The students begin in the **first year of the Honors College** with a common course, “The Pursuit of Knowledge.” Students are divided into 20-student seminars, but they are all working from the same syllabus, with the same learning outcomes. The syllabus for that course is broad and multi-disciplinary. Broadly put, the aims of the course are to whet students’ intellectual appetites for many of the different ways we approach knowledge at the university, to inspire further intellectual curiosity, to introduce them to the active, collaborative space of a discussion class, and, not least, to improve their writing (the course fulfills the university’s Writing and Information Literacy requirement).

In the spring of the first year, HCOL students take individual courses under the general banner of “Ways of Knowing.” Those seminars, most of which satisfy a D1 or D2 requirement, continue to work on the skills the students have been developing in the fall, but focus a little more intently on an area of study (disciplines of the professors come a little more into focus on these syllabi), and also all involve a significant group project, allowing us to put a little more emphasis on the skills necessary for productive collaboration. In terms of foundational learning objectives, the first-year HCOL courses stress:

- Critical reading and thinking
- Effective college-level writing, including the necessity of substantive revision
- Effective discussion and presentation skills
- Collaborative learning (including group work)
- Information literacy (library research skills)
- The creation of a community that fosters intellectual curiosity

In the **sophomore year**, which sees an influx of about 120 new HCOL students (who apply out of their first year), the disciplinary lines are becoming more distinct in the HCOL seminars (HCOL 185/186), and students will often choose a seminar based on a developing sense of their major or minor. We look to the sophomore seminars to continue the focus on **writing, discussion, and group work** that was so much a part of the first-year course, but also to begin to introduce students to some of the more **specific ways in which research is conducted at the university**. We don’t think of the seminars as purely “methods” courses—those should probably be reserved for courses the students take within their majors—but we do hope that they will be able to see inside the discipline and the process of academic research and scholarship (and creative work in some cases) significantly further than they would have in any of their first-year classes, and we do expect them to engage in focused research projects themselves in their sophomore seminars.

It’s helpful here to think of the sorts of academic skills we’re trying to introduce students to in their first two years, skills that they will eventually bring to bear on their undergraduate thesis. If the first-year courses emphasize the transition to college writing and critical thinking, and introduce students to information literacy, the **sophomore seminars deepen those skills and take the students further into the design and execution of a research project** (with “research” broadly defined to include scholarly and creative projects).
It has also been helpful for professors of sophomore seminars to remember that their students will come from potentially every undergraduate college and school at UVM. The course, though it will likely contain a prominent research component, should therefore not require specialized prerequisite knowledge (that cannot be presented early in the class). Professors have often used the sophomore seminar to investigate a slightly broader issue in their discipline, or a set of questions that brings their own discipline into conversation with others. For instance, a faculty member in Psychology has offered a course titled “Women in Science,” which engages in historical and sociological issues, among others; a faculty member in Biology has offered a course that investigates evolutionary theory in a broad way; a physician from the College of Medicine offers a course called “Controversies in Public Health” that uses the newspaper as a primary text; a faculty member in Plant Biology offered a course entitled “Ethnobotany in a Globalized World” that brought the science into contact with issues from anthropology; a professor of Music taught a seminar on “The Psychology of Music,” not something he might have had the opportunity to teach as a part of the curriculum in the Music Department.

### Elements of a Sophomore Course Proposal

The Honors College has recently adopted a new two-step process for sophomore seminar proposals to increase the likelihood of course approval and to better facilitate distribution requirement classification by the academic unit curriculum committees:

**Step 1: Draft Proposal, due mid-September**

This initial step includes seven main components:

1) Course title
2) Course description (HCOL Curriculum Committee as audience, max 200 words)
3) List of learning outcomes
4) Brief description of each major assignment and percentage of final grade
5) Estimated amount of reading each week, and preliminary list of main readings
6) Letter of endorsement from department chair
7) A brief discussion of how this course meets the essential qualities outlined by Honors College Curriculum Committee (See the Dean’s Call for Proposals)

Following the submission of the draft proposal, the HCOL Curriculum Committee will meet to discuss the idea for the course, evaluate whether the academic unit curriculum committees might need additional information, and consider possible D1/D2/SU classification. The HCOL then sets up meetings with faculty and the HCOL Deans in the first week of October to discuss the Committee’s recommendations for revising the proposal for the second step.

**Step 2: Final Proposal, due end of October**

This second step has two components:

1) Preliminary course syllabus (including description, learning outcomes, assignments, readings, and any supplemental information requested by academic unit curriculum committees for college/major/distribution requirement approval)
2) D1/D2/SU forms (if applicable)
Note that all of the above should keep in mind the eight “essential qualities” of an HCOL Sophomore Seminar as outlined in the Dean’s call for proposals. Those eight qualities are:

1. **Academically Challenging**: Courses must be appropriately demanding for sophomores, keeping in mind that students in the class may be from any college or school and may not be presupposed to have taken particular courses. Instructors may choose to introduce foundational material at the beginning of the course, however.

2. **Research Oriented**: Seminars should introduce students to aspects of the conduct of research within disciplines or interdisciplinary clusters. These seminars aren’t viewed as “methods” courses but should allow students to acquire tools that will allow them to gain skills and dispositions that will help them become more active and engaged students, and help build the research and analytical skills that they will need for independent research and scholarship. For example, courses may introduce students to how to read a scientific article, annotate a bibliography, conduct field research, devise an experiment, write an abstract, and so on.

3. **Interactive**: Courses will be seminars (and not small versions of lecture courses), with a great deal of interaction among students and the instructor.

4. **Writing Intensive**: In most cases, seminars should emphasize excellence in written communication and expression. Courses emphasizing numeracy and quantitative skills, oral communication, or information technology, are also encouraged.

5. **Creative**: Courses that emphasize intellectual creativity and foster the development of research skills are encouraged.

6. **Multidisciplinary**: Courses emphasizing important relationships among related fields of knowledge are encouraged.

7. **Engage Diversity and/or Sustainability Requirements**: Courses that might satisfy D1 or D2 diversity requirements and/or the new SU requirement are strongly encouraged.

8. **Innovative**: Courses emphasizing service learning and other forms of non-traditional learning are also encouraged.