

October 18, 2017

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

The General Education Review and Inquiry (GERI) process launched in spring 2017 as an aspect of DU Impact 2025. Our group is charged with answering the question, “What should general education at DU look like in the next few years?” Our purpose is to identify the best possible outcomes and structure for the DU common curriculum, given *our* campus, *our* faculty, *our* students, *our* resources, *our* mission, and *our* vision.

The GERI Committee was formed after all deans and the faculty senate were asked to nominate potential members. Faculty were also individually invited to nominate themselves or others, and a member from student affairs was chosen. Individuals were selected less to represent a constituency than to analyze general education on behalf of the entire university.

We will soon begin the first round of surveys and discussion groups to garner insights and ideas. Faculty will have multiple, extensive opportunities to share their thoughts and experiences. We’ll invite you to respond to themes as they develop, including contributing to drafts of any proposed revisions. After all, general education requirements must represent the best thinking of the people entrusted with teaching and supporting them. Ultimately, the Undergraduate Council has responsibility for undergraduate programs, including the general education program.

Our process may yield results ranging from a reaffirmation of the existing common curriculum, to small adjustments of particular aspects of the program, to significant renovations, to a complete reconstruction. Should we repaint? Or would it be best to scrape and rebuild?

## **Our Process**

After an orientation meeting in June, the committee has met weekly since the start of fall quarter. Four broad questions shape our deliberations.

1. What can we learn from leading theories, best research, and aspirations in the scholarly literature?
2. What can we learn from examining general education programs at other schools, especially schools who share features with DU—this while recognizing that DU has its unique traditions, identity, resources, and goals?
3. What can we learn about the strengths and weaknesses of our current DU common curriculum? What are the experiences and effects for students? What are the experiences and effects for faculty? These questions demand that we carefully study our philosophy, goals, and outcomes and how they’re being realized.
4. What can we learn from DU’s aspirations and goals? Recent strategic planning efforts have created a vision of how DU should identify and enact itself. Any general education program should be consonant with campus visions.

We've initiated our work by considering goals and outcomes. We'll then analyze how these are expressed in requirements. There are crucial practical considerations, certainly, born of our institutional history and how the DU faculty has been built and organized. We'd be foolish to ignore them. But our first phase is inquiry, suspending nuts and bolts practical barriers until later in the process, when they surely will and must matter. Along the way we'll systematically seek ideas, input, and reactions from students, various constituencies, and most crucially faculty. We expect this iterative process to require the 2017-18 academic year.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *1. Is there something wrong with the current Common Curriculum?*

We neither presume the Common Curriculum is flawed nor presume it's perfect. It's healthy to understand how the Common Curriculum is working—how it's achieving its outcomes and whether those outcomes are the best for our community. It's wise to explore new possibilities, even ones we might ultimately reject.

### *2. Why should we re-invent the wheel of general education?*

We shouldn't. Legions of theorists and researchers have generated thoughtful perspectives on what constitutes a best education, going back to the days of the medieval university's *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Recent scholars and educators have produced numerous syntheses of that work, taxonomies of possible philosophies and rationales. Organizations like the American Association of Colleges and Universities have devoted considerable time and expertise to identifying features they consider crucial to general education. Rather than devising everything from scratch, we're attending to that literature. We welcome you to do the same, if you'd like. The Committee has created a [Portfolio page with a number of readings and a bibliography](#). Most sections of the page are open to the entire University community.

### *3. Why not just identify the best gen ed program "out there" and emulate it at DU?*

We are, in fact, looking at other general education programs, including at DU's peer institutions. If we identify a structure that looks like a perfect fit, we'll pay it careful attention. However, it's crucial to remember that DU is DU. That is, we're an institution with a particular history and mission, a particular concatenation of programs and faculties, a particular set of resources, a particular geographical and higher educational position, a particular set of students and would-be students, a particular set of visions. Fort Lewis College might have a splendid gen ed program. We're not Fort Lewis. MIT might have a splendid gen ed program. We're not MIT. The challenge is determining the best general education program for who we are and who we aspire to be. Perhaps what we're doing now is very close to those aspirations. We'll determine that through the current process.

### *4. How can I make sure my voice is heard in the process?*

Expect soon to receive a survey that seeks your perspectives and insights on the current goals of the Common Curriculum. This will be but the first of many invitations to provide input. We'll use results to structure small group conversations, offering numerous opportunities for participation and engagement. We'll identify and synthesize broader themes from those conversations and from our own discussions of the literature, and we'll solicit responses, either in subsequent surveys, additional discussion groups, or combinations of both. We'll invite comments on draft proposals before we generate a final proposal. And, of course, you're welcome to share thoughts and ideas with the Committee. Please contact chair Doug Hesse at [dhesse@du.edu](mailto:dhesse@du.edu) or 303-871-7447.

5. *Doesn't everything eventually just come down to practical considerations of staffing, course offerings, seats, and schedules?*

At some level, yes. DU has finite resources, the faculty that we have, and so on. At an appropriate point, we'll ask and answer the important practical questions. But we shouldn't prematurely truncate options and potential based upon perceived limitations.

6. *Why should busy faculty make time for this process?*

Professors are fully engaged in teaching, research, and professional service, both on campus and in disciplines and community sites beyond. We're all busy—and includes members of our committee. DU faculty have devoted considerable energy in recent years shaping academic initiatives and institutional identities, and it may be easy to become weary or cynical. However, nothing is more fundamental to a university than determining what its graduates should learn and how they should come about the knowledge that they carry with them upon graduation. Along with chosen majors and minors, the general education experience is fundamental to undergraduate education. Likewise, the curriculum that we develop and teach is crucial faculty work.

Sincerely,

Chris Coleman, Professor of Emergent Digital Practices

Doug Hesse, Professor of English and Executive Director of Writing (Chair)

Barbekka Hurtt, Teaching Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences

Tonnett Luedtke, Director of Academic Advising

Kateri McRae, Associate Professor of Psychology

Nic Ormes, Associate Professor of Mathematics

Matt Rutherford, Associate Professor of Computer Science

Alison Schofield, Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Judaic Studies

Laura Sponsler, Clinical Assistant Professor, Morgridge College of Education

Billy J. Stratton, Associate Professor of English

John Tiedemann, Teaching Associate Professor of Writing

Cheri Young, Associate Professor of Hospitality

Questions or comments? Please contact Doug Hesse at [dhesse@du.edu](mailto:dhesse@du.edu) or 303-871-7447.