
General Education Steering Committee: Report to the Faculty

General Education Proposal

January, 2010

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Executive Summary

Introduction and UPEC Charge

The General Education Steering Committee presents the following document to UPEC as a recommended model for General Education at Seattle Pacific University. Our work was guided by the charge given by UPEC in June, 2009:

UPEC charges the General Education Taskforce to design a general education that resonates with the University's mission statement: Graduating people of competence and character who will engage the culture and change the world. Essential to this work is to create a clear set of criteria that courses must meet for inclusion into the Exploratory Curriculum.

The model presented in this document attempts to incorporate the results of UPEC's General Education Assessment completed during the 2008-09 academic year (Appendix A), the Goals for General Education approved by UPEC in December, 2006 (found in Appendix A), faculty feedback during Autumn Quarter, 2009, recommendations from the Global Education Taskforce, as well as the Undergraduate Learning Outcomes document (Appendix B).

Process

UPEC conducted a thorough review of General Education during the 2008-09 academic year. The findings from this work are summarized in a "Report to the Faculty" document in June, 2009. UPEC created a Steering committee charged with designing a revised GE curriculum. The design was to be completed Autumn Quarter, 2009 and presented to the faculty through the faculty governance structure in preparation for a mail ballot vote during Spring Quarter, 2010. If adopted, the 2010-11 and 2011-12 academic years would be spent preparing for a launch of the new GE program Autumn Quarter, 2012.

Guiding Principles

The proposed model used three guiding principles

- Increase flexibility and choice for students
- Attend to the skills expected of a college graduate
- Assure the curriculum is developmentally appropriate

Increased flexibility: The proposed model reduces the credit requirements in the Exploratory Curriculum from 40 to 35 credits and allows students greater choice. This addresses a key distinction between students' perceptions of a high school education and a college education. A college education offers more freedom from a prescribed course of study.

Attention to skills: Attending to skill goals through the Common Curriculum allows for a more consistent and coordinated effort to teaching the skills UPEC identified as essential to college success.

Developmentally appropriate: The “Ways of Engaging” courses will build on “Ways of Knowing” courses and will therefore be 2000 and 3000-level courses. This will fill a gap in SPU’s curriculum and will, by design, include more integrative and complex coursework as part of the EC.

Key Highlights

- Creation of an exploratory curriculum with a two tier approach focusing on epistemology (tier one) and becoming an engaged citizen (tier two)
- Increased flexibility and choice in the exploratory
- An overall reduction of five credits in general education
- Embedding skills expected of a college graduate into general education courses
- Reconceptualization of the approach to proficiencies
- Resourcing of general education

Rationale for proposed model

The current GE curriculum was introduced in 1998 and consists of three components: The Common Curriculum, the Exploratory Curriculum, and Competency Requirements. Most of the work invested in creating the current GE model was in the Common Curriculum component. The Exploratory Curriculum basically adapted the distribution model from the prior GE curriculum, with a substantial consequence; the EC lacked coherence and consistency with the University’s mission. This was most evident in the fact that no written criteria existed for determining whether a course should be approved to meet an EC requirement. This falls short of NWCCU’s accreditation requirement that clear criteria should be in place for GE courses and explains why UPEC’s charge asked for a stronger resonance between the University’s mission and General Education. This was supported overwhelmingly by faculty who believed an “engaged citizen” model of GE aligned best with the University’s mission. Thus the rationale for a revision of the current GE curriculum resides in the “accidental” character of the EC’s history, accreditation requirements, and in aligning curriculum practice with University goals.

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Complete Report

Introduction

The Steering Committee examined each of the three primary components of our current general education program. The Exploratory curriculum received the greatest amount of attention, as was the charge to the Committee. The proposed model, as outlined below, provides a completely new approach to general education at Seattle Pacific University. As is mentioned earlier, a goal was to create a program that is both coherent in its structure and relevant to the needs of the student.

The Steering Committee, while reaffirming the basic structure and content of the Common Curriculum sought to assure that any new recommended additions would seek to complement the changes made to the Exploratory Curriculum. To accomplish this goal, the GESC recommends that academic skills be integrated into the Common Curriculum courses. While it is expected these skills are taught throughout the curriculum, the Committee felt it important to assure all students received instruction in a systematic manner. In that all entering freshman are required to take these particular courses it seemed logical to place these skills in these courses. In addition, while it cannot be assured that transfer students will receive the same instruction, many will have the benefit of this educational experience.

The proficiencies provided a unique challenge. The Committee reaffirms the importance of each of the three domains (writing, mathematics and foreign language) but believed it valuable to embed the content within the general education program rather than create stand-alone requirements. As such, the Committee reaffirmed the move to a placement model for writing and mathematics proficiencies, in addition to new ways to address these critical areas, and a new approach to the study of foreign language and cultures.

***Proposed Model for Exploratory Curriculum: Overview**

A primary goal of the Steering Committee was to create a program that is both coherent in its form and relevant to the needs of today's college student. The proposed Exploratory Curriculum builds on the concept of wisdom as appropriately used knowledge and wisdom as a concept that requires both knowledge and action. Furthermore, in a time of expanding information, effective citizenship requires navigation of *ever-changing* bodies of knowledge. Therefore, the Committee sought a way by which students would be introduced not only to knowledge, but also to the way that knowledge and meaning is constructed, thereby providing them the tools for life-long learning. Thus, students will experience how knowledge is used to make meaning out of their worlds through engagement with topics relevant to today's world. *The EC is organized around ways of knowing and ways of engaging.*

* The proposal acknowledges and affirms that two university programs, University Scholars and Education Certification (Integrated Studies major) will receive special consideration with regard to GE requirements, as they do in the current Exploratory Curriculum.

Tier One: Ways of Knowing

The First Tier of Seattle Pacific University's new Exploratory Curriculum will aim not only to convey information but also to help students become lifelong learners. First Tier courses will be specifically designed to build awareness of the special intellectual methods used in a variety of disciplines and will thus couple knowledge acquisition with epistemic skill-building. To ensure students' breadth of experience, all First Tier courses will be distributed among five categories representing five distinctive ways of knowing and investigating the universe. Students will be required to select one course from each category for completion of the Tier.

Tier Two: Ways of Engaging

Tier Two of Seattle Pacific University's new Exploratory Curriculum will aim toward the cultivation of engaged citizens; after acquiring a range of intellectual skill sets through First Tier study, students will practice synthesis and application of the methods they have learned. In the Tier Two curriculum, a selection of specially-designed, problem-based courses will combine two or more disciplinary "ways of knowing," using the broad ways of knowing to investigate specific, current, real-world problems and needs.

Courses in Tier One guide students in exploring five significant ways of knowing: aesthetic imagination, human systems, natural sciences, symbolic reasoning, and cultural engagement. Courses in Tier Two apply at least two ways of knowing to significant social issues, so that students might engage our world as people of wisdom. The Exploratory Curriculum would be introduced to students in the following manner:

As a Christian Liberal Arts University, Seattle Pacific recognizes our historic claim that Revelation is a foundational means by which we know Truth. The Common Curriculum Core courses ground our story of identity and community as God's people. The Common Curriculum Foundations courses explore God's self-disclosure as a way of knowing and undergird our exploration of the world. There is more than one way to intellectually explore the world. These modes of disciplined inquiry shape our worldviews and guide our response to the world as faithful servants of God's kingdom. The Exploratory Curriculum gives students a chance to think differently, to make something new, and to find the connections between different areas of knowledge. The Exploratory Curriculum invites students to explore five different ways of knowing our world, each taught by experts in the field. The Exploratory Curriculum concludes with two courses that apply knowledge gained to significant issues humans face in today's world.

Criteria for Proposed Model

Tier One: Ways of Knowing (WK)

- Course criteria
 - The focus of the course will be towards how the discipline knows and makes sense of its material.
 - Courses will focus on the epistemology of the discipline
 - On completion, a student will be able to articulate how the discipline knows and how that discipline is similar to or different from other ways of knowing.
 - Most courses will likely serve as an introduction to the discipline

- Category criteria
 - Specific criteria for each category will be created by working groups of faculty from appropriate disciplines as described in the “Resourcing and Supporting General Education” section of this document
 - 25 credit requirement
 - The typical class size target will be 35 students, though special circumstances may require larger or smaller classes. Students will take one course from each category
 - Students must earn at least five credits in each category.
 - WK courses may count towards a student’s major requirements

Ways of Knowing: Imagination and Interpretation

Through aesthetic imagination we know and create beautiful artifacts and actions. Aesthetic imagination may include both subjective, experiential knowledge at its point of origin in the embodied individual and communal knowledge through tradition, story and ritual. Interpretation is the process of seeking meaning in cultural creations through reflection, analysis, criticism and translation. Together, imaginative and interpretive knowing build awareness of the facets of our shared human experience.

*Disciplines most likely to be found in this category:

- Art
- Music
- Theatre
- Communication
- English
- Foreign Language and Literature
- Philosophy
- Classics
- FCS/Interior Design

*The discipline groupings listed for each category are recommendations and will be determined during the process of articulating criteria. It is reasonable to expect that some disciplines may have courses in multiple categories based on the category criteria.

Ways of Knowing: Human Systems

Through observation and experimentation we know human behavior and systems. Systematic inquiry into human activity yields knowledge of personal and social behavior.

Disciplines most likely to be found in this category:

- Anthropology
- Sociology
- Psychology
- History
- Political Science
- Geography
- Economics

Ways of Knowing: Natural Systems

Through observation and experimentation we know the natural environment and human interaction with the world we inhabit.

Disciplines most likely to be found in this category:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- FCS/Dietetics
- Exercise Science
- Physics

Ways of Knowing: Quantitative Reasoning

Through quantitative analysis we know forms of human thought that include analysis of data, problem-solving, and inductive reasoning.

Disciplines most likely to be found in this category:

- Mathematics
- Computer Science
- Statistics courses in various disciplines

Ways of Knowing: Second Language and Culture Encounter

Through imaginative empathy and systematic interpretive tools we know another language and culture in our global community. Second language and culture encounter courses introduce students to the space-time factors, including language, that shape the thinking and lifestyle of a selected culture.

- Foreign Language and Literature
- Study Abroad

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- Second Language Encounter Studies
 - These courses are designed to provide the interpretive tools to understand a second culture and encourage empathy towards all member of our global community. In so doing, the course may adopt a holistic approach or may draw upon a single disciplinary lens taught by an instructor with first-hand scholarly experience with the language and culture.

Students may fulfill this requirement in one of three ways:

1. Students may take an additional five credits of foreign language beyond what was completed in high school based on appropriate placement.
2. Students may complete a five-credit study abroad experience
3. Students may complete a five-credit Language Encounter course.

Tier Two: Ways of Engaging (WE)

We courses should be offered by both professional schools and College of Arts & Sciences disciplines.

- Course criteria
 - The topic of a WE course will center around the notion of educating students to be ‘engaged citizens’
 - A WE course will be required to incorporate two ways of knowing
 - A WE course will incorporate a writing or performance component appropriate to the discipline(s), such as a lab report in the sciences or a public presentation in communication component (way of accomplishing this task, TBD)
 - A WE course will be required to incorporate an *experiential* component (service learning, field trip, lab, studio, etc.)
- Category criteria
 - Students must earn a minimum of 10 credits in WE courses
 - Courses will be set at 20-25 students
 - Students are required to take two Ways of Knowing courses before they may take a WE course
 - WE courses will be at the 2000 or 3000 level. Students may not take a 2000-WE course until 30 credits or course work has been completed or a 3000-WE course until 45 credits have been completed.
 - *Students will only be able to apply one major course to the WE category.

* Students whose major is not in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) must take at least one Ways of Engaging course that uses the scientific method of inquiry, according to criteria set by general education faculty committees as described under 'Resourcing and Supporting General Education' below. Students whose major is in science, technology, engineering, or math, must take at least one Ways of Engaging course that is not in one of the STEM disciplines. STEM disciplines are Biology, Chemistry, Computer Engineering, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Engineering Science, Mathematics, Nursing, and Physics.

Proposed changes to the Common Curriculum

As mentioned earlier, while the work of the GESC encompassed both the Exploratory and Common Curriculum the most significant effort was on the former. As such, the recommended changes to the Common Curriculum as part of this model are as follows:

- The GESC affirms the original goals of the Common Curriculum and has made recommendations to UPEC in light of the assessment data from 2008-09.
- The GESC recommends that particular academic skills be embedded in specific Common Curriculum courses as outlined below. The academic skills are information literacy, writing, oral communication, reading comprehension, research, and critical analysis. Each skill will be emphasized in at least one Common Curriculum course, so that all six skills are covered in the

Common Curriculum. Final distribution of skills to Common Curriculum courses will be determined in the implementation process.

- While the GESC was focused on the Exploratory Curriculum it also provided a review of the Common Curriculum. The GESC has provided UPEC recommendations regarding the content and structure of Common Curriculum courses for their review, consideration, and action.

University Seminar 1000

Skill focus: Writing and information literacy

Goal statement for the skill: Students will know methods to create a research question and will produce a short analytical paper that demonstrates a successful transition to college-level writing and information literacy.

University Core 1000 and University Foundations 1000

UCOR 1000

Skill focus: written communication

Goal statement for the skill: Through a deep, sympathetic engagement with works of art in various media (visual arts, music, dance, theatre or literature), students will explore the meaning of identity. Students will complete at least one written assignment in the course. The criteria for this assigned skill learning will be determined in the implementation phase.

UFDN 1000

Skill focus: Oral communication

Goal statement for the skill: Through studying the processes and practices of Christian faith formation across time and cultures, students will gain a deeper understanding of their own faith story. Students will learn skills of oral communication, with criteria for this assigned skill learning determined in the implementation phase.

University Core 2000 and University Foundations 2000 (3001)

UCOR 2000

Skill focus: Research and writing skills

Goal statement for the skill: Through careful study of human cultures around the world and across time, students will continue to explore identity through the question: “Human societies: Who are we?” Students will read primary sources from multiple cultural contexts to understand the global human story, analyze the significance of historical events and develop an appreciation for similarities and differences in human cultures. Students will use this knowledge to develop research and writing skills.

UFDN 2000 and 3001

Skill focus: Reading comprehension

Goal statement for skill: Through close readings of biblical texts, student will learn about the literature and theology of both Old and New Testaments and the forces that formed these texts. This grounding in the biblical story of God will provide students with the necessary skills for responsibly using Scripture.

University Core 3000 and University Foundations 3100

UCOR 3000

Skill focus: Critical analysis

Goal statement for skill: Through critical analysis of philosophical debates students will learn to evaluate arguments for their validity and plausibility. Students will also practice constructing written arguments through completion of carefully reasoned exam essays and one short essay.

UFDN 3100

Skill focus: Critical analysis

Goal statement for skill: Through the close reading of Christian scripture and careful reflection on classic Christian doctrine, student will be equipped to reflect theologically on topics of contemporary concern.

Capstone (4899)

The GESC recommends that Capstone courses continue as a General Education requirement, with review and integration of a student's general education and major experience as a significant goal of the course.

Proposed change for the proficiencies

The current GE curriculum requires that students achieve proficiency in writing, mathematics and a foreign language. This model, particularly for mathematics and writing, does not provide for proficiency at the end of the college career but, instead, attends to entering proficiency. The GESC recommends, however, a move away from the proficiency model for these essential skills and towards a placement model as is currently planned for mathematics and writing beginning in Fall, 2010. In the new model, these skills will be assessed early and students will be placed in appropriate courses with remedial assistance provided as necessary.

The current foreign language requirement is somewhat different in that it requires the completion of one year of a foreign language as the graduation requirement. As the GESC reviewed data it was found the majority of our students (65-69% over the past four years) have completed the foreign language proficiency while in high school. Thus nearly 70% of our entering students have no language or second culture encounter requirement under the current GE model. The remaining (31-34% for the same time period) have usually completed two years of a foreign language prior to attending SPU. For this second group, many students took their two years of foreign language early in high school and find it necessary to repeat the material in college in order to fulfill the requirement.

Given these data and the Global Education Task Force's recommendations the General Education Steering Committee sought to identify options whereby students who have completed the requirement in high school as well as those who have not would be required to complete, through several options, a

college level course where students would encounter a culture and language in addition to those already acquired. Students could complete the requirement through additional language courses, those completing the current requirement could begin the second year of that language, while those who have completed two years in high school (or the rare occurrence where a student has only completed one year) could be placed into the first year sequence. In addition, students may elect to complete a 5-credit *Second Language Encounter* course or a credit-based study abroad experience.

The changes recommended by the General Education Steering Committee to the proficiencies are as follows:

Math Placement:

- Will follow changes for mathematics placement recommended to UPEC beginning in the 2010-2011 academic year.
- All courses in the Way of Knowing: Quantitative Reasoning category will have the math placement requirement as a prerequisite.

Writing Placement:

- Will follow changes for writing placement recommended to UPEC beginning in the 2010-2011 academic year.
- Entering freshmen will take 15-20 credits of writing-focused GE coursework (USEM, UCOR 1000, UCOR 2000 and WE courses that require writing.) During the implementation period the GE Subcommittee will work with the Director of Writing to create a plan for teaching writing in these courses and preparing faculty to implement that plan.
- It is anticipated that the current writing requirement in the major (eight W credits) will remain in effect
- Will recommend a review of the current writing program to include:
 - Identify ways of incorporating writing in the revised GE
 - To incorporate an assessment component

Foreign Language:

- The foreign language competency, as currently constructed, will be discontinued.
- The current requirement is replaced with a requirement in a Tier One course, specifically with the *Ways of Knowing: Second Language Encounter* requirement.

Resourcing and Supporting General Education

Adequate support is essential to GE's success and includes administrative support, faculty development, and a community culture that values the place of GE in the undergraduate curriculum.

Administrative Support

Administrative support is needed to provide a mechanism of evaluation and accountability for the GE program. We recommend that UPEC increase the size of the GE Subcommittee and authorize the committee with responsibility for policy and procedures regarding GE. We recommend that this newly constituted committee, while reporting directly to UPEC, work closely with the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs to implement policy and procedures.

During the implementation process the General Education Sub-committee would appoint multidisciplinary working groups of faculty and department chairs from appropriate disciplines to develop criteria for the Ways of Knowing categories and for the Ways of Engaging category.

Once the new program is launched, the General Education Sub-Committee of UPEC would:

- Become a gatekeeper for the curriculum;
- Have authority to accept and delete courses into the curriculum, based on criteria for each category developed by faculty in appropriate disciplines, and report such changes to UPEC;
- Have oversight over assessment of the program and be charged with utilizing assessment data to make changes to all aspects of the general education program;
- Make recommendations to the AVPAA for all matters relating to general education.

Assessment will be a key component to assuring a high quality general education program. The GESC recommends that support be provided to the creation and implementation of a comprehensive assessment program for general education. In addition, it will be critical to provide support for the analysis and use of all assessment data.

Faculty Development

If the University approves the proposed GE model, faculty development will be a critical issue in the “ramp-up” years (2010-12), prior to launching the new program in Autumn, 2012. Faculty will need to adapt existing courses and create new courses. Teams of faculty will need to coordinate work within the various elements of the GE program. It is recommended the administration provide necessary resources to support the faculty in this conversion. In addition, the Steering Committee recommends continued faculty development in order to assure continuing success of the curriculum.

To assist in the ongoing support of a new general education program the GESC recommends that a portion of the annual academic renewal grants be designated for general education courses.

To promote the importance of teaching in the general education program the GESC recommends that department chairs, Dean’s and the Faculty Status committee give attention to all teaching evaluations, while understanding the particular challenges of teaching general education.

Community Culture

Creating a culture change that raises the perceived value of GE is perhaps the most challenge resourcing and supporting task. No simple steps exist to change a culture that places primary importance on the academic major. The GESC recommends that the University find ways to promote General Education as a “signature” of Seattle Pacific, since GE is closely connected to the signatures in SPU’s Blueprint for Excellence. The Foundations Curriculum teaches students to embrace the Christian story (Signature 2). The Common Curriculum helps students master the tools of rigorous learning (Signature 3). The Exploratory Curriculum invites students to know and understand what’s going on in the world (Signature 1). Together, these three areas of General Education play a significant role in graduating people of competence and character (Signature 5). We recommend the University find ways to symbolize/brand GE to increase its visibility to students and generate ways to connect the CC and EC curriculum so students have a better understanding of GE’s role in their undergraduate education.

Conclusion

The proposed model for General Education presented in this document represents a significant improvement to the current GE program at Seattle Pacific, particularly in the Exploratory Curriculum. This fulfills the charge given by UPEC to the Steering Committee. The changes proposed for the Exploratory Curriculum create greater coherence, resonate better with the University's mission, and allow for the application of clear criteria to courses. The changes proposed for the Common Curriculum embed desired academic skills in courses all entering first-year students take, while also granting students more freedom in selecting their courses within the Common Curriculum. Finally, the move from a *proficiency model* to a *placement model* in math, writing, and foreign language provides a more realistic and targeted approach to learning at the college level. The GESC believes the proposed model is one the University and its faculty can present to current and prospective students with enthusiasm. It can be a distinctive feature of a Seattle Pacific University education that will attract students and create renewed interest in the value of being liberally educated.