Executive Summary

University Core A: The Principles of a Classical Education in an Information Age

The goal of Radford University’s General Education program is to offer a sound, liberal arts education that will serve its students well in all of their future endeavors. Core A courses are designed as a necessary foundation for that education. Core A consists of four sequential and interconnected courses that are rooted in the principles of grammar, rhetoric, and logic—the classical education referred to as the *trivium*. These timeless principles must nonetheless be studied in the context of the information age that is the 21st century, and thus each of the four courses integrates these essential competencies with information and technology literacy.

All Radford University students will take these courses, each of which will examine the competencies in relation to one another, and build upon the skills and knowledge learned in the previous courses:

- **CORE 101**
  - This course will introduce students to basic written and oral communication skills.

- **CORE 102**
  - This course will introduce students to logic and information research skills.

- **CORE 201**
  - This course will enhance students’ ability to assess arguments and to develop written and oral arguments by further developing their skills at deductive logic.

- **CORE 202**
  - This course will introduce students to ethical reasoning. Students will develop collaborative projects using the skills learned in 101, 102, and 201 in relation to important ethical dilemmas in a variety of fields.

Upon completion of Core A, our students will be equipped with the foundation to become logical thinkers, effective communicators, critical users of technology, consumers of information, life-long learners, and ultimately better citizens.

Faculty from all departments across campus will be invited to teach 102, 201, and 202. Participating faculty will complete training workshops led by the core coordinators. Certain competencies and skills must be covered in each class through particular assignments, ensuring that students will be well prepared for the next course, but professors will be able to choose the topics to which the shared content is applied.

Students will maintain an electronic portfolio through the sequence of courses. The portfolio will integrate student learning across the competencies while providing the grounding for a portfolio that a student may use throughout his or her college career. Students will be asked to reflect on their developing skills and understanding at the end of each course. This portfolio will also serve as an assessment measure for each course and competency, and culminate in an assessment of the Core as a whole.
Oversight of the Core will be conducted by Core Coordinators and the Core Curriculum Director. Core Coordinators, one coordinator each from English, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Communications, and McConnell Library, will ensure consistency in all sections of the Core courses. The Core Curriculum Director will work with the individual Core Coordinators and oversee all Core courses.

Concepts

“To Know Ourselves and the World”

University Core A: The Principles of a Classical Education in an Information Age

The goal of Radford University’s General Education program is to offer a sound, liberal arts education that will serve its students well in all of their future endeavors. Core A courses are designed as a necessary foundation for that education. Core A consists of four sequential and interconnected courses that are rooted in the principles of grammar, rhetoric, and logic—the classical education referred to as the *trivium*. These timeless principles must nonetheless be studied in the context of the information age that is the 21st century, and thus each of the four courses integrates these essential competencies with information and technology literacy.

The English poet Matthew Arnold noted that our aim in our culture ought to be “to know ourselves and the world” (*Literature and Science*, 1882); that is a worthy objective for General Education. University Core A takes as its objective providing what rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke called “equipment for living” (*The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 1941)—equipping our students with the foundational skills and knowledge to become logical thinkers, effective communicators, critical users of technology and consumers of information, life-long learners, and ultimately better citizens.

LEARNING OUTCOMES & SEQUENCING – Learning outcomes for Core A will be fulfilled across the series of courses, each building on and reinforcing skills learned in a previous course. Courses are designed to be taken in the following sequence: Semester 1- CORE 101; Semester 2- CORE 102; Semester 3- CORE 201; Semester 4- CORE 202. CORE 101 and CORE 102 may be satisfied through alternate forms of credit (Advanced Placement, Dual
Enrollment, and transfer credit), but students would need to include work from those courses in their electronic portfolios, identifying the grantor of credit.

**SHARED CONTENT ACROSS SECTIONS** - Each section of CORE 101 will address the same written and oral communication and critical thinking skills as any other section, as will each section of CORE 102, although there may be differences in reading selections across sections of both courses. All sections of CORE 201 and CORE 202 will involve some shared texts and some shared content, although the written and oral communication and critical thinking skills addressed will be the same. The professors who teach these latter courses will have some choices with respect to the social topics to which the shared content is applied.

**SHARED TEXTS** – To achieve consistency across sections, some texts will be shared. Courses will use a shared handbook, developed by Core Coordinators, which will contain mostly articles and exercises. The readings will increase in difficulty as students move through the sequence. The program handbook will be used throughout the sequence, and it will also be distributed to faculty outside the program so that they may draw on it for information about the Core A preparation of their students.

**FACULTY RESOURCES** – CORE 101 will be taught by English Faculty. CORE 102, CORE 201 and CORE 202 can be taught by any faculty member as long as s/he completes the Core Retreat, a series of faculty development workshops delivered by the Core Coordinators. The primary aim of these workshops will be to help instructors to understand and teach the shared material of the Core A courses.

**CORE COORDINATORS** – The Core A Retreats will be delivered by four Core Coordinators, one coordinator each from English, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Communications, and McConnell Library. The role of coordinators will be to provide consistency in all sections of the Core courses. They will deliver workshops at the Core A Retreats to ensure that all faculty members understand the course material and to suggest methods by which to teach the material. The Core Coordinators will also have oversight over the courses to confirm that the objectives are being achieved. The Core A courses will be overseen by a Core Curriculum Director who will work with the individual Core Coordinators to ensure scheduling and staffing of sections.
ASSESSMENT- Each student will maintain an electronic portfolio through the sequence of courses. Papers, projects, and presentations for each course will be housed in the portfolio. Rubrics will be used to grade these assignments. This portfolio will serve as an assessment measure for each course, each competency, and culminate in an assessment of Core A as a whole. Students who enter with Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, or transfer credit for courses similar to CORE 101 and/or CORE 102 will be required to submit a portfolio of materials which represent the alternate form of credit. That entrance portfolio will then form the base of their electronic portfolio. The assessment of the e-portfolios will then compare the work of native RU students with the work of students who received credit elsewhere.

CORE COURSES

CORE 101
This course will introduce students to the expectations of reading, writing, and speaking at the college level through attention to the writing process, genre, style, audience (analysis and adaptation), and Standard Written English. Students will engage in analytical writing and the incorporation of primary texts into their own writing. The course will also introduce students to basic oral communication skills (listening, language use, and non-verbal communication) and interpersonal skills, which they will apply in discussions of their writing, as well as presentation and delivery skills.

CORE 102
This course will further develop students’ writing skills by emphasizing the use of logic and information literacy in their writing. Students will learn how to form and support claims with attention to underlying assumptions that people bring to arguments. The course will introduce students to elements of logic, including fallacies and inductive reasoning, and their use in persuasive writing. Students will continue to develop competency in information literacy as they research and write a persuasive research paper. In addition, students will learn the basic mechanics of a persuasive argumentation and make an individual persuasive presentation.
CORE 201

This course will enhance students’ ability to think critically, to assess arguments in written material, and to develop written and oral arguments. This course will continue with the language-based study of logic, including deduction, the continuation and completion of fallacies, and conditional and indirect proof. Students will use these skills to address current social issues. In addition, students will continue to hone their communication skills through writing and making an oral presentation.

CORE 202

This course will provide an overview of basic approaches to ethical reasoning, including virtue theory, utilitarianism, deontology, and justice theory. These approaches will be used to examine and address various social issues, including the effects of technology on society in the 21st century. This course will serve as a culmination of the skills learned in CORE 101, 102, and 201. Students will write a collaborative research paper utilizing their skills in information literacy. In addition, they will make a team persuasive presentation using interpersonal, team, and public speaking skills.

HONORS CORE A

Proposal for a General Education Writing Requirement for Student Members of the Honors Academy

This proposal applies to student members of the Honors Academy and is intended to replace the CORE A freshman requirement (CORE 101 and CORE 102). The proposed requirement consists of one Honors Class (HNRS 103 Honors Critical Thinking and Communication) as well as Honors Sections of CORE 201 and 202. All honor students, regardless of dual enrollment, AP, or transfer credit, will be required to take HNRS 103. Based upon SAT scores and writing samples, a small number of students will take CORE 101H prior to HNRS 103.

Motivation for the proposed change:

1. Honors Students comment that they are ready and able to handle greater expectations in developing their freshman writing skills.
2. Honors Faculty comment that students enrolled in Honors Classes are unable to meet their expectations regarding fundamental rhetorical writing and therefore not ready to progress within their study of various disciplines.

3. Consultants brought in lead workshops in teaching Honors Classes, especially writing in Honors Classes supported pervasive nature of the issues noted above and led the Honors Transformation Committee to propose a class to propose this course and its implementation.

4. The structure of CORE A complements this course beautifully and its content fits comfortably with the learning outcomes developed for the CORE.

Proposed Writing Requirement for Honors Students:

In order to meet their CORE writing requirement for General Education, each Honors Academy member will:

1. Successfully complete HNRS 103, (Honors Critical Thinking and Communication) as well as Honors Sections of CORE 201 and 202.

Course Description:

Students who successfully complete this course will demonstrate fundamental competence in oral and written communication including that of Expository Writing with the use of Standard Written English and fundamentals of Rhetorical Writing. Students will further enhance and demonstrate their competence in critical thinking skills and their ability to seek and evaluate different sources of information including those found in electronic media through their oral and written assignments. This class will ensure that students in the Honors Academy will be prepared to enhance their ability evaluate and use information to effectively develop their point of view on various current and classical issues as well as formulate written and oral arguments.

Implementation of this Requirement:

a. It is recognized that some students will enter RU having completed two semesters of Freshman writing as dual enrollment in a local Community College or having
scored successfully on the AP exam. While they will still receive college credits for their work, they will also be required to complete the Honors CORE A requirement.

b. It is also recognized that some Honors Students may not have the requisite skills to enter directly into HNRS 103. Research of the data for New Freshmen entering the Honors Academy over the past two years results in the following implementation of this policy:

1. Any student who scores below 500 on both the Verbal and Writing portions of the SAT will be required to take an Honors Section of CORE 101. (Past years’ data identified about 15 students/year.)

2. Any new Honors Student for whom we do not have both the Writing and Verbal scores of the SAT will be asked to provide a writing sample at Quest in order to determine their placement in an Honor Writing Class. (About 20 students/year.)

3. A student who has scored below 500 on both the Verbal and Writing portions of the SAT will also be provided the opportunity to provide a writing sample during Quest.

4. Based upon previous years’ data the above options will generate 2-6 writing samples per Quest Session.

5. Based upon previous years’ data and professor reports the options described will generate 15-20 students (out of an expected 150 new freshmen) who will be placed into CORE 101H.

6. The Department of English (specifically Dr. Guruswamy) has volunteered to read and rate the writing samples.

7. Students who join the Honors Academy after successfully completing an Honors Section of CORE 101 (at the end of Fall semester) will enroll in HNRS 103 rather than CORE 102.

**Benefits of the Core A Sequence**

Students enter Radford University without the reading, critical thinking, information/technology literacy, writing and speaking skills that we would like them to have at the college level. This situation is due to a number of factors, ranging from testing methods that discourage writing and speaking assignments to a culture that devalues reading. The Core A sequence is designed on the basis of two
principles: 1) that these skills are necessarily synergistic; and 2) that learning is most effective when skills are practiced and reinforced over time.

When these skills are taught in isolated courses, students often not only do not recognize that the skills are integrated, but they also do not understand that the skills will be used in other courses. By teaching these skills in an integrated way, in sections taught by faculty from across the university, the Core A sequence will develop students’ ability to employ these skills at a higher cognitive level, communicating to students that these skills will remain important throughout their college careers.

Two semesters of written communication are often insufficient to prepare students to write in their major, especially if their sophomore and junior level courses require little writing to reinforce and develop their skills. The Core A sequence extends writing instruction into the sophomore year, requiring students to build on their existing skills by completing complex assignments that demand even more sophisticated thinking and writing. Thus, students who have successfully completed the Core A sequence will be better prepared for their major coursework, allowing RU faculty to give them more challenging, subject-specific assignments.

The Core A sequence will allow learning goals and outcomes to be standardized across the student body, as each student will be required to carry out the same sorts of assignments. Students who enter with transfer credit for first-year composition courses will still need to take the sophomore-level courses, ensuring that they receive additional instruction in the core competencies that we would like them to have.

The Core A sequence can form the basis of a learning community, not just among students but also among faculty. The sequence will introduce a common RU experience for students, while retaining enough variation and flexibility to allow for personal interests. Faculty from across the university will have the opportunity to teach in the Core A sequence, particularly at the sophomore level. In order to support faculty involvement in the Core A sequence, summer retreats and workshops will be held during which faculty will learn new ways to incorporate reading, critical thinking, information/technology literacy, writing and speaking skills into their instruction, not only in the Core A sequence but also in their other courses. These retreats and workshops will enable faculty to engage in ongoing discussions about teaching and learning with their peers.

Even as the Core A sequence recalls the traditional place of rhetoric and logic at the center of education, it also incorporates the information literacy and technology skills important for students facing 21st century careers. Students will learn to view research as an act of inquiry; whether that research takes them to traditional sources or web-based sources, they will learn to discover, critique, use, and cite information appropriately. By collecting their work in an electronic portfolio, students will learn that the work they do is interconnected, involving increasingly sophisticated skills and requiring reflection in order to continue improving. The use of the electronic portfolio rather than a print portfolio will enable students to develop their technical skills but also a sense of their own identities in an age dominated by digital media. In addition, the electronic portfolio will allow Radford University to conduct a more sophisticated assessment of the Core A sequence, as the students’ skills can be evaluated over time and through a variety of assignments.