Open Forum on Curriculum Proposals
General Education Curriculum Improvement Committee

January 31, 2020
Process

Our ideas for curriculum improvement are informed by:

- Work of the GECPC and GECRC committees
- Our committee’s research on general education models and improvement paradigms
- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) general education guidelines
What are the goals of our general education curriculum?

1. Engage students in thoughtful self-reflection and exploration of their place in relation to a dynamic and diverse community.

2. Introduce students to modes of academic inquiry that lead to thoughtful, critical analysis and provide a foundation for lifelong learning.

3. Challenge students to integrate and synthesize knowledge in order to ask questions, solve problems, gain perspectives, and apply learning.
Introduction

Curricular changes should specifically address:

1. **Writing**
   • Students should have the opportunity to develop as writers.

2. **Quantitative Reasoning**
   • Students should have the opportunity to develop skills in 1) interpreting quantitative information and 2) implementing quantitative approaches to problem-solving

3. **Cohesion of the Curriculum**
   • Courses in the curriculum should connect to one another and to students’ majors. Courses should also clearly reflect UR’s mission and strategic plan.

4. **Wellness**
   • The general education curriculum should contribute positively to student well-being.
Overview of Today’s Session

We present 3 curriculum models:

**Curriculum A: Distributive model**
- required courses cover a distribution of skills

**Curriculum B: Scaffolded model**
- course timing scaffolded over 4 years

**Curriculum C: Thematic model**
- required courses connected to a single theme
Commonalities Across 3 Models

• First-year coursework dedicated to developing writing and quantitative reasoning skills

• Additional coursework that
  a. reinforces writing and quantitative reasoning skills
  b. exposes students to multiple modes of inquiry
  c. provides the core of a liberal arts education

• An opportunity for students to reflect on their education
Current Curriculum

- Wellness: 085, 086, (2) 090 courses
- Second language (COM II)
- 2 FYS courses
- Oral communication (required; not addressed in any one specific course)
- 6 Fields-of-study courses (HT, LT, NB/NC/NP, SA, SR, VP)

What we retain in our models:
- Wellness (with modification, credit-bearing)
- Second language (COM II)
- 1 semester FYS (with modification)
- Oral communication (still requires intentional development)
Statement of Intention

The skills-based distribution model provides students with what they need to ask questions and solve problems across an array of disciplines. Combined with the Sophomore Seminar, students will be able to take their place as responsible leaders in a diverse world.
Curriculum A (distributive)

Year 1
• writing FYS; quantitative FYS; wellness

Year 2
• Sophomore Seminar: Justice, Ethics, and Human Purpose (syllabus similarities)

Year 4
• Capstone/e-portfolio

Students must take courses to satisfy the following skills¹

• Symbolic reasoning
• Second Language
• Creative Expression
• Analysis of Human Civilizations

• Engaging Diverse Perspectives
• Written Competency
• Experimental Design
• Textual Interpretation

¹ A single course can satisfy multiple skills:
Curriculum B (scaffolded)

Statement of Intention

This curriculum offers students a structure within which to acquire a variety of competencies, scaffolded through the high-impact practices incorporated into their discipline-based and interdisciplinary courses. Common experiences build community and provide a foundation on which to foster later independent inquiry.
Curriculum B (scaffolded)

Year 1
• writing FYS; quantitative FYS; wellness
• Science w/lab (must be completed by end of year two)
• Identity, Diversity, and Community (Common syllabus)

Year 2
• Second language requirement
• 4 units from current FOS requirements (HT, LT, VP, SA, SR)
  → 1 must be writing intensive; 1 must be SA

Year 3
• Engagement (study abroad, internship, research, CBL, etc.)
• Reflection (.25 units, connected to engagement project)

Year 4
• .5 unit e-portfolio
Curriculum C (thematic)

Statement of Intention

This curriculum uses a combination of direct skill-building and application to relevant contemporary issues. Dedicated courses in writing and quantitative reasoning lay the foundation for analysis and continued learning, while themes create cohesion and engage students in critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as creating context for continued development of writing, quantitative reasoning, creative expression, and critical thinking.
Curriculum C (thematic)

Year 1
- writing FYS; quantitative FYS; wellness

Year 4
- Capstone/e-portfolio (linked to theme)
  - Second language
  - 5 courses in a single theme
    - At least 1 each in humanities/fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics
    - 1 must be writing intensive
    - 1 must emphasize quantitative reasoning

Possible Themes: Social Justice; Richmond and the world; Environment and Sustainability; Art, Politics, and Society; Global Health
Thank you.

We welcome your questions, comments, and feedback.

GECIC

Jennifer Cable (Music)  Kristen Ball (Registrar’s Office)
Timothy L. Hamilton (Economics)  Alec Greven (student)
Kevin M. Cherry (Political Science)  Jennifer Munnings (student)
Elisabeth Gruner (English)  Carol Parish (Associate Provost)
Adam Marquardt (Marketing)  Sydney Watts (History)
Heather M. Russell (Mathematics)
Feedback

We look forward to hearing your feedback:

https://facultysenate.richmond.edu/committees/gecic/feedback/index.html
Theory:

- designed to employ writing as a technology of thought
- focus on enhancing the ability of students to communicate effectively as a core learning goal
- use writing as a primary means to understand, explore, analyze, synthesize, interpret, and reflect on what is being taught and learned
- draw on a range of pedagogies to develop writing capacities for a variety of learners at all levels
Writing-Intensive Designation (pt. 2)

Practice:

• provide developmental instruction: from low-stakes, writing-to-learn assignments → formal essays and research papers

• require students to workshop works-in-progress, review stages of writing, and revise drafts; including rethinking, reworking, and reorganizing entire papers

• teach students to view writing as a situated practice and style as dependent upon disciplinary conventions, audience, and genre

• demand that written claims be supported with appropriate evidence; sources are used responsibly and properly cited
First-Year Quantitative Reasoning Course

1. Enhance students’ ability to **analyze quantitative information**
   - Students should improve their skills in evaluation, interpretation and analysis of numerical information. Students should have exposure to raw data, in addition to summary quantitative measures.

2. Enhance students’ ability to **communicate effectively** with quantitative information
   - Students should learn to construct meaningful arguments and draw conclusions using quantitative information. Students should also learn to develop quantitative approaches to problem-solving.

All Quantitative FY courses should address a set of **common topics**:
- Summary Statistics, Data Visualization, Correlation vs. Causation, Statistical Inference, ...
Quantitative Reasoning

Figure 1. QR within the Undergraduate Curriculum

Disciplinary Context/Real World

Math

QR

Critical Thinking
Quantitative Reasoning vs. Symbolic Reasoning

From Bates College:
“Quantitative reasoning is the application of basic mathematics and statistics to interpret data, draw conclusions, and solve real-world problems. Formal [Symbolic] reasoning involves developing, understanding, and manipulating symbols based on an explicit set of rules.”

From AACU:
“...quantitative reasoning (QR) is the application of basic mathematics skills, such as algebra, to the analysis and interpretation of real-world quantitative information... It is not just mathematics.”
Wellness: UR100

An introductory course (plus five required activities) with three primary learning objectives: Adjustment, Community, and Transformation

• Includes strong wellness components, while also introducing students in an engaging way to a Richmond education.
• Meet once a week (50 minutes, 15 weeks)
• Topics include: Liberal Arts Education; Stress and Anxiety; Sleep; D.E.I.; Sustainability

*The program’s initial frame was designed by the First-Year Experience Committee, The First-Year Experience Advisory Committee, and the academic subcommittee of the Health & Well-Being Task Force, with input from faculty, staff, and students.
Sophomore Seminar: Justice, Ethics, and Human Purpose

- Reflects UR mission statement, preparing students for “lives of purpose” in a diverse world
- Builds cohesion with a common experience for all students
- Writing-intensive → develop skills from FYS
- Textually, methodologically, and culturally diverse → complements “engaging diverse perspectives”
- Potential for connection with capstone course
Identity, Diversity, and Community

- Introduce students to an enduring question about the development of identity in a diverse world
- Focus especially on the development of diverse identities in contemporary communities, with attention to historical inequities
- Common syllabus
- Bring cohesion with a common experience for all students
- Writing-intensive
e-portfolio

- Structure that embodies the learning goals of the curriculum
- HIP
- Cohesion
- Reflection
- Meta-cognition
Example Themes

UVA Forums

• Corruption, Governance, and Institutions: Examine the caustic effects of corruption on both government and economic institutions.

• Ideals and Injustices: Consider ideals that have shaped democracies around the world and the realities of injustices that have accompanied them.

• Visions of the Good: Tackle the philosophical and practical considerations of determining what is “good” in our contemporary world.

• Religion, Politics, and Conflict: Examine one of the greatest crises of our world today: religion-related violent conflict, paying particular attention to the diverse roles played by religious actors, traditions, and institutions.
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