

SENATE COMMITTEE ON CURRICULAR AFFAIRS

Implementation of Updated General Education Learning Objectives

(Legislative)

Implementation: Upon approval by the Senate (and development of procedures when applicable)

Introduction

On April 28, 2015 the Penn State Faculty Senate approved the following in Recommendation 1 of the General Education Task Force report, **“Revise the current statement on General Education goals to include updated Learning Objectives as presented.”**

The following is the Learning Objectives and preamble as presented in the April 28, 2015 report.

The General Education curriculum will enable students to acquire skills, knowledge, and experiences for living in interconnected contexts, so they can contribute to making life better for others, themselves, and the larger world. 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 and 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, a strengthened ability to think, and a deeper sense of aesthetic appreciation. General Education, in essence, aims to cultivate a knowledgeable, informed, literate human being.

An effective General Education curriculum shall facilitate teaching and learning through seven key objectives:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – the ability to exchange information and ideas in oral, written, and visual form in ways that allow for informed and persuasive discourse that builds trust and respect among those engaged in that exchange, and helps create environments where creative ideas and problem-solving flourish.

KEY LITERACIES – the ability to identify, interpret, create, communicate and compute using materials in a variety of media and contexts. Literacy acquired in multiple areas, such as textual, quantitative, information/technology, health, intercultural, historical, aesthetic, linguistic (world languages), and scientific, enables individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, to lead healthy and productive lives, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

CRITICAL AND ANALYTICAL THINKING – the habit of mind characterized by comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating a conclusion. It is the intellectually disciplined process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

INTEGRATIVE THINKING – the ability to synthesize knowledge across multiple domains, modes of inquiry, historical periods, and perspectives, as well as the ability to identify linkages between existing knowledge and new information. Individuals who engage in integrative thinking are able to transfer knowledge within and beyond their current contexts.

CREATIVE THINKING – the capacity to synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways and the experience of performing, making, thinking, or acting in an imaginative way that may be characterized by innovation, divergent thinking, and intellectual risk taking.

GLOBAL LEARNING – the intellectually disciplined abilities to analyze similarities and differences among cultures; evaluate natural, physical, social, cultural, historical, and economic legacies and hierarchies; and engage as community members and leaders who will continue to deal with the intricacies of an ever-changing world. Individuals should acquire the ability to analyze power; identify and critique interdependent global, regional, and local cultures and systems; and evaluate the implications for people's lives.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL REASONING – the ability to assess one's own values within the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, describe how different perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Individuals should acquire the self-- knowledge and leadership skills needed to play a role in creating and maintaining healthy, civil, safe, and thriving communities.

This report includes three recommendations necessary to implement these learning objectives as the foundation for our General Education program and curriculum and one recommendation to keep the program current.

Discussion and Rationale

Several key things need to happen to establish the new Learning Objectives as the foundation of our General Education curriculum. First, all General Education courses need to demonstrate alignment with the new Learning Objectives; faculty and administration need to be aware of how courses will be evaluated with respect to this alignment. Second, faculty and students need to recognize when they are engaging with the General Education curriculum and students should to

be clearly informed of what Learning Objectives they can expect to practice and achieve in for each General Education course. Third, all current General Education courses need to be reviewed under the new criteria. This will be a time consuming and expensive process, but it is necessary to fully implement the already adopted Learning Objectives. A cost estimate for implementing the new General Education curriculum was included in the General Education Taskforce report dated April 28, 2015. A phased review process is proposed to distribute this workload over a manageable timeframe. Finally, General Education, like the academic environment in which it is housed, needs to be dynamic and responsive to student needs and assessment feedback. Therefore, we propose that General Education courses undergo rolling periodic evaluation.

Recommendations

The following four recommendations are made to address the important points discussed above. The first recommendation specifies the materials and information that must be provided for review as a General Education course. For comparison, the current text from the *Guide to Curricular Procedures* under heading “2. Criteria for General Education Courses” is Attachment 1. It is worth noting that the number of items to be answered by the proposer has been reduced from ten (10) to four (4).

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs will request the following information on course proposals and use it to determine if a course meets the Learning Objectives of General Education.

All General Education Course proposals must be responsive to the following prompts:

- 1. Which of the seven General Education Learning Objective(s) will be addressed in the course? A minimum of two (2) Learning Objective must be clearly addressed in the course; it is recommended that each course address two to three (2-3) Learning Objectives and not more than four (4).**
- 2. What component(s) of the course will help students achieve the General Education Learning Objectives covered in the course? Provide evidence that students in the course have adequate opportunities to achieve the identified Learning Objectives.**
- 3. How will students be assessed to determine their attainment of the Learning Objective(s) of General Education covered in the course? This assessment must be included as a portion of the student’s overall performance in the course.**
- 4. Please provide a copy of the current or proposed syllabus.**

It is important for students to be cognizant of when they are participating in a general education course and what Learning Objectives they are working to achieve.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Course syllabi for all General Education courses must clearly identify the course as a General Education course and which of the General Education Learning Objectives the course will address.

All existing General Education courses need to be reevaluated and aligned with the new General Education Learning Objectives. Therefore, the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs proposes an evaluation process reviewing all General Education courses take place over a three (3) year process. This timeline is proposed to distribute the workload associated with this process over a manageable timeframe while significant progress in aligning our current courses with the new learning objectives. Additionally, a subsequent periodic review of courses is proposed to monitor concerns of curricular drift as well as keep the information about each course reasonably current.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The senate must review all current General Education courses for alignment with the Learning Objectives adopted by the Faculty Senate on April 28, 2015. This process should be distributed over three years and under the direction of the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs. This process should be complete by the end of the 2018-2019 academic year. Any efforts that can be made to streamline the process and reduce burden to the faculty and staff in completing this process should be made. This may include to the extent possible ad-hoc committee formation to expedite proposal review as well as streamlined proposal submission and completion.

RECOMMENDATION 4: General Education courses are to be re-evaluated for alignment with the General Education Learning Objectives on a rolling five (5) year basis. This review process will occur under the direction of the Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs.

Effective Date

Immediately with completion of the initial review of General Education courses by the end of Spring 2019.

Attachment 1

Current text from the Guide to Curricular Procedures (<http://senate.psu.edu/curriculum/guide-to-curricular-procedures/>) under Heading “G. General Education 2. Criteria for General Education Courses”.

The criteria given below have been derived from the objectives for General Education approved by the Senate on April 30, 1985, and on December 2, 1997.

No one course must achieve every General Education objective, but each proposal must specify clearly which objectives it proposes to meet. The Senate legislation of December 2, 1997, and February 27, 2001 (see Appendix “D” of the 2/27/01 Agenda and 2/27/01 Senate Record), requires that typically three or more core competencies, activities and strategies for enhanced learning be integrated in the courses offered in the areas of Health and Physical Activity, Natural Sciences, Arts, Humanities, and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Core Competencies, Activities, and Strategies for Enhanced Learning:

Knowledge domain courses must require each student to engage in activities promoting learning course content through practicing, typically, three or more of the following core competencies, activities, and strategies for enhanced learning:

- a. writing, speaking and/or other forms of self-expression,
- b. information gathering, such as the use of the library, computer/electronic resources, and experimentation or observation,
- c. synthesis and analysis in problem solving and critical thinking, including, where appropriate, the application of reasoning and interpretive methods, and quantitative thinking,
- d. collaborative learning and teamwork,
- e. activities that promote and advance intercultural and/or international understanding,
- f. activities that promote the understanding of issues pertaining to social behavior, scholarly conduct, and community responsibility,
- g. a significant alternative competency for active learning designed for and appropriate to a specific course.

Rationale:

Students should be actively involved in a significant part of their own learning in all General Education courses at Penn State. Through the use of active learning in assignments, exercises, and other formal activities associated with a course, students become engaged participants in the particular course’s content and, simultaneously, build competencies, skills, and abilities that are necessary to promote learning in any situation. A successful General Education course typically will involve students in several active-learning activities, not all of the same type. However, evidence of significant involvement by students is more important than the count of activities. Activities that promote intercultural and international competence, or that help students assess social behavior and scholarly conduct in the community, are especially valuable.

Criteria for determining whether a course meets the general objectives of General Education

All General Education Course proposals must be responsive to the following questions:

1. Does the course proposal show which of the following general objectives will be addressed in the course?
2. Through General Education courses, students:
 - a. should enhance their key competencies for active learning,
 - b. should develop their intercultural and international competence,
 - c. should be enabled to acquire knowledge through critical reading,
 - d. should learn how to acquire information and data through a variety of means (including electronic),
 - e. should learn how to analyze and evaluate, where appropriate in a quantitative manner, the acquired information and knowledge,
 - f. should learn how to integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and fields,
 - g. should learn how to make critical judgments in a logical manner,
 - h. should learn how to communicate effectively.
3. Does the course proposal outline methods for achieving the General Education objectives identified as important components of the course?
4. Does the course proposal show how key competencies for active learning are integrated in the course?
5. Does the course proposal identify means through which the intercultural and international competence of the students is enhanced?
6. Does the course proposal show how the course assignments develop the ability of the students to analyze problems or questions and evaluate them critically?
7. Does the course proposal identify opportunities for students to integrate knowledge acquired from a variety of sources?
8. Does the course proposal show opportunities for students to formulate and express informed judgments?
9. Does the course proposal indicate how students will be examined to determine their attainment of the general objectives of General Education?
10. Does the course proposal show how the course is related to other fields of study or courses and how this relationship is communicated to students?

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