



Professor Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer

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TO: Boston University Faculty and Staff

FROM: Jean Morrison, University Provost and Chief Academic Officer *Jm*

DATE: November 19, 2014

SUBJECT: Charge to the Task Force on General Education: Developing the intellectual framework for a University-wide General Education Program at Boston University

As Boston University continues to emerge as one of the world's leading private research universities, we increasingly operate and must compete at the very highest levels with the world's best research universities. This is true for all facets of academic life including our efforts to recruit and retain outstanding faculty, to compete for external research funding, and to attract the very best graduate students into vibrant Ph.D. and professional graduate programs. And it is certainly true for our efforts to recruit a highly talented and diverse undergraduate class and provide them with a rigorous, inspiring academic experience that prepares them to be engaged citizens and leaders in an increasingly global society.

In addition, there is significant and persistent concern across many sectors about the "value proposition" of private higher education, given the increasing cost of an undergraduate education and rising student debt. Federal and state governments, industry leaders, intellectual leaders and ultimately parents and students are asking for a clear explanation of the value of an undergraduate education. As a tuition-dependent private research university that seeks to educate at the highest level, we must be able to articulate effectively to prospective and current students the unique value that a Boston University undergraduate education provides, and we must be able to deliver on it. Defining a clear and coherent academic core that will be a common experience for *all* of our undergraduates is an essential first step in establishing the distinctive value of a Boston University degree in an increasingly competitive landscape. As an expression of Boston University's shared vision of the knowledge, skills and habits of mind necessary for a rich and productive life, that core will help vitalize intellectual community among students, faculty and staff, and further the goal of "one BU."

Discussions among the University's academic leadership during the 2013-2014 academic year focused on developing an update of our 2007 Strategic Plan, *Choosing To Be Great*. Given the tremendous progress that has been made since the establishment of the plan and the significant changes in higher education since 2007, a reframing of our strategic goals was timely and necessary. We emerged from those discussions with seven new strategic priorities, which are

described in President Brown's [Spring 2014 State of the University letter](#). The first of these new priorities is the creation of a common and compelling vision for the general education of all our undergraduate students, building on our model that combines liberal arts and sciences and professional education. This vision includes a commitment to residential education that prepares graduates to live and work in a global society.

It is the development of this vision, or intellectual framework, that will be the charge to the Task Force on General Education.

Charge to the Task Force

1. Develop a set of core areas or competencies – knowledge, skills and habits of mind – that will equip Boston University graduates to thrive in their personal, professional and civic lives in an increasingly interconnected world.
2. Engage in a) broad consultation with the faculty and relevant staff of Boston University, b) exploration of the practices of high-quality research universities that have mature and successful general education programs, and c) evaluation of the relevant literature on general education.
3. Develop a report that articulates the rationale for each of the core areas or competencies that is sufficiently detailed to provide substantive guidance for a subsequent task force charged with responsibility for implementing the vision.

Next steps

I will meet with the Task Force on General Education to discuss the charge and launch the effort. I envision that the development and subsequent preparation for implementation of the University-wide general education program will take two full years. During this current academic year (AY2014-2015), the Task Force on General Education will develop the vision and intellectual framework for the program. This is an opportunity for the Boston University community to think together and to consult widely about the education we offer the next generation. Next year, during AY2015-2016 I will establish a second task force to develop a plan for implementing the program. I anticipate that the program will begin in Fall 2016.

Please join me in thanking our colleagues who have agreed to serve on this important Task Force to work with you in shaping the future of undergraduate education at Boston University.

Cc: Robert A. Brown, President
Stephen Brady, Chair, Faculty Council
Provost's Cabinet