TO: Faculty Colleagues
FROM: General Education Committee
DATE: February 24, 2012
SUBJECT: Proposing Issues Courses

Thank you for your interest in developing an Issues course for the revised GE program. Here is a brief overview of the Issues component and some guidelines to keep in mind as you think about and develop your prospective course.

The GE program has three broad knowledge goals, and in the revised program each broad knowledge goal connects to a specific component of the GE program. Knowledge Goal #1 connects to the Foundations categories, each of which has its own content goals to guide courses in the category. Knowledge Goal #2 connects to the Cultures categories, each of which also has its own content goals to guide courses in the category. And now we have a new Knowledge Goal #3, which connects to the new Issues categories:

Knowledge Goal #3: *An understanding of how academic study connects to issues in the world.* A generally educated person is able to think in broad terms and see connections in the world. Preparing for responsible citizenship requires that students become conscious of both complementary and competing viewpoints and recognize that any issue or problem can be viewed from multiple perspectives.

Here are the six Issues categories:

Globalization - including issues related to capitalism, economic justice, health, migration and immigration, communication, borders, education, etc.

Health - including issues related to equity, disparities, health systems, finance, ethics, access, quality of care, safety, happiness, human development, genetics, etc.

Human Rights - including issues related to political systems, power, war, peace, violence, terrorism, wealth, poverty, privacy, religion, gender, women, children, disabilities, labor, aging, incarceration, torture, etc.

Identity - including issues related to gender, sexuality, religion, culture, race, class, family, community, difference, education, technology, etc.

Information, Innovation, and Technology - including issues related to media, privacy, access, transparency, intellectual property, ethics, economics, creativity, education, politics, etc.

Sustainability - including issues related to the environment, population, natural resources, economic development, social justice, energy, etc.

Each category will have two GE content goals that articulate how the courses connect to Knowledge Goal #3. The initial content goals will follow this pattern:

All courses in the _____ Issue help students learn:

- *how the course relates to issues and questions regarding _____*
- *how complementary and competing perspectives covered in the course contribute to the ongoing discussion about _____*

As you consider your proposed Issues course, your primary aims should be to reflect on how the particular content of your course connects to one of the six broad Issues categories and how your disciplinary perspectives might contribute to or be enriched by the perspectives of other fields or disciplines. The underlying assumption of the Issues component is that multiple disciplines and multiple perspectives are required to address large issues such as globalization, health, human rights, and so on.

All Issues courses will be integrative problem-solving courses that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. For example, a biology course in the sustainability category will both focus on the ways in which the field of biology addresses some aspect of sustainability and invite students to research and reflect on ways their own fields and other disciplines address the same issue. Together, then, the faculty member and the students in the class will work to develop an understanding of potential solutions to the problem of sustainability.

The exact focus of these courses will of course depend on the field of the proposing faculty. But by virtue of being produced in an upper-level, multi-disciplinary academic setting, student work - papers, projects, presentations - will be enriched by a variety of perspectives, disciplinary and otherwise. The students' knowledge and experience with art, chemistry, criminal justice, economics, history, literature, nursing, philosophy, political science, psychology, and any number of other fields, as well as their life experiences (perhaps as athletes, restaurant workers, parents, or musicians), have the potential to open up new avenues of exploration within the field of study of the course itself. And, ultimately, the students' experience in the course can and should change the way they think about their own primary academic fields of study.

While there are no set requirements in terms of student assignments or projects, all Issues course proposals will need to demonstrate how faculty will teach and assess the goals of collaboration, problem solving, and integration:

<u>COLLABORATION</u> is two or more students working together and sharing the workload equitably as they progress toward shared learning objectives.

People who are generally educated work collaboratively with others on both small and large projects. Effective collaborators are *interdependent*, *interactive*, *accountable*, and *reflective*. That is, they work interdependently within a group, interact productively with group members, demonstrate accountability for

their own contributions to the work of the group, and reflect on the success of the group, including their own contributions and the contributions of others.

Students who have learned collaboration will be able to:

- contribute to the development of shared goals within the group; accept, articulate, and promote the agreed-upon goals of the group; help the group assign useful and productive roles for each group member
- offer and contribute their own knowledge and expertise to the group; take on the role or roles the group needs, developing new expertise as needed; encourage others in the group to contribute and develop as needed; and promote harmony and fairness within the group
- participate actively and responsibly in all group activities; work effectively between group meetings, completing assigned tasks on time; identify and address conflict within the group
- recognize roles and strategies that are and are not working; understand ways in which group performance could improve; honestly assess own contributions and the contributions of others

As defined here, collaboration is not simply putting students into groups or conducting group discussion within a single class period. The collaboration goal calls for structured learning activities that involve students actively, occur over a significant part of the semester, and provide for feedback from peers and instructors.

PROBLEM SOLVING is the process of designing and evaluating strategies to answer open-ended questions or achieve desired goals.

People who are generally educated can define and solve problems by seeking and identifying relevant contextual information, formulating strategies, and proposing and evaluating potential solutions.

Students who have learned problem solving will be able to:

- construct clear and insightful problem statements that prioritize relevant contextual factors
- identify multiple approaches for solving the problem within the given context
- design and fully explain proposed solutions that demonstrate deep comprehension of the problem
- evaluate the feasibility of solutions considering aspects such as the historical context and ethical, legal, or practical impact of potential solutions

INTEGRATION requires students to synthesize and apply knowledge from other coursework, experiences from outside the classroom, and other perspectives to new, complex situations.

People who are generally educated are able to correlate and synthesize facts, basic concepts, and disparate knowledge for application within and beyond the campus, to make sense of a variety of data and experiences, to address issues in a more effective way than can be accomplished from only one field of study or perspective, and reflect on their own learning.

Students who have learned integration will be able to:

- draw conclusions from examples, facts, and/or theories from more than one field of study or perspective
- adapt and apply skills, abilities, theories, or methods to explore complex issues in original ways
- effectively communicate synthesized knowledge in ways that are inclusive of diverse audiences and perspectives
- demonstrate self-reflection, building on prior experiences and responding to new and challenging contexts presented in the course