

Common Curriculum and Assessment Update – Summer 2021

The Common Curriculum (www.smu.edu/commoncurriculum) was approved by the faculty and the Board of Trustees in spring 2019. The Common Curriculum was a replacement for, and a revised and streamlined version of the University Curriculum (implemented in 2012 and revised in 2016). The learning outcomes and rubrics for each component were developed by faculty committees and approved by the Council on General Education in the 2019-2020 academic year.

In late spring and summer 2020, all SMU undergraduate courses that fulfilled requirements under the University Curriculum were evaluated for rollover to the Common Curriculum. This work was done by faculty vetting committees. Courses in the UC were evaluated for equivalent components in the CC. Committees reviewed the most recent syllabus available, as well as the archived UC course proposal to determine whether the course satisfied the newly drafted Common Curriculum learning outcomes and content criteria. Courses that were not rolled over automatically through this process could still be proposed to the Council on General Education for inclusion in the CC. As a result of this conversion process, there are currently, approximately 620 courses approved for the CC from more than 60 departments. A full list of CC courses is available here:

<https://www.smu.edu/Provost/ProvostOffice/CIP/UndergraduateCurriculum/Common-Curriculum/Courses>

Students who matriculated in fall 2020 and spring 2021 matriculated under the Common Curriculum, and the transition has been relatively seamless. Transfer students and those who work with transfer students at the university have reported that the Common Curriculum is, as intended, more transfer friendly, which was one goal of the curriculum changeover. As a result of the expedited rollout, students entering in fall 2020 and spring 2021 were given a one-time exception that allowed them to count two dual-credit courses or two additional AP courses toward Breadth requirements. Typically, dual-credit courses can not be applied toward Breadth requirements, and students are limited in the number of AP credits they can apply toward Breadth requirements. However, because students were notified after being admitted that the general education curriculum would be changing, this exception was granted (for students entering fall 2020 or spring 2021 only). The exception expired in May so students are no longer able to petition dual-credit or additional AP credit towards these requirements.

Two policy changes were implemented this year with respect to the Common Curriculum. The original CC rules prohibited students from applying post-matriculation transfer credit toward fulfillment of the CC Breadth requirements, effective fall 2021. Students will now be able to petition post-matriculation courses toward CC requirements. The form to request this is in the Registrar's Forms Library along with other academic petitions. You can access the Registrar's Forms Library here:

<https://www.smu.edu/EnrollmentServices/Registrar/FormsLibrary.aspx>

Please note that most students may still only satisfy up to three Breadth requirements with test credit or courses taken outside of SMU. The second policy change is that students matriculating Fall 2021 or later will be able to petition Calculus or Statistics courses taken as concurrent enrollment courses toward the Quantitative Reasoning Foundation, whereas this was prohibited under original CC rules. The petition is also available on the Registrar's Forms Library:

<https://smu365.sharepoint.com/sites/esign/SitePages/CC%20Dual-Credit%20Quantitative%20Reasoning%20Petition.aspx>.

The CC ushered in some changes for the Council on General Education. One significant change is the creation of the Writing Board, a committee that reports to the Council on General Education and that oversees all writing components in the Common Curriculum. Courses proposed for Writing or Writing in the Major are reviewed by both the Writing Board and the Council on General Education, and Writing courses taught during intersessions are also reviewed by the Writing Board. The Writing Board will also play an active role in the review of assessment data from Writing courses and in creating supporting resources for faculty who teach writing.

A second change that came with the CC is the expanded scope of the Council on General Education's engagement with the assessment of General Education. The Council on General Education will work closely with the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness to review assessment data from the Common Curriculum and will analyze that data to look for opportunities for improvement. In order to ensure there is sufficient time to complete this work, the Council on General Education has designated two meetings per semester for course review and approval. The second meeting of each term will be devoted to the review of course proposals toward the Common Curriculum, and the second to last meeting of each term will be devoted to the review of revised course proposals. These meetings are indicated on the schedule of Council of General Education meetings:

<https://www.smu.edu/Provost/ProvostOffice/CIP/UndergraduateCurriculum/CouncilGEC>

Faculty should take this change into account when planning new courses and should submit any course proposals to the Office of General Education no later than 1 week prior to the second Council meeting of the term. Faculty should also propose courses to the Council at least one semester in advance of offering the course.

All exceptions and changes to policy were reviewed and approved by relevant governance and oversight bodies, including (where appropriate) the Council on General Education, the Academic Policies Committee of the Senate, the Educational Programs Council, the Provost, and the Board of Trustees.

In addition to the change in the structure and content of the curriculum, SMU also instituted a new method of general education assessment as well as a new cycle of assessment. This summer marked the inaugural term of assessing general education's student learning outcomes. As a replacement for assessing every component, from every course, every term—a method the UC relied on—the new method of post-hoc (juried) assessment now reviews a sample of student artifacts on a 3-year cycle.

This summer, 4 committees of faculty, experts in each component, are convening to review and assess student work from Academic Writing, Critical Reasoning, Second Language—Modern (French, German, Italian, Spanish), and Quantitative Reasoning. Upon completion of their scoring, the committees will provide recommendations to the Council on General Education based on their observations. Recommendations may include revising course content criteria, outcome statements, rubrics, and assessment assignments. Assessment results will also be provided to offer an overview of how students are performing across the curricular component rather than within a single course.

There is still work to do on the Common Curriculum. While most components have sufficient numbers of seats, we are actively seeking courses to satisfy the Technological Advances and Society Breadth and the Civics and Individual Ethics and Quantitative Analysis Proficiency components. We urge faculty who teach courses that could satisfy these requirements to propose their courses for them. Course proposal forms may be found here:

<https://www.smu.edu/Provost/ProvostOffice/CIP/UndergraduateCurriculum/Common-Curriculum/Resources/Faculty>.

Writing in the Major also remains a concern, as only a handful of departments have designated Writing in the Major courses for their students. We urge any department that has not designated Writing in the Major courses for their majors to contact the Office of General Education to do so immediately.

The Office of General Education will be doing a full review of the Common Curriculum implementation and a comparative analysis of student progress through the UC and the CC this summer.

We are also happy to announce that we will be bringing back the General Education Pop-Up in Fondren Starbucks next academic year. This is an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to bring questions about the UC or the CC directly to us. The pop-up will be in Fondren Starbucks every other Wednesday starting in September. We will post the dates on the Common Curriculum and University Curriculum websites.

On the whole, the implementation of the Common Curriculum has been successful. As a result of the accelerated implementation of the Common Curriculum and the introduction of post-hoc (juried) assessment, SMU successfully completed the SACSCOC review of general education and general education assessment. We wish to thank the members of the Council on General Education, the Writing Board, the members of the CC faculty committees, the SMU Admissions team, the Division of Enrollment Services and the Office of the Registrar, the University Advising Center, and faculty and staff and the Records Offices of each college and school for all of their work bringing this new curriculum into existence.