we will discuss how taking poor and incomplete notes can lead to unintentional plagiarism, and I will show students how to take “foolproof” notes on readings. We will also discuss how to paraphrase, and how to get over the feeling that “other people say it better than I do” which encourages an overreliance on the writing of others. Related to good paraphrasing is how to write clearly in general, as doing so helps one to paraphrase easily.

Students will write short “reaction papers” throughout the course, and I will evaluate these thoroughly. I am indebted to Dr. Josh Shane in our Spring 2014 FLASC seminar who shared with us his FYE “Tips for Good Writing” handout. In class we will discuss these tips which include how to:

- State a thesis and generally organize a paper
- Write about one major idea per paragraph
- Avoid common grammatical and spelling errors
- Write in an “uncluttered, non-wordy” style
- Use active rather than passive constructions
- Avoid colloquialisms (and popular texting contractions)
- Identify and eliminate redundancy
- Stay focused and avoid oversimplification
- Capitalize (when and why)
- Use direct quotes properly
- Edit and proofread
- Cite sources properly, even with a simple citation style.

If appropriate, and if students respond positively to the idea, they may also work in groups to proofread each other’s work. If the work is typed and the copy circulated without names (but only numbers) feedback can be returned to all authors without embarrassment.

It goes without saying that topics of concern that originate with students, and which they want to discuss, will be thoroughly covered in class.

**Learning Objective 3: Integrative Learning**

Faculty will use writing, speech, or media in innovative ways to achieve integrative learning by students. By the completion of their First-Year Experience course, a student will be able to:

- Use appropriate critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques in appropriate disciplinary contexts
- Make connections across disciplines and/or relevant experiences

**How will Learning Objective 3 be addressed in your course?**

In teaching Anthropology 101 I have successfully used (though not recently) four one-hour videos about a contemporary Maya family living in rural Yucatan. I create a “cultural immersion experience” and ask my students to be anthropologists, teaching them how to take an ethnographer’s quick “field jottings” as they view each of the four videos. The film series begins with very basic material concerns—what the Maya look like, how they dress, make a living, set up a corn field, and build a house, and what modern conveniences they lack (no running water or electricity yet). These are easy topics for students to describe. I then encouraged students to share their “gut reactions” about the Maya, both in class discussion and in their notes. At this stage they are often quite ethnocentric, even if they are reluctant to admit it, and are not relating at all to the “poor, shabby, backward” Maya family.

The filmmaker, himself a non-custodial single parent who does not enjoy the close family ties that (students quickly learn) characterize the Maya family, skillfully moves into more human concerns: Why are so many people in this small community born deaf? (The entire community ingeniously invented its own sign language!) What happens when you have little cash but your daughter needs a doctor? What work can you do to make extra money while still tending your cornfields? Why are only the two younger sons being sent to school in the city? How do children from a rural background adjust to a city school when they look “different”, and when their father is not prepared for how much school supplies cost? How does the community decide it can profit from construction of an orchard even though the project is poorly managed by “outsiders” who do not understand Maya work patterns and values?

By the end of the videos students have become deeply involved with the concerns of this family (who they now...
perceive to be much like themselves), and understand why the Maya feel no shame just because they are “poor”. Instead the Maya are proud of their ability to solve problems as a family and as a community. At this point students write their own short “ethnography” of Yucatec Maya culture, analyze their own thoughts about the Maya “Other”, and compare their attitudes about the Maya to the attitudes of other authors whose works about the “Other” they have already read. The cultural immersion exercise generates both cultural understanding and critical thinking!

Because I have traveled widely and lived in the Maya region, and based my dissertation on part of it, we will further discuss the Maya as an “indestructible” and resilient people who have responded creatively and courageously to many centuries of problematic interaction with Westerners like ourselves. Culture is always changing, but this change has accelerated rapidly since 1492. We will discuss how Westerners have (or have not) been able to bridge the cultural divide in “Getting to Know” the “Other”, with occasional glimpses about how the “Other” views us and our culture. Anthropology teaches that in better understanding other cultures we learn to better understand ourselves. Are we getting better at “Getting to Know the Other” and, as a result, ourselves?