

2000

## University College and General Education Committee Report #2000-01-1

University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen\\_comrpts](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen_comrpts)

---

### Recommended Citation

University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate, "University College and General Education Committee Report #2000-01-1" (2000).  
*Faculty Senate Committee Reports and Appendices*. Paper 224.  
[https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen\\_comrpts/224](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen_comrpts/224)[https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen\\_comrpts/224](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/facsen_comrpts/224)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Senate at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Senate Committee Reports and Appendices by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu).



## **Faculty Senate**

### **University College and General Education Committee**

#### **Report # 2000-01-1**

### **Recommendations of the President's Commission on General Education**

**November 3, 2000**

(As approved by the Faculty Senate)

On November 2, 2000, the Faculty Senate University College and General Education Committee considered the October 1, 2000 Report of the President's Commission on General Education and approved recommendations for consideration by the Faculty Senate. The following report is divided into two parts. The first part is informational; the second requires confirmation by the Faculty Senate.

#### **Part I**

#### **Rationale**

#### **Background**

The University's current General Education Program was established in 1981. By being sufficiently flexible to accommodate the restrictions of our broad array of baccalaureate degree programs, it has served us better than we have often acknowledged. It has not been without its critics, of course, and several bold proposals for its restructuring have been brought forward for consideration in the intervening years. While some modest changes were made to the program, no major restructuring resulted from these initiatives.

The need for revision has surfaced in the faculty proposals of recent years, the last NEASC Self-Study and the report of the NEASC visiting team. President Carothers and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee revisited the topic of General Education revision during spring 2000. As a result of these discussions as well as discussions with the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, President Carothers established a Commission on General Education. On May 11, 2000, Faculty Senate Chair John Long reported to the Faculty Senate on the establishment of the Commission charged as follows:

**Intent:** To revitalize and refocus our general education program to insure its continued appropriateness as a foundation of University of Rhode Island undergraduate Education.

The Commission is specifically tasked to recognize and continue the work of the UCGE Committee, especially the efforts to incorporate writing and diversity, as follows:

- o Evaluate the current general education program and draft a rationale that articulates a philosophy that underlies a general education curriculum.
- o Review past statements of intended learning outcomes for general education and propose objectives consistent with the rationale (to be employed in reviewing courses and in future assessment of the effectiveness of the program).
- o Develop a plan and strategy to review courses resident in each existing division.
- o Develop a plan and strategy to look at the integration of skills and competencies (e.g. writing, quantitative think, technology, cultural,Š) within the content areas represented by the general education divisions, and/or within any proposed changes in content areas.

This Commission is expected to complete its work and report to the President and the Executive committee of the Faculty Senate no later than 10/1/2000.

During May and early June, the President and the Provost/VPAA discussed the make up of the Commission and recruited members. Modest summer support was offered to the academic year faculty to ensure that the Commission's deliberations could continue unabated

**during the summer. The final composition of the Commission included:**

*Paul Arakelian (English)*

*Marjorie Caldwell (Nutrition and Food Science)*

*Deborah Godfrey-Brown (Nursing)*

*John Grandin (Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures)*

*John Stevenson (Psychology)*

*Betty Young (Education)*

**Others participating in the deliberations were as follows:**

*Sheila Black Grubman (Coordinator, Faculty Senate)*

*Blair Lord (convenor)*

*C. B. Peters (as chairperson of the Faculty Senate)*

*M. Beverly Swan (Provost/VPAA)*

*Gerry Tyler (as representative of the CAS Dean's Office)*

**The first meeting of the Commission was held on June 27, 2000 and the Commission met almost weekly throughout the remainder of the summer and into September.**

**As suggested in the Commission's charge, it was decided to focus initially on developing a restatement of the purpose of General Education at the University of Rhode Island. In doing this, the Commission carefully reviewed previous reports on General Education including 1) the original version of the General Education Requirements (1981), 2) Report of the Basic Liberal Studies Program 1981-1987, and 3) Interim Report of the General Education Task Forces (October 1991).**

### **Intent of the Proposal**

**The Framework document presented by the Commission seeks to emphasize the overarching objectives of our General Education program while finding a means to introduce contemporary concerns directly into the program. For example, the explosion of the Internet, the globalization of the economy, the migration of the world's populations, and the end of the Cold War are among the current**

forces with major implications for higher education curricula today. In terms of the structure of the program, however, it was consciously decided to retain much of the current program's extant structure. Specifically, the program will still contain seven "divisions" similar to the existing seven divisions and have the same credit hour requirement in each (See the [Appendix](#)). Where appropriate, the description of these divisions has been updated.

In its deliberations, the Commission became keenly aware that General Education is not and should not be confused with our students' entire undergraduate degree program. General Education represents only about one third of a baccalaureate degree program. As such, it cannot be expected to provide our students with all of the knowledge and intellectual skills that we hope they acquire by the time they reach graduation. General Education is part of a foundation for such learning. To make clear this principle, the Framework document also provides some broader learning objectives that extend beyond General Education and apply to all who attain their bachelors degree.

While skill areas have been part of the current general education program from the start, the integration of skills into all courses approved for General Education credit is the most significant adjustment to the structure of the program. Furthermore, a larger number of skill areas have been identified and discussed than the three that are expressly included in our current General Education program. For example, in addition to writing, there have been discussions about including a component dealing with technology, and perhaps most visibly, discussions about raising the level of understanding and respect for human differences. The approach taken by the Commission is to focus on eight critical skills that are integrated into the program.

When each course is considered for general education, its instructor must demonstrate that it fits into one of the seven core areas and incorporates three of eight integrated skills. Because two of these core areas and two of these integrated skills involve writing logically and examining human differences, students will have ample opportunity and high probability of taking courses in these areas. Even though such an approach will not guarantee that each student will have extensive opportunity to practice these or the other integrated skills in General Education, it does not preclude it and is, in fact, a foundation

for the enhancement of these skills in courses which constitute the major.

To achieve this Framework, an Implementation Plan also is provided which offers a timeline and strategy for advancing the proposal. The two critical elements of this plan are a procedure to undertake a review and re-approval of courses in the program and a proposed set of administrative and financial resources to support the program. A quick examination of the courses contained in the current program indicates that almost all the approved courses were approved for inclusion in the program in its first few years of existence. Given the number of years which has intervened, the connection of the course to the principles of the General Education program has quite possibly been lost. In many cases, the faculty members who proposed the courses and provided the rationale for inclusion are no longer at the University. This reason alone argues for a review of approved courses. The new requirement that all courses infuse at least three of the identified skills makes such a review imperative. Of course, a complete review and re-approval of all courses will take a good deal of work and time to complete; hence, the plan suggests a multi-year phased process to be undertaken by the UCGE Committee and the faculty who teach the courses.

The second critical element of the proposed plan is the call for both administrative and financial support for the program. For many years, there have been requests for the appointment of a designated administrator charged with monitoring and ensuring the delivery of our General Education program. With many administrators responsible for portions of the program that must compete with their other responsibilities, there is essentially no one who is truly responsible. Benign neglect is not sufficient to guarantee the vitality of this program. The Commission believes that the overall administration of the program must be expressly assigned at the Vice Provost level. In addition, effective teaching of General Education courses infused with skills as proposed will require intentional reconceptualization of many courses. Faculty should not be expected to do this without the possibility of instructional support, and this plan includes requests for such opportunities. In truth, the administrative leadership and the financial support are complementary with one being relatively ineffective without the other.

It is also important that the institution undertake a formal ongoing assessment of its General Education program as well as its degree programs. As the process of reviewing, reapproving, and where appropriate, revising General Education courses proceeds, the faculty involved and the administrator shall include appropriate assessment initiatives.

## Conclusion

This proposal respects the structure of the existing requirements while at the same time incorporating an expanded emphasis on knowledge and skills relevant for the contemporary world. It is only the beginning of an arduous expensive task, but one the members of the Commission feel is moving the curriculum forward in a very meaningful way.

## Part II

### Framework

The purpose of general education at the University of Rhode Island is to lay a foundation for the lifelong enrichment of the human experience and for a thoughtful and active engagement with the world around us. This foundation is built on recognition of the complex nature of the natural and human worlds. The objective of general education is to introduce students to the fundamental dimensions of this complexity and to build an appreciation of different ways of understanding it and different cultural responses to it.

Specifically, courses in the seven (7) core areas of General Education address:

### KNOWLEDGE

\* Artistic and literary expression and interpretation (*Fine Arts/Literature*)

\*Wisdom and traditions of the past and present in a global setting (*Letters*)

\*Interrelationships of the natural world (*Natural Sciences*)

**\*Human behavior in social, economic, cultural, and political contexts  
(*Social Sciences*)**

## **SKILLS**

**\*Mathematical and quantitative skills and their applications  
(*Mathematical/Quantitative Reasoning*)**

**\*Writing and speaking in English (*English Communication*)**

**\*Communicating across cultures (*Foreign Language/Cross-cultural Competence*)**

**In addition, because particular skills are essential to a thoughtful engagement with the world, each course in General Education must incorporate opportunities to practice three (3) or more of the following:**

**\*Reading complex texts**

**\*Writing effectively**

**\* Speaking effectively**

**\*Examining human differences**

**\*Using quantitative data**

**\*Using qualitative data**

**\*Using information technology**

**\*Engaging in artistic activity**

**General Education is only a portion of any undergraduate degree program. Major and minor requirements along with electives contribute significantly to students' education. All programs should include in their curricula opportunities for students to develop further the skills that this general education program addresses. As a consequence of the interaction between General Education and major programs, the University of Rhode Island expects that all programs will lead students toward:**

**\*the ability to think critically in order to solve problems and question the nature and sources of authority**

\*the ability to use the methods and materials characteristic of each knowledge area with an understanding of the interrelationship among and the interconnectedness of the core areas

\*a commitment to intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning

\*an openness to new ideas with the social skills necessary for both teamwork and leadership

\*the ability to think independently and be self-directed; to make informed choices and take initiative

### Core Definitions

**Fine Arts & Literature:** courses that promote aesthetic interpretation and an appreciation of its role in human experience; courses related to historical and critical study of the arts and literature as well as creative activity

**Letters:** courses that examine the history of thought and human values in social and historical contexts through the use of written texts, e.g., primary source materials and critical expositions

**Natural Sciences:** courses that employ scientific methods to examine the physical nature of the world, the biological dimension of human life, and the nature of the environment and its various life forms

**Social Sciences:** courses related to the study of human development and behavior and varying social, economic, cultural, and political solutions to societal and global problems

**Mathematical & Quantitative Reasoning:** courses that advance skills in, understanding of, and appreciation for mathematics and the disciplines that have grown from mathematics.

**English Communication:** courses that improve written and oral communication skills

**Foreign Language/Cross-cultural Competence:** courses that promote understanding of one's own cultural perspective in a multicultural world and develop the skills necessary to work, live, and interact with persons from different backgrounds, including developing bilingual skills, the comparative study of cultures, the study of cross-cultural communication, and/or study/internships abroad

## Definitions of Integrated Skills

These skills should be addressed in a substantial part of the coursework and in the evaluation of students' performance.

**Read Complex Texts:** Course requires students to "read," evaluate, and interpret primary sources, critical commentaries, or works of art.

**Write Effectively:** Course requires written assignments designed to allow students to practice and improve writing skills with regular feedback from the instructor such as by submitting drafts and revisions, by writing a series of comparable papers, or by writing long assignments in shorter units.

**Speak Effectively:** Course requires oral presentations designed to allow students to practice and improve speaking skills with instructor and/or group feedback.

**Examine Human Differences:** Course requires assignments which examine the role of difference within and across national boundaries. Appropriate examples of "difference" would include but not be limited to race, religion, sexual orientation, language, culture, and gender.

**Use of Quantitative Data:** Course requires assignments which involve the analysis, interpretation, and/or use of quantitative data to test a hypothesis, build a theory, or illustrate and describe patterns.

**Use of Qualitative Data:** Course requires assignments which involve the analysis, interpretation, and/or use of qualitative data to test a hypothesis, build a theory, or illustrate and describe patterns.

**Use of Information Technology:** Course requires assignments which involve the use of information technology such as web-based research (access to and evaluation of information), participation in class-related internet conferencing, or introduction to and use of computer programs.

**Engage in Artistic Activity:** Course requires assignments which involve the creative process in the practice of fine arts skills and aesthetic appreciation with instructor and /or group feedback.

## Implementation Plan

### Moving from Framework to Student Learning Outcomes

#### Overview

Our proposed plan for implementation calls for simultaneous action on two fronts: administration support and faculty governance. Both the President and the Faculty Senate will receive our report, and both will be asked to indicate their willingness to commit time, leadership, and resources to make this plan a reality. Following those mutual commitments, the University College and General Education Committee will move the implementation process forward. Members of the Committee will work collaboratively with faculty representing relevant disciplines throughout the University to: (1) clarify and refine the definitions, culminating in detailed materials and procedures for course approval and re-approval; (2) work with administrative leadership to create a supportive set of resources and guided opportunities for course proposal development; and (3) create review teams to process the applications for course approval. The intent is to effect a sunset on currently approved courses with the ultimate outcome being a multi-year, phased review and re-approval of each course included in our General Education program. This course approval process will be conducted in four phases, beginning in the spring of 2001 with the Social Sciences and the newly titled Foreign Language/Cross-cultural Competence requirements. In each phase, time and support will be provided for the development of course proposals, and the review committees will work collaboratively with the relevant disciplines to establish feasible as well as meaningful standards. The final phase will end when courses in the Natural Sciences and Mathematical & Quantitative Reasoning are approved for the fall of 2003.

#### Phases of Proposed Process

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Administration</i>	<i>Faculty</i>
Pre 10/00-12/00	Allocation of funds; designation of administrator, orientation of deans; workshops, website; faculty consulting begins.	UCGE Committee reviews proposal and establishes subcommittees; * presents proposal to the Faculty Senate for endorsement.
Phase #1 2/01-3/02 (S) and (CC)	Administrative support for faculty workshops and course revision, etc.	Reapplication process for (S) and (FL/CC) Review groups include faculty from related disciplines

Phase #2 11/01-10/02 (L)	Collaboration with UCGE on progress report to the Senate; support for course development and workshops specifically include (L).	Progress report to the Faculty Senate. Reapplication process begins for (L); review groups include faculty from related disciplines.
Phase #3 4/02- 9/02 (A) and (EC)	Continued support for course development and workshops specifically include (A) and (EC); collaboration with UCGE on progress report to the Senate.	Reapplication process begins for (A) and (EC); review groups include faculty from related disciplines
Phase #4 11/02-3/03 (N) and (MQ)	Collaboration with UCGE on progress report to the Faculty Senate; continued support for course development and workshops specifically include (N) and (MQ).	Progress report to the Faculty Senate. Reapplication process begins for (N) and (MQ); review groups include faculty from related disciplines.
Post 5/03-4/04	Monitor and provide support for enhanced program; review of distribution of skills courses and enrollments; report on review to the Faculty Senate	Monitor program and collaborate on review of distribution of skills courses and enrollments; report on review to the Faculty Senate

**\*These subcommittees, which may include membership not on the UCGE Committee itself, will devise (a) clarification and specification of the intent of the requirement (especially for FL/CC); (b) detailed descriptions and forms for course applications, with special attention to "Incorporated Skills (ISK)"; (c) more specific approval procedures and timelines; (d) means for supporting faculty and departments in preparing proposals -- e.g. workshops with IDP assistance, a web page, individual consulting**

## Appendix

### Comparison of Credit Hour Distribution

#### Current vs. Proposed Program

<b>Current Program</b>	<b>Proposed Program</b>
------------------------	-------------------------

FineArts/Literature (A).....6cr.	FineArts/Literature (A) .....6cr.
Letters (L) .....6cr.	Letters (L) .....6cr.
Natural Sciences (N) .....6cr.	Natural Sciences (N) .....6cr.
Social Sciences (S) .....6cr.	Social Sciences (S) .....6cr.
Mathematics (M) .....3cr.	Mathematical/Quantitative Reasoning (MQ).....3cr.
English Communication (C).....6cr.	English Communication (EC) .....6cr.
Foreign Language/Culture (F).....6cr.	Foreign Language/Cross-cultural Competence (FL/CC).....6cr.

**Consistent with the current program, individual colleges may decrease the University General Education requirements by reducing the number of credits by three in any one of the following core areas: A, L, N, S, or FL/CC.**