

**Combined Report of the Gen Ed Task Force Subcommittees on “Best Gen Ed Programs”
and “Programs in the NDUS System and at Peer Institutions”**

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Part I: How We Chose the Programs We Researched

Although our two subcommittees worked separately and may have different things to contribute to this discussion, one thing both committees did was to look at the structure of other general education programs for ideas that UND might consider as we go about our work.

Below is a list of the programs we researched. The list of NDUS and peer institutions is straightforward. (The subcommittee used the official list of peers selected by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS).) However, the list of “best programs” is perhaps more problematic.

Aside from the AAC&U list of “promising models,” there is no common list of “best programs in general ed” that most people recognize. Nor do we have any criteria by which to evaluate such programs. What that subcommittee did, therefore, was to revise our charge somewhat and look into “interesting aspects” of a variety of gen ed programs, mostly at larger state universities.

We began by looking through the list of programs identified by AAC&U on their web site. However, since many of these models were at small liberal arts colleges, we focused primarily on the larger public institutions. We also added in a few programs that we had heard of or had some familiarity with.

These, then, are the programs we looked at:

<p>NDUS Institutions</p> <p>Dickinson State University Mayville State University Minot State University North Dakota State University University of North Dakota Valley City State University</p>	<p>UND Peer Institutions</p> <p>Ohio University -Main Campus Southern Illinois University-Carbondale SUNY at Buffalo University of Louisville University of Missouri-Kansas City University of Nevada-Reno University of South Carolina at Columbia West Virginia University Wright State University-Main Campus</p>
<p>Institutions Mentioned by AAC&U</p> <p>Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ) Grand Valley State University (MI) Indiana State University Miami University of Ohio Syracuse University Portland State University UCLA University of Delaware Washington State University</p>	<p>Other Institutions</p> <p>Arizona State University Pennsylvania State University University of Arizona University of California, Los Angeles University of Minnesota University of Nebraska University of Montana University of South Dakota University of Texas</p>

Part II: Interesting Features of Other Gen Ed Programs

Based on our research (conducted almost entirely on the Web), we have come up with the following combined list of “features of general education programs” that might stimulate us to think beyond what we have here. **Please note: These are listed in no particular order but they are numbered for convenience.**

1. Although most schools still refer to their programs as “General Education,” a few have chosen different names. Portland State’s program, for instance, is called “University Studies,” and the University of Nebraska calls their “Essential Studies.”
2. Some schools have gen ed programs that are based mostly, or entirely, **in the college**, rather than at the university level. This is especially true at larger state universities, like UCLA, which has a common set of General Education requirements for its college of Letters and Science, its School of Arts and Architecture, and its School of Theatre, Film, and Television. Its School of Engineering and Applied Science has a different set of requirements. For the most part, we have focused our research on schools that have university-wide requirements. (We also note that some schools have minimum Gen Ed requirements for everyone, with greater requirements in some colleges, especially A&S.)
3. A few schools have a set of **specific common courses** (not just subject areas) that all students take. Examples are: U of Nevada-Reno’s 9-credit “core humanities” curriculum, Washington State’s 3-course core (2 semesters of Western Civilizations and one semester of English composition), Fairleigh Dickinson’s 12-credit University Core (the global challenge, perspectives on the individual, cross-cultural perspectives, and the American experience).
4. A few schools have programs that **require that certain courses be taken at certain points in the student’s academic career.**

Some are “vertical” programs that require that some gen ed courses be taken beyond the sophomore year. Examples include:

- Washington State (which requires one 3 credit course after 60 hours have been completed)
- University of Minnesota (which requires that 2 of 4 required writing-intensive courses be taken “at the 3000 level or above),”
- Grand Valley State U. (which requires that 2 of its 3 “thematic group” classes (see below) “must be upper level,”
- University of Nebraska (which requires students to take at least two of their 10 “integrative studies” classes--courses “intended to engage students in actively developing their ability and desire to analyze, evaluate and communicate complex material and positions” at the 300 and 400 level.)

Others, such as the University of Arizona, require that some courses be taken *before* 60 units are completed.

5. Some schools require students to take **thematic clusters** of courses. Examples include Grand Valley State U. (3 courses from 3 different disciplines, including 2 at the upper level), and Miami of Ohio (9 hrs. “in a thematic sequence outside your department or major.” Other schools (e.g. UCLA) offer clusters as an option, similar to our Integrated Studies program.

6. **First-year seminars** or **First year experience courses** are offered at a number of schools (e.g., U Texas, U Minn). However, we found only three places where they are required across the university (Dickinson State, 1 credit; Penn State, 1 credit; Portland State, 2-semester “freshman inquiry” course). At Fairleigh Dickinson, a freshman seminar is required in the College of Arts and Sciences.
7. A number of schools have **writing-intensive** or **upper division writing** requirements. Examples are: Washington State, U of Minnesota, Penn State, Montana, and NDSU). Sometimes this requirement is part of the general education program; sometimes it is listed simply as a university requirement.
8. Some schools have a **senior capstone** requirement. Examples include: Washington State, Portland State, and Indiana State).
9. A very few schools have a **foreign language** requirement, though it is usually combined with something else. For instance, the U of Montana has a “foreign language/symbolic systems” requirement that may be fulfilled not only by foreign language courses but also by math, music, and philosophy courses. U of Texas and Indiana State require 2 years of h.s. language or its equivalent. Actually, one is more likely to find this kind of requirement within a particular college.
10. A few schools mention **ethics** in their goal statements, but most don’t have a particular course requirement. An exception is Montana, which has a 2-6 credit distribution requirement in “Ethical Values and Human Values.” They may satisfy the requirement either with one of several “core courses,” or with a specialized course in a particular discipline.
11. Several universities with **diversity requirements** split them into “world” and “U.S.” Examples: Penn State, Arizona State,
12. Some schools have **information literacy** requirements that focus on technologically updated “library skills.” Usually, these can be satisfied in various ways. Examples are Temple U. (which requires a set of on-line learning modules), U of Nebraska (which offers a course in Information Discovery and Retrieval), University of South Dakota (which offers a WebCT based m-c exam), and Indiana State (which offers a variety of ways of satisfying the requirement).
13. Some schools have technology requirements designed to make sure no student graduates without knowing how to use basic word processing, data bases, spreadsheets, etc. These may also include a segment on ethical use of technology, which may make them overlap somewhat with the information literacy type courses.
14. Some schools have **health, physical activity, or wellness** requirement. These include Penn State, Indiana State, and some of the NDUS schools.
15. Many schools divide our larger categories of “arts and humanities,” “social sciences,” and “math/science/technology” into **subdivisions**, requiring courses in both arts and humanities, specific courses in history, or courses in both physical and biological sciences.
16. When there is a **specific mathematics requirement** it goes by a variety of names: “quantitative reasoning” (Temple), “mathematical thinking” (U of M), “mathematics studies” (ASU), “mathematical literacy” (Montana), “quantification” (Penn State), “mathematics and statistics” (Nebraska), “mathematical sciences” (GVSU), “quantitative literacy” (Indiana State) or “mathematics proficiency” (WSU).

17. Some schools **embed skills courses into content courses**. An example is an advanced composition course embedded into a course satisfying the diversity requirement.

Not all of these options are likely to be of equal interest to us at UND, but we are reluctant to rule them out before talking with the whole Task Force about them.

Part III: Other Important Findings

We do want to emphasize two things that struck us all as we did our research:

In most cases, it is surprisingly difficult to find information about general education on a university's web site!

and

Many program web sites focused entirely on requirements, saying little or nothing about the philosophy and rationale for general education programs.

Often these programs (whether they are called general education, core curriculum, or something else) aren't listed under "Academic Programs," and cannot even be found in an A-Z index. In many cases, we had to search through on-line catalogs to find them—and even then it wasn't easy. (In comparison, one can find General Education in a couple of ways through the UND website, but each way will take you to a different page. By clicking on "Academics" (in very faint letters on green background at the bottom of the UND home page) and then on "Courses and Requirements" in the left-hand menu on that page, you end up at a catalog description of the NDUS Transfer Agreement and University Graduation Requirements, maintained by the Registrar's Office <http://www.und.edu/academics/html/courses.html>. By contrast, the A-Z index offers a link to a General Education page maintained by Academic Affairs. <http://www.und.edu/dept/vpaa/genedu/>)

Many programs offered no clearly stated rationale for general education, aimed at both students and faculty—or at least we couldn't find one. At UCLA, it was unclear whether the general education program applied to all programs or just certain ones. However, the program philosophy was clearly and succinctly stated, and obviously directed toward students: <http://www.college.ucla.edu/ge/> (In comparison, UND's Academic Affairs site offers a link to "Purpose and Philosophy of General Education at UND," but that simply takes you back to more catalog copy. It's not particularly inviting or student-friendly.)

We did find three gen ed web sites that seemed to do a pretty good job of making their programs both visible and student-friendly, and we recommend that you take a look at them—not necessarily for ideas on program structure (though you may see some interesting things there) but for the quality of their web communication.

Penn State:

<http://www.psu.edu/bulletins/bluebook/gened/> Lots of good stuff here, including links to actual course descriptions (not just catalog copy). But they don't say how many credits of each category are required! You have to go to their on-line "advising handbook" to find that: <http://www.psu.edu/dus/handbook/>

Portland State:

<http://www.pdx.edu/unst/> An unusual program, with a fairly clear web site.

Washington State:

<http://www.wsu.edu/gened/> Good information on goals and outcomes, and on "special curricula and programs" but program structure and distribution requirements aren't easy to find. And this one is less clearly designed to appeal to students.