

## Gen Ed Spring 2005 Focus Group Themes

The following are the most salient points raised in each focus group according to the facilitators (organized chronologically). The full “transcripts” of the entire set of focus group meetings will be available at <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~gened/important-documents-page.dwt>.

2/21/05

1. Flexibility: allow more alternatives; perhaps including a 2<sup>nd</sup> concentration rather than so much breadth and For Lang in lieu of P course.
2. Need more emphasis on global – including Foreign Language.
3. Keep AW and make it in the Junior year – better to drop to 3 W’s and treat the Capstone as a 4<sup>th</sup> W.

2/22/05

1. Is there an operational definition for "critical thinking" since it is so prevalent?
2. Do we have a coherent definition, across the university, of what constitutes a capstone experience? Some work on clarifying the definition, in concrete terms, is needed. What guarantees that the rigor or interdisciplinary aims are achieved with such broad purposes alone?
3. Coherence is still an area that needs attention and some kind of mentoring to help faculty understand it and to see their role in nurturing it.
4. Using department meetings as a way to get faculty on board may be necessary; focus groups may not be adequate to spread the word.

2/23/05

1. There really is not much change to the curriculum being proposed; it is more making the program more purposeful.
2. Flexibility: there should be a minimum of specified requirements – perhaps just Freshman Comp and maybe Speech.
3. Proposed curricular structure is unbalanced in favor of science and math.
4. Institute only the broadest of distributions requirements (e.g., only specify that so many Humanities courses (for example) be taken.
5. Reduce the size of Gen Ed to one-third.

2/25/05

1. Importance of faculty buy-in.
2. Need for good advisement.
3. New for administrative support and resources for new programming.
4. First Seminar and Learning Community seen as most important component.

2/28/05

1. More Gen Ed courses should be allowed to count in major.
2. New First Year programming needs resource commitments.
3. 300-level Gen Ed elective may be unreasonable b/c of pre-requisites.
4. Objectives should specify “exposure” rather than “attainment.”

5. U.S. Civics requirement seems contrary to emphasis on global issues.
6. Problem solving is not mentioned in objectives.
7. No foreign language requirement is included.
8. Too similar to what we have now.

3/2/05

1. English makes a strong case for not eliminating AW course
2. Confusion about what we mean by coherence between GENED and major
3. Must reach out even more to faculty. Schools, departments, must have more involvement in writing, defining, and explaining sections of objectives that relate to their work.
4. Define critical thinking - need new phrase to replace information literacy.

3/3/05

1. Students need to know why gen ed is important (although they may not understand until later). If they do, then “coherence” is not a major issue.
2. Technology is not mentioned in objectives or tier structure, so ITEC is (still) locked out of offering gen ed courses--in spite of the importance of technology to society.
3. Writing is important, and W requirements should not be weakened (referring to "AW or elective" in tier structure).
4. Some concerns were raised about whether students can meet prerequisites for three 200 level courses and 300 level elective within the gen ed tier structure.

3/4/05

1. Flexibility: e.g., allowing P course to count toward major (current restriction just serves to reinforce the separation of Gen Ed and the major).
2. Importance of Foreign Language study to learning English grammar and composition.
3. Advisement as key to making these changes a success.
4. Imbalance between HFA and SS vs. S&M – why not put Math into Foundations as a solution?
5. Objectives OK but ...
  - a. Change Obj. 2a to “Use and interpret data or use techniques of calculus”
  - b. Obj. 5a seems too narrow as just “literature”

Additional overall impression of John Ward from 3 meetings (2 focus groups plus Academic Advisory Committee):

Generally people respect the work that we have done and everyone likes aspects about it. Our work does seem to have sparked more interest in GENED reform, but I don't feel that many yet have an investment in our proposals. The overall sentiment was that we should have a full faculty vote. Everyone says that we have done a great deal to reach out to faculty, but that there is a still a need to have more participation and more full involvement.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
February 21, 2005

The focus group participants included three faculty members, Steven Miller (English), Lew Shoemaker (Math), Chip Schaeffer (Wellness and Sport sciences).

Facilitator: Fred Foster-Clark  
Recorder: Jim Valle

Fred Foster-Clark provided an overview of the process, opening the floor for questions.

One issue that was raised was that the vote (April 2005) should be open to all faculty, not only APSCUF members. This point was noted, and had more to do with expediting the voting process than excluding any faculty. This issue could be addressed by providing a separate ballot box to ascertain that all faculty are included.

With regard to the general principles, one point that was brought up was the need for increased flexibility in the Gen Ed curriculum. The example given was a math major who would want to concentrate on history. This student should not need to fulfill other social sciences if she/he has expressed a passionate interest in a particular field. Students are forced into learning a little bit about a lot but a lot about nothing.

Another comment, dealing with coherence and clear purpose. Is the purpose of Gen Ed, a little bit about a lot of things? We need to be clearer about our purpose; is it concentration or distribution? Where does depth come in? Where is foreign language as a requirement? Diversity seems to have a focus on U.S. diversity, not international diversity, which begs the question, "How clear is the focus?" and, furthermore, how flexible are we to allow a person who took four years of French in high school, to continue to concentrate on this in their Gen Ed program? There may be tension between item 1 and item 3 (clear purpose and coherence). This, again, came back to an uncertainty about what the purpose of Gen Ed is here at the campus. (It is consistent with mission; Gen Ed purpose has not changed, fundamentally).

What is behind "the specific learning needs of MU students"? (This looks at our clientele, their skills and their needs, such as writing)

So the needs of MU students should be subordinate to the MU mission, not equal to it. Whose perceptions will determine student need? The expressed thought was that the university should determine its offerings based on its mission and its understanding of student need, not student understanding of student need. The example provided was home-schoolers perceiving diversity as not being needed.

To address flexibility, courses in the major could be counted under a broad Gen Ed category. In other words, more courses should count for Gen Ed, which would meet the criteria of the Gen Ed mission, regarding breadth, and the notion of curricular coherence.

Requiring a foreign language suggests a more international orientation toward diversity.

The notion of academic diversity creates a tension between it and the notion of academic depth.

How do we protect particular departments and their faculty who have expertise in a particular discipline if we allow the kind of flexibility that does not require learning in a particular field?

The proposed Gen Ed structure does allow more flexibility.

There may be a resources problem when requiring a 300 level of higher course because departments may have these classes reserved for their majors, not for the general education population.

Eliminate Gen Ed designation for courses to provide more flexibility.

Include Foreign Language in Perspectives course requirement.

If Foreign Language can be used for Perspective, take away the 300 level requirement.

Keep Advanced Writing requirement. Address Writing requirement and Perspective requirement ideals and realities.

Consider what constitutes departmental and honors thesis.

Could someone go through college and never take a writing course taught by an English professor, or a Science course by a scientist? (The W courses need to be examined because they might have that result.)

What about the U.S. perspective requirement rather than global? The narrowness does not reflect mission. Perhaps study U.S. politics from an international perspective.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
February 22, 2005

The focus group participants included three faculty members: Claudia Haferkamp (Psychology), Steve Thompson (Geography), Marco Antolin (Foreign Language).

Facilitator: John Ward  
Recorder: Jim Valle

John Ward provided an overview of the process, opening the floor for questions.

Michelle White attended the group as a member of the GERC.

One issue that was raised focused on coherence. The Gen Ed curriculum has been fragmented and not connected to the major. It was difficult to understand—“like a moving target” It was difficult to understand the big picture. As a result, the coherence is an important piece. It would help the learning curve for new faculty.

Another participant agreed with the idea of coherence, bringing up a concern with assessment and the notion of the degree specification project. Will this process simplify or clarify the degree specification project.

How do we achieve simplicity? That is, will there be true coherence among departments, Gen Ed, and other initiatives.

Objectives 2 & 3 become complex—how intentional alignment (obj 2) and coherence (obj 3) become actualized as assessment and other issues are considered. This is not completely clear. After examination of the “wheel” the notion seemed to become more clear.

Some discussion ensued about considering how the university “brands” or markets itself. Are we about “getting a job” or a liberal arts institution? If the professions are a draw, how can general education be viewed as integral?

A question was raised about prioritizing the objective. One position was that 2 (intentional alignment) would be more important for the students and the program. Though “coherence” is more related to faculty response. How do I help do this? One participants so them as equal and interrelated.

Discussion moved to mission and objectives, particularly comparing the proposed change in objectives.

Is there an operational definition for “critical thinking” since it is so prevalent?

It seems like it would take more than one course to meet the objective related to mathematics (statistics). Is this a realistic strategy to achieve the stated goal?

The objectives, particularly related to the subcategories, may need labels to be more explicit about the “a” sections relating to the different targeted disciplines. (statistics, lab sciences, civics, literature, for example).

There was consensus on the clarity and purpose of the mission and the need for academic and cultural diversity.

After the introduction of the Curriculum, and its four levels, discussion about how well the structure meets the objectives involved the following:

- Questions about how students see the current Gen Ed plan.
- Discussion about how this is presented to students and faculty, so that the reasoning is integral to the process. (How can we prevent the purposefulness from being lost in the details of completing the requirements?)
- Discussion about how we are defining interdisciplinary
- Do we have a coherent definition, across the university, of what constitutes a capstone experience? Some work on clarifying the definition, in concrete terms, is needed. What guarantees that the rigor or interdisciplinary aims are achieved with such broad purposes alone?

Final comments:

Perhaps the presentation of the order of objectives could move from global to specific. (Purpose, Academic Community, to Curricular Alignment)

Coherence is still an area that needs attention and some kind of mentoring to help faculty understand it and to see their role in nurturing it.

Using department meetings as a way to get faculty on board may be necessary; focus groups may not be adequate to spread the word.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
February 23, 2005

The focus group participants included six faculty members: Barb Stengel (Ed. Foundations), Jeff Wimer (Wellness & Sport Sciences), Jennifer F. Wood (Communications), Angela Cuthbert (Geography), Abdelhadi Halawa (Wellness and Sports Sciences), and Jane Alden (English)

Facilitator: Alex DeCaria  
Recorder: Shauna Frischkorn

Alex DeCaria provided an overview of the process, opening the floor for questions.

**Initial questions from the group:**

1. English is concerned about the advanced writing classes—will they lose them or will the 300 level classes be eliminated? English 110 is not sufficient to cover all requirements.
2. How will the students be grandfathered in for gen. ed. classes.
3. How will it work in conjunction with assessment and degree specification courses?

**Discussion of 5 principles:**

“Very sensible.”

“I like them—I’d like the Gen Eds. to tailor more to the majors. Students don’t see how things fit.”

They sound wonderful and make sense, but how do we really make it happen?

What I think is missing from the report is the understanding and advising is the way that we build the structure of scheduling. We don’t do “demand” scheduling. We only want to teach what we want to teach, whether the students want it or not. Or need it.

The rotation of courses do not make sense—courses are offered out of rotation. The students can’t get the courses they need if they are “out” of the rotation. They have to get exemptions or stay an extra semester.

“Intentional and clear alignment” This is actually “university branding.” I do not agree with the whole university-branding thing. We do not want to be known by the general education courses alone.

I don't want the word "branding" to be used at all by the university. It is a marketing term and has nothing to do with education and MU.

Question about #5—reaching beyond the classroom. What does it mean? That language is not clear.

**Statement of Purpose discussion:**

Senate does not really represent the greater university, so it should be voted on by the entire university. This would help everyone understand the changes. It would make everyone responsible for their vote.

What does well-rounded mean? It is too vague. Our curriculum does not have time to make anyone well rounded in the true renaissance meaning. I don't like the word.

Not enough emphasis on history.

**Critical thinking on Civic purposes discussion:**

The first set 2: evaluate and solve problems from the real world. At this time we have no real world courses. Are we then opening the door for Psych. methods or Soc. methods to count as the problem solving courses? The way it stands now—our current math courses do not meet this goal.

#5 under critical thinking. There is so much more in English than just literature. It needs to be expanded. The students need to be able to communicate effectively as well.

Maybe 5B is the one that needs to be expanded?

Literature implies non-fiction—is criticism included in this section.

If we reworded 1B, we could add "formally and effectively" to that section.

This also includes foreign language too, right?

1D is also problematic: Wellness? This language opens up this area for other courses not from the wellness department, for example: nursing, education, etc.

What we are recommending does not line up with our courses—this is the huge flaw of the plan.

At some point then, could the English requirement be met by the nursing department, or will math requirements be met by psychology?

Our requirements are a hoax. We require our students to take these courses, and they do so grudgingly and unhappily and they cheat and they get through it without gaining any competency.

Why do we have to require specific courses, such as wellness? Shouldn't they stand on their merit?

I think the students should have these skills, I just think that they should get them without requiring them to take specific courses.

If we are going to truly follow the objectives laid out, let's really do it!

The big arguments are with the math and the wellness requirements. Those courses do not meet the principles.

My concern is that we make sure that the courses truly meet the objectives and if they can do this in multiple ways, then we should do it that way, rather than force them to take specific courses.

### **Question 3, Tier structure discussion:**

Does this structure fill the principles of reform?

What are we so afraid of? Turf battles? We have the students, and if you really believe that your course is worthwhile, then why do we need to require it?

Our gen. ed. curriculum is not based on what we really believe.

The realist in me confesses that I went out of my way to avoid writing. Then later when I got a job, I discovered that I enjoyed writing and am not bad at it. If English had not been required of me, I would never have taken it.

But then, will students really learn to write or do math like penance by us forcing them to take courses they don't want to take.

The typical Millersville student at 18 needs guidance to select the right courses (meaning the required math and wellness gen. ed.)

The 51-credit gen. ed. program is too much. It should be 1/3 of their degree requirements. Because of this, we are not meeting the new principles and statements of purpose.

Gen. Ed's are an American phenomenon. It's not done in Canada and Europe.

Don't the gen. ed. courses begin to prepare students to make the transition from High School and "the system" to the university?

We need to more clearly understand what liberal arts means.

The fact that most of our students are from the same general part of the world is also a problem.

Will the math and lab sciences stay in that same section? But we cannot require them to take four courses in this area—and only three in others—it is just not possible. We need to let go of this way of thinking that we need to continue to force feed these courses in the sciences and math. You need to get rid of the extra science thing.

I honestly think that we would be better off having students take three 1-credit seminar courses and give the students the other credits to play with. We need to give the departments more flexibility.

Advisement is a huge issue. With good advisement and this flexibility, you can cover the coherence issue and give the students what they are interested in as well.

We need to look around the campus and see best things that are being done right now. And do more of these things.

I thought the task force was working to get rid of these requirements—not add more.

### **Perspectives Courses discussion:**

Not enough to go around right now and we end up having to write exceptions to graduations. The deans need to work on this area in schedule building. There needs to be some extra compensation (to hire adjuncts) if you offer “P” courses or Honors or Women’s studies, etc.

That is the bottom line problem—no money for enough complement. We have lots of good ideas, but the reality is we have no money to do it.

### **Integration discussion:**

This area is too prescribed.

I don’t understand how the three courses (P,D,W,) lead to integration?

Maybe integration should be more open-ended. I don’t care if they take a perspectives course if they do a study abroad or a co-op, etc.

Couldn’t that section be broadened so that they could choose from a variety of things, like study abroad?

### **Wrap up: Is there one item that we think is most important?**

Flexibility—not so many specific requirements.

Principles—we need to have purposeful reasons for reform and change the university mission. The proposed changes are not really changes at all, but lengthy explanations about why gen. ed. courses are important. Nothing has changed!  
Go where the objectives take you.

Expand integration.

Flexibility—the proposed changes are not real changes—it is still a “check the box system”

I still believe that core courses are important to a young student’s education.

General Education Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
Friday, Feb. 25, 2005

The focus group participants included four faculty members: Dan O'Neill (Counseling and Human Development), Greg Szczyrbak (Library), Adele Ruszak (Wellness and Sport Sciences), Norma Rivera-Hernandez (Foreign Language)

Facilitator: Alex DeCaria  
Recorder: Janet White

**General Questions and Comments:**

Will this result in shifting of courses, development of new courses, changes to existing GenEd classes as we know it?

Will the 1<sup>st</sup> year Seminars be run similar to other colleges where it is basically a writing course on a certain topic, with small language/discussion groups?

Will the 1<sup>st</sup> Year Seminars "step on" other courses/turf in other departments?

What will GenEd courses look like now?

Why are we changing it (GenEd) again?

How many courses do our Freshmen take in large lecture sections? Discussion of large vs. small classes and the expectations of students and parents of what MU is supposed to be.

**Questions and Comments related to Faculty and Advising:**

Even (some) faculty feel GenEd is an obstacle for students.

Some students simply take too much GenEd (poor advising, or indecision, or no available classes blamed). How many extra GenEd courses are being taken? This speaks to the understanding – or lack thereof – of the program.

Need coherence/connections of the GenEd to the major programs

Advising plays a big part.

Advisors and advisees need to examine how GenEd can be connected/crafted to make everything fit or to fit toward a minor.

In terms of the new objectives: Some faculty are “narrow minded” and need to be trained/informed. There needs to be a seminar for faculty. Some will never “buy in.” You just hope you can get a majority to understand.

“I hear”...professors do not understand or buy-in to these ideas so it means that this won't work. If this is the case – what is planned to change this?

Any specific objections? Heard many, there is always a lot more to do, extra work for each of us, not enough time. What I teach is important, other things are not...

Overheard: “Why do I need GENEd if my discipline is what is really needed?”

If “we” are about Liberal Arts, then we need to explain that to new faculty – they need to understand that is our “vision”. Is the philosophy of our current faculty about GenEd? Is there a new wave of faculty for or against it?

If this is what we are going to be ... this needs to be part of faculty orientation – Stress GenEd

Dr. McNairy speaks a lot about Liberal Arts at orientations – and the strength of GenEd – some faculty do not mirror this when they just want to teach their own majors.

Is there a feeling of competition between schools/majors (will this create one)?

How are courses distributed around the university?

Sure, departments feel like their courses are being taken away – don't like that GenEd seems to take us away from what we do.

May not be that we don't believe – it may have to do with the way they are divided because it affects faculty survival. Some departments would be nervous of retrenching.

### **Suggestions:**

The portion of Part 1 referring to transforming vs. incremental changes makes it clearer – this should be repeated for emphasis and to be explicit at the beginning of Part 2.

It is difficult to comment on precedence – all are important – drawn personally to intellectual richness, but can't argue that it is more important than the others.

Something missing? Engagement (underlying principle in document) – although that seems to be covered somewhat in intellectual richness.

There appear to be similarities to the PEU's Conceptual Framework. Are there reasons for this?

It is what we want...it should be shared too with students, parents at orientations and in the summers. It will help them to understand what is happening. A clearer picture is needed.

Include as part of 1<sup>st</sup> year seminar. Why do we have GenEd, why Liberal Arts?

New Objectives.

A lot of what Middle States expects is seen in this document – critical thinking, information literacy – spread through the objectives on purpose?

Why Wellness vs. Language? Why are some selected as “more important”?

### **Comments on Tier-Structure:**

Observation: in relation to the Diversity Course – it seems to be a contradiction to have US Civics instead of a global citizen. If Civics courses were international, then wouldn't they also serve as a D-course?

Concern of calculus or statistics requirement – what will be “enough”?

Literature question: in practical sense, this is really just from ENG. In Foreign Language, for instance, there are no means or resources to develop new courses. Unless there is a plan for these courses to multiply and then support/resources are needed.

GenEd Elective in Integration? Comparable to what we have now?

Making a leap from Objectives to Tier Structure. If this is now implemented...it'll be taught the same way.

Probably part of the buy-in issue.

Is it really different? Even in the different structure?

Are we just mixing what we already have? That's what it may look like.

Need a way to show Objectives – Tier.

Not so much different. As we are trying to make it be understood – rather than just a check-off sheet.

Seems easier to understand, but I feel bad for Humanities/Fine Arts – where do they fit in individually – GenEd should indicate where each department “fits” and should spell them out in the categories.

Need to make the GenEd sheet be aligned with the Philosophy – why are we doing this?

Have the sheet set up already (prior to vote) – it is important to have as much as possible. Not just a check sheet – perhaps front/back with objectives clearly stated on one side, but it does need to be simplistic.

Training for Advising – time to understand the technicalities – advising is crucial.

**VOTE:**

All 4 attendees favored a faculty vote.

Follow-up Questions:

What if the majority are against it?

How do you get the word out?

How will a vote be taken?

Who actually gets to vote?

Who will vote?

**WRAP-UP:**

Most Essential? (by person)

Seminar – most crucial, as a good introduction to college.

Critical Thinking – it is in the middle of everything else

Seminar and Diversity Course – we cannot claim to be a university that knows about international things without a course that focuses specifically on diversity.

Seminar and Wellness – want them to have a career and enjoy life.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Groups  
Mon. Feb. 28, 2005

The focus group participants included seven faculty members: Susan Luek (Psychology), Laurie Hanich (Ed Foundations), Bill Archibald (English), Celica Milovanovic (Foreign Languages), Sepi Yalda (Earth Sciences), Michael Wismer (Math), Kathy Schreiber (Geography)

Facilitator: Dotti Blum  
Recorder: Jim Fenwick

How does the new proposal increase coherence?  
The capstone course and FYE were discussed.

In our current general education not many courses exist that make connections.  
No more than 2 courses in any one department was discussed.  
Is it possible to take some Gen Ed in the major?  
A positive aspect of the proposal is the change in attitudes about Gen Ed at MU. The idea that Gen Ed meshes with major is good. Goals of first seminar are good.

How are first seminar courses put together?  
For the students emersion into topic without background is a problem.  
Faculty need guidance on writing these proposals.  
What is meant by Critical Thinking in a course? (specific examples would help)

The new curriculum would make major changes in some departments (demand for Gen Ed courses)

What is meant by critical thinking?  
Proposal should be more explicit.  
Connections G1, G2, G3 critical thinking skills.  
Help faculty to understand exactly what is meant by critical thinking.

The "Passion" courses.  
These could be dangerous and the guidelines need to be defined very carefully.  
Should be based on expertise, not desire.  
The faculty teaching these course should not be solely self-selected.

The objectives for critical thinking are aiming too high.  
Not all MU students are scholars.  
Perhaps state objectives as "exposure to ..." as opposed to "demonstrated ability in ..."

Proposed objectives are too similar to what we have now.  
No fundamental change in objectives.

U.S. Civics not global enough  
This requirement is too specific.  
Broaden idea to “citizenship” as opposed to “civics”.

300 level course for Gen. Ed.  
Problem in many departments for students to reach 300 level.

If freshman seminar is a “W” should we change the number of W required?  
This focus group mostly thought keep 4 W’s in addition to seminar.

This group is in favor of all faculty voting this spring.  
They are in favor of 3 separate items; purpose, principles, objectives.

The task force should encourage all faculty to attend senate when Gen. Ed. Revision will be discussed. Make announcements to all faculty.

Make an outline comparing strengths and weaknesses of current and proposed Gen Ed programs. This outline would assist faculty that do not take the time to read entire document.

Develop scenarios to illustrate the proposed curriculum changes.  
This could show how individual students could benefit from the new curriculum.  
Benefits including coherence and critical thinking.

Make the data from Fall 03 and Spring 04 focus groups available to all faculty.

The objectives make no mention of problem solving.

There should be a foreign language requirement.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
March 2, 2005

The focus group participants included six faculty members: Linda McDowell (Ed Foundations), Judy Halden-Sullivan (English), Bob Sayre (History), Julie Lombardi (Wellness and Sport Sciences), Beverly Schneller (English), Kim McCollum-Clark (English)

Facilitator: John Ward  
Recorder: Jen Miller

**Principles to Guide Gen Ed Reform:**

One member suggested that Gen Ed should have “its own home” in regard to 1,2,3 so that there would be a structure already in place to create opportunities for these things.

Another suggested that *fear* may play a significant role in why people are so reluctant to change. The example was given of the “History of” courses, i.e., that many more departments might offer more of these kinds of courses so that anyone could theoretically teach history other than the History Department.

A discussion then ensued concerning this concept that there ought to be a marriage of Gen Ed & the Major. The question of how to meet the needs of both populations was then raised? The problem of how to integrate the two was further discussed. There was some consensus that such integration would be “positive.”

However, there was a question of how the union of Gen Ed and the Major would be a benefit to students was brought up. One member made the comment that many students “seem confused.” for example, those who want to be teachers may feel that they are wasting money and time on Gen Ed. courses. The purpose of Gen Ed. is not at all clear to either students or to many faculty as well. We need to let students know incoming, to make clear; “who we are” and why Gen. Ed. is relevant to the work they will do here as well as how it pertains to the other areas in their lives as well.

The suggestion was made that all incoming freshmen ought to read the same book and to be prepared to discuss it on their arrival. Having all students read the same book prior to orientation offers a common ground on which to open up the lines of communication right from the get go.

Another member argued, “It’s currently hit and miss,” that the reasons for desiring a liberal arts education go largely unknown by the student. The idea that the purpose behind a solid liberal arts education is to “liberate the mind” is a difficult value to instill in students who are more than often than not very immature when they first come to MU. Gen Ed, said one person, is “a hard sell.” She continued, “Students are clueless what college is about.”

So far as the issue of *Coherence* is concerned, how faculty may view the other majors is it problematic. Not all professors regard the other disciplines with respect. Many have indicated quite the opposite seeing little value in connecting their field with other fields of study. Some have exhibited even a great deal of contempt towards the concept of “interdisciplinary” studies.

It was further observed that most students come to Millersville for the Major and not for Gen. Ed. Presently; Gen Ed. looks a lot like “potluck.”

### **Objectives & Purpose statement:**

One member claimed the current Purpose Statement “lacks passion and commitment” in its present state, and is “too bland.”

Another member further noted that there was nothing mentioned about the importance of developing an “aesthetic Sense,” for example, the “language of music, art, etc.” Students need to develop an aesthetic sense as well as appreciate the sciences and/or those areas that require critical thinking. “What about *critical literacy*?” The member went on to distinguish between critical thinking with critical literacy.

Regarding P. 17 concerning a & b, one person said that it “lacked concreteness,” that we need to better define what “critical thinking” exactly is. “What about multiple literacies?”

“You have to get people to love it,” proclaimed one member, that is, to get faculty to really understand and support the union of Gen Ed with the Major. We need to invite departments to express how they think they can fulfill these things or how they are already fulfilling them. The need to better articulate more effectively the purpose of Gen Ed. is paramount. Another member continued, “What we need is a structure *not a another rubric to fill in.*”

### **Capstones, the Writing requirement, and miscellanies:**

There was some discussion about #6 and the idea of a Gen. Ed. capstone. The suggestion was put forth that we may need a Gen. Ed. capstone, perhaps interdisciplinary congruent with the Major.

The concern was raised that by creating more capstone courses “you need to do some subtracting from departments current offerings.” There would be both compliment and implementation issues to grapple with. For example, the English Department problem can’t teach all students literature.

A question was further raised though only briefly discussed on the meaning of the “W” designation. What does it mean?

It was suggested that a senior capstone course would be great. “There is more to writing than just discipline specific writing,” said one member. Students need to learn writing as early as possible. 6 credits of comp 100 are nowhere near enough to “develop” students’ writing. It was further suggested that there was a desperate need for a yearlong Freshman English composition experience. However, there are neither the resources nor the compliment to accommodate for it.

Another member said that a Diversity component was also necessary.

“Get the Administration to believe in it, that would be a real help” claimed one member addressing himself to the general concept Gen Ed.—Major connection. “University support is essential – what is the university’s commitment to this? She continued, “Without their support it’s just a lot of time and money wasted.

The focus group session adjourned at 2:45.

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
Thursday, March 3, 2005

The focus group participants included six faculty members: Chuck Ward (PHIL), Alan Kelly (ENGL), M.P.A. Sheaffer (ENGL), Barry G. David (ITEC), Susanne Nimmrichter (FORL), Gordon Nesbitt (Intramurals and Recreation)

Facilitator: Michelle White  
Recorder: Mark Iannone

**General questions:**

After 3/15 vote in Senate, are we locked in to tier structure shown on p. 17? (Ans: no)

What is senate actually voting on on 3/15? (Ans: principles and objectives)

\*There should be a general request to all faculty for proposals for pilot freshman seminars —there was the impression that certain faculty were selected and invited to propose.

**Principles:**

Will this result in smaller classes? (Ans: only for 1<sup>st</sup> year seminars. in general class size is not on the table) This was mentioned several times by a prof. who teaches W courses.

These are the right principles—but how much has the current system failed and how does the new system improve on these failings?

**Re principle 3:**

\*Why should gen ed “hook into” majors? This is a non sequitur.

Yes, students should be able to make connections—but the fact that they apparently can't is not necessarily a flaw in our system.. The connections are there, but students are not making them.

How is literature supposed to tie in to biology or physics? Should it?

When I was undergrad, I discovered many things I liked, different from my major.

Tying everything into an 18-yr-old's idea of what he will do for his career is not intellectual richness!!

One of the values of higher education (gen ed) is variety—topics might be completely unrelated. You never know when you'll need something. University should provide

contact with many areas. Whether or not 18-yr-olds make connections is beside the point.

Intellectual richness is available in our current gen ed offerings. Large lecture classes may be frustrating, but if students are engaged, they can provide a rich experience.

Students take whatever is available because of scheduling..if they take something they are not enthusiastic about, lack of perceived intellectual richness is not the course's fault

Students often ask, "Why do I need gen ed at all?" They need to understand why.

(One prof's answer: because you're in a University, not a trade school!)

Freshman seminars should address this.

In many cases students will appreciate their gen ed courses later on.

Any other principles that should be included?

Principle # 1 should explicitly include making students understand the advantage of taking a variety of courses

**Purpose statement:**

How does "liberal arts" differ from "gen ed"?

The statement is pretty good...but it does not refer to 3<sup>rd</sup> principle (coherence).

The phrase "balance and complement" is vague

**Objectives:**

Are these a better fit to MU's mission than the present objectives?

Critical thinking is the over-arching theme in the objectives. There was no mention of it in Principles or Purpose. Suddenly a new theme becomes the dominant idea.

Endorse putting teeth into math requirement. Stats is what "general person" should know

Stats should be linked between courses...that is, should be applied to real world situations, not abstract concepts as mathematicians teach...can apply across the curriculum

Question: can objectives and purpose be embraced at MU?

\*This still looks like G1G2G3. The problem that has always existed under this system is that it blocks out certain departments from offering gen ed classes (ITEC and school of ed. generally). There is NO opportunity for ITEC to expand on “appropriate technology” theme mentioned in objectives. Technology will impact all of us in the future, but there is no place to expand on this.

\*Suggestion: objective 1b: “...present ideas formally and accurately...” to tie in with statistics etc. theme. There is an important difference between formal and accurate; both are necessary.

\*Global society is a major point in purpose statement, but is not spelled out in objectives. Somewhere, they should include international studies, or something that is not U.S. Interpersonal skills acquired through a diversity course are not enough.

\*Historical foundations theme is lacking—3b should include historical foundations. Educated people must understand foundations of this country and the world.

How do we make this part of MU culture?

Use in syllabus—course objectives should address university objectives or gen ed principles

Require gen ed courses to include gen ed objectives in the syllabus

Statement in course selection flyer (schedule) about gen ed

### **Revised curricular structure:**

\*Concerned that advanced writing is replaced by a capstone course. Many students in advanced writing (who have taken 3 W courses already) can't write—can ill afford skip AW course.

\*This is dangerous! Should be capstone AND advanced writing.

People who teach W courses (outside of English Dept.) aren't doing that much. It is bad idea to eliminate advanced writing course where he knows they work very hard to improve students' writing skills.

Three 200 level courses might be a problem. Non-science major usually can't handle 200 level math or science. In foreign languages, 2 semesters does not get you past 100 level courses.

By taking courses in the sequence prescribed you cannot reach 300 level outside the major. Anyway, it could be a problem meeting prerequisites for 300 level courses within the proposed tier structure.

300 level G courses are in short supply

What is a literature course? (Ans: probably will be labeled)

The proposal has some specific changes (e.g. Univ 100, 3 social science and humanities instead of 4) but overall it seems like repackaging of the existing system. What is the purpose of repackaging? (Ans: new categories should make more sense to the students)

Will Intro. to Critical Thinking in the Disciplines courses be taken before Critical Thinking in the Disciplines courses? Will Intro. courses be taught as core courses? Will an Intro to Critical Thinking course for example in biology prepare you for any other science course at the Critical Thinking in the Disciplines level?

Univ 1\*\* or other gen ed: Must this gen ed be G1,2,3? Or will we open this category to school of education courses? For years we have missed opportunities for good G courses because of turf battles.

How will freshman seminars affect student/faculty ratio? Whose budget will absorb the extra cost?

\*Critical Thinking in the Disciplines should read "...Science, Technology and Mathematics,..."

Gen Ed Task Force  
Spring 2005 Focus Group Meeting  
March 4, 2005

The focus group participants included seven faculty members: Ana Borger-Greco (For Lang), Sandy Deemer (EdFn), Jessica George (Library), Elizabeth Thyrum (Psych), Bob Smith (Math), Ben Cunningham (Art), Stan Kabacinski (WSSD)

Facilitator: Fred Foster-Clark  
Recorder: Dotti Blum

**CLARIFICATION:**

Is the diversity requirement on page 17 new?

Yes.

Two courses in Foreign Languages (351 and 352) meet the writing objectives on page 18. Currently the new plan is only suggesting that ENGL 110 should be taken to satisfy these objectives. Why not allow foreign language courses to fulfill these objectives? If that is not the intention, then perhaps we need to specify that the writing objectives need to be met using the English language.

The requirement of ENGL 110 is being justified as a way to fulfill that writing objective.

**PRINCIPLES:**

How are the connections in Principle #3 to be made in the proposed “gen ed” plan?

Capstone in the major should reflect general education skills; “gen ed” and major skills are not that different

Perhaps more “double dipping” should be allowed: let more major courses labeled general education count towards a student’s general education requirements. If a course is designated “gen ed”, then it develops and reinforces certain skills whether it is in the major or not.

One reason that students tend to perceive “gen ed” as separate and unrelated to the major is because of the artificial impositions placed on “gen ed” courses in the major. Flexibility is essential for a general education plan, especially in view of the 120-credit limit.

Flexibility can also help with minor programs: communication between departments can be enhanced and there can be an increase in co-requisites for more flexibility.

Students, especially the secondary education majors, need more choices of their own.

What about themed “gen ed” courses? They exist at some other universities.

The curriculum is not changing that much, but we hope that the rationale has been changed. We are still at credit based “gen ed” program, not outcomes based “gen ed” program.

Are we too prescriptive?

The proposed “gen ed” program seems to allow advisors to be more helpful with students and to provide the students with more explanations. The proposed plan give us more of a map to follow in “gen ed” advising.

How do we make this more intentional?

more visual means; the freshman seminar will help with this.

Advisors will need significant education. Faculty are not recognized or rewarded for advising. We could require department meetings on the new “gen ed” program as a way to educate faculty about the new “gen ed”.

Missing from the list of principles are: SIMPLIFY the program and make the program FLEXIBLE. The current program is too hard to learn and understand.

How will the fifth principle work (beyond the classroom)?

Freshman Learning Communities and the First Seminar

### **PURPOSE STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES:**

It makes sense, it is all-inclusive, and it is easy to digest.

What is meant by personal wellness and is this in the same category as the other “gen ed” skills and is it the university’s job to see to this?

It also includes psychological wellness and studies have shown that wellness courses help students cope and make links. Data from our campus suggest that MU students make poor choices regarding wellness.

Diversity implies that every student should have a foreign language.

Could a psychology course replace a wellness course?

Is wellness foundational?

The dining hall needs to cooperate with wellness in its menus.

How does the environment fit in?

It is stressed in Wellness 175.

Objective (1d) seems to be more than just wellness.

### **CURRICULUM:**

The alignment seems intentional – the (a) objectives correspond to the core curriculum and the

(b) objectives correspond to the electives

Is statistics a reality for some of our majors?

They need to be to be smart consumers.

More practical applications of mathematics should be stressed.

Reword objective (2a) to read: Use and interpret data or use techniques of calculus.

Is literature restricted to English?

NO!

The freshman seminar does not seem practical in that it seems to have major resource implications, what with small classes and 40-50 sections per year. Who pays for this?

Should all departments require freshman seminars?

Or is the freshman year the time to be exploring new ideas?

What happens to undecided students who miss the freshman seminar in their future major?

The freshman seminar might not work in all majors because of pre-requisite structures that exist in disciplines such as math and science.

The freshman seminar couldn't really be an existing course.

Why couldn't it be MATH 130 or MATH 235 or MATH 161?

Would other students be excluded from seminars developed for majors?

How will the fall 2005 first seminar instructors be trained?

Their course proposal must be approved by two groups of faculty; there will be a two-day faculty development workshop; they will receive training in conducting classes in a seminar format.

There seems to be a math/science bias in this proposal.

This perception was discussed by the Gen Ed Task Force.

The social sciences seem to be getting the short shrift.

The Task Force anticipated that most of the UNIV 1\*\* courses would come from the social sciences and humanities.

Should the math requirement be put in the fundamentals block?

This was considered by the Task Force, but rejected because there is not just one course that could satisfy the requirement.

In this increasingly technical world, math and science are critical to the future. Perhaps the 300-level “gen ed” elective could not be from math and science.

The university requires math proficiency.

Pottery students need geology courses.

Advanced writing should be at the junior level.

The English Department also pointed this out and the change has been made.

ADJOURNMENT: 10:48 a.m.