

Curriculum Committee Resolution 19/20-05

Date: October 30, 2019

To: St. Olaf Faculty

From: Curriculum Committee

Re: Proposed New General Education Curriculum

At the November 7, 2019 Faculty Meeting the Curriculum Committee will move that the faculty approve the following new General Education Curriculum:

### **New General Education curriculum - the “OLE Core”**

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**First-Year Experience: The OLE Seminar (1 course: 100 level).** This course emphasizes critical thinking, conversation, collaboration, and academic habits for the liberal arts. Students learn key skills like locating and evaluating academic sources, as well as reading, reflecting, and responding to texts. Students will cultivate their own curiosity while also learning how to engage in community, better understanding their responsibilities to each other.

**First-Year Experience: Writing and Rhetoric (1 course: 100 level).** This course engages students in academic and public discourse (audience, purpose, genre, context) related to a particular topic. Students write in multiple genres and engage in writing as a systematic, interactive process. They understand, evaluate, and use appropriate technologies for different purposes and audiences.

**Religion, Faith and Values (1 course).** This course builds religious literacy with a focus on one religious tradition or a set of related religious traditions. Students develop the skills necessary for critically interpreting and understanding religious life as well as a more complex understanding of religion’s place in the world. This includes the relationship of religion with community and/or the natural world, and its role in answering fundamental questions about existence, meaning, and ethics.

**Christian Theology in Dialogue (1 course).** This course focuses on the dialogue between Christian theology and the theology (or its equivalent) of another religious tradition or between Christian theology and another form of inquiry. For example, this course could pair Christian theology with science or with American politics.

**Power and Race (1 course).** Students gain knowledge of how race and ethnicity can contribute to inequality in contemporary U.S. society, and how these forms of inequality intersect with other social characteristics and institutions such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and the environment. Students acquire familiarity with cultural differences and their contributions to a diverse society. Courses must discuss the U.S. but need not focus on it exclusively.

**Global Histories and Societies (1 course).** Students interrogate the ways in which the past is known, constructed, deconstructed, curated and preserved by the present. Courses will focus on analyzing and understanding textual, artistic, environmental and/or oral evidence within the broader historical and cultural contexts in which they were created.

**Natural Science (1 course).** Using scientific paradigms and methods, students will learn about and develop skills to lead a meaningful and responsible life in the natural world that all inhabit. This course engages students in observation, measurement, experimentation, and the interpretation and analysis of data.

**Social Science (1 course).** Students use social science approaches to better understand the complexity of human systems. The examination of these systems through theories and empirical evidence helps students understand their intersection with specific communities and/or the wider environment, while developing their ability to evaluate social science research.

**Writing Across the Curriculum (1 course).** Taught at the 200-level, this course bridges the First-Year Experience foundations of critical reading, writing, inquiry, discussion, and information literacy with deeper learning and transfer as students navigate one or more majors or concentrations, engage in academic and co-curricular experiences that invest in vocation and develop a sense of their place and role in community.

**Quantitative and Computational Reasoning (1 course).** Students gain knowledge of quantitative and computational methods. They learn how to apply quantitative and computational problem-solving and knowledge in specific contexts.

**World Languages and Cultures (1-3 courses).** This requirement aims to develop language skills and the ability to use those skills to interpret authentic texts and reflect critically on the connections and differences between one's own experience and the diverse experiences and perspectives of users of other languages. Depending on placement, most incoming students will complete at least one course and a maximum of three courses at St. Olaf in order to fulfill the requirement.

**Creativity (1 course).** Students explore "making and doing" - the experience of creation, whether the creation in question takes the form of a studio art project, a film, a poem, a dance or theater performance or a music piece. Students can also fulfill this requirement by study of the creative processes of "making and doing."

**Ethical Reasoning in Context (1 course).** Students develop an understanding of a range of ethical perspectives and the contrasts among them within a scholarly field (e.g., history, biology, computer science, philosophy) or a domain of inquiry (e.g., politics, human development, the environment, love and friendship). Students will apply those perspectives to relevant questions and controversies and critically examine their assumptions and limitations.

**The OLE Experience in Practice (1 course; can be satisfied by a non-credit bearing experience).** Students will engage in work that integrates academic and experiential learning by applying classroom theories and ideas in a practical setting and/or drawing upon experiential learning to advance their understanding in an academic setting. All students will have the opportunity to benefit from the mentoring, guided inquiry, and reflection that characterize experiential learning.

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#### Requirement to be Fulfilled Through the Major

**Writing in the Major (1 course or its equivalent).** A single course or a set of modules distributed across two or more courses that provide writing instruction and practice relevant to a specific major and build upon knowledge and skills developed in the "First-Year Experience" (especially "Writing and Rhetoric") and "Writing Across the Curriculum". As appropriate, this requirement engages students in multimodal writing, including visual and oral communication. At a minimum, half of this requirement must be at the 300-level.

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#### Policies and Procedures

**Date of Implementation.** If approved, these new requirements will first go into effect in the Fall Semester of the 2021-2022 academic year.

**Courses Can Carry a Maximum of Two Requirements:** One-semester courses can be approved to fulfill zero, one, or two general education requirements. No single one-semester course can be approved to fulfill more than two requirements. The same rules apply to the individual courses within a multi-course sequence, such as a conversation program or other learning community.

**Depending on the Course and Requirement in Question, Students Can Fulfill One or Two Requirements with a Single Course:** In four instances, students will be permitted to fulfill two requirements with a single course. The only instances in which a student can fulfill more than one general education requirement with a single course are those in which (at least) one of the two general education requirements is "Writing Across the Curriculum," "Power and Race," "Ethics in Context," or "The OLE Experience in Practice."

In all other cases, students will only be allowed to fulfill a maximum of one requirement with a single course, even if the course carries two requirements. In these instances, students will be able to use the course to meet whichever of their general education requirements they have not yet fulfilled. If a student has not yet fulfilled either requirement, the course will fulfill the first of the two requirements on a provisional basis. This provisional fulfillment will become final if the student completes a course that fulfills the second requirement. If the student subsequently fulfills the first requirement with another course, the original course will then fulfill the second requirement.

### **First Year Experience Courses Cannot Fulfill Additional General Education**

**Requirements:** “The OLE Seminar” and “Writing and Rhetoric” courses can fulfill only these general education requirements. They cannot also fulfill “Writing Across the Curriculum,” “Power and Race,” “Ethical Reasoning in Context,” or “The OLE Experience in Practice.”

**Course Level:** Unless specified, requirements can be fulfilled at the 100-, 200-, or 300-level.

**Assessment, Review, and Revision.** The requirements, policies, and procedures outlined in this resolution will be subject to periodic review. Assessment of the general education curriculum will be built into the multi-year cycle of assessment overseen by the Academic Assessment Committee. At any point after the adoption of this resolution, the Curriculum Committee, other standing committees, and individual faculty members may propose resolutions to add to, eliminate, or otherwise modify the requirements, policies, and procedures herein.

**Sunset Provision.** This general education curriculum is not meant to remain a permanent feature of the college. The requirements, policies, and procedures outlined in this resolution will remain in effect no longer than ten years. This means that if this curriculum comes into effect in the 2021-2022 academic year, the college must either approve the adoption of a revised general education curriculum or re-approve this general education curriculum (with any subsequent modifications) prior to the 2031-2032 academic year.

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Rationale:

In the Fall Semester of 2018, the St. Olaf faculty approved the following statement about general education revision:

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**

These principles have shaped every aspect of our work on general education revision, from the size of the OLE Core and the specific requirements that it contains to the deliberative process through which this proposal has been developed.

This proposal will also bring the general education curriculum into better alignment with the basic outline of the balance of general education, major, and elective credit in the current St. Olaf College Catalog:

A typical course of study may have proportions as follows:

General Education	14-16 Credits
Major	8-10 Credits
Electives	10-12 Credits
Total for graduation	35 Credits

St. Olaf students will need a maximum of 16 courses to complete the fourteen requirements of the OLE Core; however, in many cases, students will need fewer than 16 courses. Based on language placement, many students will complete the “World Languages and Cultures” requirement in fewer than three courses. In addition, we expect that many students will complete “The OLE Experience in Practice” requirement with a non-credit bearing activity.

Also, in four instances, students will have the option of fulfilling two requirements with a single course. This will be an option for courses in which at least one of the two requirements is “Writing Across the Curriculum,” “Power and Race,” “Ethics in Context,” or “The OLE Experience in Practice.” A student could earn any of these four requirements along with any other Core requirement other than “The OLE Seminar” or “Writing and Rhetoric.” For example, “Writing Across the Curriculum” could be paired with “Global Histories,” or with “Natural Science,” or with “Power and Race.” “Ethics in Context” could be paired with “Social Science,” or with “Creativity,” or with “Writing across the Curriculum.” These are only a few examples. The flexibility that results from giving students the option to complete several of their requirements in this fashion will empower students to make thoughtful choices about how best to balance general education with their other ambitions.

With the possibility of four double counts, even students who enter St. Olaf with no pre-college credit, end up taking the maximum number of language courses (3), and fulfill “The OLE Experience in Practice” requirement with a course (rather than a non-credit experience) would be able to reduce the total courses required for general education from 16 to 12. Also, because virtually all students fulfill some general education requirements with courses that also fulfill major credit, the number of courses students take that only fulfill general education will almost certainly be smaller than the numbers cited above. Given that we require 35 credits to graduate, 12 courses represents roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a student’s coursework, leaving  $\frac{1}{3}$  for a major, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  for a second major, one or more concentrations, or electives. That is the balance of coursework that many at St. Olaf have viewed as ideal.

Some faculty colleagues have suggested that double-counting be allowed across a wider swath of the Core. If we were to place no limits on double counts with the exception of the two “First

Year Experience” courses, this would mean that students could potentially complete their general education coursework in a total of 9 courses (assuming 3 language courses, “The OLE Experience in Practice” for credit, and no pre-college credit) or even fewer than that depending on language placement, etc. While this might seem a simple change, it would actually complicate our policies and practices quite a bit. For instance, we would have to institute additional rules to ensure that our students would remain in compliance with the Minnesota Office of Higher Education standards. And, even after opening things up, it is likely that we’d decide that we need to limit some pairings. For instance, it probably wouldn’t make sense to allow students to take a single course that double counts as “Religion, Faith, and Values” and “Christian Theology in Dialogue.” Perhaps most importantly, though, placing no limits on double dips would risk returning us to the practice of students choosing courses based on the number of GE requirements that they fulfill rather than actual interest in the course material. Our aim is to avoid this.

It is also the case that a given course could carry up to two Core requirements, but students would only receive one. The Registrar has assured us that the DegreePath and audit function in SIS will be able to handle this, as is currently done. Some faculty have suggested that this policy is unfair to students, but it’s important to note that this is something that St. Olaf and other schools have done for many years. St. Olaf and other schools have used rules like these in order to ensure that students have some variety in their general education coursework. For instance, in the current GE we have a rule that a course may carry both IST and SED, but that students can only earn one of these from a single course. We also have other rules that, in effect, prevent students from fulfilling one or more GE requirements that are attached to a course, such as the rules that govern HBS, MCD, and MCG. For example, we have a rule that students cannot fulfill both MCD and MCG within a single department. This means that if a student takes both an MCG course and an MCD course in the same department, they will only receive GE credit for one; they must take an additional MCG or MCD course in a different department or program. Together, the policy of allowing a single course to carry up to two Core requirements and the limits on double counting will invite faculty to offer courses that bridge two requirements, while also encouraging students to make thoughtful decisions about their general education courses that draw from the full breadth of what we offer, rather than encouraging students to simply default to double count courses in all instances.