

MEMORANDUM

TO: Karen Gipson, Chair of the Executive Committee of the University Academic Senate
CC: Maria Cimitile, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
C. Griff Griffin, Director, General Education Program
FROM: General Education Committee—Kirk Anderson, Chair
DATE: April 10, 2015
SUBJECT: General Education Committee End-of-Year Report

The General Education Committee (GEC) met 23 times this year on Mondays from 2:30-4:30 p.m., and can report progress in the following areas.

Curriculum: We considered 29 course proposals, with many resubmissions. As of this writing, there have been 23 approvals, one denial, we are waiting to hear back from four, and one is in the process of being considered. Among the approvals, eleven are Issues courses, four are Honors, and four are Arts Foundation courses. Recently approved General Education courses can be found by visiting <http://www.gvsu.edu/gened/recent-changes-180.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 94 Issues courses available for students to choose from, with more in progress. This fall, incoming freshmen will be the second class that must choose Issues courses in their junior or senior year for General Education credit. Themes courses are still serving a need for many of our students, and as this need gradually decreases, 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.

We are in communication with the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies regarding Special Topics IDS 380 Issues courses, and are optimistic that an agreement can be made to allow such courses. We also plan to encourage units to propose Special Topics “380” courses to the GEC as Issues courses, if they so choose.

After struggling with the new Sail system, improvements were made in collaboration with Institutional Marketing staff. The course proposal submission was streamlined by reducing the number of text fields and adding drop-down menus. Each skills goal has four objectives; previously, proposers were asked fill out a text field for each objective both in terms of how they plan to teach and assess the goal, for a total of eight text fields. Now, proposers can address the four objectives for each goal in one text field for their instruction, and simply choose their method of assessment from a supplied list. Another recently added feature: a statement that the course teaches and assesses the General Education goals for the Foundations, Cultures, or Issues category automatically appears in an appropriate place in the syllabus of record.

Assessment: In fall, we reviewed and replied to 22 course assessment reports (CARs), with an additional 44 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 two of the CARs were deemed not adequate and sent back to either collect better data or supply missing information. The honest and often candid reflections prompted many committee discussions about the role of General Education at GVSU. Just as reading course proposals gave us ideas for improving the curriculum process, reviewing CARs led us to reconsider many aspects of General Education assessment. As we do our work, we can't help but reflect on how the General Education Program is serving students and how we can assist faculty in the process.

Improvements were made to the CAR to capture better information; certain questions were reworded for clarity. We worked to improve the wording and timing of the pre-semester email message (and associated attachments) to faculty who are assessing their General Education courses.

We are in the process of addressing 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 are working to streamline the rubric so that it is much simpler to use. Equally important, 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. Further, the four objectives associated with each skill are now listed in the General Education handbook.

In fall, four Brown Bag Lunch sessions were hosted for Issues course instructors with the help of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center. Faculty that had already taught an Issues course as well as those scheduled to teach in winter 2015 were invited. Attendees shared successes and failures in their experience so far teaching and assessing the skills and content goals associated with Issues courses. The director of the General Education Program and the director of the Pew FTLC answered questions and addressed concerns of those who participated.

The content goals for Foundations and Cultures courses were created by interdisciplinary teams of faculty from units with courses in each of the categories. The GEC wondered if any of the categories would benefit from changes in the content goals; perhaps reducing the number of goals in certain cases. We surveyed instructors who had recently collected assessment data and asked if they felt the goals were worded in a way that still allowed them to accurately measure student mastery of the content. Feedback was positive, indicating that the current content goals are serving their purpose.

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.

Coverage of skills goals: The GEC took stock of each of the nine skills goals, in order to get a sense of how often GVSU students will be exposed to each goal over their time here. An analysis was done that determined the probability of a student encountering each skills goal at least once. For Collaboration, Problem Solving, Integration and Written Communication, it is certain, and for Ethical Reasoning, Critical & Creative Thinking and Quantitative Literacy, it is nearly certain (greater than 99%). The numbers were lower for Oral Communication (79%) and Information Literacy (52%). After much discussion, the GEC decided to contact the Writing department. It was agreed that WRT 150, Strategies in Writing, the sole course that satisfies the Writing Foundation requirement, would adjust the goals associated with it to include Information Literacy. As of fall 2015, the General Education skills taught and assessed in WRT 150 are “hard-wired” to be Written Communication and Information Literacy. Since this course is required of all (non-transfer) GVSU students, this guarantees at least one exposure to Information Literacy. A revised Course Assessment Plan (CAP) for WRT 150 was submitted by Writing and approved by GEC. As for Oral Communication, we continue to look for feasible ways to increase the number of students exposed to this goal.

Design Thinking: Three members of the GEC, including the chair, attended the Design Thinking Initiative workshop to see what this could bring to the General Education Program. One theme heard was 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 General Education, since all Issues courses teach and assess collaboration, problem solving, and integration. Also, the Design Thinking concept of involving the stakeholders aligns with our desire to include students in the assessment process. The GEC will continue to monitor the fruits of this initiative; one GEC member is part of the Design Thinking working/planning group.

Internationalization: We invited Mark Schaub, co-chair of the Internationalization Task Force and Global GV team, to a GEC meeting. Prior to this, the GEC reviewed the Cultures: World Perspectives component of the General Education Program per recommendations made in the April 2014 Internationalization Task Force Recommendation Report (hereafter referred to as the Report). We reevaluated the objectives associated with the content goals for the World Perspectives category. After much discussion, the following determinations were made. Internationalization refers to the international elements in a course. It is not the same thing as “global learning,” which is covered by our combination of U.S. Diversity and World Perspectives (Cultures). All General Education Cultures goals are inspired by the AAC&U’s definition of global learning, and our overall objective – to provide students with intercultural knowledge and competence – is compatible with their definition. The Report included a 5-point scale for ranking levels of internationalization of university courses. A GEC member looked at each of the 67 World Perspectives (WP) courses being taught to see what levels they reached. He

found that 53 (79%) of the courses achieved level 4 (the entire course has an international focus), 12 (18%) ranked at 3 (international elements are integrated throughout the course), and the remaining 2 courses (3%) achieved level 2 (one unit in the course is internationally oriented). Since 97% of courses ranked at least a 3, it is apparent that World Perspectives courses are successful in providing students with global learning.

We promote and encourage Study Abroad, offering Foundations, World Perspectives, and Issues credit for courses taken in other countries. Issues courses in the Globalization category give students another opportunity for global learning. Definition 3 in the AAC&U VALUE rubric for global learning – “address the world’s most pressing and enduring issues collaboratively and equitably” – is embodied in our definition of Issues. The fact that some World Perspectives courses also count toward Foundations (“double-dip”) was discussed, and determined not to be a problem, as all applicable skills goals are required to be met in any double-dip course, regardless of category. At the meeting, Dr. Schaub agreed with our assessment, and pointed out that the Global GV team’s next focus was on increasing global learning in the major. The GEC feels strongly that the General Education Program is meeting or exceeding the global learning goals laid out in the Report.

Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA): The new transfer agreement comes with some changes. In some areas their requirements are more stringent than GVSU’s, in others they are less so.

- Students must earn a “C” or higher in every course to count toward the MTA; courses at GVSU (including those in General Education) require a “D” or higher to count towards graduation. A “C” or higher is required for WRT 150.
- A second science or math course was added to the MTA, now matching GVSU requirements.
- MTA now requires a second communication course, either English composition or oral communication. GVSU Admissions advises prospective students to take the composition course in order to obtain writing research skills. We do not have an oral communication option.
- We require an additional humanities course, and we now allow Studio Art (drawing, painting, sculpture, and ceramics) courses, which the MTA does not.

Regarding Mathematical Sciences, we asked unit heads in the category how well each of their courses meet the MTA objectives. We were looking for confirmation that our Mathematical Sciences courses fulfill what the MTA has articulated. CIS 160, GPY 200, MTH 131, MTH 221, and PHI 103 fulfill the Mathematical Sciences requirement via the Quantitative Reasoning Pathway. MTH 122, 123, 125, and 201 fulfill the Mathematical Sciences requirement via the College Algebra Pathway. STA 215 fulfills the Mathematical Sciences requirement via the Statistics Pathway.

Conclusion: It was a busy and productive year. We adjusted to a change in leadership in the chair position, and operated at less than full capacity for the first few weeks of the fall semester. We thank former General Education Office Coordinator Jeanne Whitsel, current

General Education Office Coordinator Jen Cathey, Graduate Assistant Christina McGraw, 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 for their suggestions in simplifying the rubrics, 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.

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