

January 27, 2015

Skidmore College

CEPP

Curriculum Model for Discussion

Contents

1. Introduction

2

2. Curricular Model

a. Overview

4

b. Curriculum Proposal

5

3. Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning

9

**4. May 2014 Memo: “Update on Driving Forces for Reforming the
General Education Requirements.”**

10

**5. Contact information for CEPP members if you wish to talk
individually or as a group about a new curriculum**

16

Introduction

The last major rethinking of the all-college curriculum took place more than twenty years ago. Since then, it has undergone many piecemeal modifications. Despite these changes, it has never been systematically considered as a whole in relation to its parts and these in relation to its ends. In 2009, the adoption of Goals for Student Learning and Development provided CEPP with a standard by which we might look critically at the college's curriculum and that allowed us to evaluate the extent to which the current curriculum cultivates students who possess the capacities enumerated in this set of objectives. In addition, over the last half-decade, many studies and working groups at the college have examined how well and to what extent various parts of the existing curriculum cultivate or fail to promote these capacities. A memo summarizing these conclusions was shared last year and is included as an addendum to this handout. The studies and reports that have informed our thinking on these matters can be found at the CEPP homepage under the link << [Recent General Education Assessment Documents for Curriculum Review \(box.com\)](#)>>.

Two years ago, CEPP began preparing for a curricular reconstruction by reviewing the existing data on the curriculum and creating a timetable for its work. Last year, the majority of CEPP's time was spent examining our present curriculum, gathering information about curricula at other universities and colleges, and consulting relevant literature. CEPP also began brainstorming about how to reconstruct a Skidmore curriculum that was both forward thinking and conducive to the realization of the college's learning goals. After presenting some of these ideas, CEPP hosted numerous forums and sought feedback from various constituencies about a renewed curriculum. By the end of the 2013-14 academic year, these exchanges resulted in two curricular sketches. These were then presented to the faculty. Having received feedback and following yet more deliberation in committee meetings and workshops, these sketches were combined into one model this past semester. This "hybrid" of the two sketches from last spring was discussed at the January Chairs and Program Directors Retreat and was also deliberated at the recent Academic Summit.

One of the things that CEPP members heard from faculty last spring and this past fall was the desire for a more radical and imaginative curriculum than the models presented last spring. Recognizing this desire (and with many of us on the committee sharing it), CEPP also put considerable effort this past semester into developing a model that

is conducive to the realization of the college's learning goals and which allows for more flexibility in the student (and faculty) experience. This model was presented to Chairs and Program Directors at their January retreat and it was also examined at the recent Academic Summit. Though some features of the "hybrid" model were seen as worthy of retention, 10 of the 11 groups who discussed both models were very much favored the more innovative model. For this reason, we have chosen to present only this model to the faculty for discussion and for refinement.

In addition, because we received consistently shrewd advice the improvement of the innovative model were consistent across groups, CEPP has tweaked this model to reflect these good suggestions. Therefore, the curricular model presented here differs slightly from the "Model B" presented at this January's retreats. Basically, we have incorporated the features of the "hybrid" proposal that were seen as worth retaining and we have responded to the advice offered by groups at the retreats on how to improve the innovative model presented here. This is not to say that we think that this model is perfect; it is merely an instrument for sculpting our final and best curriculum. CEPP's ultimate goal is to put forth a proposal with the best curriculum for Skidmore College for the next generation. There is still much collaborative work to do and we hope you will participate in it.

There are two things we ask that you keep in mind as you read and discuss this proposal. First, we at CEPP are aware that the "Explorative Themes" section would really benefit from more dialogue and discussion with programs and academic units so that they can be made as coherent, well-defined, and inclusive as possible. Second, when you read this proposal and formulate your suggestions please also keep in mind that what we are trying to craft is a general structure for the curriculum. To use an architectural metaphor: we are working on the general structure of a building before drawing in detail each of its internal systems. The full implementation of this curriculum will take a number of years and its details, including staffing, faculty workload, classroom space, training, refining of curricular guidelines for individual requirements, etc., will need to be worked out by future CEPP's in collaboration with the effected and supporting constituencies.

With strong academic leadership, a new strategic plan for the college in the works, and with the Middle States assessment nearing its conclusion, it is an auspicious and promising time to be proposing a reconstructed curriculum. We thank you for helping us in its making!

If you could, we would like you to discuss what features you like and do not like about the proposed model. Sharing these preferences and the reasons or feelings for them with CEPP members and with your colleagues and debating them in the spirit of working out the best curriculum for Skidmore College is strongly encouraged! Finally, as individuals or as programs, please contact CEPP members for a meeting, we would love to talk with you about your ideas and suggestions.

CEPP 2014-15

OVERVIEW

This curriculum aims to meet the Goals for Student Learning and Development (GSLD) with a vision that values and promotes creative spaces and personalized integrative learning experiences. It honors Skidmore's Liberal Arts identity with a streamlined curriculum emphasizing strong foundations, integrative experiences, and the exploration of fundamentally important human experiences and problems, while addressing concerns with our current curriculum. The proposed curriculum requires that four **Foundational** capacities be gained in the first two years, principally through coursework. These capacities are intended to support subsequent study in various disciplines and interdisciplinary pursuits. By the end of the third year, three additional courses are required, each of which is intended to guide students' in their exploration of a broad and perpetually important **Theme** in the liberal arts. Students would take at least one course in three **Explorative Theme**. However, to provide incentive for further exploration, students would have to complete courses in all four Explorative Themes to qualify for Latin Honors.

This curriculum affords students, faculty, and academic programs with the space necessary for creative practice. For students, this space can allow them to pursue an idea, discipline, or problem in more breadth or depth, engage in off-campus study, or participate in collaborative research or internships. For faculty, this curriculum can open the way for new pedagogical approaches. For academic programs, it can introduce novel ways to attract and introduce students to a discipline. Further, for students entering Skidmore with clear interests and plans, **Themes** provide a multidisciplinary introduction to the Liberal Arts tradition, approaches that will broaden and enhance their main area of focus. For undecided students, Themes provide an engaging introduction to multiple disciplines that can guide their search for a major, leaving more course slots available to complete a major that is discovered late.

Like the current curriculum, the proposed model would allow students to 'double count' courses from their major towards course requirements. At face value, the proposed curriculum requires a minimum of eight courses outside the major, but most students will be able to use courses required for the major for 1-2 of these courses. For students with second language proficiency, this curriculum may require as few as six courses outside the major. Because this curricular model is very streamlined, students would not be allowed to 'double count' Foundations or Theme courses. For students who need preparatory courses in both mathematics and English, Model B may require as many as ten courses outside the major.

Role of the **Major** - Different disciplines expect students to become proficient in different skills. As such, the major is envisioned as the appropriate venue for students to hone their skills in oral and written communication (e.g. Writing in the Major), as well as information literacy.

Integrative moments - Here, FYE, SOYE and the Senior Major Capstone experiences serve as pivotal moments of integration at the outset, at the sophomore juncture, and at the transition out of a students' college education.

Curriculum Proposal for Skidmore College

01-21-15 CEPP

CURRICULUM

Integrative Experiences:

FYE (1 course)

SOYE (1 credit course)

Senior Capstone in Major (program decides how to implement)

Foundations: In the first two years

Expository Writing (1 Course)

QR2 (1 Course), QR1 as a pre-requisite

Scientific Inquiry (1 Course)

Foreign Literature and Language (1 Course)

Explorative Themes: Must take at least one course in three out of four themes listed below by the end of the third year. Must be 100 and 200-level courses with no prerequisites.

Global Perspectives

Courses that provide a sense of the complexity of the world today
How did today's world come about? What are the roots and dynamics of today's partnerships and conflicts? What are the differences between and among social groups and why do they exist? (e.g. anthropology, art history, economics, foreign languages, government, history, international affairs, non-Western courses, regional studies, religion, etc.)

Artistic Experience

Courses that cultivate creative and or critical skills in the performing, plastic, and literary arts
How do we integrate and understand creative, artistic practices in order to express ourselves and to communicate with others? (e.g. Creative writing, dance, media, art and film studies, music, theater, studio arts, etc.)

Ethics, Power, and Justice

Courses that seek to understand collective human action.
Courses that explore how institutions, values, and beliefs informs our actions as well as the consequences of those actions in society.
Who has power and why? How might we create a more just world? How do we live courageously, deliberately, and well? (e.g. american studies, biology, civic engagement courses, classics, education, environmental

studies, foreign language, gender studies, government, history, intercultural studies, IGR, law, non-Western, philosophy, psychology, religion, social work, sociology, etc.)

The Future

Courses that prepare students to understand and to take leadership roles in solving complex problems related to sustainability, uncertainty, and innovation. How do we handle change? How can we understand the big problems facing us? How do we decide upon and implement courses of action and how do we know that our actions will result in a better life and a better world? (e.g. computer science, environmental studies, government, economics, natural sciences, history, international affairs, literature, philosophy, management and business, etc.)

In the Major: Technical skills appropriate to each major will be specified by each Department and Program.

- **Communication (Written and Oral)** – Includes the existing Writing in the Major program, as well as an oral presentation as part of the senior Capstone project.
- **Information/Research Skills** – To be specified by each Department and Program.

NOTES ON CURRICULUM

Stipulations:

- A student cannot fulfill more than one all college requirement (Foundations or Themes) with any single course.
- A student can fulfill an all college requirement AND a requirement for a major and or minor with any course, with the exception of FYE. For example, an Economics major taking Macroeconomics could get major credit AND QR2 credit.
- Faculty can list a course for two all college requirements (Foundations and/or Themes) if approved by the Curriculum Committee, but if so each student will have to select which approved requirement the course will 'count' for. For example, some students might earn QR2 credit, while others might earn Scientific Inquiry credit for the same course.
- Students who wish to become eligible for Latin Honors at graduation must take at least one course in all four of the Explorative Themes. The fourth course may be taken during the senior year.

Themes

One idea that we could explore with the themes is that of having the requirement be satisfied either by (a) a course that meets the guidelines for that requirement, or (b) by a supervised co-curricular experience initiated by the student and vetted by appropriate faculty and which meets the guidelines for that requirement. The questions of how to make this option available, of how to ensure the rigor of the associated co-curricular experiences, and of the resources needed to staff such experiences would need to be taken up during the implementation phase.

Integrative Experiences

An integrative and applied learning experience is one that “a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus. ... [It] is one of the most important goals and challenges for higher education” (AAC&U’s VALUE rubric on Integrative Learning).

- **FYE**

No major changes proposed to requirement

- **SOYE**

The Sophomore Year Experience is a one-credit experience. It will include mentoring and advising components along with personal and group reflection on Skidmore curricular and co-curricular experiences. In addition, the SOYE may include workshops and other activities where students work with experts on decision-making and on career, and life skills. The implementation committee will have to think about how the SOYE relates to FYE as well as to the other parts of the college curriculum and co-curriculum and on how it can be integrative according to the definition above. It will also have to consider the resources needed to implement such a program and ensure that they are available. Finally, it will have to decide if it works better in the fall or spring semester or in both.

- **1 Scientific Inquiry course**

A course meeting a least one of the following criteria:

1. Examines the nature of science as a set of inquiry-based methodologies used to understand the world.
2. Engages students in scientific practices with the aim of better understanding an aspect of the world through inquiry, discovery, and or problem-based experiences in the laboratory or in the field.

- **1 Foreign Literature and Language**

No major changes proposed to requirement except for a waiver for a student demonstrating fluency in a language besides English.

- **1 QR2 Course**

One course that meets the guidelines developed by the QR2 committee. QR1 guidelines are also under development and QR1 will continue to serve as a pre-requisite for QR2 courses.

- **1 Expository Writing Course**

No major changes proposed to requirement at this time. However, revisions to EW guidelines that make EW easier to teach in disciplines other than English may be part of the implementation of the committee’s work.

- **Writing In Major**

No major changes proposed to requirement at this time.

- **Information/Research Skills**

Implementation committee will consider ways in which discipline based information/research skills can be intentionally included in the major, either through a “Writing in the Major” model or by some other mechanism.

- **Maturity Level Requirement**

No major changes proposed to requirement at this time.

- **Senior Capstone in Major**

Most programs already have a capstone experience where the skills developed in earlier work are marshaled in a project that demands the framing of a significant question or set of questions, the research or creative exploration of these question to find answers, and the communication skills to convey the results to audiences both expert and uninitiated in the subject matter.¹ These range from a 5 credit, two-semester process all the way to a one-credit or even no-credit addition to an existing experience or seminar. A few programs will need to introduce a capstone to their curricula. The Capstone must now include an oral presentation and be integrative. There are many ways that a Senior Capstone is currently implemented.

¹ Definition adapted from the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, S. S. Kenny (chair). *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*. State University of New York–Stony Brook, 1998.

Skidmore College Goals for Student

Learning

I. Knowledge

- Acquire knowledge of human cultures and the physical world through study in the arts, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences
- Understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts
- Demonstrate advanced learning and synthesis in both general and specialized studies

II. Intellectual Skills and Practice

- Think critically, creatively, and independently
- Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of information; understand and use evidence
- Communicate effectively
- Interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities
- Engage in and take responsibility for learning; strive for excellence

III. Personal and Social Values

- Examine one's own values and their use as ethical criteria in thought and action
- Interrogate one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences
- Develop practical competencies for managing a personal, professional, and community life
- Apply learning to find solutions for social, civic, and scientific problems

IV. Transformation

- Integrate and apply knowledge and creative thought from multiple disciplines in new contexts
- Embrace intellectual integrity, humility, and courage
- Foster habits of mind and body that enable a person to live deliberately and well
- Develop an enduring passion for learning

Update on Driving Forces for Reforming the General Education Requirements May, 2014

Beginning in the spring of 2012, CEPP began discussions of the need to review the general education (GE) requirements. An external scan of requirements of nationally ranked liberal arts colleges occupied much of the spring 2013 CEPP retreat. Based on this work, CEPP drafted a letter to the faculty (also shared with SGA) articulating the reasons why the committee felt that the time had come to review the GE requirements (See Appendix). Briefly, the committee felt that the GE requirements should be reviewed because:

- Aspects of the GE curriculum may no longer fit the context in which our faculty teach and our students learn.
- The age of the curriculum calls for review in the same way that our departments are periodically reviewed to ensure that they are relevant current and achieve their goals.
- The goals for student learning and development (GSLD) were passed long after the current GE system was put in place.
- Given that the college is currently in the process of crafting a new strategic plan, it seems wise to consider how that work might bolster faculty and students' GE experiences.

In early October of 2013, CEPP brought this letter to the faculty and student government, beginning what has been a yearlong study of our GE requirements. During the academic year, the committee discussed the current GE requirements, the GSLD, and met with faculty in both large and small groups on several occasions. While not unanimous, a repeated theme of these conversations is that we should be bold as we think about new possibilities. In addition to our work and review at the college level, we considered the focus of the national conversation on integrative learning in higher education at places such as the AAC&U. In the latter part of the year, our focus turned to generating a number of alternative GE models. While the work was highly non-linear in fashion, CEPP is now convinced that a new set of GE requirements could more effectively meet our aspirations. In addition to those concerns articulated in the October letter to the faculty, our sense is that we have the following opportunities:

- We see the need and opportunity to make the GE experience more integrated. The most effective GE model would help students to not only learn content and modes of inquiry within disciplines, but also help students to see *across* disciplines. While the FYE is interdisciplinary by design, students are then left to choose from a set of courses across the GE that have no intentional links. As such, we risk that students will come to see knowledge silos with sharp disciplinary and divisional lines that bear little resemblance to the world they will enter after college. As noted above, integrative learning is currently a central focus of conversation at the AAC&U. We must address this approach to learning if we are to stay at the forefront of liberal education. One very promising possibility in this regard would be the addition of a sophomore seminar

or shared integrative experience. Importantly, we see great opportunity for students to benefit from intentionality behind integration with the co-curriculum as well.

- This academic year, the Assessment Steering Committee (ASC) undertook a project to assess science literacy and quantitative reasoning. The results indicated that, while our first year students' performance is similar to our peer institutions on science literacy questions, there is still much work to do to meet our aspirations. More importantly, our students' performance on the quantitative reasoning portion of the assessment indicated that we are lagging behind our peers and not achieving our goals for student learning independent of performance relative to our peers. Thus we see the need to significantly bolster our students' learning in these critical areas.
- Since 2007, CEPP (and more broadly the college community) has learned through student assessments that we need to help them see beyond their own experiences by considering difference. In 2012-13 CEPP settled on a strategy of modifying the current CD/NW requirement by reconfiguring the non-western requirement and adding an additional "considering difference" requirement. Regrettably, such a requirement was undeliverable given the current mix of courses available at the college. Rather than continue to try to solve this problem in isolation, CEPP decided it could be better addressed through a comprehensive review of the GE requirements. CEPP is still committed to resolving this important issue.
- A new GE curriculum could make more intentional in our efforts to prepare our students for life after Skidmore. This topic has appeared consistently as an area of concern in our two most recent alumni surveys
- CEPP, informed in part by the Teagle writing assessment, also sees a need for the college to be more intentional in its delivery of information and technological literacy. Technological literacy has emerged as an area of concern at Middle States. It may be that these competencies are best incorporated into the major rather than the GE requirements, but no final determination has been made here.

Over the course of the year, the next critical step in the process will be to identify a general structure in which we can meet the current GSLD and the above concerns.

Appendix

Dear Colleagues,

The following document outlines the motivation for conducting (and a proposed plan for engaging in) a review of Skidmore's General Education (GE) curriculum. CEPP emphasizes that the current effort is simply a review, not a proposal to make revisions to the College's existing GE requirements. CEPP invites the Skidmore community to join us in conversation and analysis regarding the GE curriculum.

Plan to Initiate a Review of the General Education Curriculum

Impetus for the Current Review

Beginning in the spring of 2013, CEPP initiated the process of reviewing the general education requirements. There are four primary motivating matters pointing to the need for such a review, including:

1. **Context: The current GE curriculum may no longer fit the context in which our students now live.** CEPP believes it is necessary to review our GE requirements periodically given the context of the changing world and the multiple communities in which we all take part and with which we interact. In recent years, we have seen dramatic changes in our students; our faculty; and the technology of teaching, learning, and communication. Beyond the walls of the college, the world has changed as well. It is more integrated, global, and digital, while at the same time more fragmented and specialized. In the future, our students will face major problems that will require interdisciplinary collaboration, cross-cultural competencies, scientific literacy and effective communication in multiple modes. We need to ask now whether our current requirements meet the aspirations of the institution with regard to our liberal arts mission for the 21st Century.
2. **Age: The current GE curriculum is old and may be out of date.** The history of the current GE requirements is summarized below.
 - 1982: Introduction of the original Liberal Studies curriculum with subsequent implementation in 1985 (one team-taught course required of all students comprised of large lectures and small discussion sections; also, three clusters of interdisciplinary courses [broadly speaking, in the social sciences, in the arts and humanities, and in the natural sciences in a social context]).
 - 1996: Reduction of the Liberal Studies I-IV curriculum to the LS 1-2 curriculum; creation of the current Breadth requirements and the Cultural Diversity (Foreign Language and Non-Western) requirement.

- 2000: A revision of the Cultural Diversity requirement to Culture-Centered Inquiry (including a foreign language course and either a non-western or a cultural diversity course, the latter with a non-western component); also, a reduction of the natural science requirement from two courses to one and a reduction of the foreign language requirement from intermediate competency to one course.
- 2004: Approval of the FYE, with elimination of the Liberal Studies 1-2 curriculum.
- 2009: Goals for Student Learning and Development are approved by the faculty.
- 2012-13: Attempt to revise the Culture-Centered Inquiry requirement.

Thus, much of our current educational program--the Breadth requirement-- is 17 years old, and the CD requirement, itself originally a compromise, is 13 years old. Just as our academic departments and programs undergo periodic external review and our individual courses are continually revised, we believe that the GE curriculum is due for a critical review and perhaps revision.

3. **Goals and Assessment: The recently adopted Goals for Student Learning and Development (GSLD, 2009) may not be best met by the current GE curriculum.** The GSLD (See Appendix A) were adopted after even the most recent changes to the curriculum. Although the goals have been mapped against our current curriculum *ex post*, we have not had the opportunity to craft a general education plan that presumes the goals *ex ante*, or that articulates the Goals to our students as part of the requirement. It may be that there is an alternative curricular model that can accomplish the goals more effectively, more efficiently, or both. Even a cursory review of assessment data--in the form of direct assessments, alumni surveys, and multiple other instruments--indicates that there are aspects of our Goals that we are not meeting as effectively as we believe we can. Indeed, many of the conversations surrounding last year's unsuccessful attempt to expand the Cultural Diversity requirement point to gaps among our curriculum, course offerings, and student learning goals.

4. **Strategic Plan: The GE curriculum can play a role in synchronizing Skidmore's new strategic plan with the curricular needs of the faculty and our students.** The current strategic plan, instituted in 2005, is set to end in 2015. The process of crafting a new plan will begin in 2013-14, creating an excellent opportunity to link that plan with needs of the college as they relate to the delivery of our curriculum. If, for example, the college were to adopt a curricular change that brought with it significant changes in resource allocations, they could be incorporated into the institutional advancement goals of the plan.

Plan for Review

To date, CEPP has performed the following:

- Discussed the merits of curricular review and the potential benefits given the rationale for review.
- Discussed the role of assessment in the process. An important component of our work will be to continue to review the work that has been done to date. Further, we will continue our assessment efforts as they relate to the role of GE requirements in fulfilling the GSLD.
- Collected and conducted preliminary review of the general education guidelines at approximately 100 liberal arts colleges.

Timetable for CEPP's review of the GE curriculum:

1. **Ongoing:** Continue to collect, examine and incorporate assessment related data with the assistance of the DoF/VPAA, the Associate Deans, Lisa Christianson, other relevant administrative offices. Continue our review of GE requirements at other liberal arts colleges.
 2. **September:** Formalize the role of assessment in the review process, including ways to map connections between the GSLD and the GE curriculum and possible further assessments whose results will be helpful in our deliberations.
 3. **October:** Hold a Committee of the Whole discussion at the October faculty meeting.
 4. **October and November:** Consult with smaller groups of faculty, students, and staff to share the status of CEPP's work and learn more about departmental/program perspectives on GE.
 5. **December:** Update on status of the process at the December faculty meeting.
- Spring 2014:** Continued consultation with community and analysis. CEPP will provide several curricular models to the faculty for discussion

Contact information for CEPP members.

- April Bernard, English
 - abernar1@skidmore.edu
- Amy Frappier, Geoscience
 - afrappie@skidmore.edu
- Sarah Goodwin, English
 - sgoodwin@skidmore.edu
- Bill Lewis (Chair), Philosophy
 - wlewis@skidmore.edu
- Kelly Sheppard, Chemistry
 - ksheppar@skidmore.edu
- Peter von Allmen, Economics
 - pvonallm@skidmore.edu