

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Karen Gipson, Chair of the Executive Committee of the University Academic Senate  
**CC:** C. "Griff" Griffin, Director, General Education Program  
Maria Cimitile, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
**FROM:** General Education Committee—Kirk Anderson, Chair  
**DATE:** April 14, 2017  
**SUBJECT:** General Education Committee End-of-Year Report

The General Education Committee (GEC) met 22 times this semester on Mondays from 2:30-4:30 p.m., and can report progress in the following areas.

**Curriculum:** We considered 36 course proposals, with several resubmissions. As of this writing, there have been 21 approvals, one denial, we are waiting to hear back from eleven and three proposals are in the process of being considered. Among the approvals, 16 are Issues courses, including three Themes conversions. Recently approved General Education (GE) courses can be found by visiting <http://www.gvsu.edu/gened/recent-changes-180.htm>.

**Assessment:** In fall, we reviewed and replied to 40 course assessment reports (CARs), with another 66 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 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.

In winter, we made efforts to clarify the language of the GE recertification policy. We hope to never remove a course from the GE program, but we need a clear policy in place. The policy will be included in materials sent to units when they are due for assessment and posted to the GE website.

As we review CARs, we often think of ways to improve the report form, sometimes from faculty assessor feedback. The form now asks how the previous CAR (submitted 3 years prior), and the GEC's feedback affected their teaching and assessing this time around. We were gratified to read about the many improvements that have been made to GE courses since the last time they were assessed. Related to this, starting fall 2017, assessors will automatically be sent the previous CAR and the GEC's reply letter.

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 in our program.

**Honors College:** The GEC Chair and GE Program Director met with the Honors College curriculum committee to forge an agreement regarding HNR sequences, which the GEC

subsequently approved. All HNR course sequences going forward may count for a total of 6 or 7 GE categories. These categories can vary according to the needs of the sequence, but all sequences must include Foundations-Writing (WRT 150) and Issues. As such, the associated skills of written communication, information literacy, collaboration, problem solving and integration must be included. The Sail system is set up to not allow certain combinations of categories, such as one course counting for both Foundations and Issues. In order for the HNR sequences to cover what is needed, these Sail rules sometimes need to be broken – the solution is to simply upload additional documents so that all GE categories associated with the sequence are addressed. In this way, Sail serves as the central repository for all documentation associated with a course, including courses that make up an Honors sequence. As for assessment, we agreed that joint CARs will be completed for team-taught courses in a sequence within a semester. This should ease the management of HNR sequences for both GE and Honors.

### UAS charges 2016-2017

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

In fall, the Interim GE Program Director offered 30-minute assessment workshops on both campuses on various days and times. Faculty teaching GE courses were informed that they could drop in for assessment training; no registration was required. These workshops were scheduled in 2-3 hour blocks for a total of 38 sessions for the semester. For faculty who had time conflicts, sessions were held on an individual basis for an additional five faculty members. Faculty who were assessing either fall or winter came to the session. A total of 43 faculty attended the fall assessment workshops. In winter, the GE Program Director gave 19 assessment workshops, plus a one-on-one session. In total, 24 faculty members attended assessment workshops in the winter semester.

Kurt Ellenberger, Faculty Fellow, Pew FTLC, facilitated a Faculty Learning Community titled Collaborative Problem Solving. Ideas were shared on collaborative problem-solving strategies in GE courses, and related literature was read and discussed. Twelve faculty members participated in the fall and there were four in the winter. The group prepared a worksheet and a set of questions about GE that they plan to discuss with the GE Program Director in May.

Christine Rener, Director of Pew FTLC and Vice Provost for Instructional Development and Innovation, held a series of GE skills workshops in winter semester. These workshops were offered with a special emphasis on the GE skills of integration, collaboration, written communication, and critical thinking, and were attended by a total of 27 faculty members.

In winter 2017, Gayle Schaub and Cara Cadena of University Libraries facilitated the Pew FTLC Faculty Learning Community “The Language of Information Literacy: Library Collaboration for

Student Success.” This community met four times during the winter semester to discuss and develop a shared understanding of information literacy, explore threshold concepts within disciplines, explore specifics from terminology to large concepts and how to teach, and identify ways to collaborate with Library faculty to integrate skills into class planning.

The GEC is aware of the need for online/hybrid offerings of GE courses, especially Issues courses. We plan to contact Pew FTLC and the IDeL team in the fall about workshops or other modes of support for faculty who are so inclined.

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

*a. Implement the new rubrics for the assessment of General Education courses.*

The GE Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) include nine skills: collaboration, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, information literacy, integration, oral communication, problem solving, quantitative literacy, and written communication. Revised rubrics for assessing these skills were implemented fall 2016, along with a generic rubric giving guidance for assessing content SLOs for Foundations, Cultures and Issues.

As mentioned previously, assessment workshops were offered in the fall and winter semesters. The new rubrics were a central focus of these workshops. During our review of CARs this year, we noted several positive comments about the new rubrics.

Prior to the start of the fall and winter semesters, instructors scheduled to teach a GE course received an email message from the GE program, which included a short discussion of the revised rubrics. Instructors selected for GE assessment received an email message from the GE program, along with an attachment giving step-by-step directions. Both the email message and the directions discussed the new rubrics in detail, stressing that the rubrics must be used to give scores on an absolute scale. The scores should indicate where the student is for a particular skill at that point in time of their GVSU education, as opposed to a grade on a course assignment, which is on a relative scale.

During the process of updating the GE handbook to reflect the revised rubrics, the GEC discussed a number of changes to improve the wording and layout of the handbook. These changes were also made in the Sail system.

In winter, the GEC worked to clarify the SLOs, mostly to streamline the definitions, and make each area where the SLOs appear (GE handbook, website, rubrics, CAR forms, assessment instructions, email notifications, etc.) consistent. We reworded the content SLOs for each category to focus on what the student learns, as opposed to what the instructor teaches. In March, the GEC voted to endorse the adoption of the GE Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) as undergraduate institution-level SLOs.

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

The GE program has created a report using the data from a complete (3 year) assessment cycle (2013-16). The GEC spent a considerable amount of time discussing the report and suggesting changes. We decided that the results should be disseminated to the campus community in the following formats: an executive summary aimed at faculty, an executive summary aimed at students, and a complete report. The complete report will be made more digestible by breaking it down into smaller pieces. This way, interested parties can go right to what they are primarily interested in, such as Oral Communication or US Diversity. These reports will be rolled out in fall 2017. We hope to engage students and faculty in a discussion of the results. A series of fora will be scheduled.

In March, the GE Program submitted the Quality Initiative Report – Improving the Quality of the GE Program at GVSU, which was approved by the University Academic Senate and the Student Senate. The purpose of the GVSU Quality Initiative (QI) was to launch a rigorous assessment of student learning in the GE Program. One of the goals in the QI was to establish a baseline for student performance for each GE SLO using the 2013-16 data. In this 3 year cycle, 11,267 students in 424 sections of 222 GE courses were assessed. The GE rubrics allow for five levels: 0=below baseline, 1=baseline (where we expect most incoming students to be), 2=progressing, 3=proficient (where we want graduating seniors to be), and 4=distinguished. The goal of the GE Program is to have all students graduate at the proficient level or higher. Based on the 2013-16 data, 67% of seniors achieved the proficient level or higher for all skill and content SLOs, compared to 43% of freshmen. The number of seniors who are at the proficient or higher level varied by skill. Seniors performed highest in Collaboration, Integration, and Written Communication; they performed lowest in Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, and Ethical Reasoning.

*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;*

We fast-track Issues courses in the sense that we always place the highest priority on reviewing Issues course proposals. There are now 132 Issues courses available for students to choose from. Of these offerings, 67 (51%) are conversions from Themes courses, and 65 (49%) are newly created Issues courses. Some Themes courses were converted to either Foundations or Cultures, and of course some Themes courses count toward an academic major. We expect to see an ongoing trickle of Issues course proposals that are Themes conversions. In some cases, units prefer not to explore this option.

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

In winter 2017, Kathryn Stieler, Pew FTLC Faculty Fellow, facilitated the Faculty Learning Community “Design Thinking in the Classroom.” This community sought to expand

understanding of and experience with design thinking as well as explore ideas for its application in the classroom. A total of 21 faculty participants representing every college met either in Allendale or Grand Rapids. The discussions mostly focused on a wide range of applications across disciplines of the Design Thinking framework. The FTLC has a Design Thinking Immersion planned for May 18 & 19 for faculty who are new to the process.

An AAC&U conference titled “2017 General Education and Assessment: Design Thinking for Student Learning,” was held in Phoenix, AZ February 23-25, 2017. A GEC member was able to go to this conference and report back to the GEC. He spoke of “selling” the GE goals to students – instead of seeing GE requirements as an obstacle to overcome before they can graduate, students should realize that they can use them to highlight their experience to potential employers, speaking of skills acquired rather than merely courses taken.

Dr. Danielle Lake agreed to allow materials used in her Design Thinking course (LIB 323) to be posted to the GE website for GVSU faculty use. They include a self & team evaluation / reflection and a debrief template.

*4. Meet with Career Services to explore ways to better incorporate practical skills into the GE curriculum.*

Troy Farley, Career Center Director, was invited to the November 21 meeting of the GEC. He discussed how the marketplace has changed over the years, and how the Career Center has adapted to best help our graduating students. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Farley reviewed the GE program and shared with us that the skills employers want are synonymous with the GE skills. This is especially so for oral and written communication, collaboration, and problem solving. The key is to get students to realize this so that they take ownership of the GE component of their education at GVSU. In the 2017-18 edition of the GE handbook, an entire page will be devoted to this idea, making explicit connections between GE skills and top priorities of employers.

*5. Review GE Foundations categories, and make recommendations for changes if/as warranted. Include thorough justifications for any proposed changes.*

This was discussed at several GEC meetings. We debated the merits of a separate category for Interdisciplinary courses. We compared our program to others which have a Humanities category. Ultimately we decided that we needed more time to work on this charge and will take it up again in fall. In the meantime, we have charged the GE Program Director to investigate peer institutions over the summer and deliver a summary to GEC at the start of fall semester.

**Conclusion:** The GEC would like to thank Interim GE Program Director Scott Berlin for his efforts in the fall semester. We also thank GE Office Coordinator Jen Cathey, Graduate Assistant Tyler Ward, GE Program Director C. “Griff” Griffin, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs

Maria Cimitile, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Chris Plouff, the Pew Faculty Teaching & Learning Center, the University Curriculum Committee, the College Curriculum Committees, the University Assessment Committee, Institutional Marketing, and the University Academic Senate for helping us focus our efforts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirk Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kirk" and last name "Anderson" clearly distinguishable.

Kirk Anderson - GEC Chair, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Carly Aller, Student Senate

Hsiao-Ping Chen, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Dori Danko, Seidman College of Business

Dawn DeVries, College of Health Professions

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Kimberly McKee, Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies

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