

Proposed Model for General Education at Trinity College

Background

The Working Group on Curricular Realignment has been considering changes to the General Education Curriculum at Trinity College. It has been over a decade since the last major review and suggestions arising out of the strategic planning process (a reduction in overall credits necessary for graduation and a proposed experiential requirement) necessitate such a review. In the October 2018 faculty retreat there was discussion of a “competencies” curriculum. The Working Group heard considerable resistance to this idea and rethought the proposal. In the March 2019 retreat faculty discussed a range of options. There was very little support for either no change, an open curriculum, or a required minor. Conversation centered on Option A (Interdisciplinary Academic Pathway), and Option C (Minimal Change). There was concern that Option A put too much of a burden on both students (who may not be able to define a pathway in year one) and faculty (who would have extra advising burdens associated with the first-year seminar). Participants generally liked the idea of three defined areas within which students would have to take two general education classes (thereby adding some depth to what we currently have). There was also a sense that the areas should be defined in ways that would be meaningful to students – not simply listing divisions – but the particular attributes associated with those divisions (literacies, approaches, habits of minds, skills etc.) Students would thereby benefit from the breadth of the liberal arts while having a better idea of why it was important to be so educated. With this background in mind the Working Group propose the following.

Interdisciplinary Academic Pathway

Throughout their time at Trinity, students will construct an Interdisciplinary Academic Pathway. This will be an iterative process but include a description of the student’s hopes and expectations at the outset (first semester) and a reflection on what the pathway has taught them (in the sixth semester). The pathway is to be completed over the student’s first six semesters at Trinity.

As part of the self-designed pathway, to ensure breadth of knowledge, students must enroll in at least two courses from each of the following areas of study with no more than two courses from any single program or major.

*** Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning**

A liberal education should include the study of mathematics and the natural sciences so that students develop an understanding of their respective methods of inquiry. Specifically, the scientific and quantitative reasoning requirement is designed to help students to develop the ability to engage with complex problems, to collect, summarize and analyze numerical data; to make abstract concepts operational; and to think critically about the accuracy and soundness of conclusions based on observations, data or on mathematical models. Students will develop familiarity with the observational procedures employed by all the sciences: laboratory and field work; the theories and methods that constitute the tools and subject matter of scientific research; and the quantitative, qualitative, philosophical, social, and aesthetic dimensions of work in the natural and social sciences. Students will gain experience in quantitative reasoning including the

ability to understand and evaluate arguments framed in quantitative or numerical terms; to analyze subject matter using quantitative techniques; to construct and evaluate quantitative arguments of one's own; and to make reasoned judgments about the kinds of questions that can be effectively addressed through quantitative methods.

*** Intercultural Communication and Expressive Practice**

Artistic and cultural engagement with the world, the ability to exchange ideas, share experiences, and communicate with each other in complex ways, is a crucial aspect of what makes us human. An active presence, the ability to express oneself and practice various models of communication, in both local and global communities is a key component of a rich, full life. In these courses, students learn to express themselves as citizens of the city, region, country, and world, through the research and practice of creative expression in the arts and/or through studying a second language. Students study the creative expressions and practices of others and engage in their own creative processes in order to approach problems creatively, understand the world around them in new ways, and represent these approaches and understandings to others.

*** Exploring Cultural and Social Difference**

We live in a world where people are marked by multiple forms of social difference including, but not limited to, age and generation, class, gender and sexuality, ethnicity, geographical origin, language, race, and religion. These differences, ordinarily with deep historical roots, play central roles in the construction of social hierarchies and the exercise of power, scaling from everyday life to broader national and global institutions. On the other hand, exploring these themes necessarily includes examining also how a myriad of social actors creatively strive to challenge these hierarchies by engaging in processes of negotiation and creative alteration. Therefore, courses under this rubric offer students living in an increasingly globalized and heterogenous world with opportunities to learn conceptual approaches to difference, and to sharpen their ability to recognize and value human diversity in a range of contexts, in the past and in the present day, both domestically and globally.

NOTES:

-- This proposal assumes that from the existing general education requirements, only the First-Year Seminar and the W2 (Writing Intensive course in Major) remain. Endorsements for the elimination of the Quantitative Literacy and Writing Proficiency requirements accompany this proposal. Proficiency in a second language would no longer be required of all students, but second language study has a strong presence in the "Intercultural Communication and Expressive Practice" requirement of the IAP.

-- Courses taken for the IAP may count towards a student's major or minor.

--No general education requirement may be fulfilled with pre-matriculation credits earned in high school.

--No course may count towards more than one category.

--The requirements may be fulfilled by courses taken on approved study away programs.

--Given the likelihood that every major provides courses that would fall into at least one of the above categories, at the most, this general education requirement should require **5 courses** beyond the major (FYSM+2 courses from each category not covered by the major). This leaves plenty of space for a minor or second major, or exploration of other interests.

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