Minutes of Revised Undergraduate First-Year Experience (FYE) Committee meeting, 3/6/09

Present: Erik Craft, Joe Essid, Libby Gruner (chair), Al Goethals, April Hill, Dan Palazzolo, Joan Neff (ex officio)

The meeting began with a discussion of a series of open forums to present preliminary findings to and solicit feedback from the campus community. We agreed to try to schedule a series of meetings as follows:

- in late March: up to three open meetings to discuss the goals of the FYE
- in early April: up to three open meetings to solicit input regarding the design of the FYE
- in mid-late April: up to three open meetings to refine the design of the FYE

We also agreed to reach out to student government to solicit feedback from them.

We then moved to a discussion of the goals of an FYE. We started from the list we had developed at our first meeting, which was as follows:

- students should get to know at least one professor well
- students should be excited about learning
- a broad cross-section of the faculty should be involved
- students should have the opportunity to confront and challenge their preconceptions
- students should engage in the critical reading of texts
- students should develop skills in analytical and persuasive writing that incorporates research

We agreed also to consider four additional possible goals:

- students should get off campus
- students should learn something about social justice
- students should all have the same first-year experience
- students should have a choice of first-year experience

After a lively and wide-ranging discussion, we came to several important conclusions. First, we agreed that the important thing is to frame the goals from the student’s perspective: what could a student say in May about his/her first year experience at the University of Richmond? Second, we discussed what would follow from the various goals as currently outlined; these might include things like small classes, opportunities for mentorship, a shared structure and pedagogy, and a choice of topics.

We settled on the following goals for a FYE:

- students should be able to think, write, and communicate better
- students should have developed the fundamentals of information literacy and library research skills
- students should have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor
• students should have experience with reading critically, especially texts that might challenge their preconceptions

While we also applaud several of the other goals mentioned above (especially “learning something about social justice” and “getting off campus”), we were less convinced that these were necessarily first year goals. Since they remain central to the strategic plan we will continue to consider how they might still be relevant to the curriculum. Also, by focusing on the student experience we now omit mention of broad faculty involvement, though we remain convinced that faculty buy-in and involvement will be essential to the success of the program.

At our next meeting we will begin to discuss the ways in which our current curriculum and/or a revised first-year curriculum might meet these goals. Joe Essid handed out a single sheet from *The Transition to College Writing*, on which the differing assumptions and values of high school and college writing teachers are made clear. (NB—Joe: can you send this in campus mail to Joanna and Carol, please?) I also suggested that we might want to review the document Joanna Drell shared with us regarding a possible revision to the Core course; it may offer us a starting place for our discussions.