Michigan Transfer Agreement and University of Michigan-Flint General Education

Background

In 2013 the University of Michigan-Flint (UMF) became a signatory – along with all Michigan public four year universities and community colleges - to the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA). The MTA is intended to implement 2012 legislation to improve transferability of core college courses among Michigan colleges and universities. In late April 2014 the UMF Faculty Council directed the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) to work with the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies to study questions of implementation of the MTA, working with instructional units as appropriate, because the MTA is related to the UMF General Education (GE) programs.

The MTA provides for 30 credit hours of transfer credit (accepted as a “block”) for students certified by the “sending” institution (generally a community college) as having completed the following courses:

- One course in English Composition
- A second course in English Composition or one course in Communications
- One course in Mathematics (from one of three pathways)
- Two courses in Social Sciences (from two disciplines)
- Two courses in Humanities and Fine Arts (from two disciplines and excluding studio and performance classes)
- Two courses in Natural Sciences including one with laboratory experience (from two disciplines)

Issues in Reconciling the MTA and UMF GE

The following issues with integrating the MTA with the UMF GE programs have been identified:

Specific GE Course Requirements

1. The MTA English Composition and Communications components (the first two bullet points above) can be fulfilled with the equivalent of UMF ENG 111 and a Communications courses. So it can be fulfilled without the equivalent of UMF ENG 112, English Composition, which is a required component of the UMF GE programs.

2. The MTA identifies three “pathways” to fulfilling the Mathematics component: College Algebra, Statistics, and Quantitative Reasoning. Under the MTA, courses equivalent to UMF MTH 111, College Algebra, would fulfill the College Algebra pathway to the Mathematics component. UMF MTH 111 does not fulfill the Finance and Quantitative Literacy component of the UMF GE programs.
3. The MTA combines Humanities and Fine Arts into one component and requires two total courses (approximately six credit hours). The UMF GE program requires six Humanities credit hours and three Fine Arts credit hours). So an “MTA student” could arrive at UMF with several combinations of courses in these areas that do not coincide with the UMF GE requirements (for example, he/she could have completed six Fine Arts credits to fulfill this MTA component).

4. The exclusion of performance and studio courses within the MTA does not align with the Fine Arts component of the UMF GE program.

Other Specific Inconsistencies between the MTA and UMF GE Requirements

1. There are inconsistencies between categorization of courses within GE Categories and MTA distribution areas.

2. A student can fulfill a specific MTA component with fewer (or possibly more) credit hours than required under UMF GE requirements. Specifically, courses with at least two credit hours can be included in the 30 transferred credit hours, where all UMF GE components are based on courses with at least three credit hours. (Note: this does not reduce the 30-hour minimum required to qualify for MTA transfer status.)

3. There is no First Year Experience component of the MTA. However, no students transferring to UMF with 30 hours need to complete a First Year Experience course so the MTA does not create an additional inconsistency in this regard.

Concern Regarding Faculty Control of the Curriculum

The MTA inherently calls for “sending” institutions (generally community colleges) to identify the courses that meet the MTA course categories. Consequently, to the extent that UMF accepts the MTA, UMF Faculties are deferring to “sending” institutions decisions regarding courses that meet UMF GE requirements for MTA transfer students.

Negative Impacts of “Fully” Accepting and of Not “Fully” Accepting the MTA

Accepting the 30 credit hours transferred to UMF by an “MTA student” as fulfilling 30 GE credit hours even if the courses do exactly match compromises the UMF GE programs. In the worst case, which is quite unlikely, something like the following could occur for a specific student:

- The student does not complete ENG 112 or its equivalent and completes a communication course in its place
- The student fulfills the UMF Finance and Quantitative Literacy Requirement with the equivalent of MTH 111 at a community college
• The student ends up with a mix of nine hours in Humanities and Fine Arts that is different than the six Humanities and three Fine Arts credit hours called for under UMF GE (the combined total would not be compromised).
• A UMF GE requirement could be filled with a two-credit-hour course rather than a three-credit-hour course (the total GE credit hours would not be compromised).
• There could be some course categorization differences that could compromise achieving the UMF category total for a certain GE category, with an offsetting excess in another category.

It also could be argued that “full acceptance” of the MTA without caveat results in differing GE requirements between “MTA students” at UMF and other UMF students, to some degree.

Conversely, not accepting the 30 credit hours transferred to UMF by an “MTA student” as fulfilling 30 GE credit hours even if the courses do match exactly has downsides also. These drawbacks generally relate to transfer students and potential transfer students to UMF, State Legislators, and some other UMF external stakeholders. Essentially, lack of “full acceptance” will make transferability of “MTA Student” courses to UMF less efficient and thus less appealing than to a university that does fully accept the MTA. As a result, lack of “full acceptance” of the MTA without caveat likely will create or add to the perception that UMF policies are unnecessarily burdensome and not responsive to transfer students.

Mitigating Actions

Should UMF “fully accept” without caveat the MTA, there are actions that can be taken to mitigate detrimental aspects of the MTA without violating its letter or spirit.

It appears that the absence of an ENG 112 GE requirement can be addressed by including an admission or graduation requirement (to complete ENG 112) at either the degree, program, or School/College level.

Each program could also review its admission and/or graduation requirements for Math and Finance and Quantitative Literacy and specify its requirements, recognizing that the equivalent of MTH 111, taken at a community college, would fulfill the Finance and Quantitative Literacy GE requirement. The same is true for any shortcomings in necessary courses resulting from the different categorizations between the MTA and UMF GE Program.

Perhaps most importantly, UMF would need to aggressively work to influence and manage decisions at our “feeder” community colleges regarding the courses that are determined to be “MTA desirable” and that students who are expected to transfer to UMF under the MTA will take. This would involve significant UMF institutional commitment to engagement with community colleges on these matters, spearheaded by UMF Admissions but also including faculty and administrators throughout each UMF academic unit and Academic Affairs.
Recommendations

It is well established that the Faculty of each academic unit is responsible for establishing the general education requirements for its students. Establishment of the MTA requires each UMF Faculty to make a decision with respect to how to integrate the MTA into the Unit’s GE program. GECC recommends that the following proposed motion – modified as appropriate - be voted on by the Governing Faculty of each academic unit:

**Proposed Motion:** The (Academic Unit) Faculty specifies that transfer in of 30 credit hours (as a “block”) with MTA Certification fulfils the following components of the (Academic Unit) General Education requirements:

- English Composition
- Social Sciences
- Humanities
- Finance and Quantitative Literacy
- Natural Science with Laboratory
- First Year Experience

If the above motion is passed, the GECC also recommends that the Governing Faculty of the Academic Unit:

- Review program admission and graduation requirements to determine necessary modifications based on provisions of the MTA (such as the English 112 or Math components).
- Take necessary actions through UMF Admissions and otherwise to ensure that recommended and required courses for its degree programs are effectively communicated to community college partners, primary “feeder” schools, etc.