Information for the General Education Oversight Committee
Ad-Hoc Committee on the Development of the General Education Oversight Committee
December 9, 2021

Introduction

On April 27, 2021, the Faculty Senate resolved to create an ad hoc committee to consider and report on the creation of a new Standing Committee, the General Education Oversight Committee (GEOC). The ad hoc committee was assembled and formally charged on July 27, 2021. In addition to making recommendations for the creation of GEOC, the ad hoc committee was also charged with collecting information that would assist GEOC as it developed guidelines and processes to align courses with the revised Gen Ed categories. What follows is that report.

Scheduling

One element of the charge asked for the deadlines that must be met to have new courses approved and added to the catalog, so they might be offered when the new Gen Ed program goes into effect (now Fall 2024, instead of 2023); as well as those that existing courses must meet to be approved for Gen Ed credit.

The timeline of establishing the GEOC and its subcommittees, establishing the infrastructure to review and approve General Education courses under the new model, and the commencement of the review process is as follows:

Spring 2022

Once members of the GEOC subcommittees have been elected, requirements and expectations for each GEOC category are established.

Summer 2022

Curriculog will be reconfigured to facilitate the GEOC's review of proposals for existing courses to align with the new General Education model. Once this is complete, proposals may be submitted. New or significantly modified courses are to go through the UCC's approval process before General Education alignment is considered. It should be kept in mind that Curriculog require proposals be submitted a year in advance of the course being offered.

Faculty Development workshops ought to be offered to aid faculty in aligning their courses with the new model, particularly for courses in the First Year Experience, Civic and Community Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion, and Environmental Sustainability categories. Such workshops should continue to be offered at least until the transition is complete.

Fall 2022-Fall 2023

General Education alignment processes carried out by GEOC and its subcommittees.

In order to facilitate the movement of hundreds of courses through these processes, our committee suggests that the GEOC consider a tiered approach, where lower-level courses (particularly at the 100-level) are aligned first, and upper-level courses enter the process later.

Transition Practices

The second element of the charge asked the committee to identify best and worst practices for Gen Ed transitions. Despite initial uncertainty about the availability of information about these processes (particularly the "worst", a number of instructive case studies were identified (these documents will be appended to the report).

1. **Esch and May 2020**: Reflection on a Successful Process for General Education Reform. This mostly focuses on the steps that we have already done at SU. However, Stage 4: Implementation (pp. 97–98) as well as the references might also prove useful.
2. **Esch 2020**: Guiding Principles: A Template for General Education Reform. Again, this mostly focuses on the steps we have already done at SU. However, the discussion of (pp. 104–107) and the Appendix A: Guiding Principles (p. 109) detailing the Process and Design Principles are worth reviewing.
3. **Gaston and Gaff 2009**: Revising General Education—And Avoiding the Potholes. This is a very thorough document referenced by many others. The "Program Implementation" section would probably be most useful to the GEOC (pp. 26–29; Potholes 43–50) as well as Appendix A: Pothole Patches for the corresponding Potholes.
4. **McManus and Mosto 2012**: "Advice from the Trenches" presentations.
5. **Hachtmann 2012**: The Process of General Education Reform from a Faculty Perspective: A Grounded Theory Approach. The "Theoretical Propositions" section starting on p. 28 seems to both align with our experiences and also can potentially inform about their model for implementation, including how that worked/didn't work (from a faculty perspective).

There are also several universities whose websites provide good examples of "reformed" General Education programs, including resources and documentation, that can be considered as models.

1. **Radford University**: https://www.radford.edu/content/real/home/faculty.html
2. **University of Maryland**: https://gened.umd.edu/faculty
3. **University at Buffalo**: https://www.buffalo.edu/ubcurriculum.html
4. **University of Virginia**: https://gened.as.virginia.edu/

Key takeaways from this material include many points our transition has already incorporated or which are planned (professional development, building a process for making adjustments, and transcending departmental boundaries). Others include using our own experts, having a clear plan to assess core outcomes, and remaining flexible. Trying to make the new model fit or mirror the old model and territoriality are to be avoided. Research should be intentional and carefully planned (see comments from Northern Michigan in the appended document "Implementing General Education Reform"). Other suggestions include further exploration of the possibilities of co-teaching and the identification of "model courses" to provide concrete examples.

Requirements for certain Gen Ed categories at other institutions

Finally, the charge asked the committee to identify existing requirements at other institutions for categories similar to First Year Seminar, Experiential Learning, Civic Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion, and Environmental Sustainability. There are a wealth of resources available in these areas. Many of these have been compiled on our committee's MyClasses site, which can be made available to the GEOC. Here in the report, we will share an executive summary for each of the specified categories.

First Year Seminar

Under the new Gen Ed model, a first-year seminar course will focus on "academic preparation, skills and expectations for educational and professional success through exploration of a topic or issue". ECs include: Critical Thinking and Reasoning, Effective Reading, Information Literacy, Oral Communication, Written Communication; PSCRs include Intellectual Curiosity. Currently 4 "performance-peer" institutions offer the type of 3–4 credit hour FYS course outlined by the new Gen Ed model. Shared components include limited enrollment (~20–25 students) and emphasizing engagement in special topic as means of developing critical thinking and writing skills. Some campuses use department HEGIS codes for the FYS, but how they implement FYS curriculum varies. For instance, the [Rowan University requires the Rowan Seminar](#) is a special section of a regular class that caters to first-year students, taught by faculty who receive training in first-year curriculum. Others (see [Framingham](#)) use special HEGIS codes for FYS course.

No publicly accessible information was located about how universities approve or evaluate FYS courses. A previous FYE Working Group (co-chaired by Tim Stock) collected comprehensive information about developing an FYE, including reports from peer institutions and comparable institutions, such as Butler University, and the creation of rubric templates and course approval prototypes. While these templates/prototypes pre-date the current approved Gen Ed model, they remain helpful resources for developing materials for future SU courses. Included in that committee's summaries are links to the [National Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition](#) (which includes a resource bank for building FYE courses) and the manuscript *[What Makes the First-Year Seminar High Impact? Exploring Effective Educational Practices](#)*.

Experiential Learning

The Experiential Learning requirement is a course in which students "apply knowledge and competencies from General Education through internship, study abroad/away, research, senior project, or other relevant experience" which must meet the ECs of Critical Thinking and Reasoning, Information Literacy, Oral Communication, and Written Communication, and the PSCRs of Ethical Reasoning and Intellectual Curiosity. Many of our Peer Institutions include a variety of opportunities for experiential learning as part of General Education. As a General Education "capstone," Experiential Learning should provide students with an opportunity to apply their General Education to contexts in their programs of study and oriented to their post-graduation lives.

The [AAC&U Value Rubric on Lifelong Learning](#) seems a good fit; it captures curiosity as well as transfer, independence, initiative, and reflection, all of which seem to fit the purpose of the course (*and* the rubric directly supports part of SU's Mission).

Civic and Community Engagement

Salisbury University has a process in place for tagging CE courses. This process pre-dates but was instrumental to our designation by the Carnegie Foundation as an Engaged Campus. A faculty requests tagging through the Registrar's Office. If the course has been approved before, the Registrar will add the tag. If the course has not, the Registrar contacts PACE for a review of the course. PACE developed a single-column rubric with four criteria to review the syllabus; three of the criteria are established from best practice literature in the field, while the fourth is that at least 20% of the course time or grade comes through community engagement activities (perhaps an arbitrary number, but also set to prevent these courses from having to go through full UCC processes).

The two universities with the most robust and transparent course review processes available for public view also require faculty to submit narrative explanations of how their course meets CE guidelines. PACE maintains a similar document, which is aligned to the four-criteria rubric.

One straightforward approach would have faculty complete a narrative explanation and submit that with their course materials. The relevant party (advisory subcommittee) would then use the established four-part rubric to provide feedback and suggestions to GEOC and the submitting faculty.

Diversity and Inclusion

Faculty at Salisbury University already provide many courses on Diversity and Inclusion, which can be seen in this [library guide](#) compiled by the Healing Action group. However, determining which courses should be officially tagged as D&I for our General Education program will require discernment and qualitative discussion rather than a one-size-fits-all checklist. The reason for this is two-fold: 1) neither AAC&U nor any university our workgroup researched actually offers rubrics *specifically* for diversity courses (though the GEOC and the D&I subcommittee will no doubt benefit from the value rubrics relevant to [Intercultural](#) and [Global](#) learning); and 2) because most universities maintain a broad definition of diversity, the content of D&I courses *vary too greatly* to render a single checklist useful. One creative approach (at UC San Diego) involves a methodological, rather than SLO-based, checklist requiring a course to explain how diversity is integral to three components (framework, subject matter, and pedagogy) to ensure the course is fully committed to D&I.

The most important takeaway from other universities is that the courses approved for D&I introduce students to marginalized or misunderstood groups and make those groups the dominant focus of each approved course. The D&I courses offered at our performance-peer institutions and other universities were strikingly consistent: the three most commonly offered umbrella topics serving as D&I were, in descending order of prominence: 1) racial/ethnic diversity; 2) foreign/global cultures; and 3) gender/sexual orientation, with socioeconomic disparity a more distant fourth. Most universities in fact offer D&I as a combination of the above three, rather than just one topic. It would benefit the GEOC and D&I subcommittee to

strive to define D&I in a broad enough way to include the breadth of diversity courses at SU and our peer institutions, while recognizing that best practices suggest approved courses should be specifically focused on underrepresented groups and not general courses that partially touch on diversity.

Environmental Sustainability

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) seems to be the premier organization for information on Environmental Sustainability in Higher Education; SU's previous work in the area was based primarily on resources available through ASSHE. Our Peer Institutions do not have General Education requirements in sustainability currently; ASSHE's link to DANS provides the widest resources. It is clear that current thinking about the value of exposure to issues of sustainability in the curriculum is as much as building resilience and adaptability among students, including capacities to deal with complex issues, discern relevant facts, explore opinions, and construct strategies for resolving complex social problems. As one of the tagged areas in our new General Education, it was the intent that courses across the curriculum could achieve the tag.