# University Studies Program GENERAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

## Sample: Invitational Language and Tone for First-Year Students

In the opening words of her Religious Studies course syllabus (excerpted here with permission), Jodi Eichler-Levine invites students to become interested in the subject matter of the course. Yes, she provides expected elements such as a course description, a reinforcement of the Quest course sequence, and an introduction to the Sustainability Signature Question in the context of this course—but she does more than that. She contributes to students' curiosity by starting where first-year students might be and drawing them in to the subject. "Oh," they might start thinking as they take their first glance at her Religious Studies syllabus, "I didn't know what this would be about exactly, but...it sounds really interesting!"

As you revise your syllabus, attempt to read it from the perspective of a first-year student who is a novice to the subject matter you know so very well.

Syllabus: RELSTDS/WOMSTDS 2XX: Women, Sustainability, Religion
Dr. Jodi Eichler-Levine—Ouest II

#### **ALL ABOUT THIS COURSE**

We all live in bodies, and we all live on the planet Earth. This class explores how women from diverse religious traditions have approached the question of how to live sustainably on this planet, as well as how religious approaches to sustainability affect women's lives. We will approach this through units on four themes: 1) Wonder and Nature, 2) Food, 3) People and Bodies, and 4) Myth and Ritual.

#### ALL ABOUT QUEST II AND ETHICAL REASONING

Quest II is the second major course in the University Studies Program. Last semester, in Quest I, you were introduced to the campus and to college level analysis of a signature question. This term, we will take our QUESTions to a deeper level as we explore **ethical reasoning**. So, you might be thinking, what *is* ethical reasoning? Funny you should ask. Ethical reasoning can, in fact, mean different things, but for now, this **preliminary definition** will suffice: Ethical reasoning is the challenge of reckoning with "the good"—with what is the best course of action, or way of thinking, in a variety of situations.

(Best for *whom?*, you might ask—this is part of why it's tricky!)

We can deal with ethical reasoning in many ways. One way is to **describe other people's** ethical reasoning and decisions. Another way is **to work on the logic of** 

**our own ethical reasoning**: how do *we* think through a particular ethical dilemma? We will work on both of these approaches in this class.

Quest II happens in larger sections of students (50) than Quest I (25), but don't let that overwhelm you. We will still be operating as a learning community, and you will see many familiar colleagues from your current writing or speaking courses.

### **OUR SIGNATURE QUESTION: SUSTAINABILITY**

Our signature question is: **How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?** 

**Knowledge of Sustainability and Its Applications** is the ability to understand local and global Earth systems, the qualities of ecological integrity and the means to restore and preserve it, and the interconnectedness of ecological integrity, economic well-being, and social justice, in order to analyze complex environmental, economic, and social justice issues and to respond effectively to them.

This question lends itself very naturally to the practice of **ethical reasoning**. On almost any theme within sustainability, we can find ourselves weighing different possible choices (should we emphasize solar or fossil fuel energy?), facing the competing claims of different groups ("not in my backyard," declares *everyone* when faced with the prospect of a garbage dump). We might debate that path would lead to the best outcomes for the most species: in other words, how can we maximize "the good"?