



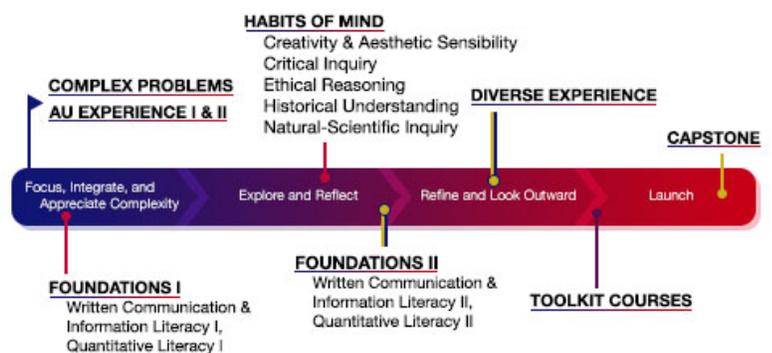
## Reimagining General Education: Toward a New AU Core Curriculum

Draft of Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Our goal at American University is to educate thoughtful, responsible human beings by offering them a challenging yet supportive academic experience. Through our commitment to a robust liberal education core, we teach our students to engage with complexity, value diversity, and understand change. The following proposal seeks to reimagine liberal education by foregrounding the specific skills and habits of mind that are at the heart of liberal education. Our proposal, while unique in its specifics, is inspired by current trends in general education: an emphasis on learning outcomes (rather than, or in conjunction with, content areas), a developmental arc that starts with a first-year experience and culminates in a capstone, and sustained attention to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Our current General Education program, designed in 1989 and revised again in 2009, exposes students to a broad base of knowledge. That aim, however, has been undermined by extensive granting of General Education credit to students with high AP scores and widespread double counting of courses toward both Gen Ed and the majors. The result is that our students experience our General Education program in wildly different ways—some taking all ten courses, others taking as few as four. While the number of courses students take varies, their attitudes toward the program cohere around one central idea: Gen Ed is an obstacle, a list of requirements to tick off before they can take courses in their majors.

In revising the program, our aim is to create an intellectual core that all students participate in equally—one that highlights metacognition, that is, making students aware that learning is a recursive process that happens over time. Our work complements the RiSE project, which aims to focus and improve students' experiences during their time at AU. (The four developmental stages in the graph at right derive from the RiSE project's student life-cycle map.) We also seek to address current deficits in both quantitative literacy, writing, and information literacy training. By reducing the number of overall credits and creating more flexibility as to when students take their core courses, we aim to expand students' ability to pursue double majors and minors, as well as to study abroad. To signal a decisive break with the content-area approach to general education, we propose renaming the program, with the final name to be developed. (Each of the two working titles to date—University College and The AU Experience—has significant drawbacks.)



Although the proposed model is holistic in design, tracking our students' intellectual development from matriculation to graduation, it is helpful to think of the courses that it comprises in three broad categories:

- A sequence of courses mostly taken outside the major, from Complex Problems through the five Habits of Mind courses (described below), along with Quantitative Literacy I, Written Communication and Information Literacy I, and the AU Experience. This sequence totals 29-33 credits (a small number of which may be counted toward the major or minor, as discussed below);
- A set of courses, often within the major and totaling 9 credits, leading to a Capstone; and
- An optional set of one-credit professional skills modules.

This draft has been the work of an *ad hoc* task force and the General Education Committee (listed below). Over the summer, the task force met bi-weekly to study current scholarship in liberal education, examine programs from across the country, meet with outside experts, and write a first draft of the proposal. This fall, the General Education Committee, comprising faculty from AU's primary undergraduate schools, met repeatedly to discuss and further revise the draft. The co-chairs of the task force have also met with representatives of many campus offices, with an eye toward anticipating possible implementation issues, and have begun meetings with student leaders. We now feel we have a draft that is ready to be shared and discussed across the entire AU community.

Each and every member of the task force and General Education Committee recognizes the complexities involved in redesigning a program that affects students, faculty and staff alike. We are dedicated to a careful, deliberative and transparent process, attentive to the ideas and concerns of the entire AU community. To that end, we have scheduled two focus groups with student leaders and will hold several student town halls in January. Town halls for faculty and staff will be held on

- Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1:00-2:30 in the Battelle Atrium;
- Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> 10:00-11:30 in the SIS Founders Room; and
- Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> 10:00-11:30 in the Butler Board Room.

Our goal will be to implement a new core program for all undergraduate students, including transfers, who arrive on campus in fall 2017. Students who arrive prior to that date will be subject to current requirements. We plan to run six sections of Complex Problems and the AU Experience as a pilot in the 2016-2017 academic year. As directions emerge from the campus-wide conversation, the Provost's Office and schools will continually assess the financial viability of the proposed curriculum.

We look forward to hearing your suggestions and concerns.

#### **General Education Task Force Members**

Cindy Bair Van Dam, General Education Committee Chair, co-chair  
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#### **General Education Committee Members**

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 Jennifer Steele, Associate Professor, School of Education  
 E. Andrew Taylor, Associate Professor, Performing Arts  
 John Willoughby, Professor, Economics

## Courses Primarily Outside the Major

### Typically taken in the first year

- **Complex Problems** (3 credits): A 1<sup>st</sup>-year special topics seminar, typically taught in fall semester by full-time faculty from across the university and capped at 19 students. All students, including transfer students, must take a Complex Problems seminar. A signature gateway to the University College curriculum, these courses will introduce students to the process of academic inquiry through analysis of one or more complex problems. Although many Complex Problems courses will draw heavily on the social sciences (in the analysis of such issues as inequality, social violence and health care access), others will be grounded in the sciences (climate change, dementia) or arts and humanities (art and politics, post-colonial expression).

Beyond introducing students to the standards of university-level inquiry, Complex Problems courses will demonstrate the value of approaching important problems and issues from a variety of perspectives: as a marker of interdisciplinarity, to be sure, but also as a demonstration of why the University places such value on fostering a fully diverse and inclusive community. As the topic and faculty interest warrant, Complex Problems courses may include a DC-based experience. Complex Problems courses may count as free electives in the student's major but may not serve as foundation courses within the major.

- **AU Experience I** (1 credit): A one-credit required course, taken by all AU students in the first semester of their matriculation, to assist them with the social, cultural, and psychological adjustment to university life. This team-taught course will be offered in a hybrid format and taught by faculty in sociology, psychology, or related fields. Discussion sections overseen by staff specialists in the college experience will be limited to 19 students. Topics covered might include: stress management and coping behaviors; time management; behavior and sense of risk in early adult development; deep learning and the role of failure; introduction to race, culture, and society; public policy and sexuality; sex, gender, and sexual orientation; historic and current perspectives on generational cohorts and the unique struggles they face; loneliness and depression; social adjustment and independence. The class will also engage in academic planning, self-assessment and exploration of career goals.
- **AU Experience II** (1 or 3 credits TBD): A three-credit required course, taken by all AU students in their second semester, normally with the same discussion leader and students and in the same hybrid, discussion-intensive mode as AU Experience I. AUx2 will delve more deeply into the sociological and psychological aspects of the individual and society introduced in AUx1, with special attention to issues of diversity, inclusion, and community. Readings and assignments will include historic and contemporary literature, film, and data on oppression and resistance. Students will explore how historical violence, such as the early slave trade and genocidal conquests, shape the contemporary experiences of marginalized groups and struggles for human rights. Class materials will consider how entrenched systems of inequality marginalize some groups and privilege others. Students will be encouraged to apply what they learn to their individual and collective situation in the multi-cultural environment that is AU.

If budget allows, the committees recommend that all students living on campus be housed with their Complex Problems cohort. Separate AUx cohorts will benefit from the work of upper-class peer mentors, who will contribute to the group while taking a three-credit 400-level peer mentoring class. Assuming that ongoing discussions around the RiSE project lead to creation of student support teams for students in their initial semesters, these teams will be assigned to specific AUx cohorts.

## Foundations I

- **Written Communication & Information Literacy I** (3-6 credits): Satisfied by WRTG-100 and 101 or WRTG-106. All students must complete the WRTG-100 and WRTG-101 sequence, unless they earn a 4 or higher on the AP or a 5 or higher on the IB, in which case they may take WRTG-106. This course sequence focuses on learning how to make effective writing choices, including formulating original theses and well-supported, effectively organized arguments. Students will learn how to write in several academic genres and how to produce error-free prose. In addition, they will acquire the conceptual knowledge needed to negotiate a complex information ecosystem, which includes web sites, social media, databases, visual media, and other sources of information. Students will learn about their role and responsibility in creating new knowledge, in understanding changing dynamics in the world of information, and in using information, data, and scholarship ethically.
- **Quantitative Literacy I** (3-4 credits): Normally satisfied by an introductory Q-suffixed course, such as MATH-15x, MATH-211, STAT-150, or STAT-202. As at present, students may test out of this requirement through strong performance on AP, IB or SAT exams. Students whose previous studies have introduced them to some, but not all, of the content in introductory Q courses may meet the requirement by taking one or more 1-credit modules (to be developed) that give them cumulative training equivalent to an existing Q1 course (typically, Finite Math). Most students will satisfy the Quantitative Literacy requirement in year one, although units that scaffold a junior research-methods course on top of STAT-202 may prefer their students take this requirement in the sophomore year.

## Typically taken in the first three years

- **Habits of Mind** (16 credits): Habits of Mind courses form the heart of the proposed core curriculum. This distribution emphasizes General Education learning outcomes yet preserves exposure to a broad range of disciplines by limiting to one the number of HOM courses a student may take in any given department. Students may count one Habit of Mind course—required or elective—toward each major or minor they pursue. Entering students may not apply AP credit toward their Habits of Mind requirements. (Note that the restrictions above do not preclude a student from taking a Habits of Mind course in the same department as a Complex Problems course and, if applicable, applying one or both for major credit.)

New courses for the Habits of Mind will follow a course approval process similar to the one already in place for general education courses. The General Education Committee will design a new procedure to ease the transition of existing Gen Ed courses into the Habits of Mind distribution.

Faculty whose HOM courses examine the same topic while employing complementary habits of mind may opt to tandem teach and offer periodic common programming. This option might include working with faculty at AU Abroad institutions.

*The following descriptions of each HOM are temporary, meant to offer a sense of what each HOM encompasses. Once we have determined a final HOM structure, the General Education Committee will develop precise learning outcomes for each category. Similarly, the course examples listed below are solely intended to illustrate the range of courses that might fit within each HOM.*

- **Creativity and Aesthetic Sensibility** (3 credits):
  - Understanding the intention, context, audience, and modes of artistic expression;
  - Expressing an appreciation for or understanding of the arts through either consideration of, or engagement with, the creative process.
  - *Course Examples:*
    - *Art: The Studio Experience (ART)*
    - *Rethinking Literature: Literary Hauntings (LIT)*
    - *Visual Literacy (COMM)*

- **Critical Inquiry** (3 credits):
  - Understanding the importance of exploring issues, ideas, artifacts or events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion;
  - Analyzing the context—political, cultural, environmental or circumstantial—that complicates the consideration of issues, ideas or events.
  - *Course Examples:*
    - *Gender, Politics, and Power (WGSS)*
    - *Global Sociology (SOCY)*
    - *The Constitution, Presidential Power, and the War on Terror (GOVT)*
  
- **Ethical Reasoning** (3 credits):
  - Understanding core beliefs and their origins;
  - Recognizing different ethical concepts, perspectives, and complex ethical issues.
  - *Course Examples:*
    - *Moral Philosophy (PHIL)*
    - *Philosophical Problems in the Law (JLC)*
    - *Global Corporate Citizenship (MGMT)*
  
- **Historical Understanding** (3 credits):
  - Examining diverse perspectives of past events and ideas in historical context, and developing the ability to write about them critically.
  - Placing contemporary events within their historical context.
  - *Course Examples:*
    - *Social Forces that Shaped America (HIST)*
    - *Stories of South Asia (RELG)*
    - *Art of the Renaissance (ARTH)*
  
- **Natural-Scientific Inquiry** (4 credits, with lab):
  - Participating in scientific inquiry and communicating the elements of the scientific process;
  - Understanding that scientific inquiry is based on investigation of evidence from the natural and physical world, and that scientific knowledge and understanding: a) evolves based on new evidence, and b) differs from personal and cultural beliefs.
  - *Course Examples:*
    - *Physics for the Modern World (PHYS)*
    - *The Chemistry of Cooking (CHEM)*
    - *Psychology as a Natural Science (PSYCH)*

### Courses Frequently Offered in the Major

#### Typically taken in the sophomore, junior or senior years

*Wherever possible, the following requirements may be satisfied by courses within the major, either by existing courses that fully meet the relevant learning outcomes (TBD), existing courses that are modified to meet those outcomes, or by substantially new courses.*

- **Diverse Experience:** a 3-credit D-suffixed course offered in the major or minor, in a Habit of Mind course or in a free elective. These courses attend to issues of power, privilege and inequality that are embedded in social,

cultural, and/or economic hierarchies, including (but not limited to) those around race, class, gender and sexual expression, and ability. These courses should build on the intellectual skills developed in Complex Problems and the diversity content introduced in The AU Experience.

○ *Course Examples:*

- *Roots of Racism and Interracial Harmony (ANTH)*
- *Gender in Transnational Perspectives (SOCY)*
- *Contemporary Issues in American Law Enforcement (JLC)*

### Foundations II

- **Written Communication and Information Literacy II:** a 3-credit W-suffixed course. W2 courses will build on the writing and information literacy foundations offered in College Writing seminars by training students in the writing conventions, research expectations, and technological resources most central to the relevant discipline. More specifically, students will refine their argumentation, organization, and proofreading skills while learning the disciplinary or professional conventions of their field. Students will learn to recognize the role of research and information in making new disciplinary knowledge, thinking critically about how information is created, valued, stored, and shared in specific disciplinary conversations. Students in the (relatively rare) majors with no appreciable writing component may pursue this credit in a related field or through custom-made courses (e.g., Writing for the Arts). Although most majors will designate a specific course or courses in the major as a required W2, any W2 may be applied toward the university's graduation requirement. Unless otherwise specified by the major(s) or minor(s), students who pursue any combination of majors and minors need only complete a single W2.
- **Quantitative Literacy II:** alternatively, a 3-credit Q-suffixed course in the major or related area, or a combination of 3 one-credit modules (to be developed, many in a hybrid or intensive format) pertinent to the student's field of study. In the case of majors whose research-methods courses are only partially quantitative, these courses may be supplemented by one or two 1-credit modules (on such topics as modeling, algorithms, GIS, etc.). In the absence of a Q course in the major (e.g., in the arts and humanities), students may satisfy the Q2 requirement by taking a Q course in a related field or a Q course specifically designed to play to their strengths.

### Typically taken in the senior year

- **Capstone:** 3-credit capstone project/course, likely in major, drawing on many of the HOMs previously acquired. In majors without capstone courses, independent studies, signature work, or other alternatives may be created.

## Optional 'Toolkit' Courses

The following courses are optional and meant to be taken by students at any time.

**Toolkit Courses:** one-credit courses, designated in the catalogue by a T suffix and offered in a variety of formats (including online, hybrid and intensive). Toolkit courses help students to acquire and demonstrate both employer-relevant competencies and general life skills. With the exception of the Financial Literacy sequence, which is specifically designed for first- and second-year students, toolkit courses are intended for juniors and seniors seeking to build upon their liberal arts training as they move into careers and subsequent education.

Most toolkit courses will not have prerequisites. Exceptions may be made in the case of prerequisites (such as STAT-202 or STAT-203) that large numbers of undergraduates will likely have taken. We expect the majority of these courses to be offered for a grade, though some will naturally lend themselves to being offered pass/fail.

In addition to toolkit courses, the university will offer a series of optional non-credit Career Edge workshops, on topics to be determined in dialogue with the Career Center.

The following are examples of potential toolkit courses. Toolkit offerings will evolve over time, largely as a function of student demand.

### *Financial Literacy*

Financial Literacy I: Financial Planning and the Time Value of Money (current FIN-197)

Financial Literacy II: Debt, Insurance and Savings (current FIN 198; FIN-197 is prerequisite)

Financial Literacy III: Personal Investing (current FIN 199; FIN-197 is prerequisite)

### *Communication and Interpersonal Productivity*

Public Speaking

Effective Interpersonal Oral Communication

Collaboration: The Art of Teamwork

The Art of Mediation

Step UP! Training

Unconscious Bias Training

### *Research and Analysis Skills*

Survey Research: Design, Data Collection, Analysis

SPSS Statistics Fundamentals (current STAT-396)

Stata Fundamentals

Nvivo Fundamentals

### *Digital Skills*

The Art of Online Presentation (current UGST-196)

Fundamentals of Web Design

Video Editing

Designing Mobile Apps (has been offered as KSB-132)

Programming (has been offered as KSB-132)

Data Visualization

Social Media Skills (has been offered as KSB-132)

Microsoft Certification

*Organization Skills*

Project Management  
Accounting Fundamentals  
Entrepreneurship  
Ecommerce (has been offered as KSB-132)

*Career Planning*

Career Exploration (current UGST-100)  
Foundations of Career Development (current KSB-200)  
Personal Branding and the Career Campaign (current KSB-300)

**Transfer Students:** Students who transfer to AU will be required to take Complex Problems and AU Experience, in non-resident cohorts designed specifically for transfer students. Because transfer-credit articulation standards are difficult to apply to Habits of Mind courses, the number of Habit of Mind courses transfers will be required to take will depend on how many credits they bring with them. Students who transfer with 0-14 credits must take all five HOM courses; those who transfer with 15-29 must take four HOM courses; those who transfer with 30-44 credits must take three HOM courses; those who bring in 45+ credits must take two HOM courses.

**AU Abroad:** As is current policy, students will be expected to complete 80% of their University College courses (not including W2, Q2, D and Capstone courses) prior to studying abroad. Students may apply up to six credits of course work abroad toward their University College requirements, assuming those courses are deemed to articulate.

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