

# **Proposal for Revised General Education Curriculum**

Presented to Millersville University Faculty Senate

by the General Education Review Committee

January 30, 2007

Amended based on Senate feedback—March 6, 2007

## **Introduction**

This proposal is the culmination of three and a half years of campus dialogue and would be the first significant revision of general education since 1988. The proposed revision of the General Education objectives and curriculum preserves the values of the current system while providing a progressive step forward.

The changes from the current system emphasize greater coherence, flexibility, and preparation for a changing world. Greater coherence comes in part through better alignment of objectives and the curriculum and through opportunities for enhanced connections between general education and studies in the major. The proposal allows up to six credits of electives, providing increased flexibility to both students and programs. The addition of a Cultural Diversity and Community requirement fits with the central value of diversity and community at Millersville University and will better prepare graduates for the increasing diversity of the United States and the growing importance of the international community in all facets of life. Other changes, such as revision of the W requirement, and redefinition of criteria for Wellness courses, do not change current curricular requirements but are clear improvements.

In the view of the General Education Review Committee, this proposal meets the learning needs of our students and is one that Millersville faculty can believe in and teach with passion, commitment, and intentionality<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Paraphrase of Ann Ferren, June 2002.

## **Purpose**

Consistent with Millersville University's mission to provide a 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. This is necessary for the holistic development of Millersville graduates as responsible citizens in a diverse and technologically complex, global community.

## **General Education Objectives**

Students, working with advisors, and taking into consideration prior knowledge and experience, purposefully select courses in the General Education curriculum that meld with required courses, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and courses in the major to achieve the following objectives:

## **Foundations for Life-Long Learning**

1. Students will think, speak, and write clearly. This is evidenced by:
  - a) the clear presentation of ideas in formal spoken, written, and media forms.
  - b) the use of effective communication for ongoing dialogue.
  - c) the ability to find appropriate sources of information, evaluate that information, and integrate that information into a final product.
  - d) the use of statistical methods and other techniques of mathematics to analyze and solve problems.

## **Critical Thinking across the Liberal Arts**

2. Students will demonstrate foundational knowledge of the important ideas and methods of different ways of knowing as follows:
  - a) in the humanities students will analyze and interpret existing works of literature and the arts.
  - b) in the sciences students will engage in the scientific method, laboratory study, appropriate technology, and mathematics to investigate, evaluate, and apply scientific concepts and theories.
  - c) in social sciences students will develop the necessary tools of critical thinking, inquiry, and diplomacy to participate effectively in our democracy and the increasingly complex global society.

## **Connections and Exploration**

3. Students will connect important ideas and methods of inquiry from different disciplines as a means of becoming holistic and responsible citizens in a diverse and technologically complex, global community. Students will:
  - a) demonstrate civic and social responsibility.
  - b) grow in their engagement with peoples of diverse histories and communities, both inside and outside the United States.
  - c) build the foundation for a lifelong process of understanding, developing, and monitoring healthy lifestyle behaviors in all dimensions of wellness, including physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental wellness.
  - d) gain personal enrichment by developing new interests that can be enjoyed throughout a lifetime.

## GENERAL EDUCATION STRUCTURE (Minimum 51 credits)

### Foundations for Lifelong Learning

- ENGL 110: English Composition 3 credits
- COMM 100: Fundamentals of Speech 3 credits
- Approved MATH Course 3-4 credits
- ENGL 311, 312, 313, or 316: Advanced Writing 3 credits

### Critical Thinking across the Liberal Arts (9 courses – min. 27 credits)

- Three courses (min. 9 credits) each in Humanities and Fine Arts (G1), Science and Mathematics (G2), Social Sciences (G3).
- *Exactly* 2 courses must be taken from one department within G1, G2, and G3.
- In Science and Mathematics, 2 of the 3 courses must come from Biology, Chemistry, Earth Sciences, and/or Physics including one which has a Laboratory (L) component.
- At least 3 courses taken throughout blocks G1, G2 and G3 must be at the 200 level or above.
- Courses in a student's primary major discipline cannot fulfill a Liberal Arts Core requirement; courses from the minor or second major can fulfill a Liberal Arts Core requirement.

### Connections and Exploration

- First Year Perspectives course 0-3 credit hours
- Approved Wellness course 3 credit hours
- Perspectives course 3 credit hours
- Elective(s) [outside of primary major] 3 - 6 credit hours
- Cultural Diversity and Community course<sup>1</sup>: 1 required; may be in General Education, the major, the minor or general electives.
- Writing courses: 4 required; may be in General Education, the major, the minor or general electives.

### Additional Stipulations:

- Six courses (18 credit hours) from Required Related course work in student's major may be counted toward any of the Gen Ed requirements above.
- Courses meeting any Gen Ed requirement will be approved according to procedures to be specified in the Governance Manual.
- Junior standing required for Advanced Writing and Perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup>is intercultural and/or cross-cultural, with culture being a worldview that reflects beliefs, customs, values, politics, and experiences as shaped by race and ethnicity, gender, geography, language, sexual orientation, education, economics, age, nationality, religious affiliation, occupation, and/or physical ability among other factors.

## **Recommendations for Specific Changes:**

### **1. Encourage incoming students to take a First Year Perspectives (FYP) course which will count as part of a Connections and Exploration block.**

FYP is a component of General Education specifically designed for first semester freshmen and offered in a seminar format, typically linked to a foundations course (either ENGL 110 or COMM 100) as part of a living/learning community. Students will choose from several varieties of FYP courses offered each semester. A major function of these FYP courses is to introduce a process of critical inquiry applied to important social, cultural, scientific, technological, and/or aesthetic problems. Each FYP course will introduce multiple perspectives related to the understanding and resolution of these problems. A second function of these FYP courses is to support students' transition into the college experience academically, socially, and personally. Each FYP course topic will be approved according to guidelines to be specified in the Governance Manual.

Specifically, each FYP course:

- a) involves 3 credit hours at the 100 level.
- b) has a meaningful written and oral component, but may not carry a W label.
- c) requires students to consider multiple perspectives in advancing their understanding of the importance of social, cultural, scientific, technological, and/or aesthetic problems.
- d) enables quality interaction.
- e) provides intellectual richness through its assignments and assessments.
- f) promotes an understanding of the importance of the liberal arts and the General Education program at Millersville.
- g) supports the students' successful transition into college life by fostering connections between and among students, teachers, and the college community.
- h) strengthens students' information literacy.

Rationale:

- Provides coherence and intellectual richness to the General Education program.
- Data collected through student focus groups, faculty interviews, and student surveys during the recent implementation of First Year Perspectives courses (i.e., UNIV 101 and 179) all point to the success of this initiative.

### **2. Institute clarified guidelines for a required WELLness course.**

The WELLness requirement is designed to assist students in making positive lifestyle changes that reduce their health risks, modify their consumer behavior, and enhance their personal well-being and productivity.

Criteria for the General Education WELL requirement are as follows:

- a) must be a 3 credit course.
- b) requires students to participate in a weekly physical or experiential component.
- c) must be a comprehensive approach to wellness employing a variety of cognitive, behavioral, and social learning strategies to encourage and assist students in accepting responsibility for their own wellness.
- d) engages students in critical thinking about wellness.
- e) emphasizes the development of life-long holistic learning.

**3. Require students to take at least three credits of Elective courses outside of their primary major. Students who are exempt from the Perspectives requirement and/or did not take or satisfactorily complete a FYP shall take additional Elective credits to satisfy the 12 credit Connections and Exploration block.**

Elective courses details:

- a) include any 100-level and higher University courses except the English Composition, Fundamentals of Speech, and Mathematics General Education Foundations courses.
- b) may not include courses in a student's primary major (BSE students may not count required professional education courses).
- c) may be credited toward a second major or minor program.

Rationale:

- Adds flexibility and choice to the curriculum.
- Promotes exploration of and experimentation with subjects of interest.

**4. Change from a 4-4-4 distribution to a 3-3-3 distribution in Critical Thinking across the Liberal Arts.**

In order to create the flexibility and choice embedded in Recommendations 1, 2, and 3, Critical Thinking across the Liberal Arts is reduced from 12 to 9 courses. All the previous guidelines to structure students' course selection are maintained, including the "2 in 1" department rule, the number of required related courses allowed, the definitions of the G blocks, and the number of required 200-level courses. Note that the required Mathematics course is moved to the Foundations for Lifelong Learning block.

Rationale:

- Provides the ability to add 2 courses to the "Connections and Exploration" block while retaining the current 51 credit load.
- Fulfills Characteristic 6 (i.e. "Simplicity and Flexibility") of a reformed program.
- Enables programs to meet both the demands of accreditation and State System limits on the total number of credits.
- Provides students a greater range of choice by allowing them to explore new areas of study.
- Provides an avenue for innovative programming, such as FYP courses, to count within the curriculum.

**5. Institute stronger guidelines for Writing Intensive (W) courses including a “revised prose” component. Class size limits for W courses should be reset to 25.**

This recommendation re-affirms the faculty’s commitment to writing-across-the-curriculum which has been eroded from its original design with increases to class size and the resulting lowering of expectations for writing and revising. The original 1988 guidelines have been updated and made slightly more flexible while maintaining the original spirit of revised prose and the centrality of the writing process to teaching and learning.

Proposed Revised Guidelines:

- 1) Students practice forms of writing typical of the field. Writing assignments are designed to develop their content knowledge and enhance their communication skills.
- 2) Students are required to submit at least 2500 words of graded analytical/persuasive writing (about 10 standard double-spaced pages). Some examples of how this requirement might be met include:
  - (A) a research paper in which the student is required to define a problem, select, organize, and synthesize information around a stated thesis.
  - (B) short analytical essays that explore a topic with reasoned evidence and informed opinion.
  - (C) position papers prepared by students that address pros and cons of controversial topics.
  - (D) microthemes that ask the student to find academic sources, organize ideas, develop a thesis and show evidence, but condense the final paper to a single page or two.
- 3) Because W courses assume that writing is a process, students will be given opportunities to develop and revise papers through more than one draft. Assignments will be structured and sequenced in ways that help students improve their writing through practice and revision. Instructors’ feedback on students’ writing will contribute to effective revision and encourage students to develop effective self-assessment.
- 4) Writing intensive courses work best when they include a combination of informal and formal writing experiences for students. In addition to the 2500 words of revised graded analytical/persuasive writing, instructors are encouraged to assign expressive, reflective and/or observational writing tasks. The purpose of these assignments is to bring out the student’s perceptions informally, and to increase writing practice.

Rationale:

- Provides clear purpose, intentional alignment and coherence to the General Education program.
- Restored rigor of writing and revision will add to students’ intellectual experience.

**6. Add a Cultural Diversity and Community (D) requirement such that students will be required to take one approved D course as part of their major, minor, or General Education requirements.**

To satisfy the Gen Ed Cultural Diversity and Community (D) requirement, all students must successfully complete one approved 3-credit course meeting the D criteria. This course may also count for credit in a student's major or minor program or may satisfy another Gen Ed requirement.

*Cultural diversity refers to the differences among people in terms of beliefs, customs, values, politics, and experiences. In essence, culture is a worldview; it is both learned and evolved. The following factors are seen as underlying these differences: Race and ethnicity, gender, geography, language, sexual orientation, education, economics, age, nationality, religious affiliation, occupation and/or physical ability among others.*

Specifically, a D course:

- a) involves 3 semester hours at the 100-level or above.
- b) is intercultural and/or cross-cultural, with culture being a worldview that reflects beliefs, customs, values, politics, and experiences as shaped by race and ethnicity, gender, geography, language, sexual orientation, education, economics, age, nationality, religious affiliation, occupation, and/or physical ability among other factors.
- c) examines historical and environmental factors that underlie cultural differences.
- d) examines the potential global, regional, or local socio-economic factors that underlie cultural differences.
- e) helps students to identify, critically analyze, and apply scholarship and experience related to cultural diversity.
- f) provides academic structure in support of students' positive engagement with peoples of diverse histories and communities.
- g) challenges students to evaluate their own personal worldview.
- h) has a meaningful written and oral component.
- i) may also count as part of any additional requirement (major, minor, or Gen Ed) of the Baccalaureate degree.

Rationale:

- Aligns general education curriculum with University mission to foster in students an appreciation for cultural diversity.
- Professional scientific literature supports the value of a structured educational approach rather than simply an experiential approach to exposing students to cultural diversity.
- Students with improved abilities to understand and engage different cultures are more likely to succeed as positive citizens in the increasingly complex local and regional multicultural environment beyond Millersville University.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2000 reported that 62% of all colleges and universities either already had some form of a diversity course requirement or were in the process of developing one.