

Draft of Subcommittee D's Response to the McHale Report, Regarding Freshman Seminars

The purpose of this report is to respond to the McHale Report's recommendations concerning Ohio State University's Freshman Seminar Program. In brief, the McHale Report suggests two changes to the Freshman Seminars: 1) Raising the Seminars from the current one- to two-credit offerings to three- to five-credits, and 2) Crediting the Seminars as a non-major requirement (NMR), whereas the Seminars currently satisfy only college credit. The changes are intended to "encourage students to participate in the program and to accord more value to the seminars" (31).

Subcommittee D appreciates the McHale Report's recognition of the Freshman Seminars as a valuable educational opportunity for our first-year students and an ideal means to "demonstrate the University's commitment to encouraging student-faculty interaction in small learning environments" (31). However, we feel if OSU wishes to maintain the original goals of the Freshman Seminar Program, the recommendations made in the McHale Report will not work for curricular and administrative reasons. We instead propose two options: 1) Maintaining the current system, or 2) Integrating the current Freshman Seminars into the proposed Freshman Clusters.

Areas of Concern

Subcommittee D has two main areas of concern regarding the McHale Report's proposals for the Freshman Seminar Program: Curricular and Administrative.

Curricular Concerns

- 1) **The Original Goals of the Freshman Seminar Program** — the original goals were to:
 - Afford first-year students opportunities for contact with faculty in small group settings.
 - Present an introduction to disciplines that provides students exposure to unfamiliar academic areas.
 - Offer an introduction to frontier areas of scholarly pursuit, allowing freshmen a glimpse at current topics of research and study.
 - Provide insight into how faculty pursue scholarship in their disciplines.

While many of these goals could be met under the changes proposed within the McHale Report, two key qualities would be at risk. First, because the Seminars would be "worth more" both in terms of time in the classroom and workload outside, students could be disinclined to expose themselves to "unfamiliar academic areas." Nearly all of the Seminars taught in Autumn 2005 were attended by a broad spectrum of students from across campus – evidence that students are trying something out (see Appendix A). This becomes especially relevant when connected with students' 72% agreement that they would take more classes in the area of the Seminar (collected in surveys from Winter 2004 to Autumn 2005). While still too new to accurately judge, such numbers hint that the Freshman

Seminar Program acts as a recruiting tool for areas of interest. Remaking the Seminars along the lines of a regular course may negatively affect this benefit.

Secondly, three- to five-credit Seminars would have to go beyond “allowing freshmen a *glimpse* at current topics of research and study.” Some of the adventurous academic nature of the Seminars could easily be lost as faculty attempt to make them more like a regular class.

- 2) **“Increased Flexibility and Student Choice”** — one of the main goals of the McHale Report is to provide students with increased flexibility and choice in how they complete their NMRs. Subcommittee D worries, however, that changing the Freshman Seminars to a three- to five-credit course may actually *decrease* flexibility and choice.

Because of the change in credit-hours, Freshman Seminars would inevitably have to become more structured and rigorous than current offerings. While the increased class time could enhance the depth of discussion, it would also require students to both read and produce more tangible work in the form of research, papers, lab work, etc. The student, then, who may eagerly register for a one-credit seminar outside of their area, knowing they will be getting just a “taste” of the topic, may be disinclined to commit to a full three-credit class.

Additionally, a longer class, meeting multiple times per week, will be harder for the student to schedule. Logistically, this may make it less likely to provide the flexibility and choice desired by the McHale Report.

Finally, the variety of topics that faculty propose and teach could also decrease as faculty struggle to justify why their Seminar should count for NMR credit. The broad choice of Seminar topics – a feature praised often in student evaluations – could become lost as the Seminars become indistinguishable from any other class.

Administrative Concerns

- 1) **Budget** — Many faculty would greatly appreciate teaching a topic about which they are passionate to a class of 18 students, rather than lecture in an introductory survey class to hundreds. However, under the current budgetary model in which much of a department’s funding springs from the numbers of students taught, it is hard to imagine many departments will happily allow faculty to replace a large class with a small one in their instructional load.
- 2) **Organization** — Allowing a three-credit Freshman Seminar to substitute for a regular five-credit NMR-core course raises many questions.
 - a. Who will decide under which of the four “breadth of knowledge” areas the Freshman Seminar sits? Will a seminar in the science of “Jurassic Park” (taught Winter 2006) be a substitute for an Introductory Biology or American Literature course? Can such interdisciplinary courses be listed jointly under multiple “breadth of knowledge” areas?

- b. Does such a seminar accomplish the breadth goals desired in an NMR course? Are the seminars narrow enough for their own purposes but too narrow for the NMR's?
- c. Will courses be taught centrally out of Arts & Sciences, as they are now, or out of individual departments? Will there be any central administration for the proposed Freshman Seminars?
- d. Will the variety of Seminars narrow as faculty struggle to justify fitting their area of interest into one of the "breadth of knowledge" areas?

Alternatives

Rather than changing the Freshman Seminars to three- to five-credit hour courses that will count as NMR credit, as proposed in the McHale Report, Subcommittee D offers two alternatives. We feel the best alternative is to leave the Seminars as they are. If changes must be made, however, a second alternative would be to offer Freshman Seminars as a required component of the proposed Freshman Clusters.

- 1) **Leave the Seminars as They Are** — In only its third year, the Freshman Seminar Program has grown substantially in terms of both offerings and enrollment.

Enrollment in the Seminars has steadily risen as word about them has spread more effectively to incoming students (see Table 1). Additionally, the number of seminars offered has doubled in our third year with more participation from faculty. We expect that 2006-2007 will continue to see growth in both offerings and enrollment.

Table 1 — Freshman Seminar Enrollment 2004-2006

	# of Courses	Students Enrolled	% of Seats Filled
Winter/Spring 2004	24	228	47.5%
Winter/Spring 2005	25	286	57.2%
Autumn 2005/Winter 2006¹	34 (plus 19 in SP 2006)	418	68.3%

The increased enrollment also addresses an implied concern in the McHale Report: that if the Seminars do not "count" for something, e.g. NMR credit, students will not take them. However, under the current system, in which students are required to take even more GE credits than they would after implementation of McHale, students *still* enroll in Freshman Seminars in increasing numbers. If GE/NMR credits are reduced, as per McHale, enrollment could jump even more as students feel they have more time to take a one- to two-credit elective.

¹ All enrollment figures are from the Final Fifteenth Day of Classes figures.

Another argument for leaving the Freshman Seminar Program stems from evaluations gathered from students and faculty over the last two years. Satisfaction runs high from both students and faculty, further bolstering our optimism about the Program's potential for growth (see Table 2). Changing the Program in any way may actually hurt the Freshman Seminars at a time when they are on the verge of truly establishing themselves as a valuable part of the first-year experience.

Table 2 — Freshman Seminar Evaluations 2004-2006

% Who Agree/Strongly Agree

Students

I would recommend this seminar to other students.	89.7%
I would take another one-hour seminar if permitted.	79.5%

Faculty

I would recommend teaching a freshman seminar to other faculty.	90.6%
I would like to teach this seminar again.	90.0%

Finally, we note that UCLA has both a Freshman Cluster series and a Freshman Seminar Program. This is important because UCLA served as a model for the McHale Report's proposed Freshman Cluster series and as a model for the Pilot of the Freshman Seminar Program. UCLA implemented their one-credit Fiat Lux Freshman Seminars four years *after* they began their Freshman Clusters, and, as at Ohio State, offer the courses for college, not GE, credit. In UCLA's student surveys for 2003-2004, 75% of respondents recommend their seminar to other students (lower than the 90% figure of our students), and in 2005-2006, UCLA intends to offer up to 200 Seminars. Such data suggests that a Freshman Cluster series and Freshman Seminar Program can not only coexist, but thrive.

- 2) **Insert Sections of the Freshman Seminar Program into the Freshman Cluster Series** — The McHale Report proposes establishing a Freshman Cluster series that runs during the students' first year and allows them to get five courses worth of NMR credit for three courses attended.

Subcommittee D proposes that a Freshman Seminar, as currently structured, could be a required component of the Freshman Clusters. As we envision it, multiple Seminars would be appropriate to the theme of the Cluster, allowing students the flexibility to take their Seminar in either the Autumn or Winter quarters and the choice to take the Seminar that most interested them.

Requiring a Freshman Seminar in one of the first two quarters provides two advantages to students. First, the 18-student Seminar offers an intimate counterpoint to the 200+-student lecture course they'll be taking, allowing students the opportunity to interact with a full faculty member in a way they cannot in the lecture courses. Second, the small Freshman Seminar will initiate students into the expectations of a discussion-based class and better prepare them for the larger 25-student seminar they'll take in Spring as the wrap-up to the Freshman Cluster.

Although required as part of the Freshman Cluster, the Seminars would still not count for NMR credit – to do so would require those Seminars that are *not* part of the Clusters to meet NMR criteria, and thus have the problems listed above. However, the students would still get college credit for the Seminar. Moreover, the Clusters essentially allow a student to skip two full courses, so adding a one- to two-credit hour Seminar seems a minor price to pay.

The major complication this proposal presents is the large number of faculty that would be needed to teach such classes. If there are 200 students in a cluster and each must take a Seminar, we would need to offer a minimum of twelve topically-relevant Seminars spread across Autumn and Winter quarters. If we allowed interested students from outside of the Cluster to enroll, we would, of course, need even more Seminars. Clearly, some sort of system would have to be devised to ensure enough faculty offered the right kind of Seminar each term, for each Cluster.

So while there are complications, this solution would show students that Ohio State University values the Freshman Seminars as an integral part of their education, worthy of being a required component of the restructuring plan. This solution also allows the Program to continue to grow on its own merits as students and faculty not involved in the Freshman Clusters could still participate in Freshman Seminars.

Conclusion

In summary, Subcommittee D strongly appreciates the McHale Report's valuing of the Freshman Seminar Program and its desire to integrate the Program into the proposed changes as a way of not only making the Freshman Seminars "count" more but also giving students the benefits of "student-faculty interaction in small learning environments" that the Seminars offer (31). However, we foresee major obstacles with the implementation of the McHale Report's proposals concerning the Freshman Seminar Program. We recommend, instead, leaving the Freshman Seminar Program in its current model. If this recommendation is deemed unworkable, we feel the second best solution would be to insert required sections of the Freshman Seminar Program into the Freshman Cluster series.

Appendix A — Majors of Students in Freshman Seminars, Autumn 2005

137.01 Your Brain on Fiction

Aldama, Frederick

English

- EXPLORATION (2)
- ENGLISH (2)
- BIOLOGY
- COMMUNICATIONS (PRE)
- ANTHROPOLOGY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (3)
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- ECONOMICS-BUSINESS
- POLITICAL SCIENCE

137.02 Big Macs, Big Tobacco, and Big SUVs

Ballam, Deborah

Fisher College of Business

- INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
- POLITICAL SCIENCE
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (10)
- HEALTH PROFESSIONS EXPLORATION
- MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPLORATION

137.03 SHS Meets CSI: Topics in Forensic Phonetics

Fox, Robert

Speech & Hearing Science

- PSYCHOLOGY (2)
- EXPLORATION
- CHEMISTRY
- ANTHROPOLOGY
- INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
- BS IN BUSINESS ADMIN. EXPLORATION
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (3)
- MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPLORATION
- HEALTH PROFESSIONS EXPLORATION
- SPEECH AND HEARING SCIENCE (3)
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED

137.04 Ohio and the Hispanic World

Morgan, Terrell

Spanish & Portuguese

- ARABIC
- PRE-NURSING
- EXPLORATION
- SPANISH
- ACCOUNTING
- PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES
- INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
- MARKETING
- BIOLOGY (2)

137.05 The Origins of Democracy

Nooruddin, Irfan

Political Science

- POLITICAL SCIENCE (8)
- COMMUNICATIONS (PRE)
- HISTORY (2)
- INTNTIONAL STUDIES (2)
- BS IN BUSINESS ADMIN. EXPLORATION
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN.
- ENGINEERING-UNDECLARED (2)

138.01 Social Justice

Alexander, Rudolph

Social Work

- PRE-SOCIAL WORK (2)
- PRE-JOURNALISM (2)
- POLITICAL SCIENCE (3)
- INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- ZOOLOGY

138.02 Utilizing a Scientific Perspective in Evaluating Current Bio/Health Issues

Cline, Morris

Plant Cellular & Molecular Biology

- BIOLOGY (4)
- ENGLISH
- EXPLORATION (4)
- PSYCHOLOGY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN.
- HEALTH PROFESSIONS EXPLORATION
- PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED

138.03 Urban Education in the 21st Century

Dixon, Adrienne

Education-Teaching & Learning

- CHEMISTRY
- SPANISH
- JOURNALISM
- EXPLORATION
- HISTORY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- ARTS AND SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- EDUCATION EXPLORATION
- PSYCHOLOGY

138.04 What Did Shakespeare Write? What Did Shakespeare Mean?

Dutton, Richard

English

- ZOOLOGY
- HISTORY
- BIOLOGY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN.
- ENGLISH (5)

138.05 Dean's Book Club: The Lives of Great Biologists

Herbers, Joan

Biological Sciences

- ZOOLOGY
- BIOLOGY (5)
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- BIOCHEMISTRY

137.06 Innovation and Entrepreneurship- Rocket Fuel for Creative Minds**Schlosser, Philip****Engineering**

- INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
- EXPLORATION (2)
- HISTORY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (8)
- BS IN BUSINESS ADMIN. EXPLORATION
- MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPLORATION

137.07 Clash of Cultures? Europe and the U.S. after the End of the Cold War**Stephan, Alexander****Germanic Languages and Literatures**

- ANTHROPOLOGY
- POLITICAL SCIENCE (3)
- MOLECULAR GENETICS
- ENGLISH
- EXPLORATION
- JAPANESE
- MARKETING
- SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- BS IN BUSINESS ADMIN. EXPLORATION
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ADMIN.
- INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (2)
- HUMANITIES-UNDECIDED

137.08 Culture and Observation: Designing for Diversity**Stone, R. Brian****Industrial, Interior, and Visual Communication Design**

- COMPARATIVE STUDIES
- COMMUNICATIONS (PRE)
- POLITICAL SCIENCE
- EXPLORATION
- SPANISH
- MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPLORATION
- PRE INDUSTRIAL, INT, & VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- LANDSCAPE HORTICULTURE

138.06 Useful Junk-The Role of Non-Coding DNA in Gene Regulation**Ioschikhes, Ilya****Biomedical Informatics**

- BIOCHEMISTRY (2)
- BIOLOGY (4)
- EXPLORATION (2)
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- MOLECULAR GENETICS

138.07 I Couldn't Help Myself (Could I?): The Biology of Human Nature**Masters, W. Mitch****Evolution, Ecology, & Organismal Biology**

- CHEMISTRY
- COMMUNICATION
- EXPLORATION (4)
- PSYCHOLOGY (2)
- BIOLOGY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (2)
- HEALTH PROFESSIONS EXPLORATION
- INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ADMIN.
- COMMUNICATIONS (PRE)

138.11 A Look in the Mirror: Body Image and Wellness**Rudd, Nancy****Consumer Sciences**

- EXPLORATION (5)
- PSYCHOLOGY (2)
- BIOLOGY
- HISTORY
- BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES-UNDECIDED
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN. (3)
- MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRY EXPLORATION (3)

138.1 Extreme Makeovers: Exploring Positive and Negative Images of Dentistry in the Media**Rowland, Michael & Bean, Canise****Dentistry**

- EXPLORATION
- BIOLOGY (2)
- CHEMISTRY
- PRE-B S IN BUSINESS ADMIN.
- MICROBIOLOGY
- BIOCHEMISTRY

