The GER Working group was convened in November 2017. The group was charged to “develop a vision for the undergraduate curriculum for Emory College by reviewing the current curriculum and consulting with representatives of the other Emory undergraduate schools with the aim of integrating this vision with the curriculum of these schools.” [From the ECAS Senate motion]. This group met twice in the fall semester and 8 times in the spring semester.

The Working Group was charged with three tasks:

1. Gather information from peer institutions and summarize different models for general education.
2. Gather information from all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and administrators, including from all undergraduate schools.
3. Gather information about and report on the various curricula innovations currently underway, and ways in which curricular change may be best accomplished within, between, and across disciplines and sub-disciplines.

As the working group began its deliberations, it became apparent that any full discussion of the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum and the general education requirements needed to be placed in the larger context of the philosophical and pedagogical objectives of a liberal arts education. Thus, the working group decided to focus on providing an articulated vision of a broad liberal arts and sciences education at Emory College, within the context of a research-intensive university with excellent undergraduate programs at Oxford College, Goizueta Business School and the School of Nursing. Especially in the context of new university initiatives focused on creating a seamless undergraduate experience, the committee emphasized the need to think about the college curriculum in this larger context.

In this report, we first describe the process of data gathering, both from our peer institutions and from our stakeholders. We then provided a summary of the major themes that emerged from our forums with faculty, students and alumni. From this summary, the working group developed a draft statement of “Exploring the Arts and Sciences at Emory College.” This statement provides the foundation for the next steps in examining and evaluating our current undergraduate liberal arts curriculum and our general education requirements, and thus, in the last section, we present a series of recommendations and issues for next steps.

1. **Data Gathering Processes:**

Gather information from peer institutions and summarize different models for general education.

In order to accomplish our first goal, the working group:

1. reviewed information from a variety of peer institutions, looking at different ways general education requirements are organized and described.
2. reviewed Emory documents related to the current general education requirements, the Committee on the Liberal Arts, and the ECAS Strategic Plan.

3. Two members of the working group participated in national meetings of the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) to attend sessions and network with faculty and administrators from a variety of institutions who are in the process of general curricula change or revision.

Appendix A contains summaries of general education documents and requirements from institutions that are either our peer institutions and/or are engaging in innovative curricular change. Summaries of attendance at the January National AAC&U meetings, and at the February AAC&U meeting on general education requirements are also included.

Summarizing the information we gathered, there are two common models of general education requirements.

A first model is the more traditional breadth requirement model, as is currently in place at Emory. This is the model in place at most of our peer institutions, and, indeed, at most institutions which we examined. Although institutions vary to some extent on areas of breadth, there is high consensus around: 1) science, technology and the physical world; 3) cultures, societies and individuals, including political and economic systems; and 3) arts and aesthetics, including performance.

A second model is based around core competencies. This is usually a series of required courses that bring together multiple disciplines to focus on an issue, question or problem. Most often it is a two-year sequence, with one foundation course required in the first year and a course in the second year that builds on this foundation. Courses focus on developing skills in critical thinking and communication across multiple perspectives, often focusing on team projects and collaborative problem-solving. This model is most frequent in small liberal arts colleges.

Additional less frequent models include a “great books” curriculum, or no requirements at all.

Gather information from all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and administrators, including from all undergraduate schools.

In order to gather as much information as possible from as many people as possible, we held a series of faculty forums across the spring semester. In addition to forums on the Emory College campus, we also held one forum at each of the other undergraduate institutions: Oxford College, the Business School, and the School of Nursing. We also met with the Alumni Board, with the IDEAS undergraduate fellows, and a group of Emory Scholars who are graduating this year. A full list of meetings and attendees is provided in Appendix B.

Gather information about and report on the various curricula innovations currently underway

To gather information about specific curricular innovations underway, one of the faculty forums focused on the first-year seminars and one focused on the writing requirements.

Finally, to gather additional information about curricular innovations currently underway, one of the co-chairs met with Tracy Scott to discuss the QEP implementation and Nature of Evidence initiatives, with
Doug Mulford to discuss the new curriculum in Chemistry, and with Kim Loudermilk (also a member of the working groups) about the IDEAS fellows.

2. Summarizing Themes

At our first two working group meetings in the fall, we discussed broad goals and aspirations of a liberal arts education in general, the values and ethics specific to Emory, and from these broader goals, how curriculum and general education requirements may be organized in ways that meet these goals. The working group emphasized that many of our goals are met in our current general education requirements and in multiple curricular innovations across the college and the university. Thus, we approached our work and our ongoing discussions with stakeholders throughout the spring semester to focus on both what we are already doing well, and what we could do better. More specifically, the faculty forums were organized around two broad questions:

1. What are our objectives or goals for general education requirements at Emory?
2. What currently works well in the GER? What is not working?

Faculty forums generated a great deal of intense conversation, and multiple common themes emerged from these discussions. At the broadest philosophical level, faculty, alumni and student forum discussions revealed good consensus around the following major objectives:

1. To guide students to become lifelong learners who remain passionate and curious about the world around them, especially as the world becomes increasingly complex and interconnected.
2. To create engaged ethical citizen leaders, who can navigate complexity and evaluate facts and claims with reason and judgment.
3. To scaffold individual journeys to help students flourish personally and professionally, to appreciate beauty in the world, and to live a life of meaning and purpose.

In addition to these broad theses, consensus across the faculty, alumni and student forums converged on several more specific goals of a broad liberal arts and sciences education:

1. Gaining an understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives; understanding the fluid and contextualized nature of knowledge
   a. Within courses: How individuals and ideologies are created in historical, cultural and social structures of power, position and perspective;
   b. Across courses: An appreciation of the complexity and differentiation of methods and ways of knowing from different disciplinary perspectives; Opportunities for interdisciplinary explorations that help students appreciate and integrate multiple ways of knowing;
   c. Across individuals: Opportunities for students to interact around critical issues with diverse audiences, to hear and listen to diverse voices.
2. Gaining an appreciation of knowledge as a process of discovery and creativity
   a. Understanding the importance of evidence; what counts as evidence, how is this defined across disciplines
      i. Learning how to ask a question, and to gather, interpret, reflect and evaluate on evidence; and how this process can be integrated across disciplinary boundaries
      ii. Learning how to “interact with information”
   b. Provide opportunities for students to work closely with faculty and peers, in ways that highlight knowledge as a process, constructed from multiple perspectives
c. To infuse the curriculum with real word problems, approached from multiple perspectives, in ways that engage ethical dilemmas and issues, and that allow multiple voices to be heard.

3. Gaining **skills and competencies** that will provide the tools for lifelong learning
   a. Communication skills – written, oral, digital, visual, non-verbal, etc.
      i. Understanding communication across the curriculum in multiple forms
      ii. Understanding specific forms of communication and how they differ
   b. Understanding the world through multiple representational systems - languages, mathematics, music, etc. – including quantitative literacy – and understanding how these systems create and recreate knowledge in particular ways.

4. Through **intentional reflection** on their own learning process, to guide students through their own process of creating an identity as a lifelong learner; to guide them through the process of individual disequilibrium and discomfort to an understanding of complexity and ambiguity that is the foundation of lifelong learning.
   a. Provide specific, intentional opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning process within and across courses, and across their undergraduate experience, to allow students to understand the arc of their educational experiences across time
   b. Provide opportunities for students to **take risks and to fail**, and to reflect on this as a positive learning experience
   c. To help students become more self-reflective and self-critical.

In focused conversations with faculty, alumni and current students, they were asked: “**What currently works well in our GERs? What does not work well?**”

There was remarkable consensus around some purposes for general education requirements

1. The positive aspects of a “breadth” requirement
2. The success of the first-year seminars, and especially the QEP and its focus on evidence
3. The need for the continuing writing requirement (and perhaps even more writing), and support for efforts to support a broader definition of student communication (written, oral and digital)

There was also some dissatisfaction around the concerns about the current general education requirements, although these were definitely not as clearly consensual. These were some common views offered by faculty and students about the general education requirements (these are a summary of opinions expressed and do not reflect conclusions reached by this committee):

1. Too many students are waiting to take their GERs until their senior year – especially in the sciences and languages.
2. The current tagging system is not completely clear as to the reasons courses are classified together in one area. There may be too many courses that have a GER tag, and some GER areas are so broad that they lack coherence.
3. There may be ways that the GERs place unnecessary constraints on majors and limit the courses that majors may require.
4. Faculty hear from students concerns about the current health and PE requirements.

Based on these discussions, the working group drafted “Exploring the Arts and Sciences at Emory College” as an initial step towards a vision for the ECAS undergraduate arts and sciences curriculum, Appendix C. One of the strong conclusions of the group was that we have failed to adequately articulate
to students why we have general education requirements or what our goals are for students in these courses; many other universities have such statements that guide their curriculum. The document in Appendix C includes proposed language for this vision. It also lays out major objectives that should be met by the GER.

3. Next steps

“Exploring the Arts and Sciences at Emory College” lays out a vision for the entire undergraduate curriculum. There are multiple ways that the identified objectives can and will be met: some will be met through specific general education requirements, some through departmental major requirements, and some in approaches that faculty use and infuse in their courses. We expect that the next steps will involve a working group focused on specific general education requirements. The working group makes two types of recommendations for next steps: broad steps for moving forward, and specific recommendations about the current general education requirements (GERs) and other issues to be addressed.

**Broad steps**

The committee recommends approaching the general education requirements as a vision that produces objectives, implemented in specific requirements. In terms of the broadest level of recommendations, the working group underscores that the most immediate next step is to seriously consider if and how the current GERs align with the vision statement, and how to move from vision to implementation.

Are there objectives that do not currently appear in the current general education requirements? For example, for the committee discussed the importance of diversity, ethics, experiential learning, and so on. There may be some things that we want students to learn that are better incorporated within a specific established GER or built into major requirements rather than developing a new requirement. One possibility is a multiple tagging system, whereby certain courses within certain areas may also focus on diversity, or ethics, etc. just as some courses currently fulfill both breadth and writing requirements. We may also want to think about how to incorporate objectives in courses without adding a requirement.

Are the distinctive strengths of Emory reflected in the general education requirements? Both in the faculty focus sessions and the committee meetings, faculty identified areas of particular strength at Emory which might be incorporated into or reflected in the general education requirements. These included Emory’s support for interdisciplinarity, the successful Nature of Evidence courses, ethical engagement, connections with Atlanta, diversity, health sciences, and sustainability. Successful innovations, like the sidecar courses, might be part of this effort. More emphasis on the values of interdisciplinary teaching was a common thread, and includes issues of facilitating faculty development to teach interdisciplinary courses, both across the college, and between the undergraduate schools. This includes both faculty development issues and infrastructure issues. The committee emphasized the need to work with the new Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education as we move these initiatives forward.

Related to this, the issue of becoming a lifelong, intentional, reflective learner is a recurrent theme. How do we accomplish this (if at all) in the current GERs? How do we build in ways for student to continue to re-visit these issues across their educational career? How do we build educational experiences over time to create a spiral of developmental outcome? Are there ways to organize the
GER so that students are building strengths over their four years, a pattern they could carry over into later learning? Is there a way to encourage student reflection on their learning?

Emory College of Arts and Sciences is part of a larger research university, including graduate and professional schools, and three other undergraduate schools. **Are there opportunities within this broader University context that might enrich the curriculum for ECAS students? Are there ways the ECAS curriculum can enhance the broader undergraduate experience at Emory?** What is the relationship between the ECAS general education requirements and similar requirements at Oxford and in the undergraduate professional schools at Emory?

How do we coordinate broad general requirements with the departments and majors? **How can we leverage the GERs to be foundational for majors to build on?**

**Specific recommendations**
The working group offers specific recommendations of actions where there is consensus on the committee that these would be beneficial.

1. **Clarity of “tagging” courses as fulfilling GERs:**
   a. Develop a set of learning objectives for each breadth area and a set of guidelines for if and how specific courses meet these objectives. The Curriculum Committee has been working on this for the current general education requirements. There is agreement among the working group members that any revision of the GERs should start with and include the development of clear learning goals for all areas of the GER.
   b. Consider whether the current GER areas are the right areas, with clear and coherent goals. If there are areas that do not have clear, coherent shared goals, those areas should be revised to achieve that clarity.
2. **Broaden the current writing requirements to include other forms of communication across contexts, media, and cultures.**
   a. Develop criteria similar to the writing intensive criteria for courses that provide in depth experience with other forms of communication
   b. Change the “writing requirement” to a “communication requirement” and increase the requirement to include at least one additional required course that includes intensive experience in a medium other than writing.
   c. Consider scaffolding writing across disciplines and students’ full degree program.
   d. Think about how to ensure comparability across continuing writing courses, and to expand writing opportunities in areas which currently have few courses (e.g., natural sciences).
3. **Provide faculty development opportunities that help faculty both understand and meet the broad objectives of the undergraduate curriculum and the specific goals related to general education requirements.** The QEP faculty development seminars are a great model for this kind of faculty development that improves the focus and quality of course offerings.

In addition to areas where there was consensus about the recommendations for change, there were also options that might be valuable additions to the general education requirements but without consensus about their value. All of these will require resources, and have practical and logistical challenges for implementation.

1. **Should there be a common experience for all students?**
a. This might include academic experiences like a common reading for first year students, a class that all students complete, or a focus on a common theme in seminars.

b. Experiential learning was repeatedly identified as something important to incorporate in students’ undergraduate experience. Broadly conceptualized, this includes things like laboratory research, archival work in libraries, internships, community engagement in Atlanta or other settings, field research, etc.

c. Capstone experiences for students can be a valuable addition to the undergraduate curriculum, and might take many forms. Is this an experience we want to include in our general education, or is it better addressed with departments and majors?

2. Should we develop more GER courses for “non-majors” e.g., in sciences, history, literature? Are there goals we want for students who will not major in an area that could be incorporated in such courses?

3. The sidecar courses are an innovative addition that was valued by both the students and faculty involved. Are there opportunities to expand these opportunities? Are there other ways to help students experience the linkages between different courses?

4. The role of advising is also crucial for the success of general education requirements. Helping students understand the purpose of general education requirements, and supporting students in making good choices among the options for fulfilling requirements requires a successful advising structure. We endorse and support the efforts of the ECAS Senate to review the current pre-major advising system and develop more effective advising options. This seems to us to go hand-in-hand with a review of requirements.

5. We need to think about ASSESSMENT and provide resources to support it!!! Are general education courses meeting our goals? How do we know? What kinds of support for faculty would help them better incorporate general education goals within their own courses and know whether their efforts are successful?

The committee would like to end the report by noting the remarkable degree of consensus within the working group and among the faculty, students and alumni in the focus groups around the values and objectives for the undergraduate experience.