

Academic Programs: The First-Year Experience

The William Atwell Brown, Jr., and Mary Brown Vacin [First-Year Experience](#) assists students in making the transition from high school to college. Through a broad array of academic and co-curricular programs, the First-Year Experience provides a foundation for students that will sustain them throughout their undergraduate years and that will enable them to achieve their academic and personal goals. The principal features of the program are described below.

Academic and General Advising -- The advising process begins during new student orientation and continues in periodic meetings with faculty advisers and Student Affairs staff during the first year.

First-Year Seminar (LA 101) -- Designed to introduce entering students to the liberal arts tradition, the First-Year Seminars nurture academic skills, creativity and active inquiry. Small class sizes ensure constant interaction among faculty and students. The seminars often address cutting-edge topics, and most include research projects or other hands-on learning experiences. Some feature an extended field trip, to a location in the U.S. or overseas, to give students a firsthand look at the issues they are studying.

Recent seminar topics have included: Genes and Society, Justice, Art in the Environment, Water: Science and Policy, the Holocaust, and Albion and the American Dream. The class schedule, available at www.albion.edu/registrar/, lists the seminars offered for the current academic year.

Seminar Associations -- The students enrolled in a First-Year Seminar also come together as a Seminar Association. Led by a peer mentor, the association members will participate as a group in the Learning Strategies Workshops during the fall semester and continue to meet for both academic and social events during the spring semester of the first year.

Learning Strategies Workshops -- Running in tandem with the First-Year Seminars, the Learning Strategies sessions are geared to helping first-year students succeed at Albion. They introduce students to campus support services, equip them with time-management and other decision-making skills, and assist them with academic and personal goal-setting.

In the Richard M. Smith Common Reading Experience, offered as one of the Learning Strategies sessions, students and faculty discuss a book they have read during the preceding summer. Past Common Reading Experience selections have included Ron Suskind's *A Hope in the Unseen*, Debra Dickerson's *An American Story*, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* and Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*. Through reading and discussion, students develop a greater appreciation for the perspectives of racial and ethnic minorities and for the ways diversity enriches American society.

Academic Planning -- Throughout their four years at Albion, students are encouraged to think about their career and personal goals, as well as the academic experiences that will enable them to reach those goals. After completing a self-assessment, students create a digital portfolio, which will eventually reflect their academic achievements; internship, research and other practical experiences; leadership accomplishments; and community service. Students maintain their portfolios on the World Wide Web so that they may be easily shared with prospective employers and graduate schools.

For more information on the First-Year Experience, contact the First-Year Experience office.

[Back to Academic Programs](#)