

THE COMMON CURRICULUM

Advisory Memorandum: Requests for Substitutions and Equivalencies for Common Curriculum Requirements

[Approved by the General Education Board on 9 June 2014; revised by the Director of General Education on 24 June 2014]

BACKGROUND. Union College's general education program, the Common Curriculum, is best described as a hybrid program that has within it common foundational courses (FYP, SRS), distribution requirements (HUM), and requirements that emphasize certain specific modes of inquiry or the acquisition of certain competencies (e.g. SCLB, LCC). As part of developing the Union Education framework in 2011 and syncing the Common Curriculum with it, there has been a move toward emphasizing the unique intellectual experiences and modes of inquiry in all the requirements, including those that might be seen as simple distribution requirements. This necessitates greater clarity and specificity in handling requests from students, faculty, and staff regarding substitutions and equivalencies for program requirements.

The General Education Board and Director of General Education view these guidelines as best practice for the consideration and approval of substitutions and equivalencies. Substitutions and equivalencies should be considered only in response to unusual and extraordinary circumstances that fall within the recommendations that follow. These guidelines are designed to balance the needs of individual students with protecting the academic rigor and integrity of the Common Curriculum. These guidelines are offered for advisory purposes only.

RECOMMENDED GENERAL GUIDELINES for consideration of requests

As a matter of principle, the Gen Ed Board and Director of General Education expect students to complete the Common Curriculum requirements through courses specifically designed for that purpose and/or approved through the normal course approval process. In particular

- 1) if an existing Union College course has not been approved for Common Curriculum credit, it should not be used to fulfill any requirement unless so approved by the Gen Ed Board in the normal course approval manner,
- 2) Independent Study should not normally be used to meet Common Curriculum requirements in place of available Union College courses,
- 3) substitutions and equivalencies should not consist of a composite of separate elements drawn from different courses,
- 4) substitutions and equivalencies should involve more than one course only if they consist of a programmatically structured and integrated multi-course sequence (such as a two-term/semester first year seminar),
- 5) substitutions and equivalencies (including non-Union courses) should always meet the recommended academic standards below,
- 6) for non-transfer students, only one AP, IB, or transfer credit can be used toward completion of the Common Curriculum requirements and only for HUM, SOCS, QMR, SCLB, and SET; the Gen Ed Board supports this existing policy,
- 7) only courses that transfer as bona fide for-credit Union College courses or electives should be considered; non-transferable or zero-credit hour courses should not be considered,

- 8) equity and transparency suggest that special treatment, outright exemptions and waivers, or private agreements should not normally be considered or approved.

RECOMMENDED ACADEMIC STANDARDS for substitutions and equivalencies.

Substitutions and equivalencies should be approved only if they meet all of the following academic standards:

- 1) the same standards for academic rigor of the required Common Curriculum course(s) as demonstrated by syllabi, sample assignments, and the like supporting documentation
- 2) the learning outcomes for the Common Curriculum, including any and all course- or requirement-specific learning outcomes (such as FYP/FYP-H or SRS/SCH) found at: <http://www.union.edu/offices/gen-ed/program-administration/assessment/>
- 3) the content requirements for Common Curriculum courses found at: <http://www.union.edu/offices/gen-ed/program-administration/assessment/>
- 4) other content, pedagogical goals, or learning outcomes specific to the required Common Curriculum course(s)

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES regarding FYP/FYP-H.

Because of its unique place in the Common Curriculum and a Union Education, substitutions and equivalencies should only be approved for First-Year Preceptorial (FYP) or Honors Preceptorial (FYP-H) after careful and stringent review according to the preceding general guidelines and academic standards. Scrutiny should include but not be limited to evidence that the proposed substitution/equivalency has explicit pedagogical foundations in writing and argumentation, process-oriented assignments, and the intellectual ethos consistent with FYP/FYP-H. The integrated academic experience of a single course is part of the mission of FYP/FYP-H. Therefore, substitutions and equivalencies for FYP/FYP-H should not consist of a composite of separate elements drawn from different courses. The starting point for evaluating a proposed substitution/equivalency should be the mission statement and learning outcomes for FYP/FYP-H at <http://www.union.edu/offices/preceptorial/>.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES regarding SRS/SCH.

Because of its unique place in the Common Curriculum and a Union Education, substitutions and equivalencies should not be made for the Sophomore Research Seminar (SRS) or Scholars Research Seminar (SCH). Students who find themselves out of sync with the normal completion of SRS/SCH should be scheduled into such courses at the next available opportunity (by the Director of General Education). For rising seniors or seniors who for whatever reason have not completed SRS/SCH, consideration could be given to waiving the requirement.

John Cramsie; Director of General Education, 9 and 24 June 2014