

COMMON CURRICULUM ANNUAL REPORT (2014-2015)

[submitted to the Academic Affairs Council by Professor John Cramsie, Director of General Education, 1 June 2015]

GEN ED BOARD

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Let me express my appreciation for the hard work of all the Gen Ed Board members. The Gen Ed Board is no longer 'easy service' and all of my colleagues on the board have responded in exemplary fashion. I particularly want to note the outstanding service by Patricia Wareh and Jennifer Bishop, who served during three of the busiest years in my time as Director. They made significant and important contributions to Common Curriculum assessment, our HUM/HUL/LCC review, and the Mellon Presidential Project for Global Learning. – John Cramsie

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SCLB/SET Enrollment and Review. We monitored the reception and implementation of our recommendations in the SCLB/SET Enrollment Report (submitted to Dean Dave Hayes on 5 June 2012). To date progress has been made with enrollment management and routine planning for SCLB/SET course offerings via the Common Curriculum Science Board. No direct progress has been made with respect to our recommendation that we provide a sufficient short-term infusion of courses and seats to clear the 'backlog' of juniors and seniors and simultaneously ensure that all students can (and will) complete both their SCLB and SET courses by the end of the sophomore year. The Director of General Education met with the AAC in Winter 2015 to discuss a resolution affirming the desirability that students complete both requirements by the end of the junior year. Overall, it would seem that our report has prompted welcome attention, but we continue to await further progress.

At the end of Spring 2015, the Gen Ed Board considered undertaking a revision of the SCLB/SET requirements, motivated by 1) intractable enrollment and staffing problems; 2) enhancing the possibilities of better integrating Center 1 and 2 faculty and courses as part of the Mellon Presidential Project for Global Learning (PGL); 3) meeting the goals laid out in the 2013 Strategic Plan; 4) requirements at peer schools. We received information that Division 3 intends to form a sub-committee to (once again) study the enrollment and staffing issues with both SET and SCLB courses. Therefore, the Gen Ed Board opted not to proceed until that subcommittee reports and will determine upon a review of the SET/SCLB requirements in 2016 if no report or progress follows from the sub-committee.

Through our Division 3 rep we advised those interested in forming the sub-committee to consider the following: 1) include both the Division 3 and 4 Gen Ed Board reps on the sub-committee and to include Division 4 faculty in this investigation; 2) as part of its remit that the sub-committee consider widely and in detail what the goals are or should be for the SCLB and SET requirements, in particular what meaningful impact faculty want the experience to have on students that shapes their four years at Union and their lives as liberal arts graduates after leaving Union, especially for non-science and -engineering students.

Common Curriculum Assessment. We have fully phased in the Common Curriculum assessment program. Details can be found at: <http://www.union.edu/offices/gen-ed/program-administration/assessment/>

We completed improvements identified in the pilot-year 2013-2104: 1) a streamlined individual assessment report webform with new functionality; 2) revised learning outcomes that better align with particular departments/disciplines; 3) an efficient process of electronic record keeping and portfolio management. Response rate in 2014-2015 has not improved over the pilot-year, falling between 30% and 50% of individual assessments to be submitted each term. We improved our notification system by which faculty are informed that they have students to assess in a particular class, though we still loose track of the occasional student who changes her/his course schedule after the first week of term or drops a course. We also now send department chairs/assessment coordinators an email with the assessment assignments for their colleagues, asking them to follow up and direct the faculty member to us with any questions. Many faculty (rightly) view assessment as another ‘unfunded mandate’ imposed on them by external authority and administrative compliance. The Common Curriculum assessment suffers from this association. We have worked hard to make the process ‘cost-effective’, sensitive of faculty time, and useful, but it still represents a genuine demand on faculty time; ‘good citizens’ among the faculty have responded but made it clear this is so. We will continue to work to overcome these challenges. We hope, as more information comes in from the CC assessment, to improve how we close the loop through ‘faculty development’ initiatives and demonstrate how the findings lead to program improvements. Nonetheless, we have probably reached a point when senior administrative support will become necessary to boost response rates.

In 2014-2015 we took important steps to fully integrate SRS/SCH and FYP/FYP-H assessment within the now-established Common Curriculum assessment process. This will enable the Director of General Education and Gen Ed Board to finally and fully respond to the recommendations of the AAC in 2011 that a regular, integrated program of assessment and faculty development be put in place that supports SRS/SCH and FYP/FYP-H (in response to the AAC Subcommittee on FYP/SRS that met and reported in 2010).

The integration is outlined to proceed as follows. Eliminate the paper/hardcopy FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH assessments in favour of a single integrated webapp IAR built on the current IAR platform. The IAR-FYP/FYP-H and IAR-SRS/SCH would substitute the FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH assessment rubric for learning outcome A in the current IAR. Proficiency categories in the current FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH rubrics will be replaced by the current IAR proficiency levels, thus creating a consistent set of assessment standards. FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH instructors will complete the same summative assessment of learning outcome A as in the current IAR to provide an aggregate assessment across all Common Curriculum courses. FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH instructors will also complete the same summative assessment of learning outcomes B and C to better integrate FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH within the broad programmatic goals of the Common Curriculum. SRS/SCH assessment currently resides with the

Director of General Education. These changes will be phased in for SRS/SCH assessment beginning in Fall 2014. In fall term, faculty will have the option to use the existing paper assessment process or the electronic one. Based on this pilot term, we will phase out the paper assessment entirely in either winter or spring terms in 2016.

FYP/FYP-H assessment currently resides with the Dean of Studies. Working with the Dean of Studies' office, we will pilot-test the FYP/FYP-H assessment in Fall 2015 and Winter 2016. Faculty will have the option to use the existing paper assessment process or the electronic one. Based on these two pilot terms, we will determine whether to phase out entirely the paper assessment beginning in 2016-2017. Our midterm report to Middle States committed up to eventually moving FYP/FYP-H assessment and faculty development for FYP/FYP-H (workshops) entirely under the Director of General Education. The Gen Ed Board agreed in May 2015 that this integration of assessment and faculty development should occur now with a view to being complete for 2016-2017.

Sophomore Research Seminar Program Development. The Gen Ed Board agreed to extend an invitation to faculty to propose and teach an ‘experimental’ SRS in 2014-2015; we had in mind particularly faculty from department, programs, and disciplines for whom the strict 15-18 page term paper requirement makes their research interests a bad fit with the course. We approved three such SRSs and hope they can be springboards to bringing innovative approaches into the program. The Gen Ed board will evaluate the success/failure of this when we have complete information in Fall 2015 and decide whether to revisit some of the SRS requirements in light of its evaluation beginning with SRSs for 2016-2017.

This was the second year of our annual SRS/SCH student research award. The General Education Board selected two students who completed outstanding research projects during 2013-2014. Avery Novitch ‘16 won for her ‘Whipping Her Into Shape: The Transformation of Shapewear in the Mid Twentieth Century’. Avery completed the project working with Professor Andrew Feffer (History) in his SRS ‘1963: Betty Friedan and the Rebirth of Feminism’. Adam Lewis ‘16 won for his ‘Documentary vs. Propaganda: The Photography of the War Relocation Authority and the Office of War Information During World War II’. Adam completed the project working with Professor Andrew Morris (History) in his SRS ‘The Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II’. Both students impressed the Board with their use of evidence, engagement with the scholarly debates and determination to push them in new directions, and the care they took in writing and presenting the research. The students were honored at the Common Curriculum convocation in January. The convocation welcomed the *New York Times* columnist and author Verlyn Klinkenborg, well known for his weekly column *The Rural Life*, written around life on his farm in upstate New York, and most recently *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (Vintage, 2013). The 2015-2016 convocation in Fall term will feature Molly Guptill Manning, author of the bestseller, *When Books Went to War: The Stories that Helped Us Win World War II* (2014).

Finally, in Fall 2015 we will determine the feasibility of three interconnected structural changes to the SRS program and decide whether to move forward on them.

First, we will examine the feasibility of moving SRS to the winter and spring terms of the sophomore year for 2016-2017. We do so for two reasons. It has become apparent that faculty simply do not want to teach the SRS in the same term that the Greek system rushes/recruits. The Greek culture has a malign effect on student engagement and performance in this very demanding course, the learning environment itself, and student success. Moving the enrolment process for SRS to the immediately preceding term (fall term), will remedy many logistical problems in settling SRS teaching assignments, obtaining course proposals, and allowing the Gen Ed Board to exercise due diligence and review of the proposals and program generally. In both 2014 and 2015, we have been forced to wait until the last minute (literally) to obtain a complete list of faculty teaching in the program let alone course descriptions or the SRS proposal form and accompanying materials. In both years, the Gen Ed Board has been unable to review new SRS proposals; the board and/or the Director have been forced to accept SRS proposals that are demonstrably inadequate for the program. While we are never in a position to say no to a faculty

member or proposal, we have nonetheless been able to provide useful pedagogical scrutiny to improve SRS when we have had sufficient time to review proposals and accompanying materials. Moving the enrolment process to the fall term will open up the spring term for the Gen Ed Board to complete its due diligence and better align the assignment of faculty to SRS with the college's hiring cycle and the work of the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs.

Second, we will determine the feasibility of moving SRS to the Winter and Spring terms of students' first year. We would aim to make direct linkages between SRS and FYP as part of a 'one-two academic punch' in the first year experience of Union students. The Honours SRS (SCH) is currently taught in the first year and we think it is desirable for all Union students to have this intense first-year experience. We will look at the feasibility of making that the norm for all Union first-year students in a phased transition. Such a transition could look like this:

Academic Year	Fall Term	Winter Term	Spring Term
2016-2017	2016 Students in FYP		
		2015 Students in SRS	
2017-2018	2017 Cohort A in FYP	2017 Cohort B in FYP	2017 Cohort A in FRS
		2016 Students in SRS	
2018-2019	2018 Cohort A in FYP	2018 Cohort B in FYP	
		2018 Cohort A in FRS	2018 Cohort B in FRS
		2017 Cohort B in SRS	
2019-2020	2019 Cohort A in FYP	2019 Cohort B in FYP	
		2019 Cohort A in FRS	2019 Cohort B in FRS

FYP/SRS are the foundation courses in the CC and tasked particularly with training students in academic standards of inquiry, critical thinking and analysis, engagement with complex and diverse ideas, and the effective presentation of their ideas in discussion, presentation, and writing. Despite the common goals, the relationship between the two courses is practically non-existent. They do not build upon each other toward these broader academic goals, the specific FYP and SRS learning outcomes that overlap one another, or the program-wide CC learning outcomes. Further, almost ten years on from the creation of the SRS program, departments and programs have infused the undergraduate research ethos into their curricula so regularly that the sophomore year now seems too late to engage students with modes of inquiry and research. FYP and SRS are the only two common experiences Union students have, the only two college-wide opportunities to establish and create a shared experience of academic excellence and rigour. For all of these reasons, we would like to create a stronger first-year experience by properly linking FYP and SRS and working to establish opportunities for more deliberate connections between content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. We expect to use several SRS and FYP workshops in Fall 2015 to evaluate these possible changes.

We should note here that in the previous general education program the college scheduled the entire first year class into three required courses, FYP and two history survey courses. While there might be some resistance to a second required course in the first year, Union students in the past did, nonetheless, complete three required courses in the first year, the Registrar scheduled and enrolled the students, and departments and programs accommodated three first year requirements in their course offerings. There is no practical reason why our administrative processes or curricula cannot support two required first-year courses, having once supported three. As an added benefit, removing the SRS from the sophomore year will free the second year from any required courses in the CC, thus eliminating a not insignificant number of conflicts between SRSs and courses in students majors (especially in longer, hierarchical, or rigid fields).

HUL/HUM/LCC Review. In 2013-2014 we processed faculty and students surveys about the LCC requirement. In Winter 2015 we reviewed peer schools for the equivalent of our LCC requirement as well as their HUL/HUM requirements.

Regarding LCC, we found that Union is an outlier in not having a foreign language requirement, either as stand alone requirement or as part of a broader cultural understanding / cultural diversity requirement. More than 75% of our 32 peer schools have some kind of foreign language requirement. Faculty in Classics and Modern Languages both expressed a serious interest in developing a foreign language requirement for the Common Curriculum. Following a productive meeting on 4 March 2015, to which Gen Ed Board members were invited, a MLL and Classics formed a working group to develop proposals for a foreign language requirement. The Gen Ed Board will work with it as desired/needed.

Over the period 2015-2017 we will work with International Programs to review the Union study abroad programs, chiefly to ensure they meet the content guidelines for the LCC requirement and determine just how and for what students should receive LCC credit for study abroad. It is likely that we will take a 1+1 approach to full terms abroad: students can complete one LCC course requirement by virtue of the term abroad itself; students can complete the second LCC course requirement by completing an approved LCC course taught by the Union faculty member on the term. There may be instances in which a full term abroad constitutes an immersive cultural experience, involving foreign language expertise and/or direct, sustained, experiential learning around cultural complexity. We would consider successful completion of such a term abroad to fulfil both LCC course requirements. We intend to review most carefully the practices associated with mini-terms and LCC credit given; we are not satisfied that a mini-term with associated pre-departure and post-return coursework is sufficient to fulfil both LCC course requirements.

Finally, effective immediately, 'Linguistic and Cultural Competency' will change to 'Languages and Cultures', to better reflect the importance of language study in LCC and achieve a slightly less ugly usage.

Regarding Humanities requirements at our peer schools. We found only two overall patterns of interest. Union is an outlier in not having a History requirement; History was more often in Humanities at our peer schools than any other division. Several faculty members in Humanities would like to take a more cultural studies approach to 'texts' in our current HUL requirement while others who would like to see better participation by students in the visual and performing arts as part of our HUM requirement. There is consensus on the Gen Ed Board in support of recasting the Literature requirement in favour of a more open-ended definition of 'texts'. We are supportive of encouraging greater participation in visual and performing arts. Our HUM/HUL requirement grew out of a two-course Humanities distribution requirement with a specification that one course must be a Literature course. Our peer schools tend to cast their requirement as choosing courses in Humanities and Arts (typically encompassing fine arts and performing arts only). Humanities might consider asking the Gen Ed Board to tweak the current HUL/HUM

requirements in several ways: 1) prohibiting students from completing a second Literature courses to fulfil the other humanities requirement; 2) requiring that the second humanities course (HUM) be a specifically visual/performing arts course; 3) eliminating the Literature requirement in favour of any two humanities courses; 4) expanding 'texts' in the HUL requirement to take in film, visual arts, music, etc. It is the settled view of the Gen Ed Board that options 3 and 4 above effectively eliminate the Literature requirement and therefore require a vote of the General Faculty under the governance process; options 1 and 2 above fall under the authority of the Gen Ed Board. We would consider pursuing option 1 on our own initiative. We would not pursue options 2, 3, or 4 without the initiative coming from Humanities since significant curricular and resources issues arise in each case.

Our attention to HUM/HUL did reveal anomalies in courses approved for HUL credit. We intend in 2015 to review and revise HUL approvals from courses as warranted. This will be the first systematic application of the procedural guideline explained here:

http://www.union.edu/offices/gen-ed/_documents/ccdesignationreviewpolicy2014.pdf.

Finally, effective immediately the title 'Humanities' will change to 'Arts and Humanities' and we will work with the Registrar to implement a coding change in datatel from the current HUM to AHU; we will also work with the Registrar to implement a coding change in datatel from the current HUL to LIT. While these do not change the substance of the requirements, they give greater emphasis to the Literature and Arts as distinct parts of the Humanities.

Mellon Presidential Project for Global Learning. In a systematic and sustainable fashion, PGL aims to introduce big questions and topics of global scope and importance into the Common Curriculum and related co-curricular activities. We are particularly interested in topics that a) have direct global-local connections, b) represent shared challenges at the local and global levels even if the direct connections may not be clear or present, or c) compress the distinction and distance between local and global. This is what we mean by a global-local-global perspective. The Mellon Presidential Grant will fund two study tours abroad in summer 2016 and summer 2017 by approximately ten faculty members each. The study tours lasting roughly ten days will be devoted to examining a global challenge from multiple disciplinary perspectives via seminars, workshops, and opportunities for travel and experiential learning. Faculty selected for the study tours commit to developing new content, new courses, or even a collaborative, coordinated set of modules and courses for the academic year after the tour. The faculty survey returned the highest levels of interest in the following (in alphabetical order): economic inequality/instability, gender and power, human rights, social justice. The survey returned lesser but still strong support for the following (in alphabetical order): climate disruption, cooperation/collective action, designing sustainability, energy, food and food insecurity. Many of these topics and themes are implied among one another or are easily comprehended under a broader rubric like social justice. We see this as expressing both a depth of interest in a broad theme like social justice or sustainability while simultaneously suggesting a breadth of individual topics or issues through which to explore it. In other words, the survey results reveal the potential to get to grips with a compelling big question/challenge through its complex pieces and the connections among them. With this concrete information about interests, Therese McCarty contacted CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange). She and I spoke with the director of faculty development programs at CIEE about our interests. We have a provisional agreement to work with CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange) to handle the organization and logistics of the study tours. CIEE has agreed to adapt an existing CIEE study program to suit our interests.

During Spring 2015, we completed various information and recruitment surveys. The Gen Ed Board working with Therese McCarty selected China (2016) and Turkey (2017) as destinations, working through CIEE. Our next steps for 2015-2016 include:

- Fall 2015: application and selection of faculty for the summer 2016 study tour, first group meeting, develop and agree on tailored content for the study tour and submit requests to CIEE
- Winter 2016: study tour members work with team leaders and Director of General Education on preliminary learning goals, curricular ideas, and possibilities for collaborative/linked teaching
- Spring 2016: finish pre-departure work; begin recruitment and pre-planning process for study tour in summer 2017
- Mid-June to mid-July 2016: first study tour, followed by two-day post-tour retreat/workshop

Gen Ed Board Oversight of the FYP and SRS Requirements. The Gen Ed Board is the standing sub-council of the AAC charged under the governance system with oversight of the general education program and the formulation of plans and policies relating to it. This oversight includes (but is not limited to) the specific requirements and the approval of courses by which students fulfil those statutory graduation requirements. These include FYP and the SRS and all courses taught to fulfil those requirements, Honors Preceptorial (FYP-H) and the Scholars Research Seminar (SCH-150) among them. Hitherto the Gen Ed Board has not played an active role in the approval process for FYP/FYP-H or SCH. There are various reasons and administrative anomalies that account for this, some long-standing and others more recent with the successive reorganizations of the academic dean positions and assignment of administrative responsibilities. The Gen Ed Board has determined to exercise greater oversight of these courses beginning in 2015-2016.

We have several reasons for doing so. First, it does not make sense that either course falls outside the same level of review that the Gen Ed Board conducts with any courses that seek approval for CC requirements. Currently, all other courses must include a syllabus, description of how it meets the content requirements, and explanation of how it will address the student learning outcomes. As the two most important courses in the CC, courses taught for FYP and SRS credit should receive at least as much attention; currently the SRS is the only one of them that does. Second, we hope that this review process will improve instruction and ensure all students receive a comparable level of attention to the learning outcomes for the courses; the Gen Ed Board often suggests improvements during the SRS proposal/review process and incorporates findings from the SRS assessment in making recommendations to faculty submitting new SRSs. A stronger review process can bring these benefits to the other courses. Finally, faculty selected for the PGL study tours commit to developing new content, new courses, or even a collaborative, coordinated set of modules and courses beginning in the academic year after the tour. The most typical approach will be to align new FYP or SRS sections with existing courses that have new/revised content. We fully expect this opportunity to be open to faculty teaching FYP, FYP-H and SCH. This will necessitate a more direct involvement of the Gen Ed Board in the review of the other courses to meet its responsibilities overseeing the curricular integration of the PGL with the Common Curriculum.

The Director of General Education began discussions with the Director of the Honors Program (Maggie Tongue) and the Dean of Studies (Mark Wunderlich) in Spring 2015 to work out the best way to achieve the proper level and type of Gen Ed Board review and oversight. We expect this to be fully implemented for SRS/SCH when recruitment/submissions begin in Winter 2016. It is important to emphasize that the Gen Ed Board will not be involved with the work by the Dean of Studies, the Dean of Academic Departments and Programs, and Scholars Program Director in the recruitment of FYP/FYP-H and SRS/SCH instructors, the selection of FYP/FYP-H or SCH sections that meet the guidelines for the program, or any of the enrollment processes associated with FYP/FYP-H or SCH.

Common Curriculum Website. We have begun migrating the Common Curriculum website from CMS to Wordpress. Older projects for version 2.0 of the Common Curriculum website envisioned under CMS have been revised and postponed until the new Wordpress version 1.0 is complete. We have four initial goals for the website revamp:

- Present a more visually compelling and attractive portal to the program.
- Ensure students are able to easily obtain the nuts and bolts information about the program and the requirements.
- Encourage students to find pathways through the program that respond to their interests and offer opportunities to find and explore new interests. We will particularly encourage departments and programs to help us build these openings. For example, helping us design information and links for students who have interests in creative arts, gender and power, global challenges, or the like.
- Ensure faculty and staff are able to easily obtain the nuts and bolts information about the program and their responsibilities under it, including program assessment, course proposals, opportunities for faculty development.

Campus Discussion on Sexual Assault. The Gen Ed Board worked with the chair of the AAC, Lewis Davis to respond to the 7 October 2014 faculty motion to investigate how to integrate the discussion of sexual assault into college curricula. With input from the Director of General Education, the AAC passed the following charge. We will assist the AAC and AAC subcommittee as requested in their work.

Charge to the Subcommittee on Curricular Responses to Sexual Assault

Investigate and make recommendations regarding a course to be offered fall term for First-year students that would address issues related to sexual assault as well as other aspects of college life. Report preliminary findings to the AAC by the end of the academic year.

In investigating this issue, please address the following:

- The form and extensiveness of the course. Two possibilities are a first-year seminar, which would meet during a regular class time and receive full academic course credit, and an extended orientation, which would take place during the first few weeks of the term and would not carry academic credit.
- The potential role of such a course to fulfill elements of Union's mission, as articulated in the strategic plan.
- The topics to be included in this course. These might include:
 - Understanding the honor code and academic honesty;
 - Envisioning their academic plan of study and course selections;
 - Responding to academic challenge;
 - Respecting diversity and difference;
 - Navigating the social scene, including sexual interactions (positive and negative) and substance use and abuse.
- The merits of an academic approach to these issues. In particular, please consider
 - evidence that curricular interventions influence student attitudes or behavior, and
 - the structure and effectiveness of similar courses at peer institutions.

Rationale for the Subcommittee:

On October 7, 2014, the faculty unanimously passed the following motion:

The faculty request General Education Board, Academic Affairs Council, and the Director of Common Curriculum review how to integrate the sexual assault discussion into the curriculum.

In subsequent discussions between the Director of General Education, the AAC Chair and the Director of the Women and Gender Studies Program, it was decided that sexual assault was only one of a number of social and academic issues related to campus culture might usefully be addressed together, including positive attitudes toward sexuality, economic and social diversity on campus, and academic integrity. Further research suggested gains to an academic approach to these issues. In addition, the desire to involve the entire student body in discussing these issues argues against a piecemeal approach, e.g. adding gender modules to particular courses, such as has been usefully applied in pursuit of other educational objectives, e.g. WAC courses.