Report of the Second Wilkes University
General Education Task Force
November 4, 2014
Second Task Force Members:

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Our Charge:

General Education Proposal approved at full faculty meeting in May 2013

The General Education Committee (“GEC”) proposes that the attached General Education Task Force Report be accepted and that the GEC shall continue to develop and to implement assessment procedures consistent with this report. This report suggests there is a faculty consensus on varying degrees of general education revision. Accordingly, it proposes that a new task force be formed to begin that work of revision by consulting with all stakeholders on potential modification of the general education curriculum, and by working closely with the GEC throughout the process. The new task force should consist of eight elected members (four places should give preference to those who served on the old task force and wish to serve again to take advantage of both their prior work and their training at the summer institute) and one ex officio member from the GEC. This final member will allow information to flow freely between the GEC and the task force. At the end of each academic year, the task force will provide a written report to the GEC in time for it to be included in the GEC’s annual report to the faculty.

GEC 2012-2013 Year End Report:

The GEC worked with the old GE Task Force to present to the faculty a proposal to continue the process of possible general education revision through the creation of a new GE Task Force. The faculty endorsed this proposal and this new task force is currently being populated.

Second Task Force Recommendations:

• Continue the work of developing a culture of collaborative and continuous “learning in service to the community”
• Review current General Education outcomes to:
  o Determine whether or not they represent current faculty judgments about the general education curriculum and
  o To revise any wording of outcomes that are not assessable as written, to make them assessable.
• When complete, insert the revised Gen Ed outcomes into the Draft Model proposed by the Task Force in March and April, and discuss/consider:
  o Whether or not the newly expanded model will solve the problems identified by faculty in the 2011 survey (see end of document) and
  o Whether or not the second draft of the model integrates the missing components of the curriculum (global outreach, diversity, application) satisfactorily to:
    ▪ Meet faculty’s felt sense of curricular needs while also
    ▪ Better aligning the Gen Ed curriculum with our Mission/Vision statements.
• Discuss/decide if/how FYF should be integrated into the Gen Ed curriculum.
• Discuss/decide whether or not the WAC program should be integrated into the Gen Ed curriculum.
• Map newly revised objectives to the Gen Ed curricular structure; develop new courses, new learning experiences, if/where called for by the review process.
• Maintain the Gen Ed curriculum: review and implement reliable assessment instruments; conduct regular review and revision.

Year's Activities:

1. Anthony Kapolka created a Google drive site for our group. The drive contains various documents from the Gen Ed Committee's work/history: https://sites.google.com/a/wilkes.edu/gen-ed-task-force
2. Investigated approaches to the second tier of work on General Education review; reviewed AAC&U suggestions for what to avoid in General Education Revision:
   • Try to address general education “according to “business as usual” (via curriculum committee); a task force may be a better route.
   • Work without any special support.
   • Plan for a short-term project.
   • Stick to using existing forums to discuss general education.
3. Considered/discussed the AAC&U recommended Essential Learning Outcomes (LEAP) in terms of how they relate to and fit (or don’t) with the current Wilkes general education outcomes, as well as a broader discussion of issues in general education (generally and at Wilkes) and thoughts as to how to approach these issues.
4. Considered/discussed how and/or where co-curricular programs/offers fit into our curriculum planning?
5. Considered/discussed Assessment:
   • Is “something we can assess” necessarily the same as “something we can teach,” and vice versa?
   • As we think about any revisions, we need to be mindful of the need to assess whatever outcomes we have or revise.
6. Considered/discussed the process of working on the core within a culture of collaborative learning in service to the community; work as inclusively as possible, solicit input from faculty on any reworking of our current outcomes and/or objectives.
7. Drafted a proposal for revision of the General Education curriculum that incorporates
   a. Faculty feedback from the survey conducted by the first task force as well as
   b. Faculty feedback from lunch meetings held in March/April.
8. Created a presentation video for faculty to view prior to discussions during lunch meetings in March/April.
9. Invited faculty to March/April lunch meetings, held on three separate days at different times, to discuss the draft model presented in the video.
10. Lunch findings shared with GEC.
11. June meeting planned next steps.
12. Summer meetings with Provost/planned next steps.
13. Faculty Retreat: facilitated, attended, and contributed.
14. Met with Helen Davis, Chair General Education Committee, for final meeting.
Faculty Input

1. Summary of Faculty Retreat Discussions August 20, 2014
   - Gen Ed should have a home with administrative structure for continuity.
   - The revision of the Gen Ed curriculum needs to be a primary focus of the new provost.
   - Done well, the Gen Ed core 'socializes' students early in their career; therefore, the core offers a great opportunity to show students the cross-disciplinary potential in their study.
   - LEAP is not the cure-all, but it offers some positive and intriguing possibilities.

2. Summary of March/April 2014 Lunch Meetings

March/April 2014 Task Force Lunches Shared with GEC April 22, 2014. Feedback garnered from approximately 60 participants, primarily faculty, but also including staff from the Admissions Office:

Advantages of the Draft Model
- Most liked the new structure.
- Most were in agreement that a more integrative model is desirable as it gives students, programs, and faculty more flexibility.
- Many, realizing that the wording of the objectives had not changed from the current list, became aware that these objectives are not necessarily the correct/desired objectives. This has prompted a felt sense that a review of the objectives across campus is desirable.
- Most agreed that the new structure would allow for easier assessment of the Gen Ed core once the objectives have been approved and course objectives have been mapped to the new structure.
- People who do not currently teach General Education courses felt like they could—with the new structure, and for the first time—contribute something to the Gen Ed curriculum.
- Participants agreed that the new structure’s addition of new objectives 3 and 4 (Development of personal and social responsibility and Application of intellectual and practical skills), would affirm both the University and General Education Mission statements and would solve a problem: these objectives are not yet formally integrated into the curriculum. Questions rose about the logistics of that integration: will these credits be added as experiences? as courses? [for example: would the new course Spanish for Pharmacists count?]

Disadvantages of the Draft Model
- These changes could potentially reduce the spirit of the liberal arts core by extending those requirements to a non-traditional core discipline:
  - Will those offerings still be substantially in the spirit of the liberal arts?
  - If core requirements are fulfilled by other programs, are we detracting from the liberal arts core?
  - If we go to the integrated model—who will decide what counts and what doesn’t?
- Philosophy OR Foreign language will remain an "or" (whether or not the choice remains one between Philosophy and Foreign language) unless more Philosophy faculty are hired.
- Coordination will be needed to provide faculty development if a more integrated teaching style is adopted:
  - writing across the curriculum: who will support faculty efforts?
  - computing across the curriculum: who will support faculty efforts?
FYF courses: who will support faculty efforts? Who will review and revise objectives?

- Any courses taught by multiple faculty members must allow for full loading for each faculty member who teaches that course.
- This structure has not yet articulated a component focused on the needs of first-generation students. They need more support than we currently give them; the Gen Ed core could/should address this deficit.
- There are potential issues with class size. If students have more choices, class size will decrease, number of sections will increase, university costs will go up. [The response to that concern is that Chairs regulate which and how many courses are offered, so that would eliminate the problem]
- This new program could require additional resources--is the administration ready to fully support this new endeavor?

Conclusions

This document contains various findings collected over the course of two and a half years of effort by two separate Task Force groups. That work was both challenging and stimulating, and both groups put a great deal of time into the creation of this final set of recommendations. The processes by which the work was completed are a model for what AAC&U calls “collaborative learning in service to the community.” Each Task Force included members with a wide range of disciplinary and experiential knowledge, and the draft model produced in spring 2014 is all the better for that diversity. It is our hope that the current review process will not only improve the General Education curriculum by filling perceived gaps and making valid assessment possible, but in addition, work to foster the development of a culture of shared development and assessment that routinely brings faculty together in a cycle of review and improvement. As the Chair of each Task Force, it has been my extraordinary pleasure to work alongside all of the contributors as we completed the work we were charged to do, and I wish to thank each of them for their service.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janet Wright Starner
November 4, 2014