

UCC COGE report 12/18/2020

Ongoing activities:

1. Survey of General Education has been sent to faculty. Due date for responses, Jan 6, 2021. A sub-committee of COGE worked to complete the survey with input from all members of the committee. The survey will help determine the direction of General Education review going forward. The link to the survey: https://ric.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2laKP0RBFypBdsh
2. COGE has submitted a letter of interest to the Teagle Foundation/NEH. Please see below for the full text. We hope to hear back in the coming weeks about an invitation to submit a full grant proposal.
3. COGE is piloting an assessment of English 120 for fall classes. There are seventeen sections of English 120 running this term. Please see below for the pilot assessment form for English 120.
4. The COGE website now has all eleven learning outcomes rubrics posted along. <http://www.ric.edu/generaleducation/Pages/General-Education-Outcomes.aspx>

Letter of interest to the Teagle Foundation/NEH

Transformative Texts and the Renewal of General Education at Rhode Island College

Concept Paper for the Teagle/NEH Cornerstone Initiative

November 2020

In what ways will your institution substantively differ or be strengthened as a result of a Teagle grant?

With this concept paper, Rhode Island College (RIC) requests an invitation to apply for a *Cornerstone: Learning for Living* planning and implementation grant. Rhode Island College, through a “transformative text” initiative, can make general education more recognizably meaningful to our increasingly professions-oriented students. Our aim is to use the Learning for Living grant to revitalize general education at the college around the “transformative texts” initiative in order to bring coherence, focus, and a common intellectual experience to our students, beginning with their general education requirements. From its beginning the college has been grounded in the liberal arts, but our current distribution model lacks a common thread that brings coherence and context to requirements, especially as they relate to students’ major areas of study. We believe a reimagined General Education program organized according to a “transformative texts” model will provide a more coherent educational experience, thus

improving student engagement and success. This common intellectual experience is even more important at a commuter school like Rhode Island College where we work to provide students with a sense of community. We believe that offering students a coherent, common intellectual experience in general education strengthens our ability to engage and inspire them across the whole of their academic lives.

Faculty ownership and program sustainability

At RIC, our current general education program is overseen by faculty, as is the latest process of general education assessment revision. The renewal of the program via a “transformative texts” initiative will be facilitated by faculty, including members of the Committee on General Education (COGE) and the college’s Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL). We are confident that a revitalized general education program will be sustainable. The college’s commitment to release time for the chair of COGE, along with the continuing positions in the FCTL provide support for implementing and sustaining general education going forward. We continue to develop broad faculty support for the “transformative texts” approach across a wide representation of Liberal Arts faculty, plus key administrative support, including from the Provost.

How the Cornerstone initiative can help strengthen learning for all students at RIC

The changes we envision will reach nearly all of our students through a mandatory three-course Core of general education, which includes First-Year seminar, First-Year Writing and a general education capstone course after 45 credits, Connections. Embedding “transformative texts” in our distribution requirements will provide a shared intellectual experience for a diverse student population. Developing a robust and diverse list of “transformative texts” will allow the college to represent diversity in General Education, while inviting students to connect their unique life experiences to the habits of mind practiced by educated persons. Through a diverse, transformative reading list, students will engage with the ideas and concepts in order for them to develop critical thinking skills that lead to intellectual agency and cultural awareness.

Rhode Island College is the state’s only affordable and accessible four-year public college. About half of our students are first-generation, and more than a third are students of color – around 50% in this year’s incoming class. The great majority of our students are from Rhode Island or from adjacent states, and the great majority of them stay in Rhode Island after graduation. RIC therefore plays a crucial to democratizing function in the state for those who have traditionally been excluded from promises of a liberal education. Most of our students arrive planning to major in one of our four professional schools: Business, Education, Nursing, and Social Work but as the provider of the vast majority of general education courses, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences has considerable influence on the educational experiences of all RIC students, and we believe the “transformative texts” model will strengthen the value of all degrees offered at RIC.

The vast majority of our students are commuters, and many work to support themselves or their families, so many choose to enroll part-time or need to take some semesters away from their studies. Our six-year graduation rate has improved to about 50%, which we would like to increase significantly. Revisions to General Education must be an important part of that effort.

We are aware that this is below the rate that you prefer to see in your grantees. As a “college of opportunity,” we are committed to providing a transformative liberal education to all students, not just those who major in the liberal arts, and providing greater coherence and relevance to general education will help students see the relevance of their studies and support their progression to completion. Our graduation rate over six years has improved, but we seek to increase this number dramatically. Revitalizing general education represents the opportunity to engage students early and keep them engaged and focused on their studies as they see the connections in their courses. A general education informed by the Humanities has a democratizing function, and coherent pathways through general education help students stay on path to graduation.

Because of general education, the college’s faculty within the College of Arts and Sciences still teach most of the courses at RIC. It is also true, however, that many first-year courses are staffed by adjunct instructors. Revitalizing general education offers a timely and necessary moment of reflection on the program, and a chance to hear from those who teach the courses, and to provide a vision back to them. Our Humanities faculty includes devoted faculty who love to teach, and yet who manage to produce award-winning, internationally recognized scholarship. Faculty understand what it means to teach at a “college of opportunity.” Yet for the past ten years the number of students enrolling in Humanities majors has declined as they have elsewhere.

From our own experience in Literature and Philosophy, we see how “transformative texts” in the humanities serve to provide structure, depth, and purpose to a student’s first years in college, and beyond. As the list of interested faculty below indicates, many of our colleagues across the Liberal Arts already agree. With Teagle/NEH funding, we would plan to systematically revise and improve our Core-plus-Distributions structure, by (a) reconfiguring our Core courses and revising Core learning outcomes around the use of “transformative texts,” and (b) coordinating the use of “transformative texts” in Distributions courses, including History, Literature, and possibly sociology, social work, anthropology, and political science.

Our current general education program is in its ninth year. It combines a three-course *Core* curriculum: First Year Seminar, First Year Writing, and then a Connections course after 45 credits. Then, students must satisfy a *Distributions* curriculum from courses in Arts, History, Literature, Math, Natural Sciences, and Social/Behavioral Sciences categories. The program’s course requirements are meant to serve eleven general education learning outcomes.

Assessment of general education

Revitalizing general education will also afford the college the opportunity to implement a refined, practical, and affordable mode of assessment. COGE is currently engaged in an assessment of its current general education program, though the assessment process has changed and will be piloted for the first time with an approach to assessment used by other peer institutions designed to achieve reliable assessment data on a regular basis with less expense. Meanwhile, the college will continue to assess the general education program’s ability to achieve its stated learning outcomes, while also taking the time to reconsider our stated learning outcomes. At the behest of Provost Tate, Rhode Island College has embarked on a review of the current general education program. As we assess the strengths and opportunities in our model, we are beginning to develop a vision for the next iteration of

general education and find the “transformative texts” model one that feeds on the strengths of our current model while bringing the needed coherence of experience lacking in our distribution. The Teagle/NEH Cornerstone Initiative would provide much needed support to develop and implement a general education revision that requires faculty to work collectively in the development of courses that thread together transformative texts.

How we plan to use Teagle/NEH funding

We seek a planning grant of \$25,000 to help cover expenses required for planning such a systematic revision properly. This includes faculty professional development, such as attendance at the AAC&U General Education conference in January 2021, and any relevant Teagle/NEH initiatives. It includes release time for key members of the planning team, to lead workshops on the process of general education revision, on the development of an inclusive common list of Transformative Texts, and on collaboration of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences with the four professional schools. Members of the planning team will also be working with the Deans, the Provost/VPAA, the Committee on General Education, and the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee to ensure that the new program meets all needs and receives all necessary approvals. The funding should also cover some release time or for faculty to develop courses and encourage robust participation by faculty beyond the Humanities and Liberal Arts. Our Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning has an established record of supporting professional development in course development and pedagogy, including our First Year Seminar, our Open Books Open Minds program, our Writing in the Disciplines initiative, and more. In these ways, the planning grant will support the development and intense collaboration that will be required to plan for success in the implementation phase.

Coherent pathways to student success

The college’s “Open Books – Open Minds” program has been reimagining the role of the common book at Rhode Island College for fifteen years. The program is voluntary, and faculty are not required to include the common book in their syllabi. The fact of the matter, however, is that they do. Faculty at the college already have an understanding of the benefits of a common reading program. OBOM created an environment of intellectual and social engagement throughout the campus community while engaging students and faculty together in academic discourse. Evidence suggests that students who feel connected to their work, persist through college. The shared intellectual experience of college life supports a students’ sense of purpose and connection. From its inception in 2006 at RIC, Open Books – Open Minds has engaged students in dialogue grounded in the humanities, but connected to the world. A “transformative text” initiative will enable the college to build on the OBOM program, and extend it through the general education program for the broadest possible reach. We are committed to the humanities in higher education and are excited about the possibility of partnering with the Teagle Foundation and the NEH.

Respectfully submitted,

Co-principal Investigators

Joseph Zornado
Professor of English
Chair, Committee on General Education

Glenn Rawson
Professor of Philosophy
Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences

Key Supporters of the “transformative text” initiative:

Helen Tate, Provost/VPAA Rhode Island College
Earl Simson, Dean, College of Arts and Letters
Sue Pearlmutter, Special Assistant to the Provost
Sue Abbotson, Chair, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Professor of English
Alison Shonkwiler, Chair, Department of English, Professor of English
Vince Bolinger, Chair, College Council, Professor of Film Studies
Elisa Miller, Chair, Department of History, Associate Professor of History
Aaron Smuts, Chair, Department of Philosophy, Associate Professor of Philosophy
Erik Christenson, President, RIC/AFT, Professor of History
Brandon Hawk, Coordinator, Open Books, Open Minds, Associate Professor of English
Anita Duneer, Coordinator, Open Books, Open Minds, Associate Professor of English
Michael Michaud, Chair, College Writing Board, Professor of English
Maureen Reddy, Coordinator, First Year Seminar Program, Professor of English
Dragan Gill, Assistant Professor of Library Science
Jesse Capece, Assistant Professor of Social Work
Tomoji Shogenji, Professor of Philosophy
Matt Duncan, Associate Professor of Philosophy
David Espinosa, Professor of History
Amy Barlow, Associate Professor of Library Science
Mary Baker, Professor of Anthropology
J. Zornado, Chair, Committee on General Education
Glenn Rawson, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, Professor of Philosophy

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Glenn Rawson, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, Professor of Philosophy

Pilot Assessment Project for General Education: English 12X

The Committee on General Education (COGE) is asking you to take part in a pilot assessment project. We request your participation in this survey because you teach English 12X at Rhode Island College. This is not course or instructor evaluation; it is program assessment. What we are asking you to do: after completing your final grades, please select two student papers-- from students #5 and #14 on your class lists (or the nearest)-- and score them according to the assessment rubric associated with the two General Education learning outcomes for English 12X: “Critical Thinking” and “Written Communication.” COGE will aggregate the data anonymously.

Critical Thinking

Students will be able to analyze and interpret information from multiple perspectives, question assumptions and conclusions, and understand the impact of biases, including their own, on thinking and learning.

Written Communication.

Students will understand the different purposes of writing and employ the conventions of writing in their major fields. Students will produce writing that is well organized, supported by evidence, demonstrates correct usage of grammar and terminology, and is appropriate to the academic context.

Please assess student artifacts according to the assessment rubric for each learning outcome (which may or may not correspond to the course grade you assigned to that artifact). Please fill in the form below with an assessment score, from 1-4 for each category. 1: unsatisfactory 2: satisfactory incomplete. 3: good. 4: excellent. Please return the form to COGE@ric.edu.

[Click Here for COGE’s Assessment Rubric for Critical Thinking](#)

Artifact 1: Critical Thinking Learning Outcome	Assessment Scores
1. Identifies Issues, Question or Problem	_____
2. Evidence	_____
3. Awareness of context and alternate perspectives	_____
4. Conclusions	_____

Artifact 2: Critical Thinking Learning Outcome	Assessment Scores
1. Identifies Issues, Question or Problem	_____
2. Evidence	_____
3. Awareness of context and alternate perspectives	_____
4. Conclusions	_____

[Click Here for COGE’s Assessment Rubric for Written Communication](#)

Artifact 1: Written Communication Learning Outcome	Assessment Scores
1. Purpose for writing	_____
2. Content Development	_____
3. Sources and Evidence	_____
4. Control of Syntax and Mechanics	_____

Artifact 2: Written Communication Learning Outcome	Assessment Scores
1. Purpose for writing	_____
2. Content Development	_____
3. Sources and Evidence	_____
4. Control of Syntax and Mechanics	_____

Respectfully submitted,

J. Zornado
Chair, COGE
Professor of English