Task Force on General Education
Summary of Goals and Process
May 2017

**General Education** is the way that we define what students will gain from a Brandeis education- all of the required courses and experiences beyond the major that will prepare our graduates to understand and be successful in the world. Through completion of the new General Education curriculum our students will develop resilience and the intellectual tools to adapt to changing life circumstances and a changing world, and will gain the breadth of perspective that can best be acquired through a liberal arts education.

The Task Force on General Education was appointed in the spring of 2016 and has been working since then to devise a set of recommendations that will define a new General Education curriculum at Brandeis. The members of the Task Force are: **John Burt**, Professor of English, Head, Division of Humanities; **Bulbul Chakaborty**, Professor of Physics; **Tory Fair**, Associate Professor of Fine Arts; **Melissa Kosinski-Collins**, Associate Professor of Biology; **David Powelstock**, Associate Professor and Chair, German, Russian, Asian Languages and Literature; **Sara Shostak**, Associate Professor of Sociology, Chair, Health, Science, Society and Policy; **Derron Wallace**, Assistant Professor of Education and Sociology; two students, **Chinyere Brown ’17**, and student representative to the Board of Trustees **Emily Conrad ’17**, **Mark Hewitt**, University Registrar; **Elaine Wong**, Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education; and **Susan Birren**, Dean of Arts and Sciences and Task Force chair.

It has now been over 20 years since we fully revised the General Education curriculum. Our decision to review the curriculum recognizes that our times and our culture have changed- technology, science, global perspectives, economic shifts, social and political upheavals at home and across the globe, and dramatic shifts in wealth and opportunity- all of which affect the knowledge and skills needed by our students for a successful career and a successful life. Using our understanding of Brandeis as a mid sized research university with a focus on liberal arts undergraduate education, and working through the lens of our commitment to social justice and inclusion and the use of our knowledge to repair the world, we have now framed a Task Force Proposal around five themes: **Brandeis First Year Experiences; Foundational Literacies; Schools of Thought; Health, Wellness and Life Skills**; and **Global Engagement**.

**Our process** has included gathering information about a variety of approaches to General Education, examining requirements and changes at other institutions, and surveying our own students, faculty, staff and alumni about our current requirements and their recommendations for the future. These surveys revealed the depth of interest of our students: over 1400 undergraduates responded to our survey, generating more than 360 pages of comments on the future of general education at Brandeis; in addition, we received responses from over 1000 of almost 5000 alumni, randomly selected from the classes of 2001-2015. We also gathered data about our students and their paths once they leave the university. We used all of this information to constantly assess the charge of the Task Force- to define a new general education curriculum based on the knowledge, understandings.
and skills that our students need to be successful and achieve professional and personal satisfaction in their lives beyond Brandeis.

The Task Force worked in small subgroups to develop recommendations, and these subgroups have reached out to many individuals across campus to seek advice in framing both the overall themes and curricular details. As the overall themes have developed we have taken them to stakeholder groups on campus- Department Chairs, Interdepartmental Program Chairs, Chairs overseeing our current Writing, Quantitative Reasoning, Oral Communication, Foreign Language and Nonwestern and Comparative Studies requirements, the Committee for the Support of Teaching, Science-Social Science-Creative Arts-Humanities Division meetings, Undergraduate Departmental Representatives, members of the Board of Trustees, staff from the Library, Student Enrollment, and Academic Services, the University Advisory Committee, the Integrated Budget and Planning Committee, Faculty Senate, and others to get and integrate feedback and refine our vision.

Within the broad themes we address a range of knowledge and skills that will allow our students to think critically and historically, communicate effectively, analyze quantitatively, develop their creativity, and move seamlessly through a digital world. These skills and understandings will be integrated across the themes- and across the four year program- in ways that allow students to build competencies and field-specific skills while gaining a broad understanding of social and cultural differences and the big challenges that we face- now and in the future.

We continue to seek comments before bringing a proposal to a vote of the full Faculty and presentation to the Board of Trustees. All together, our efforts will initiate and implement a General Education curriculum that will highlight our liberal arts values and ensure the success of our students.

* General Education Revision – Process

1. Task Force develops recommendations and presents for discussion to the Faculty Senate, University Advisory Committee, and Integrated Budget and Planning Committee (if there are any financial implications).

2. The Task Force presents recommendations to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) for discussion and vote.

3. Final recommendations are presented by the UCC to the full faculty for discussion and vote (2 rounds).

4. Final recommendations are presented to the Academy Committee of the Board of Trustees and then the full Board.

Sections of the faculty handbook relevant to the deliberative process for changes to the general education requirement can be found in section I and sections VI A3f, C2e, D3b.