

General Education Assessment Committee Academic Year 2017-2018

Overview

To support the UVA faculty's decision of whether to adopt the New College Curriculum, the General Education Assessment Committee was convened and charged with the development and design of a comprehensive, rigorous assessment of the program in its pilot period. This committee consists of faculty from across the College of Arts & Sciences and the larger University, all with relevant expertise, experience, and passion regarding curricular reform. In consultation with experts in educational research and assessment, this faculty committee spent Academic Year 2016-17 developing an assessment plan that considers the many outcomes, processes, and stakeholders of general education at UVA. This 2-year assessment program began in September 2017 and consists of numerous smaller studies and investigations divided among three distinct levels: curriculum, course, and learning outcomes. In addition to its use by faculty in their evaluation of the New College Curriculum, this assessment will also be used formatively to support the continued development and improvement of the program.

Members

- Sarah Kucenas (Chair), Associate Professor of Biology, Cell Biology, & Neuroscience
- Chad Dodson, Associate Professor of Psychology
- Kateri DuBay, Assistant Professor of Chemistry
- Judy Giering, Director of Learning Design & Technology
- Dan Gingerich, Associate Professor of Politics and Director of the Quantitative Collaborative
- Elizabeth Gorman, Associate Professor of Sociology
- Karen Inkelas, Associate Professor of Education
- Karen Kafadar, Commonwealth Professor and Chair of Statistics
- Victor Luftig, Professor of English and Director of the Center for the Liberal Arts
- Rachel Most, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Programs
- Lois Myers, Associate Director and Assessment Coordinator of the Office of Institutional Assessment & Studies
- Bo Odom, Manager of Curricular Implementation & Assessment Coordinator
- Brian Paljug, Education & Assessment Specialist
- Michael Palmer, Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence
- Karl Shuve, Associate Professor of Religious Studies
- Fred Smyth, Assistant Professor of Psychology

Assessment Goals & Methods

- Investigates the pedagogical soundness, academic experience, and sustainability of the New College Curriculum.
- Consists of eleven distinct studies spanning three structural levels (curriculum model, individual courses & classes, student learning outcomes)
- Considers numerous stakeholders: students, program instructors, faculty advisors, department chairs, external experts, and more.
- Utilizes purely quantitative, purely qualitative, and mixed-methods research in the various studies.

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Studies & Results

- An external review of the New College Curriculum was commissioned from faculty from peer institutions who have led recent and analogous curricular reform efforts at their home institution. All reviewers perceived the program extremely positively, praising its innovation and execution in the larger context of liberal arts and sciences education, while raising several concerns regarding long-term sustainability and scalability.
- The College Fellows have reported overwhelming satisfaction with their experience so far, and spoke highly of working with students and the other faculty in the program. They also raised concerns regarding the program's sustainability.
- Faculty advisors expressed concerns about the newness of the New College Curriculum and resulting challenges, but indicated an expectation that many of these challenges would naturally resolve over time while expressing general enthusiasm for the program.
- College faculty expressed a wide variety of perspectives (positive and negative) regarding the program, but the predominant theme was concern over the impact of the curriculum on department enrollments and resources. Program chairs and directors echoed this concern, but were in general cautiously supportive of the program.
- A number of studies revealed the exceptional design and execution of the Engagement courses. A review of their syllabi concluded that they are designed extremely well and in alignment with learning-focused best practices, while student surveys have revealed that the courses are effectively delivering high-impact educational experiences that are being very well received and perceived by students.
- Upcoming studies will include a comparative assessment of direct learning outcomes achievement by students in the New College and Traditional Curricula, and an investigation of their experience navigating the various resources and processes related to general education course requirements, selection, registration, etc.

Conclusions

Bearing in mind that only a semester's worth of assessment has been fully conducted, the Assessment Committee feels comfortable making the following conclusions. First, the New College Curriculum is a striking innovation in general education which, if successful, will undoubtedly be regarded highly by and serve as a model for other liberal arts institutions. Second, the faculty involved in the program (the College Fellows) speak incredibly highly of their experience so far, and have found it extremely positive in terms of their relationships with other students and faculty in the New College Curriculum; many have said that it has transformed how they will approach their teaching in the future, even after leaving the program. Third, the Engagement courses are designed in alignment with the highest standards of known

high-impact, learning-focused educational practices, and so far appear to be very well-received by students. Fourth, various groups have raised serious concerns about the sustainability of the program, from continued faculty recruitment, to departmental impact (e.g., faculty availability, lowered enrollments), to maintaining sufficient institutional support. Finally, the UVA faculty hold diverse perceptions of the New College Curriculum, including enthusiastic approval, cautious optimism, confusion and anxiety, skepticism, and outright hostility (and many with no strong opinion at all). Many faculty remain ill-informed (or misinformed) regarding the specifics of the program, which the Assessment Committee hopes to address in its upcoming report, so that the faculty may approach their evaluation of the program with the best information possible.