

TO: Members of the University Community
FROM: The University Curriculum Committee for Liberal Education
DATE: November 17, 2014
SUBJECT: Pathways: General Education at Virginia Tech

The attached proposal addresses the conceptual plan for revision of the general education curriculum at Virginia Tech. UCCLE approved the proposal on November 17, 2014 with a vote of 17 to 1.

In addition to curricular considerations, the overarching operational components are also addressed in a level of detail appropriate for governance. A general education program that will have long-term success must be responsive to any shifts in student need, new research about teaching and learning or about a discipline, new mandates from our accrediting bodies, and new evidence about the successes or bottlenecks of the program. By design, this proposal describes operational elements that will evolve and improve over time.

While the driving force for change in the general education program is improvement of student learning, the proposal also attends to the present realities for accreditation of the curriculum. Virginia Tech's general education program must be assessed by evaluating student learning of stated outcomes. The current CLE areas and goals are not amenable to assessment.

Each of the following issues is addressed in the Pathways proposal, but not in the level of detail that many have requested. The concerns raised are acknowledged and valid. Once a curricular framework is approved, UCCLE and the Office of General Education will work with CUSP, academic colleges and departments, Faculty Senate, and SGA on the implementation plan for the new curriculum.

Course approval guidelines. Many courses (old and new) will be coming forward for approval. The process will be streamlined with support to facilitate successful submission of course and minors for approval. Implicit in the approval process will be the acknowledgement that departments and colleges can best interpret the outcomes in the contexts of the course they will be bringing forward for approval. Many have asked whether specific courses will count in Pathways. If a course meets the outcome and its indicators and can be documented as such, then it will count. UCCLE, a faculty committee, retains oversight of the approval process. The Office of General Education will offer its services for those interested in submitting courses, minors, or experiences for approval.

Specific assessment practices. The assessment of learning in general education will be authentic and embedded. Work that students are already doing to demonstrate their learning will be identified by the instructor or program. This type of assessment is already implemented for accredited majors, and best practices from these programs will be adopted. The overall goal for assessment is to provide feedback that improves the curriculum and student learning.

Specific pedagogical tools. Pedagogy remains the purview of the instructor of a course. However, there is compelling evidence that student learning is improved when

students are actively engaged. Support for implementation of effective pedagogies will be available for all who are teaching general education courses.

Funding for specific courses. Funding is another issue that may be appropriate in some other document. This proposal describes curricular issues. The Office of the Provost has pledged to support courses that meet the general education criteria.

Departmental connections to Learning Outcomes -- To emphasize the focus on outcomes, this proposal specifically avoids attaching departments to learning outcomes.

The proposal as it's configured now results from the work of many people. UCCE received useful feedback from individual faculty, departments and colleges. Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association also contributed.

Some of the changes made as a result of this feedback are listed below. The committee took the following actions:

- Changed from one learning outcome to two – social sciences and humanities
- Renamed outcomes to reduce confusion between science and social science
- Added information about assessment
- Reframed emphasis on pedagogy
- Specified that ANY course could be included general education, including foreign language, if it meets the guidelines
- Added information about rationale for change
- Defined “advanced/applied” courses
- Specified the number of indicators to be met by each outcome
- Included statement of breadth for Critique and Practice in Design and the Arts
- Added indication that labs may be required of some students in science courses
- Changed name of “comprehensive” outcomes to “integrative” in order to emphasize overall purpose of those outcomes
- Determined a phase-in period for identifying every course in general education as meeting indicators for Ethical Reasoning or Intercultural and Global Awareness
- Added statement to rationale for credit hours
- Listed overall goals for course proposals
- Clarified relationship of Office of General Education to UCCE
- Adopted suggested changes in indicators in for several outcomes
- Moved requirement for English proficiency from one learning outcome to the section describing all learning outcomes

Other suggestions that might work for general education--the inclusion of the University's foreign language requirement and FYE--are not currently within the purview of the UCCE. Consequently, they were not addressed in this proposal.

Please send any questions about the proposal to Marlene Preston (mpreston@vt.edu), chair of UCCE, or Stephen Biscotte (biscotsm@vt.edu), Coordinator of General Education.