

Transylvania University—Quality Enhancement Plan

First Engagements: Enculturation into a Scholarly Community

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Transylvania University's QEP will engage all first-year students in a challenging, full-credit seminar designed to initiate them into a community of scholarly inquiry by focusing attention on a collaborative exploration of a complex issue through critical engagement with primary texts. Essential to this process will be helping students begin to define their role as active participants in the intellectual life of the College. The intensive, three-week course, *First Engagements*, will be the only class students take in August Term, a new term created exclusively for entering students. The course is designed to model Transylvania University's commitment to its liberal education mission. The timing and the conditions of August Term will facilitate student learning. Instead of immediately having to balance and manage several academic courses, orientation to a new environment, and the social distractions on campus, our new students will have three weeks to focus their attention and excitement on the challenges of a college seminar, on building academic skills and confidence, on getting to know faculty, and on getting to know one another as members of a new first-year class.

Faculty from across academic programs will come together in the fall preceding the August Term in which they are scheduled to teach and as a group will choose collectively the issue they will explore with the next entering class of students. The topic to be explored and debated in each *First Engagements* seminar will be one that calls for multiple perspectives in order to be adequately addressed and understood and that will engage a wide range of first-year students. The *First Engagements* seminar and its learning goals are designed to fit neatly with and support the related learning goals of the fall and winter first-year seminars. During August Term, students will focus on developing and refining their critical reading skills. Writing assignments and class discussions will be built around the close reading of primary texts. Students will be introduced to selected library and electronic resources to aid in their inquiry. Each section of the course will feature an August Term Scholar (ATS)—a current student who was selected for that role following a rigorous selection process. Each ATS will help facilitate discussions in the course, serve as an additional resource for questions about academics and campus life, and will help new students find ways to engage in co-curricular opportunities.

The fall term first-year seminar will continue the attention on critical reading and join with that a focus on writing and argumentation. The winter first-year seminar will build on the foundations laid in *First Engagements* and the fall seminar and lead students step by step through the process of producing a substantial, researched paper. By the end of their first college year, students will have a real sense of being part of a community of scholars. *First Engagements*, by its unique placement in the academic calendar, will help students make the most of this very important year of college.

Co-curricular activities will be designed to enhance the environment in which the college transition is taking place and to provide opportunities for making intellectual and creative connections beyond the classroom walls of the *First Engagements* course.