

# THE COMMON CURRICULUM

## Policy for Reviewing Common Curriculum Designations

[approved by the Gen Ed Board on 31 October 2013 with effect from January 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.

The hybrid nature of the program leads to certain creative and problematic tensions. The most direct problem for the General Education Board in its role as stewards of the Common Curriculum has arisen from the intersection of distribution requirements with modes of inquiry and competencies. Students, faculty, and staff have in the past three years (and more) typically raised two such concerns:

- 1) Do all courses in a broad distribution actually provide instruction and guidance in the modes of inquiry and/or competencies sought in a particular requirement?
- 2) Has the course proposal and approval process ensured that a specific course actually provides instruction and guidance in the modes of inquiry and/or competency for which it was approved?

These questions have also figured regularly in Gen Ed Board deliberations over course proposals and approvals. The Gen Ed Board typically queries one or the other at some point, but a third matter often recurs. In reviewing courses, the Gen Ed Board generally feels bound by the precedent of approvals granted to similar or identical courses in the past. It does so because there exists no specific policy to the contrary or the existence of a process of periodic review of approvals. We no longer find this to be a satisfactory process to protect the integrity of the program requirements, especially where courses are expected to provide instruction and guidance in defined modes of inquiry and/or competencies. Therefore, the Gen Ed Board has approved the following policy for processing and reviewing approvals for Common Curriculum designation.

**POLICY FOR COMMON CURRICULUM DESIGNATION APPROVAL AND REVIEW.** The Gen Ed Board will adhere to these policy provisions beginning in January 2014:

- 1) The General Education Board will determine approvals for Common Curriculum designations only on the basis of the course proposals and supporting materials submitted; the Gen Ed Board will not be bound by any precedent or approvals predating the adoption of this policy.

- 2) The Gen Ed Board will undertake reviews as needed of specific courses and courses in broad distributions to determine if they actually provide instruction and guidance in the modes of inquiry and/or competencies sought in a particular requirement. The Gen Ed Board will request that individual faculty, departments, and programs submit courses for re-approval as appropriate using an application adapted from the existing course proposal form.
- 3) In undertaking such reviews and making requests of this kind, the Gen Ed Board will be guided by indications of the erosion of program requirements. Such indications typically arise from ordinary determinations made under 1 above, discovery of bad precedent, information obtained in the course approval process, periodic reviews of CC designations in datatel, examination of course descriptions, or the like.
- 4) As part of reviewing courses, the Gen Ed Board reserves the right to withhold or remove CC designations for any course that does not demonstrate that its content will provide instruction and guidance in the modes of inquiry and/or competencies sought in a particular requirement. The Gen Ed Board will work constructively to address questions or concerns of this nature with individual faculty, departments, and programs, but reserves the final determination to itself consistent with its existing authority and responsibilities for approval of CC designations.
- 5) The Gen Ed Board will not undertake reviews or make such requests on a routine basis, but in response only to an identifiable need. Changes in the status of CC designations will not be applied retroactively and will not affect a student's past completion of the requirement. In implementing this policy, the Gen Ed Board will aim for the minimal burden on faculty and staff consistent with promoting and maintaining the integrity of the program.

On Behalf of the General Education Board,  
*John Cramsie; Director of General Education*  
*8 January 2014*