

Millersville University

## **Academic Program Review Report**

**(pursuant to Board of Governors Policy 1986-04-A)**

**Program Title: General Education**

**Final Report with Appendices**

**July 2, 2004**

**Prepared by Frederick Foster-Clark, Coordinator of General Education, on behalf of the  
General Education Review Committee**

- Introduction

- 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.” In keeping with this emphasis, the general education requirements at Millersville call for 51 or 54 (depending on admission date) credits out of the typical 120 credits that students need to complete the baccalaureate degree and for a broad range of foundational and liberal arts coursework. In order to keep the program effective, efficient, and current, the faculty and administration at Millersville have worked diligently in recent years to review, assess, and plan changes for the program, as this document and its attachments will summarize.

- The current Gen Ed program at Millersville was approved in 1987 and fully implemented beginning in the fall of 1989. In the late 1990s the requirement for a second Perspectives course was dropped and replaced by a Gen Ed elective, the stipulations for a Writing intensive course were loosened, the requirement for the so-called “CQ” (Communications/Quantitative) courses was dropped, and the Quantitative and Analytic Reasoning (QARC) course was changed to a Math requirement. A last adjustment in the present program, the dropping of the Gen Ed elective, was made effective in fall 2003. (The current curriculum sheets that summarize the Gen Ed requirements can be found in Appendix A.)

- Composition of Review Team

- The General Education Review Committee (GERC – members listed below), with the support of the Gen Ed Coordinator, is the body with primary responsibility for conducting and approving the review and this document. An executive team composed of the Gen Ed Coordinator (Fred Foster-Clark), the Executive Assistant to the President (Carol Phillips), the Chair of GERC (Jim Fenwick),

the Assistant Provost for Planning and Assessment (Dan Weinstein), and the Director for Institutional Research (Joe Revelt) was chiefly responsible for planning, data gathering, conducting, and writing the Program Review Report. The assistance of Institutional Research (especially, Joe Revelt), Information Technology (Gail Childs), and the Registrar (Candae Deen) and her staff was especially valuable in preparing and analyzing some of the institutional data for this report. The members of GERC are:

James Fenwick, Mathematics, Chair

Nadine Garner, Psychology

Jen Miller, Philosophy

William Archibald, English

Andrew Muller, Earth Sciences

David Ostrovsky, Biology

Marjorie Warmkessel, Library

Jeff Wimer, Wellness & Sports Sciences

Laurie Hanich, Educational Foundations

Shauna Frischkorn, Art

Jazmine Jones, Drew Shenk, Graham Waters – Student Representatives

Frederick Foster-Clark, Gen Ed Coordinator, ex officio

- Progress since Last Review
- Recommendations for action from the last Program Review covered four principal areas, which will each be discussed in the following subsections.
- Outcomes Assessment . The first recommended course of action pertained to assessing the outcomes of Gen Ed and revising the goals of Gen Ed to be conducive to assessment. Substantial progress has been made in this area. After two years of discussion and debate within the GERC and within Senate, Faculty Senate approved a new set of objectives for Gen Ed in the spring of 1999 (see Appendix B). Subsequently, GERC began to undertake the process of developing assessment plans for the more important and tractable outcomes. Priority was placed upon critical thinking (Gen Ed Objective #2), written communication (Gen Ed Objective #4), and quantitative reasoning. Reports on the assessments in these first two areas were drafted and circulated during this past year based upon assessment data that were collected between spring 2002 and spring 2003 (see Appendices C & D). The third objective being assessed is quantitative reasoning (Gen Ed Objective #1). Test items were embedded in exams from several different Gen Ed courses in the Math Department (approximately 300 students) in the spring of 2003 to provide course-embedded assessments. Scoring took place last

summer. Revisions to the assessment procedure were considered last fall and a re-assessment using mid-term testing was conducted in courses this spring. A report from this assessment effort will be forthcoming by fall of 2004. Preliminary research, including pilot-testing in some cases, has been conducted to prepare for assessing the following outcomes: information literacy, coherence, scientific reasoning, and technological literacy.

- **Faculty Development** . A lack of training of faculty on how to “deliver” general education, especially as it relates to general skills and competencies (e.g., critical thinking) as opposed to content knowledge, was noted in the last Review. While general efforts to promote faculty development at Millersville have expanded in the last few years, training on general education in particular has been, at best, sporadic. Recent years have seen the expansion of the New Faculty Orientation program which provides new faculty members with an intensive week of information and training on a host of institutional, practical, and pedagogical issues. While the general nature of the Gen Ed program and issues of the teaching/learning process are discussed there, no systematic effort is aimed at training new faculty about how to teach specific content or skills. Since the last Program Review, a new Center for Academic Excellence has come into existence. CAE coordinates and conducts an array of different faculty development opportunities creating a more favorable climate for the critical examination of teaching and learning philosophies and practices. The need for expanded faculty development has clearly been an important concern of the Gen Ed Task Force as they have wrestled with proposed changes to the curriculum. In fact, one of the central goals of our participation in the upcoming National Learning Communities Summer Institute is to plan for the needs for faculty development to support our movement toward first-year learning communities.
- **Curriculum “Champions .”** The last Program Review lamented the lack of leadership and advocacy for Gen Ed at Millersville. Very deliberate and systematic efforts have been ongoing over the past several years in addressing this weakness. After one earlier attempt had failed, the GERC finally got faculty and administration to agree on the creation of a Gen Ed Coordinator position in the fall of 2000. In January of 2001, the current Coordinator, a faculty member with one-course reassignment per semester, was appointed. In addition to “championing” the Gen Ed program in various ways across campus (e.g., Website creation, participating on several committees and Faculty Senate), the Coordinator has provide support to the GERC in its effort to conduct assessment activities related to Gen Ed outcomes. While still funded year-to-year, the position was expanded to a two-course release for the 2003-2004 AY. In June 2002 Millersville sent a team of five (including the Gen Ed Coordinator) to the Asheville Institute for General Education to work on the development of a plan for revising the institution's approach to Gen Ed. As an outgrowth of that plan, the Faculty Senate created a Gen Ed Task Force in November 2002 to continue the evaluation of both the current and proposed programs. This 12-person Task Force has done much to involve the entire campus in dialogues about the philosophy and reality of Gen Ed at Millersville, about where other institutions and the academy generally have moved, and about changes to the curriculum to enhance Millersville's commitment to the liberal arts.
- **Student Advisement** . The last area targeted for action was in providing more assistance to students in planning their academic programs and navigating the requirements for General Education. The 1996 SSHE Student Satisfaction Survey showed that advisement was a concern for students on our campus. Steps have been taken to address this deficiency. Academic Advisement has taken several steps to improve advisement in recent years. In the beginning of the academic year 2002-2003, MU

hired a permanent director of the Office of Academic Advisement after several years with interim directors. The Office of Academic Advisement currently offers several faculty development efforts, including regularly offered workshops on advising and the Gen Ed curriculum; interpreting the degree audit (which assesses progress in completing the general education requirements along with those of the student's major); and special and ongoing programs on developmental advising targeted to improving faculty advisors' understanding of the Gen Ed curriculum and ultimately enhancing student advisement. Also, MU has a strong established program for advising Exploratory (Undecided) students, which involves mandatory attendance at an initial training program and annual refresher training. In the Focus Groups conducted last fall, faculty members noted that their understanding of the Gen Ed curriculum was often a result of these Exploratory (Undecided) student advising training sessions.

In 2001, the Gen Ed Coordinator teamed with the Acting Director of Academic Advisement to produce a Web-based tutorial to assist students (and faculty/staff) in understanding the Gen Ed requirements (see < <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~advisemt/?page=gened> > for a demonstration). Along with the tutorial, The Office of Academic Advisement offers listings of all current Gen Ed classes in specific categories such as G1, G2, etc. and maintains the Gen Ed Curriculum Guide under "Degree Requirements" on the website (previously referenced). Providing detailed information about the Gen Ed program's specific requirements are part of the orientation presentation given by the Director of Academic Advisement to all new and transfer students each semester. The Office of Academic Advisement answers student and adviser questions concerning the Gen Ed program on a walk-in basis, by phone and email and also in the Office newsletter, *Advisement Times* .

Apparently, the efforts to improve the climate for advising have had some measure of effect. The most recent Student Satisfaction data (from 2002) show a notable increase in satisfaction since 1996, but there is still progress to be made. As the Student Satisfaction Report suggests, one out of five students still disagrees with the statement that "My academic advisor is interested in my progress." (See < <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~ir/StuSatisSurvey2002.pdf> > for the full report.)

The Focus Group process described earlier has also brought considerable visibility to issues about both student and faculty awareness of the purposes, coherence and operation of the Gen Ed program. One of the issues the Gen Ed Task Force will be addressing in its recommendations is communication about the goals and intentions of the Gen Ed program. Advising is seen as one of the primary mechanisms for conveying this information. Simultaneous with this program review, the Office of Academic Advisement is completing their five-year program review. A recommendation from one of the external reviewers was to add a statement such as "fostering the understanding of the value of a liberal arts education" to the Office's mission statement and encourage faculty advisers to echo this statement in discussing the value of the Gen Ed courses with their advisees. In line with recommendations made in the last Program Review, departments at Millersville have also been developing Four-Year Plans that describe the recommended course of study for each major or options offered and include both major courses and Gen Ed courses. While student satisfaction with academic advisement and the registration process has dramatically improved over the past six years, course availability during registration is still seen as an important impediment to students being able to assemble the program of General Education that would best serve their individual needs and expectations.

- Summary of Relevant Statistics
- Five general sources of information were compiled for this report as follows: institutional data required by SSHE, the Catalog of Gen Ed Courses, the Gen Ed Survey, institutional data on course-taking patterns, and recent literature summarizing national trends in general education. Each will be described in the following separate subsections.
- Required Institutional Data . See Table 1.

**Table 1. Program Review Statistics for Gen Ed, 2003-2004**

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
Annualized FTES 1	2,761.1	2,744.9	2,842.0	2,944.6	3,044.5
Cost 1	\$ 12,506,463.59	\$ 12,553,347.45	\$ 13,931,966.30	\$ 14,152,563.96	\$ 14,529,860.16
Cost/FTES	\$ 4,529.59	\$ 4,573.36	\$ 4,902.15	\$ 4,806.29	\$ 4,772.52
FTE Faculty 1	160.8	163.4	161.9	165.7	169.3
Majors Enrolled 2	6,540	6,401	6,497	6,597	6,646
Program Graduates	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

1 - Based on 40% of University totals.

2 - Based upon total Fall Undergraduate Enrollment

- Catalog of Gen Ed Courses . In order to ascertain the objectives pursued and the means of assessment utilized in all Gen Ed courses, the General Education Review Committee (GERC) and the Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee (AOAC) have compiled a catalog of all General Education courses taught at Millersville University (G1, G2, G3, G4, L, W and P). This catalog is

based upon surveys completed by the faculty who are currently teaching these courses. Our initial call for faculty to self-report on these courses was made in Spring 2002 and had good response. We have made two follow-ups in fall 2002 and spring 2003 and now have reports on about three-quarters of all Gen Ed courses. A report summarizing the major findings was prepared by James Fenwick and is attached as Appendix E.

- Gen Ed Survey and Focus Groups .

In order to gather information about faculty and student perceptions about the current Gen Ed program, a series of eight focus group sessions were held between the end of September and the early part of November 2003. Surveys, adapted from the Assessing General Education Survey distributed by AAC&U, were completed by all participants either prior to or at the beginning of each session. The survey, together with a two-page summary of five major discussion points or principles, was used to help structure the discussion. Each session was facilitated and discussion recorded generally by two members of the Task Force and included both faculty and student participation (by invitation) – typically 8 to 10 participants per session. Over 40 faculty members and nearly 30 students participated in total. All members of both the Faculty and Student Senates were invited as well as chairs of all departments. Additional faculty were invited at the recommendation of attendees from the first wave of meetings. Faculty members were asked to bring a student from their own department to the session if possible. Twenty-one of the 26 academic departments were represented. A report of the major findings from both the survey and focus group discussions was prepared and circulated to participants, members of Faculty Senate, and the Deans' Council (see Appendix F). While much was learned from both the survey results and the meetings, the primary weaknesses identified through this process are the lack of a strong, articulated sense of purpose for General Education, a lack of coherence to the curriculum both within Gen Ed and between Gen Ed and the major, and a limited sense of academic community prevailing among students, among faculty, and between faculty and students.

**Institutional Data .** In preparation for the five-year program review of the General Education program, the Gen Ed Coordinator in consultation with the Gen Ed Review Committee and the Gen Ed Task Force developed a list of questions and concerns regarding the patterns of utilization and student experience in the Gen Ed curriculum that we hoped could be answered with institutional databases. After consultations with Institutional Research and the Registrar, data and tables were prepared to attempt to answer these questions and concerns. The analyses are derived from one of two related sources. First, the complete academic transcripts (all courses taken) for the population of all students who entered MU as true freshman (i.e., transfers excluded) between 1996 and 2000 and had earned a Bachelor's degree (with a single-major) before March 2004 were obtained. This population totaled 2,425 students. From that group a 10% random sample was drawn in order to allow for analyses that had to be done by hand. A report on the results of these analyses is appended as Appendix G.

- **National Trends .** Attendance at a series of workshops and conferences and sending teams to two National Institutes (Asheville Institute for General Education sponsored by AAC&U and National Learning Communities Summer Institute sponsored by the Washington Center at Evergreen State College) has positioned Millersville's faculty and administration well in its understanding of current issues in liberal education. In addition our thinking has been heavily guided by recent published scholarship on teaching, learning, assessment, and higher ed policy and administration. In addition to renewed emphasis on assessment and accreditation processes, this literature points to the success of

recent reform efforts centered on first-year college programming, learning communities, capstone experiences, the integration of learning between the major and general education, interdisciplinary coursework, and learning across the curriculum (especially in areas such as writing, quantitative literacy, and information literacy). Many of these elements have been considered in our review of General Education and in proposed changes to our curriculum.

- Outcome Assessment Information

- As reported in Section 3 above, considerable progress has been made in planning for and conducting outcomes assessment for General Education. Outcomes assessment has been the central activity of the combined GERC/AOAC for the last few years. Please see Section 3 for more detail about progress in these areas.

- Criteria for Review of Areas of Focus Selected

- Because the timing of this Program Review has coincided so well with the work of the Gen Ed Task Force, the focus of our scrutiny has been on the findings of Task Force review of the current strengths and weaknesses and their proposed plans for changes to the curriculum. Our essential question has been, are we headed in the right direction in our efforts to strengthen and promote the liberal arts education offered to undergraduate students at Millersville? Secondly, we are also examining whether the Gen Ed objectives, revised substantially in 1999, are adequately addressed in the current structure of the Gen Ed program, which was designed in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, as the University and its Gen Ed program have continued to re-examine their missions, goals, and guiding objectives, we want to ensure that General Education keeps pace with present and future institutional goals and the changing needs of our regional constituencies.

- Department Review of Selected Criteria

- We believe we have successfully identified some of the key areas where change is needed – 1) establishing a strong and succinct identity and sense of purpose which can be articulated and embraced by faculty, students, administrators, and other staff of the University; 2) establishing a more coherent curricular structure for Gen Ed and more closely integrating both Gen Ed with the major and the classroom with the co-curricular experiences of students; and 3) building a stronger sense of community and connection among students themselves, between students and faculty, and between students and staff. These areas of change are reflected in the new purpose statement and objectives proposed by the Task Force (see Appendix H for the Task Force's discussion paper on Proposed Changes). The Task Force has worked closely with faculty across campus and with outside consultants to devise and discuss possible strategies to bring about these changes. While final recommendations will not be forthcoming until later this year, we are pleased with the positive feedback we've received for some of the ideas we've proposed and for the process by which we have sought input about the problems and solutions regarding Gen Ed.

- Reports of External Reviewers

- Dr. Stephen Briggs, Provost at The College of New Jersey, served as our external reviewer. He was on campus on April 15 and 16, 2004, to meet with groups of faculty, students, Deans' Council, and several individuals including the Acting Provost. He also reviewed a number of the reports appended

to this document. The report of Dr. Briggs is attached as Appendix I.

- Program Weaknesses and Strengths

- Weaknesses . Though current reports suggest that 90% or more of all colleges and universities still use some sort of distributional requirements as a cornerstone of Gen Ed, the distributional or cafeteria-style system when imposed without an explicit development of purpose can work against coherence and integration within the undergraduate curriculum. Lacking a widely endorsed, well-articulated sense of purpose for Gen Ed, Millersville's program has been viewed as being fragmented and low in coherence. The problem is compounded by the emphasis placed on the major as separate from Gen Ed and as more important than Gen Ed and by students' perception of college as mainly career preparation. A lack of purpose and a sense of coherence were judged to be missing from Millersville's current program in the survey and focus groups conducted last year. Students in our focus group meetings were nearly unanimous in stating that the purpose and rationale of the Gen Ed program were never made clear to them and were rarely articulated by faculty in Gen Ed courses they had taken. These weaknesses are those being most vigorously pursued by the Task Force in its attempt to rejuvenate Gen Ed. Much has also been written about student engagement and the quality of interactions between and among students and faculty in the classroom and co-curricular environments. Current NSSE data and the focus groups suggest that further attention to these areas is warranted as we seek to revamp Gen Ed. Budget and enrollment pressures in the past several years have caused compromises to be made in the Gen Ed curriculum from the original intentions of such requirements as Writing intensive courses and Perspectives courses. Reductions in course availability have compromised advisement and course-selection processes.

As noted in the previous Program Review (see section 3.4 above), the administration and direction of General Education has historically been decentralized and often neglected. A single University committee (GERC) is the only body charged with any focused responsibility for Gen Ed. While this situation has temporarily improved with the appointment of a part-time coordinator, the lack of permanency and the extent of resources committed to this coordination are seen as inadequate and reflect a continuing weakness in the Program.

- Strengths . Despite the acknowledged need to rededicate and reinvigorate the Gen Ed curriculum to meet the goals of providing the highest quality liberal arts education in today's environment, the Millersville General Education program needs also to recognize its strengths. Millersville is recognized by its peers and by college rating systems as providing a high quality liberal arts education for its students. All students take at least 51-54 credits in the Gen Ed curriculum while earning their degrees; many, as reported above, have far exceeded the minimum curricular expectations in several Gen Ed areas. Its long-standing commitment to Writing-Across-the-Curriculum and its recent innovations in first-year program are noteworthy. An extensive plan for assessment of learning outcomes in Gen Ed has been enacted and several outcomes have been or are in the process of being assessed.

The processes of curricular examination caused by a coalition of forces including the 120-credit mandate, the Degree Specification process, and the review undertaking by the Gen Ed Task Force among others have created a positive climate for critical discussions to occur and for changes in curricular structures to be considered. The Task Force has gotten praise for its ability to create

dialogue among faculty, students, and administrators regarding the present state and future possibilities for Gen Ed.

- Recommendations
- Curricular . While many areas of future curricular change have been discussed, Dr. Stephen Briggs, our external consultant, has cautioned us wisely to make changes incrementally rather than transformationally. Therefore, we are proceeding with plans to first propose a singular yet substantive change around which we feel we have solid faculty and administrative backing, namely modification to first-year programming to incorporate freshman seminars within learning communities. We feel this one major change helps to address several of the shortcomings noted in Section 9.1 above. We hope to make this new feature of Gen Ed a “signature” component of what a Millersville education is all about.
- Curricular . Furthermore, the Gen Ed Task Force should continue work on more comprehensive recommendations (e.g., additional learning communities, capstone experience) for incremental progress in Gen Ed revision to follow the first-year learning communities initiative.
- Curricular . The Gen Ed Coordinator should work with the GERC and other appropriate bodies to develop mechanisms for the evaluation and re-certification of courses within Gen Ed. Currently, no real mechanism for “quality control” of existing courses exists beyond the initial course approval process. Given changes in the objectives for Gen Ed that have already taken place and those that are proposed, it is necessary to find a mechanism to evaluate and re-focus as necessary existing offerings in the Gen Ed curriculum.
- Organizational . Create a permanent Gen Ed Coordinator position to be filled by a faculty member as a 6-credit reassignment per semester (including summer) to maintain continuity and oversight of the Gen Ed program. This extends what has been a temporary and ad hoc position over the past three years and fulfills one of the recommendations made in the previous Program Review. The Gen Ed Coordinator and Gen Ed program should also have a designated office space and at least limited clerical support.
- Organizational . Create a University committee with ongoing authority granted by Faculty Senate to oversee the implementation of current plans to improve the Gen Ed Program and to continue the development of a campus culture and curricular structure supportive of the liberal arts education mission of this University.
- Action Plan including Resource Requests
- Execute the Implementation Plan for the first-year learning communities initiative that lays out tasks for the next 1-2 years (see Appendix J). [Gen Ed Coordinator & Task Force, FYE Committee, Deans' Council, and others]
- Prepare recommendations to Faculty Senate for the first-year learning communities initiative and the more comprehensive recommendations (e.g., additional learning communities, capstone experience) for incremental progress in Gen Ed revision. [Gen Ed Coordinator & Task Force]

- Work with the GERC and the Faculty Senate to create a new ongoing committee to support the implementation and continued design of Gen Ed revisions. [Gen Ed Coordinator & Task Force]
- Work with the GERC and the Provost's office to make the position of Gen Ed Coordinator permanent and create an office for the General education program. [Gen Ed Coordinator & Task Force]
- Work with the Center for Academic Excellence and other appropriate bodies (e.g., FYE Committee) to plan and conduct faculty development efforts necessary to bring about and sustain changes to the Gen Ed curriculum. [Gen Ed Coordinator]
- Work with the GERC, UCPRC, and Faculty Senate to develop mechanisms for the evaluation and re-certification of courses within the Gen Ed Program. [Gen Ed Coordinator]
- Align administrative support and University resources with the proposed initiatives for Gen Ed renewal. [Provost, Gen Ed Coordinator]

Millersville University

### General Education Program Review

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4. General Education Outcomes Assessment Report: Communication Using a Variety of Speaking and Writing Processes at Millersville
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6. [General Education Task Force: Report on the Fall 2003 Faculty & Student Focus Groups](#)
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10. [First-Year Learning Communities Implementation Plan](#) (power point)