

Revised General Education Curriculum: Draft Proposal

I. Introduction and Background

The following draft Revised General Education Curriculum (RGEC) represents a *realignment* of the current curriculum, as distinct from a wholesale razing and rebuilding. To be sure, new courses will need to be developed, and courses whose goals and pedagogies no longer suffice to serve the needs of 21st-century learners may find themselves offered less frequently or revised accordingly. But, over all, a refocusing of already existing courses on a narrower range of broader goals and outcomes and the emphasis on collaborative, discussion-oriented, problem-based and experiential pedagogies in small classes are all that are required for many courses currently offered as part of the Drake Curriculum (DC) to find a home in the new curriculum.

The RGEC takes as its starting point structural and pedagogical principles developed throughout the Lumina Foundations Degree Qualifications Profile, including:

- Integrative Learning, in which approaches, methods, ways of knowing, and objects of knowledge or analysis from more than one traditional discipline or knowledge area are integrated into learning experiences.
- Coherent, Intentional, and Sequenced Pathways that lead students from the development of foundational skills, knowledges, and habits of mind to more complex, independent, and higher-order engagement with and discovery of knowledge.
- Inclusion and Equity in the design and thematic foci of the curriculum, so that students from all backgrounds are included in the University's learning mission.
- Collaboration among students, faculty, and staff sustains the curriculum and engages teachers and learners alike in deep, critical, and reflective learning.
- Quality Assurance is guaranteed through ongoing assessment practices designed and conducted by the faculty teaching the courses and relying on their expertise and experience and responsive to their needs as teachers of the courses to be assessed.

The RGEC draft also borrows from the AACU's Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) outcomes. Specifically, it emphasizes:

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
 - Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts
 - *Focused* by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring
- Intellectual and Practical Skills, *Practiced extensively*, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance, including
 - Inquiry and analysis
 - Critical and creative thinking
 - Written and oral communication

- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork and problem solving
- Personal and Social Responsibility, anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges, including
 - Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global
 - Intercultural knowledge and competence
 - Ethical reasoning and action
 - Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

Background on the research and data-gathering initiatives that supported the development of these outcomes is available at <https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research> and by clicking the links on the “Research” menu at <https://www.aacu.org/leap>.

In addition, the proposed curriculum revision responds to the Senate’s adoption of six broad learning outcome areas (November, 2015), most of which are integrated throughout and revisited on multiple occasions:

- *Communicate in a persuasive, engaging manner appropriate for their audience*
- *Access, analyze, and produce knowledge synthesized across diverse fields of study*
- *Put knowledge into practice through experiential learning and civic engagement*
- *Understand the historical, cultural, economic, and scientific forces that shape local, national, and global contexts and explain their own situation in these contexts*
- *Develop and demonstrate habits of self-reflection, self-assessment, and ethical reasoning*
- *Analyze in comparative perspective how race, culture and ethnicity create patterns of inclusion and exclusion to shape the larger context of American society and history.*

Finally, this revision builds on the work on potential revisions to the Drake Curriculum done by the University Curriculum Committee in 2013-14 and the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on General Education Curricular Reform in 2014-15.

II. Operational Precepts

Several operational precepts—that is, stipulations about the way the proposed curriculum will be implemented and sustained—subtend this model. They are:

- Small, seminar-style classes.
- No course or disciplinary prerequisites for enrollment (with the exception of Capstones)
- Faculty-driven outcomes assessment
- Robust use of current courses
- Phased implementation
- Proactive advising
- Limitation on the number of courses that can count toward a primary major; more flexibility in that regard for students double-majoring.

- Professionalization through coursework remains primarily the responsibility of major programs.
- Reduction of total number of credits required for graduation to 120 (15 per semester over four years).

To account for the need for smaller, more intensive learning experiences than is sometimes the case in the current DC, and to recognize the relative high importance students place on learning that takes place across two majors (often with minors and concentrations, as well) this model for a general education curriculum requires 33 credit hours (including the capstone in the primary major) in comparison with the current requirement of 42 credit hours. Learning experiences are loosely sequenced across four phases: Foundations; Cornerstone; Keystone; and Capstone.

III. The Model: Phased Integration

Foundations (6 credit hours; lower division; no prerequisites; completed in the first year):

- **First-Year Seminar:** As currently configured. (3 credits; first semester of the first year)
- **Seminar in Critical Communication:** Students practice communicating information and ideas to a variety of audiences in a variety of modes—visual, verbal, and written—by researching, analyzing, and articulating responses to a focused question or issue. [Outcomes: *Communicate in a persuasive, engaging manner appropriate for their audience; Access, analyze, and produce knowledge synthesized across diverse fields of study*]

Cornerstone (12 credits lower-division; no prerequisites; Students advised toward completion by the end of the fifth semester; no more than three credits toward any major, and no more than six credits toward all majors combined) [Outcomes: *Communicate in a persuasive, engaging manner appropriate for their audience; Access, analyze, and produce knowledge synthesized across diverse fields of study; Put knowledge into practice through experiential learning and civic engagement; Understand the historical, cultural, economic, and scientific forces that shape local, national, and global contexts and explain their own situation in these contexts*]

- **Topics in Civic Literacy:** Students develop skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary for effective civic engagement. Students learn about an unsettled issue or topic of contemporary social, political, or economic significance from two or more points of view. Students develop skills associated with civic debate and engagement through participatory activities organized in the classroom and/ or in the community. (3 credits outside the primary major)
- **Topics in Symbolic Literacy:** Students engage in approaches to knowledge that rely on the methods of abstract symbolic manipulation drawn from such fields as computer science, mathematics, linguistics, statistics, data analysis, logic, and musical analysis. The course asks students to use these approaches to learn about

and formulate responses to a focused issue or question of contemporary importance. (3 credits outside the primary major)

- **Topics in Scientific Inquiry:** Students learn about and articulate responses to a focused ethical, moral, or public-policy issue or question of contemporary importance to which scientific inquiry, scientific findings, or scientific methodologies are central. (3 credits outside the primary major)
- **Topics in Global Study:** Students engage deeply with and articulate responses to a focused question or issue of contemporary international or global importance. (3 credits outside the primary major or any 3 credit or greater learning experience abroad.)

Keystone: The Integrative Core: Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice (12 upper-division credits; up to 3 within the primary major; no more than six in all majors combined; students advised toward completion by the end of the seventh semester; prerequisites: at least 6 credits completed in the Cornerstone courses; no other prerequisites)

These seminars engage students in interdisciplinary learning about issues related to diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Integrative core courses will be concerned with diversity in any of its forms, including race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, ability and disability, and neurodiversity. In consultation with their advisors, students will take one course focusing explicitly on diversity and inclusion in the American context.

These courses may include such topics as: The history of race relations in the US; multicultural literature; scientific constructions of race and ethnicity; criminology; disability rights and policy; diversity activism in the arts; the cultural study of race; the ethics of immigration policy; environmental justice; equity and schooling in urban and rural settings; jurisprudence of race; global colonialisms; global geographies of race; women and gender studies; global racial inequality; international gender rights and policy.

At least one of these learning experiences will be experiential in nature, involving service learning, study abroad, fieldwork, applied research, internship components, community engagement or the like.

[Outcomes: Analyze in comparative perspective how race, culture and ethnicity create patterns of inclusion and exclusion to shape the larger context of American society and history; Access, analyze, and produce knowledge synthesized across diverse fields of study; Communicate in a persuasive, engaging manner appropriate for their audience; Put knowledge into practice through experiential learning and civic engagement; Understand the historical, cultural, economic, and scientific forces that shape local, national, and global contexts and explain their own situation in these context; Develop and demonstrate habits of self-reflection, self-assessment, and ethical reasoning]

Capstone: As currently configured. (3 credits)

IV. Implementation

This proposal envisions a phased implementation plan that will provide sufficient time for faculty, staff, students, and the pertinent administrative offices to prepare for a smooth transition. Assuming Faculty Senate endorsement of this curricular realignment, the Provost's Office would work closely with the UCC during the 2016-2017 academic year to develop an implementation plan that aligned resources, including faculty development funds, in support of a phased transition to the new curriculum. Although it will be essential for the Provost's Office to work with the appropriate faculty bodies in the development of specific implementation plans, we offer the following timeline for a phased implementation plan for illustrative purposes:

Implementation Planning: AY 2016-2017

- Provost's office, including Associate Provost for Curriculum and Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, work closely with UCC to finalize the implementation plan and to earmark resources—for instance, the Provost's and College's faculty-development budgets already in place—for supporting course development, professional development, and related activities.
- Creating a "cross-walk" document identifying which courses currently offered as part of the AOI system might fit in the revised curriculum, where, and with what changes (if any).
- Naming the new curriculum and branding it and the implementation process.
- Begin course-development process for Implementation Phase 1.

Implementation Phase 1: First-Year Experience and Cornerstone: AYs 2017-2019

- The FYS program remains in place.
- Deployment of Seminar in Critical Communication courses, many drawn from existing "Written Communication," "Critical Thinking," and "Information Literacy" AOI courses, revised to meet the outcomes of this course.
- Deployment of enough Cornerstone courses, similarly drawn from current AOI courses, revised to meet Cornerstone outcomes, to serve 50% of total need.
- Begin funding development and revision of courses to serve as Keystone experiences.

Implementation Phase 2: Cornerstone and Keystone Courses: AY 2019-2020

- Complete deployment of Cornerstone courses.
- Begin deployment of Keystone Courses to serve 50% of total need.
- Continue funding the development and revision of Keystone experiences.

Implementation Phase 3: Complete Implementation: AY 2020-2021

- Continue development of Keystone seminars.
- Engage faculty in assessment of Foundations and Cornerstone courses.

- All remaining AOI-specific courses eliminated from the Drake Curriculum or revised to meet the needs to of the new curriculum.