

Feasibility Analysis: Core Curriculum Reform Proposals

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Introduction

Two teams from the provost's office participated in the development of this document, [Student Academic Success](#) and Academic Resources. Feasibility of any new or modified core curriculum depends on coordinated planning between key stakeholders, particularly the provost's office and the deans of the colleges, to ensure adequate instructional staffing, classroom space, and infrastructure. Institutional support must also reinforce the value of teaching, service, and scholarship within the core curriculum to sustain faculty engagement and program quality. The following guiding principles were used when evaluating the feasibility of the three proposals.

- **Flexibility:** Where possible, design with adaptability in mind to support diverse student pathways.
- **Transparency:** Make requirements clear early, especially for transfer and high-credit students.
- **Support:** Ensure advising, scheduling, and instructional resources are aligned with curricular goals.
- **Collaboration:** Engage departments in shaping capstone experiences that complement existing curricula.
- **Sustainability:** Maximize the available resources, minimize duplication, and support strategic reallocation of instructional capacity.

Proposal 1: Build Your Madison Experience

Strengths

Transfer Credit

- This model offers straightforward mapping with existing courses in the current program. It will therefore be less effort to reclassify transfer credit in VCCS and TES.
- High school students who have completed the 31-33 credit Uniform Certificate of General Studies (UCGS) would take an estimated 1-2 Madison Foundations courses and 2-3 Madison Core courses at JMU. This enables new students to have enough courses to fill their first year schedule.
 - It will be important to anticipate increasing numbers of these students, based on recent legislation for all students in Virginia to have access to UCGS in high school free of charge.

- Madison Moment *can* be required of all transfer students, even those with an associate degree, if offered at the 300 or 400 level. State policy requires associate degree completion to satisfy all *lower-division* GE. Other senior institutions do have upper-division GE requirements, allowing transfer students to participate in the common institutional experience.

Academic Advising

- Clear scaffolding (Foundations → Core → Madison Moment) makes it easier, thus feasible, to explain progression to students.
- Thematic pathways (i.e. sustainability, social justice) can be aligned with advising conversations around academic/career goals and personal interests.
- The Madison Moment capstone creates a natural point for advisors to discuss reflection and integration of experiences.

Structure

- The innovation described within this proposal's structure may offer greater flexibility when interfacing with a department's major program. To be feasible, we would need to ensure that our systems could support students in choosing how they want to apply their coursework toward GE—especially if those systems could be nuanced enough to also let transfer students make some of those designations with prior coursework. We would need to consider system changes to achieve feasibility.

Resources

- The reduction of credit hours required will allow for some instructional resources to be reallocated within a given discipline, assuming the faculty expertise/availability is transferable.
- The static/consistent nature of course offerings in this proposal provides opportunities for students and departments to better anticipate first year enrollment needs, improving the first year enrollment experience and planning for instructional resources. A more efficient use of existing courses (i.e. “tagging”) and consistency of GE course offerings in the first year enhances the overall feasibility of this proposal.

Challenges

Transfer Credit

- While VCCS Math, Arts/Humanities, and Science courses map well to existing categories, the lack of a clear match for Social or Behavioral Science presents a barrier to effective articulation with Passport and UCGS credentials. Mapping

course equivalents would be significantly improved by adding or reassigning a pillar to cover social science reasoning.

- Mapping ENG 111 to GE at JMU (as required by state Passport policy): Remains a problem under all three proposals. VCCS has 6 credits of ENG 111-112 that must map to something in JMU GE. Possible solutions:
 - An option to complete the JMU writing requirement through one course (WRTC 103) or two (ex: WRTC 101+102), though in that case JMU may also need to offer WRTC 101 and 102 to students who might prefer that option.
 - Increase or define foundational requirements such that any student can take two different writing courses to fulfill the requirements (e.g., WRTC 103, advanced expository writing, creating writing, etc.).
- Students must take 5 out of 8 Madison Core courses and at least 3 at JMU as a requisite. To be feasible, the Madison Moment would need to be waived for students with the associate degree and may need to be partially waived for UCGS. It would be important for transfers to not feel excluded, disadvantaged, or penalized for their lack of digital reflections and artifacts available from previous coursework.

Technology

- Regarding the Madison Core, JMU's current class enrollment and academic requirements platform does not offer the functionality to allow students to choose which requirement a course satisfies. For example, students who take PHIL 101 for GE and elect to move it to their Bachelor of Arts requirement must individually contact the Registrar's Office to adjust it manually. We would need to consider a platform change for implementation as it is written.
- Regarding optional core pathways, currently, this option is not feasible due to the limitations of the current SA system. More specifically, the system would not allow us to verify and enforce within the current reporting structure. Additionally, it would be important to know if the pathways are officially declared.
- Badges are not currently possible for the undergraduate record using the current system; thus, system updates would need to be explored to determine if feasible. The only current example of badging at JMU is managed by SPCE and it is solely for the graduate or certificate programs.
- The proposal stipulates that the pathways could develop into minors, but the double-counting restriction could make it impossible to double-count more than a single course. For example, the Sustainability Pathway mentioned in the proposal may lead a student to develop interest in the Climate Science or an environmental

minor, but the student would then be barred from counting their Pathway coursework in the minor if they've double-counted elsewhere.

Time to Degree

- This proposal will likely delay progress towards a degree. The stipulation that no more than one course counts as a GE requirement and major requirement prompts the following challenges:
 - There are many programs that incorporate and rely on “double counting” multiple courses to allow students to stay within the allowable credits and graduate in a timely manner. Applying this standard would lead to an increase in credits that some majors must take and therefore potentially delay a student’s graduation date.
- To assess feasibility, it is necessary to define whether the double-counting restriction applies to minors and second majors. For instance, determining whether a student may count BIO 140 toward both GE and a Biology major, and CHEM 131 toward both GE and a Chemistry minor, will clarify whether the restriction limits double-counting to a single course across all declared programs.
- With regards to the Madison Moment, majors with very prescribed sequences may struggle with incorporating a traditional course into a student’s upper-level experience.

Resources

- To minimize the potential for under-enrolled GE courses and poor utilization of instructional resources, additional guidance (or limits) specific to the number of “tagged” courses offered may need to be established and more clearly articulated.
- Additionally, criteria to balance the Madison Moment course offerings across multiple disciplines (i.e. enrollment limits proportional to number of majors in a discipline or college) would improve the feasibility of this proposal from a resource perspective.

Proposal 2: Dukes Engage

Strengths

Financial Aid

- Three-credit capstone courses may reduce the risk of financial aid ineligibility for seniors who rely on maintaining 12 credit hours of eligible coursework. Without

such courses, students nearing graduation could fall below the required credit threshold, potentially jeopardizing their aid status.

Technology

- This model will be possible to implement with our current software with one exception noted below.
 - The 400-level course, which will have an instructor and a designated faculty member reviewer, will create reporting challenges in the SA system.

Transfer Credit

- High school students who have completed the 31-33 credit UCGS would likely satisfy one or more Dukes Communicate and several of the Madison Pillars, which are well-aligned with VCCS requirements. They would still need to take Dukes Discover, Dukes Thrive, and possibly one Dukes Communicate and/or one or more Pillar(s) in their first year. Having GE requirements left to fulfill at JMU would help them build a full schedule in their first year.
- The Culminating Learning Experience *can* be required of all transfer students, even those with an associate degree, if offered at the 300 or 400 level. See “Madison Moment *can* be required...” on page 2 for the detailed explanation.

Academic Advising

- From an advising perspective, this proposal is feasible as it provides a clear advising narrative.
- The thematic pillars (Scientific Inquiry, Human Expression, Civic Mindedness, Analytical & Information Literacy) and the culminating experience can be implemented using existing structures such as capstones, study abroad, or internships.

Resources

- The common curriculum component of this proposal enhances enrollment predictability and creates clear pathways for students (and departments) to progress/graduate efficiently.
- The “double count” option allowing students to meet both a GE and a Major requirement by taking a single course is an effective means of improving a students’ time to degree and utilizes instructional resources efficiently.

Challenges

Transfer Credit

- Dukes Discover being offered at 100, 200, or 300 level, depending on transfer credit/admit status, is theoretically possible within a GE program of at least 36 credits. Integrative learning and rigor would need to vary appropriately.
- Mapping ENG 111 to GE at JMU (as required by state policy) remains a problem under all three proposals. See “Mapping ENG 111 to GE...” on p. 3 for options.
- For students transferring from non-VCCS colleges and universities, JMU would need to consider whether sophomore status transfer leads to a waiver of some or all of Madison Foundations in recognition of having completed a first year appropriate GE experience at their previous institution.

Technology

- The 400-level course, which will have an instructor and a designated faculty member reviewer, may create reporting challenges in the SA system.

Time to degree

- The current program’s requirement that students complete 9 credits in the first year is burdensome for several majors, from Music to Engineering. Adding a fourth course to be taken in the first two years and an upper-level course to take later will make it even more difficult for students to progress through their majors at a timely pace.
- To determine feasibility, the following should be addressed:
 - Students who have two majors will be required to complete two separate capstones or a single integrative capstone that reflects both academic interests.
 - Honors students will be able to fulfill the capstone requirement through the interdisciplinary minor.

Resources

- This proposal expands course offerings that currently do not exist and would require additional resources to sustain (i.e. “Dukes Thrive” - wellness courses for example).
- Additionally, there are no clear parameters outlined for how GE courses across disciplines would be balanced to avoid duplication of effort and competition for instructional resources.
- The feasibility of this proposal would largely depend on the university’s ability to reallocate existing resources (or secure new resources) to afford new GE course

offerings (i.e. “Dukes Thrive”) and incorporate clear guidance for how all GE courses are balanced across the disciplines.

Proposal 3: Preparing for Unexpected Futures

Strengths

Technology

- This model is feasible using current software.

Resources

- After full implementation, this proposal would likely provide a predictable portfolio of course offerings and clearly defined pathways (i.e. themes) create improved opportunities for utilization of instructional resources, a more efficient first year enrollment experience and reduced time to graduation.
- The reduction in GE credit hours in this proposal will allow for some reallocation of instructional resources, if coordinated strategically and as faculty expertise/availability allows.
- The thematic approach to curriculum design will require significant up-front investment (i.e. re-design, teach-out of old GE curriculum, etc.), but provides a familiar, yet different approach to a more self-guided/customized learning experience for students. The increased utilization of existing instructional infrastructure and affiliated personnel further enhances the feasibility of this proposal.

Challenges

Transfer Credit

- The proposal’s feasibility depends on whether the versatility rays include clear equivalents for Passport, UCGS, and common AP or college courses. Without this clarity, the intended curricular flexibility for transfer students may be limited.
- The state policy requiring 31-33 credits of GE to be satisfied by UCGS may be difficult in this proposal. Theoretically, the 31 credits could be used to satisfy 27 credits in the lower-level core and students could still be required to complete the capstone as a 300 or 400-level GE experience. Increasing the program to a minimum of 30 credits at the lower level with an additional 3 credits reserved for the capstone would be advised.

- High school students with the UCGS would have no courses required in their first year at JMU except major and minor courses. It could be difficult to build a first-semester schedule. They would not interact with GE until their capstone, if at all.
 - It will be important to anticipate increasing numbers of students in this category now that legislation requires all students in Virginia to have the opportunity to complete UCGS in high school free of charge.
- Mapping ENG 111 to GE at JMU, as required by state policy, remains a problem under all three proposals. See “Mapping ENG 111 to GE...” on p. 3 for feasible options.

Time to Degree

- To be feasible, courses that are required in the first year, such as the Essential Literacies, must have enough seats for all students to enroll in the first year. It will also be important to determine if the proposal includes first year transfer students.
- Requiring a 400-level course may present feasibility challenges for some majors, especially those with tightly structured curricula. For courses taught outside of major programs, sufficient seat availability must be ensured to accommodate graduating students.
- Although feasible, A 3-credit capstone course may be difficult to accommodate for students in accelerated 3+2 programs due to their compressed timelines and structured course loads.

Resources

- This proposal will require significant up-front investments to teach-out current GE courses, and re-design existing courses to align with Unexpected Future “themes”.
- The feasibility of this proposal is highly dependent upon a well-designed and broadly accessible curriculum to support all majors (i.e. balance enrollment across multiple disciplines).
- If not sufficiently addressed, transfer students and students with high credit may find it difficult to satisfy their “theme-based” curriculum requirements. Strategically designed curriculum pathways and careful reallocation of existing resources will enhance the feasibility of this proposal.