

Curriculum Committee Resolution 18/19-02

Date: Sept. 26, 2018
To: St. Olaf Faculty
From: Curriculum Committee
Re: General Education Revision Principles

At the October 4, 2018 Faculty Meeting, following the procedures approved by the May 2, 2018, Curriculum Committee resolution 17/18-22, the Curriculum Committee will move that the faculty approve the following set of guiding principles for the revision of the general education curriculum:

An acceptable revised general education curriculum is one that

- Has **breadth** that complements depth in a major
- Supports the **college mission**
- Is owned and supported by the **faculty**
- Is **forward-looking**
- Is **inclusive, accessible**, and supports **equity**
- Is **resource-sensitive**
- Promotes **student agency**

Rationale:

The process for general education revision was outlined in the so-called “General Education Syllabus” that was circulated at the faculty meeting on August 30 and again prior to the faculty meeting on September 20. As outlined in that document, the first step in GE revision is to establish a set of very general guiding principles for our work this year. After establishing these guiding principles, the GE Task Force and the full college faculty will move on to producing a mission statement for general education. With these two documents in hand, we will then turn to the task of considering learning outcomes for general education. Working together on the general education mission statement and intended learning outcomes will get us closer to envisioning a new general education curriculum.

Several General Points to Keep in Mind:

The guiding principles are not a general education curriculum. The guiding principles do not specify that a revised curriculum must include or exclude specific subjects (such as literature, science, or math). Instead, the General Education Task Force envisions the faculty moving along a path of reflection and discernment throughout the fall, winter, and spring of the current academic year. At this stage, it would be premature to assume that we know what our revised general education curriculum should look like.

The guiding principles are intended to provide helpful points of reference for our future deliberations rather than narrow or otherwise restrictive limitations on what a revised curriculum might look like. Just because an idea is not mentioned in the guiding principles, this doesn’t mean that it won’t be part of our general education curriculum. In many instances, ideas that faculty have suggested including in our guiding principles have a clearer place in the general education mission statement, or they will be important to return to when we take up learning outcomes later in the fall.

In several cases, the guiding principles merely serve as reminders of expectations that govern all of our work at the college. For example, the goal of striving to be inclusive, accessible, and equitable is familiar to all of us. It applies to the work of our departments and programs, just as it applies to other areas of the college such as student housing, athletics, and off-campus studies. In a similar fashion, the college mission statement is not merely a mission statement for our academic program but one that reflects and shapes the college as a whole.

Points of Clarification Concerning the Guiding Principles:

Breadth. The general education curriculum engages different ways of knowing and doing. Students develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions across a range of disciplines and interdisciplinary areas of the liberal arts. This principle does not specify the ways in which breadth will be achieved.

College mission. The current college mission states: “St. Olaf College challenges students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition.”

Faculty-owned and -supported. This principle suggests that the responsibility for providing the general education curriculum is shared by faculty members in departments and programs across the campus, and that the full faculty sees a clear value and purpose in the general education curriculum.

Forward-looking. In some cases, preparing students to meet the challenges of 2025 might not be so different from preparing students to meet the challenges of 1995; in other cases, preparing students to meet the challenges of 2025 might be quite different. The idea that our general education curriculum should be forward-looking merely acknowledges this fact. It is not meant to suggest that the study of the present is more important than the study of the past, or that the general education curriculum should abandon the study of the past.

Inclusive, accessible, and supports equity. This principle suggests that the general education curriculum welcomes all students, fosters belonging, and supports their learning without presuming a particular student profile.

Resource-sensitive. This principle is not meant to suggest that the college devote fewer resources to general education. It is possible that the general education curriculum will require more resources after it is revised. This principle is merely an acknowledgment that the college’s resources are not infinite, and that an increase in one area may require a reduction in another. In addition, a revised general education curriculum might better promote stewardship of faculty potential for teaching and mentoring in their areas of interest and expertise.

Promotes student agency. One of the longstanding concerns about the current general education curriculum--on the part of both students and faculty--is that students have fallen into a checkbox mentality. Many faculty have expressed hope that a revised general education curriculum will inspire students to be more thoughtful about how they fulfill their requirements, and that this, in turn, will make them better able to articulate the purpose of general education and to see the value in it. The idea that a revised curriculum should promote student agency does not imply that students should have complete and total freedom to decide how to fulfill GE. As another of the guiding principles indicates, the general education curriculum should be owned and supported by the faculty. Over the coming months, it will be up to the faculty as a whole to determine how to balance the roles of faculty and students in this area, and to determine how best to nurture student capacity for critical thinking, creativity, and self-reflection.