

**Report of the Committee on General Education  
to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee  
March 16, 2018**

COGE met to consider the RICONline proposal, and transmitted our concerns to the Steering Committee. (Appendix 1)

We considered several proposals, one of which will appear on a later UCC docket:

NURS 263, conversion of Core 4 to Connections was referred back to the department and subsequently withdrawn.

A proposal from Social Work to approve [SWRK 302 and 303](#) as AQSR courses elicited an extended discussion of the mathematics appropriate for the proposed courses. The option of “any General Education math course” was not appropriate. Math 240 – Statistical methods I was recommended as a prerequisite. Stephanie Costa (Chair of Math/CS) proposed that a special section focused on statistics for the social sciences could be offered. Others proposed that a MATH 250 with the same function could be offered for the standard experimental period (three offerings.) Dr. Costa will work with the SSW on the prerequisites. Dean Sue Pearlmuter and Prof. Jesse Capece from the School of Social Work were able to join us for the discussion.

We have arranged for Mike Michaud to work for year with departments on Writing in the Discipline, with focus both on the structure of the programs and the presentation to faculty and students. The description of this assignment is Appendix 2.

We are continuing the conversation on Critical and Creative Thinking based upon last summer’s assessment. An open session is scheduled for Wednesday, March 21, 2:30-1:45 pm in the Faculty Center South Dining Room, jointly sponsored by COGE and the Committee on the Assessment of Student Outcomes (CASO) to continue the discussion. The [starting point](#) is the summer assessment report.

Respectfully submitted,

James G. Magyar, Chair  
Committee on General Education

## **Appendix 1: COGE Response to the Rhode Island College Online Proposal**

The Committee on General Education met on January 23, 2018, to consider the RIC Online Proposal. The initial plan was to consider how general education would be affected by the proposal. The committee, however, was adamant that we not discuss details until there is a clearer understanding of the scope of the plan. The subsequent discussion is summarized below.

The most important decision is whether to move forward on the proposal at all.

Concerns: This new teaching would be done almost entirely by adjuncts. To the extent that Rhode Island College faculty had a role in developing, teaching, or supervising online courses, their reduced load would be taken up by adjuncts teaching on-site students. Heavy use of adjuncts is cost effective but is also exploitative in that these individuals are not adequately compensated for their efforts.

General Education is needed for a college degree. The Rhode Island College general education program is designed as an integrated package that depends on some face-to-face interactions in meeting learning outcomes that go beyond mastery of specific content.

A question raised: would online students have the same degree requirements as resident students? If so, there are problems meeting general education outcomes. If not, a separate general education program would have to be designed for online students, and the degrees would no longer be equivalent. If online alternatives were designed to replace some GE requirements, would campus-based students be able to use those courses as well?

Technologically speaking, developing good online materials takes time and effort. What skills in developing these programs does Rhode Island College bring? Our expertise is intense personal interaction and special attention to first-generation students.

Our teaching model at the College is based on small classes, with very few mass lectures. How does this translate to an online program?

Another concern: What happens if the labor organization sponsoring the program is dissatisfied with the results. Anecdotally, pass rates for similar online programs range around 15%.

There was widespread consensus that there are no benefits to Rhode Island College or to our students other than possibly increased revenue. Even that is called into question because of the way the College is legislatively funded. Absent a change in legislation, money coming in would still be part of the legislative budget and in lean years would likely simply lead to a lower appropriation rather than a net gain. (This topic was explored in depth.)

Another comment: "There is so much risk and so many unknowns."

Several suggested that we could successfully implement specific programs such as RN to BSN for students who already have an associate's degree. These programs would be independent of the proposed initiative.

Discussions of the proposal refer to a small pilot. We envision such a pilot as a feasibility study, which would let us try out some things, then evaluate whether we wanted to continue. Our understanding, though, is that the proposed pilot would only serve to inform a scale-up, and that committing to the pilot would commit the College to the full proposal. In chemistry, a pilot plant performs reactions on a larger scale than is possible in the laboratory in order to figure out how to deal with factors that only are relevant at that larger scale. Still, if the pilot plant blows up, the synthesis is not scaled up further.

Given the current general education program, it is hard to see how we could mount it online. If we had a different program online, it would not be the same degree. If there were online alternatives, how could you block campus-based students from choosing them?

Toward the end of the conversation, several ideas were reiterated:

Is there a guarantee that Rhode Island College would keep the profits (if any)? Ans: No.

How far can one go before the technology is ready?

Can this program be an external division? Would it be a separate program or would the online courses be open to all students?

Will the state reduce Rhode Island College's appropriation?

What does this do for Rhode Island? Ans: Nothing for the state or for local students.

Students like online content on a course basis, but prefer the hybrid model over all.

Similar institutions manage online curricula themselves not through third party companies.

The program is too adjunct based, and if it grows to scale it will overtax every aspect of the college's administrative structure.

What's the hurry? Why are we being railroaded into this? We are short basic information.

We can't respond to details without a firmer outline.

All in all, there was much dissatisfaction with the proposal itself and with the way it is being presented.

## **Appendix 2: Proposal for one-year Writing in the Discipline Coordinator**

Assignment: complete the tasks required to get WID web pages up and functioning, assist departments in refining and describing plans, and organize WID in such a way that COGE can provide continuing oversight. See details below.

Responsible to COGE chair, with ultimate responsibility held by the UCC chair.

Although the WID requirement is now in its sixth year, there is still campus wide lack of understanding of the requirement. COGE believes it is crucial that the WID materials be developed with all possible speed to spread awareness of WID and to help departments focus on that requirement.

We are looking for a two-dimensional communication strategy, with students and with departments.

### Details of work planned:

- (1) Develop a webpage designed for students that explains WID and links to program-specific WID pages (in cooperation with the web team).

Work with departments to develop program-specific WID webpages that include the answers to a series of common WID questions written by each department's faculty, and that identifies the classes that qualify for WID status and why. The goal is to have such a page for every undergraduate major program. (note: many other colleges and universities have such pages, and so there are good models from which RIC could work) (also in cooperation with the web team)

- (2) Ask departments (a) to generate a very short statement to be included on syllabi of courses that are designated by departments as WID and (b) to amend/revise their RhodeMaps to indicate which of the courses will count towards the WID requirement.
- (3) With COGE, develop a review mechanism of WID courses.
- (4) Work with the Writing Center Director to investigate the possibility of having trained undergraduate peer writing mentors from different disciplines, perhaps a version of Writing Fellows/Peer Tutors models.