

FIRST TERM SEMINAR (FTS) PROGRAM

May 2009

Section 1 Description of First Term Seminar (FTS) Program

1.1 Mission, vision, and goals

The First Term Seminar (FTS) Program is staffed by one director, a faculty member who receives limited release time from courses to manage long-term planning, faculty development, assessment, coordination with campus offices, and other administrative tasks. The FTS Director appoints and works closely with the FTS Advisory Board, composed of roughly one dozen faculty and administrators who teach in, or have expertise that contributes to, the FTS Program.

Each year, the FTS Program serves roughly 90% of the first-year class by offering 35-40 sections of up to 16 students each. The FTS Program serves a crucial role in Gustavus Adolphus College's general education program by serving as a Writing Intensive (WRITI) course. Moreover, faculty members in the program serve as academic advisors to first-year students until they declare a major. Finally, the FTS Program introduces first-year students to oral communication and critical thinking at the college level.

The **mission** of the FTS Program states that:

FTS promotes both an empathetic examination of the values of others and the development and articulation of one's own values as part of a liberal arts education that encourages responsible use of knowledge. Indeed, a focus on values permeates the FTS Program, shaping the Program's goals in writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and advising.

The FTS Program has more detailed mission statements for each of its four components, Writing, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, and Advising. These state that:

The FTS **Writing** component promotes writing as a creative and critical process in which writers engage with the ideas of others. In FTS, students write to express their own ideas and to inform and communicate with others. Good writers make both stylistic and content-based choices to accommodate different purposes, contexts, and audiences. These rhetorical choices help writers make their cases in the most effective ways possible.

The FTS **Oral Communication** component promotes reasoned discourse, creative expression and development of one's own voice in critical interaction with others through both oral presentation and discussion. Effective communicators consider purpose, audience and context when constructing their messages and understanding the messages of others.

The FTS **Critical Thinking** component promotes a commitment to the application of reason to one's own ideas and those of others, a willingness to consider the perspectives of others, and an awareness of the limits of any given epistemology. These habits of mind, central to the liberal arts, help the individual find a meaningful place in a larger society and form one of the cornerstones of lifelong learning.

FTS professors serve as first-semester **advisors** and until advisees declare a major or are admitted into a certification program (Athletic Training, Education, Nursing). In this capacity, they work alongside students to plan their liberal arts education and refer them to campus resources to think about possibilities during their four years and beyond. At its best, the advising relationship fosters a climate of campus-wide mentoring.

To achieve this new vision, the first major revision of the FTS Program since its development in 1993, the FTS Program has established goals for each of its components that seek to include values across the Program.

Writing goals

1a. Invention

“Invention” is most often associated with the “prewriting” stage, when writers generate ideas, explore topics, and plan strategies; invention activities get writers going.

Focusing on invention will help students learn to: analyze texts, issues, and questions of value; explore their ideas and those of others; practice credible and effective methods of expressing thoughts in writing.

1b. Arrangement

“Arrangement” is most often associated with form or structure. Focusing on arrangement means helping students learn to consider both global and local issues. While working on arrangement, students will make decisions about what belongs in an introduction and a conclusion, about what sorts of arguments will be persuasive at particular points in a paper, and about structure within paragraphs.

Focusing on arrangement will help students learn to: analyze texts in terms of form and structure; create texts that will communicate successfully with readers due to appropriate organization and structure.

1c. Style

Loosely understood to mean that which makes a writer's work unique, “style” involves choices in sentence length and structure, word choice and “voice,” and suitability for particular audiences. Since FTS is an interdisciplinary program, students will certainly read texts that are quite varied stylistically. They should be encouraged to vary their own style when they write as well.

Focusing on style will help students learn to: communicate with an audience more effectively; make deliberate choices regarding voice and word choice; understand writing conventions as context-specific; manipulate those conventions to suit various genres, situations, and audiences.

Oral Communication – Oral Presentation goals

2a. Invention

“Invention” is most often associated with generating ideas, exploring topics, and planning strategies.

Focusing on invention will help students learn to: develop a topic in order to inform or persuade their audience; develop a main point (informative presentation) or central argument/thesis (persuasive presentation); construct the presentation with a particular audience in mind; and gather, evaluate, and integrate appropriate evidence to illustrate and support their main point or central argument/thesis.

2b. Arrangement

“Arrangement” is most often associated with form or structure.

Focusing on arrangement will help students learn to: use an appropriate organizational pattern that supports their central argument or thesis.

2c. Style/Delivery

“Style/Delivery” is associated with choices regarding language and voice.

Focusing on style/delivery will help students learn to: use language that is appropriate to the topic and audience, including vocabulary that is correct, precise, simple, and unaffected; use vocal pitch, rate, tone, volume, and gestures appropriate to the topic, the audience, and the location.

Oral Communication – Discussion goals

2d. Invention/Developing Ideas

In this context, “invention” refers to deepening one’s understanding of course material and discerning the many different ways to develop ideas through group discussion.

Focusing on invention/developing ideas will help students learn to: provide information; explain an opinion; advocate a particular position; consider alternative positions; synthesize from the ideas of others; summarize the day’s discussion.

2e. Arrangement/Advancing Discussion

In this context, “arrangement” refers to discerning how substantive group discussion functions.

Focusing on arrangement/advancing discussion will help students learn to: stay on topic; connect individual comments; actively listen to others in order to create a productive climate for learning.

2f. Style/Self-Monitoring

In this context, “style” refers to developing a capacity to identify the role each of us can play in a substantive group discussion.

Focusing on style/self-monitoring will help students learn to: become responsible participants in classroom discussions through speaking, encouraging others to speak, and listening.

Critical Thinking goals

3a. Reasoning

Focusing on reasoning will help students learn to: identify the purpose of a text; identify concepts that shape an argument; assess the evidence used to support an argument; present relevant evidence to support their own arguments.

3b. Assumptions and Implications

Focusing on assumptions and implications will help students learn to: identify how contexts and unstated assumptions influence arguments; identify the implications and consequences of arguments.

3c. Perspective

Focusing on perspective will help students learn to: articulate their own perspective and the influences that shape it; identify and evaluate alternative perspectives.

3d. Questioning

Focusing on questioning will help students learn to: ask questions of all kinds; find and assess information that answers questions.

Advising goals

4a. Developmental Advising

Class Registration

Students will: review first semester course selections prior to the start of the school year; search for classes online and use WebAdvisor to register for January and spring classes; identify back-up course options in case first choices are closed; meet with their advisor for approval prior to registration sessions; and know campus policies, procedures, and deadlines.

General Education and Liberal Arts Perspectives

Students will: read and review degree audits/progress toward degrees; understand liberal arts philosophy and graduation requirements; identify and search for courses by area approvals; know resources for investigating interests and possibilities.

Student Strengths and Academic Difficulty

Students will learn to: advocate for themselves, take ownership for their learning, become responsible and accountable as independent learners, and ultimately become their own best advisors.

4b. Introducing Students to the College

Students will: become familiar with campus resources and out-of-classroom learning opportunities.

4c. Creating a Mentoring Community

Students will learn to: experience Gustavus as a community of learners, a place of open inquiry; take responsibility for connecting their in-class and out-of-class experiences in a holistic way; broaden the definition of who an advisor/mentor is to acknowledge the value of work supervisors, coaches, organization advisors, Student Affairs staff, and others.

1.2 Programs

Courses within the FTS Program provide the bulk of the College's Writing Intensive (WRITI) courses for the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program.

FTS courses also introduce first-year students to a range of campus resources, particularly the College Library, Career Center, Academic Advising, Diversity Center, Center for International and Cultural Education, Counseling Center, Peer Assistants, Center for Vocational Reflection, and Office of Community Service, among others.

1.3 Support relationships

The FTS Program relies heavily on support from all academic departments. As of January 20, 2009, 96 faculty representing 26 academic departments are affiliated with the Program. The Program has a unique relationship with the English Department, whose faculty members each offer an FTS course annually.

The Program depends on the Advising Center to support its advising component and on the College Library to support elements of its critical thinking component. The Program also relies on the Career Center, the Counseling Center, the Diversity Center, the Center for International and Cultural Education, the Peer Assistants, the Center for Vocational Reflection, and the Office of Community Service, among other campus offices, to help connect first-year students with the many resources that are available to them.

Looking forward, the FTS Program is exploring partnerships with campus-wide events and initiatives such as the Nobel Conference, First-Year Orientation, Reading in Common, the Global Insight program, and the Learning/Living Communities strategic initiative.

Section 2 Strategic Review

2.1 Strategic issues

The First Term Seminar Program recently completed an evaluation that included a self-study and an external review, its first such evaluation since its development in 1993. The Program has also developed an assessment survey, administered to all FTS students annually beginning in Fall 2007. Moreover, the Program surveyed affiliated faculty members and held two open meetings to discuss strategic issues. These materials, as well as discussions of the FTS Advisory Board, provided the information for the following analysis.

Strengths:

Faculty and students alike regard FTS as highly successful in building **community** among first-year students, and between first-year students and faculty. In our Fall 2007 survey, which included 520 responses representing 36 of 39 sections of FTS that semester, 78% of students agreed that they felt comfortable sharing their personal beliefs with others in their FTS course. 89% agreed that their FTS course had promoted an open exchange of ideas. Nearly 86% agreed that they felt comfortable asking questions and discussing ideas with each other and with their FTS professor. Faculty feedback also indicates that the FTS Program provides a crucial sense of community that enables students to take risks in the classroom, build confidence in their academic abilities, and form healthy personal relationships on campus.

The **commitment** to the FTS Program from the faculty and the college represents another crucial strength. Gustavus faculty and staff clearly feel that the Program is vital to a

high-quality education and are willing to put time and energy into it. This is clear from the ability of the College to staff nearly 40 sections annually with relatively few problems and from the participation of faculty from 17 academic departments in Fall 2007 and from 19 departments in Fall 2008. Few institutions have such success in staffing a program such as FTS with tenured and tenure-track faculty. The commitment to the Program is equally clear from the widespread participation of campus offices in FTS. For its part, the College has supported the FTS Program with a part-time faculty director and a program budget that allows regular training workshops for new FTS faculty and modest funding for students and faculty to meet outside of class.

The Program's commitment to **academic rigor** constitutes yet another strength. The Program attempts to set high expectations for students in writing, oral communication, and critical thinking, preparing them for college-level work over subsequent years. In particular, FTS courses introduce students to college-level classroom discussions. Over 73% of students who completed the Fall 2007 survey reported that they felt more prepared to engage in discussions in other courses after completing FTS.

The Program's focus on **writing**, one of the most crucial components of a liberal arts education, is another strength. In the Fall 2007 survey of students, over 50% reported writing 3 or more papers in their FTS course; over 70% reported that their ability to use sources to create original arguments had increased; over 60% agreed that they had more confidence in their ability to cite sources appropriately after completing FTS; and over 75% indicated that their overall skill as a writer had increased after completing FTS.

The small **size** of FTS sections, which have a maximum of 16 students, is another strength, no doubt contributing to the strong sense of community among students in FTS courses. The small size of FTS sections is particularly important for first-semester students, many of whom are enrolled in courses that are much larger than average.

Finally, the Program's willingness to give **faculty control** over course content is another strength. While many institutions share a common curriculum for a first-year program, usually some form of Western Civilization course, Gustavus faculty are encouraged to develop a wide range of FTS offerings that include more diverse topics and ways of thinking about the world. Faculty members' freedom to connect their own interests and disciplines with the liberal arts mission of the College is a tremendous source of strength to the FTS Program.

Weaknesses:

The principal weakness of the FTS Program is a corollary of one of its strengths. The Program's commitment to faculty control over course content has resulted in a decentralized curriculum that produces **inconsistent outcomes**. Individual faculty members interpret the role of FTS differently, emphasizing some components over others. To date, the writing and advising components have received more attention from faculty members than the oral communication and critical thinking components. However, the emphasis of writing instruction also varies across FTS sections. In their responses to the Fall 2007 survey, over 50% of students indicated that they wrote one or

less “argumentative” (defined as papers in which they examined evidence and created an argument or thesis) papers in their FTS course. 15% indicated that they did not write a research-based paper in which they developed a question, found sources, and created an argument or thesis. Roughly 45% reported that their ability to manage conventions of writing such as paragraphs, grammar, and punctuation did not increase. This type of inconsistency in outcomes is also apparent in oral communication and critical thinking. Only about 54% of students agreed that they had learned techniques that would help them make better oral presentations. Roughly the same number reported that they felt more prepared to do presentations in other courses as a result of FTS. Just under 53% agreed that after completing FTS they were better able to identify the unwritten implications or consequences of an argument.

The Program’s limited ability to offer **faculty development** workshops is another clear weakness. Though the Program offers a regular FTS training workshop for new FTS faculty roughly biannually, it currently does not have any regular professional development opportunities for faculty who have already taught FTS. These kinds of professional development opportunities are crucial to help faculty improve their ability to teach writing, oral communication, and critical thinking and to advise students effectively. Moreover, they are crucial to developing the shared attitudes and expectations about the Program that would reduce inconsistencies across the Program.

Faculty members affiliated with the Program highlight a **perceived tension** between the Program’s emphasis on academic rigor and its attention to student advising. Some faculty members emphasize the Program’s academic nature, showing concern over the amount of time required to introduce students to campus resources and the value of a liberal arts education and to create mentoring relationships; others emphasize the importance of assisting first-semester students in the transition from high school to college and show concern over the academic expectations of the Program. To date, the Program has not been able to create a commonly held conviction that academic rigor and effective advising can coexist within FTS. Discussions about this tension will likely also touch on the new flexibility that faculty have to schedule FTS courses, choosing whether to meet for three hours or four each week. The opportunity to meet for three hours rather than four might pose additional challenges in meeting both the advising and academic functions of FTS.

It is also clear that the Program’s attention to advising produces a **strain** on the faculty members who teach FTS most often, many of whom advise upwards of 40 students in a given semester. This strain on many faculty members in the Program contributes to a sense that they are stretched too thin for deeper attention to the Program’s goals. The Program’s inability to compensate these faculty members for their extraordinarily valuable work (for example, by counting an FTS course as equivalent to 1.25 courses in recognition of its unique liberal arts and academic functions) represents another important weakness.

Finally, many faculty members feel that the FTS Program’s focus on “values” has been too **nebulous**. The Program is currently attempting to define the place of “values” within

FTS more clearly, offering a basic explanation of what the Program means by “values” and changing it from an individual component of FTS (similar to, say, writing) to an overarching and integrating concept that ties together all other work in the course. This change will hopefully address the perception that the place of “values” within FTS has not been clearly defined.

Opportunities:

The FTS Program offers tremendous opportunities for promoting **curricular innovation**. Since it is less constrained by disciplinary needs than most other programs, the FTS Program can be a focus of experimentation as faculty members look to achieve exciting results in general education. The FTS Program can also be a place where faculty members come together to develop a shared understanding of purpose and a deeper commitment to the value of a liberal arts education.

More specifically, the FTS Program sees tremendous opportunities for **collaboration and sharing** among faculty in coming years, supported by more frequent meetings of, and opportunities for, faculty affiliated with the Program. For example, we see opportunities to help faculty members connect with other faculty members who share similar interests. These faculty members could develop shared assignments or activities for their courses or could have their students collaborate to bring together different perspectives on an issue. We also see opportunities to have faculty members share successful and innovative assignments, spreading best practices throughout the Program. Other opportunities to collaborate include pairing FTS sections for campus activities, allowing presenters to make more efficient use of their time while also introducing students to a wider circle of their peers.

The Program also sees opportunities to offer more **in-depth training** sessions to small groups of FTS faculty. For example, as a follow-up to the weeklong training for new FTS faculty members, the Program could offer a two-week summer workshop focused exclusively on one component, such as Critical Thinking. These more focused workshops would play a crucial role in increasing faculty expertise in our general education program. Faculty members who complete these more in-depth training sessions could potentially serve as mentors to other FTS faculty members.

The FTS Program sees an opportunity to develop its own forum in which to **celebrate the work of first-year students**. This forum could be modeled on the successful Celebration of Creative Inquiry, which showcases the original research of Gustavus students at the end of the spring. The celebration of first-year students’ work could take place in February, allowing the students an initial opportunity to present their work in a public setting and giving them the experience and confidence to submit their work for the larger Celebration of Creative Inquiry later in the spring. Prizes, such as bookstore credits, could be awarded to the best student work.

Opportunities also exist to support faculty research, writing, and professional presentations on teaching and learning, in keeping with the College’s emphasis on the **Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL)**. This work would have the benefit of

raising the College's profile within the world of higher education, attracting attention to the outstanding work that is done on our campus.

The FTS Program also presents opportunities to pilot **assessment** efforts in writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and advising on which departments and programs can build.

The Program could continue recent efforts to connect first-year students with **alumni mentors**. Many faculty members report that students benefit from discussions with alumni who share similar interests and who can advise them on their own educational and career decisions.

The College also has an opportunity to use the model of FTS to develop a course for **sophomore students** that could focus on connecting their emerging interest in an academic discipline or program to larger issues of "values," helping them develop or maintain a focus on issues of broad significance to society even as they become increasingly specialized in their studies. Such a course could be an enormous benefit to sophomore students, who often struggle to find their footing.

Finally, the FTS Program sees opportunities to **communicate its value** to students, who often see FTS as their least important course since it does not contribute to an academic major. The Program could collect and disseminate statements by more senior students about the value of FTS to their college education and could emphasize the importance of skills such as writing, oral communication, and critical thinking, which have broad application in life. This work could be accomplished through a more effective FTS website and through brochures distributed to prospective students.

Challenges:

Difficulty recruiting faculty

Despite the commitment of Gustavus faculty to the Program, FTS faces long-term challenges in **recruiting faculty** to teach in the Program. In particular, many forces in higher education pressure faculty to specialize in their discipline. FTS asks these faculty members to combine attention to a broader liberal arts education with their own disciplinary expertise. Untenured faculty, in particular, may feel torn about participating in the Program when they are also struggling to find time for research and publication in their discipline.

Lack of funding for ongoing faculty development

FTS also faces challenges in finding **funding for its faculty development** opportunities. Current funding for the Program supports the training of new FTS faculty, but does not provide for any continuing faculty development. Developing faculty expertise in general education will require a carefully prepared and well-supported plan.

Resources needed for ELL and disability services

The FTS Program also envisions increasing challenges in working with a **changing student population**. In particular, English-language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities require expertise that is in short supply at the College. More generally, first-year students vary considerably in their level of preparation for college work. Faculty in FTS will need to be trained to identify potential difficulties and refer students to appropriate campus resources. Moreover, the College will need to devote additional funding to support of campus resources such as the Writing Center.

Limited commitment to general education

Another challenge stems from **attitudes** towards general education courses, which are generally regarded as far less important than courses that contribute to a major or minor. Students often speak of getting general education courses “out of the way.” Often FTS is regarded as a student’s lowest priority, making it more difficult to teach writing, oral communication, and critical thinking effectively. This kind of thinking about FTS occasionally results in a student picking an FTS based on the time it is offered rather than on the course content, a situation that is less than ideal.

Difficulty enrolling in FTS

Registration for FTS courses is yet another challenge. FTS courses are designed as content-based courses that are meant to attract students to a certain topic. However, responses to the FTS survey administered to students in Fall 2008 indicate that only about 70% of students are able to register for one of their top 5 choices for FTS. 16% indicated that they were unable to register for one of their top 10 choices.

Limited availability of technology

Technology represents a challenge for FTS, as it does for most academic departments and programs. FTS faculty members report that existing online resources, based around Moodle, are inadequate for their purposes. Technology now available does not allow faculty to pursue the types of electronic discussions and integration of audio and video materials that they see as essential to successful teaching.

Insufficient support for writing instruction

FTS faculty members also draw attention to insufficient **support for teaching writing**. The College’s Writing Center does not have the resources to provide designated tutors to all FTS courses. Nor do the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum have the resources necessary to launch major faculty development efforts to improve writing instruction across the campus. Resources for supporting the teaching of oral communication and critical thinking are even more limited.

Difficulty finding and retaining leaders for FTS Program

Finally, the FTS Program faces a long-term challenge in **leadership**. Directors currently serve terms of three or four years and receive partial releases from teaching responsibilities. The fact that no recent director has completed a term suggests that this level of support is inadequate. Moreover, it has proven difficult to recruit new leaders for the Program. The College needs to reconsider its commitment to the position of FTS

Director. Moreover, the College should consider creating the position of Assistant Director of FTS both to reduce the Director's workload and to cultivate future leaders within the Program.

Barriers:

The lack of a **shared philosophy** of general education is a serious barrier to the future development of the FTS Program. Though this limitation is perhaps less marked at Gustavus Adolphus College than at many other institutions, faculty members and administrators still lack models of healthy interactions between academic departments, interdisciplinary programs, and general education. These interactions need not be seen as a burden on academic departments and programs. Participation in general education can lead both to a stronger liberal arts education and to more sophisticated understandings of particular disciplines.

The shortage of **funds for faculty development** should also be considered a serious barrier to improvements in the quality and consistency of instruction and consequently in student learning.

Limited **resources for program leadership** represent another key barrier. The position of FTS Director, modeled on a department chair position, carries responsibilities for faculty development and assessment in writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and advising that are arguably far greater than those of a department chair. This has made it difficult to find the stable leadership for the Program that is vital to its long-term progress.

The FTS Program also faces barriers in finding sufficient **seminar-style rooms** for FTS sections, particularly rooms capable of creating a student-centered atmosphere for 16 students and equipped with technology.

Section 3 Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations

The FTS Program has identified the following strategic initiatives, which cut across its goals in Writing, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, and Advising. These initiatives would benefit from **increased support from the College**, particularly:

- funding for faculty development opportunities
- support for the Writing Program
- funding for a revitalized FTS web presence
- additional support for Program leadership

Strategic Initiative 1: Faculty Development

The FTS Program will work with partners across the campus to develop a program of faculty development that attracts new and continuing faculty, is sustainable, and that features clear outcomes.

Faculty development opportunities in Writing will be developed in coordination with the Kendall Center for Engaged Learning, Writing Across the Curriculum, and the Writing Center and will help faculty achieve the Program's goals of promoting effective Invention, Arrangement, and Style in student writing. Crucial elements will be developing a shared language of writing instruction that can be implemented across departments, promoting effective means of responding to student writing, and discussing effective evaluation of student writing. These efforts will likely require additional support from the College for the Writing Program.

Faculty development opportunities in Oral Communication will be developed in coordination with the Kendall Center and the Communications Studies department and will help faculty promote more effective oral presentation and discussion skills. Crucial elements will be developing a shared understanding of the value and place of oral presentations and discussion in the curriculum, promoting means of integrating oral presentations and discussions into a variety of classes, and discussing effective evaluation of oral presentations and discussions.

Faculty development opportunities in Critical Thinking will be developed in coordination with the Kendall Center and the College Library and will help faculty achieve the Program's goals of promoting clear Reasoning, identifying Assumptions and Implications, examining various Perspectives, and promoting effective Questioning. Crucial elements will be developing a shared understanding of critical thinking as a part of a liberal arts education that cuts across academic disciplines, integrating information literacy assignments into a range of classes, and promoting attention to unstated Assumptions and Implications of arguments among students.

Faculty development opportunities in Advising will be developed in coordination with the Kendall Center and the Advising Center and will help faculty achieve the Program's goals of promoting Developmental Advising, Introducing Students to the College, and Creating a Mentoring Community. Crucial elements will be developing shared expectations regarding advising of students, enabling faculty to introduce students to a wide range of relevant resources on campus, and promoting mentoring relationships, particularly identifying both talented and struggling students and connecting them with the resources that will allow them to make the kinds of progress suited to their developmental needs.

Strategic Initiative 2 – **Revitalized FTS website**

The FTS Program will work with Gustavus Technology Services (GTS) to revitalize the FTS Program website, making it a more valuable resource for faculty and a more effective means of promoting the liberal arts mission to prospective students. This will likely require additional support from the College for a GTS position that can work with FTS.

In addition to providing basic information about policies and procedures, the revitalized website will provide an array of resources to faculty affiliated with the Program, from syllabi exemplifying best practices in the Program to ideas for assignments that successfully pursue the Program's goals in Writing, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, and Advising.

The website will also present the philosophy of a liberal arts education to prospective students (and their parents) accompanied with endorsements of the Program from Gustavus faculty, administrators, and students. Additionally, the website will provide a human face for the Program, featuring web profiles of members of the Advisory Board and a sample of faculty affiliated with the Program.

Strategic Initiative 3 – **Promotion of student research**

The FTS Program will develop opportunities for first-year students to present and discuss their academic work in public settings, allowing them to gain confidence in their academic abilities and further refine their written and oral communication skills. These opportunities can be modeled on the already-successful format of the Celebration of Creative Inquiry. Moreover, these opportunities can be timed to feed into the larger Celebration of Creative Inquiry. For example, the FTS Program can hold its event in February, allowing first-year students who present to gain confidence and receive feedback prior to submitting their work for the Celebration of Creative Inquiry later in the spring.

Strategic Initiative 4 – **Develop and define partnerships across campus**

The FTS Program will explore partnerships with other programs and initiatives that reflect the College's commitment to a liberal arts education. For example, the Program will consider partnerships that allow first-year students to gain more from the Nobel Conference, First-Year Orientation, Reading in Common, and the recently instituted Global Insight program. The Program will be judicious in these partnerships, carefully avoiding commitments that will spread it too thinly or otherwise prove unsustainable.

Strategic Initiative 5 – **Strengthen FTS Program leadership**

The FTS Program will develop a sustainable leadership structure that will allow long-term planning and continuity in the pursuit of the Program's goals. This will require additional support from the College in the form of additional course releases, funding for summer work, or additional secretarial assistance to enable the FTS Director to carry out the Program's initiatives. Additional support will also be needed to create an Assistant Director position that will both ease the Director's workload and help develop future leaders for the Program.

Section 4 – Assessment

The FTS Program will develop the following means of assessing achievement of its goals.

The Program will continue to develop means of **“indirect” assessment** (assessment based on the perceptions of students and faculty as reported in surveys). In particular, the Program will assemble a more thorough collection of survey information based on three moments in students’ experience. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey of first-year students administered to incoming students through the College’s Office of Institutional Research will provide information on students’ perceptions of their abilities before beginning college-level work. The FTS Assessment Survey, administered annually in December, will provide information on students’ perceptions of their abilities near the end of their first semester. The Senior Survey, administered by the Office of Institutional Research, will provide information on students’ perceptions of their college experience from the vantage point of the senior year.

The Program will also work to develop means of **“direct” assessment** (assessment based directly on student work). This will involve 4 stages. First, the Program will develop rubrics to assess student work, drawing on existing resources such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE initiative and the Research Practices Survey recently adopted by the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) consortium and adapting these resources to our purposes. The Program will seek to develop rubrics for each of its four key components: Writing, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, and Advising. Second, the Program will develop sampling procedures that will allow it to collect student work relevant to each component. In addition to resolving methodological issues surrounding sampling, the Program will have to develop mechanisms to support electronic writing portfolios, video portfolios of oral communication, and interviews about the ways in which advising has enabled students to make decisions about their education. Third, the Program will look at levels of student achievement, aiming to identify areas of strength and weakness. Fourth, the Program will use this information to promote discussions about curricular changes (which will, of course, then continue to be assessed).