

Pathways General Education Curriculum  
Revision Proposal:  
Critical Analysis of Identity  
and Equity in the United States

CEOD/UCCGE Working Group

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## Summary

In May 2016, University Council approved a Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity resolution (CEOD Resolution 2015-2016C) to “review and update the ways in which intersectional diversity can be incorporated into the Pathways curriculum beginning Fall 2017” in light of the opportunity provided through “the study of diversity in the United States....” Faculty from across the University (representing 8 colleges and 28 schools and departments - see Appendix 3) participated in multiple meetings between May and August to discuss relevant issues and approaches.

In September, a working group was formed from the memberships of CEOD and the University Curriculum Committee for General Education (UCCGE) as set forth in the originating resolution. The working group synthesized the ideas from the summer discussions as well as additional meetings with segments of the campus community to produce the following core outcome area for consideration as a revision to the Pathways to General Education curriculum.

### **Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the United States**

Explores the ways social identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability status, sexual orientation, religion, veteran status, economic status, age, and other socially salient categories and statuses, influence the human condition and experience, with focus on the United States in particular or in comparative perspective.

It recognizes that people in society have had different experiences and opportunities rooted in social categories, and challenges students to consider their ethical responsibilities to others in that context and in the context of *Ut Prosim*, to enhance their capacities to be engaged citizens and visionary leaders in an increasingly diverse society.

Students will gain self-awareness of how they are situated relative to those around them based on social identities and foundational knowledge of the interactive dynamics of social identities, power and inequity.

### **Learning Indicators (Courses must meet a majority (3 of 5) of indicators)**

- Analyze human experience in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) as a reflection of interactions between social identities, statuses, space, place, traditions, and histories of inequity and power.
- Analyze social equity and diversity in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) through multiple perspectives on power and identity.
- Demonstrate how creative works analyze and/or reimagine diversity in human experiences in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective).
- Demonstrate how intersecting identities, statuses, space, place, formal traditions, and/or historical contexts in the United States are reflected in aesthetic and cultural expressions (particularly or in comparative perspective).

- Analyze the interactive relationships between place, space, identity formation, and sense of community in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective).

This outcome is proposed as a 3-credit, double-counting core outcome area. It would not entail an increase in the total number of credit hours (42) required of students under Pathways - rather, courses approved for one of the other core outcomes (Discourse, Social Science Reasoning, Critical Thinking in the Humanities, Critique and Practice in Design and the Arts, Reasoning in the Natural Sciences, and Quantitative and Computational Thinking) would simultaneously satisfy this requirement upon demonstrating that they cover a majority of the indicators. The proposal will proceed through the University Governance system during Spring, 2017.

## **Part I. Revision to Curriculum**

### **Rationale - Summary**

**The full rationale can be found in Appendix 1. The points highlighted below are more fully discussed there.**

#### ***Impetus for Change***

- Awareness of critical issues impacting the human condition is critical to the capacity of the next generation of Virginia Tech graduates to be engaged citizens and to provide visionary leadership.
- It is incumbent upon Virginia Tech to ensure that students completing their undergraduate education here have had the opportunity to develop an understanding of critical questions related to equity and identity.
- Virginia Tech's history, as well as its motto *Ut Prosim* (That I may serve) and commitment to the Principles of Community, combine to create a challenge for the university to equip students to understand how diversity and equity matter for service and lifelong learning in an increasingly diverse society.

#### ***Considerations for Revising Pathways***

Virginia Tech faculty interested in ensuring that our students are well prepared on these matters have identified several important dimensions that would be important both for adequate intellectual engagement and to fit the context of Virginia Tech's needs and capacities.

- Awareness of the dynamics of identity construction
- Knowledge of structural (systemic), historical and contemporary inequalities informed by recognition of the significance of power and positionality
- Knowledge of broad conceptions of diversity inclusive of dimensions like veteran status, disability, rurality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and political orientation, but also strongly oriented to grappling with the significance of race, gender, and class
- Ability to understand relationships among multiple aspects of diversity, while maintaining the salience of power and social, cultural, and historical context

#### ***Improving Pathways***

Pathways currently addresses issues of diversity through the Intercultural and Global Awareness integrative outcome. The absence of clear diversity related learning indicators in the Ethical Reasoning integrating outcome and the core learning outcome areas makes the following concerns about the Intercultural and Global Awareness outcome.

- Emphasis on interaction across boundaries ignores issues of inequality and power, as well as issues of diversity not rooted in culture but salient social categories

- Only vague allusion to “critical analysis of systems,” which would not necessitate an actual engagement with systemic inequality
- Ignores the role of historical and contemporary bias and discrimination in constructions and manifestations of difference
- Fails to provide any priority for or necessity of addressing domestic diversity in the United States
- The structure of Pathways allows courses and minors to address only 2 of the 3 learning indicators creating a potential gap in student exposure to key ideas related to inclusion and diversity

### ***Alignment with the Mission and Principles of Pathways***

The revision fits well within the principles of integration, inclusivity and relevance. It also would not present meaningful challenges for inclusion under the options of Pathways minors, distributive Pathways, or alternative Pathways.

## **Process and Curricular Content**

### ***Review and Revision Process***

This revision process was initiated through a resolution of the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity on April 4, 2016. The resolution specifically called for the creation of a joint working group between CEOD and UCCGE (the University Curriculum Committee for General Education) in order to “review the ways in which intersectional diversity can be incorporated into the Pathways curriculum” as a means of addressing “the study of diversity in the United States.” The resolution was approved by University Council on May 2, 2016 and specifically calls for the revision of Pathways to reflect the outcome of such a review.

Since that time, with support from the Office for Inclusion and Diversity, meetings were convened – April 20, June 20, and July 12 – involving faculty who either possessed expertise in diversity across multiple departments and colleges, saw a need to develop a more sophisticated engagement with issues of diversity and inequality, or engaged as representatives of colleges and departments seeking to ensure that any developments would consider implications across the University. These conversations were characterized as a part of the process for defining the vision of what would become the Equity and Social Disparity Strategic Growth Area, of which the revision of Pathways was regarded as a curricular component. It was in the course of these discussions that the key considerations discussed in the preceding sections were elucidated. Appendix 3 lists the colleges and departments represented by faculty members participating in the discussions, cutting across much of the university. This representation was especially crucial to ensure that the eventual revision reflected as broad a range of perspectives as possible in the time frame available.

Additional consultation with administrative and faculty leadership took place during the same time frame. Deans or associate deans from each college were consulted about the prospects for revising Pathways and the capacities and interest within their college for contributing to the

revision of existing courses or the development of new courses that could address the kinds of issues being raised by faculty in the effort to define the outcome area and learning indicators. Leaders from both UCCGE and CEOD were also involved in meetings, as were representatives of the Office for General Education (OGE). In the latter weeks of the summer, the executive board of the Faculty Senate and the president and vice president of the Student Government Association were informed of the process and consulted as to any concerns they might have about introducing such a revision to Pathways.

Upon the beginning of the academic year, the actual working group was formed by volunteers from the memberships of CEOD and UCCGE, comprised of two A/P faculty members and six instructional faculty members. The composition of the working group was not intended to be representative but rather reflected availability to participate in the ongoing activity required for the revision process. That group discussed the concerns and ideas produced in the preceding meetings and discussions and, based upon that foundation, has drafted this proposal, in ongoing consultation with OGE staff, as well as additional meetings with faculty, students, and administrators of multiple colleges to refine the proposed outcome area and learning indicators.

In the course of the discussions that took place, several options for revision were discussed. Revision to the Intercultural and Global Awareness integrative outcome was considered, but many felt that this would preclude many courses in STEM fields from opting into the Intercultural and Global outcome as the expertise to address this material in those disciplines would not be prevalent.

The integration principle of Pathways holds that “[t]he incorporation of the integrative learning outcomes--Ethical Reasoning and Intercultural and Global Awareness—throughout the curriculum will further enable students to connect the courses and identify various perspectives on these themes.” The goal of seeing integrative outcomes incorporated throughout the curriculum would be difficult to meet in this instance as the material and ideas are not considered routinely outside of specific fields and disciplines.

The possibility of creating a third integrative outcome addressing the dynamics of intersecting identities raised two concerns. First, to the extent that courses addressing this content would require some degree of specialized expertise, pursuing the integrative approach would not result in substantially more opportunities to expose students to the material. Second, a desired outcome for faculty during preliminary discussions was to ensure that Virginia Tech students are engaged with courses teaching this material, and there are no credit hour requirement for integrative outcomes.

Another option introduced was the revision of the entire Pathways curriculum to integrate intersectional diversity into the core outcome areas and learning indicators. The magnitude of the changes required for such an approach resulted in the conclusion that this option was impractical.

The final option discussed was the creation of the core outcome area and learning indicators discussed in the following section. ***The proposed outcome would entail a 3-credit***

***requirement, with courses allowed to double-count towards another core outcome - this would preclude students needing any additional credit hours under Pathways beyond the 42 already approved.***

### ***The outcome and its indicators***

#### **Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the United States**

Explores the ways social identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability status, sexual orientation, religion, veteran status, economic status, age, and other socially salient categories and statuses, influence the human condition and experience, with focus on the United States in particular or in comparative perspective.

It recognizes that people in society have had different experiences and opportunities rooted in social categories, and challenges students to consider their ethical responsibilities to others in that context and in the context of Ut Prosim, to enhance their capacities to be engaged citizens and visionary leaders in an increasingly diverse society.

Students will gain self-awareness of how they are situated relative to those around them based on social identities and foundational knowledge of the interactive dynamics of social identities, power and inequity.

#### **Learning Indicators (Courses must meet a majority (3 of 5) of indicators)**

- Analyze human experience in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) as a reflection of interactions between social identities, statuses, space, place, traditions, and histories of inequity and power.
- Analyze social equity and diversity in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) through multiple perspectives on power and identity.
- Demonstrate how creative works analyze and/or reimagine diversity in human experiences in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective).
- Demonstrate how intersecting identities, statuses, space, place, formal traditions, and/or historical contexts in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective) are reflected in aesthetic and cultural expressions.
- Analyze the interactive relationships between place, space, identity formation, and sense of community in the United States (particularly or in comparative perspective).

### ***Justification***

The chief concern raised by this option focused on the addition of general education credit hour requirements for students in majors that were already strained to make room for the existing Pathways core requirements. The response to this concern was to create a 3 credit hour requirement that can be met through courses that also meet the learning outcomes for another

core area, such as discourse, humanities, social science, and design and the arts. There have been some concerns raised that this will result in a “watering down” of content for one or both of the double counted outcomes. Perspectives connected to understanding the ways in which identities intersect are amenable to a broad range of scholarly topics and social and cultural issues, so there is no necessity of taking focus away from the substantive thrust of courses addressing other material. Rather, thinking in this manner becomes another way to grasp that material rather than competing content. As always, course integrity is ultimately a matter for instructors, but there is nothing about the consideration of the unique ways in which identities combine in experience that would of necessity lead to less rigor in double counted courses.

There was extensive discussion of the parallels and challenges related to Area 7 from the existing Curriculum for Liberal Education, which also allowed for double counting and was routinely criticized for inconsistency in the extent to which many of the courses so labeled actually addressed the substance of the area. A disadvantage for the Area 7 model was the vagueness of the learning objectives which resulted in a disconnected body of courses that failed to impact student learning in the ways intended. The proposed learning objectives for this revision are substantially more focused. An added advantage for Pathways rests with the extent to which assessment is treated as a core principle of this approach to general education, such that courses claiming to address inequality and identity will need to actually document how they address the learning indicators and report the results of evaluations of student competency for these learning indicators and those of any other area listed for the course. In instances where courses are approved for more than two core outcome areas other than this requirement, the course will only count towards this area and one other..

The indicators presented above represent the distillation of the conversations that took place in the meetings of concerned faculty and the working group, and are intended to guide the creation of classes that will facilitate the development of analytical lenses among our students that will orient them to issues of diversity and equity. The 3 credit requirement represents a reasonable and realistic compromise to the realities of general education at Virginia Tech, and, in concert with the Intercultural and Global Awareness outcome, certainly represents a step forward in preparing Virginia Tech students to engage intellectually, professionally, and personally in a diverse society and world. The proposed requirement would expose students to a sustained and intensive treatment of material that complements the integrative principle of inclusivity across the curriculum. Given that many courses in other core areas can be structured to include these learning indicators, there should be an even stronger integration of identity and equity throughout the curriculum. It also more prominently and clearly demonstrates the campus’ commitment to ensuring that issues of identity and inequality in the human condition are clearly addressed in the curriculum.

## **Part II: Implementation of Revision**

### ***Course approvals***



Courses seeking to be considered as meeting the outcome described herein, which have been approved for Pathways prior to the final disposition of this proposal, would [1]submit an addendum to Part II of the previously approved proposal. [2]Upon review by UCCGE, course approvals will follow the order of approval currently in place for Pathways courses. Courses seeking initial Pathways approval after full consideration of this proposal by university governance will follow the procedures defined in the Revised Pathways Implementation Plan (Section II, Parts A and B).

## ***Infrastructure***

### *Capacity*

For a 3 credit requirement, approximately 6,000 students would need to complete the requirement in a given year, inclusive of Summer and Winter Session courses, and possible Maymester offerings. Appendix 4 includes enrollment data from several years for 30 CLE courses that, with revision, would likely be acceptable options for this requirement. However, those enrollment capacities should be recognized as not being reflective solely of general education enrollments, since many of these courses are also being taken by students with majors and minors in those areas. Preliminary analyses indicate that roughly 10% of enrollments in these courses have their primary major in the departments offering the courses, so the majority of seats in these courses would be available for general education enrollments. However, there is no certainty that all of these courses will be proposed for inclusion in Pathways, or in this area. Therefore, it is anticipated that there will need to be additional courses proposed to meet the demand.

### *Transfer Equivalency*

Transfer credits from classes that are considered equivalent to courses approved for the proposed requirement will satisfy the Pathways requirement. The transfer equivalency appeal process will be handled in accordance with the policy currently under development by UCCGE. Importantly, the designation of course equivalents will be sensitive to the content of transfer courses. As a consequence, further engagement should occur with the appropriate administrative offices to determine whether to revisit equivalencies.

## ***Assessment***

Assessment of the proposed outcome area will follow the parameters described in the Revised Pathways Implementation Plan, Section VI, except as specified in the following items.

### *Data Sorting and Reporting*

Double-counting refers to the possibility that courses will be able to satisfy student credit requirements for the outcome area outlined herein, as well as for **one** of the other core learning outcomes, based upon the criteria already established for that area. Double-counting *does not* refer to the combination of a core learning outcome and an integrative learning outcome. Double

counting will not reduce the number of learning outcomes expected for each core outcome area, i.e., courses will still need to address at least three of the four learning outcomes described in the Outcome section of this proposal and the number of learning outcomes specified for the other area (a majority for all but Discourse, which requires that all indicators be met). The actual practical significance of double-counting refers to the degree audit process, wherein advisors and enrollment management will count courses approved for this area towards **one** other Pathways requirement.

Courses that are double counted will capture data and report out on results separately. The process through which faculty capture and report out on assessment data should adhere to the Pathways Implementation Plan, Section VI, Part D & E.

### *Rubric Development*

In a manner paralleling that described in the Revised Pathways Implementation Plan, Section VI, Part B, a faculty group will be assembled by the Office of the Provost to define criteria for competency in student performance and learning in collaboration with the Office for Assessment and the Office for General Education. That process should be completed by July 2017.

## **Support**

### *Resources*

Much of the support for implementation of Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the Human Condition would not differ greatly from what has been discussed in section VII. Support for General Education in the UCCGE Implementation Plan. (See below).

Support from the Office of the Provost, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, and the Office of the Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity is discussed in attached letters of support.

As an outcome, Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the Human Condition can be approached as a specific body of research, with its own content and theories, and in terms of the ways in which the indicators within the outcome can be explored within and across disciplines. With this in mind, there are several key areas that may need some additional considerations when it comes to resource support. While we do have a range of internal scholars published and working on research related to the indicators described in the outcome, successful implementation will require additional faculty to meet the demand. The support (both internally and externally provided) needs to consider the range and possibilities available for meeting the outcome and the indicators therein, both in terms of content and pedagogical approach.

### *Professional Development Support*

As described below, there will need to be support for **Course Development and Delivery**. There will also need to be **Professional Development** support which includes the units listed

under that section in the Revised Pathways Implementation Plan, but also perhaps with the addition of an advisory board – convened and coordinated by the Office of Inclusion and Diversity and consisting of university colleagues whose research, publication, outreach and teaching directly addresses Critical Analysis of Equity and Identity in the Human Condition and the indicators described therein.

This Course Development Delivery and Professional Development support should take place in the form of instructor, and GTA education (during and after offering courses approved for this area to facilitate effective pedagogical reflection and content clarification) as well as on-going sustained discipline-specific educational support (for those teaching courses that are accepted as meeting these outcomes).

As noted in the approved Revised Pathways Implementation Plan, many programs and offices on campus stand ready to support faculty members and students as they move forward into the Pathways curriculum. There will need to be additional conversations with these units to determine their ability to address the specifics of course content for courses proposed to meet this area versus general support for general education course development, delivery and academic advising. These include the following:

- Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDER)
- Office of Assessment and Evaluation (OAE)
- University Libraries
- Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS), Learning Experiences Design, and Networked Learning Initiatives (NLI), units within TLOS
- Diversity Development Institute
- Graduate School (training for graduate students who teach in general education)
- University Academic Advising Center
- Office of General Education (OGE)
- University Curriculum Committee for General Education

**Support for faculty members and other course instructors** will be available at every stage in the process. The professional development needs for a successful implementation range from course proposal workshops to institutes for development of minors to training for review committees. The Office of General Education will continue to work with CIDER, TLOS, Office of Assessment and Evaluation, the Diversity Development Institute and other units to offer professional development during the academic year and summers. Proposal-writing workshops for departmental committees and individual faculty will guide course planners through the process. Institutes will support faculty working to develop Pathways minor programs including outcome alignment, interdisciplinary approaches, and embedded assessment. To support faculty and other teaching professionals in the area of integrated outcomes and the proposed area, partnerships with professional development offices and faculty from relevant departments (e.g. Philosophy, Foreign Language, Business, etc.) will provide training in the form of workshops and institutes.

All full-time faculty, part-time faculty, adjunct faculty, graduate students and other course instructors will be welcome to participate in these workshops. In addition, the Office of General Education will work with professional development offices and academic departments to offer and schedule training opportunities in a structure appropriate for part-time and adjunct faculty teaching general education for the department. Graduate students will be offered professional development for teaching in Pathways as part of the GTA Training Workshop, Graduate Teaching Scholar, and Transformative Graduate Education programs.

In addition to training for proposing, teaching and assessing courses, training for departmental and college-level groups/committees responsible for proposal reviews will be coordinated by the Office of General Education.

**Advising support for students** will be available from well-informed advisors across the university. Because of the increased choices in Pathways, advising resources will include advisor training, up-to-date information on the Pathways website that includes Pathways Minors checksheets and flyers, Frequently Asked Questions, Pathways course lists by outcome, and other information for students as needed.

**Support for Advisors** will be available through regular training, updated databases, informational materials, and coordination with the University Academic Advising Center. Information will be provided not only to support student choices in Pathways, but also to support students who are completing requirements for the Curriculum for Liberal Education (CLE).

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## Appendix 1

### Comprehensive Rationale<sup>[3]</sup>

#### *Impetus for change*

Virginia Tech seeks to prepare its students for leadership and service, consistent with its motto of *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve). This means that awareness of critical issues impacting the human condition is critical to the capacity of the next generation of Virginia Tech graduates to be engaged citizens and to provide visionary leadership. They become critical participants in furthering the ideals of a just society and world, forging greater bonds nationally and globally for co-existence and cooperation.

Among those issues are questions of identity, ranging from questions about the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, to issues of gender equity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, to controversies surrounding immigration and the treatment of refugees, to the treatment of persons with disabilities and veterans, and myriad more issues of controversy and uncertainty. Citizens and leaders for the coming century must be aware of these issues, and recognize their significance across the spectrum of practical and social concerns. An increasingly diverse nation and Commonwealth means that there will be fewer prospects for avoiding the conflicts born of a troubled history and contemporary bias, discrimination, and disparate life chances. It is thus incumbent upon Virginia Tech to ensure that students completing their undergraduate education here have had the opportunity to develop an understanding of critical questions related to equity and identity. The goal must be to help students to realize their own agency in addressing these concerns, as well as that of others with whom they will deal in their future lives. Finding avenues to understanding the nature of diverse circumstances and experiences that facilitate an enhanced sense of the possibilities inherent in the human condition should be the goal. Diversity should not to be superficially celebrated, but understood for how it comes to be and how it comes to matter, with an eye towards expanded opportunity and maximized potential, individually and collectively.

Virginia Tech has its own history with which it must deal. Even as the University grapples with the fact that it is built on land from which indigenous populations were displaced, to the legacy of Smithfield plantation and Jim Crow, to the exclusion of women until the 1960s, to ongoing climate and accessibility issues, we seek to bill ourselves as a truly inclusive institution, as a model global land grant. Nearly 1 in 3 Virginia high school graduates are members of underrepresented groups, yet fewer than 1 in 10 undergraduates at VT belong to those groups. Most Virginia Tech students don't understand either why this is the case or the implications of this reality for the future prospects of Virginia and the nation.

InclusiveVT is the institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion. Grounded in the University motto of *ut prosim* (That I may serve) InclusiveVT represents the opportunity to “actualize the institutional and individual commitment... [to service] in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence.” Thinking of excellence as inclusion makes the consideration of diversity a key priority for the redefinition of general education at Virginia Tech. Also in the context of *Ut*

Prosim, preparing Virginia Tech students to serve without helping them to understand the experiences and circumstances of those in the diverse communities they likely will be serving renders the motto superficial at best. In much the same vein, the Virginia Tech Principles of Community urge that “We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.” More clearly and directly engaging our students in courses that facilitate such increased understanding within the context of Pathways makes the commitment of the Principles of Community manifest.

What do we, as a land grant university, hold to be the significance of this conversation for Virginia Tech’s vision of the 21st Century land grant university? It is appropriate to recall that land grant colleges were created, in part, to expand the reach of higher education in the United States. Bringing to bear the capacities of higher education on issues in agriculture and rural life, and creating opportunities for non-elites to benefit from a college education, the American land grant mission had at its core the creation of more inclusive education. Equipping future students with a more meaningful perspective on equity and identity represents an opportunity to revamp the land grant mission to expand access yet again, as well as shaping our students to become conduits for the impact of higher education in diverse communities and organizations.

Making Virginia Tech’s general education curricula more meaningfully engaged with the interactions of identities and questions of inequality makes good on the invocation of the human condition as a chief component of the strategic vision for the next 30 years. Without the ability to teach our students about the nuances of identity and inequality domestically and globally, we are hard pressed to claim that the human condition is well understood even as such issues are increasingly visible.

### ***Considerations for Revising Pathways***

Addressing identity and inequality can be done in many ways. Virginia Tech faculty interested in ensuring that our students are well prepared on these matters have identified several important dimensions that would be important both for adequate intellectual engagement and to fit the context of Virginia Tech’s needs and capacities.

- Awareness of the dynamics of identity construction

Effective instruction on diversity often taps into issues of identity. Orienting students to their own identities provides an engaging way to introduce issues of difference, helping them to understand that diversity is not just about others, but rather about the human condition as a whole. Moving from there to a broader conversation about identities and their roots in culture, experience, and social location is eased by the connection to their own experience. It is also at this point that the simultaneity of identities becomes crucial, as students come to recognize not only their own individuality as partly produced by the combination of identities linked to the categories to which they belong, but also the distinctiveness of experience and circumstance for everyone, rooted in the interactions of their identities. The development of empathy for others

who belong to groups and communities other than their own is eased by beginning with their own identities.

- Knowledge of structural (systemic), historical and contemporary inequalities informed by recognition of the significance of power and positionality

Identities matter in the context of history and social location, as points of what Stuart Hall (1996) called “suturing,” through which we come to orient social interaction, capacities for decision making, and access to power and privilege. Students thus need to come to grips with the dynamics of systems of privilege and their roots in historical and contemporary inequality. This will allow them to understand contemporary issues as not simply moments of controversy and conflict, but as manifestations of ongoing imbalances of power and control mediated through institutional disparities and individual biases.

The elements discussed above represent crucial components of intersectionality, a perspective most powerfully associated with feminists of color (Crenshaw 1988), but which has proven to be insightful in a whole range of contexts and intellectual traditions.<sup>1</sup> Developing an analytical lens informed by considering the ways in which identities interact with one another allows one to grasp not only the nature of calls for social justice and possibilities for the building of coalitions for social change, but also the complexity of human experience and circumstance in ways that lend themselves to effective leadership in diverse organizations and communities.

- Discussion of broad conceptions of diversity, such as veteran status, disability, rurality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and political orientation, but also strongly oriented to grappling with the significance of race, gender, and class

Approaches to diversity grounded in the complexity of identity lend themselves to inclusive conceptions of difference – i.e., “diversity broadly conceived.” Recognizing the multiple character of identities is a fundamental component of the intersectional lens, and students begin to recognize how virtually any identity impinges upon, and influences the experience of, other identities. As a result, being a veteran, or coming from a rural community, or being socially conservative matter for how students understand their own experiences and those of others. Recognition of the significance of social location, power, and privilege also allows students to understand that race, gender, and socioeconomic status matter profoundly for the significance

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<sup>1</sup> Intersectionality is an intellectual and scholarly tradition in its own right. The proposed outcome area is not intended to require faculty to teach from the perspective of intersectional scholars nor to require students to know the core tenets of intersectionality as articulated by feminist scholars, though that can be a very powerful way to meet the goals of this area. Rather, it borrows the metaphor of intersection to frame the ways in which identities, categories, and social locations merge to produce unique combinations of circumstances and experiences, and to connect those combinations to issues of power and inequity. Beyond that metaphor, faculty may use any relevant theoretical approaches to help students understand the specific issues being addressed in the courses.



of identity, resulting in a greater capacity to understand the roots of some of the most prominent issues related to diversity in the U.S.

- Ability to understand the relationships among and between multiple aspects of diversity, while maintaining the salience of power and social, cultural, and historical context

Several peer institutions have adopted mandatory diversity course requirements – for example, the University of California, Berkeley has instituted an American Cultures requirement, while the University of Illinois has approved a U.S. Minorities standard. **Some specifically have required courses dealing with race and ethnicity, while others have required students to choose from among several options, especially courses dealing with issues of race, ethnicity, or gender.** Integrative outcomes are one way of addressing this concern. However, as noted earlier in this proposal, there are concerns raised by solely pursuing diversity via the integrative approach here at Virginia Tech. **By defining a new Pathways requirement in terms of a comprehensive lens related to intersecting identities, Virginia Tech would take an innovative step that would preclude the need for prioritizing, or arbitrarily choosing, any given dimension of diversity.**

Effective approaches to identity maintain the significance of context. Students need to be able to situate identities in social location, history, and arrays of other relationships to grasp the dynamics of diversity. Doing so would avoid replicating superficial versions of diversity that lack efficacy in providing meaningful understanding of key issues in American society and the connections between identities and life chances – the essential elements of the human condition.

### ***Improving Pathways***

Pathways currently incorporates diversity through the Intercultural and Global Awareness integrative outcome area. The integrative outcomes require that instructors of all Pathways approved courses select either Intercultural and Global Awareness or Ethical Reasoning (or both). The utilization of integrative outcomes makes it more likely that material such as diversity will be connected in meaningful ways to the other content students are learning across the university, a chief goal of the approved Pathways to General Education. As a result, issues of cultural interaction, cross-cultural empathy, and global context are not addressed as discrete subject matter, but as relevant for much of what students come to learn.

Nonetheless, there are a number of shortcomings to the Intercultural and Global Awareness outcome as currently approved. There is also a fundamental lack of reference to diversity in the learning indicators of the Ethical Reasoning integrative outcome and every Core Outcome Area, such that the only exposure to diversity required by Pathways comes via the Intercultural and Global Area. Reference to interconnections among and differences between social institutions and groups in the Social Science Reasoning area comes close, but this indicator can be satisfied without addressing core issues related to inequality and identity. While there may indeed be courses that include some of the material about which concern has been registered, it

is likely that many will not, and, in turn, it is likely that students will leave Virginia Tech without having been exposed to the kinds of learning experiences that will prepare them for an increasingly diverse society and world. Revision to Pathways should address these concerns.

- Emphasis on interaction across cultural boundaries

While cross-cultural interactions are of obvious importance, contemporary treatments of diversity understand that issues of cultural difference are only one aspect of a broader spectrum with which our students need to be familiar. In many instances, those with whom our students will interact and/or about whom our students must think have far more in common with them culturally than there is distinctiveness. Categories of socially salient difference, such as sexual orientation and sexual identity, or class and disability matter powerfully for the experience of diversity, but go unaddressed by a focus on cultural interaction.

This approach also maintains the fallacious premise that diversity is linked to difficulties because of negative interaction and miscommunication. It absolutely fails to address any notion of inequality and power, of institutional barriers and cumulative disadvantage.

- Only vague allusion to “critical analysis of systems,” which would not necessitate an actual engagement with systemic inequality.

By referencing the “...critical analysis of global systems and legacies,” the Intercultural and Global Awareness area introduces the prospect of courses raising the issue of social, political, economic, and cultural systems. But it also lends itself to concern with other sorts of systems that are less directly connected to patterns of inequality and marginalization. Understandably, the recognition of systems and their implications for human life chances has broad relevance in agriculture, ecology and environmental sustainability, but it is crucial that students come to understand the nature and consequences of systems originating in human contexts and the current diversity related learning indicators do not address that need.

- Ignores the role of historical and contemporary bias and discrimination in constructions and manifestations of difference

The manifestations of diversity in life chances and experience are fundamentally tied to issues of differential treatment and bias. For our students to be adequately prepared to grapple with the issues of difference in their organizations and communities requires that they grasp the realities of discrimination arrayed along multiple dimensions of difference, and understand the ways in which individual, institutional, and systemic patterns of bias matter for the lived realities of many of the people with whom they will have contact.

The description of the Intercultural and Global Awareness area, as well as the learning indicators, omit any clear reference to discrimination and bias. As a result, it is entirely feasible that many courses will also fail to address these factors and students may never grasp the

historical and contemporary significance of discrimination and bias across dimensions and contexts.

- Fails to provide any priority for, or necessity of, addressing domestic diversity

We live in an increasingly global reality. It is incumbent upon the University to equip our students to operate in such a context. But it is also important to understand that the great majority of our students will not live and work abroad, but in the United States. As a result, **the nature of domestic diversity and controversies surrounding it are the most salient issues of diversity with which Virginia Tech students should be familiar.** This argument in no way precludes the consideration of global questions of difference, but emphasizes the importance of making sure that Virginia Tech students come to grips with the distinct issues surrounding diversity in the United States.

**The Intercultural and Global Awareness area makes no specific differentiation between global issues of cross-cultural interaction and domestic issues connected to a distinctive historical and contemporary cultural and structural context unique to the United States.** It is indeed important that our students be ready should they need to conduct business or otherwise interact with someone who is from another country. But it is far more likely that they will need to understand the complexity of issues of identity and equity **in the context of the United States in order to ensure that they are prepared to lead and serve in this society.**

- The structure of Pathways allows courses and minors to address only 2 of the 3 learning indicators creating a potential gap in student exposure to key ideas related to inclusion and diversity

Were the Intercultural and Global Awareness area sufficient in its treatment of issues of diversity and inclusion, the current standard requires that courses identified as addressing that area meet only two of the three learning indicators. As a consequence, it is conceivable that students would meet the requirements of Pathways without having engaged with issues and ideas crucial to making sense of how diversity matters and the tensions arising from efforts at addressing it.

### ***Alignment with the Mission and Principles of Pathways***

- Integration

The principle of integration in general education refers to the development of curricula that allow students to make connections across the general education experience. Successfully implemented, integrated general education results in course sequences that build upon one another and facilitate the development of knowledge and skills that are not constrained by disciplinary or professional boundaries.

Approaches focused on the intersections of identities and social systems lend themselves to a range of subjects and topics, as they relate to the distinctiveness of human experience and circumstance. Scholars in the social sciences and humanities have been especially associated

with such analyses. There are also scholars in fields such as agriculture, public health and medicine, fine and performing arts who have found the analytical lens associated with intersectional approaches useful for producing scholarship relevant to their fields. Thus, thinking about identities and experiences in terms of intersection is itself an integrative approach.

Understanding the implications of disparate life chances, privilege, and power is meaningful across a wide range of academic disciplines and professional fields. Recognition of the ways in which identities come to be expressed in various types of cultural artifacts similarly provides a useful way to understand varied approaches to creativity and innovation that are applicable to a whole range of majors and academic interests. A variety of courses should also allow the inclusion of this material into Pathways minors as a further layer of embeddedness across the multiple colleges and departments.

- Inclusivity

Inclusivity refers to the ability of general education to offer equitable opportunities for learning regardless of the path students have taken to Virginia Tech. The Pathways curriculum plan also specifically includes course content addressing diversity as a component of this principle.

Courses addressing this outcome area will be focused explicitly on issues of diversity. The most effective pedagogical approaches for teaching the relevant material reflect key principles of inclusive, high-impact teaching. Teaching students about their own identities and those of others also presents opportunities for building more inclusive climate in the classroom.

- Relevance

The impetus for proposing this revision is fundamentally about the relevance of the Pathways curriculum for preparing our students to be leaders and engaged citizens in a diverse society, which is the focus of this principle of general education. The faculty who have participated in the conversations leading to this proposal felt that reconsidering the manner in which general education at Virginia Tech addresses difference, power, and inequality was crucial to ensuring that undergraduate students become cognizant of the fundamentals of work, life, and service in a society that is increasingly diverse. The analytical lenses they develop will prove to be valuable across multiple dimensions of their lives – academic, professional, civic, and social. Studies have demonstrated a range of positive benefits for students taking courses that address issues of diversity and inequality.

As course development and revision proceeds, it is anticipated that courses will be integrated into both new and existing Pathways minors. There is also the prospect for the creation of Pathways minors focused on diversity and intersectionality. Students pursuing the distributive model and alternative Pathways will need to enroll in courses approved for this area just as they recognize the requirement to meet other outcome area requirements. Engagement with academic advisors as described in the implementation section will minimize any difficulties with degree audits to ensure that double-counted courses are appropriately applied.

## **Appendix 2**

### **CEOD/UCCGE Working Group**

Sheila Carter-Tod, English, CLAHS (UCCGE)

Raifu Durodoye, Institutional Assessment and Effectiveness (CEOD)

Martha Glass, Division of Student Affairs (UCCGE)

Ellington Graves, Africana Studies/Sociology, CLAHS (CEOD & UCCGE)

Erika Meitner, English, CLAHS (CEOD)

Michel Pleimling, Physics, CoS (UCCGE)

Takumi Sato, School of Education, CLAHS (CEOD)

Jim Spotila, Geosciences, CoS (UCCGE)

### **Support**

Stephen Biscotte, OGE

Marcy Schnitzer, OID

Mercedes Ramirez, OID

Fang Fang, OID

Menah Pratt-Clarke, OID

## **Appendix 3**

### **Faculty Participation in Pathways Revision Discussions**

**College of Architecture and Urban Studies** – School of Visual Arts, School of Public and International Affairs, Urban Affairs and Planning, Landscape Architecture

**Pamplin College of Business** – Management

**College of Agriculture and Life Sciences** – Agricultural Leadership, Crop and Soil Environmental Science, Agricultural Economics

**College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences** – Sociology, English, Human Development, History, Religion and Culture, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Political Science, School of Education, School of Performing Arts, Science and Technology in Society

**College of Natural Resources and the Environment** – Fish and Wildlife Conservation, Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, Geography

**College of Science** – Physics, Chemistry, Geosciences, Psychology

**College of Engineering** – Engineering Education, Biomedical Engineering

**College of Veterinary Medicine**

## Appendix 4

### Potential Courses from CLE (Areas 2, 3, and 7)

Dept/Program	Course #	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
		Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity
AFST	1714	223	260	172	185	207	235
AFST	1814	99	106	123	165	98	115
AINS/HUM	1104						
COMM/HUM/RLCL	3204	43		43		41	60
EDCI	3024						
GEOG	2214						
GEOG	4074	29		28		37	
HD	2304						
HD	2314			144		476	
HIST	1004	146	160				
HUM/APS	1704	310	319	337	345	356	386
HUM/APS	4404	24	35	38	35	32	35
IS/PSCI/SPIA	1004	162	600	59	300	39	270
RLCL/RLCL	1004						
REL/RLCL	1024	71	80	126	115	85	75
REL/RLCL	1034	56	75	96	110	182	190
REL/RLCL/WGS	2234	17	25	18	25	20	25
SOC	1004	2295	2420	2363	2650	2494	2745
SOC	2004	162	105	132	136	198	175
SOC	2014	195	195	176	175	132	140
SOC	2024	159	150	140	173	181	113
SOC	2034						
SOC	3004	123	105	136	111	129	137
SOC	3304	38	50	39	50	48	50
SOC/HUM/RLCL	2514						
UAP	1024	279	208	267	308	299	340
UAP	4214	11		9		6	
WS/WGS	1824	589	680	660	690	744	780
WS/WGS	2224	62	65	43	50	40	50
WS/WGS	2254	23	25	25	25	28	25
WS/WGS/SOC/AFST	2264	16	25	43	55	44	55
WS/WGS	3214	11		13		14	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>5245</b>	<b>5848</b>	<b>5349</b>	<b>5863</b>	<b>6086</b>	<b>6161</b>

**Appendix 4**  
**Potential Courses from CLE (continued)**

Dept/Program	Course #	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
		Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity
AFST	1714	244	279	232	279	238	280
AFST	1814	122	145	95	115	99	115
AINS/HUM	1104	152	160	369	372	314	329
COMM/HUM/RLCL	3204	63		41		31	
EDCI	3024			20	25	19	25
GEOG	2214			32	25		
GEOG	4074	42		42	25	41	
HD	2304			77	65	156	175
HD	2314	759		811		769	809
HIST	1004						
HUM/APS	1704	428	460	431	460	403	420
HUM/APS	4404	26	35	30	35	15	35
IS/PSCI/SPIA	1004	145	530	89	255	70	300
RLCL/RLCL	1004						
REL/RLCL	1024	101	105	167	160	102	115
REL/RLCL	1034	26	35	8	35	56	80
REL/RLCL/WGS	2234	21	25			32	65
SOC	1004	2112	2214	1922	2065	1894	2295
SOC	2004	207	252	296	355	143	185
SOC	2014	146	160	138	160	142	150
SOC	2024	116	178	119	138	125	143
SOC	2034						
SOC	3004	120	160	122	159	113	159
SOC	3304	43	49	47	49	43	49
SOC/HUM/RLCL	2514					34	35
UAP	1024	278	320	250	302	191	260
UAP	4214	7				8	
WS/WGS	1824	621	715	664	735	544	620
WS/WGS	2224	67	80	47	50	45	50
WS/WGS	2254	22	30	28	30	25	30
WS/WGS/SOC/AFST	2264	45	55	79	85	50	54
WS/WGS	3214	15		5		19	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>6075</b>	<b>6147</b>	<b>6333</b>	<b>6199</b>	<b>5848</b>	<b>6996</b>



**Appendix 4**  
**Potential Courses from CLE (continued)**

Dept/Program	Course #	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
		Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity
AFST	1714	253	330	296	380	322	390
AFST	1814	99	115	102	115	142	165
AINS/HUM	1104	394	369	315	329	262	292
COMM/HUM/RLCL	3204	36		90		32	
EDCI	3024	22	25	22	25		
GEOG	2214					40	40
GEOG	4074	49		33		45	
HD	2304	206	140	364	420	457	615
HD	2314	267	355	1132		1133	
HIST	1004						
HUM/APS	1704	400	440	447	742	499	1070
HUM/APS	4404	26	35	18	60	23	60
IS/PSCI/SPIA	1004	72	185	62	210	40	40
RLCL/RLCL	1004			7	25		
REL/RLCL	1024	98	115	136	155	171	210
REL/RLCL	1034	64	80	22	40	118	100
REL/RLCL/WGS	2234	35	65	40	71	50	94
SOC	1004	1666	2313	1499	1843	1670	1996
SOC	2004	218	200	187	170	227	265
SOC	2014	153	150	183	223	175	210
SOC	2024	114	143	160	183	139	163
SOC	2034						
SOC	3004	127	158	129	180	117	165
SOC	3304	41	55				
SOC/HUM/RLCL	2514	29	35	12	35	20	35
UAP	1024	158	210	116	230	101	185
UAP	4214						
WS/WGS	1824	447	470	430	540	409	491
WS/WGS	2224	32	50	38	48	30	55
WS/WGS	2254	16	30	17	30	30	40
WS/WGS/SOC/AFST	2264	19	24	40	49	39	55
WS/WGS	3214	8		8		11	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>5095</b>	<b>6172</b>	<b>5905</b>	<b>6103</b>	<b>6316</b>	<b>6776</b>

**Appendix 4**  
**Potential Courses from CLE (continued)**

Subject	No.	2014-15		2015-16	
		Enrollment	Capacity	Enrollment	Capacity
AFST	1714	361	439	317	
AFST	1814	143	152	172	
AINS/HUM	1104	274	292	294	
COMM/HUM/RLCL	3204	142		233	
EDCI	3024			31	
GEOG	2214	34	35		
GEOG	4074	65		39	
HD	2304	388	470	334	
HD	2314	1335		1208	
HIST	1004				
HUM/APS	1704	437	940	432	
HUM/APS	4404	15		12	
IS/PSCI/SPIA	1004	68	75	250	
RLCL/RLCL	1004	50	120	66	120
REL/RLCL	1024	105	145	131	
REL/RLCL	1034	141	186	119	
REL/RLCL/WGS	2234	48	80		
SOC	1004	2135	2213	1640	
SOC	2004	267	355	267	
SOC	2014	136	160	98	
SOC	2024	155	212	149	
SOC	2034			17	
SOC	3004	85	165	111	
SOC	3304				
SOC/HUM/RLCL	2514	22		36	
UAP	1024	88	185	56	
UAP	4214	5		5	
WS/WGS	1824	423	492	543	
WS/WGS	2224	23	55	37	
WS/WGS	2254	20	40	19	
WS/WGS/SOC/AFST	2264	47	50	22	
WS/WGS	3214	6		6	
TOTALS		7018	6861	6644	120

**Appendix 4**  
**Potential Courses from CLE (continued)**

**AFST 1714 - Introduction to African American Studies**

**AFST 1814 - Introduction to African Studies**

**AINS/HUM 1104 - Introduction to American Indian Studies**

**COMM/HUM/RLCL 3204 - Multicultural Communication**

**EDCI 3024 - Issues in American Schooling**

**ENGL 1664 - Introduction to Women's Literature**

**ENGL 1674 - Introduction to African American Literature**

**GEOG 2214 - Geography of North America**

**GEOG 4074 - Medical Geography**

**HD 2304 - Human Sexuality**

**HD 2314 - Human Sexuality**

**HIST 1004 - Introduction to the History of the United States**

**HUM/APS 1704 - Introduction to Appalachian Studies**

**HUM/APS 4404 - Appalachian Folk Cultures**

**IS/PSCI/SPIA 1004 - Nations and Nationalities**

**REL/RLCL 1004 - Investigations in Religion and Culture**

**REL/RLCL 1024 - Judaism, Christianity, Islam**

**REL/RLCL 1034 - Religion and the Modern World**

**REL/RLCL/WGS 2234 - Women, Ethics, and Religion**

**SOC 1004 - Introduction to Sociology**

**SOC 2004 - Social Problems**

**SOC 2014 - Dating, Marriage, and Divorce**

**SOC 2024 - Minority Group Relations**

**SOC 2034 - Diversity and Community Engagement**

**SOC 3004 - Social Inequality**

**SOC 3304 - Collective Action**

**SOC/HUM/RLCL 2514 - Asian American Experience**

**UAP 1024 - Public Issues in an Urban Society**

**UAP 4214 - Women, Environment, and Development in a Global Perspective**

**WS/WGS 1824 - Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies**

**WS/WGS 2224 - Women and Creativity**

**WS/WGS 2254 - Feminist Activism**

**WS/WGS/SOC/AFST 2264 - Race, Class, Gender, and Sexualities**

**WS/WGS 3214 - Global Feminisms**

**Additional potential courses identified by the Department of English**

**ENGL 1664 Introduction to Women's Literature, 1 per year @ 80 students**

**ENGL/AINS 2804 Contemporary Native American Literature, ? @ 35 students (has not been taught in 5 years, hoping to resurrect it)**

**ENGL 3134 Gender and Linguistics, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL3144 Language and Ethnicity in the United States, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL 3364 Topics in Literature by Women, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL 3514 Ethnic Literature for Children, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL 3624 Appalachian Literature, ? @35 students (hasn't had sufficient enrollments in recent years)**

**ENGL 3634 African-American Literature, ? @ 35 students (hasn't had sufficient enrollments in recent years)**

**ENGL 3644 The Postcolonial Novel, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL 3654 Ethnic American Literature, ? @ 35 students (have not had anyone to teach it for a few years)**

**ENGL 3694 Topics in World Novels, 1 per year @ 35 students**

**ENGL 3834 Intercultural Issues in Professional Writing, 1 per year @ 25 students**