

COMMON CURRICULUM ANNUAL REPORT (2016-2017)

[submitted to the Academic Affairs Council by John Cramsie, Director of General Education, 6 June 2016]

GEN ED BOARD

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1) Mellon Presidential Project for Global Learning (PGL). 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. The Mellon Presidential Grant will fund two study tours abroad in summer 2016 and summer 2017 to China and Turkey respectively. We have signed an 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 existing CIEE study programs to suit our interests.

The study tours, lasting roughly ten days, are 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 focus of the study tours is social justice and sustainability, as explored through a rich variety of sub-topics such as economic inequality/instability, gender and

power, human rights, climate disruption, cooperation/collective action, designing sustainability, energy, food and food insecurity. Collectively the two study tours get to grips with a compelling big question/challenge through its complex pieces and the connections among them.

We made solid progress in 2016-2017. China faculty completed an instructional-workshop in August developed and led by the DofGE. This was a crucial step for embedding and sustaining the study tour experience in the Common Curriculum. The workshop yielded draft courses and course content:

- Three new First-Year Preceptorials for 2017-2018 ('Narratives of Migration and Immigration', 'Confronting China's Challenges', and 'Made in China')
- Two new/revamped Sophomore Research Seminars for 17-18 ('Electrical Communication and Society' and 'Middle Ground: Common Ground?')
- A revision for 17-18 of MTH 061 – Math in the Public Interest to focus on metrics and data analysis integrating environmental, sociocultural, and economic sustainability
- The incorporation of China-related modules beginning with Fall 2016 in the following courses and curricular initiatives: ENS 100 – Introduction to Environmental Studies; EGL 280 – Nature Writing and Environmental Writing; Preceptorial 'Literature, Ethics, and the Environment'; proposal for a team-taught Common Curriculum lab science course in Chemistry; courses in Transnational Cinema and Documentary film-making; a possible Mechanical Engineering course on sustainable engineering and socio-environmental trade-offs in countries undertaking rapid economic development.

In addition to these concrete curricular impacts, China faculty have already collaborated with each other and reached out to colleagues in departments and programs to link courses, become resources for each others courses, and improve advising and communication designed to move students into Common Curriculum courses that emphasize global learning.

We recruited and selected eleven faculty for the second study tour to Berlin, Germany. The Berlin cohort includes faculty of all ranks from Classics, Electrical & Computer Engineering, Economics, History, Library Sciences and Special Collections, Mathematics, Modern Languages and Literatures, Political Science. The Berlin study tour will emphasize the sustainability of socially, culturally, and historically complex societies and the challenges posed for social justice in those settings. We will take advantage of unique opportunities in Germany to examine the current challenges facing the European Union, including Austerity, migration, and fears about violence and religious extremism. We will also explore Germany's leadership (and challenges) in engineering sustainability, its own domestic challenges with the EU, and its cultural and commercial role linking Europe to the new 'silk roads' of Russia, Central Asia, South Asia, and China. The history of Berlin and its manifold resources guarantee a very high level of expertise and experience with this content.

In preparation for the Berlin trip, the faculty directors and the Director of General Education led on-campus team-building workshops that include preparation for travel to Berlin itself, formulation of learning outcomes, and initial ideas for new modules, courses, and collaborative learning across courses. These last projects will be the focus of a second mandatory instructional-curricular design retreat in the summer of 2017. Our goal is that Berlin faculty will have lessons and modules ready to use beginning as early as fall term 2017 with more developed content, including new courses, coming on line throughout 2017-2018.

Various activities throughout 2016-2017 introduced the campus community to the China study tour and this initiative in the Common Curriculum, including campus talks and the screening of a short documentary film on the China Study Tour shot and produced by Jim de Seve, our filmmaker in residence who participated in the study tour. We also brought the two study tour cohorts together, starting with a mini-retreat for the Berlin faculty to learn about the China experience; both sets of faculty directors are collaborating on preparation for Berlin and how to make the most curricular impact with the study tour (before, during, and after). We expect faculty to learn with and from one another and collaborate within the study tour group, but also with their colleagues in the second study tour. At the completion of the two study tours, the twenty-five faculty should become a collaborative collective that then reaches into courses, departments, and programs initially untouched or uninvolved with the global learning project. Our challenges in year three (and subsequently) will be to sustain those partnerships and collaborative projects and develop an explicitly permanent curricular presence for global learning in general education at Union for the long-term.

2) Common Curriculum Designation Review. The Gen Ed Board completed its two year review of CC designations with its report on the relationship between study away programs and the completion of CC requirements. Beginning in Fall 2016, the Gen Ed Board worked 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 in study abroad. Study away programs vary greatly in character with the goals of LCC in mind. There are instances in which a full term study away constitutes an immersive cultural experience, involving foreign language expertise and/or direct, sustained, experiential learning around cultural complexity. Some programs include partial but not complete attention to LCC requirements and goals while it is not clear that others address LCC at all beyond a (typically false) presumption that simply spending time in a 'foreign' country is sufficient to develop linguistic or cultural understanding. We also examined mini-terms. Finally, our review expanded to include the question of how CC requirements as a whole are completed via study away.

The Gen Ed Board unanimously approved and sent revised guidelines to the AAC, Dean Thacker, and Lara Atkins on 29 May. The guidelines cover the completion of CC requirements through study away and are due to take effect as explained in 2018. The revised guidelines restore the original relationship between study away and academic credit for CC requirements approved by the General Faculty when it approved our general education program in 2005. Existing guidelines directly and substantively deviate from the program approved by the General Faculty. The disjunction occurred through administrative processes with indeterminate involvement by the General Education Board. We could not find reference to the AAC and a vote of the General Faculty that approved the policy/program changes made by the existing guidelines. The practical effects of the revised guidelines are minimal. They will not make it harder for Union students to participate in study away: they will make it harder for students to miss out on or avoid the depth and rigour of cultural learning that the General Faculty voted for in 2005. The revised guidelines will positively improve Union's academic programs and better enable Union students to become the engaged, ethical contributors in a complex global society described in our mission statement.

3) Foreign Language Requirement. Among ranked liberal arts college and our 32-school peer group, 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. Following a productive meeting on 4 March 2015, to which Gen Ed Board members were invited, faculty in MLL and Classics formed a working group to develop proposals for a foreign language requirement. On 1 June 2016, the Gen Ed Board met with the working group for a presentation. They made very solid progress on the structure of a requirement, seeking broad input from departments across the campus, and thinking through questions related to resources/staffing, enrolment and scheduling, and the relationship of the requirement to the existing CC structure and requirements. The working group collected additional data from comparison schools and further developed a proposal for a foreign language requirement as part of an 'enhanced LCC requirement'. The Board reviewed the proposal and met with the working group on 17 May 2017. Since the working group completed its proposal, it has become certain that the college will embark upon the creation of a new general education program in the near future. We requested that the working group revise the proposal and resubmit it to the Gen Ed Board as an advisory proposal for inclusion in any new general education program. The working group agreed and will submit it to the Board at the beginning of September 2017.

4) Gen Ed Board Oversight and Administrative Rationalization of the FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 Requirements. Beginning in 2015-2016, the Gen Ed Board began exercising

greater oversight of FPR/FPR-H and SCH-150 in addition to the established oversight of SRS. By 2018 we aim to complete the process of oversight and integration, including the academic and curricular responsibilities for FPR/FPR-H.

We have several reasons for developing our oversight in a more systematic fashion. First, it did not make sense that the courses fall 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 FPR and SRS credit should receive at least as much attention; previously only SRS received such attention.

Second, both FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 have unique pedagogical requirements and learning outcomes; they demand a certain kind of process and content that is specific to those requirements and goals. Through our review, we improve instruction and ensure all students receive a comparable level of attention to the learning outcomes. With SRS/SCH-150, the Gen Ed Board reviews new course proposals and requests varying levels of revision and improvements. In 2016 and 2017, our reviews led to recommendations ranging from minor changes to a full revision and re-submission of a course.

Third, in my time as Director I have found discrepancies and misunderstanding about the learning outcomes and the expectations for SRS/SCH-150. It came to my attention that several SRSs over the past three years did not require the 15 to 18 page research paper. In addition, I received complaints from students that they lost out on an important learning opportunity from not doing so. Further, it was commonly believed that students in SCH-150 were not expected to complete the SRS research paper requirement. The college-wide SRS requirement preceded the development of a first-year 'scholars SRS' that became SCH-150. That some students or sections of SCH-150 did not complete the research paper in the past does not mean that was the intent when this general education program was created or that the General Faculty approved a different requirement for the Scholars.

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 FPR or SRS sections with existing courses that have new/revised content. We fully expect this opportunity to be open to faculty teaching FPR, FPR-H and SCH-150. This too necessitated a more direct involvement of the Gen Ed Board in the review of the courses so that it can oversee the curricular integration of the PGL with the Common Curriculum.

On 18 January and 18 April, the Gen Ed Board approved initial and revised proposals to rationalize the academic and curricular responsibilities for FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150. The DofGE submitted the proposals to Dean Thacker, who asked that the DofGE, Director of Writing Programs, and Dean of Studies meet to work through the implementation of an administrative rationalization. That meeting occurred on 31 May and some progress was made on assessment and faculty development, but the overall results were not adequate with respect to the expectations of the Gen Ed Board regarding this matter. A meeting is intended for September to attempt to make further progress.

The Gen Ed Board does not see a good rationale for continuing to assign the academic and curricular responsibilities for FPR/FPR-H to the Dean of Studies office. In this we are also in agreement with the Director of Assessment, following the 30 January meeting between the Directors of General Education, Assessment, and Writing Programs to discuss the rationalization of assessment within and between the CC and WAC.

It makes sense to have the academic and curricular responsibilities assigned in the first instance to the DofGE, who has responsibility for the administration of the CC and chairs the faculty governance body charged with overseeing the CC and formulating plans and policies relating to general education programs. Because FPR/FPR-H is a foundational course for the CC and WAC, it makes sense that the DofGE and the Director of Writing Programs share joint responsibility for 1) assessment, 2) assessment follow-through in faculty development and program improvement, and 3) course proposals/approvals. Both directors agreed a working plan for their respective roles (and that of the governance boards they chair) in completing these three tasks. (Because SRS/SCH-150 is also a foundational course for both the CC and WAC, both directors will further develop and implement plans to collaborate on assessment and assessment follow-through in faculty development and program improvement for SRS/SCH-150.) It should also be noted that the Director of Writing Programs sits on the Gen Ed Board (*ex officio*).

In the context of developing a new general education program, it would be particularly desirable to rationalize the academic and curricular responsibility for general education now, in this way. Among other advantages, it will establish and develop the strong working partnerships between the Gen Ed Board, DofGE, DofWP (with the Writing Board) that will be important for the success of any new first-year seminar course(s), new WAC-foundation courses, courses meant to further and support any kind of research across the curriculum or research-based writing requirement(s), or other components of a new general education program. Course approval, assessment, and faculty development will be critical components no matter what shape a new program takes and those responsibilities should be made administratively coherent now.

5) Staffing Procedures for SRS/SCH-150. There are structural obstacles to our effective oversight of SRS/SCH-150 that became intolerable in 2017 because of the process for staffing the program in the DADP's office. It has handicapped oversight of SRS throughout my time as Director and continues to affect the broader oversight now encompassing SCH-150. We simply do not have sufficient time to review new courses between a) the final determination of SRS/SCH-150 staffing by Chairs and the DADP for the coming academic year, b) the creation and dissemination of the SRS preference survey by which students identify six preferred SRSs, and c) the deadline to complete the enrolment of rising sophomores in SRS before advising and pre-registration in spring term.

Situations we face at the deadline to send the preference survey to students include:

- Postponing the preference survey to receive a course description; almost every year.
- Receiving a course description without a proposal or syllabus; almost every year.
- Receiving a course description and proposal without a syllabus; frequently.
- Receiving a title and pro-forma description written by a department chair for a faculty member who has not been hired or accepted a tender of employment; occasionally.
- Receiving a course description, proposal, and draft syllabus we determine needed complete revision and resubmission before it should have been offered to students; occasionally.
- Receiving a course description, proposal, and draft syllabus we determine was unsuitable to be offered to students with or without complete revision and resubmission; three times.

I hope to work with the new DADP to improve this situation in 2018. Possible steps that can be applied to both FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 include:

- 1) Require the following information from Chairs when they submit initial staffing reports: that FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 faculty specify if they plan to teach an existing course or a new one. In the first instance, ask Chairs to remind faculty proposing to teach a new course that they must submit information by deadlines respective to FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150. Particularly for SRS/SCH-150, they should be reminded that they must submit a completed proposal in advance. (At the beginning of January 2016, I emailed all faculty about this and included the deadlines for submission; only one faculty member met the deadline and did so with a completed proposal. As the individuals more closely connected to individual faculty and FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 teaching assignments, the active participation of Chairs and the DADP would be very helpful.)
- 2) If little or nothing can be done about the existing time frame for staffing/scheduling, then enforce a prohibition on faculty new to SRS or faculty teaching new SRS from offering them in Fall term. This would allow the Gen Ed Board to concentrate on

reviewing the proposal to determine the course's basic suitability and the adequacy of the description in the short window before the preference survey goes out. It would then allow the Board time to work with faculty in spring term and in fall term on the SRS as well as give faculty an opportunity to attend the fall SRS/SCH-150 workshops, which are typically designed around fundamentals. It is slightly less difficult managing faculty new to or new courses for FPR/FPR-H, but the Gen Ed Board feels this would be best practice for FPR/FPR-H outside of exceptional situations.

- 3) Improve the current FPR/SRS staffing spreadsheet used by the DADP, Dean of Studies, and DofGE. In particular, the spreadsheet should a) call out changes to staffing and scheduling of FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 from one iteration to another, b) specify whether the faculty member will teach an existing or new course, and c) note how definite is the commitment of the faculty member listed. One of the problems with following up early with chairs and faculty is that final staffing/scheduling dispositions can and do change right up to the end of March. Some estimation of how certain it is that individual faculty will offer the course can help us begin the process of collecting proposals and information earlier.
- 4) DADP, Dean of Studies, and DofGE should determine if it is possible to undertake preliminary recruiting, staffing, and scheduling of FPR/FPR-H and SRS/SCH-150 in the Fall term.