

General Education Advisory Group Report

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General Education Advisory Group Report

Composition

The General Education Advisory (GEA) group was appointed by Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Lori Gonzalez in December, 2011, for the purpose of identifying and recommending strategies to revise Appalachian's General Education Program based on the solutions recommended by the campus community. The group consisted of ten members from diverse perspectives and backgrounds regarding the General Education Program, including representation from the Council of Chairs, Faculty Senate, Academic Advising, the Office of Transfer Articulation, General Education, and the faculty.

Charge

The group was charged with making substantial revisions to the Gen Ed program to deal specifically with the six areas of concern identified in the July 14, 2011, General Education Review Task Force (GERTF) report and supported by a Faculty Senate Resolution. These six areas are:

- Student Flexibility
- Advising Complexity
- Transfer Credits
- First Year Seminar
- Course Approval Process
- Administration

Process

The GEA met biweekly in Spring 2012. The group reviewed a number of publications, documents and reports that proved foundational to its work. These include, from ASU:

- Results of General Education Program Student Questionnaire, dated November 2011
- Update on General Education Policies and Actions, dated October 20, 2011
- Results for Survey on Opportunity to Offer Solutions for the General Education Program (Campus-wide survey emailed in Fall 2011 to all faculty, academic advisors, students under the new Gen Ed, and staff involved with the Gen Ed program)
- Student Achievement Team Response to the General Education Task Force Report, dated April 2012
- Statement of the General Education Review Task Force, dated September 26, 2011

- Response from the Office of General Education to the General Education Review Task Force Report, dated August 10, 2011
- General Education Review Task Force Report, dated July 14, 2011
- General Education Task Force Final Report, dated May 1, 2007
- All content on the General Education Program website, including the Curriculum Map, revised October 14, 2009; Curriculum Proposal Process; Gen Ed staff composition and responsibilities; Gen Ed administration and responsibilities of the Gen Ed Council
- Enrollment in General Education/ Core Curriculum courses, Fall 2007-Fall 2011
- Departmental Compensation for University College and General Education Courses
- Grade Distribution in UCO 1200 Sections, Fall 2009-Fall 2011
- UCO 1200 Faculty Tenure Status, Fall 2009-Summer 2012
- IRAP Study of First Year Seminar and Retention, Fall 2010 Freshman Cohort
- Results of First Year Seminar End of Course Student Course Evaluations, Fall 2011
- IRAP report on Transfer and AP Credit Data for New Main Campus Transfers and New Freshmen, Fall 2008-Fall 2011

Outside ASU:

- Bok, Derek. *Our Underachieving Colleges*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- *College Learning for the New Global Century*. Washington D.C.: AAC&U, 2007.
- Cronon, William. "Only Connect... The Goals of a Liberal Education." *The American Scholar* 67.4 (1998): 73-80.
- *The Degree Qualifications Profile*. Lumina Foundation for Education, January 2011.
- *General Education & Liberal Learning: Principles of Effective Practice*. Ed. By Paul L. Gaston. Washington D.C.: AAC&U, 2010.
- *Trends and Emerging Practices in General Education*. Washington, D.C.: Hart Research Associates, May 2009.

Goals

The overarching goal of the GEA was to address the six areas of concern while retaining the essence of an integrated liberal education experience. The first step in the GEA's process was to read and discuss the articles on best practices in general education listed above. Among other topics, we discussed the need to assure that the four learning goals of the General Education Program can be met through any revised curriculum model. Through those discussions, we reached a consensus that we should retain three key characteristics of the current model: a vertical structure, an emphasis on integrated learning, and a distribution of coursework from liberal arts disciplines. We sought solutions that preserved and enhanced these characteristics and increased institutional efficiency without compromising educational effectiveness.

Recommendations

To achieve the goals described above, the GEA makes recommendations in the following areas (described in detail below).

1. Revisions to the General Education curriculum model to address student flexibility, advising complexity, and transfer credits;
2. Changes to First Year Seminar policies and procedures;
3. Changes to General Education administration and the Gen Ed course approval process.

1. Proposed revisions to the General Education curriculum model

Changes to the Perspectives

In addressing the student flexibility, advising complexity, and transfer credits problem areas, the GEA began with a review of the current Gen Ed curriculum model. It quickly became apparent from the analysis of data and campus feedback that most of the problems in these areas have arisen largely because of the number of organizational layers in the Perspectives area of the current curriculum. Each course—those with designations and those without—nests within a theme, which in turn nests within one of four meta-disciplinary component areas (Aesthetic, Historical and Social, Local to Global, or Science Inquiry), which in turn nests within the umbrella organizational unit known as the Perspectives. The GEA concluded that the best way to increase student flexibility, reduce advising complexity, and address transfer credit concerns would be to eliminate some of these layers.

In evaluating each layer, we recognized that keeping the designations would allow for a distribution of coursework from the liberal arts disciplines to be achieved. We also recognized the importance of keeping the essence of the themes (but not necessarily as currently structured), in order to retain an emphasis on integrative learning. We too recognized that the Perspectives layer helps provide both a liberal arts distribution and integrative learning; however, since the aforementioned layers provide these essential characteristics as well, we concluded that the Perspectives are somewhat redundant.

After much thought and debate, our unanimous recommendation is to eliminate the Perspectives umbrella and reorganize the four current meta-disciplinary component areas into three new components: Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience (9 semester hours), Liberal Studies Experience (12 semester hours), and Science Literacy (7-8 semester hours). This change will preserve the focus on integrative learning while increasing student flexibility. It will also simplify advising by, among other things, eliminating the need for the transfer “wild card.”

The GEA recommends that the Aesthetic, Historical and Social, and Local to Global Perspectives be replaced by two new curricular components to be known as the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience and Liberal Studies Experience.

The proposed Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience would consist of multidisciplinary themes, and each student would be required to complete 9 semester hours in one theme. The themes would be structured similarly to the existing Perspectives themes with two key differences. First, gateway, capstone, and co-requisite courses would be allowed within themes. This allowance will give faculty who teach in the themes the flexibility to design them for maximum educational effectiveness. Second, students would not be allowed to transfer course credit from other institutions into the themes. This requirement will ensure that all students who participate in the General Education Program will experience a group of courses that have intentional connections with one another as part of their undergraduate experience. (Please note that students who have completed a general education curriculum at another institution that has been approved to substitute for ours would not have to complete this requirement nor any other General Education Program requirements.) One significant advantage of the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience over the current Perspectives structure is that it would require far fewer courses to participate in themes; thus departments could be more selective about which courses they choose to submit for theme participation and the Office of General Education could offer more concentrated support to those faculty who teach in themes.

The proposed Liberal Studies Experience would complement the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience by allowing students to choose 12 semester hours of non-linked, non-thematic courses from disciplines across the campus. Any courses that are suitable for non-majors and can commit to addressing and assessing the goals of the General Education Program would be eligible to apply for inclusion in the Liberal Studies Experience. Within this component, students would have the flexibility to select courses they are interested in and explore new subjects, providing that the 12 semester hours they select includes courses from at least two disciplines. This component would offer flexibility for transfer students because a broad range of courses from other institutions could easily transfer into this component.

We recommend that Science Inquiry remain a component of the curriculum and retain its current structure with two adjustments. First, we recommend that the component be renamed Science Literacy so that it may be conceptually grouped with Wellness Literacy and Quantitative Literacy. This grouping of these three components will help emphasize that they each develop core competencies essential to a well-rounded liberal education. Second, we recommend that the Science Literacy requirement be changed to 7-8 semester hours with at least one laboratory experience rather than the current 8 semester hours with two laboratory experiences.

The committee feels there are several reasons for this change to a 7-8 semester hour Science Literacy requirement. First, the Goals and Learning Outcomes developed for the current Science Inquiry Perspective may be attained with a combination of laboratory and more lecture-mediated examples and exercises in teaching students

the process of science. This gives students the important hands-on experience to ask and answer questions in a laboratory setting, combined with interactive lecture experiences that serve to engage students in case studies (for example) of scientific experiments. Piloted examples of this approach in large lecture classes have yielded positive results. Second, this change will allow for a better use of limited resources for courses having large numbers of students in multiple lab sections. By combining resources into one instead of two semesters, more effective laboratories may be designed for students. Finally, this adjustment would make a significant difference to transfer students who receive transfer credit for 3 semester hours or 7 semester hours of science courses from other institutions.

The Offices of Transfer Articulation and Academic Advising report that a significant number of transfer students come to Appalachian each year with 3 or 7 semester hours of science credit because many other institutions in North Carolina and beyond offer 3 semester hour science courses in their general education curricula. Some of the science departments at Appalachian have been able to offer some of these transfer students 1 semester hour independent study laboratory experiences, but this poses a resource challenge for these departments. In cases where the science departments at Appalachian have been unable to offer students 1 semester hour independent study lab experiences, the students have had to take an additional 4 semester hour science course at Appalachian to fulfill the Science Inquiry requirement, bringing them to a total of 11 semester hours in science.

These additional hours will become increasingly problematic for the institution as the UNC system moves to a performance-based funding model with transfer graduation rates as one of the performance metrics. These additional hours also prove problematic for transfer students who face the increased likelihood of incurring additional expenses due to a tuition surcharge, which was increased in 2010 from 25% to 50%. Changing the Science Literacy requirement to 7-8 semester hours would help these transfer students while still enabling other students to take two 4 semester hour science courses with laboratory experiences at Appalachian. It should be noted that the recommended change does not prevent departments from offering an 8 semester hour science requirement as the committee recommendation is for 7-8 semester hours.

Changes to the Designations

The GEA recommends that the University retain the requirement for 3 semester hours each of Fine Arts, Historical Studies, and Literary Studies and that students be required to fulfill these designation requirements within their Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience and/or their Liberal Studies Experience coursework. Because the organizational layer of the Perspectives would be removed and the new Liberal Studies Experience component would be so flexible, students should no longer find it challenging to fit designation courses into their academic plans. By retaining these designation requirements, we could ensure that students will receive a breadth of disciplinary content in their liberal education and that the University will remain in compliance with SACS standard 2.7.3. by requiring

coursework in the areas of humanities/fine arts (Literary Studies and Fine Arts designations) and social/behavioral sciences (Historical Studies designation).

Changes to Quantitative Literacy

The GEA recommends that Quantitative Literacy retain its current structure with one adjustment—that it be changed from a 4 semester hour requirement to a 3-4 semester hour requirement. This adjustment would make a significant difference to transfer students who receive transfer credit for 3 semester hour quantitative literacy courses from other institutions. The Department of Mathematical Sciences has indicated that it does not have the resources to offer 1 semester hour courses to accommodate these students. Therefore, the students must take an additional 3-4 semester hour Quantitative Literacy course at Appalachian to fulfill the Quantitative Literacy requirement, bringing them to a total of 6-7 semester hours in Quantitative Literacy. These additional hours will become increasingly problematic for the institution as the UNC system moves to a performance-based funding model with transfer graduation rates as one of the performance metrics. These additional hours also prove problematic for transfer students who face the increased likelihood of incurring additional expenses due to a tuition surcharge, as mentioned in relation to the sciences, above. The Offices of Transfer Articulation and Academic Advising report that a high percentage of our transfer students find themselves in this situation each year because many other institutions in North Carolina and beyond offer 3 semester hour mathematics courses.

Changes to First Year Seminar

The GEA recommends that First Year Seminar remain a 3 semester hour requirement for all students except those transfer students who come in with 30 semester hours at least one year out of high school. (In fall 2011, AP&P passed a policy that exempts these students from FYS, effective fall 2012.) Retention data suggest that First Year Seminar is helping increase freshman-to-sophomore retention rates, especially in populations that are statistically at a higher-than-average risk of not returning. Student evaluations and assessment data also suggest that First Year Seminar helps students develop essential academic skills. For these reasons, the GEA recommends that the course continue to be required for non-transfer students.

Changes to other components of the curriculum

The GEA recommends that First Year Writing, Second Year Writing, Wellness Literacy, Junior Writing in the Discipline, and Senior Capstone retain their current structures. The GEA did not encounter evidence that suggested changes to these components would significantly impact the six areas of concern. We do recommend that an increased emphasis be placed on the need for Senior Capstone experiences to address the four goals of the General Education Program, especially Communicating Effectively.

The committee also recommends that the campus retain the current policy that each student can only count 9 semester hours in the major prefix toward General

Education requirements and that such “double-dip” courses be allowed in the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience, Liberal Studies Experience, Science Literacy, Quantitative Literacy, and Wellness Literacy components.

2. Changes to First Year Seminar policies and procedures

The GEA generally agreed that, even though some of the problems with First Year Seminar (FYS) as identified by the GERTF and the campus community survey still exist (specifically, the large percentage of sections taught by non-tenure track faculty, the significant questions regarding academic integrity, and the concerns regarding resources allocated), FYS provides significant benefits (as described above) and should be kept in the Gen Ed Curriculum. Thus, we focused on understanding the nature of the stated problems and ways they might be addressed.

The Gen Ed Office reports that one of the most significant challenges faced by First Year Seminar (FYS) is recruiting tenured and tenure-track (T/TT) faculty to teach the course. It is desirable to have more T/TT faculty teaching FYS for several reasons: because T/TT faculty have a departmental home and teach other courses in the General Education, major, and minor curricula, they are well-situated to help students make connections between the different units of the university and components of their education; because T/TT faculty are familiar with the academic skills students need to succeed in upper-level courses, they can prioritize the development of those skills in FYS; in recent decades, the responsibility of helping first year students adjust to and understand college has shifted increasingly from faculty to student development professionals, which has resulted in the faculty being increasingly disconnected from the experiences and perspectives of first year students--teaching FYS is a way to reestablish those connections; and, finally, having senior faculty teach FYS sends the students the message that the university values the academic skills they are learning in the course and values their educational development.

The largest obstacle to recruitment of T/TT faculty seems to be the lack of direct compensation for the faculty members' home departments. Before the General Education Program was implemented, Academic Affairs allotted colleges new faculty lines in exchange for providing faculty to teach courses in University College programs, including First Year Seminar (the formula provided a lecturer position for every eight sections taught). While that system initially provided incentives, departments that did not receive a line at that time receive no financial compensation if they release a faculty member to teach a FYS section now.

In order to remedy this situation, the GEA recommends that Academic Affairs modify this funding policy. Three possible modifications include:

- 1) Allocate new tenure-track lines to specific departments in exchange for a binding agreement that the department will provide tenured and tenure-track faculty to teach six sections of First Year Seminar each year in perpetuity.
- 2) For tenured and tenure-track faculty who teach FYS, provide 100% of backfill money directly to the department, rather than the college. If this is not feasible, departments should at least receive enough backfill money to pay a replacement instructor at the terminally-degreed adjunct rate.
- 3) Provide overload pay to tenured and tenure-track faculty who wish to teach FYS in addition to their departmentally-assigned teaching duties.

Another challenge FYS faces is lack of continuity between FYS sections in the areas of workload and academic rigor. The Gen Ed Office reports that the Faculty Coordinator of First Year Seminar and Learning Support Specialist for General Education have taken many steps to improve FYS faculty development in the past year in an attempt to address these issues. Some faculty have participated in and benefited from these faculty development activities and others have not.

The GEA recommends that the General Education Office attempt to increase FYS faculty participation in these activities by paying each FYS faculty member a small, annual stipend in exchange for completing a designated number of hours of faculty development activities over the course of the year.

3. Changes to General Education administration and the Gen Ed course approval process

Various constituencies across campus expressed concern that the current process for populating Faculty Coordinating Committees (FCCs) and General Education Council does not ensure college representation proportional to each college's participation in the General Education Curriculum. The GEA therefore recommends the following two changes to how these committees are constituted.

The GEA recommends that each FCC should include only members whose home colleges have courses within the curricular component covered by that FCC and that, as far as possible, the number of members each college provides be proportional to the number of seats it offers in that component. For example, because all courses currently included in Science Inquiry are offered by the College of Arts and Sciences, all five members of the proposed Science Literacy FCC would be Arts and Sciences faculty, and because three different colleges currently offer courses in Wellness Literacy (Health Sciences, Fine and Applied Arts, and Education), each of those three colleges would provide one member for the three-person Wellness Literacy FCC. Members on all FCCs would continue to serve staggered three-year terms. Each year the distribution of courses in each component of the Gen Ed curriculum would be reevaluated by the General Education Office to determine which college(s)

should have representation on which FCCs, and Faculty Senate would assign the vacant seats to specific colleges accordingly.

New FCCs would need to be formed for the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience and Liberal Studies Experience (while the Aesthetic Perspective, Historical and Social Perspective, and Local to Global Perspective FCCs would be dissolved). Because the Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience and Liberal Studies Experience would each include courses from several different colleges, we recommend that these FCCs each include five members selected from the faculty of each college that participates in the component. We recommend that the Wellness Literacy, Quantitative Literacy, Historical Studies, Literary Studies, and Fine Arts FCCs continue to have three members, the First Year Seminar FCC continue to have four members, including the Faculty Coordinator of First Year Seminar as Chair, and the Science Literacy FCC have five members.

The GEA also recommends an alteration to the composition of the General Education Council. Because the FCCs are subcommittees of the General Education Council, the GEA thinks that it is essential to continue having the chair of each FCC sit on the General Education Council as a voting member. It is also more logistically sustainable to have the FCCs elect these chairs rather than have Faculty Senate appoint them as was suggested by one respondent to the campus survey; however, this process of electing chairs from the FCC membership does not ensure that all colleges will have a voting faculty member on the General Education Council. For this reason, the GEA recommends that one at-large member from each college be added to the General Education Council's voting membership.

In this revised configuration, voting members of the General Education Council would include the Director of General Education (serving as Chair of the Council); the Faculty Coordinator of First Year Seminar; the Chairs of the Quantitative Literacy, Wellness Literacy, Science Literacy, Fine Arts Designation, Literary Studies Designation, Historical Studies Designation, Appalachian Integrative Learning Experience, and Liberal Studies Experience FCCs; the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum; a library representative; two student representatives; and one at large member from each degree granting College. Nonvoting liaisons would continue as is (liaisons from Advising, the Registrar's Office, Academic Affairs, and Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning).

In keeping with existing faculty governance procedures, Faculty Senate would appoint all FCC members and the at-large members of the General Education Council.

The GERTF and some survey respondents expressed concern about the course approval process. However, the majority of the GEA didn't see a need for change in this area, primarily because the General Education Council and Office of General Education have revised the course proposal forms and streamlined the proposal submission process over the past two years based upon faculty feedback.

Other Recommendations:

For greater likelihood of success of the Gen Ed model, the GEA makes the following additional recommendations.

- 1) That faculty participation in Gen Ed be recognized in the Promotion & Tenure and annual review processes;
- 2) That the Gen Ed Council continue working on assuring that the Gen Ed Learning Goals are being addressed and met.

Timeline for Approval and Implementation

The GEA recommends the following timeline for implementation of the above-recommended changes to the curriculum and administration of the General Education Program. We recommend that during the 2012-2013 academic year, the curricular changes go through an approval process and, pending approval, FCCs be formed for the Appalachian Integrated Learning Experience and Liberal Studies Experience. The membership of the remaining FCCs should also be adjusted as necessary in 2012-13 to proportionally represent the colleges participating in each component. We also recommend that, in summer 2013, grants be offered to faculty who wish to develop new themes or modify existing themes to propose for inclusion in the Appalachian Integrated Learning Experience. We further recommend that, in 2013-2014, faculty submit proposals for themes & General Education courses to the FCCs and General Education Council for consideration. Finally, we recommend that the revised curriculum be implemented starting in fall 2014.