The Big Questions (BQ) Curriculum FAQ

OVERVIEW:

What are the elements of the BQ Curriculum?

• 1-unit first-year seminar; 0.25-unit Wellness; Second language proficiency (identical to current curriculum)
• Students will take courses to satisfy three areas
  - Areas of Inquiry: 1 unit in each of Arts, Humanities, Mathematics and Logic, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences
  - Core Competencies & Understandings: Cover 7 CC&Us (as defined below)
  - 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:

• Deep Reading (1 course)
• Diversity, Equity & Inclusivity (2 courses)
• Oral communication (1 course)
• Quantitative data literacy (1 course)
• Written communication (2 courses)

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.

What are the Foundations? Are they distributive? Are they like the FoS?

Yes, they are distributive. Foundations courses fall into two categories:
• Areas of Inquiry provide students with the methods of the traditional academic disciplines and contemporary correctives to those disciplines, in order to “to prepare students to contribute to, and succeed in, a complex, interconnected world. Definitions of the areas of inquiry will be determined by how course content connects to disciplinary conventions.

• Non-Area of Inquiry Foundations include First-Year Seminar, Wellness, and Second Language Proficiency requirements

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 Foundation 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 Foundation, 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 who would like 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 an Associate Provost or Director of General Education, who could then oversee various gen ed committees (the GEC, a new BQ committee, the FYS committee, and perhaps IL work). 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 an office within 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 a BQ course committee. This committee would also be responsible for determining the BQ course questions.
How many attributes can be in a single course?
Up to three, though one or two is probably more realistic for many courses. Attributes should be driven by the appropriate pedagogy and content area focus of the course. We recommend no more than two CC&Us per course.

What is the timeline? What comes next?
The GECIC will deliver the BQ curriculum to the Faculty Senate by the end of the fall semester. The Faculty Senate will then determine next steps.

CORE COMPETENCIES AND UNDERSTANDINGS:

How do we define Deep Reading? DEI? Other CC&Us?
See LOs on our website.

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 writing intensive and other 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 outside of the major. If a writing intensive CC&U is fulfilled within the major, it is up to the department to determine appropriate enrollment limits.

**BIG QUESTIONS:**

**Can a FYS be a BQ?**
No, though Foundation and CC&Us can be.

**Would the BQs be distributive?**
Yes, that is the thinking of the GECIC. We hope 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.

**What is integrated 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.

**FOUNDATIONS:**

**Is it possible that a student could not take any classes in the Humanities (or any broad disciplinary area) in the BQ curriculum?**
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 more unlikely in the BQ curriculum than in the current curriculum.

Why do we need a Mathematical and Logical Analysis Foundation course? 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 Mathematics and Logical Analysis area of inquiry. The Mathematics and Logical Analysis 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 Sciences and Natural Sciences areas of inquiry requirements will contribute to the QDL competency as much as, if not more than, courses aligned with Mathematics and Logical Analysis.

Why does this curriculum reduce students’ engagement in the Humanities from two courses (FSLT and FSHT) to one?
The proposed curriculum is not, like our current curriculum, built on a distributional model. Thus it is hard to make one-to-one comparisons of student engagement with any area of the curriculum in the proposed transition from the current to the new model. However, while the Areas of Inquiry do represent a reduction in the number of Humanities units required of our students, the CC&Us and BQs (as well as FYS) could, and likely will, represent a net gain in student engagement in humanistic thought and practice. Courses that engage with deep reading, intensive writing, on diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and on big questions are all likely to find homes in humanities departments and to offer humanists the opportunity to continue to provide valuable learning opportunities to students.

What about AP and IB? Could a student pass out of any of the BQ curriculum using AP or IB?
Yes, a student could pass out of certain of the Foundation areas of the BQ curriculum; however, the BQs and the CC&Us must be completed in UR-based programs (with exceptions for transfer students). 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.

OTHER:

Could a student fulfill aspects of the BQ curriculum while studying abroad?
Yes, though only Areas of Inquiry Courses could be taken in non-UR study abroad programs. Students could complete any element of the BQ curriculum in UR-based study abroad programs as long as they met the learning outcomes.
Could any Second Language Proficiency classes also include a BQ or address CC&U attributes?
Yes, though it will be up to the individual departments to determine whether it is pedagogically appropriate to include any CC&U or BQ attributes in their SLP general education classes.

We don't see any mention of creativity, the creative process, or a maker’s mindset in any part of the GECIC proposal. Will there be a creativity requirement such as the one now included in the FSVP?
The GECIC has discussed this, understanding that disciplines that now teach FSVP courses offer a creative process experience that is unique to those classes. The definition of the Art Area of Inquiry, like any other Area of Inquiry, will be constructed by the contributing departments and programs, allowing them to articulate how the creative process and the maker’s mindset will be addressed going forward.

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

b. We expect that the Foundation course criteria will come from the departments in each of the five Areas of Inquiry. The GEC could then work with that criteria in determining which classes will carry the Foundation course attribute. Departments themselves will determine which of their classes would be appropriate for the Foundation Areas of Inquiry. We emphasize that all of the departments who teach classes in any area that could fall within the five Areas of Inquiry be able to have a voice in determining the criteria for each area.

How will attributes be handled for multiple sections of courses?
For multi-section courses, such as ECON 101, all sections must carry the same Foundation Area of Inquiry (if they do carry that attribute) and/or the same CC&Us (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 Foundation Area of Inquiry and CC&Us. However, the Big Question attribute could come at the instructor level. So, ECON 101 might have the Social Science Foundation Area of Interest attribute, and, say, the Oral Communication CC&U, 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 area of the BQ Curriculum; once the GEC has approved the request (Areas of Inquiry, BQ, and/or CC&U), the faculty member would need to submit a proposal to make any changes (switching to another BQ, or CC&U, for example).

Can an FYS course have any other attributes (Area of Inquiry, 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 in one Area of Inquiry when they do not have a terminal degree in that area?
For SACS accreditation, faculty need to have credentials in the area in which they teach.

At what level will Foundation Areas of Inquiry classes be determined?
At the department level (see above).

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.