

February | 2016

2016 General Education Review:
Proposed Recommendations
General Education Committee



UNIVERSITY *of* VIRGINIA
COLLEGE *and* GRADUATE SCHOOL *of* ARTS & SCIENCES

2016 GE Curriculum Review: Proposed Recommendations

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION	4
LIBERAL LEARNING AND THE GENERAL EDUCATION AT UVA	5
PROPOSED GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM	6
COMPONENT ONE: ENGAGEMENTS.....	6
COMPONENT TWO: LITERACIES	6
COMPONENT THREE: DISCIPLINES	7
COMPONENT FOUR: CAPSTONE	7
TOWARDS A NEW INSTITUTION: THE COLLEGE FELLOWS.....	8
APPENDICES	9

Members of the General Education Committee

Chad Wellmon (Chair)
Associate Professor, Department of Germanic
Languages and Literatures

Ed Barnaby
Senior Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs,
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

Talbot Brewer
Professor & chair, Corcoran Department of
Philosophy

Linda Columbus
Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry

Mark Hadley
Associate Professor, College of Arts and Sciences

Paul Halliday
Julian Bishko Professor of History, Professor of Law
& Chair, Corcoran Department of History

Kelsey Johnson
Associate Professor, Department of Astronomy

Alison Levine
Associate Professor, Department of French

Ekaterina Makarova
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

Rachel Most
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic
Programs & Professor, Department of Anthropology

Todd Sechser
Associate Professor, Department of Politics

Jim Seitz
Associate Professor & Director, Academic &
Professional Writing Program
Department of English

Hank Shugart
William W Corcoran Professor, Department of
Environmental Sciences

Juliet Trail
Special assistant to the Dean & Director of
Assessment, College of Arts & Sciences

Bruce Williams
Ambassador Henry J & Mario R Taylor Professor,
Department of Media Studies

Summary of Proposed Revisions

College Fellows

Establish College-wide body of faculty members drawn from across departments and programs who would design, teach, and cultivate the core “Engagement” courses.

Engagements (8 Credits)

- (1) Aesthetic Engagement
- (2) Empirical & Scientific Engagement
- (3) Engaging Difference
- (4) Ethical Engagement

Literacies (Varying Credits)

- (1) World Languages (Proficiency through 2020)
- (2) Rhetoric for the 21st Century (6 Credits)
- (3) Quantification, Computation, and Data Analysis (6 Credits)

Disciplines (21 Credits – 3 Credits in Each Category)

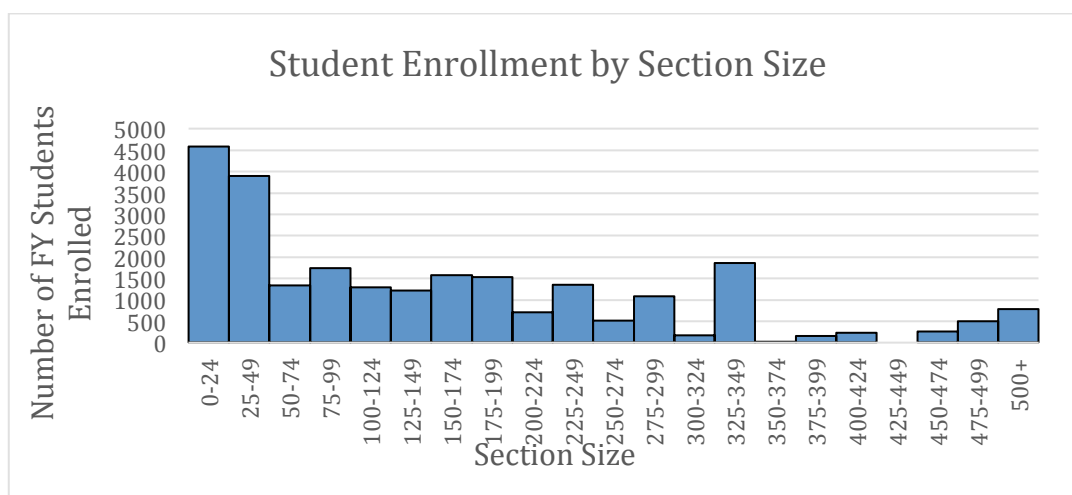
- (1) Artistic, Interpretive, and Philosophical Inquiry
 - (2) The Chemical and Physical Universe
 - (3) Cultures and Societies of the World
 - (4) Historical Perspectives
 - (5) The Living Universe
 - (6) Social and Economic Systems
 - (7) Science and Society
- Students must fulfill these requirements by enrolling in courses across seven different departments; double counting courses to fulfill requirements would be suspended.
 - A Bachelor’s of Science exemption is currently under consideration to alleviate potential load issues.

Introduction

As a committee drawn from faculty across the College of Arts and Sciences and charged with review of the General Education curriculum, we propose that any curriculum should be an expression of what the faculty holds dear and true: what is worth knowing, conserving, sharing, stewarding, and defending. The curriculum should serve as a touchstone to which alumni can return again and again as they continue to learn and develop over the course of their lives. And, finally, the curriculum should serve as a public pledge to foster, uphold and pursue knowledge that is both valuable in itself and for the purposes of a life well lived.

Need for Transformation

- The current GE curriculum comprises a set of broad categories with little institutional or intellectual coherence. Similarly, the quality of student experiences varies widely.
- The two primary values embodied by the current GE curriculum are individual choice and variety of experience. Conspicuously missing from much of our GE curriculum are values of open inquiry and reflection, shared intellectual experiences, and synthesis and connection across disciplines and fields of knowledge.
- First year students primarily take large classes, many of which are taught by adjuncts and graduate students.
 - Average faculty to student ratio in the first year is 1:155¹.
 - While 80% of students in the Class of 2018 took two 3-credit courses² in their first year with enrollments of 50 students or less...
 - only 30% of students had more than two classes with enrollments of 50 students or less;
 - only 6% of the Class of 2018 averaged 6 credits or more each semester in courses with enrollments less than 50 students.
 - Over 76% of all first-year enrollments were in a course larger than 50 students.



¹ Faculty ratio of 1:155 includes all 3+ credit courses taught by TT faculty (excluding ENWR courses)

² Courses taught by TT faculty (excluding ENWR courses)

Liberal Learning and the General Education at UVA

- What our students currently share is less a curriculum than an extra-curricular life. We want to put the curriculum back at the center of College life – a curriculum that makes specific claims about the values, commitments, and purposes of a liberal education.
- We want to provide our students shared curricular touchstones that will guide their exploration, both in making decisions about their further studies and their broader lives beyond their time in College.
- We want to foster sensibilities and intellectual habits of scholarly practice by introducing students to the standards of the highest scholarship, asking students to confront ambiguity, and cultivating in students a fluency necessary to engage multiple communities and multiple forms of thought.
- Having been exposed to these sensibilities and intellectual habits, students should then be introduced to the various forms of disciplinary thinking and practice across the academy. Our hope is that that they might then develop capacities to transform themselves and engage a world that is in constant flux.

Therefore, the committee proposes a General Education Curriculum that...

- (1) fosters shared intellectual experiences across disciplines in four distinct ways of apprehending the world. These four modes of apprehension or inquiry would serve as the organizing structure of the core first-year experience;
- (2) contextualizes fundamental global literacies within one core educational component;
- (3) frames a coherent array of experiences across disciplines; and
- (4) provides every student opportunities to reflect upon and synthesize their own learning experiences.

Proposed General Education Curriculum

The committee proposes a GE curricular structure subdivided into four components:

1. Engagements
2. Literacies
3. Disciplines
4. Capstone

Component One: Engagements

(8 Credits)

The first component of the composed curriculum cuts across the disciplines and helps develop in students intellectual sensibilities that lead to deeper, more prescient learning outcomes. The **Engagement** courses provide students with an inquiry-based framework through which to reflect critically on their College education. These courses will encourage students to connect the knowledge, literacies, and skills of their College education to their future lives of purposeful vocation as engaged citizen-intellectuals.

- Set of core *first-year* courses (8 credits total) in four critical engagements: (1) Aesthetic Engagement, (2) Engaging Difference, (3) Empirical Engagement, and (4) Ethical Engagement.
- Designed and taught by a rotating cohort of the College's most committed scholar-teachers³ with a faculty to student ratio of 1:50.

Please refer to "Appendix A" for further elaboration on the Engagements.

Component Two: Literacies

World Languages (Proficiency through 2020)

Rhetoric for the 21st Century (i.e., written, oral, and digital communication: 6 credits)

Computation, Quantification, and Data (6 credits)

The **Literacies** equip our students with fluency in a range of idioms that are essential to individual flourishing, the flourishing of the common good, the capacity to contribute to the discovery of new knowledge and the ability to navigate a heterogeneous, rapidly-transforming, and ever-more-cosmopolitan globe.

World Languages: This global literacy prepares College students to interact and collaborate within multilingual communities in their community and around the world.

- Courses satisfying the requirement develop students' communicative competence in a world language other than their own at an intermediate proficiency level.

³ See Society of Fellow below

Rhetoric for the 21st Century: This global literacy provides experience with written, oral, and digital forms of expression used by highly literate members of our society. We refer here not to a set of basic skills but to rhetorical arts learned and practiced over the course of one's life.

- All students would take a first-year writing courses that includes written, oral, and digital assignments. Unlike the current GE, no College students would be exempt from this requirement through prior AP credit or testing..
- All students would enroll in one course that meets the second writing requirement, which includes written, oral, and digital projects.

Quantification, Computation, and Data Analysis: Our students need skills and literacies to navigate and make sense of a world increasingly awash in numbers and data. Through this requirement students will acquire computational and analytical skills needed to manipulate, organize, summarize, and evaluate quantitative information.

Please refer to “Appendix B” for further elaboration on the Literacies.

Component Three: Disciplines

(18-21 Credits)

In the third component of study, students will explore a wide range of objects of knowledge from a range of perspectives grounded in disciplinary thinking and particular scholarly practices. This component recognized the importance of exposure to disciplinary knowledge, that is, knowledge that is tied to particular scholarly traditions.

Students will take a course in each of the following six (*or seven*) categories:

1. Artistic, Interpretive, and Philosophical Inquiry
 2. The Chemical and Physical Universe
 3. Culture and Societies of the World
 4. Historical Perspectives
 5. Living Systems
 6. Social and Economic Systems
 7. *Science and Society*
- Courses that comprise the “Disciplines” component will fundamentally continue to be taught by departments and other existing programs. Faculty to propose which category best represents the approach of their individual courses.
 - The committee recommends that students fulfill these requirements across six departments. The committee also recommends suspending the current policy of double counting courses to meet requirements.
 - A Bachelor's of Science exemption is currently under consideration to alleviate potential load issues.

Component Four: Capstone

The final element of the general education journey is a reflective Capstone taken in the fourth year.

- Students should demonstrate a synthesis of the General Education components informed by the specialized knowledge or interest developed in their major (or perhaps completely outside their area of specialization).
- The committee proposes that, rather than making concrete recommendations at this time, further conceptualization of the capstone is tabled until the first three components are assessed for their efficacy.

Towards a New Institution: The College Fellows

We propose the creation of the College Fellows. This is the core of our proposal and the means by which we hope to put the curriculum at the center of College life. The College Fellows would be a College-wide body of faculty members drawn from across departments and programs. The Fellows would design and teach the Critical Engagement courses (8 credits) together. Appointment to the College Fellows would be for fixed terms. This cohort of faculty would represent the College as a whole and assume responsibility for designing, teaching and cultivating the core general education courses for our first-year students.

- Current proposal models 40 faculty dedicating their full teaching effort and 40 sixth-year doctoral students serving as mentored facilitators.
- Teaching load for faculty would be 8 credits over the course of the academic year provisionally scheduled at the discretion of the instructor.
- Sixth-year doctoral students would be responsible for 2 credit hours of instruction per semester.
- Administration has committed to a budget model that prioritizes the funding of post-docs (rather than adjuncts) to meet departmental teaching needs resulting from faculty participation in College Fellows.

Appendices

Appendix A: Engagements

Unlike later requirements that introduce students to particular disciplines, this 8-credit experience—taken during students’ first year at UVA—would engage them in trans-disciplinary critical inquiry. These courses, designed and taught by a rotating cohort of College faculty, invite students to engage in four distinct ways of apprehending the world that cultivate sensibilities vital to thriving in, and contributing to, our contemporary world. These are: aesthetic engagement, empirical & scientific engagement, the engagement of difference, and ethical engagement.

The *Engagements* would be designed and taught by a College-wide body the most committed scholar-teachers: the College Fellows. In addition to a reduced teaching load, the College Fellows would hold the responsibility for serving as a corporate body to consider the purposes and aims of the General Education. Thus, the College Fellows would not only design the Engagements but reflect on the goals, structure, and delivery of these core courses.

In order to guide the initial work of the appointed College Fellows, the committee proposes a set of provisional **design principles** for Engagement courses and a set of provisional **descriptions and learning outcomes** for each engagement domain. The committee envisions these recommendations to be dynamic in nature and in need for perennial debate on behalf of the College Fellows.

Provisional Design Principles

The committee proposes that Engagement courses might model design principles that engage students in the general features of critical inquiry by:

- a. framing enduring questions for inquiry that both reflect the stated principles of a liberal education (e.g., preparing for engaged citizenship in multiple communities; flourishing of the individual, the Commonwealth, and the global good) and are relevant to today’s student;
- b. investigating and responding to how others have addressed such questions;
- c. making productive use of uncertainty and ambivalence rather than rushing to hasty conclusions;
- d. forming (provisional) positions on the issues/problems that the inquiry identifies;
- e. presenting one’s positions in ways that thoughtfully acknowledge the positions of others.

Provisional Descriptions and Learning Outcomes

Aesthetic Engagement

Aesthetic engagement entails recognizing and analyzing motivations for and responses to human creativity. We believe students should value and engage with the esthetic dimension of human experience and the natural world. In these courses, students will...

- a. identify forms, genres, and interrelationships of aesthetic phenomena;
- b. understand the social role and ongoing evolution of human creative expression and reception;
- c. acquire fluency in description and analysis of esthetic experience and objects'
- d. develop their own approach to creative expression.

Empirical & Scientific Engagement

Empirical and scientific engagement entails analyzing claims about the material and social world, as well as formulating and testing new questions and hypotheses, based on material and other evidence. We believe students should value and engage with and practice empirical inquiry in many forms and contexts. In these courses, students will...

- a. develop a framework of knowledge about the unlimited potential for empirical inquiry in the natural or social worlds;
- b. acquire fluency in the practice of generating hypotheses; engaging in direct or mediated observation (by various technologies) of material circumstances in the world; testing hypotheses making deductions from one's observation; and accepting, discarding, or refining hypotheses as the basis for further exploration of one's questions;
- c. articulate, test, and reformulate analytic claims based on the material and other evidence that may be adduced for or against those claims.

Engaging Difference

Engaging with human difference entails questioning, evaluating, and reflecting critically on one's own situation and perspective in relation to one's expanding knowledge of other human experiences. We believe students should engage with and reflect critically on many forms of human difference as a broad foundation for democratic citizenship. In these courses, students will...

- a. develop a framework for informed reflection about human diversity and social complexity
- b. develop analytic vocabularies to engage with the many forms of human difference
- c. question, evaluate, and reflect critically on and articulate their own situation in the world
- d. develop empathy as a foundation for democratic citizenship

Ethical Engagement

Ethical engagement entails systematic reflection upon and evaluation of human conduct and character. We believe students should consistently consider and integrate the ethical components of individual and collective behaviors that unfold around them. In these courses, students will...

- a. develop a foundation for informed reflection upon and evaluation of human conduct and character
- b. identify the ethical dimensions of individual and collective decisions and actions
- c. articulate ethical questions and engage in moral deliberation
- d. reflect on the ethical implications of one's own commitments at citizens of multiple communities.

Appendix B: Literacies

The committee proposes that we equip our students with fluency in global literacies that will prepare them to navigate a heterogeneous, rapidly-transforming, and ever-more-cosmopolitan globe. These *Literacies* include what we call World Languages, Rhetoric for the 21st Century (written, oral, and digital communication), and the global literacy of Quantification, Computation, and Data Analysis.

World Languages (Varying Credits; Proficiency through 2020)

Every student in the College of Arts and Sciences should be able to communicate in a language other than his or her native language. Courses satisfying the requirement develop students' communicative competence in a language (students should be able to listen/understand, speak, read and write in meaningful contexts at the intermediate proficiency level or above). Language courses also expand students' knowledge of one or more of the cultures that speak the chosen language through engagement with authentic cultural products. This requirement helps prepare College students to interact and collaborate within multilingual communities in their community and around the world.

Students completing the language requirement will realistically perform at a range of levels, with intermediate level being a minimum. Actual outcomes for each student will vary based on the nature of the language (cognate or non-cognate) as well as on the skill assessed (listening and reading skills tend to progress ahead of speaking and writing skills, for example). Some students will complete the sequence performing well above the intermediate level in some if not all areas.

Proficiency may be evaluated in five areas: speaking, writing, listening, reading, and cultural competence. Speakers at the Intermediate level are able to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. Writers at the Intermediate level can create with the language and communicate facts and ideas in order to meet practical writing needs, such as composing and responding to messages, notes, and requests for information. Listeners at this level can understand information conveyed in predictable, sentence-length speech on familiar topics in face-to-face conversations or in everyday contexts such as announcements, straightforward instructions, or directions. Readers can understand information conveyed in texts in familiar formats, such as weather reports, announcements, or advertisements. Learners combine all four skills with ongoing engagement with the practices, products, and perspectives of the cultures studied in order to communicate with cultural competence and understanding.

Rhetoric for the 21st Century (6 Credits)

We believe that all students need thorough experience with what we call “Rhetoric for the 21st Century”—by which we mean the written, oral, and digital forms of expression used by highly literate members of our society. We refer here not to a set of basic skills but to rhetorical arts learned and practiced over the course of one’s life. (Any art includes skills but is not reducible to them: the sum is greater than the parts.) In order to develop their capacity with the various arts of rhetoric, we propose that all students in the College of Arts and Sciences take a first-year writing course that includes written, oral, and digital assignments; that they engage in writing regularly as a form of inquiry and reflection in their General Education core courses; and that they take a course that meets the second writing requirement, from among the departments, which includes written, oral, and digital projects.

Quantification, Computation, and Data Analysis (6 Credits)

Quantitative Literacy is the ability to apply mathematical skills to understand and solve real world problems. Through this requirement students will acquire computational and analytical skills needed to manipulate, organize, summarize, and evaluate quantitative information and experience

Course that fulfill the Quantitative Literacy requirement will include some or all of the following:

1. Manipulation and interpretation of mathematical expressions.
2. Collection and interpretation of numerical data from a range of sources.
3. Methods for drawing conclusions from data, and understanding limitations of data.
4. Computational methods for manipulating and analyzing data and performing mathematical modeling.

Courses fulfilling this requirement should be primarily focused on quantitative and/or computational methods and analysis, rather than the use of such methods in a course with some other primary focus. Such courses are designed and taught in numerous fields, including but not limited to physics, statistics, sociology, psychology, economics, politics, and the environmental sciences.

Appendix C: Disciplines

In this third component of study, students will explore a wide range of objects of knowledge from a range of perspectives grounded in disciplinary thinking but with an invitation to cross-disciplinary exploration and thinking. We want to expose our students to the best of our faculty as they perform the practices of reasoning embodied in their lives as scholars across the various disciplines of the arts and sciences, e.g. literature, astronomy, economics, statistics, or the studio arts. Therefore, we envision these course continuing fundamentally to be taught by departments and other existing programs.

In this 21-credit component, faculty introduce students to more distinct scholarly communities and traditions—what have come to be termed *Disciplines*. No one discipline can claim exclusive right to any intellectual tradition, but each practice is institutionalized, sustained, and embodied in distinct disciplinary traditions. Thus, the committee proposes an initial re-thinking of disciplinary categories that are not tethered to specific departments but rather attempt to outline different kinds of research and modes of thought.

As part of the Disciplines requirements, students would enroll in at least three credits among the courses offered in each category. In order to ensure that students are exposed to the broad range of disciplinary thinking throughout the College, students must fulfill this requirement by taking courses from seven different departments (i.e., students could not enroll in multiple English courses, though it is reasonable that the English department might offer courses in many of the proposed categories). It is also the recommendation of the committee to suspend the current policy of double counting courses to meet requirements.

The proposed re-imagined categories include the following:

Artistic, Interpretive and Philosophical Understanding

A liberal education should develop in students an ability to interpret cultural objects and artistic expression (texts, works of art, etc.) and make and evaluate arguments. Courses in this category should help students engage in the act of making meaning and understanding concepts.

The Chemical and Physical Universe

A liberal education should develop in students a knowledge of the physical world and universe. Such knowledge is crucial to understanding social issues concerning energy, climate change, and constant transformation of technology. Courses in this category should introduce students to basic concepts and facts in the physical sciences and help students relate them to their lives as citizens and contemporary problems.

Cultures & Societies of the World

A liberal education should introduce students to cultures and societies other than the one in which they grew up. And for most students at the University of Virginia this means that they should be introduced to social systems, institutions, and cultures outside the United States. Courses in this category should expose students to the legal, political, cultural systems of a broad range of societies and help students understand how beliefs, ideas, and practices are socially

organized. Such courses should also help students understand connections between and among different societies.

Historical Perspectives

A liberal education should provide students with a broad perspective on changing human experience. Sympathetic yet incisive study of the past gives us ways of seeing our own world anew. It helps us to understand why people made the choices that they made and lived the way they did; to appreciate the consequences of those choices and ways of living; and to see how our own circumstances came to be. Knowledge of the past is produced through a range of methods and concepts that allow us to interpret words and other artifacts. Courses in this category introduce students to these methods and help them to understand particular aspects of past lives here and around the globe.

Living Systems

A liberal education should develop in students a knowledge of life, the living world, and the environment. As scientific knowledge continues to expand, students need a basic understanding of key concepts in the sciences that study our living world. Courses in this category should introduce students to basic concepts and facts in the natural sciences and help them relate this knowledge to their lives as citizens and contemporary problems.

Social and Economic Systems

A liberally educated student should be able to identify and reflect on patterns and structures in their own society and others. Courses in social and economic systems help students understand the complex relationship among individuals, institutions, ideas, markets, and historical events. More broadly such courses consider the role of individuals in social, cultural, economic and political spheres. These courses are concerned with the nature of social life and the analytical and interpretive methods of making sense of it.

Science and Society *(recently added and pending endorsement)*

A liberal education should provide students with a basic understanding of the relationship of scientific knowledge, technology, and society. Courses in this category are concerned two broad sets of questions: first, with the methods, practices, and commitments of the sciences and technology (for example, what is a scientific fact? what is the scientific method?); and second, with the impact and relationship of science and technology to society and social concerns. Such courses may be found but not limited to scholarship in sociology and science, law and science, anthropology and technology, environmental science and political theory, or technology and philosophy, bioethics, environmental humanities, and history of science.