A. What is a First-Year Seminar?

Each first-year student in the first semester at Colgate will take a first-year seminar (FSEM). The FSEM is just like your other courses in many ways. It is worth one course credit (you need a minimum of 32 course credits to graduate). You will receive a grade in the seminar which counts fully in your GPA. As in any other course, the workload and expectations are determined by the instructor and equivalent to the workload in your other courses.

There are some ways, however, in which your FSEM may be different from other courses. It is a small, discussion-oriented class. There are only first-term, first-year students in the class. The course will emphasize writing proficiency, Colgate’s Academic Honor Code, as well as how to approach college-level work so that you can improve critical thinking, research, and other important skills. Perhaps most important, your FSEM instructor is also your academic adviser.

B. The Role of the Faculty Adviser

Your FSEM instructor will be your faculty adviser for your first three semesters at Colgate or until you declare your major (no later than mid-way through spring semester of your sophomore year). You will need to meet with your FSEM adviser and later with your major adviser regularly throughout your academic career at Colgate. Your adviser needs to sign forms for your course registration, course withdrawal, Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory grading option (juniors and seniors only), petitions to take leave of absence (on a non-Colgate study group, for example), etc. On such occasions, you will be required to see your adviser for academic advice and consultation. However, don’t let these be the sole reasons for having conversations with your adviser. The opportunity to have a close relationship with an adviser is one of the greatest benefits of attending a small, liberal arts college like Colgate. Relish the opportunity!

Your faculty adviser will:

- Provide guidance about how to choose your courses each semester. Your adviser can help make sure you are making consistent progress toward fulfilling your graduation requirements and are choosing elective courses that match your interests and abilities.

- Help you work out any academic problems you might have (e.g., dividing your time for work in several courses).

- Help you choose a major. Your adviser can help you identify your strengths, areas that need improvement, and interests.

- Help you prepare for graduate school. If you think you may wish to pursue graduate study, it is a good idea to discuss your plans with your academic adviser. Your adviser can suggest courses to help with your applications and can recommend schools to consider.

- Help you explore and make career choices — though your academic adviser probably won’t find you a summer internship or the job of your dreams. (You will need to see Career Services for that).

- Write letters of recommendation for a study-abroad program, a Link application, a summer job, or admission to graduate or professional school. Remember that the better a person knows you, the more substantial a letter he or she can write for you.

While it may be appropriate in some circumstances to discuss personal problems with your academic adviser (e.g., you have to leave campus because of illness or a family emergency), you should always contact your administrative adviser (in your first year, Beverly Low, Dean of First-Year Students) if such needs arise.

Continued on reverse….
C. The Role of the Administrative Adviser/Dean

Your Dean can be an important “first stop” and a helpful resource whenever you have a question or concern about Colgate policies or procedures or when personal or “outside” influences interfere with your ability to attend classes or complete academic assignments.

Dean Beverly Low is the administrative adviser/Dean for all first-year students. Once you complete your first year, you are assigned a new administrative adviser.

In addition to advising students, administrative advisers have responsibilities for various Colgate programs and activities, such as the Sophomore Year Experience and Center for Leadership and Student Involvement. Deans also issue “Deans’ Awards” to students who earn a minimum 3.3 GPA while taking at least four courses in a term.


D. Planning Your Academic Program Year-by-Year

First Year
- Discuss your academic planning (summer) essay with your adviser; study the course catalogue; consider taking a range of elective courses that will fulfill graduation requirements, especially writing and foreign language requirements (if you have not yet met them), to enhance your “liberal arts” education.
- Claim Advanced Placement (AP) or other prematriculation credit through the Registrar.
- Note Phi Beta Kappa requirements and consider planning to fulfill them.
- Explore possible majors; explore graduate/professional programs to ascertain their requirements; complete (in October) the Academic Planning Worksheet for your first two years.
- Begin participating in colloquia, seminars, or clubs sponsored by your potential major department(s).
- Change to a new adviser in the second semester, if desired.

Second Year
- Complete CORE requirements, P.E. requirements, and foreign-language requirements.
- Continue taking electives to help fulfill distribution requirements.
- Apply for junior-year off-campus study groups.
- Select a major and a new adviser; declare a major before spring registration.

Third Year
- Participate in an off-campus study program or apply for a senior-year off-campus study group.
- Pursue Distinction in the CORE curriculum.
- Study for and take the MCAT, VCAT, DAT for Health-Sciences schools; activate applications for health-sciences professional schools.
- Explore opportunities for graduate fellowships (most application deadlines fall in September of the senior year).

Fourth Year
- Apply for national and international graduate fellowships.
- Complete major and distribution requirements.
- Pursue Honors work in a program or department.
- Prepare for and take GRE, LSAT, or GMAT.
- Visit the Center for Career Services to activate a dossier; visit faculty adviser(s) and professors (in both your major and elective courses) to request letters of recommendation.