

**Announcement of “I”-Series Courses:
Request for Proposals
The Task Force on General Education
Professor Ira Berlin, Chair**

4 September 2009

Changes in General Education

In the spring semester 2009, in accordance with the University’s new strategic plan and by direction of Provost Nariman Farvardin, the Task Force charged with revising the University’s General Education curriculum began its work. That work will be ongoing through this fall semester, addressing—among other matters—Distributive and Fundamental studies. However, the Committee has established an outline of what it believes will be the *signature* of the new General Education program: new courses that are issue-driven explorations into a variety of intellectual endeavors. These signature courses are designed to meet the established goals of the larger undergraduate program in promoting critical thinking, effective communication skills, media literacy, technology fluency, and humane understanding. Signature courses will improve the undergraduate academic culture, elevate the level of intellectual engagement on campus, foster faculty mentorship, and increase students’ commitment to their own education. Signature courses will engage students from all majors in thinking about pressing issues from a variety of academic perspectives. In short, the signature courses allow the University of Maryland to continue to strengthen its place among national leaders in undergraduate teaching and learning.

This RFP calls for proposals for the first group of approximately 20 signature courses for the new General Education program. The timeline for proposals is short so that these courses can be offered in the Spring 2010 semester to pilot this new concept. Faculty members who create the “I” signature courses that are selected for this pilot will receive a substantial stipend and additional resources to support their course. Faculty are asked to read this Request for Proposals carefully and with an eye to creating a new course or reconfiguring an existing course to address the signature as described below.

The “I” Series Course Signature

As the centerpiece of the University’s General Education program, “I”-series courses will become the intellectual and pedagogical marker for which the University of Maryland will be known—broad, analytical thinking about significant issues. In branding the University’s General Education curriculum, the signature courses begin the process of defining what is unique about education at the University of Maryland. Through these courses, students will be challenged from their first moments on campus to master the intellectual tools needed to wrestle with matters of great weight and consequence, the so-called Big Questions.

A signature course could take students inside a new field of study, where they may glimpse the utility, elegance, and beauty of disciplines that were previously unknown, unwanted, disparaged, or despised. Students may be able to see how such areas of investigation might become a subject

for extended study, a major, or even a lifetime commitment. By addressing both contemporary problems and the enduring issues of human existence, the signature courses will speak to the University's historic role both as a repository of human knowledge and as a source of solutions to burning issues of the day. At their best, the signature courses might do both. The **"I" series** offers extraordinary opportunities for increasing the level of intellectual discourse on campus and for providing occasions where new pedagogical methods may be introduced. The possibilities are large and exciting. (For a more detailed description of the "I"-series courses, please refer to Appendix B of this document.)

Information for Faculty Submitting Proposals

To test the **"I" series** in concept and practice, the University will offer approximately 20 "I"-series courses in the Spring 2010 semester. Each college will be expected to sponsor at least one "I"-series course, with appropriate deans and departments taking responsibility for each such course. Departments and deans will support the "I" series much as they do CORE or the recent innovation of Marquee courses in Science and Technology (see <http://www.marqueecourses.umd.edu/aboutmarquee.html>). The Committee welcomes new courses in all fields. Because time is short, established courses that can be reconfigured to meet the requirements of the "I" series also are welcome. A question-and-answer session for faculty interested in proposing "I"-series courses will be held on Tuesday, September 29 in Room 1102J Francis Scott Key, 4:00 p.m.

To encourage submissions, the Provost will provide "I"-series faculty whose courses are selected for the pilot offering with an overload payment of \$5,000 for the Spring 2010 semester, with funds provided by the Associate Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Studies. In addition, funding for one Graduate Teaching Assistant will be provided for the Spring 2010 semester to assist with the first offering of each selected course. TA funding will be provided by the Office of the Provost to enrich this first set of "I"-series courses.

Proposals must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 5. The Task Force on General Education, which was jointly appointed by the Provost and by the University Senate, will evaluate proposals and notify faculty whose courses have been selected for inclusion in the first group of "I"-series courses by October 19. Members of the Task Force and information on their responsibilities may be found at <http://www.senate.umd.edu/taskforces/gened/index.cfm>.

The campus also will be notified of "I"-series course selections on October 19. Publicity about "I"-series courses will appear on the Provost's web site and in campus media. Most importantly, courses will be listed in Testudo to be available as students register for Spring 2010. A minimum of 75 percent of seats in these courses will be reserved for students who have completed fewer than 60 credits. **A complete timeline for the "I"-series course process and specific requirements for proposals are found in Appendix A of this document.**

Request for Proposals

Proposals for “I”-series courses can be submitted by individual faculty members or by departments to their collegiate deans, who in turn will forward proposal materials in pdf format to Professor Ira Berlin, Chair of the Task Force on General Education, in care of Ms. Helena Iles, at hiles@umd.edu.

Proposals should be no more than two pages. They should outline the problem or question to be addressed and briefly state its significance. Proposals should then explain, again briefly, what problem or question is the focus of the course and how this question will be a useful platform on which to build an “I”-series course as described in this document. Each course that is proposed must address a topic of great interest from one or more academic perspectives. Proposals must explain how courses engage students in thought-provoking reading and discussions, encourage timely projects and presentations, and inspire research and reaction papers. All proposals need to explain what makes the proposed course an “I”-series course.

Proposals must consider that the audience for the “I”-series courses will be large and active. Students in “I”-series courses will be expected to take responsibility for their learning and for demonstrating their mastery of the material in their course work. Courses will be expected to attract an initial enrollment of between 60 and 100 students and to be offered at least once each academic year.

Selected courses, if not already CORE approved, will be eligible for provisional CORE status with an appropriate category designation. Once a new General Education plan is adopted, each course will be evaluated for an appropriate category in the new framework. At the end of the pilot period, all “I”-series courses will be collectively assessed for appropriate learning outcomes.

Questions about “I”-series course proposals may be addressed to Task Force members Dr. Betsy Beise, Associate Provost for Academic Planning and Programs, at beise@umd.edu, or to Dr. Katherine McAdams, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, at mcadams@umd.edu.

Appendix A: Timeline for Proposals for ‘T’-Series Courses

Proposals will be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 5, 2009.

A Question-and-Answer session for proposers will be held at 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, September 29, in 1102J Francis Scott Key.

Proposals selected as the first set of ‘T’-series courses will be announced on October 19, 2009.

Proposals should include the following information:

- Course title
- Course description in 200 words or less
- Proposed course size
- Need for undergraduate or graduate TAs
- Description of the role of TAs

Proposals will answer the following questions:

- How does the course fulfill the mission of the ‘T’-series courses?
- How will the course provide valuable knowledge to students in all majors?
- How will the course be evaluated?
- How will student learning be assessed?

Please include two or three sentences that could be used to advertise your course to students.

Proposal Requirements:

All ‘T’-series courses will be taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty or by full-time lecturers or professors of the practice. Faculty will be named in the proposal.

Course proposals will bear college or departmental approval and signatures.

Course enrollment will be approximately 60 to 100 students, and courses must be designed to involve recitation, discussion, or learning laboratories for this size class.

Courses must engage students in critical reading and discussion, writing of papers, and making formal presentations in groups or as individuals.

Proposing faculty members must be willing to participate in meetings of ‘T’-series faculty and TAs. It is expected that all ‘T’-series faculty and TAs will meet at least twice as a group during the Spring 2010 semester to discuss goals and progress of the courses.

Appendix B: The “T” Series

Courses bearing the University’s signature will *investigate* significant *issues* with *imagination* and *intellect* with a belief that they will *inspire* future *investigation* and provide concrete mechanisms to *implement innovative* ideas. Not surprisingly, the Committee has tentatively called the courses the “T” series: **Issues, Imagination, Intellect, Investigation, Inspiration, Implementation.** (Excuse the alliterative excess, but you get the idea.)

The “T” series attempts to view large problems from the viewpoint of defined disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives (for example, cognitive science or African American studies) and particular fields of study (for example, engineering or education). “T”-series courses have two purposes: first to investigate a significant matter in depth and second to understand how particular disciplines or fields of study address problems. How does a biologist, engineer, poet, or sociologist think about human diversity? (The “T” series draws upon the successful Marquee courses in Science and Technology, first developed in 2007 to increase scientific knowledge and engagement among students who are not science majors).

“T” series courses are not surveys. Their goals do not focus primarily on coverage of specific knowledge: for example, mastery of the basic facts of plant biology, early modern history between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, or the course of romantic poetry. Instead, they provide students with the basic concepts, approaches, and vocabulary of particular disciplines and fields of study and an understanding of how to employ those concepts, approaches, and vocabulary. Indeed, while “T”-series courses ask questions--when did life begin? What is the solution to the energy crisis? How can poverty be abolished? Why the Holocaust?--they do not necessarily attempt to answer them. Rather, they aim to examine the ways in which diverse intellectual traditions address such questions.

Courses in the “T” series aim to speak both to students with a deep interest and even a degree of expertise in the matter at hand and also to students unfamiliar with the subject but eager to expand their knowledge. Considering this diverse audience, faculty members are not expected to teach a traditional introductory course in their discipline, but rather to use their disciplines to teach students about how a scholar or practitioner approaches the question at hand. Many of the courses will be problem-based, requiring students to struggle with contemporary issues or challenges (for example, global warming, immigration, health policy), while others will address the ageless dilemmas of human existence (for example, political power, war, sexuality, ecological sustainability, wealth distribution, leadership). Rather than focusing on the broad content of a discipline, courses in the “T” series will aim to equip students with the intellectual tools required to address major questions and issues around which the course is organized. The depth of knowledge involved should be approximately what an attorney preparing for a case or a congressional aide preparing for a hearing would need to know.

By focusing on a specific problem or issue, the students will gain an understanding of the processes, policies, and disciplines employed by a scholar or practitioner to approach problems: What information is needed to address a specific problem? Where can that information be found? What constraints limit the application of potential solutions? How does one discover what is known on a topic? How does one confirm the reliability of information? What is the process used to acquire new information? How is information applied to provide a solution to a problem? What methods can be

employed to assess results or to validate conclusions? Students should develop an understanding and appreciation of how knowledge is created and applied, how it evolves through publication and peer review, and how conflicting theories are reconciled. In short, **“T”-series** courses can be eminently practical or deeply theoretical. In either case, they incorporate transferable skills, among them writing, oral presentations, and the use of library resources and other research techniques.