The New General Education Program at UMD
Introduction

- In 2009, a Task Force was charged by the Provost and the Chair of the Campus Senate to design a new General Education that:
  - aligns with the priorities of UMD’s Strategic Plan
  - calls for an intellectually rigorous and demanding curriculum
  - increases flexibility
  - prepares students for an increasingly more connected world
  - aims to reduce class size
  - considers out-of-classroom experiences
  - enhances opportunities for innovative and improved teaching methods
- The University Senate approved the plan in April 2010.
- An implementation plan was developed and approved by the University Senate in February, 2011.
- We are currently in the process of putting this plan in action, including the review and approval of all courses (new and existing) to be offered as General Education.
- The new General Education Program launches in Fall 2012.
There are 4 major areas of the plan.

- Fundamental Studies
  - Academic Writing
  - Professional Writing
  - Mathematics
  - Oral Communication
  - Analytic Reasoning
  - [5 courses, 15 credits]

- Distributive Studies, two courses each in:
  - Humanities
  - Natural Science (one course must contain a laboratory experience)
  - History and Social Science
  - Scholarship in Practice (one course must be outside the student’s major)
  - [8 courses, 25 credits]

- The I-Series Courses
  - [2 courses, double-count with Distributive Studies]

- Diversity
  - Understanding Plural Societies
  - Cultural Competence
  - [2 courses, may double-count with Distributive Studies]
Fundamental Studies

• Mathematics, Academic Writing and Professional Writing
  – Largely unchanged from existing CORE program
  – No exemptions for Math and Academic Writing based on SAT scores
  – Currently, students are exempted from Professional Writing if they get an “A” in Academic Writing. This exemption is being removed.

• New Oral Communication requirement

• New Analytic Reasoning requirement
  – Problem solving, thinking, logic – valued in the marketplace
  – Want our students to be intelligent consumers of information – statistics, data analysis

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Distributive Studies

• Just 4 Categories:
  – Humanities
  – History and Social Science
  – Natural Sciences
    • Includes a laboratory experience
  – Scholarship in Practice
    • More on this next

• Students will take two courses in each of these 4 areas.

• Two of the courses must be I-Series courses.
  – More on this later
Scholarship in Practice

- Courses in this area teach students how to assess and apply a body of knowledge to a creative, scholarly, or practical purpose.
- The resulting application should reflect an understanding of how underlying core disciplines can be brought to bear on the subject. It should go beyond the traditional survey and interpretation culminating in, for example, a final paper or activity, often used in courses that are designed to be introductions to a specific topic or area of study.
- Basically, we want students to see how what they are learning is actually used by people in that field.
  - Could be applied fields, like Engineering, Business, Architecture, etc.
  - Could be in the more traditional academic disciplines, but with a focus on methodology, research, the things that academics actually do, NOT, an “Introduction to …” type of class.
Why Scholarship in Practice?

• General Education has largely been concentrated in a few areas of our campus.
  – 3 of the 12 colleges on campus offer 90% of the CORE seats.
• This is not an accurate reflection of what our University is, what our University does.
• This is an opportunity for other areas on campus to participate in General Education.
  – Business School, Journalism, Engineering, Education, etc.
• Most importantly, it gives students an opportunity to get exposure to these areas early in their academic careers.
  – Could help them choose a major
  – Everyone has to declare a major at the end of their second year. Most of that time is spent taking Gen Ed courses. If they’re all in just a few areas, when do they get to see other things?
  – Also, many of these other areas don’t traditionally offer introductory courses open to non-majors.
The I-Series Courses

• Imagination
• Innovation
• Issues
• Implementation
• Investigation
• Inspiration
• Intellect
I-Series: *The signature of our new General Education program*

The I-Series inverts the common pedagogical pyramid. Rather than starting with a survey of existing knowledge, these courses approach large problems from particular (inter-)disciplinary perspectives. While I-Series courses ask questions, they are not meant to answer them. Rather, they aim to examine the ways in which diverse intellectual traditions and disciplinary protocols address big questions.

www.iseries.umd.edu/

Currently offering ~40 I-Series Courses per semester.
Examples of I-Series Courses

– ASTR 220  Collisions in Space: The Threat of Asteroid Impacts
– PUAF 289I  Cross-examining Climate Change
– JOUR 289I  Information 3.0: Exploring Technological Tools
– MUSC 289I  The Power of Musical Performance in Social Engagement
– BMGT 289I  Why Good Managers Make Bad Decisions
– HIST 289A  Hot Spots: Violence, Catastrophe and Civilian Conflict Worldwide in Historical Perspective
– HIST 289B  Carbon: Element at the Center of History
A Few Other Examples

• Genetically-Modified Humans: Physical Performance in the Post-Genomic Era
  – In this post-genomic era, can society pursue optimal health and maximal physical performance without changing what it means to be human?

• Philosophical Issues: The Rights and Wrongs of Killing People
  – Is it ever permissible to kill an innocent human being intentionally? Why is (unjust) killing wrong? What makes it wrong? What implications do our answers have for war, the beginnings and ends of lives, punishment, saving people from starvation

• Acting Human: Shakespeare and the Drama of Identity
  – Through an in–depth reading of key plays by Shakespeare, Acting Human will examine what acts of knowledge, understanding, imagination and courage are required for people to become complete human beings.
I-Series Summary

- These courses tackle big issues, big questions, from the perspective of a particular field.
- They are primarily taught at an introductory level (no or minimal prerequisites) and for students from all over campus.
- The types of questions are usually reserved for majors at the junior, senior, or even graduate level.
  - This requires a serious change to how we teach!
- **Main Goal is to Make Students THINK.**
  - Establish a culture of thinking from the moment they set foot on campus.
  - Do that by dealing with questions to which we don’t know the answers.
- The I-Series faculty meet several times during the semester to discuss their courses.
  - What works, what doesn’t, issues, share solutions
The New Diversity Requirement

• Understanding Plural Societies
  – Life in a globally competitive society of the twenty-first century requires an ability to comprehend both theoretical and practical dimensions of human difference. Courses in this category speak to both the foundations—cultural, material, psychological, historical, social, and biological—of human difference and the operation or function of plural societies.

• Cultural Competence
  – Cultural competence provides opportunities to gain an increased understanding of cultures and cultural practices, while learning to communicate effectively across cultural differences in a diverse society and world. This diversity category reflects a developmental, on-going process through which students learn about the lived experiences of individuals as members of socio-cultural groups and the complex interactions between groups. Cultural Competence courses emphasize acquisition of new knowledge, thoughtful consideration of issues of equity and justice, critical thinking, self-reflection, empathy, engaged global citizenship, and the development of skills necessary to work effectively with individuals, groups, and teams from diverse identities and perspectives.

• Students must take two of these courses, and at least one must be Understanding Plural Societies. They may also satisfy a Distributive Studies requirement.
Experiential Learning

- Education does not have to be confined to the classroom:
  - Internships
  - Research projects
  - Certain study abroad experiences
- These types of experiences have not traditionally been allowed to sit at the General Education table.
- While not a required component, students will be able to apply these experiences to General Education provided the experience meets the learning objectives of a General Education category.
Learning Outcomes

- During the summer of 2010, faculty committees wrote the Learning Outcome Goals for all of the new General Education course categories.
- 12 Committees with over 60 faculty members worked during the summer.
  - Important to have heavy faculty involvement in the process.
- **Learning Outcomes define the categories.**
- Our focus is on Learning Outcome Goals, not specific content.
  - This is the standard by which programs are measured today.
Summary of Differences with Current CORE Program

- **Fundamental Studies**
  - Removed SAT exemption from Academic Writing and Mathematics
  - Removed exemption from Professional Writing based on a grade of “A” in Academic Writing
  - Added a 3-credit Oral Communication requirement
  - Added a 3-credit Analytic Reasoning requirement

- **Distributive Studies**
  - Reduced the number of categories from 9 to 4
  - Reduced total number of courses in Distributive Studies from 9 to 8
  - Added new category, “Scholarship in Practice”
  - Added requirement that 2 Distributive Studies courses must be I-Series Courses

- **Diversity**
  - Two diversity categories, Understanding Plural Societies and Cultural Competence
  - Students must take 2 Diversity courses instead of 1, but may still double-count with Distributive Studies

- **Advanced Studies**
  - Removed CORE Advanced Studies requirement
  - Will allow 300- and 400- level courses to count toward Distributive Studies, however

- **Total Credit Count:**
  - CORE: 43 – 46
  - New General Education: 40 – 46