

ODU REFORMED GENERAL EDUCATION

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Regarding the George Will and Suzanne Fields Perspectives columns (March 27) about the National Association of Scholars' recently released report on the "Dissolution of General Education" at American colleges and universities: This report has received much attention in The New York Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

As a faculty member who has been involved in the development of "general" education" at Old Dominion University, I believe the Hampton Roads community should be proud to hear that 10 years ago Old Dominion University addressed many of the concerns raised in this report. ODU bachelor's-degree recipients are required to have courses in natural sciences, philosophy, history, literature, the fine and performing arts and social sciences. In addition, many of the courses with which students meet these requirements must expose students to critical thinking and to materials and issues related to the perspectives of women, minorities and the non-Western cultures. These "general-education" components are in addition to composition, math, foreign languages and computer skills.

Ten years ago a Virginian-Pilot editorial applauded Old Dominion University for its plan to restore the meat and potatoes and the planned menu to the baccalaureate degree. "Two years in the making," the editorial noted, "ODU's core curriculum will increase by a third the number of class hours a degree seeker must take in general education; more importantly, it will prescribe much more exactly the kinds of courses students must take."

Clearly, Old Dominion University responded to the "dissolution" it and other universities saw 10 years ago. It took steps to remedy the situation. While ODU had not done much to promote its creative and forward-looking general-education program, I believe the wider community should be aware that we are not to be included in the programs criticized in the most-recent general-education debate.

All curricula need to evolve to reflect and meet the needs of a constantly and rapidly changing world. Old Dominion University should ensure that it retains its "meat and potatoes" while at the same time responding to the demands of change. ODU positively responded to the "dissolution" of general education 10 years ago; one may hope that it will not participate in the "dissolution" in the future.

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Norfolk, April 1, 1996