

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

First Year Experience classes more than just the basics

By: Lidia Ryan

Posted: 10/31/08

First Year Experience (FYE) courses are designed to help freshmen adjust to college life, but they extend far beyond a basic college-survival class.

Since the program started in 1996, many topical classes have been added. These include classes like UCan Cook at UConn, Creative Thinking, Performance Poetry, Pirates of the Caribbean and Dancing with Jane Austen. The topical classes are also open to sophomores.

David Ouimette, director of first year programs, said the FYE program has grown over the past eight or nine years to include many topical classes. There are currently more than 150 sections of FYE classes available. Ouimette said he and the instructors try to pick topics that will be interesting and fun for both the students and the instructors.

"The classes help in building a sense of belonging here at UConn," Ouimette said.

Katherine Tsantiris, a 1st-semester environmental science major is enrolled in an FYE class called "This I Believe." Tsantiris said she took the class because she is not sure if she wants to stick with her major, and this class allows her to explore other options.

"It keeps me from ruling things out," Tsantiris said. "It has made me consider my personal beliefs regarding my own education in a way that I had not done before."

Steven Park, the manager of the learning resource center in the library, teaches the FYE class, Pirates of the Caribbean. Park, who has his PhD in 18th-century maritime history, said he was asked to teach an FYE class related to his field of study. He thought maritime history would be boring as an FYE class, so he changed it to piracy in the 18th-century.

To advertise for the course, Park put up a large cut out of Captain Jack Sparrow from the Pirates of the Caribbean movies in the library with the URL of the class' website. Students who enroll will create a Wikipedia page about 18th century pirates, or improve on an exiting one. The class will be taught for the first time this spring.

Another unusual FYE class is "Dancing with Jane Austen." Thomas Roby, a mathematics professor, teaches the course, which has been offered since 2006.

Roby said he decided to teach the class because dance is something he has always been interested in.

"Learning traditional dances from many parts of the world has been a major addiction of mine since I was an undergraduate," he said.

The class does not focus solely on dances during Jane Austen's time. Roby said he used that name to

grab students' attention. It focuses mostly on teaching students English country dances from 1651 to the present day. This semester, students are interested in learning the waltz, Roby said.

"I'm passionate about passing on dance traditions, and the FYE students have been fantastic," Roby said. "They learn quickly and are game for anything."

According to Roby, about 38 students usually sign up for the class every semester. It is usually taught in the Hawley Armory, but since it is undergoing renovations this semester, it is being taught in the parish hall of the Storrs Congregational Church.

While both "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Dancing with Jane Austen" were the instructors' ideas, Ouimette said that sometimes students help come up with FYE courses. One example is the class "UCan Cook at UConn."

Ouimette said that a student came to him looking to go into the culinary arts. Since there were no cooking classes at UConn, Ouimette and the student worked with dining services to create the class.

Ouimette said that most freshmen take a basic FYE class their first semester and get into the topical classes later. He said that both types of FYE classes are beneficial.

"It provides a support place for students to bond and share cool things they're doing," Ouimette said. "It builds a sense of camaraderie between other students and the instructor."

Park also believes that the basic FYE class is a valuable tool for freshmen, but that the topical classes are also useful.

"What I like about [the topical] classes is that it engages freshmen into intellectual life," Park said. "It's a place where the professor actually knows your name."

© Copyright 2008 The Daily Campus