

# Imagining Duke Curriculum Committee

**To:** Arts & Sciences Community

**From:** Imagining Duke Curriculum Committee

**Date:** January 12, 2016

**Re:** Update on a Possible Conceptual Framework

How do we craft a liberal arts and sciences curriculum that represents Duke's boldest academic aspirations and exemplifies the ethos of our shared scholarly community? As part of our ongoing conversation with faculty, staff and students, we outline here a draft conceptual framework for a new undergraduate curriculum at Duke. This first draft is a structure that we hope begins to capture our shared aspirations. We now invite faculty to think through this possible structure with us.

**Background.** After two years of preliminary discussion, planning and initial due diligence, the Dean of Arts & Sciences and the Chair of the Arts & Sciences Council jointly charged an eleven-person faculty committee<sup>1</sup> with undertaking a critical review of the current curriculum and recommending ways to redesign undergraduate education at Duke in the fall of 2014.

The framework we outline here emerged out of an intensive 15-month effort that included rigorous self-study, an exhaustive comparative examination of curricular formulations at peer institutions, and a deep dive into higher education literature. More specifically, we:

1. Paired a thorough review of the different curricula at each of our Council of Higher Education (COFHE) peers, recent significant revisions at Harvard, Stanford and Washington University, and smaller innovations across the country with an analysis of the literature on US higher education;
2. Examined longitudinal enrollment patterns at Duke as well as data on different major, minor and certificate combinations as students presently pursue them at Duke;
3. Held more than 200 meetings and focus groups with faculty, staff, students and alumni including weekly open committee meetings and meetings with departments across A&S.

**Guiding Principles.** Working inductively from this material, three things became clear and these findings constitute the guiding principles for what we offer here.

1. **We have both a responsibility and an opportunity to reassert and reimagine the value of a liberal arts education.** The liberal arts and sciences landscape is both under siege and in flux. The value of the liberal arts is contested in no place more than here in North Carolina where a narrow utilitarianism dominates debate about public higher education. At the same time, knowledge, what constitutes it, and how it is created and shared continues to evolve. Our redesigned curriculum needs to embrace the challenges of this new ecology creatively and deliberatively. Of course, Duke graduates still need to be ethically responsible, able to engage multiple languages and logics, be theoretically versatile, able to mount sophisticated arguments and able to deploy appropriate data and evidence. But how we cultivate this

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<sup>1</sup> The committee includes Lee Baker, David Bell, Gary Bennett, Sheila Dillon, Anita Layton, Mohamed Noor, Liliana Paredes, Matt Serra, Suzanne Shanahan, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Inge Walther. The committee was also advised by a broader committee including 22 additional faculty, staff and students.

sensibility, these perspectives and capabilities needs rethinking at Duke and beyond. Our students need more than ever to be challenged and empowered to be intellectually and personally creative, agile and resilient. For their part, Duke faculty have both a leadership opportunity and a responsibility to reassert the value of the liberal arts and shape how it is reimagined locally and nationally. This is an exciting moment.

2. **Simple is good; simple and more scholarly is even better.** Both faculty and students have made clear that the current curriculum is often an impediment to taking full advantage of the range of scholarly opportunities Duke now offers. And while there is much to admire in Curriculum 2000, over time its administration has encouraged instrumentalism on the part of faculty and students alike. The community overwhelmingly asked for something simple that affords more opportunities for intellectual exploration.
3. **The curriculum should be a defining feature of the Duke undergraduate experience.** Planning for Curriculum 2000 began almost 20 years ago. Clearly much has changed since the 1990s. Duke is different; Durham is different. The opportunities and challenges our students will face in life are different. Indeed, the A&S faculty has experienced an almost 2/3rds turnover since 2000. Duke faculty, staff and students are eager for something new that reflects these changes. They asked for something bold, something inspirational and something that reflects the very best of what Duke is today. Good is not good enough at Duke. Many believe that Duke can, and should, be known for its curriculum.

Working from these guiding principles, the committee considered a wide range of possible models and structures. What we outline here grew directly out of what we heard from faculty and students, the data we examined and the national trends we studied. This framework is what a committee of faculty from departments across the university together identified as a bold way forward in the collective best interests of our students. We are calling it *Experience Duke, Deliberately*.

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### **Experience Duke, Deliberately**

#### *The Promise of a Duke Education*

The Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum at Duke is an invitation to a scholarly community of faculty, staff and students. A Duke education is a deliberative, 4-year intellectual adventure where what you do inside and outside the classroom, studio and lab are part of an integrated academic experience. At Duke a liberal arts education is about learning to learn for a lifetime.

Throughout their Duke experience, students are challenged to articulate the questions, ideas and issues that animate them. Their course of study will reflect a unique combination of these passions—which Duke alone can offer—and the intellectual values we share as a community. It demands close reading, deep thinking and engaged analysis.

The specific contours of the Duke curriculum reflect both the particular traditions of scholarly excellence *and* the shared values and social commitments of the Duke academic community, including diversity, equity, knowledge both in the service of society and for its own sake, and moral purpose. Through an emphasis on shared commitments, Duke reinforces the obligations of its national and international leadership in these same areas and on these same issues. The curriculum also reflects what is extraordinary about the liberal arts in an international research university. That Duke is in Durham, North Carolina, while sponsoring programs and projects worldwide, necessarily frames the undergraduate scholarly experience. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship,

mentored research, global education, local engagement, and community-based and experiential learning are all foundational elements of any Duke undergraduate experience.

### *Coherent Scholarly Pathways*

In this draft conceptual framework there are four requirements and five expectations of every Duke graduate. Through active deliberation students—together with faculty, mentors and fellow students—will combine these nine elements to create coherent, self-authored pathways through the Duke curriculum. The goals are a broad, contextual education that embraces multiple epistemologies and scholarly traditions, and an education that empowers students to think for themselves and work with others to engage the opportunities and challenges they and their communities will face.

#### **Four Requirements**

- The Duke Experience
- Major
- Depth in a Different Field
- Mentored Scholarly Experience

#### **Five Expectations**

- Compelling Communication
- Understand Languages, Cultures, Civilizations Past and Present
- Understand Different Forms of Scientific Thought and Evidence
- Understand Creative Products of the Human Imagination
- Evaluate, Manage, Analyze Information

**Four requirements.** There are four requirements.

*The Duke Experience.* An intellectually robust and captivating introduction to the best of the Duke scholarly community is an essential foundation. So, too, is an intuitive users manual to outline both what makes the liberal arts distinctive at Duke and how to deliberately access its many educational opportunities. For students to understand how to navigate the intellectual terrain and craft their own coherent pathways, they need to experience the diversity of perspectives, logics and modes of scholarship early on at Duke. They need to see them in interaction. This introduction would be called *The Duke Experience*. *The Duke Experience* would be a truly common first-year experience with shared lectures and perhaps even shared readings. It is a space for deliberative discussion, scholarly writing, analysis and reflection. More specifically, it is a 10-month, team-taught flipped-format class (professionally produced online master lectures with twice weekly breakout seminars, larger format in-person lectures, debates and dorm-based programming). Not unlike the current University courses, each year the course will be organized around a particular question, idea or theme that has strong resonance across fields. We anticipate these themes, selected by a faculty committee, would rotate every three to five years. Possible themes include amongst other options: race and inequality, climate change, truth, economic development, mind and body, and justice. Whatever the theme, students will engage with leading faculty from across campus to develop a serious, multi-faceted understanding of the topic from different disciplinary perspectives and scholarly traditions across the arts, humanities, natural and social sciences. Students learn to argue and write across disciplinary traditions. In collaboration with Student Affairs, the course will begin with online modules and exercises in June prior to arrival on campus, be integrated into orientation and end in late April with a first-year capstone symposium for all students. Drawing from the success of FOCUS, breakout sections will consist of dorm-based communities to ensure a living/learning component and to reinforce the principle that a Duke education happens inside and outside the classroom continuously over 8 semesters and 3 summers.

*Major and Depth in a Different Field.* Rigor and depth of disciplinary knowledge are the primary gateways through which students engage Duke's shared scholarly community. And integrating different disciplines is a signature feature of the Duke experience. Thus all Duke students must

acquire depth in at least two different fields. The objective is for every Duke student is to engage deeply with at least two different sets of knowledge claims, theoretical principles and bodies of evidence. Students will need to articulate how they achieve both disciplinary breadth and depth by combining these two fields of inquiry. All students must have a major in one area. They must also acquire depth in a second area in the form of another major, a minor or certificate. Alternatively, students may choose to fulfill their second area depth requirement by creating a self-designed and faculty-approved concentration sequence of 6 thematically-integrated courses. Some departments may also choose to template their own 6-course concentrations, perhaps in collaboration with other departments or programs.

*Mentored Scholarly Experience.* Every Duke graduate will complete a mentored scholarly experience—broadly conceived. The liberal arts at Duke reflect the University’s research and creative strengths. Mentored scholarly experiences might include a distinction project, a robust directed reading, a research independent study, sustained participation on a Bass Connections team or work in a lab. Projects might include a traditional thesis, a co-authored publication, scientific report, policy brief, design of a new app, an original short story, performance or choreographic project. Work may be done individually or collaboratively.

**Five expectations.** Additionally, there are five core expectations of all Duke undergraduates. These are different ways of knowing and understanding the world that any well-educated Duke student should carefully cultivate. In their four years at Duke, we expect all undergraduates will (in multiple ways) come to communicate compellingly; understand languages, ideas and cultures past and present; understand different forms of scientific thought and evidence; understand different creative products of the human imagination; and evaluate, manage and interpret information. How students pursue these goals will vary. Duke students are inspired by different questions, ideas and interests, and we expect considerable variability in how students choose to meet these expectations. They will be achieved through experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Over time and with a robust combination of strong faculty mentoring, professional advising, annual intellectual statements, planning software and self-reflection, all students are expected to create their own deliberate and coherent pathways. These expectations will be transcribed. Not every choice inside and outside the classroom needs to be unified—intellectual adventurism for the sake of experimentation is central to any liberal arts education—but understanding when and where there are opportunities for connection is what only a liberal arts education can offer. Guided, focused, scholarly exploration/experimentation is one crucial way a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal arts education prepares students to be intellectually agile enough to navigate a complex, rapidly changing global and local landscape with purpose derived from foundational knowledge.

*Communicate Compellingly:* Writing eloquently, speaking persuasively, and analyzing critically and with precision are the keys to effective communication. Learning to write, speak and think well are interdependent and learned over time. Compelling communication is important to all fields of endeavor. It takes many forms across a variety of media. Written and spoken forms such as essays, articles, reports, books, presentations, lectures and debates serve as the foundation for communication in most academic and professional contexts. However, other genres such as film, musical composition, social media, documentaries, posters, theater, dance, photography and art are also important forms of communication. Duke graduates are expected to be able to craft ideas and persuasive arguments in written and spoken form, and communicate in a range of contexts and media.

*Understand Other Languages, Cultures, and Civilizations, Past and Present:* In our interdependent world, thoughtful citizens need to develop a cross-cultural understanding of the languages, events, and ideas that shape societies and civilizations. The ability to be effective in a global context means being able to engage with people from other cultures in their own language, as well as understand how our identities and ways of thinking are shaped by our cultural contexts, histories and practices. These engagements foster our capacity for empathy, and the ability to understand both local and global issues from multiple perspectives. We expect that Duke graduates, through a combination of coursework, civic engagement or other structured experiences in the U.S. or abroad, will have acquired proficiency in at least one language other than English, an in-depth knowledge of other cultures and societies, and a critical awareness of cultural differences.

*Understand Different Forms of Scientific Thought and Evidence.* Understanding the world in which we live, including both human interactions and fundamental laws and processes of the universe, requires both analytic and creative processes. Progress comes when researchers apply reasoning (mathematics or other logics) to deduce relationships, develop general hypotheses, test them with evidence and understand the strengths and limitations of inference based on their evidence. Students need to know what evidence supports explanatory theories for social and natural scientific phenomena, and how to analyze and evaluate this evidence. Because such evidence is often presented as quantitative research data (both in scholarly assessments and in the mass media), we expect Duke graduates to know how to evaluate and interpret scientific data properly in terms of the specific questions tested and the broader underlying concepts.

*Understand Creative Products of the Human Imagination.* Understanding our humanity involves understanding the stories we tell about ourselves. The expression of these stories takes a multitude of forms ranging from art, architecture, dance, music, history and literature to philosophy and religion. The impulse to create is a defining feature of the human condition—a way for human beings to represent themselves and understand their place in the world. The creative products of the human intellect and imagination seek to explore the nature of humanity, where we have come from and where we would like to go. At the same time, they contain an impulse to teach us how to be and act in the world, raising questions of value and judgment. Through substantive engagement with the arts and humanities, we expect Duke graduates to be able to think critically, creatively and imaginatively about our past, present and future.

*Evaluate, Manage And Interpret Information:* We are increasingly confronted with complex, often conflicting information that requires great facility to use meaningfully. Solving our most pressing societal challenges that students themselves will take requires that we analyze and synthesize data. Decisions about which medications we take, which policies we support, or which courses of action we pursue demand that we effectively evaluate, manage and interpret information—both qualitative and quantitative. Accordingly, we expect Duke students to develop the skills to manage, analyze and interpret data. We expect Duke graduates will understand how to gather relevant information, critique it and apply it in their personal and professional lives.

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**What now?** This conceptual framework is just the next step in the ongoing conversation with faculty, staff and students. There were 24 versions of the Curriculum 2000 matrix. So what we outline here is a point of departure. Further, as a conceptual framework it is necessarily a set of aspirations, not an operational manual. There is much more work to be done and many details remain unanswered. We are but half way in our three-year process.

Some of these key details include: How do we combine this structure with a robust pass/fail policy to further promote academic experimentation? What student mentoring structure will need to be in place to promote a deliberative engagement with the curriculum and ensure students embrace and meet expectations? How will this be financed? What other academic support structures may be necessary? How will faculty mentoring be recognized and remunerated as part of their overall teaching effort? How will themes for The Duke Experience be selected? How can we ensure that it is a robust and rigorous course of study? How will it be organized and staffed? What will be the guidelines for a mentored scholarly experience? Do we need some sort of infrastructure to match students with experiences?

We have sketched a structure in broad strokes knowing faculty discussion, participation and innovation will be essential. Our faculty are the key sources of intellectual strength and vitality and thus critical operational strategies will need to be developed in partnership with departments. Put differently, we now invite the faculty to try this framework on and see what it looks like from the perspective of their discipline and their department.

Discussion of this draft framework with A&S Council will be followed by another set of many smaller, faculty-led conversations as well as open weekly office hours for faculty or students to engage the committee. Focus groups with DSG and other student organizations will continue. We also make a simple request. We are hoping each department will take this conceptual framework and think it thru as a faculty in the context of their discipline and of their majors. We ask departments for their input and feedback. And in particular, we also ask departments to consider the 3 core questions listed below and then meet with members of the committee once again to discuss. Ideally, departments could send along any written responses before or after meeting with the committee but no later than March 1. These can be sent to David Steinbrenner ([david.steinbrenner@duke.edu](mailto:david.steinbrenner@duke.edu)).

1. What opportunities does this framework offer your students? How might they benefit from a more deliberative curriculum rather than one defined by detailed requirements?
2. This framework leaves the structure of majors entirely untouched. Most existing majors will already engage multiple expectations in this new framework. Are there other small ways you might adapt your programs at the level of the course or the major to best capture the spirit of this student-centered curriculum?
3. The development of mentored student pathways is an essential dimension of this new framework. Independent of this review process, faculty across units have already been considering how to cohere new pathways and programmatic opportunities for undergraduates---a performance pathway, a humanities core, and a global education constellation, for example. How might your department participate in the development of this sort of initiative to template new and novel coherent pathways?

During the winter, spring and summer the committee will engage departmental input/feedback and work with faculty, staff and students to further develop a curricular structure. The goal is to have a proposal to the faculty to consider early in the Fall of 2016.

The Committee remains happy to meet and discuss individually with any faculty member at any time.