Proposed Revision of the University of South Carolina
General Education Curriculum

April 28, 2009

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSAL

The General Education curriculum provides the common core of knowledge, skill, and academic experience for all Carolina undergraduates. General Education offers students broad exposure to the liberal arts and sciences and secures the foundation for subsequent specialized study.

In 2005 University of South Carolina Provost Mark Becker called for a revision of the General Education curriculum. Professor Frederic Medway led a task force of more than 100 faculty system-wide addressing the question "What do our students need to know to thrive as well-educated citizens in the twenty-first century?" In December 2007 the task force concluded its work and proposed new learning goals for a revised General Education curriculum.

Building on this initiative President Andrew Sorensen called for formation of the General Education Committee in early 2008 to oversee the General Education program, including but not limited to revision of the curriculum. The Committee includes representatives from all colleges with undergraduate programs, as well as from the regional campuses, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Department of Academic Support. The Committee refined the learning outcomes received from the task force and articulated a rationale, values, and guiding principles for the proposed curriculum revision.

The document presented here reflects the work of the initial task force as well as that of the General Education Committee. Forums held in January 2009 yielded comments from faculty, staff, and students; comments were also received via the General Education website at http://www.sc.edu/generaleducation/. The Committee has now revised its recommendations in light of the discussion generated by our first report, with the expectation of sending proposed learning outcomes to the Faculty Senate in April, 2009.

Upon adoption of these proposals by the Senate, the General Education Committee will undertake their implementation, mapping learning outcomes to specific courses, reviewing the introduction of new courses, and encouraging collaborative and innovative pedagogy as appropriate.

II. BACKGROUND

A. History of the General Education Curriculum at USC [1]

On May 7, 1986 the Faculty Senate approved a resolution outlining the minimum general education requirements for a baccalaureate degree. Typical of general education requirements in the mid-1980s, the resolution contained a list of courses that could be taken in each of five general areas of study: English, numerical and analytical reasoning, humanities and social sciences, natural sciences, and foreign languages.

In 1988 the South Carolina State Legislature enacted ACT 629, which makes "each institution of higher learning . . . responsible for maintaining a system to measure institutional effectiveness in accord with provisions, procedures, and requirements developed by the Commission on Higher Education." ACT 255, more prescriptive in its call for assessment and accountability, followed early in 1992. As a result, each institution of higher education in South Carolina must regularly assess its general education program and report to the Governor and the General Assembly every four years.

This new requirement created a need for general education goals and objectives, since these must be specified before success in reaching them can be measured. And so South Carolina institutions of higher education—following the national trend—began supplementing lists of courses for general education with lists of goals and objectives, or "student outcomes."

At the University of South Carolina, the Assessment Advisory Committee started to develop student outcomes for general education in the early 1990s. After much time

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[1] The following account was compiled from Faculty Senate minutes, the 1986 General Education Resolution, the Assessment Advisory Committee Outline of General Education Goals and Objectives, the South Carolina General Assembly website, and conversations with David Rembert, Faculty Senate President in 1986, and Don Stowe, Chair of the Assessment Advisory Committee in the early to mid 1990s.

and effort, the committee developed 11 general education goals and 48 objectives, following best practices in general education assessment at that time.   The committee sought to tailor these goals to the general education curriculum already in place; there was, however, a disconnect between some of the proposed goals and objectives and the existing curriculum. For example, the goal of students performing basic mathematical manipulations, displaying facility with the use of mathematics in framing concepts for mathematical analysis and interpreting data intelligently, was not addressed by the logic courses or the computer science course that could be taken to fulfill the math requirement. Asking the Faculty Senate to change the general education curriculum to match the proposed general education goals was beyond the purview of the Assessment Advisory Committee. In addition, the administration at that time did not want to reopen the general education debate. Consequently, while the committee presented the goals to virtually all faculty standing committees, the Faculty Senate never voted on a resolution accepting these as goals and objectives of the general education curriculum.

The work of the Assessment Advisory Committee nonetheless proved valuable to the University. The nine General Education outcomes proposed at the end of the present document are, in fact, a subset of the original 11 goals recommended by the Assessment Advisory Committee. In addition, the 48 objectives that committee proposed were used in selecting standardized general education instruments to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum.

B. The Challenge of Assessment

Since the early 1990s, the University has relied primarily on standardized instruments to assess General Education. The College Outcome Measures Project (COMP), the Academic Profile, and currently the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) have all been used to compare the general education proficiency of our students to that of students at other research institutions.

MAPP measures four of our general education goals, and is usually administered to a group of seniors. In the 2008-2009 academic year it was administered to freshmen as well, in an effort to assess not only how our students compare with their peers at other institutions, but also how much they have gained in general education skills and knowledge during their undergraduate years.

Various assessment procedures are used to supplement MAPP, particularly for the general education goals it does not address. For instance, in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 the College of Arts & Sciences and the Office of Institutional Assessment & Compliance conducted a writing assessment study. The SAT writing scores of incoming freshmen were compared to the writing scores of these same freshmen at the end of English 101 and 102. The results of this comparison should help measure improvements in freshman writing, and may also help us gauge how useful SAT writing scores really are in admissions and placement. Also in 2008-2009, the History Department used course-embedded assessment to address the general education goal related to history. Finally, in 2009-2010 a study of foreign language proficiency is planned.

All assessment results are shared with the General Education Committee to provide baseline data as we work to redesign the general education curriculum. A review in 2008, for example, revealed that we were not requiring all students to take a social science course as mandated by SACS, and the core curriculum was amended accordingly. Going forward we will monitor MAPP results to determine whether this adjustment in general education policy results in higher scores on the social science subscale.

C. The Need for Revision

The General Education Requirements at USC have not been comprehensively reviewed in two decades. Today's answer to the question "What do our students need to know to thrive as well-educated citizens?" may well differ from the response formulated in 1986. When the general education curriculum was last revisited:

- The Berlin Wall was still standing and Nelson Mandela was still in prison.
- Cell phones cost over $4,000 in today's dollars, and weighed just under 2 pounds.
- There were no public email systems and no commercial voicemail systems.
- There was no online shopping, no online music for downloading, and no online term papers. In fact, there was no " www.anything" until the 1990s.
- Critical thinking was generally not specified as a student learning goal until the late 1980s.
- "Globalization", "global economy", and "global marketplace" would not become commonplace terms for another 5-10 years.
- "Distance learning" meant a correspondence course.

General education reform must avoid conforming to superficial trends, but a revision aimed at preparing our students for the 21st century must consider the challenges and opportunities of the present in order to ensure that the curriculum remains effective.

III. RATIONALE FOR THE CAROLINA CORE

The University of South Carolina prepares students to be nurses, entrepreneurs, managers, scientists, journalists, poets, social workers—specialists in their chosen fields. But we also prepare our students more broadly to be active citizens in the world, adapting to new technologies, responding thoughtfully and resourcefully to economic and political challenges; and we prepare them to live meaningful individual lives as members of families and communities. To do this, we must not only teach them the skills and information they need today; we must also teach them how to keep on learning throughout their lives. We must teach them how to know and measure the world through science and mathematics and how to wonder at its beauty and mystery through art; how to ponder the meanings of history and the extraordinary variety of human cultures, how to express themselves fluently in speech and writing, and how to honor truth as the value fundamental to all knowledge and communication.

These are the goals of the **Carolina Core.** To achieve them we must step back from the focused requirements of specialized study, asking not "What does it take to be a good statistician, psychologist, or historian," but "What do our students need to know to thrive as well-educated citizens in the twenty-first century?" University faculty, staff, and administrators are all specialists of one sort or another, but we come together in this effort because of a shared conviction: namely, that to be a good teacher, musician, or pharmacologist in the fullest sense, one must first be a well-educated, thoughtful citizen, engaged in building stronger communities and a better world.

The proposals that follow result from a sustained effort by dozens of faculty members at the University of South Carolina to answer the question of what our students need to know. At the foundations of a University education, what should we offer our students and what must we require of them—and of ourselves—in order to build a perspective that gives meaning to more specialized studies? The answers we propose go beyond a list of distribution requirements, although these will be developed. Our first step is rather to recommend specific learning outcomes intended to integrate general education with the rest of a student's Carolina experience. These outcomes should open opportunities for general education in a variety of active learning modes, such as independent creative work or collaborative engagement with faculty research. Opportunities for general education may also extend to field work, training programs, internships, service learning, and study abroad. These outcomes may be realized in the classroom or outside its walls, within coursework for the major as well as during the first year. Always, though, they keep in view the goal that defines general education: a perspective that places specialized skills and knowledge in a meaningful relationship with culture, society, and other human beings in an increasingly global setting.

IV. Components of the Core

The revised General Education requirements common for all University of South Carolina undergraduate students comprise the **Carolina Core**. Faculty, staff, and students need to understand and articulate, for themselves and others, the learning goals and distributional requirements of the Core, as well as the values underlying them—integrity, intellectual spirit, aesthetic and cultural understanding, social justice, and sustainability, in preparation for global citizenship. These values are limited to no one course or field of study; they must inform teaching and learning in every subject matter. Respect for others, respect for the natural world, respect for accuracy and truth—these are equally the underlying values of scientific research, commercial enterprise, artistic creation, social work, health care, journalism, or any other intellectual labor.

The **Carolina Core** is a coherent curriculum beginning with *foundational courses* such as English or Math at the beginning of the undergraduate experience. These foundational requirements, met through a menu of courses, are balanced by an *integrative course* requirement (3 credits) near the end of the undergraduate experience, in which selected Core learning outcomes are integrated into discipline-specific study. This integrative

course may be a capstone or other upper division course in the major, or it may be an interdisciplinary offering. In addition, **Carolina Core** learning goals will be incorporated as fully as possible into coursework throughout the undergraduate experience. This means all faculty have ownership in the Core. Assessment of the **Carolina Core** learning outcomes will be ongoing, embedded in normal faculty governance.

In formulating proposed learning outcomes, the General Education Committee developed a list of seven components that make up the core of a liberal arts education:

> ***Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding***
> ***Analytical Reasoning and Problem-Solving***
> ***Effective, Engaged, and Persuasive Communication***
> ***Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding***
> ***Information Literacy***
> ***Scientific Literacy***
> ***Values, Ethics, and Social Responsibility***

The learning outcomes we propose are keyed to these **Core Components**.

Other Skills and Values

The Committee recognizes that education in the 21st century will require not only foundational coursework as outlined in the core components, but also increased competency in the application of life skills. To facilitate life-long learning and responsible citizenship, therefore, the Committee encourages efforts by the University to extend to all students the opportunity to participate in a Life Skills curriculum that would prepare them in areas such as Health and Fitness, Personal Finance, Critical Health Issues and Decisions in Society, and Human Relations. Such competencies may be developed through credit-bearing coursework or non-credit workshops and modules.

V. Associated Learning Outcomes

Core Components	**Learning Outcomes**
	Upon completion of the Carolina Core students will be able to:
Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding	Create or interpret literary, visual or performing arts.
Analytical Reasoning and Problem-Solving	Apply the methods of mathematics, statistics, or analytical reasoning to critically evaluate data, solve problems, and effectively communicate findings verbally and graphically.
Effective, Engaged, and Persuasive Communication	Identify and analyze issues, develop logical and persuasive arguments, and communicate ideas clearly for a variety of audiences and purposes through writing and speaking.
Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding	Use the principles of historical thinking to assess the relationships between modern societies and their historical roots.
	Use the principles of the social sciences to explore diverse cultural identities and to analyze political and environmental issues.
	Communicate effectively in more than one language.
Information Literacy	Collect, manage and evaluate information using technology, and communicate findings.
Scientific Literacy	Apply the principles and language of the natural sciences and associated technologies to historical and contemporary issues.
Values, Ethics, and Social Responsibility	Examine different kinds of social and personal values, analyzing the ways in which these are manifested in communities as well as individual lives.

Appendix

General Education Committee Membership

Michael Matthews (Faculty Co-Chair)	*Chair, Professor, Chemical Engineering, College of Engineering & Computing*
David Lee Miller (Faculty Co-Chair)	*Carolina Distinguished Professor, English, Arts & Sciences*
Helen Doerpinghaus (Administrative Co-Chair)	*Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of Undergraduate Studies; Professor, Moore School of Business*
Elise Ahyi	*Assistant Provost for Academic Policy, Ex-Officio*
Robert Best	*Chair, Faculty Senate, Ex-Officio; Professor, School of Medicine*
Pam Bowers	*Associate Vice President for Planning, Assessment & Innovation, Student Affairs & Academic Support, Ex-Officio*
James Burns	*Associate Dean, Senior Instructor, SC Honors College*
Mary Ann Byrnes	*Assistant Dean for Administration, Arts & Sciences*
Robert Castleberry	*Professor, Psychology Dept, USC Sumter*
Richard Clodfelter	*Professor, Interim Associate Dean, Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management*
Kimberly Glenn	*Clinical Associate Professor, Nursing*
Greg Hand	*Associate Dean for Research & Practice, Associate Professor, & Director of Neurobiology and Behavior Lab, Public Health*
Mary Hjelm	*Associate Professor of English, Liberal Arts, Extended University Division*
Stuart Hunter	*Assistant Vice Provost, Academic Support, University 101/First-Year Experience*
Miriam Johnson	*Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Associate Professor, Social Work*
Carolyn Jones	*Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Division, Moore School of Business*
Gene Luna	*Associate Vice President, Student Affairs*

Phil Moore	*Asst Provost for Institutional Assessment & Compliance, Ex-Officio*
Joseph Rackers	*Assistant Professor of Piano, School of Music*
Rick Stephens	*Professor, Advertising & Public Relations, Journalism & Mass Communications*
David Tedeschi	*Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Physics & Astronomy, Arts & Sciences*
Irma Van Scoy	*Associate Dean for Academic & Student Affairs, Associate Professor, Education*
Virginia Weathers	*Faculty Coordinator of Public Services, Thomas Cooper Library*