

Final Report to the Provost from the
General Education Task Force- March
20, 2018

GenEd30

General Education at VCU

Table of Contents

<i>Charge from the Provost</i>	2
GETF Co-Chairs	2
GETF Membership	2
<i>Preamble</i>	4
<i>Background</i>	5
<i>Overview of GenEd30 Curriculum Model</i>	6
VCU General Education Coherent Rationale	6
GenEd30 Operational Parameters	6
<i>VCU General Education Curriculum Model</i>	8
Foundations of Learning (up to 12 credits).....	8
Diversities in the Human Experience (3-9 credits)	8
Creativity, Innovation, and Aesthetic Inquiry (3-9 credits).....	8
Global Perspectives (3-9 credits)	9
Scientific & Logical Reasoning (3-9 credits)	9
<i>Standing GenEd30 Committee Representation Recommendation</i>	10
<i>Responsive Controls for GenEd30</i>	12
<i>Conclusion</i>	13
<i>Appendix A: “SACSCOC Requirements for General Education.”</i>	14
<i>Appendix B: GenEd30 Committee Responses to Faculty Feedback and Concerns</i>	18
Process, Transparency, and Faculty Governance	18
Transparency	18
Faculty Governance	18
Recommendations.....	19
Role of University College and College of Humanities and Sciences	20
Clarification of Curricular Policies	21
Degree Completion.....	21
Cross-Listing Courses	21
Transfer Students	21
Assessment	22

General Education Task Force Recommendation

Framework For New VCU General Education Curriculum,
Full Committee Report—Final

Charge from the Provost

In January 2016, the General Education Task Force (GETF) was charged by the Provost with developing a general education curriculum comprised of 30 credit hours, all of which are portable across all undergraduate majors in the university. This new GenEd30 curriculum is to be governed by a coherent rationale as required by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and all units responsible for undergraduate education at VCU may participate. Additionally, the task force was asked to develop processes for implementing and managing the new GenEd30 curriculum. Assessment matters, or the development of student learning outcomes, were considered out of scope for the GETF.

GETF Co-Chairs

- Jennifer A. Johnson, Associate Professor & Chair of Sociology, College of Humanities & Sciences
- Faye Prichard, Director of Writing, Assessment, and Evaluation, Honors College

GETF Membership

- Genevieve Beard, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing
- Leigh Ann Craig, Associate Professor, Department of History, CHS
- Alen Docef, Associate Professor, School of Engineering
- Shelli Fowler, Interim Dean for University College
 - previous representative: Kristin Reed, Associate Professor
- Nicholas R. Garcia II, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
 - previous representative: John Mahoney, Associate Professor
- Robert H. Gowdy, Associate Professor, Department of Physics, CHS
- Jeffrey S. Legg, Associate Professor, School of Allied Health Professions
- Sara Wilson McKay, Associate Professor, School of the Arts

- Joan M. Pellegrini, Associate Professor, School of Dentistry
- Allison K. Ryals, Assistant Professor in Teaching, School of Social Work
- Daniel P. Salandro, Associate Professor, School of Business
- Mikhail J. Valdman, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, CHS
- Joy Whitenack, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, CHS
 - previous representative: Angela Reynolds, Associate Professor

Ex-officio member: Linda S. Birtley, Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation, Office of the Provost.

Preamble

The GenEd30 curriculum model set forth in this document is governed by a set of shared commitments:

1. *Commitment to faculty governance:* As echoed by the Provost during the initial charge to the committee, the members of the GETF firmly believe the study, development, and improvement of the general education program is primarily within the purview of the faculty. This proposed GenEd30 model entrusts the faculty and departments with decisions regarding how to participate in VCU GenEd30 as well as with the ongoing management of the curriculum.
2. *Commitment to the mission and aspirations of VCU:* As required by SACSCOC, all general education curricula must be grounded in a 'coherent rationale' that outlines the guiding principles governing the curriculum. In order to align the GenEd30 curriculum with the mission and aspirations of VCU, we grounded our coherent rationale in the values espoused in VCU Quest for Distinction. Specifically, we emphasized VCU's deep commitment to rigorous intellectual inquiry via interdisciplinarity and creativity in a diverse, inclusive, global community.
3. *Commitment to interdisciplinary problem solving via disciplinary thinking:* Members of the committee were committed to building an interdisciplinary approach to general education that reveals the complexity of inquiry, discovery, and innovation in a global setting while at the same time respecting and advancing the value of disciplinary thinking. We resisted using a disciplinary model for organizing general education. Instead, guided by our coherent rationale, we organized the VCU GenEd30 into five areas of inquiry, all of which are open to any discipline or unit. In other words, these areas of inquiry are designed to make general education 'real' at VCU by illustrating how different disciplinary thinking can be brought to bear on shared questions, complex problems, and global challenges.
4. *Commitment to transparent, sustainable, and shared processes:* In designing the recommended processes for both the GenEd30 model and its implementation and management, members of the GETF committee are committed to transparent processes that empower faculty across the university to manage, sustain, and improve the GenEd30 curriculum. We envision GenEd30 to be a 'living' model such that it is flexible enough to grow and change with the university while retaining the essential coherent rationale.

Background

SACSCOC is the governing body that sets forth curriculum requirements for a university's general education curriculum. Standard 9.3 (see appendix) states that a general education curriculum consists of a minimum of 30 semester credit hours drawn from, and including at least one course from each of the following areas: social/behavioral sciences, natural science/mathematics, and humanities/fine arts. In this requirement, SACSCOC advises that general education courses should not “narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, or procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession” (p.22).

In the past 20 years, VCU has had two General Education models. The first, operating prior to 2006, was a typical discipline-based model that included numerous courses in several discipline-based categories from which a student could select. This model was bloated and diffuse that it no longer constituted a cogent general education curriculum. In 2006, under the leadership of Dr. Joe Marolla, the general education curriculum was revised to include a core curriculum and three tiers of requirements. The number of courses included in the core was scaled back significantly and required 21 specific credits, with nine credits in Tier II to be completed in the major, at the discretion of each unit, for a required total of 30 credit hours. While this new model created a concise set of courses, it also created a portability problem where students who changed majors across schools lost general education credit due to the different ways in which units resolved the nine discretionary credits (i.e. the ‘dangling’ nine problem). This model, particularly the issue of the ‘dangling nine’ was confusing and so limiting as to not constitute a consistent university-wide general education curriculum.

In 2016, the General Education Task Force was charged with once again updating the VCU general education curriculum with a strong, coherent rationale that organized 30 credit hours into a portable set of requirements. The GETF was comprised primarily of faculty across the university representing a broad spectrum of interests and disciplines. From January 2016 to June 2017, the committee developed the model outlined below. In October 2017, the co-chairs presented the model to the Provost’s office for review. From November 2017 through March 2018, the committee vetted the model with the faculty for input that was used to revise and make decisions on the final draft.

Overview of GenEd30 Curriculum Model

As required by the SACSCOC, the GenEd30 model is grounded in a coherent rationale which states:

VCU General Education Coherent Rationale

VCU's General Education Program seeks to provide a diverse student body with a broad base of knowledge and the intellectual skills to participate actively in a changing world. To those ends, the VCU General Education Program challenges students to seek creative answers to complex problems, see connections between disciplines and between ideas, and develop an informed perspective on the varieties of human experience.

This coherent rationale defines **Areas of Inquiry** that are the organizational structure for the GenEd30 model. These areas of inquiry include *Foundations of Learning*, *Diversities in the Human Experience*, *Creativity, Innovation, and Aesthetic Inquiry*, *Global Perspectives*, and *Scientific & Logical Reasoning*. Each area of inquiry is operationalized by a set of course objectives that define the types of questions, theories or modes of inquiry appropriate for that particular area (see below for details). While all areas of inquiry lend themselves to some disciplines more than others, no area of inquiry is discipline based.

All disciplines and/or units may contribute a course to any or all areas. These areas are intentionally multidisciplinary, encouraging students to approach issues from a variety of perspectives and encouraging faculty to share their expertise across disciplinary boundaries. They are drawn broadly so units can design courses that are traditional in their role in general education but also encourage units to stretch beyond tradition to innovate new ways of connecting ideas. The goal of this model is to illustrate how questions about the world transcend disciplinary boundaries while exposing students to the myriad of disciplined ways in which those questions can be asked. General education curricula should provide students with a breadth of knowledge while at the same time allowing for some depth of inquiry.

GenEd30 Operational Parameters

- Students complete up to 12 credits in the Foundations of Learning courses (UNIV and MATH/STAT courses).
 - Students must complete the UNIV sequence & MATH/STAT requirement unless they have approved exceptions.
- Students complete 18+ credits from the remaining four Areas of Inquiry by:
 - Selecting at least one course from each area for a total of 12 credits;

- Selecting the remaining two+ courses from any area for a total of six+ credits;
- Of the six courses taken across the four areas of inquiry, three must meet the SACSCOC requirements of one math/natural science, one social/behavioral science and one humanities/fine arts course.
- Students will be allowed to take a maximum of two courses per rubric, for example, SOCY, BUSN, MASC, with the exception of UNIV where students may take a maximum of three UNIV courses.
- AP and transfer credits count towards these course restrictions.
- Initially, units, as defined by the course rubric code, should be encouraged to contribute up to four courses across the five areas of inquiry. See Responsive Controls for further suggestions.
- Only GenEd30 courses may function as pre/co-reqs for other GenEd30 courses.
- All GenEd30 courses must be open to all students across the university with no restrictions on what majors may take these courses.
- All GenEd30 courses must be offered at least one time per academic year during the Fall or Spring semesters but may also be offered in Summer.

We recommend a standing Gen Ed committee be created at the Provost's level to manage the process for approving new courses and to ensure the continued integrity and viability of General Education at VCU (see below for detailed description).

VCU General Education Curriculum Model

Students enrolled in the General Education Curriculum will take courses in the following five areas.

Foundations of Learning (up to 12 credits)

Courses in this area provide the student with the core competency skills necessary for academic success across all disciplines:

- UNIV 111, UNIV 112, & UNIV 200 or HONR 200 & HONR 250
- MATH 131* or higher OR STAT 208 or higher *Portability problem = School of the Arts uses MATH 121 as general education math.

Diversities in the Human Experience (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Examine modes of inquiry used in the study of social institutions, patterns of culture, historical narratives, and human behavior;
2. Understand and evaluate patterns and processes affecting social organization and distributions of power and resources;
3. Investigate the relationship between the individual and society through a diverse range of voices;
4. Explore varieties of human psychology or development;
5. Compare theories about human society, culture, history, and behavior;
6. Examine patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and other forms of social grouping;
7. Consider the civic and ethical implications inherent in the study of the human experience.

Creativity, Innovation, and Aesthetic Inquiry (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Examine the circumstances and choices that influence the production of creative work;
2. Investigate, establish, and/or apply criteria used to evaluate creative work;
3. Attend and/or participate in creative activities and explore their relevance;
4. Analyze how creative work reflects, responds to, and shapes various contemporary and historical contexts;

5. Consider the role of imagination in confronting and expressing the human condition;
6. Encounter ambiguity and diverse interpretations as aspects of aesthetic inquiry;
7. Consider the civic and ethical implications in production, consumption, and access to creative works.

Global Perspectives (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Encounter, comprehend, and appreciate cultures and contexts outside the U.S.;
2. Develop an understanding of how the world is organized and interconnected;
3. Interpret regionally specific social, political, historical, and/or economic issues within the larger global context;
4. Recognize how knowledge is constructed differently in various communities;
5. Consider alternate viewpoints among disciplines, histories, cultures and groups;
6. Explore the complexities of cross-cultural communication and problem-solving;
7. Consider their civic and ethical responsibilities as local and global actors.

Scientific & Logical Reasoning (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Explore how logical and empirical methods can be used to form and revise beliefs;
2. Apply methods of logical and empirical reasoning to their own beliefs;
3. See relations between ideas, both contemporaneous and historical;
4. Use and connect scientific concepts to describe the world, formulate questions, and solve problems;
5. Consider and compare different applications of evidence-based reasoning;
6. Model phenomena in a variety of ways such as through mathematics or the use of computer programs or physical representations;
7. Consider the civic and ethical implications of scientific inquiry.

Standing GenEd30 Committee Representation Recommendation

The General Education Task Force recommends that the standing GenEd30 committee be comprised of the following voting members:

- A. Four faculty representatives from the College of Humanities and Sciences, representing Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, and Mathematical Sciences, respectively.
- B. Two faculty representatives from University College.
- C. One faculty representative from the Honors College.
- D. One faculty representative from VCU Health Sciences.
- E. One faculty representative from the School of Education.
- F. One faculty representative from the School of Engineering.
- G. One faculty representative from the Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs.
- H. One faculty representative from the School of Business.
- I. One faculty representative from Life Sciences.
- J. One faculty representative from the School of the Arts.
- K. One faculty representative from Social Work.

This representation is intended to be reflective both of the size of units and their participation in general education curricula. The committee is empowered to alter the balance of this representation by their own vote as needed in the future. Voting members shall be chosen by and serve at the pleasure of the deans of their units.

The committee shall also include the following non-voting members, in a consultative capacity:

- A. One representative from University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UUGC).
- B. One representative from Assessment Council.
- C. One representative from University Academic Advising Board.
- D. One representative from the Office of Transfer.
- E. A representative from the Division of Strategic Enrollment Management.
- F. A student representative selected by the Student Government Association.

G. A representative from the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence.

Two senior tenured faculty, one from the CHS and one from another unit shall chair the committee. Both shall be elected from the committee's membership and shall retain voting rights on the committee.

One voting member of the standing GenEd30 committee shall serve as a non-voting delegate to UUCC.

Responsive Controls for GenEd30

The committee charged with maintaining the General Education Curriculum must ensure that students have a list of courses that maintain a balance across disciplines. The General Education Task Force suggests an initial limitation of four course offerings from each unit, as defined by the course rubric code, for example SOCY, to be included in the four areas of inquiry. Furthermore, we recommend that students be limited to two courses from each rubric, with the exception of UNIV where students are allowed three courses. We recognize these parameters as starting points to allow for responsible vetting of new courses under the GenEd30 framework and to allow space for units new to general education to develop course contributions. We recommend that the new standing committee evaluate new courses and adjust the aforementioned limits by reference to the following questions:

1. How many total new general education courses should be approved in any given year?
2. How many new general education courses should be approved in any given year from any particular department?
3. How many courses should be in the current GenEd30 list?
4. How many courses should be in each GenEd30 area of inquiry?
5. Should there be any limit on course capacity?
6. How should interdisciplinary courses be counted in the overall GenEd30?

General considerations that could give rise to controls are:

1. The areas of inquiry are designed to emphasize interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to common disciplinary questions. Therefore, the committee should strive to maintain disciplinary balance; no theme should be dominated by a single department.
2. However, the areas of inquiry should also maintain the integrity of disciplinary ways of knowing and seeing the world. Therefore, the committee should consult with the department when considering courses that bridge disciplines to ensure courses are taught by appropriate subject matter experts in the field.
3. The greater a department's representation in the general education curricula, the more reluctant the committee should be to grant that department new courses or to grant it more or larger sections of an existing course.
4. Each department should be encouraged to have at least one general education course.

Conclusion

This proposal was developed, refined, and submitted in a spirit of faculty governance, and we hope to see it received and considered in that same spirit.

Final Vote taken on March 23, 2018 with majority (13 yes/1 no) approval of the 14 active voting members.

Appendix A: “SACSCOC Requirements for General Education.”

From SACSCOC, *Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement*, 3rd. ed., Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2018, pp. 81 – 83.

- 9.3** The institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the undergraduate level that:
- (a) is based on a coherent rationale.
 - (b) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree program. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent.
 - (c) ensures breadth of knowledge. These credit hours include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. These courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. (*General education requirements*) [CR]

Rationale and Notes

General education is an integral component of an undergraduate degree program through which students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge. This Core Requirement establishes four key principles regarding the general education component of undergraduate degree programs:

- The General education component is based on a coherent rationale.
- General education courses are college level.
- In order to promote intellectual inquiry, general education courses present a breadth of knowledge, not focusing on skills, techniques, and procedures specific to the student's occupation or profession, and are drawn from specific academic areas.
- The general education component constitutes a minimum number of semester hours, or its equivalent, and comprises a substantial component of each undergraduate degree.

It is essential to understand the general education component of the degree program within the context of the institution's mission and within the expectations of a college-level institution. Through general education, students encounter the basic content and methodology of the principal areas of knowledge: humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences and mathematics. Courses in each of these areas introduce a breadth of knowledge and reinforce cognitive skills and effective learning opportunities for each student. Such courses may also include interdisciplinary studies. It is important, however, that courses selected by students as "general education" do not focus on skills, techniques, and procedures specific to that student's occupation or profession.

The SACSCOC Executive Council adopted the following interpretation in February 2010:

Courses in basic composition that do not contain a literature component, courses in oral communication, and introductory foreign language courses are skill courses and not pure humanities courses. Therefore, for purposes of meeting this standard, none of the above may be the one course designated to fulfill the humanities/fine arts requirement in [this standard].

Note that this interpretation does not preclude the mentioned courses from being part of general education requirements beyond the required courses in the three specifically mentioned areas; while they are “skill courses,” these are not skills specific to a particular occupation or profession. Courses that would not be acceptable as meeting this standard are courses such as “dosage calculations” (specific to occupations) or most upper-level courses with multiple prerequisites (lack breadth of knowledge).

The rationale undergirding the courses that meet general education requirements is often published in institutional documents such as the catalog. It is important that institutions have criteria for evaluating courses for inclusion in the core curriculum, both to maintain adherence to the underlying rationale and to ensure the expected breadth of knowledge.

NOTES

In its publications, an institution is obligated to clearly designate the specific general education courses included in the three areas of knowledge: humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and natural sciences and mathematics. Publications should clearly indicate or direct students in their options for selecting general education courses and, in particular, those considered pure humanities/fine arts that are in accord with the interpretation above. Finally, the institution should indicate how it ensures that all students follow the pathway for selecting general education courses as described in its publications.

In its assessment of institutions, the SACSCOC review committee will specifically evaluate whether each of the three subparts in the standard have been addressed. This review should specifically determine (with narrative supporting) its findings under part (c), whether credit hours that constitute the general education program at an institution are (1) drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics; (2) are consistent with the Executive Council’s interpretation cited above; and (3) include courses that do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a student’s particular occupation or profession.

Questions to Consider

- Does the institution have a formal guideline or policy that establishes a rationale for its general education requirements?
- How does the institution ensure that the student’s breadth of knowledge acquired through the general education component of the degree program is sufficient and appropriate to its mission?

- What measures does the institution use to ensure that general education represents a substantial component of the undergraduate degree program?
- What process is used to ensure that courses students may take to fulfill general requirements support the goals of the general education component of the degree program?
- What criteria does the institution use to ensure that the desired general education outcomes meet college-level standards?
- Even if there is some variation in general education requirements across some majors, do all undergraduate degree programs include at least one course from the three required areas of study, as well as the requisite total hours?
- Does the institution designate in its publications those general education courses that are considered pure humanities/fine arts in accord with the interpretation above? How has the institution validated that the courses that the institution designates are in accord with the standard?
- Are printed materials describing general education requirements clear as to how a student can meet the requirements?
- How does the institution ensure that all students follow the pathway for selecting general education courses as described in its publications?
- How does the general education program apply to transfer students, distance and correspondence education programs, or competency-based programs?

Sample Documentation

- Description of and rationale for general education, including expected student learning outcomes.
- Publications that consistently describe the general education requirements.
- Explanation of the process used to review or change how students meet general education requirements.
- If requirements vary by major or degree, documentation that the standard is met for all degree-seeking students.
- Specific information as to how general education requirements are met for transfer students as well as students in competency-based, direct assessment programs.
- An explanation (and examples) of how completion of general education requirements is tracked and verified.

Reference to SACSCOC Documents, If Applicable

None noted.

Cross-References to Other Related Standards/Requirements, If Applicable

Standard 8.2.b (*Student outcomes: general education*)

Standard 9.7 (*Program requirements*)

Appendix B: GenEd30 Committee Responses to Faculty Feedback and Concerns

The following are responses to comments and concerns discussed during twenty presentations of the framework across the university as well as solicited online feedback. These comments are on file and accessible to the Provost's office. There were a total of 65 written comments from across VCU.

Process, Transparency, and Faculty Governance

The primary concern raised in both the written comments and those expressed at the presentations focused on the roles, responsibilities and transparency of the standing committee. Most faculty were deeply concerned about how the new general education framework would be vetted and managed once the proposal from the task force was submitted. The concerns are as follows:

Transparency

Many faculty were concerned about the level of transparency both up to this point and going forward. While all were appreciative of the support for faculty governance, many expressed concerns about a lack of transparent and clear guidelines for how this proposal would be voted on and approved. They were particularly concerned about how additional layers of details, such as, connecting general education with assessment, REAL and approval processes, would be developed, vetted and approved. While assurances by the Vice Provost that the proposal would follow standard committee approval processes were appreciated, many remain unsure of what those processes are, given the new committees being developed in the Provost's office as well as the process through which membership on those committees were being assigned. For many faculty, these new developments were not in line with transparent or clear administrative processes.

Faculty Governance

Of particular concern was the process for membership on the new standing committee as it aligns with the value of faculty governance. The general education curriculum is at the heart of liberal arts education and defines the character of VCU. As Provost Hackett emphasized during her charge to the GETF, the faculty "own" general education and should be deeply involved in developing and managing the curriculum. However, there is no clear indication of the scope of responsibilities of the new standing committee nor how the composition of the committee will be decided. Faculty were gravely concerned about the representation of faculty as a measure of the Provost's office commitment to faculty governance. Questions that were asked included:

- Will the committee be comprised of faculty with experience in general education?

- Will the committee be overloaded with administrative tasks such that the faculty are unable to serve effectively?
- Will appointment to the committee be through a vote or through appointment?
- Will members of the task force serve on the standing committee in an effort to ensure continuity of faculty input?

In response to these concerns, the GETF puts forth the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- The standing committee should be comprised primarily of faculty, preferably senior faculty who are designated as members by other faculty via democratic vote.
- Attention should be paid to the ratio of tenure to non-tenure faculty with a higher proportion of tenured faculty represented.
- Composition of the standing committee should be proportional to the unit's responsibility for general education. We encourage the standing committee to consider how its own constitution can best provide that proportional representation as the Gen Ed develops, without excluding any unit or undermining its own functionality.
- A member of the CHS should always serve as a co-Chair as has been the case for the GETF.
- The final GenEd30 framework and structure should be vetted through the undergraduate academic committees for each unit involved in general education, and faculty governing organizations including, but not limited to, Faculty Senate, the CHS Faculty Council, the School of Engineering Undergraduate Academic Committee, the Wilder School Curriculum Committee, the CHS Undergraduate Academic Committee, the School of the Arts Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the School of Social Work BSW Committee, the School of Nursing Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the School of Business Undergraduate Programs Committee.
- The standing committee should focus on ensuring the integrity of and adherence to the coherent rationale. While assessment is a part of that process, the standing committee should not be responsible for implementing assessment. Rather, the standing committee should be tasked with applying assessment data to the curation process.
- As Provost Hackett affirmed in her Fall 2017 meeting with GETF, several members from the GETF should serve on the standing committee to ensure continuity of faculty governance.

Role of University College and College of Humanities and Sciences

Of significant faculty concern was the role of University College in the general education curriculum beyond Focused Inquiry (FI). University College (UC) faculty voiced a desire to play a larger role in general education beyond FI based on their commitment to innovative interdisciplinary teaching as well as a desire for the option to teach courses beyond UNIV 111, UNIV 112 & UNIV 200. Other faculty, particularly in the CHS, voiced concerns about the disproportionate role that a single unit--University College--plays in general education and the way in which the faculty and courses are uncoupled from disciplines and departments, connections which are critical for strong interdisciplinary learning and teaching.

The GETF appreciates the values and concerns of both sets of faculty. In line with University College, the proposed GenEd30 framework emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary study for our students.

We also support the UC faculty's desire for an intellectually stimulating work environment. However, we also share the CHS faculty's concern about concentrating general education in one unit that stands apart from other faculty in the disciplines and departments which anchor general education, including the SACS requirements. The task force does not see the GenEd30 curriculum as a means of resolving the constraints created by the teaching and fiscal policies of the University College.

In response to both of these sets of concerns, we revised the framework from two to four course offerings per rubric but limiting the students to two course in each rubric except UNIV in which students are allowed to take three courses. For most students, those three UNIV courses will be the FI courses. However, those who transfer in credits which meet one of those FI course requirements, can take a UNIV course outside the FI sequence thus allowing for more teaching opportunities for the UC faculty. By expanding the number of courses a unit could offer to four, the CHS departments have more flexibility in developing their general education offerings thus ensuring students experience disciplinary breadth in their general education experience.

We also encourage the Provost's office to work with both University College and the College of Humanities and Sciences to build connections between faculty. The CHS faculty would benefit from working with UC faculty to better understand how various disciplinary ways of knowing can come together in the classroom in innovative and interesting ways. And, the UC faculty would benefit from engaging with their CHS colleagues who conduct research and teach inside departments where disciplinary logics and scholarship are produced, vetted, and challenged.

Clarification of Curricular Policies

Degree Completion

Several concerns about clarification of policies were raised during presentations, particularly those related to ‘double-dipping’ and the percent of shared credits across tracks. The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) requires that curriculum leading to a baccalaureate degree share a common core of courses. The common core requirement for a baccalaureate degree is 25% of the total credit hours required for the degree, excluding the general education core. This common core requirement extends to the concentrations, tracks, and other course groupings within the degree. At VCU, these course groupings are commonly understood to be part of the ‘major.’

The General Education Task Force recommends that the Office of the Provost provide written guidance to the academic units on whether courses taken to fulfill general education requirements could be counted toward the major or the fulfillment of any other degree requirements. Could a student receive credit for approved general education Course ABC as fulfilling a general education requirement AND as fulfilling a ‘major’ requirement, OR would this constitute ‘double-dipping’?

Cross-Listing Courses

In discussing the promotion of an interdisciplinary general education, the General Education Task Force received comments and questions about the future of cross-listed courses at VCU. While we were not tasked with determining the future of cross-listed courses, there was significant discussion, concerns, and questions from faculty that the Task Force felt ill equipped to answer. Many questions stemmed from the two course per rubric framework proposed by the Task Force. For instance, if POLI/INTL 105 remained in the General Education Curriculum, would it count as one of the Political Science department’s courses, or International Studies’, or both?

Historically, cross-listed courses have played a role in the development of interdisciplinary learning at VCU. With changes to General Education and the New Budget Model on the horizon, clarification is needed in this area. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that the Provost Office provide an update to faculty regarding the continuation, value, and role of cross-listed courses in regards to general education and en masse.

Transfer Students

In response to numerous questions raised about the impact of these changes on transfer students, the standing GenEd committee should evaluate the impact of the new General Education curriculum on students completing coursework outside VCU and adopt

relevant policies. The overarching principles for these policies should be clarity and transparency.

The following categories of such coursework should be considered:

1. Students transferring to VCU with an earned degree (Associate-level or higher). VCCS graduates are covered by articulation agreements; the committee should ensure that the new curriculum does not impede these students' curricular progress. For all other degree holders, the committee should adopt explicit policies governing general education requirements.
2. Students transferring to VCU with completed courses that have one-to-one VCU equivalents. The committee should adopt explicit policies allowing or limiting the use of these courses to meet some (or all) GenEd30 requirements.
3. Students transferring to VCU with completed courses that do not have one-to-one VCU equivalents. The committee should adopt a process by which these courses can be evaluated and allowed to meet some (or all) GenEd30 requirements.
4. Students entering VCU with completed AP/IB courses (with or without one-to-one VCU equivalents). The committee should adopt explicit policies allowing or limiting the use of these courses to meet some (or all) GenEd30 requirements.
5. Students who have completed credit by examination or other credentialing processes. The committee should adopt explicit policies allowing or limiting the use of these credits to meet some (or all) GenEd30 requirements.
6. Students who intend to obtain credit using any of the mechanisms in parts 1-5 AFTER they have enrolled at VCU. The committee should adopt explicit policies allowing or limiting the use of these credits to meet some (or all) GenEd30 requirements.

Assessment

The Charge from The Office of the Provost did not include matters of assessment; the development of an assessment plan was considered out of scope. The General Education Task Force has the following recommendations in response to questions and comments received during the open feedback sessions across campus:

1. So as to ensure faculty governance of the proposed standing committee on general education, we propose a separate standing committee on general education assessment.
2. The charge of the standing committee on general education assessment would be to develop, implement, and monitor the assessment of the new general education program.

3. We recommend that this new standing general education assessment committee be comprised of faculty who teach in the general education program for each College or School.
4. We recommend that each School or College have at least one faculty representative on this committee.
5. We recommend that the committee commence its work in tandem with the timeline of the standing committee on general education.
6. We recommend that the Office of the Provost provide incentives for the professional development of faculty who commit to these additional assessment leadership responsibilities, in order to develop VCU's institutional assessment capacity and to reinforce the faculty-ownership of the general education curriculum.
7. We envision the faculty committee members actively engaged in the development of the assessment plan for the general education program, e.g. identifying the student learning outcomes, the benchmarks or targets, the methods and frequency of data collection, how results are disseminated and put to use, and identifying lessons learned.
8. We envision that this committee's ongoing work functions in tandem with the standing committee on general education, providing data and information at the following levels: course, areas of inquiry, and overall program.
9. We envision that this committee will ensure that the university fulfills its obligations to external stakeholders, including the State Council of Higher Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, for the measurement and reporting of student learning outcomes and VCU's commitment to student success through the continuous improvement of the educational experience.