

## **Review of Longwood's General Education Program 2009-10**

### **Introduction**

“The purpose of the General Education Program at Longwood is the development of disciplined, informed, and creative minds. General Education is the foundation upon which all other learning is built and is therefore the central component of a Longwood education” (catalog). In place since 2002, Longwood’s current general education program is structured around fifteen (to become fourteen in Fall 2011) goals, all of which identify knowledge, skills, or experiences the faculty believes Longwood graduates must have in order to take their place as 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen leaders. Courses designated as fulfilling any general education goal must meet nine criteria common to all; courses must further show how they achieve the specific student learning outcomes associated with the goal they are designated as fulfilling. Not an adjunct to students’ majors, general education at Longwood provides a coherent progression from lower-level to upper-level knowledge and skills and culminates in a general education capstone course and the practical application of coursework in internships, practica, or directed research.

The 2009-10 review of Longwood’s program considered the program from three angles: the comprehensiveness and integrity of the goals, expectations outside groups have for general education programs, and programs at comparable institutions. These comparisons revealed the strengths of Longwood’s program and some opportunities for improvement.

Looking at Longwood’s program from the angle of the comprehensiveness and integrity of the goals, the Committee identified Goal 12 as a goal that was somewhat addressed in all general education courses and that might be incorporated more effectively in Goal 14. Others goals all add something particular and desirable to the program.

The Committee compared Longwood’s program to the requirements of our accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and to the expectations of the American Association of Colleges and Universities and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires that accredited institutions maintain general education requirements meeting certain criteria. Comprehensive standard 2.7.3 specifies that general education requirements be a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, ensure breadth of knowledge, be based on a coherent rationale, be a minimum of 30 credits, and draw credits from humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/math. Longwood’s requirements fulfill these criteria.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities has as its motto “a voice and a force for liberal education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” The organization identifies ten “high-impact practices that educational research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement”

<http://www.aacu.org/meetings/PSR09/documents/HighImpactPractices.pdf>).

Longwood’s program includes five of the ten practices and may involve four more.

The AAC&U further identifies both ten areas of knowledge in learning goals and ten intellectual skills in learning goals that many general education programs address. A recent survey shows what percentages of general education programs include each. Longwood’s program requires coursework in seven of the ten areas of knowledge and allows coursework in another two; the use of technology is woven through the program as one of the nine criteria. Longwood’s learning outcomes explicitly include all ten of the intellectual skills.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni recently named seven “key subjects” in which universities should require students to take coursework as part of their general education: composition, literature, foreign languages, U.S. government or history, economics, mathematics, and natural or physical science. Students fulfilling the goals of Longwood’s general education program must take coursework in five of the seven and may take coursework in the other two.

The charts below show how Longwood’s general education requirements stack up against the criteria of these outside proponents of general education:

SACS comprehensive standard 2.7.3: a general education component that	is a substantial component of each ug degree	Y
	ensures breadth of knowledge	Y
	is based on a coherent rationale	Y
	is a minimum of 30 credits	Y
	draws credits from humanities/fine arts	Y
	draws credits from social/behavioral sciences	Y
	draws credits from natural science/math	Y

AAC&U high-impact educational practices	first-year seminar	Y
	common intellectual experiences	Y
	learning communities	M
	writing-intensive courses	Y
	collaborative assignments and projects	N
	undergraduate research	M
	diversity/global learning	Y
	service learning	M
	internships	M
	GE capstone	Y

AAC&U survey: areas of knowledge in learning goals	humanities	Y
	science	Y
	social sciences	Y
	global cultures	Y
	mathematics	Y
	diversity in U.S.	M
	technology	N

	U.S. history	M
	languages	Y
	sustainability	Y*

\*through Longwood Seminar/First-Year Experience common reading

AAC&U survey: intellectual skills in learning goals	writing skills	Y
	critical thinking	Y
	quantitative reasoning	Y
	oral communication	Y
	intercultural skills	Y
	information literacy	Y
	ethical reasoning	Y
	civic engagement	Y
	application of learning	Y
	research skills	Y

American Council of Trustees and Alumni key subjects	composition	Y
	literature	Y
	intermediate-level foreign languages	Y
	U.S. government or history	M
	economics	M
	mathematics	Y
	natural or physical science	Y

key: Y = yes; N = no; M = maybe

The Committee also compared Longwood’s program to programs at other institutions (other state institutions and benchmark institutions).

SCHOOL	STRUCTURE	COURSES	CREDITS	ADD. DEGREE REQ.
Longwood	goals with student learning outcomes	disciplinary	41	6-7
JMU	clusters with student learning outcomes	disciplinary + some interdisciplinary	41	BA lang + phil; BS math + sci
Radford	core + distribution requirements	disciplinary	43-45	BA lang
Mary Washington	lang + first-year seminar + distribution req. + experiential learning	disciplinary (more than 300 eligible)	c.36	degree specific to major
Elon	core (seminar, comp, lang,	disciplinary + 1	62	majors

	math) + distribution requirements + upper-level courses in arts & sciences + interdisciplinary seminar	interdisciplinary		distinguish BA from BS
Christopher Newport	core (first-year sem, composition, lang, math) + distribution req. + 1 upper-level)	disciplinary	46	BS extra science sequence
Trinity	core (sem, writing, lang, fitness) + dist. req. + senior interdisciplin. sem.	disciplinary + 1 interdisciplinary	c.49	degree specific to major

Based on its multi-angle review, the General Education Committee considered the strengths and weaknesses of Longwood’s program.

**Areas of Strength**

The high correlation of Longwood’s program with the expectations and criteria of external proponents of general education (see above).

The existence of a de facto “core” composed of certain goals with limited course options along with broader requirements allowing student to choose among a variety of courses. Several general education programs at comparable institutions describe themselves as consisting of a “core” curriculum accompanied by broader requirements (similar to distribution requirements). Longwood’s program, though framed as fifteen goals, actually embodies both a core and broader requirements. In fact, in seeking to develop foundational knowledge and skills, the General Education program at Longwood recognizes the benefits to students both of common educational experiences and of more diverse course offerings. The program embodies a common core that is composed at the lower-level of a freshman-year seminar and writing course, one of two courses in western civilization, a foreign language course at the intermediate level, and a health and fitness course. The upper-level common core comprises a general education capstone course that addresses citizen leadership through writing and an internship, a field experience, or a directed research project that requires students to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained at Longwood. More diverse course offerings give students the ability to choose in what specific discipline they fulfill the other goals of the program.

To highlight this underlying structure, the Committee proposed to add the following paragraph to the introductory material in the catalog:  
 “In seeking to develop foundational knowledge and skills, the General Education program at Longwood recognizes the benefits to students both of common educational experiences and of more diverse course offerings. Students share a common core of coursework that begins at the lower-level with a focus on active citizenship in a freshman seminar and ends at the upper-level with a general education capstone course that addresses citizen leadership through writing and with an internship, a field experience, or a directed research project where students put their skills to work. Also in the core program are courses in writing,

western civilization, an intermediate-level foreign language, and health and fitness. Students exercise intellectual agency by choosing from a variety of courses to develop their knowledge and skills in scientific and quantitative reasoning, our cultural heritage as expressed in art and literature, social science, cultural diversity, and ethics.”

### **Areas of Weakness and Opportunities for Improvement**

#### General Education assessment

SACS requires not only a general education program that is a significant component of the undergraduate degree but also evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum. Standard 3.3.1 states that “The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs . . . ; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvements based on analysis of those results.” The specification of outcomes for each goal and the design for assessment of how each course in a goal meets those outcomes (embodied in the general education course approval process) are strengths of the program. (If they didn’t exist, we would be scrambling to put them in place for SACS reaccreditation purposes.) At the same time, the lack of ongoing assessment of and current assessment data for the general education program is a weakness. The Committee discussed what would be a multi-level assessment of general education in preparation for SACS reaccreditation. The software program WEAVEonline will allow assessments of individual General Education courses to be entered and tracked year-by-year. Courses within a goal must all demonstrate they have assessed the student outcomes associated with the goal. In the case of multiple sections, the same assessment process must be followed in each section, as specified in the matrix that was part of the course’s proposal for General Education designation. The assessment of the SCHEV core competencies, which curriculum mapping shows to be deeply embedded in the general education outcomes, will provide more general assessment of the program. Also discussed was the possibility that the value-added tests of critical thinking, problem solving, and analytic writing required if Longwood is to remain a part of the Voluntary System of Accountability (use of either MAPP, CAPP, or CLA testing) could provide a further assessment of the entire program encompassing lower-level through upper-level goals.

#### Variability of expectations for student work in English 400 sections (Goal 14)

The courses students take in fulfillment of Goal 14 perform three separate roles, each of which is key to the program overall. In addressing public issues, Goal 14 explicitly incorporates at the upper-level of the program Longwood’s mission of inspiring students to become citizen leaders. As the general education capstone, courses in Goal 14 are expected to draw students back out of their major and put them with students from other majors. This representation of various points of view and ways of looking at questions anticipates the greater community in which Longwood graduates will exercise their citizen leadership. And as an advanced writing seminar, the courses must provide explicit instruction in writing. With the increase in students arriving with dual enrollment credits or an associate’s degree, the Goal 14 course may be the only writing course many students take at Longwood.

Director of Composition Chene Heady talked with the Committee about the work the English 400 faculty is doing in developing by-laws for the course that will make more specific the types and amount of writing students in all sections are expected to do. Committee members and Chene discussed the possibilities for incorporating in Goal 14 (either in the outcomes or the course description) the spirit of Goal 12, that is, helping

students make connections between their major course of study and the work they do in the Goal 14 course. As part of its focus on writing, Goal 14 has always been expected to help students see how to use the specialized knowledge developed in their major to participate in public issues as citizens, to participate in questions related to the larger society, but committee members believe that aspect of the goal should be made more explicit. The by-laws developed by the English faculty could in the future help faculty members in other disciplines who propose courses in Goal 14 and could help the General Education Committee in evaluating proposals for GNED 495 and other courses proposed for Goal 14.

### Goal 12

Committee members reviewed the history of Goal 12. The prior general education program included fewer than 40 credits of requirements and additional degree requirements were 9-10 additional credits. For the BS and BSBA, the additional degree requirements were a course in math, science, and social science; other degrees included at least one course in the humanities. Since an overriding objective of general education revision at that time (in response to expectations of SCHEV and Longwood's Board of Visitors) was a program requiring at least 40 credits, one change was the addition of Goal 12, which involved moving three credits (social science or humanities) from the additional degree requirements to the general education program proper.

While considering the relationship of Goal 12 to the additional degree requirements, members discussed an idea that would acknowledge this history by making more flexible the additional degree requirements for the BS (and possibly the BSBA) and returning to them the possibility of a social science course if the proposal to delete Goal 12 was adopted. The idea would be to maintain two courses as additional degree requirements for the BS and BSBA, but two courses from math and science and social science. This change would also have the advantage of requiring fewer student places in math and science courses, which appear to be under pressure.

The Committee voted to delete Goal 12 from the program. Goal 12 (which requires an upper-level humanities or social sciences course) is a worthy goal in stressing the interconnectedness of disciplines. From several points of view, however, the goal is questionable. First, the interconnectedness of disciplines is already embodied in the eighth of the nine course criteria all General Education courses must meet ("8. Foster awareness of the common elements among disciplines and the interconnectedness of disciplines.") Second, perhaps more than 70% of students are required by their major to take a specific course to fulfill this goal (sometimes even a course in the major discipline), making the goal more like a degree requirement or a major requirement than general education. Third, since the courses students take for Goal 12 do not have to go through the General Education approval process, whether any particular course meets the specified outcomes is hard if not impossible to know. Deleting this goal would maintain the essential character of the overall program while at the same time reducing student requirements by three credits.

In concert with the deletion of Goal 12, the Committee voted to revise the additional degree requirements for the B.S. degree. Returning the possibility of social science credits to the additional degree requirements for the BS degree would acknowledge the history of Goal 12, which the General Education Committee has proposed deleting, while at the same time making more flexible the additional degree requirements for the BS. This proposal would

maintain two courses as additional degree requirements for the BS, but two courses from math and natural science and social science. In programs that do not specify what courses students must take to satisfy the additional degree requirements, students would have more choice. In programs that do specify what courses students must take to satisfy additional degree requirements, the programs would have more flexibility in being able to specify a math course and a natural science course, or a math course and a social science course, or a natural science course and a social science course. This change would also have the advantage of requiring fewer student places in math and science courses, which appear to be under pressure.

Committee members talked about the possibility for making a similar change for the BSBA degree, but decided the request for a change should come from the CBE faculty.

#### Proliferation of courses in certain goals

Some goals have seen a proliferation of courses in recent years. The Committee discussed whether having many courses in certain goals was a problem. A review of the student enrollment over the past year in the courses fulfilling Goals 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 produced much discussion. The benefits of the common educational experience produced by goals which include only one, two, or three courses were weighed against the benefits of diversity, choice, and suitability to a particular student's abilities and objectives provided by goals which include more courses. Members pointed out that many institutions frame their general education programs as a core curriculum accompanied by something akin to distribution requirements. Longwood's program can be seen as fitting this model. Indeed, Longwood's program stacks up very well against programs at comparable institutions. We have, in effect, a core curriculum consisting of the Longwood Seminar, Writing and Research, one of two courses in Western Civilization, the foreign language, Fitness Concepts, the Goal 14 capstone, and Goal 15 (an internship, field experience, or directed study) and we have other Goals (3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13) that allow students to choose from a broad range of courses. Committee members do not think the number of courses in the goals or the presence of courses enrolling both general education and other students are problems in themselves. Reducing all goals to a few courses would risk producing too much homogenization or standardization in the program, leading to a factory-line mentality in teachers and students. Members stressed the importance of students being required to develop and exercise their critical thinking skills through interaction with faculty members and other students in every course. Members do agree a recertification or reapproval procedure (every five years) is necessary. If particular sections of courses in the General Education program are underenrolled, deans and department chairs may need to work out a different rotation to ensure reasonable enrollment.

#### Lack of interdisciplinary courses

Through course criterion number 8, Longwood's General Education program tries to assure that all courses in the program make clear to students the interconnectedness of disciplines, but with a few exceptions the program lacks true interdisciplinary courses. The Committee recognizes the difficulties involved in creating an interdisciplinary course (which often requires collaboration with colleagues in other departments) and in maintaining such a course over time (see "It's Alive! The Life Span of an Interdisciplinary Course in the Humanities"). One of the committee's recommendations (see below) is for the University to offer faculty development grants specifically for the purpose of encouraging the

development of interdisciplinary courses in certain goals and for the purpose of encouraging faculty members in different departments to link courses among goals.

### **Proposals for program revision sent forward**

- Change the wording of Goal 1 to make it more consistent with the other goals—approved by EPC and Faculty Senate.
- Delete Goal 12—approved by EPC and Faculty Senate, effective Fall 2011.
- Require each five years reapproval of courses designated as fulfilling a general education goal—approved by EPC; not approved by Faculty Senate.
- Modify the wording of the introductory material in the catalog and slightly modify the wording of some of the nine criteria—approved by EPC and Faculty Senate, effective Fall 2011.

### **Further recommendations**

- Academic Affairs or the Center for Academic Faculty Enhancement (CAFÉ) should offer Faculty Development Grants for faculty members seeking to develop interdisciplinary courses in appropriate goals (for example, Goal 4, Goal 6, Goal 8, or Goal 9) or seeking to link courses in multiple goals (for example, linking a section of the World Music course to a section of the World Literature course, so that students took the two courses concurrently, would allow the two instructors to work together to show students how music and literature from particular areas and times are related; other examples could be a science and a math course linked or an American history and an American literature course or an art history course and a western civilization course).
- The General Education Committee should use the proposed reapproval process for general education courses as an opportunity regularly to reevaluate the goals involved and seek interdisciplinary linking of goals.
- For courses with the GNED prefix, FTEs generated should go to the department(s) of the instructor(s) of record. Faculty members in some departments expressed reserve about teaching a course designated GNED without this assurance.
- The General Education Committee should consider further the possibility of explicitly reforming the program as a core curriculum (in which students take the same courses or nearly the same courses) and other goals or requirements (area studies?) in which students have a broader choice of courses.
- The General Education Committee should continue to study the upper-level components of general education. The need for upper-level general education is intensified by the increasing number of students who bring dual enrollment credits when they matriculate or who come with an associate's degree and because of articulation agreements are therefore considered to have met all lower-level general education requirements.

### **Submitted by the General Education Committee**

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## General Education—recent reports and resources

SACS Principles of Accreditation:

<http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/2008PrinciplesofAccreditation.pdf>

SCHEV competencies:

<http://research.schev.edu/>

report on AAC&U survey:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2009/05/15/aacu>

AAC&U survey:

summary: [http://www.aacu.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2009/membersurvey092.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2009/membersurvey092.cfm)

full report: [http://www.aacu.org/membership/documents/2009MemberSurvey\\_Part2.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/membership/documents/2009MemberSurvey_Part2.pdf)

AAC&U list of “high-impact” educational practices:

[http://www.aacu.org/LEAP/hip.cfm?utm\\_source=meetings&utm\\_medium=blast&utm\\_campaign=fr10cfp2](http://www.aacu.org/LEAP/hip.cfm?utm_source=meetings&utm_medium=blast&utm_campaign=fr10cfp2)

American Council of Trustees and Alumni report:

<https://www.goacta.org/publications/downloads/WhatWillTheyLearnFinal.pdf>

*Journal of General Education* (available from the Library’s database list through *Project Muse*):

<http://www.longwood.edu/library/research/db/azlist.htm>

(For a good listing of articles, just type “general education” in the box and do a subject search.)

These are interesting or useful articles from the *Journal of General Education*:

“Tensions and Models in General Education Planning,” 49.3 (2000).

“‘Making Connections’ at The University of North Carolina: Moving Toward a Global Curriculum at a Flagship Research University,” 58.2 (2009).

“Problem-Based Learning in General Education at Samford University: A Case Study of Changing Faculty Culture Through Targeted Improvement Efforts,” 51.4 (2002).

“It’s Alive! The Life Span of an Interdisciplinary Course in the Humanities,” 57.4 (2008).

“A Discourse-Based Theory of Interdisciplinary Connections,” 54.3 (2005).