Curriculum FAQ

OVERVIEW:

What are the elements of the BQ Curriculum?
- 1-unit first-year seminar; Wellness (.25 units)
- Students will take courses to satisfy two additional areas
  - Core Competencies & Understandings: Cover 12 CC&Us (as defined below; some require more than one unit in the area)
  - Big Questions: 2 units designated as Big Questions Courses

What are the CC&Us?
Core Competencies and Understandings:
- provide students with what they need to ask questions and solve problems across an array of disciplines
- provide skills for lifelong learning, competencies and understandings that students will continue to draw on throughout their lives both to “produce scholarly and creative work” and to maintain an attitude of “thoughtful inquiry” to the world around them
- build a foundation for student growth

The CC&U areas are:
- Artistic Expression (1)
- Deep Reading (1)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity (2)
- Experimental Reasoning (1)
- Change Over Time (1)
- Integrative Learning (TBD—pilot program will determine unit structure)
- Structured Reasoning (1)
- Oral Communication (1)
- Quantitative Data Literacy (1)
- Second Language Proficiency (0-4)
- Social Inquiry (1)
- Written Communication (2)

What is a Big Question Course?
Big Questions courses
- engage with pressing and enduring questions
- recognize that true education lies in learning what questions to pose and how to pose them as much as how to answer them.
- challenge thought, shake up disciplinary boundaries, and engage students to bring their diverse perspectives to bear on enduring as well as emerging issues

And may also:
- create opportunity for high impact practices such as community-based learning, faculty-mentored research, and living-learning communities.
- provide an opportunity to explore transdisciplinary questions that engage scholars, thinkers, and doers from a variety of perspectives

A “Big Question” must thus be susceptible to approach from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, must be engaged throughout the semester, and must be of enduring interest to both students and faculty.
LOGISTICS:

Could any attributes of the BQ curriculum be taken in the major?
That will be entirely up to individual departments/programs, yet the GECIC hopes that various elements
of the BQ curriculum could either count for the major or could be taken in the major. For example,
perhaps one of the CC&U writing intensive courses could come in a department’s senior seminar. Or
perhaps a CC&U class could serve as a gateway to the major (just as many of our Fields of Study classes
do now). Or perhaps a Big Question class could be another gateway to the major. Indeed, there is nothing
to prevent any of a department’s courses being designated as CC&U and/or Big Question, thus easing the
distinction between major and non-major courses if a department should so choose.

Won’t the BQ curriculum be too complicated for both student and advisor to navigate?
It will take our community time to become knowledgeable about any new general education curriculum.
While it may present some challenges early on, it will become more comfortable over time, just as our
current general education curriculum has become. And the BQ curriculum offers far more variety and
flexibility than our field-of-study curriculum, for both faculty and students.

What kinds / types of support will be available to help faculty to transition to the BQ curriculum?
The GECIC recommends that training and stipends be made available to all faculty adapting or
developing courses as we transition to the BQ curriculum. Faculty will want to revise existing courses to
adapt to the new curriculum, or create new courses to fit into the new curriculum. Faculty may need
support and training for teaching courses that include the DEI CC&U, for example, or a refresher course
on offering a writing intensive course.

What kind of oversight of the BQ curriculum would be put into place?
The GECIC recommends that there be consistent, thorough, and prudent oversight of all aspects of the
BQ curriculum. We recommend the appointment of a Director of General Education, who could then
interface with various general education committees. One of the shortcomings of our current general
education curriculum is that there is no rigorous oversight of courses, in large part because the job is one
that takes time and attention. Thus the GECIC’s recommendation to create a position, or perhaps even an
office, reporting to Academic Affairs, to provide appropriate oversight.

What will the approval process be for BQ curriculum courses?
The GECIC expects that courses approved as BQ courses will be done through the a subcommittee of the
General Education committee. This subcommittee would also be responsible for determining the BQ
course questions.

How many attributes can be in a single course?
We recommend no more than two CC&Us per course. A Big Question course may add up to two
CC&Us. FYS courses may not add CC&Us or the BQ attribute.

What is the timeline? What comes next?
The GECIC will deliver the BQ curriculum to the Faculty Senate on January 22, 2021, in a final draft
proposal. There will then be ample time for community discussion on the proposal across the remainder
of January and throughout February. The members of the GECIC will be offering fora for discussion,
meeting with stakeholders to work through CC&U learning outcomes and to receive feedback, and
meeting with faculty of A&S, Business, and Jepson. It is the GECIC’s intention that we reach as many
people as possible in order to receive feedback on the BQ curriculum model, allowing us to then refine
the model prior to submitting our final proposal to the Faculty Senate by the beginning of March. Faculty
Senate will then determine next steps as regards voting on the proposal. If the proposal passes, the GECIC will then offer the charge for the Implementation Committee.

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CORE COMPETENCIES AND UNDERSTANDINGS:

How do we define Deep Reading? DEI? Other CC&Us?
See Learning Outcomes in the appendix.

How much attention must a course give to a CC&U for the course to receive that attribute?
While this will be up to the implementation committee, the GECIC anticipates that courses receiving CC&U attribution will need to dedicate explicit instructional time to any attribute, and to build them into the learning goals for the course. In applying for CC&U attribution, an instructor/department would indicate the CC&U’s integration into the course by demonstrating its inclusion in the learning outcomes. We will provide draft implementation guidelines for all CC&U outcomes to suggest effective practices for integrating CC&Us into courses.

Will faculty be able to receive training necessary for teaching a course that addresses DEI?
Yes, this is something that the GECIC would expect to see as the BQ curriculum is brought online.

Why are there two DEI units in the CC&Us?
The GECIC is recommending two units of DEI in the CC&Us because our research into this element of a general education curriculum led us to this conclusion. An in-depth study of general education curricula with DEI included at other institutions made clear that this element should not be treated as a “one and done” course. In fact, there is doubt that a single DEI course was actually that effective. Our on-campus experts, as well as our AAC&U summer institute faculty, also concurred that DEI in general education could not be appropriately addressed in a single course. We include two units of DEI in our proposal so as to allow for scaffolded learning in this area; the student is exposed to the DEI learning outcomes not once, but twice, allowing for a deeper engagement with material and a more profound learning experience.

Why are there two writing intensive units in the CC&Us, in addition to the focus on writing in FYS?
One of the recommendations that came to the GECIC from the GECRC was to increase our students’ engagement with writing. Again, as with DEI, we hope to scaffold writing across the general education curriculum and, perhaps even beyond, if departments choose to bring one of the writing intensive CC&U units into one of their major courses, such as a senior seminar. A deliberate engagement with writing would, in that case, start in the FYS, build in another general education course, then move into the major, allowing for a writing intensive experience within the student’s chosen discipline.

Would there be an enrollment limit for writing intensive classes?
The GECIC recommends an enrollment limit of 12 for writing intensive courses, which research has shown offers optimum attention on writing within a class structure. We recommend further study of the issue, especially the impact on staffing, by the implementation committee. The FYS classes already have a 16-student limit on enrollment, and the GECIC supports that same limit going forward.

What is integrative learning? How does IL fit into the BQ curriculum?
Integrative learning is an understanding that students build across the general education curriculum, major, and/or various co-curricular programs. Students begin by making simple connections among ideas and experiences and progress by synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus. Integrative learning requires students to reflect on specific elements of their
college experience, and construct a coherent narrative that draws on carefully selected learnings and signature work.

The curriculum as structured creates many opportunities for integration, and while there is at present only a pilot program planned for formal IL instruction and assessment, most students should experience the curriculum in a more integrated way than at present. For example, the curriculum is integrated through the “doubling up” of attributes. As courses combine attributes--for example, Deep Reading with Artistic Expression; Social Inquiry with DEI; Change Over Time with DEI; QDL with Logical/Structured Analysis; QDL with Experimental Reasoning--the curricular integration starts to happen right at the level of the course, with courses that literally integrate two (or more) elements of the curriculum.

We share a proposal for an Integrative Learning Pilot Program in the Appendix of this report.

Why do we need a Structured Reasoning CC&U? Isn’t the CC&U Quantitative Data Literacy requirement the same thing? Isn’t that two Math classes in the general education curriculum?
The QDL competency is a response to the results of the GECRC’s work, which suggests that numeracy is lacking in the curriculum. This is distinct from the Structured Reasoning CC&U. The Structured Reasoning CC&U requirement introduces students to a broad field of problem-solving built on abstraction and logic. The QDL competency, however, focuses on application, providing a specific set of skills that permeates multiple areas of inquiry. Similar to how Deep Reading and Writing span several disciplines, QDL is a fundamental competency for working with quantitative data in the social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities, as well as for understanding the plethora of quantitative information we live with today.

In the BQ curriculum, we anticipate that courses that fulfill the Social Inquiry and Experimental Reasoning CC&U requirements will contribute to the QDL competency as much as, if not more than, courses aligned with Structured Reasoning.

What about AP and IB? Could a student pass out of any of the BQ curriculum using AP or IB?
In our current general education curriculum, it is possible for a student to receive credit by examination for almost any given area of the general education curriculum at the University of Richmond. CC&Us and BQs are designed to expose students to a broad variety of disciplines through a different mechanism than the traditional distribution requirement, which makes exemption from any one area less likely in the BQ curriculum than in the current curriculum.

Decisions regarding which CC&Us must be completed at UR will be one of the important charges of the implementation committee. We recommend, however, that if a student brings in credit for a course that bears multiple CC&Us, no more than a single CC&U be completed via the AP/IB exam mechanism. Departments currently determine whether they want AP or IB scores to count for any courses in their area; the GECIC is not recommending any changes to that current policy, but the CC&U subcommittee would need to review courses satisfied by AP/IB exam for CC&U credit.

BIG QUESTIONS:

Can a FYS be a BQ?
No, though a BQ may have up to two CC&U attributes.

Do the BQs have a disciplinary emphasis? Can they count towards a major requirement?
Yes, we expect that BQs will cover a wide range of academic areas and disciplines.

Must students take both their BQ courses on the same Big Question?
No, but they may. Students may choose to focus on a single question in two different courses, or they may choose to explore two different big questions. The committee recommends that the two BQs be taken in two different departments or programs.

How long would the BQ questions be in rotation?
While this is likely a question for an implementation committee, the GECIC has suggested that a BQ should be in place long enough so that a course that is newly created for the BQ portion of the curriculum can be taught multiple times over several years. Perhaps the BQ committee could rotate one or two questions every few years, thus allowing some questions to continue while others are changed.

OTHER:

Could a student fulfill aspects of the BQ curriculum while studying abroad?
Yes, though, as with AP/IB, there are likely to be few one-to-one correspondences, and courses may not carry the same CC&Us in the abroad institution that they would at UR. Close examination of syllabi and assignments will be required to determine CC&U credit at non-UR study abroad programs. Students could complete any element of the BQ curriculum in UR-based study abroad programs as long as they meet the learning outcomes.

Could any Second Language Proficiency classes also include a BQ or additional CC&U attribute?
Yes, though it will be up to the individual departments to determine whether it is pedagogically appropriate to include a second CC&U or BQ attribute in their SLP general education classes.

How will faculty request approval for courses in the BQ Curriculum?
a. We recommend that the GEC have two subcommittees devoted to overseeing gen ed attribute proposals:
   1. One subcommittee for BQ requests
   2. One subcommittee for CC&U requests

How will attributes be handled for multiple sections of courses?
For multi-section courses, such as ECON 101, all sections must carry the same CC&U(s) (if they carry that attribute). In other words, in multiple sections of a single course, those courses must all carry the same BQ Curriculum attributes when it comes to CC&Us. However, the Big Question attribute could come at the instructor level. So, ECON 101 might have the same CC&U attribute, and, (say, the Oral Communication), for all sections of that class. However, an individual faculty member teaching ECON 101 could, if she so desired, also include a Big Question for her course.

How will attributes be handled for individual courses (without multiple sections of the same course)?
A faculty member can submit for any attributes from any either area of the BQ Curriculum; once the GEC has approved the request, the faculty member would need to submit a proposal to make any changes (switching to another BQ, or CC&U, for example).

Can a FYS course have any other attributes (CC&U, BQ)?
No, it cannot. Because FYS has its own learning outcomes that include writing and oral communication, as well as information literacy, adding more learning outcomes associated with other attributes would not be pedagogically appropriate.

What about a faculty member asking to teach a CC&U when they do not have a terminal degree in that area? For SACS accreditation, faculty need to have credentials in the subject area in which they teach. CC&Us combine an emphasis on course framework, pedagogy, and (in some cases) subject matter: for those in which subject matter is central to the learning outcome, faculty will need demonstrable expertise, as they would for any other course.

Could we possibly streamline new course approvals with BQ curriculum attributes at the same time? That process now takes two different steps. This would be something for the various schools to consider.

How will transfer students fulfill the general education requirements? Transfer students are exempt from the FYS requirement. All other requirements must be fulfilled. Transfer courses may be reviewed for CC&U requirements. BQ classes must be completed at Richmond.