Gen Ed Task Force
Why are we doing what we’re doing: A national view of general education

GenEd.psu.edu
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The world in 1997

- There was no downloadable content to mobile phones.
- Ellen DeGeneres came out.
- *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published in the U.K.
- Pluto was a planet.
Rube Goldberg or the Mouse Trap Game
But what is General Education?

The University Faculty Senate, at its meeting on April 30, 1985, adopted a comprehensive definition of General Education. This definition was revised in the General Education report adopted by the Senate on December 2, 1997, as follows (with the exception of updated information highlighted with bold below regarding First-Year Seminar requirements [now First-Year Engagement Program] as revised April 29, 2008, and Intercultural and International Competence requirements as revised April 27, 2004):
General Education encompasses the breadth of knowledge involving the major intellectual and aesthetic skills and achievements of humanity. This must include understanding and appreciation of the pluralistic nature of knowledge epitomized by the natural sciences, quantitative skills, social-behavioral sciences, humanities and arts. To achieve and share such an understanding and appreciation, skills in self-expression, quantitative analysis, information literacy, and collaborative interaction are necessary. General Education aids students in developing intellectual curiosity, strengthened ability to think, and a deeper sense of aesthetic appreciation. General Education, in essence, aims to cultivate a knowledgeable, informed, literate human being.
In addition, the University Faculty Senate, at its meeting on December 2, 1997, mandated an integration of key competencies and emphasis on active learning (writing, speaking, quantitative skills, information and computer literacy, problem solving and critical thinking, team-work, and intercultural and international competence), as appropriate, in all General Education courses.
Another Definition

That part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning.

http://www.aacu.org/leap/what_is_liberal_education.cfm
Value added

- The partner to the major
- Beyond a series of hurdles
- Often a question of parents, employers
The “Cohen” Report

The report identified four models:

- The Cafeteria Style Breadth model
- The Open Curriculum mode
- Full Prescribed Curriculum model
- Core Curriculum approach
A Perfect World

Land Grant University X

Assesses students taking courses in Cafeteria style General Education program at beginning of academic career and end of academic career and sees how well they achieve learning outcomes.
A Perfect World

Land Grant University X implements thematic General Education Curriculum

Assesses students at beginning of academic career and end of academic career and sees how well they achieve learning outcomes.
A Perfect World

Land Grant University X compares outcomes from first assessment to second assessment.
What is out there

- Case studies of assessment of general education programs
- Assessment tools, rubrics and plans
- Research directing us toward best practices in pedagogy and learning
AAC&U Survey of Members (2009)

- Vast majority of members employ distribution model – but only 15% employ this alone
- Common intellectual experiences, thematic courses, upper-level requirements, core curriculum and/or learning communities are often incorporated
Rochester Institute of Technology

Implemented in fall 2012, the new framework moves away from a strictly distributive General Education model to a more outcomes-based and integrated learning model which offers students Foundational courses (e.g., First Year Writing), seven Perspective course categories, and a required three-course Immersion sequence.
San Jose State

Incoming students at SJSU take core courses designed to develop foundational skills and knowledge, more advanced students take a sequence of courses that engage them with pressing problems in U.S. society and the world, and students at all levels benefit from the curriculum’s emphasis on integrative learning. These elements come together in a program that both satisfies the statewide requirements of the California State University System and provides students with a distinctive general education. (http://www.aacu.org/aacu_news/aacunews07/february07/feature.cfm)
From what we know to learning outcomes

- Our current General Education goals and requirements

- Benchmarking (Association of American Colleges & Universities’ materials, Michigan State, University of Kansas, other institutions with Thematic programs)
How we can set the national agenda

- We begin with Learning Goals as the framing element of the General Education Curriculum.
- The structure flows from the Learning Goals.
- The assessment takes place from the inception of the curriculum – it is part of the process.