At the Regular Meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University on Tuesday, May 15, 2007, the following vote was passed:

WHEREAS, the aim of general education at Harvard is to connect a student’s liberal education—that is, an education conducted in a spirit of free inquiry, rewarding in its own right—to life beyond college, a new program in General Education is outlined herein. Complementing the rest of the curriculum, this program aims to achieve four goals that link the undergraduate experience to the lives students will lead after Harvard: to prepare students for civic engagement; to teach students to understand themselves as products of, and participants in, traditions of art, ideas, and values; to enable students to respond critically and constructively to change; and to develop students’ understanding of the ethical dimensions of what they say and do.

The world has changed since the last time the Faculty instituted a general education curriculum. So has the state of knowledge, and so has Harvard. It is the mission of the Faculty to help students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that will prepare them to understand and appreciate the complexities of the world and their roles in it. Students must learn to question assumptions, to be self-reflective, to think critically and analytically, and to engage effectively with different historical moments and cultural formations. Thus, the material that is taught in General Education courses is continuous with the material taught in the rest of the curriculum, but it is taught in a distinctive way and in the service of distinctive goals.

VOTED:

I. That a Program in General Education, together with a new set of General Education requirements, be established to replace the Core Program and Core requirements for the four-year A.B. and S.B. degrees. The General Education curriculum will aim to serve the rationale and goals of General Education as stated in the February 2007 Report of the Task Force on General Education (and reprinted here as an Explanatory Note).

A. Courses that are to count for general education should serve one or more of the four goals of general education as described in the Report (and stated above), and aim to address the following pedagogical goals: to present a wide range of material, rather than focus in depth on a single topic or a small number of texts; to help students learn how to use abstract conceptual knowledge or a knowledge of the past to understand and address concrete issues and problems; to make students aware that all of their coursework makes a difference to the people they will become and the lives they will lead after college; to be taught, to the extent practicable, in interactive formats that give students an opportunity to discuss the material with the faculty member teaching the class and with one another; and/or to strive to apply the basic concepts and principles to the solution of concrete problems, the accomplishment of specific tasks, and the creation of actual objects and experiences out of the classroom.
B. The General Education requirements shall consist of one letter-graded half-course from each of eight subject areas (regardless of a student’s concentration) as described in the Report and meeting the specific criteria as listed below, one of which courses shall engage substantially with study of the past.

1. Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding
   
a. Develop skills in criticism, that is, aesthetic responsiveness and interpretive ability;

b. develop skills in understanding written, aural, visual, kinaesthetic, or other forms by examining primary texts in any language, linguistic structures, and/or works of art in one or more media;

c. teach how to analyze these works in a contextual framework, such as critical theory, aesthetics, philosophy of art, rhetoric, theories of language and meaning, or theories of perception; and

d. where practicable and appropriate, include experiences out of the classroom, such as visits to exhibitions, performances, and readings, or interactions with performers, directors, and curators, or allow students to undertake creative work.

2. Culture and Belief

   a. Develop an understanding of and appreciation for traditions of culture and belief in human societies;

b. introduce students to primary texts in any language, works of art in one or more media, or ethnographies, social histories, or other secondary texts;

c. develop the ability to analyze these works in the light of their historical, social, political, economic, religious, and/or cross-cultural conditions of production and reception;

d. examine ways in which traditions of culture and belief shape the identities of individuals and communities; and

e. draw connections between the material covered in the course and cultural issues of concern or interest that are likely to arise in students’ own lives.
3. Empirical and Mathematical Reasoning
   a. Teach the conceptual and theoretical tools used in reasoning and problem solving, such as statistics, probability, mathematics, logic, and decision theory;
   b. provide exercises in which students apply these tools to concrete problems of wide concern; and
   c. where practicable, familiarize students with some of the mistakes human beings typically make in reasoning and problem solving.

4. Ethical Reasoning
   a. Teach how to reason about moral and political beliefs and practices, and how to deliberate and assess claims about ethical issues;
   b. examine competing conceptions and theories of ethical concepts such as the good life, obligation, rights, justice, and liberty;
   c. teach how to assess and weigh the reasons for and against adopting these various conceptions and theories;
   d. apply these conceptions and theories to concrete ethical dilemmas of the sort students will encounter in their lives, such as those that arise in medicine, law, business, politics, and daily life; and
   e. where appropriate, acquaint students with value systems different from their own, such as those of different religions or different historical periods and those expressed in different languages, or with empirical studies of moral life.

5. Science of Living Systems
   a. Introduce key concepts, facts, and theories relevant to living systems;
   b. teach the nature of experiments on living systems, ideally through laboratory experiences;
   c. relate scientific concepts, facts, theories, and methods to problems of wide concern; and
   d. where relevant and appropriate (as determined by the instructor), discuss one or more of the following: the history, philosophy, contexts, and institutions of the scientific work being taught.
6. Science of the Physical Universe
   a. Introduce key concepts, facts, and theories about the physical universe that equip students to understand better our world and the universe;
   b. teach the nature of experiments in the physical sciences and engineering, ideally through laboratory experiences;
   c. relate scientific concepts, facts, theories, and methods to problems of wide concern; and
   d. where relevant and appropriate (as determined by the instructor), discuss one or more of the following: the history, philosophy, contexts, and institutions of the scientific work being taught.

7. Societies of the World
   a. Examine one or more societies outside the United States;
   b. demonstrate connections between societies and/or across historical periods in a single society; and
   c. relate the material studied to the kinds of social, cultural, political, legal, linguistic, or economic issues students might encounter in a global context.

8. The United States in the World
   a. Examine American social, political, legal, cultural, and/or economic institutions, practices, and behaviors, from contemporary, historical, and/or analytic perspectives;
   b. demonstrate the connections between those institutions, practices, and behaviors and those of other societies in the world, and/or show change over time within the United States and its colonial antecedents; and
   c. use the material studied to give students critical tools to understand the social, cultural, political, legal, or economic issues confronted by the United States in a global context.

II. That a Standing Committee on General Education be established together with subcommittees that will oversee the content of the subject areas, as well as other aspects of the program, as necessary. The committees will be appointed by the Dean of the Faculty.
A. The Standing Committee on General Education shall be chaired by the Director of the Program on General Education, who shall be a senior member of the Faculty. The committee shall consist of members of the Faculty and student representatives.

B. Any subcommittees overseeing the subject areas shall consist of faculty from a variety of departments and divisions, and student representatives.

C. The Standing Committee (and any subcommittees) will be responsible for:

1. recruiting faculty in collaboration with departments to develop new General Education courses;

2. determining, in conjunction with the relevant department chair, which departmental courses shall count for General Education credit;

3. developing policy proposals to be discussed and where necessary voted by the Faculty concerning:
   a. the relationship to General Education of other aspects of the curriculum (including study abroad, the freshman seminar program, language requirements and citations, and requirements for concentrations and secondary fields);
   b. related administrative and academic matters;
   c. any mid-course adjustments in the legislation governing General Education deemed important as the Standing Committee proceeds with implementation; and

4. recommending to course heads, departments, and the Dean of the Faculty and other relevant administrators how the opportunities and resources necessary for course development and pedagogical innovation can be most effectively utilized in support of the General Education program.

III. That, during the academic year 2007-2008, the Standing Committee will assume responsibility for planning all aspects of the transition to the new curriculum and its requirements, and will present to the Faculty within one year a plan for transition and implementation. The plan should detail all aspects of the transition from the Core Program to the Program in General Education, including how students who are enrolled in the College during the transition will complete degree requirements.
IV. That, beginning in the academic year 2008-2009, the Standing Committee on General Education and its subcommittees will assume the responsibilities currently under the jurisdiction of the Standing Committee on the Core Program until such time as the Core Program is concluded. Upon assumption of such responsibilities, the Standing Committee on the Core Program will be abolished.

V. That the Dean of the Faculty appoint a committee to conduct a review of the Program in General Education and its curricular requirements (including the definitions of the subject areas and the criteria for courses offered in those areas) within five years of the Program’s inception.
EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Reason For General Education

A Harvard education is a liberal education—that is, an education conducted in a spirit of free inquiry, rewarding in its own right. This kind of learning is not only one of the enrichments of existence; it is one of the achievements of civilization. It heightens students’ awareness of the human and natural worlds they inhabit. It makes them more reflective about their beliefs and choices, more self-conscious and critical of their presuppositions and motivations, more creative in their problem-solving, more perceptive of the world around them, and more able to inform themselves about the issues that arise in their lives, personally, professionally, and socially. College is an opportunity to learn and reflect in an environment free from most of the constraints on time and energy that operate in the rest of life.

A liberal education is also a preparation for the rest of life. The subjects that undergraduates study and, as importantly, the skills and habits of mind they acquire in the process, shape the lives they will lead after they leave the academy. Some of our students will go on to become academics; many will become physicians, lawyers, and businesspeople.\(^1\) All of them will be citizens, whether of the United States or another country, and as such will be helping to make decisions that may affect the lives of others. All of them will engage with forces of change—cultural, religious, political, demographic, technological, planetary. All of them will have to assess empirical claims, interpret cultural expressions, and confront ethical dilemmas in their personal and professional lives. A liberal education gives students the tools to face these challenges in an informed and thoughtful way.

A liberal education is useful. This does not mean that its purpose is to train students for their professions or to give them a guide to life after college. Nor does it mean instilling confidence in students by flattering the presumption that the world they are familiar with is the only one that matters. On the contrary, the aim of a liberal education is to unsettle presumptions, to defamiliarize the familiar, to reveal what is going on beneath and behind appearances, to disorient young people and to help them to find ways to re-orient themselves. A liberal education aims to accomplish these things by questioning assumptions, by inducing self-reflection, by teaching students to think critically and analytically, by exposing them to the sense of alienation produced by encounters with radically different historical moments and cultural formations and with phenomena that exceed their, and even our own, capacity fully to understand. Liberal education is vital because professional schools do not teach these things, employers do not teach them, and even most academic graduate programs do not teach them. Those institutions deliberalize students: they train them to think as professionals. A preparation in the liberal arts and sciences is crucial to the ability to think and act critically and reflectively outside the channels of a career or profession. The historical, theoretical, and relational perspectives that a liberal education provides can be a source of enlightenment and

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\(^1\) Roughly five percent of seniors say that they intend to pursue doctoral study in the arts and sciences in the fall after graduation, and eighteen percent say that they plan to pursue a Ph.D. some time in the future. Fifty-three percent of graduating seniors in 2006 said that they were expecting to enter a professional school—business, medicine, or law.
empowerment that will serve students well for the rest of their lives. It is with this aspect of liberal learning in mind—the influence it can have on the kinds of lives students will lead after they leave Harvard—that we propose the program in general education that follows.

The world has changed since the last time the Faculty instituted a general education curriculum. So has the state of knowledge, and so has Harvard. We think that a general education curriculum needs to take these changes into account. We do not think, however, that this means that we should teach courses that simply train students to deal with today’s issues. Professors routinely make connections in class between what they are teaching and what is going on around us. We wish to stress how important this kind of connection can be for students. We do not propose that we teach the headlines, only that the headlines, along with much else in our students’ lives, are among the things that a liberal education can help students make better sense of. All of us believe that what we teach is important for students to know. General education is a place where we can explain why it is important.

A Harvard education has many dimensions: student organizations, the performing arts, athletics, and the life of the residential houses all contribute to the intellectual, ethical, and personal growth of undergraduates. The academic experience, though, is the centerpiece. It has three components: the concentration, electives, and general education. The concentration enables students to pursue a disciplinary interest in depth; electives enable them to explore fields outside their main academic focus and to broaden their interests and enthusiasms. The role of general education, as we conceive it, is to connect in an explicit way what students learn at Harvard to life beyond Harvard, and to help them understand and appreciate the complexities of the world and their role in it. We face the challenge of preparing our students to lead flourishing and productive lives in a world that is dramatically different from the world in which most of us grew up. The world today is interconnected to a degree almost inconceivable thirty or forty years ago. It is, at the same time, and in ways that are often obscured in the press and the culture of public life, a deeply divided, unstable, and uncertain world. Harvard’s students will need to make their way in an environment complex for new and incompletely understood reasons; they will also lead lives that affect the lives of others. It is our mission to help them to find their way and to meet their responsibilities by providing a general education curriculum that is responsive to the conditions of the twenty-first century. The material that is taught in general education courses is continuous with the material taught in the rest of the curriculum. It is part of a liberal education. But it is taught in a distinctive way and in the service of distinctive goals. General education is the place where students are brought to understand how everything that we teach in the arts and sciences relates to their lives and to the world that they will confront. General education is the public face of liberal education.

The Goals of the General Education Curriculum

The general education curriculum we have designed aims at four overarching goals in linking the college experience to the world its graduates will confront. These goals are, in many respects, overlapping, and they are not tied to specific disciplines or departments.

*General education prepares students for civic engagement.* Civic engagement means participation in public life. Harvard should seek, throughout the college experience and in its
general education curriculum in particular, to inspire its students to become active and engaged citizens locally, nationally, and internationally. Achieving this goal requires that students understand the forces driving local, national, and global change: the diverse cultures that have helped to shape communities and identities; political, economic, and social institutions; and advances in science and technology. Students need to appreciate that citizenship today brings responsibilities that are both local and cosmopolitan, national and international. Most of our students are citizens of the United States, but whether they are American citizens or students who have come here for college and will return home, we ought to help them to have a critical and balanced understanding of American history, institutions, and values, and a critical appreciation of the place of those institutions and values in a shifting global context.

General education teaches students to understand themselves as products of—and participants in—traditions of art, ideas, and values. Students should understand what is at stake in cultural conflicts. They need to appreciate the considerable difficulties in negotiating across cultural differences; they also need to see how cultures that seem opposed have often emerged from shared traditions, and can, despite their differences, have profound effects on each other. Students also should know how to “read” cultural and aesthetic expressions. Knowledge of the history of art, religion, and ideas, both those of their own culture and of other cultures, helps students appreciate the contingent nature of the world of beliefs and practices they inhabit; it helps them see how their identities have been shaped; and it helps them understand their own traditions in relation to other traditions. Familiarity with the dynamics of culture, both past and present, is essential to students’ successful navigation of today’s world.

General education prepares students to respond critically and constructively to change. Students need to know about the forces that generate change and transformation in modern life, not only in order to make informed decisions as civic agents, but in order to have some degree of control over their own lives. Perhaps no area of endeavor today exerts more powerful transformative effects than science and technology. General education is one of the means by which all students can become familiar with important concepts and issues in these areas, and wrestle with their social, personal, and ethical implications. Rapid change is also a feature of contemporary political, economic, and cultural life. Our world is not a stable one, and students are ill-served by a curriculum that assumes that the shape of things today is all they need to understand in order to engage with the political, socio-economic, and technological landscape of tomorrow. Students need to leave Harvard with skills to match the world’s speed.

General education develops students’ understanding of the ethical dimensions of what they say and do. Liberal education is about more than the acquisition of information, skills, and techniques. It is also about the capacity to grasp the ethical consequences of the ways in which those acquirements are put to use. Ethical awareness is achieved in part by helping students reflect critically on their own beliefs and values, and learn how to defend them with reasoned arguments. It is also achieved by exposing students to beliefs and values that have shaped others’ lives, historically and internationally, so that they are put in a position from which they can choose for themselves what principles will guide them. Students may well reaffirm the principles they came to Harvard with, but they should be able to do so self-
consciously and deliberately. In addition, they should gain a deeper understanding of other belief systems, even when they do not share them. They should see that conflicts about values arise from a variety of sources, including cultural differences, religious differences, socio-economic differences, and the impact of developments in science and technology.