

# THE COMMON CURRICULUM

## Procedural Guidelines: Approving Requests for Substitutions and Equivalencies for Common Curriculum Requirements

*[Approved by the General Education Board on 9 June 2014 with effect from 1 July 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. These requests come up in a variety of circumstances with a range of students. The General Education Board has approved the following procedures for regularizing the approval of substitutions and equivalencies.

### **PROCEDURES for APPROVAL of SUBSTITUTIONS and EQUIVALENCIES**

Approval of substitutions and equivalencies is specified as a recurring responsibility of the Director of General Education in the position description as follows: 'Approve requests for General Education course substitutions and equivalencies and answer questions on General Education (with Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board)'; see Appendix 1 below. These procedures will govern how the Director of General Education discharges this responsibility (with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board).

- 1) **Responsibility for approval of substitutions and equivalencies.** The responsibility for approvals rests with the Director of General Education working with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board; it does not rest with the Dean of Studies and/or Gen Ed Board individually or independently of the Director of General Education. Any and all requests for substitutions and equivalencies are to be directed to the Director of General Education for final approval. Approvals or rejections will be made by the Director of General Education in consultation with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board, but the primary responsibility for making determinations rests in the last instance with the Director of General Education.
- 2) **Requirements subject to this procedure.** All current and future requirements in the Common Curriculum are subject to this policy. Those requirements currently consist of FYP, SRS, HUL, HUM, SOCS, SCLB, SET, QMR, LCC.
- 3) **Students subject to this procedure.** Requests for substitutions and equivalencies must be approved for all Union College students. For purposes of this policy, Union College

students are defined as: transfer students; ex-LIM students; Organizing Theme students; Honors students; non-transfer students seeking credit for AP, IB, or a transfer course; students in unique or otherwise unusual curricular circumstances; former or returning students; current students; students not otherwise included in these categories.

- 4) **General Guidelines for what will/will not be considered for approval.** As a matter of policy, the Gen Ed Board requires 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
- a) if an existing Union College course has not been approved for Common Curriculum credit, it cannot be used to fulfill any requirement unless so approved by the Gen Ed Board in the normal course approval manner,
  - b) Independent Study cannot be used to meet Common Curriculum requirements in place of available Union College courses,
  - c) substitutions and equivalencies cannot consist of a composite of separate elements drawn from different courses,
  - d) substitutions and equivalencies may 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),
  - e) all substitutions and equivalencies (including non-Union courses) must meet the requirements in 7 and 8 below to be considered,
  - f) 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,
  - g) for all students, only courses that transfer as bona fide for-credit Union College courses or electives will be considered; non-transferable or zero-credit hour courses will not be considered,
  - h) special treatment, outright exemptions and waivers, or private agreements will not be considered or approved.
- 5) **Process and Workflow.** As a matter of policy, substitutions and equivalencies are considered only in response to extraordinary circumstances or circumstances relevant to a particular category of student:
- a) Requests that fall outside those criteria and the general guidelines in 4 above should be refused at their starting point without further action.
  - b) Requests that fall within those criteria and the general guidelines in 4 should be sent to the Director of General Education for final approval as the last step in the ordinary workflows out of which requests arise.
  - c) Requests for final approval are to be sent only to the Common Curriculum email [education@union.edu](mailto:education@union.edu) not to the email of the Director of General Education or Gen Ed Board members.

- 6) **Information to be provided to the Director of General Education for approval.** The Director of General Education will be provided with full information relevant to requests for substitutions and equivalencies. This information includes but is not limited to:
- a) a provisional audit of student's Common Curriculum requirements,
  - b) information about proposed substitutions and equivalencies including the course content (description, syllabus, representative assignments, etc.),
  - c) a report on the student's academic progress and standing,
  - d) other information deemed relevant for reviewing the request or requested by the Director of General Education.

It is the responsibility of the student, faculty member, and/or member of staff concerned to provide the necessary information in a timely manner. Requests will not be processed or approved without the necessary information.

- 7) **Academic requirements for substitutions and equivalencies.** Courses will be approved as substitutions or equivalencies only if they fall within the general guidelines in 4 above and meet all of the following academic requirements:
- a) the same standards for academic rigor of the required course(s)
  - b) 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/>
  - c) the content requirements for Common Curriculum courses found at: <http://www.union.edu/offices/gen-ed/program-administration/assessment/>
  - d) other content, pedagogical goals, or learning outcomes specific to the required course(s).

The Director of General Education with the Gen Ed Board will evaluate and make final determination whether proposed substitutions and equivalencies meet these academic requirements. Academic departments/programs/chairs will be consulted (as needed) in cases of uncertainty regarding requirements a or d.

- 8) **Additional guidelines and procedures regarding FYP/FYP-H.** Because of its unique place in the Common Curriculum and a Union Education, substitutions and equivalencies will only be approved for First-Year Preceptorial (FYP) or Honors Preceptorial (FYP-H) after careful and stringent review according to the provisions of 7 above. Proposals for substitutions and equivalencies for FYP and FYP-H should be accompanied by as much information as possible per 6b above. With respect to 7d above, the accompanying materials and information must clearly and unequivocally demonstrate 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 cannot consist of a composite of separate elements drawn from different courses per 4c above; multiple-course substitutions of equivalencies must demonstrably meet the general guidelines per 4d above. The starting point for evaluating a proposed substitution/equivalency will be the mission statement and learning outcomes for FYP/FYP-H at <http://www.union.edu/offices/preceptorial/>.

In cases when a proposed substitution/equivalency is not approved:

- a) The Director of General Education will schedule first-year students and sophomores into an FYP/FYP-H section at the next available opportunity.
  - b) The Director of General Education will schedule rising juniors and juniors into an FYP/FYP-H section or, when appropriate, a suitable upper-level Union College course based on the student's completed coursework, academic qualifications (including grades) and academic program.
  - c) The Director of General Education in consultation with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board may agree to waive the requirement for risings seniors or seniors.
- 9) **Additional guidelines and procedures regarding SRS/SCH.** Because of its unique place in the Common Curriculum and a Union Education, substitutions and equivalencies will not be made for the Sophomore Research Seminar (SRS) or Scholars Research Seminar (SCH). The Director of General Education will schedule students who find themselves out of sync with the normal completion of SRS/SCH into such courses at the next available opportunity. The Director of General Education in consultation with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board may agree to waive the requirement for risings seniors or seniors who for whatever reason have not completed SRS/SCH.
- 10) **Notification and validation of approvals.** The Director of General Education and Gen Ed Board will normally process approvals within one week of receipt, when all necessary information is provided. Approvals for substitutions and equivalencies will be certified and recorded in the Gen Ed Board minutes and communicated directly to the Registrar by the Director of General Education. Only approvals certified by the Director of General Education will be valid. The Director of General Education will notify students and interested parties of decisions in a timely manner.
- 11) **Ethos of this procedure.** The Director of General Education (with the Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board) will work constructively to consider substitutions and equivalencies consistent with promoting and maintaining the academic integrity of the Common Curriculum and the statutory graduation requirements of Union College.
- 12) **Disagreement resolution under this procedure.** In the event of serious and irresolvable disagreement involving the Director of General Education, Gen Ed Board, or Dean of Studies about a particular substitution or equivalency, the matter will be referred to the Dean of the Faculty.

On Behalf of the General Education Board,

*John Cramsie; Director of General Education*

*9 June 2014*

## **APPENDIX 1. Position Description of Director of General Education, 30 May 2011**

### **Position Description: Director of General Education**

The Director of General Education reports to the Dean of Studies and provides academic and administrative leadership for the College's General Education program. The director works in collaboration with relevant faculty committees (General Education Board), governance groups (Academic Affairs Council) and administrative offices (Dean of Studies, Director of Advising) to implement and assess the General Education program. The Director of General Education articulates the vision, goals and benefits of the program to a broad variety of audiences.

### **Recurring Responsibilities:**

#### **A. Outreach and Communication**

- In consultation with the Director of Advising and other offices and programs, articulate the General Education program to students, faculty and parents and ensure that College publications including the Academic Register accurately characterize the General Education program
- Coordinating the First Year Preceptorial (FYP) and Sophomore Research Seminar (SRS) programs including promoting the importance of the courses across campus, and organizing faculty development opportunities
- Be informed about emerging trends in General Education on a national scale
- Attend an academic deans' meeting once per term to review progress and priorities

#### **B. Interface with Faculty and Students**

- Chair the General Education Board
- Approve requests for General Education course substitutions and equivalencies and answer questions on General Education (with Dean of Studies and Gen Ed Board)
- Assist in analyzing General Education course offerings and scheduling to ensure that the program is sufficiently staffed (with Dean of Studies and Dean of Academic Departments)
- Act as a resource for faculty interested in developing courses for general education

#### **C. Oversight of Administrative Tasks with Administrative Assistant Support**

- Coordinate assignment of students to SRS sections, including compiling and posting online lists of SRS topics, soliciting from students their preferences (currently by Zarca survey), assigning students to sections
- Coordinate on-going assessment of the General Education program
- Maintain and update the College's General Education website

**Special Projects – 2011-12**

- Rearticulate the General Education program based on the new Union Education curricular description
- Work with the Director of Advising, the Registrar and ITS to improve the functionality of both the WebAdvising and the Datatel Systems, such as eventually eliminating the need for the Cluster Finder software by incorporating that function into Datatel, and enabling students to create curricular plans in Datatel which can then be reviewed by advisors.

**Special Projects – 2012-13**

- Reevaluate the approach to assessment in light of the upcoming 2014-15 Middle States mid-term report (in consultation with the Director of Assessment, the General Education Board, the deans, department chairs and faculty)
- Work with the Academic Affairs Council and the deans in the development of recommendations for policies and processes based on assessment data and best practices

**Special Projects – 2013-14**

- Facilitate professional development opportunities for faculty teaching general education courses
- Participate in national conference in general education and articulation of the value of a liberal education

*Please note that the administrative assistant position currently assigned to the Dean of Interdisciplinary Programs will continue to provide support for General Education.*