

# Build Your Madison Experience

## **Contributors:**

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## **Executive Summary**

James Madison University's current General Education program is already nationally recognized for its outcomes-based structure, integrative learning goals, and upper-level course offerings. By highlighting and enhancing these essential features, the present proposal is a strategic improvement upon an already solid program. This proposal aims to preserve the core strengths of our current program, revise the areas that need improvement, and expand its most innovative elements to enhance student learning.

We propose a renewed General Education (GE) program for JMU that embraces a timeless and relevant outcomes-based structure, creating increased student agency by means of a unified and coherent multi-level curriculum with a focus on integration and synthesis among various disciplines, experiences, and ways of thinking.

## ***Innovations***

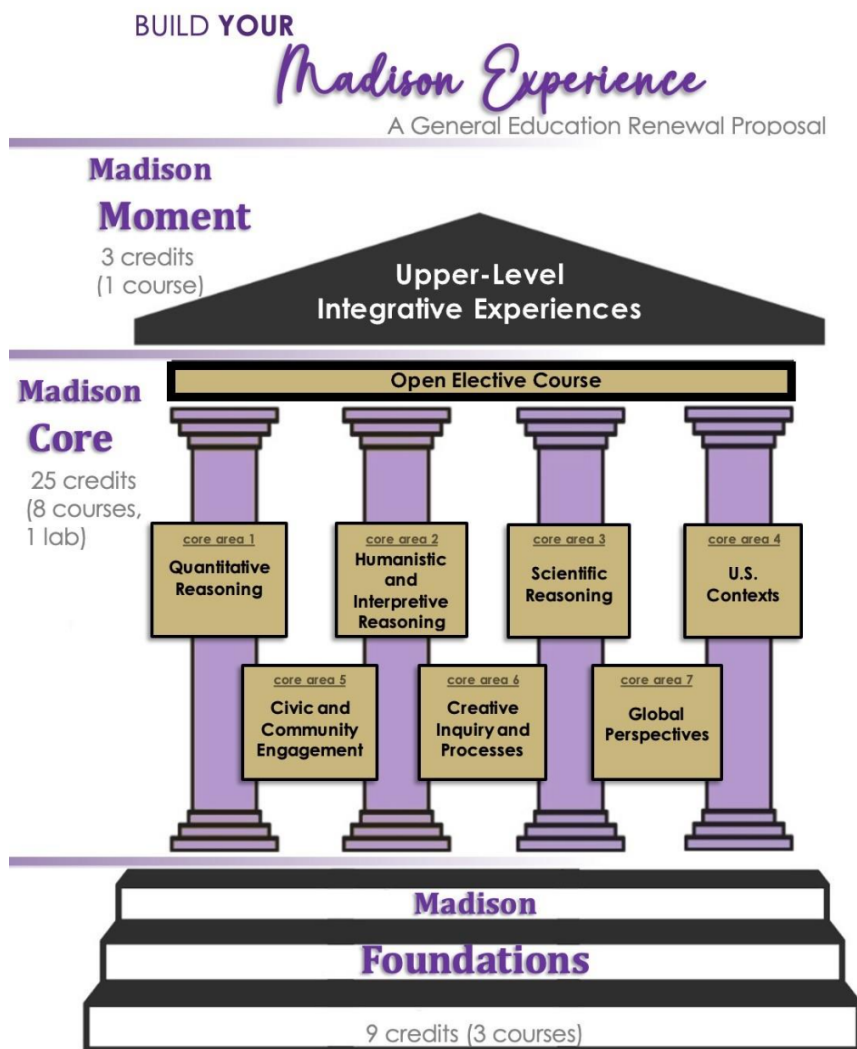
Among the unique components of our proposal are five of special note:

- A focus on integration among all layers of the GE experience and beyond, culminating in the "Madison Moment" upper-level integrative course.
- Increased agency for academic units to determine for themselves the link between their courses and the outcomes those courses achieve within the GE curriculum.
- Increased opportunities for faculty to design new courses focusing on topics about which they are highly knowledgeable and passionate.
- Increased agency for students as they shape their GE journey and build their Madison Experience.
- A coherent, scaffolded approach to the GE experience, from "Madison Foundations" to the "Madison Core," and culminating in the "Madison Moment."
- Our proposal reduces credits and is resource neutral, with increased emphasis on upper-level integrative experiences offset by a reduction in overall program credits (current: 41; proposed: 37).

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- Fundamental to the success of this plan is a new commitment at all levels to a more robust University-wide system of validating and rewarding faculty and academic unit contributions to the GE program.

### Program Summary



#### Madison Foundations (9 credits / 3 courses)

- Three courses comprise the first-year experience, focusing on foundational knowledge and portable skills such as writing, communication, literacies, and wellness.
- Some learning experiences in these first-year courses will define, identify, and begin to apply the principles of integrative learning.

#### Madison Core (25 credits / 8 courses + 1 lab)

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- Students complete eight courses (in gold on the diagram in Appendix 1)—one from each of seven outcomes-based core areas, and one additional “open elective” course from any of the seven core areas.
- Academic units tag their GE courses to one or two core areas. For example, a math course might be tagged not only to the Quantitative Reasoning area, but also to the Creative Inquiry and Processes area; a Global Music course could be tagged to both Global Perspectives and Humanistic and Interpretive Reasoning areas. A GE C&I body for each core area would be responsible for approving academic units’ requests for tagging in a specific area. Courses should be tagged only to core areas that are of primary significance in the course. For courses tagged to two core areas, students will choose which area they wish for the course to fulfill when they enroll. To promote as diverse an experience as possible, students must choose courses with at least seven different course prefixes among their eight Madison Core selections. In addition, students may count no more than one course as both a General Education requirement and a major requirement.
- Students can complete part of the Madison Core via an optional “Core Pathway”—a series of three or more courses from different core areas that have been identified as focusing on a particular idea or issue (e.g., Environmental Justice and Sustainability; Social Justice; Possible and Probable Futures; Technology; etc.).

### **Madison Moment (3 credits / 1 course)**

Organized around a specific topic or theme, Madison Moment courses are upper-level classes designed to challenge students to bring together strands of learning from their general education, major, and extra-curricular experiences by connecting, synthesizing, and reflecting on knowledge and skills that emerge from different disciplines, contexts, experiences, and perspectives.