VISION

General Education has long been recognized as a critical component of Penn State’s mission of research, teaching and service. Its central role in shaping the lives of our undergraduates was reiterated in the 2009-10 Strategic Plan, which called for a comprehensive review and re-evaluation of the goals and requirements of General Education at Penn State. At a national level, higher education faces the pressures of increasing tuition and decreasing public funding, and the potential for transformation by newly emerging technologies. Responding to these challenges as opportunities, we seek to make substantive changes to our undergraduate curricula that will elevate the academic quality of a Penn State education. With the national call for accountability and affordability in higher education, and the need to ensure that credit hours and tuition dollars fulfill the promised goals of an undergraduate degree, we must ensure that our General Education requirements are not only worthy of the significant place they occupy in the curriculum, but that they also prepare Penn State graduates to thrive in increasingly competitive global contexts.

We envision a distinctive, Penn State General Education curriculum that embraces intellectual inquiry, diversity, and excellence, and as we draft a proposal for the Faculty Senate’s consideration we seek robust constructive engagement with Senators and other stakeholders.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

During the 2012-13 Academic Year, the President, the Provost, and the Chair of University Faculty Senate invited a study group of faculty and administrators to engage in a conversation on General Education. Included in their deliberations were discussions of observations drawn from a survey of the General Education landscape in the U.S., the program currently in place at Penn State, and the many principles and challenges to be considered in making changes to our current General Education program. On behalf of the study group, Jeremy Cohen, Associate Vice President and Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, presented a report during a forensic session to the University Faculty Senate on October 16, 2012.

To advance the process of revisiting and potentially revising General Education at Penn State, the Chair Elect of the University Faculty Senate and the Interim Provost and Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education formed a General Education Planning and Oversight Task Force in March 2013. The Task Force was formally charged in May, 2013 with:

1. Developing the process for revisiting and revising General Education
2. Creating and managing a timeline with milestones for developing and implementing the process
3. Determining subcommittees to be charged with addressing various components of the process
4. Identifying the many stakeholders in General Education and ensuring their consultation
5. Providing ongoing oversight of the process, including oversight of the subcommittees
6. Making specific recommendations to the University Faculty Senate

The University’s leadership selected Task Force members based on the members’ deep understanding of undergraduate education and General Education. The Task Force consists of 20 members, including two administrators from Old Main, five unit administrators, and faculty members drawn from many of the University’s academic units. A majority of the Task Force members have Senate ties. The Task Force is co-chaired by Robert Shannon, Associate Professor of Agricultural Engineering, Faculty Senate Council Member and Member of the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education; and Mary Beth Williams, Professor of Chemistry and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education in the Eberly College of Science.

The Task Force was convened in May 2013 and has met biweekly throughout the summer, including a full-day retreat in August. That level of commitment and the membership will continue throughout the work of the Task Force and its subcommittees, which is projected to take at least three academic years.

The following report provides information on the work of the Task Force to date, including an overview of discussions regarding the main tenets of a new General Education program, subcommittee charges and composition, and our timeline.

THE MAIN TENETS OF GENERAL EDUCATION

Our guiding principle in revising General Education is to enable students to acquire the skills, knowledge, and experiences for living and working in interconnected and globalized contexts, so they can contribute to making life better for others, themselves, and the larger world.

While we have worked hard over the last several months toward the goal of a revision of General Education at Penn State, there is still much work to be done. The directions stated herein represent the current thinking of the Task Force but are not final. A large undertaking such as this requires the involvement of all stakeholders to be successful.

Building on the efforts of the 2012-13 study group, the Task Force affirms the value of a University-wide General Education program. We have reached consensus around a revised General Education program that:

- Is distinctive and capitalizes on Penn State’s research and educational strengths as a world-class public research institution with an extensive variety of academic opportunities
- Reflects the strengths of our faculty and the needs of our students at all Penn State locations
- Is flexible and allows for multiple pathways for all student populations
Engages students in rigorous and intellectually challenging learning by spanning and complementing the entire undergraduate curricular experience, including upper division courses
Prepares students to live and work in our diverse global society
Contains thematic clusters of courses (perhaps 9-12 credits) that together address an important topic from a variety of disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives
Includes exploration courses (perhaps 9 - 12 credits) in various knowledge domains to ensure flexibility for students to explore topics beyond their chosen theme

There are a number of additional questions that we need to explore and around which we will solicit broad input from the Senate and University community. Remaining issues to be discussed include: a possible reduction in the total number of required General Education credits; the structure of the General Education curriculum and whether, or how, it will continue to require the traditional skills and knowledge domains; the number and definition of themes and exploration credits; the number and integration of upper level courses in the General Education curriculum; the role of first year seminars; and the possible creation of a General Education Faculty.

SUBCOMMITTEES

The following seven subcommittees will be charged during the fall 2013 semester to concentrate on various aspects of the work of the Task Force. Each subcommittee will include members of the Task Force together with members from a broad constituency of the University. Subcommittee leadership and membership will reflect the diversity of campuses and fields of inquiry across Penn State. These subcommittees will report to the Task Force, which will be responsible for proposing the revised General Education curriculum to the University Faculty Senate.

- Themes and Explorations
- Faculty and Staff
- Student Opportunities and Constraints
- Assessment
- Budget
- Communications and Transparency
- Logistics and Implementation

A copy of each subcommittee’s charge is attached to this report.

In pursuing its charge, the General Education Task Force is coordinating closely with the Joint Diversity Awareness Taskforce (JDATF) and the University-wide Council on Engaged Scholarship (COES). In recognition of the General Education Task Force’s strong commitment to diversity and inclusion in the undergraduate curriculum and General Education, and in response to a request from the JDATF, the subcommittee charges prominently include items addressing diversity and inclusion at Penn State. Similarly, the General Education Task Force is giving considerable attention to engaged scholarship.
TIMELINE

The task force timeline focuses on implementation of a new General Education program for first-year students entering the University in Fall 2016. This deadline will allow the full consultation across all units of the University, and align with the launch of the new student information and classroom scheduling systems. Our plan is as follows:

Fall 2013
- Complete subcommittee assignments and begin subcommittee work, including consultation and communication across all campuses
- Provide the University Faculty Senate with an initial informational report (October 22)

Spring 2014 – Fall 2014 (if needed)
- Conduct a forensic session with the University Faculty Senate
- Draft a legislative report to the University Faculty Senate, with input from appropriate Senate Committees, including the Senate Committees on Undergraduate Education and Curricular Affairs. This report will include an impact study with a cost estimate.

Fall 2014
- Present the legislative report to the University Faculty Senate
- Present a Task Force update to the President, Provost, Senate Chair, and the Board of Trustees; post the update on the Senate website for the University community’s information

Spring 2015 – Fall 2015
- Unit implementation – Begin course change/add proposals (particularly 100- and 200-level courses), coordinated with the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs
- Classroom scheduling for Fall 2016
- Update the University Bulletin related to General Education curriculum and requirements
- Continue with course change/add proposals at the unit level

Spring – Summer 2016
- Begin new student orientation and scheduling, including the new General Education curriculum, for the incoming freshman class

Summer - Fall 2016
- Phase I implementation of the new General Education curriculum: Offering of new/revised General Education courses to first-year students

Spring - Fall 2017
- Phase II implementation: Offering of new interdisciplinary themes
OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT

In addition to the broad-based subcommittee membership, we will be seeking input from the entire University Faculty Senate during the discussion of this informational report and again during a Forensic Session in Spring 2014, when we will focus on soliciting Senate feedback on the outline and direction of a proposed legislative report. Presentations, town hall meetings, subcommittee-sponsored focus groups, and other public events will also take place throughout the coming year to gather important contributions from across the University system. All public events will be publicized as broadly as possible. Reports and other resources, including an FAQ page, will be collected on a Task Force webpage on the University Faculty Senate’s site. Members of the University Faculty Senate are asked to help spread the word about these opportunities and to encourage the participation of the members of the units they represent. Questions and comments can be directed at any time to the co-chairs, Robert Shannon (rds13@psu.edu) and Mary Beth Williams (mew17@psu.edu), or to any other member of the task force.

GENERAL EDUCATION PLANNING AND OVERSIGHT TASK FORCE

Mark Brennan, Professor and UNESCO Chair in Rural Community, Leadership and Youth Development; College of Agricultural Sciences (Elected Senator)
Caroline Eckhardt, Professor of Comparative Literature and English; Director, School of Languages and Literatures; College of the Liberal Arts (Elected Senator; Senate Council Member; Senate Liaison to the Graduate Council)
Tanya Furman, Professor of Geosciences; College of Earth and Mineral Sciences; Associate Vice President and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education
Betty Harper, Senior Planning and Research Associate, Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment
Terry Harrison, Earl P. Strong Executive Education Professor of Business and Professor of Supply Chain and Information Systems; Smeal College of Business (Elected Senator, Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Outreach)
Krishna Jayakar, Associate Professor of Communications; College of Communications (Elected Senator)
James Kasting, Evan Pugh Professor of Geosciences; College of Earth and Mineral Sciences
Jonna Kulikowich, Professor of Education; College of Education (Senate Chair-Elect)
Andrew Lau, Associate Professor of Engineering; College of Engineering
Marie Lindhorst, Advising Program Coordinator; Penn State World Campus
Christopher Long, Professor of Philosophy and Classics; Associate Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Education; College of the Liberal Arts (Elected Senator; Member of the Committee on Committees and Rules)
Paula Milone-Nuzzo, Professor and Dean; Penn State College of Nursing
Aldo Morales, Professor of Electrical Engineering; Penn State Harrisburg (Elected Senator; Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Educational Equity and Campus Environment)
Keith Shapiro, Associate Professor of Art; College of Arts and Architecture (Elected Senator)
Robert Shannon, Co-chair, Associate Professor of Agricultural Engineering; College of Agricultural Sciences (Elected Senator; Senate Council Member; Member of the Committee on Undergraduate Education)
Appendix C
10/22/13

Jane Sutton, Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences, Penn State York (Elected Senator)
Ann Taylor, Senior Lecturer; College of Earth and Mineral Sciences; Director, John A. Dutton e-Education Institute (Elected Senator; Senate Council Member)
Mary Beth Williams, Co-chair, Professor of Chemistry; Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education; Eberly College of Science
Kenneth Womack, Professor of English; Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Penn State Altoona
Careen Yarnal, Associate Professor of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management; College of Health and Human Development (Elected Senator)
Appendix

GENERAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE
Subcommittees and Charges

One charge of the General Education Planning and Oversight Task Force (GETF) is to “Determine subcommittees to be charged with addressing various components of the process.” The GETF has identified seven subcommittees: Themes, Faculty, Logistics, Communication and Transparency, Budget, Student Opportunities and Constraints, and Assessment. This document briefly describes each of these subcommittees and presents their charges.

Two other charges given to the GETF are to “Provide ongoing oversight of the process, including oversight of the subcommittees” and “synthesize the products of the subcommittees and make final decisions on the ultimate face of general education at Penn State.” To meet these charges, the subcommittees described here will report regularly to the GETF, and the parent committee will ultimately use the information and recommendations from the subcommittees to determine the nature and structure of the General Education recommendations forwarded to the University Faculty Senate.

Note that many of the following charges will require coordination among the various General Education subcommittees. Identifying areas of overlap among the subcommittees and coordinating the subcommittee interactions are essential elements and should take place early in the process.

Themes and Explorations Subcommittee
Co-Chairs: Caroline Eckhardt; Robin Bower; Rob Crane

Charge

The Themes and Explorations Subcommittee will develop the foundations of the themes and explorations components of General Education to the GETF and, should these components become part of a revised General Education, will establish the criteria for implementation. Specific responsibilities for the Themes and Explorations Subcommittee are to:

- Define what a General Education theme is, determine the goals and objectives of general education themes, justify the reasons for including themes in Penn State General Education, and provide examples of potential themes.
- Appraise the potential impact of themes on existing General Education courses, on majors, on minors, on Commonwealth campuses, on transfers between campuses, and on the Registrar’s Office and LionPATH.
- Ascertain ways to assess the impact of themes on student outcomes.
- Determine the criteria and process for establishing and implementing themes.
Faculty Subcommittee
Co-Chairs: Krishna Jayakar; Jane Sutton

Charge

The Faculty Subcommittee will examine and report to the GETF on aspects of General Education curriculum revision that pertain to faculty and staff with instructional responsibilities, and especially to the feasibility of establishing a General Education Faculty. Specific responsibilities for the Faculty and Staff Subcommittee are to:

- Define what a General Education Faculty is, determine the goals and objectives of such a faculty, justify the reasons for establishing this faculty, and provide examples of the value added to student outcomes and to the institution by this faculty.

- Examine the advantages and disadvantages of a formal institutional structure for undergraduate education, including administrative responsibility for General Education Faculty and impacts on home unit administration, as well as the need for a physical home for General Education administration, meeting space, support staff, and other infrastructure.

- Evaluate the degree of curricular autonomy and oversight that might be granted to General Education Faculty in formulating and managing the General Education curriculum.

- Determine the criteria for eligibility in a General Education Faculty and the responsibilities of individual faculty members to a General Education Faculty and to their home units.

- Appraise the impact of membership in a General Education Faculty on promotion, tenure, and salaries, and recommend changes to HR-23 Promotion and Tenure Procedures and Regulations and to associated administrative guidelines that would support and protect General Education Faculty members.

- Examine potential differential impacts on University Park, Commonwealth Campus, and World Campus faculty resulting from General Education reform, focusing especially on workload, promotion and tenure, hiring, mentoring, and evaluating fixed-term and temporary faculty, and other impacts the Subcommittee may identify.

- Explore opportunities to enhance the intercultural competence of General Education Faculty, thereby fostering a diverse and inclusive environment in General Education, and enabling the University to be more effective in recruiting and retaining students from underrepresented groups.
Logistics Subcommittee
Co-Chairs: Martha Aynardi, Mike Dooris, Paula Milone-Nuzzo

Charge

The Logistics Subcommittee will focus on making the implementation of the revised General Education plan as smooth as possible. To accomplish this goal, the responsibilities of the subcommittee are to:

- Identify the key constituent groups that will be partners in implementing any General Education revisions, and are most likely to be affected by any changes. Groups include but are not limited to the:
  - University Registrar
  - LionPATH team
  - DUS and academic advisers
  - University admissions
  - New Student Orientation
  - University Faculty Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs
  - Leadership from each UP college and each Commonwealth Campus
  - University libraries

- Develop and carry out a process to work directly with all key constituent groups to identify likely implementation challenges, options, and opportunities.

- Recommend actions to eliminate, decrease, or avoid challenges, to select the most efficient, effective, and cost-effective options, and to take advantage of opportunities presented by General Education revision.

Communication and Transparency Subcommittee
Co-Chairs: Keith Shapiro (one additional TBD)

Charge

The Communication and Transparency Subcommittee will be responsible for engaging and educating university stakeholders and the wider public about General Education at Penn State and the general education reforms undertaken by the GETF and the Faculty Senate. The subcommittee will develop a communication strategy of engagement and education designed not simply to disseminate information about the general education curriculum, but also to educate stakeholders and the public about the value, importance and unique character of General Education at Penn State. To accomplish this strategy of engagement and education, the subcommittee will:

- Facilitate discussions and town hall meetings with various stakeholders within the University, including students, faculty, advisors, administrators, and trustees at University Park, the
Commonwealth Campuses, and the World Campus to solicit feedback about the general education revisions.

- Coordinate with the GETF and its subcommittees to ensure reforms are responsive to the ideas and feedback from the wider university community.

- Develop a coherent strategy of engagement and education for those outside the immediate university community with an interest in or influence over General Education at Penn State, including state and local politicians, alums, local and national press, and parents.

- Create a General Education training program for faculty, advisors, and others who work directly with students and prospective students.

- Ensure that incoming students have a clear understanding of the importance and value of General Education at Penn State.

- Create a living and engaging web presence for General Education at Penn State that will serve as an ongoing space of dialogue, discussion, and engagement about academic and practical issues associated with General Education.

- Develop a long-term social media strategy focused on General Education at Penn State designed to cultivate a robust and thoughtful community capable of advocating for the central importance of general education at Penn State.

**Budget Subcommittee**
Co-Chairs: Christopher Long, Rachel Smith

**Charge**

The Budget Subcommittee is responsible for evaluating the impact of the proposed General Education revisions on University, College, and Campus budgets to determine if revisions are both financially feasible and how they affect individual units and sub-units. Specific responsibilities of the Budget Subcommittee will be to:

- Estimate the budgetary impact of specific GETF reform proposals by developing models and budget scenarios, and regularly report the results of these models and scenarios to ensure that decisions are fiscally responsible.

- Conduct focus groups with a variety of unit and sub-unit administrators and financial officers to determine if the assumptions used in the models are correct and the model outputs are realistic.

- Evaluate the cost of reforms across Colleges and Campuses to determine if any unit, including World Campus, is disproportionately affected in a negative way by the GETF reforms.
Suggest budget models that will address both the academic quality and cost-effectiveness of General Education at Penn State.

**Student Opportunities and Constraints Subcommittee**
Co-Chairs: Ann Taylor; Jalon Alexander, Patrick Tanner

**Charge**

The Student Opportunities and Constraints Subcommittee will identify opportunities and constraints for students presented by a revised General Education curriculum. Specific responsibilities of the subcommittee will be to:

- Determine potential opportunities and challenges produced by General Education revision for students as recognized by advisors, and suggest possible strategies for addressing these opportunities and challenges.

- Conduct a series of focus groups to elicit student perceptions of opportunities and challenges on the new General Education framework, including but not limited to the following student populations:
  - University Park and Commonwealth Campus students
  - Residential and non-residential students
  - World Campus students
  - Adult learners
  - Transfer students
  - International students

- Create a master list of opportunities and challenges as recognized by advisors and perceived by students, and create a set of recommendations to address these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities.

**Assessment Subcommittee**
Co-Chairs: Norah Shultz; Betty Harper

**Charge**

The Assessment Subcommittee will propose vehicles to assess student mastery of the Learning Objectives for General Education at Penn State. Specific responsibilities of the subcommittee will be to:

- Propose specific Learning Objectives and identify feasible and meaningful instruments for the assessment of those objectives.

- Benchmark against best practices across the CIC and AAU.
• Develop a five-year plan for assessment of student learning.

• Determine measures of student learning at all Penn State campuses that will function under the new structures developed by the GETF.

• Outline realistic investments that will enable meaningful assessment.
General Education Planning and Oversight Task Force

Informational Report to
Faculty Senate
October 22, 2013

General Education

Enable students to acquire the skills, knowledge, and experiences for living and working in interconnected and globalized contexts, so they can contribute to making life better for others, themselves, and the larger world.

General Education Curriculum

- Is distinctive
- Reflects the strengths of our faculty
- Is flexible
- Is intellectually challenging
- Includes exploration courses
- Contains thematic clusters of courses

Possible Themes

Indian Subcontinent
The Earth, the Environment, and Our Future
Our Place in the Universe

Next steps

Many remaining structural and instructional questions to be answered.

- SITE conference 10/31
- Town halls meetings for students, faculty, staff
- Meetings with unit leaders
- Forensic session spring 2014
- sites.psu.edu/genedatpsu