GENERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

General Education is the foundation of a liberal arts education and is designed to cultivate the skills, knowledge, values, and habits of mind that are essential in every field of study and which enable graduates to make effective decisions as citizens of a rapidly changing, richly diverse, and increasingly interconnected world. The University's General Education requirements introduce students to a variety of learning perspectives and methods of inquiry, which combine to foster an appreciation of the connections between different ways of viewing, knowing, and engaging with the world. In particular, the General Education curriculum should:

- *develop core skills that enable students to understand, evaluate, articulate, and advance their ideas and the ideas of others*. Across their General Education courses, students learn to think critically, analyze data, evaluate evidence and the arguments and theories grounded in that evidence, conduct research thoroughly and with integrity, write and speak effectively, and be in command of the technologies that define not only 21st-century communication but also the emerging tools of different disciplines.

- *challenge students to explore issues, solve problems, and learn though multiple methodological approaches*. General Education offers a wide range of courses challenging students to make connections across their course of study and to explore the variety of ways they can understand and apply what they learn. They achieve this through studying complex problems and issues in the arts, humanities, quantitative reasoning, and natural and social sciences.

- *prepare students to engage knowledgably and responsibly with a changing, complicated, and multi-dimensional world*. University of Mary Washington students must understand and appreciate global connections, differences, cultures, languages, environments, and change. These courses require students to be both individual and collaborative learners, solve problems systematically and creatively, and find opportunities to explore beyond the classroom experiences such as undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, and engagement in community and civic life.

These goals were the basis for the development of the new General Education curriculum, where requirements were placed into three overarching categories: Foundations, Methods of Investigation, and Connections. Courses in the Foundations category will establish skills for later success at UMW, are fundamental to the liberal arts, and ideally should be taken early in the academic career. Methods of Investigation consist of lower level courses that explore how different disciplines approach critical thinking, research, and problem-solving. Connections courses will build on prior requirements to help students make links between classroom knowledge, the world, and their life beyond UMW. This arrangement of the courses emphasizes the skills and knowledge that will be gained from each required course and clarifies the benefits that will be acquired through the completion of the General Education curriculum through this framework.

The General Education curriculum and the Honor System are both integral parts of the educational experience at UMW. It is expected that students will devote their authentic selves to each course, will learn and respect relevant disciplinary norms, and will conduct themselves with integrity in accordance with the honor pledge made upon arriving at Mary Washington in the completion of this curriculum.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

In 2017, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia established a policy on Student learning Assessment and Quality in Undergraduate Education. Goal #2 of the *Virginia Plan for Higher Education* directs SCHEV to "optimize student success for work and life," and, specifically, to "strengthen curricular options to ensure that graduates are prepared with the competencies necessary for employment and civic engagement." Priority Initiative #4 for 2016 includes a commitment to "collaborate with institutions to measure the quality of undergraduate education, including civic engagement of graduates and relevance to demand occupations across regions of the state." The 2017 policy identifies four core competencies for student success to be assessed by all institutions:

1) **Critical thinking** – the ability to subject one's own and others' ideas, arguments, assumptions, and evidence to careful and logical scrutiny in order to make an informed judgment, draw a sound conclusion, or solve a problem.

2) **Written communication** – the ability to develop and communicate ideas effectively in writing as appropriate to a given context, purpose, and audience. It includes a variety of styles, genres, and media, including computer-mediated communications.

3) **Quantitative reasoning** – the ability to manipulate, analyze, and/or evaluate numbers and numerical data. It may involve calculation and/or analysis and interpretation of quantitative information derived from existing databases or systematic observations, and may be based in a variety of disciplines, not limited to mathematics and the natural and physical sciences.

4) **Civic engagement** – an array of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the civic life of their communities. It may include, among other things, exploration of one's role and responsibilities in society; knowledge of and ability to engage with political systems and processes; and/or course-based or extra-curricular efforts to identify and address issues of public or community concern.

Two additional core competencies are selected by the institutions themselves. At the University of Mary Washington, these competencies are:

5) **Oral communication** – The ability to communicate effective oral messages in a variety of settings, including public speaking, group discussion, and interpersonal communication; the ability to plan, organize, support, and deliver ideas and arguments, and utilize a variety of research techniques to synthesize information and support their messages.

6) **Digital Fluency** – Digital fluency is the ability to consume and produce digital knowledge critically, ethically, and responsibly, as well as to creatively adapt to emerging technology.

The calendar for UMW's reporting of these core competencies is below:

SCHEV Competencies Review Calendar							
2018-2019	**2019-2020**	**2020-2021**	**2021-2022**	**2022-2023**	**2023-2024**	**2024-2025**	**2025-2026**
	Civic Engagement (early)			Civic Engagement			Civic Engagement
Critical Thinking (early)				Critical Thinking			Critical Thinking
		Digital Fluency			Digital Fluency		
Oral Communication			Oral Communication			Oral Communication	
		Quantitative Reasoning (late)			Quantitative Reasoning		
Written Communication			Written Communication			Written Communication	

Civic Engagement at UMW

Definition. An array of knowledge, abilities, values, attitudes, and behaviors that in combination allow individuals to contribute to the life of their communities. It includes course-based or extra-curricular efforts to identify and address issues of public or community concern and exploration of one's role and responsibilities in society.

The following learning outcomes are used both for assessing Community Engagement courses that meet UMW's General Education requirement, "Beyond the Classroom," and the SCHEV core competency of Civic Engagement. These three criteria are expressed in material, assignments and exams for all courses offered at University of Mary Washington that fulfill the BTC:CE requirement.

Learning Outcomes. Civic Engagement proficiency was evaluated by measuring students' abilities across three criteria as expressed in writing assignments for community engagement (CE) courses.

> **Analysis of Knowledge**: Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/ field/ discipline to community engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.

> **Identity/Commitment**: Provides evidence of experience in community-engagement activities and describes what the student has learned about themselves and their own role in the community as it relates to a growing sense of public identity and commitment to public action.

> **Action and Reflection**: Demonstrates independent experience, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of community action while making connections to other community issues.

Standard(s) for Proficiency. There are four rating categories (i.e., *limited, average, good, high*) for each SLO. 75% of students must pass each SLO with a rating of 2 (average) or higher. The evaluation categories are the same as those used in university assessments of Community Engagement, a subset of our General Education category "Beyond the Classroom."

Description of Methodology Used to Gather Evidence of Proficiency. Administrative, discipline-trained evaluators reviewed writing assignments from four Community Engagement courses to assess proficiency in the categories listed above. Final papers from Honors 201 ("Service Learning"), reflections from Spanish 321 ("Service and Social Action") and Interdisciplinary Studies 121 ("Be The Change"), and journal entries from Education 351 ("Instructional Design") were read by two reviewers. Writing assignments from 60 students were evaluated. The individual administrator evaluations were compared with each other and, in cases where team members did not agree on an overall rating, the evaluators discussed each assignment until agreement was reached on each SLO category for each student.

Civic Engagement Benchmark. For each SLO, the benchmark was at least 75% of students would achieve a passing score (2, average) or higher.

Results. Results of this assessment are presented in the tables below. The results of the Civic Engagement assessment for 2023 are compared to 2020, the last time this competency was reported to SCHEV, and the two ensuing years in between:

Results of Community Engagement Learning Outcomes

2019-20 Results

	SLO 1 A of K	SLO 2 ID/Comm	SLO 3/A&R
Students evaluated	28	28	28
Average	1.6	2.1	1.9
# Passing (2 and above)	39%	75%	71%

2020-21 Results

	SLO 1 A of K	SLO 2 ID/Comm	SLO 3/A&R
Students evaluated	18	16	14
Average	2.3	2.8	2.6
# Passing (2 and above)	61%	93%	88%

2021-22 Results

	SLO 1 A of K	SLO 2 ID/Comm	SLO 3/A&R
Students evaluated	51	52	52
Average	2.2	2.7	2.5
# Passing (2 and above)	75%	93%	88%

2022-23 Results

	SLO 1 A of K	SLO 2 ID/Comm	SLO 3/A&R
Students evaluated	60	60	60
Average	2.7	3.0	2.9
# Passing (2 and above)	98%	100%	98%

For two consistent years, the 75% benchmark for each of the learning outcomes has been met. Furthermore, we have seen steady increases in the percentage of students meeting the proficiency expectations for SLO 1, Analysis of Knowledge, since it was considerably below the benchmark in 2019-20, indicating that students were not addressing the knowledge in their academic studies to their community experience in the assignment at all in the past. This issue was addressed by providing and discussing Community Engagement learning outcomes to students ahead of time

so that students understood that they *could* address academic knowledge brought in from this course or other arenas and/or courses at UMW. In addition, Center for Community Engagement staff provided additional professional development in the ensuing years to faculty members on teaching Community Engagement courses. In particular, faculty were trained in writing or altering assignments to allow students to reflect on how their community engagement experiences address facts, theories, and/or knowledge from their academic studies (in the CE class or beyond).

Recommended Changes: Monitor as needed.

Civic Engagement is scheduled to be assessed again in 2026-27. For questions, contact the office of OIAE.

Report prepared by:
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August 2023

Updates:

2020-21 Results

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2021-22 Results

	SLO 1 A of K	SLO 2 ID/Comm	SLO 3/A&R
Students evaluated	51	52	52
Average	2.2	2.7	2.5
# Passing (2 and above)	75%	93%	88%

These results were shared with the director and faculty director of the Center for Community Engagement. After this report, both worked considerably to develop the community engagement designation with multiple faculty, who were offering, or thinking of offering, CE courses. These one-on-one consultations are the way information was shared more widely and effectively. Discussions of the CE learning outcomes and rubric helping faculty design assignments, which likely contributed to improved scores in later years.

Community-Engaged Course Student Learning Outcomes Scoring Scale and Rationale

Scoring Criteria	Limited to No Proficiency (1)	Somewhat Proficient (2)	Proficient (3)	High Proficiency (4)	Score/Rating
Analysis of Knowledge	Makes *basic identification* of knowledge (fact, theories, etc.) from one's academic studies that may be relevant to civic and community engagement.	Begins to *connect* knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic studies to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	*Analyzes* knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic studies *making relevant connections* to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	*Connects and extends knowledge* (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline to engagement and to one's own participation in community life, politics, and government.	P = 2 or higher F = 1 and below
Identity/ Commitment	Provides little *evidence* of the students experience in community-engagement activities and does not connect experiences to the development of one's public identity. Shows no commitment to future action for self.	Evidence suggests involvement in community engagement activities is generated from expectations or course requirements rather than from a sense of *public identity*. Shows rudimentary commitment to future action for self.	Provides evidence of experience in community engagement activities and describes what the student has learned about themselves as it relates to a growing sense of public identity and commitment to public action.	Provides evidence of experience in community engagement activities and describes what the student has learned about themselves as it relates to a *new or clarified sense of public identity* and continued commitment to public action.	P = 2 or higher F = 1 and below
Action and Reflection	Has *experimented* with some community engagement activities but shows little understanding of the aims and effects of community engagement.	Has clearly *participated in* community focused actions and begins to reflect or describe how these actions may benefit individual(s) and/or communities.	Demonstrates independent experience and *team leadership of* community action, with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of community action.	Demonstrates independent experience and *shows initiative in team leadership* of complex and multiple civic engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of community actions.	P = 2 or higher F = 1 and below