Shared Governance and the Ad Hoc Core Curriculum Committee's Work (2nd Round)

This document is intended to provide transparency into the deliberations of, and choices made by, the ad hoc Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) during the CCC's revisions of the draft proposal (11/21/2025), culminating in a revised proposal disseminated on 3/9/2026.

Context of the CCC's Work

CCC Membership

Membership on the CCC was established by the interim provost, in consultation with campus constituencies, including the General Education Council, Faculty Senate, and Academic Council. It includes 21 voting members: six instructional faculty appointed by the Faculty Senate; six faculty administrators appointed by the provost (five deans and one AUH); one joint provost-Faculty Senate appointee who is an instructional faculty member; and eight representatives coming from the colleges with instructional faculty. These eight voting members self-nominated and were appointed by their college dean at the recommendation of the advisory committee of each college: eight instructional faculty including one associate dean representing University Studies and the Libraries combined.

Additionally, seven non-voting advisory members to the CCC include: the instructional faculty member chairing the General Education Council/GEC; the Vice Provost for Student Academic Success; the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum; the Associate Dean for Academic Engagement of the Libraries; an Associate Vice President for Student Affairs; and two student representatives.

CCC Charge

The CCC was charged with reviewing and disseminating the proposals developed by the three summer working groups, collecting feedback on those proposals (we also solicited feedback relating to the current program and opened the discussion to topics that did not appear in any of these places), and then developing a single draft curriculum "informed by the review of the disseminated summer proposals and the feedback they received."

In addition to the feedback, the interim provost asked the CCC to consider academic quality, accreditation requirements, student needs, state transfer policies, market trends, resource availability, faculty expertise, and alignment with the university's mission. We met with the interim provost as we began our work in September 2025; in November President Jim spoke to the committee; and the interim provost spoke to the committee a second time, following the president's visit.

Academic Program Review 2022 and Resulting Reform Process

The reform process was first initiated following a 2022 Academic Program Review (APR), in which the external consultants acknowledged the many strengths of JMU's current general education program (clear mission, strong alignment with institutional identity, etc.), and identified several challenges (rigid program structure, implementation issues with bottlenecks, lack of flexibility, etc.).

The APR results recommended the development of a process that would invite broad campus participation in reform of the General Education program and re-examine faculty governance and administrative structures to ensure that they are sustainable and appropriate.

Following the APR process's conclusion, in Fall 2022 the former provost established the Core Curriculum Appraisal Task Force/CCATF to "lead the division through a process of consultation, discernment and innovation." The CCATF's responsibilities included forming and overseeing the 2025 summer working groups. This taskforce's work concluded in summer 2025, and leadership of renewal was passed onto the ad hoc Core Curriculum Committee (CCC) to propose the new program's curricular structure.

The CCC's Engagement with Faculty Feedback

The development of the revised version of the Proposed Core Curriculum (PCC2) was driven by campus feedback on the original Proposed Core Curriculum (PCC), released on November 21, 2025. We collected feedback in multiple ways, including open forums, department and other group meetings, and a campus wide survey. We will frame the feedback in terms of the Survey 2 questionnaire (217 responses, more than 85% of whom are instructional faculty), expanding as necessary to include feedback gathered in the other settings where they expand upon or clarify survey results, or are otherwise not sufficiently addressed in the survey.

Overall Evaluation of the Program

Respondents to the second survey felt that the proposal was likely to help students see the value and relevance of General Education, with 58% stating that this was extremely or somewhat likely vs. 20% answering either extremely or somewhat unlikely. 45% of respondents felt that the proposal would strengthen faculty commitment to Gen Ed (again, combining extremely and somewhat likely), with 25% responding somewhat or extremely unlikely. These results were similar across groups, including non-faculty, faculty who teach Gen Ed, and faculty who do not teach Gen Ed.

The strengths of the model include:

1. An emphasis on broad student development, with a focus on skills and dispositions rather than over-reliance on disciplinary content overall.
2. Flexibility in course contributions and the interdisciplinary structure this engenders.
3. The focus on democracy and the public good, with several respondents suggesting that this piece provides a defining vision for the program
4. Inclusion of key areas of learning, which protect the liberal arts foundation of the program

The primary concerns include:

1. The 2-credit/1-credit launch sequence, which was seen as potentially leading to issues with scheduling, staffing, and implementation. The perception of 1-credit classes in particular being seen as not important was frequently referenced.
2. A lack of clarity in the categories and learning goals
3. Implementation logistics
4. Challenges involving transfer students
5. The lack of a "global" component (this came from forum and group discussions)

Guiding principles

One of the perceived strengths of the program lies in the idea that learning outcome development should be ongoing and iterative. 43.8% of respondents strongly agree with this sentiment, and an additional 41.4% somewhat agree. There was also a strong consensus that learning outcomes should guide decisions about course inclusion, with 41.6% strongly agreeing, and 40.4% somewhat agreeing.

The overwhelmingly positive responses to these questions provide some context into the concern regarding a lack of clarity in the learning objectives (concern #2 above). Respondents wanted more clarity for the guidelines we provided for the individual program elements, but not at the expense of a set of flexible and iterative learning objectives that guide course inclusion for the program. After discussion, the committee elected to stay with framework-level guidelines for learning objectives, passing the development of specific learning objectives for each element to expert teams of faculty to assemble over the summer and beyond. We did respond to the request for more clarity by significantly expanding the set of guidelines that the learning objectives will evolve from throughout the proposal.

The other area of concern in this section relates to transfer students, ensuring that they are able to integrate with the new Gen Ed program in a way that doesn't add new hurdles or difficulties. To this end, the committee met with Jolie Lewis (Associate Vice Provost for Academic Support and Director of Transfer Initiatives). We were able to get our questions answered about state requirements, alignment with Virginia community colleges, and barriers to transfer student success.

Embedded Themes

The embedded themes were generally seen as a strength, reinforcing important skills across the curriculum, encouraging curriculum coherence, supporting interdisciplinary learning, and potentially improving student learning.

The main concerns included a lack of clear definitions, unclear terminology, and confusion about how the embedded themes interact with the rest of the curriculum.

The embedded themes idea is retained in the revised proposal, but the relationship between requirements and the embedded themes has been clarified. The embedded themes are not additional requirements and do not need to be student-facing as an element of course selection. The embedded themes are intended to provide program coherence and oversight in the hands of the group that will eventually administer the program, but the structure of the program would not materially change if the themes were removed.

Launch Requirements

72.7% of respondents strongly agree that information literacy and critical thinking are important components in a Gen Ed program, and an additional 16.1% somewhat agree, resembling a near-consensus.

Conversely, only 44.8% considered Power Skills to be either strongly or somewhat important, against 26% who argued that they aren't important.

There was general support for something resembling a first-year experience, but also significant skepticism involving the 2-1 credit structure along several compelling lines.

In response to these objections, the committee has replaced the 2-1 credit model with a single three credit Information Literacy and Critical Thinking requirement. Power skills will no longer exist as a separate course, but a version of it has been moved into the Embedded Themes category, relying on a set of explicitly stated skills that include information and critical thinking, communication, collaboration and problem solving, global perspectives, well-being, and engaged citizenship and democracy (no longer relying on the "power skills" label).

The Communication I & 2 sequence was somewhat or strongly supported by 90% of respondents and left unchanged beyond some expansion of the framework for learning objectives.

The Well-Being requirement was seen as somewhat or strongly important by two-thirds of faculty, with only 14.3% somewhat or strongly disagreeing. This requirement remains essentially as it was in the draft proposal.

Core Requirements

The specific elements of the core program were all considered to be important by an overwhelming majority of respondents, with the percentage responding either strongly or somewhat important provided below.

Creative Inquiry and Processes (87.4%)

Humanistic and Interpretive Reasoning (90.1%)

Social and Behavioral Inquiry (90.7%)

Quantitative Reasoning (90.6%)

Natural Science and Lab (88.9%)

Science, Technology, and the Built Environment (88.8%)

Overall, the core program was seen as strong, retaining foundational academic areas with an additional emphasis on foundational skills, increased flexibility and the potential for cross-disciplinary participation.

The concerns that came out in the discussions and survey focused on the lack of clarity in some guidelines and advising and scheduling complexity.

The committee has expanded the framework guidelines for most of the core components, with substantial clarification for the Creative Inquiry and Processes, Humanistic and Interpretive Reasoning, Natural Science and Lab and Science, Technology, and the Built Environment elements. Natural Science has been defined (as different from Social Sciences), and "Physical" has been removed from the Science, Technology, and Built Environment component, which now has three approaches to meet the requirement specifically laid out.

Engaged Citizenship and Democracy

The Engaged Citizenship and Democracy elements also received broad support, with 77.7% of respondents somewhat or strongly highlighting the importance of Foundations of Democracy, 69.2% support for Problem-Solving for the Public Good or Practicing Democracy. While Civic education was perceived as an important educational goal, there were concerns about the risk of political or ideological bias and lack of clarity about course content and learning outcomes.

In response to feedback, the committee changed the name of the second course to Practices for the Public Good, with two branches: Public Problem-Solving and Public Expression and Engagement. The framework guidelines for both of these have been significantly expanded.

Connection

Support for the Connection requirement was mixed in the survey, with 45.7% of respondents supporting and 37.0% of respondents skeptical. Comments identifying strengths most often emphasized the potential for the requirement to encourage integrative and cross-disciplinary learning and to create a structured opportunity for reflection on students' academic development. Concerns focused overwhelmingly on lack of clarity about course expectations and structure. Some concerns reflected misunderstandings that demonstrated that the committee needed to offer more clarity in the proposal. In response, the committee expanded the framework guidelines and continued refining the language describing the requirement's purpose and structure.

The Connection requirement remained a subject of active discussion through the committee's final meetings. Ultimately, the committee concluded that the requirement has the potential to meaningfully advance several objectives of the proposed curriculum and campus general education reform efforts. The final version of the Proposed Core Curriculum therefore retains the Connection requirement and clarifies its purpose, benefits, and anticipated structure. At the same time, the committee recognizes that realizing these benefits will depend on thoughtful implementation, including faculty development and ongoing evaluation. Most faculty feedback pointed to implementation challenges rather than a rejection of the educational goals the Connection requirement is designed to support, and the committee expects that continued faculty oversight will help ensure the requirement develops in ways that best serve students and the broader goals of the program

Double-Counting

The poll for double-counting showed a preference for a two or three course limit, with a skew towards larger numbers. The comments suggested that low double-counting would reduce student and program flexibility, whereas high double-counting would potentially limit student interaction with students from other disciplines.

In the end, the committee adopted a 10-credit overlap, allowing for one (4) credit class and two (3) credit classes (or any other combination) to be double-counted as a major course as well as

meeting a Gen Ed requirement. The Connections requirement stands outside of this and can always be double counted with an existing requirement.

Additionally, cognate courses (courses required by the major but that do not share the academic program's prefix) are not restricted from double-counting.

Global Requirement

One objection to the initial PCC (that was presented by many people and in multiple contexts) had to do with the lack of any requirement for a global perspectives course, arguing that meaningful engagement with non-American or non-Western contexts is an essential part of a general education program.

The committee (after engaging in lengthy debate and evaluating several alternative approaches) responded by adding this requirement as a credit-neutral overlay that could be achieved through several of the program elements but must be acquired at least once as a student navigates the program.

Going Forward

While the committee developed expanded framework guidelines for each of the elements of the proposal, with the purpose of making clear our intent for each element, we stopped short of developing specific learning objectives. We did not feel that we had the appropriate expertise to accomplish that effectively, and elected to defer this to faculty working groups to be assembled in the summer and/or fall. It is with gratitude that the CCC learned that the provost extended the timeline to ensure time for development of these learning objectives and subsequent shepherding through the C&I process.

We also considered making the Democracy/Public Service and Connections elements upper level (300-400) courses with the idea of ensuring that all JMU students (including transfer students) would have some elements of a shared General Education. While this idea had its origin in faculty feedback, we did not feel that it had sufficient evidence to support or oppose the idea in the proposal, so we chose to defer.