

ODU GENERAL EDUCATION REFORM



October 2025 Update

October was a busy month for General Education Reform at ODU! Martha Daas, Associate Dean for the College of Arts and Letters, kicked things off with a webinar (Oct. 3rd) to introduce the three potential general education models the reform committees have been working on for the past 18 months. Reform Committee members then took the posters around campus to have conversations with hundreds of faculty, staff, and students about what we envision for the future of general education.

[We created a video about the proposed models so you can learn more!](#)

This newsletter edition will cover the proposed models, but there is much more information on our [website](#), including a list of frequently asked questions.

We will continue to collect input throughout the fall semester, so please watch the video above or invite a member of our team to visit your department or program and then let us know your thoughts [via this survey](#).

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Big Blue stopped by to learn about the proposed models during a poster pop-up on Kaufman Mall October 9

Committee Member Spotlight

Matt Grau, Assistant Professor, Department of Physics

“These meetings have been some of the most engaging and thoughtful discussions I’ve been a part of. Everyone is so engaged and focused on making sure we build a system that serves our students. I don’t yet know what it will look like in the end, but I think it will be something quite beautiful.”



The Proposed Models

Common Elements

- ✓ **First-Year Seminar (3 credits)**
- ✓ **Core Courses (24 credits minimum)**
- ✓ **Exploratory Electives (6 credits)**
- ✓ **Capstone Course (3 credits)**

All proposed models emphasize a breadth of disciplinary exploration while meeting the General Education Learning Goals. They all require students to take part in **experiential learning**, a **writing-intensive course** in their major, and **ongoing reflective processes** to help them recognize how the general education curriculum integrates with their overall plan of study. The models differ mainly in how the **24 minimum credits of Core Courses** are organized and presented.

Model A: Core courses are aligned with **General Education Learning Goals**.

This model puts the learning goals front and center and gets away from the traditional “check the box” system. This model highlights how different disciplines can contribute to the learning goals. Some benefits of this model include connections across disciplines, greater opportunities for interdisciplinary work, ease of navigation, and student agency.

Model B: Core courses are organized into **pathways** that align with themes.

This model provides students with an integrated structure that allows them to understand the relevance of their coursework. The pathways can be based on a variety of themes. The benefits of this model are greater flexibility, greater opportunities for interdisciplinary work, and a clear curricular relevance of courses.

Model C: Core courses are organized around **subject-area** categories.

This model is based on subject area and is the most like our current model, but the requirement of an FYS along with a Capstone could provide students with a better ability to integrate learning across their general education courses.



Committee Member Spotlight

Barbara Kraj, Associate Dean for Education and Innovation, Ellmer College of Health Sciences

“To me the most rewarding aspects of the reform process are the inclusion of the professional and well-being concepts in the language of the new general education goals developed jointly by colleagues representing ODU and EVMS Legacy programs, and consideration to develop a unique first year experience fostering strong sense of belonging in all students joining our university.”

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROPOSED MODELS

Curricular Considerations

Regardless of the model chosen, the new program will be developed with our new learning goals in mind. The program must also meet SACSCOC requirements for at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. **In the next steps of Gen Ed Reform, we will engage with faculty to draft student learning outcomes and make decisions about the curricular requirements within the model.**

Exploratory Electives (6 credits)

All models incorporate 6 credits of elective courses with any prefix and at any level. To promote disciplinary exploration, these credits may not be used to satisfy major requirements.

Capstone (3 credits)

A capstone is a culminating experience, usually completed in the 3rd or 4th year of study, that requires students to synthesize and apply knowledge and skills acquired throughout their studies to an authentic situation. A capstone is required in the proposed gen ed program to bring coherence to the curriculum. It is designed for students to reflect on their undergraduate experience by drawing together their learning, skills, and goals.

Ongoing Reflective Processes

In all models, students will engage periodically in scaffolded reflection to strengthen their recognition of how their general education curriculum integrates with their overall plan of study. Reflection begins during the FYS or the first semester a student transfers to ODU. The student will build on their reflection portfolio in subsequent core courses, culminating in the Capstone course.

Writing-Intensive Courses

Writing to think, writing to learn, and writing to communicate are important elements of a student's academic journey. Writing-intensive courses are also a high-impact practice. Upper-level writing-intensive courses within the major will remain a part of the revised general education curriculum.

Experiential Learning

We talked a about experiential learning in [What's Possible in General Education](#) section in the [September newsletter](#). Incorporating Experiential Learning in these models ensures that all students have the opportunity to benefit from these high-impact learning experiences.

Student Voices in Gen Ed Reform

Emily Purdue, Senior, Media Studies

“As a transfer student who has switched their major, I love the idea of transforming the General Education structure to be more personalized to a student’s individual journey. The General Education curriculum played a huge role for me when it came to figuring out my major, and I think it is valuable for all students to have the opportunity to explore different areas of interests. One of my favorite concepts when it came to reforming the Gen Ed experience is the idea of having a capstone requirement. Documenting my experiences and accomplishments through an ePortfolio has helped me receive opportunities such as internships and scholarships. It would be a great opportunity for students to be able to come out of the Gen Education program with a digital showcase of their work and experiences.”



Gathering Feedback

On October 8, we shared the posters with students at a forum that was co-sponsored by the Student Government Association (SGA). We spoke about the models with students, who then provided feedback on the common elements and responded to the [feedback survey](#). So far around 25% of the responses we have received have come from students.

Reform committee members also took part in poster pop-ups in buildings across campus:



Committee member Tatyana Lobova discusses the potential new models with Jasmine Johnson of the SGA and David Burdige, Professor and Eminent Scholar in the Department of Ocean and Earth Sciences, at the Model Showcase on October 7.

- Batten Arts & Letters
- Constant Hall
- Darden College of Education
- Health Sciences
- Kaufman Hall
- Kaufman Mall
- Mills Godwin Building
- Perry Library
- Webb Center

Save the Date...

Join us for a [Town Hall on November 13 from 11:00AM-noon EST via Zoom](#), where we will answer some of the common questions we received this month and continue our conversations with the campus community.

Committee Member Spotlight

Jeffrey LaCombe. Associate Dean for Undergraduate and Graduate Education, Frank Batten College of Engineering and Technology

"Our General Education reform process emphasizes equipping students with broad knowledge and essential skills for today's world. Equally important, we aim to offer many personalized options that allow students to tailor their Gen Ed experience. This approach highlights how Gen Ed complements their major and prepares them for real-world challenges with skills that benefit the workforce."



What's possible in general education?

A **First Year Seminar (FYS)** is a small, discussion-based class that introduces first-year students to a college academic environment by fostering intellectual inquiry, developing good scholarship habits, and building community among students and faculty. These courses explore unique topics from disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives and are taught by professors or experts in the field, providing a more engaging and interactive learning experience than a traditional lecture. They aim to develop critical thinking skills, expose students to new subjects, and create a welcoming atmosphere for new students to connect with their peers and professors. The goal of including a 3-credit hour FYS as a requirement in the general education reform is to promote academic inquiry and foster community building, which have been shown to improve grades and support retention and progression.



Committee members Joshua Wallach, Paige O'Shaughnessy, Barbara Kraj, and Megan Mize attended the Institute on Developing and Sustaining First-Year Seminars at the University of South Carolina in September.

John Gardner, founder of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at USC, notes that students who take part in a well-designed FYS are more likely than their peers to:

- **interact with faculty and staff outside of class**
- **understand and seek assistance from university resources**
- **develop friendships with other students**
- **join clubs and organizations**
- **feel connected to the campus**
- **persist and succeed**

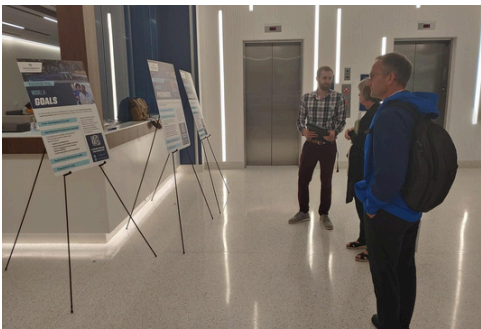
[Listen to his conversation with IHE here](#)

MODEL POSTERS ON THE MOVE!

Photos from the Model Showcase, October 7



Poster Pop-Ups Across Campus Oct 7-9



Email GenEd@odu.edu and invite us to visit your department or office with our model posters!