

Rethinking General Education
CORE Major Initiative Committee Charge
November 13, 2007

In a retreat organized by the President and attended by Vice Presidents and Deans in the Summer of 2006, it was agreed that the university should rethink the General Education component of undergraduate education. The working group that met to further discuss this matter posed a basic question:

What characteristics should we look for in the graduates from our baccalaureate programs? What ‘outcomes’ do we want or expect from the students who successfully complete their degrees at the University of Maryland? What combination of knowledge, abilities, and skills do we want an undergraduate student to possess upon graduation?

In his Senate speech on September 17, 2007, President Mote said similarly:

“Finally, we must identify the knowledge, capabilities and preparation that will describe every University of Maryland graduate in 2015. From there we can prepare the new CORE experience to achieve those goals.”

Prepare recommendations for the goals and objectives of the General Education program for undergraduates at the University of Maryland. The goals should describe the principles of General Education and specify what the General Education experience is meant to accomplish for every student. The objectives should provide direction for how these goals will be achieved for all students, as well as means for evaluating success. Aim for a General Education program that is forward looking and bold and that becomes a distinguishing component of our students’ educational experience.

Goals and objectives should be based on a thorough and serious consideration of the values to be instilled in and the habits of thought, knowledge, skills, and experiences to be acquired by all of our graduates to prepare them for living in and contributing to tomorrow’s world for many decades to come. Please feel free to consult with anyone inside or outside the university community who might provide useful insight in this area. Outcomes expectations should be clearly articulated.

You should consider how and by whom critical courses are to be taught. Interdisciplinary courses might be team taught, for example. High profile researchers might be asked (required) to participate in presentations or discussions in their areas of expertise. Professorial faculty might generally be required to teach general education courses as a fraction of their course offerings. Innovative teaching and learning strategies might be strongly encouraged. Courses should be challenging and General Education an exciting and eye opening experience for all students.

In addition to formal courses, please consider what outside-the-classroom activities might be included as required or optional components that would further enrich the General Education experience. Consider as well what our increasingly talented student body is bringing with them

from their previous educational and life experiences. In designing a General Education program you should also consider its connection to and impact on the student's major program as well as other programs such as University Honors and Gemstone.

The current CORE program is described at <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/core/overview/WhatIs.html>. Current Learning Outcomes goals for CORE overall and for the various elements of the program are given at <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/core/LearningOutcome.htm>.

It may be helpful to consider general education programs at other institutions. Personnel from IRPA can assist you in accessing these programs. Contact Associate Vice President Mona Levine for such assistance.

Among constraints to keep in mind are the following:

1. Most students use some CORE courses as introductory courses in their major programs. There needs to be flexibility in mixing interdisciplinary courses with the disciplinary courses that usually play this role.
2. Transfer students will usually fulfill most of their CORE requirements in their original institution, so flexibility is required here as well. State law defines the transferability of general education programs.
3. State requirements, copied in the attached extract from the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). However note the great flexibility provided in COMAR 13B.06.01.03A(2), which refers to COMAR 13B.02.02.16D.2(b), also copied in the attached. (For the curious, the full COMAR can be accessed at <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/>.)

State Requirements for General Education

There are state requirements for the content of a general education program. In particular, the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) 13B.06.01.03 states:

A. While public institutions have the autonomy to design their general education program to meet their unique needs and mission, that program shall conform to the definitions and common standards in this chapter. A public institution shall satisfy the general education requirement by:

(1) Requiring each program leading to the A.A. or A.S. degree to include not less than 30 and not more than 36 semester hours, and each baccalaureate degree program to include not less than 40 and not more than 46 semester hours of required core courses, with the core requiring, at a minimum, course work in each of the following five areas:

(a) Arts and humanities, (b) Social and behavioral sciences, (c) Biological and physical sciences, (d) Mathematics, and (e) English composition; or

(2) Conforming with COMAR 13B.02.02.16D(2)(b)------(c). { THIS PERMITS GREAT FLEXIBILITY: SEE BELOW, SECTION 2(b) }

B. Each core course used to satisfy the distribution requirements of §A(1) of this regulation shall carry at least 3 semester hours.

C. General education programs of public institutions shall require at least:

(1) One course in each of two disciplines in arts and humanities; (2) One course in each of two disciplines in social and behavioral sciences; (3) Two science courses, at least one of which shall be a laboratory course; (4) One course in mathematics at or above the level of college algebra; and (5) One course in English composition.

D. Interdisciplinary and Emerging Issues.

(1) In addition to the five required areas in §A of this regulation, a public institution may include up to 8 semester hours in a sixth category that addresses emerging issues that institutions have identified as essential to a full program of general education for their students. These courses may:

(a) Be integrated into other general education courses or may be presented as separate courses; and (b) Include courses that: (i) Provide an interdisciplinary examination of issues across the five areas, or (ii) Address other categories of knowledge, skills, and values that lie outside of the five areas.

However COMAR 13B.02.02.16D states:

D. General Education Requirement.

(1) An approved degree-granting institution shall provide to its students, within the required curriculum for graduation, a general education that is designed to provide the student with the skills and knowledge necessary to:

(a) Communicate effectively in oral and written English; (b) Read with comprehension; (c) Reason abstractly and think critically; (d) Understand and interpret numerical data; (e) Understand the scientific method; (f) Recognize and appreciate cultural diversity; and (g) Understand the nature and value of the fine and performing arts.

(2) A nonpublic institution shall satisfy the general education requirement by:

(a) Requiring each associate degree program to include not less than 20 semester hours and that each baccalaureate degree program shall include not less than 40 semester hours of required arts and science core courses, with at least one 3-semester-hour course from each of the following five areas:

(i) Arts and humanities, (ii) English composition, (iii) Social and behavioral sciences, (iv) Mathematics, and (v) Biological and physical sciences;

(b) An integrated and structured general education experience required of all students, adopted by the governing board of the institution, which shall be demonstrated to the Commission at the time of initial approval or reaffirmation of approval, to achieve the goals of general education as defined in §D(1) of this regulation; or

(c) A process to measure competencies and to award credit in the areas of general education adopted by the governing board of the institution, which shall be demonstrated to the Commission to achieve the goals of general education in accordance with guidelines approved by the Commission.