Overview of Findings in the General Education Review

Preface:

The GECC thanks the General Education Review ad hoc committee for their hard work and recommendations. This document is an overview of the General Education review and is presented for discussion purposes.

Background and Purpose

The review primarily focused on the size of the GE program and its ability to be assessed and reviewed. Over the years, the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) has noted the following issues and concerns:

- In terms of the number of courses, the GE program has greatly increased in size since the program revision.
- Some of the GE designation definitions are rather vague.
- Many of the learning outcomes are vague and not measurable.
- The Committee did not find measurement rubrics for learning outcomes 8 and 9.
- The high turnover rate of faculty on the GECC, combined with unclear and subjective interpretations of the definitions for GE designations and learning outcomes, resulted in a highly inconsistent application of accepting GE courses.
- Although learning outcomes were assessed on a rotational basis since 2009-2010, the process of continuous improvement is not clearly documented nor implemented. Furthermore, not all learning outcomes have been assessed.

The Committee was asked to look primarily at two issues: the proliferation of general education courses and the assessment process. The number of GE courses increased from around 250 in 2009 to over 530 (as listed in the catalog) by 2017, arising from several factors (refer to full report for details).

Although assessment of learning outcomes has occurred, several issues remain:

- The data was not effectively used to continuously improve the program or its learning outcomes.
- The quality of the data collected. Even after approximately 10 years, GELOs 8 and 9 still do not have rubrics to measure them.
- Participation in the assessment process. Although the rate of use of TK20 remains relatively good, it has been declining over the past several years.

Current Status of the GE Program

The Committee obtained and reviewed two documents regarding the current status of the Gen Ed program. The first document is entitled “Relative Contribution of Top 10 Credit Hours by
GEDD” (general education designation description). This report identifies the top 10 courses for each GE designation for the academic years 2010-11 through 2016-17. (See Appendix A1).

The Committee identified the following patterns:
1. A majority of the credit hours are being taught by a relatively small number of courses. For every GE designation, over 50% of the credit hours are taken in the top 10 courses.
2. For certain GE designations, the number of classes listed in the schedule has remained relatively low.
3. For some designations, there are typically high numbers of unique courses listed every year.
4. Across all designations, significant numbers of courses were listed that produced no credit hours for a given year.
5. Even as more courses are added to the GE program, the dominant courses have consistently maintained high percentages in their credit hour production.
6. A few courses cover a very high (relative) percentage of credit hours. For 8 of the 10 designations, positions 1 and 2 of the top 10 courses cover greater than 10% of the total credit hours.
7. Certain designations have dropped significantly in credit hour production since 2011, yet they continue to have a high number of courses listed on the yearly schedules.

The second document is entitled, “General Education Analysis”, prepared by Fawn Skarsten, Director of Institutional Analysis. This document contains information about the Gen Ed courses offered between fall 2011 and Spring 2017. (See Appendix B)

The Committee identified the following patterns:
1. For all GE designations, more course sections are offered than are actually sufficiently enrolled.
2. Upper level (300 and 400 level) courses with sufficient enrollment during the period represent 27% of Gen Ed courses offered. Of this amount, 21% are capstone courses.
3. Overall, 35% of Gen Ed courses require pre-requisites (excluding Capstone courses).
4. Regarding GE assessment, the report identifies the following:
   a. Before rubrics were developed and before the TK 20 system was implemented, learning outcomes 1, 2, and 5 were assessed.
   b. The rotation continued as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 and 10</td>
<td>2013-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 and 4</td>
<td>2014-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 and 12</td>
<td>2015-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 and 11</td>
<td>2016-17</td>
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c. Learning outcomes 6, 8 and 9 have yet to be assessed. Currently, no rubrics exist for learning outcomes 8 and 9.
 d. The volume of assessments (i.e., faculty participation) has declined every year since Fall 2013.

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1 The Committee could not determine the authors of this report and discovered that it apparently contains some factual errors. Therefore, we used WebFocus and similar tools to re-generate (and supplement) the data for use in the appendix as included.
e. Assessment data varies not only by learning outcome but also by GE designations. Only 5 of the 9 GE designations had assessments for all 8 learning outcomes assessed during the 2013-17 period.

General Principles of GE Program

Although the goal of integrated GE is widely accepted, the Committee notes some additional issues increasing the proliferation of courses.

- First, some GE courses require a prerequisite course. Some prerequisites are necessary, for example, basic math or English, but when a course requires another course in the same discipline the higher-level course should not be a GE course.
- Second, the original intent was to integrate GE throughout the curriculum, at all course levels (100, 200, 300, 400). This intention led to both a proliferation of courses and to students taking more GE in just a few disciplines rather than receiving broad disciplinary exposure. Additionally, the professional schools (SOM, SON, SHPS) prefer to have students complete their GE requirements in their first two years of coursework, at the 100 and 200 level, because their upper level coursework fills their time at the 300 and 400 level.
- Third, by definition, GE courses should be of interest to non-majors.
- Fourth, departments or prefixes could limit the number of GE courses.
- Fifth, if the GE learning outcomes (GELOs) are to be considered of equal importance, each one needs to be equally covered within the entire GE program, in terms of both the curriculum and the assessment process.

To this end, we recommend the following requirements/restrictions:

1. No general education courses should have pre-requisites except for basic skill courses (e.g., Math 090 or English 111).
2. With the exception of capstone courses, no general education course should have an upper division number (300, 400) unless the department/discipline has no 100 or 200 level courses.
3. General education courses must be of interest to non-majors as well as majors. The courses should be broad enough to attract non-majors and not be so discipline specific that non-majors cannot succeed in the course.
4. Departments (or prefixes) should be limited to a maximum of two distribution area attributes.
5. GELOs need to be spread across courses in a more equitable distribution so that some are not avoided, since no weight distribution currently exists for the GELOs. All GELOs are currently of equal importance.

Designation Descriptions/Definitions

2 Naturally, all these suggestions, if adopted, should have an appeal process. The appeal process applies to individual courses as well as a series of courses. Some disciplines offer courses that embody three or more of the designations. If a department wished to offer GE courses in all three areas, they could apply for an override from GECC, explaining how they would meet all three designations. Similarly, there may be departments who only offer upper division courses – there could be corresponding overrides in that case.
One of the issues noted in the document review is that the current GE designation descriptions/definitions are rather vague. The Committee felt the Natural Sciences description/definition was very clear and made a compelling case for inclusion in GE. The Committee reviewed and discussed each designation description, using the Natural Sciences description as a template.

**Assessment Review**

For the past five years, faculty participation in the GE assessment process has declined significantly. Accordingly, the Committee examined the current set of General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) rubrics. The review process included the following activities:

1. Focused on what types of skills and attributes our general education program seeks to develop in our students. To this end
   a. Outcomes were reviewed for an ability to be assessed
   b. Goals, potential indicators, and rubrics were rewritten to reflect accessibility and clarity
   c. Rubrics were condensed into fewer indicators and levels for easier and clearer use
2. Obtained the value rubrics from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and used the ones similar to our learning goals as a source of reference.
3. Invited members from other schools and departments not represented on the Committee to help develop some of the rubrics.
4. Tried to retain the essence of the original learning outcomes except for GELO’s 8 and 9. These learning outcomes dealt with specific discipline knowledge, currently have no rubrics, and have never been assessed.

The Committee recommends the following actions for GE assessment:

1. Adopt the recommended/revised definitions, indicators, and rubrics. Reduce the number of GELOs from 12 to 10, dropping current GELOs 8 and 9.
2. For a course to maintain its GE designation, it must be assessed at a minimum of once per every 3 years.
3. The assessment of all of the GELOs need to be performed more frequently than the current six year rotation.
4. Implement a GE program review on a regular schedule, for example every six years.

**Renewal Process for General Education Courses**

Each year, GECC will generate a list of the courses that have reached the three-year period on their general education designation. GECC will provide a short form to department chairs to complete. It is expected that regularly offered, assessed, and improved courses that achieve the ends of their distribution description would be renewed. The process should also make sure the GE courses in the various programs are regularly offered.