

**Design Principles of a
Revised General Education Curriculum for the
University of Kentucky
February 14, 2008**
[For consideration by the University Senate]

The foundational essence of general education will emphasize learning experiences that produce understanding of the process of inquiry and help students develop critical thinking skills.

We should intentionally set knowing how to learn and think as an essential goal of a general education program. At its best, general education establishes a foundation for critical and thoughtful approaches to solving problems and strengthens intellectual development. In the context of disciplinary problems and issues, the intended outcome of general education is the development of evidence-based thinkers; students capable of understanding what critical argument demands and what it offers as a way of understanding ourselves, others, and the world around us.

2. *The general education foundation curriculum will consist of no more than the equivalent of thirty credit hours of course work.*

Foundational courses will need to meet, as an essential goal, the appropriate learning outcomes of the revised general education curriculum. As a result, it is expected that there would be fewer opportunities for “double-counting” courses to satisfy both general education and pre-major disciplinary requirements. Therefore, the reduction in the required number of general education credit hours (compared to 40 credit hours in the current USP) will provide more opportunity for degree programs to tailor prerequisites.

3. *A revised curriculum will intentionally identify and strengthen the connections between the general education foundation curriculum and the student’s major field of study.*

The recent change in the writing program, which calls for development of writing-intensive courses within majors, underscores the value of linking the experience of the major with general education foundation. Similarly, it is expected that some general education goals will be achieved and reinforced by incorporating them into the course of study in the major and through program electives. The reduction in the number of required credit hours in the proposed general education foundation curriculum allows for, and mandates further strengthening of the interconnections.

4. *A revised general education foundation curriculum will be designed to smooth students’ transition from high school to a research university, and to establish the foundations for advanced college-level learning.*

A first-year curriculum should provide students a set of integrated learning experiences that facilitate the successful transition to UK by highlighting the academic strengths of a research university and acculturating undergraduates to rigorous intellectual inquiry. The first-year curriculum will be anchored by courses that (1) ask students to explore the nature of intellectual inquiry within established, broad knowledge areas; (2) bring students in contact with faculty, advanced graduate students and others who are engaged in the core activities of a research university; and (3) provide a common experience for all first-year students premised on intellectual engagement, addressing forthrightly issues attendant to the transition from high school to college.

5. *A revised general education curriculum will pay explicit attention to developing students' communication skills and quantitative reasoning abilities.*

University students need to develop effective communication skills - written, oral, and visual. As with the recent change in USP, which incorporates writing-intensive courses in the majors as a second-tier writing requirement, a similar approach, employing strategies across the curriculum, should be adopted to foster the development of students' oral and visual communication skills.

In the context of general education, quantitative reasoning is an interpretive activity, employing mathematical and statistical methods to analyze, evaluate and draw conclusions. We need to delineate the mathematical prerequisites for various disciplinary majors from the optimal quantitative reasoning ability desirable for effective participation in a technological world.

Information literacy, in particular the ability to search, sort through, validate, and make sense of ever expanding, electronically available data resources is fundamental to both effective communication and quantitative reasoning.

6. *The general education curriculum will lay the foundation for effective citizenship in our pluralistic society which is increasingly interconnected with a multilingual, global community.*

We must help our students understand the contours of the society in which they will live and work as productive citizens. More so than earlier generations, they will encounter at home and abroad, people who speak other languages, practice other religions, and differ in other ways. The demands of productive citizenship require students to understand cultural competency and the value of human diversity. As a tool for social success, it is important that our graduates appreciate the role that culture plays in influencing individual behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. Appropriate courses will adopt multidisciplinary perspectives and include both historical and contemporary analysis of institutions and social organizations, of nation-states and transnational affairs.

Furthermore our students must be introduced to the life of the mind as it informs moral decision-making, ethical conduct and personal responsibility. Our task should be to help prepare them to deal effectively with situations of great complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability. Life does not always present itself as a problem to be *solved*; it often appears as a dilemma that must be *resolved*. In these situations, knowledge alone is inadequate. A graduate who has had little experience in thinking about moral dilemmas as a student is ill-prepared for the world she or he will inhabit.

7. *The curriculum will specify learning outcomes and the processes for the systematic assessment of those learning outcomes, and ongoing curricular improvement.*

We must clearly define what our students should master across the cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal dimensions of learning and fashion an effective assessment strategy to ensure our curriculum accomplishes the intended learning outcomes. This imperative of curriculum development is no less true for general education than for a program of study in an academic major (many of which are dictated by external accreditation requirements). It is the faculty's responsibility to define and assess the learning outcomes of the general education program—both for the individual courses that constitute the curriculum, and for the program as a whole.