

**FINAL REPORT
FROM THE
GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE – HUMANITIES
RE: HUM2305: WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?**

OVERVIEW

The General Education Task Force – Humanities recommends that the university move forward with its initiative to offer a signature, common experience in the Humanities for *all* first-year students beginning in the summer B semester of 2012. In support of this, the members of the Task Force, which began this project in April 2009, present this report on the genesis and evolution of the course (HUM2305: *What is the Good Life?*) and recommendations for its future. Sample course syllabi and task force information can be found at the following websites:

<http://undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/hum-course.aspx>

<http://fora.aa.ufl.edu/Provost/TaskForces/General-Education-Task-Force-Humanities>

GENESIS

The genesis for the course, HUM2305: *What is the Good Life?*, is the report of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education at the University of Florida (UF), where the recommendations include a charge to develop “a signature UF experience . . . using a themed approach” for students and a call to “reexamine the purpose of the general education curriculum, articulate this purpose in all processes related to the general education curriculum, [and] reconsider ways in which the curriculum is fulfilled . . .” Both of these recommendations reflect similar efforts at most, if not all, of UF’s peer institutions. The full report is available at

<http://fora.aa.ufl.edu/docs//56//UGTaskForceReport.pdf>.

While one course itself obviously cannot accomplish all these goals, the General Education Task Force – Humanities was charged with leading this initiative. Indeed, the Humanities is an excellent place for the university to start; that is, since one of the purposes of a common, signature experience should be to engage students in life’s bigger, and sometimes more esoteric, and often times not quantifiable, questions, the university must provide a conduit through which these questions can be explored. Clearly, the Humanities is that conduit.

With this in mind, the Task Force established the following desiderata:

1. The course should offer a common, signature experience for UF students.
2. It should serve as an invitation to the humanities and to a lifetime of reflection on the human condition.

3. It should be interdisciplinary and draw, insofar as practicable, on all the humanities resources at UF (all relevant areas, departments and units, including the Harn Museum and Phillips Center for the Performing Arts).
4. It should be cross-cultural and draw on the full range of human experience across the world and through time.
5. It should aim, over the long run, to found a community of humanistic inquiry at the university that reaches to all humanities disciplines and involves the broader Gainesville community, and reaches out through invited speakers and collaborative ventures beyond the university.
6. It should be rigorous and hold students to a high standard.
7. It should inculcate skills in
 - a. analysis
 - b. argumentation
 - c. writing
 - d. communication, and in
 - e. close reading, looking, and listening
8. It should involve a small classroom experience in which students engage in discussion.
9. It should involve comments on and evaluation of papers with respect to content, organization, style, and mechanics.
10. It should include significant, effective, on-line support.
11. It should not be hard to administer.

In the two years that the Task Force worked on this project with these guiding principles serving as the foundation, HUM2305 has evolved into an excellent example of what a large public institution such as UF can accomplish at its best: A collaborative effort of faculty with interdisciplinary expertise working together to produce a course that offers students a signature experience unique to the university. Indeed, the course has evolved to such a degree that it is now highlighted as one of seven primary Presidential Initiatives at the university:

<http://www.president.ufl.edu/initiatives/>

THE COURSE

One of the challenges the Humanities Task Force faced was to develop a course model that adhered to our established criteria but that also never lost sight of the intended audience—first-year students, most of whom are just a couple of months removed from their high school curricula. Additionally, though each year students matriculating to UF generally have become much more competitive on a national level, the fact is that educational disparities still exist throughout the state, and as such, a common, signature course such as HUM2305 must not only be academically rigorous, but also serve as an introduction to university-level critical thinking in the Humanities. This is particularly important given that in many cases the course might be the *only* course many of the students will take at UF that will challenge them to think in ways that *only* Humanistic studies can.

For this reason, the Task Force zeroed in on what has become the central theme for our course—*What is the Good Life?* Not only does this subject present the opportunity to consider life's bigger questions, it is also open-ended enough to show what the Humanities has to offer students new to a university setting: Not the answers, but the tools for contemplating the question.

The Task Force then concluded that the best method of delivery for a three-credit course is a combination of two weekly lectures of 180 students delivered by faculty members selected by the departments/colleges (CLAS, CFA, DCP) represented on the Task Force, supplemented by discussion sections of 20 students maximum led by experienced graduate assistants, or teaching preceptors.

Course content is divided into what can broadly be described as three categories. First, the "Gateways" represent an introduction to the common themes and components of the course, such as readings and multi-media presentations. "Pillars," the second, are the materials that each faculty member brings to the course to explore the themes of the Gateways in greater detail. Last, the Task Force determined that a common, signature course such as HUM2305 should require students to participate in outside activities that expose them to opportunities unique to UF that they may otherwise never find, including a performance at the Phillips Center, a cell-phone guided tour at the Harn Museum, and a lecture on the Humanities given by an outside speaker.

Gateways that are consistent with the overall aims of the course were selected on these guiding principles:

1. All the principal disciplines must be represented fairly, adequately, and properly. The course should be interdisciplinary and draw, insofar as practicable, on all the humanities resources at UF (all relevant areas, departments and units, including the Harn Museum and Performing Arts Center).
2. The set of gateway readings taken as a whole should represent a diverse range of cultural perspectives from a range of places and eras. The course should be cross-cultural and draw on the full range of human experience across the world and through time.
3. Gateway readings prescribed for each week must remain at a manageable length, in the range of 10-15 total pages.
4. Supplemental materials on the gateways (including short introductions that provide socio-historical contexts) should be made available to instructors to help them prepare lectures that are interdisciplinary.
5. Within the standardized pattern of common readings across all sections each semester, the pattern leaves sufficient flexibility for instructors to introduce Pillar readings.

The first pilot section of the course was taught in Spring 2010 when three members of the Task Force offered a small section of the work in progress to students in the Honors Program. In AY 2010-11, larger pilot sections were taught, and currently,

three sections of the course are being offered with enrollment caps of 180 students, with an additional two lecture sections planned for Spring 2012.

Pilot sections have given the Task Force the opportunity to fine tune the course through consistent and on-going feedback from faculty, graduate assistants, and enrolled students. Though the guiding principles of the course have remained the same, the course syllabus and materials and logistics have been vetted such that the Task Force firmly believes that the course, HUM2305: *What is the Good Life?*, is ready for its next step.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Education Task Force – Humanities confidently recommends the following actions:

1. The university should move forward with mandating the signature, common experience course, HUM2305: *What is the Good Life?*, to all first-year students beginning with the 2012 matriculating class. This will be accomplished by offering 11 faculty-led lecture sections of 180 students and 99 discussion sections of 20 students each in summer B 2012 and 12 faculty-led lecture sections of 180 students and 108 discussion sections of 20 students each in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013.
2. This distribution of the course will require the following commitments from the colleges involved with this project (CLAS, CFA, and DCP):
 - a. 11 faculty members in summer B and 12 each for fall and spring.
 - b. 33 experienced Teaching Preceptors in summer B and 36 each for fall and spring.
3. Last, the university administration shall appoint a faculty-based steering committee that will be charged with overseeing the on-going intellectual evolution of the course.

SUMMARY

The General Education Task Force – Humanities has embraced the challenge presented by the Task Force on Undergraduate Education to develop the university's first common, signature experience for new students. The Task Force has been energized by the potential of this course to expose new students to the breadth of resources available at UF for engaging in the principal questions of the Humanities and for acquiring the principal skills of our respective disciplines: Attention to detail, discernment of subtle differences, problem solving, patience, creativity, and careful analysis followed by responsible synthesis. In short, the General Education Task Force - Humanities is confident that the course, HUM2305: *What is the Good Life?*, accomplishes these goals and is a worthy, and pedagogically sound, addition to the undergraduate curriculum at UF.

**SUBMITTED BY THE GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE – HUMANITIES ON
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