

MEMORANDUM

From: Kevin Evans, Chair,
University Level Advisory Committee (ULAC) on the General Education

To: Council on Academic Affairs

Subject: Review of the General Education Program

Date: October 31, 2017

Attached is a document produced and supported by the University-Level Advisory Committee (ULAC) on the General Education (GE) Program. It recommends that the Council on Academic Affairs initiate a University-wide review of the GE beginning this (2016-17) academic year.

The recommendation is based on ULAC's own insights through its continuous monitoring of the GE over the past decade, but also on its recent discussions about several contemporary issues that have aligned to prompt such a review. Moreover, in March 2016, Bruce A. McPheron, now-Executive Vice President and Provost, suggested that a review may be warranted.

The document provides a brief history of the current GE, identifies a set of issues that serves as a rationale for review, and proposes a process to do so.

General Education Review

Background:

Initiated by President Edward Jennings, the current general education program was established in 1988, as the General Education Curriculum (GEC), and emerged from a 3-step process:

- a position paper on the nature of general education (known as the Reagan Report);
- a proposal for a general education curriculum structure (known as the Babcock Report); and then,
- the submission, to the Council on Academic Affairs (CAA), of a proposal to implement that structure by each of the undergraduate colleges. The then-five Arts and Sciences colleges submitted their collective proposal first, followed by each of the other colleges. Once approved by CAA, each received formal action by the University Senate.

The model had eight content-based categories, each with specified learning outcomes. The colleges proposed courses within each category from which the student would choose. The main variations among the colleges were that Arts and Sciences had a foreign language requirement and most other colleges did not; and some colleges had greater specificity of course options within the categories based on alignment with the content of their major programs.

The GEC was administered through the Arts and Sciences Curriculum Committee. Formal reviews, by “special University-wide committees,” occurred in 1996, 2002, and 2007. None produced any substantial structural changes to the model. However, the 2007 review led to a reduction in some of the categorical requirements; the establishment of the “additional breadth” category; and a reduction in the total degree hours from 191 to 181 (or 180 in some colleges). The GEC became the GEC-Revised (abbreviated to GEC-R).

Importantly, in 2007, as an outcome of the last review, a University-wide Committee – the University-level Advisory Committee (ULAC) for the general education curriculum was established.

Semester conversion (2009-2012) did not include a wholesale review of the GEC-R. However, through ULAC the “additional breadth” and “issues of the contemporary world” categories were dropped; the history requirement was revised; and an “open options” category (including service learning and education abroad) was created. The GEC-R became GE (General Education).

The Issues:

After nearly a decade-long review of the GE – for example, monitoring enrollment trends and assessment results – and discussion within the Committee since Spring 2016, ULAC recommends to the Council on Academic Affairs that a formal campus-wide review of the GE begin immediately. The rationale for doing so is based on the following considerations.

- The current GE has been in place for nearly 30 years without substantial review and revision. That situation is not appropriate for any curricular program.

- Within the University a revision to the GE needs to align with the new mission/vision statement and growing attention overall to its teaching and learning mission. Indeed, a new University-level Teaching and Learning Institute has just been established.
- The GE was developed by a generation of faculty many of whom are no longer with the University. Most of our current faculty were not involved in its development and implementation and need to be given the opportunity to help determine what the GE should be going forward.
- The GE was developed when the University had an open admissions policy and there were questions about the level of student preparedness that the GEC was designed to help address. Today, with the selective admissions process well established, students are better prepared for university-level work and the GE component of their undergraduate program needs to be aligned accordingly. The University needs to understand more clearly current state-wide K-12 content standards and assessments - that affect the academic expectations placed on our students at the pre-collegiate level. How do these educational changes affect the sequencing of GE courses (first year, second year, beyond) within our undergraduate programs?
- Statewide initiatives administered through the Ohio Department of Higher Education, such as College Credit Plus (dual enrollment), and an increasing number of students taking Advanced Placement and other related types of credit while in high school, have resulted in many students entering the University with a large amount of credit – much of it GE credit – completed. Transfer students entering with similar credit represent a large part of our enrollment profile. These students, through the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM) bring credit with them that must be transferred and applied, primarily to our GE requirement. These initiatives will continue.
- Computing technology is now ubiquitous throughout the University's learning environment. Instructors and students are immersed in a digital world, operating within a rapid and instant information age. Our connectedness allows new forms of engagement and instruction via varied implementations of blended, flipped, or online learning. The University has expanded undergraduate and graduate level online course and program offerings in the past five years and continues to explore new opportunities. How does that affect the content and the method of GE instruction going forward?
- Our institutional accrediting body – the Higher Learning Commission – has expectations about general education, notably student learning outcomes assessment, and this dimension of the GE needs strengthening.

Overall these considerations relate to broader structural issues such as simplification, coherence, and attention to a more unified model across the colleges.

Stated simply, The Ohio State University, through its faculty and students, needs to determine what it wants its GE to be at this point in its history - with its current faculty and students – and in alignment with relevant statewide initiatives, including the Ohio Transfer Module (OTM).

Such a review can be aided by an examination of recent GE reviews at other, notably peer, institutions, as well as a well-established and ongoing national level dialogue about GE most effectively led by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).

The Process:

The process needs to be inclusive, faculty driven, with substantial input from students and staff, notably advisers, all campuses, and include alumni and our major transfer partner, Columbus State Community College (CSCC).

The University Senate leadership will be consulted on process issues at each stage of the review.

- The Council on Academic Affairs recommends a GE review (11/16)
- A GE Review Committee is established with membership (12-15) from ULAC, CAA, and faculty and students from across the University. Members should include at least one adviser, one representative from a regional campus, and one representative from XSCC. Committee to be led by two faculty fellows. (11/16)
- Review Committee: (11/16-3/17)
 - establishes and runs a set of listening sessions with the following constituencies: undergraduate students, faculty, college curriculum committees, graduate teaching associates, Deans, University Senate committees and other groups as determined. Such sessions provide background on the rationale for the review and potential options for moving forward, as points of departure.
 - develops a website for monitoring of, and input to, the process.
 - develops online surveys of faculty, students, staff, alumni, for input
 - may form subcommittees as needed.
- Review Committee develops a broad structure for the GE and distributes a draft to constituencies that provided input for reactions. (4/17)
- Review Committee makes recommendation to CAA (5/17).
- CAA determines components of approval process (AY 17-18) and implementation (date to be determined).