

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kris Mullendore, Chair, ECS/UAS

CC: Robert Adams, Chair, University Curriculum Committee
Wendy Wenner, Dean, Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies
C. Griff Griffin, Director, General Education Program
Maria Cimitile, Academic Program & Curriculum Development Officer

FROM: General Education Committee—Roger Gilles, Chair

DATE: April 15, 2011

SUBJECT: GEC Annual Report

By the end of this semester, the General Education Committee will have met 24 times this year (Mondays 2:30-4:30 p.m.) and can report progress in four areas:

Curricular Proposals: We considered 28 curricular proposals, approving 14 on first consideration and requesting amendments from 14. Twelve of the amended courses have now been approved, and two are still outstanding.

Program Assessment: We completed our fourth year of program-wide assessment. Shelley Schuurman, a former GEC member with assessment experience in her home unit, was assigned time to draft responses to Course Assessment Reports, and we met with Shelley to clarify the committee's practical and rhetorical intentions with the CAR responses. This year, we have thus been able to respond to 30 CARs with a unified committee voice. Our next steps in the assessment process are to begin drafting "category reports" that reflect on the first-round assessment of all courses in each GE category or theme, and to continue the second round of the assessment cycle.

Integration of GE and Basic Skills: We completed work begun last year to integrate the "basic skills" requirements into General Education. In January 2011, the UAS and Provost approved our proposal to drop the "Basic Skills" designation under "University Requirements" and instead achieve those proficiencies within the General Education program itself. We made MTH 110 a prerequisite to all courses in the Mathematical Sciences foundation category, created a "Writing" foundations category in GE for the WRT 150 course, and eliminated the junior-level writing requirement. Since then, we have updated the 2011-12 university catalog and GE handbook to reflect the changes. We have also helped to spread word of the changes to affected students, particularly those graduating in April and August 2011 who still need to satisfy the junior-level writing requirement.

Through the other revisions we are planning for the GE program, our intention is to focus and improve the teaching and assessing of writing in designated GE categories so that the proficiencies associated with the junior-level writing requirement will continue to be met by all students completing the program.

GE Program Revisions: The majority of our work this year focused on continuing our pursuit of the three basic charges we received from ECS/UAS in August 2009: 1) considering "plausible structural changes to the General Education program, taking into account the recent series of campus discussions concerning student success, time to graduation, and resource efficiency"; 2) seeking "efficiencies on behalf of students by evaluating various program expectations"; and 3) finding "ways in which the program might broaden its notion of themes including the possibility of adding appropriate minors or other alternatives—while adhering to the program's core principles" (ECS memo, 8/28/09).

In Spring/Summer 2010, five GEC members met several times, with assistance from Griff from GE and Chistine Rener from FTLC, as part of a special working group to follow up on some of our work in 2009-10 and facilitate our decision-making in Fall 2010. Specifically, the working group generated a draft list of objectives for each of the proposed LEAP goals and developed sample syllabi of two “GE” courses we had discussed for possible inclusion in the revision proposal. In Fall 2010, we began our work by reviewing the work of this group, and the draft objectives became supporting materials for our eventual draft proposal.

Also in Fall 2010, based on revision ideas we had developed in 2009-10, we surveyed all units with courses in GE to help us gauge the interest and capacity of existing GE categories to take on each of ten potential goals, including several new goals. We received responses from units teaching 280 of the 306 courses in GE (92% of the courses). The results told us the percentage of courses in each GE category reporting that they would need to make little or no adjustment in order to teach each goal. Based on the data, the GEC concluded that all ten goals were feasible and developed a preliminary plan to distribute the goals across the program. Our hope was to develop a distribution plan that would allow us to add new goals without increasing the number of goals any one GE course would be responsible for teaching and assessing.

In December 2010, we sent a three-part draft proposal to ECS for discussion. The first part focused on the basic-skills integration, which after discussion we agreed to propose separately in January 2011 (see above). The other parts proposed to add three new goals to the GE program; distribute those goals, as well as the existing GE goals, across categories; replace the Themes categories with a new upper-level requirement focusing on problem-solving and global issues; and reduce the upper-level requirement from three courses to two. These proposals became the focus of our work for the Winter semester.

Early in the Winter semester, we developed a revised draft proposal, a short version for discussion, an FAQ about the proposal, a detailed presentation of the goal-distribution plan, and several other supporting documents to facilitate a campus discussion of the “draft proposal for discussion,” which was shared with all faculty on February 1. Between January 26 and March 2, members of GEC participated in over 30 scheduled opportunities for discussion with students and faculty, including four university forums and meetings with individual units and colleges as well as the Student Senate. We also met with individual faculty and unit heads to discuss the proposal. In addition, we sponsored two discussion boards, one for faculty and one for students, on the GE website.

Given the range of feedback we received and a clear sense of lingering concern within certain units and among certain faculty, we determined on March 14, after Spring Break, that it would be best for us to postpone any formal submission of a revision proposal until Fall 2011. We anticipate there will be wider support for these goals once we further clarify them and help faculty see how they might be implemented. Therefore, we have recently invited faculty to participate in several ways as we develop a series of FTLC workshops to be offered in September and early October 2011. First, we have invited faculty to recommend or share scholarship or other resources related to the proposed goals. We have invited faculty to submit descriptions or examples of how they are teaching and assessing the proposed goals in their current courses. And we have invited faculty to participate in a series of spring/summer sessions devoted to researching and planning for the Fall FTLC workshops. Our hope is that this broad range of input from faculty across campus will allow us to reflect on the current draft proposal and develop a revised version for campus consideration sometime later in the fall. We intend to submit our formal proposal for revision by Thanksgiving 2011.

Significant work has been done. The committee spent many hours comparing alternatives, considering options, and refining elements of our proposals. But there is significant work yet to do, and we anticipate another busy year in 2011-12.

Finally, we wish to thank Krista McFarland, GE Office Coordinator, C. “Griff” Griffin, Director of GE, and Maria Cimitile, our ex-officio designee from the provost’s office, for their efforts throughout the year to facilitate and support the work of the committee.