

Millersville University
General Education Task Force
Final Report and Recommendations
Part 1: Background and Appendices
Part 2: Recommendations

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Table of Contents

Part 1: Background.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Findings.....	5
Conclusions: Guidelines for Reform at Millersville University	9
Part 2: Recommendations	13
Recommendation 1: A new purpose statement and objectives for General Education	15
Rationale	16
Recommendation 2: A revised curricular structure for General Education.....	17
Rationale for Tier Structure	18
Recommendation 3: First-year Seminars and Learning Communities	22
Rationale for the First-Year Seminars and Learning Communities.....	23
Recommendation 4: Capstone Experiences Linking General Education with the Major.....	26
Rationale	26
Recommendation 5 – Administration of General Education	28
Recommendation 5.1 To Enact Organizational Structures to Support Gen Ed Revision and Ongoing Functioning.	28
Rationale	29
Recommendation 5.2 To Require the Certification and Recertification of Gen Ed Courses.....	29
Rationale.....	31
Timeline for Discussion and Reform Plan.....	32
Assessment Plan.....	33
Appendices.....	34
Appendix 1. Resources for further information	35
Appendix 2. Gen Ed Timeline	36
Appendix 3. Mission of Millersville University	37
Appendix 4. Current Gen Ed Objectives	38
Appendix 5. First Seminar Draft Proposal (DRAFT – 12/3/04).....	41
Appendix 6. Sample First Seminar Descriptions (forthcoming)	

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Part 1: Background

“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).

The above quote has been something of a mantra for the Task Force and has shaped our orientation to fulfilling the charge given to us two years ago by Faculty Senate. We have spent considerable time and effort in dialogue with faculty, students, and administrators on our campus; in dialogue with experts from other colleges and universities at conferences, at institutes, through listservs and emails, and right on our own campus; and in dialogue with each other. Our goals have been to understand the options for Gen Ed programming available to us, to understand what’s worked well and what hasn’t right on our own campus, to understand the students we serve now and those who will come to our campus in the near future, and through these understandings to comprehend the “learning needs of the students on this specific campus.” We have sought avenues to infuse the Gen Ed program with the passion and commitment of our faculty and the engagement of its students by being more intentional and articulate about why we do Gen Ed and about what outcomes it seeks to achieve.

This document lays out the strengths and weaknesses of the current Gen Ed system and concludes that significant improvement should be sought. We lay out a timeline for change and maintain that reform requires steady incremental progress with wide involvement from all campus stakeholders. In the end, the central reform we envision is the development of a shared and well-understood purpose for MU Gen Ed that faculty are passionate about. While we have put forth proposals for specific initiatives to serve as a foundation for campus dialogue, it is the ideas about the characteristics of a vibrant and healthy Gen Ed program and about how we get there that lie at the heart of our message.

Before moving on to consider the various recommendations and the rationales that support them, it is important to review briefly where the Task Force began and what it has done,

our findings regarding the strengths and weaknesses that characterize the present system, and most importantly the principles that should continue to guide our efforts at enhancing the general education to better fulfill the University's mission of "providing an exemplary liberal arts-based education" to its students.

Introduction

In November 2002 the twelve-person General Education Task Force¹ was created and charged with re-examining our Gen Ed program and making recommendations for enhancing it. The Task Force began its work in early 2003. Several of the monographs recommended by resource faculty at the Asheville Institute on General Education (which a team from Millersville attended in June 2002) were procured and read by Task Force members. Additionally, a variety of internal documents, including the Governance Manual and the University Mission and Vision statements, were reviewed. The mission in particular helped to sharpen our focus. The University's mission statement places a high emphasis on General Education. It begins as follows: "The primary mission of Millersville University is to promote intellectual development through an exemplary liberal arts-based education. The University is steadfastly committed to the proposition that a thorough, broad-based foundation in the arts and sciences is a necessary condition for the development of the whole person. It resolutely embraces the conviction that all of its degree programs must maintain a strong liberal arts component while preparing students to engage in productive and contributive lives as professionals." Though written more than a decade ago, this statement (and the passages that follow it in the entire University Mission statement) was felt to appropriately state the importance of General Education and to convey the orientation to Gen Ed that faculty and administrators at Millersville would endorse. As explained further below (see Conclusions), the Task Force has tried to shape its approach within the framework given by the University's Mission.

The orientation reflected in this Mission statement fits well the current National discussion on college learning reflected in the National Panel Report, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (AAC&U, 2002). There, they emphasize that the learning college students need as they prepare to live and work in the 21st century is liberal education, which blends the breadth provided by general education with in-depth study in

at least one field. Similarly, and consistent with the University's mission, the Task Force has tried to preserve the integrity of general education while working towards a greater integration between Gen Ed and major programs of study. A holistic and integrated rather than bifurcated approach to curriculum planning is felt to be consistent both with the University's mission and the *Greater Expectations* report.

Another of the starting points of the work of the Task Force was to review and discuss a seminal book, *Strong Foundations* (AAC, 1994), based upon twelve principles put together by the Association of American Colleges (now AAC&U) and intended to "explicate what is basic to implementing and sustaining strong general education programs" (p. xvii). After a few months of discussion and debate among ourselves, we decided to extend our discussion of the purposes and principles behind Gen Ed to the larger campus community by holding a series of eight focus group sessions during the fall of 2003. Several of the AAC Principles were selected by the Task Force as most relevant and substantive and served as a framework for our initial campus conversations about general education at Millersville². Most received strong endorsement in the focus groups and have helped to guide our work on this revision to the Gen Ed program. These principles are as follows:

1. Strong Gen Ed programs explicitly answer the question, "What is the point of General Education?" (p.3)
2. Strong Gen Ed programs continuously strive for educational coherence. (p.12)
3. Strong Gen Ed programs are self-consciously value-based and teach social responsibility. (p. 18)
4. Strong Gen Ed programs require and foster academic community. (p. 31)
5. Strong Gen Ed programs reach beyond the classroom to the broad range of student co-curricular experiences. (p. 48)

While participants strongly endorsed these principles³ as important to Millersville's vision of what Gen Ed should strive for, they also strongly suggested that the current Gen Ed program does not live up to these principles. The issues of purpose, coherence, and building community have ascended to become the central foci of our efforts to find ways to strengthen Gen Ed at Millersville.

Interestingly, just last year Andrea Leskes of AAC&U, in reflecting upon the current status of general education (*Peer Review*, Summer 2003, p.3), reviewed five key concepts in designing strong general education programs:

- Intentionality – “Intentionality is an alignment of desired aims with action.”
- Coherence – “... coherence translates into conscious designs for learning, or ‘purposeful pathways,’ that foster cumulative learning of intellectual skills and insights.”
- Linkage – “General education learning outcomes can best be achieved by drawing on all aspects (curricular and co-curricular) of college life.”
- Culture of Evidence – “Assessment of learning outcomes ultimately requires demonstrated accomplishment.”
- Concerted Action – “... general education must become the responsibility of the entire faculty. Student affairs personnel and students also form part of the equation.”

Clearly, the recipe for making a strong general education program hasn’t changed much in the last decade. As outlined below (see Conclusions), our approach to the revision process also seems validated in Dr. Leskes’ remarks.

In summary, current perspectives from the National discussion and literature on higher education and existing University statements have informed our approach to the process of Gen Ed reform at Millersville. However, it was important to test out these ideas by examining faculty and student experience and perceptions with the current program and how they viewed the principles that should govern how our Gen Ed curriculum should operate. It is to these on-campus findings that we now turn.

Findings

Millersville is recognized by its peers and by college rating systems as providing a high quality education for its students. The commitment to General Education and the liberal arts is reflected in the substantial investment in this program. All students must take at least 51-54 credits in the Gen Ed curriculum while earning their degrees; our analyses show that about 40% take 66 or more Gen Ed credits outside of their major.⁴ This commitment to General Education has also been shown by the creation of the Gen Ed Coordinator’s position in 2001 and the

formation of the Task Force in 2002. Through the support of both faculty and administration, the importance of a careful assessment and review of Gen Ed has been underscored.

Millersville is also recognized as having a wide array of high quality majors; not only in education but across the arts and sciences and professional programs. While strong majors and the prospect of effective career preparation are more often cited as reasons for coming to Millersville, many students come without an identified major or switch major fields of study while here. While quality majors are both a strength and drawing card, in an increasingly complex world most students are best served by a balance between and an integration of Gen Ed and the major.

Another often-cited strength of Millersville is its writing emphasis. The current undergraduate program has a strong focus on writing across the curriculum and graduates are often commended for their skills in this area. While concern was raised in campus discussions about slippage from the original intentions and standards for writing-intensive courses, due in part to increased enrollments, the emphasis placed on writing-across-the-curriculum at Millersville was consistently endorsed. The analysis of student course-taking patterns showed that most students take more than the minimum number of writing courses during their undergraduate programs⁵.

Another important strength found at Millersville lies in the increasing commitment to and the success of first-year programming (including seminars and learning communities) and learning community initiatives (in the first-year and beyond). Among the Exploratory students, student satisfaction, student behavior, their GPAs, and their retention have all been impacted positively by the current FYE program. Students in FYE (University 101) have had 16% and 17% higher second-year retention rates than students who are not enrolled in the program during the past two years. Their retention record exceeds the average for students who enter with a selected major and recent data even show higher persistence is maintained into the third college year. Faculty in these and other learning communities and faculty involved in first-year seminars and learning communities offered in major fields of study have consistently reported positive impressions about the success of these programs.

However, a number of sources – Gen Ed surveys, focus groups, NSSE data, outside reviewers – suggest that there are also areas that need improvement. While nearly everyone has their own pet peeve regarding Gen Ed, several themes seemed to emerge in our analyses. The

first of these is the lack of any real understanding of the purpose of Gen Ed at Millersville. The Gen Ed Task Force conducted focus groups and surveys about the quality of general education in the fall of 2003. As previously discussed, these sessions focused on five of the 12 principles for strong general education programs as promulgated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Attendees were asked to assess the importance of each principle and to evaluate how well it was being upheld at Millersville. Drawing upon Faculty and Student Senators, department chairs, and other faculty and students, twenty-one of the 26 academic departments were represented at these sessions and in the survey results.

In these focus group meetings, neither students nor faculty were very expansive or articulate about what the point of Gen Ed at Millersville actually was. The typical response was “to make you (the student) well rounded.” Only 7% of faculty and no students felt strongly that the purposes of Gen Ed were “explicit and clear for the faculty and the students” and that there was a “coherent rationale” and “commitment” to Gen Ed. While the findings indicated that faculty and students can’t articulate an explicit nor deep sense of purpose for Gen Ed, there does seem to be wide agreement about the importance of citizenship, diversity, and critical thinking. This implicit understanding of purpose seems well aligned with the University’s mission statement (although that connection was not directly stated in the focus group discussions). These elements of a liberal education were recurrent themes in the focus group discussions.

A related difficulty is the perceived lack of coherence. Faculty and students clearly expressed the view that our current Gen Ed program was more like a list of courses than a program that purposefully builds links between courses, concepts, or skills⁶. The perception was that Gen Ed was quite “fragmented” and required students to search on their own for commonalities and connections.

A third liability is the complexity of the Gen Ed curriculum. Since the advent of the current system in the late 1980s, faculty and students alike have complained of the complexity of the Gen Ed requirements. While DARS has helped to manage the complexity, course “planning” too often remains a box-checking, letter-grabbing, number-counting exercise rather than a discussion of educational interests or needs.

While Millersville ranks high on its commitment to teaching and learning overall, there are indications that teaching in the Gen Ed program is not as highly valued as teaching courses for majors. On the focus group survey, 29 percent of faculty agreed that teaching Gen Ed was

seen as an “academic chore or burden.” Teaching Gen Ed was typically viewed as done in isolation rather than with a sense of collaboration, interaction (with other faculty), or interdisciplinarity and with little support given to “faculty development related to general education.” Despite having a capable cadre of adjunct and part-time instructors, it is often the Gen Ed courses that bear the brunt of having less experienced and less permanent teachers and having larger classes.

Surveys of student engagement confirm focus group findings that students feel less engagement with their learning (especially in Gen Ed) due to a lack of intellectual challenge and low levels of student – faculty interaction. This is shown both in the NSSE data and in our focus groups⁷. Millersville ranked in the 30th percentile of Masters I and II institutions in terms of student-faculty interactions in the freshman year (according to the National Survey of Student Engagement). A common theme of focus groups was that currently there is a perception that Gen Ed courses are “supposed to be easy.” Focus group participants also confirmed the NSSE findings on student-faculty as well as faculty-faculty interaction in Gen Ed.

Based on the above findings and continuing dialogue across campus, the Task Force drew up some preliminary recommendations which were shared and debated in a second set of focus group meetings in spring 2004. After further review by external consultants, continuing study of the literature in higher education, input from Deans’ Council, ongoing dialogue with GERC and amongst ourselves, the present report and recommendations have come forth.

Summary: *Modifying the Culture of the University*

Despite the University’s many strengths and its stated commitment to General Education, there is clearly room to strengthen that commitment and enhance the Gen Ed program. Many of the changes we envision have more to do with changing the overall culture of the University’s approach to general education rather than necessarily changing specific features or requirements. Therefore, we believe it is essential to reach consensus on the overall philosophy of the Gen Ed program and the principles to which it should adhere. It is these principles we will now review prior to discussing the more specific recommendations.

Conclusions: Guidelines for Reform at Millersville University

Stated most concisely, our beliefs about the philosophy and principles that should guide both the process and the content of Gen Ed reform at Millersville can be summarized in the following sets of principles:

- **Principles that guide the process of reform:**
 - Reform must reflect what the faculty believe in and can teach with passion, commitment, and intentionality.
 - Change should be incremental and based on campus-wide dialogue. We should maintain and build on current MU strengths.
 - Reform must be well understood by as many members of the University community as possible.
 - Increased emphasis on Gen Ed must be accompanied by increased administrative and resource support.
 - Reform should be informed by meaningful evaluation.

- **Reform of Gen Ed at MU should be characterized by:**
 - a 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.
 - intentional and clear alignment of the objectives, curricular structure, assessment, and University “branding” with the purpose.
 - improved coherence and connections between Gen Ed and major.
 - increased intellectual richness and challenge.
 - a greater sense of academic community that extends beyond the classroom.

Discussion of Principles

Based upon our extensive campus discussions framed by the issues and findings discussed above, we put forth these principles to guide both the process and content of Gen Ed reform at Millersville. One of the most critical guiding principles we’ve endorsed is that Gen Ed reform must align with the learning needs of students on our own campus and must be strongly

supported by faculty. It must be responsive to local needs and issues and to the University's particular mission. A review of the University's mission and Academic Affairs strategic plan leads to two specific needs or issues that should be incorporated into discussions about enhancing undergraduate education: (1) encouraging responsible citizenship and civic engagement, and (2) preparing students to live and work in a diverse, multicultural, and globally-connected society. We feel that these components have been undervalued in the present curriculum.

Another guiding belief focuses on the partnership between Gen Ed and the major. Another manifestation of the lack of curricular coherence at Millersville is the bifurcation between Gen Ed and the major. Students and even some faculty see Gen Ed as something to "get out of the way" or otherwise devalue so that they can get to the "important stuff," i.e., courses in their major. Instead, we'd like to see Gen Ed courses and courses in students' majors better integrated, much in keeping with the current emphasis on Degree Specification which also asks programs (majors) to think holistically about the entire 120-credit academic experience. For instance, while the groundwork for certain competencies (e.g., writing, speaking, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy) may well be laid by Gen Ed courses, it has long been recognized that these competencies are expanded and honed throughout the curriculum and throughout a student's academic career. We'd also like to see greater value attached to what Gen Ed contributes to a student's baccalaureate experience.

The particular learning needs of first-year students and others in transition have become an increasing focus of both National and local (i.e., Millersville) attention in recent years. We feel that the Gen Ed program should build further upon recent efforts to enhance student engagement by providing the combination of structure, support, and challenge that students need to get a successful start on their academic careers. Thus, the principles of intellectual richness and challenge and of academic community are vital to a healthy and vibrant educational experience.

Our Approach to the Change Process

Stephen Briggs, Provost at The College of New Jersey and external reviewer for our Gen Ed Program Review last year, characterized two approaches to the curriculum change process: transformational and incremental. While he has overseen a transformational change on his own

campus, he clearly viewed our situation at Millersville as favoring incremental change. Most Millersville faculty with whom we have consulted would agree. We are not proposing an abrupt transformational change, nor do we see ourselves as having the perfect and final solution. We are, however, proposing a change process that over time will significantly improve Gen Ed, thereby continuing a trend toward solidifying Millersville's mission as a regional comprehensive university fostering "intellectual development through an exemplary liberal arts-based education".

More important than any single recommendation is maintaining the integrity of any revised program by keeping it closely aligned with the principles reviewed earlier.

- Is its purpose clear and well understood by the entire academic community? Does the purpose fit well with the University Mission?
- Is the program intentional?
- Is the curriculum closely aligned with the stated purpose and learning objectives? (i.e., is it coherent?)
- Do elements of the curriculum fit together across courses, across disciplines, and across time (from semester to semester and year to year with a student's program of study)? In other words, are there connections? Is it coherent?
- Are courses in Gen Ed and courses within the majors complementary and integrated? (i.e., is it coherent?)
- Are students intellectually and socially engaged with each other, with their professors, and with others in an academic community?

Lastly, despite advocating incremental change that allows for thoughtful deliberation inclusive of many opinions and perspectives, we maintain that the reform process needs to make steady and continual progress. To that end, we have established an implementation plan with goals and benchmarks set semester by semester for the next three years. Over the three years the details of the specific recommendations are sure to be debated and some, modified. But if the core ideas and the principles they reflect are kept foremost in our minds and if the input and support of faculty, students, administrators, and other staff are gained, we are confident that these recommendations can result in a Gen Ed program that the University as a whole can be proud of, a program both "aligned with the learning needs of students" and worthy of the "passion, commitment, and intentionality" of the faculty at Millersville.

¹ Current membership includes John Ward, Dorothee Blum, Michelle White, John McLarnon, Alex DeCaria, and Phil Tacka (inactive due to illness) all elected by Faculty Senate. Carol Phillips and Phil Riordan are appointed members from Academic and Student Affairs, respectively. Fred Foster-Clark serves by virtue of his position as Coordinator of General Education. The slot formerly served by Paul Studdard is vacant. Former members from the faculty include Barbara Bensus, John Dooley, and Behnam Nakhai. James Hague and Rob Kuhn are the current elected Student Senate representatives. Former student members include Nikki Miller and Graham Waters, both of whom served with distinction.

² The twelve principles are as follows (those marked with asterisk are the five selected for discussion in the focus groups): Part I. Articulating a Compelling Vision for General Education

1. *Strong Gen Ed programs explicitly answer the question, “What is the point of General Education?” (p.3)
2. Strong Gen Ed programs embody institutional mission. (p. 7)
3. *Strong Gen Ed programs continuously strive for educational coherence. (p.12)
4. *Strong Gen Ed programs are self-consciously value-based and teach social responsibility. (p. 18)
5. Strong Gen Ed programs attend carefully to student experience. (p. 22)
6. Strong Gen Ed programs are consciously designed so that they will continue to evolve. (p. 26)

Part II. Forming an Evolving Community Based Upon a Vision of General Education

7. *Strong Gen Ed programs require and foster academic community. (p. 31)
8. Strong Gen Ed programs have strong faculty and administrative leadership. (p. 36)
9. Strong Gen Ed programs cultivate substantial and enduring support from multiple constituencies. (p. 40)
10. Strong Gen Ed programs ensure continuing support for faculty, especially as they engage in dialogues across academic specialties. (p. 44)
11. *Strong Gen Ed programs reach beyond the classroom to the broad range of student co-curricular experiences. (p. 48)
12. Strong Gen Ed programs assess and monitor progress toward an evolving vision through ongoing self-reflection. (p. 52)

Source: Association of American Colleges (1994). Strong foundations: Twelve principles for effective general education programs. Washington D. C.: Association of American Colleges.

³ Number 3 proved to be somewhat contentious. Many of the concerns about this principle revolved around who gets to define which values are “taught” and whether values should be taught at a public university.

⁴ This is just slightly higher than National data that finds that the average (mean) gen ed requirement is 37.6 percent while the median is 40 percent (48credits out of 120).

⁵ In an analysis of over 2400 graduates, 62% had taken five or more “W” courses (4 is the minimum requirement) and 24% had taken 7 or more.

⁶ On a 5-point scale, with 1 being low, 27 out of 44 (61%) faculty and 11 out of 27 (41%) students rated general education coherence (survey item #4) as either a 1 or a 2. Additionally, just over 50% of both faculty and students strongly or somewhat agreed with the view that Gen Ed was primarily “a list of courses that students must take” (item #3).

⁷ According to the 2003 NSSE data, 56% of MU freshman never discuss ideas with faculty outside of class (vs. 43% Masters/ 40% Overall); only 9% do so often or very often (vs. 16% Masters/ 17% Overall). In the focus groups, 43% of participants agreed that faculty and students in our general education program rarely interact outside the classroom (Item #10).

60% of participants agreed that general education faculty teach with little or no consultation or dialogue with other faculty (Item #16).

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Part 2: Recommendations

Part 1 of the General Education Task Force's Final Report presented some of the background to the recommendations for Gen Ed program reform that are discussed in this, Part 2 of our Final Report. In order to better understand the present recommendations, we urge readers to familiarize themselves with that document (Part 1) before launching in on these recommendations. As emphasized in Part 1, many of the changes we envision in reforming Gen Ed have more to do with changing the overall culture of the University's approach to general education than simply changing specific features or requirements of the program. As such we put forth a number of principles that we feel should guide both the process of reform and the content of the changes to the program. The rationale for each recommendation in this document refers back to the guidelines and principles discussed in Part 1. Briefly, the principles that should guide Gen Ed reform are as follows:

Principle 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.

Principle 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.

Principle 3: Coherence and connections between Gen Ed and majors.

Principle 4: Intellectual Richness, setting appropriately high early expectations for students' engagement with the provision of necessary supports.

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

What follows in subsequent sections of this report are the five specific recommendations that the Task Force sees as vital to enhancing general education at Millersville. In brief, the recommendations deal with:

1. Purpose and objectives
2. Curricular structure
3. First-year programming
4. Capstone experiences
5. Administration of Gen Ed

Also as noted in Part 1, though the process we prefer is incremental, allowing for thoughtful deliberation inclusive of many opinions and perspectives, we maintain that the change planning and implementation processes need to make steady and continual progress. To that end, we have established a timeline for discussion and reform with goals and benchmarks set semester-by-semester for the next three years. This timeline follows the five recommendations. Lastly, in promoting a “culture of evidence” where data are used to inform the institution about its success and limitations in achieving its desired ends, a final subsection lays out an assessment plan.

Recommendation 1: A new purpose statement and objectives for General Education

Proposed Purpose Statement (Drafted 11/23/04; Approved 12/20/04)

Consistent with Millersville University's mission to "promote intellectual development through an exemplary liberal arts based education," the purpose of General Education is to provide breadth of knowledge as a balance and complement to the depth provided by the major. General Education is designed to provide a coherent, well-rounded educational experience that assures the acquisition of lifelong values and competencies, including information literacy, personal wellness, ways of knowing across a variety of disciplines, and an appreciation for cultural and academic diversity. These are necessary for the holistic development of our graduates so that they may become responsible citizens in a democracy that exists within an increasingly complex global society.

Proposed Objectives (Drafted 12/20/04; Approved 12/20/04)

The General Education Program prepares graduates who meet all of the following objectives.

Foundations for Critical Thinking and Life-Long Learning

1. Students will:
 - a) generate, express, and revise ideas for personal, career, and civic communication.
 - b) present ideas formally in spoken, written, and media forms.
 - c) find appropriate sources of information, evaluate the information, and integrate it into a final product.
 - d) demonstrate general knowledge and an appreciation for physical and psychological well-being, as well as an appreciation for the environment, life-long learning, and community participation.

Critical Thinking And Its Application To Personal, Academic, Career, and Civic Purposes

2. Students will:
 - a) use and interpret statistical data.
 - b) evaluate and solve problems from the real world using the symbolic language of mathematics with appropriate technology.
3. Students will:
 - a) use social science evidence and theories to become a participating and informed citizen in a democracy that exists within an increasingly complex global society.
 - b) evaluate theories of human behavior and social institutions using methods of inquiry of the social sciences, including quantitative and qualitative methods and appropriate technology.
4. Students will:
 - a) use scientific reasoning, laboratory methods, appropriate technology, and mathematics to investigate scientific concepts.
 - b) evaluate and apply scientific evidence and theories.
5. Students will:
 - a) use critical analysis to respond thoughtfully to works of literature.
 - b) apply critical and creative methods of the arts and humanities.

Connecting Critical Thinking In The Disciplines To Life Beyond The Classroom

6. Students will be able to:
 - a) demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and skills essential for communicating with, working with, and making decisions with people of diverse backgrounds.
 - b) articulate and rationally support personal, moral, and civic values and manifest a commitment to these values through personal, academic, career, and civic endeavors.
 - c) connect big ideas and methods of inquiry from different disciplines including both historical and contemporary perspectives in ways that lead to effective problem solving and support life-long learning.

Rationale

The first round of focus groups found a lack of coherence across the Gen Ed curriculum. Students and faculty felt the Millersville's Gen Ed program was more like a list of courses that had to be checked off than a purposeful program. Developing a new purpose statement is the beginning of clarifying what we value. (Principle 1: Clear Purpose)

The first round of focus groups also found that students come to Millersville because of the strength of their major programs and because of their career interests. The proposed purpose statement recognizes the complementary nature of Gen Ed and major studies. (Principle 3: Coherence)

Although the culture of Millersville tends to place more importance on major areas of study than on Gen Ed, progress toward the development of an exemplary liberal arts education can be seen historically in Millersville's evolution from a teacher's college to a university with a strong regional reputation. One participant in the first round of focus groups commented that this is the third round of Gen Ed reform at Millersville and each time Gen Ed has gotten stronger. The purpose statement recognizes Millersville's aspiration to develop a Gen Ed program that is as strong as our major areas of study. (Principle 4: Intellectual Richness)

The phrase "well-rounded" is the most common understanding of the current purpose of Gen Ed. The proposed purpose statement gives depth to this phrase by describing the qualities we seek in our graduates. In particular, the statement highlights the importance of Gen Ed as preparation for responsible citizenship. (Principle 1: Clear Purpose)

The phrase "increasingly complex global society" highlights the growing importance of general education as a complement to major programs. Now, more than ever, students need a strong general foundation in order to adapt to the challenges that an increasingly complex global society provides. This foundation includes the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with people from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. (Principle 1: Clear Purpose)

There is a logical and coherent progression from the Purpose Statement to the Objectives. (Principle 2: Intentional Alignment).

Our interest is not only in having a widely endorsed and well stated purpose and set of objectives; it is also vital to increase the dissemination of these in ways that are both accessible and powerful. Expanded and ongoing dialogue about the purposes and practices of a broad liberal education are needed in order to fulfill the intended spirit of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: A revised curricular structure for General Education

GENERAL EDUCATION TIER STRUCTURE (minimum 51 semester hours)

Foundations (4 courses - 12 sh)

- UNIV 1***: First Seminar (or other GenEd course) 3 sh
- ENGL 110: English Composition 3 sh
- COMM 100: Fundamentals of Speech 3 sh
- WELL 175/352: Wellness: Concepts of Health & Fitness/Health Education in Elem. Schools 3 sh

Introduction to Critical Thinking in the Disciplines¹ (4 courses – min. 12 sh)

- Math with statistics or calculus component
- Laboratory science
- U.S. Civics-related Social Science
- Literature (from the Humanities)

Critical thinking in the Disciplines Electives (6 courses – min. 18 sh)

- 2 each in Humanities and Fine Arts, Science and Mathematics, Social Sciences
- Three courses at 200 level or above

Integration (3 courses - 9 sh)

- Perspectives course
 - At least junior standing
- Gen Ed elective
 - At least junior standing
 - 300 level or higher
- Writing intensive capstone or Advanced Writing
 - Senior standing

Six courses (18 sh) from Required Related course work in student's major may be counted toward any of the Gen Ed requirements above.

Other University requirements:

Writing courses: 4 required; may be in General Education, the major or general electives.

Diversity² course: 1 required; may be in General Education, the major or general electives.

Courses meeting any Gen Ed requirement will be approved according to existing procedures.

¹ Students select from a set of approved core courses in each area.

² The purpose of the Diversity requirement is to help students understand people and cultures that they may have had limited understanding of before coming to the university. Courses meeting this requirement should focus on helping students deal constructively with prominent intercultural questions and differences that currently cause discord among citizens within the United States or between the United States and peoples from other countries.

Rationale for Tier Structure

One of the manifestations of coherence in the Task Force proposals is to carefully align the curricular structure with the principles, purposes, and objectives for general education. The correspondence of the various elements of the Tier Structure with the principles, purposes, and objectives is shown in the chart that follows. (Principle 2: Intentional Alignment)

Foundations for Critical Thinking and Life-long Learning (4 courses - 12 sh)

- Communication with a purpose; decision making; critical thinking
 - First seminar (UNIV 1**)
 - coherence
 - critical thinking
 - articulate and rationally support personal, moral, and civic values and manifest a commitment to these values through personal, career, and civic endeavors. (Objective 6.b)
 - find appropriate sources of information, evaluate the information, and integrate it into a final product. (Objective 1.c)
 - Writing (ENGL 110)
 - generate, express, and revise ideas for personal, career, and civic communication. (Objective 1.a)
 - present ideas formally in written forms. (Objective 1.b)
 - find appropriate sources of information, evaluate the information, and integrate it into a final product. (Objective 1.c)
 - Speech (COMM 100)
 - generate, express, and revise ideas for personal, career, and civic communication. (Objective 1.a)
 - present ideas formally in spoken forms. (Objective 1.b)
 - find appropriate sources of information, evaluate the information, and integrate it into a final product. (Objective 1.c)
 - Wellness (WELL 175/352)
 - Demonstrate general knowledge and an appreciation for physical and psychological well-being, as well as an appreciation for the environment, life-long learning, and community participation. (Objective 1.d)

Introduction to Critical Thinking and its Application to Personal, Academic, Career, and Civic Purposes (4 courses – min. 12 sh)

- Coherence through a common core of courses; critical thinking
 - Math with statistics or calculus component
 - Use and interpret statistical data (Objective 2.a)
 - Evaluate and solve problems from real world using symbolic language of mathematics with appropriate technology. (Objective 2.b)

- Laboratory science
 - Use scientific reasoning, laboratory methods, appropriate technology, and mathematics to investigate scientific concepts. (Objective 4.a)
 - Evaluate and use scientific evidence and theories. (Objective 4.b)
- Civics related Social Science
 - Use social science evidence and theories to become a participating and informed citizen in a democracy that exists within an increasingly complex global society. (Objective 3.a)
 - Evaluate theories of human behavior and social institutions using methods of inquiry of the social sciences, including quantitative and qualitative techniques and appropriate technology. (Objective 3.b)
 - Articulate and rationally support personal, moral, and civic values and manifest a commitment to these values. (Objective 6.b)
- Literature (from the Humanities)
 - Use critical analysis to respond thoughtfully to works of literature. (Objective 5.a)
 - Apply critical and creative methods of the arts and humanities. (Objective 5.b)

Electives in Critical thinking in the Disciplines (6 courses – min. 18 sh, 9 of which at 200 level or above)

- Depth and breadth through choices of electives in the Humanities and Fine Arts, Science and Mathematics, and the Social Sciences.
 - Breadth through taking 2 courses in each area (not in major).
 - Depth through taking 9 credits at 200 level or above.
- Reinforcing the objectives in the previous tier.
 - 2 courses in the Humanities and Fine Arts (Objective 5)
 - 2 courses in Science and Mathematics (Objectives 2 and 4)
 - 2 courses in the Social Sciences (Objective 3)

Connecting Critical Thinking in the Disciplines to Life Beyond the Classroom (3 courses – 9 sh)

- Personal, ethical, and civic values and decision-making skills.
 - 3 credits in Perspectives (from any area, including major; must have junior standing)
 - Connect big ideas and methods of inquiry from different disciplines including both historical and contemporary perspectives in ways that lead to effective problem solving and support life-long learning. (Objective 6.c)
 - 300-level elective (not in major; at least junior standing)
 - Depth
 - Writing intensive capstone or advanced writing (3 sh; senior standing)
 - Coherence
 - Objectives 1.a, b, and c

Other University Requirements

- Diversity course (1) (from any area, including major)
 - Demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and skills essential for communicating with, working with, and making decisions with people of diverse backgrounds. (Objective 6.a)
- Writing courses (4) (from any area, including major)
 - (Objectives 1.a, b, and c)
- Six courses (18 sh) from Required Related course work in student's major may be counted toward any of the Gen Ed requirements above.
 - Coherence and connections between Gen Ed and the major

Overall, the curricular structure closely parallels the objectives laid out in Recommendation 1. This parallelism is represented visually in the Gen Ed Wheel figure on the following page. There is a developmental sequence shown both in the objectives and in the curricular structure. Students move from more simple and fundamental skills and knowledge to the more complex and integrated. They move from having less freedom of choice (and more structure) to having greater freedom of choice (and less structure). Increased emphasis on spreading Gen Ed throughout the four-year undergraduate experience works against the vision of Gen Ed as “just foundational” and separable from study in one's chosen discipline and as something you do primarily in the first two years to “get it out of the way.” Instead, we hope the proposed curriculum would be seen as creating a more integrated and collaborative relationship among the different components of what constitutes a Baccalaureate degree. (Principle 2: Intentional Alignment)

This proposed curriculum has more intentionality, with careful alignment to the University's mission as well as the Purpose and Objectives of Gen Ed, than is true in the current curriculum. Our University mission and our current Academic Affairs Strategic Goals both emphasize preparation for citizenship, civic engagement, and living in a complex, diverse, multicultural world. The proposed addition of a diversity requirement, the First Seminar, and a core social science course related to U.S. civics are aligned with these emphases. (Principle 2: Intentional Alignment)

The proposed curriculum also encourages greater partnership between Gen Ed and the major through its endorsement of major-related first-year learning communities, addition of the Capstone option, and continuation of counting Required Related courses in the major as part of a student's Gen Ed curriculum. (Principle 3: Coherence)

The proposed curriculum offers alterations in the current system that build upon the perceived strengths of that system while at the same time moving us incrementally toward a better vision of what General Education could be, in order that we may better serve our students and the larger community we operate within.

Recommendation 3: First-year Seminars and Learning Communities

“Learning communities. . . purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students. . . learning communities are also usually associated with collaborative and active approaches to learning, some form of team teaching, and interdisciplinary themes.” (Gabelnick, F., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R.S., & Smith, B.L. (Eds). (1990). *Learning communities: Creating connections among students, faculty and disciplines. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 41*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.)

Proposal

The General Education Task Force is recommending that incoming first-year students at Millersville be placed in small, supportive learning communities during their first semester. It is expected that many of these learning communities will include new Gen Ed first-year seminars – three-credit, theme-based, intellectually rich courses linked, at a minimum, to a Fundamentals course (Engl 110, Comm 100). The seminar introduces entering students to the mission of the University and the purpose and objectives of general education and to the skills necessary for successful college work and eventual postgraduate endeavors. The requirement would also be fulfilled by the expanding set of learning communities offered by certain majors or minors to incoming first-year students. In this case, a Gen Ed elective would take the place of the three-credit First Seminar.

Learning Communities at Millersville University are generally designed to:

- Promote coherence in the General Education Program and facilitate integration of knowledge across disciplines. (Principle 3: Coherence)
- Support students’ successful transition to college life and engagement with the University in the broadest sense.
- Create a sense of community by developing connections between and among students and teachers. (Principle 5: Academic Community Reaching beyond Classroom)

Rationale for the First-Year Seminars and Learning Communities

This proposal builds upon the success of our own growing experience with first-year programming for both Exploratory students and students with a variety of majors. It is also consistent with National trends to enhance the engagement of students early in their college careers to promote their retention and eventual success.

The First Seminar is designed to meet four critical needs: 1) to imbue an appreciation in students of critical thought as it is developed in a variety of disciplines, 2) to create a culture of intellectual richness at the beginning of a student's experience with Millersville general education, 3) to improve student faculty interactions in the freshman or transfer year, and 4) to enhance student engagement in the life of the University, both within and outside the classroom. Identification of each of these needs arose from an analysis of multiple sources of data including Gen Ed Task Force focus groups and surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and data collected on the current 1-credit Freshman Year Seminar (UNIV 101).

The first need relates to the goal of developing a more purposeful general education program as has been discussed previously. Each seminar will include readings and discussion designed to raise dialogue about and appreciation for critical thought as it is developed in disciplines related to the seminar. Moreover, each seminar will include investigation of the relation between seminar questions and broader cross-disciplinary questions. It is also envisioned that the seminar will explicitly address the role of Gen Ed in a student's program of study. Seminar instructors will most often serve as formal or informal advisors for their seminar students, especially in the area of Gen Ed programming. Peer Mentors will assist faculty in this regard and will help students to link with extra-curricular, co-curricular, and academic support resources. (Principle 1: Clear Purpose)

A second need indicated by the Gen Ed Task force was for improved intellectual richness and challenge. A common theme of focus groups was that currently there is a perception that Gen Ed courses are "supposed to be easy." Seminars are designed to challenge this assumption in the first semester. Each seminar should reflect the goal of an intellectually rich course, both in terms of expectations for active critical thinking and in terms of appropriate yet challenging expectations for reading, writing, student research, and student-led discussion. Seminars are designed to challenge through piquing curiosity, sustained inquiry, and dialogue, rather than

through the memorization of a large body of knowledge. Faculty will develop Seminars around issues, topics (often current), and questions that they are passionate about, yet that may not fit within the established curriculum. Students will be able to select seminars of interest to them. Our external consultant reinforced the importance of setting appropriate expectations for intellectual richness and engagement as soon as students begin their work on the college campus. (Principle 4: Intellectual Richness)

Third, Seminars are designed to improve student-faculty interactions during the freshman year. Millersville ranks in the 30th percentile of Masters I and II institutions in terms of student-faculty interactions in the freshman year (according to the National Survey of Student Engagement). Typically, freshmen are placed in large lecture classes with little chance to interact with faculty. Each section will be limited to 20 students and will promote a seminar approach to learning as one way to create opportunities for rich interactions. (Principle 5: Academic Community Reaching beyond Classroom)

The fourth need, student engagement, is not independent of the preceding three needs. Increasing intellectual richness and student-faculty interactions address engagement within and sometimes beyond the classroom. But another seminar goal is for engagement with all of campus life. Integrating the First Seminars with learning communities where possible, encouraging the use of living-learning programs, and including a service learning requirement when appropriate are additional ways to extend the bonds of friendship and interest beyond the classroom. As mentioned previously, Peer Mentors will also assist in the integration of Seminar participants with campus activities and resources that lie beyond the classroom. (Principle 5: Academic Community Reaching beyond Classroom)

Finally, it is essential to address all of these needs early in the general education program. The current freshman seminar for undecided students has been highly successful in helping new freshman transition to college. Students in University 101 have had 16% and 17% higher second-year retention rates than students who are not enrolled in the program during the past two years. Their retention record exceeds the average for students who enter with a selected major, and recent data show higher persistence is maintained into the third college year. Currently, University 101 is a 1-credit course offered only to students who have not declared a major. Also, University 101 is not designed to address the need for intellectual richness. The First Seminar (University 179) will be a 3-credit course with a substantial academic focus offered to all

students. Efforts will be made to incorporate the features of University 101 that have made the experience so successful into the new First Seminars.

Recommendation 4: Capstone Experiences Linking General Education with the Major

According to Joseph Cuseo's 1998 review of senior capstones, the intended objectives included the following:

- "Promote the coherence and relevance of general education"
- "Promote integration and connections between general education and the academic major"
- "Explicitly and intentionally develop important student skills, competencies, and perspectives" ... including such qualities as "leadership and character and values development" (Henscheid, J.M. (2000). *Professing the disciplines: An analysis of senior seminars and capstone courses* (Monograph No. 30). Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, p. 2.)

Proposal

Each major program of study is encouraged to develop and require some capstone experience(s) that will provide a culmination of study that blends the general education program's emphasis on developing lifelong competencies, constructive citizenship, and civic engagement with the specific skills and knowledge of the major discipline. This could be a course (e.g., History & Systems of Psychology, senior seminar), a project (e.g., honors project, independent study), or other experience (e.g., student teaching, co-op). A properly designed and approved senior capstone, even if it fulfills a major-related requirement, will count as an upper-level Gen Ed requirement. Written reports or presentations are a required element of each capstone. For majors having no approved senior capstone, an Advanced Writing course offered by the English Department will also fulfill this requirement.

Rationale

The first round of focus groups found a lack of coherence both across the Gen Ed curriculum and between requirements of the major and those of the Gen Ed program. The purpose of the first (i.e., first-year learning community) and last (i.e., capstone) academic requirements of all Millersville students is to intentionally bridge these gaps, thereby helping the overall undergraduate experience to take on the sense of coherence, connection, and purpose that students and faculty have said they desire. (Principle 3: Coherence) When these first and last requirements are book ended around a series of course progressions, both within and outside the major, depth of study is gained along with a sense of continuity and connection among the

courses taken throughout the four years. Integration and coherence are thus achieved both between Gen Ed and the major and across the years of study. No longer, then, would Gen Ed be viewed as “something to get out of the way” in the first two years of college.

Consistent with recent initiatives to promote the Degree Specification process, the major programs of study should build both upon and alongside the Gen Ed program to develop the whole person with specific skills as well as lifelong competencies, equipped for career, civic, and personal fulfillment. Capstone experiences represent the culmination of this growth process and an opportunity to assess, at both the individual and program levels, the readiness of students in terms of the outcomes specified for them by their degree programs. Thus, Capstones tap into the principles of coherence and intellectual richness and challenge, and help to meet the mandate to include and be informed by the evaluation of student learning.

Recommendation 5 – Administration of General Education

Promoting “intellectual development through an exemplary liberal arts-based education” is the stated primary mission of Millersville University. To move the University forward in its achievement of this lofty goal, the Gen Ed Task Force is putting forth a series of proposals to enhance general education at Millersville. While curricular and pedagogical issues may be paramount in this effort, it is also essential to put in place the organizational capability to implement and maintain the programs needed to fulfill the liberal education mission. The proposals below address these organizational capabilities.

Recommendation 5.1 To Enact Organizational Structures to Support Gen Ed Revision and Ongoing Functioning.

Coordinators. Coordination and day-to-day administration of the First-Year Learning Community Initiative will be provided by a faculty member with initially a two-course per semester release who will serve as First-Year Experience (FYE) Coordinator. (This will involve a substantial broadening of the role currently played by the FYE Coordinator who has responsibility only for FYE for Exploratory students.) Coordination and day-to-day administration of all other aspects of Gen Ed will be provided by another faculty member with a two-course release who will serve as Gen Ed Coordinator. Offices for the two Coordinators will be provided in a central location with sufficient meeting space for carrying out their responsibilities. Clerical support will also be provided. Both Coordinators will report to the Associate Provost.

Committees. Modifications, including the expansion of roles and responsibilities, of two existing Committees are envisioned to provide programmatic oversight and policy direction for the ongoing revision of Gen Ed. First, the Gen Ed Review Committee(GERC) will be separated from the Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC), resume its full original charge, and oversee the work of implementing the remaining recommendations (other than the First-Year Learning Community Initiative) made by the Gen Ed Task Force. The Gen Ed Coordinator and the FYE Coordinator will serve as *ex officio* members of the GERC and will work actively with and seek direction from this Committee. The Gen Ed Coordinator will also bear responsibility for much of the day-to-day work of ongoing revision of the Gen Ed Program in line with the

recommendations of the Gen Ed Task Force and in cooperation with and under the oversight of the GERC.

Secondly, oversight and direction for the First-Year Learning Community Initiative will be provided through modification of the current FYE Steering Committee. This Steering Committee will be created as a separately elected (by Faculty Senate) committee that would report to GERC. The FYE Coordinator, Gen Ed Coordinator, and the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs or his/her designee will be *ex officio* members of the FYE Steering Committee and will work actively with and seek direction from this Committee on matters related to first-year programming.

The mission of AOAC will be revised to reflect as its primary mission the continued coordination of outcomes assessment efforts related to Gen Ed learning outcomes. The Assistant Provost for Planning and Assessment will serve as an *ex officio* member of this committee.

Rationale

In order to continue and to expand upon the University's commitment to Gen Ed, it is necessary to have the requisite support structures in place in order that the program can function effectively day-to-day while maintaining a vision of the future. This is especially important at a time where considerable change is being contemplated and new ideas are being implemented. This is in line with the guidelines for reform mentioned earlier. It is essential that there be systematic support for an evolving Gen Ed program at Millersville.

Recommendation 5.2 To Require the Certification and Recertification of Gen Ed Courses

Millersville has a fairly rigorous process for the approval of courses or the assignment of Gen Ed designations to existing courses that involves substantial faculty and administrative input to initial course creation and modification. It seems we have been remiss, however, in not providing any oversight of courses once they are approved. Hence, we are proposing the periodic review and recertification of existing Gen Ed courses. This is deemed to be especially critical at this juncture as we now consider a second revision to the Gen Ed objectives. Many existing courses were approved long before even the first revision of the objectives back in 1999. That revision made substantial changes in the learning outcomes that we envision for students as a result of their completion of the Gen Ed curriculum (as anyone who remembers the "truth and beauty" objectives will confirm).

We propose that all courses in the Gen Ed program undergo a one-time recertification over a six-year period following implementation of the new tier structure. The recertification will be conducted by a joint working subcommittee of the GERC and UCPRC. This subcommittee will be composed of three members from each committee and constituted so that each Division has representation and no more than two members from the same school serve simultaneously. Membership on this working subcommittee may rotate, however, as long as the specified balance is maintained. Recertification will be based on alignment with current Gen Ed outcomes and with criteria that have been established for Gen Ed course approval for courses carrying specific designations (e.g., Writing, Perspectives, and Diversity courses). Evidence for meeting the appropriate objectives and/or criteria should be provided with the application for recertification. After completion of the one-time recertification above, Gen Ed courses except those excluded below will be subject to continual recertification on a six-year cycle. Electives in Humanities and Fine Arts, Science and Mathematics, or Social Sciences that only serve to meet distributional requirements are not subject to this continual recertification, but will only undergo the one-time recertification. The recertification process will also serve to clean up the existing course catalog by eliminating “inactive” courses and to refresh other courses by encouraging the re-examination of their objectives and intent.

Courses that do not seek or that are denied recertification will have their Gen Ed designations removed beginning one year after the semester when recertification was due (e.g., denial in Fall 2006; designations removed beginning Fall 2007). Courses denied recertification will be allowed to resubmit a revised recertification request during the same semester or during the next semester with the consent of the subcommittee. Subsequently, denials can be appealed directly to Faculty Senate for consideration.

Timing of Recertification. Newly approved Gen Ed courses (or those with newly approved changes to their designations) will be scheduled for recertification six years after Faculty Senate approves the course (or change) and every six years thereafter. Existing courses will be reviewed and recertified as follows:

First year – Foundations courses, AW, and non-Gen Ed W courses; S&M electives (one-time)

Second year – one-half of all Gen Ed W courses; HFA electives (one-time)

Third year – other half of all Gen Ed W courses; SS electives (one-time)

Fourth year – first third of all P and D courses; S&M Core

Fifth year – second third of all P and D courses; HFA Core

Sixth year – last third of all P and D courses; SS Core

Continuing recertification will occur six-years after the initial recertification and every six years thereafter.

Rationale

The recommendation for recertification is intended to help maintain the integrity of the entire Gen Ed program. In particular, the principle of intentionality applies here. Periodic re-examination of the operation of Gen Ed courses is needed to better ensure that the desired aims of the program, as stated in the Purpose and Objectives, are aligned with the curricular structure and its components (i.e., the courses). (Principle 2: Intentional Alignment) We would encourage the development and use of brief standardized assessments (student surveys) or the use of other data to help demonstrate that Gen Ed courses are fulfilling the learning objectives and specified course criteria consistent with their role in the overall Gen Ed curriculum.

Gen Ed Task Force Recommendations Timeline for Discussion and Reform Plan

AY 2004-2005

- ▲ Presentation and discussion of final report and recommendations
- ▲ Consideration by Faculty Senate of proposals for...
 - Pilot-testing of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative for Fall 2005
 - Organizational structures to support Gen Ed
- ▲ Faculty referendum on proposals for...
 - Purpose and objectives for Gen Ed and critical goals for reform

Fall 2005

- ▲ Conduct pilot-test of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative
- ▲ Collect and report interim data on First-year Learning Community/Seminar pilot-test
- ▲ Seek Faculty Senate approval for continuation of pilot-testing in AY 2006-7

Spring 2006

- ▲ Compile and report results of pilot-test of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative
- ▲ Consideration by Faculty Senate of proposals for...
 - First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative
- ▲ Faculty referendum on proposals for...
 - Restructuring of Gen Ed curriculum

AY 2006-2007

- ▲ Continue pilot-test of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative
- ▲ Consideration by Faculty Senate of proposals for...
 - Senior Capstone proposal

AY 2007-2008

- ▲ Partial implementation of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative

Fall 2008

- ▲ Full implementation of First-year Learning Community/Seminar initiative
- ▲ Initiation of new Gen Ed curriculum with incoming students

Gen Ed Task Force Recommendations Assessment Plan

Only preliminary work has been completed on an assessment plan. The following elements are being discussed.

- Degree specification – should allow the assessment of the Foundations and Life-Long Learning skills reflected in Gen Ed Objective 1 but assessed through the major program.
- Course surveys – to assess whether courses are doing what they are designed to do; tied to the recertification process and any guidelines developed for Gen Ed course approval and recertification.
- Survey of Graduates – designed to assess in particular Gen Ed Objective 6 which is felt to require the longer-term perspective of students after they have finished their undergraduate studies.
- Tasks in Critical Thinking – adapt the TCT (which has been used previously at Millersville for Gen Ed assessment) for assessment of critical thinking within different disciplinary areas for the assessment of Gen Ed Objectives 2-5.

A more elaborate plan for the assessment of the First Seminars and first-year learning communities is being developed for the pilot-testing scheduled to take place in Fall 2005 and beyond. It will combine some of the potential questions listed in the First Seminar course proposal draft (see Appendix) and some of those currently being used in the assessment of the FYE program.

**Millersville University
General Education Task Force
Final Report and Recommendations
Appendices**

Appendices.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 1. Resources for further information.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 2. Gen Ed Timeline**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 3. Mission of Millersville University**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 4. Current Gen Ed Objectives**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 5. First Seminar Draft Proposal.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Appendix 6. Sample First Seminar Descriptions (forthcoming)

Appendix 1. Resources for further information

General Education resources and information can be found on the general education web site directly by going to <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~gened/important-documents-page.dwt> or by following the directions below.

1. Start at the Millersville University Web Site, www.millersville.edu
2. Click on the Information for “Faculty and Staff” link
3. Under Academics, click on “General Education”
4. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on “Important Documents”

Documents currently available are listed below:

- 2002 Annual Report
- 2003 Annual Report
- Asheville Institute Report
- Reference Materials
- Spring 2004 Focus Groups Document
- Strong Foundation Selected Principles
- Summary of Focus Group Meetings
- Fall 2003 Task Force Report
- Program Review Report

Appendix 2. Gen Ed Timeline

Millersville University General Education Task Force General Education Timeline (Rev. 8/12/04)

Fall 1988	Major Gen Ed revision implemented
May 1996	First Gen Ed Program Review
Fall 1997	Modification of Gen Ed Requirements as result of Task Force on General Education Curriculum and Its Resources
May 1999	Revised Gen Ed Objectives approved by Faculty Senate
January 2001	Gen Ed Coordinator (1/4 release) begins
Fall 2001	FYE Undecided Program begins
June 2002	MU team attends Asheville Institute for General Education
November 2002	Faculty Senate creates Gen Ed Task Force (GETF)
February 2003	First meeting of GETF
Fall 2003	Initial round of GETF Focus Group meetings
Fall 2003	Elimination of G4 Gen Ed Elective becomes effective
January 2004	Report to Deans' Council and to Faculty Senate
Spring 2004	Second round of GETF Focus Group meetings
April 2004	External Reviewer (Steve Briggs) visits
June 2004	MU team attends Learning Communities Summer Institute (LCSI)
July 2004	Second Gen Ed Program Review
Fall 2004	Third round of GETF Focus Group meetings
November 2004	Final recommendations of GETF to Faculty Senate

Appendix 3. Mission of Millersville University

The primary mission of Millersville University is to promote intellectual development through an exemplary liberal arts-based education. The University is steadfastly committed to the proposition that a thorough, broad-based foundation in the arts and sciences is a necessary condition for the development of the whole person. It resolutely embraces the conviction that all of its degree programs must maintain a strong liberal arts component while preparing students to engage in productive and contributive lives as professionals.

Millersville University resolves to provide a comprehensive range of meritorious baccalaureate programs consistent with student aspirations and faculty wisdom and expertise to all qualified Commonwealth residents at the lowest reasonable cost. Additionally, it will offer graduate programs in those fields where there is both need and corresponding institutional strength.

Millersville University seeks to prepare its students to live in an increasingly diverse, multicultural, and technologically complex society. It will accomplish this by offering a curriculum that is rich and multifaceted, by serving as a model of a pluralistic community, and by providing leadership in this regard to the greater community.

While Millersville University recognizes excellence in teaching as its reason for being, it also undertakes to open avenues for personal, social, and cultural growth essential to the development of an educated and productive person, including development of the capacity for leadership and decision-making in order to make the fullest possible contribution to society. It will foster the examination, development, and understanding of personal values and appreciation of the values of others.

The University also accepts its responsibility to provide opportunities for research, artistic and scholarly effort, and other creative endeavors in a manner consistent with its primary mission as a teaching institution. Additionally, the University accepts its responsibility to serve society by acting as an intellectual and cultural resource to the regional community.

To achieve this mission, the Millersville University community pledges itself to academic freedom and encourages imagination and curiosity, unfettered discourse, the exchange of divergent and controversial opinion, multicultural awareness and understanding, within an environment of civility, mutual respect and cooperation.

Approved by the Strategic Planning and Resource Council on February 8, 1993.

Approved by the Council of Trustees on April 29, 1993.

*this information was extracted from Section 1 of the [University Governance Manual](#)

Appendix 4. Current Gen Ed Objectives

General Education Objectives – Full Text

Approved in 1999

I. Fundamental Skills (all approved 2/16/99)

Objective 1. Mathematical Reasoning.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) formulate problems from the real world in the symbolic language of mathematics;
- b) select and perform mathematical procedures appropriate for solving such problems;
- c) explain mathematical concepts and procedures appropriate for further learning.

Objective 2. Critical Reasoning.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) recognize, analyze, and appreciate arguments supporting theories and perspectives other than one's own;
- b) provide reasoned support for their own beliefs;
- c) compare and evaluate competing arguments.

Objective 3. Inquiry/Information Literacy.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) generate research questions/pose problems;
- b) recognize when they have a need for information;
- c) find reliable sources;
- d) evaluate information found and select relevant information;
- e) make effective use of information, including being able to integrate what they have learned into a final product.

Objective 4. Communication using a Variety of Speaking and Writing Processes.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) generate, express, and revise ideas;
- b) take into account others' critiques of their ideas;
- c) present ideas formally in both spoken and written form;
- d) reflect on their ability to work through these processes.

Objective 5. Communicating within Different Contexts.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) use speaking and writing for a variety of purposes;
- b) target different audiences according to those purposes;
- c) select appropriate strategies for both writing and speaking for those audiences and purposes;
- d) demonstrate awareness of their decisions.

Objective 6. Communications Technology Literacy.

Students completing 60 credits at MU will be able to:

- a) make use of appropriate communications technology;
- b) explain the way new technologies alter the process of inquiry and communication.

II. Discipline-based Skills and Knowledge**Objective 7. Humanities and Fine Arts.**

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to identify and discuss (in a way that demonstrates broad-based knowledge within one or more disciplines) at least two different individuals/movements from a list of historical and contemporary artists, philosophers, musicians, playwrights, or writers, including Western and non-Western examples. [Approved 3/16/99]

Objective 8. Humanities and Fine Arts.

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to discuss and apply critical and creative methods of the arts and humanities, including the ability to create works of art and/or literature and respond to their aesthetic attributes by analyzing, critiquing, and defending their reasoned opinions concerning works of theater, literature, art, philosophy or music (American or international, contemporary or historical) and create and/or aesthetically appreciate works of art and/or literature. [Amended & Approved 3/16/99, p. 4585]

Objective 9. Science and Math.

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to articulate connections between mathematical and scientific principles, technologies, and events affecting our everyday lives. [Approved 3/2/99]

Objective 10. Science and Math.

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to explain how we know and why we believe key concepts in the natural sciences, and be able to use:

- a) scientific reasoning;
- b) laboratory methods;
- c) mathematics to solve scientific problems; and
- d) appropriate technology [Approved 3/2/99]

Objective 11. Social Sciences.

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to articulate the relationships among people, culture, environment, institutions, and systems across history and geography. [Amended and approved 3/2/99, p. 4580]

Objective 12. Social Sciences.

At completion of their general education requirements, MU students will be able to explain and be able to use some of the methods of inquiry of the social sciences, including quantitative and qualitative methods, to:

- a) study human behavior and social institutions;
- b) communicate the results using appropriate language; and
- c) ascertain and evaluate the results obtained by others. [Approved 3/2/99]

III. Connections**Objective 13. Coherence.**

At completion of degree requirements, MU students will be able to see and discuss connections among courses in various disciplines and between their course work and “real life.” In addition, they will be able to use what they have learned to make decisions and solve problems. [Approved 5/4/99]

Objective 14. Diversity.

At completion of degree requirements, MU students will be able to demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, and skills essential for communicating with, working with, and making decisions with people of diverse backgrounds. [Approved 5/4/99]

Objective 15. Historical Consciousness.

At completion of degree requirements, MU students will be able to explain how the development and expression of institutions and beliefs interact with historical circumstances.
[Approved 5/4/99]

Objective 16. Personal, Ethical, and Civic Values and Decision-making.

At completion of degree requirements, MU students will be able to:

- a) articulate and rationally support personal, moral, and civic values;
- b) understand and treat with respect the perspectives of others;
- c) use this knowledge of self and others to resolve conflicts and make responsible decisions; and
- d) manifest a commitment to core values such as wellness, honesty, and civic responsibility. [Amended & Approved 5/4/99, pp. 4640-1]

Appendix 5. First Seminar Draft Proposal (*DRAFT – 12/3/04*)

UNIV 179: 3 credits

First Seminar

Catalog Description:

Each Seminar section focuses on a different topic of strong interest to faculty and students. Seminars are designed to jump start the process of intellectual inquiry; students participate in a free exchange of ideas through discussion and oral presentations. Each Seminar should reflect the goal of an intellectually rich course both in terms of expectations for active critical thinking and in terms of appropriate yet challenging expectations for reading, writing, student research, and student-led discussion. Professors teaching First Seminars have a strong mentoring role as they assist students in developing a meaningful and purposeful approach to General Education that will prepare them for life.

An important part of the First Seminar is that most sections will be part of a learning community. Learning communities may be arranged as living-learning communities and Seminar sections may team with either the freshman writing or speech course. Whatever the design of the learning community, the goal is always to promote a richer experience that extends learning and relationship beyond the classroom. Seminars are limited to 20 students.

Course Rationale:

The First Seminar is designed to meet three critical needs: 1) to imbue an appreciation in students of critical thought as it is developed in a variety of disciplines, 2) to create a culture of intellectual richness at the beginning of a student's experience with Millersville general education, and 3) to improve student faculty interactions in the freshman or transfer year. Identification of each of these needs arose from an analysis of multiple sources of data including GENED Task force focus groups and surveys, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and data collected on the current 1-credit Freshman Year Seminar (UNIV 101).

The first need relates to the goal of developing a more purposeful general education program. The GENED Task Force conducted focus groups and surveys about the quality of general education in the fall of 2003. Faculty and students clearly expressed the view that our current GENED program was more like a menu of courses than a purposeful program. On a 5-point scale, with 1 being low, 26 out of 41 faculty and 11 out of 27 students rated general education coherence as either a 1 or a 2. Institutional structures and curriculum can support a purposeful general education program. Yet true reform requires a shift of culture and understanding that can only occur through sustained dialogue. Each seminar will include readings and discussion designed to raise dialogue about and appreciation for critical thought as it is developed in disciplines related to the seminar. Moreover, each seminar will include investigation of the relation between seminar questions and broader cross-disciplinary questions.

A second need indicated by the GENED Task force was for improved intellectual richness and challenge. A common theme of focus groups was that currently there is a perception that GENED courses are “supposed to be easy.” Seminars are designed to challenge this assumption in the first semester. Each seminar should reflect the goal of an intellectually rich course, both in terms of expectations for active critical thinking and in terms of appropriate yet challenging expectations for reading, writing, student research, and student led discussion. Seminars are designed to challenge through piquing curiosity, sustained inquiry, and dialogue, rather than through the memorization of a large body of knowledge. Faculty will develop Seminars around issues, topics (often current), and questions that they are passionate about, yet that may not fit within the established curriculum. Students will be able to select seminars of interest to them.

Third, Seminars are designed to improve student-faculty interactions during the freshman year. Millersville ranks in the 30th percentile of Masters I and II institutions in terms of student-faculty interactions in the freshman year (according to the National Survey of Student Engagement). Typically, freshmen are placed in large lecture classes with little chance to interact with faculty. Each section will be limited to 20 students and will promote a seminar approach to learning as one way to create opportunities for rich interactions. Integrating the First Seminars with learning communities where possible, and including a service learning requirement are additional ways to extend the bonds of friendship and interest beyond the classroom.

Finally, it is essential to address all of these needs early in the general education program. The current freshman seminar has been highly successful in helping new freshman transition to college. Students in University 101 have a 17% higher retention rate than students who are not enrolled in the program. Currently, University 101 is a 1-credit course offered only to students who have not declared a major. Also, University 101 is not designed to address the need for intellectual richness. The First Seminar (University 179) will be a 3-credit course with a substantial academic focus offered to all students.

Course Objectives:

By completion of this course, the students will

- Investigate a specific topic or question in-depth.
- Understand comparisons and connections within and between various fields of study and the role of critical thinking in a liberal arts education.
- Recognize the need to explore assumptions, including assumptions from readings, peers, and faculty.
- Find appropriate sources of information, evaluate the information, and integrate it into a final product.
- Demonstrate strengthened inquiry, research and information literacy skills.
- Understand and demonstrate tolerance for the relativity and plurality of human values and beliefs, especially the multicultural values represented in society.
- Reflect upon the importance of civic responsibility and academic integrity.
- Develop skills in oral discussion and written communication

Comprehensive Outline of Course Content:

The very nature of First Seminar courses is that the content will be different for each section, prohibiting a full course outline here. However, each section will have several topics/issues in common.

- **Critical Thinking and General Education:** Is there value in seeking a well-rounded education? How is critical thinking a vital part of being a well-educated person? What does critical thinking look like in the disciplines related to the seminar topic?
- **Service Learning:** seminars will include a 5-hour service learning experience. The service learning experience will not be part of class time, but essays/discussions related to service learning will be part of the seminar. Organizing and implementing the service learning experience is not part of the faculty responsibilities for the course; this work will be done by the office of Community and Academic Partnerships
- **Information Literacy:** in the context of student research for the seminar, library faculty will deliver instruction to strengthen inquiry, research, and information literacy skills.
- **Examples:** the concept of the First Seminar was proposed to Millersville by a Stephen Briggs, Provost at The College of New Jersey. Although this proposal differs in many respects from TCNJ's version of the course, examples of potential seminar topics can be seen on TCNJ's website: <http://www.tcnj.edu/%7Eliberal/firstselection.html>

Criteria for Evaluating Student Performance:

Each instructor will define specific evaluation procedures, but assessment should be consistent with a seminar format and the rationale for the course. Students should be expected to engage in challenging discussions, writing, and research; assessments should reflect this. It is likely that assessments will involve some of the following: research projects, intellectual portfolios, journals, class discussion, and oral presentations.

Bibliography:

Each Seminar section will have its own bibliography.

Collecting Data on Seminar Format Implementation:

This course is intended to be delivered in a true seminar format with extensive student-led discussion. In order to evaluate the degree of success in implementing this format, each seminar faculty member would agree to collect data using questions designed by the GERC. Data would be connected to a specific seminar section, but not to individual faculty members. Examples of the types of prompts that might be used for this purpose are listed below.

Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions

Made a class presentation

Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in

Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources

Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments

Come to class without completing readings or assignments

Worked with other students on projects during class

Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class

Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)

Resources:

- Staff: given the format of the seminars and the limit of 20 students per section, this proposal does have resource implications. Discussions are ongoing to resolve these resource issues.
- Library resources: the library faculty will provide the necessary instructional support for seminars. The current library facilities and resources provide a strong foundation for student research.
- Service Learning: the office of Community and Academic Partnerships will organize and implement service learning experiences.

- No special equipment is needed for this course.

This course adheres strictly to the University Academic Honesty Policy.