

## UCA Core: Recommendation to the Faculty Senate and the Council of Deans

### Preface – An Outcomes-Based UCA Core

In academic year 2011-2012, the Mission and Outcomes Subcommittee of the General Education Council (GEC) developed a new mission statement and basic outcomes for the General Education Program. The proposed recommendation also included the renaming of the program as the UCA Core. After making the mission statement and outcomes available to the faculty for comment, the GEC revised the document based on the faculty response and approved it. The new mission and outcomes statement was then unanimously endorsed by the faculty senate and approved by the Council of Deans.

Once the new mission and outcomes were in place, the provost, in consultation with the GEC and the Director of General Education, appointed a General Education Task Force (GETF) to work through the summer of 2012 and recommend to the GEC a restructuring of General Education based on the new mission and outcomes. (The charge to the Task Force and the GETF recommendation may be read at [http://uca.edu/gened/files/2012/09/GETF-Report-Final-Draft\\_\\_RedesigningGeneralEducation-UCA.pdf](http://uca.edu/gened/files/2012/09/GETF-Report-Final-Draft__RedesigningGeneralEducation-UCA.pdf).) As one basis for the GEC recommendation below, the following criteria for an effective UCA Core were agreed on by both the GETF and the GEC and are reflected in the recommended restructuring of the program:

1. A tiered structure where skills are developed and demonstrated at higher levels throughout a four-year program
2. General Education areas of emphasis (skills and/or values) embedded across the curriculum and fully integrated within the majors
3. Integrative knowledge emphasized throughout the program
4. Enhanced assessment. In addition both the GETF and the GEC agreed that the Core should incorporate as many of the “High Impact Practices” recommended by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as possible. (The list of such practices may be seen at <http://aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>.) The recommendation below incorporates the following high impact practices as defined by the AAC&U:
  - a. First-Year Seminar
  - b. Writing Intensive Courses
  - c. Collaborative Assignments and Projects
  - d. Diversity/Global Learning
  - e. Capstone Courses and Projects

In the process of developing their recommendations, both the GETF and the GEC assumed that the mission statement and basic outcomes, having been approved through a shared-governance process, were not to be modified. At the same time, the GETF developed more specific outcomes to guide it in its development of a curricular structure that would serve the basic outcomes

established by the GEC. The GEC accepted these more specific outcomes except in the case of Responsible Living, where the GEC has recommended revised specific outcomes. For the purpose of clarity, the GETF recommendation and the GEC recommendation below both refer to the basic outcomes approved in Spring 2012 as “Goals” and the more specific outcomes as “Outcomes.”

The GEC also found that there was confusion about where Diversity fit in the UCA Core Goals as presented by the original GEC document; therefore it voted to modify the way in which the Goals and Outcomes were represented without changing the Goals themselves. Specifically, Critical Inquiry Goals 3 and 4 were designated as Diversity Goals 1 and 2. In order to reflect this designation and show the importance of diversity in the Core, the GEC voted to replace the original graphic representation of the Core with one that better reflects the importance of Diversity. The representation of the UCA Core as approved by the GEC can be seen in the attachment entitled “The UCA Core.”

In addition, the GEC approved the assessment plan recommended by the GETF and described below. In fulfilling its charge “to review the current general education program and make appropriate recommendations to the Council of Deans,” the GEC is fully prepared to recommend modifications to the program as implemented, based on assessment, faculty input, and other sources of information about the effectiveness of the program. In other words, with its emphasis on effective assessment, the UCA Core is to be seen, not as a program we will have to live with until some indefinite future time when we once again revise it, but as a program that includes the possibility for ongoing change and evolution based on data about its effectiveness.

Finally, the GEC recommendation includes an implementation plan designed to help provide a smooth transition from the current program to the new Core. Details of timing have been left to the Provost’s Office, based on the assurance of the provost that UCA has the resources and capability to implement the Core in a timely fashion; the GEC recommendation, therefore, focuses on issues of curriculum and faculty development and is designed to ensure that both existing and new courses will be approved without unnecessary delay and staffed by appropriately prepared faculty.

## GEC Recommendation

The General Education Council recommends establishing the UCA Core with the following structure, requirements, assessment plan, and implementation plan.

### I. Overall structure

- A. A lower-division (General Education) Core of 38 hours, including
  - 1. A first-year foundation consisting of Written Communication (6 hours), one Laboratory Science (4 hours), Mathematics (3 hours), and a First-Year Seminar, which will count for one Core requirement other than Written or Oral Communication (0-4 hours, depending on which requirement is satisfied by the FYS)
  - 2. Twenty-two hours of remaining lower-division (General Education) Core requirements, to be taken in the student's second year (*see section II below for the distribution of lower division Core requirements*)
  
- B. An upper division Core including
  - 1. Upper division courses, to be taken as major, minor, or elective requirements, which address outcomes in the following areas:
    - a. Diversity (D)
    - b. Critical Inquiry (I)
    - c. Communication (C)
    - d. Responsible Living (R)

(6-12 hours, since one course may count for up to two requirements)
  - 2. A capstone course/experience (Z), which will address outcomes in Critical Inquiry and Communication.

### II. Distribution of Lower-Division Core (General Education) Requirements

Goals and Outcomes addressed by the requirements are in square brackets in bold typeface. See the UCA Core Mission and Outcomes document for the list of Goals and Outcomes.

#### Critical Inquiry (20 hours)

Quantitative (3 hours)

Mathematics [**I, 2b**]

Natural Sciences (8 hours)

Choose 1: Physical Science [**I, 2a**]

Choose 1: Life Science (Biology 1400 or equivalent to be developed) [**I, 2a**]

**Inquiry and Analysis (9 hours) [I, 1]**

Choose 1: HIST 2301 or 2302 or PSCI 1330 (3 hours)

Choose 1: Social Science (3 hours)

Choose 1: Fine Arts/Humanities (3 hours)

**Communication (9 hours)**

Writing Foundation (3 hours)

WRTG 1310 or HONC 1310 [C, 1b]

Research and Writing (3 hours)

Courses from English, Honors, and Writing may be options to meet the second writing course requirement. The courses must be the equivalent of Academic Writing and Research as defined by the outcomes listed in the Task Force recommendation, pp. 39-40, and faculty teaching these courses must participate in the professional development and assessment activities of the First Year Writing program. [C, 1b]

Oral Communication (3 hours)

SPCH 1300 or alternatives to be approved by the General Education Council. Courses must address the outcomes listed in the Task Force recommendation, p. 40. [C, 1a]

**Diversity (6 hours)**

Diversity in Creative Works

Courses in this category will include an appropriate focus on relevant aspects of diversity as defined in the UCA mission statement: "the diversity of individuals and ideas, including race, ethnicity, religion, spiritual beliefs, national origin, age, gender, marital status, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, physical ability, political affiliation, and intellectual perspective."

Fine Arts/Humanities [D, 2]

\*Diversity in World Cultures

Global Diversity: Courses must address both Western and non-Western cultures.

Any department may propose courses in this area [D, 1]

**\*Responsible Living (3 hours)**

Any department may propose courses in this area [R, 1-3]

### First-Year Seminar

May be taken to fulfill any lower division Core requirement except for Written or Oral Communication [**C, 1b, 1c**]. (See section III below for a description of the First-Year Seminar.)

Notes:

\* Students must take a social science course either in the *Diversity in World Cultures* category or the *Responsible Living* category

Students must take at least one course in the Fine Arts and one course in the Humanities as part of their lower-division core requirements.

### III. Description of the First-Year Seminar

The GETF and GEC members agreed that a first-year seminar (FYS) course will provide an intimate educational experience, integrating knowledge and skills within an academic discipline and connecting students to UCA. Further, students would be introduced to the intended outcomes of the UCA Core, the way those outcomes will be assessed, and the expectations of their performance as they progress through the university. A variety of courses could be used for the first year seminar. *However, no department is required to put forth a course as a first-year seminar. Any course proposed as a first-year seminar must address the goals and outcomes of the appropriate academic area in the lower-division core (e.g. Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Responsible Living, etc.) The intent of the first-year seminar is to emphasize academic knowledge and skills, not to teach study skills as content.*

The FYS courses would be specially designed and would address Communications outcomes, including written communication and collaboration, and either the Critical Inquiry, Diversity, or Responsible Living outcomes. Faculty members would be chosen by their department chairs on the basis of teaching effectiveness and willingness to adapt their course and approach to fit the FYS guidelines (listed below). Since allowing a FYS to count in place of a lower-division communication course would run counter to the GETF's recommendation that we increase student requirements in communication, a FYS could be offered in any area used to fulfill one of the lower-division Core requirements except communication requirements.

Required content of the FYS should include the following:

1. Written discourse, which will be assessed using the writing rubric;
2. Collaboration, which will be assessed using the teamwork rubric;
3. An orientation to the UCA Core mission, purpose, and general learning outcomes, which will be integrated into the course and assessed;
4. A focus on the basic principles of the discipline, which will allow the course to fulfill one of the lower-division Core requirements other than communications.

Assessments in these areas will be required for a course section to receive the FYS designation. Obviously, not all sections of a particular course will be offered as a FYS. Only sections which meet the specific requirements would be included in this category. As a 3-credit academic course, the FYS would not use class time to address the aspects of the university typically associated with

orientation (e.g. health services, the counseling center, etc.); however, instructors would be informed about these resources so they could recommend them as needed to students. A list of all university services would be given to FYS instructors (with appropriate training regarding what to look for, etc.). The expectation is that FYS instructors would be aware of and able to refer students to special services (e.g., the Academic Success Center, the Writing Center, the Counseling Center, etc.) and have an understanding of how to weave basic academic success skills into the course without diluting academic content. The list of resources could also be made available via Blackboard or some other venue for the students in the class.

Additional considerations for first-year seminars include the following:

1. Class size must be small (25 students or fewer);
2. Faculty must be selected by the department chair and have demonstrated an aptitude for high impact teaching;
3. FYS faculty will agree to participate in more thorough assessment and additional training as needed (e.g. in teaching writing skills, developing collaborative assignments, etc.)

While the recommendation would be that FYS be taken in a student's first semester, it is expected that some students will need to take it the second semester. Transfer students with more than 30 hours of transfer credit would not be required to take a FYS.

#### **IV. Upper Division Core Requirements**

As noted above, students would be required to take upper division courses that address outcomes in each of the four Core areas: Diversity (D), Critical Inquiry (I), Communication (C), and Responsible Living (R). These courses may also count as major, minor, or elective requirements, and one course may satisfy up to two Core requirements, as long as the outcomes for both areas are assessed.

The following guidelines apply to courses that satisfy the upper division Core requirements:

*Diversity* courses must address either Diversity Goal 1 or Goal 2;

*Critical Inquiry* courses must address either Critical Inquiry Goal 1 or Goal 2;

*Communication* courses must address Written Communication [C, 1b]) and one of the other Communication Outcomes (Oral Communication [C, 1a] or Collaboration [C, 1c])

*Responsible Living* courses must address two of the three Responsible Living Goals.

#### **V. Capstone Course/Experience**

In order for an upper division course to receive a general education Capstone designation "Z," it must meet the guidelines to receive both an I and a C designation at the upper division (i.e., it must address either Critical Inquiry Goal 1 **or** Goal 2 **and** the Written Communication Outcome [**C, 1b**] **and** either the Oral Communication [**C, 1a**] **or** the Collaboration Outcome [**C, 1c**]).

## VI. Assessment Plan

The GEC approved the assessment plan recommended by the GETF (p. 51), with revisions that have been incorporated into the following description, based on the Task Force proposal. The plan includes multiple assessment points throughout a student's progression through the program. The initial assessment point will take place in the first year seminar or Freshman Orientation where a sample of students will be given the ETS Proficiency Profile. This assessment will provide an entry level benchmark for students. FYS will also assess written communication (Effective Communication Outcome 1b), teamwork (Communication Outcome 1c), and students' understanding of the mission and goals of the UCA Core.

Then every class in the Lower Division core will have required assessment activities. Writing and Speech courses will assess written and oral communication skills as appropriate for Effective Communication Learning Goal 1. Math, Natural Science, and Social Science courses will assess Critical Inquiry Learning Goals 1 and 2. Humanities/Fine Arts courses in the Critical Inquiry category will assess Critical Inquiry Learning Goal 1. Courses meeting the Diversity requirements will assess Diversity Goals 1 or 2. Responsible Living courses will assess the three Responsible Living Learning Goals. All of these lower level assessments will be conducted using common assessment rubrics, to be developed by the GEC using the GETF models (pp. 60-71), which will be adapted and modified with faculty input. Instructors can adapt existing assignments to generate data for the rubrics. Departments that want their courses to remain part of the Core must routinely provide the appropriate assessment data to the Director of University Assessment.

The I, D, C, R designated upper division courses would assess the learning goals specified in order to gain the designation. For example, an I course would have to assess either Critical Inquiry Learning Goal 1 or Critical Inquiry Learning Goal 2. The assessment results would be reported using the same rubric as is used for the lower division course. The expectation would be that there would be a higher acceptable benchmark specified for the upper division course. Since every student will have to take at least one course with each designation there would be a variety of assessment points for the UCA Core Learning Outcomes occurring in the upper division courses where students will be expected to demonstrate mastery of the UCA Core Learning Outcomes at a higher level and in an integrative fashion with study within the major or minor.

A final assessment will take place in the capstone courses. First, the courses would have to provide assessments from Critical Inquiry (I) and Communication (C); in addition, an end point assessment could again be performed for a sample of students using the ETS Proficiency Profile which would be directly comparable to the incoming freshman exam given in the first year seminar.

The assessment data collected will be compiled by the Director of University Assessment and sent to the General Education Council. Assessment results will be evaluated against the targeted benchmarks set for each assessment point. The General Education Council will review results and make recommendations for closing the loop to improve overall student learning.

## VII. Implementation

The GEC recommends the following steps be taken in the process of implementing the new Core:

1. All courses currently in the General Education program will be grandfathered in to the proposed Lower Division UCA Core as long as the department offering the course agrees to (a) collect and report required assessment data, (b) incorporate any necessary changes in the course required by the General Education Council to make the course fit the appropriate category in the UCA Core Curriculum, and (c) report those changes to the GEC. It is understood that some of the course changes might not be processed until after the beginning of the implementation period due to the initial work required of the GEC as the new program is implemented. In that case, the courses would be taught during this period with the understanding that further changes may need to be incorporated as recommended by the GEC.
2. Once a department begins to collect assessment data for the UCA Upper Level Core, all students in a designated assessment course will participate in data collection regardless of which general education program they are completing.
3. An expedited procedure will be adopted for the review of UCA Core courses from Spring 2013 through Spring 2015. In the expedited review process, departments would have the option of proposing up to three new or existing courses in each subject area prefix to be included in the Lower Division (General Education) UCA Core. At the upper division, departments may propose two new or existing courses in each of the four areas (I, D, C, R) for each major/concentration. In the expedited review, new courses will be reviewed by first the department and then the college curriculum committee relative to the guidelines for receiving a specific course designation. The department will provide a narrative with examples of learning experiences and a sample assignment which will use the appropriate UCA Core Learning Goal Rubric. The General Education Council can then adopt these expedited proposals after a minimal review. Courses that go through the expedited review will be reviewed for assessment results one year and two years after assessment data is available. These courses may lose their designation as a UCA Core course if appropriate assessment activities and results are not being reported as required by the GEC.
4. After review/revision by the GEC, the assessment rubrics adopted will be implemented for at least 2 years prior to revision in order to provide some consistency and establish a benchmark.
5. Programs that have specific requirements in the lower division that would make it difficult or impossible for majors to complete the lower-division Core requirements on the schedule prescribed by the GEC recommendation may request a waiver for such students, allowing them to complete some lower division requirements after the first two years. This waiver shall be approved by the chair of the department and presented as an information item to the GEC. However, the requirement to take the First Year Seminar and the basic Writing courses in the student's first year shall not be waived.