

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Step 5a

Course Criteria

General Education Policy Review Committee

May 4, 2010

A proposal for discussion and comment by the campus community.

The General Education Policy Review Committee (GEPRC) is not yet prepared to circulate a complete proposal for the GEP Course Criteria. However, we are eager for campus input on the portions of the proposal which we have completed, especially our proposal concerning instructor qualifications for teaching in various areas of the new curriculum.

Consequently, we are circulating this abbreviated proposal in the hopes of gathering comments from the campus prior to the end of the spring semester. Members of GEPRC will then work through the summer to revise and complete the Course Criteria proposal by the beginning of the fall semester.

Proposal

GENERAL CRITERIA

- All courses must be approved by the General Education Committee (see Appendix I) through the submission of an electronic course portfolio. The portfolio will include:
 - A brief curriculum vitae describing the instructor's qualifications.
 - Basic course information, including course number, title, credits, and catalog description.
 - A course syllabus, including learning outcomes aligned with those of the General Education program.
 - A faculty narrative describing how student learning will be assessed.
- All courses must address the approved learning outcomes in the category in which they are taught.
- All courses should be taught by an instructor with teaching, research, and/or professional expertise in an appropriate area of study in order to satisfy the relevant learning outcomes in each category. Typically, instructors should possess at least a Master's degree in their respective fields.

Note: If there is a question about instructor qualifications, the General Education Committee will seek advice from the appropriate Consulting Departments indicated below.

GEP Category	Consulting Departments
Arts	Art & Design, Communications, Music, Theatre & Dance
Humanities	English, Foreign Languages, Philosophy, Political Science
Historical Perspectives	History
Social Sciences	Business & Economics, Geography & Geology, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology & Social Work
Natural Sciences	Biology, Chemistry, Geography & Geology, Physics & Astronomy

- No course in the Foundation, Investigation, or Integration Levels may satisfy more than one general education requirement, unless it is paired with one of the following categories: Global Awareness, U.S. Diversity, or Environmental Responsibility.

FOUNDATION

- All requirements in the Foundation Level must be completed before students reach 60 credits.

First Year Seminar

- All First Year Seminars must be numbered FYS 101, with appropriate subtitle.
- All First Year Seminars should focus on topics in which instructors have both expertise and interest, but which are engaging to a general audience of first-year students. The primary function of the First Year Seminar should NOT be to serve as

- an introduction to a major. Ordinarily, no First Year Seminar may be required for a major.
- Instructors of the First Year Seminar may be drawn from the faculty, teaching academic staff, or non-instructional academic staff.
 - All First Year Seminar instructors must attend a training workshop sponsored by the Center for Academic Excellence and Student Engagement.
 - All First Year Seminars will have an enrollment cap of 20 students.

Written Communication

- The Written Communication outcomes will be satisfied by English 101/201.
- English 150 may be substituted for English 101/201, with appropriate placement.
- English 101 should be taken during the student's freshman year.
- English 201 should be taken during the student's sophomore year and will have a prerequisite of English 101.
- English 101, 201, and 150 will have an enrollment cap of 23 students.

Oral Communication

- The Oral Communication outcomes will be satisfied by Communication 101.

Quantitative Literacy

- The prerequisite to all Quantitative Literacy courses is Math 90.

Wellness

- Wellness is a 1 credit requirement that may be met by 1, 2, or 3 credit courses.

Explanation of Proposal

With the completion of Step 4 of the General Education review process, the campus decided *what students should learn* from the new curriculum. By contrast, Step 5 of the review process necessitates deciding *how and by whom* the approved learning outcomes will be taught.

Instructor Qualifications

Without question, the most difficult aspect of this task is to define instructor qualifications for teaching within each area of the new general education curriculum. On this issue, the committee has been pulled in two seemingly opposite directions. On the one hand, the growing emphasis on assessment and learning outcomes in higher education suggests that outputs rather than inputs should be paramount in defining and evaluating a curriculum. By this logic, any instructor demonstrating an ability to teach the approved learning outcomes should be qualified in a given category. On the other hand, however, it is equally clear that inputs like instructor qualifications still have an important—and perhaps *the most important*—role in shaping the desired outcome of a given class. To suggest otherwise would be absurd.

Under the present General Degree Requirements (GDRs), UWSP has been governed by relatively inflexible rules regarding which instructors are permitted to teach in each GDR category. Many of the GDRs themselves are labeled using department names, including Freshman English, Mathematics, Communication, History, and Foreign Language. (The GDRs are described in Chapter 7, Section 6: <http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/handbook/handbook09-10/CH7-8%2009-10.pdf>.) Beyond this implicit restriction, the only instance in which instructor qualifications are explicitly stated in the Handbook is in the Social Science area, which specifies that “Category 1 courses must be offered from the departments of Business/Economics (Economics only), Geography/Geology (Cultural Geography only), Philosophy/Anthropology (Anthropology only), Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology.” Other faculty are permitted to teach Social Science classes, but only under the optional “Category 2” label.

This practice of attaching ownership of our GDRs to individual departments is out of step with current practices in general education, in part because it makes the assessment and continuous improvement of the curriculum extremely difficult. The issue was specifically cited as problematic by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) team that reviewed our GDRs in 2006, and it is among the concerns that prompted the upcoming February 2012 focused visit by the Higher Learning Commission, our accrediting organization. As a result, GEPRC has sought to avoid using department names as titles for the components of the new general education curriculum. We proposed Quantitative Literacy rather than Mathematics, for example, and Historical Perspectives rather than History. We did this

deliberately in the hope of avoiding any conversation about “ownership” of the curriculum until after the campus had defined what learning outcomes specifically that curriculum would entail.

Now that Faculty Senate has approved these learning outcomes, however, the question of instructor qualifications must be addressed. For help in navigating this difficult issue, the committee turned to UWSP’s faculty and staff, conducting an online survey for two weeks during March 2010. Here, too, we heard apparently conflicting advice. The survey asked faculty to select which areas of the new curriculum they were most interested in teaching. The responses—which can be viewed at <https://committees.uwsp.edu/gedpolrev/Step5/default.aspx>—illustrate just how difficult it may be to draw firm boundaries related to degrees or department memberships around many areas of the curriculum. In addition, the survey also asked faculty what factors were most important in defining course criteria. Among those who elaborated on the question of instructor qualifications, some respondents advised the committee to keep “turf” and department memberships out of the criteria while others insisted that instructor qualifications were paramount and should be defined as precisely as possible.

Keep turf out of the formula.... Our past system allowed approval of courses by faculty who had no training or experience in the areas in which they were trying to offer a course. Other faculty courses were precluded because they were not in the right department or College. This must stop.

--response to Step 5 Survey

Yes, a person might be able on paper to “meet learning outcomes” as defined by the gen ed committee, but a person must also be able to demonstrate they have the qualifications to teach in the area they are proposing. Otherwise, a person in history who also speaks Spanish could propose a language course. Equally, a person in the sciences might propose a “history of science class,” but are they qualified and experienced in how to conduct historical research and/or teach history?

--response to Step 5 Survey

Both points of view have merit. As a result, the committee has sought to find a middle ground between the potential extremes: in other words, to define criteria precisely enough to ensure qualified instructors but not so rigidly that capable instructors are excluded from teaching in a given area solely because they lack particular degrees or department memberships. As one respondent described the problem, “it would be appropriate to allow a mechanism to recognize expertise acquired and demonstrated through some means other than a degree program in unusual cases, but not to open [the] door wide.”

The solution proposed by the committee is to vest “ownership” of the curriculum in a new General Education Committee (GEC) as a standing committee of the Faculty Senate. This idea was initially proposed by the HLC Assessment Academy Team and approved in principle by

the Senate's Executive Committee. It has been referred to the Constitution and Handbook Revision Subcommittee for development as a formal proposal for consideration by the Senate. (For a description of the broad outlines of this committee, see Appendix I.) According to the criteria proposed by GEPRC, the new GEC would be charged with ensuring that instructors in each category of the curriculum possess "teaching, research, and/or professional expertise in an appropriate area of study in order to satisfy the relevant learning outcomes." In most cases, this should be easily determined by reviewing the instructor's curriculum vitae. But if members of the GEC are uncertain for any reason, the committee should seek advice from what we have termed "Consulting Departments."

As outlined in the proposal, Consulting Departments would help to provide a measure of accountability in the evaluation of instructor qualifications without obligating the GEC to adhere to rigidly defined criteria involving specified degrees or department memberships. Toward that end:

- We have proposed Consulting Departments only for those areas in the Investigation Level, or in other words, in those areas of the curriculum where discipline-specific methodologies seem essential to ensuring student achievement of the learning outcomes.
- We have avoided assigning Consulting Departments in areas of the curriculum that are inherently interdisciplinary—in the Cultural and Environmental Awareness Level, for example.
- Finally, we do not intend any particular list of Consulting Departments to be a complete inventory of units with faculty potentially qualified to teach in each area of the curriculum. Rather, the lists are intended to include those departments with faculty most obviously qualified to evaluate potential instructors in each area.

Instructors in the First Year Seminar

The only area of the curriculum for which we have proposed additional criteria related to instructor qualifications is the First Year Seminar. Here, the committee suggests allowing non-instructional academic staff with at least a Master's degree to serve as qualified instructors. Although this is common practice in First Year Seminar programs across the country, the practice would be new to UWSP. Thus, it deserves some explanation and campus discussion.

We make this proposal for several reasons:

1. The First Year Seminar, although intended to be a rigorous learning experience, is not dependent on any discipline-specific content or methodology. In fact, such seminars work best to the extent that they are not structured as introductions to a major.
2. Several of the learning outcomes for the First Year Seminar relate to areas in which non-instructional staff have significant expertise, especially those involving study skills, co-

curricular involvement, and the academic support services available to students at UWSP. As one survey respondent noted, many non-instructional staff “have valuable insights into student engagement/success and can develop a course or experiences that meet the learning outcomes.” We agree.

3. The inclusion of qualified non-instructional staff is very much in keeping with the broad goals of the new General Education Program, especially the more effective integration of curricular and co-curricular learning. The First Year Seminar seems an ideal location in which to encourage this type of collaborative teaching and learning.

Certainly, there are obstacles to broadening the pool of instructors for the First Year Seminar. Training in the methods of teaching a FYS will be essential for both faculty and non-instructional staff; and in the case of the latter group, it is likely that instructors will need further assistance with curriculum development. In addition, while faculty participating in the program would teach these courses as part of their normal load, non-instructional staff would potentially need to participate as an “overload” to their regular responsibilities. This raises the possible need for additional compensation.

That said, given that the First Year Seminar depends for its success on placing UWSP’s most experienced, engaging, and enthusiastic instructors in the classroom, there are strong reasons to create a pool of instructors that is as broad and inclusive as possible.

Foundation

First Year Seminar

The course criteria for the First Year Seminar are meant to ensure that the class enrollment is small enough to conduct the class in a true seminar format, that instructors are appropriately trained, and that the topics of individual sections are general enough to be appealing to the broadest possible audience of first-year students. Given the unique challenges of teaching the First Year Seminar, the new General Education Committee may wish to establish a special subcommittee to consider and approve proposals for new courses in this area. Ideally, this process could be led by a Director of General Education or a Coordinator of the First Year Experience who could develop the expertise to effectively judge what kinds of topics and course structures are most effective.

Written and Oral Communication

This is the only area in which the committee has proposed singling out particular classes to satisfy the learning outcomes. We did so for two reasons:

1. UWSP has a history of relying on faculty within the English and Communications Departments to teach these foundational courses.
2. Faculty in other departments wishing to teach these kinds of communication skills have an opportunity to do so through the Communication in the Major requirement.

The idea of moving the current English 101/102 sequence to a new English 101/201 format comes from the English Department itself and reflects research which suggests that a sophomore writing experience can be more beneficial to students than a two-course requirement entirely in the freshman year.

Finally, although the committee is content to recommend that Communication 101—revised to become a three-credit course—continue to serve as the sole course fulfilling the Oral Communication outcomes in the new General Education Program, we hope that strong consideration is given to offering a greater variety of class options under this course number. For example, some sections of Communication 101 could be geared specifically to students majoring in the sciences, or other similar emphases.

Quantitative Literacy

The committee seeks to maintain essentially the same standard of proficiency in math skills as exists in the current General Degree Requirements. In the process, however, we hope to broaden the definition of quantitative literacy to include a greater variety of competencies, including applied mathematical skills. These skills might be taught in courses such as statistics, personal finance, business math, probability theory, consumer economics, etc.

In 2009, 11% of UWSP's incoming students scored a 1 on the math placement exam, which placed them into beginning algebra (currently offered as Math 90). Under the new program these students would need to take Math 90 prior to enrolling in a Quantitative Literacy course. The remaining 89% of UWSP's incoming students in 2009 scored high enough on the math placement exam to fulfill the proposed prerequisite to a General Education Quantitative Literacy course. Consequently, these students would simply need to complete one three-credit Quantitative Literacy course under the new GEP.

Wellness

Only three faculty/staff indicated in GEPRC's recent Step 5 survey an interest in teaching courses in the Wellness category. Although Wellness is a one-credit requirement, there is nothing preventing a two- or three-credit course from also meeting the approved learning outcomes where appropriate.

Providing Comments

The committee will collect feedback from now through the end of the summer. Comments can be posted on our Web site (<https://committees.uwsp.edu/gedpolrev/Step5/default.aspx>) or emailed directly to the committee co-chairs: Don Guay (dguay@uwsp.edu) and Gary Olsen (golsen@uwsp.edu).

Members of GEPRC will host two public forums open to anyone on campus to introduce and discuss this proposal. The first forum will take place on May 12 from 3:00-4:30pm in CPS 116. The second will take place on May 19 from 4:00-6:00pm in CCC 213.

In addition, members of the committee would welcome invitations to attend department or unit meetings or to meet with individual department chairs over the summer to hear your comments and suggestions.

Appendix I: General Education Committee Proposal

MEMORANDUM

TO: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE FACULTY SENATE
FROM: HLC ASSESSMENT ACADEMY TEAM
SUBJECT: PROPOSAL FOR A NEW GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
DATE: 2/11/2010

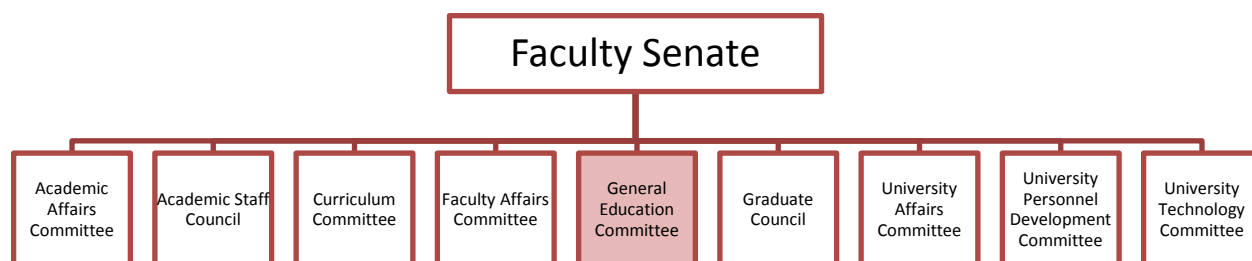
The HLC Assessment Academy Team has been charged with the task of formulating an assessment plan for the new General Education Program, a draft of which we hope to complete by the end of the spring 2010 semester. As a first step, however, we believe it is important to move forward in addressing perhaps the most significant shortcoming of our current General Degree Requirements (GDRs): the structure of their governance and administration, especially as this relates to assessment.

Note: The Faculty Senate has charged the General Education Policy Review Committee with making “recommendations regarding the administration of the new GEP” in Step 6 of the GE review process. However, if courses are to be approved in time for the new curriculum to become effective in the Fall 2011, then consideration of governance issues must take place sooner than this process will allow.

According to both the AASCU review of our GDRs and the HLC Accreditation Report, the current structure for managing UWSP’s general education and assessment programs is hampered by several difficulties. Faculty oversight of the GDRs, for example, is overly bifurcated, divided as it is among several committees: the GDR Subcommittee, which handles the approval of new courses; the Academic Affairs Committee, which approves policies regarding general education; and the Assessment Subcommittee, which is responsible for assessing the GDRs. (Even this latter responsibility is not clearly defined in the UWSP Handbook: the Assessment Subcommittee is directed to “alert appropriate faculty committees about curricular problems revealed by general education assessment,” but there is little formal guidance as to how the actual assessment will take place. See Ch. 7, Section 3, pp. 21-33: <http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/handbook/handbook09-10/CH7-8%2009-10.pdf>.) Similar problems confront the administration of general education and assessment, both of which lack dedicated directors. Although responsibility for each effort technically rests with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Programs, in practice the many functions involved are divided among numerous administrative units, including the Registrar, the Office of Policy Analysis and Planning (formerly known as Institutional Research), the various deans’ offices, and the many departments that contribute courses to the curriculum. Consequently, the administrative oversight of both general education and assessment is often so diffuse as to seem nonexistent. Given this fractured administrative structure, assessment in particular is nearly impossible: to the extent that UWSP

currently assesses its GDR courses, the only place where these assessment results can be utilized to improve the curriculum is on the floor of the Faculty Senate, a situation that is impractical at best.

To begin to remedy this situation, the HLC Assessment Academy Team proposes the creation of a new General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate (to replace the current GDR Subcommittee).



The new General Education Committee will unify the various aspects of faculty oversight of general education in a single administrative body, thus serving to reduce the duplication and fragmentation of efforts with respect to the current GDRs. Much as a department manages its own program, the committee will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the general education curriculum: the approval of courses for general education credit, the assessment of student learning within the curriculum, and the subsequent improvement of the curriculum based on assessment results.

Because this new committee would have significantly broader responsibilities than the current GDR Subcommittee, it would seem to be more appropriately structured as a standing committee of the Faculty Senate than as a subcommittee of either the Curriculum Committee or the Academic Affairs Committee. In addition, placing the new committee directly beneath Faculty Senate would significantly reduce the amount of time and paperwork required for faculty to seek approval of courses for general education credit. This process can take as long as six to eight weeks under the current structure, which significantly limits flexibility in managing the curriculum.

Note: Creating a General Education Committee of this sort would also involve removing responsibility for the assessment of general education from the present Assessment Subcommittee.

Given these broad responsibilities, the new General Education Committee will play the pivotal role in coordinating the various activities required to administer the general education curriculum.

- The committee will be responsible for designating courses as meeting general education learning outcomes, a procedure that must include specific discussion of how courses will be

assessed in relation to those outcomes. (Ideally, this process would begin as early as Fall 2010, or as soon as possible thereafter.)

- The committee will then be responsible for collaborating with others to gather assessment evidence. This will include both course-based assessment data provided by instructors and also institutional-level assessment data gathered and reported by the Office of Policy Analysis and Planning through the administration of standardized tests and institutional-level surveys.
- Once assessment data is gathered, the committee will be responsible for evaluating this information and making recommendations to improve the general education curriculum.
- The committee will then pass these recommendations to the appropriate governance and administrative units, including the Office of Academic Affairs, the respective colleges and departments involved in teaching courses within the general education curriculum, and the Faculty Senate. Further, the Center for Academic Excellence and Student Engagement will be involved in designing instructional and faculty development programs intended to support continuous improvement in the curriculum based on identified needs.

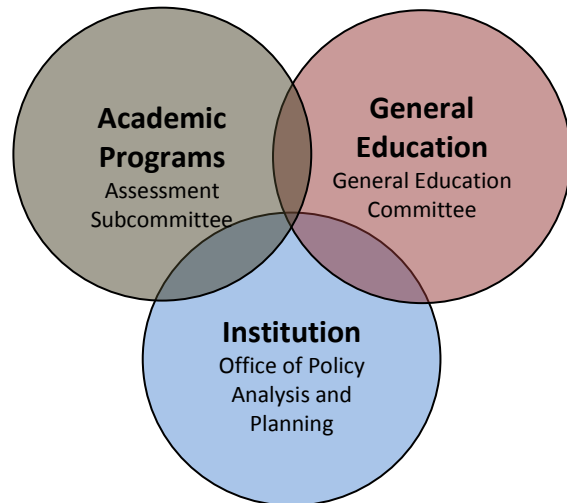
To carry out these responsibilities, we suggest that the new General Education Committee have broad campus representation, similar to the current GDR and Assessment Subcommittees:

General Education Committee

- Faculty Representatives from each College
- CAESE Representative (ideally, an Assessment Coordinator?)
- Provost's Representative (ideally, a Director of General Education?)
- Policy Analysis & Planning Representative
- Student Affairs Representative
- Student Representatives
- Elected Representatives

With a new General Education Committee in place, the management of the revised General Education Program could take place within a clearly-defined structure in which one committee maintains primary responsibility for all aspects of managing the curriculum. This change in governance structure will be an especially significant improvement to the way assessment is managed at UWSP. Oversight of program assessment will continue to be the responsibility of the current Assessment Subcommittee; the assessment of general education, meanwhile, will be carried out by the new General Education Committee; and finally, institutional-level assessment (which will inform the work of both the Assessment Subcommittee and the General Education Committee) will be administered by the Office of Policy Analysis and Planning.

Under this structure, UWSP will be able to administer its general education curriculum much as a department does its programs. Assessment results can be used directly by the new committee to inform changes in the curriculum, all aimed at ensuring the continuous improvement of student learning.



Assessment at UWSP