Proposed Initiative: Develop a one-credit First-Year Seminar (FYS) course that challenges and supports all first-year students - both inside and outside the classroom. The FYS will be designed to develop first-year students as learners and scholars, build their skills for success, and connect them with the campus community.

Person, department or college proposing the initiative: Division of Student Affairs

Which strategic goal does this initiative support?
Innovation and Partnerships; Distinctive Academic Excellence

Describe how the initiative supports the goal(s) – limited to 1000 characters or less
UWRF is more likely to succeed in helping first-year students make a successful transition to college if we provide challenging educational experiences accompanied by effective support services and programs. One of the most effective methods for improving student success and retention is the First-Year Seminar. Offering this high-impact practice to our first-year students would require collaborative partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

Based on the definition of university-wide initiative above, indicated how the proposed initiative has a university-wide impact.
The overwhelming majority of First-Year Seminar research has shown that these courses positively affect retention; grade point average; number of credit hours attempted and completed; graduation rates; student involvement in campus activities; and student attitudes and perceptions of higher education; as well as faculty development and methods of instruction (Barefoot, 1993; Barefoot et al., 1998). Offering a FYS and creating a culture of first-year student success at UWRF would require effort from the entire campus.

Please provide a set of benchmarks and/or indicators of success to support your initiative (1000 characters or less)
- Improved first-year to second-year retention rate
- Increased 4-year and 5-year graduation rate
- Improved academic support and intervention
- Improved campus-wide commitment to student development and success
- Improved first-year student performance in General Education courses
- Enhanced ability for first-year students to think critically and work collaboratively

What elements are involved in the initiative?
Sustainability, Inclusiveness, Human Capital, Finance, Other

Indicate how each element would be/would not be affected by the initiative.
- **Sustainability:** With increasing competition for students and declining state resources, it is more important than ever before to deliver a high-quality first-year experience that supports the transition of our new students. Improved retention and persistence is a more sustainable than recruiting new students to replace those lost to attrition. Offering a FYS is a critical component to a sustainable enrollment management plan.
- **Inclusiveness:** We have a responsibility to provide a challenging and supportive learning environment for all our new students. However, there are several characteristics that make the retention of our new students so challenging:
  - First-Generation Status - Research on academic performance, along with retention and graduation rates consistently demonstrate that first-generation students are often
less prepared for college success than students who have at least one parent who attended college. Additionally, parents of first-generation students have limited working knowledge of the higher education system and its demands, which intensifies the need for student support programs. Nearly 50% of new students at UWRF are the first in their families to attend college.

- **Academic Profile** - There is substantial evidence that indicates that a first-year student’s prior academic achievement, including high school grades and standardized test scores are the most powerful predictor of persistence in to the sophomore year (Stage & Hossler, 2000; Allen, 1999; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Our efforts to provide broad access to education for a diverse student body have yielded an academic profile for first year students that may provide some challenges. In the fall of 2010, approximately 75% of our students ranked in the top half of their high school class and had an average ACT score of 22. Although this profile is somewhat average within the UW System, it does contribute to our need to assist our students in acquiring the skills that are needed to become successful college students.

- **Socioeconomic Status** - Socioeconomic status also influences a student’s likelihood of persistence and retention. Research indicates that students from families with higher incomes tend to persist more than students from families with lower incomes (Cabrera et al., 1990; St. John, 1989, 1990; St. John et al., 1991). This student characteristic should be of concern for UWRF, given that 71% of our enrolled Wisconsin students are in the lowest three quintiles of Wisconsin Family Income, with an estimated average family income of $52,000. This is the second lowest level of Family Income in the UW System (UWSA Office of Policy Analysis and Research, 2006).

- **Race and Ethnicity** - Persistence rates of minority students at predominantly white institutions are consistently less than those of their white counterparts (Stage and Hossler, 2000). UWRF is no exception - the latest first-year retention rates indicate that 63% of students of color return for their second year as compared to 77% for white students (Office of Integrated Planning, 2010).

- **Offering a FYS** would provide all new students with the opportunity to develop their skills for academic, personal, and social success. In addition, students would begin to understand the educational opportunities and social responsibilities that are expected of campus community members.

- **Human Capital**: Additional FTE (1.0) would need to be assigned for program development, management, and assessment. Best practices also suggest that First-Year Seminars be offered in sections no larger than 25 students. With approximately 1200 new students each year, a minimum of 48 sections would need to be taught by faculty, staff, and/or administration.

- **Technology**: Implementing a FYS would not have a substantial technological impact.

- **Facilities**: 

- **Finance**: Compensation would be needed for faculty and academic staff teaching the course.

- **Other**: Successful first-year seminars (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Kuh, 2008) are those that:
  - Are offered for academic credit
  - Involve both faculty and student affairs professionals in program design and instruction
  - Include instructor training and development as an integral part of the program
  - Compensate or otherwise reward instructors for teaching the seminar
  - Involve upper-level students in seminar delivery
  - Place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students’ intellectual and practical competencies
  - Include ways of assessing their effectiveness and disseminating the findings to the campus community