

Area Requirements Proposal
Frequently Asked Questions
Version 1.0, November 2005

1. How will the new requirements be administered?

On the faculty/ student side, responsibility rests with the Senate, through the UCC; the proposal requests the creation of a subcommittee of the UCC, The General Education Subcommittee (GESC) which will make recommendations to the UCC, which will review them and make recommendations to the Senate.

On the administrative side, the newly created Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum, for assistance to departments that wish to develop new courses or modify their existing syllabuses, and for working with the Provost, Registrar's office, advising office and peer-advising office to improve student knowledge of the requirements, guidance for individual students, and access to the proper courses. This Office will provide executive assistance to the UCC and GESC in matters relating to General Education, just as the Executive Center for the USSC assists that committee. It will have no actual authority over the curriculum.

2. Will every General Education course have to go through a complex approval process?

Every course submitted for PLAS will have to be examined to insure that it meets the expectations of the new curriculum; this will be primarily the task of GESC, which may not only approve or reject submissions but encourage the Department to work with the GESC and to use the good offices of the CTL to bring the syllabus more into line with the needs of the curriculum.

Departments in some cases might submit syllabus outlines, when the emphasis of different instructors will lead to some variation in content within a framework of a course in which all sections would have the same disciplinary and general education emphases.

3. Can the list of PLAS courses grow *ad infinitum*, as now appears to be the case with LASAR?

No. The GESC, working with the CTL, will create a schedule for reviewing courses. The approval or re-approval of courses will not only depend on the course's (actual) syllabus, but also take into account number of courses in each area, the representation of departments and the spectrum of choices for students, the representation of full-time and senior faculty in the teaching, and, in general, the aim of maintaining the best possible expression of the goals described in Part 2 of the report.

4. Will the FD list also be so closely monitored?

No. FD courses are correlated with the experience of PLAS courses; they are not expected by themselves to have the same function in the General Education Curriculum. It will primarily be the responsibility of the departments to designate any courses which they judge suitable in accordance with the criteria in Part 2 of the report, and to propose a change in description (for existing courses) which states that the course fulfills a particular requirement (perhaps just by adding the appropriate initials in parentheses). Like all changes in description, it must be submitted to the UCC with a syllabus or outline that justifies the change (and approved by the Senate). The UCC may refer some courses to GESC for further discussion or act on them if they are self-evident. We expect the broadest possible representation of courses, broader than the current LASAR, and some departments may wish to put most of their courses on the list.

For advisory purposes, the CTL will maintain lists of courses, and it is anticipated that the Degree Works program will be able to advise students at registration time when they still need to fulfill parts of the requirement.

5. How will transfers students be affected by the change?

Under the current requirements, transfer students without an AA from CUNY or NCC have their courses evaluated for one-to-one correspondence with LASAR courses or they receive blanket LASAR credit if they have a course with no QC equivalent "that fulfills the spirit of LASAR." Faculty long ago were encouraged to interpret LASAR broadly for transfer purposes. Now, students who come from colleges with specific Gen Ed courses typically have difficulty finding a LASAR equivalent. Under the new requirements, student who have Gen Ed courses on their transcripts should find equivalents fairly easily; students with a variety of distribution courses will have to have these evaluated to

see if they meet the “spirit” of our new requirements. The net result should be pretty much the same, in terms of difficulty for students and departments.

6. Why is there no mention of the Freshman Experience recommended by the President’s Task Force in the Report?

The Freshman Experience as recommended is administratively identical in cost and staffing to the English 110 requirement. Budgetarily, this is not feasible without severely cutting into the offering of courses for the majors. In addition, it was not clear that there would be sufficient faculty interested in committing so much of their time on an on-going basis. In public forums and further discussions with students, it became clear that there was no consensus on what should or could be achieved. The idea of some kind of introductory common requirement, attached to (for example) FYI or English 110 is still on the table. The role of introducing students to the larger context of a college education (envisioned by the Task Force) has been assigned to the PLAS courses/

7. What are the other primary differences between the proposal and the recommendations of the President’s Task Force?

The President’s Task Force tried to construct an image of the kind of education we wish to achieve and called for broad changes in the structure of the College’s offerings, especially the creation of a large number of special designed General Education courses. It emphasized the role of Liberal Arts Education in terms of training the ability to “learn[ing] new methods of inquiry and modes of understanding the world” and, in an implicit criticism of LASAR, described this as something beyond “a mere accumulation of credits and subjects.” The UCC, building on its previous studies of LASAR and on its experience with the institutionalization and budgeting of courses, recognized that the creation of such a large number of specially designed courses and the maintenance of them over time would not be feasible, and that it would still be necessary for the departments, as the structures responsible for faculty, to play a primary role in offering courses for general education. The UCC, therefore, has recommended the structure that has PLAS as its basis and then adds to this the FD and extended requirements as supplements. The PLAS structure, above all, is intended to fulfill the goal of assuring that the courses on different subjects have a context in the ways we study and understand the world. Many of the requirements of PLAS courses draw on recommendations which the Taskforce distributed over the specially designed Freshman Seminar and the three synthesis courses (a number which also appear to be more than is feasible).

8. The Task Force also emphasized Critical Abilities—where do these fit in?

Our work on these is not complete. Some of them are incorporated as extended requirements. But we also concluded that some (such as critical thinking, research, and oral expression) are most properly associated with advanced work, and that means with the major. This UCC report does not address the question of College-wide expectations for the major, but the a full examination of General Education as something which “should extend throughout the whole of [an undergraduate career]” (Taskforce, p. 9) will have to include a discussion of the major.

8. Why are the “Content Requirements” part of PLAS?

The content requirements look to the Western intellectual experience in which the idea of Liberal Arts education originates, to the larger context of the “global village,” and to the immediate experience of the United States as our own location. Learning about these contexts is meant to be part of what it means to learn about “methods of inquiry and modes of understanding,” the function to which PLAS courses are directed; the criticism of “mere accumulation of ... subjects” would apply if these were treated merely as topics to which one needs to be exposed, without any deliberate consideration of context. By treating them as part of PLAS it is possible to keep the number of General Education that need to be supervised as College requirements to a minimum. Students then enjoy maximum freedom in choosing additional PLAS or FD courses to fulfill their FD requirement, and departments can devote maximum resources to courses that address the specific interests of their programs.