

Report of the Curriculum Elements Committee (sub-committee A)  
Draft Report 1/26/2017

**Sub-committee members:**

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Student members: Yamini Bhandari (ILR, student trustee), Nelson Billington (Hotel, student), Carlton Burrell (ILR, student), Mitchell McBride (student assembly)

**Charge:**

The Curriculum Elements Committee is a Sub-Committee of the Curriculum Oversight Committee, convened by Provost Kotlikoff and currently chaired by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Becky Stoltzfus. The sub-committee met four times in the Spring Semester 2016. It was initially chaired by Ross Brann. Julia Thom-Levy chaired the last session. The sub-committee was charged by Provost Kotlikoff to "review current offerings, university wide, and to make recommendations about elements of a common undergraduate academic experience and/or shared educational requirements across undergraduate colleges."

**SUMMARY:**

We initially conducted a comparative review of existing college mission statements and educational requirements, as listed in the Courses of Study  
<http://courses.cornell.edu/index.php?catoid=28>

The committee found that common Cornell values and themes, such as leadership, research, problem solving, and global citizenship, are expressed or implicit in all college statements, but could be distilled and made visible in a more consistent way. Substantial differences in the expression of a mission, and in the number and type of distribution requirements, notably for ILR, the College of Human Ecology, and the School of Hotel Administration, were pointed out.

In addition, we discussed benefits and implementation of shared first year academic experiences for all Cornell students. The student perspective was taken into account and the student membership on the committee was expanded to get better representation from the colleges. We discussed the pros and cons of the few existing shared experiences for all freshmen and the opportunities for more such experiences, for example by expanding and collaborating with the North Campus residential living learning program.

Among the possible shared academic experiences that were discussed and considered by the committee were a "diversity course" requirement, as requested by student groups, a first year project like the Book Project, and implementation of more one credit courses on North Campus. Substantial challenges for implementing a common diversity requirement

into each of the college's curricula were recognized, and alternatives, for example through an extended orientation period or the introduction of a one credit "Cornell 1101" course, were suggested. A more detailed exploration of these opportunities could be done with extended membership of the committee, to adequately represent all colleges. It will also be important to interface and cooperate with existing structures such as the First Year Student Experience working group (co-convened by VP of SCL and VPUE), the CAS curriculum reform committee, and others.

## **REPORT:**

We reviewed the **educational requirements** of Cornell's colleges, and found that CALS, AAP, CAS, and the College of Engineering have substantial common curricular elements, realized through similar distribution requirements. For example, all four colleges require at least 15 credits in Science and Quantitative Reasoning, and at least 12 credits in Social Sciences and the Humanities.

On the other side of the spectrum, ILR has substantially fewer distribution requirements, and The School of Hotel Administration has no such requirements. A summary of the requirements by college can be found here:

<https://cornell.box.com/s/wq26z1trs7bhni053ncrory51qighyql>

The committee recognized that much broader representation from the colleges is necessary to do an in-depth comparative curriculum review.

In their **mission statements** the colleges all stress themes that we identified as common "educational modalities", or outcomes, shared across the colleges. CALS, AAP, CAS, and the College of Engineering describe them on their individual web pages, and on the central "Courses of Study" web page, whereas mission statements for ILR and The School of Hotel Administration could only be found on the individual College Web pages. They are: *leadership, research, problem solving, and global citizenship*.

The committee considered the following themes for potential additional common curricular proposals: *visual literacy, technological literacy, human diversity, cultural diversity, global engagement*.

Several members of the committee suggested to present the various college mission statements in a more consistent way, and align with the core values expressed in the University mission statement <https://www.cornell.edu/about/mission.cfm>

In a second step, we discussed existing **shared academic opportunities** for all Cornell students, such as

- First Year Writing Seminar
- former Book Project
- University Courses
- Residential Living Learning Opportunities.

In general, we agreed on the great academic value of such opportunities, especially if they are offered in the first year. They bring students from different colleges together, foster a sense of belonging to the Cornell community, provide (ideally) small class settings with opportunities for direct interactions between faculty and students, and expand horizons before students dive into a chosen Major. These factors clearly contribute to our students' liberal education.

Members of the committee suggested facilitation of more informal opportunities for University-wide one credit courses, by introducing an easy course creation mechanism, for example a "University" category.

The committee also pointed out the challenges facing such a plan;

- How to ensure sufficient faculty engagement in new initiatives?  
This was discussed in the context of the former Book Project, which was discontinued due to a lack of faculty participation and interest.
- How to ensure high quality of programs? Which process should be put in place to select proposals?  
Quality control was mentioned in the context of the University Courses
- How to interface with educational policy committees from the colleges in order to determine satisfaction of existing or new requirements?

Finally, the downsides of adding more courses to the students' already overcommitted schedules were discussed. A simple scheduling problem was explained by one of the students on the committee, pointing out that ILR requires in-college credits first, before students can take distribution requirements. Another student representative voiced doubts about the value of shared academic experiences: "I just want to study Hotel Administration- the very focused program is what I came to Cornell for".

Other students on the committee made the case for a **university-wide "diversity requirement"**, in the form of a required course. The committee recognized the importance of this topic, and efforts by various colleges (CALs, ILR) to address it were reported. E.g., CALs identifies courses that satisfy a College "Human Diversity" requirement. The committee discussed the challenge of recommending such a requirement to all colleges.

A structure that is already in place and might yield itself to this need is the freshman orientation program, taken by every Cornell student. The committee discussed the possibility of adding a one credit weekly seminar that would meet during every student's first semester, to be taken on North Campus, and could be used to explore topics such as identity, diversity, and academic integrity. In addition, this course could expose students,

at least superficially, to the academic opportunities at Cornell and could also offer more effective first year advising, for example in small groups.

To conclude, we found very significant differences in the distribution requirements across colleges, and suggest an in-depth comparative curriculum review with broad representation from the colleges, as well as the alignment between the various college mission statements and the core values expressed in the University mission statement.

We believe that shared and intentional academic opportunities, especially for our Cornell freshmen, are an important contribution to our students' liberal education and sense of belonging. We recognize existing opportunities for effective shared academic experiences in the residential living-learning environment on North and West Campus.

Going forward, we suggest to investigate these opportunities further, together with existing groups such as the First Year Student Experience working group, and in close cooperation with the CAS curriculum reform committee.