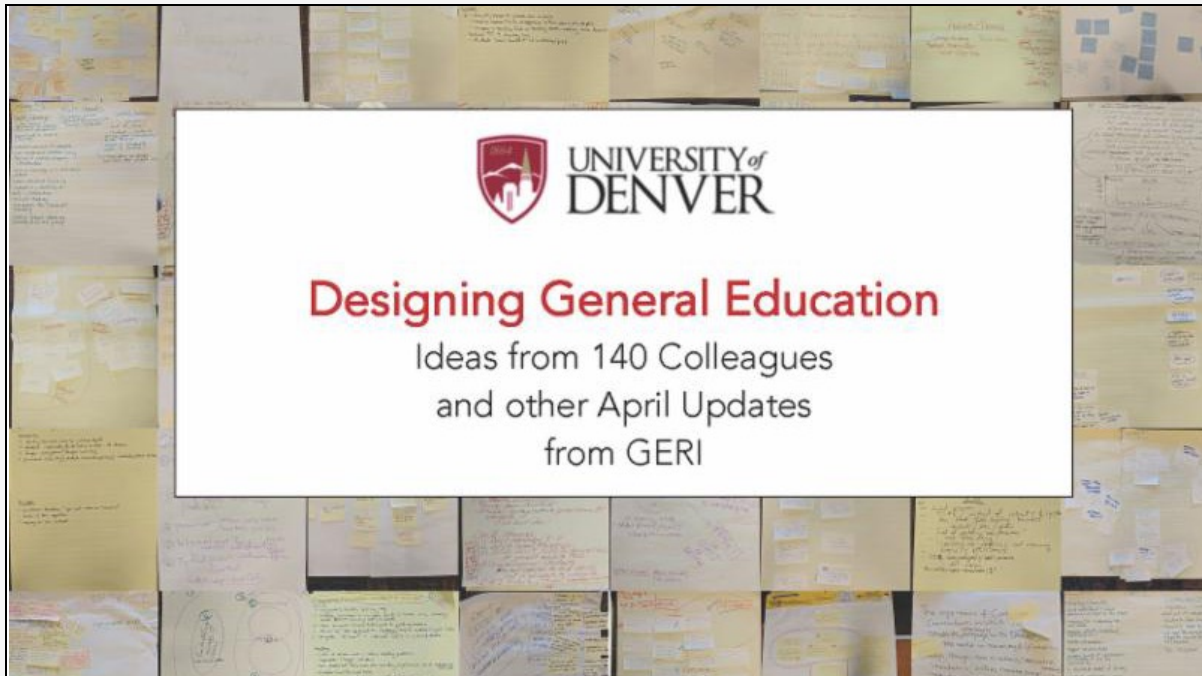


Subject: DU General Ed. Update

Date: Tuesday, April 30, 2019 at 4:17:02 PM Mountain Daylight Time

From: Doug Hesse, GERI Committee

To: Douglas Hesse



[Visit the GERI Portfolio site](#)

The Quick Version

The detailed email below explains

- Why we're considering revisions to the Common Curriculum, citing identified needs, opportunities, and threats;
- Why, consistent with The University of Denver's vision as "A great private university dedicated to the public good," we're proposing The Public Good as a complex, engaging, and flexible framework for general education;
- How we've been attending to the campus-wide ideas generated during the design sessions;
- What's next.

Dear Colleagues,

We're writing with updates on the general education review and inquiry process. From the Faculty Senate, we received a thorough and productive analysis of ideas we shared in March. That input is helping guide us toward a proposal. We also continue paying attention to ideas we received from over 140

colleagues through the various design sessions (more on that below); to needs we identified through the 2017-18 faculty and student inquiry process; to the scholarly literature on general education and how it plays out at peer institutions; and to DU's strategic vision and circumstance.

Why revise general education?

Some colleagues still occasionally ask why we're considering changes in the Common Curriculum. The answer lies in a combination of opportunity, need, and—to be blunt—institutional identity. As we laid out in [October 2017](#), DU Impact 2025 created a broad opportunity to ask whether the Common Curriculum might better contribute to DU's strategic vision. As part of that inquiry process, we surveyed and interviewed over 200 faculty and 400 students, and we closely analyzed the strengths and weakness of existing requirements. That process identified needs and opportunities that we explained in [our March 2018 report to the faculty](#):

1. Whatever the substantive merits of the current DU Common Curriculum, neither students nor faculty understand its logic and purpose to an extent that is desirable.
2. A general education program that clearly manifests integration and purpose is desirable.
3. The learning outcomes in the Common Curriculum do not currently foster coherence and purpose, even though they are well-intentioned.
4. There is a disparity between the DU Undergraduate Learning Outcome for community engagement and the representation of community engagement in the Common Curriculum.
5. Diversity and inclusivity are manifested in the Common Curriculum learning outcomes and requirements much less than they are in the Undergraduate Learning Outcome for Engagement with Human Diversity.
6. Any general education program at DU must leverage the strengths of the university and embody its mission and vision.
7. Whatever revisions are made as a result of the review process, the program clearly will need to be accompanied by a significant communications effort, plus significant ongoing faculty development and learning.

For the survey basis of these findings, you may refer, once again to [Select 2017 Faculty Survey Results](#) and [Select 2018 Student Survey Results](#).

Our inquiry happened against a backdrop of challenging demographic realities. Numbers of traditional college age students are diminishing, and longstanding assumptions about the value of attending college are eroding in the popular press and public imagination. DU will increasingly compete to attract and retain students for whom “trust us; it's good for you” is an insufficient

rationale. Most of us on GERI disdain the language of “value propositions” in relation to general education requirements, and share a deep belief in knowledge for its own sake. But we’re also pragmatic about DU’s health and vitality.

We need to engage students in all aspects of their educations, including the crucial fraction of general coursework that lies alongside disciplinary and career aspirations. The good news is that we can frame general knowledge in ways meaningful to college students, intellectually compelling to faculty, and clearly essential to a fractious world confronting complex challenges: scientific, social, economic, aesthetic, and political. The even better news is that those frames resonate with the DU Vision.

(As background on the current scene of general education, see [a recent article in Inside Higher Ed](#) about far-reaching changes at several colleges and universities. Or see Cathy Davidson’s recent book, *The New Education: How to Revolutionize the University to Prepare Students for a World in Flux*, characterized in “[Throwing Down the Gauntlet: The Need to Revolutionize Higher Education](#),” or see “[Advancing the Liberal Arts in an Age of Demographic Change](#)”)

The combination of opportunities, needs, and threats create important conditions for reinvigorating general education. That said, we fully understand and experience ourselves the accelerating proliferation of initiatives at DU. We won’t propose changes lightly.

Why “The Public Good?”

Our desire to foreground “the public good” as a broad organizing theme came most directly from the DU Vision statement. That vision is core to who we say we are. (If it’s not, we should change it!) “The Public Good” was the most popular idea at Designapalooza, with seven groups tackling that challenge.

In her [DU Impact 2025 framing letter](#), Chancellor Chopp underscored that, “Democracy and education in this country share common values—a commitment to equal opportunity, our wariness of the inertia of tradition, a restlessness with the status quo and our quest always to make society better. We are a people who believe passionately in the rights of the individual and the importance of the common good—as well as an obligation to work toward a better world” (iii).

We understand “the public good” as a complex construct, subject to ongoing debate and competing definitions. (One might even forward an Ayn Randian perspective: there is no public good.) The very idea of what constitutes the public good(s)—for whom, when, and why—should be a key ongoing issue for general

education, especially as “the public” itself grows increasingly diverse and global. It’s a concept to define, interrogate, enact, and reinvent rather than something presumed or given. The public good as we’re construing it has neither a narrow political agenda nor a narrow service manifestation. Questions about and knowledge toward the public good are present, at some level, in every discipline. Every discipline has a stake. We imagine that explicit focus on the public good will vary in degrees across different requirements within general education but that its shaping influence will be visible in the program as a whole. Here, once again, is the mission of general education we produced last year:

The mission of the general education program at DU, emanating from our vision to be a great private university dedicated to the public good, is to foster in each undergraduate the knowledge, skills, and critical abilities that are crucial to informed, responsible, and effective participation in civic, scholarly, and professional lives.

How is GERI paying attention to ideas from the design sessions?

--Attentively, though our work isn’t done. The desirability of thematic sequences or clusters came up repeatedly in our design sessions, and that idea was reflected in the prototypes we shared. So were frequent calls for a more thematically unified first year and for an electronic portfolio.

A dozen design sessions produced over 90 posters of materials. Even the briefest summary of ideas generated runs 40 pages. We’re continuing to draw from deserving ideas, which sometimes compete with one another. If only we had a 25-course, 100-credit general education program. . . .

Consider several proposals from these design sessions, in thumbnail fashion:

- Two required courses on diversity, first and second year, plus optional third and fourth year courses, constituting a concentration in diversity for those who do the additional courses.
- A four-course companion sequence progression called “Information Research Practices,” one each in natural science, social science, arts, and humanities, focusing on “discovery,” “curation,” “interpretation” and “communication.”
- Build an engagement/service component into study abroad, simultaneously creating for others a “domestic” opportunity through ongoing projects organized at the university level, aligned with Grand Challenges, project structures that students could join without individual

faculty continually having to create them. These could take many forms, including clinics.

- Create a number of courses in different disciplines, from the first year and beyond, focusing on Denver as site and laboratory.
- A 60-credit requirement, with 32 hours in first year on Awakening Intellectual Curiosity, 16 hours in second year on Integrating Knowledge, 8 hours in third year on Individual Agency, Social Responsibility and Justice, 4 hours in fourth year in Experiential Learning.
- Change to a semester system to promote community building.
- To foster collaboration, require a four-course sequence consisting of team-taught, team-based “lab-like” classes anchored in real-world problems.
- Create three tracks to satisfy experiential learning requirements: full courses dedicated to internships, practica, capstones, etc. (4-12 CH); parts of several courses that are experiential; co-curricular projects that wouldn’t be for credit.

As you can see, colleagues have generated a trove of ideas—and the list above is but a fraction.

What next?

GERI is meeting weekly and considering various permutations and combinations of ideas. There are multiple moving parts. As we create a sufficiently complete model, we’ll invite feedback, revise, and repeat, with the goal of having a full proposal by the end of the academic year.

We expect that faculty development and support will be a key element of any revision, however small, and our final proposal will describe the support required and request a commensurate budget.

Sincerely,

Doug Hesse (Writing and English), on behalf of the Committee: Alejandro Cerón, Anthropology; Barbekka Hurtt, Biological Sciences; Tonnett Luedtke, Academic Advising; Kateri McRae, Psychology; Nic Ormes, Mathematics; Gregory Robbins, Religious Studies; Matt Rutherford, Computer Science; Billy J. Stratton, English; John Tiedemann, Writing; Cheri Young, Hospitality.

PS: If you need a quick refresher on GERI’s work, with links to key documents, please see [GERI in One Page](#).

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