

Build Your Madison Experience

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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)

- 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

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extra-curricular experiences by connecting, synthesizing, and reflecting on knowledge and skills that emerge from different disciplines, contexts, experiences, and perspectives.

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Purpose of General Education

JMU's General Education program aims to ensure that every JMU student experiences a diverse, intellectually challenging, and personally enriching education in the liberal arts and sciences. General Education guides students to integrate learning across their many spheres: connecting major and GE courses with their academic, extracurricular, and personal experiences. An effective GE program provides students with a wide variety of experiences, an enhanced understanding of the world, and the ability to appreciate viewpoints different than their own, along with the critical transferable skills needed to navigate complexity and to adapt to—even lead—change. Enhancing the integrative elements of JMU's General Education curriculum will provide value to students by supporting them to develop as lifelong learners who are well-prepared both to earn a living *and* to live a fulfilling and meaningful life.

The world in which we live can feel fragmented, but integrative education helps students to connect their lived experiences and their learning experiences in creative, dynamic, and often unexpected ways. An emphasis on integrative learning asks students to identify meaningful connections across distinct contexts, to put disparate pieces together, to perceive patterns and corollaries, to communicate in a variety of media with different audiences, and to develop habits of mind that will serve them in all aspects of their lives. As Huber and Hutchings articulate the benefits of such learning, it “builds habits of mind that prepare students to make informed judgments in the conduct of personal, professional, and civic life” ([Huber and Hutchings 2004](#)).

The benefits to students who experience an integrative education are indeed substantial and measurable. Studies ([Carmichael and LaPierre 2014](#); [Fincham et al. 2021](#); [NSSE 2024](#)) indicate that students who participate in a variety of integrative learning experiences have higher grade point averages, increased rates of retention to graduation, and higher self-reported levels of satisfaction with their education. These students perform at higher levels when it comes to discovering and synthesizing information, working productively with a team, and solving complex problems, both within and beyond their specific majors. They are also sought after by employers ([AAC&U](#); [Ehiyazaryan and Barraclough 2009](#); [Selznik et al. 2022](#)). Integrative learning helps students to prepare for a wide range of both expected and unexpected career paths, encouraging them to develop and to recognize their transferable knowledge and skills. This adaptability is particularly important in a future where the average college graduate will change careers multiple times ([World Economic Forum](#)).

By encouraging students to collaborate, innovate, and apply their knowledge to progressively challenging situations, an integrative General Education experience helps them discover their own agency and responsibility. Graduates of the program are not just informed; they are active learners prepared to navigate complexity, embrace change, and make positive contributions to society for years to come. In this way, students' integrative educational experiences at JMU will be both timeless *and* relevant.

This proposed program is timeless because it engages students to develop and refine fundamental skills—critical thinking, communication, ability to evaluate information— that will serve graduates throughout their lives. It introduces students to enduring questions that give them a broader context for understanding their place in the world. It is relevant in that it empowers students to connect their learning to contemporary issues, develop significant questions about their world, refine skills valued by employers, and participate effectively in civic life.

The purpose of general education at JMU and its impact beyond the curriculum can be expressed by the following Mission, Vision, and Values statements:

Mission (purpose of program): To develop intellectually curious, critically engaged, and creative individuals through a broad and challenging exploration of knowledge and methods of discovery, preparing them to lead productive and meaningful lives in a complex world.

Vision (what we want to achieve): To be a leading liberal arts and sciences program that fosters lifelong learning by preparing graduates to adapt throughout their lives with wisdom, curiosity, and creativity, contributing to every community of which they are a part.

Values (principles of the program):

Intellectual Inquiry: We develop graduates who are intellectually curious and critically engaged by challenging them to explore a range of knowledge, methods, and skill sets.

Holistic Learning: We enable students to integrate the intellectual, ethical, spiritual, social, and civic dimensions of life, and encourage students to reflect critically on their own beliefs and to consider new and diverse perspectives.

Lifelong Learning: We cultivate lifelong learners who are empowered to lead meaningful lives and adapt to the ever-changing conditions of the world.

Ethical and Civic Engagement: We encourage ethically responsible individuals who understand their place and purpose within a variety of communities.

Individual Growth: We empower students to become mature individuals with the intellectual and emotional skills to continue developing themselves long after they graduate.

Distinctiveness

Our program is unique for its commitment to integrative learning, guided by four key principles: connection, collaboration, synthesis, and reflection. The program's streamlined and scaffolded structure fulfills JMU's mission to be an "engaged university: engaged with ideas and the world." JMU students are already active participants in their communities and in the wider world. This new curriculum honors their engagement and strives to center processes that enhance students' awareness of their own agency and responsibilities, empowering them both in and beyond the classroom. With its streamlined core and culminating "Moment" emphasizing reflection and synthesis, this renewed General Education program is designed to cultivate the kind of engaged, lifelong learning that JMU values.

Table 1 (see Appendix 2) compares our proposed program to some of our peer universities on three elements (as well as the program's mission): whether the program i) is learning outcomes based, ii) includes an integrative component, and iii) has an upper-level course or capstone. Summarizing the findings in the table, most schools' general education programs seem relatively similar on the surface. Our program, though, has a distinct advantage: a clear, step-by-step structure that detectably builds towards a culmination point. This design, by intention, is a progression, starting with foundational courses and ending with a capstone course where students apply what they've learned. While many programs use the word "integrative," what those programs do is often more accurately described as interdisciplinary—they combine two or more subjects, but that's about it. Our "Madison Moment" course goes further. It is designed so that students are required to bring together knowledge from different disciplines, connect it to what they already know, and then apply it to new and complex situations or questions.

Think of it this way: Many general education programs operate more like a huge library, saying to students "Go ahead, check out a few books from each section." Our program, by contrast, operates more like a well-guided tour in the new Carrier Library. While the students still get to "borrow books" from all over, they encounter content and methods in a specific order: the first floor holds books on fundamental skills and knowledge. The second floor has books and exhibits on a variety of topics, ideas, methods, questions, events, cultures—and students can explore here in their desired order, as long as they engage with each section. The top floor is populated with student carrels, as well as study rooms, collaboration spaces, and experts of all sorts. This floor represents students' Madison Moment. Our program, like this imagined guided tour of Carrier, is designed to support students as they build something meaningful, not just wander from row to row.

What Makes this Program Different from the Current One?

Content

It is likely that courses with a place in our current Gen Ed program would remain relevant and productive in the proposed program, while the new structure also makes space for more and newer courses. The Madison Moment upper-level integrative course, while seemingly “new” when considering most JMU students’ Gen Ed experience, is also not an entirely new element. It is, instead, an expanded and better-connected version of what currently happens in Gen Ed’s integrative courses. For further information on what may remain the same, and what will be distinct between the current program’s learning outcomes and the proposed streamlined learning outcomes, see section 3, Learning Outcomes, below, as well as the appendix; that section gives a clearer idea about what courses may fulfill each of the new core areas.

Policy

See descriptions of program requirements, above and below.

Structure

We propose a streamlined and scaffolded restructuring of JMU's GE program. Building on current practices, our proposal gives students, faculty, and academic units greater flexibility and choice, with fewer disciplinary constraints. This flexibility comes from crystallizing learning outcomes that students can meet through a wide variety of courses. The redesigned program streamlines existing learning outcomes and introduces a scaffolded structure that progresses from foundational courses to mid-level core courses and, finally, to an integrative upper-level course. Each stage of the program provides students with a stronger sense of coherence by focusing on the integrative principles of connection, collaboration, synthesis, and reflection.

Our program has three scaffolded stages: Madison Foundations, Madison Core, and Madison Moment. These stages of learning are metaphorically represented by the steps, pillars and portico, and pediment of Wilson Hall in the diagram in Appendix 1.

Well-defined Purposes at Each Level

Madison Foundations (9) credits: These courses are the “steps” of students’ Madison Experience. Foundations courses introduce students to the General Education program as well as reinforcing basic skills needed for a successful university education. We endorse a Foundations stage that cultivates belonging, critical curiosity, college readiness, and the value of integrative learning. Foundations courses provide students with significant, formative learning experiences in writing,

communication, and a variety of literacies (informational, digital, etc.). Courses may also foster wellness in areas that promote student achievement and health in their academic, career, and everyday lives.

Madison Core (25 credits): In this portion of the program, students select eight courses from a wide range of classes offered by a variety of JMU departments and instructors. Students choose courses that reflect their interests and also represent breadth of content, disciplines, and approaches to knowledge and learning. This proposal articulates seven Learning Outcome categories (or core areas) defined by common, high-level outcomes (see details on these proposed outcomes in the appendix): Humanistic and Interpretive Reasoning, Scientific Reasoning, U.S. Contexts, Quantitative Reasoning, Global Perspectives, Creative Inquiry and Processes, and Civic and Community Engagement. Students would be required to take one course in each category. The eighth Core course would be an open elective course of each student's choice that can come from any of the courses approved for the core area requirements. The eight core three-credit courses and a required one-credit lab for the Scientific Reasoning core area make the total 25 credits.

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, a student may not count more than one course for both a General Education requirement and a major requirement. While they may take additional courses for their major that are eligible for General Education core area credit, no more than one course in their major will also count for their GE requirements. In this way, students must go beyond their intellectual and academic comfort zones. Although this may appear strict, we have reduced the program by one course. Therefore, this would affect only those majors that allow three General Education courses to count as major courses. Secondly, this requirement protects and honors the agency of students to choose their core courses.

The integrative principles remain a throughline connecting Madison Core courses. All Madison Core courses would engage students in one or more of the four overarching principles of integrative learning: connection, collaboration, synthesis, and reflection. In fact, most courses in the current GE curriculum already encourage student learning guided by these principles, particularly connection. Instructors will receive professional development support to identify and improve the integrative parts of their courses.

The final objectives of any GE program must also satisfy SACSCOC requirements for such programs, which we believe our suggested core areas would. We also propose that a follow-up group of faculty, with support from academic units and other educational leaders, should define the specific objectives for the core areas.

Optional Core Pathways: Students would have the option to take a series of Madison Core courses from different disciplines that are connected to one of several pathways or common themes. A student, for example, may take three courses from three different core areas that each address, through distinct forms or methods, topics such as income inequality, sustainability, or other large-scale and timeless questions. These pathways would expose students to alternative perspectives on a theme unavailable through their major courses. Faculty across departments would identify and develop pathways, which may provide productive connection and collaboration opportunities for instructors. Without having to team-teach, faculty may find unexpected and fruitful alignments across core areas, learning outcomes, and departments, which they could make visible to students by proposing a pathway option among selected courses. Pathways could be expressed or marked by a system similar to the current “tagging” system in Gen Ed. Students who complete one or more pathways in the Madison Core could also earn a transcript notation or a “badge” to mark their focus. Pathways also introduce the possibility of developing minors, either within General Education or linked to existing or new minors. Students would not be required to elect or complete any pathways in the core. Pathways simply link together through topically connected courses that fulfill the Core requirements and do not create an additional credit burden.

Madison Moment (3-credits): The Madison Moment is represented by the pediment of Wilson Hall in the diagram in Appendix 1. It is an upper-level course that challenges students to bring together the strands of learning in their general education, major, and extra-curricular experiences by connecting, collaborating, synthesizing, and reflecting on knowledge and skills that emerge from different disciplines, contexts, experiences, and perspectives. The processes of integration guide students to develop a nuanced understanding of timeless and relevant questions and to address them competently and creatively. The words ‘integrate’ and ‘integrity’ share the Latin root *integrare*, meaning to create or maintain wholeness. Bringing things together—often in new and unexpected ways—is essential to lifelong learning and epitomizes what makes a James Madison University education both useful and distinctive.

Active learning and high-impact practices characterize these courses. Instructors may approach integrative learning from different directions: connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse or even contradictory points of view; and understanding issues and positions contextually. A course in the Physics of Science Fiction, for example, may make connections between physics and literature; a course in the Contending Economics of Climate Change may integrate various theories and approaches (social, economic,

environmental, etc.) to ask forward-looking questions. Throughout these topic-driven courses, the Madison Moment would also challenge students to synthesize and reflect on the strands of learning in their GE, major, and extra-curricular experiences, applying them to the specific contexts and interests of their Madison Moment course.

Madison Moment courses could be offered on campus or in study abroad contexts. Students would need to have completed at least five of their eight Madison Core courses (and at least three of these courses through JMU) and have Junior or Senior standing before embarking on their Madison Moment experience. The proposed reduction in total hours within the General Education program (from 41 credits to 37credits) as well as substitution of the Madison Moment for one current General Education course would make this upper-level course feasible without an increase in teaching resources. In addition, some faculty who currently do not teach in the General Education program will likely be attracted to this teaching option.

Our team discussed one further potential method of fostering integrative thought. At the conclusion of each Madison Core course, students could be prompted automatically (without the course instructor needing to do anything) to deposit a brief digital reflection in a digital GE scrapbook. Students may also submit one or more artifacts—perhaps an assignment they completed in the course of which they are proud—from each core course. Each student's GE scrapbook could be preserved digitally throughout their time at JMU. By the time a student takes their Madison Moment course, they will have multiple years of digital scrapbook entries that can serve as a resource as students synthesize and reflect on their past experiences.

Increased Academic Unit Agency

Academic units have the option of designing and submitting courses to fulfill at least one, and up to two, core areas, and will be empowered to make the primary determination regarding which of their courses fulfill which areas (see below for thoughts on Governance and approval processes). Academic units also have the choice of offering new or adapted courses in a variety of topics that fulfill the learning outcomes for the Madison Moment. These courses enable faculty to design courses toward their interests and expertise at an upper level, offering the option of teaching beyond their unit's current curriculum.

Increased Student Agency

Students exercise increased agency within the program in a few ways. First, if a course can be used to fulfill more than one requirement, they can elect for which requirement they will use it. Each course can only be counted towards one core area in a student's requirements (i.e., no "double

counting” of courses within the GE program). Second, the open elective course in the Madison Core enables students to follow their own interests. Third, students have the option to follow a Pathway that links together some of their Core courses across disciplines and learning outcomes. Last, the wide range of Madison Moment Integrative courses allows them a range of choices that support their interests, professional direction, or educational breadth.

Increased Connectivity between Courses and a Clear Throughline in the Student Experience

Our proposed program seeks to overcome one of the most persistent difficulties in higher education: student confusion about (even skepticism of) the value of a liberal education, the reason for liberal education courses, and their connection to their major. Through mutually reinforcing methods, this program integrates student GE learning and helps students perceive such connections. It does so through

- a three-level developmental structure in which each stage builds upon the skills practiced in the prior stage;
- a thematic and pedagogical focus on the four elements of integration (connecting, collaborating, synthesizing, and reflecting);
- streamlined student learning outcomes that clarify the purpose of each Core area requirement;
- a pathway option that foregrounds thematic and topical connections between courses from different disciplines;
- an upper-level course with learning experiences that help students integrate knowledge and/or perspectives from different areas as well as synthesize and reflect on their learning experiences.

A Sense of Culmination to and Reflection on the Educational Experience

The integrative course that forms the culmination of students’ Madison Experience brings together their learning experiences. Through the metacognitive experiences required throughout the program, students will better understand

- The purposes of a liberal education
- The connections and mutual learning reinforcements between their GE and major courses
- The enduring, timeless, and transferable skills and understanding underlying their courses and education
- The holistic nature of general, career, and lifelong learning

Credit Hours

This program requires a total of 37 credit hours, 3 lower than the current requirement.

Madison Foundations:	9 credits
Madison Core:	25 credits
Madison Moment:	3 credits
Total:	37 credits

Such a reduction enables students the ability to complete Core requirements early enough to take the Madison Moment course in or prior to their senior year, explore areas of interest through other courses in or outside their major, and more readily complete the General Education program if they are transfer students.

Governance

Any General Education program should seek to adapt to developments in learning as well as university needs as they emerge. The governing body or bodies of the General Education program will be responsible for overseeing the smooth running of a program that constitutes approximately one-third of every student's undergraduate coursework and offers as many as 38,000 seats in hundreds of courses per semester. These two overarching responsibilities and the proposed qualities of the program depend on fulfillment of several tasks. Tasks foreseen at this point as necessary to fulfill through a General Education governing body include

- Coordinating the review and approval of new and revised Madison Moment options (on campus; Study Abroad). This would include assuring that enough seats are available each semester and the range of options is broad enough to address student interest
- Coordinating the review and approval of new and revised proposed Pathways options
- Coordinating and ensuring that sufficient options are offered of Foundations and Core courses
- Coordinating with academic units
- Coordinating with college deans and offices of Academic Affairs, particularly the vice-provosts' offices, Honors College, University Studies, Academic Resources, and the Center for Global Engagement
- Coordinate with the Center for Assessment and Research Studies regarding assessment
- Communicating effectively with the university community, particularly students and GenEd faculty
- Reviewing student transfer credit requests and pre-approvals not accommodated by the automated system; review Transfer Evaluation System requests and re-approvals

- Staying current with developments in higher education liberal education, pedagogy, and national organizations, including suggesting or coordinating needed and/or positive changes to the program
- Troubleshooting as difficulties arise unexpectedly
- If the Office of Student Academic Success does not take over this responsibility, coordinating that enough seats in a sufficiently wide breadth of courses in each area are offered every semester

To fulfill these responsibilities and tasks effectively, governance of the program may be composed of:

- One person responsible of higher-level communications and oversight of the program.
- Two or more others who would coordinate each stage of the program (foundations, core, moment).
- Committees with faculty representatives from units offering courses in each stage of the program would be responsible for the review and approval of new Madison Moment and Foundations courses and Pathway proposals

Placement: Many of the offices with which the General Education governing body will need to coordinate (University Advising, Registrar) are within Student Academic Success, so this is one possible location of the governance. University Studies and Online Strategies, however, has the most alignment in its components with the responsibilities of a General Education program, with all of its offices in relationship to the program.

What Remains the Same?

This proposal retains, and in specific ways enhances, the breadth of the curriculum all JMU students follow as a core of their university learning. Students are expected to take a diverse range of classes in the older model and in the proposed model. This suggested revision to the program also retains and further emphasizes the focus on metacognition and intellectual self-awareness for students, as well as on in-depth engagement “with ideas and the world,” per the university’s mission.

Learning Outcomes

High-level learning outcomes have been summarized in section 2, especially in our discussion of proposed mission, vision, and values statements for GE. In addition, this proposal pursues the following outcomes related to integrative learning:

1. Students will recognize and express specific **connections** between their learning in each class, other Madison Core Curriculum courses, and their majors.

2. Students will interact productively with their peers, instructors, and their communities, broadly conceived, through diverse modes of **collaboration**—from active listening in discussion to completing collaborative projects.
3. Students will transfer the knowledge and skills they gain in each course in order to **synthesize**—put together in innovative ways—their varied experiences and expertise, acting as agents of their own learning.
4. Students will **reflect** thoughtfully upon their academic and personal experiences, practicing metacognition—analyzing their own thinking—in order to become more well-rounded individuals and effective learners.

Madison Moment courses, independently of their specific outcomes that are based on the topic and academic perspectives included in those courses, will have to attain these four integrative outcomes.

All Madison Core courses, regardless of their learning outcome category, will be encouraged to identify how they will engage students in one or more of the four main Integrative principles and pursue some of the four listed integrative outcomes. When applying for approval in specific outcome areas of the Madison Core, programs and instructors will be encouraged to describe how they guide students in processes such as connection, collaboration, synthesis, and/or reflection.

The outcomes of the different core areas in the Madison Core will be defined by the general education governing body or bodies, including input from instructors who teach in those areas. Example outcomes are included in the appendix.

Implementation Considerations

Madison Core: A GE governing body will finalize the learning outcomes for the seven Madison Core areas, solicit course proposals from academic units, and approve, as appropriate, courses. It is expected that many current GE courses can be adapted for that purpose, though units and faculty will also be able to propose a wide range of new courses.

Madison Moment: GE has to communicate the nature of Madison Moment courses to JMU faculty and solicit course proposals that satisfy the Madison Moment requirements as laid out in this report. The GE governing body has to approve Madison Moment courses. CFI, JMU Libraries, and other units and offices supporting faculty teaching will provide information, workshops, and other programs guiding faculty in the design of course proposals as well as approved courses.

Faculty Support: Besides implementation considerations for the specific proposals included in this report, academic affairs leadership must provide the support and create the incentive structure that is needed for faculty to engage in wide-ranging curricular change:

Colleges and departments need to foster an **academic culture** that recognizes and rewards teaching in general education. Integrative and innovative general education teaching has to be recognized in awards and grants. General education teaching has to be rewarded in annual and promotion/tenure guidelines, especially as a pathway towards excellence in teaching.

While the reduction in overall GE credits will enable the creation of the Madison Moment without additional faculty lines, the university should be willing to expend **supportive funds to enable faculty to create course proposals and design new courses**. Such funds could be used to finance professional development opportunities as well as to stipend faculty for work conducted while off contract in the summer.

Faculty development programs have to go beyond support for the development of new courses and in addition will have to focus on integrative learning as well as to strengthen cross-disciplinary faculty communities that enable integration across courses and disciplines. This requires **continuing and expanding support for units that provide professional development around teaching**, such as CFI, JMU Libraries, the Madison Center, CEVC, and others.

Resources Needed

For this or any GE program to reach its full potential, systems must be put in place that unambiguously validate and incentivize faculty contributions to GE (including, but not limited emphasizing GE participation and innovation in Academic Unit P&T criteria) and regard these contributions as fundamental to the University's core mission. Likewise, academic unit leadership must be incentivized to assign GE teaching to the unit's most engaging master teachers. Such systems do not currently exist at JMU universally, and the resulting deprioritization of GE among faculty and administration makes a positive and successful GE student experience nearly impossible to achieve.

Faculty will need support to develop and implement the Madison Moment courses, though many existing 300-level courses are already engaging students in integrative learning—just outside the Gen Ed curriculum at present. There is extensive innovation and cross-disciplinary teaching that already happens at JMU, and with the Madison Moment, faculty would find a fertile new outlet for their most exciting teaching ideas.

Our program proposes 37 credits total. Nine Foundations credits (three 3-credit courses); 25 Core credits (eight 3-credit courses, plus lab); three Madison Moment credits (1 upper-level approved

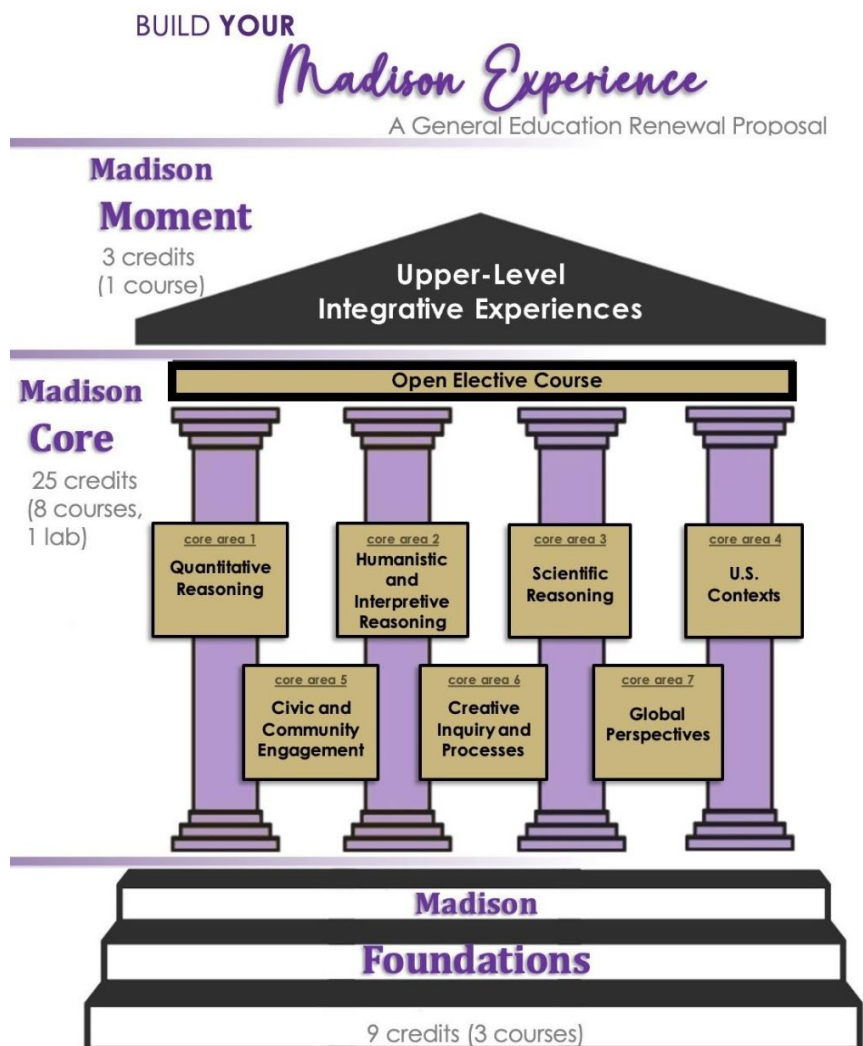
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Integrative 3-credit course) = 37 credits total. The Madison Moment course is offset by a reduction in overall program credits, allowing our proposal to remain credit- and resource-neutral. While this program makes room through credit reduction for the number of instructors that will be needed to teach the Madison Moment course, we acknowledge that a new component as significant as this will require careful logistical oversight and creative thinking by major programs and other constituents.

Budgetary Needs

This Gen Ed program will require professional development funds for faculty to develop the Madison Moment course (the integrative experience course). We anticipate that faculty from all colleges and departments will teach this course, and many sections will be offered. We may need ninety plus faculty to participate and therefore, we recommend that professional development opportunities should be offered in the fall, spring, and summer for consecutive years.

Appendix 1: Program Diagram



Appendix 2

Table I: Comparison of Our Program to Some Peer Universities: This table compares the general education programs of James Madison University and several peer institutions, highlighting their program missions, learning outcomes, integrative components, and upper-level course requirements.

Universities	Program Mission	Outcome Based Learning	Integrative Components	Upper-Level Course
James Madison University ¹ (37 credits)	To develop intellectually curious, critically engaged, and creative individuals through a broad and challenging exploration of knowledge and methods of discovery, preparing them to lead productive and meaningful lives in a complex world.	Based on specific student learning outcomes in seven areas: Civic and Community Engagement, Creative Inquiry, Global Perspectives, Humanistic Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Scientific Reasoning, and U.S. Contexts.	Strong emphasis on integration, with courses designed around four principles: connection, collaboration, synthesis, and reflection. A culminating course brings together prior learning experiences.	The Madison Moment is a learning experience where students connect, collaborate, and reflect on what they've learned in different classes and activities. This process of integrating knowledge from various disciplines helps them develop a deeper understanding of important questions and address them with creativity and integrity.
Virginia Tech (45)	To examine the world from multiple perspectives and integrate knowledge across disciplines, promoting integration, inclusivity, and relevance.	"Pathways" build on seven core concepts: Reasoning in the Social Sciences, Critical Thinking in the Humanities, Reasoning in Natural Sciences, Quantitative Thinking, Critique and Practice in Design of the Arts, Reasoning in Social Sciences,	Features two integrative concepts, Ethical Reasoning and Intercultural and Global Awareness. Each course in the program must satisfy at least one concept.	The program does not have an explicit upper-level course requirement, but the integrative concepts encourage connections beyond introductory courses.

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		and Critical Analysis of Equity in the U.S. Each has specific learning outcomes		
George Mason University (40)	To provide a comprehensive liberal education that builds the foundation for the Mason Graduate—an engaged citizen and scholar prepared to act.	The program's learning outcomes are tied to its three-part structure (Foundation, Exploration, Integration). Outcomes for the Foundation section, for instance, are highly skill-focused, including the ability to "use research strategies for topic exploration" and "develop knowledge of linguistic structures.	Students take three courses that refine their communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. The first course is an upper-level written communication course. The second course is a major specific course, which are writing intensive. The third is the "Mason Apex: course.	Students now take a "Mason Apex" course, which replaces the previous Capstone and Synthesis course. These courses are high-impact, culminating experiences that challenge students to apply critical thinking and make connections across their undergraduate academic experience.
Virginia Commonwealth University (30)	To challenge students to connect disciplines and ideas and find creative solutions to complex problems.	"ConnectED" has specific learning outcomes students must demonstrate: critical thinking, communication, and global awareness. Courses are divided into Foundations, Breadth of Knowledge (Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences), and Areas of Inquiry.	The curriculum integrates subjects by having courses in the "breadth of knowledge" category also count toward the "areas of inquiry" requirement. This structure encourages students to see the interconnectedness of different academic fields.	VCU's general education curriculum does not have an explicit upper-level course requirement. The focus is on a broad foundation of courses, with advanced work primarily reserved for a student's major.
Grand Valley State University (40-45)	To prepare students for informed citizenship and responsible participation in local, national, and global communities.	GVSU's general education program is based on essential skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration etc.) and themes (foundations, cultures and issues).	Integration is a stated learning outcome in all sections of the program: "apply knowledge from multiple disciplines to new, complex situations."	Although there is no specific upper-level requirement many of the courses have a prerequisite of junior standing.

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Appalachian State University ² (44)	<p>To shape students into globally minded, responsible members of society who engage with and contribute to their communities.</p>	<p>The university is revising its program (Gen Ed 3.0 for Fall 2025) to align with specific competencies. New components include Sustainability and Climate Literacy and Intercultural Literacy, with clear goals for what students should learn in these areas..</p>	<p>The curriculum includes an "Integrative Learning Experience," a multi-disciplinary, theme-based component that is appears similar to our current 300 level courses.</p>	<p>The program includes junior-level writing courses, which serve as an upper-level requirement to continue developing foundational skills.</p>
Miami University (36-40)	<p>Offer an inclusive liberal education that empowers students to be creative transformers of the future and better global citizens.</p>	<p>The "Miami Plan" is a requirement designed to provide a breadth of knowledge that complements a student's major. There are pillars: Civic-Mindedness, Collaboration and Innovation, Communication and Expression, and Critical and Integrative Thinking.</p>	<p>The curriculum features a "Knowledge in Action" component that includes opportunities for global learning, research, and internships to create a culminating experience.</p>	<p>The Senior Capstone is a dedicated, upper-level requirement designed to integrate a student's learning, making it a strong counterpart to JMU's Integrative course.</p>
University of Oregon (45)	<p>To help individuals question critically, think logically, reason effectively, communicate clearly, act creatively, and live ethically.</p>	<p>The curriculum goals are incorporated into all general education courses and focus on communication, quantitative literacy, critical thinking, and social justice.</p>	<p>The curriculum aims to provide students with deep and integrative experiences, with courses designed to help students apply critical thinking and make a positive impact.</p>	<p>The "Signature Core" includes an upper-level writing course designed to help students adapt to new writing situations and audiences.</p>
California Polytech	<p>To promote an understanding and appreciation of the foundational disciplines that ground all intellectual</p>	<p>Based on program learning outcomes and structured around a</p>	<p>The program explicitly states it "supports integrative learning" and</p>	<p>Requires a minimum of 12 upper-division units in General Education</p>

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University - San Luis Obispo (48) ³	inquiry... to impart transferable skills, nurture creativity, foster critical thinking and ethical decision-making, support integrative learning, and prepare students for civic engagement and leadership."	tiered system of areas (e.g., Area A: English Communication).	requires upper-division courses that are "integrative in nature."	courses, with specific requirements across different areas.
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1. The table compares our *proposed* program to other universities.
2. App State has a new program starting this year (Fall 2025)
3. Cal Poly is on a quarter system. They require 72 credit hours, which breaks own to 38 semester hours.

Appendix 3: Example learning outcomes for Madison Core areas

Quantitative Reasoning—Students will learn and practice the principles of numeracy with an emphasis on accuracy and appropriate contextual applications. Students will understand and describe the types of questions or problems for which numerical and mathematical approaches are best suited.

Humanistic and Interpretive Reasoning—Students will analyze one or more cultural text, broadly conceived (literary, filmic, visual art, performance, etc.), through distinct qualitative methods and reasoning. Students will consider and describe how the form, content, contexts, creation, and reception of texts affect their meaning(s), synthesizing this data to make significant interpretations of and/or arguments about these cultural creations and experiences.

Scientific Reasoning—Students will learn the reasoning, processes, and purposes of the Scientific Method. Students will be able to understand and describe the types of questions or problems for which the Scientific Method is best suited

U.S. Contexts—Students will identify, describe, and analyze select institutions, processes, communities, and contexts of the United States, past or present, applying economic, historical, cultural, and/or social scientific approaches.

Civic and Community Engagement—Students will identify, analyze, and participate in “mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships, ranging from local to global, that connect learning to practice, address critical societal problems, and improve quality of life.”

(<https://www.jmu.edu/engagement/community/index.shtml>)

Creative Inquiry and Processes – Students will synthesize knowledge, skills, and methods from one or more disciplines, to develop or meaningfully engage with original works, broadly defined. Courses in this category will have a synthetic “making” component as part of their analytical and theoretical explorations of creativity.

Global Perspectives – Students will identify, describe, and analyze select political, social, cultural, and economic systems and issues whether past or present. Students will be able accurately to understand and apply economic, historical, cultural, and/or social scientific methodologies to analyze global communities and contexts, broadly conceived.