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Fall 2011

General Education Forum Summary 2011

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Themes that emerged from the Division and Student Group discussions of general education
Fall 2011

1. College Writing

Faculty Comments

- College writing seems to be working; some students were interested in taking college writing even though their ACT scores exempted them.
- College Writing seems to work, to judge from reports (i.e., Institutional Research data)
- Students hands down see college writing as one of the most valuable general education requirements
- College writing was deemed most useful based on graduating senior surveys.
- College writing is an essential part of the general education curriculum that is not being communicated to students. Allowing students to test out undermines the message that college writing is essential.
- What does it mean to achieve these goals? E.g., College Writing: you can test out; you check off a box, but this comes with no message that writing skills are essential or why writing is important.
- Not all alternatives to College Writing across campus are equivalent and that more students would benefit by taking the course.
- Some see UMM's writing requirements as lacking compared to, for example, the TC that requires four intensive writing courses.
- Writing and math should be required, and then students can choose from other categories.
- EDP money could be used for integrating more writing into current courses.
- Mandate writing for all students
- *ALL* students should take a writing class of some kind.
- Writing requirement for everyone, might include intermediate writing course options for higher level writers
- Offering courses within the major that are writing courses could be valuable because every discipline writes differently. We used to have a writing component in every major, i.e., a W designator, but we got rid of it. There is a staffing concern with offering writing classes within the major. It would also take a considerable amount of training to teach writing within the major.
- College writing was deemed most useful based on graduating senior surveys. Writing should not be seen as an either Major or General Education requirement. Everyone should be able to communicate information.
- More help with specialized kinds of writing is needed, for example courses in scientific writing or writing courses for specific majors. There was general agreement that more lower and upper level writing courses geared toward different specializations would be helpful though there was also concern about staffing. Not all disciplines would be able to staff writing courses for their major. Not all who are good at scientific writing can teach it. The small sections needed for good writing courses would be a strain on staffing too.
- There was discussion of giving courses that have a writing component a Gen Ed designation for writing.
- There are uneven writing skills within the incoming class, and there are a variety of ways that students are able to get out of the requirement; however, those ways that get students out of the writing requirement are not all fulfilling the requirement.
- There is a lack of writing requirements within the curriculum. The Twin Cities requires 4 intensive writing courses in their curriculum, **while we make 0 requirement if they tested out or their requirement was waived based on their ACT scores.**
- Many students would benefit from improved policy and more courses that focus on writing.

- All students need to take some composition class. An idea would be to offer more intermediate level composition courses. It would also help science students who need writing courses for graduate school.
- More needs to be done to see that students at UMM learn to write well, in general and at a higher level within their major.
- There were concerns about implications for staffing and that giving courses with a writing component an additional W designation would not work well and cause additional problems.

Student Comments

- College writing is generally a dreaded class, but it was really helpful.
- My writing skills improved dramatically after taking college writing.
- Huge response in realizing College Writing is important
- College writing needs more emphasis and possibly be two semesters long.
- Add a class strictly for scientific writings because it's a lot different from college writing. Students would benefit more from a scientific class than a regular writing class.
- There should be more writing. Offering a course that is intensive in scientific writing could be valuable for graduate schools and more interesting.
- Non-science majors could also benefit from taking a scientific writing course.
- Writing in a particular major or writing for publications is critical
- There is an openness to reducing the number of general education categories, which may allow a greater emphasis in writing.
- The idea of intermediate writing classes is really appealing
- Requiring writing in the existing classes should be used more effectively.
- A huge disparity in writing ability exists and is a problem and CW.

2. Depth and Breadth of Gen Ed requirements

Faculty Comments

- At one time, there weren't enough courses in some categories but the students can now find what they need.
- The current Gen Eds give students a variety of experiences.
- There are too many courses meeting GERS. If everything is Gen Ed it is impossible to assess.
- Students have too many choices in the categories and that leads to "dumbing down" of the categories.
- The "packaging" needs to be revamped. There is a lack of depth in studies required outside the major so the current system just becomes a checklist
- There is no depth within any category outside of major
- Giving courses more than one Gen Ed designation creates problems, reducing Gen Ed breadth, and offering an easy way out.
- There is a need increase the depth of the general education curriculum. Consolidation may help that because it would open up some of the options.
- Essential is breadth and exposure to some core things (like arts and math/science) to get students out of their comfort zone
- There was concern that students do not necessarily get sufficient depth in areas outside their major. Most general education requirements can be met by 1000 level courses.
- The "packaging" needs to be revamped. There is a lack of depth in studies required outside the major so the current system just becomes a checklist
- Many members of Science Math expressed interest in having categories within the Gen Ed curriculum consolidated. More credits could be offered within broader Gen Ed designations. Such a

consolidation could compensate for a lack in breadth of courses offered under some current designations.

- There is a pervasive culture on campus to race through general education requirements in the first year that hinders the ability to create depth

Student Comments

- Aspects of student choice more so than GER labels. For example, two upper level courses outside of their major would allow them to dive into something else, caring about something more than “dabbling”, getting the chance to learn a little bit more.
- Messy balance, over average credits required, might need to take away as much as give
- Students treat the requirements as a checklist. The lack of depth does not encourage continued exploration within the general education curriculum

3. Flexibility in meeting Gen Ed requirements

Faculty Comments

- Money issues are a constraint and it's difficult at this moment in time to suggest that we impede students graduating for general education
- The current designators are limiting because one course can contain a number of general education requirements. Having the ability to offer courses with more designators would be helpful.
- Multiple GenEd designators on a class?

Student Comments

- Students in particular were concerned with flexibility in meeting general education requirements and many faculty members shared these concerns. One example mentioned by students is the case of those who have returned to school after gaining a depth of perspective based on life experiences.
- Non-traditional students do not like that they need to fulfill the general education requirements to graduate.
- Non-traditional students would like the ability to apply for a waiver for specific general education courses because they feel their lives have enriched by their life experience.
- Students wondered whether there could be a mechanism to give general education credit to those who have learned life lessons intended by some Gen Ed designations.
- Consider a waiver for Gen Eds for the non-traditional students.
- Having these experiences in college outside of accomplishing other things, finding things outside of courses, (study abroad does not equal human div.) that should be able to fit these examples as well
- Have general education requirements change depending upon the major
- Logic based majors are handed their schedules to graduate on time, and are not really allowed any free time/movements to branch out. Frustration comes from having to take so many requirements, but they need to be prepared in their field over having branched out.

4. Complexity of current Gen Ed curriculum

Faculty Comments

- There is difficulty from faculty remembering what the acronyms stand for.
- There is a problem with our system because it is so confusing to students. Students do not have a mental map of what academia is with our current structure. Students are getting lost in the number of categories.

- Many see the Gen Ed curriculum as too complicated. The complexity is seen to prevent understanding of the Gen Ed curriculum and to result in unnecessary bureaucracy. The Gen Ed curriculum from the 70s and early 80s only required three courses from each division, a much simpler scheme.
- The general education designators can be difficult to work with, i.e., students can encounter problems with which requirements certain classes fulfill. Having multiple designators on a class and then having students choose which designator they wish to take could be helpful.
- Simplify the requirements to taking at least 2 courses or at least a certain number of credits in courses from each division.
- There is a difference in the students of today than the students of years ago. There is a maturity difference that is excusable. We need to understand that students of today may not have as concrete a grasp on the benefits of a general education curriculum.
- "Service" requirements are becoming popular but adding to the Gen Ed could make graduating in 4 years impossible

Student Comments

- No to expanding topics because it can get messy for students.

5. Appropriate overall emphasis of Gen Ed curriculum in view of current trends

Faculty Comments

- UMM has had fairly consistent GenEd plan over the years, without huge changes; our basic goals seem core.
- The Global Village requirements are what are most important in our current world.
- Are technology, wellness, and environmental issues appropriately represented in the general education requirements?
- Non-Western does not mean only non-Western European, and our requirements exclude diversity in US, North America
- The UMM system is antiquated.
- The environmental requirement within the general education curriculum does not meet the strategic plan of the college. In particular, UMM's sustainable mission isn't highlighted in the Gen Eds. The major Gen Eds are archaic.
- The expanding perspectives courses are relics from a time long, long ago and are not the focuses of today's world.
- Concern was expressed that the current emphasis in general education requirements is dated and that to keep up with current trends more emphasis on categories now included in Global Village, diversity, globalization, and natural environment for example, would be better. A counter argument was made that we do not have the flexibility to shift the emphasis like this because transfer credits to and from UMM would then become a problem.
- There was concern that shifts in emphasis in curriculum are undone and pointed in new and unpredictable directions every time there is a new chancellor. (Would we shift from the Renewable Sustainable Education to Renaissance on the Prairie and turn into the college version of a Renaissance fair?)
- We need a GER regarding domestic diversity.
- We need a GER regarding the environment.
- Amazon.com model for students: if you took x and liked it, you might also like y (set up somehow, like "what if" APAS or when students are searching for classes)
- Shouldn't we have some kind of wellness requirement?

- Shouldn't the word "sustainable" appear somewhere in the presentation of GE requirements?
- The UMM system is antiquated and we should look at what other schools are doing.
- The environmental emphasis will be gone 2 years after chancellor Johnson leaves. Marketing trends will change and we will one day change our marketing. As such, stick to the ones that are universal irrelevant of the administration.
- There was continued support for a more pronounced environmental emphasis in the curriculum.

Student Comments

- Some schools are having different Gen Ed requirements for different majors.

6. The status of IC

Faculty Comments

- There seemed to be some agreement that courses that encourage beginning students to be part of an intellectual community are a good thing.
- There did not seem to be any kind of clear or unanimous enthusiasm for IC courses.
- Information literacy is something that students are lacking. Students who are very advanced are having a real difficulty identifying good sources, how not to plagiarize, and how to paraphrase. Part of the problem is that the IC courses no longer require library visits, which means students are no longer getting exposed early to the idea of information literacy. Introducing a course that could deal with these issues would be helpful.

Student Comments

- Art performance comes off as not having any relevance to the major.

7. The success of senior seminar as a capstone experience

Faculty Comments

- There was wide enthusiasm for the senior seminar as a capstone experience.
- Senior Seminar/cap stone as a uniform thing across campus is good. There could be a general one across campus. We could also just emphasize it more.
- Standardizing the cap stone classes would be a mistake. There is value in letting disciplines do what they see fit.
- There was concern that any changes made not result in standardization of the senior seminar from major to major.

Student Comments

8. Foreign Language Requirement

Faculty Comments

- Foreign language is a necessary requirement.

- Foreign Language has struggled to be relevant to students and has seen the lowest sense of achievement. One year is not enough to teach students a foreign language.
- There is a sense that introduction language courses are remedial. It's difficult to change that stigma.
- Ethnocentric language in FL (including American Indian languages) and in IP
- 2 years of foreign language
- Need more foreign language to have more fluency not just 2 semesters. But do we have the resources to do more?
- Beef up FL

Student Comments

- Language needs to be kept separate

9. Redundancy in the current Program

Faculty Comments

- There was not a strong feeling of redundancy within the general education curriculum.
- Rethink Global Village? Diversity at home and diversity abroad
- Ethnocentric language in FL (including American Indian languages) and in IP
- How is III.B (Human Behavior, Social Processes and Institutions) different from III F 1, 2, 3, 4 (Global Village)?
- III C, D overlap: aren't the arts "works of thought and imagination"?
- In terms of redundancy, group history and social sciences together, collapse the humanities together (art requirements).

Student Comments

- fine arts/performing arts
- I haven't found the curriculum to be redundant. I believe the current curriculum nicely covers a range of subject areas.

10. Artistic Performance

Faculty Comments

- There is value in the Art Performance courses (Choir, lessons)
- Student athletes do athletic performances all of the time, in competition, but they are still required to take a class to meet the artistic performance GER.
- Art performance in practice is not successfully fulfilled currently.
- Include athletic competition in the ArtP category.
- We need a GER called "performance" that might be athletic or it might be artistic.

Student Comments

11. Do our students (and/or faculty) understand our Gen Ed program?

Faculty Comments

- As courses and instructors have changed over the years, the link to the Gen Ed requirements may have been lost.

- The human diversity category maybe needs to be clarified.
- Through the eyes of an incoming student, how are subsections B and F of the catalogue different from one another.
- Advises ask why do I need 2 science courses?
- There is a problem in that this university has not effectively communicated the value of taking courses outside the major.
- Terminology and language within the requirements needs to be revised.
- We don't do well at explaining our Gen Ed requirements, goal, and purpose.
- Yellow advising sheet presents GenEd as checklist. It's functional, but intellectually bad packaging.
- Understanding of purpose, more than checklist of requirements.
- - Why is some first year advising so awful re: Gen Eds?
- Benefits of the general education curriculum are not well understood. Majors in the sciences have many requirements for their major and some students and faculty do not see the benefit of requirements under all Gen Ed designations for all students.
- Students check them off
- The link to Gen Ed should be clear for each course and reviewed as part of the assessment process.
- Try to map phrases from the mission into the general education subsections with students when students are willing to listen
- Fewer courses with GenEd designator might help make point of GenEd categories clearer *in class* (instructor could really address GenEd purpose/goal)
- Look at how other colleges package GenEds (St. Olaf, apparently, does a great job at this)
- Work on changing students' and advisers' language about GenEds
- Packaging needs to include timeframe suggestions, like majors do
- Global Village needs clarity-maybe incorporate them into other parts of Gen Ed, looking at survey results Global scores low in both areas
- Need better communication, perhaps not all classes need to meet Gen Ed, especially upper level ones. It is odd to have Gen Ed on a course where prerequisites carry the same Gen Ed.
- - Why two science classes?

Student Comments

- The GER are scattershot, and basically just checkboxes in order to get the graduation credits.
- Seen as "have to do" over "get to do"
- There is no explanation on why you have to take the courses. It's just taking them for the "liberal arts" education.
- Trying to understand why some courses don't fill requirements even though they "should"
- UMM isn't marketing the GER programs enough to make it okay/acceptable to take more GER courses.
- You need more than the "conscious" student to get the idea of the GER
- (From a freshman): Don't really know the actual requirements-just the titles and not WHY we have to take them.

12. Gen Eds on upper level courses

Faculty Comments

- What is the value of adding a general education designator onto a 3000 level course that only majors can take anyway?
- Gen Eds should mostly be at the 1000 and 2000 levels.
- Include one mandatory course at 3000 level in addition to the 1000 levels

- Fewer categories, option of lower level PLUS advanced course in some, e.g., 10 GEs, in any 2-3 take one higher level course *outside major*
- Can we reduce the number of GenEd categories (by combining some), require 2 from a group, with option delve further included in the group, so one 1000-level plus one upper level?

Student Comments

- Any history is just at info level or level is beyond capability for non-majors. Not really wanting a cop-out class, a middle ground is needed.
- Upper level major courses shouldn't be able to fit a GER – trying to take away the students from the “wrong places”
- Introducing courses similar to those offered in the Honors Program would be a positive addition to the Gen Ed curriculum.
- Limit the prerequisites for upper level courses for social sciences

13. Gen Eds *in* the major and Gen Eds *and* the major

Faculty Comments

- The check and balance has been the requirement for 30 credits outside the major, but it's not quite good enough. It doesn't ensure a broad liberal arts education.
- Difficulties stem from the credit size of major. Science and Math for example have large major sizes.
- There are distinct and different student populations' i.e. undecided majors may benefit more than transfer students from the current system
- Having courses inside the major that satisfy the general education requirements defeat the purpose of the curriculum is a mistake. The general education curriculum should not include classes within the major; you must go outside the major to fulfill the requirements.
- How large should a major be? Some are so large as to limit liberal arts achievement.
- Cross-listing could really help highlight connections across fields, including among GenEds or between Gen Eds and majors
- One advising technique is to suggest classes outside the major that would enhance the major. If a studio art major likes literature, than suggest literature courses that could help inspire them.
- Allow NO GenEds to count from within a student's first major
- At some universities, the GEs depend on major. E.g., UC San Diego: declare major, then have a GE requirement outside major, in the form of a two-area concentration—below a minor, but close

Student Comments

- The alumni who returned over home coming all said that a class outside their major has changed their major, or influenced their lives after college
- As an Art History student, I do not need to directly apply math to my major, but I understand the need for those classes in my education.
- Students focus on the major because that is what they absolutely need to know when I get out of here, but there is value in knowing other things.
- The Gen Ed program is succeeding at getting students to take classes that they would not normally consider taking and forcing students to do work outside their major.
- Gen Eds can be a relief from major courses, but sometimes they bog down the student more than the major courses.
- There is a discrepancy with how much work some general education classes require. Some are relatively light while others will demand more time than the major.

- Students felt that there should be a way that Gen Ed courses relate back to a given major and make the major more understandable in context.
- Being well rounded in many things, philosophy major – interested in how to fill the math requirement, finding ways to get through the generals by staying towards the major over all.
- To have something where you can stay on the same path but dive into different issues that relate to a major, and then students can benefit from the class more.
- Messy balance, over average credits required, might need to take away as much as give
- Need a better sense of integration of the major studies
- Cap on amount of GER from a single major – Psych
- Double dip allows growth into other major/minor, leave early

14. Mapping Gen Eds to UMM Mission or Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Faculty Comments

- Incorporate phrases from mission into the requirements
- Consider adding something that is uniquely or more distinctly UMM
- Whatever we do to the GER, it should broaden the understanding of the liberal arts of our students. We are unique and we should be developing our own general education program.
- Regarding how the student learning outcomes fit with the general education curriculum:. Will students be required to take *more* general education requirements to graduate so that as a university we can show we are teaching the student learning outcomes? There were ways other than the general education curriculum to meet the learning out comes. When the learning outcomes went to campus assembly it was explicitly stated that they are goals and not guidelines.
- We can't do our own Morris thing because there is a politics game to be played. There are fads that we have in terms of marketing, but at the end of the day we need to be able to fit with what the legislature wants. Credits need to be transferable among colleges and universities in at least the state of Minnesota.
- The question of whether the Student Learning Outcome (SLO) statements are a possible driving force for changing the General Education Curriculum was raised. David Roberts and Michael Korth who served on the Curriculum Committee last year responded that SLO's are broader than the curriculum and partly addressed by extracurricular activities including community involvement and that the SLO's are goals not requirements and so are not intended to drive changes in curriculum.

Student Comments

15. Other comments

Faculty Opinions about our Current Gen Ed Program

- The more the general education requirements have changed, the more they have stayed the same. Despite the name changes throughout the years, the general education requirements have never been tossed up in the air, which to some extent reaffirms the idea that the current curriculum is good. The real issue may be a function of the packaging.
- Gen Ed is not bad.
- Nutrition and/or fitness was proposed as a GER but was not accepted. Philosophically, health and fitness were part of the original liberal arts.
- Information literacy
- If we have students who meet a GenEd requirement before they come to UMM, have they really met *our* GenEd?

- GenEd requirements DO force students to take courses outside their major(s)
- ALL the visiting alumni mentioned a class outside their major that has had significant influence on them.
- There is value in forcing students to take courses that might not otherwise want to take. Doing learning outside the comfort zone can be helpful.
- The intention of general education curriculum is designed to encourage students to take courses outside the major, and for the most part that works. For the most part the current system is successful, though there is sometimes more whining.
- As Gen Eds are reviewed and developed, we should be careful that special interests of a particular discipline aren't allowed to inflate the Gen Ed requirements (e.g. another language course).
- Would like to see a division between global and US diversity. Students should have to take both to fulfill the Gen Eds.
- Include a GER regarding fitness or health and fitness.
- Writing and math should be required, and then students can choose from other categories.
- It is of great importance that the GERs be met with a reasonable number of courses and within the first two years.
- Whatever system is chosen has to keep the students in mind.
- There should be an ongoing review.
- Interrelating courses could be beneficial and the campus is particularly well suited to do so.
- Offer few classes with general education courses, so that the general education program would be more coherent.
- Strip designators from all courses, but then have students draft a report about how they have satisfied the needs of general education.
- Do the courses that students take elsewhere really fulfill the requirements of this university?
- Having fewer general education designators that are broader would help students explore general education
- Create some sort of "Amazon-like" listing of courses. Have suggestions for other courses based on previously taken courses
- Change art requirements to creation
- Combine some of the current categories
- Smaller core requirements, but require more from each
- GenEd requirement is itself in some form essential
- Information literacy in GenEds
- Change FA to Visual Literacy, expand options
- Maybe students could have to prove that a certain class fulfills a certain requirement? Too hard to track? (probably)
- Enforcing attendance at extra curriculum could greatly strengthen the general education requirements.
- On the flip side, enforcing attendance is a disaster because students have a million ways to check out. There are simply taking up space and take up a seat that other people who are interested would like.
- There are some activities on campus that fulfill the requirements of the general education that individuals can currently count. (Open Mic Night)
- Need to retain skills and ways of thinking aspect
- Fix Global.

Student Opinions about our Current Gen Ed Program

- Hated a class at the time, but did learn something in the end Fewer headings, but more options within the headings – more to build

- The worst advising I have ever gotten was the first semester because the student advisors suggested classes based on their ability to take care of general education requirements
- As a student the requirements are very difficult.
- As far as problems with Gen Ed requirements, obviously resources are limited, so offering a larger variety of classes for the curriculum is difficult. Also, it is hard to ensure all students get their first choice for a class and schedule conflicts will often arise when trying to fit in desired classes. But all of these things are unavoidable for the most part and it seems these have been the biggest problems with the curriculum.
- Missing basic skills for computers – teaching majors (IS courses)
- Missing research courses from majors based around that
- Missing ways to be civically involved – non-academic accomplishments
- Missing Global perspectives - culture
- More categories to pick and choose – all will obtain different experiences
- Broaden perspectives and see what the real life is like: that's what liberal arts means.
- If students can get the same rigor/value out of general education with consolidation then do it, but don't sacrifice the integrity of the current program.
- Offering more interdisciplinary courses would help students to more easily and happily fulfill these requirements.
- There was discussion of whether some extra-curricular activities effectively meet a Gen Ed requirement. Examples include concert or guest lecture attendance. Some felt that if this idea included forced attendance of people without a genuine interest would it would detract from the event for those there for their own interest. It was also noted that such an idea could be implemented without forced attendance by the uninterested.
- For students who are more solidified in one area, the GER need to be shown in more light/advertised better – more well-rounded