

UND General Education Task Force
GE Goals Subcommittee
Pat O'Neill, Lori Robison, Ike Schlosser, & Tom Steen

Proposal: Plans for Refined GE Goals for UND (December, 2005)

Our subcommittee is proposing two different plans for GE goals at UND. Each plan reflects certain issues that we tried to take into account as we analyzed

- UND Documents (e.g., The current 6 goals stated in UND Catalog; College of Arts and Sciences Mission Statement; Assessment Rubrics)
- Recommendations from national experts (e.g., AAC&U's "Greater Expectations")
- Model goals from other institutions (e.g., Indiana U-Purdue U at Indianapolis).

It's our view that we need to revise or modify UND's current goals for several reasons. One, academic goals should be fluid, not fixed, and they should reflect changes in the institution as well as the evolving nature of higher education. One such change facing us now is that of the assessment of student learning, an issue raised with us by the HLC in their North Central accreditation review. Second, the current goals seem to overlap, especially with respect to different aspects of critical thinking. Third, the current goals are fuzzy regarding the development of intellectual skills, on one hand, and the importance of study in a broad range of disciplines/subject areas, on the other. We feel that the campus should re-engage in a discussion of how UND's general education should aim for one or both of these aspects of GE—skills vs. content. Finally, our current goals (and program) seem to over focus on the courses in the GE requirement, when much of the national discussion is about focusing on a GE ("liberal learning") that cuts across students' entire undergraduate experience. This seems to us to be another critical issue that we should address here at UND.

In both plans, we also want to have the GE goals become more meaningful and widely used. As we all know from various sources, one of our main UND problems is basic awareness of the goals and purposes of GE here. The goals should help us talk about GE more specifically and positively, and they aid all of us—faculty, students, administrators—in getting behind our GE and promoting it, instead of going through the motions and "getting the GERs out of the way," as so many students report now.

So with those ideas under girding our subcommittee discussions, we decided to propose two plans for new goals. We list them below, along with the major features of each plan:

Plan A: main features include . . .

- Goals focus directly on intellectual skills that should easily gain consensus among faculty and others
- Outcomes are tightly worded and lead clearly to assessment
- Having a few, easily assessable goals that all agree on simplifies the task of institution-wide assessment plan, which in turn, allows us to upgrade campus discussions of how to best close the loop and refine the GE program

Plan B: main features include . . .

- Goals are directly linked to NDUS system requirements for GE, thus making a closer connection to distribution requirement (now, the 6 "big goals" do not have a clear, obvious linkage with distribution requirement)
- Goals reflect Greater Expectations' 3 types of goals for liberal learning in the 21st C.: skills, knowledge, and responsibility
- These goals also reflect campus suggestions for new goals (e.g., ethics, wellness) to make sure these ideas are discussed and debated

As you can see, both plans focus on student learning outcomes. This is in response to the language of our current GE goals in which learning outcomes are less clear and more difficult to narrow down for assessment and instruction purposes. We hope that a strong emphasis on outcomes will encourage more campus attention to how outcomes are achieved, thus, in turn, creating a stronger focus on curriculum and ways of teaching in the continuing discussions of GE.

Both plans imagine that these are goals that will be met throughout the undergraduate curriculum--they are not limited to only GERs.

What We'd Like to Have GETF Members Consider

Undoubtedly, there are a number of ways to think about developing or refining goals for general education. Our approach was to draft two plans that reflect many of the issues that you and others have raised previously. Hopefully, the two plans will trigger your thoughts about how we may want to modify (or overhaul) the goals for GE here.

For those of you who would like some guidance as you review these plans and consider what UND's GE might aim for, here are a few questions that we asked ourselves and which you might find helpful in your own thinking:

1. In a student's general education, what is the ideal relationship between the development of academic/intellectual skills and the study of certain kinds/disciplines/subjects (academic content)?
2. How important is it to link GE goals to the NDUS system's distribution requirement?
3. How should GE requirement courses relate or connect with courses in the major? With other aspects of students' undergraduate experience (e.g., dorm life, student organizations, athletics, etc.)?
4. Do these goals (either plan) address what you see as critical "stuff to learn" for UND undergraduates? Do these goals miss any outcome that you believe is critical? For example, our subcommittee had long discussions on whether or not it's critical for our undergraduates to study and become competent in a foreign language. Please consider any outcome that might be missing but should be included in our deliberations.

UND's Current Goals for General Education

THE PURPOSES OF A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: UND's Philosophy of General Education

Before consulting the University-wide graduation requirements, students are urged to read this statement of philosophy prepared by UND's General Education Requirements Committee. One aspect of the University-wide requirements for a baccalaureate degree is completion of UND's general education requirements. This statement places the general education requirements into a broader context and indicates the end results which should be striven for in undertaking a university education.

Students are expected to explore a range of content areas and to develop broad learning abilities as they complete their general education requirements at UND. Students' general education courses should anchor their future university work and provide a model for life-long learning.

By the time students complete their general education courses, they should be able to:

- *communicate effectively, both orally and in writing;*
- *think critically and creatively;*
- *make informed choices;*
- *understand how conclusions are reached in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities;*
- *acquire knowledge over a broad spectrum of subject areas*
- *develop some familiarity with cultures other than their own.*

In choosing general education courses, students are encouraged to venture into areas that are new to them. By choosing courses that complement each other, students can reinforce and enhance the knowledge and abilities acquired in each course, as well as develop the ability to recognize relationships.