

Annual Report
2005-2006
General Education

In accordance with the Guidelines for Annual Reports, this document will review major accomplishments of my program area during the past year. After recapping some of the recent changes to the administrative structure of Gen Ed, progress is reviewed in two key areas of my responsibility pertinent this year: Gen Ed curricular reform and assessment. All accomplishments fall within the “Student Learning and Engagement” category of the University’s Strategic Directions.

Gen Ed Administration

- The Gen Ed Task Force (GETF) officially went out of existence with the beginning of the fall 2005 semester. The tasks of implementing the recommendations of the Task Force and overseeing the curricular change process were assumed by the Gen Ed Review Committee (GERC) whose charge was amended by Faculty Senate in April 2005 to reflect these new responsibilities. The charge for the Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC) was also amended to make Gen Ed outcomes assessment the central focus of this committee. The Gen Ed Coordinator serves on both of these committees as an ex officio member and structures many of his assignments to support the work of these two committees.
- A call was issued in January 2006 to request applicants for a new term of the Gen Ed Coordinator position (August 2006 through May 2009). Two applicants were interviewed, a recommendation was made to the Provost by the GERC, and the Provost selected Dr. Frederick Foster-Clark to continue in the position he currently holds.
- The Gen Ed Coordinator, in conjunction with the Coordinator of the First Year Experience (FYE), applied for and was granted a half-time graduate assistantship to support outcomes assessment and the service learning component of the new first seminar/learning community initiative. This new position will begin in fall 2006.

Gen Ed Curricular Review and Reform

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. [Several aspects of the review and reform accomplishments reviewed below also relate to Goal #3 (Assuring a student-centered environment).]

- To increase our understanding of approaches to enhance students’ civic engagement and civic learning, a team of seven faculty, staff, and students

- attended the AAC&U's conference on civic engagement in Providence, RI, in November 2005. [Also relates to AA Goal #4 Civic Engagement]
- The Gen Ed Coordinator continued to serve on the American Democracy Project (ADP) Steering Committee and was heavily involved in conducting and writing the ADP Campus Audit which was presented to the University community in January 2006 as part of the Campus Dialog on Civic Engagement. The Audit examined the present institutional, curricular, and co-curricular commitment to civic engagement. [Also relates to AA Goal #4 Civic Engagement]
 - A pilot-test of five sections of the new three-credit First Seminar course for incoming students began in fall 2005. 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. Approximately 100 Exploratory students were randomly assigned to the pilot-test sections in order to more rigorously evaluate this new initiative. [Relates to area C (Pedagogy initiatives) of AA Goal #1 and area C (First-year initiatives) of AA Goal#3]
 - A proposal to expand and extend the pilot-test of First Seminars/ Learning Communities through 2006-2007 was presented and eventually passed by Faculty Senate. Subsequent recruitment efforts led to the eventual passage of ten more course proposals (in addition to the 5 passed last year). This program will now be able to be offered to all incoming Exploratory students in fall 2006.
 - A revised FYE survey was designed and administered at both the mid-semester and end-of-semester time points as part of the assessment of the pilot-test. Focus groups were also held with students from the new three-credit and “old” one-credit FYE seminars. Assessment results were shared with the campus community and also as part of a presentation at the AAC&U Gen Ed and Assessment conference in Phoenix, AZ, in March 2006.
 - After the presentation about first-year Gen Ed programming made to the AAC&U Gen Ed and Assessment conference, AAC&U staff invited us to make a similar presentation at the upcoming (October 2006) AAC&U conference on Diversity and Learning in Philadelphia.
 - Faculty Senate continued its detailed review of the proposed principles, purpose, and objectives for Gen Ed with the intent to formally approve them before submitting them again to the full faculty for a referendum. The Gen Ed Coordinator and the GERC assisted Senate in rewording and revising the principles and purpose. Senate passed a revised set of Principles and Characteristics to guide the reform of Gen Ed in October 2005 (attached). Further discussions on the statement of purpose and the objectives were delayed so that they could be better coordinated with changes to the curriculum.
 - Several working groups were formed to develop Gen Ed curricular proposals as alternatives to both the current Gen Ed program and the proposal put forth by the GETF. Draft proposals were shared at a special open Senate meeting in late November 2005. Subsequent surveys of all Departments and discussions in Senate and in GERC led to a series of proposed curricular elements submitted to another special Senate meeting in April 2006 (summary of proposal is attached) where “straw votes” were taken to gauge faculty sentiment for certain changes to

the Gen Ed curriculum. The Gen Ed Coordinator in consultation with members of GERC and other interested faculty and staff will continue to work through the summer to hammer out additional details for these proposals in order to present a more comprehensive curricular proposal to Senate in fall 2006. At this time, an effort will be made to mesh the curriculum with a new set of objectives for Gen Ed.

Outcomes Assessment

As noted above, the administration of outcomes assessment work was altered slightly beginning in fall 2006 when the AOAC was split from the GERC with which it had been paired for the previous two years. The Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC) developed a plan to continue assessment related to the seven Gen Ed student learning outcomes enumerated by Middle States. This plan involved taking direct action on three outcome areas during AY 2005-2006.

- A brief quantitative reasoning test was developed and administered to a random sample of sections of Perspectives (P) courses offered in spring 2006. Approximately 270 students from ten sections completed the assessment. Scoring and reporting is planned for summer 2006.
- Selected assignments from a sampling of composition courses were gathered during spring 2005 by Library faculty in order to assess the Information Literacy objective. AOAC will use the analyses and reports of this assessment (prepared during summer and fall 2005) to address this Middle States objective.
- AOAC is working with the English Department on the assessment of written communication skills. A sampling of written assignments from selected Writing (W) courses was also gathered in anticipation of completing a second level of assessment for this objective. Progress in this area was disrupted by the resignation of the Assistant Provost for Planning and Assessment, but discussions will resume this summer.
- As noted above, early work on assessing the pilot-test of the First Seminar/Learning Community initiative was completed and reported. Continued study of this first pilot-test cohort will occur during the next year. Additionally, a more comprehensive direct assessment is being planned for the expanded pilot-test cohort entering in fall 2006.
- Selected faculty (White, Foster-Clark, Valle, and Lawrence) attended a two-day workshop in Philadelphia sponsored by Middle States and developed a plan for Gen Ed assessment, portions of which will help shape the assessment agenda in the coming year.
- Planning began for the 2006-2007 assessment agenda which will address critical reasoning and analysis, scientific reasoning, oral communication, and technological literacy.

Strengths and Challenges

- An impressive dialogue within Senate and across the University was stimulated by the efforts to reform the Gen Ed curriculum. This dialogue was facilitated by the background work done by a series of working groups structured by the hard working GERC under the outstanding leadership of John Ward. The size and difficulty of such a major reform effort and the inevitable politicizing it engenders has slowed progress toward implementation. Despite delays from the original timeline for implementation laid out by the GETF, the quality of discussion and the attention the process has received will hopefully enhance the likelihood of eventual success for a revised curriculum.
- A successful beginning to the pilot-test of the First Seminar/Learning Community initiative led to the approval to continue and expand the program for fall 2006. We were nearly overwhelmed by the outpouring of high quality new proposals for additional topics for fall 2006 and are extremely pleased to be able to offer the program to all new incoming Exploratory students. On a less positive note, the web-based surveys, which were the heart of our initial efforts to assess the initial run of the program, were completed by far fewer students than desirable to assure the validity of the results. Efforts to correct these difficulties for the cohort entering this fall are already underway. Increased attention and resources directed to the assessment of this new initiative is absolutely vital.
- Some of the challenges to progress on Gen Ed assessment relate to the availability of resources and administrative leadership. The illness and later resignation of the Assistant Provost for Planning and Assessment disrupted both the planning and implementation processes for AOAC's work. Together with an already overburdened Institutional Research office, support for AOAC's planned efforts for summer and fall 2006 might well be lacking. Some relief may be provided by the return from sabbatical leave of the Gen Ed Coordinator coupled with the awarding of a half-time grad assistant whose responsibilities will include assessment efforts.

Background for Discussion of Gen Ed Proposals for April 4, 2006

“The best General Education program is not based simply on choosing specific goals or finding the perfect model. The best program is one that is aligned with the learning needs of students on a specific campus and that the faculty of that campus believe in and teach with passion, commitment, and intentionality – only then can they help students engage fully with its purposes and opportunities.” (Ann Ferren, June 2002, Presentation at the Asheville Institute for General Education).

Middle States Standard 12

General Education

The institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

Principles to Guide the Restructuring of General Education at Millersville (Revised 11/15/2005)

The following principles, together with the revised statement of purpose and learning objectives, are intended to provide a framework for re-visioning General Education at Millersville and for guiding the development of changes to the curricular structure. They grow out of the recommendations of the General Education Task Force and have subsequently been reviewed and revised by Faculty Senate and the Gen Ed Review Committee. It is understood that the statement of purpose and learning objectives will continue to undergo refinement as work on the restructuring of Gen Ed continues.

Principles that guide the process of reform:

Principle A: Reform will reflect what the faculty believe in and can teach with passion, commitment, and purpose.

Principle B: Change will be incremental, based on campus-wide dialogue, and well understood by the University community.

Principle C: The reform will build on and maintain current MU strengths.

Principle D: Reform of Gen Ed will be balanced by the curricular needs of major programs of study, especially as they are impacted by State mandates and/or disciplinary accreditation.

Principle E: Reform will be accompanied by sufficient faculty, administrative, and resource support.

Principle F: The reform process will be guided by meaningful evaluation.

Characteristics of a Reformulated Gen Ed Program

Characteristic 1: Clear Purpose, that is well understood by all members of the university community and that is consistent with the MU mission and the specific learning needs of MU students.

Characteristic 2: Intentional Alignment of the objectives, curricular structure, and assessment with the purpose of Gen Ed, the mission of this University, and the learning needs of our students.

Characteristic 3: Coherence and connections between Gen Ed and majors without being overly prescriptive.

Characteristic 4: Intellectual Richness, setting appropriately high expectations for students’ engagement that develop as students progress through their academic programs.

Characteristic 5: Academic Community Reaching beyond the Classroom, fostering interactions between and among students, faculty, and the larger University community.

Characteristic 6: Simplicity and flexibility, promoting ease of understanding and greater choice in meeting the Gen Ed requirements.

Outline of GERC Curriculum Proposal (In-Progress)

Foundations – 9 credits

- ❑ Composition
- ❑ Math
- ❑ Speech

Explore and More 15 credits

- ❑ 9 credits “Explore”
 - First Year Seminars (FYS) are strongly encouraged and can count for up to 3 of these 9 credits. FYS include 1 credit FYE, 3 credit “passion” courses, 1, 2, or 3 credit Major-based seminars, and new forms that develop and are typically integrated into a Learning Community. Maximum 25 students for most seminar formats.
 - Except for Freshman Seminars, all Explore credits must come from programs outside the student’s major. BSE students may not count required education courses as Explore courses.
 - All Wellness courses count toward Explore credits. All types of Wellness courses should count, including 1 credit sports courses.
- ❑ Advanced writing – encourage English to develop discipline specific sections linked with major courses.
- ❑ Perspectives and / or Capstone.

Liberal Arts – 27 credits minimum

- ❑ 3 courses in Math / Science (1 lab science)
- ❑ 3 courses in Social Studies
- ❑ 3 courses in Humanities

Skills across the curriculum:

- ❑ The W course system would be maintained, but we are still considering a proposal to move to 3 required W courses with a maximum 25 students and moving back to the old requirement that a W course must include writing with revision.
- ❑ D courses. It is vital for our students to grow in their understanding of diversity. It is important that this occurs in extra-curricular and extra-curricular activities, as well as in coursework. We recommend the creation of a D designation for courses and recommend that advisors and students use this designation during the advisement process. We do not recommend requiring a specific number of D courses. Because “diversity” has many different meanings, we recommend requiring a short statement about what the D designation means for each course. We have not finished work on a recommendation for how courses would receive a D designation.

Eliminate: the current requirement that: *Exactly* two courses must be taken from one department within G1, G2, and G3. No more than two courses can be taken from one department within G1, G2, or G3, but two courses from two different departments is acceptable.

Advisement recommendations – There are many important goals for Gen Ed that are not represented by a specific course. Instead we recommend the development of advisement guidelines to help students and faculty make decisions that best meet these goals for each student. One draft of such guidelines would be:

“Please consider each student’s individual needs, interests, and skills when making the following recommendations. Most students at Millersville should:

- ❑ Take multiple challenging courses. Although this may include several 300 level courses outside the major, course numbering is not always the best indicator of challenge.
- ❑ Be encouraged to take sequenced courses outside the major.
- ❑ Take a course with a significant wellness / physical fitness component. Examples of courses may be 1 credit sports courses, the current 3 credit “Wellness” courses, or other courses such as coaching or nutrition.
- ❑ A variety of courses that emphasize diversity in its many forms. Development of foreign language competency should be considered as one component of diversity.
- ❑ Take courses that emphasize information literacy, critical thinking, and the meaningful use of technology.
- ❑ Take courses that include a major speaking with feedback component. These courses should build upon Comm 100, but they can also include other communication courses and other Gen Ed and major courses.
- ❑ Courses (especially those that involve service learning) and/or co-curricular and extracurricular activities that encourage civic engagement.
- ❑ Students and advisors should consider courses in literature, music, art and other areas that may help broaden the student’s areas of interest.