



Forum on the UVa College Curriculum

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The Forum on the College Curriculum, hosted by the College Council and Student Council at the University of Virginia on November 23, 2015, brought light to potential changes to the curriculum of the College of Arts & Sciences and also served as a venue for students and community members to give feedback to key deans and faculty who are proposing to re-write the curriculum and implement change.

The forum was a discussion intended to promote dialogue and new ideas. **None of what was discussed is final. Any student with ideas on how things can be changed may forward them to Student Council, College Council, or any of the administration's leadership noted in this report.**

The forum featured three panelists:

Ian B. Baucom - Buckner W. Clay Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

Rachel Most - Associate Dean for Academic Programs

Chad Wellmon - Chair, Committee on Curricular Reform

The forum began with Dean Baucom introducing considerations and potential changes to the curriculum, then Dean Most spoke about 'College Forums' and new experiences for first years, and then Chad Wellmon discussed the work of the General Education Committee on Curricular Reform. The panelists then stayed for questions.

Curriculum Reform

Curriculum reform has been occurring for several years and began in 2012, under Dean Meredith Woo.

- Goal: To look at general education requirements (area requirements, competency requirements) and create a better structure for education.

Reasons:

1. Lack of significant reform since mid-1970s.



2. Lack of integrated sense of purpose behind curriculum.
3. College faculty organized by humanities, social sciences, natural sciences. Proposed curriculum creates opportunities to be more interdisciplinary.

Dean Baucom, Dean Most, Professor Wellmon, and their teams created five principles to help shape the curriculum:

5 Broad Principles of Purpose of Liberal Arts Education

- 1) **Informed Citizenship:** Local, global, cosmopolitan citizenship - shared responsibilities
- 2) **Meaningful Vocation:** It is the purpose of liberal arts to equip students for lives of meaningful vocation; we don't mean vocational - we mean vocation in secular sense; work with purpose or meaning; work conferring sense of dignity and purpose; about getting ready for a vocation; not about prepping for just one job.
- 3) **New Forms of Knowledge:** Inviting students to be co-discoverers of new forms of knowledge - scientific, etc. Ideals of what a democratic society should be. Sense of ownership for students to partake in the production of knowledge
- 4) **Personal Flourishing:** It is the purpose of education to promote students individual flourishing. Not simply fixated on instrumental purposes - not just the tangible things people can get from education. About experience the transformation of life because it's good in and of itself. Whatever brings you exuberance, you have the potential to study.
- 5) **Bettering the Commonwealth:** We are a public school, and CLAS admins want education to better the Commonwealth (both Virginia state and the common good). It is the hope that in what the teacher conveys there is a sense of the common Good.

Four Key Components of the Proposed Curriculum

Dean Baucom then described four key components of the curriculum as proposed by the Committee:

1. Critical Engagements and Global Literacies - signature first-year experiences.
2. Crossing the Disciplines - right now everyone has to do one humanities, one social sciences, etc. There is only one path. We are considering having multiple, different tracks as an option.



3. The Major - our work leaves that essentially untouched. Our departments handle that.
4. Capstone Experience – As students prepare for Final Exercises, this would be an opportunity to reflect on UVA education in its entirety

While the proposed changes to the curriculum would significantly impact first-year experiences and an expansion of interdisciplinary study, the Committee plans to have each department continue to shape each major.

Writing

Dean Baucom stressed the importance of writing and that it will be a large part of the Committee's proposed changes to the curriculum:

3 Writing Reforms:

- 1) Discussing making writing **mandatory** for everyone.
- 2) Exploring what it means to be highly literate within the **digital** arena - something emerging and important for employment
- 3) Return to **rhetoric**, the oral capacity to think through our voice; speech training.

Currently, ~1/3 of students test out of writing. They never take a writing course at UVA. These are the students who have tested highly on some writing something or other. We believe that if you test highly you should be more likely to take it. Furthermore, with so many students testing out, writing can seem remedial, rather than a focal point and a key part of an education. It's an opportunity to meet students where they are with their writing and make them better—even if they're already exceptional.

We also should focus on **digital literacy and writing**. Any job that you have, you will need to be able to write well. You will also need to be able to communicate in the digital arena. You will need to be able to speak well and articulate your thoughts clearly.

Quantitative Language - there is no requirement for quantitative yet. The requirement could be calculus or statistics, while it could be a language in the quantitative social sciences - for example quantitative social experimentation within psychology. It is virtually impossible to navigate the political arena and the news without having competency in statistics, for example.

World languages will grow increasingly important in today's global world, and language skills will remain important.



Tracks Within the Curriculum

Dean Baucom (to students): Would you recommend that we have 3-4 tracks through the curriculum? For example, with math, you could have a greater concentration through the STEM side. With theater, you could focus more on rhetoric.

The General Education Committee has not decided on tracks yet. It has not decided any of this, actually. Once you get to the middle arena - the crossing of disciplines - we can imagine some ways that you can cross fields.

The College is already piloting writing, rhetoric, and digital literacy in some of these classes.

There are two areas where we are saying you cannot have credits replace. For example, first-year students having their modes of engagement or **forums**. Also **writing** - we would not let people test out of it. That said, we are not likely going to change **AP Credit**.

College Forums

Dean Most discussed **College Forums (Fora):**

There are five College Forums, four have already been passed by the faculty:

1. Human Impact on the Environment
2. Arts and Creative Design
3. Visions of the Good
4. Mobility and Community
5. Epidemics

The Forums all focus on complex issues - they are not easily solvable issues. There will be 30-40 students in each forum for four semesters. They will all start out together in a common course and return their fourth semester (second year) to do a capstone project together. In between, students will be able to choose from a few different classes.

These are all set-up so that there will be a summer reading component. These will not be impacted by AP/IB credit.

Dean Baucom: We are launching five, but would ultimately like to get to 10 or even 20 forums.



Hopefully that would cover ~800 students. We probably could not go too far above that for logistical purposes, largely because it would take so many more faculty members.

Dean Most: These are not designed to lead you down any one path. They can be used as major requirements but cannot lead you down any one path.

Professor Wellmon: These would replace area requirements.

Making the Curriculum Part of the Welcoming/Incoming Community

Some people suggested that we take a look at some things that Texas does: FIGS (First Year Interest Groups) FLAGS (Flagged courses that help satisfy requirements) TRIGS (Transfer Interest Groups) that help satisfy these questions on how to include transfers. These would essentially be Forums.

Major Question: How should we include transfers?

Professor Wellmon: One thing that the Committee is considering is called 'College 101' and it would **focus on what is UVA**. This would be a one credit course that every first year and every transfer would go through. For example, our vice provost, Maurie McInnis, is leading the charge on the University and slavery. Every student needs to know about the history of UVA itself and talk about this history of race, women, etc. Those are some of the elements that the Committee is talking about.

Reworking the Structure of the College Experience

College is not limited to eight semesters of five classes of three credits each

Professor Wellmon: Knowledge should not be restricted to, for example, 50-minute time slot on Monday/Wednesday/Friday. This gets back to the question, "Where does research fit in?" I don't think that we or even you would want to prescribe how that would happen. But we do want to create a structure where faculty can work outside that experience. Think of how J-term courses are! Almost all day every day for three weeks. We could have more 1- or 2-credit courses and other options. Ideally we create a structure where students and faculty cannot get enough of each other!

Key Questions from Students

Should the DMP be more intensive - and therefore possible more exclusive? Or should it be made open to more people?

Some students at the forum felt that the DMP is so time-consuming and requires so many



prerequisites that it deters students from doing it. The Deans and the Committee on Curricular Reform will continue to think about this.

Question: What about competition with other schools within UVA? Should we be pulling students back from Commerce and Batten? How do we combat the idea of “The College of Arts & Crafts?”

Dean Baucom: No, that is not our goal. These are all great schools with great possibilities for students. From the perspective of the college we want all of you to have a job when you graduate, but we also want to think about more than year one. Think about the value of your liberal arts degree beyond Year 1. Think about Year 7, Year 50. We are playing a much deeper game. We want to equip you for amazing, and complex years of your twenties. That is the Year 7 that I have in mind. There is a greater degree of freedom to shape your life in your twenties. After a while, your life catches up. What do you want to explore over those years? You're not 22 and have made your decision. You are not going to be who you become in Year 1. The 50 years that follow also need to be informed by what you learn during your time here. For you to navigate successfully in an increasingly globalized and technologized world, we need you to speak a language other than English. Many of you will not work in the U.S. You need to be able to write well. Across the board, when people hire, people look for how well you can write. You also need to be quantitatively literate. The Commerce School is a great school. We also need to re-affirm and advance the central place of the liberal arts in the sphere of higher education in concert with what students can study in Commerce or Batten or Education, Nursing and Architecture.