

## PROPOSED AGES REDUCTION OVERVIEW

Since the General Education Committee began our discussions about course reduction two years ago, we have been committed to keeping what has been successful about AGES while simultaneously reducing its overall footprint in the curriculum and addressing some of the significant staffing challenges we continue to face. Based on two surveys of the faculty (2009 and 2011) as well as several Friday Conversations regarding the future of LSFY and AGES, we know that the majority of faculty continue to see value in our general education program, and continue to support the student learning outcomes we developed in “Draft 8,” one of our founding AGES documents.

Below we have sketched out the parameters for a restructured AGES curriculum, and have included a brief rationale for each of our decisions. Believe us when we say we considered many, many options – especially in talking about LSFY and LCs, the two biggest “investments” from departments in AGES. We are happy to provide more detail about those discussions as needed.

### Course tally in current trimester system

LSFY 101, 102, 103	3
Christian Traditions, with LP	1
G, D, Q, and I	4
Learning Perspectives (LPs), without Christian Traditions	8
Learning Community	2
Foreign language	3
<b>Maximum course claim on BA</b>	<b>21 (51% of BA)</b>
<b>Likely course claim on BA</b>	<b>18 (44% of BA)</b>

### Course tally in proposed semester with J term (4-1-4) system

LSFY 101, 102	2
Christian Traditions, with LP	1
G, D, and Q	3
Learning Perspectives (LPs), without Christian Traditions	5
Integrative Learning	Department, not course- based
Foreign language	2
<b>Maximum course claim on BA</b>	<b>13 (37% of BA)</b>
<b>Likely course claim on BA</b>	<b>11 (31% of BA)</b>

## **RATIONALE**

### **LSFY requirement**

The General Education Committee strongly endorses a two-course LSFY program with intentionally designed coherence throughout the year especially concerning academic skills consistent with the College's learning outcomes. During the eight years of the LSFY program's existence, it has had institutionally and nationally recognized success in improving student academic skills. Mark Salisbury recently reported that based on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), between 2005 and 2009 Augustana College students improved in critical thinking skills "by 28 percentile points – double the average of students participating in the Academically Adrift study". In addition, Ellen Hay recently shared that NSSE has selected Augustana to participate in a Spencer Foundation study, "an in-depth investigation of select institutions that show a pattern of improved NSSE results over time on several measures of student engagement in educationally-effective practice" specifically because of the positive impact of the LSFY program on student learning. Finally, for those of us who remember the first years of the program when students seemed disgruntled with LSFY classes, it is reassuring to note that student satisfaction with the program has steadily increased over time.

The General Education Committee will make no recommendation for LSFY to be a required part of a J-term, although we have had conversation about using some J-term classes to provide additional skills practice for students who need to or choose to continue improving their academic skills supported by an LSFY skills matrix.

### **Learning Perspectives requirement**

The General Education Committee strongly endorses reducing the current LP "footprint" from 9 courses (effectively 8, with Christian Traditions) to 6 courses (effectively 5, with Christian Traditions). The Committee values the breadth and exploration provided to students through our LP offerings, but these courses offer the least to students in terms of intentionality, commonality, or skills development. While we hope to make these offerings more robust in terms of general education outcomes in years to come (in keeping with the original AGES proposal), our estimation is that student learning will be least impacted with a cut to LP classes.

### **Incorporation of "I" suffix into the PN Learning Perspective**

It is clear that the college should still require some form of scientific inquiry course. However, Gen Ed has been tasked with reducing its footprint in the curriculum. There is already a significant overlap in the descriptions of the PN and I requirements. We believe that a single designation capturing both would stream-line the application process and facilitate the case-making process for the designation. As a result, we recommend a new PN definition to incorporate material now associated with the I suffix. Our provisional definition of the new PN will hold that students must: (1) examine natural laws, (2) engage in scientific inquiry, and (3) encounter science as a modern discipline.

There are currently a few courses with a PN and without an I. These courses become significantly less appealing for a Gen Ed requirement after a reduction from 9 to 6 LPs. However, many of them will be able to include scientific inquiry, or can be slightly redesigned to include scientific inquiry. There are also

a few courses on campus with an I but not a PN. Many of these courses are upper-division courses, much like senior inquiry (SI) experiences. The students who take these would already be required to take a PN course, so we do not anticipate any Gen Ed losses from removing the I from these classes.

Finally, we suggest that AP credit not carry with it a PN designation in much the same way that AP History carries credits but not a PP.

### **G and D suffix requirements**

The General Education Committee strongly endorses the continuation of the Global (“G”) and Diversity (“D”) suffixed courses as two distinct and significant requirements in the AGES curriculum. Classes in these areas help students learn to embrace and investigate differences and provide opportunities to help students comprehend and confront contemporary matters to make cross cultural connections. Through these requirements students develop an understanding and awareness of other perspectives, find commonalities, and examine stereotypes of different cultures. Through classes which fulfill Global and Diversity requirements, Augustana students develop an understanding of their own backgrounds, and learn to evaluate others’ philosophies, cultural traditions, and social practices from multiple perspectives.

Identifying and embracing differences of gender, race, ethnicity, class, creed, age, ability/disability, and sexual orientation while acknowledging the distinctive contributions of one or more groups reveals unique perspectives on the changing global landscape. In today’s world it is integral for students to develop skills to function in a diversified global economy, to be cognizant of other society’s music, religion, literature, art, and political expressions. The importance of global awareness is emphasized in Augustana’s mission and Gen Ed continues to endorse this component of our required AGES requirement.

### **Q requirement**

The General Education Committee strongly endorses a one course quantitative/statistical literacy requirement. Quantitative and statistical modes of reasoning are important for college graduates and are becoming more so; statistical and quantitative literacy have become critical citizenship skills. For two examples, consider the decisions that politicians make about the climate and that the faculty makes about

curricular reform. There is a clear national trend of students failing to develop these skills in high school and never developing them in college; as a result, the federal government recently amended education legislation to include statistical literacy. We have copious anecdotal evidence that a sizable portion of the incoming student body needs significant aid in becoming quantitatively/statistically literate.

In theory, quantitative and statistical literacy could be folded into general information literacy (and hence included in LSFY) or into scientific inquiry (and hence included in the PN), but the instructors of these courses already report being unable to incorporate all aspects of the expected general education skills into these courses currently. In short, there is a clear need for dedicated time spent with students on quantitative and statistical literacy.

## Integrative learning requirement

The General Education committee recommends removing our Learning Community requirement from the AGES curriculum.

We arrived at this regrettable conclusion after much deliberation. On two surveys and in various conversations, faculty have expressed their desire for students to engage in intentional, integrative learning experiences. However, the desirability of this goal is not matched by faculty enthusiasm for or ability to offer Learning Community classes. Since 2005, we have had trouble offering enough LCs for our students; even after significantly expanding the definition of LCs in 2009, we are now offering only the bare minimum of courses needed for our seniors to meet this requirement. LC classes will not become easier to offer with the reduction of both student and teaching course loads. Further expanding the definition of an “LC” stretches the concept to a point of incoherence, and we can’t continue to require something that we are not providing for students.

The Gen Ed Committee thought about several possibilities for continuing to require an Integrative Learning component in the curriculum. We have listed these below. As a committee, the majority of us rejected the idea of individualized “integrative learning” plans developed by each student; as pedagogically desirable as this may be, the time and oversight required by either individual faculty/advisers or a committee seemed too formidable to undertake at this time.

We encourage faculty to talk with their departments, divisions, and Gen Ed reps as to how to best move forward, and we hope to sponsor a Friday Conversation on this topic in January.

Option #1: Integrative Learning would remain a college-wide learning outcome that is managed entirely at the department level.

In this scenario, departments would be responsible for ensuring their students had some sort of integrative learning experience, as defined by the department. (i.e., the integrative learning could be “vertical” – drawing on previous knowledge/courses in the major, and/or it could be “lateral” – asking students to make connections across various fields, disciplines, and/or types of knowledge.) We can imagine departments using their Senior Inquiry experiences/reflections, e-Portfolios, required service learning experiences, or even mandated LCs to ensure this experience. (If requiring LCs, departments would need to partner with other departments in order to ensure offerings.)

Departments would monitor and assess integrative learning experiences, checked only by an external body during program review.

Option #2: Integrative Learning would remain a college-wide learning outcome that is managed largely at the department level but overseen by an external faculty committee (i.e., Gen Ed).

In this scenario, the General Education Committee would create a college-wide definition of integrative learning and the experiences that might fulfill this requirement. Departments would then apply to Gen Ed with their Integrative Learning plan for their majors, and departments and Gen Ed would have oversight of the requirement over time.