

Planning for Princeton's Future



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Task Force on General Education

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Charge

The undergraduate curriculum at Princeton is organized around four pillars: the general education course requirements (Gen Ed); electives that allow students to freely explore course offerings; courses taken in the departmental concentration (or major); and independent work in the junior and senior years. These pillars serve distinct yet interconnected purposes: the Gen Ed requirements are intended to "transcend the boundaries of specialization and provide all students with a common language and common skills" (*Undergraduate Announcement*); electives enable students to experiment freely across the disciplines; coursework in the concentration immerses students in the knowledge, methods and practices of a specific discipline; and independent work provides students with the opportunity to conduct original research or to produce a creative work or a project in their chosen field of study under the guidance of a faculty member.

Princeton periodically reviews its policies and curriculum to ensure that they continue to support our mission and respond to changes in the landscape of higher education. Twenty years ago, the Office of the Dean of the College oversaw a review of the general education requirements that resulted in a shift from "definition by discipline" to "definition by ways of looking at and interpreting the world" ("Undergraduate Education Report," 1994). Since then, incremental revisions to these requirements were introduced, most notably, the modifications of the writing and science and technology requirements in 2001 and 2010, respectively. At present, in addition to the writing and foreign language requirements, students are required to take courses in the following areas: epistemology and cognition; ethical thought and moral values; historical analysis; literature and the arts; social analysis; quantitative reasoning; and science and technology. As part of the University-wide strategic planning process, the Task Force on General Education is charged with conducting a self-study to review our goals for an undergraduate education to ensure that our requirements achieve those objectives.

Process

A committee of faculty members and administrators should undertake a review of the curriculum, focusing particularly, although not exclusively, on the Gen Ed requirements. In conducting its work, this committee should consult a variety of sources, such as colleagues in academic departments, benchmarking data from peer institutions, surveys of students and faculty members, focus groups of students and faculty, and secondary literature on developments in general education. Members of this committee should consult periodically and coordinate their work with members of both the Committee on the Course of Study and the Council on Teaching and Learning.

This committee should address the following general questions and recommend reforms consistent with its answers to them:

- What do we want Princeton students to gain from their undergraduate education? What are the fundamental skills, abilities and perspectives that every Princeton student should develop during the course of this education?
- What purposes should Gen Ed requirements serve? Do the current distribution areas appropriately reflect the objectives of a Princeton education?
- How do Princeton's Gen Ed requirements compare to those at peer institutions? What might we learn from their recent curricular reviews?
- To what extent, and how, should Princeton's general education curriculum require students to attain familiarity with foreign cultures or an international perspective? Does the University's current foreign language requirement appropriately support the goals of Princeton's general education curriculum, and how, if at all, should it be modified?
- How should issues of diversity and culture be integrated into the general education curriculum at Princeton? Should we include a “diversity requirement,” as the Special Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion urged in their May 2015 report?
- Given the pervasive importance of computers and computer programming in the modern world, should our general education curriculum incorporate a computer science requirement?
- Do Princeton's course offerings provide students with appropriate opportunities and incentives to achieve the goals of our distribution requirements? Would it be possible to improve the match between our course offerings and those goals? For example, should we offer more large foundational courses and fewer specialized seminars in each category in order to increase the likelihood that students would share a common intellectual experience? Should we alter our advising practices to ensure that students acquire greater breadth and depth in their course of study? Should we modify the processes by which courses that fulfill certain Gen Ed requirements are reviewed and approved?

- How might Gen Ed requirements better prepare students for the process of choosing a concentration and completing independent work? Specifically, should they be used to introduce freshmen to various ways of knowing and to provide sophomores with a more coherent and focused academic experience? If so, when should students be encouraged or required to take the majority of their Gen Ed courses?
 - What percentage of students' required coursework should be devoted to the fulfillment of the Gen Ed requirements? Do we allow students adequate opportunities for reflection and intellectual risk?
 - What are the implications (if any) of our responses to these questions for the academic calendar?
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Members

Chair

- Jill Dolan, *Dean of the College; Annan Professor in English*

Faculty members

- Christina Davis, *Professor of Politics and International Affairs*
- Elizabeth Gavis, *Professor of Molecular Biology.*
- Claire Gmachl, *Eugene Higgins Professor of Electrical Engineering*
- Andrea LaPaugh, *Professor of Computer Science*
- Pedro Meira Monteiro, *Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures; Acting Director, Program in Latin American Studies*
- Michael Smith, *McCosh Professor of Philosophy; Chair, Department of Philosophy*
- Michael Strauss, *Professor of Astrophysical Sciences; Associate Chair, Department of Astrophysical Sciences; Acting Chair, Department of Astrophysical Sciences*
- Mark Watson, *Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Economics and Public Affairs, Woodrow Wilson*

School.

Staff members

- Anne Caswell-Klein, *Dean of Wilson College*
 - Liz Colagiuri, *Deputy Dean of the College, Office of the Dean of the College*
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Reports

- [Report of the Task Force on General Education \(.pdf\)](#)
 - [General Education at Princeton University: A statement by President Christopher L. Eisgruber and Dean of the Faculty Deborah Prentice \(.pdf\)](#)
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