Challenge Curriculum Proposal FAQs

I thought we were going to reduce the number of requirements. This proposal doesn't seem to. What happened?

The Curriculum Committee's early focus on reducing the number of requirements came from faculty feedback that showed a preference for fewer requirements (the magic number seemed to be around 5 or 6). As we circulated proposals, however, faculty consistently identified a number of things that were missing. When we asked faculty for a number of requirements, we found that faculty wanted a smaller curriculum. When we asked faculty for what they wanted in the curriculum, we found that faculty wishes did not accord with the smaller numbers.

As a committee, we decided to focus on what students needed in the curriculum. We lowered the number of distribution areas to five, but added secondary requirements (e.g. QUANT and Identities and Difference in the US—requirements that can be either combined with a distribution requirement or with a majors-only course). We added more writing course, because we have heard (and believe) that our students need more writing instruction, particularly in the second and third year. And so on.

In the end, we think that there are types of courses all of our students need. We were not convinced that students would get them through self-direction or that we could (or should) rely on advising. We didn't include everything that everyone wanted, but we did include those things that we thought essential in a 21st century general education curriculum.

How are we supposed to implement and staff a new curriculum? We can barely afford to do the one we have.

We have worked hard to create a curriculum we can implement with current staffing. Based on the information we have from the Provost's Office, we think we have achieved that goal.

We recognize, however, that this curriculum will demand people rethinking and changing courses. We cannot staff this new curriculum if everyone (or even some people) refuses to change. You might need to think about ethical issues in your field or you might need to take an existing course and reconceptualize it as a disciplinary writing course. Departments will have to contribute to FTS and capstones. And, we suspect, that it is the issue of change that most concerns people. How will we, when we many of us already feel overburdened, find the energy to change? And will the College give us the support we need to do the professional development necessary to make this curriculum a success?

All we can say about the College's contribution to professional development is that we have been clear with the Provost's Office, the President, and the Board that a new curriculum will demand professional development. We have been assured that they understand that.

We also hope that this new curriculum will be reinvigorating. We hope that we will feel less overburdened if we are teaching students who come through FTS with a more established set of skills and if they come to our majors with more writing courses to their credit. We think that we will all feel a greater sense of accomplishment as we see students bring to bear their skills on a project.

If we pass this, will we inevitably cut J-Term because of cost? I am concerned about the absence of a CC recommendation on J-Term and would like more information before I vote on the Challenge Curriculum.

We will be able to include CC thoughts about J-Term and the cost of the Challenge Curriculum at the April 20 faculty colloquium.

How will you ensure parity of participation across departments? Won't some departments contribute more to FTS, WRIT, and the Capstone than others?

Yes, some departments will probably contribute more than others.

This question is a difficult one. We have heard it in a number of forms throughout this process. The question speaks realities and frustrations that, if we were not in the Midwest, we would probably publicly air more. Simply put: some departments think that other departments do not pull their weight in general education owing to numbers of majors or number of courses required for the major (or some combination of the two). Departments that do contribute more to general education, so the thinking goes, often do so at the expense of building their own majors, putting them continually in the position of needing to make many of their courses general education courses in order to fill them, but sacrificing the kind of depth that comes from scaffolded majors with significant prerequisites on upper-level courses. Other departments think that they are doing all that they can to meet student demand for their major courses. Participating in general education is not necessary for filling courses and any additional requirements for general education courses make these departments less prone to participate at all because, again, meeting student demand is about all they can do.

The reality, as we see it, is this: a new curriculum will demand rethinking both how departments contribute to general education and how we ensure that participation is appropriate across the College. (That will be true even if we don't pass the Challenge Curriculum, because we have already passed new general education outcomes that will force us, even within the current model, to make changes.) Some departments probably are going to have to accept that they teach more general education courses because, like it or not, general education drives student demand for those courses. We will need to see that as opportunity even as we make certain that these departments are able to offer robust majors. Other departments will need to think about flexibility in how they teach high-demand courses, not because they "have to" for demand, but because general education is everyone's responsibility. No one gets to outsource it.

Now that we do more course planning at the departmental level, we are better equipped to discuss participation in general education than we were a few years ago. Those plans give us some sense of what department needs and capacities. As we move forward, we will all need to give a little because the general education of our students really is our shared responsibility.

I'm still confused on structure. We have five areas and then WRIT, QUANT, GLOBAL Perspectives, and Difference and Identity in the U.S. Are those all separate? That is a lot of courses.

Think of the proposal like this:

Liberal Arts Perspectives (Please hold the following names lightly):	Other Requirements	Major Courses
Artistic Expression or Interpretation	QUANT (1)	
Theological Reflection	WRIT (3)	
Scientific Reasoning	Global Citizenship: Global Affairs and Cultures	
Analyzing Social Systems	Global Citizenship: US Identities and Difference	

Humanistic Inquiry	Global Citizenship: Foreign Language	

Requirements in the middle column can be attached to courses in either the left or right columns. (We have talked about a policy that would specify that one course can only have one designation from the left column and one from the middle, thus cutting down on things like Social Science-QUANT-Global Affairs-WRIT courses that have to try too hard to do it all.) And, remember, that chart doesn't show the two language courses (and what other designations those should carry remains something we need to discuss.)

General Education Distribution Areas

All five required courses must meet the four general education SLOs, which means they must have written and oral components? What about course size?

These courses must involve two opportunities for written and oral communication. This does not mean that all writing and oral communication must be formal. We imagine that even our largest classes can (and many already do) ask students to speak with each other about the material they are learning and write about it. This writing and oral communication can be formal or informal.

I am not an ethicist. Nor do I study diversity and global perspectives. How, in good conscience, can I include these in my general education course?

We believe that every faculty member has access to materials about diversity and equity within their field that can be integrated into their general education courses. Every field has its own ethical dilemmas and debacles. Some fields have issued apologies for unethical research practices. Every field also has documents about equity in the field, e.g., sexual harassment, the status of people historically under-represented in the field, and so on. Departments and divisions can work together to develop materials to be included for this component of general education courses. These issues could be integrated throughout the course or they could be in a unit set aside from "the course material." We again see this as an opportunity for faculty to model life-long learning for our students.

Will this get in the way of covering the course material?

The committee believes that the SLOs can be integrated without significant loss of course content. The proposals stipulates that courses "substantively engage" the SLOs. For ethics and global perspectives, the proposal defines "substantive" engagement as two opportunities for students to discuss or write about both ethics and global perspectives throughout the semester. The proposal does not demand that any of it be graded--the writing, for example, could be informal. And, note, that language is two opportunities, not two course sessions. Finally, the committee would suggest looking for places where you are already having these discussions. Do you talk about not falsifying data? That could be a discussion about ethics in the field. Do you discuss working with people in laboratory situations? That might be a time to reflect on working with people from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

First Term Seminar

What happened to the First Year Seminar? Don't students need more help at the beginning of their Gustavus education?

As we listened to faculty, we heard several things about First Term Seminar: some students need significantly more help at the beginning than they are currently receiving; some students receive enough foundation in their FTS; many students need opportunities to practice skills developed in FTS; FTS is trying to do too much. We also heard, from many faculty, that we needed something more robust at the end of general education. So, what to do? We couldn't staff a course at the end if we had an FYS. The question then became whether an FYS was still the right thing to do (integration at the end be damned).

Ultimately, we decided that a FYS wasn't the only way to more effectively "launch" students. We believe that a re-envisioned FTS (or GAC 100) should focus on fewer things and have clearer expectations (perhaps even some shared assignments?), particularly regarding writing. That, we hope, will make FTS a more useful experience for all students and provide a foundation that every course thereafter could build upon. This also could help meet faculty demand for more support; so many FTS teachers question whether or not they are teaching writing the "right way." We also decided to add more writing courses after FTS. This will take some advising, but our hope is that students will take WRIT courses early and often (and this might be the time to think about which of your courses would be a really good WRIT course for second semester students who need focused attention on writing). We are also diffusing some of what FTS does through the general education curriculum with the repeated attention to communication, ethics and equity (SLOs 2, 3 & 4) and required courses in Global Diversity and US Identities and Difference.

So, the plan: a more focused, streamlined FTS that consistently teaches shared skills; more reinforcement of those skills in courses early in the GAC career; more attention to issues that we want students to think about throughout their GAC career. More consistency; more scaffolding.

Yeah, but my students really can't write.

Teaching writing should be occurring in a high percentage of our classes, regardless of whether they carry WRIT designations. WRIT courses, of which there will be three (plus the writing taught in FTS), will explicitly require writing instruction. The more opportunities for student writing we can introduce into our classes, the better. We believe teaching writing is everyone's job.

My students also need skills in oral communication. Where is that?

We see oral communication continuing in FTS. It is also part of the general education student learning outcomes, and will therefore be a component in general education courses. We can also see how oral communication would be essential for successful GAC 300 courses.

What about building research skills?

We imagine research elements in WRIT courses, GAC 300, and some general education courses. We expect that majors will continue to be the place where most students develop their research, scholarship, and creativity skills.

GAC 300: Challenge Capstones

Where in the world did this idea come from (and can we have FYS back)?

One of the goals of the new curriculum was integration. When we started this process, faculty identified a lack of integration in our LAP curriculum as a problem. As the committee has worked, we have also become convinced that the "check-box" mentality of our students owes much to the sense that things don't come together. That is, the problem is not that they have to check boxes (as a colleague, not on the committee said "why not check-boxes? People like checking things off") but that the checks become ends

unto themselves. As we unveiled various versions of the new curriculum, one of the persistent criticisms of faculty has been that none of our means of integration do enough toward integration.

The capstone also responds to many of the goals outlined in the ACTS strategic plan: emphasizing student discovery and intellectual risk-taking (check), creating more opportunities for research and creativity (check), and facilitating "interdisciplinary collaboration to address complex problems through innovative approaches, application of diverse and even divergent theoretical concepts and models, and global perspectives" (check).

We were compelled that we needed a clear place in the curriculum where students would integrate general education and their disciplinary work. Hence, the capstone.

Why Project-Based?

Because of the kinds of skills we want students to practice. We also want students to have something they can point to so they can say in job and/or fellowship (etc.) applications, "In addition to my major specialization, I worked on a capstone project in my [junior or] senior year that addressed [X] problem and achieved [Y] results…"

What do you mean by "project-based"?

John Larmer and John Mergendoller propose seven project design elements of "gold standard" project-based learning: a challenging problem or question; sustained inquiry; authenticity (for those of you who hate that word, the definition they give might be helpful: "A project can be authentic in several ways, often in combination. It can have an authentic context…it can involve the use of real-world processes, tasks and tools, and performance standards…it can have a real impact on others….Finally, a project can have personal authenticity when it speaks to students' own concerns, interests, cultures, identities, and issues in their lives); student voice and choice; reflection; critique & revision; and a public product (Larmer and Mergendoller, "Gold Standard Project Based Learning: Essential Design Elements," http://www.bie.org/blog/gold_standard_pbl_essential_project_design_elements).

Those marks leave room for many different kinds of projects. In our proposal we identified four major categories (CBL; digital humanities; research/creativity/scholarship; public event) but there might be others.

If you are interested in learning more about project-based learning, you might look at the following:

Worchester Polytechnic Institute Lib Guide to Project-Based Learning:
http://libguides.wpi.edu/c.php?g=688857&p=4869209

Buck Institute, "What is PBL?"
https://www.bie.org/about/what_pbl

Does "student choice and voice" mean that student decide on the project? Do they each need their own?

No and no. Student choice and voice means that students need opportunities to make meaningful choices about the direction of the project, the questions to pursue, the manner of presentation and the like. Faculty, however, can decide on the project.

And, no, students do not need individual projects. In fact, we hope that the projects are collaborative. Learning to work with others is a skill students need. That does not mean that every component of the

project needs to involve every students. Working with other students, however, should be part of the experience.

How am I supposed to come up with a new project every semester?

You aren't. Like FTS, we will need around 30 sections per year (assuming current class sizes and retention). We would like to see these on a rotation. Depending on the kind of project you do, you might have to make a new one. But you might not. You might build on a previous project. Or, you might have successive classes work on a project that a previous class couldn't complete.

(That last point is important: in project-based learning, failure is an option. At Worcester Polytechnic Institute, a humanities professor based a class around creating a Reacting to the Past type game about life in Worcester in 1899. Great project. Students learned a lot. Total fail in terms of producing a playable game. Substitute Saint Peter for Worcester, fill your class with people who can read records in Swedish, and you could probably do that project more than once.)

Also, remember that "project-based" does not mean "unique project" or "unrepeatable project" or "something outside of Gustavus that needs doing." When some of us hear "project-based learning," we essentially hear a Community Based Learning Project that, once done once, won't be needed again. We can, however, think more broadly. Remember that an essential feature of project based learning is that it features "real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact—or speaks to students' personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives" (https://www.bie.org/about/what_pbl). Note the "or's." Not all projects exist "out there" somewhere and, thus, have to be redone every year. Maybe successive classes do essentially the same project but bring to it different skills and content and make different decisions.

Reflecting on the sample GAC 300 we discussed on comprehensive sexuality education, this course could spend several years working with one school district to identify best practices and current research, measuring outcomes with a district, and so on. We would be naïve to think one semester (or JTerm) would settle the curriculum and the question. See above that failure is also an option. We could design best practices based on global models of sexuality education and not find a school district with whom to work. This would also be part of the process, going back to community partners and finding something workable, making sense of the reluctance, and so on.

Some people may want to come up with a new project every time they teach the course, and would be free to do so. We do anticipate benefits from seasoned courses that have been developed over time. It is also possible that faculty could share responsibility for a course and alternate teaching of it.

How are capstones integrative if students do not share a body of knowledge? What are we integrating?

We won't, it is true, know exactly what content our students have had. We will, however, have some idea about the skills, questions, and perspectives they will have encountered. Thus, these capstones will focus on integrating those skills (everyone should have a QUANT class), questions (students should have asked ethical questions throughout general education), and perspectives (students will have global perspectives courses and US Difference and Identity). Faculty in capstones will have to teach content, or, maybe better put, show students how they can use their skills to access content.

Teaching these capstones will not be like teaching courses where all students have the same content knowledge. On the other hand, they will give students some experience in doing what they will be doing in offices, on school boards, in religious communities: working with people who may or may not know a

lot about a given subject while they rely on their skills to access the information they need in order to achieve a common end.

Our faculty has not shown consistent support for a core curriculum, or even core readings in FTS. Those who do remain committed to the Three Crowns Curriculum as the place where core curricula occur.

How am I supposed to teach an interdisciplinary capstone? I don't know multiple disciplines well.

The interdisciplinarity of the capstone comes from two places: a project that people with different disciplinary training can contribute towards and the presence of people with different disciplinary training as part of the team. It is not your job to teach different disciplinary perspectives. It is your job to facilitate student exploration with your own disciplinary expertise. Think of it this way: in the capstone, faculty are not expected to know the answers. We are expected to know when it is time to ask more or different questions and where students might go for help in doing so. We are modeling life-long learning for our students and the kinds of problem solving people tackle as citizens who also have expertise in particular areas.

For GAC 300, are project-based learning approaches limited to the four examples listed?

No.

Can GAC 300 be offered during J-Term, provided we still have it?

We see no reason why not. It could work well for the project-based aspect of the course. Specifics would be set by a faculty working group.

How will know that capstones are high-quality? A bad capstone gets us nowhere!

We will need to have accountability. We will work out details in the implementation phase, but we have some ideas. Like FTS, we could require participating in training to teach a capstone. We could require faculty submit to their project and some plans about how they will lead students through it. We could require faculty submit a syllabus and prompts each year.

We will also be assessing the capstone (and general education). We want to be careful here. Assessment of student learning is different from course evaluations. We don't want to incentivize "good" results that come because the standards are low. We will, however, be assessing the capstone as a whole. That information will help us to improve the capstone and make it a rigorous, helpful experience for our students.

What about classes that seem to fit in multiple themes?

Faculty leaders of the different themes can set criteria for what makes a course fit into a particular area. We imagine that there will be some overlap but that in general, the courses will fit fairly easily into one of the three areas. Given that students can move around among the theme, it should not be a deal breaker for a student or a faculty member if their course officially counts as "Health & Happiness" but also deals with issues of "Justice and Inequality."

Can you provide some more examples of possible GAC 300s?

We expect that faculty will be able to come up with lots of creative ideas, and we understand that some faculty will continue to offer FTS and/or contribute to general education in ways other than GAC 300. Everyone won't teach everything. We think the Nobel Conference offers good models of problem- or question-based themes and could imagine good use of Nobel archives to build seminars on topics like

Soil; Reproductive Technology; Addiction; Globalization; Oceans; Big Data, etc. Some other ideas: Voting (mobilization and suppression); Plastics (possibilities and pollutants); Local Foodways; Migration in Minnesota; Higher Education Policy; Challenges in K-12 Education; Sexual Assault and Violence; Mass Incarceration; Housing and Homelessness; A Generation at War, 9/11-present; Film and Representation of War; Social Media and Society; Comedy and Social Change; Hip Hop and Youth Mobilization; Anxiety & Depression among College Students; College-Prison Partnerships; etc.

Specific Requirements

Do the Global Perspectives and Difference and Identities in US courses need to be contemporary or can they be historical as well?

We foresee working groups developing criteria for all the areas and requirements. We haven't, in other words, gone this far into the weeds on these requirements, but we would imagine that historically-focused courses on something like immigration exclusion acts; genocide; imperialism; or apartheid (among countless other examples) would certainly help students become more engaged global citizens in the present.

Would Global courses have to focus on a particular area?

These criteria would be set by the faculty working group. We could imagine space for highly-focused regional courses and also comparative courses.

Could a course count for both Global and US?

These criteria would be set by the faculty working group. We could imagine a course counting for both, but students would need to choose which area they wanted it to count for (and would need to take a second course).

What percentage of our students test out of the current foreign language requirement?

10%.

Why Wellbeing?

A plurality of faculty (almost 50%) indicated support for some Wellbeing requirement (40% indicated something different than the current ACT/FIT model). In the Preamble to the Institutional Student Learning Outcomes, we commit to fostering personal wellbeing. And, as we know, many of our students lack basic wellbeing skills. Although we recognize that some issues of student wellbeing stem from systemic issues such as financial need, we do believe that some deficits in wellbeing stem from a lack of knowledge about practices that contribute to personal wellness. We also decided that FTS currently carries too much responsibility for wellbeing outside of ACT/FIT and that attention to wellness across FTS sections was inconsistent. Thus, as the committed considered student needs, we decided that we should have a designated place in the curriculum for students to learn about holistic wellness.

In its discussions, the committee was clear that the Wellbeing requirement should include multiple dimensions of wellness. We were also clear, as we have been with regard to other requirements, that Wellbeing would need to be staffable with current faculty with expertise in the field.

Will courses in traditions outside of Christianity count as "Exploring Belief" courses (or whatever name we decide upon)?

Exploring belief courses will still need to include Christianity. That requirement stems, in part, from our message to give students a "mature understanding of the Christian faith." We foresee, however, that what is now common practice in THEOL courses will become policy: all exploring belief courses will be expected to deal with at least two traditions (one of which will be Christianity).

You can find more information about the history of this requirement on our resource page: https://gustavus.edu/committees/curriculum/CurricularPlanning/Resources.php.