The First-Year Seminar Program (FYSP) invites incoming students to begin their Oberlin educational experience in a small seminar setting. The topics and academic approaches of seminars are diverse, but all are designed to help students hone their critical thinking, discussion, and writing skills. First-year seminars introduce students to resources for learning at Oberlin by engaging our libraries, art museum, writing center, career development center, the cities of Oberlin and Cleveland, and more. First-year seminars allow students to get to know a faculty member well and to reflect upon the personal value and social relevance of a liberal arts education.

SAMPLE FYSP COURSES

“In This Here Place, We Flesh”: Underground Railroad and Sanctuary Spaces
Exploring sanctuary for enslaved people who moved through Oberlin on the journey to freedom, and for Africans who attended Oberlin from the 19th-century forward; exploring the underground railroad in literature and art.

What’s for Dinner? The Science of Healthy Eating
Analyzing the strengths and limitations of different types of nutritional research to evaluate newly emerging dietary claims.

Deconstructing Technology
Exploring the people, science, and industries involved in the making of cell phones, computers, and other technologies; assessing technology’s impact on the environment and society at large.

Faith and the Ballot Box
Weighing Thomas Jefferson’s “wall of separation” between church and state against the reality of a thoroughfare of exchange. Examining the 2020 presidential election and appraising the most religiously diverse Congress in American history.

Nature and the Environment in East Asian Culture
Exploring concepts of nature influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional aesthetics in the context of environmentalism and sustainability.

Silence=Death: Rhetorics of HIV/AIDS
Exploring contested intersections of science, culture, and politics. Engaging remotely with a class at the American University of Nigeria.

Comics: The Art of Graphic Storytelling
Investigating the increasingly influential graphic narrative, illuminating artistic and storytelling approaches to themes of politics, sexuality, class, violence, memory, and cultural and ethnic diversity.
The Sixth Extinction
Exploring biodiversity through readings and multiple weekend trips to sites of local conservation.

Writing Religion and Gender Across Cultures
Considering the religious lives of women (including trans* women) from Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Vodou communities in the United States and internationally.

Know Your Place: Civic Humanism and Community Engagement
Working reciprocally within communities and engaging the humanities as a vehicle for active citizenship.

Black Women’s Narratives on Page, Stage, and Screen
Exploring storytelling styles of African American women authors in fiction, playwrighting, stagecraft, and film.

Heroes and Villains
Exploring in our local region the ways in which history, culture, belief systems, and time shape our understanding of heroism and villainy.

Conceptions of Self in East and West
Examining the nature of human existence from the ancient and modern West and from East Asia; sensitively comparing these diverse visions of human life.

Mind, Machines, and God
Analyzing how carbon-based entities and machines process, store, and learn from experience. Understanding programming’s impact on society from the neuroscience of thought to LEGO Mindstorm robots.

Cryptography
Exploring the science of making and breaking secret codes. Drawing ideas from number theory to study the RSA cryptosystem for secure data transmission.

Natural History of the Vermillion River Watershed
Uncovering the life forms and natural processes of the Vermilion River and its tributaries, local waters that have been carving into the northern Ohio landscape for over 10,000 years.

So You Want to Be an Intellectual
Learning to think and communicate as a citizen of the international republic of letters, analyzing the tools of speaking truth to power.

23 and Us: Genetics in Contemporary Society
Exploring what it means to access our nucleotide sequences. Examining society’s use and abuse of genetic knowledge.