

**UNIVERSITY SENATE  
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council

Date: April 2, 2012

**REVISIONS OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the changes to the existing general education program be adopted as outlined in this document.
2. That a new General Education category entitled “International Perspectives” be created in accordance with the attached rationale.
3. That a new General Education category entitled “Challenges for the Twenty-First Century” be created in accordance with the attached rationale.
4. That these requirements be implemented in accordance with the timeline outlined in this proposal beginning in fall 2012.
5. That a General Education Advisory Board that is advisory to the Undergraduate Academic Council and whose membership is approved by a majority vote of the Undergraduate Academic Council be created.
6. That this bill be forwarded to the President for approval.

## **RATIONALE:**

The Undergraduate Academic Council (UAC) in conjunction with the General Education Committee submits the following proposed changes to the University at Albany general education curriculum. This proposal is the culmination of a process that began over two years ago when the SUNY Board of Trustees afforded the opportunity to streamline the University's General Education Requirement (Memorandum of 19 January 2010). The current proposal builds upon the efforts of the 2010-2011 General Education Committee and UAC, which worked to develop a proposal based on a thorough review of the General Education Task Force report (submitted to the Senate Executive Committee on 22 November 2010), as well as feedback received from schools, colleges, and departments across the university.

The UAC engaged in thoughtful deliberation of each decision included in the report below. We attempted to maintain the intention of the recommendations of the General Education Task Force while being mindful of the feedback received from academic departments and schools. In developing this proposal UAC sought to ensure that the proposal:

- (a) reflects the unique excellence of the UAlbany undergraduate degree;
- (b) includes a focus on and an appreciation for our students' total educational experience with attention to both native freshmen and transfer students;
- (c) achieves academic rigor without excessive bureaucracy, is not overly prescriptive (which impedes progress to degree, especially for transfer students) but does not neglect essential elements that encourage exploration; and
- (d) improves the overall academic experience for the majority of our students, yet aligns with the SUNY Board of Trustees efforts to streamline the general education programs on all SUNY campuses in an effort to enhance student mobility and time-to-degree.

## Revised General Education Program

The General Education Program at the University at Albany is a distinct educational program that is broad by design, unique to our campus, and coherent in structure. The following elements comprise the proposed UAlbany General Education Program:

Students must complete a minimum of 30 credits in General Education courses to fulfill the General Education requirements as specified by the SUNY Board of Trustees. Within these 30 credits, students must earn a minimum of 3 credits in each of the categories below. In a number of areas, these categories remain as they are under the current general education program. An explanation accompanies categories that are new or significantly changed.

- **Mathematics**
- **Lower-Level Writing Intensive** (Maintains the current requirement—courses 100-299 with a Z, W, V, or T suffix)
- **Arts**
- **Humanities**
- **Natural Sciences**
- **Social Sciences**
- **U.S. History**
- **International Perspectives:** Can be fulfilled by at least 3 credits in cultures and traditions of a region, nation, or society outside the United States; or completion of an approved study abroad experience that earns UAlbany credit. [Note: many courses that currently count as Europe, Regions beyond Europe, or Global and Cross-Cultural Studies under the present General Education program would count in this new category.]
- **Foreign Language:** One course of at least 3 credits in a language other than English. This requirement is also considered satisfied for students who have:
  - demonstrated competency in a language other than English, including languages not currently offered for formal instruction at this university; or
  - passed a Regents “Checkpoint B” Examination or a Regents-approved equivalent in a foreign language, with a score of 85 or above; or
  - completed three or more years of a foreign language in high school with a course grade in the third year of 85, or B, or better (contingent on approval from SUNY); or
  - earned a score of 530 or better on an SAT II Subject Test in a foreign language.
- **Challenges for the Twenty-First Century:** A University at Albany signature course and local general education requirement. Any department may offer these courses, and students may take this course inside or outside their major, at any level between 100-499. These issues-based courses will integrate challenges and opportunities in such areas as cultural diversity and pluralism, science and technology, social interaction, ethics, global citizenship, and others, and may include interdisciplinary approaches. Courses in this category address the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of challenges that lie ahead as students move into the world beyond the University at Albany. [Note: Many

courses that currently count as Global and Cross-Cultural Studies or US Diversity and Pluralism under the present General Education program could fulfill this category. These would of course be in addition to new offerings designed to explore challenges for the twenty-first century.

### **Major Competencies**

In addition to these course requirements, students will demonstrate competency in SUNY mandated areas of critical thinking, basic communication (oral and written), and information management. Students will not meet these competencies in specific courses that count as part of the 30-credit general education program, but rather in discipline-appropriate and -specific ways during the course of completing their majors.

A major at the University at Albany, required of all students, is a coherent set of classes and, in some cases, field and/or extra-curricular experiences. By progressing through the major, students gain important discipline-specific knowledge and competencies. This proposal adopts the General Education Task Force recommendation that students acquire SUNY mandated competencies in critical thinking, oral and written communication, and information management largely in the discipline(s) of their majors. Each major will specify how students will become proficient in these competencies through coursework completed to satisfy the requirements of the major, either within or outside the major department.

- **Critical Thinking:** Integral to virtually every course students take at the university, coursework in the major will significantly develop and refine this competency in ways appropriate and specific to major disciplines. As the Task Force report noted, “the sustained engagement with both subject matter and methodology that comprise work in [students’] major fields will provide by far the best occasion for disciplined critical thinking.” Departments will specify how a course or a sequence of courses in the major accomplish the specific learning outcomes for this competency.
- **Oral and Written Communication:** This proposal envisions retaining the lower-level writing intensive requirement as it is under the current general education program. However, major departments will specify how their students become proficient in oral communication and advanced writing in ways appropriate and specific to major disciplines. It is important to note that this proposal does not suggest that current requirements for oral discourse and upper-level writing intensive courses merely be transferred as they are into the majors. Rather, major departments will specify how coursework develops these competencies in ways appropriate to disciplines.
- **Information Literacy:** Acquiring basic information management skills should happen at a time when students are required to use those skills. Information specialists recommend that skill acquisition begin before students enter their major, in most cases by their sophomore year. Therefore, faculty should consider prerequisite experiences or classes (including the information literacy classes offered by the library where appropriate, or classes developed in consultation with information literacy specialists on the library staff) as part of their discussion of how students can best acquire this competency in the major. Students can then refine and expand these basic skills through discipline-based research assignments in upper-level courses within the major.

The key question, of course, is how students will become proficient in these competencies. While university-wide policy will specify learning outcomes for the competencies, faculty in each department will determine how best to reach these outcomes in ways appropriate to the discipline or disciplines of specific majors. Departments might designate a specific class or sequences of classes within the major in which students learn these competencies; or departments might choose to require a course taught outside the major to accomplish these goals; or an exam might certify that majors have acquired basic levels of competency in these areas.

Faculty may specify courses that include significant levels of required discussion, or oral presentations, or small group discussion, and so on, as meeting the learning outcomes of oral communication, while capstone courses or others that require significant higher-level writing might certify majors have attained competency in written discourse. There are many possibilities, and faculty within disciplines are best suited to determine how to teach these competencies in ways that follow the norms of their disciplines.

SUNY's General Education Program outlines several learning outcomes for these three competencies, and departments will decide how best to achieve the outcomes within the contexts of their disciplines. The proposed General Education Advisory Board will constitute a resource for departments as they engage in this process, helping faculty develop appropriate assessment plans that demonstrate how competencies are completed within the majors.

## Summary of UAlbany General Education Program

SUNY MANDATED CATEGORIES	MINIMUM # OF CREDITS
Mathematics and Statistics	3
Lower-Level Writing Intensive*	3
SUNY FLEX CATEGORIES - REQUIRED AT UALBANY	
Arts	3
Humanities	3
Natural Sciences	3
Social Sciences	3
U.S. History	3
International Perspectives**	3
Foreign Language	3
UALBANY LOCAL REQUIREMENTS	
Challenges for the 21st Century**	3
<b>TOTAL CREDITS IN GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES:</b>	<b>30</b>

### REQUIRED COMPETENCIES MET IN UALBANY MAJORS \*\*\*

Critical Thinking	N/A
Advanced Writing	N/A
Oral Communication	N/A
Information Literacy	N/A

\* The lower-level writing intensive requirement will remain as it is under the current General Education Program. The Strategic Planning Implementation Groups are engaged in explorations about if and how to implement a new writing program and what corresponding writing requirements might be desirable. Given the university wide consideration and evaluation of the writing program on campus the UAC is recommending that the general education program retain the current lower level writing requirement pending the outcome of these discussions and UAC's consideration of any subsequent recommendations that come from the Strategic Planning Implementation Groups.

\*\* See attached Learning Objectives for International Perspectives and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

\*\*\*Students complete these competencies as determined by their major departments or programs.

### **Summary notes applying to the General Education Program:**

- As is the case in the current program, courses may count in more than one general education category (except between Arts and Humanities).
- The General Education Committee notes that a revised General Education Program may necessitate a review and revision of current assessment mechanisms.

### **Implementation Strategy:**

Due to the extent of the proposed changes to the general education curriculum and the need to allot time for implementation, the UAC proposes the following timeline for implementation of the new general education curriculum:

- For students matriculating in Fall 2012, Spring 2013, or Summer 2013, the general education requirement will require students to complete the nine core courses, one additional course from any of the SUNY flex categories required by UAlbany and an Information Literacy course.
- For students matriculating in Fall 2013, Spring 2014 or Summer 2014, the general education requirement will require students to complete the nine core courses, a course that fulfills the Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century category and an Information Literacy course.
- For students matriculating in Fall 2014 and thereafter, the general education requirement will require students to complete the nine core courses plus a course that fulfills the Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century category and the competencies within the major (competencies are: Critical Thinking, Advanced Writing, Oral Communication and Information Literacy).

### **General Education Advisory Board\*:**

- The committee recommends creating a General Education Advisory Board whose members are approved by a majority vote of the UAC to help ensure that UAlbany's general education program remains forward-thinking and accomplishes its goals. The General Education Committee of UAC will remain responsible for administration of the General Education Program.
- The General Education Advisory Board will work with major departments and the General Education Assessment Committee to develop a structure or process by which departments will verify how students acquire competencies in critical thinking, oral and written communication, and information literacy within the framework of majors.
- The General Education Advisory Board is advisory to the General Education Committee of the UAC.

### **Transfer Students:**

- Students who have completed an AA or AS degree from another SUNY institution will have fulfilled the general education requirements at UAlbany with the exception of the local requirement, "Challenges for the 21st Century."
- Students who transfer to UAlbany from another SUNY institution who have not earned an AA or AS will satisfy requirements in the UAlbany General Education program based

on their SUNY General Education Transcript Addendum (GETA). A SUNY-GER area successfully completed at another SUNY campus will meet the same SUNY-GER area at UAlbany.

- Students who transfer from non-SUNY schools will satisfy General Education requirements based on the University at Albany course equivalents assigned.

**\* See attached rationale and proposed composition of the General Education Advisory Board.**



## Learning Objectives for New General Education Categories

### **Challenges for the Twenty-First Century courses enable students to demonstrate:**

1. Knowledge and understanding of the historical roots, contemporary manifestations, and potential future courses of important challenges students may encounter as they move into the world beyond the university.
2. Familiarity with these challenges in areas such as cultural diversity and pluralism, science and technology, social interaction, ethics, global citizenship, and/or others.
3. An integrated understanding of how challenges often affect individuals and societies simultaneously in many of these areas.
4. An appreciation for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding contemporary and future challenges.

### **International Perspectives courses enable students to demonstrate:**

1. knowledge and understanding of European history and/or culture, through:
  - a. An understanding of the variety of cultures, regions, and countries that make up Europe.
  - b. Knowledge of the distinctiveness of Europe as manifested in the development of diverse histories, institutions, economies, societies, and cultures.
  - c. Knowledge of the relationship between Europe and other regions of the world as expressed through political, economic, and cultural contact.
  - d. An understanding of how the knowledge that becomes the basis of historical inquiry is constructed;
2. **OR** knowledge and understanding of the history and/or culture of regions beyond Europe, through:
  - a. Knowledge of the distinctive features (e.g. history, institutions, economies, societies, cultures) of one region beyond Europe or European North America.
  - b. An understanding of the region from the perspective of its people(s).
  - c. An ability to analyze and contextualize cultural and historical materials relevant to the region.
  - d. An ability to locate and identify distinctive geographical features of the region;
3. **OR** knowledge and understanding of cultures and traditions of any region, nation, or society outside the United States, including courses taught in a foreign language beyond the elementary level, through:
  - a. An understanding of the impact (e.g. economic, political, historical, cultural) of nations, regions, and cultures upon other nations, regions, and cultures.
  - b. An understanding of the reciprocal interactions between individuals and global systems.
  - c. An ability to see cultural groups from their own points of view.
  - d. An ability to use the analytic tools of a specific discipline to engage in comparative analyses of cultures, nations, and regions;
4. **OR** knowledge and understanding of a culture other than that of the United States by completion of a study abroad experience that earns credit at the University at Albany.

## **GENERAL EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD RATIONALE**

This rationale is provided to clarify the need for the Advisory Board in light of the Middle States Self Study and in response to the University Strategic Plan. Furthermore, this rationale details the long-term role of the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will be advisory to the General Education Committee of the UAC. The Advisory Board is not a policy-making body. UAC will undertake all policy-related deliberations and will bring forward proposals for approval by the University Senate. Membership of the Advisory Board will be recruited by the Associate Dean for General Education with the help of UAC and will be approved by a majority vote of the UAC.

### **Current Structure and Charge of the General Education Committee:**

The General Education Committee is a committee of the UAC. According to the Charter (amended 12/18/06), it consists of the Associate Dean for General Education *ex officio*, the Chair of the General Education Assessment Committee of the Council on Academic Assessment or designee *ex officio*, at least five but no more than ten members of the Teaching Faculty, at least two of whom are members of the Council, two Professional Faculty, two Undergraduate Students, at least one of whom is a member of the Council, and no more than two voting members selected from Faculty or Staff who are not students or Voting Faculty. The Chair of the Council consults with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education when determining the membership of this Committee.

The Committee is charged with considering and approving new courses proposed for inclusion in the General Education program as well as revisions to existing courses designed to qualify them for the program.

The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education has the authority to grant waivers and make appropriate substitutions for individual students. The Committee is the appellate body for students who are not satisfied with their waiver requests. In practice, the Associate Dean for General Education reviews straightforward waiver requests and involves the Committee in deciding more complicated cases.

Under the current Charter, the Associate Dean for General Education's main official responsibility, besides serving as *ex officio* member of the General Education Committee and the General Education Assessment Committee, is to review waiver requests from students. The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education has the authority to delegate additional responsibilities, for example, coordinating assessment of General Education courses with staff from the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness and Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Leadership.

### **Middle States Self Study and Strategic Planning Committee Recommendations**

The proposal to create a General Education Advisory is in response to the recommendations advanced by the Middle States Self Study and the Strategic Planning Committee.

The following are some of the recommendations from the Self Study that pertain to this proposal:

- Governance committees should discuss the current makeup of instructors in the General Education program and decide whether the mix of tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty, graduate students, and part-time faculty should be monitored — and, if so, by whom.
- The General Education Committee should consider ways to publicize information from the petition and exception process.
- The General Education Committee should review the academic progress of students in highly-sequenced degrees or combined programs to evaluate whether their total requirements pose a hardship that should be modified to facilitate timely graduation.

#### Proposed Structure and Charge for the General Education Advisory Board

The General Education Advisory Board will be chaired by the Associate Dean for General Education and include up to twenty (20) instructors (tenured or tenure-track and part-time/adjunct faculty). A majority will come from the College of Arts and Sciences, with at least one person representing each of the different categories of the General Education requirements; one member chosen by the Dean of the College of Arts and Science; one member from the Institute for Teaching, Learning and Academic Leadership; one member of the Advisement Services Center staff; one member from the Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness staff; and at least one (1) but no more than five (5) undergraduate students chosen by the Student Association whose majors and minors represent the different Schools and Colleges. Membership on the General Education Advisory Board should not only be representative of the different categories of General Education courses, but should also appropriately represent the units responsible for teaching courses in the General Education program.

The purpose of convening a General Education Advisory Board is to ensure that the principles and practices of the General Education program are well understood by all stakeholders, so that all concerned parties understand that General Education courses are an integral part of undergraduate work. In this context, the Board would be responsible for soliciting student input on an ongoing basis about desirable General Education courses, and work with deans and department chairs to find support for faculty to design and teach such courses. Additionally, the Advisory Board will work with departments, Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness, and the Council on Academic Assessment to develop assessment processes and strategies for implementation of new General Education requirements such as the major competencies.

The Chair of the General Education Committee will be responsible for reporting on the activities of the General Education Advisory board to the UAC at least once a semester.

UAC's General Education Committee will continue its role in considering and approving new courses proposed for inclusion in the General Education program as well as revisions to existing

courses designed to qualify them for the program. It will also continue its role in reviewing student requests for waivers and substitutions.