

Recommendation of the General Education Subcommittee Regarding CLAS-Specific Requirements beyond the Common Curriculum

College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Committee on Curricula and Courses

Apr 12, 2023

The charge of this subcommittee was to review the structure of the recently-approved UConn Common Curriculum and determine if its Topics of Inquiry, Competencies, and requirements were sufficient to prepare students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for their major fields of study. This subcommittee first reviewed the current general education system and how CLAS requirements differ from university-wide requirements. We then reviewed the [Common Curriculum Guidelines](#) to understand the fundamental shifts in general education that would take place under this new system. Following these reviews, we discussed the unique needs of students and programs across the college, and whether the Common Curriculum meets these needs. We share our findings in these reviews and our recommendations to both the CLAS CCC and the Dean of the College below.

The Current General Education System, A Review:

The current general education system has been in place (with occasional modifications) for over two decades. It stipulates four content areas: (1) *Arts & Humanities*, (2) *Social Sciences*, (3) *Science & Technology*, and (4) *Diversity & Multiculturalism*. UConn Students must complete two courses in each content area; one course in area 3 must have a laboratory component, and one course in area 4 must cover international topics. The current system also stipulates four competencies:

- Quantitative: Demonstrated by completing 6 credits of ‘Q’ courses, 3 of which must be in MATH or STAT.
- Second Language: Demonstrated by completing three years in a single language in high school, or during university work by completing the second semester course in a language.
- Writing: Demonstrated by completing a first-year composition course (ENGL 1007 or 1010 or 1011) and by completing two writing-intensive (W) courses, one of which must be within the student’s major.
- Environmental Literacy: Demonstrated by completing 3 credits in an ‘E’ course.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences places the following additional requirements on students in the current system:

- Two additional Content Area 1 courses for Bachelor of Science Students (12 total CA1 credits), and three additional Content Area 1 courses for Bachelor of Arts Students (15 total CA1 credits.) These credits are divided into five areas: (a)Arts, (b)Literature,

(c)History, (d)Philosophy & Ethical Analysis, and (e) World Cultures. All CLAS students must complete CA1 courses in areas A through D, and Bachelor of Arts students must complete one additional course in any area A through E.

- Bachelor of Science students must complete sequences of courses in Biology (3), Chemistry (2-3), Math (2), and Physics (2) resulting in seven to eight additional courses in Content Area 3. While these sequences apply to most B.S. degrees, alternative - but comparably rigorous - plans have been approved for the B.S. in Economics and the B.S. in Statistical Data Science.
- To meet the Quantitative Competency, One additional course in Q course is required of all CLAS students. Bachelor of Science students meet these requirements as part of the aforementioned science course sequences with no additional coursework required.
- For students who do not meet the Second Language Competency prior to arriving at UConn, students in CLAS must complete four semesters of language through the intermediate level, which constitutes two additional semesters of language work. Students who meet the competency through high school education do not have any additional requirements.

The Common Curriculum as Approved:

The Common Curriculum represents an overhaul of the University's General Education System. Under the new plan, the four Content Areas are replaced by six Topics of Inquiry: (1) *Creativity, Design, Expression, Innovation*, (2) *Cultural Dimensions of Human Experiences*, (3) *Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice*, (4) *Environmental Literacy*, (5) *Individual Values and Social Institutions*, and (6) *Science and Empirical Inquiry*. Students must complete at least 3 credits in each Topic of Inquiry, including at least one laboratory course in TOI 6. Students also must complete three courses in a focus area, which consists of either (a) any trio of courses in a topic of inquiry, or (b) any trio of courses approved as an academic 'theme.' The Common Curriculum also specifies five competencies:

- Quantitative (unchanged): Demonstrated by completing 6 credits of 'Q' courses, 3 of which must be in MATH or STAT.
- Second Language (unchanged): Demonstrated by completing three years in a single language in high school, or during university work by completing the second semester course in a language.
- Writing (unchanged): Demonstrated by completing a first-year composition course (ENGL 1007 or 1010 or 1011) and by completing two writing-intensive (W) courses, one of which must be within the student's major.
- Information, Media, and Digital Literacy: "Infused throughout the curriculum via an intentional process."
- Dialogue: "Infused throughout the curriculum via an intentional process."
 - *Note: The Previous Environmental Literacy Competency is now captured through TOI 4.*

The CLAS Question

The summary above lays bare the challenge facing CLAS to adapt to the new general education structure. Topics of Inquiry are broad by design, interdisciplinary, and flexible; they are also nebulous, difficult to define succinctly, and harder to assess as preparatory work for specific plans of study. Mapping legacy Content Areas onto Topics of Inquiry is a difficult exercise, which makes it harder to predict the eventual results of the *Gen Ed Migration*, currently in its infancy with the Common Curriculum Committee. We also foresee the creation of new courses, both to take advantage of the new system's affordances and to address areas where the new framework is underserved by the existing curriculum. It is difficult to discuss these issues in hypotheticals, however, and even more difficult to make policy decisions based on them. When we review the current landscape, we are constrained by what we do not know, and offer our recommendations within those constraints.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is a big tent, containing a vibrant and diverse collection of fields of study, scholars, and students. Our needs are not all identical, and so the question of "*does this one-size-fits-all plan fit us?*" was always going to have a complicated answer. In this case, however, we can safely say two things:

1. The college will need additional requirements beyond the Common Curriculum.
2. We cannot fully and properly articulate those additional requirements until we see a clearer trajectory for the Common Curriculum's Implementation.

A single example can be used to demonstrate the first point: Rolling back our requirements to the Common Curriculum's requirements would leave Bachelor of Science Students taking a single science laboratory course as preparation for their in-degree-field Plan of Study. Not only would that constitute a radical departure from our current curriculum, it would also put each B.S.-granting Discipline at risk for accreditation issues, and compromise their students' prospects for graduate-level education. Asking each B.S. program, then, to fend for themselves in arranging sufficient requirements for their students would create an unfair burden on units and myriad logistical issues. In short: It wouldn't work. To be clear, this sort of issue isn't limited to B.S. programs, but the example illustrates the need for the college to determine additional requirements.

To the second point: It is foolish to speculatively engage in this work without a single course formally aligned into any Topic of Inquiry. Without knowing where existing courses are (or are not) situated in the Common Curriculum, it is hard to understand both how many additional requirements would be necessary, and in which areas. One frequent commentary we have heard in this process is that many units feel their general education courses could fit in several (or even most) Topics of Inquiry. Common Curriculum courses are limited to declaring a maximum of

two Topics of Inquiry, though, which would suggest that the ultimate shape of the Common Curriculum is contingent upon the migration process: Which Topics will units select for their swiss-army courses? How will the Common Curriculum Committee interpret the names, definitions, and learning objectives of each Topic? How inclusive or exclusive will each Topic be with courses that are edge cases? Until we have clarity on these issues, we cannot set our own standards.

Common Curriculum Competencies

One area where we have a better picture of things is with the Competencies. The Common Curriculum makes no changes to Q, W, and Language Competencies, which has allowed us to consider these with better clarity.

- We have no desire to reduce the Quantitative Competency requirement from the college's current standard of 9 credits down to the University's requirement of 6. The role of understanding mathematics and statistics is as important as ever in today's world, as evidenced by the college's recent approval of new programs in Statistical Data Science and Applied Data Analysis. Previous conversations among the CLAS C&C (circa 2020) have posed the question of whether every student in the college should have to take a course in statistics, but no resolution or action was reached. Other discussions have centered on whether students would better benefit from taking at least one Q course within their major when feasible academically and logistically. The process of considering CLAS requirements for the Common Curriculum is an ideal space for continuing such conversations.
- We do not anticipate increasing the number of W-courses required. While students would no doubt benefit from more writing instruction, staffing these important, small format courses is not feasible without the earmarking of additional funding/hires for this purpose.
- The Second Language Competency requirements deserve further discussion. The college requires only students who do not meet the competency in high school to complete two additional language courses than their peers across the rest of the university, making expectations consistent across the university for students with adequate high school preparation, but inconsistent for CLAS students who lack that high school preparation. Many factors would be involved in such discussion, such as issues of equity, impacts on units, enrollments, and of course desired student outcomes. The discussion must gather input from relevant units, advisors, and students, as well as data about how many students are impacted by this requirement, and if those students are clustered by campus or demographics. These discussions should also compare the CLAS requirement to Liberal Arts and Sciences programs at peer and aspirant institutions.

Finally, we intentionally omit the remaining competencies of *Dialogue* and *Information, Media, and Digital Literacies*. These competencies are grossly underdeveloped in the approved

Common Curriculum, so much so that nothing within their definitions can be systematically assessed *across* the Common Curriculum. The characterization that these competencies will be “infused throughout the curriculum” is optimistic, vague, and inadequate for curricular development. The entire University must reconsider the academic implementation of these competencies for them to become a meaningful component of the Common Curriculum, and that process should include thought leaders from the academic units within CLAS that research and practice these topics on a daily basis: Communication, English (via Writing/Composition), and Journalism, to name a few. Until that process begins, the college should use its curricular resources in other areas of general education.

Recommendation to the CLAS C&C

We applaud the efforts of so many experts within the university community - both inside and beyond CLAS - to create a modern, interdisciplinary structure for general education that will welcome so many units to offer courses that enrich the education of UConn undergraduates. At the same time, we must ensure that students in our college receive an education with the breadth and depth of experience within the arts and sciences. To ensure that the college meets its pedagogical obligations when the University shifts to the Common Curriculum, we recommend the following course of action:

1. Inform members of the College and the Common Curriculum Committee that CLAS will, in fact, stipulate additional requirements of students beyond those in the Common Curriculum. We will label these additional requirements as “CLAS Requirements” and not as “additional Common Curriculum Requirements” to prevent confusion for students, faculty, and advisors.
2. Wait until the first phase of CCC+ curricular realignment is complete to assess the specific areas where the college will need additional requirements. The CCC+ has initiated an expedited process for units to propose their existing general education courses for Topics of Inquiry in the new Common Curriculum; the results of this process will inform CLAS in making these decisions. The expedited process is projected to be completed by the end of the Fall, 2023 semester. This work within the College, then, should begin in the Spring of 2024.
3. For competencies unchanged by the migration to the Common Curriculum:
 - a. This subcommittee should reconvene in the Fall of 2023 to:
 - i. Revisit the Q competency to decide whether the college’s current 9-credit requirement is sufficient, or if additional coursework should be required (and if so, whether that coursework should be in particular areas, such as within a student’s major when feasible.)
 - ii. Revisit the additional requirements placed upon students who do not complete the second-language requirement through high school coursework to determine whether the current CLAS requirements are appropriate and equitable.

- b. Leave the current W competency requirements unchanged.
4. Take no action on the new *Dialogue and Information, Media, and Digital Literacies* competencies until they are further developed at the university level.

We hope the CLAS CCC and College leadership will accept our recommendations.

Respectfully,
The CLAS CCC Subcommittee on General Education

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