

An Update on Re-Envisioning the Clemson Undergraduate General Education Curriculum

To accompany a planned listening tour

Introduction

The General Education Committee, now in its second year, has reviewed the work of the General Education Task Force and writes with continued purpose to re-envision the General Education curriculum at Clemson.

As the General Education Task Force noted in May 2018, a Clemson General Education curriculum should/could involve *Ways of Knowing* (i.e. – traditional disciplines of arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics), *Communication* (i.e. - composing, editing, oral/written/digital presentation), and *Integration*.¹ Currently, Clemson’s General Education curriculum emphasizes Ways of Knowing and Communication, but falls short on the Integration component.

At the August 2019 General Education Program retreat, approximately 200 stakeholders were able to examine and make meaning from course assessment and survey data related to student learning. Qualitative feedback collected from attendees indicate that our current General Education curriculum needs improvement in encouraging students to practice application, engage in diversity, and take ownership for their intellectual development. Nearly all of the input can be summarized into two needs: improving our curriculum and truly supporting its delivery.

Our discussions over the past year-and-a-half have focused on these opportunities. We revised our student learning outcomes and assessment rubrics last year for all but the Integration components, and we supported a program of faculty development to focus on assignment design in courses that are part of the General Education curriculum. Now it is time to further discuss and implement curricular improvements.

What Do We Propose?

To complete the steps taken in the May 2018 white paper from the General Education Task Force and the needs identified by colleagues in August 2019, the General Education Committee is working toward proposing the following curricular reform: implementing a **Global Challenges** integrative requirement in the General Education curriculum. To be clear, what looks like a single reform is in fact a multilayered approach to General Education revision, addressing a number of pedagogical and structural concerns raised over the past few semesters of collaborative work.

We propose that all Clemson students complete six credit hours in Global Challenges courses and that these credits are Clemson courses only. The General Education Committee has deliberated extensively about *the how* of this component, discussing two possible options.

1. All of these six hours of Global Challenges credits are at the 3000-level or above, in order to build on foundational coursework (i.e. – Ways of Knowing and Communication) and extend knowledge,

¹ Link to the original white paper is available on the General Education Re-envisioning Blog: <https://blogs.clemson.edu/undergraduate-studies/2018/05/04/whitepaper/>. While you’re there, consider reading other posts to catch up on or reacquaint yourself with the work that has been completed or is underway.

skill and engagement throughout the curriculum. The Committee believes that this approach is the overall best one for student development and for a coherent curriculum.

2. At least three credit hours of Global Challenges curricula must be at the 3000-level or above, but the other three can be variable.

Clemson’s proposal creating the CT2 program in 2013 sought to address the need for 2000-level courses,² and a 3000-level Global Challenges scaffold provides additional opportunity for curricular depth and breadth. It is imperative to remember that Global Challenges courses are part of a student’s true *general education*, designed to impart knowledge and skill for all students regardless of their major courses of study. The General Education Committee intends to work on an implementation plan and timeline to ensure that we have adequate course offerings and staffing within the next four years, while also acknowledging underlying resource and structure issues that must be addressed.

The Global Challenges proposal insures a shared experience of a distinctively Clemson perspective as part of the undergraduate education. The integrative nature of the Global Challenges requirement insures exposure to ethics, perspectives, and critical thinking in every Clemson graduate’s experience. Furthermore, this structure allows the space to integrate Clemson’s engaged learning portfolio (undergraduate research and creative inquiry, service-learning, international virtual exchange, etc.) into the Global Challenges curriculum and to allow transfer students to take advantage of our R01 institution’s resources not always available at other institutions.

This third category of the General Education curriculum calls on Clemson faculty to consider how they prepare their students for Global Challenges and to develop or revise courses to meet the new student learning outcomes. It builds upon our land-grant mission and pushes our curriculum to establish the relevancy that prepares all of our students for Global Challenges.



Classification	Student Learning Outcome Area
Communication 6 hours	Oral Communication (3 hours or distributed)* Written Communication (3 hours) *
Ways of Knowing (18-19 hours)	Arts & Humanities (6 hours)* Social Sciences (6 hours)* Natural Sciences (3-4 hours)* Mathematics (3 hours)*
Global Challenges 6 hours	Courses with themes that connect to Global Challenges (6 hours)

Note: Student learning outcome areas depicted with a * are currently in operation. New student learning outcomes and assessment rubrics were passed effective fall 2019 and the new student learning outcomes are in the Undergraduate Catalog.

Image and table to accompany the proposal. SACSCOC requires 30 hours of a general education curriculum, a coherent rationale, and courses that do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. The draft proposal delineated above addresses SACSCOC core requirements and responds to the evolving needs of Clemson students.

² CT2 website: <https://www.clemson.edu/academics/programs/thinks2/>.

What Are Global Challenges Courses?

Global Challenges are a series of problems, issues, and/or enduring questions facing the world and its inhabitants. Although the title is a nod to the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) Grand Challenges category, Global Challenges do not belong to any one discipline or area, much like how the NAE's Grand Challenges can be fully addressed only by interdisciplinary thinking. Global Challenges are problems faced locally, nationally, and globally. In this context 'global' does not imply an international focus, though it may. Global Challenges occur across multiple regions and spaces, including past, present, future, and virtual.

Global Challenges courses would involve thematic areas, including but not limited to:

- Environmental & Economic Sustainability
- Gender Equality
- Equitable Societies
- Peace & Conflict
- Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender
- Health & Wellness
- Value Systems
- Energy
- Culture & Diversity

Global Challenge courses involve multi-dimensional, multi-perspective explorations of a current or long-term issue facing the world and its inhabitants. These courses may look at such challenges from a primary lens, but should also incorporate multiple perspectives to illustrate that such problems have many approaches to solutions. Global Challenges courses should require reflection from the student, thereby expecting students to analyze their own perspectives while exploring other ways of viewing, analyzing, and approaching issues.

The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals ([Appendix I](#)) framework is a valuable source for defining and engaging Global Challenges.

What Do Global Challenges Contribute to Intellectual Development?

Courses with Global Challenges themes help students with interdisciplinary, integrative, and systems thinking. They build upon skills and knowledge acquired in the Communication and Ways of Knowing areas and address what is lacking in our current curriculum and its scaffolding. Furthermore, they encourage student critical thinking and metacognition in analyzing their own perspectives with regard to the needs and perspectives of others. (See [Appendix II](#) for a brief table delineating these types of thinking.)

Many current Clemson courses – including current offerings that fulfill STS and CCA requirements - may be suitable for modification into Global Challenges courses.

Student Learning Outcome(s)

The proposed student learning outcomes for Global Challenges courses are as follows:

1. Demonstrate critical thinking through analysis of global challenges.
2. Evaluate how varying perspectives influence global challenges.
3. Demonstrate integrative thinking through analyzing ethical consequences of global challenges.

Each Global Challenges course would connect to at least two of the three student learning outcomes.

[Appendix III](#) contains a link to the Clemson Global Competency Outcomes from which the language was derived, and [Appendix IV](#) contains the draft rubric that will be used for assessment and development of Signature Assignments.

Resources Available to Support Change

The Division of Undergraduate Studies, the Office of Teaching Effectiveness & Innovation, and the Office of Global Engagement have appropriated resources to faculty development with regard to a Global Challenges curriculum. These include, but are not limited to:

- The development of a Global Engagement Institute, to parallel the successful CT2 Faculty Institute. Faculty will work on course design/redesign in a learning community with other faculty and will receive a stipend. This will begin in June 2020.
- The continuation of an Assignment Design workshop series, to assist faculty with designing/redesigning signature assignments. We have created an asynchronous, self-paced version of the series to be launched in Canvas in early spring 2020.
- We have created six Faculty Fellow positions, with Clemson faculty members poised to lead workshops, discussions, consultations, etc. around Global Challenges courses and assignments. This will begin in spring 2020.
- We have funding available to bring outside speakers to provide additional perspectives and best practices to our campus.

The General Education Committee and the Division of Undergraduate Studies leadership will continue to develop resources and address timelines and needs as the revision process unfolds. [Appendix V](#) details some of the constraints and opportunities that have been identified through discussions with faculty and other stakeholders. We are optimistic that improvements are possible and look forward to the discussions with our colleagues on these ideas.

Appendix I. U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>



Appendix II. Intellectual Development for Proposed Curriculum

	Student Learning Outcome Areas:	Intellectual Development:	Fulfilled By:
Communication	1. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizational reasoning Justification of ideas Point of view and purpose Oral, written, digital, multimodal communication and presentation skills 	Oral Communication course or cluster Written Communication course
	2. Arts & Humanities 3. Social Sciences 4. Natural Sciences 5. Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplinary thinking Application of concepts, theories, principles, models Coherent argumentative reasoning Interpretation, reinterpretation, and/or Criticism Application of social science concepts and evidence to explain human actions or behaviors Scientific reasoning Calculation and interpretation 	Disciplinary courses

Global Challenges	6. Global Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary and integrative thinking • Metacognition, student self-awareness in relation to knowledge position • Systems thinking 	Courses developed/revised with Global Challenges themes
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Appendix III. Clemson Global Competency Outcomes

The Clemson Global Competency Outcomes, created by a task force of Clemson faculty during the 2016-2017 academic year, were used in developing the Global Challenges student learning outcomes. The task force was established with the support of the Office of Global Engagement and responded to a need for articulated global learning, as identified through the ACE Internationalization Lab report.

Link: <https://www.clemson.edu/administration/global-engagement/documents/globalcompetencyoutcomes.pdf>

Appendix IV. Global Challenges Rubric

The proposed rubric to accompany the Global Challenges student learning outcomes is below. The rubric provides the means for the student learning outcomes to be assessed, and they help to guide the creation of signature assignments within courses in the General Education curriculum. Each Global Challenges course will have an assignment that meets at least two of the rubric rows. (One assignment that addresses all six is not an expectation.)

	4 (Capstone)	3 (Milestone)	2	1 (Benchmark)
Analysis of Global Challenges	Challenge to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering relevant information necessary for thorough understanding.	Challenge to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Challenge to be considered critically is stated and described, with ambiguities.	Challenge to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
Influence of varying perspectives	Interprets experiences from the perspectives of one's own and more than one worldview while demonstrating respect for other cultural groups.	Recognizes and uses dimensions of more than one worldview.	Identifies components of the worldview of others.	Catalogs one's own cultural worldview only.
Analysis of Ethical Consequences	Insightfully and explicitly analyzes ethical consequences in a complex, multilayered context. Integrates an explanation of cross-relationships among the issues.	Analyzes ethical consequences fully and in a complex, multilayered context.	Identifies ethical consequences fully.	Identifies basic and obvious ethical consequences, but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships.
Integrative learning (i.e. – "transfer" of knowledge)	Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to explore complex issues and extend knowledge.	Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to explore complex issues.	Connects skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to a new situation to understand issues.	Identifies (in a basic way) skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies applicable to a situation.

Diversity and Inclusion	Insightfully and explicitly analyzes basic and complex advantages and challenges of diversity and inclusion in communities or organizations, while recommending strategies for improvement.	Insightfully and explicitly analyzes basic and complex advantages and challenges of diversity and inclusion in communities or organizations.	Identifies basic advantages and challenges of diversity and inclusion in communities or organizations.	Superficially or simplistically identifies advantages and challenges of diversity and inclusion in communities or organizations.
Global Challenges and Opportunities	Insightfully and explicitly analyzes significant and complex global challenges and opportunities in the natural and human world, while recommending strategies for improvement.	Insightfully and explicitly analyzes significant global challenges and opportunities in the natural and human world.	Identifies significant global challenges and opportunities in the natural and human world.	Superficially or simplistically identifies global challenges and opportunities in the natural and human world.
<p>Definitions:</p> <p>Complex, multi-layered context: The sub-parts or situational conditions of a scenario that bring two or more ethical dilemmas (issues) into the mix/problem/context for students' identification</p> <p>Context: The historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial settings or conditions that influence and complicate the consideration of any issues, ideas, artifacts, and events.</p> <p>Cross-relationships among the issues: Obvious or subtle connections between/among the sub-parts or situational conditions of the issues present in a scenario.</p> <p>Perspective-taking: The ability to engage and learn from perspectives and experiences different from one's own and to understand how one's place in the world both informs and limits one's knowledge. The goal is to develop the capacity to understand the interrelationships between multiple perspectives, such as personal, social, cultural, disciplinary, environmental, local, and global.</p> <p>Strategies for improvement: A plan/plans of action or an approach/approaches designed to arrive at a solution.</p> <p>Worldview: Worldview is the cognitive and affective lens through which people construe their experiences and make sense of the world around them. It involves metacognition on behalf of the learner, through student self-awareness in relating one's own perspective to the perspectives of those in a position of knowledge.</p> <p>Created and/or adapted in part from: Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) VALUE rubrics. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics Pathways: General Education for All. Virginia Tech. Retrieved from https://www.pathways.prov.vt.edu/about.html</p>				

Appendix V. Historical Constraints and Possibilities

Some obstacles at Clemson University have reduced the space for past developments in the General Education program. Many of these are outside the purview of the General Education Committee, but are nonetheless real and substantial impediments to improvement. We itemize current and past obstacles, while recognizing that the proposal herein is a start for addressing some of these issues.

1. Overall, the General Education curriculum has seemed a low priority at Clemson. Students often see it only as a requirement for graduation and the University as a checkbox for SACSCOC accreditation.
2. Plans have not yet been communicated as to how Clemson will grow General Education course staffing needs with increases in student enrollment. There is a history of limited, rather than systemic, investment in staffing and structure, scattered across the University.
 - a. Over time, we have developed a widespread departmental reliance on revenues from summer and/or online General Education courses to support departmental expenses and activities throughout the year that are not related to improving the General Education program.

- b. An uneven budget structure and assignment of teaching load creates problems with the two current General Education requirements that are conceptual but not departmental, i.e. - Cross-Cultural Awareness (CCA) and Science, Technology and Society (STS).
3. There has been minimal investment in General Education pedagogy. The Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation currently has only one permanent employee despite a student population of 25,000+. Dedicated FTE lines filled by those with classroom and pedagogical experience are necessary.
4. There are no common intellectual experiences or core that all Clemson University students share.³
 - a. A substantial percentage of first-time, first-semester students arrive with AP, IB, and dual-enrollment credits which exempt them from Clemson General Education courses.
 - b. Approximately one-third of our undergraduate population transfers to Clemson from other institutions with credits that meet General Education requirements, but the courses taken elsewhere do not always provide a solid foundation for a Clemson education.
 - c. The net result is a system that moves undergraduate students through a checklist of General Education requirements such that some students take no General Education courses at the institution that will award their degrees.
5. The current structure for the General Education program does not support an integrated intellectual development of Clemson students as thinkers and citizens, largely handing that development to courses in the majors. Many Clemson faculty continue to express to this Committee their shared frustrations at the need to cultivate students' growth through a holistic curriculum. Because the integrative dimension of general education - which should offer students access to that bigger picture - is lacking, some Clemson faculty see this as a profound weakness of Clemson's current General Education system.

For all these reasons, we see our task as one of making progress where possible while continuing to advocate for remediation of the obstacles in the long term. Change on this scale does not happen overnight, but the General Education Committee intends to continue to identify and mitigate challenges for the foreseeable future.

³ The Association of American Colleges & Universities helps to define, promote, and publicize a series of high-impact educational practices (HIPs). These HIPs are known to benefit undergraduate student learning and success. The literature defines common intellectual experiences as the following:

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community. These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and co-curricular options for students.

Link: <https://aacu.org/leap/hips>