Recommended Revisions to the General Education Program Requirements:
Values, Society, and Diversity
Fall 2015

Background for the Revision to the GE Values, Society, and Diversity Area (VSD)

Association of American Colleges and Universities and LEAP Research
Growing pedagogical research and advocacy, such as conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and discussed as part of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative, has shown that today’s college graduates need “higher-level learning and knowledge as well as strong intellectual and practical skills to be successful.” Among the high-impact practices that colleges can offer are courses that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and viewpoints different from their own. It is strongly encouraged by such research that these courses explore areas of “difficult differences,” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality and struggles for human rights and social justice.

Issues of Campus Climate and Role of UISG
On the local level, the recent events on campus last year encouraged the University of Iowa Student Government (UISG) to pursue methods of creating a better campus climate, looking at the work of Penn State as a model [http://equity.psu.edu/diversity-strategic-planning]. UISG also created its own UISG-sponsored plan for change, with a recommended revision to the GE area of Values, Society, and Diversity.

Changing demographics at UI have likewise raised awareness of the importance of inclusion and of a welcoming environment. Last year, for example, a university-wide committee studied the climate for international students, confirming that these students at times found it difficult to be an international student at Iowa.

At the same time, the SERU Brief 2014: Stretching Our Students suggested that growth in awareness and understanding of diversity can occur in the classroom, especially when students work together and are given opportunities to see the variety of backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences brought to bear on problem solving. Sixty-seven percent of students reported through the SERU survey that they gained a deeper understanding of another person’s perspective because of experiences within a class (http://www.uiowa.edur/assessment/seru).

Today’s students also need this deeper understanding of “difficult differences” in order to work with others professionally, and many employers appreciate and even expect this outcome from a liberal arts education.

Impact of Revisions Made to GE Requirements Before 2011
Additionally, when the GE Program was last revised in 2008-2010 (and implemented in 2011), the faculty committee charged with this change advocated for a GE area that focused on cultural diversity. In the pre-2011 rendition of the GE requirements, Cultural Diversity was in the Distributed Category and was a choice among six other areas as a way for students to fulfill...
the Distributed requirement. Faculty argued that the message sent to students because of this choice was that understanding cultural diversity was not essential to the undergraduate mission of the College or of the University. The faculty committee overseeing this GE revision agreed that this was a problem, as did the College, with the end-goal to make cultural diversity more visible in the GE requirements.

However, because of the complexity of the proposed GE changes and because the College had been asked not to raise its requirements of GE semester hours, this request to create a cultural diversity requirement was not then possible. A compromise was thus created. A new area called Values, Society, and Diversity was approved that included many of the courses from the seven areas of the Distributed Category, which included courses from the GE areas of Cultural Diversity, Foreign Civilization and Culture, Health and Physical Activity, and the Humanities.

This compromise helped to create more visibility for cultural diversity but did not solve the initial problem of having a very broad category with only some of the courses focused on diversity. This problem led, in part, to the UISG legislation in Spring 2015 requesting a change in how the GE Program handles diversity. This conversation included the point that students most in need of understanding cultural diversity often avoid it and that a focused GE diversity requirement would ensure exposure to this area for CLAS undergraduates.

In part because of the changing UI landscape and demographics and because of the student input, the College has the endorsement of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education to increase the GE requirements if focused particularly on diversity and inclusion.

**Spring 2015 Committee Recommendations**

During the spring 2015 semester, an ad hoc committee (referred to as the General Education VSD Revision Committee) was convened by Helena Dettmer, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum, to examine the Values, Society, and Diversity (VSD) requirement of the CLAS GE Program. Members of this committee are listed below:

- Matthew Hill, Anthropology, Chair, CLAS General Education VSD Revision Committee
- Jeffrey Ding, UISG Vice President, Student member
- Denise Filios, Spanish and Portuguese
- Kathryn Hall, Academic Programs and Student Development
- Timothy Havens, Communication Studies and African American Studies
- Karen Heimer, Sociology and Gender, Women’s and Sexuality Studies
- Michael Hill, English and African American Studies
- Michelene Pesantubbee, Religious Studies and American Indian & Native Studies

The CLAS General Education VSD Revision Committee met biweekly during the spring semester 2015 to discuss the questions presented by the charge.
**Charge to the Committee**

The CLAS General Education VSD Revision Committee was charged by Dean Helena Dettmer to answer the following questions:

- Should the current GE VSD category be rewritten to focus more specifically on inclusion and diversity rather than on the current broader scope of values and the human experience?
- Should the current GE VSD category be split into two categories, with one focusing specifically on inclusion and diversity and with the other focused on values and the human experience?

The committee was asked to recommend a new name, content description, and outcomes for any new and revised categories, if needed. The committee was not asked to recommend the movement of any existing GE courses to a new or revised GE category since those curricular decisions exist within the regular duties of the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) and the Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee (UEPCC) and thus were beyond the scope of this charge.

**Findings of the Committee**

The committee unanimously recommended that the College split the current VSD area into two separate categories, thus effectively adding a 3 semester hour requirement to the GE Program. One of the new areas would focus on diversity and inclusion and the other area would focus on values and the human experience.

The committee also recommended that the two resulting areas from the VSD split should not overlap, with each requirement distinctive and with differing outcomes.

The current Values, Society, and Diversity requirement would be ended except for current CLAS students who, according to CLAS policy, would graduate under the requirements in place at the time of their acceptance to UI and as stated on the degree audit. (Students are always allowed, however, to move to new requirements if they so wish.)

**Work in Fall 2015 on the New Areas**

During the fall 2015 semester, the Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee (UEPCC) and the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) reviewed this proposed split of the VSD area into two requirements and recommended its approval to the College. The two committees also continued to refine the language resulting from the work of the Spring 2015 committee.

The College additionally met with Christina Bohannan, President, Faculty Senate and with Georgina Dodge, Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President, who both gave the
College valuable guidance and suggestions, helping to shape the outcomes of the proposed Diversity and Inclusion GE requirement. Christina Bohannan also met with UEPCC during the fall semester to discuss the proposal in more detail. Additionally, the College met a number of times with Lon Moeller, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education about the requirement; the College also shared the proposed plan of the new GE area with the associate deans and directors of the various UI undergraduate colleges. The College spoke with two university-wide committees studying the climate on campus, with committee members welcoming the new requirement because of related climate issues on campus. Students who had worked on the initial proposal were also consulted during this process, with the student representative of the Spring 2015 committee sharing drafts of the proposed Diversity and Inclusion GE area with UISG.

Proposed GE Area Revisions

If this proposal is approved, the current 3 s.h. requirement in the GE area of Values, Society, and Diversity (VSD) would remain in place for all continuing CLAS students. CLAS undergraduates entering UI starting with Fall 2017 and after, however, would not finish the VSD requirement but instead would be required to complete 3 s.h. from each of the categories below.

Diversity and Inclusion

Content

Courses develop students’ recognition of their positions in an increasingly pluralistic world while fostering an understanding of social and cultural differences. Courses in this area are generally discussion based.

Outcomes

1. Students explore the historical and structural bases of inequality.
2. Students learn about the benefits and challenges of diversity.
3. Students reflect critically on their own social and cultural perspectives.
4. Students increase their ability to engage with people who have backgrounds or ideas different from their own.

Values and Culture

Content

Courses focus on how culture shapes the human experience and on the role of values in society.
Outcomes

1. Students ask fundamental questions regarding the human experience.
2. Students become aware of the characteristics that define culture and values.
3. Students apply at least one method to analyze cultural value systems.
4. Students consider the complex origins of their own values and beliefs.

Addition of Courses to the New GE Areas

If this proposal is approved, CLAS will issue a call for course proposals for GE status in the area of Inclusion and Diversity. Some of these proposals likely will be based on current GE course offerings in the Values, Society, and Diversity area, but this is not required. Any department or program may submit a proposal.

Additionally, CLAS will review all current GE courses in the Values, Society, and Diversity area, recommending that some be moved to the new GE area of Values and Culture, with changes suggested if needed in order for the courses to meet the new area outcomes. New proposals will also be accepted, with any department or program welcome to submit a proposal.

Departments offering these courses will be consulted, with a conversation occurring about the department’s wishes to be included in either category. Both UEPCC and GECC will also be involved in this curricular process since it falls within the expected duties of each of these committees.
Appendix

Fall 2015 Members of UEPCC

Helena Dettmer, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum, Chair
Mary Adamek (School of Music, May 2017)
James Cremer (Computer Science, May 2016)
Sarah Fagan (German, May 2016)
Denise Filios (Spanish and Portuguese, May 2017)
Timothy Havens (Communication Studies, May 2016)
Lena Hill (English, May 2018)
Cornelia Lang (Physics & Astronomy, May 2018)
Mary Noonan (Sociology, May 2018)
Jacob Simpson (Student member, May 2016)
Shaun Vecera (Psychology, May 2017)
Kathryn Hall (Staff)

Fall 2015 Members of GECC

Ingrid Uijkstra Peate, Geoscience (May 2016), Chair
Doug Dion, Political Science (May 2017)
Oguz Durumeric, Mathematics (May 2018)
Matthew Gilchrist, Rhetoric (May 2018)
Dexter Golinghorst, Student member (May 2016)
Kenneth Mobily, Health and Human Physiology (May 2016)
Kristy Nabhan-Warren, Religious Studies (May 2016)
Kerby Boschee, Liaison, Study Abroad, ISSS
Paula Kerezsi, Liaison, Academic Advising Center
Shaun Vecera, Liaison to UEPCC, Psychology, May 2017)
Kathryn Hall (Staff)