Delaware Will Shine Concept Paper

**Models of the New American Research University**

**Curriculum & Delivery Subgroup**

# General Education

## Overview

In early 2014, a task force on general education was appointed by the Provost’s office to bring to fruition multiple years of efforts to revise the University of Delaware’s program of general education. The task force divided its work into two pieces. In the first phase, the task force synthesized past work and engaged the university community in the development of a new set of *purposes* and *objectives* for general education at the University of Delaware. These new purposes and objectives were formally adopted by the Faculty Senate on November 3rd, 2014. In the second, ongoing phase, the task force seeks to design an implementation plan to ensure that all students are able to meet these new objectives. Since general education has been a frequent topic of discussion during constituent meetings with our subgroup, here, we present both the new purposes and objectives and an outline of the developing implementation plan. We note that the work of the task force has been coordinated with the work of our subgroup and that the effectiveness of this implementation plan is strongly tied to the concepts outlined in our other four concept papers.

## Review of Purposes and Objectives

On November 3, 2014, the Faculty Senate of the University of Delaware unanimously passed the following resolution on general education. We note that the addendum to the resolution and the components of the resolution detailing a timeline for Phase Two are not included here.

**University of Delaware Faculty Senate**

**Resolution on General Education**

WHEREAS, the University of Delaware exists to cultivate learning, develop knowledge, and foster the free exchange of ideas, and

WHEREAS, a robust program of general education is an essential component of the cultivation of learning, the development of knowledge, and the fostering of a free exchange of ideas, and

WHEREAS, the overarching goal of general education at the University of Delaware is to set students along the path of possessing the characteristics of one who is both broadly and deeply educated, and

WHEREAS, in our April 2011 self-study prepared for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, we noted that the current undergraduate general education goals, requirements, and assessment activities are under review with an eye toward streamlining the list of goals and taking action steps between now and 2015 to establish a coherent and integrative program of undergraduate education and university requirements, and

WHEREAS, this review has proceeded and culminated in the recommendations below, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate adopts the following statement of purposes for the University of Delaware’s general education program:

We seek to prepare students who are:

* Engaged citizens, involved in the world around them, and who understand the major challenges and debates of the day;
* Aware of their intellectual strengths and interests and of their ethical values and commitments;
* Capable of interpreting the arts and culture of contemporary and past societies; and,
* Equipped with the essential skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving world including the ability to be a lifelong learner, creator, and innovator.

And be it further

RESOLVED, that to meet these purposes, the Faculty Senate adopts for all students the five objectives of general education set forth as follows:

General education at the University of Delaware prepares students who are able to:

(1) Read critically, analyze arguments and information, and engage in constructive ideation.

(2) Communicate effectively in writing, orally, and through creative expression.

(3) Work collaboratively and independently within and across a variety of cultural contexts and a spectrum of differences.

(4) Critically evaluate the ethical implications of what they say and do.

(5) Reason quantitatively, computationally, and scientifically.

## Working Definition of General Education

To aid in the discussion it is useful to define our current program of general education clearly. We define the current general education program as all requirements imposed at the university level on undergraduate students. The components of the current program are then:

1. First Year Seminar (FYS)
2. English 110
3. Discovery Learning Experience (DLE)
4. Multicultural Requirement
5. University Breadth Requirement

Note that the “Capstone Experience” is not included in this definition as there is no formal capstone requirement passed by the Faculty Senate. At the same time, we note that the senate did endorse *in principle*, the notion of a capstone experience and that many units have instituted such an experience as a required component of their degree programs.

## Principles for Design of a Program of General Education

Competing and conflicting interests can make the navigation of the design of a program of general education tricky to navigate. In order to mitigate these effects and attempt to bring some clarity to the decision making process when weighing competing or conflicting interests, the task force converged on a set of principles to be applied and followed during the design process. These are summarized in the following table.

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| --- | --- |
| **As we design a new program of general education, we will…** | **Our new program will…** |
| …prioritize student learning in all decisions. | …be interwoven throughout a student’s four years of study. |
| …carefully evaluate all current requirements, reconsidering each one from scratch. | …be engaging for both faculty and students. |
| …work to construct a more integrated, combined course and experiential program. | …be coupled to strong advising, enhancing coherence and integration of the student experience. |
| …develop mechanisms to ensure that appropriate content is included, evidence-based, high-impact educational practices are incorporated, and regular review and assessment of all general educational requirements are institutionalized. | …be an integrated, combined course and experiential program for all students. |

## An Implementation Plan for General Education

While Phase II discussions are ongoing, there is broad support and consensus around the notion that a new implementation plan for general education should include four key components. These are each described below.

**Experience beyond the classroom:** A significant experience that goes beyond “book learning” is a key part of the emerging plan. Multiple ideas are being explored as to the form such an experience might take including an undergraduate research experience, a service-learning experience, a study-abroad experience, an internship, a student teaching experience, and a practicum. There is general agreement that no one such experience is likely to be appropriate or feasible for all students, but that all students should have some such experience. The importance of advising in ensuring that a given students experience was well integrated with the rest of their education is an important component of this requirement.

**Common intellectual experience:** A move from our current system that embodies “all-choice” to one that includes a meaningful common intellectual experience is the second key component of the emerging plan. The idea of a set of common first or second year “core” courses that are interdisciplinary, possibly team-taught, and integrative is the proposed framework for this experience. We note that these courses are intended to help attain both the purposes and objectives of general education. In order to offer these courses in a coherent, coordinated manner, the notion of a new college, tasked with supporting these courses is seen as an integral part of implementing this component of the plan.

**Revised Breadth Requirement:** A revision of the university breadth requirement is the third key component of the emerging plan. In particular, a revision of the categories of breadth to more closely align with the objectives of general education and a new program of certification of courses meeting those objectives is planned.

**Capstone Requirement:** Moving from our current “capstone suggestion” to a formal capstone requirement for is a fourth key component of the emerging plan. The importance of having general education span each student’s entire academic career, the importance of an integrative experience, and the importance of a product-driven collaborative experience, all support the wide-scale implementation of capstones. There is strong evidence to suggest that the University of Delaware already implements excellent capstone courses and experiences and has the expertise to quickly scale this up across the institution.