

## REPORT FROM UAC AND THE GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

(April 28, 2011)

The following represents the current proposal for changes to the University at Albany General Education curriculum. This proposal is the product of a thorough review of the General Education Task Force report, feedback received from all schools, colleges, and departments and consultation with the Undergraduate Academic Council. Note this is not bulletin copy nor in specific bill language rather it is a summary of the consensus on the recommendations for changes to the General Education program.

The General Education Committee has spent much time in thoughtful deliberation of each and every 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 solicited by UAC from academic departments and schools. There were many times that individual positions on specific items yielded to form consensus. It has not been an easy process but it has always been a respectful one. Of primary importance at all times was the need to view the entirety of the General Education program, and not each sub point, to ensure that what the proposal: (a) reflected the unique excellence of the UAlbany undergraduate degree; (b) included a focus on and an appreciation for our students' total educational experience with attention to both native freshmen and transfer students; (c) encompassed a desire to find a balance between academic rigor and excessive bureaucracy, between becoming overly proscriptive (which impedes progress to degree especially for transfer students) and missing essential elements that encourage exploration; and (d) provided something that was an improvement on the overall academic experience for a majority of our students, yet was respectful of the SUNY Trustees' plan and the overall direction of a streamlined and flexible General Education program on all SUNY campuses.

Two specific examples typify the committee's work and process:

- 1) Writing as a competency in the major. Much discussion centered on the merits of maintaining an upper division writing requirement. The General Education Committee reached consensus that the freshman writing experience would significantly strengthen the student experience and was respectful of the Trustee's plan and the work of the UAlbany Gen Ed Task Force and chose not to impose more required categories and the associated bureaucracy. We embraced the idea that students with a strong foundation in a freshman writing program can strengthen their writing skills through a variety of pathways that are best determined by faculty in the major.
- 2) International Perspectives as a general education requirement. Again, the General Education Committee and the UAC reached consensus that this category did a better job of specifically encouraging and facilitating foreign language studies on our campus, eliminated the community college "loophole", made a positive statement about the value of study abroad, was mindful of prior language instruction and was consistent with the Trustees plan for greater flexibility.

## Revised General Education Proposal

### Major Competencies:

- I. A major at the University at Albany is a coherent set of classes and, in some cases, field and/or extra-curricular experiences. It is a requirement of all students – it is not possible to graduate from UAlbany without a major. By progressing through the major, students gain important discipline-specific knowledge and competencies. Therefore, the General Education Committee and the UAC concur with the Task Force recommendation that some of the competencies students need to be successful are best acquired when firmly grounded in the discipline(s) of the major. Variance within and application to the disciplines are thus recognized and appreciated in the acquisition of these competencies.

Therefore, each major will specify how students will become proficient in the following:

- a. Critical thinking
- b. Communication
  - i. oral
  - ii. written
- c. Information Management  
Acquiring basic information management skills should happen at a time when students are required to use those skills. Information specialists in the library recommend that skill acquisition begin before students enter their major – in most cases, in their sophomore year. Therefore, faculty should consider prerequisite experiences or classes (including the information literacy classes offered by the library where appropriate) as part of their discussion of how competencies are best acquired in each major. Basic skills acquired before or early in the major can then be refined and expanded during discipline-based research assignments in upper level courses within the major.

It is important to note that the key question is “how” students will become proficient in these competencies. Departments might have a specific class within the major where these competencies are specifically taught, might have several/many classes within the major where these competencies are addressed, might choose to require a course taught outside the major as a requirement for the major, might include a competency exam for their majors, etc. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but is meant to spur thoughtful discussion among faculty about how students graduating with a UAlbany degree from their major meet the above mentioned competencies.

While a specific process has not been determined, it is envisioned that each major will put forth a document describing how, when and/or where the department will ensure these competencies for each of its graduates. The proposed General Education Advisory Board will be instrumental in helping majors develop appropriate assessment plans that demonstrate how these competencies are completed within the Major framework.

## Requirements:

- II. 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. Additionally, within these 30 credits, students must satisfy the requirements in the following categories:

- a. 3 credits in Math (math classes, statistics classes, logic classes etc.) Students may be exempt from this requirement by successfully completing the NYS Regents Math B examination with a score of 85% or higher.
- b. 3 credits in Natural Sciences
- c. 3 credits in Social Sciences
- d. 3 credits in Humanities
- e. 3 credits in Arts
- f. 3 credits in U.S. History
- g. 3 credits in International Perspectives which can be fulfilled by: (a) 3 credits in European history/perspectives; (b) 3 credits in regions beyond Europe history/perspectives; (c) 3 credits of an appropriate level of foreign language as determined by the faculty within the specific language (understanding that the level specified may vary based on the language) or any course taught in that language at a higher level; or (d) completion of a study abroad experience that earns UAlbany credit.
- h. 3 credits in Freshman (100-level) writing instruction that would come from a UAlbany writing program consisting of freshman composition classes, classes in writing offered by the English department, and/or freshman seminars. Students must pass these classes with a grade of “C” or better. We strongly encourage each major to require the successful completion of the freshman writing general education requirement prior to advancing into the major or registration of upper level, major-specific requirements. Transfer students needing this general education requirement should register within their first two semesters of study at UAlbany. Additionally, UAlbany advisors should strongly encourage transfer students who have completed the SUNY writing requirement at another SUNY institution, but did not earn a grade of “C” or better, to register for one of UAlbany’s freshman writing program classes.
- i. 3 credits of “Challenges for the Twenty-First Century” – a UAlbany signature course and local general education requirement. This course can be taken inside or outside the major. Courses can be offered at any level (100 – 400) at the discretion of the department. General course description:

*Approved courses will consider the challenges facing our graduates for this century and may be offered by any department. These challenges may focus on scientific, social, humanistic, technological or cultural topics and may include interdisciplinary approaches. Courses in this category focus on current opportunities and dilemmas and examine the challenges that lie ahead.*

**Summary of UAlbany General Education Program:**

<b><u>SUNY MANDATED CATEGORIES</u></b>	<b>NUMBER OF CREDITS</b>
Mathematics and Statistics	3
Freshman Writing	3
<b><u>SUNY FLEX CATEGORIES - REQUIRED AT UALBANY</u></b>	
Arts	3
Humanities	3
Natural Sciences	3
Social Sciences	3
U.S. History	3
International Perspectives	3
Additional 3 credits chosen from the above categories	3
<b><u>UALBANY LOCAL REQUIREMENTS</u></b>	
Challenges in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	3
<b>TOTAL CREDITS IN GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES:</b>	<b>30</b>

<b>REQUIRED COMPETENCIES MET IN UALBANY MAJORS</b>	
Oral Discourse	N/A*
Information Literacy	N/A
Critical Thinking	N/A
Advanced Writing	N/A

\*Credits are not given for requirements met in the course of completing a major since those credits are not confined to the General Education program.

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

- In general, double counting of categories will be allowed

### **Establishment of a General Education Advisory Board:**

- A General Education Advisory Board will be created to ensure that UAlbany's general education program remains forward-thinking and accomplishes its goals. Routine administration of the General Education Program would be handled by the General Education Committee
- The General Education Advisory Board shall work with Major Departments and the General Education Assessment Committee to develop a structure or process by which departments will verify how the above mentioned competencies are met within the framework of the major.
- Recognizing both the need for a rigorous freshman writing program and the variety of ways writing can be taught, a process for both reviewing courses that meet this general education requirement and supporting faculty teaching them should be established. The General Education Advisory Board shall be charged with creating this process.
- Assessment of both specified competencies within the major and the General Education Program will have to be ensured. While these might be accomplished by similar (or identical) processes and structures, current assessment practices should be reviewed and may need to be revised or new assessment mechanism might need to be developed.

### **Special Notes Regarding Transfer Students:**

- Students who have completed an AA or AS degree from another SUNY institution will have met 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 be accepted as meeting 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.