

General Education Curriculum Planning Group Proposal for Provisional Approval of a Curriculum to replace the Core Curriculum

Consistent with the General Education Council's Pathway Review Process, we seek **provisional approval** of our proposal for a new general education curriculum. As the GEC's Pathway Review Process requests, our proposal addresses the following points:

Provisional Approval Process

Provisional proposals should have the following:

- An implementation plan with timetable
- Detailed templates or syllabi for entry-level courses
- Templates for mid-level and capstone
- The matrix filled out as a curricular map which includes co-curricular experiences.
- A reasonably clear vision of the financial impact of both pathway development and implementation.

The accompanying "Curriculum Description" addresses these 5 points required for provisional approval. Additionally, we include a narrative which addresses the coherence, integration, rigor, inclusion and practicality of our proposed curriculum. We also include responses to recommendations made to us previously by the GEC.

The Guidelines and Criteria for General Education at USM state that if a curriculum is coherent, integrative, rigorous, inclusive and practical, it will foster students who are world-minded, intentional, and life-long learners. As requested in the General Education Council's Pathway Review process, we discuss each of these five characteristics in turn and we address the questions the Pathway Review Process specifies for each characteristic.

I. Coherence:

- a) **How does the pathway acquaint students with the different lenses used in the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and field(s) of practice?**

Students will be acquainted with the different lenses used in the areas listed above in a developmental fashion throughout the curriculum. Beginning with EYE, students' understanding of the distinctions and commonalities in perspective and practice will be initiated by the interdisciplinary examination of human cultures and the natural world.

The second level of courses (Creative Expression, Socio-Cultural Analysis, Cultural Interpretation, and Science Explorations) provide a powerful opportunity for faculty to teach and students to further develop their understanding of the perspectives and practices of disciplines without narrow assumptions about the organizational or departmental basis of such perspectives and practices. For example, while many Creative Expressions courses in the new curriculum will no doubt be developed in the departments associated with the fine arts, there is

nothing in the learning outcomes which restricts courses to such a narrow definition of disciplinary perspective. Indeed, many of the central learning outcomes of this component deliberately transcend “departmentalized” notions of disciplinarity. Consider, for example, learning outcome number 11: “Describe and use steps in a creative process, such as identifying and defining a problem, generating imaginative solutions to it, and critically evaluating the outcome”. This outcome could be accomplished in a computer science or media studies course as easily as in one offered by the Art Department. Similarly, while the current Core H designation specifies literature as the object of study that defines the Humanities, outcomes for Cultural Interpretation could be fulfilled not just by all of the Humanities Departments, but by many in the Social Sciences as well.

Student understanding of the different lenses and practices of the disciplines will be advanced first in the thematic clusters, where students will examine a topic within at least two different disciplinary contexts, and again at the capstone level, where learning outcomes require students to reflect on and to integrate their general education knowledge with their knowledge of their major course of study.

b) How are skills and knowledge developed throughout the college years?

This requirement of coherence is embodied in the developmental and sequential nature of the learning outcomes and of the curricular components themselves. The curriculum pays careful attention to learning experiences at the introductory, mid-career, and concluding phases of a student’s academic career. The learning outcomes themselves explicitly address learning at the introductory, developed, and accomplished levels. Student engagement with the learning outcomes at increasing levels of complexity and sophistication is illustrated in the Outcome Matrix included with our proposal. In general terms, the curricular design pays careful attention to the need to introduce, develop, and advance learning of a substantial portion of the 43 outcomes specified in the Vision, Goals and Outcomes (see matrix).

c) How is/are learning communities fostered (specify entry, mid-career, and concluding experiences)?

Entry Year Experience courses help foster communities of learners through learning outcomes and course characteristics that attend to the student as a whole (e.g., through the collaboration and cooperation of a “teaching community” involving faculty from different disciplines working with staff and others from other divisions such as advising, library, etc.). Entry Year Experience courses also help foster learning communities through their explicit requirement of co-curricular learning. While these learning experiences will no doubt manifest themselves in a variety of ways and contexts, they will nonetheless constitute a common experience at the entry level which our students have heretofore lacked.

At the midcareer level, a community of learners will be further fostered by the requirement of a common text or texts for the Midcareer Course (Bellah et. al.’s (2005) Habits of the Heart will be used during the pilot phase).

The sense of being part of a community of learners will be extended at the concluding phase as all students at USM will complete a capstone course, either within their major or elsewhere in the curriculum. The design of this curriculum component again carefully balances the benefits of common learning experiences with the flexibility and freedom for individual capstone planning and execution by departments, programs, etc.

d) What is the relationship of the pathway to students' majors?

The Guidelines and Criteria for General Education at USM impart to any pathway proposal which follows them the defining characteristic which shapes a pathway's relationship to other elements of USM's curriculum (e.g., majors, minors, concentrations, etc.). This defining characteristic is a consistent and authentic focus on learning objectives. What matters in this curriculum is the achievement of the learning outcomes themselves, not how many of a student's general education credits are in or outside of the major. Because there is no limit on the number of courses that can count for both general education and the major, the relationship between them is significantly enhanced.

In addition, the curriculum contains key features which create purposeful connections between the student's general education and her education within the major or minor. For example, the thematic clusters and the alternative minor specify learning outcomes which call for integration on the part of the student of their learning in the major, the minor, and general education.

II. Integration/Interdisciplinarity

a) Where in the pathway is there collaboration between faculty from two or more disciplines in curricular development?

The EYE, Midcareer, and Thematic Cluster components all require collaboration between faculty from two or more disciplines. The EYE component involves the most intensive interdisciplinary collaboration (3-5 faculty from different disciplines). In the Midcareer course faculty from at least two disciplines coordinate course design. Thematic Clusters will involve faculty from five to twelve disciplines working to "plan and assess the cluster's coherence, to share syllabi, and to articulate explicit sites for overlap and integration" (see Curriculum Description and Summary, Thematic Cluster Courses).

b) Where and how do students demonstrate the intellectual skills of connection and integration?

These skills are introduced in the learning outcomes of the EYE course and are developed and advanced in Midcareer and Capstone. Integration is fostered by learning outcomes which specifically call for students to draw connections between learning within and across their general education courses, and by a

Capstone experience which calls for such integration in a summative manner. In addition, the curriculum includes a pilot plan for a self-reflective writing component involving a self-analysis of what the student has learned in relation to the general education learning outcomes. This component would be a pre-requisite to the mid-career course and a requirement at the capstone level. We will pilot this using a variety of approaches: as a 1-credit course involving part-time faculty in appropriate departments such as English; a 1-credit addition to sections of second row courses; a 1 credit course developed and overseen by schools/colleges/departments/majors, etc.

III. Rigor

What evidence will be used in the pathway to demonstrate rigor, and how will it be used to inform and improve learning (how will you know that you are accomplishing what you say you are)?

- a) **What is the mechanism for evaluating new course proposals and assessing on-going courses?**
- b) **What is the plan for ongoing assessment of students' learning and for identifying collective student success as defined in the pathway?**
- c) **How will the pathway demonstrate that students have met the five goals of general education?**

During the two year provisionally approved pilot phase, members of the General Education Curriculum Planning Group will assess both course proposals and courses themselves, with assistance from the appropriate sources (e.g., the Office of Academic Assessment and the General Education Council).

Currently, EYE pilot courses are being assessed through three assessment components:

- 1) A diagnostic form developed in conjunction with the Office of Academic Assessment, EYE pilot faculty, and members of the Planning Group. This form provides student feedback in relation to an agreed upon subset of the learning outcomes for EYE courses.
- 2) Pilot courses are assessed using the standardized SIR II assessment form currently recommended by USM's Director of Academic Assessment. This form contains multiple items relevant to the learning outcomes for the proposed courses.
- 3) Additionally, pilot faculty worked with the Director of College Writing to develop and implement writing assessment assignments. Follow-up work will produce collaboratively designed rubrics to assess this writing and to link it to course level assessment. This and other forms of course embedded

assessment will be the central feature of outcomes assessment in the proposed curriculum.

A fuller description of our assessment plan will be available when we seek full approval, within the next two years. In the mean time, we expect all pilot courses at all levels of the curriculum to include minimally the three assessment components currently used for EYE and described above.

IV. Inclusion:

How does the pathway incorporate diverse perspectives and demonstrate inclusion?

- a) **Where do students encounter diverse points of view and contend with diverse people and ideas?**
- b) **How are considerations of human diversity included?**

The learning outcomes (specified in the Vision, Goals and Outcomes) most closely associated with the characteristic of Inclusion are incorporated throughout the curriculum. They are first introduced in the EYE course, where learning outcomes pertaining to the interrelationships between human cultures and the natural world foster awareness and consideration of diverse people and ideas. These outcomes are developed through course work at the second level, most explicitly in the Socio-cultural Analysis course, which requires that students “have knowledge of socio-cultural systems over time and across the world” and “be able to describe the effects of behaviors in various roles, such as community member, family member, consumer, and producer through a cross cultural and historical perspective.”

In addition to these features of the current proposal, the Planning Group has formed an interdisciplinary and university-wide group to discuss possible additions to the curriculum to insure careful attention to diversity and inclusion. Among ideas under consideration is a diversity-intensive requirement similar to the current writing intensive requirement in the Core curriculum.

V. Practicality:

How are the curricular and co-curricular experiences articulated, developed, integrated and evaluated throughout the pathway?

The learning outcomes of the curricular components themselves explicitly refer to the introduction, development, and accomplishment of co-curricular learning experiences at the Entry, Mid-career, and Capstone levels. In addition, other curricular components specify co-curricular experiences as well, though in a less sequential manner.

More broadly, if a practical education is one that develops “analytical skills, effective communication, practical intelligence, ethical judgment, and social responsibility” (General Education Council’s Pathway Review Process), then this curriculum fosters these broader skills and sensibilities in a developmental and integrated fashion. Analytical skills and effective communication are explicitly addressed in learning outcomes at all levels of the curriculum. Practical intelligence (defined in various ways) is fostered in the curricular components focusing on particular skills (e.g., Creative Expression) and in curricular components focusing on particular lenses (e.g., Science Exploration). In addition, the Capstone experience extends this practical learning by calling upon the student to make connections between the learning they’ve experienced and their lives after college. Ethical judgment and social responsibility are most explicitly introduced and developed in the Midcareer course, and then developed further at the Capstone level. In this sense, while not specifying a particular vocational preparation, the curriculum is intensely practical in that it fosters the capacities students need upon graduation.

VI. Transfer:

While not a curricular characteristic in the same sense as coherence, integration, rigor, inclusion, and practicality, transfer issues are of central importance. Our philosophy and practice with regard to transfer are as follows:

Guiding Principles Regarding Transfer Credits in General Education

1. The General Education Curriculum will be clearly presented and easily accessible.
2. Course equivalencies for all General Education requirements will be interpreted flexibly for transfer students by those making preliminary and official evaluations of transfer credit.
3. Transfer credits will be evaluated by the Transfer Affairs Office, in consultation with faculty when appropriate. The age of transfer credits does not affect the transferability for General Education requirements.
4. USM will develop a grid showing how credits completed within the UMaine System and the Maine Community College System will transfer into the USM General Education Curriculum.
5. Students transferring fewer than 24 semester hours are required to complete all levels of the General Education Curriculum, either in transfer or by completing appropriate USM courses. These students must take the Entry Year course if they have not completed a comparable course.
6. Students transferring in 24 or more semester hours are not required to take the Entry Year course, but must complete all other General Education requirements

either through appropriate transfer credit or by completing the requirement at USM.

7. In reference to USM's minimum 30 semester hour residency requirement, transfer students will be required to complete a minimum of 6 semester hours in the General Education Curriculum (Planning Group Pathway) to include Mid-career and Capstone.
8. Students who have already earned a baccalaureate degree will not be required to complete the General Education Curriculum.

Responses to the GEC's Recommendations:

During Summer, 2006, a subgroup of the General Education Council made 12 recommendations to the Planning Group which they requested we take into account when seeking Provisional Approval for the proposed curriculum. We address each of these below. The specific recommendation of the GEC subgroup is listed and underlined, and our response is in bold. Where necessary, we request reference to the relevant contents of the "Curriculum Description", rather than reproducing large bodies of text here. Please see the table of contents of the "Curriculum Description" for page numbers.

1. Review second row and determine learning outcomes for that row as a whole. These row outcomes should specify outcomes 1.3, 1.6, 4.3 and 4.7. Explain why these outcomes are being addressed at that level. Attention to these outcomes will address gaps in the matrix.

This recommendation has been addressed by the changes in the second level of the proposed curriculum, the inclusion of four courses at this level (Creative Expression, Science Exploration, Socio-cultural Analysis, and Cultural Interpretation) and the specification that all courses at this level will include 1.3, 1.6, 4.3, and 4.7 (among others) as learning outcomes.

2. Revise second row to include four required components: Creative Expression, Science Explorations, Social Analysis and Textual Interpretation. This will very clearly demonstrate attention to all the major disciplinary "lenses" (see wording of VGO 1.3) without returning to old Core ideas and terms or linking them to specific departments.

This recommendation has been addressed by the changes in the second level of the proposed curriculum, described in response to #1 above.

3. Clarify narrative with respect to prerequisites and sequencing between entry-level, mid-career and capstone. It might be useful to re-read pp.7-8 of the *Guidelines and Criteria*.

- How do EYE and Row 2 prepare students for the mid-career course?
- What is the relationship between the mid-career course and thematic clusters?
- What is the relationship between English Composition, Quantitative Reasoning, and Row 2 courses?
- Re-word Thematic Cluster outcomes so that they don't claim to explicitly build on the Midcareer Course.

This recommendation has been addressed by changes in the "Course Sequencing" discussion in the Curriculum Description and Summary. This revised document clarifies the relationships between elements of the curriculum as requested in the 4

bullet points above. In addition, the description of the Thematic Clusters component has been revised to address bullet point number 4 above.

4. Review transfer policy: Some members feel the transfer policy specifying credit break-downs is fine as is, others feel that the categories (1-23, 24-53, etc.) are inappropriate (especially the gap between students with 24 and 53 credits). All are concerned that allowing concurrence of the Row 2 courses with the Midcareer course would undermine the intentional verticality for a large number of students. Examine carefully the credit benchmarks set in this policy. Do not merely adhere to UMS practices (i.e. #credits that determine frosh, soph, jr. or sr. standing). Assure that benchmarks correspond to meaningful curricular and educational points.

This recommendation has been addressed by changes in the “Transfer Recommendations” specified in the Curriculum Description and Summary. See in particular items 5 and 6.

5. Review Assessment plan: Course embedded assessment by itself is insufficient. Include a self-reflective writing component involving a self-analysis of what the student has learned in relation to the general education learning outcomes. Make this a pre-requisite to the mid-career course and a requirement at the capstone level. Pilot this using a variety of approaches: as a 1-credit course involving part-time faculty in appropriate departments such as English; a 1-credit addition to sections of second row courses; a 1 credit course developed and overseen by schools/colleges/departments/majors, etc.

- Gives students responsibility for integration of learning
- Provides program assessment data
- Provides more authentic transfer assessment
- Facilitates inclusion of Perry assessment instrument

This recommendation will be acted on by the Planning Group during Spring, 2007, when we formalize our assessment plan. Since the Provisional Approval Process adopted by the GEC does not require a fully developed assessment plan, we will present this plan to the GEC when we seek Final Approval for the proposed curriculum.

5. Clarify where/how students will have co-curricular experiences (as described in *G & C, II E*). Make explicit that co-curricular learning is introduced in EYE course, developed in MC course, and that it is required of gen-ed related minors and of Thematic Clusters. Provide a menu of examples of what qualifies as co-curricular learning. Tie it to the self-reflective writing by requiring that students address their co-curricular learning as part of this self-reflection.

Recommendation number 5 has been addressed in part in our discussion of sequencing. Examples of what might qualify as co-curricular learning experiences are included the templates for EYE and MC courses. The developmental continuum of co-curricular learning is already explicit in the outcomes for EYE,

MC and Thematic Clusters. The recommendation that such experiences be connected to the recommended self-reflective writing will be considered during Spring 07.

7. Clarify where students will have opportunities to learn about “significant differences within and among human cultures...” (G & C, p12) and other considerations of human diversity (e.g., VGOs 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9)

This recommendation has been substantially addressed by changes in the row-level learning outcomes and course learning outcomes at the second level of the curriculum. Specifically Socio-cultural Analysis places an explicit emphasis on the outcomes specified in recommendation 7.

In addition, the Planning Group has scheduled a series of discussions during Spring 2007 to further address issues of diversity in the proposed new curriculum. Proposals on the table include a Diversity Intensive requirement, much like the current Writing Intensive requirement. Planning Group members are working with Lee Knefelkamp, Wendy Chapkis, and other interested faculty on diversity and the proposed new curriculum. Thus, this recommendation has been substantially addressed with the current revisions to row two, and will be more comprehensively addressed by the time we seek Final Approval.

8. Address the gaps in the matrix (missing outcomes, particularly the paucity of those in goals 4 & 5). Ensure that matrix is accurate as currently completed, locate errors that produce the appearance of gaps. Explain in narrative that attention to some outcomes over others does not mean that particular courses and instructors can't address others, or place a different emphasis; explain the desire to avoid overly parsing and to allow leeway for creativity and discretion on the part of faculty actually developing the courses.

This recommendation has been addressed by revisions to the second level of the curriculum. The inclusion of Socio-cultural Analysis and Cultural Interpretation fills the previous gaps in the matrix in relation to goals 4 and 5, among others.

The recommendation stated in the second sentence of #8 above is addressed in the “Introduction” section of the Curriculum Description and Summary.

9. Develop descriptive names for EYE and MCE courses.

We have chosen not to address this recommendation at this time. We prefer to retain the name of EYE and MC for these two courses, at least during the provisional approval and pilot phase, and to allow course-specific names to be developed by the faculty who actually develop and teach the courses. For example, EYE 101: Portrait of a Space; EYE 102: Sustainability, Culture and the Environment., EYE 103: Shopping: American Consumerism, etc. This approach allows faculty to put their own imprint on the course names.

10. Clarify language on p. 21 of proposal, #5, regarding competency in English Composition and Quantitative Reasoning: What is meant by “competency” Does the Planning Group really mean proficiency? What is the relationship between this and the transfer policy? Given the sequencing inherent in the curriculum, the description should clarify that transfer students ought to be prepared to do college-level work.

This recommendation has been completely addressed through revisions to the “Sequencing” and “Transfer” sections of the Curriculum Description and Summary.

11. Specify policies for each component of the curriculum in relation to piloting and beyond (e.g., minimum offerings, faculty compensation and development, etc.)

This recommendation has been addressed in the Faculty Development and Support section of the Curriculum Description and Summary.

12. Provide an outline of cost implications of the proposal in relation to faculty development, cost-savings and efficiencies, expected additional costs, etc.

This recommendation is addressed in preliminary form (consistent with the Provisional Approval Process) in the Implementation Timetable section of the proposal.