

October 30, 2009

Dear Campus Community,

The report below is a work in progress. The two models represent our best current judgment about a general education curriculum after eight months of committee meetings and two months of open forums, as well as discussions with student government associations and with the faculties of various schools. The purpose of the models is to sharpen debate and identify specific issues of concern. We therefore expect the models to evolve during the next month of further open hearings, meetings and presentations before reaching their final forms in a proposal we expect to present to University faculty for approval on December 10.

Respectfully submitted,  
General Education Revision Committee of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Curriculum

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### **General Education Revision Committee Progress Report**

According to a report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), the "core values" of liberal education include, "expanding horizons, building understanding of the wider world, honing analytical and communication skills, and fostering responsibilities beyond self." However, the Council takes issue with the notion that liberal education can only take place within the arts and sciences and that it must be "nonvocational" by definition (National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), 2007:3)

A recent survey of chief academic officers representing member institutions of the Association of American Colleges and Universities found the following percentages indicating that their institutions' general education programs addressed specific areas of knowledge and/or intellectual skills/abilities (Hart Research Associates, 2009).

<b>Areas of Knowledge</b>	<b>Intellectual Skills/Abilities</b>
Humanities - 72%	Writing Skills - 77%
Science - 71%	Critical Thinking - 74%
Social Sciences - 70%	Quantitative Reasoning - 71%
Global/World Cultures - 68%	Oral Communication - 69%
Mathematics - 68%	Intercultural Skills - 62%
Diversity in U. S. - 57%	Information Literacy - 59%
Technology - 48%	Ethical Reasoning - 59%
U. S. History - 39%	Civic Engagement - 53%
Languages - 33%	Application of Learning - 52%
Sustainability - 18%	Research Skills - 51%
	Integration of Learning - 49%

The University's accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), requires a minimum of 30 semester hours in general education, which translates to a minimum of 8.75 units at Richmond. In addition, SACS indicates that general education must ensure breadth of knowledge, be based on a coherent rationale, and include at least one course from each of the following areas:

- Humanities/Fine Arts
- Social/Behavioral Sciences
- Natural Science/Mathematics

From a more local perspective, Principle I of the Richmond Promise states that, "the University will have an academic enterprise that will be connected, innovative, rigorous and personal" and "seek[s] to ensure that our students appreciate different modes of inquiry, engage in lifelong learning, and communicate effectively both orally and in writing." In addition, Principle I highlights the importance of helping students develop "skills in critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, intercultural effectiveness and ethical decision-making. With respect to the general education curriculum specifically, Principle I.1.(vi) indicates that it should be revised "to include attention to our local and international contexts" and Principle I.1.(vii) states that the University should "create greater opportunities for community engagement linked to academic coursework."

In May 2009, the University faculty approved the first piece of a revised general education curriculum by establishing a requirement that all students complete two first year seminars, all of which will adhere to a set of common goals:

1. Expand and deepen students' understanding of the world and of themselves.
2. Enhance their ability to read and think critically.
3. Enhance their ability to communicate effectively, in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms.
4. Develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research.
5. Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor.

Although the above goals are in keeping with LEAP's core values of a liberal education, it should be emphasized that the first year seminars (FYS) are merely the starting point or the beginning level foundation for the development of these core values. The General Education Revision Committee recommends that the remainder of the general education curriculum continues to build upon these goals by assisting students in further developing and refining the competencies listed in goals 2, 3, and 4, as well as providing additional opportunities for them to increase their understanding of the world and of themselves as they continue to work closely with a variety of faculty mentors.

**To this end, both of the models we are proposing for discussion recommend that general education consist of requirements in certain fields or areas of study as well as a set of competency requirements cutting across these areas or fields.**

If neither of our two models (or variations thereof) is approved by the University faculty, the present system of general education requirements, including the two-semester of FYS (replacing CORE, English 103 and Library 100-101) will continue.

### **Present Model of General Education**

Fields of Study (one unit each)	Competencies	
	Writing	Second Language
Historical Studies (FSHS)		
Literary Studies (FSLT)		
Natural Science (FSNS)		
Social Analysis (FSSA)		
Symbolic Reasoning (FSSR)		
Visual and Performing Arts (FSVP)		
<i>Minimum Units</i>	2*	0-4

\*fulfilled by FYS

### Alternative Model A

Model A expands on the present general education requirements by adding competencies in some of the areas delineated in Principle I of the Richmond Promise. Competencies other than second language could be completed by means of courses fulfilling more than one requirement; e. g., the oral communication competency could be fulfilled by an FSHS course that incorporates a significant oral component or by a course taken for one's major that incorporates a significant oral component.

**The Committee, however, recommends that no more than two competencies may be fulfilled by any one FOS course or course within one's major.**

The model also:

- Focuses primarily on skills and competencies while retaining the same breadth as the current field of studies model.
- Permits general education to be accomplished over the course of a student's academic career as opposed to being confined to lower-level courses taken during the first two years of study.
- Views general education as developmental with an explicit emphasis on building upon skills and competencies introduced during the first year seminars.

#### *Rationale for Changes*

1. **Diversity/Global awareness** is a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of socio-cultural contexts. Attention to international contexts is an important component of general education specified in our committee's charge as indicated in Principle I of the Richmond Promise. Besides being satisfied by means of a significant cross-cultural component within a course, the competency could also be fulfilled by a second language course beyond the intermediate level, an approved study abroad program for credit or by a one-unit accumulation of Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC) courses.
2. **Ethical decision-making** is the ability to assess one's own ethical values, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical problems and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. An ethical decision-making competency is included as a response to one of the overall goals of a University of Richmond education as stated in Principle I of the Richmond Promise. Besides being satisfied by means of a significant component within a variety of courses, the competency could be fulfilled by a specific course in ethics per se.
3. **Civic engagement** is a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that support working to make a difference in communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skill, values and motivation to make that difference. Incorporating a civic engagement competency is a response to that portion of Principle I that calls for the University to "create greater opportunities for community engagement linked to academic coursework." The competency could be fulfilled by any course with a significant civic

engagement component.

4. **Written communication** is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum. Two semesters of intensive writing in FYS provide, at best, an introduction to writing at the college level. A third component taken after the first year would supply further development in a different context and at a more advanced level.
5. **Oral communication** is a prepared, purposeful presentation designed to increase knowledge, to foster understanding, or to promote change in the listeners' attitudes, values, beliefs, or behaviors. Oral competency is an important component of general education cited in the Richmond Promise but one that is not formally required in the present curriculum. The competency could also be satisfied by a one-unit accumulation of participation in Debate or Mock Trial.
6. **Quantitative reasoning** allows for a broadening of FSSR to include, in particular, courses in statistics that meet the spirit of the current FSSR requirement. Specifically, these courses should, using one or more symbolic systems, help students develop skills in translating new problems into terms appropriate for such systems and in carrying a solution method through to completion. Application of problem-solving tools/software, while a welcome addition, should not be the primary objective of the course.
7. The present **second language** requirement of 0-4 units represents, for the roughly 35% of students who enter the University with less than intermediate placement, a disproportionate share of the general education and the overall graduation requirements. The Committee has heard arguments on both sides of this issue but wishes to encourage further debate among a larger segment of the faculty before making a final recommendation.
8. **Fields of Study (FOS)**. Retaining FOS in a revision of general education has the advantages of familiarity and practicality. A great deal of faculty effort has been expended since the implementation of FOS in 1992 to refine, redefine and assess such courses. **Nevertheless, if retained, our committee recommends that present FOS criteria undergo comprehensive review and revision in order to allow FOS requirements to be fulfilled through a broader range of courses in A&S departments and in the Schools of Business and Leadership Studies.**

### Model A

Fields of Study (One unit each)	Competencies						
	Diversity/ Global Awareness	Ethical Decision- making	Civic Engagement	Written Communi- cation	Oral Communication	Second Language	Minimum Units
Historical Studies (FSHS)							1
Literary Studies (FSLT)							1
Natural Science (FSNS)							1
Social Analysis (FSSA)							1
Symbolic and Quantitative Reasoning (FSSR)							1
Visual and Performing Arts (FSVP)							1
<i>Minimum Units</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3*</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0-4(?)</i>	

\*2 units fulfilled by FYS

### Alternative Model B

Model B is a variation of Model A, with the addition of a competency in technological/information literacy and with Fields of Study (FOS) being replaced with requirements that students take two units in each of the following Areas of Study (AOS):

- **Humanities and Fine Arts** focus on the cultural products of human beings, including languages and literatures, the arts, history, and attempts to address fundamental questions pertaining to the manner in which meanings are constructed and connected to human experience.
- **Natural and Mathematical Sciences** focus on the systematic study of the physical world and its phenomena, the science of numbers, quantities and space, and the frameworks for understanding the scientific and mathematical foundations of technology.
- **Social and Behavioral Sciences** focus on the systematic study of human behavior in its social and cultural aspects, including patterns of human behavior within or across various societies and cultures.

The model also:

- Focuses primarily on skills and competencies while retaining some degree of breadth.
- Permits general education to be accomplished over the course of a student's academic career as opposed to being confined to lower level courses taken during the first two years of study.
- Views general education as developmental with an explicit emphasis on building upon skills and competencies introduced during the first year seminars.

### *Rationale for Changes*

1. **Areas of Study** reduce the need for specially designed general education courses, since courses within various majors and schools can potentially fulfill AOS as well as areas of competency. AOS also provide greater flexibility to allow interdisciplinary courses and cross-school courses to fulfill both types of requirements. Although requiring two courses in each area exceeds SACS' minimum requirements, it is important to provide students with more than one course experience in such broad areas. In order to offer students greater flexibility, courses that fulfill these requirements may be taken in any department, interdisciplinary program or school that offers a course whose focus is consistent with the subject matter focus within one of the three areas. However, the faculty may wish to limit the number of courses students may take within any given subject to one; e.g., students could not take two courses in History (HIST) to fulfill the Humanities and Fine Arts area.
2. **Information literacy** is the ability to know when there is a need for information, and to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand. **Technological literacy** is the ability to know how to apply an appropriate type of technology to solve a problem or to process or share information and to effectively and responsibly use that technology. Competency in technological/information literacy, while not specified in our committee's charge, is becoming increasingly important in every aspect of life. Although certain computer science courses might satisfy this requirement, a technology component would focus more generally on the employment or impact of technology in disciplines outside computer science.

### **Model B**

Areas of Study (2 units each)	Competencies							Minimum Units
	Written Communication	Oral Communication	Second Language	Civic Engagement	Technological /Information Literacy	Diversity/ Global Awareness	Ethical Decision-making	
Humanities and Fine Arts								2
Natural and Mathematical Sciences								2
Social and Behavioral Science								2
<i>Minimum Units</i>	3*	1	0-4(?)	1	1	1	1	

\*2 units fulfilled by FYS

## Impact of the Alternative Models on the Number of Units Required for General Education

In both models, a student who managed to combine the Fields of Study/Areas of Study and the areas of competency with the greatest degree of efficiency, and who placed out of taking a second language, would be able to complete the general education requirement by completing **eight units**—two units of FYS plus six units of FOS/AOS. On the other hand, a student required to take four units of a second language who could not find any courses that fulfilled both FOS/AOS and at least one area of competency (which would be highly unlikely) would be required to complete a maximum of **seventeen** (Model A) or **eighteen units** (Model B) of general education.

### Suggestions for Implementation

- All undergraduate programs in the Schools of Arts and Sciences, Business and Leadership Studies would submit potential general education courses to the General Education Committee for review. Programs would specify which FOS (Model A) or AOS (Model B) any given course would fulfill as well as any competency or competencies each course would fulfill. The General Education Committee would be charged with reviewing proposed courses to ensure that a consistent set of criteria would be applied when designating a course as fulfilling a particular FOS or AOS and/or competency requirement. The Committee would bring recommendations for approval of all general education courses to the University faculty.
- After the final version of the revised general education curriculum is approved by the University faculty, the Committee on Committees should be asked to review the charge and composition of the General Education Committee and to recommend to the University faculty any appropriate revisions to both of those matters.
- The revised general education curriculum, if approved, would go into effect in Fall 2011.

### References

Hart Research Associates. 2009. *Trends and Emerging Practices in General Education*. Washington, D.C: The Association of American Colleges and Universities. Retrieved October 24, 2009 ([http://www.aacu.org/membership/documents/2009MemberSurvey\\_Part2.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/membership/documents/2009MemberSurvey_Part2.pdf))

National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). 2007. *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington, D.C: The Association of American Colleges and Universities.