GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

FINAL PROPOSAL

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FROM: General Education Committee
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SUBJECT: Revising General Education

Since Fall 2008, the General Education Committee (GEC) has worked to align GE program goals with the ongoing national conversation on liberal education and to address widely-held concerns about the upper-level component (Themes) of the current GE program. Our discussions have taken into account what we have learned from the first program-wide GE assessment, begun in Fall 2007, as well as feedback on previous drafts of this proposal, collected at campus-wide forums and workshops in March 2009, February 2011, September 2011, and October 2011, and responses to unit surveys we distributed in November 2009, October 2010, and October 2011. We also collected feedback through online discussion boards in February and November 2011. We talked directly with nearly 25 groups, including colleges, units, and the Student Senate. As the result of our research, the assessment process, internal deliberations, and discussions with the campus community, we have developed this proposal for your consideration.

In brief, we propose four broad changes to the GE program:

1. Add four new GE skills goals—ethical reasoning, quantitative literacy, collaboration, and problem solving.
2. Adopt a new goal-distribution method for our assessment plan. This will reduce the number of goals each course is responsible for teaching and assessing while still ensuring that students gain adequate exposure to each goal.
3. Eliminate the upper-level Themes requirement and replace it with an upper-level "Issues" requirement.
4. Replace Knowledge Goal #3 with one corresponding with the upper-level component of the GE program.

Below, we describe each proposed change in some detail and then outline an implementation plan. More materials are available at the GE website, including additional background information, details about each proposed goal, and supporting readings.

1. Add New Goals

The GVSU General Education program aims to "provide students with the general knowledge and skills necessary to participate intelligently in the discourses that shape local, national, professional, and global communities" (*GE Handbook*, p. 3). The current GE program has three broad knowledge goals. The first two—"the major areas of human investigation and accomplishment," and "an understanding of one's own culture and the cultures of others"—are expressed as more specific content goals within the Foundations and Cultures categories, respectively. That is, the courses in each of the eight Foundations categories focus on familiarizing students with the major domains of academic inquiry—the sciences, the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, and so on. The courses in each of the two Cultures categories focus on world and U.S. cultures. Thus knowledge, or content, is at the heart of the Foundations and Cultures categories.

The third knowledge goal—"the tradition of humane inquiry" is not currently expressed in the content goals in any required GE category. In section #4 below (see p. 10), we propose replacing that goal with one directly related to the upper-level component of the GE program.

In addition to the knowledge goals, the current GE program has five skills goals:

1. engage in articulate expression through effective writing
2. engage in articulate expression through effective speaking
3. think critically and creatively
4. locate, evaluate, and use information effectively
5. integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives

To begin, we propose to describe each goal with brief noun phrases rather than the lengthier verb phrases. Instead of "locate, evaluate, and use information effectively," for example, we propose to call the goal "information literacy." These goals can then be articulated into objectives that describe what students actually learn to do.

We also propose to revise the language of the "integration" goal to suit the proposed changes to the upper-level component (see #3 on page 6 below).

We propose to add four new skills goals— ethical reasoning, quantitative literacy, collaboration, and problem solving—which would give us a total of nine goals to be distributed through the program:

1. written communication
2. oral communication
3. critical and creative thinking
4. information literacy
5. integration
6. ethical reasoning
7. quantitative literacy
8. collaboration
9. problem solving

The GEC believes the proposed goals are consistent with the mission of the GE program. They are also among the "essential learning outcomes" of a liberal education recommended by the Association of

American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), an organization with more than 1200 member institutions, including GVSU, committed to preserving "the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education" (AAC&U website: www.aacu.org).

- Ethical reasoning is a skill that encourages students to identify and evaluate the systems of value that inform people's beliefs and actions in contexts of all kinds—historical, political, cultural, academic, and professional—and thus to reflect on their own developing systems of value.
- Quantitative literacy is a skill that allows students to understand and use numerical data and quantitative evidence, again in a range of academic, professional, and civic contexts.
- Collaboration is a skill that enables students to work together with those with talents and expertise other than their own. In a time when public and even much professional discourse has devolved into shouts and counter-shouts, collaboration is an essential democratic skill that can set our students apart as they move forward in the world.
- Problem solving is a practice or habit of mind valued in every discipline and profession, worth developing in as many contexts as possible.

All these skills are intended to be developed in specific contexts—in biology courses, in history courses, in art courses—and then brought to bear and recontextualized in new situations, including in upper-level GE courses.

Below, we offer more formal descriptions of the proposed goals. We define the upper-level integration goal more fully in #3 on page 7 below. Full descriptions of the goals, along with sample assignments and informative readings, are available at the GE website.

ETHICAL REASONING is a decision making process based on defining systems of value.

Generally educated people are able to recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings and contexts, identify different systems of ethical reasoning (including disciplinary and professional ethical systems), and assess the consequences of those choices in different contexts. This enables them to evaluate and understand different systems of ethical reasoning.
Students who have learned ethical reasoning will be able to:

- recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex situation
- demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and principles underlying various systems of reasoning
- demonstrate the ability to deal constructively with ambiguity and disagreement
- apply ethical reasoning to an ethical question, and consider the implications of the application
- participate in activities that engage them in ethical reasoning

As proposed here, ethical reasoning is not about the teaching of ethics, nor is it about favoring a particular belief system. As a goal, it is meant to be flexible enough to be taught and assessed in the full range of GE courses offered at GVSU.

QUANTITATIVE LITERACY develops in students the ability to work with numerical data.

Generally educated people possess the ability to reason and solve quantitative problems from a wide array of authentic contexts and everyday life situations. They understand and can create sophisticated arguments

supported by quantitative evidence, and they can clearly communicate those arguments in a variety of formats (using words, tables, graphs, mathematical equations, etc., as appropriate).

Students who have learned quantitative literacy will be able to:

- interpret numerical data presented in a range of formats
- convert relevant information into various mathematical forms
- use data to make accurate calculations
- make and evaluate assumptions in estimation, modeling, and data analysis
- present numerical results in a range of formats
- manipulate numbers and variables to solve equations
- make judgments and draw appropriate conclusions based on the quantitative analysis of data and express quantitative evidence in support of the argument or purpose of the work

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

Generally educated people 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 proposed 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.

Generally educated people can define and solve problems by seeking and identifying relevant contextual information, formulating strategies, and proposing and evaluating potential solutions or hypotheses.

Students who have learned problem solving will be able to:

- construct clear and insightful problem statements identifying and considering relevant contextual factors
- identify multiple approaches for solving the problem within the given context

- propose one or more solutions or hypotheses that indicate 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
- design and provide a rationale for an implementation strategy for a solution or solutions that address multiple contextual factors of the problem
- prioritize relevant contextual factors and consider the need for further work

2. Revise the Goal-Distribution Method

To accommodate the addition of new goals, we propose revising our assessment plan so that each skills goal is distributed a limited number of times in the GE program, allowing for more focused and rigorous teaching and assessment while ensuring that students gain sufficient exposure to each goal. The result of this plan will be that GE Foundations and Cultures courses will be responsible for teaching and assessing two skills goals each, instead of three.

Our intention is not to preclude any course from pursuing any or all of the nine proposed skills goals of the program. Our intention is to develop a plan that ensures that all nine goals are explicitly taught and assessed in the program and that provides us with a systematic way to collect assessment data on each of the goals.

In Fall 2010, we surveyed units offering GE courses and asked them to identify from a list of 10 possible goals the ones most natural for each of their GE courses. In Fall 2011, we surveyed units again, this time providing more detailed descriptions of the collaboration, ethical reasoning, and problem solving goals, and again asked them to identify which were most feasible for each of their GE courses in the Foundations and Cultures categories. In the meantime, beginning with the March 2011 forums, faculty from several disciplines expressed a desire to include quantitative literacy in the GE program, and in Fall 2011 members of GEC and faculty from the sciences worked to develop quantitative literacy as a new GE skills goal.

From the surveys (the results of which are available at the GE website), we learned that nearly all GE courses teach and assess the goal of critical thinking and most teach and assess the goals of written communication and information literacy. From our discussions of quantitative literacy, we learned that many faculty already teach the goal and are readily prepared to integrate it into their GE courses. We also learned from the surveys that far fewer courses currently teach and assess the goals of oral communication and ethical reasoning, and that while many courses are readily prepared to teach and assess the problem solving goal, fewer are readily prepared to teach and assess collaboration.

Our solution is neither to ask all courses to teach and assess all the goals nor to give up on goals that are not already universally taught and assessed; it is to strategically assign the goals in a way that best ensures that students are adequately exposed to each goal as they work their way through the GE program. Therefore, we have developed a distribution plan that gives courses in each category a limited choice of goals to be included in their GE Course Assessment Plan (CAP). The first goal will be selected from those our data suggest are already widely taught in the program, and the second goal will be selected from those that are not yet widely taught in the program. Courses in each category will select one goal from each group to be included in their CAP:

Category	First Goal	Second Goal
Physical Sciences courses	Written communication or Quantitative literacy	Oral communication or Problem solving
Life Sciences courses	Information literacy or Quantitative literacy	Collaboration or Problem solving
Writing courses	Written communication or Information literacy	Collaboration or Ethical reasoning
Mathematical Sciences courses	Critical and creative thinking or Quantitative literacy	Collaboration or Problem solving
Arts courses	Critical and creative thinking or Written communication	Collaboration or Oral communication
Philosophy and Literature courses	Written communication or Information literacy	Oral communication or Ethical reasoning
Historical Perspectives courses	Written communication or Critical and creative thinking	Problem solving or Ethical reasoning
Social and Behavioral Sciences courses	Critical and creative thinking or Quantitative literacy	Problem solving or Ethical reasoning
World Perspectives courses	Critical and creative thinking or Information literacy	Collaboration or Oral communication
U.S. Diversity courses	Written communication or Information literacy	Oral communication or Ethical reasoning

Again, the goal of this distribution plan is not to limit what faculty teach in their courses; instead, it is a way to distribute or limit what faculty teach and assess for the purposes of GE.

Our essential proposal is to change from an assessment plan that asks all courses in the Foundations and Cultures categories to teach and assess the same goals—written or oral communication, critical and creative thinking, and information literacy—to one that allows the GEC to distribute the goals, for the purposes of assessment, strategically through the program. The particulars of the above distribution plan would be for the 2013-16 assessment cycle; after that, we propose to use assessment results and feedback from units to tweak the distribution in ways that best achieve our program goals.

3. Replace Themes with Issues

GEC remains committed to several aspects of the current Themes program. An upper-level, multi-disciplinary component makes for a stronger and more relevant GE program, as it underscores the fact that a university education is about more than developing knowledge and expertise within a major field of study. We also very much support the "integration" goal that has been the hallmark of the Themes program.

Our research demonstrated that the values and intentions behind Themes were laudable, but the integration across courses created problems that cannot be solved within the existing framework. This has created an opportunity for GEC to more fully align the upper-level component with the national conversation on liberal education. Thus, the GEC proposes to replace the Themes component of the program with a new upper-level component called "Issues." As a result, there would be three components to the GE program: *Foundations*, *Cultures*, and *Issues*. We propose to change from having nearly two dozen relatively small upper-level categories (Themes) to half a dozen relatively large upper-level categories (Issues), which will allow for more choice, and fewer roadblocks, for students. We also propose to achieve the upper-level integration goal *within* courses rather than *between* them,

as has been the intention with Themes. And we propose to ask all upper-level GE courses to teach and assess three skills goals—integration, collaboration, and problem solving—rather than the current five.

To accommodate the shift from Themes to Issues, we propose to adjust the definition of the existing integration goal:

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

Generally educated people 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, and to address issues in a more effective way than can be accomplished from only one field of study or perspective.

Students who have learned integration will be able to:

- meaningfully synthesize connections among experiences to deepen their understanding of fields of study and to broaden their own perspectives
- draw conclusions from examples, facts, and/or theories from more than one field of study or perspective
- adapt and apply skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to solve difficult problems or explore complex issues in original ways
- demonstrate a developing sense of self as a learner, building on prior experiences and responding to new and challenging contexts (may be evident in self-assessment, reflective, or creative work)
- effectively communicate synthesized knowledge in ways that are inclusive of diverse audiences and perspectives

As faculty, we recognize that much of our own scholarship requires us to integrate learning from multiple fields and disciplines, and we see that much of the productive work done outside of the academy—in government, in business, in social action—involves collaboration among those from diverse fields of expertise and an integration of multiple perspectives. Our colleagues from the 1990s here at GVSU made integration a key upper-level GE skills goal. We have fallen short of achieving the goal. In "Integrative Learning for Liberal Education," an article that appeared in *Peer Review* in 2005, Mary Taylor Huber, Pat Hutchins, and Richard Gale identify the dilemma we face here and elsewhere: "Of course, developing such a synthesizing, creative cast of mind has long been a goal of liberal education, albeit one that students have been expected, more often than not, to pick up for themselves" (p. 4). This proposal aims to make integration a goal of every upper-level GE course. We wish to make good on our promise to provide students an opportunity to use prior learning and co-curricular experiences to build connections to new learning. It is our obligation to provide such opportunities within the classroom, and not to assume that students will "pick up" this ability on their own.

This proposal has been guided in large part by the recent national conversation sponsored by the AAC&U. We wish to pursue several of AAC&U's "principles of excellence," which include engaging big questions, problem solving, and connecting knowledge with choices and actions students face after graduation. And we wish to pursue several of AAC&U's "high-impact educational practices," including collaborative learning and GE capstone experiences. For more on AAC&U's recommendations, please visit the GE website.

We propose to transform the current Themes program by building multi-disciplinarity and integration into each course, pursuing the goals of collaboration and problem-solving in each course, and connecting each course to a widely recognized human issue. We believe these changes will make the upper-level component more relevant and useful to students, as it more clearly pursues goals that are not only academic but also vocational and civic. Through this two-course requirement, students will develop their ability to draw on previous knowledge and experience, collaborate with others, and address problems that connect to important world issues.

Although we are proposing that all upper-level Issues courses teach and assess the goals of collaboration, problem solving, and integration, we recognize the potential for a wide range of pedagogical approaches to achieve the proposed outcomes. The GEC does not dictate particular pedagogical approaches to achieve existing goals such as written communication or information literacy, nor do we plan to dictate particular pedagogical approaches to achieve the goals of the Issues courses. We are trying to create a coherent program in which students can develop familiarity with and competence in program outcomes in various contexts. Our emphasis is on pursuing shared goals.

We propose the following six Issues categories, which we intend to be both inclusive of many different disciplinary perspectives and suggestive of many pressing issues:

- **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.

Our aim is neither to define these categories too narrowly nor to use the categories to exclude existing courses. Indeed, our hope is to spur thinking around the university about how existing upper-level GE courses, other existing courses, and potential new courses might connect to these broad categories. We believe that many existing GE courses could be strengthened and made even more relevant to students if we articulate how they connect to issues included within these categories. We also believe that these broad categories are flexible enough to contain a wide range of courses held together by their ability to contribute to the human conversation about important issues.

We propose to make all upper-level GE courses integrative problem-solving courses that encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration within each section. For example, a biology course in the "sustainability" category will both focus on the ways in which the field of biology can and does address some aspect of sustainability and invite the 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 in the world.

The focus of these upper-level courses will depend on the field of the faculty. But by virtue of being produced in an upper-level, multi-disciplinary academic setting, student papers and projects 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 as athletes, restaurant workers, parents, and musicians, have the potential to open up new avenues of exploration within the field. And, ultimately, the students' experience in the course can and should change the way they think about their own primary academic fields of study.

Here are some additional details related to this portion of the proposal:

- As with the Themes, students will take two courses, and the courses selected must come from different disciplines (i.e., they must have different course prefixes). This is our way of ensuring that students will take at least one upper-level GE course outside of their major unit.
- As with the Themes, courses may have prerequisites, but the prerequisites should not preclude course availability to students from a variety of majors. This is our way of ensuring that GE courses remain open to all students.
- As with the Themes, a full-time semester abroad will satisfy the Issues requirement. Faculty-led study abroad programs, or those less than a full semester, will count as long as courses transfer back with at least two prefixes. If there are not two prefixes, then one Issues course may be satisfied, but the students will need to take the second one on campus (or through another Study Abroad program). Also, all students wishing to satisfy the Issues requirement through Study Abroad will be required to reflect on their experiences by either 1) submitting a written reflection to the PIC office and the director of GE, or 2) presenting their experiences to an approved audience, perhaps at Student Scholarship Day, perhaps by visiting a class to discuss Study Abroad, perhaps by writing a newsletter article of some kind, etc. (It should also be noted that currently, and under this proposal, World Perspectives credit is also satisfied through Study Abroad.)
- In contrast to current Theme requirements, we propose to allow students either to focus on a single issue by taking two courses in one category or to seek connections of their own by taking courses from two different categories. That is, the emphasis is on taking integrative, problem-solving courses that connect to an issue, not necessarily on exploring one particular issue in depth. The categories themselves remain important, however, both as guides for faculty as they develop course proposals and as guides for students as they select courses. The categories will function very much like those in a menu: students may select any courses they wish, but the Issues categories will guide them in their selections.
- We propose that Issues courses be limited to those at the 300- and 400-level. This is an upper-level GE requirement, and courses should be designed for students who have completed their first two years of college-level coursework. Indeed, we also propose that enrollment be limited to those with junior and senior standing.
- We propose a maximum enrollment cap of 40 students per section to allow for the teaching and assessing of collaboration, problem solving, and integration. Some units may, of course, choose lower caps.

4. Replace Knowledge Goal #3

As stated earlier, the current Knowledge Goal #3, "the tradition of humane inquiry," while certainly a *value* of the GE program, is not assessed in any systematic way. The GEC sees it as part of the overall mission of the program to provide students with a foundation of knowledge and skills related to the broad tradition of humane inquiry, but the tradition as such is not workable as a specific, assessable curricular goal. We prefer to see it reflected in our Values and Mission statements. In its place, we propose a new knowledge goal that would relate to the *Issues* requirement.

We envision three broad knowledge goals, each corresponding to one component of the program. Existing Knowledge Goal #1 connects to the *Foundations* categories of courses. Existing Knowledge Goal #2 connects to the *Cultures* categories of courses. The language below about these two knowledge goals comes directly from the current GE handbook. Proposed Knowledge Goal #3 would connect to the *Issues* categories of courses.

Knowledge Goals

1. **The major areas of human investigation and accomplishment—the arts, the humanities, the mathematical sciences, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.** A generally educated person is able to understand a variety of disciplinary perspectives, their respective contributions to the growth of human knowledge, and the various approaches through which knowledge is generated, tested, and used.
2. **An understanding of one's own culture and the culture of others.** A generally educated person is able to comprehend and respond constructively to the world's diversity, a diversity manifested not only in ideas and ways of knowing but also in populations and cultures. As citizens of the United States, students should be familiar with our pluralistic heritage. As citizens of the world, students should be knowledgeable about cultures and perspectives different from their own.
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.

Implementation

Under this proposal, all prospective Issues courses would have to submit either new-course or course-change proposals to demonstrate how their courses would address an issue and meet the new goals. And all GE courses—Foundations, Cultures, and Issues courses—would have to develop new Course Assessment Plans (CAPs) prior to the initial assessment cycle of the revised program. We recommend Fall 2013 as the target date to implement changes to the Foundations and Cultures courses and offer the first Issues courses alongside the current Themes courses. And we recommend implementing the Issues requirement in the Fall 2014 catalog.

Foundations and Cultures: GEC is currently in its fifth year of ongoing assessment of the GE program, a process that has helped to shape this proposal in significant ways. Of course, the current assessment program is based on the current goals. In order to prepare for the integration of the new goals and the new Issues courses, we propose a suspension of our current assessment plan until Fall 2013. That will give us one full academic year, 2012-13, to work with units offering Foundations and Cultures courses to develop new CAPs and, if necessary, make any formal changes to their courses.

Issues: Before the end of the Winter 2012 semester, GEC will invite units and faculty to propose new or existing courses for inclusion in the Issues component. This will be an initial call; there will of course be ongoing future opportunities. Course proposals will demonstrate 1) how the course fits into one of the Issues categories, and 2) how the course will teach and assess the proposed skills goals of integration, problem solving, and collaboration.

To support faculty in the development of Issues course proposals and to help ensure that a sufficient number of proposals are generated, the GEC and FTLC will co-sponsor a course-development process in the summers of 2012 and 2013. Full details of the process will be available at the GE website as they are developed. The Provost has agreed to provide $1000 to those faculty selected by the GEC who complete a brief online module, attend a three-hour workshop, participate in online peer consultation, and submit a course proposal to the online curriculum process by August 1 of each summer. To assist in the process, a streamlined curriculum-approval process will be developed to consider the proposals during August so that the courses can be ready for the following year's catalog.

Proposed Timetable:

Spring/Summer 2012	Issues course-development process—first 30+ courses proposed by 8/1/12
2012-2013	Foundations and Cultures courses submit new CAPs for GEC approval
Spring/Summer 2013	Issues course-development process—second 30+ courses proposed by 8/1/13
2013-2014	▪ First 30+ Issues courses offered ▪ All Foundations and Cultures courses now teaching new goals ▪ All students may satisfy upper-level requirement by taking *either* Themes or Issues courses
Fall 2014	Catalog lists new GE requirements; transfer students must take Issues courses
2014-2015	Second 30+ Issues courses offered
Fall 2016	Fall 2014 freshmen are now juniors; Issues courses up to scale