

## **FIGs and the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates**

September 11, 2009

Submitted by Greg Smith, Director of FIGs

### **Background:**

Since its modest inception in 2001, the First-Year Interest Groups program has experienced steady growth. From four FIGs enrolling 75 students in 2001, the program has grown to 32 FIGs enrolling over 600 students in Fall 2009. The impact of FIGs on the academic experience of participating students has been documented by annual assessments. While FIGs students have lower ACT scores (average ACT = 27) than their non-FIGs peers (average ACT = 28), and far fewer have graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class (38% of FIGs compared with 54% of non-FIGs), nevertheless, FIGs students on average outperform their non-FIGs peers at the end of their first semester (FIGs average GPA = 3.38; non-FIGs average GPA = 3.16), and their graduation rates surpass those of non-FIGs students.

FIGs has been unable to meet student demand. Freshmen enroll in FIGs when they attend SOAR, and each summer large numbers of students are turned away as FIGs fill. The FIGs that seem to be of greatest interest to students are those that include topics related to medicine and public health, environmental science, international studies, psychology, political science, and economics. In responses to survey and focus group questions, FIGs students recommend that there be more FIGs options from which to choose, that there be more FIGs that are related to academic majors, and that there be FIGs available to during the spring semester. Students frequently ask that there be FIGs available for second-year students.

Continued growth of FIGs is hampered by two factors. The first is program budget. Faculty who teach the main FIGs classes receive an S&E stipend of \$1500; the program has reached its budgetary limit in terms of the number of stipends it can award. The second factor is the availability of faculty. Over the years, nearly 100% of the FIGs faculty have commented on how much they have enjoyed their experience teaching FIGs students. Most try to repeat that experience. Some departments have the capacity to allow faculty to teach FIGs seminars quite regularly, some for as many as seven years in a row. Other departments have limited capacity, and because of their commitments to their graduate students, their majors, or to the campus in terms of the service courses they must offer, they have been unable to sustain their support for FIGs. The third factor may be administrative commitment. At this point, all but one of the schools and colleges have supported FIGs. Even the School of Medicine and Public Health, which does not offer undergraduate programs or courses, has faculty who occasionally teach FIGs: this fall, Beth Meyerand is repeating her FIG entitled "Medical Imaging."

## **Proposal:**

This proposal would double the number of FIGs offered over the next two years. It would also include some spring semester FIGs (SpriGs?) as well as some options (SIGs?) for second-year students.

**Spring 2010:** Five pilot FIGs would be offered. Four of these would be offered to first-year students who enrolled in the fall but were unable to participate in FIGs then, and to first-year students enrolling for the first time in the spring semester, when there is little other programmatic support to help them connect to the campus. These four would be connected to specific majors or areas of study, for example pre-business, international studies, biological sciences, or pre-health. The fifth course cluster would target second-year students and would focus on career exploration issues.

Assessment would determine whether spring options and second-year options should be expanded in the future. If the spring pilots prove successful, additional spring options would be added, with ten options in Spring 2012.

**Fall 2010:** The program would grow to include 45 FIGs in Fall 2010. In addition to the general "exploratory" types of FIGs that have been offered in the past, there would be a strong effort to include more "major-specific" FIGs, possibly including pre-business, biological sciences, consumer affairs, etc.

**Fall 2011:** The program would grow to a total of 60 FIGs, effectively doubling the number currently available, and making FIGs opportunities available to roughly 20% of UW-Madison students.

**Faculty Recruitment:** FIGs are the product of faculty involvement and faculty imagination: faculty members interested in teaching FIGs submit proposals that are reviewed by the FIGs Planning Committee. In the beginning, in order to recruit faculty to teach the main FIGs classes, the Dean of L&S tied tenure-track faculty hires to departmental support of FIGs: a department that was awarded a tenure-track position had to agree to provide a faculty member to teach a FIG class. This strategy worked for the first two years to get the program started. It could be an effective way of bringing together two goals of the Madison Initiative: hiring faculty and increasing FIGs opportunities.

In their survey responses, a number of FIGs faculty have indicated that they connected their research activities to their FIGs. They often got their FIGs students involved in some of their research projects, and they were continuing to publish, so that their participation in FIGs enhanced rather than inhibited their research agendas. A possible incentive to recruit faculty to teach FIGs would be to offer some research grants for appropriate projects that would create opportunities for students as well as faculty.

### **Administrative and Staffing Needs:**

- Funding for S&E stipends for five spring 2010 FIGs/SPRIGs/SIGs groups in Spring 2010 and Spring 2011 (\$1500 each, total of \$4,500) and ten groups in Spring 2012 (\$15,000).
- Funding for S&E stipends for FIGs faculty: \$22,500 for 15 additional FIGs in 2010, and an additional \$22,500 for 15 more FIGs in 2011 and each subsequent year (\$45,000 total annually).
- Funding for FIGs-related research grants. Research proposals would be screened, evaluated, and awarded by the FIGs Planning Committee. In the first year, \$10,000 would be available for research grants, and after that \$20,000 in research grants would be available each subsequent year.
- FIGs Coordinator: Currently, the FIGs coordinator position (student services coordinator) is 0.5 FTE during the academic year and 100% during two months of SOAR in the summer. Logistical and planning support for additional FIGs would require more staff support. The senior student services coordinator position should be increased to 1.0 FTE for 2010.
- FIGs Director: According to his position description, 30% of the director's time is dedicated to FIGs. As the program has grown, this no longer reflects the reality of the position. If the program is to double in size in the next two years, this position description needs to be revised and probably revised so that at least 50% of position is dedicated to FIGs: faculty recruitment, assistance in the design of FIGs course clusters, additional logistical support, additional program assessment, etc.
- Graduate Student Project Assistant: A part time (0.33 FTE) graduate student project assistant would be able to help with logistics and planning in the fall and with additional program assessment in the spring. With some extra research help, program assessment could be expanded to look at some other critical areas, such as the impact of FIGs participation on first-generation students, the impact of FIGs participation on the development of critical thinking skills, etc. Currently, program assessment tracks students through their time on campus to graduation. Assessment could also be expanded to include surveys of graduates.

Item	Spring 2010	2010 Academic Yr.	2011 Academic Yr.
S&E Stipends (\$1500 each) for spring FIGs Faculty	\$4500	\$4500	\$15,000
Additional S&E stipends for FIGs Faculty (\$1500 each)		\$22,500	\$45,000
Faculty Research Grants (\$2,000 each)		\$10,000	\$20,000
Senior Student Services Coordinator, additional 0.5 FTE (Full time salary of \$58,411)		\$29,205	\$29,205
Project Assistant, 0.33 FTE		\$18,485	\$18,485
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4500</b>	<b>\$84,690</b>	<b>\$127,690</b>



MEMORANDUM

October 1, 2009

TO: Madison Initiative Oversight Committee  
FROM: Gary Sandefur, Dean, College of Letters and Science GS  
Re: Non-Instructional Madison Initiative Proposals

The College of Letters and Science is pleased to forward the attached proposals for:

- Eliminating Academic Deficiencies for L&S Students
- Expansion of the FIGs program
- Expansion of the Chemistry and Physics Learning Centers

These proposals are self-explanatory, so we do not discuss them in this cover memo.

We received 30 proposals for the October 1, 2009 deadline. We consider these three to be the most pressing.

Among the 27 proposals we are not submitting are several really good ideas. A number of departments requested support for advising. Several of these requests, especially in high demand majors such as Biology, Communication Arts, Economics, Psychology, Political Science, and Pre-Health Professions are very compelling. For the November deadline, we will propose a comprehensive advising plan for L&S, which will utilize a combination of centralized, department-based, and "pod-based" academic and career advising. Our plan will also include the use of peer advisors and satellite locations, along with clearly articulated goals and assessment plans. These initiatives will enable the College of Letters and Science to connect with significantly more liberal arts students helping them to understand and embrace the Wisconsin Experience.

We hope to partner with CALS and other schools and colleges on advising for Biology and Pre-Health Professions. We encourage the university to take a comprehensive look at advising and to develop a coordinated campus approach to advising needs rather than funding specific advising proposals piecemeal over the next four years.

Attachments

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Office of the Dean

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