

General Education Task force Recommendation
Framework for new VCU General Education Curriculum
Full Committee Report--DRAFT

Charge from the Provost:

In January 2016, the General Education Task Force (GETF) was charged by the Provost with developing a general education curriculum comprised of 30 credit hours, all of which are portable across all undergraduate majors in the university. This new GenEd30 curriculum is to be governed by a coherent rationale as required by SACSCOC and all units responsible for undergraduate education at VCU may participate. Additionally, we were asked to develop processes for implementing and managing the new GenEd30 curriculum. Assessment matters, or the development of student learning outcomes, were considered out of scope for the GETF.

Co-chairs of the GETF include:

- Jennifer A. Johnson, Associate Professor in Sociology, College of Humanities & Sciences
- Faye Prichard, Director of Writing, Assessment, and Evaluation, Honors College

Members of the GEFT include:

- Alen Docef, Associate Professor, School of Engineering
- Allison K. Ryals, Assistant Professor in Teaching, School of Social Work
- Daniel P. Salandro, Associate Professor, School of Business
- Genevieve Beard, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing
- Jeffrey S. Legg, Associate Professor, School of Allied Health Professions
- Joan M. Pellegrini, Associate Professor, School of Dentistry¹
- Nicholas R. Garcia II, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs (*previous representative: John Mahoney, Associate Professor*)
- Angela Reynolds, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics, CHS (*previous representative: Joy Whitenack, Associate Professor*)
- Shelli Fowler, Interim Dean for University College (*previous representative: Kristin Reed, Associate Professor*)
- Leigh Ann Craig, Associate Professor, Department of History, CHS
- Mikhail J. Valdman, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, CHS
- Robert H. Gowdy, Associate Professor, Department of Physics, CHS
- Sara Wilson McKay, Associate Professor, School of the Arts

Ex-officio member of GETF is Linda S. Birtley, Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation, Office of the Provost.

¹ Due to scheduling conflicts, Joan Pellegrini was not able to make any meetings. She remained on the email listserve and was kept abreast of all decisions.

Preamble:

The GenEd30 curriculum model set forth in this document is governed by a set of shared commitments:

1. *Commitment to faculty governance:* As echoed by the Provost during the initial charge to the committee, the members of the GETF firmly believe the study, development and improvement of the general education program is primarily within the purview of the faculty. This proposed GenEd30 model entrusts the faculty and departments with decisions on how to participate in VCU GenEd30 as well as with the ongoing management of the curriculum.
2. *Commitment to the mission and aspirations of VCU:* As required by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges ([SACSCOC](#)), all general education curricula must be grounded in a 'coherent rationale' which outlines the guiding principles governing the curriculum. In order to align the GenEd30 curriculum with the mission and aspirations of VCU, we grounded our coherent rationale in the values espoused in [VCU Quest for Distinction](#). Specifically, we emphasized VCU's deep commitment to rigorous intellectual inquiry via interdisciplinarity and creativity in a diverse, inclusive, global community.
3. *Commitment to interdisciplinary problem solving via disciplinary thinking:* Members of the committee were committed to building an interdisciplinary approach to general education that reveals the complexity of inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting while at the same time respecting and advancing the value of disciplinary thinking. We resisted using a disciplinary model for organizing general education. Instead, guided by our coherent rationale, we organized the VCU GenEd30 into five *areas of inquiry*, all of which are open to any discipline or unit. In other words, these areas of inquiry are designed to make general education 'real' at VCU by illustrating how different disciplinary thinking can be brought to bear on shared questions, complex problems and global challenges.
4. *Commitment to transparent, sustainable and shared processes:* In designing the recommended processes for both the GenEd30 model and its implementation and management, members of the GETF committee are committed to transparent processes that empower faculty across the university to manage, sustain and improve the GenEd30 curriculum. We envision GenEd30 to be a 'living' model such that it is flexible enough to grow and change with the university while retaining the essential coherent rationale.

Background

SACSCOC is the governing body which sets forth curriculum requirements for a university's general education curriculum. [Core Requirement 2.7.3](#) states that a general education curriculum consists of a minimum of 30 semester credit hours drawn from and including at least one course from each of the following areas: social/behavioral sciences, natural science/mathematics *and* humanities/fine arts. In this requirement, SACSCOC advises that

general education courses should not “narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, or procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession”.

In the past 20 years, VCU has had two General Education models. The first, operating prior to 2006, was a typical discipline-based model which included numerous courses in several discipline based categories from which a student could select. This model was bloated and so diffuse as to no longer constitute a coherent general education curriculum. In 2006, under the leadership of Dr. Joe Marolla, the general education curriculum was revised to include a core curriculum and three tiers of requirements. The number of courses included in the core was scaled back significantly and required 21 specific credits, with nine credits in Tier II to be completed in the major, at the discretion of each unit, for a required total of 30 credit hours. While this new model created a concise set of courses, it also created a portability problem where students who changed majors across schools lost general education credit due to the different ways in which units resolved the ‘dangling’ nine problem. This model, particularly the issue of the “dangling nine” was confusing and so limiting as to not constitute a coherent general education curriculum.

In 2016, the General Education Task Force was charged with once again updating the VCU general education curriculum to ensure it had a strong, coherent rationale which organized 30 credit hours into a portable set of requirements. The GETF was comprised primarily of faculty across the university representing a broad spectrum of interests and disciplines. From January 2016 to June 2017, the committee developed the model outlined below. In October 2017, the co-chairs presented the model to the Provost’s office for review. Beginning in November 2017, the committee will vet the model with the faculty for input which will be considered for the final draft anticipated in February 2018.

Overview of GenEd30 Curriculum Model

As required by the SACSCOC, the GenEd30 model is grounded in a coherent rationale which states:

VCU General Education Coherent Rationale:

VCU’s General Education Program seeks to provide a diverse student body with a broad base of knowledge and the intellectual skills to participate actively in a changing world. To those ends, the VCU General Education Program challenges students to seek creative answers to complex problems, see connections between disciplines and between ideas, and develop an informed perspective on the varieties of human experience.

This coherent rationale defines *Areas of Inquiry* which are the organizational structure for the GenEd30 model. These areas of inquiry include *Foundations of Learning; Diversities in the Human Experience; Creativity, Innovation, and Aesthetic Inquiry; Global Perspectives; and Scientific & Logical Reasoning*. Each area of inquiry is operationalized by a set of course

objectives which define the types of questions, theories or modes of inquiry appropriate for that particular area (see below for details). While all areas of inquiry lend themselves to some disciplines more than others, no area of inquiry is discipline based. All disciplines and/or units may contribute a course to any or all areas. These areas are intentionally multidisciplinary, encouraging students to approach issues from a variety of perspectives and encouraging faculty to share their expertise across disciplinary boundaries. They are drawn broadly so units can design courses that are traditional in their role in general education but also encourage units to stretch beyond tradition to innovate new ways of connecting ideas. The goal of this model is to illustrate how questions about the world transcend disciplinary boundaries while exposing students to the myriad of disciplined ways in which those questions can be asked. We want students to have a breadth of knowledge while at the same time allowing for some depth of inquiry. To these ends, the model operates under the following parameters:

- Students complete up to 12 credits in the *Foundations of Learning* courses (UNIV and MATH/STAT courses). Students must complete the UNIV sequence & MATH/STAT requirement unless they have approved exceptions.
- Students complete 18+ credits from the remaining four *Areas of Inquiry* by:
 - Selecting at least one course from each area for a total of 12 credits;
 - Selecting the remaining two+ courses from any area for a total of six credits;
 - Of the six courses taken across the areas of inquiry, three must meet the SACS requirements of one natural science, one social/behavioral science and one humanities/fine arts course.
- Initially, units, as defined by the course rubric codes, e.g. SOCY, BUSN, MASC, should be encouraged to contribute up to two courses across the substantive areas of inquiry, not including Foundations of Learning. The UNIV 111, 112 & 200 sequence is an exception. See Responsive Controls for further suggestions.
- Only GenEd30 courses may function as pre/co-reqs for other GenEd30 courses.
- All GenEd30 courses must be open to all students across the university with no restrictions on what majors can take the course.

We recommend a standing Gen Ed committee be created at the Provost's level to manage the process for approving new courses and to ensure the continued integrity and viability of General Education at VCU.

VCU General Education Curriculum Model:

Foundations of Learning (up to 12 credits)

Courses in this area provide the student with the core competency skills necessary for academic success across all disciplines:

- UNIV 111, UNIV 112, & UNIV 200 or HONR 200
- MATH 131* or higher OR STAT 208 or higher

*Portability problem = School of the Arts uses MATH 121 as general ed math.

Diversities in the Human Experience (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Examine modes of inquiry used in the study of social institutions, patterns of culture, and human behavior;
2. Understand and evaluate patterns and processes affecting social organization and distributions of power and resources;
3. Investigate the relationship between the individual and society through a diverse range of voices;
4. Explore varieties of human psychology or development;
5. Compare theories about human society, culture, and behavior;
6. Examine patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and other forms of social grouping;
7. Consider the ethical implications inherent in the study of the human experience.

Creativity, Innovation, and Aesthetic Inquiry (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Examine the circumstances and choices that influence the production of creative work;
2. Investigate, establish, and/or apply criteria used to evaluate creative work;
3. Attend and/or participate in creative activities and explore their relevance;
4. Analyze how creative work reflects, responds to, and shapes various contexts;
5. Consider the role of imagination in confronting and expressing the human condition;
6. Encounter ambiguity and diverse interpretations as aspects of aesthetic inquiry;
7. Consider the ethical implications in production, consumption, and access to creative works.

Global Perspectives (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Encounter, comprehend, and appreciate cultures and contexts outside the U.S.;
2. Develop an understanding of how the world is organized and interconnected;
3. Interpret regionally specific social, political, and/or economic issues within the larger global context;
4. Recognize how knowledge is constructed differently in various communities;
5. Consider alternate viewpoints among disciplines, cultures and groups;
6. Explore the complexities of cross-cultural communication and problem-solving;
7. Consider their ethical responsibilities as local and global actors.

Scientific & Logical Reasoning (3-9 credits)

Courses in this area encourage students to:

1. Explore how logical and empirical methods can be used to form and revise beliefs;
2. Apply methods of logical and empirical reasoning to their own beliefs;
3. See relations between ideas;
4. Use and connect scientific concepts to describe the world, formulate questions, and solve problems;
5. Consider and compare different applications of evidence-based reasoning;
6. Model phenomena in a variety of ways such as through mathematics or the use of computer programs or physical representations;
7. Consider the ethical implications of scientific inquiry.

The current General Education Task Force has been hard at work on this version of the General Education requirements for VCU for well over a year. We greatly appreciate the patience and support of the Office of the Provost and look forward to their feedback as well as that of the full faculty as we present the GenEd30 model publicly in the fall of 2017.

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Standing GenEd30 Committee Representation Recommendation

The General Education Task Force recommends that the standing GenEd30 committee be comprised of the following voting members:

- A. Four faculty representatives from the CHS, representing Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, and Mathematical Sciences, respectively.
- B. Two faculty representatives from UC.
- C. One faculty representative from the Honors College.
- D. One faculty representative from VCU Health Sciences.
- E. One faculty representative from the School of Education.
- F. One faculty representative from the School of Engineering.
- G. One faculty representative from the Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs.
- H. One faculty representative from the School of Business.
- I. One faculty representative from Life Sciences.
- J. One faculty representative from the School of the Arts.
- K. One faculty representative from Social Work.

This representation is intended to be reflective both of the size of units and their participation in general education curricula. The committee is empowered to alter the balance of this representation by their own vote as needed in the future. Voting members shall be chosen by and serve at the pleasure of the deans of their units.

The committee shall also include the following non-voting members, in a consultative capacity:

- A. One representative from University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UUC).
- B. One representative from Assessment Council.
- C. One representative from University Academic Advising Board.
- D. One representative from the Office of Transfer.
- E. A representative from the Degree Audit Office.
- F. A student representative, selected by the Student Government Association.

The Committee shall be chaired by a representative from the Provost's office, and shall serve at the pleasure of the provost. The Chair of the committee shall be a non-voting member.

One voting member of the standing GenEd30 committee shall serve as a nonvoting delegate to UUC.

RESPONSIVE CONTROLS FOR GenEd30

The committee charged with maintaining the General Education Curriculum must ensure that students have a list of courses that maintain a balance across disciplines. The General Education Task Force suggests an initial limitation of two courses from each unit, as defined by the course rubric code, e.g. SOCY, to be included in the four areas of inquiry.² We recognize this as a starting point to allow for responsible vetting of new courses under the GenEd30 framework and to allow space for units new to general education to develop course contributions. We recommend that the new standing committee evaluate new courses and adjust the aforementioned limits by reference to the following questions:

- (1) How many total new general education courses should be approved in any given year?
- (2) How many new general education courses should be approved in any given year from any particular department?
- (3) How many courses total should be in the current GenEd30 list?
- (4) How many courses should be in each GenEd30 area of inquiry?
- (5) Should there be any limit on course capacity?
- (6) How should interdisciplinary courses be counted in the overall GenEd30?

Here are some general considerations that could give rise to controls:

1. The areas of inquiry are designed to emphasize interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to common disciplinary questions. Therefore, the committee should strive to maintain disciplinary balance; no theme should be dominated by a single department.
2. However, the areas of inquiry should also maintain the integrity of disciplinary ways of knowing and seeing the world. Therefore, the committee should consult with the department when considering courses that bridge disciplines to ensure courses are taught by appropriate subject matter experts in the field.
3. The greater a department's representation in the general education curricula, the more reluctant the committee should be to grant that department new courses or to grant it more or larger sections of an existing course.
4. Each department should be encouraged to have at least one general education course.

² Foundations of Learning area is not included in responsive controls.