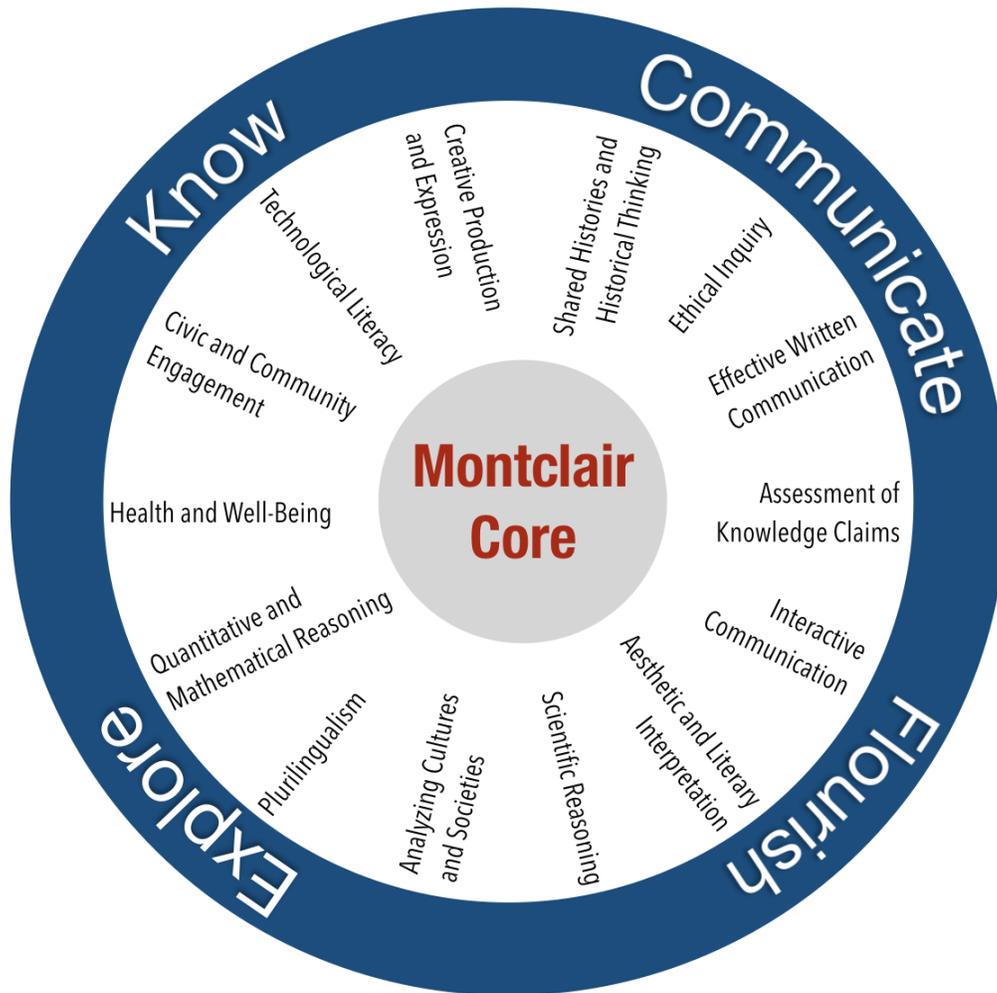


**Montclair State University
Blue Ribbon Task Force
Final Report on
General Education Curriculum Redesign
2019-2020**



**Montclair State University Blue Ribbon Task Force
Final Report on General Education Curriculum Redesign
2019-2020**

Katherine McCaffrey, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Task Force Chair
Brian Abrams, Associate Professor, John J. Cali School of Music
Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, Associate Professor, History
Elizabeth Emery, Professor, Modern Languages and Literatures
Marc Favata, Associate Professor, Physics and Astronomy
Todd Kelshaw, Associate Professor, School Communication and Media
Douglas Larkin, Associate Professor, Teaching and Learning
Stanislav Mamonov, Associate Professor, Info Mgmt & Business Analytics
Jeffrey Alan Miller, Associate Professor, English
Ethne Swartz, Professor, Management
Darren Sweeper, Associate Professor, Library
Mayida Zaal, Associate Professor, Teaching and Learning
Michelle Zhu, Associate Professor, Computer Science

Table of Contents

I.	Motivation for Reform	2
II.	Charge to Task Force	4
III.	Overview of Meetings and Work Accomplished	5
IV.	Recommendations	8
V.	Proposed Tasks for the Next Committee	20

I. Motivation for Reform

1.1 The General Education curriculum has been an essential part of undergraduate education at Montclair State University since 1965. As one of the elements that distinguishes a university education from other types of more narrow post-secondary training, our General Education curriculum was initially designed—and revised over the years—to ensure that graduates have a breadth of knowledge in multiple fields, well-developed analytical and communication skills applicable to all disciplines, and an awareness/understanding of values, ethics, and perspectives that permit them to be active, engaged, and responsible members of society.

1.2 The current Montclair State University General Education program has been in place since 2002. By the spring of 2019, internal and external circumstances prompted leadership to call for a reconception of the current program. Factors precipitating the reconsideration of the MSU General Education program included:

- The need for a more flexible framework capable of accommodating incremental change over time. The “Montclair Core” should not need to be overhauled every 20 years.
- The desire for one core curriculum across colleges (there are currently [three sets of requirements](#))
- An interest in creating flexibility to allow students to declare a major as well as a double major, and/or a minor.
- Systemic issues with maintaining the “signature” interdisciplinary team-taught component of the 2002 General Education curriculum ([see 2012 memo from the Provost](#))
- NJ Legislation [updating chapter 62 of Title 18A](#) of the New Jersey Statutes (S1265, 2018) that limits baccalaureate degrees to 120 credits.
- The desire to encourage greater full-time faculty participation in the instruction of General Education courses.
- The need for better alignment with the [statewide transfer articulation agreement](#), which [waives General Education requirements](#) for transfer students possessing Associate degrees (approximately 15% of entering students in fall 2019).

1.3 In April 2019, in advance of an initiative to revamp Montclair State University’s core curriculum, the Office of the Provost convened 13 focus groups to elicit faculty input on the structure, purpose and effectiveness of the current MSU General Education program. The focus

groups were open to the entire faculty and participation was voluntary. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from 3 to 10, with a total number of 76 faculty participating. This [report](#) raised important questions about what ought to be the purpose and process of revising the General Education program.

1.4 In September 2019, the Academic Affairs Council of the MSU University Senate was asked by the Provost to explore the concept of University-Wide Undergraduate Learning Goals, which are defined as student-focused outcome goals that apply to all undergraduate students. The [report](#) offered three possible models for undergraduate learning goals with varying degrees of connection to individual students and the curriculum.

At the same time, the Provost announced the formation of a Blue Ribbon Task Force on General Education Curriculum Redesign, solicited nominations, selected members from across all colleges at the university as well as the library, and convened the first meeting of the Task Force on October 16, 2019.

II. Charge to Task Force

2.1 In his invitation letter to members of the Task Force, Provost Willard Gingerich described the work of the committee as the next step “in our systematic and comprehensive review of the alignment of the University’s liberal arts core of learning with the University’s mission.” His charge to the Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) was:

To consider how a liberal core curriculum at Montclair State University can best prepare all our graduates with the intellectual resilience and basic tools they will need to face shifting career landscapes, transformed media environments, globalized job markets, supercharged evolutions in technology including artificial intelligence, challenges to environmental sustainability, disruptions in civil society, conflicts of personal, communal and national identities—all within the context of rapidly evolving structures of higher education.

2.2 Structurally, the BRTF was organized as an advisory committee that reports to the Provost. The Task Force was led by Dr. Katherine McCaffrey (Anthropology) and Associate Provosts David Hood and Joanne Cote-Bonanno, who provided administrative support with the BRTF and collaborated with its efforts to meet the Task Force’s charge.

2.3 In the inaugural meeting of the BRTF in October 2019, Provost Gingerich shared additional information to assist the Task Force with its charge. He discussed the relationship of the draft strategic plan to the Task Force’s work, highlighting entrepreneurial spirit as the underpinning of student success. He acknowledged that academic cultures are not normally at the forefront of innovation and change, and that the committee’s objective was to be innovative, despite possible cultural challenges. He also conveyed that the committee’s work should be timely, thoughtful, and transparent, and recommended that the group utilize existing resources and literature as a starting point for these conversations.

2.4 Finally, the charge to the Task Force included a commitment to transparency in the process, and to this end the meetings would be open to the university community and include adequate time for public comment at each meeting. All materials used and produced by the committee would be [posted on a site within MSU’s Canvas Learning Management System](#) in a timely manner.

III. Overview of Meetings and Work Accomplished

3.1 Between October 2019 and March 2020, the BRTF met face to face a total of ten times, and continued its work remotely in the wake of the impact of the coronavirus outbreak that month. The committee announced meetings and agendas in advance on Canvas, and reserved time for public comment at each meeting. The work of the Task Force followed a four-step framework [adapted](#) from the AAUC report: [General Education: A Self-Study Guide for Review and Assessment](#), and was divided into four main steps:

Step 1: Gain Knowledge. The first three meetings of the BRTF (Oct 16, Nov. 1, Nov. 12) were devoted to three specific tasks concerning the General Education program at MSU and elsewhere:

- 1.) Ensuring that each representative on the committee had a good understanding of the existing General Education program. It was particularly important for committee members to be able to view the current General Education program from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders from across and beyond the university.
- 2.) Studying the structure and function of general education programs at 11 other institutions. Each member of the task force looked closely at five institutions, and reported back to the committee using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) framework.
- 3.) Focusing on the process of general education reform at three specific institutions selected by the committee (The University of Buffalo, The University of South Florida, and the California State University system) in order to better understand how to prioritize and shape our own work as a committee. The goal of the discussion was to make sure all BRTF members were familiar with the national higher education reform context; to learn about similar reform at comparable institutions; and to gain awareness of key issues in the reform process as we proceed. The committee closely analyzed the strategic planning documents each task force produced to familiarize ourselves with the type of document we would eventually produce.

3.2 Step 2: Agree on Major Parameters. The three meetings at the end of fall 2019 (Nov. 12, Dec. 3, Dec. 16) included in-depth discussion and debate concerning both the purpose of general education at Montclair State University and the features a general education program ought to contain. The Task Force continued to build consensus on an understanding of the purpose of general education and how a new core curriculum might best reflect the mission, culture, history, and values of Montclair State University.

It should be emphasized that during this period, the work of the committee was largely exploratory and deliberative, and numerous possibilities for general education were entertained without committing to a single vision. Important questions were raised and considered, but a few important parameters emerged from these discussions. (Although these parameters may appear somewhat obvious in hindsight, the committee had to explore what *not* having them might look like):

- 1.) **Keeping the categories.** For a variety of reasons, it made sense to the committee that the three categories of courses—major courses, free electives, and General Education—ought to remain, even if the size of each category or how it would be filled by courses remained to be resolved at this point. There were other models of general education that we examined that were much more creative and integrated with institutional goals and missions.
- 2.) **The optimal vs. the possible.** Task Force discussions were heavily influenced by the previous General Education program revision in 2002. The unsustainability of the interdisciplinary course provided a case study of the tension between what is optimal versus what is possible, which extended to discussions about the possibility of “pathway” options. Although a pathways approach, such as the one adopted by the University of Buffalo, might provide a superior General Education experience for MSU students, the Task Force concluded that it would also be quite difficult to implement and communicate, and thus might not be sustainable. Over the course of these meetings (actually through the Feb 27th meeting), the Task Force moved towards a consensus that a revised “Montclair Core” ought to be both understandable to students, and not hampered by limited offerings of specific courses or staffing concerns. The committee discussed a possible capstone experience and how this might fit into existing programs (including conflicts with existing capstones of majors).
- 3.) **Updating the substance of General Education** Following the charge by the Provost, the committee examined readings relating the purposes of general education in the 21st century as well as literature concerning artificial intelligence, environmental sustainability, and the changing requirements of the modern workforce. The Task Force recognized the urgency of creating a core curriculum that would respond to increasingly critical challenges, such as climate change, through the cultivation of thoughtful and engaged citizens. While no specific curricular decisions were made at this time, these discussions informed subsequent deliberations about the types of literacies that would be the focus of a “Montclair Core.”
- 4.) **Emerging discussion about learning outcomes.** The Task Force considered a new approach to a “Montclair Core” that would move General Education away from a course-

based distribution model, to focus instead on student learning outcomes. The committee spent a great deal of time in deliberation and considered whether simply passing a course ought to be used as an indicator of mastery of a learning outcome or whether a more specific measure (i.e. a certain assignment in a course) ought to be the indicator.

By late 2019/early 2020, pairs of individuals from the committee requested and were allocated time at college-level meetings to share the work of the BRTF, answer questions, and bring concerns back to the group. These presentations included:

CSAM—Michele Zhu and Marc Favata, 12/4/19

CEHS—Mayida Zaal and Doug Larkin, 12/4/19

CHSS—Elizabeth Emery and Jeffrey Miller, 12/4/19

FSB—Ethne Swartz and Stanislav Mamonov, 02/05/2020

CART—Brian Abrams and Todd Kelshaw 3/4/2020

3.3 Step 3: Reaffirm/Determine Learning Goals and Outcomes. The four face-to-face meetings at the start of the Spring 2020 semester (Jan. 28, Feb. 19, Feb. 27, and March 3) were primarily focused on clarifying the committee’s vision of the learning outcomes and how they might be characterized in a revised General Education program. This period of time was marked by work in small groups that was brought back to the larger committee, discussed, and then worked on some more by other groups.

The first task taken up by the committee was to draft some suggested University Core Mission and Vision Statements. Other groups proposed specific outcomes, course categories, and literacies which were then brought back to the entire group for discussion. Another working group discussed how the category of ethics might be integrated into the final proposal. Three committee members attended national AAC&U conferences on General Education and brought back samples of vision, aims, and structures for General Education that were helpful in pushing the work of the committee forward.

The results of these discussions may be seen in the final proposal of the committee as detailed in the following section, which corresponds to [Step 4 of the AAUC guidelines](#) (“Design or Review Curricular Structure”).

IV. Recommendations

In this section, the Blue Ribbon Task Force presents recommendations for the redesign of the current General Education program and its position within the university curriculum. This document is offered as a vision statement, intended to encourage faculty, departments, and centers across the campus to look at our core curriculum with fresh eyes and new energy, and to provide direction for the next phase of the redesign. In the following section, the Task Force refers to the new program as the “**Montclair Core.**”

The Task Force make a distinction between the “Montclair Core,” a program that replaces the current General Education, and an interrelated “Montclair Experience,” which includes elements such as community-engaged and anti-oppression learning, language proficiency, and student success programs that it considers the hallmark of all Montclair graduates. The Montclair Experience encompasses what are currently known as “graduation requirements.” The distinction between “Core” and “Experience” stems from the need to better serve the large number of transfer students who attend our university having already satisfied the General Education requirements of the Montclair Core. They, too, will graduate with a unique Montclair experience (see sections 4.6.3 and 4.7 below).

As a point of clarification, this document is intended not as a proscriptive, finalized directive, but as a vision statement intended to guide the revamping of our existing curriculum.

4.1 Definitions

Before presenting the recommendations, the committee wishes to clarify and define some of the terms used here:

Mission and Vision Statement: The mission and vision statement is intended to frame the overall aims of the Montclair Core, as well as to frame and describe the characteristics of students who successfully complete the Montclair Core and graduate from Montclair State University.

Competency: A general statement that describes the desired knowledge, skills, and behaviors of a student completing the Montclair Core. Competencies commonly define the applied skills and knowledge that enable people to thrive in professional, educational, and other life contexts. In this document, competencies embody the mission and vision statement and serve as a framework for the assessed outcomes rather than as measures for assessment.

Outcome: A very specific statement that describes exactly what a student is intended to learn and do in some measurable way. Outcomes are to be assessed. In this document the Task Force

uses the term “outcome” interchangeably with “Institutional Learning Outcome” because, as part of the Montclair Core, the outcomes presented here are by definition the desired outcomes for all undergraduate students at Montclair State University. These outcomes, many of which occur in courses across the curriculum, do not represent a one-to-one ratio between outcome and course as in the previous General Education curriculum.

Montclair Core: This is the program to replace the current General Education program at Montclair State University as described in the document below.

Montclair Experience: Shared experiences for all Montclair students that relate to outcomes in the Montclair Core and will be completed before graduating. These include the new student experience, world language exposure, community engagement, and anti-oppression learning, which engages students in an understanding of structures of power and inequality and tools for dismantling them.

Additionally, the Task Force distinguishes between three groups of student populations by the following categorizations:

- **First-Year Start (FYS) Students:** This categorization refers to students who begin their undergraduate education at MSU. These students must complete the Montclair Core.
- **Transfer No-Degree (TND) Students:** This categorization refers to students who begin their undergraduate education at a different institution, but transfer to MSU prior to the completion of an Associate’s Degree. These students must complete the Montclair Core, but their prior coursework may be substituted as appropriate.
- **Transfer with Associate’s Degree (TAD) Students:** This categorization refers to students who begin their undergraduate education at a different institution, earn an Associate’s Degree, then transfer to MSU to complete a Bachelor’s Degree. These students are considered by state law to have met our general education requirements, and are therefore exempt from the Montclair Core. Our committee recommends that the Montclair Experience (new student seminars, world language, and community engagement and anti-oppression learning) apply as a graduation requirement for these students.

4.2 Mission and Vision Statement for the Montclair State University Core

The Montclair State University Core—the Montclair Core—is the foundational component of an undergraduate education at Montclair State University.

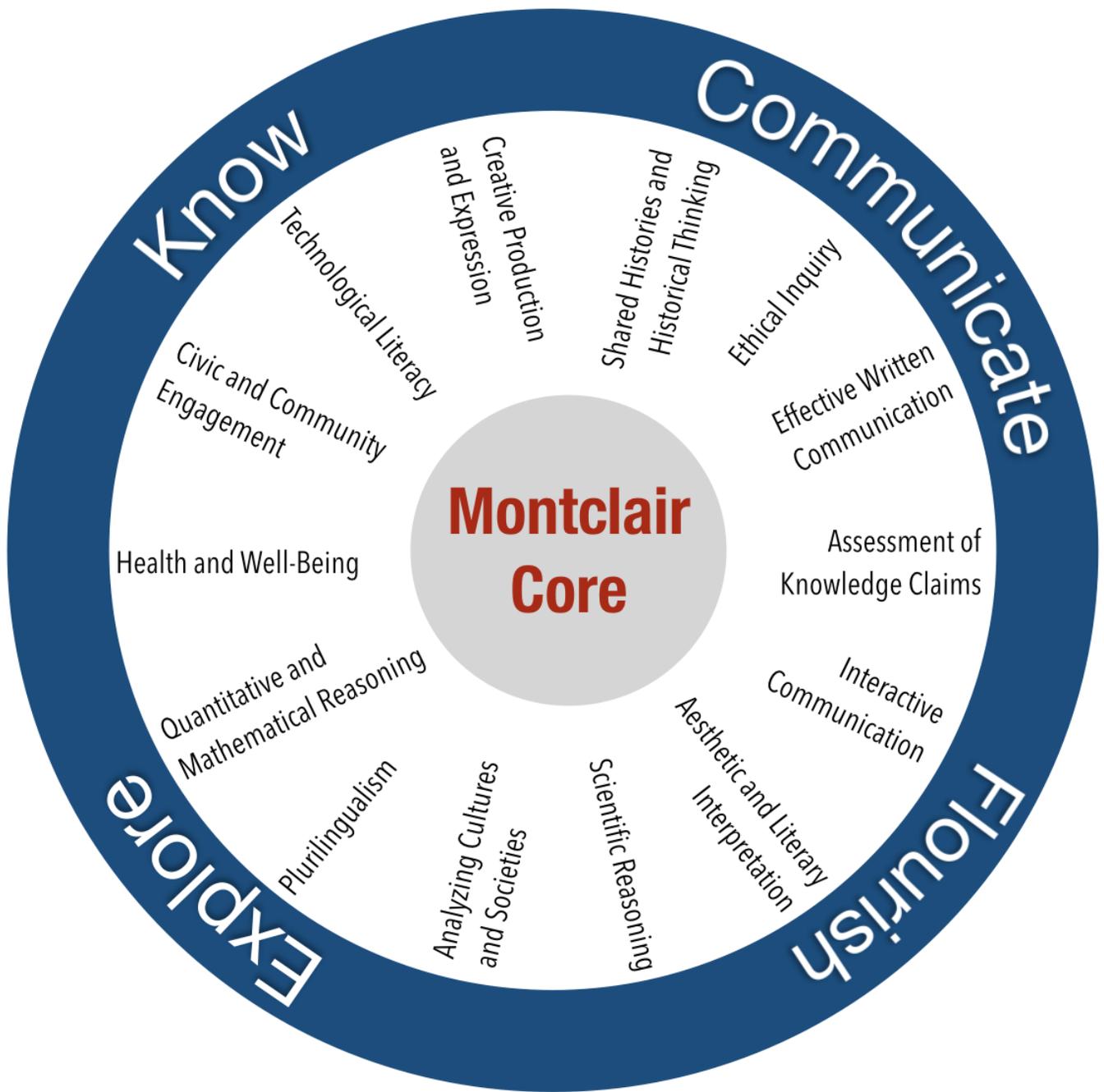
The Montclair Core will ensure that students complete their education with a set of foundational skills, broadening experiences, and access to information from across academic disciplines: these

are necessary elements for succeeding in the workplace and for flourishing in a multicultural, multiracial, pluralistic, and inclusive democracy. Indeed, the foundation provided by the Montclair Core will enable our students to operate effectively and ethically in the world of local, national, and international finance, accounting, and commerce science, arts, health care, education and public service. Through the Montclair Core, students will integrate diverse areas of knowledge and ways of knowing. They will develop the capacity to communicate their ideas and to cultivate and mobilize resources for informed, ethical, creative cultural engagement as global citizens and stakeholders of their respective communities.

4.3. Competencies in the Montclair State University Core

The student success model described in this mission statement relies on four specific competencies:

- **Know**
Students will develop knowledge across diverse fields of study and deepen their capacity to formulate arguments and evaluate claims based on evidence.
- **Communicate**
Students will grow in their abilities to write, orally present, and interact within social, professional, political, and creative contexts.
- **Explore**
Students will cultivate their abilities to engage in lifelong exploration of the world in its past, present, and future complexity.
- **Flourish**
Students will continue to grow and apply their knowledge and skills in ways that contribute meaningfully and constructively to their own lives, to their communities, and the world at large.



4.4. Institutional Learning Outcomes in the Montclair State University Core

The 14 measurable Institutional Learning Outcomes necessary for achieving the four competencies outlined in Section 4.3 of the Montclair State University Core intersect these four competencies multiple times at multiple points. Unlike the previous General Education program, where an outcome could be satisfied by a single course, each course approved for the Montclair Core may propose up to two primary outcomes. As a result, students in the Montclair Core will be exposed to these outcomes a number of times and in a variety of courses spanning multiple disciplines. The infographic visualizes this dynamic by depicting outcomes as the interrelated components of a flexible learning process. They are presented here non-hierarchically, in alphabetical order:

- **Aesthetic and Literary Interpretation**
Students will be able to read, understand, and think critically about cultural works, such as those in the domains of literature, art, music, and design.
- **Analyzing Cultures and Societies**
Students will be able to employ qualitative and quantitative approaches to knowledge and understanding of the societies and cultures they currently inhabit as well as societies throughout the globe.
- **Assessment of Knowledge Claims**
Students will be able to identify, analyze, and evaluate explicit and implicit knowledge claims. Students will formulate arguments in response to specific questions and problems.
- **Civic and Community Engagement**
Students will develop capacities for understanding and engaging with critical social, cultural, or scientific issues affecting their communities and societies.
- **Creative Production and Expression**
Students will create, engage in, and/or respond experientially to diverse forms of human creative production and expression.
- **Effective Written Communication**
Students will have knowledge and skills for effective communication in writing.
- **Ethical Inquiry**
Students will identify, analyze, and evaluate moral and social justice questions across a range of disciplines. Students will be able to conceptualize ethical decisions and social justice issues and claims. Students will demonstrate ethical reasoning and behaviors in line with their chosen discipline.
- **Health and Well-Being**
Students will gain knowledge, methods, and/or experiences enabling them to promote their own health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of others.

- **Interactive Communication**
Students will gain knowledge and skills for effective oral or other forms of interactive communication in presentations and discussions, across face-to-face and mediated settings.
- **Plurilingualism**
Students will develop an appreciation for the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of linguistic diversity by achieving proficiency and intercultural competence in a language previously studied, or by embarking on the study of a new language and its associated cultures.
- **Quantitative and Mathematical Reasoning**
Students will demonstrate how fundamental elements of mathematical and/or statistical knowledge are applied to solve real-life problems.
- **Scientific Reasoning**
Students will be able to identify, consider, and address problems within and across scientific disciplines.
- **Shared Histories and Historical Thinking**
Students will gain an understanding of the past and the different methods of interpreting the development of individual, cultural, and social identities, including class, race, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, etc. Students will gain the tools to make sense of our shared human experience over time.
- **Technological Literacy**
Students will be able to appropriately and effectively evaluate and use technological tools to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information, both individually and with others. Students will understand the implications of and learn how to apply state-of-the-art technology across different domains.

These outcomes, many of which occur in courses across the curriculum, do not represent a one-to-one ratio between outcome and course as in the previous General Education curriculum. Instead, students may engage with up to two of these outcomes within a single course, as described in Section 4.5.

4.5. The Curricular Framework and Relationship to the Learning Outcomes

The Montclair Core places great value on transdisciplinary exposure. As a result, students will be encouraged to gain experiences extending beyond the cognate disciplines of their major. The committee recommends the credit-based guidelines below to ensure that students take sufficient coursework outside of the major field of study. Outcomes should be completed by credit-bearing courses.

To complete the Montclair Core, students will:

- Meet each learning outcome by taking one or more courses that satisfy that outcome.
- Take a minimum of 28 credits of Montclair Core courses outside the cognate disciplines of their major.
- Take a minimum of 40 credits in the Montclair Core.
- Complete 6 credits in **Effective Written Communication**, with a foundational writing course constituting 3 of those credits and the other 3 credits coming from a designated “writing-intensive course” (see section 4.5.4 for consideration of students with advanced writing proficiency).

4.5.1 Meet each learning outcome by taking a course that satisfies that outcome

As noted above, there are 14 institutional outcomes for the Montclair Core. While a given course may engage with any number of institutional outcomes, no more than two of these outcomes may be formally designated per course toward the satisfaction of the Montclair Core. The committee recognizes that there might be an opportunity for more than two outcomes to be associated with a course, but it intentionally recommends a limit of two for two reasons. First, every outcome in a course must have a valid assessment that measures that outcome, and the committee recognizes that assessing more than two outcomes is a significant challenge. Second, limiting associated course outcomes to two fosters the wider aims of the Mission and Vision Statement for the Montclair State University Core and encourages students to take advantage of the intellectual resources of the whole university.

Each person who enters MSU does so at a certain level of proficiency in that outcome. The goal in the Montclair Core is to increase each person’s proficiency in each outcome.

It is the recommendation of this committee that successfully passing a course is the main indicator that there has been growth in the Montclair Core outcome(s) associated with that course, and the student will be considered to have satisfied those one or two outcomes. However, the Task force also recognizes that accreditation reporting requirements may necessitate more fine-grained strategies for assessing outcomes.

As stated in Section 4.4, completing the Montclair Core involves more than a one-to-one relationship between a course and an outcome. In order to meet the credit requirement for the Montclair Core, described below, this structure encourages students to explore and to seek out multiple opportunities to take courses and grow in each outcome.

4.5.2 Take 40 credits in the Montclair Core

Given that a key charge to the group was to reduce the size of the current General Education program and increase its flexibility, the committee recommends a Montclair core of 40 credits.

This threshold is proposed to encourage exposure to multiple Core outcomes. Without such a limit, a student could, in theory, complete all 14 outcomes by taking 7 courses (if each course were associated with 2 of the 14 outcomes). The 40-credit stipulation ensures that even if each of these hypothetical 7 courses carried 3 credits, the student would need to take an additional 19 credits to reach the 40-credit threshold.

In combination with the above requirements of the Montclair Core, this 40-credit requirement ensures that students will have the opportunity to revisit some of the outcomes, ensuring depth as well as breadth in the opportunity to learn. The flexibility of this requirement also facilitates the addition of minors and double majors, particularly if a select number of 200- and 300-level courses are approved as fulfilling the Montclair Core.

4.5.3 Take 28 credits or more Montclair Core courses outside of the cognate disciplines of the major

One of the key ideas discussed in the committee's deliberations concerned the concept of disciplinary exposure. Given the flexibility inherent in this proposal, it seems both reasonable and possible that programs will choose to embed outcomes within their own major courses. Without some constraint on this practice, however, it would be possible for programs to have their students complete the majority of their Montclair Core within the major, a practice that would run counter to the Mission and Vision.

This particular requirement for students to take 28 credits of courses outside of their majors ensures that students engage with the intellectual diversity of the university. Another way of framing this, given the 40-credit requirement discussed below, is that no more than 12 credits of students' Montclair Core credits may be fulfilled by the cognate disciplines of their major field of study.

4.5.4 Students must complete 6 credits in Effective Written Communication

In the focus groups and other materials examined by the committee, there was an overwhelming consensus that writing instruction should maintain a central role in the General Education program. Therefore, the committee recommends that the overall

structure of the current writing requirements remain largely unchanged and that all students complete two core writing classes: one that addresses foundational skills, and a second that is writing intensive. The committee recognizes that there may be advanced students interested in greater rigor. In these instances, such a student may place out or opt out of the foundational class and complete two writing intensive classes instead. All students, however, need to meet the 6-hour Effective Written Communication outcome.

4.6 Discussion of the Montclair Core Recommendations

The committee wishes to highlight some of the advantages of the Montclair Core as proposed here.

4.6.1 Flexibility

Multiple courses from across the university will allow students to meet institutional learning outcomes. Consequently, single courses will not “own” specific outcomes, and students will have greater flexibility in meeting the Montclair Core requirements.

4.6.2 Freedom

Given that the outcomes will be embedded within a variety of courses, majors will have room in their schedules to select a wider variety of courses and to create interdisciplinary tracks or to add a minor or second major. This will provide a more expansive experience as categories are more integrated with one another.

4.6.3 Communication and Inclusivity

Currently, about 15% of Montclair's current student population consists of Transfer with Associate's Degree (TAD) students who are deemed to have already met the General Education requirement. This percentage is expected to increase in the near future. This proposal, which highlights a common “Montclair Experience,” provides a framework for integrating the transfer community into a shared university experience that includes community-engaged and anti-oppression learning, language proficiency, and student success programs that will be the hallmark of all Montclair graduates.

4.6.4 Increased Participation of Full-Time Faculty

Because the Montclair Core is predicated on outcomes rather than individual courses, and because upper-level courses will be able to fulfill some of these outcomes, the committee anticipates expanded opportunities for full time faculty to engage and commit to the Core curriculum. The outcome-based approach will allow greater curricular creativity and flexibility, thus bringing cutting-edge research into the general education classroom.

4.6.5 Community Engagement

The specific commitment to community engagement honors a key, yet understated aspect of student experience at Montclair State University as recognized by a 2015 [Carnegie Foundation](#) designation as a “Community Engaged Campus.” The Task Force understands the urgency of the current historical moment, including the global rise of authoritarianism, extremism, and its challenges to democracy, as well as the existential threats to human survival and environmental sustainability posed by climate change. Community engagement encourages students to gain meaningful experiences with stakeholders from surrounding communities, and to graduate from Montclair State as active citizens, prepared to engage some of the most complex and pressing problems in human history.

4.7. Additional Recommendations: The Montclair Experience

The committee makes the following recommendations in relation to what are currently called “graduation requirements” and which sit outside of the requirements for completing the Montclair Core. It is wrapping these into what it calls here the “**Montclair Experience**” shared by all students, including Transfer with Associates Degree (TAD) students. For First-Year Start (FYS) Students and Transfer No-Degree (TND) students, it is very likely that these requirements will be satisfied through courses in the Montclair Core. The Task Force’s recommendations are that students:

- Achieve at least intermediate proficiency (as defined by [ACTFL](#)) in a language carrying the "world language" (WL) designation.
- Complete at least one 3-credit course that carries a “Community Engagement” (CE) designation.
- Complete at least one course that meets a new Anti-Oppression Analysis and Action (AAA) designation, which replaces the current [World Cultures](#) graduation requirement.
- Complete New Student Seminar course, or its equivalent.

4.7.1 Achieve at least intermediate proficiency in a language carrying the "world language" (WL) designation.

In regard to world languages, the committee retains here the [current policy](#), which is as follows:

For the world languages portion of this requirement, students wishing to continue a language with which they have some experience, either academic or personal, must take a placement test. If they place at the second semester level, they must take 6 s.h. (2 sequential courses) to fill the requirement. If they place at the third

semester level or higher, they must take only 3 s.h. (one course) at the level at which they place, or a course in English about a foreign culture or civilization. Students wishing to begin a new language, with which they have no experience, must take 6 s.h. of that language.

Given the Montclair Core's commitment to [plurilingualism](#) (the ability to speak more than one language and to appreciate the intercultural differences interrelated with language study), the committee encourages the language department chairs to devise a wording other than a "course in English about a foreign culture or civilization" to acknowledge native or heritage world language speakers' skills as an asset rather than a deficit.

This Montclair Experience stipulation is unlikely—and not intended—to add required credit hours to a given student's program of study. It may be conducted as part of one's Montclair Core, major, or free elective coursework, thus fulfilling those particular required credits and this aspect of the Montclair Experience.

4.7.2 Complete at least one course that meets a new Anti-Oppression Analysis and Action (AAA) designation, which replaces the current World Cultures graduation requirement.

The Task Force recommends that the existing World Cultures graduation requirement be revamped and updated. The Task Force acknowledges the work of a [2018 University subcommittee](#) that expressed an interest in revising the requirement "to focus on issues of power, inequality, difference, and intersectionality" and, in particular, to focus "on the mechanisms that create advantaged and disadvantaged communities." It also notes that [historically](#), this requirement was intended to focus on the US to enhance student understanding of diversity and inequality in their own society (earlier iterations included "Minorities Culture Requirement" and "Multicultural Awareness Requirement"). It notes Montclair State's status as a [Hispanic Serving Institution](#) (HSI), and the faculty recognition that "students find the exploration of how structures of power and inequality form and how they influence the students' lives to be exceptionally important and empowering." The committee also acknowledges that many of our students maintain transnational lives with family, work and often citizenship extending beyond the United States. The Task Force recommends that the World Cultures graduation requirement be replaced with an Anti-Oppression: Analysis and Action (AAA) graduation requirement.

Anti-Oppression: Analysis and Action

Students will develop an understanding of the structures, policies, institutions, and systems that create barriers and perpetuate inequities both within the United States and

globally. They will examine the different ways people experience oppression for reasons including race, age, gender, sex, ability, class, and religion, and learn to use tools (such as the tools of anti-racism) to work to dismantle those structures of oppression.

The Anti-Oppression: Analysis and Action requirement will join Community Engagement, World Language, and the New Student Experience as a key dimension of the Montclair Experience. Similar to the Community Engagement designation, the AAA designation is not intended to add required credit hours to a given student's program of study. An AAA-designated course may be conducted as part of one's Montclair Core, major, or free elective coursework—at once fulfilling those particular required credits and this aspect of the Montclair Experience. The Task Force has chosen to position this new requirement outside of the Core as a Montclair Experience not because it sees it as extraneous or less important than the Core, but rather, because it sees it especially important. To this end, students who have transferred from other institutions will still have this learning experience.

4.7.3 Complete at least one Montclair Core 3-credit course that carries a “Community Engagement” (CE) designation.

The committee recommends that course-based community engagement be a key experience related to the achievement of this report's described competencies and outcomes. As a particular form of “high-impact educational practice” identified by the [Association of American Colleges & Universities](#) (AAC&U), community-engaged courses enable students to apply course-related knowledge and skills in reciprocally beneficial partnership with community organizations. In the [AAC&U](#)'s conception,

The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

In support of Montclair State University's 2015 [Carnegie Foundation](#) designation as a “Community Engaged Campus,” [the Center for Community Engagement](#) (situated in Academic Affairs) provides crucial resources for the design and execution of community-engaged courses spanning the university's curriculum, and is poised to assist academic units in expanding the quantity and disciplinary range of offerings.

Notably, this Montclair Experience stipulation is unlikely—and not intended—to add required credit hours to a given student’s program of study. A CE-designated course may be conducted as part of one’s Montclair Core, major, or free elective coursework—at once fulfilling those particular required credits and this aspect of the Montclair Experience.

4.7.4 Complete New Student Seminar course, or its equivalent.

The committee recommends that what currently exists as GNED 199, “New Student Seminar” be moved into the Montclair Experience. The purpose of this curriculum should be to provide all students with the necessary knowledge and tools that will allow them to thrive at Montclair State University. The committee recommends that a) University College remain responsible for the creation and delivery of this course; b) University College continue to examine whether a one-credit course is sufficient to prepare students for their college experience; and c) University College develop mechanisms for colleges, departments, or programs to collaborate in the development of their own courses or to insert content into an existing syllabus.

V. Proposed Tasks for the Next Task Force

In this section, the BRTF suggests tasks for the phase two 2020-2021 Blue Ribbon Task Force, whose work will follow from that of the 2019-2020 Blue Ribbon Task Force. These are as follows:

- Establish an efficient process for certifying courses to be associated with outcomes.
- Develop mechanisms for fulfilling outcomes, including how best to define and regulate the courses that can and cannot be satisfied within the cognate disciplines of the major.
- Review the credit minimums/ranges and other requirements suggested here for potential difficulties associated with their application in particular degree programs.
- Decide on the grain-size of the assessment and nature of the assessment reporting process.
- Develop a way to communicate the Montclair Core in a manner that will make it easily understandable to students, instructors, and the wider MSU Community.
- Designate additional credit or non-credit bearing activities and/or curriculum to sit outside of the "Montclair Core," thus allowing transfer students to be included in activities integral to the "Montclair Experience."

5.1 Establish an efficient process for certifying courses to be associated with outcomes

One of the key features of the proposed Montclair Core as presented here is its flexibility, and one consequence is that the number of courses categorized as fulfilling the outcomes of the Montclair Core is likely to increase dramatically. In order to maintain this flexibility and ensure that the new Montclair Core launches successfully, a robust, transparent, and efficient process for approving courses must be associated with outcomes.

The phase two Task Force will need to develop policies including a process for solicitation of courses under various categories and the politically fraught question of whether to limit the number of courses from specific departments (or alpha-numeric codes) in any one category. Questions might include:

- How many courses from a specific department (or alpha-numeric code) should be included under a single area of competency?
- What proportion of 200- and/or 300-level courses can fulfill outcomes?
- What will the process be for solicitation of courses under various categories? Can it be as simple as possible to encourage innovation?
- How will the university track and assess the overall operation of this outcome-based approach?

- Does the credit count align with the most current iteration of the [statewide transfer articulation agreement](#), which [waives General Education requirements](#) for TAD (transfer with Associate’s degree) students?
- Does the Registrar’s new curriculum software offer any new tools for embedding aspects of the “Montclair Core”?

5.2 Mechanisms for fulfilling outcomes

The Task Force recommends that outcome requirements may only be fulfilled by courses carrying three or more credits. It encourages the phase two Task Force to determine the best way of setting boundaries for how “beyond the cognate disciplines of the major” are restricted (such as by alphanumeric codes) and whether the minimal numbers proposed below will be feasible for students in programs with large numbers of credits and/or for students with double majors.

5.3 Review minimum Core credit requirement and other Phase Two issues

Because the Montclair Core values transdisciplinary exposure, the committee recommends that students take a minimum number of credits within the Core of which a specified minimum should be met by courses outside the cognate disciplines of the major. The Task Force feels that minimums of some sort are needed to ensure that (i) students take courses in a range of disciplines and (ii) students are not meeting too many Core requirements with courses within their major.

However, the Task Force did not analyze in detail the implications of specific choices for these recommended minimum values. The phase two Task Force should investigate in detail what minimums are appropriate, given the range of degree programs offered at Montclair State. A key goal for the phase two Task Force should be to balance the goal of maintaining a single transdisciplinary Montclair Core common to all programs with students' needs for flexibility.

5.4 Decide on the grain size of the assessment and nature of the assessment reporting process

In the current General Education, the assessment process has been cumbersome, time-intensive, and unlikely to inform changes to the program. As noted above, it is the recommendation of this committee that successfully passing a course serves as the main indicator that an outcome has been met, yet this recommendation may not align with the requirements of accreditation. In implementing these recommendations, the phase two Task Force will want to be mindful of creating a streamlined system for assessment of the Montclair Core. The program will also need to think about how to evaluate whether courses are doing what they claim to do.

Currently, many of the courses in the existing General Education use the [AAC&U rubrics](#) for assessing student outcomes, and it would be worthwhile for the phase two Task Force to examine whether the continued use of these tools is appropriate in the proposed Montclair Core.

5.5 Develop a way to communicate the Montclair Core in a manner that will make it easily understandable to students, instructors, and the wider MSU Community.

Though there are many aspects of the Montclair Core that are consistent with current practices in the existing General Education program, there are enough significant differences to warrant attention to public understanding of the new program. Students need a clear understanding of why the core is important and relevant to their education (See the Vision and Mission statement in Section IV and particularly the articulation of the four core competencies with the 14 outcomes.). The importance of explaining relevance in a non-prescriptive manner (words such as “encourage,” “opportunity,” and “growth” rather than “must” and “have to”) should be emphasized at every step of the process. Course descriptions, in particular, should connect classes across disciplines.

One of the key tasks of the next committee will be the technical application of these recommendations, which will depend greatly on the optimization of the new curriculum software and its designated function of mapping progress toward degree.

5.6 The Montclair Core and the Montclair Experience

As noted above, our committee recommends that the current graduation requirements be reworked into a more expansive “Montclair Experience” that may include some scaffolded academic success modules, as well as world language, community engagement and anti-oppression learning opportunities. Casting the Montclair Core curriculum primarily in terms of outcomes allows the program to be framed in terms of learning opportunities for entering first years and transfer students alike. The phase two Task Force will need to decide, however, how to balance delivery of the Montclair Core (which is waived for Transfer with Associates Degree [TAD] Students) with the “Montclair Experience” that the BRTF wants all Montclair graduates to have.

5.7 Resources for the committee

The phase two Task Force may find it useful to consult other documents in addition to this report:

- The Academic Affairs Council of the MSU University Senate’s Fall 2019 [study](#) of University-Wide Undergraduate Learning Goals—student-focused outcome goals that apply to all undergraduate students. The report offered three possible models for undergraduate learning goals with varying degrees of connection to individual students and the curriculum.
- The General Education Reform faculty focus group Executive summary document, which provides a sense of pitfalls to avoid.
- The Academic Affairs Council of the MSU University Senate’s Spring 2020 [Curriculum Reform Guidelines](#).
- The NJ Presidents’ Council [Academic Issues Committee Manual](#), 2019-2020 (recommends ½ of classes in major and ½ outside the major). See p. 57.

5.8 Conclusion and Procedural Recommendations

This Task Force was charged with formulating new ideas for a revised general education curriculum at Montclair State. The current document has presented our vision for a flexible and innovative Montclair Core, whose foundational competencies follow a cycle characteristic of lifelong learners: *Know, Communicate, Explore, Flourish*. This core sits within an even larger Montclair Experience, intended to appeal to new and transfer students alike. Even though the Montclair Core is waived for TAD transfer students, they will share university-wide experiences that include student success programs, community engagement and anti-oppression learning, and world language exposure.

The Montclair Core’s stated objective of weaving real-world experiences into undergraduate education foregrounds the Institution’s foundational (yet often invisible) commitment to public service captured in the motto “Carpe Diem” and its designation as a Carnegie Community Engaged Campus, while echoing the new strategic plan’s emphasis on cultivating entrepreneurial spirit.

The task force wishes to make a few procedural recommendations necessary for successful communication of the proposed Montclair Core to the faculty with an ultimate eye to ratification. It proposes:

- Upon approval by Provost Gingerich, the Task Force will announce and publicize its report on its existing Canvas page for faculty review. The Task Force will also provide access to the report upon request to interested community stakeholders.
- Members of the Task Force will visit college meetings in the fall semester to elicit feedback and concerns that can be shared with the phase two Task Force. Given

the ongoing pandemic, it is recommended that these interactions take place on Zoom, which offers multiple tools to capture input.

- The existing BRTF Canvas site will add a discussion board to elicit faculty feedback and concerns about the next phase of the new Montclair Core. The Task Force recommends that a newly constituted phase two Task Force maintain clear lines of communication with faculty and transparency in its deliberations.

The Task Force recommends that the phase two Task Force's final report, which includes a discussion of the implementation and assessment process, be presented to the faculty for ratification.

The Task Force expresses our appreciation to the multiple members of the MSU community whose efforts informed our work, from those who participated in focus groups, attended our meetings and offered public comment, and those who contributed to the preparation of the numerous reports that were significant in completing this task. We also thank Associate Provosts David Hood and Joanne Cote-Bonanno for supporting and facilitating the work of the task force.