

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Karen Gipson, Chair of the Executive Committee of the University Academic Senate  
**CC:** C. Griff Griffin, Director, General Education Program  
Maria Cimitile, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs  
**FROM:** General Education Committee—Kirk Anderson, Chair  
**DATE:** April 8, 2016  
**SUBJECT:** General Education Committee End-of-Year Report

The General Education Committee (GEC) met 25 times this year on Mondays from 2:30-4:30 p.m., and can report progress in the following areas.

**Curriculum:** We considered 40 course proposals, with many resubmissions. As of this writing, there have been 34 approvals, we are waiting to hear back from three, and three are in the process of being reviewed. Among the approvals, 22 are Issues courses and four are Honors courses. Recently approved General Education courses can be found by visiting <http://www.gvsu.edu/gened/recent-changes-180.htm>. In addition to these 40 courses, we also reviewed and approved a proposal for a special topics CMB course for Issues credit in the winter semester.

In collaboration with the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies, we developed a procedure for faculty to create Special Topics IDS 380 Issues courses. This isn't limited to Issues; the courses can be numbered 180, 280, 380, or 480 and be in Foundations, Cultures, or Issues. The IDS x80 designation can be used when a faculty member wants to teach an integrated, interdisciplinary course for Gen Ed that doesn't fit under a traditional disciplinary prefix. Proposals for such courses are vetted by both the Brooks College Curriculum Committee and the GEC. More information can be found at <http://www.gvsu.edu/brooks/proposing-ids-x80-special-topics-courses-37.htm>. We also created a plan to encourage units to propose Special Topics 380 courses to the GEC as Issues courses, if they so choose. Details of the process can be found at <https://www.gvsu.edu/gened/proposing-a-course-181.htm>.

We continue to encourage faculty to convert Themes to Issues courses, to create new Issues courses, and to offer more sections of popular Issues courses. There are now 113 Issues courses available for students to choose from, with more in progress. This fall, incoming freshmen will be the third class that must choose Issues courses in their junior or senior year for General Education credit. Themes courses are still serving a need for some of our students, and as this need continues to decrease, faculty will become more motivated to propose course changes. We also expect to see increases in the number of sections offered for established Issues courses.

The Sail curriculum system has come a long way since it was first introduced. Through regular communication with Institutional Marketing staff, we continue to make improvements as needed.

**Assessment:** In fall, we reviewed and replied to 33 course assessment reports (CARs), with an additional 49 in winter. We composed replies to each CAR, giving faculty and departments further insight into what portions of their response we valued most highly and what additional information we would most like to receive in the future. For the vast majority, we were pleased with the dedication to high quality instruction and assessment that was made clear by the author of the report. Only three of the CARs were deemed not adequate and sent back to collect better data.

After a careful review of the skills goal choices for each of the Foundation categories, along with an assessment of student exposure to each goal, we identified the most appropriate areas to offer a third skill option. Historical Perspectives courses may now choose among written communication, critical & creative thinking, or oral communication as the first goal, and among problem solving, ethical reasoning, or information literacy as the second goal. Physical Sciences courses may now choose among written communication, quantitative literacy, or information literacy as the first goal. Social and Behavioral Sciences courses may now choose among critical & creative thinking, quantitative literacy, or information literacy as the first goal, and among problem solving, ethical reasoning, or oral communication as the second goal. In response to this announcement, we received and subsequently approved revised course assessment plans (CAPs) for eleven courses, all of which now teach and assess information literacy. We continue to look for feasible ways to increase the number of students exposed to oral communication.

We are grateful to the assessors for providing such valuable information and useful feedback on our assessment process itself. We continue to learn a great deal about better ways to teach and assess our goals, as well as about the achievements of Grand Valley students within our program.

Finally, we continue to refine the CAR form itself. In an effort to “close the loop” between one assessment cycle and the next, we have added questions that prompt the assessor to make a connection between the current assessment and the previous one for that course. This encourages instructors to reflect on their course since the last assessment and collaborate with other instructors of the course, ensuring that the course fits into Gen Ed in a way that is optimal for both the home unit and the Gen Ed Program. This change will happen fall 2016, when we begin the second three-year cycle of assessment of the new Gen Ed Program.

### *UAS charges 2015-2016*

*1. Suggest additional Professional Development workshops that FTLC or others might host for teaching General Education Skills.*

In September, a survey was sent out to faculty asking which of the Gen Ed skills they had interest in attending a workshop on. The survey results were used to prioritize the order in which to offer them. Workshops for the top three choices, critical & creative thinking,

collaboration and problem solving, were held on two campuses for a total of six sessions on December 16 and 17, and these were repeated on January 7. The workshop facilitator was Christine Rener, Director of the Pew FTLC and Vice Provost for Instructional Development and Innovation. These workshops also included instruction in techniques for teaching and assessing the skills with large class sizes.

In fall, the Gen Ed Director offered 30-minute assessment workshops on both campuses on various days and times. Faculty teaching Gen Ed courses were informed that they could drop in for assessment training; no registration was required. These workshops were scheduled in 3-hour blocks for a total of 25 sessions for the semester. For faculty who had time conflicts, sessions were held on an individual basis for an additional ten faculty members. One department requested a visit from the Director to give assessment training. Faculty who were assessing either fall or winter came to the session. In addition, a total of 15 half-hour assessment workshops were held in the winter semester on both campuses.

*2. Continue to monitor and improve the General Education assessment process:*

*a. Work with the Director of the General Education program to ensure timely communication with faculty and to clearly articulate the rationale for General Education assessment of specific courses to faculty in the relevant units.*

The General Education program now asks unit heads to identify sections/instructors for assessment two weeks ahead of the fall semester. For this academic year, the enquiry was sent out August 18. The message to instructors with assessment instructions was sent out September 2. The message to all faculty (nearly 550 instructors) teaching Gen Ed courses was sent out August 10. This is the message which includes a link to Gen Ed syllabus attachments. For winter 2016, we sent letters to all faculty teaching Gen Ed courses on December 8. Winter assessment instructions went out right after final exam week.

*b. Streamline the rubrics for the assessment of General Education courses.*

This task was a major project for the GEC this year. We worked to address a common concern about the assessment rubrics for the skills goals – that they are too wordy, unwieldy for instructors to use, and potentially overwhelming to students. For each of the nine skills, we worked to streamline the rubric so that it is much simpler to use. We split the GEC into smaller working groups, each tasked with revising two rubrics. Each group took the rubric currently in use, compared it to the AAC&U rubric that served as the original inspiration, and found ways to simplify and clarify the tool without losing any important meaning. No changes were made to the 0-4 scoring system; baseline performance earns a 1, progressing is 2, proficient is 3, and distinguished is 4. However, the decision was made to omit the description of “distinguished” on each rubric. Similar to how a zero is given for student work that falls below the baseline level, instructions simply state that a 4 can be given in the rare cases of truly outstanding work that falls above the level of proficient. We believe that the scores captured with the streamlined rubrics will give a better assessment of where each student stands at that point of

their GVSU career. Best practices indicate that students should be involved in the assessment process, and it is our hope that faculty will be more inclined to share the streamlined rubrics with their students at the start of and during the semester as they teach and assess the skills associated with the course.

After each group revised their assigned rubrics, they were sent to another GEC group to review, then the entire committee discussed each rubric during our Monday meeting time. Once the GEC was satisfied, each rubric was sent to the Writing Center (we also sent the oral communication rubric to the Speech Lab). Finally, we sought expert opinion from the University Assessment Committee. New and improved rubrics for the nine Gen Ed skills goals will be in place for the fall 2016 semester.

*c. Include an analysis of the GEP report in the GEC's EOY report.*

The Gen Ed program will create a report using the data from a complete (3 year) assessment cycle. This academic year (2015-16) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the cycle, but we have already begun discussing how best to summarize this information. Nearly all Gen Ed courses were assessed during this cycle. In the fall, we will disseminate the results to the GVSU community.

*3. Continue to support the development of additional Issues courses by:*

*a. Encouraging the creation of new courses;*

*b. Investigating obstacles to transitioning Themes courses;*

This academic year, Issues courses were fast-tracked in cooperation with other curriculum committees (UCC and college CCs). Unit heads were alerted to the fact that Issues course proposals would be considered ahead of all other course proposals.

As mentioned above, Special Topics Issues courses in Gen Ed can now be created through a department or through the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies.

The Gen Ed Director met with several individuals and departments about converting Theme courses to Issues courses or creating new Issues courses. The Gen Ed website has been overhauled. The layout is cleaner, and the faculty resources page now contains additional materials, including exemplary curriculum proposals.

*c. Exploring ways to connect to the Design Thinking Initiative.*

One tenet of design thinking is to involve the stakeholders. We know that employers want students to be able to engage in critical & creative thinking and to collaborate across disciplines, which corresponds very well with the upper-level component of Gen Ed, since all Issues courses teach and assess collaboration, problem solving, and integration. In particular, the new Issues course, LIB 323: Design Thinking, was offered in fall and winter semester this year. LIB 341, Leadership for Social Change, also incorporates design thinking. On April 21, the

workshop “What is Design Thinking?” will be held at GVSU, and at least two representatives from GEC plan to attend and report back to the committee.

*4. Work with FSBC on exploring the feasibility of limiting enrollments for General Education courses, especially the Foundations courses, for pedagogical reasons.*

Most faculty prefer small class sizes and would agree that content and (especially) skills are much easier to teach and assess with fewer students per section. Occasionally, course assessment reports will indicate to the GEC that faculty desire smaller class sizes for the Gen Ed courses they teach. In consultation with the Faculty Salary and Budget Committee, we investigated the budget implications of limiting enrollment of Gen Ed courses. This will be summarized here. Estimates are based on enrollments for course offerings in the 2015-2016 academic year, and average faculty salaries by rank as given in the 2014-2015 FSBC Newsletter. Assumptions are that six sections at three credit hours each are taught by an instructor per academic (fall/winter) year.

Issues courses are currently capped at 40 students. If all Gen Ed courses were capped at 40, this would require an additional 96 sections of course offerings per academic (fall/winter) year, which is 16 new positions. At the average Adjunct Instructor rate of \$900/credit hour, this would be \$16,200 per instructor for an annual total of \$259,200. At the average Associate Professor rate (\$79,800 plus 37.5% to cover retirement and health insurance benefits), this would be \$109,725 per instructor for an annual total of \$1,755,600.

Faced with this cost, we might consider a focus on the largest sections, capping all Gen Ed courses at 80 students (except Issues courses which would remain capped at 40 students). This requires an additional 11 sections per year, or two new positions. The additional cost at the Adjunct Instructor rate is \$32,400 per year. The additional cost at the Associate Professor rate is \$219,450 annually.

We have begun efforts to solve the problem in other ways:

- In the workshops described above, Christine Rener of Pew FTLC covers effective approaches to teaching and assessing Gen Ed skills in large sections. She also wrote a white paper that is posted, along with other large-class teaching strategies, on the Gen Ed website: <https://www.gvsu.edu/gened/goal-resources-236.htm>.
- We now give units more flexibility in choice of skills to associate with any particular Gen Ed course – three of the Foundations categories now have a third choice for one or both of the goals.
- The Gen Ed Office has been and continues to be flexible and reasonable in its dealing with units in the lead-up to and during assessment time, for example allowing assessment to be postponed a semester for one or more sections, or accepting a subset of students for assessment of a large section.

**Conclusion:** It was a busy and productive year. The chair of GEC would like to express his gratitude to the GEC members, pointing out that much of the year's work was conducted outside of meeting time. In a typical week, the agenda and work assignments went out on Wednesday, giving GEC members just a few days to complete fairly substantial prep work. Beyond just doing the work, members routinely shared insights and raised concerns that the chair would have otherwise missed. It is the chair's opinion that this is a very high functioning committee! We thank General Education Office Coordinator Jen Cathey, Graduate Assistant Tyler Ward, General Education Program director C. "Griff" Griffin, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Maria Cimitile, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs Julie Guevara, the Pew Faculty Teaching & Learning Center, the University Curriculum Committee, the College Curriculum Committees, the University Assessment Committee, the Faculty Salary and Budget Committee, Institutional Marketing, the Writing Center, the Speech Lab, and the University Academic Senate for helping us focus our efforts.



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