

AAC&U Institute on General Education  
Application Narrative  
Fayetteville State University  
DRAFT (last revised February 22, 2005)

Fayetteville State University (FSU) has initiated the first comprehensive review of its general education program, the University College Core Curriculum, since 1992. This review is part of a larger effort to improve the quality of education for FSU students. At the same time, structural changes in the organization of the University necessitate careful reflection on both the institutional basis of the general education program and on the process of curricular change. The AAC&U Institute on General Education offers Fayetteville State University (FSU) an opportunity for reflection as a prelude to concerted action.

The current general education model at FSU combines a core of common courses in intellectual skills with a distribution requirement of courses in different knowledge areas. A two-semester Freshman Seminar orients students to the University and guides them through the first year to the declaration of their major.

- Freshman Seminar (2 hrs)
- Core skills
  - English Composition (6 hrs)
  - Mathematics (6 hrs)
  - Speech (3 hrs)
  - Critical Thinking (3 hrs)
- Distribution requirements
  - Health and Physical Education (2 hrs)
  - Natural Sciences (8 hrs)
  - Humanities/Fine Arts (3 hrs)
  - History/Social Sciences (3 hrs)
- Restricted Electives (9 hrs)
  - Foreign Language sequence (6 hrs)
  - OR
  - Two courses from History/Social Science or Humanities/Fine Arts (6 hrs)
  - AND
  - One other course from the University College Core Curriculum (3 hrs)

The University College Core Curriculum is overseen by University College, the academic unit that teaches the Freshman Seminar.

In many ways this model has served the University and its students well. The Freshman Seminar assures continuity and advisement through the first year. The Core skills courses ensure that all students have the same preparation in the intellectual tools needed for the educated life: oral and written communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking. And the Distribution requirements provide a general knowledge of the world and its human inhabitants.

However, aside from the fact that every institution should review its general education program periodically, a number of factors have led University College to initiate a review of the core curriculum. Retention of students beyond the first year is one concern. FSU has a good record of retention in the first year, thanks to the Freshman Seminar, the freshman advisement system, and the other University College programs. Retention after the first year does not match this performance. In addition, FSU would like to improve student performance on standardized assessments such as the PRAXIS exam for teacher education majors. Founded as a normal school for blacks during Reconstruction, FSU has always identified itself with teacher education, and it must continue to be a leader in education. Concern about student performance is one motivation to look for ways to improve the teaching of general education skills.

Structural changes and new programs have also influenced the need to review the general education program. In 2003 the College of Arts and Sciences was split into two schools: the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences. A new chancellor charged these schools to develop new programs, a challenge to which the new colleges have responded with energy and innovation. At the same time, University College, which had been a department of the former College of Arts and Sciences, was moved to Enrollment Management. These structural changes altered the institutional basis of the general education program. The College of Arts and Sciences had been the de facto custodian of general education. Arts and Sciences faculty taught most of the core classes, and University College provided the Freshman Seminar. With the division of Arts and Sciences, the focus of its successor colleges on new programs, and the shift of University College, there was no longer a natural institutional basis for the general education program. The current review is intended in part to rethink the institutional support for the core curriculum.

Practical problems of staffing and course scheduling have also influenced the timing of the current review. In areas where all students must take core courses, departments find themselves torn between offering enough sections of core courses and offering enough courses in the major. For courses with no corresponding major, faculty face the opposite problem: they are essentially hired to teach one and only one course for the remainder of their careers. This situation has led to the suggestion that the skills courses be defined by competencies that could be mastered in more than one course.

Finally, assessment of the general education program is a widely acknowledged concern on our campus. Currently, all students are required to take the College Basic Academic Subject Examination as a rising junior exam after 45 hrs of completed coursework. This exam is intended to be an assessment of general education, but its implementation has never lived up to its promise. Some students escape the requirement. Students who do take the exam are not required to achieve a specific score. Faculty and advisors make little use of the results. And no other means of assessment exists to remedy these shortcomings. New trends in higher education, such as embedded assessment, may offer ways of supplementing or replacing reliance on a standardized instrument.

FSU is engaged in a number of projects to enhance teaching and learning. A learning communities initiative will increase the integrative character of core curriculum courses. FSU is participating in the BEAMS (Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students)

initiative. And the Chancellor has sponsored a series of faculty development workshops to improve student learning. The Core Review Committee sees an opportunity to harness and coordinate these efforts in the service of general education goals.

FSU has already taken steps to review the Core Curriculum. With the support of the Chancellor and Provost, the University College Advisory Board has appointed a Core Review Committee charged to review the general education program and recommend needed changes. That Committee represents the four academic colleges of the University as well as University College and Student Affairs. It met for the first time in February 2004. It sent a representative to the recent AAC&U conference on General Education and Assessment in Atlanta. The University is poised to undertake the task of general education review.

This is why participation in the Institute on General Education would be so beneficial to the FSU initiative. The Institute would allow representatives of the Core Review Committee

- To learn more about emerging best practices in General Education (design and assessment), and
- To develop a process that would ensure both widespread inclusion and predictable closure.

Our team would like to leave the Institute with a clear roadmap for general education reform.

While team members represent different disciplines and perspectives, they are each committed to the ideals of a general education. These individuals, moreover, are respected by the faculty and will be able to give effective leadership to the core review initiative.

Our team members will bring to the institute perspectives shaped by their experiences in an institution that serves many low-income and historically underserved student populations. The team members have significant experience working with a student population that is racially diverse: FSU is an HBCU with approximately one-fourth of its students non African-Americans. The university's significant accomplishments in developing its first-year experience program will also enrich the team members' contributions to the institute.