

Proposal for An Integrative Culminating Experience

Preface (From the General Education Task Force Report:)

At the upper division level, general education courses that cross various areas of knowledge will enable students to draw on a broad range of knowledge and skills acquired throughout their undergraduate training. These courses will present opportunities for students to integrate general education in a broad, cross-disciplinary way and to demonstrate their mastery of the core critical abilities. Building on the foundation of faculty research, the life and work experiences of alumni, as well as initiatives of community organizations, upper division integration and synthesis courses will allow students to integrate a Queens College liberal arts education into their lives as active citizens of the nation and world.

Requirement

All students must take one course designated as an *Integrative Culminating Experience* course which may be given in one of the two following categories:

Integration and Synthesis ("Inter-Major")

To qualify for the *Integration and Synthesis* category, a course must

- be an upper-division (open only to juniors and seniors) course where the content intentionally crosses areas of knowledge (i.e., majors or those defined in the PLAS requirements)
- have content appropriate for non-majors who have adequate yet reasonable prerequisites (although potentially also appropriate for majors within the department offering the course)
- allow students to integrate general education in a broad, cross-disciplinary way and to demonstrate their mastery of the core critical abilities
- offer upper-level students opportunities to probe deeper into cultural, philosophical, scientific, artistic, political, or other issues while sharpening their critical thinking, analytical and communication skills.

Culminating Experience in the Major ("Intra-Major")

To qualify for the *Culminating Experience in the Major* category, a course must

- be open only to advanced students in a major
- relate, compare, contrast or show an integral connection between different areas, subjects, skills or emphases in the major
- draw attention to the completed major and its relationship to the liberal arts, including critical thinking, analytical and communication skills.

Other Notes:

- *Integration and Synthesis* and *Culminating Experience in the Major* courses may be used as part of the requirements for a major at the department's discretion.
- All new or existing courses will be proposed to the UCC to be in one of these categories and approved by the Academic Senate.
- Departments may offer one, the other, neither or both.

Appendix from the General Education Task Force Report

Appendix IV: Areas of Knowledge: Upper Division General Education—Integration and Synthesis

At the upper division level, general education courses that cross various areas of knowledge will enable students to draw on a broad range of knowledge and skills acquired throughout their undergraduate training. These courses will present opportunities for students to integrate general education in a broad, cross-disciplinary way and to demonstrate their mastery of the core critical abilities. Building on the foundation of faculty research, the life and work experiences of alumni, as well as initiatives of community organizations, upper division integration and synthesis courses will allow students to integrate a Queens College liberal arts education into their lives as active citizens of the nation and world.

The integration and synthesis courses are designed to offer upper-level students unique opportunities to probe deeper into cultural, philosophical, scientific, artistic, political, and other issues of the world. To this end, such courses will introduce students to a significant subject, problem, or activity that will broaden their horizon and deepen their understanding of the nation and world. Such courses are intended to provide a means to sharpen students' critical thinking, analytical, and communication skills. Secondly, students learn to put different areas of knowledge and experiences together and to draw connections across domains of knowledge. Third, these courses enhance students' understanding of their own location in space and time. Fourth, they present an opportunity for students to experience significant intellectual challenges and satisfactions in their junior and senior years. Fifth, they serve as a link between academic learning and practical experience that may be attractive to prospective employers. Sixth, they facilitate the integration of curricula content across disciplines. Finally, they foster a sense of self-actualization, empowerment, and citizenry among students.

Much of The General Education Task Force's thinking concerning the Upper Division General Education Integration and Synthesis requirement was influenced by the Working Group on An Integrative Capstone Experience. The Task Force therefore recommends that one of these upper division courses be taken in a student's final semester to provide a general education capstone to the student's Queens College education.

Criteria

The following four broad criteria will be used to evaluate upper division General Education courses, including existing courses.

Some or all of the criteria may be determined to be necessary. Suggested criteria include:

1. Course content that intentionally crosses the areas of knowledge as defined in this report;
2. Course content appropriate for non-majors, although potentially also appropriate for majors within the department;
3. Understanding New York City and the world including understanding of one's role in the greater society and the world (options involve both the school community and the greater community outside school);
4. Well-roundedness (this would include efforts to expose students to areas of study with which they have little or no previous familiarity);
5. Personal growth and fulfillment (to enable students to develop the tools necessary to reach their full potential and the understanding of themselves, including their strengths and interests, that will help them lead fuller and richer lives); and
6. Career transition including experiences that would enhance students' movement from student to professional life. (Experiences would include mentoring, internships, networking, training, and/or seminars).

Models of upper division courses

Departments and faculty are encouraged to construct or adapt courses to provide an appropriate general education experience that crosses areas of knowledge. In the process, the Task Force recommends that traditional lecture formats be supplanted with course pedagogies that encourage students to actively make connections and contrasts in their own construction of knowledge. The following models are offered to encourage and inspire such new courses that would fulfill the upper division General Education requirements.

1. Colloquium Series: A semester of large colloquia by major speakers on broad, interdisciplinary topics. These topics may or may not be thematically related. Throughout the semester, preparatory and follow-up sections with small numbers of students would enable small groups to work carefully with the topic at hand. Sections may or may not be grounded in a department. As an

alternative, the groups could work in 3-4 week short courses with different faculty teaching from different disciplinary perspectives. The culminating experiences may be for each cycle (colloquium); there would not necessarily be a final paper to summarize the semester as a whole. A coordinator would plan speakers and coordinate with faculty.

Example: Speakers from the biological sciences, philosophy, literature, and law present different perspectives on the central theme of the Human Genome Project.

2. Learning Community: Based on the model established by the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI), a group of students would join a community that enrolls in two courses together. These may be regularly offered courses within different disciplines in which the subject matter allows for linkages between the courses. The faculty would negotiate beforehand the ways in which the linkages could be emphasized. Students would work collectively on a group project as partial fulfillment of each of the courses' requirements, and faculty would work together during the semester to assure co-ordination of assignments and oversight.

Example: Courses in music history (or art history) and philosophy focus on the ways in which music and philosophy impact one another. Such a pairing incorporates attending concerts, lectures, going to museums, or other activities involving students within Queens and the greater NYC community.

3. Community/Professional Service: A model which entails recruitment of alumni, corporations, government agencies, research facilities, artistic organizations and cultural organizations with ties to the New York city community to provide the opportunity for Seniors to bring their accumulated skills and experience to bear on concrete issues or projects. This may be an intensive internship, mentoring program, volunteerism, or perhaps even participation in approved retreats or outreach programs/seminars. A separate administrative unit drawing on faculty from different areas would oversee this work to identify particularly germane issues and suggest specific sites and potential support groups.

Example: In their final semester, five graduating seniors work with a faculty member on a project regarding revenue models on the Internet. Each student is given a separate area to explore such as e-commerce, the effectiveness of the clicks-and-bricks (on-and off-line) economic model, single product (pets.com) vs. multiple product (amazon.com) websites, etc. Faculty and students meet once a week to review their progress. A seminar at the beginning of the semester strengthens the students' information literacy competencies.

4. Individual Research Project: A student would develop a proposal for a Senior-year research project involving one or more faculty, either within a discipline or from more than one. Many departments currently have this option available or even require it within the major. The key point here, as noted above, would be the nature of the project itself. How does it bring together what the student has learned during her/his undergraduate Liberal Arts career? The thesis would be about more than just the student's discipline—it would put the discipline in a broader context of a liberal arts education.

Example: Topics combining art and the social sciences include the art market in Bruges in the fifteenth century; building a Gothic cathedral; European reception of American art before World War I; American reception of art of the Americas during the early years of the Republic; art heritage threatened in geopolitical conflicts.

5. Senior Seminar: This would entail a student working within a group dedicated to a single research project with one or more faculty as directors. Again, this is a model already in place in several disciplines at the College, and it would be the nature of the project itself that determines whether the course would qualify as a Capstone.

Example: Faculty-mentored research projects; software/hardware development practicum.