

Annual Report
General Education Coordinator
May 2005

In accordance with the Guidelines for Annual Reports, this document will review major accomplishments of my program area during the past year. Progress is reviewed in the three key areas of my responsibility: Program Review, Gen Ed curricular reform, and assessment. All accomplishments fall within the “Student Learning and Engagement” category of the University’s Strategic Directions.

Gen Ed Five-Year Program Review: Accomplishments [relevant to AA Goal#1 (Transforming the Curriculum)]

- General Education completed its five-year Program Review last summer. Included in the report were analyses of the curricular experience and course-taking patterns relevant to General Education and the analysis and recommendations of our external reviewer, Dr. Steven Briggs, Provost of The College of New Jersey, based upon his site visit in April 2004.
- Additionally, during the summer and fall of 2004 we prepared (with the assistance of the Dean’s office in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences) reports for each individual major on campus that analyzed the Gen Ed course-taking experience of recent graduates of that major. These reports were shared with all Department chairs on campus in order that Departments could better articulate the connections between Gen Ed and the major (action item within AA Goal #1B).

Gen Ed Curricular Review and Reform: Accomplishments

Goal#1 (Transforming the Curriculum): Continuing this past year was a process of examining the existing General Education program with an eye towards making it more responsive to the learning needs of students in the 21st century and taking advantage of new models, trends, and innovations in undergraduate education nationally.

- To enhance our ability to design and implement a restructuring of students’ first-year experiences, a team of five faculty and administrators and one student spent five days attending workshops and collaborating with the Evergreen Summer Learning Communities Institute faculty to design a first-year learning communities proposal and implementation plan. This work was then incorporated into the report and recommendations of the Gen Ed Task Force (see below). [Relates to area C (Pedagogy initiatives) of AA Goal #1 and area C (First-year initiatives) of AA Goal#3]
- The Gen Ed Task Force (GETF), which began meeting in February 2003, held two meetings with Dean’s Council this year (August 2004 and January 2005) to keep them apprised of changes being proposed for Gen Ed and to get feedback on implementation issues.

- The Task Force finalized its Report and Recommendations and presented them to Faculty Senate on January 19, 2005. [Relates to area B (assessment and continuous improvement of existing programs) of AA Goal #1]
- Subsequently, the Final Report and Recommendations was distributed to all faculty on campus and a series of three open, campus-wide meetings were held to present and discuss the report with faculty. Meetings were also held with APSCUF Rep Council, Student Senate, and the campus-wide Academic Advisement Steering Committee to continue the dialogue about changes to Gen Ed.
- A series of eight focus groups were conducted jointly in March 2005 by the GETF and the General Education Review Committee (GERC) and included 54 additional faculty. Input was gathered about specific features of the proposed changes to Gen Ed through focused discussion questions. These results have also been shared with Faculty Senate.
- A proposal to pilot-test a new three-credit First Seminar course for incoming students in fall 2005 was presented and eventually passed by Faculty Senate. These First Seminar courses are designed to have faculty “teach their passion” using engaging, cross-disciplinary content themes and student-centered pedagogy. They are linked in a living-learning community with either a Speech or Composition course. [Relates to area C (Pedagogy initiatives) of AA Goal #1 and area C (First-year initiatives) of AA Goal#3]
- Course proposals for the pilot-test were solicited and criteria for their review and approval were developed. Five of the seven proposals submitted were eventually approved by both GERC and the School Curriculum Committees and will be taught in fall 2005.
- A plan for assessing the pilot-test was drafted and will be finalized during summer 2005.
- After a campus-wide faculty referendum on new principles, purpose, and objectives for General Education scheduled for April 2005 was postponed, Faculty Senate began a detailed review of the proposed principles, purpose, and objectives with the intent to formally approve them before submitting them again to the full faculty for a referendum next fall. The Gen Ed Coordinator and the GERC will assist Senate in rewording and revising the principles, purpose, and objectives.

Outcomes Assessment

Given the time committed to the Program Review, to finalizing, writing, and disseminating the final Task Force report, and to beginning the process of implementing some of the recommended changes to Gen Ed, outcomes assessment work took a lower priority this past year. However, the GERC/Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee did continue assessment related to three Gen Ed objectives related to student learning.

- A second assessment of quantitative reasoning was completed during fall 2004 and preliminary results were shared with the GERC/AOAC. This effort was spearheaded by James Fenwick.

- A qualitative assessment related to the Coherence objective was conducted and a preliminary report was made to the GERC/AOAC in spring 2005. This effort culminated two years of work by Nadine Garner and James Valle.
- Selected assignments from a sampling of composition courses were gathered during spring 2005 in order to assess the Information Literacy objective. Building upon the previous pilot-testing of a rubric for assessing students' information literacy skills, a revised rubric will be applied to the writing samples this summer. This effort is being led by Marjorie Warmkessel.
- Reports on two of the previous assessments (critical thinking and writing) were included in the Five-year Program Review.
- As noted above, a plan for assessing the pilot-test of the First Seminar/Learning Community initiative was drafted and will be finalized during summer 2005.

Further Connections to the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan

In addition to the direct ways that the activities of the Gen Ed office relate to the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan as noted above, several of the specific initiatives recommended in the Task Force report deal with other objectives embedded in the Strategic Plan.

- The Gen Ed Task Force recommended inclusion of a Diversity requirement which relates to the action item "Provide curriculum that celebrates and incorporates diversity" within AA Goal #2 (Diversity).
- The recommended first-year initiative involving learning communities and a three-credit First Seminar, which is to be pilot-tested this fall, includes a service learning component and has as one of its objectives to encourage reflection on "civic responsibility." Both of these elements relate to specific action items within AA Goal #4 (Advancing civic engagement).
- The proposed new Gen Ed curriculum also furthers this same goal through its requirement that all students take a U.S. Civics-related social science course as a foundation for further study in the social sciences.