The research into the student perception of the general education system was continued by Victoria Babb and Spencer McCullough in MGMT 496 during the Fall 2014 semester. The data for this research came from focus groups, a Qualtrics survey, and speaking with students in the HUB. The survey was sent out by professors in the college of IST, Earth and Mineral Science, Liberal Arts, and the Smeal College of Business, bringing in over 200 responses (a full demographic breakdown can be found in the slide deck).

In the focus groups we kept hearing students mention the phrase “difficulty of course”, it was also a term that was used by the research group from last year. When asked what people meant by that no one could give us a consist definition. Through our research we discovered that the difficulty of a course is defined by seven key criteria:

- Fulfills Requirement
- Interest in Course Material
- Time of Day
- Professor
- Time Put in Outside of Class
- Difficulty of Exams
- Size of Class

In our survey we had students rank the importance of these seven criteria in the order from most important to least important when choosing classes. The list above features the results pertaining to major required courses. When students were then asked to rank the criteria in the same manner when choosing general education courses we received the following list:

- Fulfills Requirement
- Time of Day
- Difficulty of Exams
- Time Put in Outside of Class
Our survey was structured and presented in a way that did not inform students that we were doing research on general education, as to reduce the bias in the responses above. As you can see, students are much more concerned with how much effort they are putting into a course when selecting general education ones. They are less concerned about what interests them, and more concerned on getting an easy A to protect their GPA. Students are not asking which general education course is harder than the other, they are asking which one is the easiest. Their goal is to put in as little effort as possible.

One question on our survey was as follows: “Are you more likely to choose a Gen Ed class if the exam and homework answers are available to you?”. This graphic below shows the average response to this question, a 3.1.

This shows that students are considering how easy it is to cheat in a course when they are choosing it. This ties back to our early observation that students are trying to minimize the effort they are putting into general education courses.

At the end of the survey, the participating students were presented with breakdowns of the (then three) prototypes. The Modern Literacies Prototype was the overwhelming favorite, followed by the Scaffolded Prototype, and then the
Chosen Topics Prototype (for further information on this breakdown see the slide deck). All of these prototypes still contained the traditional three literacies – reading, writing, and math – but the most popular one contained the largest amount of new content. The students of Penn State want to be challenged, the want to learn new things, but in this current system they are strongly discouraged from doing so.