

PROPOSAL TO THE UNIVERSITY SENATE  
GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM  
December 2, 2008

The General Education Curriculum proposes to lay the foundation for the University of Kentucky to graduate citizens who are educated for the twenty-first century. Alongside the role that individual Colleges play in building upon and enriching these foundations of a broad and liberal education, the core curriculum will ensure that our graduates can demonstrate literacy in the various methods of inquiry to which they have unique access, as students at a research university. With this in mind, the General Education Reform Steering Committee proposes the attached set of Learning Outcomes that will serve as the guiding principles for the design of specific courses.

This proposal adheres closely to the Design Principles approved by the University Senate in March 2008 (<http://www.uky.edu/GenEd/documents/Design Prin.pdf>). It also takes into account a long history of campus conversations and national conversations, which can be found at the website [www.uky.edu/GenEd](http://www.uky.edu/GenEd). In consonance with these documents as well as campus-wide faculty input, we propose the following as central components of the new General Education curriculum:

- attention to the development of critical thinking skills across all four areas, by ensuring that the courses dedicate substantial time to explicit discussion of research methodologies, multiple avenues of inquiry and sources of information, and the complexity of reaching and supporting conclusions.
- coherence over time, through continued attention to the learning outcomes specified for each section of the General Education Curriculum.
- relevance both to the students' potential fields of specialization and to the real-world problems and decisions that students will confront as educated citizens of the twenty-first century.
- a structure that can allow for and invite interdisciplinarity, team-taught courses, and other pedagogical and disciplinary innovations, as well as the opportunity for more Colleges to participate in the delivery of General Education courses.
- a program of assessment that demonstrates students' mastery of the core competencies outlined in the Learning Outcomes.

In addition, it is recommended that the eventual templates developed for each of the ten course categories specify that the courses explicitly address the following elements of the core curriculum, which should be seen as uniting threads throughout the four areas:

- information literacy
- attention to the transition between high school and college learning
- a pedagogy that promotes active learning
- the active and creative incorporation of the university co-curriculum—the summer reading experience, invited lectures or performances, the campus art museum—as well as community-sponsored events, opportunities for engagement, international experiences, and other methods for applying skills or enlarging experience beyond the classroom setting.

Successful implementation of the core curriculum will require an infusion of new resources to foster the development of new courses by faculty across the campus. Such resources should address issues of instructional technology, course design, and effective pedagogy in courses with small or large enrollments. The Steering Committee expects that some of the courses commonly taken in the students' first year will have lower enrollment caps, or be offered in the format of Discovery Seminars, in order to address more explicitly the transition between high school and college and to provide an introduction to the nature of a research university. The success of the proposed General Education curriculum, in enriching the undergraduate educational experience and improving retention in the early years of coursework, is contingent upon a support structure that includes the infusion of such resources.

The General Education Reform Steering Committee also recommends that an effective and efficient structure be created for the review and approval of courses for the core curriculum. The new structure, within the Undergraduate Studies division, would involve three phases:

- The creation of faculty-driven curricular teams for each of the course divisions, each of which would create a clear and usable template outlining the elements that a course must include in order to qualify as a part of the General Education curriculum. These teams would be composed both of specialists and non-specialists in the corresponding discipline, in order to ensure balance between rigorous disciplinary content and the central learning outcomes of the General Education curriculum. Some courses as currently taught might fit the template, others would fit with some modification, and some new courses would be created, in order to establish the body of courses from which students would select in fulfillment of the General Education curriculum.
- An expedited and simplified process for course approval. The General Education Reform Steering Committee recommends that syllabi for General Education courses be reviewed on a biennial basis, in order to prevent the erosion of the learning outcomes that can happen as a result of faculty and staff attrition and turnover. In particular during the implementation phase of the new core curriculum, the University Senate and the Undergraduate Studies division should work closely together in order to avoid duplication of process.
- Assessment. The learning outcomes of the General Education curriculum should be assessed at both the course and the program level, in order to demonstrate that the students have gained the skills and knowledge targeted in those objectives.

***I. Students will demonstrate an understanding of and ability to employ the processes of intellectual inquiry. [12 credit hours]***

Outcomes and Assessment Framework

Students will be able to identify multiple dimensions of a good question;<sup>1</sup> determine when additional information is needed, find credible information efficiently using a variety of reference sources, and judge the quality of information as informed by rigorously developed evidence; explore multiple and complex answers to questions/issues/problems within and across the four broad knowledge areas: arts and creativity, humanities, social and behavioral sciences, and natural/ physical/mathematical sciences; evaluate theses and conclusions in light of credible evidence; explore the ethical implications of differing approaches, methodologies or conclusions; and develop potential solutions to problems based on sound evidence and reasoning.

Curricular Framework

Students will take four 3-credit courses, one in each of the four broad knowledge areas defined above.

***II. Students will demonstrate competent written, oral, and visual communication skills both as producers and consumers of information. [6 credit hours]***

Outcomes and Assessment Framework

Students will demonstrate the ability to construct intelligible messages using sound evidence and reasoning that are appropriate for different rhetorical situations (audiences and purposes) and deliver those messages effectively in written, oral, and visual form. Students will also demonstrate the ability to competently critique (analyze, interpret, and evaluate) written, oral, and visual messages conveyed in a variety of communication contexts.

Curricular Framework

Students will take one 3-hour course focusing on the development of effective writing skills, and one 3-hour integrated communications course focusing on oral and visual communication skills, along with continued development of written communication skills.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., interesting, analytical, problematic, complex, important, genuine, researchable...

<sup>2</sup> This proposal assumes the continuation of the Graduation Writing Requirement currently in place.

**III. Students will demonstrate an understanding of and ability to employ methods of quantitative reasoning. [6 credit hours]**

Outcomes and Assessment Framework

Students will (a) demonstrate how fundamental elements of mathematical, logical, and statistical knowledge are applied to solve real-world problems; and (b) explain the sense in which an important source of uncertainty in many everyday decisions is addressed by statistical science, and appraise the efficacy of statistical arguments that are reported for general consumption.

Curricular Framework

Students will take one 3-hour course on the application of mathematical, logical, and statistical methods, and one 3-hour course devoted to a conceptual and practical understanding of statistical inferential reasoning.

**IV. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the complexities of citizenship and the process for making informed choices as engaged citizens in a diverse, multilingual<sup>3</sup> world. [6 credit hours]**

Outcomes and Assessment Framework

Students will recognize historical and cultural differences arising from issues such as ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, race, religion, sexuality, and socioeconomic class; students will demonstrate a basic understanding of how these differences influence issues of social justice, both within the U.S. and globally; students will recognize and evaluate the ethical dilemmas, conflicts, and trade-offs involved in personal and collective decision making.

Curricular Framework

Students will take two courses, each with a topical or regional focus. The first course will include critical analysis of diversity issues as they relate to the contemporary United States. The second will be a non-US based course that includes critical analysis of local-to-global dynamics as they relate to the contemporary world. In addition, each course must address at least 2 of these 4 topics: societal and institutional change over time; civic engagement; cross-national/comparative issues; power and resistance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Current University of Kentucky entrance requirements include 2 years of second-language study in high school; this knowledge requirement should be assessed upon students' entrance to the University, as a prerequisite for the fulfillment of Learning Outcome IV.

<sup>4</sup> This proposal recognizes also that such issues will be addressed throughout the students' course of study, building effectively upon the foundation of the General Education core curriculum.