

Part 1. Executive Summary

Purpose of this Document

In Spring 2025, the GE Task Force created a restructuring document according to the specifications in the UCC Manual (2017): “Prior to the preliminary review, a specially appointed committee, consisting of representatives from both faculty and administration – including representatives from the University Planning Council (UPC), the General Education (GE) Committee and the University Curriculum Committee (UCC)– shall develop a restructuring document which analyzes the need for change and describes in detail the proposed program as well as its academic, fiscal, and administrative implications.”

The document, *Considerations for Restructuring the GE Program at Kean*: February 13, 2025, was distributed, as prescribed by the UCC Manual for Major Restructuring of the GE Program: first to the University Planning Council (UPC), then to the GE Committee, followed by the Office of Accreditation & Assessment (OAA) and the University Curriculum Committee (UCC), and finally to the University Senate. Along the way, recommendations were collected and forwarded to the next entity for their review, creating a cumulative collection of suggestions for revision.

At its May 6, 2025 meeting, the University Senate decided that it would deviate from the procedure articulated in the UCC Manual, and instead of moving to open hearings, it requested that the GE Task Force revise *Considerations for Restructuring the GE Program at Kean* so that the accumulated recommendations could first be addressed. The GE Task Force welcomed this invitation, knowing that a revised document would make the open hearings more fruitful, as members of the campus community would be able to respond to an updated version that addresses the Spring 2025 recommendations from the five reviewing bodies.

The aim of this newly revised document, known as *Proposal to Revise General Education at Kean University: Summer 2025* is to provide Kean University community members with a clear explanation of the proposed new General Education curriculum and to consider the wide-ranging implications of the proposed changes.

The appendices provide an overview of the years-long collaborative efforts, situate these efforts within national trends and best practices, and provide a report on the Fall 2024 GE pilot which informed the proposed redesign at scale outlined in this document.

The Vision for a Redesigned GE Program at Kean

Kean’s General Education Program is the academic core of the University, providing students with the intellectual tools to live meaningful and productive lives. As such, it is

central to advancing the University's mission, as well as its Core Values of academic excellence, equity, inclusivity, wellness, social mobility, public impact, and vision—all to be reaffirmed in the upcoming release of Kean's next Strategic Plan.

General Education at Kean aims to offer a broad, liberal education that cultivates and empowers the whole person, so the academic implications of the revised GE Program are manifold and will be transformative for the institution and student learning. In addition to creating more dynamic, inclusive, and supportive learning environments through innovative pedagogy and curricular models, a well-structured General Education Program will support a range of institutional needs and mandates, including such things as:

- providing students with a unique, Kean-specific “Cougar Core” experience that fosters a sense of belonging where individuals feel acknowledged and welcomed in shared experiences,
- decreasing achievement gaps and DFW rates across General Education courses, which are often also the gateway/foundational courses for some of the University's undergraduate majors,
- building more effective curriculum and improving pedagogy to support increased student persistence, retention, and completion rates,
- improving each student's individual preparedness for their academic majors and minors by ensuring that students reach proficiency across the GE Program Learning Outcomes and have learned how to successfully “be in college,” and
- strengthening the sense of community on campus and fostering robust connections with the surrounding region.

Summary of the Proposed New Structure: The “Cougar Core”

The new GE Program structure of 31-32 credits for all students will focus on the implementation of High Impact Practices (HIPs) and be guided by a Learning Outcomes model. There is overwhelming evidence that the implementation of HIPs in a core curriculum enriches student learning, particularly for student groups served by Kean. This integrative approach will foster inclusive teaching practices, and its central organizing principle is the student experience in a learning community during Semester 1.

The Cougar Core will offer:

- thematic, interdisciplinary learning communities using two courses in the first semester,
- writing-intensive courses in Semesters 1, 2, and 3/4,
- consistent and intentional use of comprehensive and longitudinal e-portfolios,
- peer-to-peer support through GE peer tutors and embedded tutoring,
- experiential learning activities,
- place-based experiences on- and off-campus,

- common intellectual experiences, including the Common Read, and
- a research course, or GE-approved research experience, in Semester 3 or 4.

Moving away from a disciplinary-based Foundation/Distribution model, the new Cougar Core Curriculum will consist of:

1. Essential Learning courses;
2. Core Competency courses, including a writing-intensive course beyond College Composition, and
3. a sophomore-level research course (i.e., The Passion Project), or GE-approved research experience.

Through this revision, the General Education Program will substantially bolster students' communication, critical reading, and quantitative literacy skills and foster the habits of mind and values aligned with the Kean mission and Core Values as both a global and locally anchored research institution.

Implications

Like other exciting initiatives happening at Kean currently, the changes catalyzed by the new GE Program will be transformational in nature. The implementation of the Cougar Core will not only impact teaching and learning but also the behind-the-scenes processes and procedures that affect the student experience in a variety of ways and at multiple touchpoints on their Kean journey. As such, the successful implementation of the new General Education curriculum will require a range of administrative changes and will depend upon the collaborative efforts of Deans, faculty, and staff-- all as partners across the university.

Recommendations from the GE Task Force include:

- the adoption of centralized scheduling in the Office of the Registrar to provide a holistic, big picture understanding of the use of resources (like classroom space) and to maximize efficiency when creating the needed learning communities;
- the hiring of additional support staff to manage student travel and coordinate faculty schedules across colleges;
- an expanded investment in professional development for faculty teaching in the learning communities, as already implemented by the Center for Teaching Excellence with the Fall 2024 and 2025 pilots,
- a significant reduction in the number of adjunct faculty teaching in GE by calling upon Deans to facilitate the strategic assignment of full-time faculty to teach in the GE Program,
- the creation of an Implementation Team, a joint project of the GE Task Force and the University Senate, comprised of

- faculty to support curriculum development and guidelines around the new GE PLOs,
- administrators and staff from key areas (for example, the registrar's office, admissions, advising, assessment) to help move forward the learning community model at scale, to aid all University stakeholders in understanding the new GE Program, and to clarify how each individual's work impacts and can support the transition to the new Cougar Core
- a review by the University Senate of the structure and composition of its General Education Committee to include faculty who teach in the GE Program while serving on the Committee,
- more structured and sustained collaborations between relevant Senate sub-committees (e.g., Writing Emphasis Committee) and the GE Committee to support student learning in the new PLOs.
- early consideration of the pending merger with New Jersey City University, as well as implementation of the new GE Program in Wenzhou, at Kean Ocean, as well as with Kean Online.