The following criteria for the award of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies have been agreed upon by the Vermont College Undergraduate (VCU) Core Faculty and approved by the Academic Board, President, and Trustees of Norwich University and accepted by Union Institute and University. The education provided within the Vermont College Undergraduate Program can be reasonably expected to yield competence in each of the seven criteria.

These criteria (bold type) are excerpted from the VCU’s Academic Regulations and elaborated upon by the regular faculty of the Program (regular type).

Learners may demonstrate competence in each of the criteria through credit-bearing, college-level learning, specifically, VCU study projects and seminars; documented transfer credit from an accredited institution; the College Level Equivalency Program (CLEP); approved "workshop" credit; and Experiential College Equivalent Learning (EXCEL).

These competencies should not be viewed as equivalent to narrow “course-requirements.” Indeed, the VCU Program encourages inter- and cross-disciplinary study. We intend the criteria to be broad and flexible and that learners will achieve competence in ways enriching to the learner and acceptable to the VCU Program.

The VCU Program desires that learners design independent studies that integrate personal reflection with knowledge of areas of study. We hope learners pursue academic passions during their study in the Program, passions encompassing a well-rounded familiarity with the liberal arts and sciences. Learners are encouraged to think of these degree criteria as ways of addressing their passions and interests while yet achieving competence across liberal arts curriculum.

A. CURRICULUM AND CONCENTRATION

To earn the degree, each learner must develop and complete a coherent curriculum, designed to insure breadth and depth of liberal studies, including mastery beyond the introductory level in one definable area.

B. THE SEVEN DEGREE CRITERIA

Each learner must demonstrate:

1. The ability to write clear English prose, to speak effectively, and to read and understand material that does not require specialized vocabularies.

   All VCU learners before their final semester are expected to produce substantive, literate, academic writing. Such writing makes significant points in an argument or thesis, substantiates these points with detail drawn from appropriate reading and experience, and integrates this detail through paraphrase and short and long quotation. All such references are documented in the Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, or other accepted conventions as recommended by the learner’s faculty advisors.

   Each semester’s faculty evaluation will include an overall assessment of the learner’s academic writing skills and will deal specifically with, first, fluency, clarity, and literacy; second, the incorporation of references and resources into the learner’s writing; third, accurate documentation of these references.
Faculty advisors’ evaluations of learner work will make specific mention of writing deficiencies to be corrected in future semesters.

Overall, the minimum expectations for literate academic writing are detailed in A Writer’s Reference, Fourth Edition on, Diane Hacker, Bedford/St. Martin’s, Boston, ISBN 0-312- 247-540. Use of this Handbook in the Program is compulsory for VCU faculty and learners.

2. The ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems.

In practical terms, this criterion means the ability to focus broad interests into questions that can be pursued systematically. Procedures engaged in this pursuit include the formulation of fruitful questions, breaking large problems into components, understanding problems or questions from different perspectives, evaluating a variety of arguments and perspectives, and, backed by evidence, formulating one’s own interpretation.

3. A knowledge of contemporary cultures and their foundations.

Calling for critical reflection on individual, social, and environmental interactions and concerns, this criterion may be met by study in history AND in at least two of the academic disciplines of anthropology, business, environmental studies, geography, economics, political science, psychology and sociology.

4. An awareness of ethical, moral, and spiritual concerns.

These concerns address the beliefs, attitudes, motives and practices which shape our relationships to the social and natural world, and which underlie our ideals about what is good, desirable, true or right. Although every study can offer opportunities to reflect on these concerns, they may also be explored through focused studies in such areas as philosophy, religion, feminist theory, and law.

5. An appreciation of aesthetics.

Such academic study aims at an understanding of aesthetic experience through the study of literature, which may include creative writing, AND through study and studio work in one or more of the primarily nonverbal fine arts: painting, drawing, photography, music, dance, or others.

6. An awareness of quantitative and scientific methodologies.

The VCU Program expects its learners to develop abilities to make inferences and draw conclusions from numerical data, and to acquire an articulated understanding of the physical and natural world. In addition, the Program expects learners to be aware of the scientific method as one among many ways of knowing. Such awareness may include a sense of the history, uses and critiques of scientific and non-scientific disciplines and society.

7. A commitment to active and positive participation in the world.

The VCU Program expects that its learners will participate actively and positively in the world. This criterion asks learners to reflect upon how academic experience translates into that active and positive participation. The criterion suggests that learning embraces not only scholarly competence but also action.

VCU, adopted March 23, 1994; effective with cycle learners entering the Program in May, 1994, and thereafter, and with weekend learners entering the program, February, 1994, and thereafter.