

Task Force Report to GERC/Faculty Senate

April 29, 2003

Faculty Senate created the General Education Task Force in November 2002, and members were elected December 2002 (see attached listing of members). It held its first meeting shortly after the start of the spring 2003 semester. It met six times during February – April. At its first meeting the Task Force elected Fred Foster-Clark, the current Coordinator Of General Education, as chairperson for an unspecified term.

Each Task Force member had received during Winter break a binder with background materials, including a set of four reports issued by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). The first meeting oriented members to the mandate of the Task Force and its origins as an outgrowth of MU's experience and efforts at the Asheville Institute for General Education in June 2002. We then began a consideration of some of the AAC&U materials which members found quite helpful. Subsequently, the group considered the mission and purpose statements contained in the current Governance Manual in an effort to isolate those principles that should continue to guide any efforts to improve the Gen Ed program.

While a diversity of views about the purposes and present configuration of General Education were offered in many of these early meetings, by the fourth meeting some consensus began to develop on some of the basic ideas that should guide the continuing work of the Task Force. It was also felt that dialogue should begin more broadly among faculty, staff, students, and any other MU constituents about the very ideas and principles we had been discussing. It was felt that these general governing principles should be disseminated, digested, and debated, particularly among the faculty who hold primary responsibility for the design and approval of curricula.

At the final regular meeting of the Task Force this spring (April 22) and subsequent to it as well, Task Force members continued to work on more concrete representations of what a curriculum revised in line with these principles might look like. Work of this type will continue throughout the next semester and will be continually informed by the ongoing discussion and debate about the principles that govern our work. In fact, as more specific components of a draft proposal become sufficiently refined by the work of the Task Force, these possible components will be shared widely among the faculty. We view this continuing dialogue to be necessary to the eventual success of any proposed changes to the curriculum. It is only through the full and open discussion of possible ideas, along with educating ourselves about trends and practices in higher education, that we will develop the buy-in necessary for reaching the goal of enhancing General Education at Millersville.

What appears in the remainder of this document is a statement of some of the principles that we propose to guide the enhancement process. While they represent a seeming consensus of most members to the principles implied, some members have different views about the details or priority of various items. However, they are intended to spark dialogue and debate and not to reflect a specific or fully endorsed proposal. The Task Force will hold a half-day meeting during pre-session to further consider specific strategies for disseminating our ideas, gathering

feedback, and starting conversations broadly among the faculty about the meaning and purposes of Gen Ed and what might be done to better fulfill them.

Gen Ed Task Force – Draft Statement of Principles

April 29, 2003

The Governance Manual statements about Gen Ed (Sections I – III as attached) seem to point to assumptions about Gen Ed that still do (and should continue to) apply to our Gen Ed program (e.g., “broad, liberal course of instruction in the major areas of knowledge”, “reason logically”, “communicate ... intelligently”). The descriptors given in current language seem to miss the mark chiefly in the following ways:

- The “interrelatedness”, “integrated educational experience”, etc., in short the idea of coherence, seems well articulated in the philosophy of Gen Ed but is in short supply in practice. We’ve agreed that this is an area that should be addressed in any revised program.
- The “foundational” notion that Gen Ed requirements should mostly be done early should be revised to make sure there is more vertical integration to the Gen Ed program.
- The “cultural pluralism” and “global perspectives” are not now sufficiently or systematically addressed in our current curriculum.

The following points also represent some issues that may help to frame our discussions about changes to the Gen Ed program.

1. The Fundamental Skills portion of the current Gen Ed Objectives represents the foundational skills (e.g., writing, speaking, listening, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, information literacy) that every student needs to successfully complete their MU degree. Early experience within the Gen Ed program and the major should develop and expand beginning competencies in these areas. Upper level courses in both Gen Ed and the major should refine these competencies and offer a venue for their assessment. We recognize that many of these foundational skills are part of the K-12 experience of many students. MU should be flexible in granting appropriate credit to students upon entry when they have the requisite skills (e.g., through AP and CLEP tests).
2. First-year programming for all students should include a learning communities (LC) component during both semesters of the first year. This component will involve at least two regular courses linked along with a Freshman Seminar. One of the LCs may include a course in the major. It is expected that one or both of the Engl110/Comm100 will be part of a LC.
3. Rising juniors (having earned approximately 60 credits) will also participate in an LC linked to their Advanced Writing course. This may involve either a Gen Ed or major-

related course. This would represent the first LC experience for incoming community college transfers and would allow mid-program assessment opportunities.

4. Gen Ed requirements will be reduced to a minimum of 48/51 credits, including 3 credits of seminars connected to the LCs. LC seminars offered by Departments for their majors will count in Gen Ed providing they include certain specified Gen Ed foundational skills along with assessment opportunities.
5. An integrative Capstone experience will be required of all graduating seniors. It should provide a vehicle for reflective integration of the total package of a student's undergraduate work and for end-of-program assessment of learning outcomes in both Gen Ed and the major.
6. Students will continue to have broad exposure to various disciplines by taking 3 or 4 courses in each of the following areas: Humanities and Fine Arts; Natural Sciences and Mathematics; and Social Sciences. A total of 11 courses (33 credits) will be required of all students in these three areas of study. A serious reduction in the overall number of different courses that students may take in these areas will be sought so that students have a more common grounding in the liberal arts and so that the courses are more explicitly targeted to fulfilling Gen Ed needs. This might be accomplished by being more prescriptive with a subset of these courses (something of a "modified core") and offering more freedom of choice with other courses

GEN ED TASK FORCE MEMBERS

ED04	John Ward, Educational Foundations
SO04	Behnam Nakhai, Business Administration
SC04	Dottie Blum, Math
HU04	Barb Bensur, Art
NO04	Paul Studdard, Library
AT04	Michele White, Developmental Studies (Director of Academic Advising)
AT04	John Dooley, Physics
AA04	Carol Phillips, Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Services
SA04	Phil Riordan, Director of Housing & Residential Programs
SS04	Nikki Miller, student
SS04	Shelly Luff, student
GE04	Fred Foster-Clark, Psychology, Coordinator of General Education