

Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach
at the University of Washington



Teaching Freshman Interest Groups

A Freshman Interest Group, or FIG, is a learning community program for new University of Washington students. First-year students have the opportunity to enroll in a cluster of courses with a group of 20-25 other freshmen. Each Autumn, about 50% of the entering class choose a Freshman Interest Group.

WHAT HAPPENS IN A FIG?

Students in a FIG take 2-3 classes together, plus a one-credit seminar (*University Resources, Information, and Technology*) taught by an undergraduate Peer Instructor. FIG students in large lecture courses are assigned to the same quiz sections. Most FIGs also include a small class composed only of FIG students (for example, English composition, speech communication, or studio arts).

The FIG program strives to help students become acclimated to University opportunities, think about their academic commitment, and develop a community of friends and colleagues for academic and social support.

"A FIG is the best group of supporting friends anyone could ask for in such a large university. Knowing that you have 20 other students with the same schedule and responsibilities as you makes you feel comfortable working together." – FIG student, Autumn 1998

HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE TEACHING A FIG?

FIG staff work with departments and faculty to determine which courses and how many sections will be included in FIG clusters. Current FIGs are listed by title and by department at <http://depts.washington.edu/figs>

Faculty are notified in September if their course is included in a FIG. It is up to the faculty member to share this information with teaching assistants assigned to the course. Information about FIGs is also given to Lead TAs and department curriculum coordinators. During the first few weeks of Autumn quarter, Peer Instructors contact the TAs assigned to the FIG-designated sections of large lecture courses, and also the FIG's small course instructor.

"The dynamics of the group were excellent, and as a group, they worked hard and they worked well together. The FIG seemed to reinforce their interest in the subject matter and in tackling the challenges of adjusting to the expectations of college writing." – FIG Instructor

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HELPING FIG STUDENTS SUCCEED

A FIG consists entirely of first-quarter freshmen, for whom being at the university is a new experience. Many are still discovering how to be successful learners in college-level courses. To help them succeed in your course, make sure they know your answers to questions like these:

1. What are your expectations for classroom interaction? What ground rules will you establish for class discussion and group assignments?
2. How should students approach note-taking? studying for tests? learning effectively from the readings?
3. How will students know what you consider good writing for your course?
4. What is the role of the TAs in a large lecture course? How do quiz sections relate to lectures or labs?

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TEACHING A FIG

FIG students know each other! The amount of time that FIG students spend together can be a strong foundation for productive class discussion and small group work. Also, a FIG's common schedule makes planning office hours, out-of-class meetings, activities, or field trips easier.

However, as you might imagine, students who know each other well may develop some counterproductive attitudes or behaviors. If you see troubling patterns developing, talk to other instructors, a course supervisor, FIG program staff, or a CIDR consultant for suggestions about ways to approach your situation.

Students in a FIG have chosen the same cluster of courses. If you find out what interests them about the theme of their FIG, you can make connections with your course. FIG instructors can also coordinate classes with others in the cluster, improving learning across subjects.

FEEDBACK ON TEACHING AND WORKING WITH FIGS

Contact the FIG Program with your questions, suggestions, challenges, and success stories: figs@u.washington.edu

Results from a recent survey of FIG faculty and instructors can be found at: http://www.washington.edu/oea/reports/faculty_surveys.html

CIDR can also help you with questions about teaching and learning: <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>

This issue of the Bulletin was written by Michaelann Jundt and Jason Johnson from the Carlson Leadership and Public Service Center at the University of Washington.



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CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to cidr@u.washington.edu, or visit our web site:

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/>



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