

Preparation for Unexpected Futures: A Reimagined General Education Program

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Executive Summary

Vision

By 2035, JMU will be a nationally recognized leader for changing the traditional narrative about General Education. Under this proposal, *JMU will prepare its graduates for both expected and unexpected futures*. As higher education faces increased scrutiny and skepticism, JMU will inspire the broader culture to again embrace learning beyond each student's expected personal and professional path as embodied by their majors and minors. At JMU, the timeless general insights of the Arts, Letters, and Sciences will be rediscovered as its faculty challenge students to identify, imagine, and interpret how those fields might impact them personally and professionally in unexpected futures. As a result, General Education will increasingly be valued by students, families, and the Commonwealth of Virginia as its purpose and power is seen (again) through JMU alumni who are distinguished by literacy and versatility—the ability to adapt their knowledge and skills to engage those unexpected futures.

Proposal

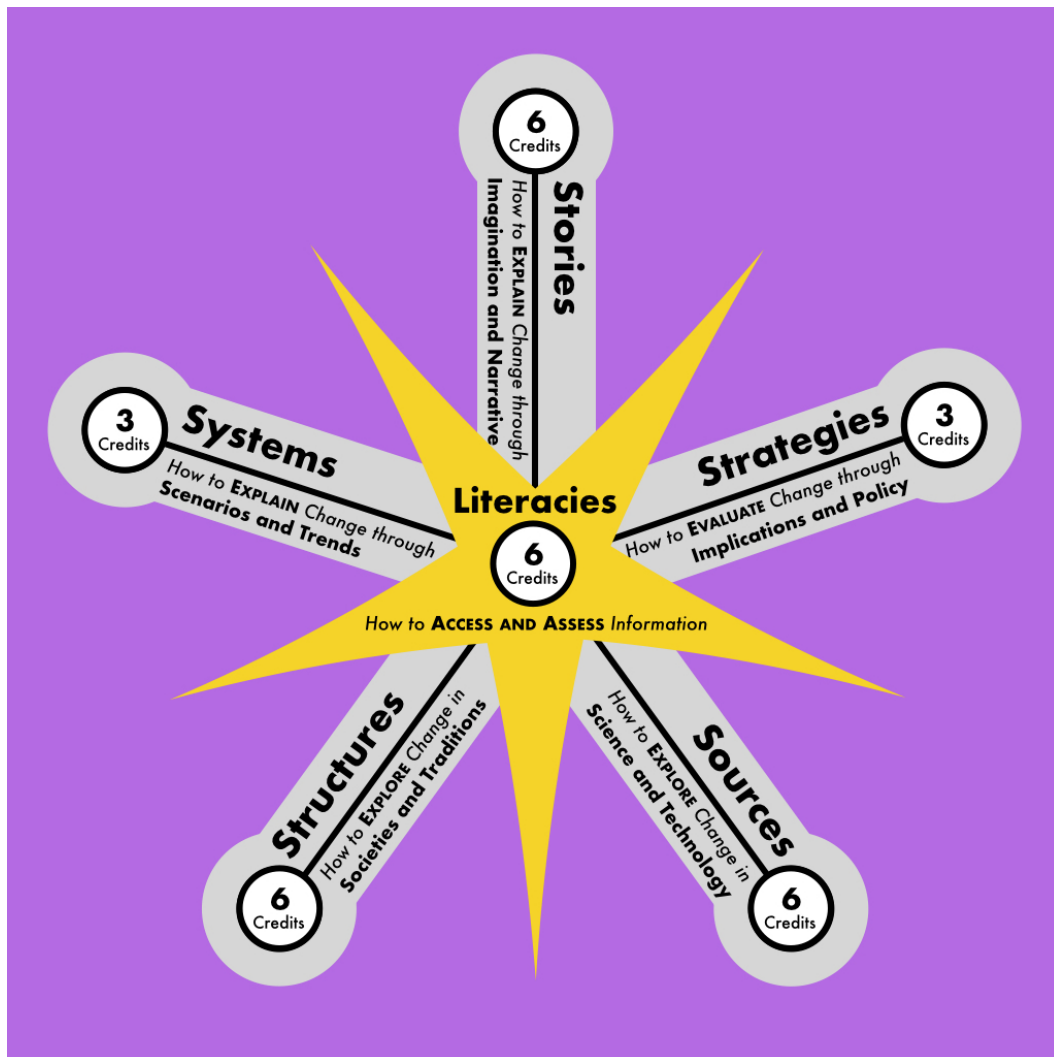
Public trust in higher education has been eroding for decades due to concerns about its increasing cost, perceived politicization, and alleged lack of relevance, with a potential moment forthcoming when others will ultimately decide its fate. But rather than lean into these trends and transform universities fully into pre-professional preparation, this proposal imagines a new “framing” of the purpose and power of the traditional Arts, Letters, and Sciences and inspires the broader culture to “rediscover” the significance of General Education. What is the value of learning beyond one's major, minor, and expected personal and professional future? It is simple: being prepared for everything

else...the unexpected futures. As graduates change jobs, fields, and life circumstances multiple times during their lives, it is a general education that provides the literacy and versatility to remain relevant regardless of what alumni face. They can adapt the knowledge and skills of their majors/minors to whatever surprising challenges emerge.

To develop this kind of graduate, this 30-credit model consists of one Literacy “Core” and five emerging Versatility “Rays”:

Literacy “Core” (6 Credits): One first-year (introductory) and one fourth year (culminating, capstone) course on how to access and assess information from different types of sources.

Versatility “Rays” (24 Credits): Courses will explore change in (1) Science & Technology (6 credits) and (2) Societies & Traditions (6 credits); explain change through (3) Scenarios & Trends (3 credits) and (4) Imagination & Narrative (6 credits); and evaluate change through (5) Implications & Policy (3 credits).



Preparation for Unexpected Futures

With this proposal, General Education will expose students to the foundational wisdom of classic academic disciplines, but within a new overarching narrative that transcends these boundaries and focuses on helping students develop versatility beyond the skills of majors and minors. Students will learn to explore, explain, and evaluate change in the many unexpected futures where each of these disciplines impacts their futures in potential ways they do not imagine...yet.

This proposal further solidifies JMU's signature commitment to an energetic and engaged undergraduate education, but also makes General Education no longer seem peripheral, but definitive of JMU graduates: literate and versatile citizens who adapt to lead productive and meaningful lives even in unexpected futures.